



Adventure #5

Last Session...

...the heroes infiltrated the Redbrand's hideout at Tresendar Manor. There was a weird, jabbering one-eyed thing in the basement that could read their minds, and it demanded foodsies, preferably the kicking and screaming kind. Well, they couldn't find any rats for the thing, in hopes that it might divulge some information, and in their search they reached an upper level and heard gruff voices behind a door.

There are six 3rd level people in the party: Elgweth the rogue, Cora the monk, Carp the warlock, Feyta Wan the Fighter, Thoradin the dwarf cleric and the warrior Sildar Hallwinter, who really wants to find out if this Glasstaff wizard of the Redbrands is in fact also the missing Iarno Albreck of the Lord's Alliance of Neverwinter. One disappearing at the same time the other appeared is too much of a coincidence.

There is also a curious alcove that Elgweh the rogue investigates, and upon searching it he feels a draft through a crack. A dagger and thief tools unveil a secret passage into a prisoner chamber. He has gently popped the stone door open and sees three figures reclining on straw and covered by dirty blankets. One of them appears to be a human female no older than eighteen or nineteen. He closes the door without waking them and then listens at the other door.



Behind this other door he still hears deep voices. “Well, how many?” “I don’t know, three or four maybe. They killed ‘em all, right there in the street.” “Well do your godsdamned jobs better! Ask Glasstaff what to do next, and obey his last word, you filthy human. That’s what we get for depending on YOU to get things done around here...”

Well, the conversation must be in regards to the party; they just killed a bunch of Redbrands in Phandalin over an hour ago, and word must have filtered back

to the hideout. Licking his lips and gently testing the knob, Elgweth pushes the door open a crack to see inside.



Three bugbears and two Redbrands. They know they're bugbears because they killed one in the original goblin hideout, a bugbear that had been hired by someone (or something) named **The Black Spider** to kidnap **Gundren Rockseeker** and learn the location of *Wave Echo Cave*, *the Lost Mine of Phandelver* within, and thusly the *Forge of Spells*. So, the bugbears might be in cahoots with all of this; Glasstaff, the Redbrands, Cragmaw Castle, and the kidnappings.

He closes the door, discussions ensue, and it is decided that an abrupt attack is the best course of action. First they cast an illusory voice through the secret door to the prisoner chamber” “WE'RE FREE!” to try and thin the ranks, and then the heroes burst in; NPCs first of course.

I'm not going into every cut, jab and blow of the following fight. Reinforcements surge in from another alcove and the final battle caps out at 14 participants, but it goes quickly, and is brutal, gory, and has some heads rolling. Sildar Hallwinter is brought to one hit point, but the PCs are relatively unscathed by the end of the bloody assault.

