Last time…

The PCs managed to reach the mine itself after following directions given to them by Reidoth the Druid in Thundertree. They found a recently dead dwarf in the entry foyer (not the dwarf Gundren they are seeking), and Elgweth disturbed a nest of stirges that damn near killed Carp the Halfling warlock. After a short rest to recuperate they grab the human fighter, give him some light as he is the only one who can’t see in darkness, and forge onward into the depths.

But they haven’t gone far at all when they hear a strange sound…echoing waves that resonate from somewhere deep in the cave. It rolls eerily through the halls, trembling the floor slightly, and then dissipates. For the first time they wonder, “Why IS this called Wave Echo Cave? Did we ever ask?” Well, no, they didn’t, and no one ever explained the meaning behind the name.
Elgweth the elf rogue takes point, slinking in the shadows beyond the right of light the human fighter carries. The room with the stirges is filled with the bones of long dead dwarves and orcs, and a careful inspection indicates that these corpses were slain by each other, hacked to pieces long, long ago and now draped with dust and webs and decay. They briefly recall someone telling them that hundreds of years ago the mine was overrun and the Forge of Spells was lost within it.

The passage splits two directions and they take the south option to a deadend with two doors, one of them intact, the other partially shattered with more cracked bones and skulls beyond. The dwarf cleric Thorin shoves a shoulder into the intact door, managing to burst it open, and they find a moldy accounting room filled with dusty scales for weighing and measuring gold and silver ingots. A dried up corpse slumps in the corner, and the walls are filled with slots and hundreds upon hundreds of parchments, scrolls and sheafs of rotting paper. A cursory inspection reveals they are written in Dwarvish and are painstaking records of the mine’s output, the dates and weights and values, etc. All of it extremely old now. A further inspection of the cubby holes unveils a magic scroll of Protection from Elementals, and the rogue finds a locked safebox, but fails to open it. It is shoved in the bag of holding for later retrieval.
Elgweth and Thorin shed light into the other room, the one filled with bones and detritus, but no sooner have they stepped inside than the bones begin wobbling! Bony fingers rattle and skulls roll across the floor and connect to shattered vertebrae. Within seconds, nine skeletons are rising from the floor, clad in rotten armor and bearing rusty swords. Elgweth leaps out of the door, and for a brief terrifying moment the dwarf is facing the legion all alone!

[DM Note: And to my dismay, I did not have access to my skeleton miniatures for this encounter and had to make do. Oh well. Next time...]
The funny little Star Wars droid? Well, that’s the cleric’s *Spiritual Weapon* spell, now aptly remained *Spiritual Droid*, and yes it beeps and attacks with a small electrical discharge 😊.

The skeletons are nearly mindless and surge forward in a group, hacking with rusty weapons, but they can’t all crowd through the doorway at once. The dwarf beats them back, taking a fighting stance with his warhammer, and magic soars over his head from the others, exploding dusty bones into pieces. The skeletons are not particularly formidable and in a short time they are able to batter their enemies to pieces and send them to rest again. Searching the room reveals nothing of interest, although it might make a defendable location if they need to retreat here later. They keep that in mind.

They cautiously advance up the north passage, the elf rogue taking point again in the shadows, and find more branching mine tunnels. You can’t tell from the map itself but these tunnels are pitted and notched and uneven, the kind of tunnels one would expect to find in a heavily mined area.
Then they hear the eerie echoing wave sound again, rising and surging and crashing and finally dissipating into the darkness, like the shore of some distant black beach.

{DM Note: I think the music randomly queued up around this time was the Exorcist Main Theme, so it was pretty f***** scary as they explored! It was also queued for Psycho main theme among others}

The tunnel branches again, but Elgweth the elf spots a door and hear odd scratching sounds behind it. The dwarf casts a cantrip to batter it open, and in the resulting open room they see three ghouls rise to their feet, the bloody remains of a recent kill still dripping messily from their jaws. Long black tongues loll from their mouths and they hiss, instantly surging forward to attack.
But the PCs are stationed and ready in the hall and doorway to cut them down as they approach, and only the fighter is briefly paralyzed by the claws of one before the enemies are hacked to pieces.

