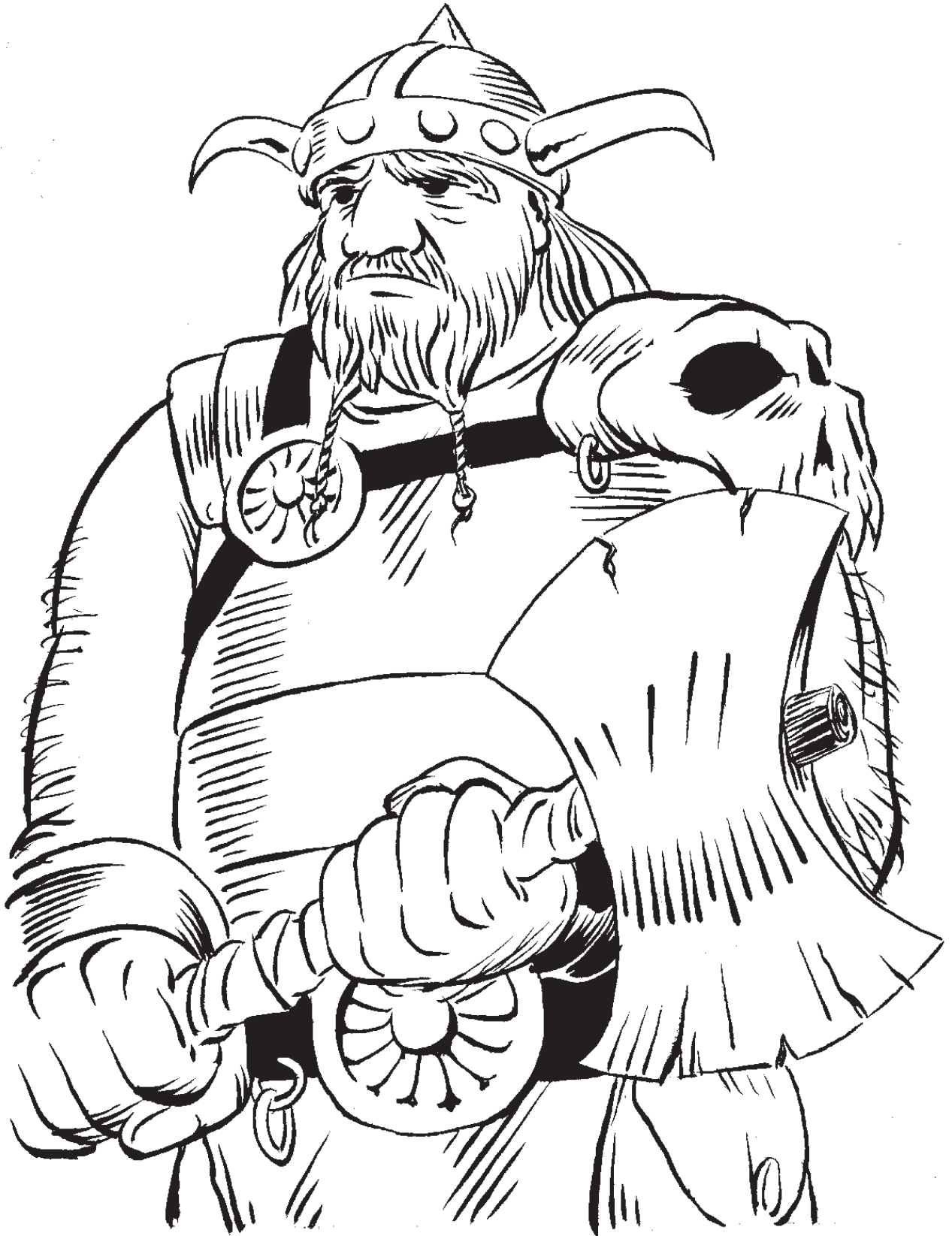


# Dwarf



The tunnel's normal damp, musty sulphuric scent was heavily overlaid with the coppery smell of flowing blood which reverberated with the thunderous clanging din of battle. The adolescent dwarven girl, only a mere 12 years of age, cautiously groped and made her way to the main cavern where the battle was taking place. The Jagged Tooth Trolls were trying to take the blacksmithing cavern from her clan; a major armor producing site. All available warriors were there in that cavern bravely resisting the Trolls from taking it. The little girl's mentor was in the thick of it all and she had come to find him and her uncle. As she entered the mouth of the tunnel, the body of a headless kinsman slammed into her, knocking her off her feet like a Hobling bowling pin as she careened into the far wall of the tunnel and then crumpled doll-like onto the polished stone floor. A blood-soaked blade then came into view forcing her eyes to grow wide and her lower lip to tremble.

