A detailed illustration of a magical forest. A stone path leads through a dense thicket of plants. Numerous mushrooms with glowing red caps are scattered throughout. Small, glowing orange and yellow lights, possibly fireflies or bioluminescent plants, are visible on the forest floor. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and enchanting, with a soft, golden light filtering through the trees.

JAMES ESPARZA PRESENTS

**WORLD
WITHOUT
END**

GLIMMERLEAF

A SHORT STORY



Kingdom of Doter

Everflow Mountains

Doter
Freelands

Weary
Desert

Kingdom of Whitlow

WORLD WITHOUT END

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DEDICATED TO
MY GOOD FRIEND KAT

GLIMMERLEAF

G L I M M E R L E A F

“Boy oh boy! What did I get myself into this time?”

Gwendolyn Glimmerleaf, a small gnome, crouched inside a hidden tunnel. The passage, though tight, accommodated her even smaller frame. Yet, it also allowed ample room for a peculiar species of carnivorous red worm, many slithered through the twisting labyrinth hidden beneath the earth's surface, relentlessly seeking her presence.

In the heart of the underground realm, Gwendolyn found herself trapped in a twisting network of dark tunnels. The oppressive walls seemed to close in on her, and she could hear the echoing thuds of the relentless worms drawing near. Panic surged through her tiny frame, but she knew staying still was not an option.

Gwendolyn's mind raced like the rapid heartbeat of a wild hare. Ahead, a slender crevice allured to her like a beckoning lantern, bathed in an ethereal glow, courtesy of the fluorescent moss that adorned the surroundings. Her gaze locked onto this sliver of escape, without a moment's hesitation, she sprang into action.

Behind her, the menacing red worm pursued, its gaping maw threatening to devour the desperate gnome. Its enormous form writhed and twisted, its segmented body pulsated like a river of bloodthirsty intent. Gwendolyn's fingers brushed against the damp walls of the crevice, her senses heightened to a feverish pitch. The sensation of cool moisture against her skin was a stark contrast to the searing heat of the worm's breath that licked at her heels.

Gwendolyn's gaze shifted to her satchel as she ran, where a weathered wooden bottle nestled among her supplies. She withdrew the container and a makeshift tool she had fashioned earlier, its end wrapped in a cloth soaked in a flammable concoction. Her heart thrummed with a mix of fear and resolve as she struck a stone against the cavern wall, sending a shower of sparks onto the cloth.

The crevice had led her to a hidden enclave, a secret haven shielded by the unforgiving landscape. Her chest heaved as she turned to face the opening, her eyes widening as the worm's monstrous head thrust into the passage, jaws snapping shut just inches away. The flames danced and flickered like tiny warriors,

casting eerie shadows against the creature's face. Gwendolyn took a step back, sipping a bitter liquid from the wooden container. With a swift exhale, she leaned forward, spitting a stream of fire onto the approaching creature.

Its massive form heaved and twisted, tearing itself away from the searing intensity of the bright flame. Its movements, while pained and laborious, forged an unexpected path, a perilous trail that Gwendolyn could potentially exploit. Heart pounding, she wasted no time, dashing forward with a newfound burst of energy.

As she emerged into another cramped tunnel, Gwendolyn knew she couldn't keep evading the creature forever. That's when the rumble of the floor beneath her alerted the poor gnome to another approaching worm. Gathering her wits, she focused on finding a way to outsmart her pursuer. Spotting a low hanging Limestone deposit, an idea formed in her mind.

With a daring leap, she grabbed onto the Limestone drip and swung like a tiny acrobat, just as the worm appeared from the surrounding dark. The creature roared in frustration as it scraped the wall, trying to reach its elusive prey. A strike of terror ran through the fleeing Gwendolyn, but she refused to let fear paralyze her. She knew that the worm was relentless, and her only chance was to escape to the surface world. In a burst of speed, she dashed through the winding tunnels, the worm's guttural growls reverberating behind her. Each step brought her closer to freedom, but the darkness seemed endless.

At last, she saw a faint glimmer of light up ahead. Gwendolyn's heart leaped with hope as she quickened her pace, her small feet pounding against the hard ground. The light grew brighter, and the tunnel opened before her. She burst to the up world and emerged within dark, uncharted grounds, where not even the worms dare follow.

Gwendolyn found herself in a realm consumed by decay and darkness. A seemingly ancient temple, once a grand structure, now stood as a haunting reflection of its former glory. The scent of rot permeated the air, mingling with the musty dampness that clung to every crevice. The walls, adorned with crumbling murals depicting forgotten tales, were now marred by patches of strange, flesh-like growth that seemed to pulsate with an eerie rhythm. It was as

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if the very essence of life had been corrupted and twisted into a grotesque mockery.

For most beings, the sight of such a place would evoke terror and uncertainty, their thoughts consumed by fear and unease. But within the mind of a micro gnome like Gwendolyn, their sense of wonder, and a child like spirit unburdened them from such things. With wide eyes, Gwendolyn scanned her surroundings in awe, absorbing every detail her keen senses could capture. Her mind buzzed with excitement as she mentally cataloged each element, gathering fodder for future tales to share with the gnomes within the Glimmerleaf family.

"Might be getting a little too excited for this..." She said as she explored.

Her gaze wandered, capturing the play of light and shadow as it danced across the ancient stone floor. A delicate scent of decay hung in the air, mingling with the faint whispers that emanated from the darkened chamber where the shadowy figures congregated. Gwendolyn's small form trembled with a mix of trepidation and curiosity, her imagination already weaving fantastical narratives about the mysterious beings she observed.

