

A silly story of dwarves as an homage to dwarf fortress.

Tags: dwarves, silly, dwarf fortress, bad end

One

“This day, my friends, has been long awaited! My father is dead, long live me! So... Let us get drunk and be merry!” Hjrالدruk cried out, already plastered. The late Hjrالدruk Sr., though not a bad man, had been a useless waste. He sat on council, he voted last, and always with the largest contingent. He also wasted money on endless engravings along the great halls of Hjrالدruk Hall. It did make their holdings the envy of Gar`Druk`Daan (Dark-Stone-Metropolis), yet envy paid not bills nor purchased votes.

So the crowd cheered in the great mead hall and Hjrالدruk tossed back another Druũk`gob (Golden-mug) of shroom bee mead. He wasn't being unkind, he would miss his old dad and probably hord socks or bits of string in sadness for a year; as was Dwarfish way. Tonight he celebrated in memoriam.

The revelry last long into the fourth shift and Hjrالدruk drank himself sober twice before calling it quits. With his last swallow, the celebration came to an end. “Friends! Philbort, my father's lawyer is here with the will, shall he read it?”

The crowd began to chant, “Will! Will! Will!” over and over.

Hjrالدruk raised his hand for silence, “Alright, alright! Read it Bort.”

The bespeckled lawyer clears his throat, broke the seal, and began to read, “To my son I leave Hjrالدruk Hall and all within it. Along with I leave a sum of... ah... 82,000 Druũk`kon (golden-coins) in debt to Druk Beard. 77,000 Drook`fig (silver-ingots)... ah... debt to the council...” The list went on and on, a debt so deep it would take thousands of years to dig himself out. Sensing the low grade panic, the hall began to clear quickly until all that was left of the party was only Philbort and himself.

“I am ruined, Phil, my fool of a father has...” He sighed, shook his head, then whined, “I am worse off than the poorest scullery.”

Philbort shook his head, “There is much of value in the Hjrالدruk Hall and I don't expect the debt to be collected so soon as you think. No one ran your father out of home”

Hjrالدruk, realizing the empty room was empty, suddenly went cold and still, “Oh no! the Hall!” he cried and Philbort just looked befuddled and chewed on his beard.

The great doors of engraved Druũk were gone, even the Dröök (Mithril) frame and Drauk (Iron) hinges. The walls, once livid with beautiful carvings were now just crudely hewn Durk (Stone). The embossed and gilded pillars were stolen as well and a few rooms had already collapsed. No furniture, no vases, no Drok (Copper) pipes of hot and cold water. Hjrالدruk Hall—was now little more than a cave. Hjrالدruk wept.

“Has everyone abandoned me, Phil?” He asked upon his knees in the center of the throne room.

“Not all,” a voice said from a side chamber.

“Argdruk!” Hjrالدruk cried, seeing his loyal soldier and bodyguard; with bloody axe hefted over his shoulder.

“I tried to stop ‘em, m’Lord, but meh late Lord said no to beheadin’ otha’ lords. So I’s jus’ bloody ‘em up a lil. They was too many,” the old soldier admitted.

“What of the rest of the army? Or the servants? We housed 2,000 loyal servery staff and a legion of 5,000 soldiers!” Hjrالدruk cried.

“Well, see, m’Lord...” Argdruk bit his mustashe, “They was wit dem in the lootin’.”

“Indeed m’Lord! But not all,” added Brawnmur, Hjrالدruk’s body servant.

“I am blessed indeed to have such fine friends!” Hjrالدruk wept aloud while gesturing at the ruined cave. The others didn’t know what to say to that. In all they found another three; Bofin, his father’s head smith, Doc, a seamstress, and Rastok, the engraver who had created all the beautiful masterpieces that had once lined the Hall. He stayed more out of anger at having his work defiled than out of loyalty.

The seven of them explored the expanse, searching for anything worth salvaging. There was little, but enough to supply them with perhaps a cartload... if they had a cart.

In a dark humor, Hjrالدruk asked of the lawyer, “Philbort, have I been robbed or has my debt been met?” Hjrالدruk asked.

With a moment’s hesitation, the lawyer replied, “Robbed for sure.”

Hjrالدruk nodded, “Of course—Hjrالدruk Hall is no more—Let us go.”

“Where to, Sire?” asked Argdruk.

Hjrالدruk tried to smile, “I am loved by my friends, they will help me in these dark times. But, please, call me Hjrالدruk, not Sire or Lord, I have no hall now. Stay for love, not honor.” The six returned his weak smile and agreed.

Seven, they departed and went from house by house, Hjrالدruk learned the ugly truth. His ‘friends’ who had so loved him with money, would now not be seen in his presence without. Doors were shut in their faces, they were laughed at, or worse—were handed charity meals and sent on their way. In the end Hjrالدruk lead them with mounting dread to his private club under the East Deep Road. There he found Bibble and Druk McDruk.

The club was intact, though poorly stocked. Some mead, a small forge (as any Dwarf hoval must be equipped; more important than even a toilet!) and a couple of weapons. The back bedroom for sleeping off the occasional sobriety, was also intact, though unkept.

The two girls were odd friends; Bibble was a bit of a floozy and airy of mind while Druk McDruk was a somber down to earth girl with mountains of muscles and a beard filled with stone dust. Bibble also happened to be just out of childhood while the other was an old matron of some years.

“Hjrالدruk! Whatever is the matter?” Bibble asked with wide eyes and a mead dipped mustache.

Hjrالدruk half sobbed, half roared, “My fool father has died and left me ruins! My only skill is the courtly arts and what use is that? I am 72, too old to learn a new trade as an apprentice and at such a wage it would never cover my debts.”

