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THE LEGACY
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THE LEGEND OF DRIZZT BOOK VII



The rogue Dinin made his way carefully through the dark avenues of Menzoberranzan, the city of drow. A renegade, with no family to call his own for nearly twenty years, the seasoned fighter knew well the perils of the city, and knew how to avoid them.

He passed an abandoned compound along the two-mile-long cavern's western wall and could not help but pause and stare. Twin stalagmite mounds supported a blasted fence around the whole of the place,

PRELUDE

and two sets of broken doors, one on the ground and one beyond a balcony twenty feet up the wall, hung open awkwardly on twisted and scorched hinges. How many times had Dinin levitated up to that balcony, entering the private quarters of the nobles of his house, House Do'Urden?

House Do'Urden. It was forbidden even to speak the name in the drow city. Once, Dinin's family had been the eighth-ranked among the sixty or so drow families in Menzoberranzan; his mother had sat on the ruling council; and he, Dinin, had been a Master at Melee-Magthere, the School of Fighters, at the famed drow Academy.

Standing before the compound, it seemed to Dinin as if the place were a thousand years removed from that time of glory. His family was no more, his house lay in ruins, and Dinin had been forced to take up with Bregan D'aerthe, an infamous mercenary band, simply to survive.

“Once,” the rogue drow mouthed quietly. He shook his slender shoulders and pulled his concealing *piwafwi* cloak around him, remembering how vulnerable a houseless drow could be. A quick glance toward the center of the cavern, toward the pillar that was Narbondel, showed him that the hour was late. At the break of each day, the Archmage of Menzoberranzan went out to Narbondel and infused the pillar with a magical, lingering heat that would work its way up, then back down. To sensitive drow eyes, which could look into the infrared spectrum, the level of heat in the pillar acted as a gigantic glowing clock.

Now Narbondel was almost cool; another day neared its end.

Dinin had to go more than halfway across the city, to a secret cave within the Clawrift, a great chasm running out from Menzoberranzan’s northwestern wall. There Jarlaxle, the leader of Bregan D’aerthe, waited in one of his many hideouts.

The drow fighter cut across the center of the city, passed right by Narbondel, and beside more than a hundred hollowed stalagmites, comprising a dozen separate family compounds, their fabulous sculptures and gargoyles glowing in multicolored faerie fire. Drow soldiers, walking posts along house walls or along the bridges connecting multitudes of leering stalactites, paused and regarded the lone stranger carefully, hand-crossbows or poisoned javelins held ready until Dinin was far beyond them.

That was the way in Menzoberranzan: always alert, always distrustful.

Dinin gave one careful look around when he reached the edge of the Clawrift, then slipped over the side and used his innate powers of levitation to slowly descend into the chasm. More than a hundred feet down, he again looked into the bolts of readied handcrossbows, but these were withdrawn as soon as the mercenary guardsmen recognized Dinin as one of their own.

Jarlaxle has been waiting for you, one of the guards signaled in the intricate silent hand code of the dark elves.

Dinin didn't bother to respond. He owed commoner soldiers no explanations. He pushed past the guardsmen rudely, making his way down a short tunnel that soon branched into a virtual maze of corridors and rooms. Several turns later, the dark elf stopped before a shimmering door, thin and almost translucent. He put his hand against its surface, letting his body heat make an impression that heat-sensing eyes on the other side would understand as a knock.

"At last," he heard a moment later, in Jarlaxle's voice. "Do come in, Dinin, my *Khal'abbil*. You have kept me waiting far too long."

Dinin paused a moment to get a bearing on the unpredictable mercenary's inflections and words. Jarlaxle had called him *Khal'abbil*, "my trusted friend," his nickname for Dinin since the raid that

had destroyed House Do'Urden (a raid in which Jarlaxle had played a prominent role), and there was no obvious sarcasm in the mercenary's tone. There seemed to be nothing wrong at all. but why, then, had Jarlaxle recalled him from his critical scouting mission to House Vandree, the Seventeenth House of Menzoberranzan? Dinin wondered. It had taken Dinin nearly a year to gain the trust of the imperiled Vandree house guard, a position, no doubt, that would be severely jeopardized by his unexplained absence from the house compound.

