

3/13/05: The Forge of Garodeus

The Guardians of Gore spent a day or two contemplating recent events. Having discovered the nature of the Curse of the Five and seen its effect in Simon Gore, the group felt a growing need to learn more.

Information trickled in. Using the Rod of Insight, they developed a suspicion that the curse was related in some way to the 7-year period during which the Five were missing underground. Focusing the Rod on the concept of Gore's armor yielded a cryptic vision of a smoking mountain and a short message: *The relic of Gore now serves a dark master. By the glow of the ancient Forge he teaches his art to an army of the wizard's creations.*

This vision dovetailed with a recurring dream of Elayna's. In her dream, Elayna saw a mountain that spewed black smoke. The vision was accompanied by the visage of a dark knight and the sound of heavy footsteps marching and the steady, rhythmic clang of metal on metal.

The dream and the Rod's reference to an ancient forge reminded Dimdar of an old legend. She told the group the story of the Forge of Garodeus. In the Age of War, when the dwarven people were faced with overwhelming foes on all sides, the wizard Garodeus discovered the secret means to create living constructs -- soldiers who needed neither food nor rest and were resistant to the magic and weapons of the dwarves' enemies. These warforged, as they were called, made incredibly efficient soldiers. So much so, in fact, that they frightened their makers with their effectiveness. The dwarves allied with their human rivals, destroyed Garodeus and hunted down the wizard's creations. The secret of giving life to a construct was thought to have died with Garodeus.

But the Guardians began to suspect otherwise. They recalled hearing of an ancient spell book that was sold on the black market some time before; a stray adventurer's complaint about his party being ambushed by Halflings in the mountains; the disappearance of a number of master craftsmen and raw materials from the stores in Tiburon. Investigation was clearly indicated.

The party visited the dwarf city and spoke to Farzic Elidain, captain of the guard. They learned that the craftsmen had vanished several weeks before, apparently taking nothing but their tools. Since that time, at regular intervals, stocks of mithral and adamantine and darkwood had vanished from the storage buildings. The thefts were done by arcane means, teleporting the goods to an unknown location. Farzic was powerless to stop it.

The group also visited Ralma Farhand, an elderly sage and one of the few living from the days of Garodeus. She told them what she knew of the warforged and of where the Forge was thought to be. The party set off in search of the Forge.

On their first day of travel the party found themselves in one of many narrow mountain passes when a hail of small boulders halted them. They were accosted by Skrag, a skullcrusher ogre, and three cohorts of the same type. Skrag demanded a "toll" to allow the group to pass through what he claimed as his territory. As Skrag had already taken a well-placed arrow from Cori and seemed unimpressed, the party looked to solve the problem without using up precious spell and combat resources. After a short, one-sided negotiation they allowed Skrag to take their rented horses and continued the journey on foot.

That night the team camped in a wider passage. Most of the night passed uneventfully, but as dawn neared a pack of feral yowlers came upon the party and decided they looked like a breakfast. The animals used their fear-inducing cry to terrify some of the group into inaction. Elayne set to work immediately counteracting the fear effect while others engaged the creatures.

Nimbus used a *fireball* to discourage two from attacking, nearly catching Purdue in the blast radius. He followed up with *scorching ray* and *orb of electricity* to avoid injuring his allies. Groop, Cori and Purdue fought the creatures and protected the stricken while Elayna went to each with *remove fear*. As the yowlers weakened Pyroh used *magic missile* spells to finish them off.

With dawn near but spells depleted, the group opted to rest longer. Elayna used *power nap* to enable the spellcasters to recover spells.

All through the day the party approached their goal, a mountain spewing a column of black smoke. Late in the afternoon they entered another narrow pass. Renn spied movement in a clump of bushes overlooking the pass and the party remembered the other adventurer's tale of ambush by a band of halflings. The party climbed to higher ground rather than run the gauntlet at ground level.

They chose wisely. As the party made their way along a ledge, small arrows flew at them from the suspicious bushes on the other side of the gap. Purdue got a running start and tried to leap across the narrow canyon but slipped and landed on the path below. Pyroh set the bushes alight with a *fireball* and sent four halfling-sized figures scurrying for other cover. Groop picked one off with his longbow and Nimbus sent a *fireball* that destroyed the remaining three.