Druk McDruk cast a wan smile and told him, “I cannot promise riches, but I would teach you

to mine or to carve. Or you could learn to farm under my husband, Jim.”

To that he shook his head, “The council will put me in debtors prison before your kindness could do me well. Perhaps I should flee into the deep roads and find an unknown Daan.”

Bibble belched, gave a drunken giggle, then asked, “Why not make our own Daan? With Games of Chance and Entertainers?”

Druk McDruk snorted a laugh and retorted, “We all know what method of entertainment you would suggest!”

Ignoring Durk McDruk’s cruel barb, Hyraldruk retorted, “With only the nine of us? You would run out of men too soon Bibble,” and added his own.

Bibble scowled at him with a flush; yet they noted, she did not disagree. “I only meant, we don’t need this dusty old pit!”

Druk McDruk paced a few laps while they all sat in silence, then spoke with a sudden light in her eyes, “That may not be such a bad idea. You will have to learn other skills of course Hjrjal, but as colonist your courtly arts would give you a good position as leader. After all we all here have a goodly mix of knowledge and ability.”

In shock he asked, “You would leave Gar`Druk`Daan? Why?”

She smiled, “These mountains are empty. I have found no seam of good Druk in 96 years.”

Bibble asked, “Wait, what skills do I have? I don’t start apprenticeship until next year.” She had a cute little frown and glazed eyes that were abjectly Bibble.

Druk McDruk grinned, “Why dear, we all need entertainment.”

“Hey!” Bibble cried with an angry scowl.

To which Druk McDruk said, “You can sing.”

“Oh...”

For the next couple of days they asked around. More than one dwarf was quite willing to set out on their own in a new Daan. Some even had funds to help pay for the expedition. To the nine joined Jim Druk, an avid poet and farmer, Druk McDruk’s husband. Dug Hjrjal and Muradinhrjal, their friends, the former another miner, the latter an accountant and storekeeper. Then there was Yog, a goat keeper with no goats and Goangin, nobody quite knew what he did.

Thus and so, the plans were made, quiet queries were addressed to the right people, and word spread. More than one Dwarf was quite willing to set out on their own in a new Daan. Some even had funds to help pay for the expedition. To the nine joined Jim, an avid poet and farmer, also he was Durk McDruk’s husband. Dug Hjrjal and Muradinhrjal, their friends also joined. The former another miner, the latter an accountant and storekeeper who had lost most of his business to Barrier Boutique. Then there was Yog, a goat keeper with no goats and Goangin, nobody quite knew what he did.

Lastly there was Urist. He was one of Hjrjal’s few true friends, and one of the oddest. A brewer by trade but drank far too much of his own stock. He was also the most expressive and flamboyant Dwarf anyone had ever met. He tended to giggle, bounce, and flutter his eyes as he flitted about. He wore eye gougingly bright ribbons and beads in his copious beard and stashe. He could be seen from anywhere in a crowd and tended toward the center of attention.

Bofin, the old smith, fell madly in love at first sight, not quite realizing Urist was male. No one, least of all Urist, had the heart to tell him the truth. "My Lady! Allow me to help you!" Boffin cried and took the draw on Urist's wagon right out of the colorful Dwarf's hand... which was filled with mead.

Urist could only hiccup, titter, then stutter out, "I... uh... all... alright?"

So upon the fourth day they pushed their wagons through the impossible dense crowds of the market. Much of their communal wealth would be useless on the voyage and they still had need for many materials. Much was bartered, some deals good, some bad. A few things were stolen, mostly weapons and food, after what happened to Hjrالدruk Hall, no one felt guilt. And finally, a few good names were used to borrow upon promise. Those financiers assumed no one would ever want to leave the city.

Once it was all done, with full wagons, pulled by donkeys, they set out. They only made it as far as the first inner gate. Braun Mur, leading the caravan, noticed a wanted poster in Hjrالدruk's likeness and armed guards ahead. Without a word he led the train down the first turn and back into the Daan proper.

"What can we do? Ras Tok cried.

"You can go without me," Hjrالد decided.

Arg Druk scoffed, "Nonsense! We could hide you in a barrel or under a wagon."

Hjrالد shook his head, "I'm not necessary. The Deep roads are heavily patrolled for leagues, I could not hid for weeks and they would search the wagons."

Murادinhjrالد cleared his throat, "I may have a solution. The Elven Road."

"The what?" They all asked.

"It's not nearly as grand as the Deep Roads but its only one league and has only one guard post. It's up near the top of the Daan Spiral."

Bibble, confused, asked, "It has a top?"

Murادinhjrالد chuckled, "Yes child, there is a top. I don't know what is up there, but that should speak to the safety and lack of Dwarf kind. It should be easy to leave that way." And so they did.

It took two weeks to climb the Daan Spiral to the Elven caravansary. New friendships were formed, Urist was relentlessly pursued by Bofin, and the group developed an easy camaraderie. No one called Hiral Druk sire, and though he did lead them, he felt more their friend than anything else.

As luck or providence would have it, there was an Elven envoy in residence, They came to trade and gossip though no Elf would admit as much. To them it was an exchange of gifts yet somehow an Elf never came out behind. The Elf Nations neither mined nor smithed, they wove, they carved, they brewed and mostly they sniveled.

"You like, must be kidding me!" the Elf scoffed, "you want to like, what? Take the Surface Road? That's like totally unreal!"

"Aye, we desire to settle under new mountains. Gar`Druk`Daan is far too populated for a simple Dwarf to live in comfort," Hjrالد told him. News of his indebtedness had yet to reach this far up the city.

