

The Tale of Elban's Demise

The man is sitting in his chair, just like you were told he could be found, the description you were given matches as well. A dirty, smell shell of old man, matted grey hair hanging over his face, a waist length greasy mess of a beard. Hands, crippled and knotted on the arms of his chair.

"You be them that been asking about Elben's Demise? I can smell it on you," this gets a chuckle of the old man. You were told he hasn't been the same since last he ventured into the mysterious valley, according to the legend and tales, this crazy old man is the only one who survived.

"Elben's Demise... a hateful place. Ye best find another hole to poke yer noses into. Elben, he was always chasin' the gold you see. Din't matter where it took him, or what he had to do. This time he tol' us that he had found a map that showed 'em miles and miles of caverns and tunnels. He needed me and me wagons. Most 'liable teamster around then. Pay was good 'nough to keep me interested.

"It was good travel till we hit that god-forsaken valley, then we found The Scrub, can't rightly 'member who called it that, but it stuck. There is an old, long forgotten trail, on the eastern side. Stay on in. it leads to Gorst's Hold. He is kind of the boss of the valley, you'll need to make a deal with to go farther. Any trading you want to do has to be done there. Gorst don't like visitors pokin' around his people too much. Gorst himself, is some big bastard of a... well, I don't rightly know. He is big, ugly mean, he will make deals, but just like to stab you in the back. He has all manor of bandits, deserters, and Gods know what else up his sleeve.

"Now, Gorst isn't stupid, he keeps his people alive and fed in that place. He might even offer to sell you extra gear is you are braving those caves. He wants a reasonable cut of yer take, just don't try to cheat him. Bad things happen.

"To get to the gold and treasure in them caverns, and a lost dwarf city you need to enter the cave called Demon's Throat. It's like you crossed the bridge to hell there. A hot, bubbling black streams come s out the cave and into the Scrub. Yup, the water is black as tar, don't drink. No antidote is quick enough, lost a few men and animals to that stuff.

"Comin' back out the tunnels with our haul is when Elben made the mistake of trying to go 'round the other side of the valley from Gorst. I can't remember how many and wagons were lost trying to drive them through the Scrub. Its full of razor-sharp rocks, stunted evil trees, pieces of stone that had been marked by hands of man lie scattered about the Scrub. You ain't going to get away from Gorst that way.

"Then we stumbled across that Circle of Stones. Tall, green-purple stones standing taller than a building, and humming with energy. I ain't never felt anything like that since. Then bolts of light started flashin' out of them rocks. Anyone they hit, didn't make it. So just disappeared, others exploded in a mess. Running at night, through that Scrub, with the bolts of light streaking out and exploding, the cries of my friends and the animals as they died.

"Then the shadows started hunting. I think they came from Death's Gate, its an evil smelling a place I have ever seen. Some sort of fortress made from black rock stood there in ancient times. Strong and proud it was said. At some point it exploded, black rock reigning down all over the valley. Grost and his people avoid the place as they are constantly fighting with the shadow creatures.

"The black stream that flows out of the cave, empties into the Death Gate, thundering over the edge into a hole...a deep hole. So deep ain't anybody live come out of there.

"Like I said, Gorst don't like to be cheated, so let this be yer last warning about it." The gnarled hands lift the matted and tangled mess of hair out of the way. You stare in some revulsion at the mangled mess you see before. The man's eyes have been gouged out, and his nose hacked from his face. Layers of scars from being cut and burned cover the rest of his face. Lips have been hacked and burned showing missing and cracked teeth.

"Seek yous the treasures of Elben's Demise if yous have gold lust, just be careful it doesn't bite back!"

His hands fall to his arm rests once again, and the old man retreats into his thoughts and memories once more.