Upon examination the party discovered that these "halflings" were not halflings at all. They were a halfling's height, but thin and wiry and made entirely of steel, wood, and fibrous tissue connecting solid pieces. The heads had tiny red eyes, now dark, and bore a familiar insignia -- the same symbol the group had previously found on chests at Bainard's Keep and the Pearl Tower, which teleported their contents to an unknown location. That symbol, they knew, was the signature of the Dark One.

They followed the trail for another hour before coming to their destination, the base of a large mountain. There was no obvious entrance, only a land bridge 50 feet up leading to

another smaller mountain. As Pyroh's familiar sent word of an opening at the bridge, Pyroh himself spotted an irregularity in the rock at the base. A few minutes of searching turned up a secret door and the means to open it.

The group entered the mountain through the secret door, which opened into a man-made corridor lit by magical means. The corridor was wide and showed signs of heavy wheel traffic.

Soon the party came upon a large storage room. Stockpiles of mithral, adamantine, darkwood, steel, and other goods filled the room. As the group studied the piles a pair of man-sized automatons entered. The party took cover while the new arrivals filled wheelbarrows with metal plates and shaping blanks and then returned deeper into the mountain.

Dimdar turned to gaseous form and slipped through a closed doorway to reconnoiter. She found a massive round chamber 250 feet across and dominated by a tremendous, roaring furnace that shot flames and smoke straight up. The room was littered with more warforged workers who were busy making and joining the pieces to create more like themselves. Also stationed at the perimeter were a number of warforged bearing bastard swords. The shine of their chest plates and limbs suggested they were made of mithral rather than steel.

The party tried to draw the warforged into the storage room a few at a time to avoid a long battle in the open space of the Forge. The warforged proved too focused on their work, though, and eventually the party opted to attack. They deliberately stayed near the doorway, attacking only a select few opponents, and drew back into the corridor. Instead of following them, though, the warforged closed and barred the iron doors to the main chamber.

Elayna used *stone shape* to widen the opening, allowing Groop to push the doors down easily. The party spotted a warforged worker climbing a ladder to an upper level and tried to stop it, but the distance was too great for a decisive blow. They focused on the constructs in the immediate area, counting on others to join the battle slowly.

The fighters discovered quickly that there were major differences in the warforged. The workers were steel, unarmed, and relatively easy to destroy. The armed guards, on the other hand, had mithral body parts and improved protection from weapon damage. Inflicting damage on them was more difficult.

The space was too large and the enemy too numerous for the party to contain them. They were not surprised, therefore, when reinforcements appeared from a far tunnel. These new constructs were large and ape-like, charging on all fours with heads down, and had spikes on their adamantine-clad shoulders. They charged straight for the main party, connecting once with Purdue for a devastating blow.

Fortunately, Nimbus discovered a weakness in the warforged. Being made mostly of metal, they proved highly susceptible to electrical energy. His *orb of electricity* and *lightning bolt* spells proved highly effective. Pyroh and Gilead heeded the cue and adjusted their tactics accordingly.

Things turned deadly when a new figure emerged from the upper level: a fighter, clad in Marcellus Gore's armor, appeared at the rail. He stood calmly firing arrows from his greatbow, each shot striking a party member and doing serious damage.

Cori saw that the best way to protect the party was to force the dark fighter into melee. He used a spell to render the cavern wall easy to climb then took to the ledge and ran to close on the assailant. Groop followed suit, circling around from the other side.

The decision proved dangerous for them both. The fighter dropped his greatbow and drew a wicked adamantite claymore. He greeted Cori's charge with two devastating blows and then did the same to Groop.

The party had never encountered anyone before with this warrior's combat skill. Despite the quality of their armor and dodging skill the warrior hit both men almost at will, doing heavy damage with each powerful blow. He took blows in return but most were glancing, his magic armor protecting him from serious damage. First Cori and then Groop were forced to back off and drink healing potions to stay in the fight.

