

# Hidden Horrors of Megyntia

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**A** MAN IN CHAINMAIL and blue cloak and a large sword on his shoulder emerged from the woods and peered in the distance, greatly pleased by what he possibly couldn't miss seeing.

"I can see it! Yess!" Facyr shouted. "Come on, hurry already!"

To those two in the woods, rays of the morning sun had revealed a misty day, but mist was not uncommon and they had fully expected it. A constantly smiling, cat-like young woman in a tight black suit and a bit older – at least mentally, or at very least in his mind – man in dark red robe brushed brances from their faces and kept the same speed as their good friend had.

"We're right behind you, Facyr! Don't worry, we have no reason to stop our expedition at the very beginning", Faira said. Facyr knew well that his comment had been very silly, but he couldn't make sense of Faira's smile: Was she just happy that the ancient map had been correct, or was she really trying to suggest he was a fool? Perhaps he was just overreacting to a small, random fancy, the excitement of discovery rocking the foundations of his always calm mind. . .

The three adventurers had come to the end of a long, yet exciting trek to the far eastern reaches of Varmhjelm. The three were Facyr Tann, Faira Ativel and Gnedrnygr Adithebadoggr, and they had met in the eve of the revolution of Varmhjelm, got famous, then conveniently forgotten, which helped them a great deal, because this was a time for adventures, not perpetual celebration and being celebrity. Facyr was a daring and goodhearted young warrior. Faira was a joyous and calculating rogue who, among the three, probably fit best to the "adventurer" mold – and she clearly had suffered enough during the revolution for not getting enough adventure, while the others had found the whole ordeal an adventure in itself. Gnedrnygr was possibly the most magician-like, wise, and often absent-minded magician in the whole realm – but easily among the most competent in Anchorfall, which still wasn't much. They were, in a few words, a group of good friends that could overcome all obstacles.

They reached the edge of the nearly impenetrable and quite treacherous woodlands, and paused—though only for a while—to adore the sheer monumental mas-

sivity of the gigantic, most huge temple that lay before them. They resumed their journey as their minds could no longer find any more adjectives describing the size of the temple - their minds just snapped and they had to press on, just like before, not bothered by the fact that the temple was not visible from the other side of the woods. After all, the temple was squarely in middle of the woods, which in turn spread upon a nearly circular, very wide and very low hill. By all logic, the temple should be visible – even if the region were not completely shrouded by mist.

The preceding week had been full of surprises. Jenyr had his hands full trying to keep order in Anchorfall, which was, years after, still in disarray after the revolution. But the three saw themselves as free citizens, and had grown bored. They went to seek some adventures. And, as it usually happens in this kinds of situations, the adventure had found them in the most predictable way possible: As they entered the tavern, a brown-robed, hunched old man just happened to utter the sweet words they had been waiting for: “Friends, adventurers! Would you be interested of an old treasure map?”

The treasure map, as it turned out, described how the Monks of Megyntia had hidden a treasure in the central temple just before King Edictel’s army finally breached the temple’s defenses. The Church of Megyntia had fallen in disfavor, mostly due to the fact that the Head Priest had kept refusing to pay land taxes for their rather large estates near Anchorfall; The plots were mostly unsettled as the city had grown around them over the past decades. The Church claimed the land was sacred and refused to do sell it or build anything there, apart of a small chapel; King Edictel thought, quite justifiedly, that a massive real estate scam was in progress. After similar but smaller clashes with the church and the state kept cropping up, the King decided his patience was full, claimed the land was in the Crown’s possession, and proceeded to wipe the entire church. The temple was invaded, the clergy killed, and the king kept looking for the rumored treasure – which did not, after consideration and months of careful search, exist.

Facyr was somewhat convinced that Edictel’s troops had missed the deep reaches of the temple that this map described in detail. Faira thought there was no treasure, but, like Gnedrnygr, was convinced there was a lot of lost lore in the halls – after all, Edictel did not actually burn any churches, or even forbade the followers from practicing the religion – he just confiscated their land, sold the Megyntian temple of Anchorfall to the rich, tax-paying Order of Slashed Veils, and marked it done. Central Temple of Megyntia, in middle of rather tricky woods, was left to rot. It technically belonged to the Kingdom of Varmhjelm, but these adventurers decided that the tumultuous state of the Kingdom meant nobody was really paying any attention to a distant, crumbling, if a bit *huge* forsaken temple that was rarely spoken of. . .

And now, the three adventurers were busy heading toward the temple. After

following the unmaintained, mostly overgrown road through the woods, they arrived to the flat central valley which was somewhat lower than the surrounding woods. The road wound down the edges of the sharply declining cliffs, and as it reached the bottom of the valley, it continued, unobstructed, straight to the main gates of the temple, which loomed far higher than the cliffs surrounding the valley, its spires lost in the middle of the great clouds that seemed to cover the valley.