There was only one way to find out, the rogue soldier decided. He held his breath and forced his way into the opaque barrier. It seemed as if he were passing through a wall of thick water, though he did not get wet, and after several long steps across the flowing extraplanar border of two planes of existence, he forced his way through the seemingly inch-thick magical door and entered Jarlaxle's small room.

The room was alight in a comfortable red glow, allowing Dinin to shift his eyes from the infrared to the normal light spectrum. He blinked as the transformation completed, then blinked again, as always, when he looked at Jarlaxle.

The mercenary leader sat behind a stone desk in an exotic cushioned chair, supported by a single stem with a swivel so that it could rock back at a considerable angle. Comfortably perched, as always, Jarlaxle had the chair leaning way back, his slender hands

clasped behind his clean-shaven head (so unusual for a dwarf!).

Just for amusement, it seemed, Jarlaxle lifted one foot onto the table, his high black boot hitting the stone with a resounding thump, then lifted the other, striking the stone just as hard, but this boot making not a whisper.

The mercenary wore his ruby-red eye patch over his right eye this day, Dinin noted.

To the side of the desk stood a trembling little humanoid creature, barely half Dinin's five-and-a-half-foot height, including the small white horns protruding from the top of its sloping brow.

"One of House Oblodra's kobolds," Jarlaxle explained casually. "It seems the pitiful thing found its way in, but cannot so easily find its way back out."

The reasoning seemed sound to Dinin. House Oblodra, the Third House of Menzoberranzan, occupied a tight compound at the end of the Clawrift and was rumored to keep thousands of kobolds for torturous pleasure, or to serve as house fodder in the event of a war.

"Do you wish to leave?" Jarlaxle asked the creature in a guttural, simplistic language.

The kobold nodded eagerly, stupidly.

Jarlaxle indicated the opaque door, and the creature darted for it. It had not the strength to penetrate the barrier, though, and it bounced back, nearly landing on Dinin's feet. Before it even bothered to

get up, the kobold foolishly sneered in contempt at the mercenary leader.

Jarlaxle's hand flicked several times, too quickly for Dinin to count. The drow fighter reflexively tensed, but knew better than to move, knew that Jarlaxle's aim was always perfect.

When he looked down at the kobold, he saw five daggers sticking from its lifeless body, a perfect star formation on the scaly creature's little chest.

Jarlaxle only shrugged at Dinin's confused stare. "I could not allow the beast to return to Oblodra," he reasoned, "not after it learned of our compound so near theirs."

Dinin shared Jarlaxle's laugh. He started to retrieve the daggers, but Jarlaxle reminded him that there was no need.

"They will return of their own accord," the mercenary explained, pulling at the edge of his bloused sleeve to reveal the magical sheath enveloping his wrist. "Do sit," he bade his friend, indicating an unremarkable stool at the side of the desk. "We have much to discuss."

"Why did you recall me?" Dinin asked bluntly as he took his place beside the desk. "I had infiltrated Vandree fully."

"Ah, my *Khal'abbil*," Jarlaxle replied. "Always to the point. That is a quality I do so admire in you."

"*Uln'hyrr*," Dinin retorted, the drow word for "liar."

Again, the companions shared a laugh, but Jarlaxle's did not last long, and he dropped his feet and rocked forward, clasping his hands, ornamented by a king's hoard of jewels—and how many of those glittering items were magical? Dinin often wondered—on the stone table before him, his face suddenly grave.

“The attack on Vandree is about to commence?” Dinin asked, thinking he had solved the riddle.

“Forget Vandree,” Jarlaxle replied. “Their affairs are not so important to us now.”

Dinin dropped his sharp chin into a slender palm, propped on the table. Not important! he thought. He wanted to spring up and throttle the cryptic leader. He had spent a whole year . . .

Dinin let his thoughts of Vandree trail away. He looked hard at Jarlaxle's always calm face, searching for clues, then he understood.