“Huh! Never have I heard of a Dwarf, like, willing to brave the surface!”

“I am no coward!” Hjrál growled.

“No, No! Peace Brother! This is totally rad! I must give you, like, a totally righteous gift. You have given me one totally righteous story. I know where you should settle, in the “Evebon Forest.” It’s like totally beautiful and no one for leagues upon leagues! So, just follow the sun West to the Fire wine river, then North to the Sand Scab Desert Bridge and West some more along the road until you see a copse of like, the bluest redwood you ever saw. Then North, through the wiggle fang hills to the Erebon Forest at the foot of Mount Dud.”

It took another hour of questions to understand what the Elf said. So many new concepts, most did not have a Dwarfish word, or did, but not used for tens of thousands of years, or worse, that had changed meaning completely. Skai for instance in Elvish meant “ceiling” while in Dwarfish it meant “painted surface.” Sun, he couldn’t quite grasp in Elfish but in Dwarfish it meant “Big hot floating burny thing that comes and goes.” The trouble was obvious with the gift of directions, Hjrál Druk returned to his dwarves, “We go to Mount Dud.” They cheered and oddly, Argdruk’s beard mewed, “Ah... what?”

Arg Druk looked slightly embarrassed and shifted slightly. A small white head poked free and mewed again, “I can explain!” The axe dwarf said, “Elf called it a cat, said they are very helpful on the surface road.” A second head poked out the other side, then a third from behind his neck, “Ain’t they just the sweetest things you ever did see?”

Hjrál reached out for one, seeing Arg Druk scratch one behind the ears. It hissed, swatted and gave Hjrál a hand full of scratches. “Ack! No! Vile furballs!” Arg Druk just chuckled and gave the little cat a nuzzle.

They only attention the guards paid the caravan of colonists was incredulity. They couldn’t believe a sane Dwarf would brave the Elf Road. “Have ye ever tried it?” asked old Doc with hands on her hips.

“Of course not! I’m not mad,” the guard said in disgust. To that the band just chuckled and swelled with their own bravery. In truth, not a one was afraid. If a prissy little Elf child could walk it, so could any Dwarf even blind with no legs!

The Dwarf Tunnel lasted a while, with odd twists and turns you couldn’t see around. It was very unlike the straight and efficient Deep Roads. “Hope the whole surface road isn’t like this, else it might double our journey length.” muttered Yog.

It wasn’t, it was worse. They exited the mountain into early dawn, the sun barely visible about the Eastern Ranges. No walls, no pillars, and strangely the air moved! It was too much to take. The Dwarfs wailed and cried, poor Brawn timer rushed back into the tunnel. With two steps the world had been reborn strange and terrifying.

Hjrál withstood it best “Calm down, maybe I should have told you the elf words first but until now I didn’t understand. Up there is a ceiling which the Elves call skai. That out there is the sun. It goes from East to West every day. Not sure if it is coming or going yet so lets take a few to get our bearings.”

Dug sobbed, “What’s holding up the ‘skai’? I—I’ve been in a cave in, oh Gods! It’s going to fall on us!”

“Quiet Dug! It’s not falling,” Hjrál snapped.

Brawn timer was whimpering, still back in the tunnel, “No... No pillars, no celing! Nothing,

void, emptiness! I... I feel... oh Gods, I'm going to fall in to it!"

"Brawnmur! Snap out of it and get over here, you aren't falling."

With a stutter, the old man said, "Y... yes Sire." He took one step forward and... started to fall forward but missed the ground. "No! Noooo..." He screamed as he shot out into the skai."

"Huh, Dad always said old Brawn was a little bit magic." The other dwarves just stared at the distant spec as it disappeared over the horizon.

An hour and they knew the sun was coming up, The skai changed colors, odd downy patterns drifted across it, and shortly there after__ ate the sun and proceeded to cry. Cry so much in fact that the Dwarfs feared to drown where they stood. Unlike a deep tunnel however, the water seemed to vanish from the Surface Road instead of flood.

So they marched soggily West. Eventually the rain stopped, the sun came back and the mud started to dry and then came the bugs, mosquitoes, biting flies, gnats and ticks. Some were there already but only noticed as they left the foothills. They were miserable.

Gongin was in the lead when they came in sight of the Firewine River. Rivers were not unknown underground but a rusty red river of Elven Firewine? No one had believed it. Goangin rushed forward, laughing and dropped to his hands and knees at the bank. He hesitated only a split second before dunking his head to drink.

He came up sputtering, "Tis only Drauk laced water! Pah!" He stood, then bent over to peer down at something, "That's peculiar..." suddenly something large and golden sprang from the water and slapped poor Goangin in the face. So surprised he was that he tumbled head first into the rapids and was pulled swiftly downstream.

Hjral and a handful of others rushed south along the bank. Dwarves sprint well but not very long and a sprinting Dwarf isn't unlike a sweaty wobbling puddle rolling down a hill... Not very dignified. They failed to catch up and wouldn't have known what to do anyhow.

"A dangerous place, this Surface Road," Yog observed morosely.

Hjral nodded, "Quite true. Bipple, give us a song," She did.

Her voice, as usual, was cheerful and her song bawdy with a good timing to march to. They made good time and tried not to think about the fact they had lost two before lunch. So they thought of lunch and ate as they walked.

Two

The sun was low in the west when they reached the bridge. It was of Elven make, that "Forest Druk?" That was so useful. (Wood) It safely spanned the river and kept them away from the disturbing fish within. Once across, the light fell and the ceiling faded from blue to orange, to red, to purple, then velvet black.