The valley itself didn't hold many interesting things, so the friends pressed on. It didn't take much time for the adventurers to find their way to the opulent hall of the temple – the gates were, after all, wide open and the door was still very functional decades after the royal onslaught, unlocked and not much troubled by the weather.

Faira smiled as she looked around the hall. "I'm impressed! The Megyntians surely knew how to welcome people to their temples", she said. "If I didn't know this place was long abandoned, I'd feel... safe."

"Yes", Gnedrnygr said with a lecturing, yet not boring, voice. "Megyntia is, after all, the Protector. The temples usually were unconquerable forts, but at the same time, Megyntia never meant people to stay fortified temporarily – one's home must be their castle. 'Build your defenses, live ever defended', as his divine orders go."

Facyr smiled. "Well, good that there doesn't seem to be any... well, speak of the bad things..." As he had turned around, he saw the very first unwelcomed sight. The journey to the temple had kept them on toes, but there had really been no sight of any monsters. Like his two companions, he had felt safe in the hall, but he was even more safe when he knew that there were no monsters lurking just around the corner; he much preferred the monsters the way they presented themselves now, in plain sight.

"Goblins", Gnedrnygr growled. "And not at all friendly ones either", he said as the green-skinned things swarmed to sight. There were about twenty of them.

"Gapus be praised", Facyr shouted. "Right, how about shooting them while I cut them on close?"

"Well, I'd prefer you not to get too close, because my spells tend to fry... zaba-gry-ankhl-da-tsruwtarb... oh, darn it, like I told you, these things are often *very* flashy!"

"You almost had a terrible accident in there! Oh, good shot, Faira. Wonder how motivated these things are when they find their comrades nailed to the ceiling with crossbow bolts?"

"I don't know", Faira replied, "Oh, dear, looks like I have to..."

Gnedrnygr broke into laughter. "Sorry, that thing looked kind of funny when you stabbed it. Did it really think it had any chance?"

"You have a very twisted sense of humor, Greg. Eww, that was disgusting."

“I hate it when you call me Greg. I told you, you should pronounce it correctly”, Gnedrnygr said with some sadness in his voice.

“I don’t think I can ever learn how to pronounce your name, even if I can say a lot of the fancy words you taught, like zee-gvrag-tsiletalihp-yretsym. . .”

“Well, well! You finally mastered Bovinier’s Beam! Good work, good work! Looks like the goblins need to collect their dead comrades with spoon and bury them in a tinderbox. . .”

“. . . well, let’s not argue about that right now, I’m kind of busy”, Faira said. “Oopsy-daisy!”

“Killing two goblins with one move? Unfair!” Facyr protested. “Maybe I should carry daggers too.”

“Bet you can slice more goblins at once than I can with two daggers”, Faira noted. “I have only two weak hands, while you can. . .” she reflected for a moment as Facyr decided to test the veracity of her hypothesis. “. . . yes, you can do things like that, clean the whole room with one sweep of that gigantic sword.”

“This isn’t even that big. You should see what Thremon of Agabligen can do with *his* huge sword and a room full of goblins.”

“Wait, wait, I don’t want to know”, Faira said, terrified. “I *don’t* want to know.”

“Heh, I was just saying how it w. . . Whoops! I told you to be careful, Gnedrnygr!”

“Apologies, again! I try to tone the spell down a bit so that there will be less of these near misses”, Gnedrnygr said with considerable worry in his voice, but continued more cheerfully. “Oh well, looks like the goblins are done for!”

Thus, while chatting joyfully, with a little bit of help from Faira’s crossbow and daggers, Facyr’s blade and Gnedrnygr’s spells and steel-reinforced mage’s staff, four dozen goblins that formerly inhabited the spacious rooms around the hall of the temple and that, for no particularly good reason and showing remarkable – or unremarkable, from the point of view of a typical adventurer - foolhardiness, had attacked them, had met their bloody demise.

“Why do we always see goblins right when we enter these forlorn places?” Faira wondered.

“Well”, Gnedrnygr said, “the common goblins typically build their homes right at the mouth of caves or at the entrance of abandoned buildings. If the buildings are small, they may even infest the whole building eventually.

“And why do these goblin-infested places always get the reputation of being places of adventure for foolish greenhorns?” Facyr wondered.

“Never mind that, just remember, wherever you are, they probably are too”, Gnedrnygr sighed. “Let us not concern ourselves with defeated foes, for more difficult monsters undoubtedly wait us.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure”, Facyr said with more than a hint of foreboding lament.

