DREAMS OF DARKNESS VI – GIDEON FIREFORGED

The blink of an eye takes but a moment, but within that moment lies an eternity of darkness. Frozen in time, your body paralyzed, all you can do is watch helplessly as the vision unfolds before you …

You are flying. The clouds part to reveal the southern tip of the Galena Mountains. You spiral ever downwards, the ground rushing up to meet you. There, in the shadows of a dormant volcano, a cavern beckons. Its location is burned into your mind.

Suddenly, a wall of fire blocks your path, encircling you. Kossuth’s voice booms inside your head.

“My Avatar, I have come bearing a gift in your hour of need. My fellow elemental princes and I will vow to send our strongest elemental servants to aid you against the coming darkness.”

“But first, my fellow elemental princes need to know that you are indeed worthy, and that they have allied themselves with the strongest side in the coming conflict. You and your companions must enter the cavern you see before you and claim your prize within the next three days.”

“If you do not, then other forces may claim the prize instead, taking the allegiance of the other elemental princes from our everburning light and into the shadows.”

“A final warning, others may seek to steal our gift from you, or if they cannot, then they will aim to put you in their control”

With that the vision shifts, as you soar in the air back home to Mistledale, to the woods outside town, to your stone cabin, where Meliai awaits your return. Fear fills your heart as you edge ever closer, the stone cottage nothing but ruins and a circle of nine red robed figures, in their center lies Meliai bound to her favourite tree. Thayan knights, the clergy of Kossuth and other soldiers stand witness and on guard.

It is a rare sight indeed to see all nine of the Zulkirs beyond Thay’s borders. Szass Tamm leads the ritual, mystic energies crackle around Meliai. She screams as her flesh is forced to merge with her favourite tree as the leaves and the limbs shrivel and wither away to nothing, leaving a barren hole in the ground. Szass Tamm’s haunted figure limps to where the tree once stood. His skeletal fingers reach down into the ground, and retrieve a small token in the shape of a heart-shaped acorn. Summoning a minion, he places the token inside a rune carved box.

Yaphyll, the Zulkir of Divination asks Szass Tamm, “Is this wise? Imprisoning Gideon’s beloved?”

“Love is weak. Fear of what will happen to his beloved will make his power mine” Szass Tamm, the Zulkir of Necromancy replies as he opens a portal for he and his minions to depart with their new prize.

Soon, naught is left but Yaphyll, the Zulkir of Divination. “You are wrong Szass Tamm. I have foreseen Gideon’s path. To succeed, he will need to have love in his heart and his beloved by his side to give him strength, not fear. Or the darkness will overwhelm everything, even us, the mighty Zulkirs of Thay…”

DREAMS OF DARKNESS VI – KILZADI LITECASTER

The blink of an eye takes but a moment, but within that moment lies an eternity of darkness. Frozen in time, your body paralyzed, all you can do is watch helplessly as the vision unfolds before you …

Your true love, Gwenect, writhes and dances around a pool of water beneath the light of the moon. Her body moves with the rhythm of the night, calling to you. Imperfect shapes ripple across its surface. She turns to you and draws you near, beckoning you to gaze into the pool with her.

“Kilzadi, my beloved, Eilistraee has blessed me with a vision.”

“Soon, an opportunity will arise to expose the true face of the darkness to the drow, freeing them from its shadowy yolk.”

“In ten days time, you and I must stand before the thralls in the great city of Maerimydra and confront this false mother of drow. The truth will set them free and halt the rising darkness…”

A loud roar jerks your gaze up from the pool. Gwenect is gone. Standing on the other side is Nartheling. Angry. Hissing his frustration, the great fang dragon rakes his claws across the pool, distorting the face projected on its surface.

“I have been betrayed. No one reneges on a promise made to me,” vows Nartheling. “Send the package to my agent; instruct him to rain down vengeance on my enemies. Remember… No Mercy”

The image in the pool fades, leaving nothing but shadows rippling across the surface as the great fang dragon retreats into the darkness of his cave.