Urist, well into his cups, sobbed out, "Sun has died, now how will we know our way? Curse you Hjrالدruk for bringing us to this Durkless wasteland!" Then he promptly fell over and snored.

Bofin rushed up to cradle poor Urist's head, for it had struck hard dry stone. In fact, the dwarfs had found themselves in a red Druk badlands from which the Firewine river stole it's color. There wasn't much there but Druk.

With Urist unconscious the Dwarfs settled down to talk through their troubles. Some guessed that the sun would come again, others thought perhaps a new one would be born. No one reasonably agreed with Urist that it was gone for good.. The argument became especially heated when Jim wondered if it perhaps moved back and forth like a pendulum. No one wanted to believe west changed directions, that would make the Elf gift quite suspect!

It was about then that the howls started. No one had heard anything like them before—and the subject shifted to the howls.. The conversation only stopped when one of the Donkey's bawled in pain and the night was filled with yips and barks. Dark gray forms moved through the caravan, Direwolf eyes flashed, Direwolf teeth bite. The Dwarfs were surprised but not helpless, sword, axe and spear did far more damage than teeth. Still, when the finally tally was made, one donkey was dead, one wounded and three Dwarfs hurt... And Bibble was gone.

The Dwarfs learned well, guards were posted, wagons were circled, animals protected, and everyone slept armed. The wolves didn't come again but the sleepless caravan heard other noises in the dark. When sunlight spilled from the east, all cheered and none had slept a wink.

Three

The desert was dry and dusty, strewn with broken rock and distant stands of forest. Hjral now regretted not asking the Elf more questions. What was a "redwood" and a "copse"? Setting out he assumed he would see something red and know it. But the entire desert was red.

In frustration and fear, he told no one they were lost and did not regret any longer keeping the directions secret. The sun reached higher and the desert became an inferno, armor and heavy clothes had to be removed. The wagons were slower now as well with one donkey dead and another lame, they made poor time. Night came again and they a defensive ring, fed and boozed the animals, and set watches. That night they were left in peace.

The night was cold, horribly cold, and filled with scuttling things. The day was hot, blisteringly so, and all but the Dwarfs and some birds slept. After the first week, they were hardened on the second week Jim was finding edible plants and tiny watering holes. By week four they felt almost at home under the burning sun, and then in week five the tanned and world weary Dwarfs found a "copse" of "Redwood", or so claimed Hjral. They turned North.

It just so happened that it was a copse, and the desert baked pine was reddish, but it was not infact the one they wanted. That one was passed four weeks ago. The land to the north was less rocky, covered in dry grasses and a few sparse trees, you might even have called it savanah. It was there they met the monsters.

The ground shook. The air filled with an earthly noise. A dust cloud rose to the East. Urist saw them first: gray wrinkled skin, feet like stalagmites, as tall and wide as the largest wall, and worse; a face like a gray maggot. The herd of elephants charged them and the Dwarfs broke into mad dash west. Luckily the donkeys had the same idea.

The great lumbering beasts slowed but never stopped. Each Dwarf recognized a sprinter conserving his energy and that monster did just that. For two days and nights—they were stalked. Upon the second night Argdruk came up with a plan and set the dry savanna to burning between them and the elephants. Pity Dwarfs did not know the first about wind.

The elephants turned aside from the inferno but with a stiff breeze out of the east—they were stalked by flames instead. It was midday when they finally reached a shallow stream and used it for protection. Old Doc simply collapsed face down in the water and had to be rolled over lest she drown. The only good thing about the brush fire? Plenty of cooked meat after it passed.

Four

Three days they rested upon the banks of the stream. On one side, the blackened savannah; on the other, creepy forest of web strewn trees. It was spaced wide enough for the wagons to pass under, but it was so silent and still. Every Dwarf but Doc hated it, she on the other hand started collecting wispy bits of web by the bushel.

“If I can find the right essence to clean off the stickum, our cloth will be famous.” she told them when asked. Then she climbed another tree and gathered more.

Now, seeing an old woman of 708 years climb 100 foot trees was all quite spectacular. Even more so was seeing her slide down the trunk with a high pitched keening. In one hand was a little stone box with a thumb sized egg sack. In the other was something like the size of her head. On closer inspection the Dwarfs realized the large thing was her hand, swollen horribly.

Old Doc wobbled about until someone laid her down. She was mumbling, oddly coherently in ways that made no sense, “Ohh... sticky colors, all in a row. Must remember the color stars and spindly little legs All the nibbles and nips! Nip, nip nip!” Then she started to gum her mouth on poor Boffin’s boot.

That was the way she remained for the rest of the day. All who carried her ended up slobbered and well versed in color theory. She didn’t sleep that night but her constant chatter did keep the watch awake and amused. By morning she had quieted down and complained of a headache, briefly. An hour later they left the forest and found more grassland, wetter and greener this time with lots of rolling hills.

Five

On the first day in the rolling hills, they found the road... or at least a road. Hjral claimed they were on the right path and that was all that mattered. Courtly arts school had taught him to lie when necessary. On the road, they turned North.

More than one poor Dwarf found themselves spooked as some shadow passed over the sun in a cloudless sky. So quick it was, just a ripple of darkness that streaked over the hills. Also creepy was the way the light played over the grasses as they rippled in the breeze. The whole world seemed alive in a way that neither the desert nor savannah did.

Over one particularly tall hill they came to a stop. The light was fading but far to the north they could see the edge of sunlit mountains rising above the plains. Perhaps that was their destination, yet still a long way off. They made camp, with the usual precautions as well as a palisade of forest Durk spikes. Argdruk’s idea to ward off elephants.

