
The Wealth of the Elves

by Dr. Juice

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It was our third day at sea. We were on our way to Grandmother's house when the storm hit. My brother, Lucas, and I had been lucky we were near the raft when the cruiser smashed into pieces. Luckier still, the raft did not fall apart. But that is where our luck stopped.

As the sun rose, it was getting hot again. "Mia, I'm thirsty", Lucas complained, "Really thirsty." I wouldn't let Lucas drink the sea water – it would only dehydrate us more. The storm had pushed us past the sea border, we were floating in the Exclusion Zone – an area outside of our people's lands. Here, all communications were blocked by the dwarves. No human would know we were there or be able to cross the line to save us.



We floated.

We floated some more.

It seemed like forever. We held each other and thought of our parents.



Suddenly, we lurched. A dwarf fishing vessel came out of nowhere at incredible speed and grabbed us in a net full of fish. We were scared at first, then Lucas said, "I don't think they have seen us, but they are dragging our raft toward shore." I agreed, "We can hopefully get their attention on shore".

We didn't know much about the dwarves. They keep mostly to themselves to protect their gold. Ever since they put up the Exclusion Zone, humans had left them and the elves behind it to themselves. As we got closer, "Look at that!", shouted Lucas.

The Dwarf shipyard was even larger and grander than I had imagined.

We knew the dwarves were rich, but it had been decades since the Exclusion Zone went up, cutting off all contact between the dwarves and our people. Our raft started being pulled up to the dock. It didn't look like we were going to get home – but we were not going to die on the vast ocean either.





Surprisingly welcoming, a stocky dwarf said, “Hi, folks. I am Gree – welcome to my shoreline and the Land of the Dwarf Kings!” “Help'em out of that wreck!”, he yelled at his servants. Gree continued, “You look'n healthy just a little tired and hungry. Let me take'n you to the guest house. Can't have'n people starv'n on my doorstep.

Gree brags, “We have great meat – you'll be love'n it.”

“Mia can you believe how much meat they have?” asked Lucas.

Gree seated us at an over-flowing table. “Have'n as much as you want, we'll trash the rest anyways.” My stomach growled loudly and we dug in gleefully.

After we had finished, Gree said, “Let me show'n you how I pay for this . Everything has a price.”

“Come tour'n my mines.” He wheezed as we climbed the stairs. “Need'm escalator.” he mumbled.





“Look at all my workers going to get'n my gold and my coal. “, Gree boasted.

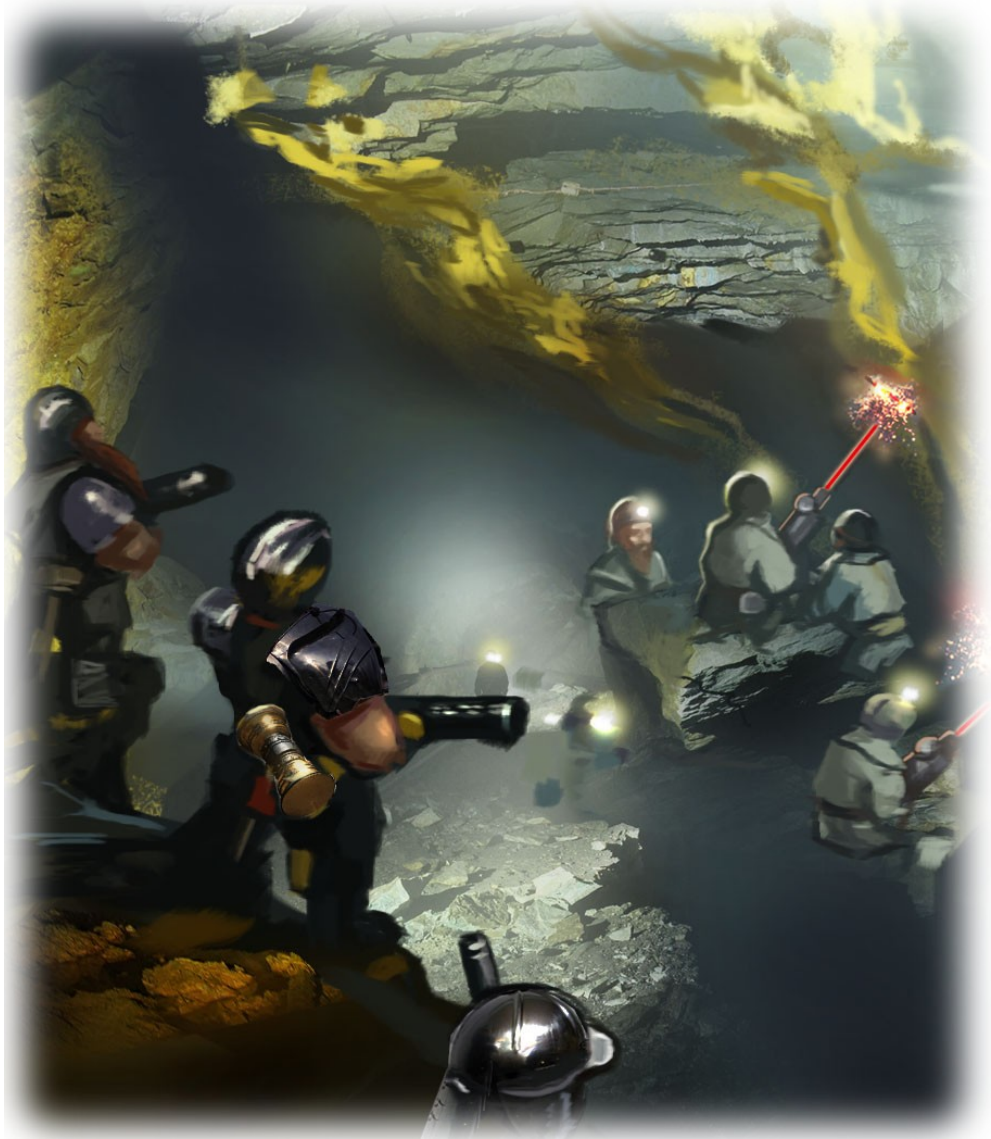
“They work'n for wages, 10 of my gold coins a day. We have guards to protect against the thieves – they are every-where.”

