[GM Note: This was an interesting adventure. It combined the old group and new group, mixing, trading and dismissing PCs while blending details of what happened from the Shadowfell and Tallow’s Deep mini-campaigns with new Thunderspire material].

Two uneventful weeks have passed since the Heroes of Winterhaven destroyed Kalarel, Priest of Orcus, in the bowels of Shadowfell Keep. For the most part the goblin tribes have been disbanded, the kobolds are laid low, and temporary peace has settled upon the region. Helga, Kerric, Splug, Irann, Brandis and Erevan spend time relaxing after the ordeal, which means guzzling mead at Salvana Wrafton’s Inn and eating their fill of honey, bread, fruit and cheese. They’re heroes after all, and Thair Coalstriker, the lame dwarf smithy, works even harder to finish their bronze effigy in the town square.

Right now they’re biding time until the next full moon when they are to meet the Frog Queen on Jade Hill and turn over Irontooth’s hands. Only Helga and Brandis saw the Frog Queen before, so the others are extremely curious as to what sort of entity this is.

[Minor Quest]

Kerric, the Paladin of Kelemvor, hangs around just long enough to make sure that all is well, and then he bids goodbye, packs his belongings and returns to the Church to report
the resounding success of his mission (GM Note: we kicked him out fast, or he’d NEVER leave after catching wind of Vecna! A barbarian is replacing the paladin).

But there are still a few issues that concern the party, and oddly enough, it has to do with the dead necromancer Kalarel.

After defeating him, they had rummaged through his lair and discovered a number of items, some mundane and some magical, but one in particular Erevan did not inspect until recently. What he assumed was a vile spellbook was actually a vile journal written in Kalarel’s flowery script. Much of it was egotistical ranting like “blah blah blah…kill those who oppose Orcus…blah blah blah…I’m great and powerful and special…blah blurh blurh,” and Erevan found himself skipping over most of it…

…until he reached the end. Two sheets of paper were folded there, neither one written by Kalarel, and were in fact letters TO Kalarel:
Greetings Kalarel,
I have recently learned of your activity in the area and have an offer for you. During your time in this region, if you should capture any humanoids, we are eager to buy them. We have duergar allies in Thunderspire in need of slave stock. If you are interested, send an envoy back to me. My messengers will show the way.

Chief Krand of the Bloodreavers
Erevan reads them first, and then shares the information with his companions. Vecna is a demonic god of Knowledge, Secrets and Mysteries, known and worshipped by only a few madmen and liches [GM Note: the pantheon in this campaign is a mix of Realms and default core deities]. They are not sure what to make of this, but it implies that there are hostile parties in the region, and that Kalarel may very well have friends more dangerous than himself. Winterhaven, perhaps, is not as safe as they assumed, and this greatly

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**MY DEAR KALAREL...**

I hope that this letter finds your black soul hale and healthy. You will be interested to know that I have come across a magical pen and parchment, a gift from the bloodsavers who found it in an old shrine called the Chamber of Eves. A curious relic indeed, for as you see, it allows me to write upon a scrap of parchment here, and you see the result inscribed there, which I argue in still bone dark, stinking ruin near Winterhaven. Really, my friend, you should aspire to loftier goals. It is beneath your station, those of our prestige and ambitions could have all of Aber-Toril in our grasp if we but chose it.

And do you still converse with those idiotic dead things? Please, Kalarel, a true hero of power lies not in the wills of minions of orgues. Only Lord Vecna coerces the most powerful of the undying, and his glorious might is a true testament to Undeath, spinning the aeons for all eternity. Surely you can see that, can’t you?

Ah, but I suspect not, hence your blind devotion to a demonic god who cares nothing about you. But what is a little professional rivalry and jealousies between friends? Although I doubt you would truly call me a friend. My heart still beats, Blood still flows in my veins, and my flesh has not yet rotted and blackened, like that of your true friends.

But I digress, I did not pick up this quill to mock you, despite the pleasure I had a true reason, my project is proceeding according to plan and nearing completion. But in my search, I have come across the name of a place of which I’ve never heard —

**-The Pyramid of Shadows. Do you know of it? According to the ancient grimoire I acquired, there could very well be a powerful relic to Lord Vecna housed within the pyramid, but I believe it might reside in an extrahuman dimension outside of time and space. Your close connection to the Shadowfell might allow me a way to investigate closer. To peer back the nifty veil between worlds and step through.**

Please let me know if you have any knowledge of the pyramid or magical advice, and I will be most grateful.

