

# Krinelaith





*Also by Jim Gleeson*

*BARREN WORLD*

*ON STRENGTH OF WORDS*

*ARMAGEDDONS TWILIGHT: CONVERGENCE*

*THE RECKONING: (WITH DAVID ALLEN COOK)*



# Krinelaith



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# Krinelaith





# ◆|◆ The Dwarves

Let me tell you about the dwarves. I'm not talking about Snow White and the seven cuddly children who wear soft hats and work in a mineshaft all day singing with real high falsetto voices. And I'm not talking about the endearing Tolkien-like dwarves who have character and sometimes seem to slink into grumbling adults who take very personally when they are insulted. I'm referring quintessentially to a bunch of ill-tempered forest dwelling dwarves. And when I say ill tempered, I'm not embellishing, these dwarves were simply miserable. Their faces held it, their shoulders tensed to show it, they hated their life, and they complained about it incessantly.

This is not fiction. I've seen them. They, however, despise being called dwarves, which is the first thing I learned about them during my stay in Krinelait. But, and I say this quietly even now, they were dwarves. Not in the sense that they had stunted growth or a hormone deficiency as one would look at dwarfism

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today. They would be first to tell you that their size was just perfect, thank you very much, and even the mention that they were abnormal was, well, rather self centered of big, giant sized treelike people like myself.

I met them in the Hugros forest. Never heard of it? That is not surprising, nor have you heard of Krinelraith. Well, maybe a few of you have, but if you have you would either keep it quiet, or you would talk about the place amongst yourselves. It is not the kind of place one admits to arriving to openly, else you might find yourself in a rubber room with coloring books all day long with very soft, non toxic crayons.

But back to them, the dwarves. They were the first breath of civilization I encountered in Greyland. To be fair, I was out of place. Not only out of place, but out of time. I'm not talking about being in this part of the country, or that, I mean, I was out of place, out of time, out of reality as you and I know it.

Now I imagine your curiosity is rather high. Where did I go? How did I arrive where I was? How I arrived here in Krinelraith is not as important as the story I am telling of the dwarves. If you wish to get an idea of what my full voyage to Krinelraith was about you should read the rest of my book entitled "Krinelraith." Yes, it is a bit of a cliché kind of beginning, but I could never think of anything better to call it. Henny once said to me that perhaps I should have called it, "Into the Heart of Darkness." I explained to her that Joseph Conrad wrote something with a similar title and I didn't want this story mixed up with that one.

Anyway, back to the dwarves - or the little people. They accepted me calling them this since, I was in fact, big. However, if one of their own called them a "little people" they would likely have been shoveled over the head with a nice spade or other dwarfish tool.

But I once again digress. I met the dwarves in the Hugros forest, and anyone keeping up on dwarfish mythology might

well know that it is the elves who favor forests, and dwarves who favor mountains, caves, and things rocky and dark. This is one of the few truths still remaining concerning the dwarves, at least in the realm of Krinelath. The dwarves are built for the darker rockier places. I don't subscribe to any theory of evolution and I would much easier assume that God had made them as such for the purpose of mining and mountain dwelling, but I do not presume to know the mind of God. Who knows? Perhaps the dwarves were a real clumsy lot and were created short so they wouldn't harm themselves as much when they fell to the ground.

You should also know that the dwarves were mountain dwellers by their appearance in the forest. It was as unexpected as finding a penguin in the Sahara desert. It doesn't look right at all. In fact, they looked quite out of place. They were a short stocky lot, well muscled, but as I said grossly ill tempered.

That was my first impression, for they immediately captured me upon my entrance into what was to be their camp. They were very picky about that, after all, very large uninvited guests really did not make a good impression on them. As I entered into the place and was accosted by my first glimpse of a little person I asked, "Excuse me?"

The little man, or dwarf, looked upon me with a mixture of incredulity as well as hostility. And then turning around he began this rather raucous scream.

"Wait." I called after him and began to chase him. That was a mistake as well. More raucous screams arose around us in the forest. Branches were flung into my face, for the foliage had overgrow in places where dwarves did not walk. My height was perhaps my greatest detriment at that moment, for I think that if I were not so preoccupied with the leaves and branches swinging into my face, I might have seen the net.

The next thing I knew I was held taut and couldn't move at all. I felt like I had taken an extremely high-speed elevator ride.

So there I found myself, dangling from a tree at the edge of the small hut-like settlements of a dwarven village. A crowd gathered underneath me, grumbling like angry dogs.