Peering through a narrow crack in the immense doorway, she caught a glimpse of a large stage and many pews where a captivating audience of various undead things. Vampires, Skull creatures, Zombies, and unspeakable horrors, shouted animalistic encouragements towards the speaker who flaunted before the stage. An undead voice echoed above all others, and chilled Gwendolyn's very form as she took in his terrible words.

"The time of reckoning has arrived, as you have delivered countless souls to swell our unending legions. Man shall savor the bitterness of our wrath! Children of mine our moment has arrived, we shall embark on a crusade against these monstrous deceivers, tearing away our sacred lands! We shall advance through the arid desert of anguish, unleashing torrents of blood and shattering the bones of war upon the lifeless husks of humanity!"

As the creature's voice shook within the confines of the chamber, the intrepid Gnome swiftly delved into her small pack, retrieving a small pencil and a tiny piece of parchment. With nimble fingers, she diligently began to transcribe every sensory detail her keen gnome senses absorbed. The hushed whispers that permeated the air, the creaking of ancient timbers, and the resonance of the speaker's voice, were all meticulously documented.

"I think I got it, but I'm going to do it again just in case!" She said while examining her work.

The weight of the ink-stained parchment pressed against Gwendolyn's heart as she absorbed the gravity of the inscribed words. The sinister machinations of these malevolent beings loomed large, as their wicked designs threatening the very fabric of man. It was not in a gnome's nature to meddle in the affairs of humans, but Gwendolyn understood the danger looming upon them, she had to warn somebody.

With a resolute sigh, Gwendolyn folded the parchment, carefully tucking it away within the recesses of her pack. The weight of responsibility settled upon her small shoulders, urging her onward. Her gaze lingered upon the tunnel's dark maw, the very path she had emerged from moments ago. Its depths, once infested with danger, now echoed with an eerie silence. Gwendolyn's heart raced, knowing she had no choice but to retrace her steps and venture back into the treacherous depths. She needed to make her way towards Rufus, her loyal companion and trusted pack rat, who awaited her return.

With a steadying breath, Gwendolyn turned on her heels, her resolve hardening. The tunnel's oppressive air pressed against her, carrying with it a sense of urgency and the faint scent of damp earth. Step by cautious step, she ventured back into the labyrinthine passages, her diminutive figure navigating the tight spaces with nimble grace.

As Gwendolyn ventured deeper into the subterranean depths, the distant glow of light behind her faded into a mere memory. The ground beneath her feet quivered with a subtle tremor, a telltale sign of the lurking red worms that wriggled through the intricate

network of tunnels. She navigated the labyrinthine passages with utmost care, her keen gnome ears, and her soft to the touch hands lead the way through the darkness.

Multiple times, Gwendolyn found herself swiftly seeking shelter or burrowing into cramped spaces to evade the passing worms. Their slithering bodies moved with an eerie grace, their unsettling presence reverberating through the air. With bated breath, she waited until the creatures slithered out of sight, a sense of relief washing over her. After a few moments of respite, she pressed onward, away from their territory.

Confident and unburdened, Gwendolyn glided into the dark tunnels, her nimble gnome feet propelling her at a rapid pace. Unbeknownst to her, a lone worm slithered through a nearby tunnel, detecting the subtle vibrations of her quick footsteps. The grotesque creature emerged, its nightmarish appearance contorting as it extended its head, sniffing the air of the tunnel, drawn by the faint vibrations and the scent of a micro gnome.

Within moments, Gwendolyn detected the peculiar vibrations signaling the approaching worm. Assessing her options in the labyrinthine tunnels, she swiftly altered her course, opting for an alternate path. However, to her dismay, the vibrations persisted, growing stronger instead of fading away. Even when she skillfully concealed herself and allowed the worm to pass, only to resume her journey thereafter, the relentless creature swiftly changed direction and resumed its pursuit. It was clear that it had picked up on her very scent.

Her nimble form weaved through the maze-like passages, utilizing every ounce of agility to stay one step ahead. She leaped over jagged rocks, squeezed through narrow gaps, and ducked beneath low-hanging roots. The monstrous worm, its hideous features illuminated by faint patches of bio luminescent moss, was a terrifying sight. Its elongated body writhed with insatiable hunger, its gaping maw ready to feast.

She spotted a thin ledge jutting out from the tunnel wall, offering a momentary respite. With a burst of energy, she propelled herself onto it, narrowly evading the worm. Spotting a network of exposed plant roots above, she reached out and swung herself onto them, propelling her small frame forward. The worm lunged, narrowly

missing her as she swung out of its reach. With lightning speed, she dropped onto a nearby rock ledge and continued her frenetic escape.

The tunnels stretched out before Gwendolyn, a familiar path she had traversed during their long and arduous journey. Her feet carried her forward with purpose, the relentless worm in hot pursuit. They had been running for what felt like an eternity, their chase spanning great distances.

Breathless, she unleashed a piercing whistle that echoed through the tunnels, a plea for aid that carried her hopes and fears. She ran forward through a tunnel until it came to a clear and sudden stop, as only darkness could be seen below. With a leap of faith, she soared off a ledge, heart pounding.

In that critical moment, a blur of brown fur materialized beneath her, in mid air. Gwendolyn found herself atop the saddle of her loyal companion, Rufus, a plump and nimble tunnel rat. His twitching whiskers and keen black eyes reflected his unwavering loyalty.

The plump rat gracefully landed on the ground, its nimble feet making a soft thud upon impact.

"Ru, Ru!" Gwendolyn exclaimed, her voice filled with affection as she wrapped her arms around the rat's head. She retrieved a small piece of dried cheese from her pocket, a modest treat for a rat of his stature, yet cherished all the same.

Their reunion was short-lived as the worm crashed through the tunnel walls, its monstrous presence shaking the ground. Gwendolyn and Rufus knew they had to keep moving, staying one step ahead of their relentless pursuer. With a firm command, she urged Rufus forward.

