



DENNIM AND THE GOLEM

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NIGHTFALL IN THE MOUNTAINS was like nightfall in the city for Dennim. Shadows—home—grew and prospered; darkness, which blinded others, keened his eyes and ears as nothing else could. The sounds were different, to be sure, but hearing a centurion sneak up from behind was almost the same as hearing a cat poised to attack. And the awesome mountains of Kenna held something that had eluded Dennim for all of his life in the city: everlasting treasure.

Dennim was a hobgoblin and a thief, and both identities had caused him discomfort many times. In the villages at the foot of Kenna's mountains, a child born of mountain goblin and lowland human was neither as unusual nor as humiliated as in the larger city. But justice against an apprehended thief in Montgate and other small villages was swift and brutal, far worse than the labors and imprisonment issued in Kenna City. There was a best and worst in both places, just as there was Whitefire and Darkfire. The best in Kenna City were those shadowy streets and questionable taverns, where a demihuman might be welcome and a thief could earn a living. The best in Montgate and the villages were these nearby mountains and the secrets that they hid.

The jagged opening in the mountain face was exactly where the map Dennim had memorized indicated it would be. It was a tall, human-sized, but cleverly concealed entrance. From his pack, Dennim pulled out some of the corn ears he had stolen in Montgate for luck. He arranged these ears in a tottering pile at the cave entrance. On top of the pile of corn, he balanced rocks and a few coins. Anyone or anything following him would topple the standing ears, and Dennim's sensitive hearing would pick up the noise. This done, he crept inside.

The map, which Dennim had stolen in Kenna City, had recorded this place as a monastery, but it was like no monastery that he had ever seen. The jagged entrance widened into a full room, barely lit by the moon outside. Once inside, Dennim moved quickly to the right-hand wall, which was clammy and rough. Running water had probably carved out the cave, as it did not appear to be the work of humanoids or tools. There were no torches, no offering fires. While there were dark forms scattered about this near part of the room, none of them resembled the shape of the traditional Whitefire vault that Dennim was here to loot.

He pulled an ear of corn from his pack and tossed it toward the dark center of the room. It landed with a quiet splash, which echoed to his goblin's ears but quickly ended. All was quiet again. He tossed another ear as far as he could into the darkness. It didn't land,

or it landed on something soft, or it landed beyond his hearing range.

"Or," he whispered, "just to be paranoid, something caught it."

Dennim smiled and slid his dagger out of its scabbard. With a flick of his wrist, he flipped the dagger into the air, heard it spin, and caught it by the blade. The best smith in Kenna City had made this knife, had formed it lightweight and streamlined for easy throwing. Of course, the smith hadn't made it for Dennim.

With his right hand, Dennim withdrew yet another ear of corn from his pack and tossed it in the same direction as he had the last, but only half as hard. It landed on stone, at floor level. He threw another ear in this same direction, harder than the last one, but softer than the first. It also hit rock, probably floor. The room was very deep.

Dennim turned his attention to the opposite wall, made visible only by the moonlight that filtered into the room. There were several large shadows and shapes against that wall. Though this was the wrong place for a vault, it was just right for an ambush. The next ear he threw found wall. The one after also hit stone, but was followed by the sound of claws scampering across stone and a sharp squeaking noise. Rodent? Or small cat?

Maybe.

Dagger arm raised, Dennim crept past the moonlit entrance, his small, crouched form briefly silhouetted onto the rocky floor. One by one, the shapes and shadows by the wall became distinguishable to his eyes. A stalagmite, nothing above it. A waist-high slab of rock. A sculpted metal foot.

Dennim leaped backward and nearly hurled his dagger. The foot was metal, shiny, and there was no sign of rust or scratches on any part that he could see. And it was more than just a foot. As he let his attention focus on a wider area, Dennim saw that it was a statue, taller by far than he, but in proportion, squat, and powerful looking. "And ugly," he murmured, gazing up at the too-wide, too-shallow, not quite human face.

Who would sculpt a statue of metal, since the material had so many better uses? Certainly not Whitefire monks, who preached Rikmon's pragmatism and conservation. Moreover, who could build it? Dennim straightened from his crouch, curious rather than cautious, flipping his dagger once into the air and catching it by the hilt. No seams, he noticed. No rivets or forge marks. He tapped the statue with the hilt of his dagger. As no echo sounded, it was either very thick or not hollow. He scratched it with the blade, but it wasn't metal flaked over stone, either.