“Excuse me.” I once again called out and there was silence, and then the crowd ballooned out into a circle with one small man in the middle of it.

He called out something I didn’t understand; I saw some movement out of the corner of my eye and then-

I was falling, falling hard and fast. I was trying to brace myself for the impact, but I couldn’t move. I opened my mouth, but I couldn’t scream.

And then there was ground, suddenly; it was there, like running into a wall, the force of gravity took care of me. My arm snapped right as I fell, and the wind was knocked out of me so all I could utter was a stifled keening kind of sound. About four of them stood on one side of me and rolled me over on my back.

“Excuse me.” I said again, heaving, and was kicked. So I stayed quiet. They tied me between two ponies and dragged me through the village. It was very rustic looking, the ground was just dirt, like an old western town, and the huts had walls of stone, and roofs of straw. I was taken to a larger place and placed in what appeared to be a stronghold. The dwarves still grumbled and talked among themselves, and then satisfied that I was safely secured, they left me alone to my pain.

Alone in my pain, on the dirt floor, in a pungent smelling stronghold was not my idea of a vacation, and instantly I regretted taking that walk through the forest behind the Shepherd’s Gate apartments. Even more so, I regretted taking a turn of the trail and letting my more curious and adventurous spirit get the best of me.

And now I was smack dab right in the middle of something that was a cross between Twin Peaks and Snow White and the Seven Ill-Tempered Bearded Midgets. Granted, at this moment, I did not know I had inadvertently stumbled into another dimension, so

that made it all the more peculiar. What were a gaggle of dwarves doing living in a small village just behind an old rundown apartment complex? And what a strange language they were speaking!

Still tied securely in the net. I tried to get comfortable enough to get some sleep, I was weary and my mind was getting quite a marauding headache from the strange reality I had come to realize must be actually reality. No matter what position I rolled myself into, it was hopeless. Like a beached whale I turned and tossed vainly, finally wearing myself out enough in the process to send me exhausted into a troubled, but grey misty sleep.

I was being prodded awake. I had been released from the net now, and it was quite refreshing to be able to move around again, although the net did provide a kind of bizarre sling for my arm. Now the dwarves, apparently inspecting me, found that my arm had been broken and had tied two small twigs together with a bit of vine. A very feeble sling indeed, but I was grateful for small favors. And this was a good sign; rarely to intelligent beings mend someone's arm before they kill them.

As they poked prodded, and seemed to go over my entire body with a fine toothcomb, wondering at my strange clothes and build, I imagine they were discussing if I was a demon, or perhaps they could find some use for me, yet. But I was yet far from privy to their conversation. And still I wondered if by some freak mischance, a small aircraft carrying a Bulgarian dwarf circus hadn't crashed in my backyard leaving the people within fearing for their lives, and not wanting to contact the American Embassy.

What was my destiny to be, I was uncertain. They had nasty looking spears and clubs and such and some of them made many threatening gestures in my direction, but relented by the bigger group of dwarves who seemed to be gruffly protecting me from a certain painful death.

A verdict was reached, and the dwarf carrying an assort-

ment of weapons as well as wearing a very large knitted together fashion of furs pronounced something. He could have been announcing a sale at Penny's for all of my knowledge of Bulgarian or whatever language the dwarfish people spoke. Then things moved quickly. Well quickly for them, I imagine, and for me it was a hectic addition in my life I had not looked for, and was in great need to be no longer burdened with.

I was placed in a stronghold, a stocky stone structure quite impervious to the onslaught of the strongest of people. The dwarves built it for an unknown purpose and it too looked quite out of place in amongst the trees and various flora of the forest. Like Stonehenge would be my best way to describe the feeling. The stronghold had very small windows, and was arrayed with torches on its four corners.

In the center of it stood a stone slab that must also be a table of some kind. Upon it was placed books of many kinds and food was replaced every couple of hours

For two weeks I was kept in the stronghold, and the absence of aircraft traveling in the sky as well as not even a glimpse of power lines, or the faint sound of a train coming through town convinced me that I was not in Kansas anymore, or actually Georgia.

I was stuck here, wherever here was, and of all the things these strange people wanted me to do, they decided to plop a book before me. It was yellowed, crinkled at the edges and torn, and was filled with many strange drawings. There were laughs as I began looking at the book, because they wanted me to do what I feared they wanted me to do, read.