Pack rats and gnomes may not possess great strength, but their swiftness more than compensates for it. The burrowing worm, like its subterranean counterparts, proved no match for the untamed agility of a sprinting pack rat. Within moments, the worm found itself abandoned, meandering through the darkness while Gwendolyn and Rufus hastened toward the realm of light.

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The fleetness of the subterranean dwellers was renowned, akin to legends and tales of old. They surged through the depths, their pace unyielding, traversing underground for hours on end. As the span of twenty-four hours unfolded, the two neared a dwarf settlement, where their elders would know what to do with the information.

With a tired trot, the rat ventured into a slumbering cavern, where tiny beings found solace. The walls of the cavern bore meticulously carved buildings, seamlessly hewn into the sturdy stone. Elaborate niches ascended the walls, housing multiple tiers of homes that accommodated numerous dwarf families, and production facilities.

Rufus came to a gentle halt upon reaching a small sign that proclaimed, "Welcome to Mushy Caverns."

Two formidable Dwarfs, towering over Gwendolyn's small gnome form, cautiously approached with spears held at the ready.

"Declare your purpose," one of the guards demanded.

Gwendolyn furrowed her brow, a mix of exhaustion and defiance evident on her face. "Boy, oh boy. There's no need for spiky metal. I'm just a gnome, can't you see? I bring tidings and a warning from the treacherous depths beyond the light."

Gwendolyn's response took the guards by surprise, causing their stern demeanor to waver. She gracefully dismounted from Rufus, her loyal pack rat, and presented them with the carefully transcribed parchment. One of the dwarfs cautiously took the parchment and began to read aloud, his annoyance evident as he stumbled over the detailed account. However, as he reached the speaker's words, a flicker of recognition crossed his face. Instantly, his annoyance turned into a sense of urgency, and he motioned for Gwendolyn to proceed. With a grateful nod, she and Rufus entered Mushy Caverns, ready to share the vital information they had gathered.

Leaving Rufus to rest outside, Gwendolyn stepped into the vast interior of the cavern city. The tight corridors and labyrinthine junctions were enough to confuse even the most experienced traveler. However, Gwendolyn was not deterred. She approached a group of friendly inhabitants who were enjoying the vibrant life of the city. Politely asking for directions, she was swiftly guided to

the only Elder awake at that late hour.

As she approached the Elder's dwelling, she encountered a series of perplexing challenges. First, Gwendolyn was redirected to a different tunnel by a guard, where they instructed her to fill out a requisition form for an audience with the elder. Gwendolyn furrowed her brow in confusion.

With focused hands, she carefully inked the details on the form, outlining the urgency of their visit and the crucial information they carried. The paper, now filled with their mission's essence, was handed over to the clerk, who pointed her towards another office to obtain the all-important approval stamp. The catch was, this office lay on the far side of the cavernous complex.

Gwendolyn skillfully weaved through the labyrinthine corridors, deftly avoiding the bustling dwarfs and the threat of being trampled under their colossal feet. Upon reaching the office, a disappointing sign greeted her, declaring the closure for a mushroom and moss break.

“I guess sometimes the most urgent thing you can do is sit still...” She told herself.

During the seemingly endless wait, Gwendolyn adeptly maneuvered through the crowd, using her diminutive size to her advantage as she sidestepped the much larger dwarfs. With each step, the anticipation of the mission's success grew stronger, driving her to stay focused despite the weariness that weighed on her shoulders.

Finally, the lunch hour passed, and the office doors creaked open. Gwendolyn stepped inside with renewed determination, her eyes fixed on obtaining the elusive approval stamp. However, the stern-faced clerk demanded additional documentation and references, threatening to dampen their spirits. Frustration threatened to overwhelm Gwendolyn, but she summoned her inner strength and remained composed.

She engaged in a grueling process of explanations, persuasions, and cleverly worded arguments to convince the clerk of the vital importance of the message. It was a mental duel of wills, but Gwendolyn's tenacity eventually triumphed. The approval stamp was reluctantly applied.

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A mixture of relief and exasperation filled Gwendolyn's heart as she finally approached the Elder's chambers. Presenting the now-stamped form to the guarding dwarf. The doors creaked open, revealing a sight that took them by surprise. A mushroom-munching, plump gnome sat nonchalantly on the floor

“All hail the elder of dusk, Sir Shroom-Hat!” The guard announced.

“I thought the elders were suppose to be dwarfs?” Gwendolyn asked.

The fat Elder let out a loud laugh. “they’re all asleep, the foolish ones know nothing of the consultation of the late evening!” He said before munching down on some mushrooms.

“Ummm, I have some dire news...”

Gwendolyn anticipated a lengthy and arduous task of conveying the urgency of the situation to the elder, who was nestled among a cluster of mushrooms. However, to her astonishment, the stout gnome attentively listened to every word she spoke and carefully examined the parchment she presented. He praised her meticulous writing and keen attention to detail, recognizing her efforts.

Without wasting a moment, the Elder consumed the contents of the parchment, absorbing the information. His brows furrowed in deep contemplation as he pondered the gravity of the impending danger. Gwendolyn's heart raced, anxiously awaiting his response. He slowly picked a mushroom and chewed on it, savoring it’s flavor.

“I sit here often, I think even more.”

“...Go on.” Gwendolyn urged him.

“I think it is peculiar that a gnome would be the one to find out about the plight of man, and the on goings of the above world. That a gnome would bring such a message to a dwarf settlement and get a chance to speak with the only gnome Elder about. The light has great plans for you. I think this, yes I do.”

Gwendolyn nodded. “So the dwarfs will do something?!?”