Your peer...but clear superior.

P.S. And please do destroy this letter.

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Erevan reads them first, and then shares the information with his companions. Vecna is a demonic god of Knowledge, Secrets and Mysteries, known and worshipped by only a few madmen and liches [GM Note: the pantheon in this campaign is a mix of Realms and default core deities]. They are not sure what to make of this, but it implies that there are hostile parties in the region, and that Kalarel may very well have friends more dangerous than himself. Winterhaven, perhaps, is not as safe as they assumed, and this greatly
troubles Brandis Padraig. His hometown has suffered in the past few months, including the murder of his youngest brother, Kel, at the hands of bloodthirsty marauders.

During the interim while they wait for the full moon, while on a lone patrol one day through the countryside, Brandis hears the sounds of pursuit through the underbrush, followed by an ear-splitting caterwaul. Moments later a panther emerges from the bushes, and Brandis damn near skewers it on the tip of Wolftooth, but then the panther fluidly transforms into a man-shaped panther wearing hide armor, and wielding a bloody falchion in its hands.

“Did you see a gnoll pass this way, human? Be quick! It is a dangerous thing.”

[GM Note: This was actually a small scenario carried out the week before to explain how Xenoseth met the others in Winterhaven.]

Well no, Brandis stammers, still unsure of this Cat Man’s motives. He did not see a gnoll pass by, but the warlord agrees that such creatures are dangerous, although he has never personally fought one. The Cat Man’s ears twitch.

“Did you hear that? A hyena whining. To the north! Follow me!” He bounds off, and Brandis, confused, lumbers behind.

They find a dilapidated barn house, the roof caving in, rotting straw falling from the bale loft. For a moment they see a normal hyena lurking in the entrance, and then it darts back inside. The sun is bright and the day is hot, and both Cat Man and warlord feel brave. They kick the doors in, only to find an arrow whizzing down from the rafters!

A ferocious, wounded gnoll is hiding above them, but it cannot withstand the combined attacks of Xenoseth and Brandis. They manage to knock it down, blasting the wind from its lungs, and quickly finish it off before it can rise.

Wiping the sweat from their brows, the cat man and warlord shake hands, introduce themselves, and Brandis asks Xenoseth if he would like to accompany him to Winterhaven. Wary of such civilized places, Xenoseth nonetheless complies, as he has been on the run for days now from the Bloodreavers, ever since escaping the drow outside of the Seven-Pillared Hall.

At Salvana Wrafton’s Inn, the shifter Xenoseth is introduced to Brandis’s friends. Naturally, stares are rude at first, but they soon find that Xenoseth is polite enough, although he has a wild air about him, and a deep, seething hatred of gnolls. They’re not quite sure why. Eventually the group’s conversation returns to the strange letters
regarding Kalarel, and the name of the “Bloodreavers” comes up again…and Xenoseth hears that.

The growl begins low in his throat, startling the others.

“I know of the slavers,” the shifter mutters, his lips peeled back in a black snarl. “I know them well…”

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A few more days pass, and then several new strangers enter town: a gruff human ranger (Douvan Stahl), a willowy female druid (Raven) and a battle-scarred genasi sword mage with glowing ember eyes (Nari-lana). But more interesting is the squealing critter they drag between them:

Balgron the Fat.

[GM Note: Merric the halfling and Jolen the Cleric have traveled north to Silverymoon to tell Merple about Balthazar, and to collect payment].
The Heroes of Winterhaven are shocked to see Boss Fatty, and Fatty is just as surprised to see them.

“No!” the fat goblin cries. “NO! Kalarel would ‘ave killed you! He had to! No!”

Well, that wasn’t the case, and then who should boldly strut the forefront of the crowd but iddle widdle Splug. The goblin tilts the pan on his head the other direction, draws in a breath, and then says to his former boss:

“Oh, oh, oh…you is gonna get it NOW, Fatty! Big meanie. Mmm-hmmm-mmmm-hmmm.”

[GM Note: Splug is slightly tougher than before, but not much].

