

DRAGONS OF THE GLOAMING

written by

Joel McElvaney

FADE IN:

EXT. RUINED CASTLE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON the image of a dragon on the shield of a KNIGHT in motion. SWORDS CLASH amongst GRUNTS and HEAVY BREATHS.

A tall ELF shoots an arrow into the eye of a demonic WOLF. A SORCERER in dark robes sends a GLOWING ORB flying into a crowd of GOBLINS. It EXPLODES, flattening them.

KNIGHT
Quick, the tunnel!

INT. DUNGEON - MOMENTS LATER

Wavering torchlight illuminates a rusty iron door.

ELF
There's a lock.

SORCERER
Pick it! Hurry!

The Elf kneels in front of the door. All is quiet.

FEMALE VOICE #1 (O.S.)
I already promised!

FEMALE VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Not my problem.

FEMALE VOICE #1 (O.S.)
I hate you!

FEMALE VOICE #2 (O.S.)
And you're grounded!

The Knight, Elf, and Sorcerer look at each other, confused. A DOOR CLICKS offscreen. A shaft of light floods the scene.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

The shaft of light reveals the real-life basement of game master ERIC, 17, meticulous and a little full of himself.

In t-shirt and medieval vest, Eric sits with THREE other BOYS at a candle-lit table strewn with D&D-like paraphernalia.

A DOOR SLAMS and Eric's twin sister NIA, 17, sarcastic and insecure, stomps down the stairs.

ERIC
Didn't you see my 'Keep Out' sign?

NIA
Go to hell.

Nia trudges over to a couch against the wall, collapses into it, types on her phone. Awkward silence.

RAJ, 17, painfully shy, stares longingly at Nia.

CARLOS, 17, short, baby-faced, mature beyond his years, stands and stretches.

CARLOS
I gotta pee.

KYLE, 16, always annoyed, checks his phone.

KYLE
My mom texted. I have to go.

ERIC
Everyone sit! I did not call break.
Are you picking the lock?

Carlos sits back down.

CARLOS
Yes. I pick the lock.

RAJ
I have a bad feeling about this.

CARLOS
(mocking)
Okay, Han.

Carlos rolls a die. Eric checks a chart.

ERIC
You fail! The door remains locked!

Nia receives a TEXT ALERT. She reads:

"TRISH: You-know-who's coming!"

NIA
Oh!

Nia bounds upstairs. Raj watches her go.

KYLE
I blast the door with a fireball.

RAJ

Wait!

ERIC

Too late. Kyle's blast destroys the door and half the wall.

Eric pitches his voice low, mysterious.

ERIC (CONT'D)

As the dust settles, your feeble torchlight reveals a dark chamber.

FLASH SEQUENCE - INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

No longer in Eric's basement, we are back in the game world that Eric describes in voice-over.

ERIC (V.O.)

You hear faint howling of wind.
Beyond the reach of your torch, two glowing eyes appear in the dark.

KYLE (V.O.)

I cast a light spell.

Kyle's dark-robed Sorcerer waves his hand, lighting the room.

ERIC (V.O.)

A skeletal figure in a tattered velvet robe levitates a foot or so above the ground. He floats toward you slowly, his eyes glowing.

END FLASH SEQUENCE:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Eric sits back in his chair, smirking.

ERIC

Everyone has to make a saving roll.

RAJ

I knew it!

Raj holds his hands in prayer and rolls. He smiles as Carlos and Kyle roll. Carlos sees his number, frowns.

KYLE

Crap!

ERIC
If you didn't make your save, you
take twenty hit points of damage.

RAJ
(to Carlos)
How many did you have left?

CARLOS
Fifteen.

ERIC
Tanzor and Fitlo crumple to the
floor, dead.

KYLE
That's not fair!

ERIC
I don't write the modules.

Kyle starts packing up his stuff in anger-filled silence.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Don't be a sore loser.

KYLE
Screw you. I quit this dumb group!

Kyle stomps up the stairs.

RAJ
I guess this campaign is over.

CARLOS
Fitlo was my best character.

Raj puts a consoling hand on Carlos's shoulder.

ERIC
The others have fallen. What are
you going to do, Raj?

RAJ
Bruh! We're stopping here.

ERIC
Are you GM now?

RAJ
I can't continue alone!

ERIC
Fine, but you get attacked as you
retreat. Roll.

INT. NIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nia's room decorations reveal her rather bookish nature. Nia
lies on her bed, phone to her ear.

NIA
I can't come.

INT. TRISH'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Typical high school girl's room. Messy. TRISH, 17, perky,
persistent, sits on her bed, phone in hand.

TRISH
It's your last chance.

INTERCUT telephone conversation.

NIA
He barely knows my name.

TRISH
Whose fault is that?

NIA
Shut up.

TRISH
Can't you sneak out?

NIA
My mom is in one of her moods.

TRISH
Find a way.

Nia ends the call, punches her pillow.

NIA
Aaargh!

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Carpenters work on a partially-framed house. Carlos, hardhat
on, sets down a short stack of two-by-fours.

WORKER'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, you! Hand me that hammer.

A Worker on the upper floor points to a toolbox near Carlos.

Carlos grabs a hammer, tries to hand it up to the Worker. The Worker reaches, but Carlos can't get it to him.

WORKER
Toss it up, shorty.

Carlos tosses the hammer, but it sails too high. The Worker reaches for it, loses his balance, and falls.

He lands with an OOMPH! at Carlos's feet.

INT. CONSTRUCTION TRAILER - LATER

Carlos sits grim-faced across from a FOREMAN, 40s, tired eyes, looking over a roll of blueprints.

FOREMAN
Look, your dad's a friend, but I
don't think this is gonna work out.

CARLOS
I can do the work.

The Foreman looks Carlos up and down, critically.

FOREMAN
You sent a man to the ER today.

CARLOS
I'm really sorry about that. It
won't happen again.

FOREMAN
Sorry, kid. I can't afford to have
someone onsite who's a liability.

CARLOS
I really need this job. My parents.
They need me to have this job.

The Foreman regards Carlos with some sympathy.

FOREMAN
Alright. Tell you what. Be here at
seven sharp Monday morning. If you
can go all day without costing me
money, I'll keep you on.

CARLOS
Thank you. You won't be sorry.

INT. ERIC & NIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Eric walks in the front door, the day's mail in hand. He pulls an envelope from the pile, looks at it.

MRS. WILKINS, 40s, a little frazzled, comes down the stairs. Eric hides the envelope behind his back.

MRS. WILKINS
What's that?

ERIC
What's what?

MRS. WILKINS
That envelope behind your back.

ERIC
It's nothing.

MRS. WILKINS
Show me.

She puts her hand out. Eric reluctantly hands it over.

Mrs. Wilkins tears it open, pulls out a WEDDING INVITATION. She reads, puts her hand to her mouth, tears forming.

ERIC
Is it--?

MRS. WILKINS
He has the nerve to send me an invitation?

ERIC
Technically, it's for Nia and me.

Mrs. Wilkins bursts into tears and runs up the stairs.

ERIC (CONT'D)
We probably won't go!
(to himself)
Crap!

INT. RAJ'S HOUSE - RAJ'S BEDROOM - DAY

In a pristine room with movie and college posters, Raj packs a suitcase on his bed. MRS. PATEL, 40s, tiger mom, peeks in.

MRS. PATEL
Don't forget to pack a dress shirt.

RAJ
It's a college visit, not an interview.

MRS. PATEL
It's never too early to make a good impression.

RAJ
It's my reach school. I'm not gonna get in.

MRS. PATEL
Not with that attitude.

RAJ
I don't have enough extracurriculars.

MRS. PATEL
That's because you spend too much time playing that silly game.

RAJ
Can we not do this?

MRS. PATEL
Did you call Mr. Muniz about that internship?

RAJ
It's the first day of summer!

A TEXT CHIMES. Raj checks his phone.

RAJ (CONT'D)
Eric's outside. I gotta go.

He's halfway out the door.

MRS. PATEL
We fly out in two days!

INT. ERIC'S CAR - DAY

Raj sits in the passenger seat as Eric parks his well-used sedan in front of a modest house with a small, neat yard.

ERIC
Where is he taking us?

RAJ
He didn't say

Carlos trots to the car, gets in with a backpack.

RAJ (CONT'D)
What's with the backpack?

Carlos zips open the pack.

CARLOS
Fireworks my cousin got in Mexico.
M-80s, Fireball rods, and a ton of
firecrackers.

ERIC
Damn, those M-80s are huge.

CARLOS
Can I keep them at your place till
the fourth? If my mom finds them,
she'll kill me.

ERIC
Why not Raj's?

RAJ
Have you met my mom?

ERIC
Fine.

CARLOS
Turn at the light.

RAJ
So what's the big surprise?

ERIC
Yeah, where are we going?

CARLOS
We're almost there. Turn here.

RAJ
Why all the mystery?

CARLOS
There!

Carlos points to a two-story house with a 'For Sale' sign on
the lawn and a 'Garage Sale' sign with balloons.

ERIC

Dave Gary's house is for sale?

RAJ

I've always wanted to see inside.

CARLOS

I read somewhere that when he was creating *Weapons & Wizardry* he locked himself in his basement for a year and a half.

RAJ

Do you think he's in there?

ERIC

No one's seen him in public for years. Not since that crazy stunt at GenCon.

Eric parks at the curb.

RAJ

Where he came in costume and levitated a whole table of players?

ERIC

I saw the video. So fake.

CARLOS

If he's in there, I'm getting his autograph.

Carlos gets out. Eric and Raj follow.

INT. DAVE GARY'S BASEMENT - DAY

Remodeled as a medieval tavern, the basement is cluttered with exotic artifacts, dusty board games, and miniatures.

A WOMAN, 40s, sits near the fireplace on her phone.

WOMAN

Without a death certificate, the insurance company won't pay.

CARLOS

It looks like the Prancing Pony in *Lord of the Rings*!

The Woman turns.

WOMAN

Oh, hello!
(into the phone)
Just a sec.

CARLOS

Mrs. Gary?

WOMAN

Stephanie.

ERIC

We're big fans of your husband.

STEPHANIE

That makes three of us.

An awkward moment. The guys look at each other.

CARLOS

Is he here?

STEPHANIE

He hasn't been here for some time.

CARLOS

Oh.

STEPHANIE

Take a look around. Everything's
for sale.

Stephanie turns back to her phone. The boys move away.

STEPHANIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

It's creating problems for the
bankruptcy court, too.

INT. DAVE GARY'S BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Carlos examines boxes near the fireplace. Raj wanders among
the tables. Eric looks at games behind the bar.

Below the beer taps, Eric spies a flat, square BOX of dark
wood covered in intricate carvings.

A high-pitched, mysterious, TONE hums in the background.

ERIC

Whoa!

Carlos and Raj go to Eric behind the bar.

RAJ

Cool!

CARLOS

Lemme see.

Carlos reaches for the box. Eric pulls it to his chest.

ERIC

I found it.

CARLOS

Okay, Gollum.

RAJ

What's inside?

Eric turns and examines the sides of the box.

ERIC

Don't see a latch. What did you
guys find?

Raj holds out a tray of figurines; Carlos, a wooden game
master screen.

ERIC (CONT'D)

What do you need that for?

CARLOS

For when you finally let me be GM.

ERIC

What fantasy are you living in?

CARLOS

See? This is why Kyle quit.

RAJ

I wanna see.

Raj reaches for the box. Eric pulls it away, turns and starts
toward Stephanie. Carlos and Raj follow.

ERIC

How much for these?

Stephanie turns around. The three boys hold out their goods.
Her eyes linger on the box, emotions unreadable.

STEPHANIE

How about ten dollars for
everything?