“No! The dwarfs would have you collect a petition, formally register a plea hearing, and being carried all about the court chambers for hearings before making a move. This needs the keen

senses of a gnome, I will arm you and give you aid, that, I will do.”

“Aid?” Gwendoly asked.

“Yup, yup, just a second.” He tilted his head back into the doorway. “Hermann!” He called out. “Hermann I have a task for you!”

As Gwendolyn waited for the elder's response, the sound of approaching footsteps caught her attention. She turned her gaze towards the source and noticed a figure emerging from behind the large frame of the elder. With a clumsy stumble, a brown haired gnome with a relatively tall stature was called before them.

“Hermann, I have a mighty task for you.”

Hermann looked around and both the elder and the unfamiliar girl in their presence. “Yes sir?”

“I need you to escort our friend here to the surface, and you will need to use the quickest way.”

“But Elder Shroom-Hat that passage is blocked by rat riders!”

“Indeed, that is why you are to armor your pack rats and be ready to defend yourselves. I need you to fill out two armory forms and get them stamped; agusto!” He looked over to Gwendolyn, “this might take a little while, come on in!” He struggled to lay on his side, and eventually rolled himself down the dark hall, falling out of sight.

Hermann let out a light sigh, “well I’ll be back.” He turned and walked slumped over.

Gwendolyn said in her most cheerful voice, “Thank you, my pack rat and I owe you a lot.”

He stopped in place and looked over his shoulder, his back a bit less slouched. “It’s what I do!” Gwendolyn stepped inside the dimly lit abode of the Elder. She found him seated at a long table in a spacious yet sparsely furnished room. The walls were adorned with portraits of renowned gnomes from bygone eras, capturing their noble visages as they sat in the very room she now stood in.

"Sit, sit, sit," the Elder beckoned from his imposing chair in a room filled with smaller, wooden seats.

"Thank you," Gwendolyn replied, carefully choosing the most

comfortable looking hard wooden chair she could find.

"We're sorry for the humble state of our abode. All our cushions are currently being washed. But we have more stressful matters to speak of. Reaching the humans will only be half the battle, perhaps even three-fourths. However, capturing their attention will prove to be quite the challenge. Have you ever conversed with those towering beings?"

"The little ones, the believers, those can see me sometimes," Gwendolyn answered.

"Indeed they can, small things mean nothing to big people. However, like many children, they are often met with disbelief. If you wish to capture the attention of the adults, you need to find one who is neither too old nor too young, somewhere in between."

"That sounds reasonable. But how can I make an older human listen?"

"That's why we have this," the elder said, rolling to the side and nearly toppling out of his chair. Behind him, a magnificent golden relic gleamed. "This is one of our cherished treasures, a medallion. It is sure to catch the eye of many humans."

Gwendolyn stood up as she gazed at the shine of it. She took some steps forward, the giant medallion was as large as she was. "How am I suppose to drag this across the under world?" She asked.

"Two pack rat's can drag this easily, I assume a traveling gnome like yourself has a pack rat in tow? Well we will get you three more, four pack rats can pull this on a small wagon like nothing."

She nodded, "I'm up for it! Though, I could use some rest."

Gwendolyn's steps echoed through the cavernous halls as she made her way to the room assigned for her much needed rest. The journey had taken its toll, her small form weary from the travel. Nestled in a cozy corner, she allowed herself to succumb to sleep's embrace, her breaths gradually slowing as dreams carried her away.

However, the peaceful rest Gwendolyn desperately needed was soon interrupted. The serenity of the moment was shattered by an explosion of sound. The noise echoed and bounced off the walls

of the corridor, creating a jarring chorus of chaos that filled the air with an unanticipated sense of urgency. The sudden intrusion had yanked her from the clutches of sleep, leaving her senses heightened as she frantically tried to decipher the origin of this disruptive commotion.

Gwendolyn swiftly collected her belongings and hurried out of the snug bed. Her senses sharpened as she took in the scene before her and peeked her head out of the door to her room. An upheaval of once organized belongings, an unspoken testimony to the whirlwind of events that had unfolded, in the once ordered living area. In the midst of this chaos, her eyes fell upon the void left by the missing medallion, a sudden and stark realization striking her like a lightning bolt.

“Hello?” She called, before walking out into the wrecked room. She made her way to the front door, where she saw Elder Shroom-Hat sitting on his rear outside.

“Guess who’s awake!” She said.

He looked over his shoulders, “ah, hello there! Hermann is preparing the wagon now. The little guy dragged off that heavy medallion all by his tiny self, oh what wanders a young gnome can do, what wanders indeed! Nonetheless, you ready for that; there journey? It’s going to be rather dangerous you know?”

“So that was you guys making all that noise? Also you mention something called a rat rider? Also, Also are they dangerous?”

“Yes, yes, yes, rat riders are the only thing that can keep up with a pack rat. Those small mice, too small to carry heavy pack; sometimes go bad on us. They ride strange mechanical things with turning wheels.”

“Bad rats on wheels. I heard of them before, but I never seen one.”

“You will young Gwendolyn, do what Hermann says, he traveled those paths before, so you know he’s a good boy. He will show you how to protect yourself. I think it’s time you go meet with him, an old Elder like me needs his shrooms and rest.”

She nodded with a chuckle, “It was fun getting to spend time with you Elder Shroom-Hat.”

He returned a light chuckle, “theres always room for a gnome in our home.” He gave her a light bow and took off his Shroom covered hat, bidding her farewell.

Gwendolyn hurried down the long and perfectly carved halls of the dwarf city, her destination clear in her mind. As she made her way through the bustling corridors, she eventually reached the lower levels. There, on the dirt floor of the cavern, she spotted the giant medallion resting atop a four-wheeled wagon. A group of four brown furred rats, one of which was Rufus.