The warrior also proved adept at resisting magical attacks. He absorbed *magic missile* attacks with a magic brooch and seemed to take the damage from *melf's acid arrow* without flinching. As the party ganged up on him with spell and weapon, the warrior pushed his way past Cori and tried to escape. Gillead stopped him with *vampiric touch*, draining the last of his hit points and rendering the fighter unconscious. Elayna bound his wounds to keep him alive and Groop secured him with ropes. The party removed the fighter's helm to find the face of Marcellus Gore himself underneath it.

Unsure what to do, the party took the armor off the man and bound him tightly. The idea that this was Marcellus Gore, the hero of old, unsettled several of them. They searched for another explanation even as Pyroh destroyed a group of fleeing warforged with another *fireball*. They took a few minutes to heal their own wounds and resumed the mission.

The Guardians found the missing craftsmen in a locked cell on the lower level. They had been Geased into creating the warforged, they testified, and had no choice but to follow the wizard's orders. By their best estimate about 250 warforged had been created thus far, including 50 completed bodies waiting to be animated.

The craftsmen had worse news. The wizard was seldom seen in the Forge anymore; day to day operations were normally run by an evil cleric. The cleric had been animating the bodies and then turning them over to the warrior for martial training. The cleric was not in residence at the moment, but they had no idea where to find him.

In upper chambers the party found more evidence of the nature of the plot. A bedroom showed signs of being shared by two people, one military type and one clerical. A book found in the room told the history of the Flats at the time of the Heroes and beyond. A magical laboratory held a disturbing sight: an arm from a warforged scout, apparently being modified to allow the insertion of a magic wand.

Finally, the party found the wizard's private chamber. There they discovered a chest bearing a familiar-looking face: Fred, the unfortunate flunky of Silas Rook who'd been transformed into a door by the Dark One, was now serving as a storage chest. Fred recognized the party as those who had tricked him into allowing them to free Charlotte Gore but saw in them his once chance at freedom. Fred offered to give them his password in exchange for safe transport to a place where he could be returned to human form. He also tipped them off to a secret door in the room.

The secret door led the group to a remarkable treasure. A suit of exquisite dwarven plate armor, with shield and urgrosh to match, stood in a corner. An iron chest contained thousands of gold and platinum coins with markings that predate the Northern Alliance, along with brass-bound books and an old wand. These treasures were clearly from the time of Garodeus himself and would be priceless to the elders in Tiburon.

The party loaded up the treasures, the craftsmen, and their captive into wagons they found nearby along with as much of the valuable material as they could fit. They pulled the wagons themselves, with some summoned help from Elayna, and returned to Tiburon.

Along the way Fred revealed his contents:

- A magic robe, which proved to be a Robe of Disguise
- A very old bone Wand of Improved Darkvision
- A traveling spell book with the arcane spells *Improved Darkvision*, *Detect Secret Doors*, *Locate Object*, *Detect Scrying*, and *Geas*.
- Another small spellbook with an unknown spell. This later proved to be the spell used to animate warforged.
- A set of three leather notebooks, very old, with newer pages inserted. The mages recognized it as magical spell notes and saw three distinct handwritings. On later inspection Gillead was able to glean the gist of several previously unknown spells in various stages of completion.

The party arrived in Tiburon and discreetly waited until dark to enter the city. They had members of the clans unload the materials and secure them, bringing joy to the craftsmen who had been suffering from the shortage. The captive and the chests they took to the library, where they met with Thorauk Tiburon, Theo Gore, and three members of the Council of Elders.

Theo identified the mysterious notebooks as part of the sealed research materials of Artemis Tavor. The implications of that discovery were upstaged, however, by the

unveiling of the captive. The man who resembled Marcellus Gore greeted Theo by name and called him "brother," much to the older man's chagrin. Theo gagged the man and had him taken away to a deep cell. The party agreed to help guard him, lest the wizard or cleric attempt a rescue.

The elders identified the armor as belonging to Fardain, a legendary hero of the Great War. The armor, shield and urgrosh were priceless historical items and were conferred to Bolubin the librarian to be cleaned and studied. The brass-bound books were the personal journals of Garodeus, likewise priceless to any historian.

In gratitude for the party's efforts the Council gave them all of the antique coins and other items they recovered. They also decreed that members of the party could order any armor or weapon items they wished from the craft houses and receive top priority and at-cost pricing for such items. They then adjourned with Theo, who promised to meet with the party again the next day to answer their many questions.