INT. ERIC & NIA'S BASEMENT - DAY

At the table, Carlos wipes his new Game Master screen with a cloth. Eric tries to open the carved box. Raj stands near.

ERIC
I need a screwdriver.

RAJ
Let me try.

Eric reluctantly hands the box to Raj. Raj runs his hands along the edges of the box. A SOFT CLICK sounds.

RAJ (CONT'D)
Did you hear that?

A HIGH-PITCHED TONE increases in intensity as Raj opens the lid. Four woven-metal, multi-sided DICE sit in green velvet.

Next to the dice, a leather-bound BOOKLET with a bas-relief dragon tooled on the cover.

ERIC
Oh my god!

RAJ
Is that...?

Carlos comes closer. Eric takes out the booklet, opens it to reveal a yellowed title page in calligraphy. He reads:

ERIC
"Dragons of the Gloaming. An
Immersive Adventure for Character
Levels 6-8. Written by Dave Gary."
Holy crap!

CARLOS
It's a handmade *Weapons & Wizardry*
module!

RAJ
With some very fancy dice!

Raj pulls a ten-sided die from the velvet and holds it up. The metal fibers of the die form numbers on each side and light refracts from a small green gem inside it.

RAJ (CONT'D)
Cool!

Raj rolls the die onto the table. The gem inside glows briefly before the die stops.

RAJ (CONT'D)
Did you see that?

Carlos rolls another die, and it glows briefly, too.

CARLOS
How does it do that?

Eric turns a page in the module and reads.

ERIC
*"Roll thine dice and open thy gate,
Defeat the flying death.
Find jade stones and set them firm,
Or take thy last free breath."*

CARLOS
What is that?

ERIC
It's a poem on the next page.
Listen to the rest of it:
*"Escape with haste, do not tarry,
nor let your breath surcease.
Once inside, three suns you'll get,
Before your chances cease."*

RAJ
These pages look legit ancient.

CARLOS
We have to play it!

ERIC
I wonder if anyone has ever GM'ed
this module. I could be the first.

CARLOS
Why are you automatically GM?

ERIC
I bought it.

CARLOS
You never would have bought it if I
hadn't literally directed you to
Dave Gary's house.

ERIC
I paid Stephanie. It's mine.

RAJ
No one's playing till I get back.

CARLOS
Which is when?

RAJ
Two weeks.

ERIC
Plenty of time to prepare a proper
campaign.

CARLOS
Couldn't we play a short session,
just to see what it's like?

RAJ
It'd have to be tomorrow. I leave
on Monday.

ERIC
I guess I could read enough today
to get us started.

RAJ
We need a spellcaster. You think
Kyle would come back?

ERIC
He doesn't get to know about this.

CARLOS
Who else is there?

RAJ
No one who plays RPGs.

CARLOS
Maybe Nia can sit in.

Raj smiles at Carlos and nods approvingly.

ERIC
What? No!

RAJ
Why not?

ERIC
Cause she's my sister. And... she's
annoying.

CARLOS
More annoying than you?

RAJ
Have you ever asked her?

ERIC
She's not interested.

CARLOS
Come on, Eric. Dave Gary's module!

ERIC
Fine. I'll ask.

He turns toward the stairs.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Nia!
(to Carlos and Raj)
She's gonna say no.

After a moment, Nia comes down the stairs, sullen.

NIA
What do you want?

She shuffles to the fridge and takes out a can of soda. Eric nods for Carlos to speak.

CARLOS
We need a third player to play this cool, one-of-a-kind module we found at a garage sale.

NIA
You think I know someone?

CARLOS
Actually, we were wondering if you'd play?

NIA
Ha! Couldn't get Kyle back?

RAJ
He hates Eric.

NIA
Spend enough time with him.

Carlos and Raj laugh.

NIA (CONT'D)
Can't you just play with one less player?

CARLOS
We need a spellcaster.

NIA
Don't games last for, like, hours,
days even?

ERIC
Told you.

Nia takes a sip, thinking. Then realization dawns on her.

NIA
Are you playing tomorrow night?

ERIC
Yeah.

NIA
Okay then. I'll play.

Eric narrows his eyes.

ERIC
What changed your mind?

NIA
I just want to do something nice
for my brother.

Nia flashes a fake smile.

ERIC
You have to actually play. Not just
sneak off to Kaylie's party.

NIA
I'll play. Until Mom goes to sleep.

ERIC
If she comes looking for you, I'm
not covering for you.

NIA
Whatever.

Carlos and Raj give Eric a 'what gives?' gesture.

ERIC
Fine.

Raj quietly high-fives Carlos. Nia sees, smiles.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Go ahead and roll your sorcerer.

NIA
Huh?

CARLOS
You roll dice to see how powerful you are. And some other traits like wisdom, dexterity and stuff.

RAJ
She could be a druid.

NIA
What's a druid?

RAJ
Like a sorceress who's into nature.

NIA
Perfect.

CARLOS
Here. Roll these.

Carlos hands Nia four six-sided dice.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. ERIC & NIA'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Three pewter figurines--a knight, an elf, and a dwarf--sit in the center of the table next to the four woven-metal dice.

Eric sits behind a GM screen. Carlos rearranges the figurines. Raj points to Nia's character sheet.

RAJ
This shows how much damage you can take. And those are your spells.

ERIC
She's not gonna know which spells to use.

RAJ
I'll help her. Or Carlos. He's got the entire *Weapons & Wizardry Handbook* memorized.

NIA
(half-mocking)
Impressive.

CARLOS
Yeah, babes really go for my arcane
W&W knowledge. And my height.

Nia laughs.

NIA
Don't girls think you're cute?

CARLOS
Yeah. Like a bunny.

ERIC
We're trying to play here, Nia. Are
you sure you want to do this?

NIA
Not really.
(beat)
Is that the vest you got at the
Renaissance Festival?

ERIC
Yeah.

NIA
It looks... not good.

ERIC
You look not good.

Eric gets up and dims the lights.

NIA
Ooooh!

ERIC
Shhh!

Eric takes his seat behind the GM screen and begins speaking
with his 'Game Master's voice.'

ERIC (CONT'D)
The town of Greymoor has recently
been attacked by a mysterious
dragon. It has killed a villager
and carried off dozens of
livestock.

Eric pauses for dramatic effect.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Afraid for their lives, the
 townspeople are desperate to hire
 brave warriors willing to risk
 death to save the town.

Eric reaches over his GM screen and grabs one of the dice.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Everyone take a die.

CARLOS
 What for?

ERIC
 To determine starting locations.

They all pick up the dice and look at the green gems within.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Everyone ready?

Everyone nods.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Roll!

They all roll their dice into the box lid. The DICE CLATTER
 and GLOW GREEN as they roll to a stop.

NIA
 Cool dice!

The GLOW intensifies. An ELECTRIC CRACKLE shakes the house.

ERIC
 What the hell?

NIA
 Are they supposed to do that?

A BOOM OF THUNDER as GREEN LIGHT BURSTS UPWARD into a wide
 column that encompasses the players.

NIA (CONT'D)
 Eric! What's happening?

With a WHOOSH, the COLUMN flies upward and disappears,
 leaving an empty table, no players.

EXT. FIELD OF GRASS - DAY

A PILLAR OF GREEN LIGHT shrinks into itself with a SOFT BOOM.

Where the green pillar was, four bodies lie in a circle of burnt grass: A stocky DWARF, the armored Knight from the opening scene, a female ELF in dark green robes, and Eric.

Eric sits up and looks around. The Knight sits up as well.

ERIC

What is this? Where am I?

KNIGHT

And who are they?

The Knight gestures to the Dwarf and the Elf. He stops mid-gesture and stares at his own hand.

ERIC

Who are you?

DWARF (O.S.)

Eric?

Startled, Eric turns to look at the bearded Dwarf.

ERIC

You know me?

DWARF

We've known each other since--

The Dwarf stops abruptly, puts his hand to his mouth.

DWARF (CONT'D)

What's wrong with my voice?

ELF (O.S.)

Eric? What did you do?

Eric turns to the Elf.

ERIC

You know me, too?

ELF

Unfortunately.

ERIC

This isn't funny! Where's Raj and Carlos and Nia?

Eric looks around wildly at the open field, forest beyond.

KNIGHT

I'm right here!

ELF
Where's our house? Our
neighborhood!

ERIC
Our house?

ELF
You know, the one with our mom in
it!

ERIC
What?

DWARF
This can't be happening.

KNIGHT
What is happening?

ERIC
(to the Knight)
How can you know me?

KNIGHT
We met in third grade. Ms.
Waldrop's class. You sat behind me.

Eric stares at the Knight, mouth dropping open.

ERIC
Oh my god! You're them!

DWARF
Who?

ERIC
Your game characters!

The Elf feels her pointy ears.

NIA-ELF
Ahhh! My ears!

The Knight stands, touches the sword at his belt.

RAJ-KNIGHT
But how?

The others stand up, look at themselves and all around.

NIA-ELF
This is crazy! Is this a
hallucination?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Are we actually in the module?

CARLOS-DWARF
That's physically impossible!

NIA-ELF
Not funny, Eric. Take us back.

ERIC
You think I did this?

Carlos-Dwarf grasps an ax at his belt.

CARLOS-DWARF
Harbek's magic ax! This is insane!
And look at these muscles!

Carlos-Dwarf flexes a bicep thicker than Eric's thigh.

NIA-ELF
Why did we change but Eric didn't?

They all look at scrawny Eric. He reddens.

ERIC
I'm not playing a character. I'm
the game master.

NIA-ELF
I feel sick. I wanna go home!

RAJ-KNIGHT
Same.

NIA-ELF
How did this happen?

CARLOS-DWARF
The dice!

NIA-ELF
Where are they? Are they here?

Nia-Elf gets on her knees and searches frantically in the
ashes. She finds nothing and starts to cry.

Raj-Knight kneels next to her, puts a hand on her shoulder.

ERIC
I don't know what's going on, but
if we're in the module, that's the
town of Greymoor.

Eric points toward a walled town about a mile away.

NIA-ELF

I have to get home. Now! I told
Trish I was sneaking out!

CARLOS-DWARF

I have to be on a job site in the
morning. I made a promise!

RAJ-KNIGHT

And I'm supposed to be on a plane
with my parents tomorrow!

NIA-ELF

How can you not know how to get us
out of here?

ERIC

Sorry, Nia! The whole "travel to
another dimension" thing wasn't
covered in the module!

NIA-ELF

Maybe it was in the part you didn't
read!

ERIC

Maybe you need to shut up!

CARLOS-DWARF

Hey! Chill, everybody.

NIA-ELF

Does anybody have a phone?

The others glance down at their medieval outfits.

CARLOS-DWARF

It was in my jeans.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Our phones and clothes didn't
travel with us.

NIA-ELF

Eric?

INT. ERIC & NIA'S BASEMENT - SAME TIME

Eric's phone sits on the table next to the module and the
figurines. The four dice are gone.

EXT. FIELD OF GRASS - SAME TIME

Eric reaches into his pocket, finds nothing. Shakes his head.

NIA-ELF

No!

CARLOS-DWARF

(to Eric)

You must have read something in the module we can use.

ERIC

There's a guy in the town who can help us. Master Dryga.

CARLOS-DWARF

Who's he?

ERIC

Like a town elder. He's the one with the info about the dragon.

NIA-ELF

What dragon?

ERIC

The one I described at the beginning. The one who stole the cattle. Weren't you listening?

NIA-ELF

A lot's happened since then!

RAJ-KNIGHT

How is information about the dragon gonna help us get out of here?

ERIC

He might know more. If people live actual lives in that town.

CARLOS-DWARF

As opposed to...?

ERIC

I don't know. Like humanoid *Westworld* robots who only know lines programmed into them.