Balgron pales from dark green to lighter green, and his jowls start shaking. The Tallow’s Deep party asks about a “reward” for this blubbering goblin, but no, there is no official reward for Balgron the Fat. While he was known as a goblin commander in the region, he kept a low profile and kept his nose out of any conflicts, letting his minions do the
dirty work. The heroes of Winterhaven are the only ones to have ever met him. It was the goblin Irontooth who was known by name as a terrorist in the region.

Brandis and the others decide to turn Balgon over to the official authorities, which means his father Lord Ernest Padraig and the Chief of the Regulars, Rond Kelfern.
Lord Ernest Padraig
of Winterhaven

Human Warlord
At the estate, Lord Padraig gravely observes their prisoner. Rond Kelfern watches as well, his expression stern but his eyes betray his opinion.

“So…this was the goblin leader at the Keep,” Lord Padraig finally says. “Responsible for many deaths all around Winterhaven I assume. He escaped you, but Fate has deemed he return here. Then it is the will of Kelemvor that we send this pathetic soul to the afterlife. I blame him for the death of my son Kel. Brandis, do as you want with this worthless mutt, but I want it done in public. The citizens need to see what happens to those who harm our community.”

Boss Fatty howls in terror, thrashing, but they’ve got him cuffed. There is no escape this time. Balgron is dragged to the town square and thrown down next to the larger than life gleaming bronze effigy of the Heroes of Winterhaven. He is given the option of fighting to the death, and it is actually Xenoseth the shifter who volunteers as an opponent. A crowd quickly gathers around the town square, including families and children who are treating it as a special event. Cheers rise and Xenoseth feels his heartbeat quickening. It’s just like his days in the drow gladiator arena!
Gobbo Goodnest the half-orc is even taking bets as to how long the goblin will survive. Sister Linora appears too, but she is displeased by the raw show of brutality. She shakes her head in disappointment, saddened at the state of affairs in Winterhaven, for violent only begets violence.
Gobbo Goodnest
Half - Orc Farmer
Thair Coalstriker tosses Balgron a crappy sword. Xenoseth hefts his twenty pound serrated falchion. Douvan the ranger shakes his head, unable to believe they brought the goblin all the way here just to have it chopped down. Hell, he could have done that himself! Screaming as loud as he can, Balgron charges the shifter, but Xenoseth easily sidesteps, bringing the flat of his blade down across the goblin’s shoulders. Balgron yelps and tumbles, sprawling face first in the street. More laughs and jeers ensue. Xenoseth is playing with him as a cat would toy with a mouse, but it seems to be what the crowd wants, and Xenoseth has learned how to work a crowd.

The battle is not a long one, and eventually Xenoseth tires of the game and finishes Balgron the Fat, tearing him down in cat form and crushing the life from him with his jaws. The light flees Balgron’s eyes, and the heroes of Winterhaven find one more foe put behind them. As fate would have it, Balgron should never have mentioned Winterhaven in the first place.

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Douvan, Nari-lana and Raven stick around for a few days, not quite ready to leave yet. The morning after Balgron’s execution is actually the day the heroes of Winterhaven
have been waiting for…the full moon, one month since they first met the Frog Queen on Jade Hill. Well, only Helga and Brandis actually met the Fey Queen, but the others have been anxious to see what all this mysterious talk about Irontooth’s hands will ultimately lead to.

Today is also special in another sense; it is the Cleansing of Sune holy day, where female worshippers of the fiery-haired Goddess of Beauty adorn sheer white silk robes and have Sister Linora—and her newest acolyte, Ninaran the Half-elf, newly liberated from her service to Kalarel—baptize them in a nearby pond on Old Eilian’s farm. But that event does not take place until later, well after sun down.

The day passes quietly, and later they are approached by the sly-eyed Bairwain Wildarson of the Shoppe of Curious Goodes, a trader and merchant with whom they have dealt before. His shop contains a fair number of rare items, including ones you would not normally find in a small hamlet like Winterhaven, but he has been tight-lipped about his source. Until now, anyway.