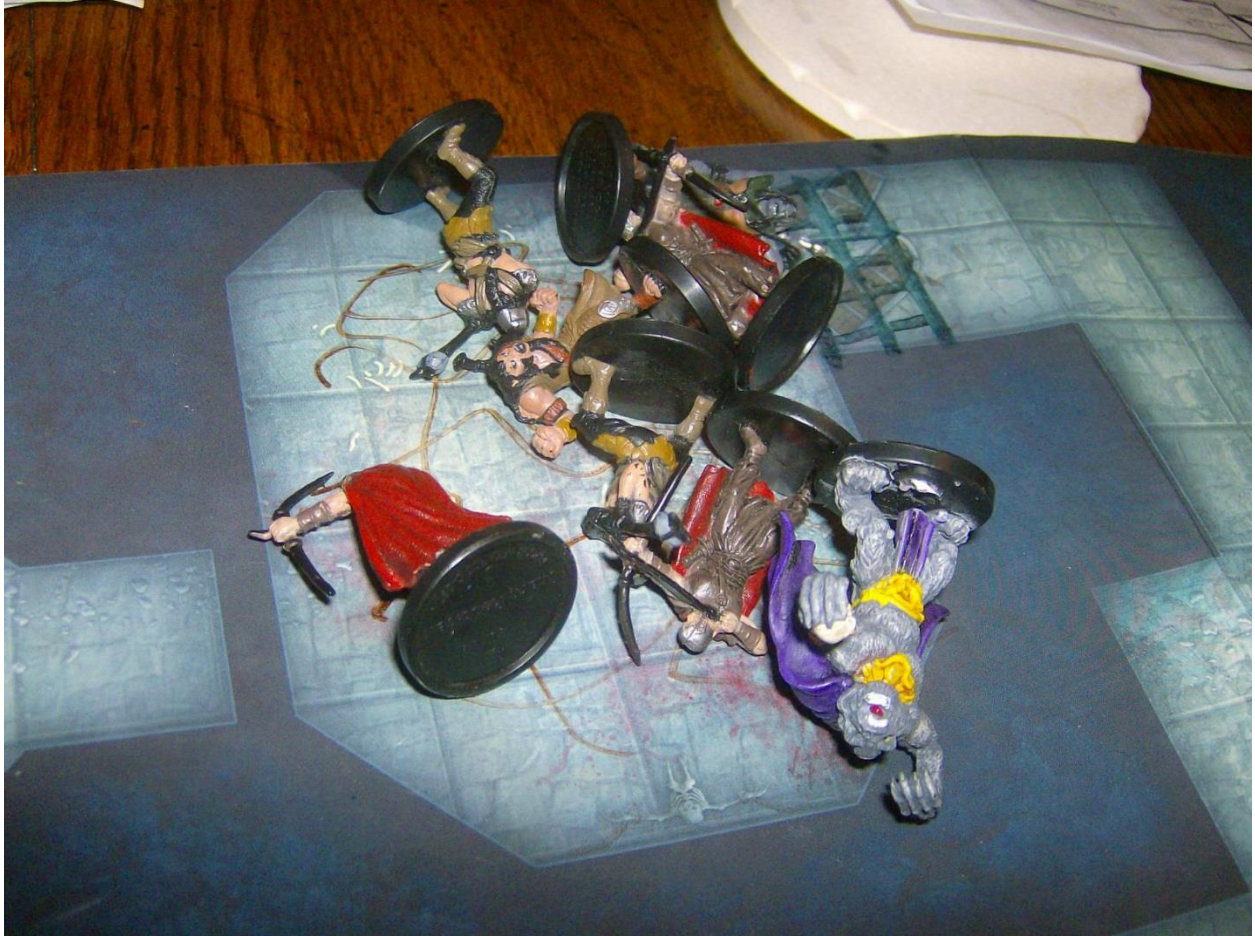
[DM Note: And we all agreed on how fast the combat went; I also introduced some 13th Age powers to the bugbears and Redbrands to spice things up; in a nutshell, bugbear *ferocity* against staggered foes, and a bonus disengage for the Redbrands on 16+ rolls. One really nice thing about 5th edition, the core is simple enough that you can easily overlay more complex rules without messing anything up]



Eventually the slaughter is over, and six Redbrands and three bugbears are toast. WELL, not quite – Elgweth pulls his blow, leaving one Redbrand alive for questioning. Wiping the blood from their blades, the heroes reconvene in the alcove and release the prisoners, who turn out to be a mother and her son and daughter. In fact, Carp knows them, they're the family of the woodcutter whose body they found in the bottom of the crevasse where the one-eyed telepathic whispering thing lives downstairs. The mother, Gara, is extremely, extremely grateful that the heroes rescued her and her children. She tells them that her husband was cut down in cold blood for standing up to the Redbrands, and they came and kidnapped the rest of them that very night, to sell into slavery or worse. She doesn't have much to give them in the way of reward, but she tells them ONE interesting tidbit:

“Long ago when I was a little girl, this was over 20 years, I lived in the town of Thundertree to the north. It was called such because there was a tree in the middle of town that would also get struck by lightning, but it would never burn. Hence the name. But one day it DID burn down, and that very evening the volcano in the woods erupted, and Thundertree was shrouded by ash and death. It was a portent of doom. We fled for our lives, but many did not survive. It has been a cursed place ever since. My parents owned an Apothecary, and I know they had some valuable treasures hidden under a loose floorboard against the north wall. I have never returned. No one goes to Thundertree anymore. If you can find that stash there are some enchanted relics within. They are yours to keep.”