"Little girl, little girl, pick my teeth with your bones shall I," the hideous creature croaked in a sing-song voice.

Although afraid, she did not scream, nor did she close her eyes. She was an apprentice to Haldvan Armorsmith Trollgrinder and daughter of the late Dwannon Shieldhand the Rockdodger and she would not meet her end mewling like a Goblin-child with eyes closed shut. Even in death, she would not dishonor her mentor, her heritage, or her clan. Thin lips parted showing rows of jagged yellowed teeth, then formed into a lop-sided grin as the bloodied blade rose back, but as it reached its full spread the horrid creature froze where it stood and gurgled. The Troll's black pupil-less eyes widened as the blade of an ax burst through its mottled chest. The body slumped hard against the cavern wall, and then pitched over onto the cave floor as a powerfully large gray bearded Dwarf grunted as he yanked his ax free as he stepped over the still twitching corpse.

"Uncle Rolf!" squealed the girl as she leaped into his outstretched arm.

"What are you doing here, Little Pebble?" Rolf asked the girl as he held her tight while making a quick glance about for more danger.

"I came to find you and my master," Teles softly replied as Rolf picked her up.

"You shouldn't be here. It's still very dangerous." Rolf turned, took a few steps into the cavern, then bawled, "Sturla, get your lagged-prone mangy butt up here, now!"

Sturla, one of the few remaining functional healers, quickly came into view wiping off assorted Troll matter from his war hammer.

"Yes Cap'n?" Sturla asked as he deftly dodged an errantly fired arrow shot from the far, far side of the cavern.

"Take Teles through the north side passage and guide her back to Mountholm Proper. Quickly. I left Brexsus by the entrance, he needs to be Lifer," Rolf commanded as he gingerly handed Teles over to the healer. "Be careful, Little Pebble, mind Sturla and be brave," he said softly as he tugged at the chin of her short beard.

"I will be, Uncle," the little girl smiled as she too tugged at his long ornately braided gray beard.

"I'm already there and gone, Cap'n," Sturla responded, and then he and Teles quickly disappeared into the darkness as they made their way to safety.

Rolf watched them as they entered the tunnel, then spun about to reenter the fray. On the other side of the cavern his clan leader, Haldvan Armorsmith Trollgrinder, helmless and battered, staggered into view. His ax, the very weapon that was once forged by his father for his own coming-of-age ceremony, still burned with an eldritch flame rune as gouts of green blood dripped from its twin razor-sharp blades. The bodies and various mangled

parts of several Trolls lied strewn and spattered before him and their hideous king now loomed over him, an immensely large hateful brute of a creature aptly named "Dwarf Killer." The numerous open wounds on Haldvan burned with an unearthly pain that contested only with the glowing weapon's power. His hatred for the Trolls and the searing pain from his gashes were all that kept him from falling into a swirling bliss of unconsciousness.

"I will kill you, maggot!!!" Haldvan spat as a trickle of blood oozed from his mouth as he tried to steady himself while trying to keep an eye on his opponent through the reddish, blurring haze. "Prepare to Die!"

"Me tink you stupid to keep fighting. Me tink you slowly die. Only time now," Dwarf Killer cackled.

Rolf charged headlong at the Troll's exposed flank, but the Troll King's reflexes were far too keen, and Rolf was swatted down like a fly well before he could place himself between the two. Rolf crashed down a series of finely carved stone steps, and finally crumpled into a heap at the bottom, his right pauldron and breastplate smashed beyond repair from where he was struck. A leg was shattered in the fall and painfully he crawled and propped himself up so that he could helplessly watch that which was about to happen.