The room beyond appears to be an old barracks equipped with uncomfortable looking stone cots that only a dwarf miner could appreciate. A cold brazier of coals rests in the middle of the floor, along with the shredded remains of what looks like might have been a lizard man that the ghouls caught and were feasting upon. Another door leads out of this chamber, and peeking through it, Elgweth sees even more twisting mine tunnels. Their options for exploration continue branching the further they go, so they decide to have the warlock cast Invisibility on Elgweth so he can creep ahead with more safety. Hopefully. They’re not sure if undead can see through invisibility or not.
So, silent as a shadow, the elf enters the dark tunnel, letting his darkvision scan ahead. He sees multiple branching paths, and a set of stairs leading up into darkness, and broken tools and a shattered mining cart and more dusty webs and desiccated debris. He beckons the others to follow with a whisper, and he’s edged even further into the gloom when he suddenly hears a sound: a wet, slurping, sloppy sound that fills him with revulsion. Seconds later the source reveals itself, a large, ochre-covered ooze that rolls out of the darkness, pseudopods extending like the heads of slimy snakes.
The thing is slow though and they are able to hit it from a distance with magic, forcing it to retreat, but then they drag the corpse of the lizard man out into the hallway to lure the disgusting monster back. It takes the bait, covering the remains and beginning to dissolve it instantly, and the mindless ooze is soon blasted apart, its slippery innards dispersing into the hallway like stinking pudding. It didn’t even get an attack off.

Still invisible, Elgweth scouts out more derelict tunnels and dead ends, finally finding a cooler passage with a wet breeze that leads to a room filled with a large pool of water.
Now, they don’t like this.

Abloeths live in water. In fact, all kinds of nasty things live in dark underground pools of water, so rather than progress any further this direction they decide to backtrack and let Elgweth ascend the stairs he found earlier. I need to reiterate the terror they felt while exploring these tunnels, every twist and turn held a potential threat, and they never had any idea what each dark crevice would unveil. The creepy music every step of the way didn’t help either.

So the others wait behind nervously while Elgweth creeps up the steps. The room at the top is completely dark and opens up into a large cavern whose recesses he cannot completely see…but what he DOES see fills him with terror.

The back of the room is crowded with dead bodies standing in the darkness, shifting slightly, as if waiting for something to grab their attention. Like movement. Or light. Or a sound. None of which Elgweth has done, and if not for his invisibility the nearest thing would have been looking right AT HIM.

It is eight or nine ghouls huddled in the darkness, their rotting bodies moving just slightly. Elgweth freezes, but the dead things don’t notice him, and he quietly creeps back down the stairs and warns the others. They just killed three ghouls in the last room, so this new batch of ghouls is considerably more deadly. In fact, Elgweth would have been torn to shreds if they’d caught him.
They decide to lure the monsters down the steps into the choke point of the hallway and decimate them from there. If left behind they might encounter them later at a far less opportune time. The dwarf cleric extends his voice with a cantrip into a booming challenge, and within seconds they hear ravenous hisses. Claws and nails scuttle on stone and then they see eyes gleaming in the darkness at the top of the stairs, followed by hungry howls and the ghouls begin charging down, jaws slavering for fresh meat.
Again, the party has wisely attacked from a vantage point where the enemies cannot crowd around them, and they pour in two ranks deep. But to their disappointment, four of the ghouls disengage from the others and recede into the darkness, possibly knowing of an alternate route to approach the group from behind. God knows there’s enough winding passages elsewhere they’ve not explored. Elgweth is forced to drop his invisibility in order to attack and deal enough damage to drop these things before reinforcements arrive. Steel and magic fly into the gh. Limbs and heads are hewn off and eldritch magic burns with purple flames, exploding two of them into hissing charred corpses. The fight is short and brutal but the party is able to escape relatively unscathed, well, the fighter Fyghta Wan is hit pretty hard, and after this they decide to quickly retreat and board up in a room to recuperate and catch their breath before continuing.

They run back the way they came, but Fyghta Wan has no sooner crossed the passage intersection when the remaining four ghouls rip around the corner, howling and slobbering.
He’s about to get cut off from the others, it really depends on how Initiative rolls next round, but this is where we stopped with a picture to remind us where to begin next time. The PCs have scouted less than half of the map, and it only gets more deadly and dangerous from here on out.....

This was 2 hours of gameplay.