Victorious, the three soon started to examine the ground floor of the mighty fortress. They spent several hours in the library, which, as Gnedrnygr had suspected, had several very rare and interesting tomes, all nearly in as good condition as the day the order fell. They found recent tracks of several other people, and Faira deduced that over the last years several people had come over the garden wall, up the library wall and down from the high windows, then grabbed a few books and headed home, avoiding the goblins and profiting from books.

Faira suspected that some of the Megyntia's remaining worshippers were doing this, but it seemed a bit far-fetched that Megyntia's clergy would steal these important books back, then, being penniless, would then be forced to sell them. Perhaps Megyntia's clergy didn't want to put themselves in such dilemma. Or, more likely, it may be that they did, and suffered quietly in their hearts, without much money and knowing they again had priceless tomes they couldn't possibly sell. And then it made perfect sense for Faira: They might steal the books back just to test the strength of their own devotion. . .

They met no opposition on the ground floor, and it seemed that there was no other monsters in the three floors above them.

"Looking for trouble, Facyr?" Faira said as Facyr returned from the second floor, with that worried look at his face that was the usual sign that he was suffering from insatiable boredom. "Honestly, try the library – I just found a tome on the greatest swordsmen of Treglin, and their fighting prowess. I never knew my dull homeland was home to such capable heroes. I know so little of swordfighting yet – I need your help to determine if it's a big book of lies!"

"Well", Facyr said, brightening up a little. "looks like there's nothing up there, just a whole lot of empty monk's alcoves, a few storerooms with moth-eaten clothes, and lots of goblin dung. I still wonder what they eat while they waited to ambush us", he added thoughtfully.

"Want to know my theory? Shields. Did you look at them when they charged us? They had bitemarks all over them."

"Yes, logical", Facyr said, not very satisfied with the reply but finding it as good as any. "There's nothing on the floor below us either. I think I found the way that leads down from there, at least it's marked as such on the map, but I don't know how to open the door."

"Let me see the map."

"Right", Facyr said as he unrolled the map on the library table. "This is where the door is. It's bolted from the other side. There's another door down here", he said, pointing at another end of the hallway the map, "but the wall had partially collapsed there, and the rubble blocks the door pretty much. The floor above is gone too, and there's a huge hole on the wall with a rotten battering ram outside, maybe that's where Edictel's men got through."

"Ah, well, I can see, you can get to that stairwell only through the first and

second floor. No floor on second floor, too much floor on the first”, Faira said with a grin.

“I think we need to break down the door – or some wall – to get there.”

“Nnn-no. . .” Faira muttered as she thought. “This well here goes down all the way to the bottom. It’s a narrow well shaft with openings on every floor – I saw it on our way in. I could climb down and open the door – it’s only a short way from the well to the door.”

“Right. . . and if there are monsters? I thought I heard something stirring on the other side of the door. They must have heard our noise. Damned Gnedrnygr’s fireballs. . .”

“Don’t worry, just wait on the other side of the door.”

Moments later, Facyr and Gnedrnygr got waiting on the other side of the door, both focusing on a particularly interesting book while Faira focused on getting the door open – cat-like women in black and deep, dark, moss-lined wellshafts generally mixed fairly well, provided the former kept their wits with them, and they frequently did. Faira was no exception.

Faira had no problems at all. She didn’t even need a rope, and actually found the moss less disgusting than she had first thought - It was strange how this whole place brought to mind a night in Furinel just three weeks ago. She climbed down, silent like a ghost, lost in thought and thinking of those elven lords and their magical kingdom, and was almost surprised how easy it all was as she emerged from the wellshaft a floor lower.

And, in the terrifying dark, she felt momentarily helpless but not for long – Lucien, the elven lord of Bluebrook, had given her a very helpful parting gift, as was their custom. She felt a sting of a memory, memory of embarrassment that she had no gift of her own in return at the time, but Lord Lucien was just happy of her company. As the moment of grief passed, she took the ring of dark-seeing from the pocket where she kept her impressive collection of helpful magic trinket and put it on her finger. That done, she could see better than the thrice-despised miners, and now saw the room was, as she expected, deserted.

Moments later, Faira tried her best not to make any sound as she removed the bolt from the floor and opened it, hush-hushing and hoping her friends were less happy to see her just for a while. “Goblins again!” she whispered as she took off the ring. “Only five this time, but these are bigger. Probably half orcs and half goblins.”

“Will be no problem at all. Where these friends of yours were?” Gnedrnygr wondered, already mixing magical reagents with darkened glasses on his face.

“Just down the stairs and head a bit straight after turning left”, the rogue replied, and before she could say anything, she saw Gnedrnygr hurry down the stairs to the darkness, saw blinding blast of white light, then flame-like blasts of light accompanied by some shrieks that meant goborcs were not to be considered

a problem anymore.

