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Transition

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I hate professor Friedlander's economics course. I mean the man has totally archaic conservative principles. It was Trumpanomics in its worst form. From his point of view if everyone was rich then all the world's problems would go away. I mean duh. Somehow, it seemed to be oversimplifying everything, and as his students, we were mindless morons for not figuring it all out. His reading assignments were the polar opposite of Danyelle Steele. The article in Atlantic Monthly he made us read on reverse income tax put me to sleep four times before I managed to get to the end. Political Science was a little better, but I couldn't care less about Emma Goldberg. I mean look at her. She looks like a drag queen who swallowed a bag of old lady farts. I mean really. Of course, she had issues. I'd have issues too if I looked like she did. And Karl Marx, the guy needs a hair stylist in the worst way.

Computer Science, now there's a drag. We have to do all these assignments on our computers and the network here won't even let us into any social media sites. Don't they know the only way to get a job these days is to market yourself on social media? How am I going to update my Facebook status? I'm so bored I could cry.

My English Literature course is no picnic either. The guy just went on and on about using Strunk's *Elements of Style*. Hasn't the man ever heard of poetry? I had the gall to ask him if we were going to learn anything else this semester and he gave me a dirty look. "Little lady," he snapped at me, "I've been teaching this course this way for 30 years." First of all, where does he get off calling me little lady? So, I snapped back at him, "Maybe you've been teaching it wrong for 30 years." I'm pretty sure I lowered my GPA.

By the end of the week, I really needed a break. So, I was anxiously looking forward to game day on Saturday. There's a whole big group who takes over the student union. It was pretty impressive and probably the best-organized thing I've seen on campus. There were the usual geeky *Magic: The Gathering* players and a group of tech weenies with their *Pokémon* cards. I fell in with the roleplaying folks. In the main hall, they held a big mixer, where everyone got to meet each other and decided who you wanted to play with. There were the usual arguments as to what was better Pathfinder or classic D&D. Of course, two or three arguments broke out over rumors which have been circulating about the new versions. I mostly followed a guy by the name of Dave Boorman. God, he's a hunk. A barrel chest you could lose your soul in. He could have replaced Jason Momoa in a remake of *Game of Thrones*, only he was better looking. So good looking, I had to pull out my mirror to make sure I wasn't drooling.

After we picked who were we going to play with, we were assigned to rooms. Dave was a classic D&D player, so I opted to roleplay. Thank god he wasn't into *Pokémon*. We spent the first part of the game rolling up characters and getting to know the other players. Character generation is my favorite part of the game because all you have in front of you is a success. You haven't blown any saving throws or dropped your spellbook on the ground before a rampaging horde of kobolds. Every roll is a twenty and the number one doesn't even appear on the dice. Naturally, all that changes once the game actually starts. Especially for me. The dice hate me.

My man Dave rolled up a fighter, naturally, with that big chest of his and those dreamy blue eyes. We won't even talk about his ass. I had this side goal, just for myself, of stealing his heart, so I rolled up a thief. You know, the kind who wears an all-black, skin-tight leather outfit that shows off her great bod. Josh didn't like non-human characters, otherwise, I'd have played one of those hot elves, like Evangeline Lilly. Maybe one of these nerds is an artist and I can have him draw up my character, you know, so you

can see the nipples under the leather. Those types are usually good at drawing hot women. Then I can give the drawing to Dave.

The Dungeon Master, a bookish guy whose flat face looked like someone smacked him with a hammer, played the “Song of Durin” on his iPad. It was okay, but it showed what we were going to be in a blackout for recent music in our sessions. The first adventure was exciting enough. Against my expectations, Josh turned out to be a good storyteller. Alyson Cornell was a cute girl who played a mean Sorceress, but she was a little ditsy. She was spending a little too much time mooning over our party’s assassin, James, a mod kid who wore too much gel in his hair. Still, he was kind of cute. If David hadn’t been in the room, I might have given him a good chase myself.

Michelle Lewiston was kind of an odd duck. I have no idea how she matriculated, she couldn’t have been more than sixteen. Smart as a whip but a little immature, if you ask me. She kept forgetting to heal us after the battles, which for a cleric, is not what you’d call exceptional player performance. She had this tight t-shirt on. I had my work cut out for me to keep Dave from leering at her the entire game. I don’t think he realizes she’s underage. I’ll have to spend some time on my outfit for the next game.

Speaking of outfits, Stewart Brown had a genuine problem with growing up. He came to the game dressed up as his character. Talk about a dweeb. He was playing a bard or some kind of weird harper character, I couldn’t figure it out. Not that I cared.

“What’s your name?” Alyson asked me cheerfully.

“Leowyn,” I replied.

She parried my flippant remark with skill and grace. I was impressed. “No, silly, not your character’s name, your name. Or shall we call you redhaired-girl?”

“Sarah,” I answered.

“Sarah,” she beamed, “Cool. Like Sarah in *Chuck*.”

I’m not a fan of personal player chit-chat, so I decided to nip this conversation in the bud. “No,” I gave her a cold reply, “not like in *Chuck*. Did you stop watching television ten years ago or are you still catching up on your DVDs?” I may have gone too far. After I finished all you could hear were dice rolling on the table. I’ll have to apologize later.