As they gave this book to me they guffawed laughter and thrashed one another on the back, sometimes with the hilt of their sword, or the handles of their clubs. These individuals were the very pillars of civilization.

As they saw my obvious puzzlement, their laughter turned

to angry snarls, and then a smaller, more emaciated dwarf was dragged unceremoniously inside and left with me. An older frail man with wild grey hair and a gnarled unkempt beard, and he seemed as unhappy at his predicament as I was. He pointed at words, pictures, and pronounced words to me over and over again.

I don't know how I did it, but I learned the dwarf's language. I never knew I had a penchant for languages, but a month in a holding cell with nothing else better to do than have your broken arm mend will leave you wanting to do anything to break the monotony. Reading and understanding their language was something I could do, and I went into it with both feet.

Their language is what they refer to as "Runa" It is a quaint simple language, a little gruff sounding like German, and at the same time having some elements in it that had a sing-song kind of speech.

Like most languages, it had its peculiarities. There was no word for certain emotions among these people, and they usually stayed away from diminutive adjectives describing something anything. They would never say, for instance, that something was small, instead that would say that it was "Larger than a pebble."

It was a peculiar form of relativity and you could tell that they were a hyper sensitive lot when it came to their height and it was amazing they even let me live, I was a shining example of everything they were not and it was more than a few times that I could recognize the envy of some of the younger dwarves eyes.

The first words I learned had to deal with food, there is only one thing these dwarves of the Hugros like more than complaining, and that is they eat. They eat like no other civilization I have seen before. They do not trouble themselves with such trivialities as silverware and napkins. If anyone even caught someone else manipulating food with an implement they were subsequently backhanded severely for the breach of etiquette.

In fact, it was rude to eat food with utensils. It was an in-

sult to the cook. Soup was drunk straight from the bowl, and meat with the hands as well as any vegetable the dwarf could find. Of course dwarves favorite vegetables were those that could be defined as roots, like Tooka, a potato like food, which is tastes tangy, and at a certain part of the year has a kick kind of like alcohol.

Again, if anyone was caught eating with utensils, it was considered rude because you were implying that the cook's food was not good enough to be touched by your hands. The dwarves had a warped sense of table etiquette. I was taught to unlearn the very things my mother had spent many years scolding me for.

To top this table etiquette off, dwarves were very proud when you seemed to wear some of their food at the end of the meal, it had significance in that the food was so good, that you could not control your hunger. Lest there be any father's listening, eating was a race to the dwarves. If you arrived late to mealtime you went hungry, it was that simple.

This was perplexing. I gave up early trying to tell them my customs with eating. They simply sniffed and used the word "larger than tree barbarian." They were a very strange people.

When my broken arm was finally mended and I was having conversations with them, everything seemed to change between us. I was ordered outdoors, first of all, and sent to work in the mines with the others. My knees still ache when I think of that time. Heft a small dwarf-sized pick and crawling on hands and knees through sharp rock adorned tunnels just was not my idea of fun.

I imagine I spend sixteen hours a day in the tunnels digging for a black ugly minerals that when exposed to light, illuminated them. Their use and purpose were far stretching though the dwarves used these very rocks to illuminate the camp at night. Occasionally, when enough of these strange rocks were gathered, I would learn later were called Luquez, they would pack it on wagons and the overworked ponies would bare their teeth in their

bridles and drag the stuff away from the mines, through the town to some other point of destination.

This work enough was wearisome, but the dwarves also insisted that when I returned to camp, that I would talk about my world to all hours of the night. They laughed at the idea of cars, television, indoor plumbing.

“Tell us about this thing, what is it you call it, an auto carriage. What does it run on?”

“Fuel.”

“From where?” another dwarf prodded smiling innocently.

“From the ground, it is black gooey stuff that is extracted from the earth and then refined-”

“Enough-” they were laughing clapping one another on the back, and after suffering numerous bruises my back as well was getting use to this kind of attention.

After the fit of laughter would dissipate, they would think again and ask, “Tell us about your-people in a box.”

“The television.”

“Yes. Tell us about you Tell-Vision”

But as I would begin to explain they laughed louder, clapped and hit each other on the backs, all the while drinking a beverage made from Tooka. I would laugh as well about extracting a beverage from a tangy potato, but I think they would hardly find that amusing.