Faira smiled, glad that Gnedrnygr knew what he was doing – not that she had any doubt. Then she got worried again as the light flared again, with similar shrieks, only a bit more to the left. Faira wondered what was going on as Gnedrnygr returned.

“Well, darn, dark-seeing and soot glasses don’t mix, especially if you’re confused about your orders”, he said. “I went straight on, turned left, and set the goblins on fire. Then I remembered you said I was supposed to turn left, *then* go straight on, and besides, I figured you probably didn’t go in the back of the floor afterall, since there’s longer way there than there is to the well.”

“Well, at least the floor is goblin-free now”, Facyr said as he lit a torch and slowly walked down, lighting the wall-torches as he went forth. “The floor is, as Gnedrnygr undoubtedly noted, a bit confusing. This is probably why the treasure room was left unransacked. The treasure room is the big one right in the center of the floor, and the beautiful part is that it *looks* like there’s nothing there – it’s the lowest floor and everyone immediately thinks there’s nothing in the middle”, Facyr said as they walked forth to the fascinating place he was leading them to. “But if you really look at the floor plan, there *has* to be rooms down here, it’s not just very obvious. There was previously a way to access these rooms from ground floor, but it has since been lost when the main temple was redesigned. Now, we’ve arrived to the secret door. . .”

Facyr looked at the featureless wall in front of him, then determinedly pushed the four tiles marked on the map in the order indicated. Somewhere, ancient systems consisting of bits of string helped a section of wall slide back and then inside of the wall, revealing a well-hidden passage in the wall.

As they reached the hidden heart of the temple, two facts came forth: Firstly, there was not that much treasure left, and secondly, whatever was left was guarded by some kind of magical. . . thing.

“I knew there was going to be something nasty here”, Facyr said. “Just hit it if you can! How might we destroy this thing, Gnedrnygr?”

A gigantic magical suit of armor stomped toward them, a big glowing sword ready to strike. And, of course, they weren’t going to let it hit them. . .

“Oops!” Faira said as she neatly flipped back as the sword swept to her direction. “this is not going to be fun at all.”

“I’m fairly sure brute force will help. Faira, try Theelbum’s Fire, you have studied it well. I try my ice spell. Facyr, try hitting it with all your might and stay clear when we strike.”

“Right, armor doesn’t like getting hot *and* cold often – Blast! I can barely make a dent. This thing is tough!”

“Ready, Faira? Trazkalle-gradablem-eyrofdabsireeb! . . .”

“Thafla-eniturationa-dooqnradosleef! Oh, that’s just great“

“Hmm, interesting! Looks like we could damage it! Did you see that?”

“It’s working!” Facyr interjected. “And now let me just get my hands on that...”

“Facyr! That’s no way to fight a magical thing of wondrous power! Don’t, under any circumstance, hit it like that!”

“Why not?”

“Oh, never mind...”

The suit of armor was clearly weakened by the magical attack and Facyr’s not so gentle beatings on the head. Magical sparks that flew from some unseen source in it ceased their emanation, and the whole thing collapsed on the floor, giving Facyr, who was sitting on its shoulder, a rather bumpy landing.

“Fascinating, usually these things tend to either turn even worse and nastier, or explode to protect the treasure”, Gnedrnygr said with voice trembling. “I know we’re good at getting cover, but I wish not to push our luck.”

“So”, Faira said, “this is the treasure.”

“It seems like so, and I’m not particularly surprised they didn’t have much money. This whole temple took most of their money, and the Megyntian church firmly believed in amassing big fortunes, then using it all for their own fortification. As you can guess from the size of the castle...”

“... they first got lots and lots and lots of money, built a really large temple with lots of guards and siege gear...” Faira reasoned.

“... and got conquered by Edictel when their money ran out”, Facyr concluded.

“Precisely. And their defenses held to this day, even when the door had been wide open for decades. I am sure Megynthians everywhere are pleased to hear this tale. Quite an educational day, is it not?”

“Well, it surely is”, Facyr said as she took one of the three large bags of gold to his shoulder, “and it won’t be conquered again either. I hope the caravan has stopped out of the woods as I wanted. We have lots of things to carry away. Well, you two, at least”, he added. “Unless my eyes deceive me, they also hid more books in this big and otherwise useless room.”

The companions left the temple with a bag of gold for each, and several books. As they reached the edge of the valley, setting sun was already painting the heavy clouds above them deep orange and red, and Faira looked one last time at the citadel. It still stood there, she thought, and even when it looked crumbling it didn’t look like it might fall anytime soon. Work had been done well. Merrily chatting and talking about their interesting day, the companions went back to the woods, and week later, they were again in Anchorfall.

THE END

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