RAJ-KNIGHT

That would be creepy.

NIA-ELF

That would be creepy? This whole thing is creepy!

ERIC

Complaining about it's not helping.

NIA-ELF

You're loving this, aren't you?

ERIC

What?

NIA-ELF

You've been obsessed with escaping into fantasy ever since Dad left, and now you've actually done it.

ERIC

You think I want to be here?

NIA-ELF

Your own little magical world to control? Yes!

ERIC

I don't control this world! I'm more helpless than you. I don't even have any armor or weapons!

Nia-elf turns and stomps away. Raj-knight watches her.

CARLOS-DWARF

If you'd let me be GM, you'd have armor now, and I'd be the weak and vulnerable one.

ERIC

Shut up, Carlos!

Eric storms off in the other direction, sees the edge of a DARK FOREST, and stops, real fear in his eyes.

EXT. FIELD OF GRASS - LATER

Raj-Knight and Carlos-Dwarf stand near the circle of burnt grass. Nia-Elf sits twenty yards away hugging her knees.

Thirty yards the other way, Eric looks out at the forest.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Eric needs a weapon. In case we run into any baddies.

CARLOS-DWARF
I have a dagger he can use.

A HOWLING comes from the Dark Forest. Eric and Nia-Elf jump and run to the blast site.

NIA-ELF
What was that?

RAJ-KNIGHT
I don't wanna know.

ERIC
I think we'd be safer inside the town walls.

Eric starts toward the town. The others glance fearfully back at the forest and follow Eric.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

The players huddle together, the towers of Greymoor's entrance gate about a hundred yards away.

RAJ-KNIGHT
See the guards?

CARLOS-DWARF
(to Raj-Knight)
Maybe you can smooth talk them into letting us pass.

NIA-ELF
Raj Patel, smooth talk?

Nia-Elf grins at Raj-Knight who grins back.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Ha, ha. Not me. My Paladin.

CARLOS-DWARF
His character has a very high charisma score, which means he's more attractive--and persuasive--than us. I mean, look at him.

Raj-Knight blushes.

NIA-ELF
Can you be all...
(waving her hand)
"These are not the droids you're looking for"?

Raj-Knight laughs.

RAJ-KNIGHT

I wish. I just have a much better chance of convincing someone to do something.

ERIC

The module said we can bribe them.

CARLOS-DWARF

Even with you looking like that?

Eric looks down at his jeans and fancy sneakers.

NIA-ELF

At least the vest is on point now.

ERIC

I'll just cover up with something.
Nia, give me your cloak.

Nia-Elf pulls her cloak more closely around her.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You'll get it back.

Nia-Elf rolls her eyes, removes her cloak, reveals the Elf character's smooth, muscular physique.

Raj-Knight stares, blushes, looks away. Nia-Elf sees him, looks down at herself, smiles and blushes.

EXT. GREYMOOR ENTRANCE GATE - DAY

Between the tall stone towers of Greymoor's city gate, TWO pike-wielding SENTRIES in plate armor stand at the entrance.

As the players approach, the two Sentries step forward.

SENTRY #1

Halt!

SENTRY #2

State your business.

Raj-Knight stands at full height and speaks with authority.

RAJ-KNIGHT

I am Evindal of... America. We have business with Master Dryga.

SENTRY #1
Never heard of you--or him.

SENTRY #2
Performers are you?

RAJ-KNIGHT
No, we are lost travelers.

The Sentry points at Eric.

SENTRY #1
Why is he clothed so?

Raj-Knight looks at Eric's sneakers, smiles slightly. He opens his mouth to speak, but no sound comes out.

He turns to the others, eyes wide. Carlos-Dwarf steps up.

CARLOS-DWARF
The dragon.

At the word "dragon," the two Sentries look toward the sky, then down at Carlos-Dwarf with suspicion.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
The dragon. It... uh, destroyed this boy's home. He escaped wearing only these strange garments.

Sentry #1 grunts a reply.

RAJ-KNIGHT
That's why we are here. To see Master Dryga about the dragon.

The guards confer as the players try to act casual.

Sentry #2 points to a small wooden box next to the gate, half-filled with coins.

Carlos-Dwarf drops a silver coin into the box; the sentries take a step back, and the players move through the entrance.

SENTRY #2
Beware the gloaming!

CARLOS-DWARF
What did he say?

EXT. GREYMOOR TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The players gather in a patch of thin grass near the gates.

An old female halfling hurries past them, stares at Eric, mutters to herself.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Stolen clothing. Quick thinking.

CARLOS-DWARF
Evindal almost blew it.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Stupid paladin.

NIA-ELF
What?

CARLOS-DWARF
Technically, paladins can't lie.
They're 'lawful good' knights. They
follow a very strict moral code.
(beat)
Unlike Raj's actual moral code.

Raj-Knight pushes a smiling Carlos-Dwarf.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Says the kid who asked me to help
him steal a pack of Pokemon cards
in sixth grade.

ERIC
Can we focus here?

CARLOS-DWARF
Where does that Dryga guy live?

ERIC
At the north edge of town, but I
need gear first. And we might need
a place to stay.

NIA-ELF
Stay?

ERIC
Raj, go see if they have any rooms.

Eric points at a building up the street, the Blackbriar Inn.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Carlos and I will be across the
street at... Hawk's Forge.

Nia looks around fearfully and grabs Raj-Knight's arm.

NIA-ELF
I'm coming with you.

INT. HAWK'S FORGE - DAY

The rhythmic CLINK of a HAMMER ON ANVIL echoes from the forge in back. Armor and weapons line the walls.

A red-haired YOUNG WOMAN, face smudged, smiles at Eric and Carlos-Dwarf as they enter.

YOUNG WOMAN
Good day.

Carlos-Dwarf stares at the Young Woman, immediately smitten.

CARLOS-DWARF
Good day! We are looking for a
sword and armor for my friend here.

The Young Woman appraises Eric.

ERIC
And a shield.

YOUNG WOMAN
A moment.

She disappears into the back.

CARLOS-DWARF
Not expecting the hot blacksmith.

ERIC
She's not the--

The BLACKSMITH, 30s, a burly man in a leather apron, enters from the forge, wipes sweat from his brow.

The Young Woman enters behind him.

BLACKSMITH
I'm Hawk. Bree says you're lookin'
for armor.

CARLOS-DWARF
Do you have anything that would fit
my young squire?

Hawk looks Eric up and down.

HAWK
May have a wee something.

Hawk disappears into the back. Carlos-Dwarf stifles a laugh.

ERIC

Shut up.

INT. BLACKBRIAR INN - SAME TIME

The inn is dark. The central fireplace barely provides light and heat. Several patrons of various races drink at tables.

When Raj-Knight and Nia-Elf enter, conversation stops.

A couple of rough-looking HALF-ORCS near the fire watch them with suspicion as they make their way to the bar.

The INNKEEPER, a slender, copper-skinned wood elf, turns from serving a surly GNOME at the end of the bar.

INNKEEPER

What can I get you?

RAJ-KNIGHT

Any vacancies?

INNKEEPER

Single room?

He winks at Raj-Knight. He and Nia-Elf turn red.

RAJ-KNIGHT

No, two. Two doubles.

INNKEEPER

There are others?

RAJ-KNIGHT

At the armorers.

GNOME (O.S.)

Out for the reward, eh?

Nia-Elf and Raj-Knight turn toward the Gnome.

NIA-ELF

What reward?

GNOME

For killing the dragon.

RAJ-KNIGHT

How much?

INNKEEPER
A thousand gold and twenty acres.

NIA-ELF
Nice.

GNOME
Hard to spend if you're dead.

Raj-Knight and Nia-Elf share a look.

INNKEEPER
I've got rooms. One gold per person.

The GNOME SNORTS. The Innkeeper gives him side eye.

INNKEEPER (CONT'D)
Gotta pay before the sun sets.

NIA-ELF
Why is that?

INNKEEPER
May not need two rooms after sundown, if you know what I mean. My little insurance policy.

GNOME
Highway robbery.

INNKEEPER
Shut it, or I'll toss you.

INT. HAWK'S FORGE - SAME TIME

Eric pulls a sword from the wall, struggles to lift it.

CARLOS-DWARF
Let me try.

Carlos-Dwarf lifts and swings the sword easily, one-handed.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
Harbek's strength score makes this feel like a butter knife.

BREE
Here for the dragon?

CARLOS-DWARF
What can you tell us about it?

BREE
Until last year, it was only a
legend. Now, we live in fear of it.

CARLOS-DWARF
Have you seen it?

BREE
Aye. Two moons ago.

MEMORY FLASH

EXT. GREYMOOR ENTRANCE GATE - TWILIGHT

BREE (V.O.)
Da' and I were returning from
market. There was a man on
horseback at the city gate.

Giant Dragon TALONS pull man and rider into the sky. SCREAMS.

BREE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It plucked man and horse as easy as
a falcon takes a rabbit.

END MEMORY FLASH

INT. HAWK'S FORGE - SAME TIME

CARLOS-DWARF
How awful. Does it come often?

BREE
Often enough.

Hawk returns with a long shirt of chain mail. He motions Eric
over and brings the chain shirt over his head.

It hangs down to his thighs. Below that, Eric's jeans and
sneakers are still visible. Hawk pats Eric's head.

HAWK
A little long, but does the job.

ERIC
(unhappily)
Thanks.

HAWK
Best of luck to ya.

Hawk disappears into the back.

CARLOS-DWARF
We'll take two daggers and this
short sword, too. And the shield.

ERIC
And a long bow. And a full quiver.

BREE
That'll be a hundred-twenty gold.

CARLOS-DWARF
Oh, right!

Carlos-Dwarf rummages in a leather pouch at his belt. He
pours the contents out in front of Bree.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
Sorry. Do I have enough here?

Bree gives a few coins back to Carlos-Dwarf, smiles.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
Whew! Thanks!

As Eric and Carlos-Dwarf leave, Bree calls out.

BREE
Beware the gloaming!

EXT. STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Carlos-Dwarf and Eric step into the street.

CARLOS-DWARF
What did she say? Beware of what?

NIA-ELF (O.S.)
The gloaming.

Carlos-Dwarf and Eric look up to see Nia-Elf and Raj-Knight
standing in the street outside the Blackbriar Inn.

CARLOS-DWARF
That's what the sentry said, too.

RAJ-KNIGHT
What's a gloaming?

NIA-ELF
It means twilight.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Right. I knew that.

ERIC

It's when the dragon comes. It's in the title of the module: Dragons of the Gloaming.

NIA-ELF

Well, that's useful info!

ERIC

I assumed you knew. It's obvious.

Eric hands a longbow to Raj-Knight.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Here. This is for you. Did they have rooms?

RAJ-KNIGHT

Yeah. Paid already.

NIA-ELF

(to Eric)

Nice mini-dress.

The others laugh.

NIA-ELF (CONT'D)

Need to lose the sneakers, though.

EXT. MASTER DRYGA'S COTTAGE - DAY

CLOSE ON Eric's new boots as the players stand in front of a thatched cottage with a tree sprouting from its roof.

ERIC

Let me do the talking.

HECTOR-DWARF

What are you gonna say?

ERIC

I'm going to tell him the truth and see if he can help us.

NIA-ELF

He'll think we're crazy.

ERIC

We have to start somewhere.

Eric knocks. The DOOR SWINGS OPEN to reveal MASTER DRYGA, a wiry human with an unkempt, mostly gray beard.

DRYGA
Who are you?

ERIC
I'm Eric. These are my friends. We,
uh... need help.

Dryga frowns.

ERIC (CONT'D)
We come from a far away place. And
time.

Dryga raises his eyebrows, stands back and gestures them in.