"Little bug go splat, no save you. Time to die!" Then, with unusual speed belying his huge bulk, the Troll sprung forward, swinging his sword with tremendous force at the elder Dwarf's blood-caked head. For as near death as Haldvan was, he kept his wits about him, and moved with the methodical speed and precisioned grace that only a seasoned warrior of his many years could possess. Slipping under the Troll's swing, he braced himself, and then brought his ax up, critically ripping a deep gouge into Dwarf Killer's large overtly abused belly. Dwarf Killer's eyes grew wide as he screamed in horror as his lifes' blood and guts tumbled onto the cavern floor with a sickening, soggy thud. Haldvan twisted the ax some more, then slammed his leg into the off-balanced eviscerated creature's chest and sent it sprawling down the cold stone steps. By the time Rolf had scrambled out of the way, Dwarf Killer's body had come to a halt, his blank, wide eyes permanently transfixed unblinking at the ceiling. Rolf called out to his comrade-in-arms, then tried to make his way up the wet, sticky steps, but to no avail. Haldvan coughed, spat out a gout of blood, then waved him off.

"A-are the children safe," he gasped. "Tell me ... young Teles?"

"Aye, they all are. Young Teles is with Sturla ... on her way to Mountholm Proper even now as we speak."

"Good, Sturla, that is good." Haldvan clutched at his wounds, slumped over onto the expertly lined cold stone floor, then wordlessly went into the Light with a faint smile of satisfaction still etched upon his bruised, battered lips.

Leaderless, the remainder of the Jagged Tooth Trolls were quickly rooted out and instantly put to death. Rolf saw to it that aid was sent to Haldvan as soon as possible, but it was far, far too late. Haldvan Armorsmith Trollgrinder had spent his final death defending the armory, his fellow clan members, and the very children he so loved and adored. For his efforts and his life's accomplishments he was later honored amongst his people and was entombed in the Hall of Heroes at Mountholm Proper, his likeness engraved into stone which can still be seen outside that hallowed hall to this day.

When told by her uncle of Haldvan's bravery on her behalf and the others, young Teles wept and vowed never to forget her mentor's sacrifice and to keep his memory alive amongst her people for as long as she still had breath to draw upon. Today, many years later, although she is Supreme Matriarch of the



Armorsmiths' Guild and is an Elder amongst Elders, she still recites Haldvan's act of supreme selflessness and bravery from so long ago in her salutatory litanies, thus preserving yet another piece of her proud race's glorious past and golden heritage.

## COSTUME REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, Dwarves must sport beards! No self-respecting Dwarf, male or female, would ever be seen out and about without a full beard, and societal and guild rank is often determined by the length and intricate braiding of their beards. Female dwarves also must have beards, and although they are often noticeably shorter, they are never shaven in any way (no goatees, for example.) Dwarves that do not sport beards are often mocked and shunned by others, for a beardless Dwarf in their culture is a shamed Dwarf. Dwarves on Honor Quests often keep their beards shorter than usual to remind them of their missions.

If you have a real beard, you must braid it so that it is clear that you are a dwarf and not a bearded human. If your beard is not long enough to braid, then you must wear a fake beard over your real one.

In clothing, dwarves favor earth-based colors and favor using various metals for aesthetic as well as defensive purposes. They also often incorporate their clan symbol somewhere on their person for all to see.

## RACIAL BASICS

Anyone can play a Dwarf, although much larger, thinner individuals may think twice about doing so for obvious reasons. Dwarves, being much stockier and muscular than most

racers, are a very proud race of fierce warriors that absolutely refuse to take any guff from anyone, especially if they are much larger than they are! Since their life span is much longer than that of humans and other races (up to 500 years or so), they often approach and take on tasks at a somewhat slower pace than others and are meticulous about detail almost to the point of obsession, a fact that sometimes infuriates other races from time to time. However, they are quick and decisive when it comes to any type of warfare for to them battle is the very stuff glory is made of, especially when it is in defense of their race, their friends, and/or their ideals. Dwarves greatly pride themselves in their craftsmanship, be it smithing or anything else, their creations ranking amongst the best in all of Fortannis and they are not amused by any unwarranted criticism done by others of their own, or their people's, for that matter, handiwork.