By the time I went off to bed, I could hear murmuring among the dwarfish leaders. Did they ever sleep? I always was tired out long before they seemed interested in bedding. Some nights I would hear them discuss trivial things, like the wife and kids, which side of the brook that went through the Hugros was safe for bathing, but mostly they would complain, complain, complain, about the infernal trees.

To a dwarf, dung smelled better than pine, and death

smelled better than an oak. They hated the land they lived in, despised it with a passion, and in the past they had taken to carving curse words in their language on many trees surrounding the forest. Now, all they could do was complain, because of the strange fairy folk, the elves.

And maybe that was the source of their disgust with the forest. Forest and Elves seemed to be tied together. They hated both with equal passion. Maybe because the forests reminded them of the elves, or the elves reminded them of the forests. It was hard to tell, and the dwarves would not speak of it. They only referred to elves as the “Betrayers.” who knows why....

In the beginning, when they had made their clearing, they were determined to burn, cut down, and turn to sawdust every tree in the forest, but after a prolonged skirmish with the elves of the Thelindira, it was decided that the dwarves would stay, but could not harm another tree. So this left dwarves grumbling angrily among themselves about the trees instead of taking an axe to them, which was something they really wanted to do.

“And why can’t we cut down these trees, what will the elves do to us? Why they are a tall fair frail folk, not strong and stocky like yourselves.” I had learned long before that even to be listened to by the dwarfish people, it was best to stroke their ego a bit and praise their strengths. As usual they looked at me as an inexperienced child who did not know the words he was saying.

“The faery folk would not allow it.”

“What do you mean? What can they do?”

“Destroy us all, is what they’ll do, it is even plausible that their ears might be upon us now.”

This one who spoke to me, who dignified me with a response to my questions often, was Ronor. He was slightly tall for a dwarf and secretly I think he fancied himself as a brother to me. He was the least insecure about his height. These dwarves had the worst short people’s syndrome I had ever known; even using a

diminutive word in their presence could start the axes flailing.

Anyways, I asked Ronor, “This magic you speak of, have you seen evidence of it.”

“I have seen it.” Ronor nodded and the others with him. He whispered this phrase carefully as if it took him a great deal of concentration to say it. I could tell it was a sore subject, a sore subject perhaps among many. The dwarves rarely spoke of their past, only seeming to complain about their present.

Ronor continued, “Our village once numbered into the thousands until the elves came and saw our destruction, they killed in kind one dwarf for every tree that had fallen to create this village you see before you.”

“Tree huggers.” I spat, “Why would they do such a thing?”

“They believe.” Ronor continued, “That their dead spirits inhabit a tree, so to them, destroying a tree is like destroying a broth-”

“Why that’s the most convoluted form of horse pockey I’ve ever heard in my life.” I replied, “Except for some of Shirley McClain’s writings.” I added.

“We told them as such.” Ronor replied, “But they would not hear of it. We also told them the truth of where spirits reside after their death, it is of course the rocks of the very mountains we once inhabited.”

I was tempted to correct Ronor on his obviously erroneous view of the afterlife, but stopped myself, for at the time; I myself was ignorant of such things as well. Instead I asked, “Why did you ever move from your mountain region at all since you hate these forests so much. I hear you cursing the trees in whispered tones at night and its hard to get to sleep though all of that complaining.

There came a hushed silence over the muttering dwarves. The fire flickered like a fading forge. Ronor tended to the fire and began to sing, which I hoped someone would drown out, Ronor

had no ear for music.

He stopped and said, "It was the Bulraghs."

"Is that a musical group?" I asked and immediately I was met with angry stares so I pursed my lips and let Ronor continue.

"We moved here not out of choice, but because we had to. Many years ago, back when I was scarcely coming of age we were a noble and wonderful people. We lived in our mountain. Gedon, we called it, and the word made us proud. It was filled with many fine caverns, and it was a city underneath. Our families played and worked hard in that cavern, and our attitude was a little different than the countenance most of us wear now."

"And then the Bulraghs came."

"What are these Bulragh's?" I asked extremely curious, they sounded like giant slugs or something, but I was about to learn differently.

"They are of our shape, but smaller, and their skin is hard, like rock and sleek. Their eyes are a cold dark black, and they speak in a kind of whispery slimy language, and they are unbelievably strong and fast. They killed half of our people before we were able to make it safely from our mountain."

"And we want it back."

"It cannot be done," said Ronor to the dwarf who had just spoken." In the beginning maybe we could have, but we have been gone to long, and there is too few of us."