“My sister,” he said, and Jarlaxle was nodding before the word had left Dinin's mouth. “What has she done?”

Jarlaxle straightened, looked to the side of the small room, and gave a sharp whistle. On cue, a slab of stone shifted, revealing an alcove, and Vierna Do'Urden, Dinin's lone surviving sibling, swept into the room. She seemed more splendid and beautiful than Dinin remembered her since the downfall of their house.

Dinin's eyes widened as he realized the truth of Vierna's dressings; Vierna wore her robes! The robes

of a high priestess of Lolth, the robes emblazoned with the arachnid and weapon design of House Do'Urden! Dinin did not know that Vierna had kept them, had not seen them in more than a decade.

"You risk . . ." he started to warn, but Vierna's frenzied expression, her red eyes blazing like twin fires behind the shadows of her high ebony cheekbones, stopped him before he could utter the words.

"I have found again the favor of Lolth," Vierna announced.

Dinin looked to Jarlaxle, who only shrugged and quietly shifted his eye-patch to his left eye instead.

"The Spider Queen has shown me the way," Vierna went on, her normally melodic voice cracking with undeniable excitement.

Dinin thought the female on the verge of insanity. Vierna had always been calm and tolerant, even after House Do'Urden's sudden demise. Over the last few years, though, her actions had become increasingly erratic, and she had spent many hours alone, in desperate prayer to their unmerciful deity.

"Are you to tell us this way that Lolth has shown to you?" Jarlaxle, appearing not at all impressed, asked after many moments of silence.

"Drizzt." Vierna spat the word, the name of their sacrilegious brother, with a burst of venom through her delicate lips.

Dinin wisely shifted his hand from his chin to cover his mouth, to bite back his retort. Vierna, for

all her apparent foolhardiness, was, after all, a high priestess, and not one to anger.

“Drizzt?” Jarlaxle calmly asked her. “Your brother?”

“No brother of mine!” Vierna cried out, rushing to the desk as though she meant to strike Jarlaxle down. Dinin didn’t miss the mercenary leader’s subtle movement, a shift that put his dagger-launching arm in a ready position.

“Traitor to House Do’Urden!” Vierna fumed. “Traitor to all the drow!” Her scowl became a smile suddenly, evil and conniving. “With Drizzt’s sacrifice, I will again find Lolth’s favor, will again . . .” Vierna broke off abruptly, obviously desiring to keep the rest of her plans private.

“You sound like Matron Malice,” Dinin dared to say. “She, too, began a hunt for our broth—for the traitor.”

“You remember Matron Malice?” Jarlaxle teased, using the implications of the name as a sedative on overexcited Vierna. Malice, Vierna’s mother and Matron of House Do’Urden, had ultimately been undone by her failure to recapture and kill the traitorous Drizzt.

Vierna did calm down, then she began a fit of mocking laughter that went on for many minutes.

“You see why I summoned you?” Jarlaxle remarked to Dinin, taking no heed of the priestess.

“You wish me to kill her before she can become a problem?” Dinin replied equally casually.

Vierna's laughter halted; her wild-eyed gaze fell over her impertinent brother. "*Wishya!*" she cried, and a wave of magical energy hurled Dinin from his seat, sent him crashing into the stone wall.

"Kneel!" Vierna commanded, and Dinin, when he regained his composure, fell to his knees, all the while looking blankly at Jarlaxle.

The mercenary, too, could not hide his surprise. This last command was a simple spell, certainly not one that should have worked so easily on a seasoned fighter of Dinin's stature.

"I am in Lolth's favor," Vierna, standing tall and straight, explained to both of them. "If you oppose me, then you are not, and with the power of Lolth's blessings for my spells and curses against you, you will find no defense."

"The last we heard of Drizzt placed him on the surface," Jarlaxle said to Vierna, to deflect her rising anger. "By all reports, he remains there still."

Vierna nodded, grinning weirdly all the while, her pearly white teeth contrasting dramatically with her shining ebony skin. "He does," she agreed, "but Lolth has shown me the way to him, the way to glory."