INT. DRYGA'S COTTAGE - DAY

The DOOR CREAKS closed as they enter a circular room. The
trunk of a tree grows through the ceiling.

Dryga ushers them in and gestures to a sofa. They sit.

DRYGA
Time travel! You must be great
sorcerers indeed.

ERIC
That's just it. We're not sorcerers
at all.

DRYGA
How is it you came to be here?

Eric takes a deep breath, glances at the others.

ERIC
We were playing a game with dice.
When we rolled them, they came
alive, created a pillar of light, a
portal that transported us here.

DRYGA
Do you have these living dice?

ERIC
No, that's the problem.

DRYGA
Hmmm. A pillar of light.

NIA-ELF
Can you help us get back?

DRYGA

I do not even know where--or when--
you came from.

NIA-ELF

So you can't help us?

Dryga wanders to a bookcase, searches the titles.

DRYGA

Perhaps we can help each other. You
know of the dragon terrorizing the
people of Greymoor?

CARLOS-DWARF

Bree said she saw it take a horse
and rider.

DRYGA

The Blacksmith's daughter? Lovely
girl. Good with a bow, too.

RAJ-KNIGHT

You think we can help you with the
Dragon?

DRYGA

Perhaps, yes.

Dryga pulls a dusty leather tome from the shelf.

DRYGA (CONT'D)

I have information that may aid you
in your quest. But first I must
have your word that you will help
save Greymoor from the dragon.

ERIC

You have our word.

DRYGA

Excellent!

Dryga plops the book on a table near the center of the room.

INT. DRYGA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Carlos-Dwarf pulls Eric aside.

CARLOS-DWARF

Don't the rest of us get a say?

ERIC

I'm GM.

CARLOS-DWARF

Not anymore, you're not.

ERIC

Oh, and you are?

Raj-Knight and Nia-Elf converge on the other two.

RAJ-KNIGHT

What did you just commit us to?

ERIC

Helping to kill the dragon.

CARLOS-DWARF

We aren't qualified to take on an adult dragon.

NIA-ELF

I'm not qualified to play in our basement.

ERIC

What choice do we have?

(whispering)

Besides, maybe we can use his info to get home before we ever see the dragon.

RAJ-KNIGHT

That's unethical. You promised to save the town from it.

ERIC

Help save the town, Mr. Goody-two-shoes.

INT. MASTER DRYGA'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Dryga turns several yellowed pages in his book. The others gather around, respectfully silent.

He points to an image of a dark green castle, a pillar of light jutting into the clouds.

RAJ-KNIGHT

That's it!

CARLOS-DWARF

What is that place?

Dryga traces his fingers along the flowing script.

DRYGA
It is called Hariyo Mahala. The
Green Castle.

The TRILLING OF AN OWL, perched in the live tree in the middle of the room, interrupts the quiet.

NIA-ELF
That's beautiful.

Dryga SLAMS the BOOK shut.

DRYGA
My alarm. We must go.

ERIC
Now? Can't you tell us your
information first?

DRYGA
No time. Follow me.

Dryga grabs a bow and quiver, rushes past them out the door.

DRYGA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Bring your bows!

The adventurers look with concern at each other, then stumble after Dryga, GEAR and WEAPONS JANGLING.

EXT. GATE TOWER PARAPET - TWILIGHT

Dryga bursts out of the stairwell onto the battlements of a Greymoor gate tower, followed by our heroes.

Hawk the blacksmith and another Watchman, both holding longbows, turn toward them and nod greetings.

DRYGA
(to Hawk)
What are you doing here?

HAWK
Krago's wife wouldn't let him come.

Dryga nods. Hawk and the Watchman turn back to the sky.

CARLOS-DWARF
What can we do?

DRYGA

If you haven't a bow, be spotters;
and have a weapon ready.

Raj-Knight nocks an arrow and takes up a position on the battlements. Carlos-Dwarf joins him, battle ax in hand.

Eric and Nia-Elf hang back by the stairs. Eric brandishes his short sword and Nia-Elf a dagger.

NIA-ELF

What good is this little thing
going to do me?

ERIC

Don't worry. The module said
there's only a ten percent chance
of a dragon encounter in the town.

Raj-Knight waves to the three men holding bows on the other gate tower. They nod, puzzled.

CARLOS-DWARF

Do you know what you're doing?

RAJ-KNIGHT

No. But I think Evindal the Paladin
does.

CARLOS-DWARF

Do you think we'll actually see a
real live dragon?

RAJ-KNIGHT

Um, I kind of hope we don't.

From the top of the gate tower, the streets appear empty.
Golden twilight colors everything as an EERIE QUIET falls.

On the battlements, everyone scans the sky in tense silence.

DRYGA

There!

Dryga points to a silhouette of a DRAGON in the distance.

NIA-ELF

(to Eric)

Ten percent, huh?

HAWK

Bows ready!

Raj-Knight and the others pull back their bows. Eric and Nia-Elf stay near the stairs.

The DRAGON GLIDES over fields toward the gate towers.

The Watchmen scan the sky. Long seconds pass.

A DRAGON'S FLAPPING WINGS break the silence.

DRYGA

Aim for the head or neck!

The Dragon passes over. Watchmen release a volley of arrows.

Several arrows bounce off the Dragon's hide, but one pierces its wing and another, shot by Hawk, sticks in its neck.

With a SCREECH, the DRAGON pulls up and away.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Did you see the size of that thing?

Silence for a moment. Then the Dragon appears, hovering near the other tower. Its CHEEKS PUFF UP.

With a GUTTURAL HISS, the DRAGON EXPELS a STREAM OF YELLOW MIST that envelops the Watchmen on the other gate tower.

The Watchmen grasp at their throats and fall to the ground, writhing in agony. Their eyes bulge as they gasp for breath. Yellow foam oozes from their mouths. Then nothing.

The players on the other tower watch in horror.

And now the YELLOW MIST rolls directly toward our heroes.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)

Look out!

In panic, Nia-Elf holds up her hands. A GUST OF WIND SWOOSHES up behind her, BLOWS the mist away, and knocks everyone else off their feet.

Nia-Elf stares at her hands. Eric and the others get back on their feet and look at her in wonder.

DRYGA

It's turning!

The Dragon circles around and streams straight toward them.

HAWK

Here it comes!

Raj-Knight, Hawk, and Master Dryga let their arrows fly.

The Dragon drops low, PLUCKS Hawk from the tower. Its TALONS PUNCTURE his chest. BLOOD SPRAYS the battlements.

Nia-Elf covers her eyes. The DRAGON FLAPS HARDER under Hawk's extra weight. Droplets of blood fall through the air.

Eric VOMITS over the side of the tower.

The DRAGON gains altitude and FLAPS away toward the forest.

Raj-Knight rushes to the stairs where Nia-Elf stands over Eric, who wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Are you okay?

NIA-ELF

I thought dragons breathed fire.

CARLOS-DWARF

Green dragons breathe poison.

BREE (O.S.)

Where is he? Da'?

Carlos-Dwarf sees Bree run toward the gate towers.

CARLOS-DWARF

Oh no.

The sound of BREE'S FOOTSTEPS on the tower stairs.

BREE (O.S.)

Da'? Are you there?

Bree bursts onto the battlements, looks around wildly.

BREE (CONT'D)

Where is he?

She sees the dead Watchmen on the other tower and gasps. Dryga goes to her, takes her hand.

DRYGA

He's not there, Bree. The dragon took him.

She sees the blood on the battlements and falls to her knees, weeping. Dryga places a hand on her shoulder.

INT. DRYGA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Everyone gathers around Dryga and his leather book. They stare at the picture of the castle.

DRYGA
The light pillar is described as a celestial gateway.

ERIC
"Roll thine dice and open thy gate."

DRYGA
Pardon?

ERIC
A line from a poem in the game.

DRYGA
What else does the poem say?

ERIC
I don't remember all of it.
Something about setting stones,
defeating the flying death.

DRYGA
Killing the dragon. Is that the objective of your game?

ERIC
Well, yeah. I guess.

Dryga pushes away from the book.

DRYGA
Well then, our purposes align. Go forth and defeat the dragon and Greymoor's riches shall be yours.

NIA-ELF
But we don't want to kill the dragon. We don't want riches. We want to go home.

ERIC
Maybe if we kill the dragon we'll be able to leave.

RAJ-KNIGHT
That's a big 'if'!

DRYGA

If not, there's still the reward.

CARLOS-DWARF

There was a bit about three suns.

ERIC

Right. The poem said we get "three suns" before our "chances cease."

DRYGA

Oh, dear.

NIA-ELF

What?

DRYGA

Three suns means three days. When did you say you arrived here?

ERIC

Today.

DRYGA

Well, that's one sun gone.

CARLOS-DWARF

What happens after three days?

ERIC

We "take our last free breath" or something.

NIA-ELF

Can you take us to this Mahalo thing, the castle?

DRYGA

I am afraid I'm needed here. I can provide you with information and supplies, but I cannot join you.

BREE (O.S.)

I can.

They turn to see Bree's tear-streaked face in the doorway.

BREE (CONT'D)

I will guide you in the forest.

DRYGA

Child, your mother needs you.

BREE
I am not a child.

DRYGA
You are your father's apprentice.

BREE
The creature that murdered my
father lives in the Dark Forest. I
must seek it out.

Dryga nods grimly. Bree turns toward our heroes.

BREE (CONT'D)
May I accompany you?

CARLOS-DWARF	ERIC
Of course!	Afraid not.

Eric and Carlos-dwarf frown at each other.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Excuse us.

Eric walks out the door, gesturing for the others to follow.

EXT. DRYGA'S YARD - NIGHT

Everyone gathers in a circle in front of Dryga's house.

CARLOS-DWARF
How can you say no? We just watched
an actual dragon murder her dad.

ERIC
You wanna take some random NPC
along with us?

Nia-Elf looks the question to Raj-Knight.

RAJ-KNIGHT
(to Nia-elf)
Non-playable character.

CARLOS-DWARF
This is a role-playing game, not a
video game. Maybe she can help.

ERIC
You heard Master Dryga. Her family
needs her.

CARLOS-DWARF
She could be useful. We need all
the help we can get.

NIA-ELF
Let's vote. All those in favor of
bringing Bree raise their hand.

Carlos-Dwarf's hand shoots up. Then Nia-Elf's.

Eric glares at Nia-Elf. Raj-Knight hesitates for a moment,
then raises his hand.

ERIC
Thanks a lot!

RAJ-KNIGHT
Dryga said she was good with a bow.
Are you good with a bow?

Eric's stung. He looks down.

INT. BLACKBRIAR ROOM #1 - NIGHT

In a bare room with two twin beds, Carlos-Dwarf and Raj-Knight remove their gear.

CARLOS-DWARF
You and Nia should prepare
"protection from poison" spells.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Maybe we don't need to. You saw
what Nia did.

CARLOS-DWARF
Was that a "wind wall" spell?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Had to be. And no preparation, no
incantation. Easy.

Carlos-Dwarf lies back on his bed.

CARLOS-DWARF
I used to wish that I could live as
my character in a cool game world.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Re-thinking that?

CARLOS-DWARF
This world would be way cooler if
we didn't have to worry about
dying.

INT. BLACKBRIAR ROOM #2 - SAME TIME

A similar room with two twin beds. Eric and Nia-Elf remove their gear.

NIA-ELF
Mom must be freaking out.

ERIC
Maybe she hasn't noticed yet.

NIA-ELF
How could she not?

ERIC
Maybe time pauses or something when
we're in here.

NIA-ELF
God, I hope so.

ERIC
Me too.

NIA-ELF
Why? Got a hot date?

ERIC
Ha ha, no.
(serious)
Dad's getting married.

NIA-ELF
What? Already? Who told you that?