Sometime in the night Rastok went out to relieve himself. All awake heard thumping, a startled cry, then a loud gallop followed by, “Heeelllpppp... .” fading into the distance. Come morning they found no Rastork, only flattened grasses and hoof prints like a donkey’s—yet even larger than an elephant! They had lost another... .Now only 11 remained.

Six

Those distant peaks were distant indeed. If not for Jim and Yog they might have starved. Jim found many edible plants while Yog... Yog had no goats, but he found a variety of ground dwelling rodent that provided decent milk and tasty meat. It took him a few months but soon he had a herd of over 100 that followed the caravan. To everyone’s relief the shadow did not return and there were no thumps or cries in the night. Once you got used to it, the plains were

in fact quite comfortable. Not that anyone wanted to live there, not near enough Druk and a Dwarf with no Druk was like a Dwarf with no beard!

Week by week the terrain grew steeper, wetter, and had a splattering of forest. The mountains, still a distant, but the foothills were vast. They crossed streams, rounded lakes, and wondered at the variability of the of the Surface Road. In the plains it had been just a series of wagon ruts, but here it was laid stone, almost as well crafted as a deep road... This was no elf road.

They met the road builders two weeks after seeing the roads They called themselves something like Horks or Urks. To Hjral it sounded like they were trying to cough up a lung. Thankfully the green skinned giants spoke both Dwarf and Elf languages well. They told their tale and reasons for leaving, then while Muradinhjral went to barter—Hjral Druk spoke to the Orc Chief.

“I know I am lost. But, have you heard of Mount Dud? Or Erebon Forest?” Hjral asked hopefully.

“Oh, certainly my good chap!” Chief Nigel told him, “would be hardly sporting to send your there though. A dread Lich took up residence upon that land not two years ago.”

The Dwarf sputtered, “B-But the Elves said no one lived there!”

With a scoff the chief replied, “Bloody Elves, their truths are lies. No one lives there, it’s true, a Lich is a however quite undead.” The chief sat back with a hand over the ruffled white breast of his shirt.

“Un... Dead? Like, once dead and now not, yet not alive?” Hjral asked.

“Indubitably.”

Hjral, too, sat back and tugged at his beard, “Where should we go then? What about the mountains here?”

“Oh, no no no, that wouldn’t do! You see, there is a dragon. He’s not truly ferocious, but he’s a bit... well... He’s too Elvish?”

“Elvish?” Hjral pressed.

Nigel nodded, “Elvish, most assuredly!” While not exactly helpful, Hjral left it at that and thanked the chief for his time. “Of course my good Hjral! Come back anytime.”

With a full load, Murdinhjral wandered up, grinning. He encouraged the Dwarfs out of town hurriedly and they set off North, toward the mountains and the—Elvish—Dragon, whatever that meant. The road was just as crafted and the lot of them made good time. That night they camped on a switchback above the foothills and rested soundly. By noon the next day they reached the mountain pass.

So high they were, the air so thin, Philbort and Dug had to rest. Hjral wandered about with Druk McDruk, looking at stone, “Druh, Druh, more Druh (Granite), Nothing much of interest in these skai facing stones,” Hjral complained.

Druk McDruk smiled knowingly, “Well now, that’s not entirely true. Last switch back I found a whole nugat of Drug (Iridium) just laying there in the dirt.” She reached in under her beard, dislodging a small mewling kitten, then pulled free the iridescent nugget of Drug.

“Pretty,” Hjral said, then eyed the kitten, “where did that come from?”

Druk McDurk chuckled, “Argdruk’s cats, all three, gave birth last month. Everyone has a cat or two now, don’t you?”

He shook his head, “No, they all hate me.”

It was about this time when both Philbort and Dug, who had been sitting on the edge of the cliff both screamed. All heads turned to see Dug’s pick and Philbort’s lawyer hat—and a dragon of green scale, munching away happily.

“You... You ate Dug!?!” cried Durk McDurk. No one really cared about Philbort though, there were too many lawyers in the world anyway.

The Dragon belched and peered down at the dwarfs and oddly looked embarrassed, “Like, oh my god! I’m like so sorry! I totally thought they were Humans! I swear. Oh, oh, I know, like B R B.” The dragon said, truly sounding Elvish indeed. Then it dropped back over the cliff and vanished.

The colonists ran, no they sprinted. So, they didn’t make it far before the Dragon returned, all of them winded and quite self conscious. Hjrál looked up at the swooping green shadow, “Oh, flatulating donkey fart! What more?”

“Like, wait little ones! I’ve got, like the totally best gift!” The Dragon cried and landed, “This radical golden armor, it’s got gnarly magic!”

It was armor, it was gold, and it fell with a dull series of thuds and deformed from the impact, “Gifts, why always gifts?” Hjrál mustered.

“Uh, thanks?” Hjrál muttered, then told Yog to load it onto the wagon. At least the dragon wasn’t going to eat them but it was too elvish for comfort.

Seven

The other side of the mountain, they glimpsed a vast blue line of strange Druk in the West and they try to head that way. It is not so easy though as it seems to rain all the time and the foothills are filled with rivers. Some they ford, some they wander along for days, and one, they found an Elf bridge and road. They followed that west, all the way to the largest river they had ever seen. No good to drink, either, too salty.

For two long months they wandered the sandy shore, seeking a way across. First South, to the cliffs of the mountains, then North until the air had a bite and the forest grew huge and tall. They again had to forage and hunt, Yog’s rodents were down to only 15 and he wanted to keep a few, for breeding stock, He set cats to guard and herd the flock and let no Dwarf close.