“They worse than those buy-nothing elves! They will ruin everything,” Gree grumbled .

The gold mine was sweltering hot and smelled of chemical wastes that seemed to rise as steam from the deep tunnel. "Work'n harder!!", yelled Gree at the miners. "Need'm more! Need'm more! More!"

A servant called Gree away for his nap and we were thankfully left on our own.

"Why does he need all this gold anyway?" asked Lucas. "I'm not sure," I admitted. It already seemed Gree had more than enough. We followed some worker dwarves who didn't talk to us to the coal mine. The filth of the coal mine was even worse. "Let's get out of here, Mia. It's scary", said Lucas.





We walked out of the dark of the mines back into the street. Lucas said, “Mia, boost me up to see”. We both peer over the wall. All the splendor of the great dwarf city seemed to vanish in a few feet.

Decaying buildings leaned against each other to keep from falling down.

“Where is all the gold?” I ask.

Curious, we climbed the wall and started down an alley into the wasteland.

We saw that everyone does not live as well as Gree in the Land of the Dwarf Kings.



Handicapped and elderly workers lined the street, begging for handouts.



We hurried along quietly, trying to avoid eye contact.

As we explored deeper into the ruins, passing the beggars, the smell hit us.

Lucas said "This place stinks." The smell was so bad, my eyes started to water, but I grabbed Lucas' arm just as he nearly fell into a massive landfill.

The smell was overpowering.

Someone grabbed my arm. "There you kids are." said a servant dwarf, "Gree wants you back to your room so you get a good night's sleep before you start work tomorrow."

"If you don't work you don't eat in the Land of the Dwarves. You will get the standard 10 gold coins a day."

The room was a stunning contrast to the street we had just come from. When the servant left, Lucas whispered "I don't understand - why are there so many poor dwarves with so much richness all around? 10 gold coins seems like a lot!"





“I don't know, let's get some sleep now and try to figure it out in the morning.” We laid down in the soft pillows and quickly fell asleep.

In the middle of the night, I was awakened from my sleep with a tug on my ear. “I am Ava – a member of the Light Brigade. I am here to rescue you,” she said.

“ You must get up and leave immediately. The dwarves are not who they appear to be. The rich live well, but all the other dwarves serve them.”

Just as she said this, a white letter slides under the door.

“That would be your bill,” Ava said with disgust.

I held the letter and read in awe. We had been charged for everything!

Ava explained “It will take you years of toil in the mines to pay off the debt to Gree – most never do – they simply become slaves to his company, which now owns most of the Dwarf Kingdom.”

Now I understood why there were so many homeless dwarves – those that could not work in the mines ended up on the streets.

I woke Lucas and showed him the bill. His face became red as he realized how we had been tricked.

Gree Dwarf Inn and Suites	
Ocean rescue	10,000 gold coins
Food	20 gold coins
Lodging	10 gold coins
Mine tour	10 gold coins
Minibar stocking	1 gold coin
Billing	1 gold coin

Sub-Total	10,042 gold coins
Taxes for King	1,005 gold coins

Total	11,059 gold coins
Due at checkout (Can be paid through wage deductions)	



Ava said, "You must come with me to the Land of the Elves where you will be free of this wage slavery."

We slipped on our clothes and followed the fairy. We followed Ava running as fast as we could.

"It is after curfew. Halt!", shouted a dwarf guard that spotted us.

Ava knocked over the short dwarf with a flash of light and yelled "Run!"

We ran.

The dwarf guards chased us but we made it to the woods. The woods were thick and dark, but we could see Ava's fairy glow.

As we got deep into the woods, we lost them. Ava flew in front of us and did her best to knock away insects as big as she was with her light. They were intent on eating us alive.

As the air cleared, Ava explained, "To keep the privileged dwarves like Gree in luxury, everyone else in the dwarf society must work like slaves until they can no longer work, and then they are discarded. We fairies have sworn to save those that we can – but most dwarves are too far gone with their lust of gold to listen."



"You will like the Land of the Elves much better." she said.

Walking was hard and lasted a long time. Lucas was homesick and I was starting to worry we would never see our parents again. She told us about the great Exclusion Zone the dwarves had built to keep the elves from meeting humans and destroying the dwarves' markets. It was really nice to have Ava to explain things. She assured us the elves could help. "We have finally made it – this is the land of the Elves!" Ava shouted with glee and a flourish of her hands. "Amazing!", Lucas and I said together. From our overlook, we could see that all of the region was bountiful and beautiful. There were no ugly alleys here, just waterfalls, trees and simple, elegant houses with odd rooftops.



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