

*Our mission to recover or destroy the Chalice of Dark Secrets has failed and our company is broken. The clerics of Tyr who financed our journey will be upset to learn this, but after what we encountered in our defeat no cleric's wrath can frighten me. Let them strike me dead if they wish, I'll not return to that godforsaken place.*

*We tracked the storm giant Lyrador to Porphatys, a wretched place largely covered in cold, acidic oceans. One could spend a miserable eternity searching the infinite orbs for any one creature, and we did spend days slogging across sandbars, surrounded by the black water and constant acidic snowfall, asking any and all who would answer if they had seen the giant and receiving contradictory answers. Liars abound in that despicable place; had we paid more attention to that perhaps Arvernien and Gaitus would not have died there.*

*We boarded the infamous Ship of One Hundred and there encountered the stranger called Femus. He was unlike the wretched spirits of the sandbars, or so we thought. He told us to seek the giant in a stronghold below the sea called the Black Iron Keep, and that a suitable offering of precious gems would induce the ghostly crew to stop on the correct orb. This last proved true enough, as a handful of rubies cast into the bilges caused the ship to jump to another orb and dock until we disembarked.*

*Finding the Castle proved simple once we donned our water breathing items and dove beneath the caustic waves. Arvernien's magic protected us from the acid waters and we found that despite the appearance of blackness there was sufficient red-tinged light for normal vision.*

*And here was where we fell prey to the treachery of Femus. "Do not approach the castle openly," he cautioned us. "A scant two miles to the east is the entrance to a cave system that leads underneath the fortress. There, your rogue can open a hidden grate to gain you entrance to the structure in secret."*

*So did we eschew the castle for the cave, and this was our undoing. For deep under the ocean floor as we wound our way through that system did we encounter a creature unlike any we'd faced before. In form it resembled an aboleth, though far larger than any known to our world. Its color was black and its eyes shone bright with intellect. We felt it probing our minds and were helpless to prevent it from reading our surface thoughts.*

*It spoke to me in my own voice, albeit devoid of any emotion, as if from inside my mind. "So you seek the storm giant Lyrador," it said. "I might be willing to allow this if you prove yourselves worthy."*

*Gaitus must have heard the same, for he brandished his holy symbol and stepped forward. "By the power and glory of Tyr I admonish you, foul thing, to retreat back into your hole. We have no quarrel with thee."*

*The voice remained absolutely cold. "Your mortal gods do not impress me, human. I am Uriel; I was spawned before your gods came to be and I have already seen one die. So put away your meaningless bauble and either leave my domain or earn my indulgence."*

*The barest movement caught my eye and I saw Arvernien attempting a spell. I'm no arcanist but it looked like his charm monster, a favorite tactic of his. The creature moved not at all, but a beam of brilliant energy shot forth from it and struck my wizard friend squarely on the chest. His body turned to dust that swirled in a tiny vortex formed by the water as it closed around the space where he had been.*

*So shocked was I to see such a mighty wizard felled in the blink of an eye that I had yet to even draw my katana when Gaitus cried out to Tyr for justice. Whatever spell he attempted failed; moments later I saw Gaitus fall to his knees and toss his holy symbol aside.*

*The voice spoke again. "This one is now my thrall; I shall keep him alive until I tire of his company and then I will*

*feed on his flesh. You two may leave now or die now. The choice is yours.”*

*Shameful as it is, I must admit that I gave no thought at all to the fate of my friends. I turned and swam from that place as fast as I could, not even pausing to see whether Durden had followed until I reached the mouth of the cave. There I learned that my quick-witted friend had paused just long enough to steal Gaitus's belt pouch, which contained the amulet of the planes we'd used to reach this abominable place, before making his retreat.*

*Thanks to Durden's skill and wits we escaped Porphatys and returned to our home world, arriving by chance in Nessen. He spoke of checking in with the Guild, maybe recruiting a larger party to go and save Gaitus, but I've years of experience reading Durden – by now he has surely talked his way onto the next ship to anywhere. He has no more desire to face that creature again than I.*

*This will be my last entry in this journal, for it sickens me now to even think of what I've done. I am no longer worthy to wield the daisho. In time I will pay the price for my cowardice, but right now my craven soul is simply glad it was Gaitus and not me who got left behind.*

*By the holy blade of Hachiman-shin, unknown Reader, understand this: there are far worse things in the multiverse than ever climbed out of Hell, and one of them calls itself Uriel.*