Dwarves are also resilient to most poisons, hence their ability to use Build Points to purchase Resist Poison. This is primarily due to their lengthy exposure to certain harmful trace mineral poisons and gasses that commonly waft about the shafts of their beloved mines which have caused their biological make-up to evolve to the point where they can readily resist nearly all poisons in single doses. Because of this, they are also less likely to be affected by certain intoxicants and naturally found mineral-based poisons as well. The down side to this natural form of protection is that it has interfered with their ability to cast Celestial magicks, already stressed from their younger years (see below) hence their double cost penalty to learn the Scholar Skill Read Magic. Its not that they have trouble reading the words, they have trouble manipulating the meaning of the words.

Due to their rigorous physical regimens caused in part by mine-working, militia training (*all* Dwarves serve in their home clan armies/militia at some capability throughout most of their adult lives), and subsequent bouts of intense warfare, they are also more hardy than other races hence their innate +1 Body Bonus. Their continual exposure to varying degrees of stone, heat, cold, and other elemental-based phenomenon, they are also able to purchase Resist Element as well. Unfortunately, due to their lack of height and overdeveloped and somewhat stunted upper limb musculature, they are unable to wield two-handed weapons with any marked success, and are thus banned from purchasing such weapon skills with their Build.

## ROLE-PLAYING TIPS

As mentioned above, Dwarves are proud craftsmen and relentless warriors who go out of their way to take care of their own. This kind of clan loyalty will even find itself expressed by certain individuals who join up with adventuring parties that prove themselves to be exceptionally trustworthy and honorable. To have a Dwarf as a friend is a hard task to accomplish, but to have one as a friend is to have a true steadfastly loyal friend for life.

Contrary to many popular beliefs, Dwarves are indeed capable of exhibiting a wide range of emotions, but are very reluctant to do so amongst those they have not known well for any lengthy period of time. This somewhat constantly guarded emotional state of being often comes off as aloofness, gruffness, or at worse, arrogance to other races, especially to those whom Dwarves do not deem to be "serious enough" to begin with.

As a race Dwarves generally think of the other races in the following terms:

Humans make for good allies and hold great promise as a race, but rush throughout life too much to actually accomplish anything of great lasting value (mostly in part due to their tragically short lifespans), although most Barbarians are deemed too primitive and hopelessly superstitious for Dwarves to even bother

dealing with.

Elves, in general, are a pompous, dangerously carefree lazy lot that should spend their gifted long years actually working at accomplishing something more worthwhile. (*Note:* the Dark Elves are seen as potential rivals for underground space and resources, and are thus initially approached with suspicion and caution.

Stone Elves are more highly respected due to their nonsense approach to certain life paths and their stoic philosophical bent, even if they cannot enjoy a good joke. Wild Elves equate as Elven barbarians.

Gypsies are a curiosity to be studied thoroughly for there are tales of curses and bad omens associated with them.

Mystic Wood Elves are flighty vagabonds who dabble far, far too much with this and that to really become good at any *one* thing (MWEs, however, are quite fond of often arguing against this point with the "too self-absorbed" Dwarves, incidentally) and are not serious enough to deal with on a regular basis.

Sarr are much, much too high strung and finicky to associate with for long periods of time, but some are very highly respected for their bravery and scouting skills.

Biata are yet another curiosity and a far too entrenched in internal politics for Dwarven tastes, but are somewhat kindred due to their lack of innate Celestial skills and bird of prey mentalities.

Hoblings are honest, decent folk with good sense for business, but a wary eye must always kept out for their notorious troublemakers.

High Ogres are a hopelessly primitive lot that could never appreciate the better things in life beyond warfare and resemble their Ogre cousins far too much for comfort.

High Orcs, although a bit crude, are highly respected for their honor, their resistant to fear, their battle prowess, and their symbiotic ties to certain natural areas in Fortannis.

Scavengers are approached on a species by species basis, but require a bit more trust than most.

If a Dwarf can get past these initial concerns and prejudices, they do have the ability to readily accept individuals of these races by judging their actions and their integrity instead. It might just take a matter of time, that's all.