“Ah, friends, friends, good to see you,” he says. Everyone is gathered at Salvana’s taproom, enjoying some brews and playing cards and dice. Xenoseth is unfamiliar with this person, but the stink of commerce and greed crawls all over him. The shifter growls.
“I have a slight problem and thought perhaps you could help me. As you well know, I am a merchant in the region, and some of my most precious items are acquired from a trading post north of here, known as the Hall of Seven Pillars. For various reasons I cannot go into right now, I am not currently allowed there. However, if you would be willing to travel to the Hall and seek a man named GENDAR, tell him my name and trade this cask for what he gives you. But tell no one except Gendar my name! That is very important. Bring the item back to me and you’ll be rewarded.” [Minor Quest]

Well, the group is not averse to helping Bairwain. He has been reliable in the past, and they have bought magic items from his shelves. But they dig deeper; who exactly is this “Gendar”?

“Well,” says Bairwain sheepishly, “do not let his appearance perturb you. Gendar is a night elf, also known as a drow. But fear not! He has cast off his faith of the foul Spider
Queen Lloth and lives only for coin and commerce, such as myself. He can be trusted. Well, to an extent. Well, not too much.”

Xenoseth feels the hackles rise on the back of his neck. A drow merchant in the Hall of Seven Pillars? Excellent. He hates the drow only second to gnolls.

“I’ll take the cask to him personally,” growls Xenoseth, and yanks it from Bairwain’s hands. Bairwain nods, pleased that the Cat Man is so willing to help, but also slightly worried by the bloodlust in his eyes. Xenoseth watches him leave without saying another word.

This brings up a new issue that Xenoseth discusses with his allies:

“If I am to return to this place, I must use a disguise. The Bloodreavers will recognize me. We do not know their numbers or strength. We need to find them and get as close as possible.” They ask Erevan to start searching for a ritual that will magically disguise the shifter, and if nothing else he will wear a deep-hooded cowl.

Evening arrives, and then night envelopes the town, and the group finally sees the moon rise over the trees. It is a cool eve, right at the end of Mirtul, with summer just around the corner. Helga, Xenoseth, Erevan, Splug, Irann the Warlock and Brandis the Warlord trudge through the dense forest outside of Winterhaven on the way to Jade Hill.
The path is dark and overgrown, but they carry only a normal non-magical lantern. Strange night creatures chirp and flying bugs drone, but soon they leave the confines of the forest and clamber up the steep, dewy slopes of Jade Hill. The moon is a high bright orb, and they already see the swirling motes of light like tiny fireflies, although Helga
and Brandis know otherwise. Getting closer, they see the pinpricks of light for what they really are:

Mist seeps from the ground, an opaque, clammy cloud, and they see shapes marching through it. A familiar little man appears (familiar to Helga and Brandis), a goblin of some kind, and announces:

“I am Picklenose! Make way for the Frog Queen!”
Brandis and Helga remember Picknose’s sob story from last time: he once was a barber in Waterdeep until stolen and polymorphed to join the Frog Queen’s Court. More squat goblins clamber out of the mist, vicious redcaps and redscarfs that snarl and gurgle at the mortal trespassers on Jade Hill.

And soon enough, the Queen of the Court appears, first as just an indistinct billowing black shape in the mist, and then coalescing into the rotund Frog Queen in all her opulent glory.
“MORTALS…
HAVE YOU KEPT YOUR BARGAIN FROM THAT WEEK?
DID YOU BRING ME WHAT I SEEK?”

Brandis Padraig nods, and tentatively shows the fey queen Irontooth’s hands, the very same goblin hands that slew their friend Ash with a double edged axe.

“AHHHH……”

She slowly takes the hands, holding them to her ample bosom, and then closes her bulbous eyes, waving a webbed hand over the dead fingers and chanting in a deep, throbbing alien tongue. It is a magic ritual, cast with a speed and efficiency that impresses Erevan. The Frog Queen is done within moments, and to everyone’s surprise, Irontooth’s hands begin to twitch!

The fingers flex, muscles spasm, and to everyone’s shock, a ghostly apparition begins to form from the severed, stumpy ends. Within moments a phantom replica of Irontooth stands before them, his soulless black eyes shrouded by the pain and sorrow of eternal despair.
“IRONTOOTH!” bellows the Frog Queen. “HOW GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN. YOUR HANDS ARE STRONG. YOUR LIFE IS LONG. I BELIEVE IT’S TIME TO BEGIN. SO—RUB....MY....THIGHS!!!”