ERIC
The invitation came yesterday.

NIA-ELF
You cannot let Mom see it.

ERIC
She already did.

NIA-ELF
Is that why she didn't leave her
room all day?

ERIC
Like when the divorce papers came.

NIA-ELF
Do you think she... ?

ERIC
That's what's worrying me.
They look at each other, fear in their eyes.

NIA-ELF
We need to get home.

EXT. FIELD OF GRASS - DAY

Bree and Dryga gather with our heroes outside Greymoor's walls. The sunrise illuminates the mist over the fields.

The Dark Forest in front of them stretches to the horizon.

ERIC
There's sun number two.

DRYGA
You must make haste. Legend says
the castle lies in the center of
the Dark Forest.
(to Bree)
Stay on the Forest Road until you
pass the Fairy Tree.

Bree nods.

DRYGA (CONT'D)
Then due south for several leagues.

ERIC
Not exactly Google maps.

NIA-ELF
(to Carlos-Dwarf)
What's a league?

CARLOS-DWARF
About three and a half miles.

DRYGA
There you will find Hariyo Mahala.
According to legend.

ERIC
You've never been there?

DRYGA

No one has ever seen Hariyo Mahala.

NIA-ELF

What?!

DRYGA

It is said to be hidden from
mortals by the gods.

NIA-ELF

Great! So all we have to do is find
a mythical castle no one's ever
seen and defeat a dragon no one can
kill. In two days.

ERIC

Don't forget the dice. We might
need some dice, too.

DRYGA

May the gods be with you.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Dappled light filters through the tree canopy. Eric and Carlos-Dwarf walk in front with Bree behind them, followed by Nia-Elf and Raj-Knight.

CARLOS-DWARF

If we get attacked, you should
probably hang back.

ERIC

I can handle the short sword.

CARLOS-DWARF

It's your hit points you should
worry about. A teen human? You're
technically level zero.

ERIC

Technically, you can shut up.

CARLOS-DWARF

Just saying.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - LATER

The foliage is thicker here, the road darker. A deep off-screen HOOT-HOOT is heard somewhere behind them.

NIA-ELF
What was that?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Sounded like an owl.

NIA-ELF
Nice to know there are normal
animals here.

BRANCHES CRACK in the near distance.

ERIC
Weapons out!

A huge BEAR-LIKE CREATURE CRASHES into the road. It turns
around, revealing a FEATHERED HEAD and large BEAK.

NIA-ELF
That's not a normal animal!

The creature rears on its hind legs and GROWL-HOOTS.

ERIC
It's an Owlbear!

Bree shoots an arrow, striking the Owlbear in the stomach.
The OWLBEAR GROWL-HOOTS with pain and charges.

ERIC (CONT'D)
It gets two attacks per round!

Raj-Knight and Carlos-Dwarf engage the monster mid-charge,
get in a few licks before the Owlbear strikes Carlos-Dwarf's
shield, knocking him into the dirt

With the swipe of a claw, it sends Raj-Knight to the ground,
denting his plate armor.

Next to Eric and Nia-Elf, Bree releases a second arrow. The
Owlbear GROWL-HOOTS and lumbers toward them.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Nia!

Bree fumbles with another arrow. Eric and Nia-Elf move in
front of her.

The Owlbear arrives and swipes at them both, sending them
into the bushes.

The Owlbear towers over Bree and GROWL-HOOTS as she nocks an
arrow, pulls back her bow.

Suddenly, its GROWL-HOOT CUTS OFF, and it falls forward, Carlos-Dwarf's ax firmly planted in the back of its skull.

Raj-Knight runs to Nia-Elf lying in the bushes, carries her to the road, and lays her down gently.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)
You're bleeding! Here.

Raj-Knight puts his hand on her forehead, closes his eyes.

After a few seconds, he lifts his hand to reveal a small white scar amongst the drying blood.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)
There. It wasn't a bad cut.

NIA-ELF
How'd you do that?

Before Raj-Knight can answer, a GROAN offscreen.

CARLOS-DWARF
Eric!

Carlos-Dwarf finds Eric lying in the underbrush.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
He's here!

Carlos-Dwarf picks Eric up and lays him next to Nia-Elf. Blood flows from a jagged gash along Eric's neck.

NIA-ELF
Oh my god!

CARLOS-DWARF
He's losing blood fast. Nia, use a cure wounds spell.

NIA-ELF
How?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Try putting your hand on the wound and then... think healing thoughts, I guess.

NIA-ELF
What's a healing thought?

RAJ-KNIGHT
I don't know! That's what I did with you!

Nia-Elf places her hands on Eric and closes her eyes. After a few moments, she pulls her bloody hands away.

NIA-ELF
Nothing's happening!

RAJ-KNIGHT
Imagine fixing what's broken.

Nia-Elf puts her hands back on the bleeding wound and closes her eyes again.

This time, the bleeding slows, stops. The gash closes, the skin grows together.

Nia-Elf slumps to the side with a sharp exhale.

BREE
What's wrong with her?

CARLOS-DWARF
The effort of the spell must've drained her.

Carlos-Dwarf yanks his ax out of the Owlbear's skull, wipes it clean on the creature's fur and hooks it back on his belt.

Nia-Elf's eyes flutter open. She sees Eric.

NIA-ELF
How come he's still unconscious?

RAJ-KNIGHT
He's not fully healed. He'll need rest. You will, too, before you're able to do that again.

BREE
There's a place. Just up ahead.

NIA-ELF
Eric can't walk yet.

CARLOS-DWARF
I'll carry him.

Carlos-Dwarf picks up Eric easily, cradles him like a baby.

Raj-Knight helps Nia-Elf to her feet. She drapes her arm around his shoulder as they walk.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Not far from the road, an enormous willow tree grows; its flowing canopy sparkles with white blossoms and creates a curtain hanging to the forest floor. Bree points to it.

BREE

The Fairy Tree. We can rest there.

The adventurers pick their way to the tree. Around the trunk, a curtain of willow fronds encloses a carpet of emerald moss.

CARLOS-DWARF

Why is it called the Fairy Tree?

BREE

It is sacred to the Fae. Evil things cannot pass through the hanging boughs.

NIA-ELF

Cool.

BREE

A bit, but warmer than the rest of the forest.

NIA-ELF

No, I... never mind.

EXT. FAIRY TREE - NIGHT

Bird-sized fireflies glow in the high branches of the tree.

Eric sleeps on the moss near its gnarled base, covered in Nia-Elf's cloak.

Bree sits near the edge of the willow fronds, knees to her chest, looking out. Carlos-Dwarf goes to her and sits.

CARLOS-DWARF

Master Dryga was right. You are good with that bow.

BREE

My little arrows could not even bring down an Owlbear.

CARLOS-DWARF

My grandmother says dynamite comes in small packages.

Bree sits back and looks at Carlos-dwarf.

BREE
Dynamite?

CARLOS-DWARF
It's an explosive. Like powerful
exploding fire.

Bree nods thoughtfully.

BREE
You saved my life today.

CARLOS-DWARF
Lucky shot.

They are silent for a moment.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
How does your family feel about...
your quest?

BREE
My little brothers say it is my
duty to avenge my father's death.

CARLOS-DWARF
And your mother?

BREE
She says I'm needed at the forge.

CARLOS-DWARF
Are you?

BREE
Now that Da' is gone, aye.

Bree's weeps quietly, leans against Carlos-Dwarf.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - SAME TIME

A CLOAKED FIGURE's POV from the forest as it watches Bree
lean against Carlos-Dwarf.

EXT. FAIRY TREE - SAME TIME

Raj-Knight and Nia-Elf sit together near the edge of the tree
curtain. Nia looks at dried blood on her hands.

NIA-ELF
Eric almost died today.

RAJ-KNIGHT
We all almost died. Again.

NIA-ELF
If it wasn't for Carlos...

RAJ-KNIGHT
I know.

NIA-ELF
What happens if you die in here?

RAJ-KNIGHT
I don't know.

NIA-ELF
You never told me how you healed my head. I thought you were just a buff, goody-goody knight.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Paladins can "lay on hands" and cure lesser injuries.

NIA-ELF
A fighter and a healer.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Can I ask you a personal question?

NIA-ELF
Can I stop you?

Raj smiles uncertainly.

RAJ-KNIGHT
What were you upset about the other night? In the basement.

NIA-ELF
Getting grounded.

Raj-Knight nods.

NIA-ELF (CONT'D)
It's such a double-standard. She never stops Eric from going out.

RAJ-KNIGHT
That's cause Eric never goes out.

Nia-Elf laughs.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)
Big party, huh?

NIA-ELF
I was gonna meet... people there.

RAJ-KNIGHT
As one does at parties.

Nia-Elf smiles. They sit in silence for a moment.

NIA-ELF
Can I ask you a personal question?

Raj-Knight smiles.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Can I stop you?

NIA-ELF
I mean, Paladin Raj, or Evindal, or
whoever you are in this world, has
to answer truthfully, right?

She smiles at Raj-Knight. He looks wary.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Riiight.

NIA-ELF
Tell the truth, do you like Nia the
druid better than the real Nia?

Raj-Knight considers how to answer.

RAJ-KNIGHT
I can truthfully say that I like
them both the same.
(beat)
Because they are both you.

Raj-Knight grins. Nia-Elf hits him on the shoulder.

NIA-ELF
You know what I mean. I like the
game Nia better. She's got powers,
she's stronger. Hotter.

RAJ-KNIGHT
But all that's true of the real
Nia: Power, strength, beauty.

NIA-ELF

Aww. That's such a nice thing to say. Dang, that charisma thing's for real, huh?

Raj-Knight laughs.

RAJ-KNIGHT

It's not just the charisma talking. I literally can't lie.

A loud CRUNCH from the forest ruins the moment. They stand and look out. Carlos-Dwarf and Bree come up behind them.

CARLOS-DWARF

What is it?

BREE

Maybe bandits.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - SAME TIME

The CLOAKED FIGURE's POV as it watches the players search the darkness. The Figure ducks down into the bush.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

No longer on the Forest Road, the players make their way through ever-thicker foliage. Carlos-Dwarf walks with Eric.

CARLOS-DWARF

How are you feeling?

ERIC

Like an owlbear mauled me.

CARLOS-DWARF

You're lucky to be alive.

ERIC

Raj said you killed it.

CARLOS-DWARF

It was like I knew what to do. The ax hit exactly where I was aiming.

ERIC

We're gonna need those skills. This is day three, you know.

CARLOS-DWARF

I know.

(to the others)

Day three, everybody!

RAJ-KNIGHT AND NIA-ELF

We know!

NIA-ELF (CONT'D)

Find the castle, defeat the dragon,
return home. Simple!

RAJ-KNIGHT

Or what?

ERIC

"Take your last free breath," I
think it said.

NIA-ELF

So we all just stop breathing?

ERIC

I think it means we lose our
freedom, not our lives.

CARLOS-DWARF

Meaning we'll be trapped in here.

NIA-ELF

Forever?

Raj-Knight raises a hand.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Hold up.

Everyone stops where they are.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)

Listen.

NIA-ELF

I don't hear anything.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Exactly! Where's all the forest
noises? The birds, the insects?

Everyone listens again. Total silence.

CARLOS-DWARF

Not even wind in the trees.

ERIC
Raj, use a "detect magic" spell.

BREE
Look!

Bree points to where yellow mist drifts toward them.

ERIC
The dragon! Run!

They all scramble away from the mist and crash through the underbrush in panic.

Without warning, all five of them FALL FORWARD and DISAPPEAR SOUNDLESSLY into a MIRAGE that continues to look like the forest floor even after they've fallen through it.