Her heart warmed at the sight of Rufus among them, and she couldn't resist giving him a loving cuddle. Rufus's soft fur brushed against her cheek, offering a sense of comfort and familiarity amidst their journey.

“We’re almost there buddy, just one more big run and we can get a real rest afterwards, I hope.” She said.

She gave Rufus a light kiss and took her step atop the wagon next to Hermann, who looked slightly worried yet stern.

“You ready?” He asked.

"It's been a while since I rode on a wagon. Feels a bit strange, but I'm ready!" Her gaze fixated on Hermann's fantastical scatter gun laying atop of his lap. The hollow interior reverberated with the soft rattling of the small pebbles it held. “Rat riders that bad here?”

He nodded approvingly. "They may be faster than us, but they won't outsmart us." He reached into his side holster and pulled out a small, compact hand cannon designed for shooting larger pebbles. "This here is the pebble blaster. It packs quite a punch, so be prepared for a kick." Gwendolyn took a moment to examine the hollow design, listening to the faint rattling sound of the larger pebbles contained within the grip of the weapon, much like Hermanns.

The wagon's wheels creaked into motion as the lively rats harnessed their energy, propelling the wagon forward along the compact dirt floor. A gated entrance loomed ahead, blocking their path, its rusty hinges groaning in protest as it swung open. The resounding echo of the gate's movement reverberated through the long, dark cavern. Allowing the wagon to disappear into the

depths.

As they sped along the pitch black, Hermann began to hum a familiar tune while securing a small light to his helmet. Gwendolyn's ears perked up as she recognized the melody once again, and she couldn't resist joining in, humming along with him. The rhythmic vibrations of the wheels beneath them added a playful beat to their impromptu duet, making their journey through the dark cavern a bit more cheerful.

As Hermann held the sturdy pebble gun in his hands, the clinking of stones inside the tin added a subtle base. Their cheerful melody resonated through the vast, expanding tunnel, filling the air with a sense of adventure. Unbeknownst to them, the soft humming caught the attention of small mice-like creatures lurking in the darkness. These tiny creatures saw an opportunity for mischief and swiftly donned tiny helmets before jumping onto their makeshift motorbikes, ready to ride.

“You hear that?” Hermann asked.

“Rat riders, right?”

“That's right. They like shiny things so don't let them get close to the medallion.”

She nodded. “I can hear their engines, and I might be able to smell them. Something smoggy.”

“That's them alright!” Hermann perched his scatter gun on the wood of the wagon to get a good aim into the darkness behind them. The sounds of tiny engines approaching reverberated off the cavernous walls.

Gwendolyn's heart raced with anticipation as she braced herself, peering into the black. The soft hum of approaching engines grew louder, their smoky scent filling the air as she prepared for the imminent encounter.

The tiny motorbikes emerged from the shadows, their headlights casting eerie glows. The rat riders wore mischievous grins as they closed in on the wagon. Gwendolyn's eyes narrowed, her senses heightened as she caught glimpses of their mischievous forms.

Hermann sprang into action, his scatter gun thundering as he fired

a volley of pebbles at the oncoming swarm. The tiny projectiles whizzed through the air, sending the rat riders veering off course, one rider smashed into the ground. The tiny mouse jumped to his feet and shook his fist at them.

Gwendolyn stood firm, her nimble fingers working skillfully to unload and reload her pebble blaster. She took a measured breath before zeroing in on the swiftly approaching riders. Her shot soared through the air, connecting with precision and sending one of the motorbikes into a skidding spiral. Another rider was forced off course. With a quick calculation, Gwendolyn realized that six adversaries remained. Side by side, Gwendolyn and Hermann raised their pebble blasters.

Adapting swiftly to the situation, the rat riders displayed impressive agility, performing intricate maneuvers that allowed them to avoid the pebbles Gwendolyn and Hermann skillfully launched. The wagon beneath them rocked and swayed in response to the rapid pursuit, yet the determined pair stood their ground, unyielding in their defensive stance.

With impressive coordination, Rufus and the other rats took charge of the wagon's movements. Their tiny paws sped across the tunnel floor, and they navigated the wagon with astonishing skill and precision. Gwendolyn marveled at their intelligence and teamwork, as they swerved and dodged with remarkable agility.

"Go, Rufus! Left! Right! Faster!" Gwendolyn encouraged, her voice filled with excitement. The rats responded to her commands with an almost gnome-like understanding, guiding the wagon through the twisting tunnels with ease.

As the wagon thundered forward, Hermann's eyes lit up with a daring plan. "I've got an idea! There's an underground canyon up ahead, and the rat riders won't dare to follow us there!"

Gwendolyn's mind rushed with a mix of excitement and apprehension, but she trusted Hermann's instincts. Without hesitation, she nodded in agreement. "Let's do it! Lead the way!"

The rat riders persisted, closing in as they neared the edge of a dark abyss. With a burst of courage, Hermann urged the rats to go faster. As the wagon approached the edge, Gwendolyn's breath caught in her throat. The canyon yawned before them, its depths shrouded

in darkness. For a moment, doubt crept into her mind, but the unwavering resolve in Hermann's eyes fueled her determination.

With a fierce cry, Hermann commanded the rats to take the leap. The rats sprung into action, their powerful legs launching the wagon into the air with a surge of force. The heavy vehicle defied gravity, its wheels soaring gracefully over the expanse of the gaping chasm. In that suspended moment, time seemed to stretch, allowing the adventurers to savor each heartbeat and every breath as they hung in the embrace of uncertainty. The rush of wind whistled around them, creating a symphony of exhilaration that engulfed their senses.

At the very edge of the canyon, the rat riders found themselves caught in a moment of profound hesitation. Unable to muster the same courage as Gwendolyn and her companions. With wide eyes, they observed the spectacle before them. As the wagon gracefully cleared the gap, a mix of admiration and envy painted their expressions.