Now, Thundertree is a name the party knows; it is where they're supposed to go find a druid named **Reidoth**. As **Linene** of the Lionshield Coster informed them, he knows everything about the region and can tell them the whereabouts of Cragmaw Castle and Wave Echo Cave, and hopefully they can save Gundren's life, the dwarf who hired them for this little expedition in the first place that has suddenly blossomed into a *clusterfuck*.



All of the bodies are searched, some coins are lifted, and the surviving Redbrand is questioned about the whereabouts of Glasstaff. He doesn't have much to say and is summarily knocked unconscious and locked in the holding cell with the pile of corpses they just made. (btw, the secret door only opens from the outside)

The heroes then rest up while Thoradin the dwarf cleric casts a healing spell on the group, including the woodcutter's wife and her children, and then they are released to Phandalin to tell Townmaster Wester what happened here.

While they're recuperating they see a rat watching them. Perfect! The one-eyed monster wants more food, so Elgweh lures it near and captures it. Telling the others to wait, he traipses back down to the lower level and slowly

approaches the lair of the thing, which automatically slides into his mind: *You brings its foodies kicking and screamings?*

“Yes I do,” answers the elf and proudly hands the monster the rat snack. It grabs it and BITES down, ripping the head off...but the rat instantly vanishes into formless smoke.

WHAT? You tricks it! Tricks! Miserable you! Die you! Die! Die! Die!



Elgweth is inundated with horrific mental images of cutting his own throat, over and over and over, blade to bone and spurting hot arterial blood. He staggers away, sickened, but more disturbed by knowing that the rat he fed the monster was not a real rat, but most likely Glasstaff's familiar. The wizard has known they are here, and probably for quite some time.

[And since Elgweth had already been researching *find familiar* as a potential spell, they metagamed the shit out

of the time conditions and how far the wizard could have potentially fled and how much he could have learned within certain logical parameters]

But Glasstaff might still be here, and Sildar wants to know if Iarno Albreck, the agent of the Lord's Alliance he is searching for, is actually Glasstaff, leader of the Redbrand gang.



But he got his butt kicked, and the cleric's magic has helped mitigate some of that, but he's still not top notch.

They keep searching, find a locked door that the rogue's mage hand unlocks, and they find a bubbling laboratory. Beakers, distillers and tubes run the gamut of the central room, percolating with strange color and odors. Books, papers, pens and quills litter another table.

Stairs encircle the room, and Elgweth sneaks up, rapier in hand and ready to skewer a magic-user on the pointy end.



He finds the wizard's personal chambers locked upstairs, but opening it, Glasstaff is long gone, along with a small chest that has left only a dusty imprint. There's a secret door ajar that leads to a sarcophagus in the hallway, the ribcage recently smashed as Glasstaff made his escape. They estimate that he has a 30 minute head start on them. Capturing or killing Glasstaff is their first priority, but they do find one interesting note in their cursory search of his chambers. It is a letter to Iarno (the man Sildar is searching for, and this is pretty much proof that Iarno and Glasstaff are one and the same). The letter is signed with the image of a **Black Spider**, and it is instructions to Iarno to kidnap a dwarf named Gundren and waylay or kill anyone with him, and to confiscate any materials the dwarf has in relation to Wave Echo Cave.

Rather than search the rest of the complex, the party hauls butt to the surface level through the main entrance and tries to follow any footsteps, but no one is particularly trained in that, and there is lots of evidence of foot traffic leading from the main exit all the way down to Phandalin.