Now, a Dwarf is half liver, they have to be to drink as much as they do. No known poison can kill them, though as in the case of Doc, it can incapacitate—for a time. So it was that Jim had never imagined a toxic mushroom. It looked and smelled tasty enough, a little nibble suggest to him a stew... so that’s what he did.

The sweating he passed off as heat from the stove. He was used to the cold, that’s all. An hour later the stew was ready. The donkeys ate with the Dwarfs, the Dwarfs ate hungrily. Bu sundown all hell broke loose. With no one sane enough to recount the experience accurately, lets just say; it was a very colorful six days where the animals talked, the forest druk? sang, and free love was known by all. The all felt and acted down right Elvish.

When minds again cleared they found themselves near a wide river, standing under a forest of tall red druk with all their donkeys dead. Jim decided to name the mushroom Drug, after all

the pretty colors just like iridescent iridium. Doc on the other hand had gotten into her dyes and learned the art of tiedye, trying to recapture the vision.

Without donkeys the giant Drauk wagons were too heavy to pull, so here they stopped, and here they decided to stay. Hjrál took charge and started giving orders, “Bofin, take poor Dug’s pick and mine us some forest Druk? Durk Mc Durk, make us a decent room below. Jim start a surface farm over there,” he pointed to a clearing, “Arg Druk, stand guard. Everyone else! unload!”

First came Druk McDruk, an hour later as anyone who has been to a pine forest knows, the topsoil is little more than mulch needles and pine cones. “Hjrál... It’s futile, I pick, it just falls back in. It’s power. I could dig in with a shovel if we had one, but we can’t build with it.”

Bofin showed up next, red faced and sweating, “It’s impossible! I swing the pick and it—sticks! I spend more time wrenching the pick free than mining.”

Then it all came to a halt with a high pitched scream of anguish. Before him was one of his cats, flat as a pancake from where a barrel fell on it. The barrel being made of metal, was fine and its precious mead unspilled, to which both Hjrál and Urist were grateful. Everyone else however moaned and sobbed over the dead cat.

“Oh, just have Dock make some mittens from it or something!” Hjrál grumped.

“You Monster!” Yog screamed, then pulled his sword at first they thought he would go after Hjrál which all thought quite reasonable, instead he cut his own throat while they all stood around.

“Poor bastard,” Bofin muttered and Arg Duk flung his axe angrily. It struck a tree, cleaving half the massive trunk, and it fell.

“Arg Druk!” Hjrál yelled, making the dwarf flinch, “You mine forest Durk? with Bofin! Druk McDruk bury Yog.”

Over the next week they settle in. Bricks of Forest Druk are almost useless for building, but wole legs and slabs do work to make crude and leaky buildings. Jim’s farm comes along well, but dies suddenly as the ground begins to freeze and snow falls. Frozen soil, Druk McDruk eventually fond, makes for a decent building material and she mimed out a single room for the cold Dwarfs to sleep in. A few days later, she hit proper Druk and a proper Daan was started.

Eight

Hjrál, with no skills and little to do, took up fishing at first afraid the fish might knock him in, he was cautious, but as he learned to catch enough to feed his people, he found it relaxing. He also took over Yog’s job with the ginpigs, though his being there drove away the cats.

Bofin attempted to use Skai Druk (Snow) to build a forge, but this proved untenable as it kept putting his fire out. However, though his skill as a smith were going unused, his romantic influence finally bared fruit. Not that he was particularly thrilled with the outcome. Urist himself seemed rather satisfied but poor Bofin refused to speak to anyone for a month. The were married later that winter.

Time slid by as Hjrál`Druk`Daan grew and prospered. Doc’s spider eggs hatched and took up residence above the midden room. Mostly they caught flies and the occasional bat, but more than one curious kitten was found emaciated in their nest.

And then came spring.

Nine

“Whoa Dude, whoa! Not cool man. This is like—the Ancestral Forest. These trees are like totally our beloved ancestors! Ambassador Kanove of Reed told Hjral as they walked through the stone hills towards his office.

“We were told to go here and settle, Evebon Forest,” Hjral told him with a little smirk.

Reed flinched and stopped, “But... That’s three months East of here! You must leave at once!”

“That is quite out of the question.” as he spoke, he pushed open the door and the ambassador let out the most awe inspiring shriek of horror as his eyes fell upon the Redwood desk, chair and bed.

Argdurk had found himself a new profession as a carpenter. He could chop down a tree in two swings, split a log in three, and carve tooth and groove work that barely needed glue. The elf beheld his work and despaired, “Nooo... my grandfather... you... you monster.” And wept for a time. Hjral almost felt pity—until the Elf said, “This will mean war you know...”

“Oh,” Hjral said shortly, then grabbed his fishing hook on it’s Redwood pole and used it to gut the Elf. Shortly there after, he and Argdurk dispatched the rest of the envoy. That night they learned how delicious Elf meat was. It gave them a new appreciation for vegetables.

Ten

Hjral was fishing as usual while his herd of 200 ginpigs foraged along the bank. It was a quiet day, peaceful even. Last night the third envoy of Elves came across the dinner table and he still felt stuffed. He was half drowsing in the warm sun when someone called to him, “Ahoy thar, Matey!” The old familiar voice said.

He looked up and gasped, “Goangin? Is that you? We thought you drowned!”

The Dwarf was standing on a rat with a long pole in hand. He jabbed the pole down, pushed the raft to the bank, and grounded himself, “Aye, tis me! Met some humans down river who fished me off a log. Spent the winter on one of their coastal boats where I learned me a trade! Heard from some Orcs you were about, took me a week to find sign o`you but here I am!”