With a heartening thud, the wagon found its footing on the opposite side of the canyon, its wheels meeting the solid ground once more. A triumphant exchange of glances passed between the valiant gnomes.

"We did it!" Gwendolyn said.

Hermann grinned, his eyes shining with pride. "We sure did! And the rat riders won't be following us anytime soon."

Through the twists and turns, they encountered sparkling crystal formations and glowing mushrooms that cast an ethereal light on their path. The soft murmur of underground streams added to the symphony of the caverns, their rhythmic flow weaving a soothing melody.

Gwendolyn's eyes widened as they rested near an underground stream, its cascading waters falling gracefully into a shimmering pool below an exposed root system. The temperature dropped, and Gwendolyn exhaled, her breath visible in the chilly air.

"We can climb from here." Hermann said as he dismounted the wagon. "It'll take some time to haul this all the way up, better get

something to munch on.”

“Looks heavy, I think humans just like heavy things, or shiny things like the rat riders.”

“Humans do what humans do, I think it makes rest and munch time last longer, everyone likes a long rest.”

“No time to be lazy.” Gwendolyn halfheartedly replied as she rummaged through ample pockets, searching for a special woolen sack adorned with a vibrant ribbon. With a deft movement, she untied the ribbon, revealing an array of mouthwatering mushrooms and dried roots.

After taking a satisfying munch break of her road provisions, Gwendolyn gracefully dismounted the wagon, her nimble form landing with a gentle hop. With a purposeful stride, she set out to gather food for their rat companions. Meanwhile, Hermann skillfully unhooked the rats from their reins, granting them the freedom to roam and graze.

Herman looked at the larger roots, “we haul the medallion up, up, up. It’s not as far as it looks, though it will feel like it’s farther than it is.”

“Humans up there?” She replied, while picking dried roots out of her teeth.

“Yes, always hear the rumbling of moving humans in big machines. I never wanted to get close, guess we have to now.”

“I’m sorry Hermann.”

“Don’t be, I’ll tell great stories of this journey.”

The cavern's chilly air gnawed at their bones, making the idea of resting alluring. But Gwendolyn's determined eyes locked onto the path ahead. She knew they couldn't afford to waste time, not when their mission hung in the balance. Hermann acknowledged her unspoken plea, standing beside her with a resolute nod.

The gnomes worked swiftly, gathering fibers from the large roots that towered before them. With practiced hands, they deftly twisted and braided the fibers, transforming them into sturdy cords of rope. Their nimble fingers fashioned harnesses and skillfully tied them to the now rope-covered medallion. Working together in perfect

harmony, they discovered that their combined strength was more than enough to bear the weight of the precious artifact as they prepared to ascend the near vertical roots.

Gwendolyn was the first to take the lead, her adventurous spirit guiding her every move. She carefully tested her foothold on the rough surface of the roots before she began her ascent. The rope felt reassuringly taut beneath her grasp, providing the stability she needed to climb with confidence.

Hermann followed closely behind, his agile movements mirroring Gwendolyn's. His heart pounded with excitement and a touch of trepidation as he ascended the roots. Yet, his trust in the rope and in his fellow gnome bolstered his resolve. The medallion, now suspended between them, swayed gently with each upward step. Its golden surface glinted in the faint light filtering through the cavern, a testament to the importance of their mission.

The cavern walls echoed with the soft sounds of their footfalls and the gentle creaking of the ropes. It was a symphony of adventure, harmonizing with the heartbeat of their adventurous spirits. As they ascended to the surface, cracks of light pierced through the hardened dirt surrounding them, gradually giving way to soft, and much warmer sands. Gwendolyn and Hermann felt the tiny granules slipping between their fingers as they emerged into the open air. The world above trembled from a distant rumble, heightening their sense of adventure. Gwendolyn basked in the warmth of the rays, feeling its direct touch on her tiny gnome hand.

Together, they hoisted up the medallion, its golden surface gleaming under the light. Finding themselves in the midst of a rough and scorching desert, Gwendolyn and Hermann knew they had to adapt quickly to the extreme heat. They used whatever rags they had to cover their faces, seeking refuge from the blazing sun. Amidst the heat, a distant rumbling caught their attention. They turned their gaze toward the horizon, where a strange vehicular machine was approaching. Its appearance was unlike anything they had encountered before, and curiosity mingled with caution as they observed its approach.

“Only humans drive such big vehicles, we need to stop them somehow!” Hermann shouted.

With synchronized movements, the two gnomes carefully

positioned the medallion to catch the sunlight and direct its luminous beam toward the approaching mechanized vehicle. As the peculiar machine drew nearer, the light danced and shimmered on its metallic surface, creating a mesmerizing spectacle. The vehicle's design was unlike anything they had encountered in their fantastical adventures.

The sand beneath it shifted and swirled, revealing more of the massive machine. It was a sight to behold, adorned with metal plates that bore scars and scorch marks, evidence of battles past. What struck them most were the bipedal, heavily armored legs that served as its means of movement, replacing the conventional wheels they were accustomed to seeing.

The machine resembled a formidable fortress of war, each side bristling with colossal weapons, ready to unleash devastating power. Its imposing presence filled the air with tension, and the quake of the earth shifted the gnomes so much they lost grasp of the medallion and parted with the sands. The hulking machine would come to a stop, giving the gnomes the time to hoist themselves from the grasp of the hot desert. Gwendolyn patted herself down as an unseen layer of dust fell upon her.

“Boy, oh boy this is no good!” She pouted.

As the dust settled, Gwendolyn's keen eyes caught a glimmer of light, the medallion's shine barely visible above the sandy surface. Hermann was already sprinting toward it, a determined figure in the distance. At the same time, the sound of heavy footsteps approached, indicating the presence of humans drawing near.