Again, Jarlaxle and Dinin exchanged confused glances. By all their estimates, Vierna's claims—and Vierna herself—sounded insane.

But Dinin, against his will and against all measures of sanity, was still kneeling.



PART
ONE

Nearly three decades have passed since I left
my homeland, a small measure of time by
the reckoning of a drow elf, but a period that
seems a lifetime
to me. All that I
desired, or believed
that I desired, when I
walked out of Menzober-

THE INSPIRING
FEAR

ranzan's dark cavern, was a true home, a place
of friendship and peace where I might hang my
scimitars above the mantle of a warm hearth
and share stories with trusted companions.

I have found all that now, beside Bruenor in
the hallowed halls of his youth. We prosper.
We have peace. I wear my weapons only on my
five-day journeys between Mithral Hall and
Silvermoon.

Was I wrong?

I do not doubt, nor do I ever lament, my

decision to leave the vile world of Menzober-ranzan, but I am beginning to believe now, in the (endless) quiet and peace, that my desires at that critical time were founded in the inevitable longing of inexperience. I had never known that calm existence I so badly wanted.

I cannot deny that my life is better, a thousand times better, than anything I ever knew in the Underdark. And yet, I cannot remember the last time I felt the anxiety, the inspiring fear, of impending battle, the tingling that can come only when an enemy is near or a challenge must be met.

Oh, I do remember the specific instance—just a year ago, when Wulfgar, Guenhwyvar, and I worked the lower tunnels in the cleansing of Mithral Hall—but that feeling, that tingle of fear, has long since faded from memory.

Are we then creatures of action? Do we say that we desire those accepted cliches of comfort when, in fact, it is the challenge and the adventure that truly give us life?

I must admit, to myself at least, that I do not know.

There is one point that I cannot dispute, though, one truth that will inevitably help me resolve these questions and which places me in a fortunate position. For now, beside Bruenor and his kin, beside Wulfgar and Catti-brie and Guenhwyvar, dear Guenhwyvar, my destiny is my own to choose.

I am safer now than ever before in my sixty years of life. The prospects have never looked better for the future, for continued peace and continued security. And yet, I feel mortal. For the first time, I look to what has passed rather than to what is still to come. There is no other way to explain it. I feel that I am dying, that those stories I so desired to share with friends will soon grow stale, with nothing to replace them.

But, I remind myself again, the choice is mine to make.

—Drizzt Do'Urden



SPRING DAWNING

Drizzt Do'Urden walked slowly along a trail in the jutting southernmost spur of the Spine of the World Mountains, the sky brightening around him. Far away to the south, across the plain to the Evermoors, he noticed the glow of the last lights of some distant city, Nesmé probably, going down, replaced by the growing dawn. When Drizzt turned another bend in the mountain trail, he saw the small town of Settlestone, far below. The barbarians, Wulfgar's kin from faraway Icewind Dale, were just beginning their morning routines, trying to put the ruins back in order.

Drizzt watched the figures, tiny from this distance, bustle about, and he remembered a time not so long ago when Wulfgar and his proud people roamed the frozen tundra of a land far to the north and west, on the other side of the great mountain range, a thousand miles away.

Spring, the trading season, was fast approaching, and the hardy men and women of Settlestone, working as dealers for the dwarves of Mithral Hall, would soon know more wealth and comfort than they ever would have believed possible in their previous day-by-day existence. They had come to Wulfgar's call, fought valiantly beside the dwarves in the ancient halls, and would soon reap the rewards of their labor, leaving behind their

desperate nomadic ways as they had left behind the endless, merciless wind of Icewind Dale.

“How far we have all come,” Drizzt remarked to the chill emptiness of the morning air, and he chuckled at the double-meaning of his words, considering that he had just returned from Silvermoon, a magnificent city far to the east, a place where the beleaguered drow ranger never before dared to believe that he would find acceptance. Indeed, when he had accompanied Bruenor and the others in their search for Mithral Hall, barely two years before, Drizzt had been turned away from Silvermoon’s decorated gates.

“Ye’ve done a hundred miles in a tenday alone,” came an unexpected answer.