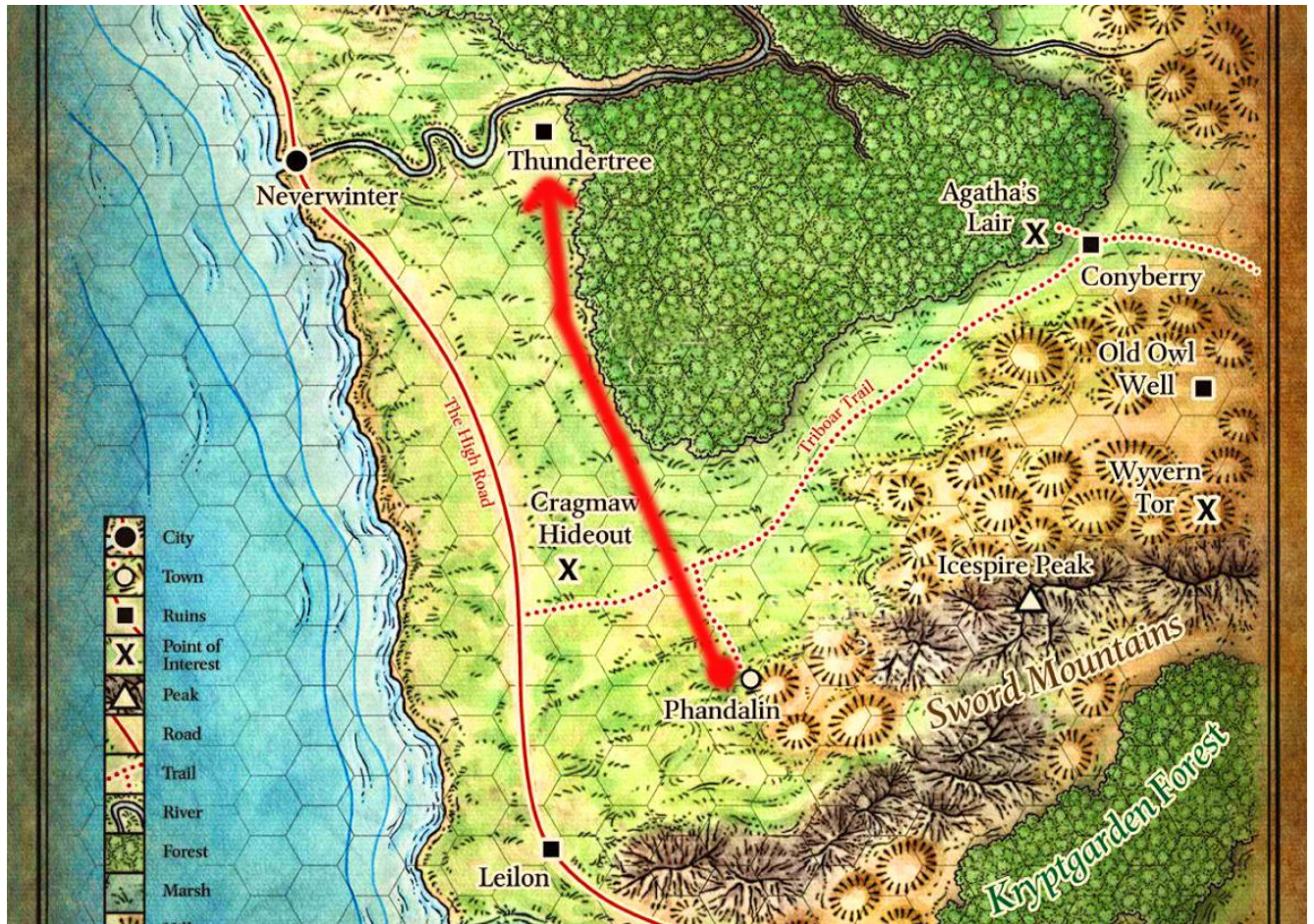


The heroes reach town quickly, hoping to find Glasstaff before he can get too far, but when they question someone at the Miner's Exchange they discover something strange just happened; a horse was stolen and ridden off without a rider! Right down the south road toward the miner's hills. *Invisibility*, the PCs suspect. They try to get their own horses by demanding Halia of the Miner's Exchange give them some, but Phandalin does not have five horses for use or sale just laying around to be confiscated, it's a very small town. Carp Alderleaf's farm has some plow horses, but he's reluctant to give these to the heroes because hero horses often get tied off to a post in the wild and then abandoned, and Carp's family needs the horses for farming.