The first part of the game was your standard fare. We found ourselves in a dark tomb which naturally needed to be looted. We ran into your typical tomb guards. I learned quickly that Dave and I had different techniques of gameplay. Dave tended to be more enigmatic, looking deeply at the intrigue present in the game. Which required you to spend more time interacting with the non-player characters. My style is a bit more like a murder hobo. My standard interaction with everything you meet in the game is to hit whatever it is so hard, it stops hitting back. There were several times in the game Dave gave me a sideways glance across the table. Normally I’d want him to look at me in a totally different way, but nothing gets in the way of my gaming.

For a fighter, he preferred war hammers. When he did decide to fight, he really came out swinging. I ended up feeling all sorts of distinct kinds of jealousy when he did this. Damn, the guy was a god with the die rolls. Those little plastic bits just loved him. I’m not sure if you can be jealous of a bunch of

polyvinyl lumps with numbers on them, but I was close. I noticed how he caressed them with his hands before he rolled. God, that was hot.

Alyson was also serious about her game playing. She had no trouble backing me up on my killing sprees, turning opponents into a pincushion with rapid-fire flaming-missile attacks. She also cast a pretty good charm spell. Although she could be easily distracted, just by looking at James. For his part, he didn't seem to notice her much. I can see why he picked an assassin. His preferred method of play was sneaking around and then gutting opponents from the back with a long sword. A little bit sadistic, if you ask me, but it was an effective style of play.

Michelle didn't seem to have a style of play, she'd flitter from one point of view to the next. In some encounters, all she wanted to do was talk to everyone. Yet at other times she'd come out swinging with her mace. Occasionally she'd mix the two, sitting on some creature's lap threatening to pull out their tongues with a pair of pliers unless they told her everything she wanted to know. She had this kind of early teen sex appeal and she knew how to turn it on.

Naturally, the family of the tomb we had robbed was less than happy and threatened us with revenge. Josh was definitely building a story arc here. You could see where he was going. We were going to have undead creatures following us for the rest of the campaign. But it wouldn't be your regular skeletons mind you, no, we had to loot a mind flayer tomb.

As the last part of the campaign, we were required to come up with a group name so that the game room assignments could be published on the Web site. We settled on the Raiders of the Lost Dorm. Not bad; at least it was sufficiently whimsical. After the game, we all assembled in the main hall and the organizers passed out evaluation forms for users to comment on game procedure. A note to all you would be organizers out there, the perfect way to ruin a good evening is to end it by making the participants fill out a frickin' form.

As we were finishing up, a fanatical nut-case ran into the room. He started raving how the game was the work of Satan. Gez, I though raving about the connection between games and Satan worship went out in the 1980s. He was holding a copy of Dearborn's money-grubbing book, *The Dungeon Master: The Worship of Satan in Games*, in his hand. I remember hearing stories about this guy. Some people are perfectly willing to make up stories for money. As soon as everyone figured out that this poor sap had been taken in by sensationalism, people started to ignore him. No one even bothered to try to defuse him, his type never listens anyway. For his kind, false belief is better than no belief at all.

At the end of his rant, he threw the book on the floor. It slid across the highly waxed floor and ground to a stop in the middle of the room. I thought I was seeing things when I noticed a faint trail of mist following in the book's path. There was a huge crack of thunder that was accompanied by a bolt of lightning running from the floor to the ceiling. It hit a lighting fixture, which exploded in a shower of sparks. The roar of the wind generated inside the room was now drowning out every other noise. When I looked at the floor again, the book was traveling around the edges of a hole which had appeared on the floor.

The wind picked up to gale force and the hole appeared to be widening. Everyone was retreating to the far corners of the room. I stepped back as well, not because I couldn't manage to avoid falling into a stupid hole in the floor, but because I didn't want to have to redo my hair. As it happened, once the hole

got bigger, nothing fell into it. On the contrary, things were climbing out. Now when I say things, I really mean *things*. The kind of things you see in your nightmares. Trolls, goblins, demons, giants, ogres and I'm pretty sure I saw a mind flayer in the pack too before the hole went zap and the room calmed down again. Notice, I didn't say back to normal. Everything was far from normal.

For a while, I thought the fanatic had released a hallucinogenic gas in the room. It was just too crazy. I think I started to get the picture of the situation being far too real when the minotaur tore the fanatic in half. I don't think hallucinations spout fountains of blood and cause excessive girly screaming. I suppose it was poetic justice, none of the gamers caused this to happen, only the pathetic loser who was worried we were a satanic cult. Still, no one deserves to end up as two separate, bloody pieces.

As the light left his eyes, one of the fire giants crashed through the massive plate glass windows in the front of the student union. Soon all the other creatures were running through the open windows, invading the rest of the campus. Well, all except for one. They seemed to have left behind a male centaur. *Jesus, that guy should but some clothes on.*

As things started to return to something closer to normal, I was starting to think maybe I'd been too hasty about the centaur. James tapped me on the shoulder, Michelle was following him like an unhousebroken puppy dog. "Shouldn't we do something?"

I gave him one of my patented stares, the one I give to dweebs who tell me I look hot. "Like what exactly?" Okay, maybe I was being a little insensitive, but I was having a bad night. Have you ever noticed that life has a tenancy to sense happiness and snuff it out like a candle? As I started walking toward the door, Michelle grabbed my arm. "Where are you going?" She asked in that innocent, teenaged voice of hers.