"Rikmon's fire, you are ugly!" Dennim whispered, flipping the dagger back into its throwing position. He spoke in the singsong doggerel of outcast hobgoblin

society. “But you’re too big to carry and too strange to sell, so what good are you? And why in Whitefire are you in this butt-backwards monastery?”

The statue’s leg swung forward at the knee and kicked Dennim across the cave floor. He landed hard, unprepared. He ached in the belly, where it had kicked him; he hurt in his leg, where he had landed. Without thinking, he sprang to his knees and hurled his dagger with deadly accuracy.

The giant moon-gleaming arm swung forward. Stubby fingers flexed and delicately, ever so precisely, caught the dagger between metal thumb and forefinger.

Dennim stared, his jaw hanging to his chest. The statue had moved so quickly, and it had changed so much. It glowed now, not with moonlight, but from some inner source. Where once it had been dull and lifeless, it now had the sheen of a centurion’s steel sword. It was fully alive, moving effortlessly and as nimbly as Dennim himself, and it moved toward him. Dennim’s knife dangled between two shiny, stubby fingers.

Dennim retreated desperately. The thing made no noise as it walked and still showed neither seams nor joints where it might be vulnerable. It moved as effortlessly as a humanoid, though it was made of more metal than existed in all of Montgate. What could he do? Throw corn ears at it? He was dead. It would surely crush him.

The statue leaned forward at the waist. Then, with a long, powerful arm, it held out Dennim’s dagger. It also stopped, and Dennim let himself breathe again. The thing’s eyes began to glow. They didn’t open, for they were not eyes. They glowed, growing intense as the light of a just-lit candle grows intense. Dennim felt that the thing was looking at him.

It turned its outstretched arm and rotated its big hand in such a way that the hand’s metal palm was held open. Dennim’s dagger fell across that palm. It was handing Dennim his dagger. Very hesitantly, open-mouthed, he reached out and took the knife. The metal statue straightened to its full height and did not move.

Dennim took one step backward and found wall. Water dripped off the rock and down his back, but he barely noticed it. The thing’s eyes glowed stronger, and they lit the room so that what had been shadow was clear and what had been dark was shadow. Dennim allowed himself a quick look around, but standing as he was in the focus of the new light, he wished the statue would close its eyes.

The cave was perhaps thirty yards long, compared to but ten or so feet wide. There were strange stone statues and unfamiliar altars spread throughout the deep room, but not patterned in a way similar to Whitefire monasteries. Just the opposite, in fact, and Dennim suddenly realized how stupid he’d been. Of course this was nothing like a Whitefire room! This was just the opposite; it was not Whitefire, but Darkfire. Not Rikmon’s house, but T’oori’s. Evil. Lost. And this—Dennim glanced back at the huge statue in front of him—was Lost T’oori magic!

“Very good,” a voice called from deeper within the cavern. “Dennim.” At the sound of his name, Dennim turned from the statue. A figure in dark robes stood beside a long flat stone, perhaps halfway down the

cavern. “And your next thought, thief, is that there are riches to be taken here.” The figure stepped onto the stone. “There are, and I have taken them. Come here.”

Dennim’s mind raced. He stepped around the huge statue and walked slowly toward the new figure, absently palming his dagger as he did. The thing with the glowing eyes followed him. The figure ahead had known his thoughts—more Lost T’oori magic—and probably knew them now as well. There was little that Dennim could do. Thinking not to think something was as good, or as bad now, as thinking it in the first place. He struggled to remember his Whitefire upbringing.

T’oori the Enslaver, master of Rikmon and Rikmon’s wife Katelin, and of the pantheon of Landsman, Spain, and Linares. Rikmon had fought T’oori, the wicked enslaver who had a thousand eyes and arms. Their battle had been so fierce that from it had burst forth the sun and life on Kenna and the other islands. As Rikmon had fought with his blade and his heart, T’oori had held his evil magic in each of his thousand hands.

“The fiercer Rikmon fought,” the dark figure called, “the more he injured T’oori. He cut off arms with his sword, yet as each arm fell to the world, so did a piece of Lost T’oori magic.”