Their frustration eventually gives way to logical thought. Glasstaff has a solid head start. He knows where he's going obviously, and with great haste, and the PCs don't have an easy way to follow him, or even know where he's headed! The bastard fled to fight another day, and there's not much they can do about it.

Sildar wants him ALIVE. He tells the party this. If they find him, don't kill him, it is his duty as an agent of the Lord's Alliance to return him to Neverwinter for punishment.

Well, this little detour ultimately gets the PCs back on track to find Gundren the dwarf, the guy at the center of this whole debacle who knows where to find Wave Echo Cave and the Lost Mine of Phandelver. Someone named The Black Spider wants to know where it is too, and is willing to brutally slay anyone else who might find out.



If they follow the safer roads north, west, north and then east back to Thundertree, it will take them three days. Cutting straight up across open country will shave off an entire day, so they opt for that. Gundren has already been missing two days, so any more time wasted could be fatal, if not already.

So without further ado, they march off on foot to Thundertree to find Reidoth the druid and hopefully the magic stashed in the old apothecary. It takes 8 random encounter rolls in that terrain for that distance. There are TWO encounters.

The first is a roar at the end of the second evening. The sky is cloudy and overcast, the air cool, and a winged lion – a deadly manticore – screeches by in the distance, scanning for prey. The party hunkers down and manages to avoid it. The second encounter is far more frightening.

It happens shortly after dawn the next day. They're wading through wet grassland, not swamp or marsh, just thick and wet from recent rain, their boots squelching through the muck. The Neverwinter Wood rises dark and looming to the east, and far north they see the perpetual shroud of gloom that hangs over Thundertree. About a hundred yards away as they reach the top of a grassy rise, they see an old woman approaching them across a boggy field.

An old, teetering crone, out in the wilderness all by her lonesome...



[DM Note: one of the players has past experience with hags from 2nd edition, and is still somewhat emotionally scarred from the experience. Under no circumstances are they having ANYTHING to do with a seemingly helpless old woman all by herself, hell no]

The old woman raises a hand a greeting, but the group takes a WIDE berth around her and double times it for Thundertree. They finally reach the outskirts of the destroyed village and enter the subsequent forest.

They soon find the corpse of a human sprawled on the trail, his mouth filled with black ash, his hand touching two words written in the dirt: BEWARE THUNDERTREE. He's been dead about a day, and has long, ragged claw marks ripping down the side of his face, as if from a man-shaped hand.

Then cross another rise and find themselves looking down into a prematurely dark, desolate place, shrouded by mist and falling ash...Thundertree.



There's a fairly recent sign posted at the outskirts: LEAVE OR DIE. The red paint is actually paint, not blood, and the wooden posts seems newer than the dilapidated buildings beyond the perimeter. The group enters anyway, weapons at the ready.

"REIDOTH!" shouts Carp the Halfling. "ARE YOU HERE?"



The first building on their left seems structurally intact. In fact, it has four walls and a roof, bars on the thick, pebbled windows, and roots grow straight up from the ground to obscure the entryways, in quite an unnatural fashion actually. They assume this is the abode of the druid. They shout for Reidoth again, but this attracts something from the shattered building across the street, and they hear hissing and rasping from elsewhere too.



Ash vomits from the mouth of the zombie, and its eyes are like white hardboiled eggs. The down it from a distance, it is thankfully slow, but the corpse erupts into a cloud of poisonous gas when it collapses. They don't have long before another group appears and shambles toward them from the other direction.



The ash zombies are slow and lumbering, and this gives Elgweh time to pitch an oil flask at two of them, and then it is lit with a cantrip. Warlock eldritch fire is flung as well, and soon several of the zombies are reduced to smoldering corpses, but a stink of poison still rises from their bodies.

Elgweh and Cora climb to the roof of the druid's hut and rain down attacks from above in relative impunity. Cora calls for Reidoth again, and THIS time, far, far off in the gloom, Elgweh spots someone on a roof suddenly hop down, and moving far too fast for a zombie.



Just about then they hear some sort of growl reverberate throughout all of the town. And as for Reidoth? No one has yet answered to that name. And we stopped there. Next time, we find out what else lurks in the ruins of Thundertree....