With good cheer they walked to the Daan, exchanging tales. Sadly they ground had thaws and wit the spring rains it had turned to mud. Instead of leading Goangin down below, they fell through the sagging roof of the muddy room and brought the rest down with them. It took the rest of the day to clear out the entrance and shore up the walls with masonry. Still, everyone was thrilled to have Goargin back.

Argdruk and Goangin spent the next few weeks building a pier for the river, and then a boat. Goangin didn’t stay long though after it was built. He and Muradinhjral took a load of crafted goods to the human and Orc villages along the coast.

He was not the only lost Dwarf to return. Shortly before summer, they heard howls in the night, yet oddly musical. Two days later Bibble showed up with 10 huge yet friendly Direwolves—and two half wolf children, Howlabeth and Yipyip. Bibble was not the same airhead she had been, now she was a wild huntress with an Elven bow. She did still sing and her pack sang along, always on key.

Eleven

It was fall and Urist was behaving strangely. Bofin complain to anyone who would listen but it wasn't until Urist stole the Invincible Armor that anyone paid him any heed. But by then the brewer and locked himself in the workshop and yelled at anyone who knocked. Three days later the door opened.

It was called Druũk`Biskibop`Wae`Sun`Daan (Golden-Savage-of-the-Sun-City) and it was a Golem. Sober due to his pregnancy, Urist found his true calling as a Golomancer. He set his invincible construct to guard the Daan and retired to his room.

Urist had completed it just in time too, the next day an army of 200 Elven warriors besieged the Daan. With Druk McDruk, Bipple, Bofin and Arg Durk defending the door, the Golem was sent out to war. Wooden blades dented it, but it reformed, arrows pierced it, until it had the look of a porcupine, that did not stop it. It killed over 100 Elves, the Dwarves took out another 20, the rest fled.

Two days later a party of 7 Dwarf immigrants arrived at their door step. Three died before Urist could halt the Golem. Better instructions were given and the four stragglers were welcomed in. The had set out from a Daan to the North, a troupe of 300, only 4 made it.

Twelve

The years drift by, children born, the city swelled. By the 10th year the war had made their primary export smoked Elf jerky, No Dwarf had died. in fact, but for the six rotated through guard duty, no one even noticed the war. Elves had never mastered Druk, so when they great Durk doors were shut, they broke their weapons upon it until the Golem was let out to play.

The only tragic death that did occur should have been easily preventable. Every good miner knows not to mine straight down, always leave a place to stand and always listen to the Druk before you cut. Druk McDruk had been frustrated. Once she had hoped for gems, metals, or even Durk for carving. There was only Druh. So she was in a foul mood when he pick struck the Druk between her feet, and stuck. She jerked, pried, then kicked. The Druk cracked and she fell 30 feet into an underground lake. Even that might not have been so bad, but she had never taken up Goangin's offer to learn to swim.

Her son, Druk McJim took her place as head miner at the young age of 9. By age 11 he found a seam of coal, precious metals, and an old half flooded Deep Road close to the lake. Within a year that Deep Road became a highly active Throughway and brought immigrants by the thousands... and a handful of bill collectors for Hjral's dungeon.

Another 10 years and the primary export was cat shit. Hjral Dirk fell in love with Howlabeth, mostly for her hatred of cats, at their wedding she proclaimed open season on the little things and the primary export shifted to mittens. Only a few suicides followed before they learned to spay and neuter.

Hjral`Druk`Daan prospered. It grew to 7 million Dwarfs over the next 23 years. One might even think it would lead to a whole new way of life. If only Druk McJim (Who, to be honest, looked nothing like Jim) had not dug so deep. Upon the 45th year of Hjral`Druk`Daan, he woke a Balrog. More might have survived if it hadn't come up between the Daan and the Deep Road, or if there had been more than one lair to reach it—or if the Golem had not been engaged with some 3,000 Elves on the Surface.

Of those that survived, one was Doc, she had been picking herbs for dye when the Elven army arrived and hid under the pier. She at least had learned to swim. Out the Golem came and it battled for the next two days until the Elves were broken once again. When it was over she made her way to the Daan, then stopped, for the Deep was shaking. She hid again as the

Balrog came out, ready to unleash horrific devastation upon the land... only to face off against good old Druŭk`Biskibop`War`Sun`Daan. It was no contest.

Once the land was quiet, Doc came out once more to find the Daan in ruins. Even her spiders and ginpigs were dead. Quietly she shut and locked the door, walked past the Golem, and went to sit upon the pier. That even another survivor showed up, Gonagin and his kids on their river boat. They took her upstream to an Orc City where she eventually married a nice young Ork by the name of George. As for Golagin? He founded the River Dwarf Civilization.

Then there was Rastok. Now with a spare head (bion) a pair of wings (eagle) and a tail (snake). He spent his days engraving the Deep Roads with nightmares and suffered from P.T.S.D. when asked what happened to him, he would only say "When a Chimera wants your hand in marriage, say No."

As we know, Yog, Dug, and Philburt are quite dead so are the rest who lived in Hjrall`Druk`Daan. But, you may be wondering what became of old Brawnmur. No, he didn't die, he was magic after all, right? Well who do you think is telling this tale? I became the first (and only) Dwarf in space! Oh, I came back frequently enough but I made my home on the moon. I even met Neil Armstrong when he popped by for tea.

The End.