DREAMS OF DARKNESS VI – NEON WILDE

The blink of an eye takes but a moment, but within that moment lies an eternity of darkness. Frozen in time, your body paralyzed, all you can do is watch helplessly as the vision unfolds before you …

The ground beneath Ashabenford is shaking. Houses collapse as panicked citizens run screaming from their homes into the night. Noristuor’s tower topples over like a tree being felled by some giant axe. Even the great stone temples are collapsing as the earth quakes beneath them without mercy.

Swan’s Uncle Holfast struggles to pull staff and patrons from beneath the timbers of his fallen inn. Last but, not least, he frees Jhaer Brightsong from the wreckage. Somehow, her beauty still shines through as she brushes away the dirt and dust.

“We must rally the town,” says Uncle Holfast, “Captain Nelyssa Shendean and Jarrod Rold should be assembling the Riders in the town square.”

“Or not,” notes Jhaer, “The mayor’s office is burning”

“All the more reason to hurry,” shouts Uncle Holfast, “All who are able, come with us”.

Heldo and Parvus Ubler, the Miller's sons answer the call, and the four of them race toward the town square.

Suddenly, a voice calls out to them from atop the rubble. “Well, well, what have we here?” queries Mandi. “We can’t have you lot running about trying to help people. Why, that would just ruin all the fun. Boys, be good and dispatch these do-gooders for me, please”

The blades punch through the hearts of Uncle Holfast and Jhaer simultaneously. “Anything, else we can do for you Mistress Mandi?” ask Heldo and Parvus simultaneously, as they pull out their swords from the spines of their victims, letting their bodies fall to the ground.

“Our Dark Deity has a mission for the two of you. There is a boon in the Galena Mountains that the Seekers of Faerun will attempt to claim as their own. You must claim it first. You leave now. “ She instructs them. With a wave of her hand, an ebony portal emerges, and the Millar’s sons step through.

“Mother will be pleased.”

Leaning over the still form of Jhaer, Mandi whispers in her ear, “Did you really think I would share Neon Wilde with the likes of you? He is mine; now and forever.”

The last thing you see is Mandi walking off in the distance, following a Regal Female Drow, into a newly formed wound in the earth. As she descends into the darkness, the fissure collapses upon itself, sealing the path behind them.

DREAMS OF DARKNESS VI – OKUL TARMIKOS

The blink of an eye takes but a moment, but within that moment lies an eternity of darkness. Frozen in time, your body paralyzed, all you can do is watch helplessly as the vision unfolds before you …

Kurud emerges from the forest into a wide clearing, the ancient elven standing stone casting a long dark shadow in the setting sun. He turns at the noise of branches breaking behind him as two lithe female figures emerge from shadowy foliage.

“Look sister, are stoic Paladin has come to stop the darkness all by his little lonesome”, says Sandi, “except our Dark Diety is the keeper of all secrets. She whispers them to us, and she has told us his.”

“Yes, dear sister, we know this one’s secret. A stoic Paladin he is not, isn’t that right Kurud”, taunts Sindi, “or would you prefer that I call you by your true name … Kurudravos , son of Yenamros.”

“It matters not what you know, I shall stop you both here and now” boasts Kurudravos, his human features melting away, revealing the bright golden scales of a true gold dragon wyrmling.

“I think not”, the sisters say in unison, as long dark shadowy tentacles emerge from the forest, striking the immature gold dragon, entangling his limbs, his wings, his maw. His serpentine body struggles against the blackness trapping him, but to no avail.

“Have no fear, we shan’t slay you yet”, teases Sindi, holding Crimdrac’s Claw. “After all, we will require a worthy sacrifice to draw the great Crimdrac back into the fold, to serve our dark mistress once more.”

“And don’t think your bastard half-brother Okul will save you. His fate has already been sealed” proclaims Sandi confidently.

The sisters go back into the forest, skipping along shadowy trails, dragging their ensnared golden prey behind them, dragging him down through a hole in the ground, dragging him into the bowels of the earth, dragging him into the shadows…

“Mother will be pleased”

DREAMS OF DARKNESS VI – RISCA FORAKER

The blink of an eye takes but a moment, but within that moment lies an eternity of darkness. Frozen in time, your body paralyzed, all you can do is watch helplessly as the vision unfolds before you …

“Barundar, Egg Farmer, at your service, My Lord Nartheling”, says Barundar cautiously to the mirror before him, “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I have been betrayed. No one reneges on a promise made to me,” vows the great fang dragon. “Send the package to my agent; instruct him to rain down vengeance on my enemies. Remember… No Mercy”

“As you wish, My Lord Nartheling, right away” assures Barundar, Egg Farmer.

