

# Streams of silver prelude



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

On a dark throne in a dark place perched the dragon of shadow: Not a very large worm, but foulest of the foul, its mere presence, blackness; its talons, swords worn from a thousand thousand kills; its maw ever warm with the blood of victims; its black breath, despair.

A raven's coat was its tested scales, so rich in their blackness that they shimmered in colors, a scintillating facade of beauty for a soulless monster. Its minions named it Shimmergloom and paid it all honor.

Gathering its strength over the course of centuries, as dragons do, Shimmergloom kept its wings folded back and moved not at all, except to swallow a sacrifice or to punish an insolent underling. It had done its part to secure this place, routing the bulk of the dwarven army that stood to face its allies.

How well the dragon had eaten that day! The hides of dwarves were tough and muscled, but a razor-toothed maw was well suited to such a meal.

And now the dragon's many slaves did all the work, bringing it food and heeding to its every desire. The day would come when they would need the power of the dragon again, and Shimmergloom would be ready. The huge mound of plundered treasures beneath it fueled the dragon's strength, and in this respect, Shimmergloom was surpassed by none of its kind, possessing a hoard beyond the imagination of the richest kings.

And a host of loyal minions, willing slaves to the dragon of darkness.

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The chill wind that gave Icewind Dale its name whistled across their ears, its incessant groan eliminating the casual conversation the four friends usually enjoyed. They moved west across the barren tundra, and the wind, as always, came from the east, behind them, quickening their already strong pace.

Their posture and the determined drive of their strides reflected the eagerness of a newly begun quest, but the set of each adventurer's face revealed a different perspective of the journey.

The dwarf, Bruenor Battlehammer, leaned forward from his waist, his stocky legs pumping mightily beneath him, and his pointed nose, poking out above the shag of his wagging red beard, led the way. He seemed set in stone, apart from his legs and beard, with his many-notched axe held firmly before him in his gnarled hands, his shield, emblazoned with the standard of the foaming mug, strapped tightly on the back of his overstuffed pack, and his head, adorned in a many-dented horned helm, never turning to either side. Neither did his eyes deviate from the path and rarely did they blink. Bruenor had initiated this journey to find the ancient homeland of Clan Battlehammer, and though he fully realized that the silvery halls of his childhood were hundreds of miles away, he stomped along with the fervor of one whose long-awaited goal is clearly in sight.

Beside Bruenor, the huge barbarian, too, was anxious. Wulfgar loped along smoothly, the great strides of his long legs easily matching the dwarf's rolling pace. There was a sense of urgency about him, like a spirited horse on a short rein. Fires hungry for adventure burned in his pale eyes as clearly as

in Bruenor's, but unlike the dwarf, Wulfgar's gaze was not fixed upon the straight road before them. He was a young man out to view the wide world for the first time and he continually looked about, soaking up every sight and sensation that the landscape had to offer.

He had come along to aid his friends on their adventure, but he had come, as well, to expand the horizons of his own world. The entirety of his young life had been spent within the isolating natural boundaries of Icewind Dale, limiting his experiences to the ancient ways of his fellow barbarian tribesmen and the frontier peoples of Ten-Towns.

There was more out there, Wulfgar knew, and he was determined to grasp as much of it as he possibly could.

Less interested was Drizzt Do'Urden, the cloaked figure trotting easily beside Wulfgar. His floating gait showed him to be of elven heritage, but the shadows of his low-pulled cowl suggested something else. Drizzt was a drow, a black elf, denizen of the lightless underworld. He had spent several years on the surface, denying his heritage, yet had found that he could not escape the aversion to the sun inherent in his people.

And so he sunk low within the shadow of his cowl, his stride nonchalant, even resigned, this trip being merely a continuation of his existence, another adventure in a life-long string of adventures. Forsaking his people in the dark city of Menzoberranzan, Drizzt Do'Urden had willingly embarked upon the road of the nomad. He knew that he would never be truly accepted anywhere on the surface; perceptions of his people were too vile (and rightly so) for even the most tolerant of communities to take him in. The road was

his home now, he was always traveling to avoid the inevitable heartache of being forced from a place that he might have come to love.

Ten-Towns had been a temporary sanctuary. The forlorn wilderness settlement housed a large proportion of rogues and outcasts and, though Drizzt wasn't openly welcomed, his hard-earned reputation as a guardian of the towns' borders had granted him a small measure of respect and tolerance from many of the settlers. Bruenor named him a true friend, though, and Drizzt had willingly set out beside the dwarf on the trek, despite his apprehension that once he moved out beyond the influence of his reputation, the treatment he received would be less than civil.

Every so often, Drizzt dropped back the dozen yards or so to check on the fourth member of the party. Huffing and puffing, Regis the halfling brought up the rear of the troupe (and not by choice) with a belly too round for the road and legs too short to match the pumping strides of the dwarf. Paying now for the months of luxury he had enjoyed in the palatial house in Bryn Shander, Regis cursed the turn of luck that had forced him to the road. His greatest love was comfort and he worked at perfecting the arts of eating and sleeping as diligently as a young lad with dreams of heroic deeds swung his first sword. His friends were truly surprised when he joined them on the road, but they were happy to have him along, and even Bruenor, so desperate to see his ancient homeland again, took care not to set the pace too far beyond Regis's ability to keep up.

Certainly Regis pushed himself to his physical limits, and without his customary complaining. Unlike his companions, though, whose eyes looked

to the road up ahead, he kept glancing back over his shoulder, back toward Ten-Towns and the home he had so mysteriously abandoned to join in the journey.

Drizzt noted this with some concern.

Regis was running away from something.

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The companions kept their westerly course for several days. To their south, the snow-capped peaks of the jagged mountains, the Spine of the World, paralleled their journey. This range marked the southern boundary to Icewind Dale and the companions kept an eye out for its end. When the westernmost peaks died away to flat ground, they would turn south, down the pass between the mountains and the sea, running out of the dale altogether and down the last hundred mile stretch to the coastal city of Luskan.

Out on the trail each morning before the sun rose at their backs, they continued running into the last pink lines of sunset, stopping to make camp at the very last opportunity before the chill wind took on its icy nighttime demeanor.

Then they were back on the trail again before dawn, each running within the solitude of his own perspectives and fears.

A silent journey, save the endless murmur of the eastern wind.