The indentured soul forlornly bends down, crying silent gray tears as it begins the first of many hundreds of thousands of massages upon the Frog Queens flabby, green, slightly slimy thighs. She moans with pleasure, and everyone looks away, just glad they’re not Irontooth, even if he is dead. The redscarfs, redcaps and faeries all chatter and laugh at Irontooth’s eternal fate, and the PCs still don’t know what he did to piss her off so much.
The Frog Queen is pleased that the mortals have fulfilled their side of the bargain, and she gives them a reward of four rare magical elixirs. But there is more.

She looks very serious, and speaks in a low, hushed voice, as the drone of faeries around her fades:

“TIME SWIRLS LIKE FOG IN THE FEYWILD, YES…and I can see all.

“BEWARE THE CRUEL ONE-EYED GOD, who seeks all knowledge, all mysteries abroad.

“BEWARE THE WELL WHERE DEMONS DWELL; a pit of night, a wyrm from hell.

“BEWARE THE CRUEL ONE-EYED GOD AND THE FACELESS ONES WHOM DEATH HAS SHOD.

“WE WILL MEET AGAIN, I'VE SEEN. ON ONE SIDE OF THE VEIL…OR BETWEEN!”

Gurgling, the Frog Queen steps back into her roiling retinue, taking Irontooth with her, and the minuscule cloud of faery-kin sweep back inside as if blown by a gale. Tinkling bells accompany their departure, and soon there is nothing on the hill except for the bewildered heroes.

And that is when they see the fires.

Winterhaven is burning.

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Xenoseth is the first to react, shapeshifting into panther form and darts down the hill, a shadow among the shadows. His low light vision allows him to see well enough through the dense foliage, although the others move much slower and must use lantern light to pick their way the mile back to town.

The shifter soon detects the acrid smell of smoke, and then he is at the front gates of Winterhaven. Smoke and flames rage behind the walls, and the Regulars are armed with bows along the parapets. [GM Note: We determined that Xenoseth can talk in panther form, like Aslan]

“What’s happening here?” the panther demands, and he’s somewhat lucky the guards don’t shoot him on principle alone, a talking black panther leaping out of the darkness (but they have seen him around town for a few days now).
Rond Kelfern, Head of the Militia, barks an answer: “Archers to south are firing pitch arrows! They came out of nowhere, with no warning; the fires inside are terrible! We don’t see anyone now.”

Xenoseth nods and bounds into the woods again, stealthily creeping through the underbrush, his senses acute for intruders. Soon he detects the glint of torchlight well beyond the treeline, and then movement. He creeps forward even slower, his padded paws as quiet as mice on a carpet. He makes his way around a small clearing and sees two human squatting not ten feet from him. They carry longbows with the tips wrapped in oily cloth; a few burning torches are thrust into the ground next to them. They seem to be waiting for something, or someone.

So Xenoseth waits too…

Meanwhile, the others have navigated their way to the front gates. They do not see the panther anywhere.

“Ho!” cries Rond Kelfern. “We’re under attack! Your cat friend was just here, he went to the south looking for assailants. But we need help inside! The fires are out of control, even more damage than it seems like they could have inflicted!”
Erevan, Raven, Splug, Irann, Brandis and Helga squeeze inside the opened gate, ready to help in any way they can.

Brandis sees his father immediately, Lord Ernest Padraign, already covered in soot and sweat at the head of a water chain, desperately hauling buckets to the roof of Salvana Wrafton’s Inn.

“Brandis! Head through town! Make sure no one’s trapped in other buildings! The living quarters on the west side have been heavily hit!”

Brandis runs off, while Raven shapeshifts into a (small) elephant and uses her trunk to help spray water (awww, that was cute).

Erevan climbs to the top of the parapets and sends his owl familiar (as yet unnamed, but Owlie, Tim and Theodore are all ace suggestions) gliding through the darkness in the direction he thinks the shifter ran. Closing his eyes, the wizard can see through the owl’s vision, and right at the very limit of the magic, some hundred feet into the woods, the owl spots two armed humans in a clearing crouched low beside torches, then the connection winks out.

In the woods, Xenoseth hears a flutter of feathers and sees Erevan’s familiar swoop by. Its plumage is distinct, so the shifter knows that his new allies are at least nearby now. The humans still seem to be waiting for something or someone, Xenoseth doesn’t know which, and he is getting antsy. Nevertheless, he delays, waiting to see if the scenario changes. The humans whisper something but Xenoseth can’t quite hear it.