INT. TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

On a dimly lit screen, THUDS and CLANKING of ARMOR. General GROANS and SHUFFLING. A dull light filters in from above as the adventurers come into focus.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Everyone okay?

NIA-ELF
Yeah. I can't see! ERIC

RAJ-KNIGHT
I can see just fine.

CARLOS-DWARF
Elves and Dwarves have dark vision.
Humans don't.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Nia, say "produce flame."

NIA-ELF
Produce flame.

Flames burst out of Nia-Elf's palm. She screams. Carlos-Dwarf swipes a torch across her hand. It lights.

CARLOS-DWARF
Thanks!

NIA-ELF
It's still there!

Carlos-Dwarf blows on Nia-Elf's hand; the flames go out.

NIA-ELF (CONT'D)
You could've warned me!

RAJ-KNIGHT
Sorry.

Carlos-Dwarf hands the torch to Eric.

ERIC
Where'd you get this?

CARLOS-DWARF
From there.

Carlos-Dwarf gestures to the ground. Eric holds the torch low, revealing scattered bones near their feet.

A rat scurries over them. Nia-Elf jumps.

NIA-ELF
Big rat!

Carlos-Dwarf examines the remains.

CARLOS-DWARF
Something gnawed the flesh off. Not even a rat that big could make those marks.

NIA-ELF
What are you, Animal C.S.I.?

CARLOS-DWARF
SVU. Special Veterinary Unit.

The others laugh. Bree looks confused.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Whatever it is, it lives down here.

ERIC
Where are we?

RAJ-KNIGHT
We fell through some sort of force field or something.

Raj-Knight looks to the opening far above them. At its edge the dim outline of a CLOAKED FIGURE ducks out of sight.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)
Did you see that?

NIA-ELF
The dragon?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Someone in a hood!

ERIC
Just one?

RAJ-KNIGHT
I think we're being followed.

CARLOS-DWARF
Bandits?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Same ones we heard last night?

ERIC
Let's not hang around to find out.

As our heroes hurry down the tunnel, the CLOAKED FIGURE stands silhouetted at the edge, looking down.

INT. TUNNEL - LATER

Roots hang from the ceiling of the wide tunnel. Carlos-Dwarf leads the way. Eric and Raj-Knight bring up the rear.

ERIC
If I don't make it out of here, I--

RAJ-KNIGHT
Stop.

ERIC
I want you to know that I'm okay
with you and Nia.

RAJ-KNIGHT
What?

ERIC
Dude, don't act.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Nia and I are not a thing.

ERIC
But you like her.

Raj-Knight shrugs.

ERIC (CONT'D)
You should tell her.

RAJ-KNIGHT
I know.

ERIC
Like, soon. We could die in here.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Okay!

ERIC
Well, me at least.

RAJ-KNIGHT
That's the spirit.

ERIC
You saw what happened yesterday.

CARLOS-DWARF (O.S.)
Shh! I hear something.

INT. TUNNEL - SAME TIME

Everyone stops, listens. A SHUFFLING. Louder, with GRUNTING.

CARLOS-DWARF
It's on the ceiling!

Torchlight reveals a six-foot-long creature with large GLASSY EYES and a snout full of RAZOR-SHARP TEETH. A cross between a hog, a centipede, and an octopus.

The BEAST clambers over roots in the ceiling, SNUFFLING and GRUNTING as undulating TENTACLES reach out from its snout.

NIA-ELF
What the hell is that?!

CARLOS-DWARF
A Carrion Crawler! Those tentacles are poisonous! Get back!

Carlos-Dwarf and Raj-Knight lead the attack. The Crawler's TENTACLES LUNGE at them.

Carlos-Dwarf slices one off. The CRAWLER SQUEALS.

One Tentacle wraps around Carlos-Dwarf's arm. He roars in pain, pulls the tentacle off, leaving ROUND WELTS behind.

The Crawler moves forward, knocks Raj-Knight to the ground.

Raj-Knight gets to his knees and raises his broadsword over his head, sinking it deep into the Crawler.

The CRAWLER'S SQUEAL becomes a GURGLE, and it DROPS from the ceiling directly onto Raj-Knight, who disappears with a SQUELCH beneath its massive corpse.

NIA-ELF

Raj!

Eric rushes forward to help. Carlos-Dwarf raises his hand.

CARLOS-DWARF

Stay back, Eric. You too, Bree.

Carlos-Dwarf pushes the dead Crawler off Raj-Knight, who lies motionless, eyes open and vacant.

NIA-ELF

Is he dead?

CARLOS-DWARF

Paralyzed I think. Use a "protection from poison" spell. It might neutralize the poison.

NIA-ELF

How?

CARLOS-DWARF

Not sure. Can you imagine the poison becoming harmless? With your hand on him?

He wipes Crawler goo from Raj-Knight's face.

NIA-ELF

Okay.

Nia-Elf kneels near Raj-Knight, places her hand on his cheek, and closes her eyes. Moments later, she opens them.

After a moment, Raj-Knight gasps and sucks in a huge gulp of air. He takes several deep breaths and blinks his eyes.

Nia-Elf hugs him tightly.

NIA-ELF (CONT'D)

Thank god!

She releases him. He coughs and sits up.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Did I die?

CARLOS-DWARF
Poisoned. Nia neutralized it.

RAJ-KNIGHT
(to Nia)
Thanks. Did we kill it?

Eric points to the Carrion Crawler corpse lying next to him.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)
Gross.

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

The tunnel is wetter here. Nia-Elf walks with Eric.

ERIC
Thanks for, you know... healing me
yesterday.

NIA-ELF
I thought you were going to die.

ERIC
Whatever that means in this world.

NIA-ELF
I don't wanna find out.

It's difficult for Eric to say.

ERIC
In case I don't make it out of
here, I want you to know that you
were right.

NIA-ELF
About what?

ERIC
About me escaping since...

NIA-ELF
I shouldn't have said that.
We all have our ways of escaping.
Your way's a lot better than Mom's.

Eric nods.

ERIC
Trying not to think about that.

NIA-ELF
I know.

RAJ-KNIGHT (O.S.)
Hey! We've got a problem here.

INT. TUNNEL - IRON DOOR - SAME TIME

At the front of the line, Raj-Knight stands in front of a rusty iron door.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Looks like a job for Harbek the Dwarf.

CARLOS-DWARF
I'll get my tools.

Carlos-Dwarf pulls out a set of lock-picking tools and unfolds them on the ground in front of him.

NIA-ELF
You're a locksmith?

CARLOS-DWARF
I'm dual class: rogue and fighter.

NIA-ELF
What's a rogue?

CARLOS-DWARF
It's like a thief.

BREE
You steal?

CARLOS-DWARF
No. I use my rogue skills for lock-picking and trap detection. Things like that.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Ah, now. You do lift the occasional item.

CARLOS-DWARF
Well, yeah. Sometimes.
(grinning)
Only for the purest of purposes.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Of course.

As Carlos-Dwarf works on the lock, Bree stands close.

BREE
He called you Harbek, but sometimes
he calls you Carlos.

CARLOS-DWARF
That's my name in our world.

BREE
You are different in your world?

CARLOS-DWARF
Same mind, but not the same body.

Carlos-Dwarf picks at the lock. Bree stands back.

BREE
(to Raj-knight)
And your real name is Raj?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Right. Evindal is my game
character's name.

BREE
What game?

RAJ-KNIGHT
Uh...

A LOCK mechanism GRINDS. A loud CLANK and the door swings open, revealing stone steps leading up. Carlos-Dwarf grins.

CARLOS-DWARF
Rolled a twenty!

EXT. STONE STEPS - NIGHT

As the group climbs the ancient stone steps, the ROAR of a WATERFALL grows louder. Lush vegetation hinders their ascent.

The vegetation clears, and they find themselves on a rock outcropping bathed in moonlight.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

A WATERFALL FLOWS over a cliff face far above the rock outcropping and CRASHES below into a crystal pool.

An imposing castle made of dark green stone perches above the waterfall. Its spires jut into the clouds.

BREE
Hariyo Mahala!

NIA-ELF
It's beautiful!

RAJ-KNIGHT
Just like the picture!

The huge DRAGON BURSTS out of the WATERFALL and glides through the air well above the stunned adventurers.

Water flows off its back as it curves up into the clouds, unaware of the interlopers below.

Everyone shrinks back into the cover of the undergrowth.

BREE
(whispering)
It came from inside the waterfall!

NIA-ELF
Did it see us?

Everyone holds their breath, listening for the dragon.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Okay, so we found the castle and the dragon. Now what?

ERIC
We have to find some way to activate the portal.

CARLOS-DWARF
Whatever we need to do, we gotta do it up there.

ERIC
Lead the way.

Carlos-Dwarf nods, takes the lead. Eric and the others glance anxiously at the sky and follow.

EXT. WATERFALL LEDGE - NIGHT

The path leads onto a narrow ledge near the waterfall. Eric slips, Raj-Knight catches him.

The narrow ledge leads behind the waterfall. The players step single file into a cavern the size of a basketball arena.

INT. DRAGON'S CAVERN - NIGHT

On one side, a pile of bones in various stages of decay. In another, mounds of gold coins and chests of GEMS.

CARLOS-DWARF
Look at all those jewels!

ERIC
Go see if there's any dice.

CARLOS-DWARF
On it!

Carlos-Dwarf hurries across the floor of the cavern to the Dragon's stash of treasure. Bree stares at the bone pile.

ERIC
We're still below the castle. We
have to climb higher.

Raj-Knight points to the back of the cavern where a wide stone staircase curves up.

RAJ-KNIGHT
That's our way up.

NIA-ELF
Let's go then. We don't want to be
here when the dragon returns.

ERIC
Agreed. Carlos, let's go!

Carlos-Dwarf looks up from a chest overflowing with emeralds.

CARLOS-DWARF
Coming!

He leaves the treasure and makes his way across the cavern.

Just then, the DRAGON BURSTS THROUGH THE WATERFALL and lands in the center of the cavern.

It ROARS in anger as Eric and the others scramble for cover.

Bree SHOOTS AN ARROW that hits the Dragon's wing.

The DRAGON ROARS again. Its head expands, and with a GUTTURAL HISS, it sprays a stream of yellow mist at our heroes.

Nia-Elf, arms aloft, creates a WIND that BLOWS THE MIST OUT through the waterfall and knocks the others to the ground.

The Dragon leaps into the air at the top of the cavern.

The others get to their feet. Bree releases an arrow that lodges in the Dragon's tail.

The DRAGON SCREECHES and banks toward them.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Take cover!

The DRAGON LANDS HEAVILY. Its TAIL SMACKS Nia-Elf in the side, sends her sprawling across the rocky floor.

Carlos-Dwarf and Raj-Knight gash the Dragon's legs.

The DRAGON ROARS and sweeps its tail at Raj-Knight and Carlos-Dwarf, sends them crashing against the rocks.

The Dragon moves closer to Nia-Elf. Very close. Eric sees and rushes out, swinging his short sword wildly.

ERIC

You wanna fight! Come on, you green bastard!

Eric nicks the Dragon's tail with his short sword.

The DRAGON SCREECHES, swivels, and with a quick HISS, sends a short burst of YELLOW MIST that hits Eric in the chest.

Eric cries out in pain.

NIA-ELF

Eric!

Eric drops his sword and clutches his throat; his skin bubbles. He falls to the ground, convulses, mouth foaming.

Nia-Elf watches in horror. Eric's convulsing stops, his eyes bulging and lifeless.

Nia-Elf's sorrow turns to fury. Dark clouds form inside the cavern followed by FLASHES of LIGHTNING, THUNDER.

Football-sized CHUNKS of ICE drop from the ceiling, TEAR HOLES in the Dragon's wings, and EXPLODE ON THE GROUND.