Drizzt instinctively dropped his slender black hands to the hilts of his scimitars, but his mind caught up to his reflexes and he relaxed immediately, recognizing the melodic voice with more than a little of a Dwarvish accent. A moment later, Catti-brie, the adopted human daughter of Bruenor Battlehammer, came skipping around a rocky outcropping, her thick auburn mane dancing in the mountain wind and her deep blue eyes glittering like wet jewels in the fresh morning light.

Drizzt could not hide his smile at the joyous spring in the young girl’s steps, a vitality that the often vicious battles she had faced over the last few years could not diminish. Nor could Drizzt deny the wave of warmth that rushed over him whenever he saw Catti-brie, the young woman who knew him better than any. Catti-brie had understood Drizzt and accepted him for his heart, and not the color of his skin, since their first meeting in a rocky, wind-swept vale more than a decade before, when she was but half her present age.

The dark elf waited a moment longer, expecting to see Wulfgar, soon to be Catti-brie’s husband, follow her around the bluff.

“You have come out a fair distance without an escort,” Drizzt remarked when the barbarian did not appear.

Catti-brie crossed her arms over her chest and leaned on one foot, tapping impatiently with the other. “And ye’re beginning to sound more like me father than me friend,” she replied. “I see no escort walking the trails beside Drizzt Do’Urden.”

“Well spoken,” the drow ranger admitted, his tone respectful and not the least bit sarcastic. The young woman’s scolding had pointedly reminded Drizzt that Catti-brie could take care of herself. She carried with her a short sword of dwarven make and wore fine armor under her furred cloak, as fine as the suit of chain mail that Bruenor had given to Drizzt! Taulmaril the Heartseeker, the magical bow of Anariel, rested easily over Catti-brie’s shoulder. Drizzt had never seen a mightier weapon. and even beyond the powerful tools she carried, Catti-brie had been raised among the sturdy dwarves, by Bruenor himself, as tough as the mountain stone.

“Is it often that ye watch the rising sun?” Catti-brie asked, noticing Drizzt’s east-facing stance.

Drizzt found a flat rock to sit upon and bade Catti-brie to join him. “I have watched the dawn since my first days on the surface,” he explained, throwing his thick forest-green cloak back over his shoulders. “Though back then, it surely stung my eyes, a reminder of where I came from, I suppose. Now, though, to my relief, I find that I can tolerate the brightness.”

“And well that is,” Catti-brie replied. She locked the drow’s marvelous eyes with her intense gaze, forced him to look at her, at the same innocent smile he had seen those many years before on a windswept slope in Icewind Dale.

The smile of his first female friend.

“Tis sure that ye belong under the sunlight, Drizzt Do’Urden,” Catti-brie continued, “as much as any person of any race, by me own measure.”

Drizzt looked back to the dawn and did not answer. Catti-brie went silent, too, and they sat together for a long while, watching the awakening world.

“I came out to see ye,” Catti-brie said suddenly. Drizzt regarded her curiously, not understanding.

“Now, I mean,” the young woman explained. “We’d word that ye’d returned to Settlestone, and that ye’d be coming back to Mithral Hall in a few days. I’ve been out here every day since.”

Drizzt’s expression did not change. “You wish to talk with me privately?” he asked, to prompt a reply.

Catti-brie’s deliberate nod as she turned back to the eastern horizon revealed to Drizzt that something was wrong.

“I’ll not forgive ye if ye miss the wedding,” Catti-brie said softly. She bit down on her bottom lip as she finished, Drizzt noted, and sniffled, though she tried hard to make it seem like the beginnings of a cold.

Drizzt draped an arm across the beautiful woman’s strong shoulders. “Can you believe for an instant, even if all the trolls of the Evermoors stood between me and the ceremony hall, that I would not attend?”

Catti-brie turned to him—fell into his gaze—and smiled widely, knowing the answer. She threw her arms around Drizzt for a tight hug, then leaped to her feet, pulling him up beside her.