"I'm going back to my dorm, then I'm going to call the cops." I put it in plain words for her. Explaining things to a girl who was no older than my kid sister wasn't really my strong suit. "They get paid to handle this sort of thing. Or they can call the Army or somebody who knows how to treat with hostile aliens." She gawked at me with a gaping mouth as if I'd just killed her cat.

I pushed my way towards the door and almost ran into the centaur. "Will you cover that thing up!" I shouted as I pushed my way past him.

"Don't you realize how much damage they could do before the police get here? Especially because they won't believe you when you call them." That was Dave. Suddenly I felt horribly small. This was not the impression I wanted Dave to have of me. Crap. Well, I not going to look like a coward. I guess I'm about to end my night by going monster hunting. While it might be fun in a game, I wasn't sure it would be a laugh-riot in real life. "Anybody got a gun?" I asked.

"You know this is a weapon-free campus," Alyson retorted, quoting the student guide.

"I was just trying to break the tension," I smiled as I led them toward the broken window.

Before I could even reach it, Dave called the next halt. "Wait a minute." Dave picked up a heavy wooden chair and smashed it against the wall. He sorted through the remains and picked up two pieces with sharp points. He kept one and handed the other to James. "What?" he exclaimed as I gazed at him with my arms crossed. It took him a minute, but he handed me his stake and then turned to grab another.

We were through the window faster than I had anticipated. I was hoping for a bit more time to come up with a reasonable plan for what we were going to do with a bunch of sharp sticks. The rest of the team was close behind me as well as the centaur. Great that's all I need, to be followed around by some half-stallion with his thing flapping in the breeze. Way, way too distracting.

"Look, you ..." I turned to the centaur.

"Brendon," he said.

"What?" I spat.

"The name's Brendon." He answered, not responding to my annoyance.

I felt a bit of remorse for being so crude, so I dialed it back a few notches. "Sorry, Brendon could you please do something about that?" I pointed to his back legs. He had no idea what I was going on about, shrugged his shoulders and simply trotted after us. As fate would have it, there wasn't much time to do any long-term planning. A group of orcs had seized a coed on the lawn in front of the building. They'd already stripped her down to her underwear.

Dave rushed at the first one and threw the creature off her. James took on another one and plunged a wooden stake into its back. Dark blood splattered across the screaming girl. Sharpened stakes are good for a lot more than dispatching vampires, but they don't do well against swords. By the time I got to one he was aware of our presence and let out a low growl at my approach. He swung his sword and split my chair leg in twain. He was an ugly cuss and I decided I didn't like his face. My Jujutsu training kicked in and I swung my legs in a wide arc kick that took the orc off his feet. In the next instant, I plunged what remained of my chair leg into his heart. I half expected him to dissolve into a pile of dust as things do in the movies, but he merely lay there, unmoving. James managed to take out the fourth one by using his wooden stick like a baseball bat. He gave the creature a great thrashing that would have fractured your average skull. The orc staggered for a bit and then fell to the ground.

I looked at Dave, in his blood-spattered hand he held one of the orcs blades. He must have taken one of them after pummeling the beast to death with his bare fists. I think I'm getting a serious crush going. All in all, we collected four swords. They were in terrible shape. The metal was rusty, and there were nicks and indentations all over the blade edges. The hilt was nothing more than an old piece of leather covering the tang. If it fell off, you'd be holding a bare piece of metal at the bottom of your sword. Dave already had his, James and I picked up two more and Stewart picked up the fourth. Although in his case he held it as if grasping it might give him some kind of disease.

Dave put his jacket around the girl the orcs attacked and sent her off to her dorm. Ah, a gentleman as well. Somehow, it made him seem even hotter. Although I can't see how that would be possible. James tapped me on the shoulder, "This way," he announced as if he had found a clue leading to the murderer in a Miss Marple mystery classic.

"Where are you going?" I demanded accusingly as he headed toward the south end of campus.

"The maintenance supply shed," he yelled back at me without even slowing down. I finally followed him, if only to see what he was up to. As we crossed the quad lawn the lights went out. Apparently, some of the creatures had found the power plant. With any luck, a sizable number of them had electrocuted

themselves in the process. As luck would have it, the full moon was shining down out of a cloudless night sky. Maybe it wasn't such a clever idea to have game night during a full moon.

Of course, when we got to the shed, it was locked. James went to work on the master combination padlock with one of the orc blades. It had no effect on the lock, but the hinge that held the door closed ripped right off the wood frame it was screwed to.

Turns out that someone had already found a way in by breaking a window. Now we were standing face to face with an owlbear. God, those things are big ... and stupid looking. They move fast though for a creature of his size. He had no problem fending off the three of us. Our dull orc swords were not doing much in the way of damage, but it was pissing the owlbear off. He looked like he was about to charge us. After giving the matter due consideration, I decided to let him.

I grabbed Dave and Jim, they were in my way anyway and yanked them backward. "Hey!" they yell in unison, but I still managed to pull them back into the shed's door. The owlbear saw his opportunity and charged. Owlbears are tough, but they are not too bright. He fell, face first, over a lawnmower. Turns out the weakest part of an owlbear is its back. Who knew. James and Dave rained blows down upon its spine until it changed from a quivering mass to a pile of goo.