The DRAGON ROARS in pain, pulls in its wings, and hurtles itself through the waterfall and out of the cavern.

As soon as the Dragon is gone, the ICE STORM CEASES.

Nia-Elf collapses. Raj-Knight goes to her, puts his hands on her, eyes closed. In a moment, Nia-Elf awakes, groggy.

She turns to where Eric's body still lies among chunks of ice and bursts into tears.

Raj-Knight follows her gaze, looks away, holds her more tightly as he sheds his own tear.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Maybe he got zapped back home.

NIA-ELF

His body's still here!

She sobs. Carlos-Dwarf and Bree come near with bowed heads. Bree sits next to her.

BREE

I'm so sorry about your brother.

Carlos-Dwarf puts a hand on Nia-Elf's shoulder.

CARLOS-DWARF

I don't mean to be insensitive, but
we need to go before it comes back.

Raj-Knight nods and helps Nia-Elf to her feet. The four of them climb the stone staircase.

INT. CASTLE - GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Breathing heavily, our heroes step into a great hall with an arched ceiling. Thick vines grow through the windows.

At one end, a staircase leads up. At the other, a stone fireplace. Heavy oaken doors lie on either side.

Carlos-Dwarf goes to examine one of the doors. Raj-Knight puts an arm around Nia-Elf as she wipes her tears.

NIA-ELF

How could he be so stupid?

Raj-Knight doesn't answer.

NIA-ELF (CONT'D)

What was he thinking?

RAJ-KNIGHT

He wasn't. Just acting on instinct.

NIA-ELF
To save me!

Nia-Elf sheds more tears at this.

CARLOS-DWARF
Hey, guys. In here.

INT. ALTAR ROOM - NIGHT

They enter a long, narrow room with a few rows of stone benches. Some are covered in splotches of dried blood.

A massive altar shaped from smooth, dark stone takes up the entire far end of the room.

CARLOS-DWARF
Looks like a chapel.

Carlos-Dwarf goes to the altar, sees its flat surface carved in an intricate design.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
It's like the design on the box!

The others come to the altar. Carlos-Dwarf points to several small depressions built into the carving.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
See the sunken parts? The poem said, "Find the stones and set them." Maybe this is where we're supposed set them.

RAJ-KNIGHT
What stones?

DRYGA (O.S.)
These stones.

Dryga stands in the doorway holding a fistful of green gems, his cloak hood pushed back. Everyone's mouths drop open.

BREE
Master Dryga?

CARLOS-DWARF
What are you doing here?

DRYGA
I've come to help you.

CARLOS-DWARF
I thought you had town business.

Dryga enters the altar room.

DRYGA
It concluded sooner than I thought.

RAJ-KNIGHT
You were at the tunnel opening!

DRYGA
I called to you, but the castle's
magical cloaking muffled my voice.

Dryga strides toward the altar.

CARLOS-DWARF
So you knew the whole time how to
find Hariyo Mahala?

DRYGA
I directed you here, did I not?

NIA-ELF
But Eric is dead!

To Nia-Elf's surprise, Dryga steps around the altar and takes
her hand briefly.

DRYGA
I am deeply sorry that you lost
your brother. But he died a hero's
death. A noble sacrifice.

NIA-ELF
Sacrifice for what?

DRYGA
For these.

He opens his palm, revealing several green gemstones.

RAJ-KNIGHT
The dragon's treasure?

NIA-ELF
We don't care about treasure!

DRYGA
No mere treasure.

He begins placing the gems into the depressions on the altar.

DRYGA (CONT'D)

You seek a way home?

NIA-ELF AND RAJ-KNIGHT

Yes!

Dryga holds up a final, huge green gem.

DRYGA

Here is your means.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Wait!

Dryga places the gem in the last depression in the altar.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)

I have a bad feeling about this.

As Dryga pulls his hand away, all the stones begin to glow.

Thin threads of green light flow along the pattern in the altar, connecting the stones.

The glow fades and the emerald gemstones embed themselves into the altar. Silence.

DRYGA

You may want to stand back.

Dryga steps into the center of the room. The others follow, eyes trained on the altar.

A RUMBLE shakes the room as the ALTAR starts to DISASSEMBLE itself, coming apart in large pieces.

BREE

What's happening?

Dryga slips out the door while the others are transfixed.

Like some medieval Transformer, the solid altar reorients itself into a ten-foot tall, smooth-stoned, HUMANOID SHAPE.

A large green gemstone glows in the center of its chest.

RAJ-KNIGHT

What the fu--

CARLOS-DWARF

It's a golem. A stone golem!

As Carlos-Dwarf speaks, the Golem takes a step toward them.

CARLOS-DWARF (CONT'D)
Don't let him touch you!

The others retreat out of the room and into the great hall.

INT. GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Just behind them, the GOLEM CRASHES through the doorway.

Bree fires an arrow straight at the Golem's chest. It bounces harmlessly aside.

CARLOS-DWARF
It's impervious to non-magical weapons!

RAJ-KNIGHT
It's up to us, then!

Raj-Knight swings his broadsword, slices off one of the Golem's ARMS. It falls and BREAKS into pieces.

The Golem ROARS. Raj-Knight and Carlos-Dwarf share a smile.

RAJ-KNIGHT (CONT'D)
She works!

A new bud of stone grows from the Golem's shoulder.

CARLOS-DWARF
Uh-oh.

The Golem attacks. Carlos-Dwarf's ax takes a chunk out of its leg. It grabs Carlos-Dwarf and swings him into the wall.

Carlos-Dwarf gets up in SLOW MOTION (half speed) while the others move normally.

Nia-Elf holds a hand up, eyes closed.

VINES at the window grow into the room, slide along the floor, CRAWL and TWIST around the Golem.

They ENTWINE and COVER it completely, hardening into a shell.

Nia-Elf falls to the floor. Raj-Knight goes to her.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Nia, can you hear me?

Silence.

Then the ROOTS and VINES EXPLODE off the Golem.

Raj-Knight falls, his SWORD CLANKING to the floor.

The Golem ROARS and lumbers toward Raj-Knight, who scuttles backward, reaches for his sword.

He grabs it, swings it around in time to pierce the gemstone in the center of the charging Golem's chest.

The GEM BURSTS with light, and the GOLEM EXPLODES.

INT. GREAT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Silence as the dust settles.

Raj-Knight limps to where Nia-Elf lies on the floor.

Carlos-Dwarf and Bree untangle themselves.

At the quiet center of the explosion lie the FOUR WOVEN DICE.

NIA-ELF

The dice!

Everyone turns, and Dryga is there, standing over the dice. He scoops them up.

DRYGA

I'm impressed. We couldn't get past him last time.

CARLOS-DWARF

RAJ-KNIGHT

We?

Last time?

DRYGA

My party. Not sure how long ago. I lose track of time in here.

RAJ-KNIGHT

You're from the real world?

DRYGA

I prefer to call it the non-magical world. Stuff gets pretty real here.

RAJ-KNIGHT

Who are you?

DAVE

I'm Dave.

CARLOS-DWARF

Wait. Dave Gary?

DAVE
In the flesh.

RAJ-KNIGHT
You're stuck in here, too?

CARLOS-DWARF
But you wrote the module!

DAVE
Ironical, I know.

CARLOS-DWARF
Why didn't you just kill the golem,
make more dice, and go back?

DAVE
Tried that. I was the only one who
survived the attempt. Should've
written an easier way to recreate
the dice.

RAJ-KNIGHT
There were others?

Dave nods.

DAVE
I believe you already met Andrew.

MEMORY FLASH:

The gnawed skeleton in the tunnel.

DAVE (V.O.)
Idiot fell on his own dagger. Chris
and Mike? Well...

In a Castle Courtyard, the Dragon blasts a lanky ELF with a
stream of poison mist.

In the Altar Room, the Golem crushes the head of a massive
FIGHTER; blood splatters the benches.

END MEMORY FLASH

INT. GREAT HALL - SAME TIME

DAVE
They met more noble ends.

NIA-ELF

Did-did they return to the... non-magical world?

DAVE

I've been dying to find out.

(beat)

No pun intended.

CARLOS-DWARF

Why not just die and follow them?

DAVE

Looked painful. Kinda hoping they'd re-enter the game and rescue me.

I'd just about given up hope when I saw you walk into town.

NIA-ELF

You've been watching us?

DAVE

Watching. Nudging.

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

Dryga/Dave, in hooded cloak...

...watches them from an alley near the Blackbriar Inn.

...spies on the adventurers under the Fairy Tree.

...blows FAKE yellow mist toward our heroes in the forest.

...peers down through the tunnel opening.

...steps gingerly past the Carrion Crawler corpse.

END FLASHBACK

RAJ-KNIGHT

But you can't get back. After "three suns," your "chances cease."

DAVE

I won't be taking the chance, you will. I'll simply stand in the portal when you activate it.

CARLOS-DWARF

A loophole.

DAVE

As yet untested. Who would like to
volunteer to roll the dice?

CARLOS-DWARF

But how do the dice create a door
to another dimension? What's so
special about those stones?

DAVE

Ah, the stones. Well, after years
of playing W&W, I got bored. I
wanted to truly experience magical
adventures, not just imagine them.

FLASHBACK: SERIES OF SHOTS WITH VOICEOVER

DAVE (V.O.)

I spent years investigating dozens
of reports of astral projection.
Every bizarre rumor.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Dave talks to native villagers.

A man in a headdress gesticulates wildly in front of Dave.

DAVE (V.O.)

They were all bunk. Until I came
upon the little village of Tsavo,
on the Kenya-Tanzania border.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A satellite view of Africa ZOOMS down into the jungles of
Kenya where Dave stands in the middle of a shallow creek.

DAVE (V.O.)

The only place on earth with large
deposits of tsavorite, one of the
oldest, rarest gems on the planet.

Dave holds a large, green tsavorite gemstone up to the sun.

EXT. JUNGLE VILLAGE - DAY

DAVE (V.O.)
 Centuries ago, according to the
 locals, artisans began wrapping
 tsavorite in black zirconium,
 earth's oldest metal.

An artisan creates a tsavorite-zirconium necklace.

A beautiful tsavorite pendant around the neck of a villager.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Then there was an accident.

EXT. JUNGLE VILLAGE - DAY

An artisan drops a handful of black zirconium-wrapped
 tsavorite pendants. A pillar of green light consumes him.

DAVE (V.O.)
 They discovered that clusters of
 zirconium-wrapped tsavorite, when
 agitated, create some sort of
 electro-magnetic displacement.

INT. GREAT HALL - PRESENT DAY

The players stand staring at Dave.

DAVE
 They apparently kept this discovery
 a secret, occasionally using
 zirconium-wrapped tsavorite to
 disappear their enemies.

CARLOS-DWARF
 You had someone make *Weapons &*
Wizardry dice out of tsavorite and
 black zirconium?

Dave grins.

DAVE
 And it worked! Don't ask me how.
 (beat)
 Tell me. How did you come to
 possess my module?

RAJ-KNIGHT
 Stephanie sold it to us.

CARLOS-DWARF
Said something about bankruptcy.

DAVE
Another reason I must return at
once. But I need your help. Who
will roll these?

RAJ-KNIGHT
What's the catch?

DAVE
No catch. You activate the portal.
We all go back. I take my game and
we never see each other again.

RAJ-KNIGHT
It's not your game. It's Eric's.

DAVE
Judging from what's left
downstairs, I don't think he has
much use for it anymore.

Nia-elf starts to cry.

RAJ-KNIGHT
He will if he's home already,
waiting for us!

DAVE
Only one way to find out.

Dave holds out the dice in his open palm.

Nia-Elf turns to the others, suddenly fierce.

NIA-ELF
I have to go back!

DAVE
And we have our volunteer.