"Hermann, we need to make them notice us!" Gwendolyn's urgent voice rang out as she joined the race toward the medallion. She grabbed a nearby piece of cloth and waved it fervently above her head, the colorful fabric catching the light and dancing in the wind like a beacon.

Hermann picked up on the idea and rummaged through his pockets, pulling out a small mirror that he angled to reflect the light towards the approaching group. The combination of the waving cloth and the glinting mirror created a dazzling display, a message of hope amidst the barren landscape. The gnomes' actions were an invitation, a plea for attention from those who could help them.

As the dust parted, two sets of footsteps could be heard approaching the small pair. The gnomes stood atop of the medallion as two large figures approached from the machine of war. The towering figures were clad in military uniforms that exuded a sense of mechanical artistry. As one of the figures bent down, a twist of the face mask revealed the countenance of a young, curious individual hidden beneath the imposing military guise.

"It... It's a gnome," The thunderous sound of his voice reverberated through the tiny beings, causing the hats of the small gnomes to topple off their heads as he spoke.

A third set of foot steps approached from behind the soldiers and a sturdy yet mellow voice demanding their attention. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Sir!" The other soldier called out before they both stood at attention.

A tall man with a beard and broad shoulders, dressed in the crisp white uniform of an officer, directed his gaze to where the soldiers were looking. There, perched atop the gleaming medallion, were two gnomes peacefully resting. He knelt down into the sands and looked at their remarkable form.

"What do we have here..."

With a gentle gesture, he extended his open hand, inviting the small gnomes to step into his warm embrace. Gwendolyn and Hermann both removed their recently recovered hats before bravely taking a step forward into the silky gloved hand of the officer. After they did he carefully pulled them close to him to inspect.

He whispered to them, "I haven't seen one of you since I was a child, I always wandered if it was more than just a fantastical fiction I pondered?"

Gwendolyn made subtle hand gestures to signal her intent, and he nodded in understanding. With a gentle smile, he placed his hand on his shoulder, allowing the tiny gnomes to take hold of his finely crafted uniform and find a resting spot on him. With nimble movements, Gwendolyn climbed up the officer's shoulder, gently

brushing aside strands of his hair to make herself comfortable next to his ear. The officer remained as still as possible, allowing her to settle in place. With great care, she unfurled the hand-written scroll and began to read its contents aloud.

The officer fought back a chuckle as he heard her tiny voice echoing in his ears. His smile caught the attention of the other men, who looked on in awe at the unusual sight. With a mix of wonder and confidence, their commanding officer displayed a bright smile. However, that expression soon turned to concern as the gravity of the gnomes' message sank in.

“Commander Irons, Whats wrong?” One of the men asked.

Their officer quickly began a sudden walk back to the Mechanized contraption for which he came, with gnomes in tow. “We got a message to deliver, and we got a randevu with destiny!”

“Wait, you’re taking us with you?” A tiny gnome voice echoed in his ear.

“I have to, there needs to be proof of your message, and everyone knows a gnome doesn’t lie, at least anyone who knows gnomes exist that is.”

The two soldiers following behind their commander dawned looks of confusion as they blindly followed the encouragable officer.

“Lies are yucky! We can’t be gone long. We have friends waiting for us!” Gwendolyn replied

His footsteps began to clank on a metallic surface as the light faded into a dim darkness of the mechs interior.

“I am afraid this is grander than us. If what you say is true, all of Whitlow is in danger, and we’re the only mechanized units in the area, forgive me for the late introductions. I am Commander Rich Iron, entrusted leader of the Desert Ranger Core Mechanized Private Legions. You are my esteemed guests.”

As Gwendolyn stepped down from his hair covered shoulder, the heavy bi-pedal legs of the mech began to propel forward. She found herself inside a moving canister, the space around her was vast and filled with intricate machinery, all operated by levers, gears, and glowing buttons. The ceiling soared high above her.

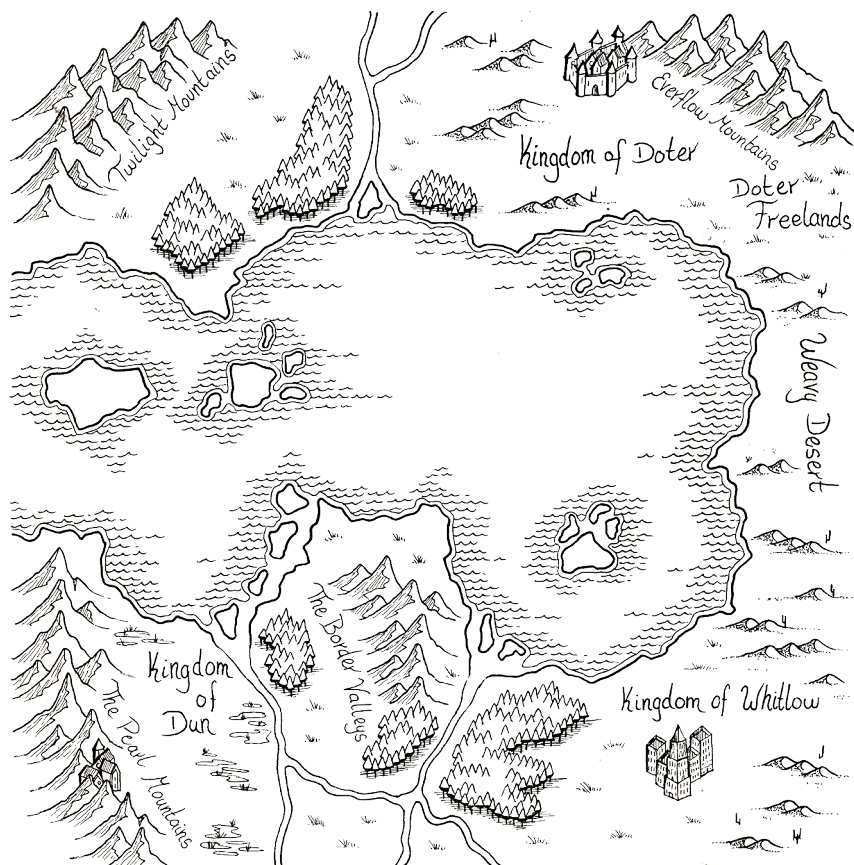
The walls were made of metal, with pipes and dials scattered here and there, giving the place a curious mix of advanced technology and rugged charm.