After the owlbear was down, Dave tore apart the inside of the shed. Naturally, there were shovels and more lawnmowers and bags of fertilizer. I suppose that if we'd had a detonator we would have the makings of a pretty good bomb. James pulled something out of a messy pile of tools, it was a machete. "Great," he announced swinging it with glee, "something with an edge." A little too much testosterone if you ask me. Dave picked up a rather large sledgehammer, I can't imagine a more appropriate weapon for the big hunk. Michelle picked up a small hammer, as there wasn't much else in the way of potential weaponry.

Turns out I was wrong, Stewart found a pitchfork hanging on the wall. Somebody, please explain to me what a university needs with a pitchfork ... there are not many piles of hay to be moved around on campus. But I guess it's best not to look a gift horse in the mouth. While Stewart was standing holding the pitchfork, Brendon took it right out of his hands.

"What are you doing?" I asked him pointedly.

"Well, at least I know how to use this." He announced with determination, "Do *you* know how to use that?" He pointed to the sword I was holding in my hand.

"Yea," I answered in as snotty a tone as I could muster, sprinkled with a hint of contempt, "you swing it at the other guy." I took a rough swing ... yea, rough was the right word for it alright. OK, I needed something with better balance. The balance on this rusty weapon was shit.

Alyson jumped up like she had discovered penicillin. "I know what you need," she declared with a bit more cheerfulness than the situation required. I saw it in the coach's office yesterday. At this school, you're forced to take gym classes. They're mandatory. Alyson's first-semester gym class was fencing. The supply shed was right behind the gym, so Alyson hustled us off to the upstairs offices where the fencing supplies were kept. We didn't have to break in, someone had already to torn off the door. What? Are these things in every building? Don't some of these things live *outside*?

When we got up the stairs we saw what had ripped the door off its hinges. It was the fire giant. Not only was it big, but it was wearing armor, so that was going to be a problem. It also was carrying a sword the length of a pole vault. To add insult to injury, the giant's armor was also on fire. You could see waves of flames move across its surface like foam on a wave crashing against a beach. Being about nine feet tall it was at a slight disadvantage inside the building. It could barely move around without running into the light fixtures. On top of that, the ceiling was a drop down. That means, if it wasn't careful, it would lift the ceiling tiles and then it couldn't see us very well.

Covered in armor, our weapons didn't seem to be putting much of a dent in it. The only thing saving our necks was the drop-down ceiling. Finally, it got tired of dealing with it and ripped the entire ceiling down with its spare hand. Debris and portions of the T-brackets which held the tiles up were spread everywhere. I sure hope they removed the asbestos from this building. The good news was, if we didn't think of something fast, none of us would live long enough to have lung problems.

Did I mention that Michelle was smart as a whip? While Dave was still trying to put a dent in the creature's armor plating with his sledgehammer, Michelle found a fire extinguisher. She must have memorized the entire *Monster Manual* from cover to cover. She remembered that cold-based attacks do double damage to fire giants. The CO₂ fire extinguisher not only put out the flames that were running across the armor, but the metal turned white. The next time Dave hit it with his hammer it disintegrated into a shower of white dust. Jim managed to cut through the giant's sword arm at the elbow. Making sounds like a broken whale, the fire giant's arm and the sword came clattering to the floor.

I saw several jets of fire leap past my ear and go directly into the giant's chest as if they were flaming arrows shot from a bow. I turned around and watched Brendon send a few more out from his hands. When they landed in the giant's torso, he groaned one last time and fell on a desk. It barely slowed down his fall. The desk shattered into a million wooden splinters. Four of the larger ones ended up in James' chest.

I turned to Brendon and must have given him a dirty look. "What?" He replied, "Can't you people do magic."

"Do we look like Penn and Teller to you?" I shouted back, "Of course, we can't do any magic." I paused for a brief moment before continuing, "Let me correct that statement. Hell no, of course, we can't do any magic." Brendon gave me a quizzical look. I'm not sure if I lost him with the small detail that humans here can't do his kind of magic or with the Penn and Teller reference, but it didn't matter.

Michelle was already on top of James, pulling out the splinters. She reached into her purse and pulled out some rather large Band-Aids and covered the holes with Neosporin before slapping them on. "Oh," he hollered rather loudly, "that hurts."

She gave him a harsh look. "Knock it off, you big baby."

"Baby?" he protested loudly, "I just cut off a giant's arm you b..." He was about to say something really rude when Alyson interrupted him. "Here you go." Alyson handed me an Epee. "The coach put it away in the office yesterday," she pointed at the tip. "One of the students broke off the little protective tip on the end, so it's quite pointy."

I handled the sword, giving it a few practice swings. Now this baby was balanced. "Here, hold this for me." I gave Stewart the crappy piece of orc metal and headed for the door. "Come on," I shouted. I now felt prepared to conquer the world. "We've got lots more hunting to do. But first, it's time for a snack."

"Are you kidding?" James snorted in an exasperated tone, "I'm sitting here with half a forest in my chest and you want to go out for a bite to eat?"

"Come on, Bilbo," I retorted, "Aren't you up for a little adventure?" I teased.