Dennim looked behind him. The statue was still there. As he kept moving, so did it. “Rikmon won,” he said as defiantly as he could. “T’oori is Lost, while Rikmon is in God-Heaven, watching over the children he freed.”

“And the magic?” the figure asked. “What of it, Dennim?”

“Lost as well, but lost in the many corners of the world.”

“Found now, goblin! Found by me, and found by my brethren of the Darkfire! I have it. I have the power of Lost T’oori!”

Dennim glanced quickly behind him. The statue showed no change. “‘The hands of T’oori still clench Lost T’oori magic,’” he quoted.

“More Whitefire lies!” the figure shouted, his voice echoing through the cavern.

The figure was more in focus now, faceless still, but more detailed. In his hands, he held two dowel-shaped objects. Wands? The source of his—?

“I possess T’oori magic, thief. This one”—he raised his right hand—“renders me invisible to any whom I wish not to see me. And this one tells me your thoughts, goblin.” When Dennim stopped walking, so did the statue. The man—it was a man beneath that hooded robe—was about fifteen feet away. “But I am not alone in my magic, Dennim. You too have an arm of Lost T’oori.”

The man’s face was visible beneath the hood, an old grey face lined with zealous fire, Darkfire. The man’s brows tightened over his hawk nose, and Dennim did not need T’oori magic to know that whatever was upcoming was important.

“What did you say that brought the T’oori golem to life, Dennim? What were your words, exactly?”

Dennim smiled in spite of himself. He couldn’t know, of course, because if he did, the Darkfire priest would have read his thoughts and known too. The priest nodded unhappily as if to confirm this. “It must have been an unconscious, unthinking slip of the tongue,” the old man growled. “A saying, perhaps, or

an oath. Something you say often that cursedly sounds like the Lost T'oori commands which activate and control the golem."

Dennim fought against thinking over his collection of oaths and exclamations. He was not sure that he succeeded—can one truly know all of the thoughts running through the mind?—but the priest did not seem satisfied, so he had done something correct.

"I say many things," he said truthfully, "without thinking about them first. It is my nature."

"And you say much in that damned doggerel tongue," the priest snarled, reading Dennim's next thought,

They both waited a moment, but for different things. The priest's dark eyes looked past Dennim to the golem. "Nothing," he said. "Try again. Something that you say frequently."

Dennim thought of vivid goblin tortures to which he would subject the priest. He thought of methods and techniques of violence that only a goblin or hobgoblin could possibly conceive of. He colored his thoughts as graphically as he could, so that anyone sharing his thoughts would wince, if not cry out in pain. Aloud, he spoke in the human tongue. "Lost T'oori's eyes."

"A common enough exclamation," the priest agreed



"which I neither know nor can pronounce." The black-garbed figure seated himself upon the stone in one graceful motion, legs crossing effortlessly beneath him. "Very well, I have time and I will know the secret commands of the golem. Speak for me, Dennim. Speak for me in doggerel, if you like. Call me slime or toad, whatever you wish. I want to see what effect it has upon our friend behind you."

Dennim was curious, too, about many things. His mind raced once more, but this time with doggerel thoughts of the hobgoblin societies of Kenna City. He had to be careful, he realized, for so many of the thoughts and ideas were expressed in little more than bastardized human words. But his goblin father's heritage, whatever it was, flowed in Dennim's blood and occupied some part of his mind as well. Doggerel owed some of its existence to the hobgoblins who had grown up in the company and with the language of goblinkind.

"Darkfire priest," he said in doggerel, "you are T'oori's own private parts, shriveled and useless as T'oori himself."

calmly, "but one I've tried many times." Dennim thought he saw the man flash a smile. "And Dennim, the tortures of your father's race pale in comparison with the rites and practices of Darkfire. Think hard, thief. What did you say when you first saw the golem?"

Well, that was that. Dennim slumped back against the metal golem. Either the priest had lied when he said that he could not understand hobgoblin doggerel, or thoughts were thoughts, regardless of one's race or spoken language. In either case, there was nothing that Dennim could do. The priest was in complete control.

"Dennim," the shadowy figure said, "we really are much alike, you and I. We live by our wits, we take from lesser people. We lie, cheat, steal—we are better than normal people, more deserving of the riches of the world. You're a thief. Not a bad one, I gather. But think of how good you could be, of the things you could steal, if you were invisible to those you were stealing from! I'll give you this wand, Dennim, the wand and its secrets, if you can remember the secret of the golem."