Back in town, Brandis has charged ahead, scouting for anyone that needs help. Smoke fills the streets and he can hear cries from the wounded and distressed all around him. Villagers desperately run around trying to extinguish flames wherever they can.

Then Brandis sees red-haired Delphina Moongem skipping toward him in her flowered nightgown. She smiles and twiddles her fingers at Brandis.
“Would you believe it?” she says. “A silly bugbear was in my pantry! You just never know where you’ll find those things. Bye, Brandis!” She skips down the road, seemingly oblivious to the danger. Brandis looks to her house. The door is ajar, and he walks toward it, Wolftooth in hand.
Delphina’s home is not burning, not yet anyway, although an adjacent building is crackling with orange light. Brandis decides not to wait for his allies, although Irann, Helga and Splug are somewhere down the street behind him, also looking for people to assist. He kicks the door in, seeing Delphina’s small entry room. There are two doors flanking the stairwell to the second level. From the right door he thinks he hears something. Gripping the pommel of Wolftooth tighter, Brandis advances and SLAMS the door in!

A hideous hyena-faced humanoid is crouched on the floor in the pantry, and it rises, baring long yellowed teeth, and snarls at the warlord. It charges immediately, and although unarmed, its claws are as hard as steel, and it rakes two painful scratches down Brandis’s chest. The warlord counterattacks with a downward swipe of his blade, granting him a brief moment to stagger out into the foyer for more room to fight.
His enemy leaps after him, a bestial, feral monster that Brandis knows is a gnoll, like the one he and Xenoseth slew in the farmhouse. They exchange blows, and Brandis edges away, confident that he can bring this creature down, but still he yells “MONSTER!” out the open door, hoping that someone hears.

Back in the woods, Xenoseth has grown tired of waiting for these humans to do something. He decides to act, so he gathers himself and POUNCES, bowling one over, snarling and slavering and biting him, and then slickly transforms to half-panther form, his falchion readied. The humans shriek in surprise, stumbling away and both release pitch-covered arrows that fly wide.

On the parapets, Erevan brings his owl familiar swooping back, and then sends it off over the streets, looking for trouble where it can find it…

Helga, Splug and Irann continue roaming, and they even pass Delphina Moongem who is busy giggling at the moon. Yeah, they hope HER house doesn’t burn down; the streets would be flooded with narcotics. Helga thought she heard Brandis yelling, but she doesn’t see him yet…

Brandis continues sparring with the gnoll but fails to hear the door behind him open! Seconds later a garrote has lashed around the warlord’s neck, and a mouth is pressed to his ear: “You gonna DIE now, prettyboy…”
The garrote tightens, and the warlord feels his face flushing purple. More feet stomp down the stairs and Brandis has the distinct impression of a second gnoll somersaulting over his head to land beside him, and then it viciously stabs through his armor. Brandis is not feeling so confident anymore as stars begin to flash before his eyes.

But Helga has heard the commotion.

At the end of a flower-lined lane she sees an open door, and inside Brandis being mercilessly assaulted by three foes. The dwarf charges in, sidestepping the gnoll, leaps across a coffee table and plants herself squarely between everyone, trying to defend Brandis as best as possible. The warlord is choking and clawing at the noose around his neck, unable to escape from the bugbears impressive strength [GM Note: Bugbear Stranglers are BAAAAAAD-ASSSSSSS].

Splug is not useless, although he is hesitant to enter the house. He pulls out a javelin and throws it at the closest gnoll, skewering its leg. Irann the Warlock is not far away by now and runs up behind the goblin, cursing the gnoll as well with her eldritch magic, and feels the ebb and flow of its lifeforce in her hands.

Helga lines up an attack on the bugbear with her Brutal Executioners Axe +2, burns a Daily power, and SLAMS it down. To her dismay, the bugbear swirls Brandis around
and he takes the brunt of the attack full in the chest. ("I…thought…we were…friends…*gag*)

The warlord has failed to escape the grab, and he’s faltering at the edge of consciousness.