Drizzt tried to equal her relief, or at least to make her believe that he had. Catti-brie had known all along that he would not miss her wedding to Wulfgar, two of his dearest friends. Why, then, the tears, the snuffle that was not from any budding cold? the perceptive ranger wondered. Why had Catti-brie felt the need to come out and find him only a few hours from the entrance to Mithral Hall?

He didn’t ask her about it, but it bothered him more than a little. Anytime moisture gathered in Catti-brie’s deep blue eyes, it bothered Drizzt Do’Urden more than a little.



Jarlaxle’s black boots clacked loudly on the stone as he made his solitary way along a winding tunnel outside of Menzoberranzan. Most drow out alone from the great city, in the wilds of the Underdark, would have taken

great care, but the mercenary knew what to expect in the tunnels, knew every creature in this particular section.

Information was Jarlaxle's forte. The scouting network of Bregan D'aerthe, the band Jarlaxle had founded and taken to greatness, was more intricate than that of any drow house. Jarlaxle knew everything that happened, or would soon happen, in and around the city, and armed with that information, he had survived for centuries as a houseless rogue. So long had Jarlaxle been a part of Menzoberranzan's intrigue that none in the city, with the possible exception of First Matron Mother Baenre, even knew the sly mercenary's origins.

He was wearing his shimmering cape now, its magical colors cascading up and down his graceful form, and his wide-brimmed hat, hugely plumed with the feathers of a *diatryma*, a great flightless Underdark bird, adorned his clean-shaven head. A slender sword dancing beside one hip and a long dirk on the other were his only visible weapons, but those who knew the sly mercenary realized that he possessed many more than that, concealed on his person, but easily retrieved if the need arose.

Pulled by curiosity, Jarlaxle picked up his pace. As soon as he realized the length of his strides, he forced himself to slow down, reminding himself that he wanted to be fashionably late for this unorthodox meeting that crazy Vierna had arranged.

Crazy Vierna.

Jarlaxle considered the thought for a long while, even stopped his walk and leaned against the tunnel wall to recount the high priestess's many claims over the last few tendays. What had seemed initially to be a desperate, fleeting hope of a broken noble, with no chance at all of success, was fast becoming a solid plan. Jarlaxle had gone along with Vierna more out of amusement and curiosity than any real beliefs that they would kill, or even locate, the long-gone Drizzt.

But something apparently was guiding Vierna—Jarlaxle had to believe it was Lolth, or one of the Spider Queen's powerful minions. Vierna's

clerical powers had returned in full, it seemed, and she had delivered much valuable information, and even a perfect spy, to their cause. They were fairly sure now where Drizzt Do'Urden was, and Jarlaxle was beginning to believe that killing the traitorous drow would not be such a difficult thing.

The mercenary's boots heralded his approach as he clicked around a final bend in the tunnel, coming into a wide, low-roofed chamber. Vierna was there, with Dinin, and it struck Jarlaxle as curious (another note made in the calculating mercenary's mind) that Vierna seemed more comfortable out here in the wilds than did her brother. Dinin had spent many years in these tunnels, leading patrol groups, but Vierna, as a sheltered noble priestess, had rarely been out of the city.

If she truly believed that she walked with Lolth's blessings, however, then the priestess would have nothing to fear.

"You have delivered our gift to the human?" Vierna asked immediately, urgently. Everything in Vierna's life, it seemed to Jarlaxle, had become urgent.

The sudden question, not prefaced by any greeting or even a remark that he was late, caught the mercenary off guard for a moment, and he looked to Dinin, who responded with only a helpless shrug. While hungry fires burned in Vierna's eyes, defeated resignation lay in Dinin's.

"The human has the earring," Jarlaxle replied.

Vierna held out a flat, disc-shaped object, covered in designs to match the precious earring. "It is cool," she explained as she rubbed her hand across the disc's metallic surface, "thus our spy has already moved far from Menzoberranzan."

"Far away with a valuable gift," Jarlaxle remarked, traces of sarcasm edging his voice.

"It was necessary, and will further our cause," Vierna snapped at him.

"If the human proves to be as valuable an informant as you believe," Jarlaxle added evenly.