Across the other side of the quad was the cafeteria, but more importantly, behind it and facing us was the kitchen.

As we were about to enter, Brendon stopped everyone, "Wait a minute. Before we go in ..." He started rummaging around in his saddlebags. Did I mention that Brendon was wearing saddlebags? No? Well, he was half-horse you know. I guess I must have been distracted by Brendon's ... you know ... other problem. He pulled out a piece of dark material that seemed to have white waves flow across it, sort of like a soft electrical discharge. He handed it to me.

"What's this?" I asked confused. I had said I was cold or anything. Just what was he thinking? He seemed overly proud. "It's a cloak," He replied.

"Duh." I snorted.

"A cloak of invisibility." The centaur explained, "go ahead. Put it on."

I looked at it. I'd always wanted a cloak of invisibility. Do you know what you can do with this thing? A whole second career as a bank robber flashed before my eyes. Who needs school? I put the cloak over my shoulders. I could tell it was working instantly. The world turned especially dark, but all the objects started glowing a dull olive color. Very quickly, I noticed how full the world had become. I could see hundreds of white floating skulls everywhere. It was like a Disney cartoon of the dead. A white mist was flowing out of the necks of each of the skulls as they moved as if they were inverted boiling over teapots on a stove. At first, they didn't notice me. They continued going about whatever ghostly business they were engaged in. After just one turned in my direction, they all seemed to face me. Within seconds I could feel every eye socket staring at me like I was a fresh piece of meat.

I've felt uncomfortable in social situations before, especially before guys who had never moved out of their mother's basements, but this was something totally different. I could feel my skin crawl. They started circling me like a pack of wild dogs looking at lunch. Now I know why everyone in the four realms doesn't own one of these things. I took the thing off and handed it back to Brendon.

"It doesn't really go with anything else I'm wearing," I announced.

"Suit yourself," the centaur smiled and started to put it back in his saddlebag.

"Wait a minute," James interrupted, as he grabbed the cloak, "If you don't want it."

I took it right out of James' hands and started stuffing it in Brendon's saddlebag without bothering to fold it up. "You don't want it either," I explained, "*trust me.*" I guess I must have had an incredibly serious look on my face because he just shrugged his shoulders and we moved on. I couldn't wait to come in contact with some more substantial monsters. That thing had given me the creeps.

Dave took the knob off the locked door with the sledgehammer and we crept in quietly. This time we didn't want to be surprised by some monster who had already broken in. We were pleased to find the place was empty. I snapped on the lights and took a couple of meat cleavers off the wall. In the meantime, Alyson had found a set of large cooking knives that she favored. You know, the big bladed things you use for dicing carrots and the like. Dave also found a pair of those chainmail-mesh gloves you wear to keep you from cutting off your fingers in machinery. He put them on his hands. It was like Michael Jackson's thing with the single glove, only cooler.

He stood there looking so cool, I almost couldn't stand it. "How do you get so cool?" I asked him, "Did you order it?"

There was a loud crash in the dining room. Shit, something was out there. Dave waved James to move to the other door. Alyson and I backed up Dave. Michelle, Stewart and the centaur followed James. Which was good. I was tired of having Brendon's 'thing' following me everywhere. We snuck up to the doors carefully. Dave opened the swinging door just a crack, so we could see what we were up against. Goblins. There must have been about twenty of them. They were sitting around eating the Boston cream pie leftovers from dinner. How can they eat that stuff? It's disgusting.

"Oh, yuck," somehow spilled out of my mouth. OK, it was stupid. It was just a gut reaction. I couldn't help myself, OK? The goblins stopped eating once they heard the sound and turned to face the kitchen. Dave quickly closed the door and we stood frozen on the other side. In retrospect, this was probably not a good plan. Those swinging doors didn't have a tight seal, so we could still see what they were doing on the other side. They had their little spears out and were cautiously approaching the doors. "What do we do now?" James whispered.

"There are too many of them," Dave suggested, "we'll hit them as they come through the doors. That way they can't use their numbers against us." James nodded his ascent and we stood adjacent to the doors and waited. It felt like we were waiting forever.

We heard a bash on the door in front of us and we all jumped back. That's when I realized, these were fire doors and they only opened out. There was a metal plaque above the handle on the other side which read, "Pull," but goblins can't read. After a while, the goblins figured out that they had to use the handle. Although this was only after running into the door a few more times.

The door opened a crack and a single spear poked through. Dave motioned us to stay still. At last, one of the goblins burst into the doorway. Dave dropped his hammer on its head. It exploded in a shower of red. Shit, this stuff is never going to come out of my slacks. I stabbed the next one with my sword. I heard the scream of a third one as Alyson threw one of the Ginsu knives through the open door. Well, that's three down and seventeen more to go.

They fell back to the other side of the door. On the next attack, they hit both doors at once. We got three more in the second rush. One to the hammer, one to the sword, and another screamer to one of Alyson's knives. I have to say, she throws well. Makes you wonder, where do you go to learn that kind of skill? Does the university have a freshman class in knife tossing?

Not only do goblins not read, but they're also not too bright either. They kept using the same strategy. Charge the door, lose three more. I have no idea how many James' crew was getting at the other door,

but the numbers must have dwindled down to the last few. Dave motioned to us. He was going to rush the door. James gave him a thumbs up and I prepared to follow right behind him.

