
City of the Spider Queen

The heroes of Gore's Cliff slept in the secret tunnel connecting the realm of the lich queen Nyrelda with the drow city of Sheoloth. They had a contact in the city who was loyal to Nyrelda and a way into Sheoloth that would bypass the infamous Black Gate. The mission was on track.

As the heroes worked their way through the tunnel they noticed an increasingly thick tangle of cobwebs above them. The passage widened out and the party suddenly found itself ambushed by a group of large, half-drow/half-spider aberrations – driders. The creatures fired arrows from the cover of the webs, then dropped down to attack. Two appeared at the party's rear and two at the front.

Elayna stunned one drider by invoking the Cerulean Sign, an obscure spell that repulses aberrations. Perdue took advantage of the creature's helpless state to perform a *coup de gras* on it. Groop and Nazir engaged the front driders in melee while the rest of the party defended their flank. The driders unleashed vile spells the likes of which Gilead had only read of, including a word of the Black Speech and another that sent a stream of sharp bone splinters at the party. The magic users responded with a barrage of destructive magic which, combined with the melee attacks of the fighters, overcame the creatures. Within a few seconds all four driders lay dead.

The party followed the tunnel and traced the driders' tracks back to their lair. They found a modest cache of gems and a magic scroll containing several useful spells and one corrupt spell, *Rotting Curse of Urfestra*. They secured the items and continued toward the drow city.

The secret tunnel ended in a narrow hatch. The party climbed through the opening into an alley behind a series of natural stone walls. They followed their directions and entered the home of Tyrak'manon, a slaver in service to Nyrelda. The slaver was uneasy at first, especially when he realized how many of the party there were, but Dimdar and Nazir were able to put him at ease.

Tyrak'manon told the party of recent developments in Sheoloth. Rumors had reached the city of a large party of outworlders traveling into Middledark. The authorities were publicly blasé about it, but the city was on high alert for any kind of action by outlanders. Tyrak advised the party not to be seen together, as the sight of eleven armed outworlders would surely bring soldiers in great number. He also took note of the armor worn by Elayna and Nimbus, which had the holy symbol of Corellon boldly stamped into the chest plates. To wear such armor openly in Sheoloth was to invite death. Tyrak left the party in his home while he went to secure more appropriate armor for them.

While Tyrak was away the party made plans for their assault on the city. While using the secret tunnel had gotten them past the main city entrance they would still need to pass two more heavily guarded checkpoints on their way to the Great Temple of Lolth. First was the Inner Gate, a barrier separating the business district from the more affluent and exclusive Forum area. Once in the Forum the party would then have to get into the Temple Courtyard and to the Temple itself, where (per Tyrak) non-drow are never allowed entry.

They came up with a plan designed to take advantage of the nervous state of the populace. When

Tyrak returned with drow chainmail for Elayna and Nimbus, he agreed to plant a rumor among his business associates that the drow were planning a wholesale slaughter of slaves out of fear that outworlders would start an uprising. The story was highly plausible because the Five had used a slave uprising to distract the armies when they had taken on Eclavdra fifty years before.

For the second part of their plan, the party broke up into three smaller groups. Groop, Renn, and Dimdar visited a pub wearing Clynestra house medallions. Dimdar offered to perform and used her suggestion ability to plant the idea that Andrathne, the matriarch of House Mahlvain, had arranged for the outworlders to come to Sheoloth in order to make Gaelanea, the current High Priestess and matriarch of House Clynestra, look as if she was losing control. At the same time Nazir, Cori, Gilead and Perdue wore Clynestra medallions to another pub and allowed themselves to be overheard discussing Gaelanea's plan to have a party of outworlders attack the city in such a way that House Mahlvain would be blamed. Bullseye, Nimbus and Elayna went to a third public house and seeded both rumors to a mixed and receptive crowd.

By the next morning the party's rumor mongering had done its work. Tyrak'manon reported increased tension between soldiers of Clynestra and Mahlvain and borderline panic among the slavers, who feared losing valuable stock to drow paranoia. As the party prepared to take to the streets a drow patrol from Mahlvain pounded on the door and tried to arrest Tyrak'manon.

The combat was short but intense. Pyroh and Nimbus used *arc of lightning* spells to damage the drow fighters from cover inside the house while Groop engaged them in melee. The fighters proved more dangerous than the party expected; Groop took heavy wounds in the doorway. Cori also suffered when the cleric who led the party unleashed a phantasmal claw of evil energy that ripped at Cori's body and wounded him severely. The party's spells were more powerful than the fighters' blades, though, and the drow didn't last any longer than the driders had the previous day. While Tyrak's neighbors scurried away in fear the party dumped the bodies in a public place and set them ablaze.

The heroes made their way to the inner gate in the same subgroups they had used the night before. They were able to gain entry to the Forum by seeking out a guard captain named Roue and giving him substantial bribes.

As they worked their way through the Forum the party witnessed a minor riot breaking out as groups of soldiers from Clynestra and Mahlvain skirmished over the latest rumors that were openly spreading through town. The conflict escalated nicely with no help from the party, so they headed for the Temple courtyard entrance to try and get those guards involved.