In the clearing, Xenoseth has taken down one of the human archers. He has a feeling, some feline sixth sense that his new allies are in terrible danger (and, well, he sees Brandis dying on the battleboard), so he takes advantage of the last human’s burning pitch arrow and tosses the canister of fuel at him. The burning pitch explodes in the man’s face, and screaming, he flounders into the woods and collapses, dead. Xenoseth runs toward the front gates of Winterhaven, shouting for the guards to open the door…

Brandis finally runs out of hit points. Unconscious and dying, he falls limp in the bugbear’s arms, and it allows him to slump to the floor.

The bugbear and gnolls are all injured themselves, thanks to Helga’s axe, Irann’s curses and Splug’s javelins, but they’re not going down without a balls-to-the-wall fight. If only Erevan and Xenoseth could hurry up and get here!

In fact, the wizard’s owl familiar spots the trouble in the street, so the wizard climbs down the ladder from the parapets and starts running. Xenoseth is on the way too, sprinting through town on four paws, following his instincts.
Irann Eyebites the enemies once they’re all cursed, but doesn’t roll very well. Helga manages to chop down one of the gnolls, finally ending their coordinated Pack Attack, but the bugbear wraps its noose around her neck, yanking it tight. Her short legs kick and flail as the leering bugbear strangles the life from her. On the floor, Brandis is rolling Death Saving throws, and has already failed two by the time Erevan arrives.

The wizard instantly conjures Bigby’s Icy Hand to assist! (and I’ve got to find a good miniature for this) Icy fingers grab the bugbear who is grabbing Helga, and the three stumble back and forth in the small confines of the room. Erevan cannot risk dropping an area spell as it would probably kill Brandis and Helga, the latter of whom is quickly bloodied as well. She tries attacking the bugbear with her axe, despite the difficulty of the angle [GM Note: I need to recheck the Attacking while Grabbed rules; we might have done that wrong]
The bugbear is finally killed, and Helga rips the cord from her bruised neck. The last gnoll flees, not brave enough to face the party alone, and Brandis rolls a 19 on the saving throw that could have killed him. Erevan runs forward and tries to use a Heal Check to stabilize the warlord.
The wounded gnoll tries to climb out the window, but Xenoseth finally arrives, better late than never. He sees the hated beast clambering out, so he charges, roaring, and bears down on the thing with a resounding strike from his falchion. The gnoll is rocked back into the pantry, bumps off Helga who has followed it, and she finishes the monster with a devastating strike to the back of its head, inflicting 24 points of damage when it only had 10 left. Blood, brains and skull fragments shower the enraged fighter, but she cannot calm down even then and storms into the streets, bellowing threats at the sky. Although not a barbarian, she sure can act like one.

Severely wounded but alive, Brandis Padraig is helped to his feet. Oh, he’ll be fine in a few hours and shake it off like a man (4e silliness, yes). Of more concern right now are the raging fires in Winterhaven. The heroes find three more barrels of fuel the gnolls and bugbear carried with them, and they were obviously setting fires behind the walls while archers provided a distraction outside. Xenoseth also finds something interesting: gold coins in their pockets engraved with a spider, minted in the drow city of Mor’loth’achek, where he spent two years of his life. There is no reason why these gnolls and bugbear would carry drow coinage unless they spent time in Thunderspire…which means these might be Bloodreavers.

But the assault seems so unnecessary, dangerous and doomed to failure. What did they want to gain?

The PCs find out later in the wee hours of the morning. The flames have been mostly extinguished, and a morbid hush falls over the town. Lord Padraig is exhausted and slathered in soot, as are almost all of the citizens, but they have prevented the town from being completely razed.

But then they hear new shouts of alarm.

The front gate is opened, and a familiar man staggers through, carrying a pig in his arms. It is Old Eilian, blood dribbling from a deep gash across his forehead, and his throat bruised purple from a garrote’s sting.
“HELP!” he cried. “Help! They attacked! Monsters! On my farm! They attacked the women at the Cleansing of Sune! Sister Linora is kidnapped! Ninaran! Salvana! My wife and others! Oh for the love of the gods, someone HELP US!!!”

And there we stopped.

[GM Note: Well, that was a fun first session everyone. I didn’t get as far as I wanted, but that was a good place to stop. And I suppose we learned the dangers of splitting the party! And although I would have felt guilty killing Brandis in the first encounter of the first adventure, hell, it’s a dangerous world you live in ;)].