The priest's voice grew more soothing. "I'm Darkfire, Dennim, but I am a priest. There are holy things upon which I can swear that I will uphold my side of any bargain we strike."

It was an idea that had crossed Dennim's mind. In fact, that was probably where the priest had gotten it—a point that disturbed Dennim considerably. Dennim was not Darkfire by any means, but neither was he Whitefire. Religious fires and other spiritual passions interfered with his independence. And what use had a thief for a lumbering golem that he only half understood anyway? The uses he could find for invisibility, however . . .

Another point that angered Dennim was the priest's offhand description of him. He quite agreed with the man's account of his thieving abilities, but he preferred to think of himself as a loner, an independent being holding his own against a hostile society, rather than the selfish, insensitive, almost evil being that the priest had described.

"Stop deluding yourself, Dennim, and let's get on with it. I can read all the thoughts of our ilk, so there is no escape. Cooperate and I will make it worth your while, for you'll share my treasure. Choose not to, and I will destroy you."

Our ilk? Selfish and evil ilk, selfish and evil thoughts. That must be it: the priest could only read selfish and evil thoughts! Just as Lost T'oori's weakness had been all that was true and good, all that allowed Rikmon to win their battle, so was there such a weakness in this T'oori relic. Again, Dennim smiled.

"I never said that the wands were infallible, Dennim," the priest said, "but surely someone such as yourself would still want to be invisible in order to steal? What I offer is still a good bargain: the wand for the secret of the golem."

True, Dennim agreed. Considering his profession, he could think of a great many profitable uses for the wand. But what uses had the priest for the golem? This was not a harmless man who sat before Dennim. The priest had probably given the better years of his life to this cave, this monastery. For a reason, a goal. For a dream, and undoubtedly not a very pleasant one.

The priest was going to kill him, Dennim realized. Even if by some wild chance, after days of trying, Dennim could remember the words that activated the metal golem, the priest was not going to let him live. Dennim did not want to die.

The man in the cloak said nothing, gave no reaction that Dennim could see. Perhaps for the first time, he could not read the thief's thoughts. Dennim felt the cool metal of the dagger he'd palmed beneath his sleeve.

Perhaps thoughts of survival were not selfish or evil, and were thus shielded from the wand. Perhaps.

Dennim raised his dagger arm abruptly, flicking his wrist strongly upward as if tossing a card in a Kenna City tavern. His dagger flew straight, rising in a deadly and true path until it buried itself deep in the Darkfire priest's throat. The man gurgled once and fell back. Then a terrifying bolt of green light sprang forth from the priest's left hand and shattered a slab of rock that had rested behind the golem. Dennim whirled to see the results: a mistake. Sickly dark ooze slunk forth from the rubble and slithered quickly up the wall of the cavern, where it slurped into a crack in the roof.

"Lost T'oori spits," Dennim growled, already diving to his right. A fiery green beam shot past him and brought rubble down from the far wall. *The problem with daggers, damn it, is that after you throw them they're gone!*

Dennim had more problems, he realized. Not only was the priest not dead yet, but the golem was no longer still. As Dennim had moved, so had the metal creature—not mimicking him, but following him wherever he went. Now it stood towering over his crouched form. A green beam from the priest's hand struck the golem in the chest, which glowed green and sparkled orange momentarily before both colors vanished. The golem took another step toward Dennim.

Dennim rolled between its legs and to his feet, standing as close behind the golem's leg as he could without actually touching it. There was another burst of green and orange on the far side of the golem, but then silence loomed. Perhaps . . . ? But Dennim was not fond of *perhaps*. He crept from behind the golem. Then, hidden in the shadows created by the thing's glowing eyes, moved carefully to the cave wall. The golem cursedly

followed him, a clear giveaway as to where the priest should fire.

But there were no more bursts of the priest's green beam. Dennim, pursued by the golem, moved forward cautiously. The golem with its eyes was like a beacon. Dennim kept low and spied the priest whose body was collapsed over the slab of stone. In one quick surge of speed, he reached the slab. The golem lumbered behind. Dennim's dagger, bloodied, rested off to one side of the body. The priest had pulled it from his throat, but that might have been the last action the man ever took.