“Do you doubt him?” Vierna’s words echoed through the tunnels, causing Dinin further distress and sounding clearly as a threat to the mercenary.

“It was Lolth who guided me to him,” Vierna continued with an open sneer, “Lolth who showed me the way to regain my family’s honor. Do you doubt—”

“I doubt nothing where our deity is concerned,” Jarlaxle promptly interrupted. “The earring, your beacon, has been delivered as you instructed, and the human is well on his way.” The mercenary swept into a respectfully low bow, tipping his wide-brimmed hat.

Vierna calmed and seemed appeased. Her red eyes flashed eagerly, and a devious smile widened across her face. “And the goblins?” she asked, her voice thick with anticipation.

“They will soon make contact with the greedy dwarves,” Jarlaxle replied, “to their dismay, no doubt. My scouts are in place around the goblin ranks. If your brother makes an appearance in the inevitable battle, we will know.” The mercenary hid his conniving smile at the sight of Vierna’s obvious pleasure. The priestess thought to gain only the confirmation of her brother’s whereabouts from the unfortunate goblin tribe, but Jarlaxle had much more in mind. Goblins and dwarves shared a mutual hatred as intense as that between the drow and their surface elf cousins, and any meeting between the groups would ensure a fight. What better opportunity for Jarlaxle to take an accurate measure of the dwarven defenses?

And the dwarven weaknesses?

For, while Vierna’s desires were focused—all that she wanted was the death of her traitorous brother—Jarlaxle was looking at the wider picture, of how this costly exploration up near the surface, perhaps even onto the surface, might become more profitable.

Vierna rubbed her hands together and turned sharply to face her brother. Jarlaxle nearly laughed aloud at Dinin’s feeble attempt to imitate his sister’s beaming expression.

Vierna was too obsessed to notice her less-than-enthusiastic brother’s

obvious slip. “The goblin fodder understand their options?” she asked the mercenary, but she answered her own question before Jarlaxle could reply. “Of course, they have no options!”

Jarlaxle felt the sudden need to burst her eager bubble. “What if the goblins kill Drizzt?” he asked, sounding innocent.

Vierna’s face screwed up weirdly and she stammered unsuccessfully at her first attempts at a reply. “No!” she decided at length. “We know that more than a thousand dwarves inhabit the complex, perhaps two or three times that number. The goblin tribe will be crushed.”

“But the dwarves and their allies will suffer some casualties,” Jarlaxle reasoned.

“Not Drizzt,” Dinin unexpectedly answered, and there was no compromise in his grim tone, and no argument forthcoming from either of his companions. “No goblin will kill Drizzt. No goblin weapon could get near his body.”

Vierna’s approving smile showed that she did not understand the sincere terror behind Dinin’s claims. Dinin alone among the group had faced off in battle against Drizzt.

“The tunnels back to the city are clear?” Vierna asked Jarlaxle, and on his nod, she swiftly departed, having no more time for banter.

“You wish this to end,” the mercenary remarked to Dinin when they were alone.

“You have not met my brother,” Dinin replied evenly, and his hand instinctively twitched near the hilt of his magnificent drow-made sword, as though the mere mention of Drizzt put him on the defensive. “Not in combat, at least.”

“Fear, *Khal’abbil*?” The question went straight to Dinin’s sense of honor, sounded more like a taunt.

Still, the fighter made no attempt to deny it.

“You should fear your sister as well,” Jarlaxle reasoned, and he meant every word. Dinin donned a disgusted expression.

“The Spider Queen, or one of Lolth’s minions, has been talking with that one,” Jarlaxle added, as much to himself as to his shaken companion. At first glance, Vierna’s obsession seemed a desperate, dangerous thing, but Jarlaxle had been around the chaos of Menzoberranzan long enough to realize that many other powerful figures, Matron Baenre included, had held similar, seemingly outrageous fantasies.

Nearly every important figure in Menzoberranzan, including members of the ruling council, had come to power through acts that seemed desperate, had squirmed their way through the barbed nets of chaos to find their glory.

Might Vierna be the next to cross that dangerous terrain?