We were armed for bear and ready to go. Dave had his sledgehammer, Alyson her set of stainless steel carving knives and James his Ever-sharp™ machete. Michelle had the fire extinguisher strapped behind her back like it as a flamethrower and she was tossing around a hammer in her hands which were stained with goblin blood. Stewart had his orc blade, which, like Michelle's hammer, seemed to have been baptized appropriately and Brendon was holding his pitchfork in a death grip. I balanced my epee in my hands. We were ready to go.

When we crashed through to the other side there were only two of the little buggers left. They screamed, panicked, and ran right into each other. The Three Stooges couldn't have done it better. Except, of course, there were only two of them, but you get my drift.

Unfortunately, they weren't alone. Standing, its armed folded in disgust at his minions' deficient performance, was a minotaur. You know, one of those half-bull, half-man things. Also, notoriously hard to kill. I was hoping this was more like the minotaur's in the game and not like the mythological one. I mean Dave was big, but Theseus he wasn't. Brendon reacted first, throwing his pitchfork across the room. It bounced off the minotaur's chest as if it were a rubber ball. Brendon followed up his pitchfork attack with some of his flame bolts, but those just seemed to wash over the creature's torso, singeing a chest hair or two. Hum, starting to look more like the mythological kind. Damn.

Dave gave a signal to Jim and the two picked up one of the long dinner tables that filled the room. These were heavy suckers that were massive enough to hold up an elephant at the circus. The minotaur watched casually as the two men ran towards him at full speed, picking up steam as they went. It didn't seem to care as they were both out of his reach. That is until the table hit him. He fell backward and hit the floor like a ton of bricks. Dave and James dropped the table on him and he let out a serious grunt. Dave jumped on one side of the table, holding it down. Jim caught on quickly and weighed down his side. The minotaur was on trapped on the floor under the table.

Alyson jumped into action. Taking a meat cleaver, she started to hack away at its neck. She swung it wildly like some mad chef in a horror film. But it was like trying to cut through a whole side of beef. Alyson soon gave up hacking and began to saw her way through the thick neck muscles. Apparently, the minotaur wasn't going to take this lying down. With a great crash, one fist smashed its way through the table top. He waved it around madly. Dave and Jim were still out of range, so it reached up for Alyson. He closed his fingers just short of her long hair. She managed to pull her hair out just in time, you could see some of the strands just slip out of his fingers. Sometimes, oily hair can be an advantage. The table shook as it struggled to regain its feet, or at the very least, get a better grip on Alyson locks.

Stewart jumped on the table and tried to hold the minotaur's arm down, but it batted him away with little more difficulty than one would swat a fly. Alyson was really struggling now, trying to cut through the bones in the creature's spine. She had her spare hand pressing down on the back of the cleaver and you could see the strain on her face. Not wanting to be left out, I ran up beside her. The minotaur smashed his other hand through the table's top and this arm was close enough to grab Alyson. He took her by the hair and dragged her off his neck. In the same instant, I drove my sword through its right eye socket and sliced it deep into the creature's brain. It shuttered for a second or two and then lay still. It

let out a final breath like he was expelling the gasses from the lowest levels of a sewer. This one needed a serious mouth wash. I don't think even Listerine was going to do it.

(If you are reading this story out loud, the sound of the air escaping from the Minotaur's lungs was just like the sound of air escaping around a lid as a pot boils over on the stove mixed with someone opening the end of a balloon.)

I pulled the blade out of his eye. Your average minotaur, like most animals, has a hole in their skulls right behind the eye with direct access to the brain. At least those high school biology labs had been good for something.

When we got back outside, there was a whole collection of guys, milling about in a tight group. They hardly even noticed us. They behaved like they were zombies, stumbling about aimlessly. Most of them had their backs to me, but I could see a few faces on the far side of the group. What stood out was their eyes. They had no color, they were all white, glowing white, in fact. It was eerie. They must be freshman.

The pack started to move as if something was trying to get out from inside the group. Pushing the zombie-like boys aside, she strode into view. This woman had the blackest hair you ever say, but what stood out ... I mean really stood out ... was that she was completely nude. Seriously, who walks around like that? I've never had any attractions to other women, but even I thought this one was hot. She had a body to die for. And she moved ... she moved like a walking sex object.

Out of the corners of my eyes, I saw Dave and James drop their swords and glide over toward her. I noticed that even Alyson and Michelle seemed smitten. I wonder if they are feeling what I was feeling. I had the strongest desire to protect this woman. After all, being naked, she was fairly vulnerable. Steward was standing there like he was waving in the breeze. One look at his eyes and you could tell there was no real activity behind them. They hadn't gone all glowy-white yet but, yep, nobody home. I started to look over at Brandon to see how he was responding, but no, I stopped myself on that one. I didn't need to see how Brandon was responding, I could imagine.

Dave was now closer to this woman I need to protect. She put her arms around his shoulders and gave him an intense look. Something wasn't right, but I couldn't put my fingers on it. It was like all my thoughts were covered in a deep mist. I tried to reach back to get a better understanding of some of the things I was seeing, but the deeper I went, the thicker the haze became. What I did see was this woman starting to slowly unbutton Dave's shirt. That's when I saw them. He had two diminutive dark-brown horns sticking out of her forehead. After that, I could see her leathery wings unfold. How could I have missed that before?