Dennim was a hobgoblin and a thief. His first identity had saved his life; his second might now make him rich. This narrow slab of stone, from where the priest never seemed to stray, must be the monastery's vault. In a Whitefire monastery, a vault contained the collected



offerings of the fervent. Dennim hesitated only briefly before investigating the vault of the Darkfire cave.

His fingers found the lock, a camouflaged masterpiece. It barely rose from the smooth surface of the vault. No depression for a key existed, so there was probably a spring somewhere. Dare he test it normally? Dennim slid his pack off his back and removed the small metal pins and wedges that were the tools of his livelihood. He wanted to tap the vault, but was far too leery to do so unprotected. He backed up, bumping into the golem's leg.

That gave him a brilliant idea. He slid around the golem, and the creature slowly turned to watch him. Pressing himself against the golem, Dennim reached his arms around one thick leg and tapped the side of the vault with an iron pick. He heard a small crack and what sounded like hail on a tin roof. After the sound stopped, he peered around the golem and found hundreds of tiny spikes littering the floor behind the creature. The golem's back and legs were unscarred.

With that kind of protection, Dennim had the lock sprung and the vault open in no time. As he had suspected, the Darkfire priests took in very little compared to their Whitefire counterparts. All he found were a few coins and assorted stones, all of which he slipped into his pack. He stood and looked down at the slumped corpse of the priest. The two dowel-shaped sticks lay beside the body, and on one of its fingers was a large ring within which was set a sparkling green stone. Dennim very carefully put each of these objects into the hidden lining of his pack.

Darkfire priests wanted power, perhaps so they could rule all of Kenna. They studied long and hard to obtain this power, and they apparently did not value the coin of Kenna's races. The treasure that they lived and died for was Lost T'oori magic.

IT WAS A BUSY NIGHT AT THE GOLEM'S LAIR. The farmers of Montgate, at last through with the harvest, hurried to their favorite tavern for a tall mug of ale and a tender leg of game. The proprietor of The Golem's Lair, a hobgoblin like about half of his customers, watched happily as the coins crossed the counter. His business was a great success; customers

DENNIM'S IRON GOLEM

The iron golem that is Dennim's companion has long malfunctioned as a side effect of the lost magic that powers it. Whoever speaks a special command phrase becomes bonded to the golem as its master (as Dennim is), but that lost command phrase remains unknown even to Dennim.

When bonded to a master, the golem stays close to that creature at all times. It moves with its master if the master gets too far away, returns dropped items, and performs other minor tasks at the DM's determination. It is not known whether other command phrases might allow the golem to perform additional tasks or engage in combat (which it presently does only by accident). Since Dennim found it, the golem has thankfully shown no ability to use the Poison Breath for which those constructs are known.

If the golem's bonding command phrase is ever discovered again, any creature can speak the phrase as an action to bond to the golem. If two creatures speak the phrase in the same round, they engage in a contest of Charisma to determine who the golem treats as its master in that round.

came in now for the service and the ale as much as for the tavern's novelty. Dennim was far wealthier than he had ever been as a thief.

There had been no way in which Dennim could have continued in his former profession. No thief lurks well in the shadows when he is forever followed by a towering metal statue, and sneaking up on would-be pickpocket victims was out of the question. The two wands and the ring were as great a mystery to him now as they had been the many times he had tried them in the Darkfire monastery. There were reasons why it took Darkfire priests years of study and practice to attain their goals, and, having encountered such a priest, Dennim realized that he simply did not have the consuming fire or the endless patience to do the same. The Lost T'oori magic remained lost.

Despite his initial findings, there had been a fortune in the monastery, just as his map had promised. Dennim was the richest person residing in the area of Montgate and its numerous neighboring villages. None of it would have happened had he not ventured into the cave. He smiled at more customers who were coming through the door and puffed contentedly on his pipe. Then he leaned back against the golem's leg and wondered for the thousandth time how much money he could have stolen had he ever rendered himself invisible. ■

DENNIM, HOBGOBLIN THIEF

Medium humanoid (goblinoid, human), neutral

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +3

Skills Acrobatics +6, Deception +3, Perception +3, Stealth +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Goblin, Thieves' cant

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Dennim can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Evasion. If Dennim is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, Dennim deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Dennim's that isn't incapacitated and Dennim doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Unexpected Strike. Any hit Dennim scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Dennim makes two dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.