From the vantage point of the towering window, Gwendolyn stood next to Hermann as they beheld a breathtaking sight. The endless expanse of the desert sprawled before them, a vast and untamed wilderness reaching to the very horizon. Each grain of sand seemed to shimmer like a sea of gold. As their eyes shifted, they beheld other awe-inspiring war machines, powerful and majestic, their metal frames gleaming like beacons in the desert's fiery glow. All moving in formation towards a dark horizon.

“Boy oh boy. How do I get into these kinda things?”

GLIMMERLEAF

MAP OF THE LANDS OF LIGHT



Thank You For Reading!

This is the 2nd edition of Glimmerleaf, a wanderous little tale that was a joy to write, I appreciate all those who take the time to explore this amazing world of mine. A Special thanks to the voice actors who helped creat the full cast dramatized audio book that was released as a companion for this 2nd edition.

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A WORLD WITHOUT END SHORT STORY

GWENDOLYN
GLIMMERLEAF

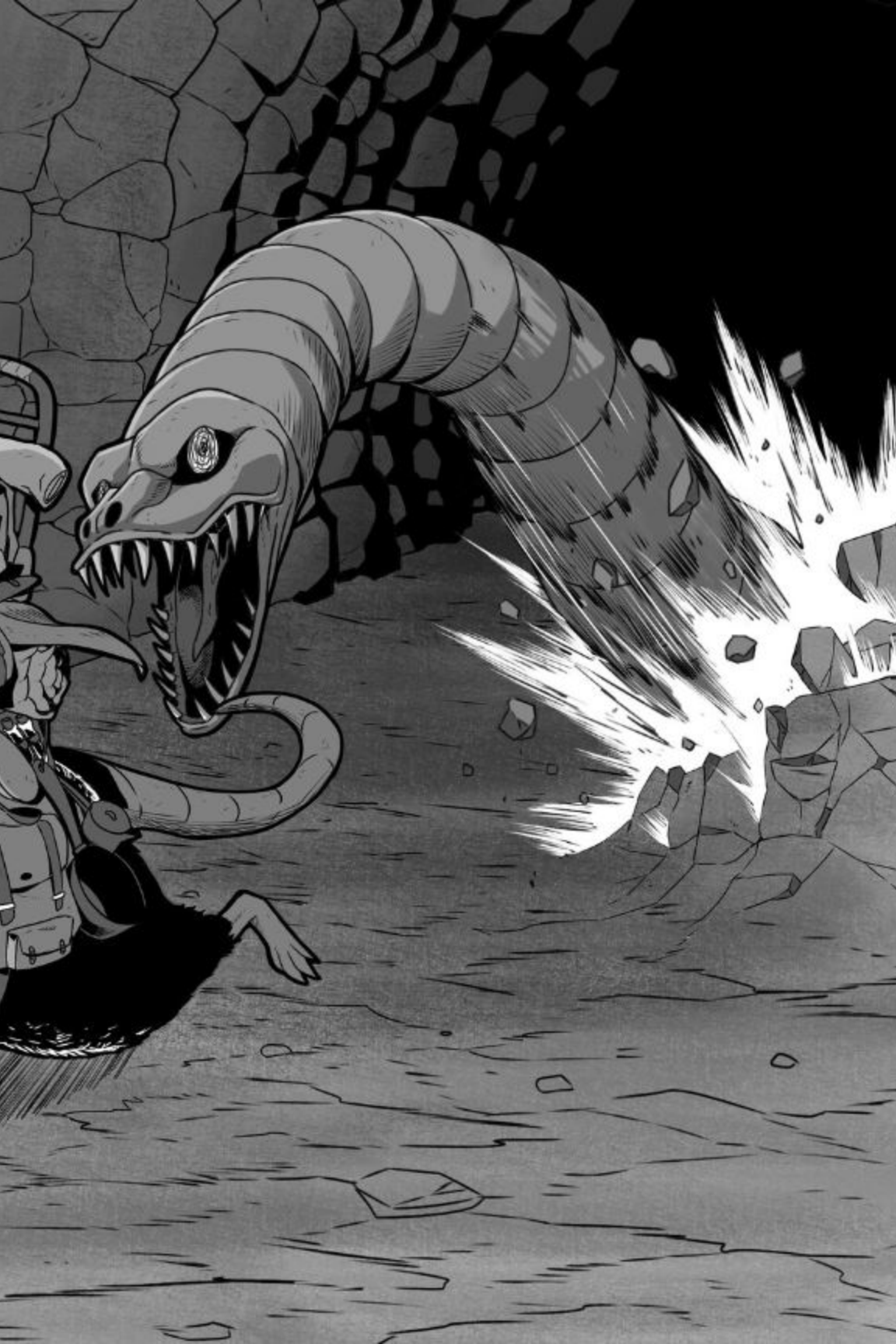




COMMANDER
RICH IRONS









Twilight Mountains

Kingdom of Dun

The Pearl Mountains

The Border Valleys