You've got to be fucking kidding me. What juvenile male fantasy is this? She was a succubus. I watched as she continued to unbutton Dave's shirt. Screw that, I'm going to gut this bitch. The succubus noticed my approach and gave me an iron look. I stopped. She gazed at me directly, red eyes glowing. Her gaze spoke volumes, in a way that nobody had ever looked at me before. I could see it all so clearly now. The hopelessness of it all. The pointlessness of existence. The bleak, endless toil only to get outsourced to a company in Bangladesh. Endless years of decadent and conservative Republican Presidents. She was right, the only solution was for me to kill myself. I raised my sword ... and gutted the bitch.

No one takes Dave's shirt off but me. I twisted the blade violently and then drew it up toward her breastbone. Her screams here a mix of high-pitched wailing and the torments of the damned. Finally, she exploded in a blast of flame and was gone. Finally, a corpse we won't have to pick up later.

Dave and Jim give the impression of waking from a deep dream-filled sleep. Alyson and Michelle didn't take long to snap out of it and Brendon ... nope, still not looking. Dave was the first one to go back and get his weapon. James followed, rather sheepishly. He gave Alyson a rather plaintive, apologetic glance. The group of males broke up, now staggering aimlessly. Their eyes were still locked in mindless dreams, eyes glowing white. Oh, well, they're freshman ... nobody'll notice.

Once things returned to normal, it was not a matter of great detective work to see where we had to go next. Whatever was on a rampage had left a trail of student bodies on the lawn. It was heading toward the freshman girl's dorm. Whatever it was, it was definitely male. God, all men think alike. We hustled off in the direction of Renfield Hall.

It didn't take us long to find him, he was standing in the main doorway. This one was built like a wrestler. A muscled chest you could land a plane on. The cloven hooves were a bit distracting as were the two ram horns growing out of his head. His legs needed a serious shave, and then there was his ... OK, this guy was built. With a capital "B." Sorry, Brendon. I might have spent some more time staring, but the huge creature was busy ripping the clothes off a petite redhead.

I started to charge forward, sword ready to taste more demon blood, when I felt Dave's arm grab me. "Where do you think you're going?" he asked.

"I'm going to give that one," I indicated the horned demon, "a second bellybutton ... just before I castrate him." I gave him a determined grin.

"Are you kidding," Dave spat, "that chest you're so busy drooling over is probably armored like a tank. Just one of us isn't going to do it. We can't let him use the doorway as we used it against the goblins in the cafeteria." I could see his point. Considering what the demon was doing to the redhead in the door, I didn't want to see it, but he did have a point. I was also a little embarrassed that he noticed my momentary distraction. Still, he noticed, there was something to be said for that.

"We need to draw him out, so we can hit him from more than one side at a time." Dave had an 'I have a plan' look on his face. Actually, it made him look cuter, like that thinking guy statue.

"So, you need a distraction?" I suggested as if I was suggesting what movie we should go to town and see.

"Yea," Dave replied, "A distraction might work. If we can get it to come out here."

"I got you covered," I announced.

"What are you going to do?" James asked. I was touched he was concerned.

"He's male, isn't he?" It was a rhetorical question, and everybody knew it. I unhooked my bra and pulled it out through one sleeve. Dave gave me an odd glance like he's never seen that before. A shame, I was hoping he might be a bit more experienced. Oh, well, there are some advantages to teaching the remedial class. I wadded up my bra and handed it to Dave. "Here, hold on to this."

“What am I going to do with this?” He asked incredulously.

“Use it as a giant slingshot, I don’t know.” I was hoping he’d be a bit more receptive, but I can work on that.

“What are you going to do?” Dave asked.

“Just stand over there on either side of the door,” I explained, “and watch.”

Dave, Alyson, and Brandon went to stand behind the bushes on the left side of the door. Jim, Michelle, and Stewart had to stand with their backs against the side wall of the dorm, as the right side didn’t have any foliage to hide behind.

This was one of those times you wished you had a boombox handy, but I wasn’t about to go wandering around looking for one. I’d have to do the music in my head. Something like the burlesque piece in *Chicago*. *Cell Block Tango* I think it’s called. As if it was following my cues, the wind picked up. It was doing remarkable things to my hair. I was also standing in bright moonlight. I started by ripping off my slacks. I was never going to get the blood stains out of them anyway. That got the demon’s attention. I do have a nice set of legs. Five years of dance classes and ballet, you know. Although I always preferred the Jujutsu class. I spread my legs out like an inverted V, then I started my gyrations. You can really show it off if you’ve got it. Hopefully, this was going to be a memorable night for Dave.

I started to unbutton my blouse. Slowly, really slowly. It wasn’t that solid of a blouse and even in the moonlight, you could see my nipples through the material. The one thing you can say for underclasswomen is that everything is still pointing up. I teased the creature by holding the material down against my chest. That made the girls genuinely pop out through the fabric. I opened button after button. *All* the way down. After the last one, I held the edges, slowly spreading them open. Then I threw my shirt open, pulled it off, swung it in a great arc, and threw it on the ground.