"Will you set me free if we can do it?" I asked abruptly. Me and my big mouth, what was I thinking, maybe it was their incessant complaining about trees that had driven me to it.

The dwarves responded predictable, busting out into fits of raucous laughter. Pretty soon the whole camp was littered with belly laughs. I should have clammed up them, but their laughter, why it was worse than anything I could imagine, and I wanted to be free. So I made them promise to let me free should I be able to pull off what these dwarves had failed to do in fifty of their years.

To be sure, the dwarves, for some unknown reason, had not even tried to retake their land in the last fifty years, instead I think they began to enjoy complaining about the trees, and consequently, about the elves. It was a lot easier than getting off your duffs only to be met with some sort of failure. The older dwarves still stung from the siege of their beloved Gedon. But still, I would have at least tried.

To be sure, I was not very optimistic. But I did not want to stay on the hind end of a bad joke concerning my feeble-mindedness, nor did I want to go back and sit kneeling in the coal mines until my knees would totally give out on my and I'd have to be wheeled into the mines with a pick axe and a pair of crutches.

I got together with some of the brightest and eldest of the dwarves to help devise a plan. Some of these men were senile, others had just plum forgotten what it was like to live in Gedon, and a couple of others got lost in the woods, forgetting where it was they were actually headed to. I was getting the impression that none of them were taking me very seriously.

And so I decided to offer a plan to the elders that would be significantly different to the one I had in mind, would that I could come up with a brilliant plan, much less a plan at all on my own.

“I think a good way to get rid of the Bulragh's would be simply to gather an army together surround them and rush into the caverns

Once I had my plan together, which was really not a plan at all, but an elaborately complex way of wasting time until I thought of a real plan, I took a couple of the younger, stronger dwarves with me, actually, they escorted me. Even Ronor was not stupid enough to give me a chance of escape, and I could not blame him.

“Thus, I will come with you as well, larger than a tree, barbarian man.” he quipped.

It was with two guards, Ronor, and an older dwarf that we threaded through the forest on our way to the mountain of Gedon.

I was anticipating a very large majestic peak that would rise over the tops of the forest trees before long, but that did not happen.

“How long will this trip be?” I asked.

“Seven days.” Came the reply from Ronor who had leaned down to hear the older gentleman, our guide speak from atop a pony.

“Seven days? You traveled, no you fled this land for seven days?”

“We were a scared people. The Bulraghs are very strong and dangerous, a barbaric creature bent on the destruction of the dwarfish race, we wanted to be through with them.”

But seven days? I mean one or two maybe, that might be enough, but seven, why that was a week of fleeing. I would be out of fear and caution three days out. But then I remembered, a lot of these people had fathers and mothers who were killed in Gedon, whose bones might still be resting from where the Bulraghs destroyed them. This did not ease my spirit and sent doubts shivering up my spine. If these dwarves, who knew their land so well could not destroy the Bulraghs, then who was I to think such a thing.

But maybe somewhere in the back of my mind I really believed that I came here to this strange world for a purpose, and maybe that purpose had everything to do with these foul tempered little people I had come to grudgingly call, my jailers, and even one, Ronor, my friend.

One night, while I was popping some blisters on the bottom of my feet Ronor came to me and sat across the fire from me, and gave a dismissive gesture to the guards hounding over me, neither one seeming to like his job very much. When we were alone Ronor asked, “So have you a plan yet?”

“I was about to ask you the same question.” I replied a made a slight grin. He wasn’t entertained. As I said Ronor possibly fancied me as a brother, but that still did not translate into cordiality, merely tolerance.

“My people have the first embers of hope in years from your speech. “ He replied, “Do not trifle with it McGowen.”

“Trifle with it, I’m at my wits end. I have plans, but until I see the mountain, I will not know a strategy.”

“Not even a spec of a plan?”

“No.” I replied in truth. For some reason I just didn’t have the time or energy to lie to Ronor, I popped another blister on the bottom of my foot.

“Then you are the Hot-winded one,” he said angrily, “Making promises with your mouth that does not sink into your heart.”

“No, I have made a promise, and I shall not break it.” I said. What was with this guy anyways? Ronor was never one to mince words and he often used the harshest language available for his accusations. Sometimes you just had to act on faith that there was a solution to the problems at hand.

“Think of a plan quickly, or this I will tell you, you will not return to the Hugros alive again.”

“Is that a threat?” I asked and immediately my throat got dry and my heart drew cold.”