Unfortunately, the guards at the entrance to the courtyard were either too committed to duty or too afraid of punishment to leave their posts and join the fray. The party started a new altercation of their own, using their opposing house medallions to create the illusion of conflict. The guards were not taken in, however, or perhaps were not that interested in the squabbings of what they saw as slaves. Groop tried to draw them in by throwing Cori at the Mahlvain group but the tactic backfired – the drow leaders, who turned out to be warmages, cast *fireballs* at both clusters of the party and a melee ensued.

The fight was short and bloody. The courtyard guards proved more capable than the street thugs who had tried to take Tyrak. It took a coordinated effort between the magic users and the fighters to take down the line of guards. One tried to flee and was taken down by Elayna's *flame strike*. Three more were engulfed in a *fireball* from Pyroh and then finished off by the fighters. Renn, Perdue, Nimbus and Bullseye also killed drow.

Short as it was, the combat gave the drow in the courtyard enough time to scramble and get out of the way. Word spread quickly through the area that the outlanders were attacking and civilians took cover wherever they could. The courtyard emptied, allowing the party easy passage across 800 feet of rock to the steps of the Great Temple of Lolth. There they found the way barred by eight soldiers bearing heavy armor and wielding gyrspears. The soldiers were backed by two more senior-looking fighter types. Behind them, with her back to the blocked Temple doors, was a drow priestess bearing a shining black staff – Gaelanea, the current High Priestess of Lolth.

In a brief exchange of Elvish words Gaelanea told the party she knew why they had come and advised them to leave immediately. For the heroes of Gore this was not an option, so the talk ended and the fighting began. Pyroh opened the combat with a *fireball* and Dimdar began her inspiring song.

The senior fighters stepped forward and attempted to cast curses on Groop and Cori, but both men resisted the affects. Elayna fortified herself with *divine power* for a showdown with the drow priestess. Perdue charged the woman, using his tumbling skills to move past the ranks of fighters without giving them an opportunity to attack him. Nimbus summoned his *defenestrating sphere* to use against the front line fighters. From some distance overhead, the ominous roar of a great beast echoed through the courtyard – the Obsidian Dragon was coming.

Anticipating a need for a fast medic, Pyroh took the Shroud of Healing from Elayna and cast *dimension jump* on himself. Perdue would be the first to need it: surrounded by enemies, he absorbed a *darkbolt* from Gaelanea and multiple hits from one of the hexblade captains in rapid succession. Then Gaelanea targeted the persistent monk with a devastating *harm* spell that put Perdue within a scratch of death.

Seeing that Gaelanea was using magical protections on herself, Gilead cast *reciprocating gyre* on the priestess and did some damage. Dimdar's *burning melody* damaged the front line and the priestess. Nimbus send an *orb of acid* at the priestess but missed. Pyroh's *orb of acid* was bounced back at him by Gaelanea using the Staff of the Spider Queen.

While the spellcasters focused on Gaelanea and her senior guards the rest of the party chipped away at the front-line fighters. It was a hard fight because the drow were well armored, but the Guardians had experience and ability on their side. The drow slowly weakened, though with their backs to the Temple they dared not run.

After another great roar a massive winged beast landed in the courtyard at the party's flank. The Obsidian Dragon was a huge creature with glassy black scales and a long wingspan. Its frightful presence ability shook most of the party but they held firm to their purpose. On Gaelanea's person, they knew, was a talisman that bound the dragon to service; they made obtaining that object their primary focus.

Renn scored a critical hit on the priestess and absorbed a *flame strike* in retaliation. Gilead used a chained *lightning bolt* to damage several guards at once while Elayna tended to the reeling Perdue. A guard hit Renn with a poisoned crossbow bolt that dropped the half-elf to the ground and left him vulnerable to the first drow to reach him. Cori killed a temple guard but strayed too close to the Obsidian Dragon and was bitten by the beast.

A blast of the dragon's breath weapon enveloped most of the party and their opponents in a cloud of black, sickening mist that threatened to pull the life energy out of their bodies. Several of the party and

most of the drow were weakened by the mist.

At the top of the stairs, Gaelanea was clearly weak and near to collapse. Perdue was able to jar the Staff from her hands and tried to pick it up, but the Staff sent bolts of pain through his body that caused him to drop it instantly. Gilead killed the high priestess with a *vitriolic sphere* just as she was reclaiming the Staff for herself. Elayna sensed a strong intelligence in the Staff calling to her and found she could pick it up without injury or resistance. While she examined it Gilead searched Gaelanea's body and found the talisman of the dragon.

The Staff spoke telepathically to Elayna – it had great destructive power which it placed at Elayna's disposal. The Obsidian Dragon loomed over the party still, despite Dimdar's assertions that the party meant it no harm. Elayna used the Staff to cast *disintegrate* and turned the dragon's talisman into a pile of fine dust. The dragon roared and spread its wings, then shimmered and vanished.

With their best soldiers and their High Priestess dead and the fearsome guardian of the Temple gone, the remaining drow fled. The party used ropes and *fly* magic to scale the Temple wall and escape through the passage in the dragon's former lair. No drow made any attempt to pursue them.