That has it. The stupid sap headed right for me. He stood there as I gave him the full show, dancing in nothing but my panties. I smiled. “That’s it, just stay still long enough for Dave to smash your brains in.”

Michelle hit him with the CO₂, Brendon gave him a spread of his patented flaming bolts, Alyson hit him right between the eyes with one of her stainless-steel blades, James opened up his belly with the machete and even Stewart stuck his orc blade right between the creature’s ribs. Finally, Dave gave him one hell of a bashing over his head with that sledgehammer. The horned devil just stood there, like Frankenstein’s monster. With one hand he pulled Stewart’s blade out from between his ribs and flung it on the ground. Then with the other hand removed Alyson’s thrown knife. It made a popping, suction sound when he pulled it out. He had a huge gash in his abdomen from the machete, but all it did was seem to show off something that resembled a big stone.

The creature turned around and faced swatted James, who went flying into a bush. The machete went flying too. Brendon charged the beast using his pitchfork like a lance. The demon caught the points and stopped Brendon in his tracks. He used the pitchfork like a lever and threw the centaur over his head, bouncing him off the outside wall of the dorm. He nodded his head and Stewart was instantly transported to a spot right in front of him. Then the creature pointed at the ground with his finger. Flames shot out from his extended digit and he seemed to be writing something on the ground ... in cursive.

“Can you read, puny sub-intelligent creature?” He asked.

Steward bent his head down. In the grass, you could clearly see the word, “headbutt.” That’s what the creature did. Steward went flying. Nice work ... writing upside down, I mean. The demon puffed up his chest and held out both of his hands to either side as if to grab hold of two ski poles. Alyson and Michelle literally flew into his hands. In the next instant, he had them both by the throat, their feet kicking in empty air below them. He squeezed his fists closed. Both the girls struggled, gurgling, and then hung, limp in his grip.

He dropped the two girls and looked directly at me. OK, *now* I can see where we went wrong. The correct answer was running away as fast as our legs could carry us. I attempted to put this plan into action, but I found that I couldn’t move. He smiled. “Go ahead, dance some more,” the demon suggested, “I was beginning to enjoy it. No? No matter, I think you know what is going to happen to you now.” He smiled again, wickedly. One of those big shit-eating grins. “You didn’t think it would be that easy, did you?” Dave’s hammer appeared, exploding through the demon’s belly, covered in gore, “Yea, for a second ... I did.”

The demon stumbled for a few seconds. I looked him squarely in the eye, “Down boy,” I exclaimed, and he fell face first into the grass. Michelle and Alyson got up, coughing, but only slightly dented from their experience. James stepped out of the bushes and brushed himself off. He was covered in those stupid little green-sticky-seed things. He was followed by Steward and Brendon who, surprisingly, seemed only slightly worse for wear. I reached down and grabbed my shirt and put it back on. I mean this had been an emergency, but I didn’t want to give Dave too much of a show if you know what I mean.

Personally, I was exhausted. Nobody else looked any better either. I think I even staggered for a few steps. The sun was just starting to glow on the horizon, the sky turning a dull pink and the stars were winking out one by one. Stepping out into this light was Josh our dungeon master. He was wearing a long midnight blue velour robe filled with gold stars and moons. It resembled a costume you might see in a fifth-grade play. Here I thought Steward was the only costume-wearing nerd the funny farm had let out tonight. He stepped closer and applauded.

“Very nicely done,” he congratulated us. “I had no idea how I was going to manage to kill the demon to steal his powers, but you did an excellent job. My compliments.”

“You did this?” I tried not to act surprised, but I did a crappy job. Five years of dance lessons don’t do anything which would result in a better poker face. “Real wizard, huh?” I spit in anger, “You look like a baboon dressed like that.”

He smiled glibly. “Yes, well, you’ll find that in the quest for ultimate power, some sacrifices have to be made.” He lifted his hands and there was a slight flash. Now we were all wearing the outfits we had described in your characters sheets. Although my all black-leather outfit was a little tight around the edges. Dave looked resplendent in a mighty suit of armor, decorated in gold inlays and filigrees. Only Steward remained unchanged, except he was carrying what I could only imagine was an insanely expensive lute.

Naturally, we were all stunned, but only for a moment. Dave rushed Josh, got halfway to him and stopped in his tracks. I couldn’t move either. “You can thank me for my largess later. I’m sorry I going to

miss all the fun. The press is going to have a field day. I can see the headlines now. Young students dress up like some escapees from a renaissance fair, run amuck on campus. I'd love to stick around and watch the festivities, but right now I must be going. Work to do you know. Ta-ta." In a flash, he was gone.

Fucking wizards. If I ever get my hands on him ...

The sun was really coming up now and I fully expected all this stuff to just fade away. I'd wake up and it would all have been a dream. I was really expecting that. It would have solved a lot of issues. I looked around in the slowly gathering dawn and saw that Brendon was still there and his ... "Brendon," I tried to look the other way, "Would you please put that thing away!"

He glanced at me in his normal bewildered look.

"Yes!" Michelle shouted holding her arms up like we'd won the homecoming game. She was wearing the long robes of a cleric. The tans and browns made it look like she was some kind of underage Jedi-in-training. "Let's hear it for Raiders of the Lost Dorm! That was exciting," she exclaimed, "I can't wait for the next game night."