“No, it is this instead, a mandate from Hagwain.”

Hagwain was the leader of the dwarves, the guy I told you about earlier with the knitted multicolored furs and such. Ronor unrolled a scroll and presented it to me and although I did not get a few of the words, I understood the content. I was to be killed should I fail at my mission.

Three nights later, the old man got down to his knees and wept in an old clearing. The clearing, I could tell was not naturally made, but square in structure and directly ahead was a huge stone arch, covered by foliage. The soldiers hacked the brush away leaving a moss covered stone with ancient runes on it, I couldn’t make out a single word, much less a cohesive sentence. But the old man talked excitedly.

Ronor tapped me on the shoulder and said with a new rev-

erence, “We are at Gedon, it shall be in sight soon.” And then we threaded through the arch.

Seeing the “mountain” almost made me blanch and laugh. Even the dwarves beside and around me seemed uncomfortable and felt a little embarrassed. Their beloved Gedon was simply an oversized hill. While it is plausible to believe that there is an underground cavern system that might rival the New York subway, it was just sort of the nature of all thinking beings to make things seem bigger and grander as time passed.

To say they had made a mountain out of a molehill was not an exaggeration. We waited until nightfall and the Bulraghs did manage to be seen in the night.

They were fast, and their skin glinted in the darkness, and their eyes were like black embers. One passed close to us, sniffed the air, and moved on. They talked in groans and such. I began to think about how close the dwarfish lair looked like an anthill, and then I had my idea. It came like that, and it was simple, and it would only take me and the four guards to accomplish it.

Using my extensive knowledge of television, most notably Star Trek, I was able to find the ingredients for gunpowder. This world was rich with minerals and it was not too hard to find. The charcoal and sulfur were easy to find and I was also able to find some “fire rocks” as the dwarves called them almost just as easily. The potassium nitrate was difficult to find because I wasn’t quite sure what it would look like, but I was able to make quite a bang when I found a deposit of this certain white crystalline rock....

We got more of the dwarves together after sending updates to our progress, they were amazed and some of the dwarves marveled at me for being a wizard when I just did what a chemistry set might call for. The dwarves are expert miners, and almost have a sixth sense on where to find certain types of mineral deposits, thus in a short while we were able to get together two carts of barrels

full of the powder, and a couple of refined “fire rocks.”

It was determined that the Bulraghs stayed pretty dormant during the day and so, picking some of the fastest dwarves, as well as myself, we went perusing through the inner chambers with dead tree wood, leaves, and gunpowder, littering and inundating the place with the munitions. In addition, various entrances were being blocked by large thick furs of Tumans. These were furs that looked like bears, but their meat had a taste similar to Angus beef.

Before nightfall, we had to work swiftly. I set off a small explosion that was a signal for all else to hear. The fires were lit. And then various muffled explosions could be heard through thick fur as well as a keening sound of the Bulraghs. Then, all went to chaos..

These creatures barreled through the furs only to be assailed by dwarven axes and halberds. But it turned out these weapons were not needed. The Bulraghs bodies had a sheen, a shine of which it was later determined by me to be the cause of an inordinate amount of oil on their skin, thus many of the Bulraghs were burned to a crisp, others soon were, or they escaped only to be pummeled to death by dwarven swords and clubs.

In minutes it was all over. I was greeted with respect that night and treated as an equal. I helped clean up the noxious foul smelling carcasses of the Bulragh's and then we had a feast. Surprisingly, the Bulragh's tasted quite good and the foul smell was some chemical reaction on their outer skin. They tasted like chicken, as I recall.

“Bryant the fire wizard” they called me from that evening on. And over the years, like everything else, I imagine they have stretched the tale to make it seem more so. Of course they also changed the part of how ill-treated I was to begin with. Some such nonsense as “we accepted him as our own, and saw the signs from the stars and moon.” It really is just a bunch of mess, and really, I am surprised the dwarves hadn't discovered the fire powder them-

selves, though that might be a problem now.

There was something I hadn't quite counted on, you see, the dwarves of today are still rather angry about the whole forest, and the elves idea of killing one dwarf for every tree that fell to make the piddly village in the Hugros forest, and well, I've begun to hear things about revenge and such. Really! --Small figures in the night hefting barrels on their shoulders. But, did I not fail to mention that these dwarves are still ill tempered. They like me a lot more, yes, but they hate the smell of wood, though many dwarves will tell you there's nothing like the sweet smell of burning pine.