When it comes to Trolls, Ogres, Orcs, and most Giants, however, Dwarves have a notoriously legendary intense hatred for all them and will seek them out and destroy them whenever they can, especially Trolls. All of these races often savagely compete with Dwarves for basic resources, and attack Dwarven cave systems in order to take them over for themselves. Trolls are considered to be the worst of the lot and are often shown the most malice. No respectable Dwarf would ever trust a Troll, and if at all possible, would they ever allow one to walk away alive, or at least not without a permanent limp...

In short, Dwarves make for noble steadfast allies and dreadful unrelenting enemies.

## FAMILY AND LEADERSHIP

Dwarves marry for life and have no concept of divorce. Such courtships are long, drawn-out affairs that often take decades before being consummated, the couple having only eyes for one another during the entire process. A Dwarf's heart is nothing to be trifled with, and when it is given, it is given freely without reserve for life. Clan honor is very important to them and when a Dwarf meets a stranger for the first time, they will often recite their lineage going as far back as they can remember and boast of the great deeds they have already accomplished, hence the Alborian phrase "as quickly as an Dwarven greeting," meaning a very long time...

Some Dwarves will only recite going back 5 generations or so and only recite the key event that has earned them their coming-of-age name (see below).

Dwarves have three names: their birth-name, which is given to them by their parents; their clan name; and their coming-of-age name. For example, an individual named by her parents "Bora" who came from a clan of healers and managed to slay a Troll on her coming-of-age day would quite possibly carry the full name of "Bora Earthcaller, the Troll Slayer". When a Dwarf becomes of age (usually after their 45th birthday), they participate in an elaborate ceremony whereupon the candidate recites their clan's lineage and history in front of the entire community and then makes a presentation of an item of the finest quality that they themselves have forged/created. (These items are highly symbolic of the completion of their life's apprenticeship (i.e. "childhood") and such items are often used in the making of very powerful artifacts used in the clan's defense due to the detail, care, and infusion of the very life essence, if you will, of the individual who created it.

This explains their innate ability to purchase the Blacksmithing Skill cheaper, and this may also be another reason why Dwarves do not make good Celestial casters as an initial whole — such energies are so subconsciously spent up in the creation of their coming-of-age item tributes that they no longer have such energies to easily spend again on themselves.

Dwarves suffer a great disproportion by way of birth ratio amongst the sexes (usually 3 males for every 1 female — sometimes up to 5 to 1 in some communities!), so great that more often than not if a male Dwarf has not found a mate by the time he has reached 150 years of age or so, he will either lose himself entirely in his work or martial duties or, more often than not, leave his home and go adventuring afar. These are the Dwarves that are most commonly encountered by other adventurers throughout Fortannis. Female Dwarves that are so encountered away from their homes have most likely spurned a suitor, are on a personal Honor Quest, and/or seeking a mate amongst the adventuring types since the Dwarves of her home hearth were not up to her (strict) standards. Whatever the sex, these Dwarves have sacrificed greatly their personal needs and perception of a home and are somewhat psychologically disposed to correct this "unnatural imbalance" at the earliest convenience. In short, they try and find other groups of adventurers to attach themselves to whenever possible in order to ease the pain of giving up their beloved ancestral homes.

Dwarf families are very tight-knit and it is not too uncommon to find various cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents all living in the same area. When a Dwarf child becomes orphaned, they are often given over to such a relative for care and/or become the ward of a certain craftsman guild that already has established ties to the family. Such children who grow up under such circumstances often regard these guardians with just as much love and respect as if they were indeed their very own parents.

Large Dwarf communities/clans are usually ruled by a hereditary King or Queen who also assigns certain governmental duties and privileges to a Royal Council which consists of various Guild Masters and Elders who, in turn, handle and oversee all guild-related disputes and said matters. Since instances of crime committed against fellow Dwarves are so uncommon and rare, the King or Queen presides over most trials and dispenses justice accordingly as he or she sees fit consulting his counselors and ancient rune tablets if need be, hence the Alborian phrase "to be placed in front of a Dwarf king" — to come face to face with an ultimate authority or to be placed in a very, very tough situation. Such leaders are also renowned for their wisdom, their inability to be bribed, and their keen innate sense for (Dwarven) Justice.