Dave hands the dice to Nia-Elf and steps close to Bree.

CARLOS-DWARF
Wait! Don't roll yet.
(to Bree)
Bree, you need to stand back. Way
back. Otherwise you'll get caught
in the portal when it activates.

Before Bree can move, Dave pulls a string of leather pouches
from under his cloak and ties them around Bree's waist.

BREE
What are you doing?

DAVE
Sorry folks, Bree has to come with us. Only she can transport items from this dimension. I think.

CARLOS-DWARF
What items?

Dave points at the pouches bulging with gems and gold pieces.

DAVE
Those items.

CARLOS-DWARF
You can't do that to her. She has a life here!

Carlos-Dwarf moves toward Dave. Dave pulls out a dagger and holds it to Bree's throat.

DAVE
But she's just an NPC, right? Nia, roll those dice.

A horrible CRUNCH from above startles everyone. Then a CRUMBLING as the weight of the DRAGON COLLAPSES THE CEILING.

PIECES OF THE CASTLE FALL all around our heroes.

RAJ-KNIGHT
Watch out!

A CHUNK of STONE GRAZES Nia-Elf, knocks her down. The DICE FLY from her hand and BOUNCE across the floor.

Dave watches the dice, keeps his dagger at Bree's throat.

The DRAGON descends and LANDS with a ROAR.

CARLOS-DWARF
Bree, run!

Bree struggles to get away, but Dave holds her tight.

As Carlos-Dwarf moves to help Bree, a CHUNK OF STONE LANDS on his leg, crushing it.

One DIE SPINS in SLOW MOTION, then STOPS.

Bree elbows Dave in the stomach, starts to run. Dave tackles her from behind.

Another SLOW MOTION DIE comes to a STOP.

Raj-Knight rushes forward. The DRAGON BITES his ARM off at the shoulder. BLOOD GUSHES from the wound.

A THIRD DIE comes to a stop.

Nia-Elf raises her arms. LIGHTNING SPARKS in the air, but the DRAGON STAMPS down, CRUSHING her ARM and shoulder.

Bree kicks Dave in the head and frees herself.

CLOSE ON the LAST DIE--the twenty-sided--as it SPINS, STOPS.

GREEN LIGHT BURSTS from each die. An ELECTRIC CRACKLE and BOOM OF THUNDER as a pillar of GREEN LIGHT BURSTS UPWARD.

INT. ERIC & NIA'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

The GREEN LIGHT PILLAR shrinks into itself with a SOFT BOOM.

Raj, Nia, and Carlos, in their normal clothes and uninjured bodies, appear in their seats.

The FOUR DICE sit in the middle of the table, next to the pewter figurines.

All the players stare at each other, speechless.

They feel their normal bodies again. Raj rubs his shoulder where his arm was bitten off, relieved.

Then they see Eric's empty chair. They look frantically around the room.

NIA
Eric? Are you here?

Suddenly, a LONG SQUEAK fills the room, like air being let out of a balloon.

A SMALL PILLAR of GREEN LIGHT appears above Eric's chair. Then a POP and there's Eric, in t-shirt and medieval vest.

NIA (CONT'D)
You're alive!

ERIC
Nia? Is that you?

Nia comes over and hugs Eric in his chair.

NIA
I'm so glad you're not dead.

Eric hugs her back.

ERIC
Me too.

Nia wipes away a tear. Eric looks around in confusion.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Produce flame. I can't see.

NIA
You can't?

Eric looks around the well-lit room with unseeing eyes.

RAJ
We're back in your basement. The
lights are on.

ERIC
Everything's pitch black!

An offscreen GROAN and a SHUFFLING under the staircase.

BREE (O.S.)
Harbek? Carlos?

Eric looks, unseeing, toward the sound of Bree's voice.

ERIC
You brought Bree back with you?

RAJ
Not us.

Carlos pushes away from the table and goes to Bree.

Wearing her BOW and QUIVER of ARROWS, as well as Dave's
bulging POUCHES of TREASURE, Bree appears confused.

CARLOS
I'm here. It's me. Carlos.

BREE
You? But you're so--

CARLOS
Small, I know.

BREE
Young!

Carlos helps Bree to her feet and sees they are about the same height. He smiles.

Dave GROANS offscreen. Everyone shares a look of surprise.

DAVE (O.S.)
My treasure. Where's my treasure?

ERIC
Who the hell is that?

CARLOS
That's Dave Gary!

ERIC
What?!

NIA
He was stalking and spying on us as
Dryga the whole time. He sent that
mist in the forest!

Dave, now clean-shaven, gets up, looks around.

DAVE
But I brought you home, didn't I?
You should be thanking me.

He pushes Carlos aside, grabs Bree and unties the pouches from around her waist.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I love it when a plan comes
together.

Dave sees the dice on the table, moves toward them.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I'll be needing these, too.

Raj grabs the dice, stands up, speaks with authority.

RAJ
The game doesn't belong to you
anymore. Eric made a legal exchange
with your wife. Should we go talk
to Stephanie?

DAVE
Real smart, kid, but I outweigh you
by about a fifty pounds.

RAJ
Try it.

Before Dave can respond, the DRAGON SCREECHES offscreen.

Everyone freezes.

ERIC
Is that...?

They all push away from the table and scramble up the stairs.
Nia leads a sightless Eric.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Lying in the yard, shaking its head, the DRAGON SCREECHES.

RAJ
It got caught in the portal!

The Dragon comes to its feet and takes in its surroundings.

Dave stumbles out the front door, SPILLING GREEN GEMS.

He stops when he sees the Dragon in the yard.

DAVE
Crap!

The Dragon turns at the CLINKING of the SPILLED GEMS.

NIA
It's looking at us!

RAJ
We're dead! We don't have our
weapons or powers!

The Dragon's eyes narrow in anger and focus on Dave.

Dave's eyes widen in terror.

BREE
I still have my weapon.

DAVE
Your little bow's not gonna be
enough, girly!

Dave hugs his BAGS of LOOT and takes off down the street.

The DRAGON watches Dave for a moment, then ROARS.

CARLOS
He's right!

Carlos rushes back into the house as the others watch Dave stumble, DROP a few more GEMS, get up, and continue running.

The DRAGON leaps into the air, SCREECHES, flaps toward Dave.

Dave looks back, sees it gaining, stops at a parked car and tries to open the door.

Finding it locked, Dave takes off running. The Dragon lands on the car with a CRUNCH, TIRES POPPING.

ERIC

What's that sound? What's happening?

The Dragon leaps high and lands directly in front of Dave, cuts him off.

Dave screams and tries to flee, but the Dragon CHOMPS down on him, SWALLOWS HIM WHOLE, bags of loot and all.

The others watch Dave's demise with disgust. Nia turns away.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Is it chewing?

Carlos appears back on the porch with his BAG of FIREWORKS, a stick LIGHTER, and a roll of DUCT TAPE.

He pours out the contents of the bag and hands FIRECRACKERS and FIREBALL RODS to Nia and Raj.

CARLOS

These might distract it. Bree, hand me one of your arrows.

Carlos takes an arrow from Bree and duct tapes two M-80s to its shaft.

BREE

What are those?

CARLOS

Explosives.

The Dragon, done eating, turns toward Eric and the others.

NIA

It's looking at us again!

The Dragon leaps into the air, quickly gains altitude.

Raj holds a fistful of FIREBALL RODS as Nia LIGHTS them.

They aim the rods at the Dragon as FIREBALLS FLY out, THOOMP, THOOMP, THOOMP, arcing in front of it.

The Dragon swerves to avoid them, banks away.

Carlos hands the M-80-loaded arrow to Bree.

CARLOS

After I light these, shoot quick.
Aim for the Dragon's mouth.

Bree nods. She hefts the arrow, testing its weight.

The Dragon turns, heads straight toward them.

Bree raises her bow, and Carlos lights the M-80s. Their FUSES SIZZLE and Bree releases the arrow.

The ARROW WHIZZES straight at the Dragon's head, but EXPLODES before reaching it.

The Dragon SCREECHES and banks up.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Short fuses! Quick, another arrow!

Bree grabs another arrow from her quiver.

The Dragon turns and glides toward the porch again.

As the Dragon nears the house, Nia and Raj light and throw packs of FIRECRACKERS toward it.

They CRACK and POP just in front of the Dragon, and it swerves around the house, takes out a TV dish.

Carlos finishes wrapping M-80s around another arrow and hands it to Bree. She nocks it and sights it.

The Dragon turns and comes straight at them, face puffing up.

Carlos LIGHTS the FUSES and Bree releases the arrow.

The ARROW WHIZZES through the air INTO THE DRAGON'S MOUTH.

The DRAGON CHOKES and pulls up just as the M-80s EXPLODE and BLOW OFF ONE SIDE of the Dragon's face, its JAW and EYE.

As life drains from the Dragon, it descends erratically, until its other EYE goes DEAD, and it finally LANDS with a CRASHING THUD in the street.

Carlos embraces Bree and swings her around.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
You did it!

Bree looks as stunned as the rest of them.

INT. ERIC & NIA'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Eric sits at the game table with Raj, Carlos, and Nia gathered around him. Bree stands nearby.

ERIC
The pain just stopped and
everything went pitch black. I
couldn't see or hear anything. I
thought I was dead.

NIA
You looked pretty dead to us.

ERIC
I'd probably still be in that black
nothingness if you hadn't activated
the portal.

Nia puts a hand on Eric's shoulder. He reaches for her hand,
looks up, unseeing.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Thanks, Sis.

NIA
It was a team effort.

Eric looks around, unseeing.

ERIC
Thanks, everybody. I mean it.

Nia's eyes fill with tears.

NIA
Can you still see nothing?

ERIC
I'm starting to see dim shapes.

NIA
Maybe it's only temporary.

ERIC
Can you go check on Mom?

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Nia peeks into her mother's room, sees her sound asleep, snoring. She exhales with relief.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Raj and Nia stand on the porch and look out at the road where the Dragon's corpse lies under the street lights.

RAJ

Who's gonna explain that tomorrow?

NIA

Maybe the trash guys will take it.

Raj laughs. A moment of silence.

RAJ

Tell the truth. Who do you like better, Paladin Raj or real Raj?

NIA

Well, Paladin Raj was pretty impressive. Killing that crawly thing and the golem. And the healing hands thing. That was cool.

RAJ

No contest, right?

NIA

No contest.

(smiling)

I definitely like the real Raj better.

RAJ

Why?

NIA

The way you stood up to that awful man. You were so sure of yourself. It was... heroic.

RAJ

Says the hero who saved my life at least twice in two days.

Nia smiles with pride.

NIA
Has it really only been a couple
hours here?

RAJ
Yeah. I guess Kaylie's party is,
uh, just getting going.

She knows what he's asking.

NIA
Guess I should be leaving... Unless
you've got a better idea?

She smiles at Raj. He leans in and kisses her. She kisses
back. After a moment, they pull away.

NIA (CONT'D)
Nice idea.

INT. ERIC & NIA'S BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Carlos and Bree talk on the sofa. Raj and Nia come down the
stairs smiling foolishly.

Eric places the module booklet next to the four dice in their
green velvet nest.

NIA
How's your vision?

ERIC
I'm starting to see colors.

NIA
Oh, thank god!

RAJ
What are we gonna do with the box?

NIA
Bury it forever.

ERIC
Fine by me. I think I'm done GM'ing
for a while. Let's put it to a
vote. Carlos, what do you think?

On the sofa, Carlos looks up.

CARLOS
Hey guys, Bree's got a question.

He turns back to Bree.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

BREE

Will you help me return home?

The others' mouths fall open as the CAMERA TRACKS to the box, the DICE, and the DRAGON on the module cover.

FADE OUT.