 Barundar, Egg Farmer, retrieves a finely carved box, similar to the one he had offered to Kilzadi not so long ago, and makes his way through the undertown of Glen. He hears revellers in a nearby tavern singing a ballad about the bravery of the great Rosco Foraker, the Paladin who held off an entire army of orcs himself, saving his kin from the cowardly actions of his cousin Risca. The tale has become popular ever since Rosco himself has come to town.

As he approaches the gates to the underdark, Barundar sees Rosco beguiling the guards with tales of his heroic adventures. Their laughter is cut off, as suddenly and without warning, the guards are cut down from a single stroke of Rosco’s axe. The crowd is stunned, silent as Rosco moves the levers that open the gates to the underdark.

Barundar watches in horror as a swarm of drow fan out through the undertown, with nearby dwarves being cut down by the dozen. Rosco is soon joined by the leader of the drow raiders, Anuth the Slayer, as they expand their carnage upon the helpless citizens of Glen. Being a simple Egg Farmer, Barundar flees with his precious cargo. He takes one last look at the undertown of Glen from his rocky perch. Below him, his fellow surviving dwarves are being placed in chains and forced to march back into the underdark, slavery and sacrifices to be their fate now. As the raider’s depart, Barundar hears but a single phrase eminate in unison from the raider’s lips:

“Mother will be pleased.”

Scrambling through the caverns and tunnels, Barundar makes it to the surface, and heads towards Ashabenford, stunned and shaken by what he has just witnessed.

DREAMS OF DARKNESS VI – SWAN BATTLESTAR

The blink of an eye takes but a moment, but within that moment lies an eternity of darkness. Frozen in time, your body paralyzed, all you can do is watch helplessly as the vision unfolds before you …

The Mayor of Ashabenford, Haresk Malorn, squints in the dim candlelight at the ledgers on his desk, recording the town’s taxes that have been collected. He smiles as his wife Imbrautha enters his office. She moves behind him, massaging his shoulders, leans down and whispers into his ear. A confused look comes across the Mayor’s face, then horror, as the necromantic energies leaching from his wife’s hands tear his soul apart.

Imbrautha smiles as her dead husband’s body slumps onto the desk, spilling a vial of black ink all over the “precious” ledgers. “My dear Fool” she says to the corpse “you have served your purpose, but I cannot risk you having a change of heart.” An errant candle, topples over, setting papers on the desk alight.

Imbrautha stares at the Rod of Peldan, hovering above the Mayor’s chair, just out of reach. “And I am no Fool either” she muses. Moving gracefully amongst the flames, she opens a secret panel in the wall, revealing another Rod of Peldan. The illusion hovering in the air vanishes as she takes possession of the true Rod.

Imbrautha steps outside from the burning building and into the cool dark air of night. Summoning the power of her Dark Deity, the ground begins to tremble, shaking ever more violently. A great fissure opens up along the main street of Ashabenford, sending a shockwave outwards, heaving the towns fragile buildings like twigs in a storm, smashing them to the ground. Noristuor’s tower topples over like a tree being felled by some giant axe. Not even the Gods can stop the damage being wrought upon their temples, as stone cracks, crumbles and collapse, crushing the clerics within. Imbrautha surveys the havoc she has wrought, taking a moment to savour the screams of those suffering and dying.

Her daughter, Mandi, emerges, climbing deftly over the debris littering the street. “It is done Mother, I hope you are pleased”.

“Yes, child, I am pleased.” Imbrautha says as she softly caresses her daughter’s cheek. “Come, let us join your sisters, we have much to do, and little time to do it.”

Imbrautha’s features shift, revealing a mysterious Regal Female Drow that has haunted you in previous dreams. The Regal Female Drow, with Mandi following close, enter the newly opened entrance to the underdark. As their figures fade into the darkness, the fissure collapses upon itself, sealing the path behind them.