Words

- Biskibop: Savage
- Daan: Metropolis
- Druk: Stone
- Druŭk`Biskibop`War`Sun`Daan: Urist made Fighting Golem in Indestructible Armor.
- Druh: Granite
- Druk?: Wood
- Drook: Silver
- Druŭk: Gold
- Drŏŏk: Mithril
- Drok: Copper
- Drauk: Iron
- Drug: Iridium & Hallucinogenic mushrooms
- Fig: Ingot by weight
- Gar: Dark / Black
- Kon: Coin
- Skai: Painted surface or surface sky
- Sun: Big hot floating burny thing that comes and goes
- Wae: of the

Characters

- Hjrall`druk
Son of Hjrall`druk Sr. although not a Junior, he has courtly skills, learns to herd guinea pigs and learns to fish, he has a mutual hate relationship with cats, leader of the colonists troop of Dwarves, then King of Hjrall`druk`Daan.
- Philbort
Hjrall`druk Sr's lawyer. Carries briefcase everywhere. Eaten by Dragon, though no one cares.
- Argdruk

Loyal soldier and bodyguard to Hjrالدruk. Axedwarf. Weapon's maker. Lover of cats.

- Brawnmur
Hjrالدruk's body servant. who magically floats off into oblivion, teller of the tale.
- Bofin
Hjrالدruk Sr.'s head smith, in love with Urist, even though Urist is male, creator of magnificent weapons of war.
- Doc
Female, seamstress, first Dwarf to use spider webs as a textile, and after being stung by a spider, in a fevered delirium created a tied-dyed clothing line.
- Rastok
Engraver of the beautiful masterpieces. 4th to be taken away & 1st back. Changed, now with 2 more heads a lion head and a snake head.
- Bibble
Female, a bit of a floozy airhead yet a skilled and talented singer. 3rd to disappear, assumed dragged off and eaten by Direwolves.
- Durk McDruk
Female, miner and married to Jim
- Jim
Farmer, herbalist, avid poet and husband to Durk McDruk
- Dug Hjrال
Miner, friend to Durk McDruk and Jim, eaten by Dragon with Philbort, everyone mourns for him.
- Muradinhrال
Accountant and store keeper, skilled in bartering and obtaining supplies and surprisingly learned.
- Yog
A goatkeeper with no goats, finds fuzzy rodents in the Grassland Plains and builds them into a great herd both for milk and food. 1st to commit suicide, over an insulting indifference to a squashed cat.
- Goangin
Skills unknown, at first, 2nd person lost on the expedition to the new Daan, knocked into the Firewine River by a carp and carried away down river, assumed drowned. Second to return to the Daan. In his away time he has learned the trade of sailing and trading upon the rivers and high seas.
- Urist
A flamboyant Dwarf, brewer, and Golemancer, eventually marries Bofin and has a child, whom is never specifically named which raised solely by Bofin, goes on to create a Clay Golem army which goes onto win many wars against foreign foes.
- Elf
Called The Elf but otherwise unnamed from the Elven Outpost near the exit atop the Daan Spiral, who gives Hjrالدruk directions to the Erebon Forest.
- Road Hork
Speaks with Cockney accent and works hard.
- Betty the Dwarf
Secretary to Lord Nigel - no relationship or incarnation of Betty the Human.
- Lord Nigel
Poper Kings English speaking Aristocrat
- Dragon
Unnamed and very Elfish in his manner of speech, eats both Dug Hjrال and Philbort.
- Ambassador Kanoue of Reed
Arrives at Hjrالدruk Daan with a funeral cask for burial in the redwood forest site of the new Daan, apparently it is a sacred burial ground for Elves, when Hjrالدruk refuses to move the Daan, Ambassador Kanoue of Reed declares war and is its first casualty.

- Howlabeth
Daughter of Bibble and a Direwolf, she falls in love with Hjrالدruk and marries him.
- Yipyip
Son of Bibble, brother to Howlabeth, and brother-in-law to Hjrالدruk.
- Pack
Direwolf pack of which Bibble is leader. Number and Individuals unknown.
- Druũk`Biskibop`Wae`Sun`Daan
Golden Golem created by Urist from the magical golden armor given to the Dwarves as a gift from the Dragon, this Golem is the savior of the Daan, a fighting machine par none, defeats every Elf which comes near the entrance to the Daan, and defeats the Baalrog that Bo allowed to escape.
- Baby Girl
Daughter of Urist and Bofin, unnamed.
- Immigrant Lawyer
Unnamed, he is refused entrance to Hjrالدruk`Daan, even his immigrant wife agrees he should not enter.
- Immigrant Lawyers wife
Unnamed a Tanner by trade.
- Belling
immigrant Cheesemaker
- Bo
Pump opperator who mistakenly opens up a rune protected and rune warned chamber containing a Baalrog, sentenced to community service in the puppet show.
- Baalrog
Kills over a thousand Dwarves before being killed by Druũk`Biskibop`Wae`Sun`Daan
- Bell
Hjrالدruk`s Hork receptionist.
- Beefeeder Adrok
a representive of Gar`Druk`Daan who comes to Hjrالدruk`Daan to collect the debt Hjrالدruk's father owes, who is summarily dropped into the dungeon. Unwilling participant of the dungeon game.
- Gweedu StrongErm
already a resident in the dungeon and assumed to have also come to collect debts and also an unwilling an participant in the dungeon game.

Places

- Gar`Druk`Daan
Dark Stone Metropolis starting point and former home of the colonists.
- Elven Outpost
atop the Daan Spire
- Erebon Forest
Destination the colonist set out for, along the way they get terribly lost, which is a good thing as the Erebon Forest is inhabited by a Lich... not that it ends well anyway.
- Fire Wine River
- Sand Scab Desert Bridge
- Sand Scab Desert
- Mount Dud
Pronounced Dude, at the foot of which is the Erebon Forest
- Hork Village

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