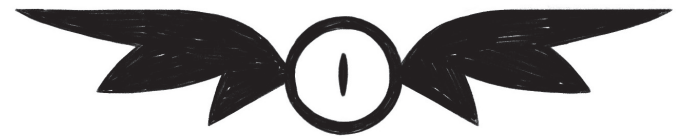


AND NOW LIVE ... TONIGHT'S EPISODE OF
DUNGEON RUNNERS. OVER TO YOUR HOSTS,
DIRK THE ORC AND JENNA THE GIANT...



1

THE TRIAL

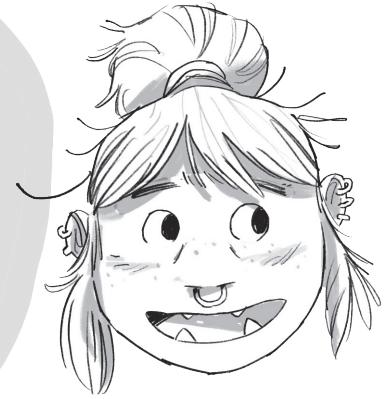
Welcome back, dungeon fans, to this week's epic Dungeon Running action from the Master League! You join us as the teams are just about to enter the Armageddon Arena for the season final. If the Ultima Squad can come out on top, they will win the cup for a record-breaking FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW!





But it may not be that easy, Dirk. Don't forget that the Night Beasts are only two points behind them in the league! If they can get out of the dungeon first, or maybe find that precious loot, they may scoop the win and knock Ultima into second place.

I heard a rumour that it was a **FIRE-BREATHING HYDRA**, Dirk. But my money's on a return of the **GIANT WERE-ELEPHANT** we saw last year. That sure was a battle to remember!



That's right, Jenna. And also don't forget the sweet two points either team could earn by defeating the dungeon boss. Any idea what the monster is this time?



It certainly was, Jenna. And it looks like today's match is going to be just as nail-biting. I've brought plenty of spare undercrackers, just in case. Hey, look! The teams are getting ready... This is going to be awesome!



“Awesome,” Kit whispered. He was sitting in the inn, just up the road from his house, watching the show on their super large crystal screen. Kit could see the National Dungeon League commentators, Jenna the giant and Dirk the orc, standing in front of a ruined castle – the site of this evening’s Dungeon Run.

Torches blazed all around them, glinting on Jenna’s chainmail armour and lighting up Dirk’s bright green skin. Soon, the teams would walk out, waving at the fans – Kit’s favourite part. If only he had a better view.

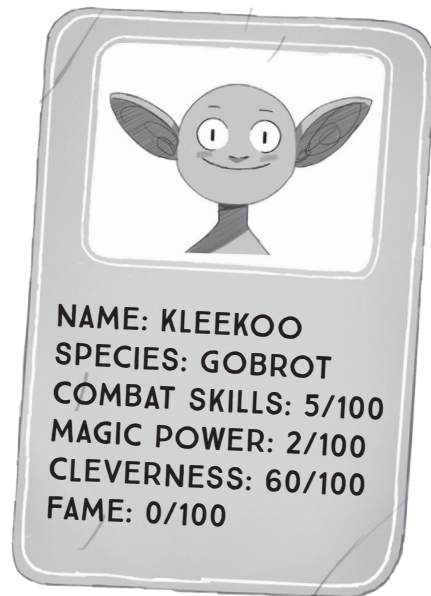
Nearly everyone else from Kit’s street was squashed into the poky room, and he had just managed to

find himself a tiny scrap of space on the floor, crushed in against the wall. Being a gnorf – part gnome, part dwarf – he was much smaller than the folk around him, who were mostly bulky troll-like creatures called troggles, so – luckily – he didn’t need much space.



Kit had to squint round several pairs of boots and chair legs, but he could *almost* see what was going on. How he wished his family was rich enough to afford a crystal of their own, so he could watch Dungeon Running from his bedroom.

“Nikkik krik klikklqk!” came a squeaky little voice from a hole in the wall next to him. Bending down, Kit saw a tiny creature, no bigger than his hand, with green skin, pointy ears and a mouth full of sharp fangs. It was Kleekoo, his gobrot friend.



“Yes, I know,” Kit replied. “I hope the Ultima Squad wins too. I’m saving up to buy a poster of Lord Studly. He was the league’s Most Valued Player last season.”

Kit reached out and helped Kleekoo climb out of the wall.



The little creature's whole family lived under the inn, all of them as small as rabbits. Although Kit knew gobrots in dungeons could grow much bigger. He'd seen them battle against Dungeon Runners on the crystal screen many times.

"Oh, look," a mean voice came from somewhere up above him. It was Breg, the horrible troggles who lived next door to Kit and wouldn't

ever leave him alone.

"The little kitten has found himself a green mouse to play with.



Why don't you take it out into the street where you belong? This inn is for grown-ups who want to watch the match in peace, not snot-nosed toddlers."

"You're only two years older than me, Breg," Kit replied. "If I have to leave, then you do too."

Breg was about to say something horrible back, when everybody in the inn gasped at once. Something was happening on the screen. Kit jumped up to see, holding Kleekoo up high so he could get a good look as well.

The Dungeon Run action had paused for a moment, while Dirk and Jenna, the commentators, were reading out an announcement.



This is exciting stuff, Jenna!

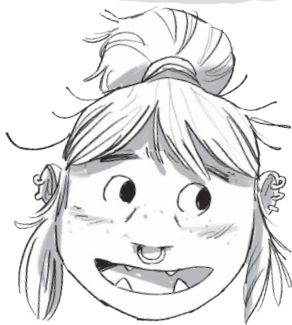


But tragic, also, Dirk. Don't forget that.



Oh yes, of course. Terrible news, folks. But exciting for some of you.

That's true.



Because one of the teams in the Bottom Feeder League has sadly had an accident with a frost dragon.



Did anyone survive, Dirk?

Well, let's just say it was **DRAGON DINNER TIME**, Jenna. So sad for those guys.



But really lucky for everyone else! There is now an opening for a new **Dungeon Runner** team. This is **YOUR** chance to enter the leagues and fight your way to the top!

That's right, Jenna. In two weeks' time there will be a **Dungeon Trial**. A contest that any team can enter, with the top prize being a place among the **Bottom Feeders**!



“Did you hear that?” Kit called up to Kleekoo. “A Dungeon Trial! There hasn’t been one of those for years. There could be a new team to support!”

Kleekoo peered between Kit’s fingers and opened his mouth to squeak, but before he could say anything, Breg’s meaty hand clamped down on him, ripping him from Kit’s grasp.

“I *said*, get out into the street!” Breg shouted, and hurled poor, tiny Kleekoo out of the inn door.



Squeal!!!

Squeal!!!



“KLEEKOO!” Kit shouted, and dashed after him. He ran into the street, just in time to see his little friend splash down in a muddy puddle and begin flailing his tiny arms, trying to swim.

As fast as he could, Kit ran over and scooped the gobrot up. He patted Kleekoo on his back (very gently) in case he had swallowed muddy water.

Kleekoo coughed and spluttered, and began to shout some very angry things in the gobrot language, when he was interrupted by a chorus of laughter.

Breg was standing at the inn door with his two friends, the Lumber sisters, pointing and hooting, as if it was the funniest thing in all of Zerb.

“See?” Breg said in between chortles. “I told you that babies belonged in the street. The inn is for proper Dungeon Runners like us.”

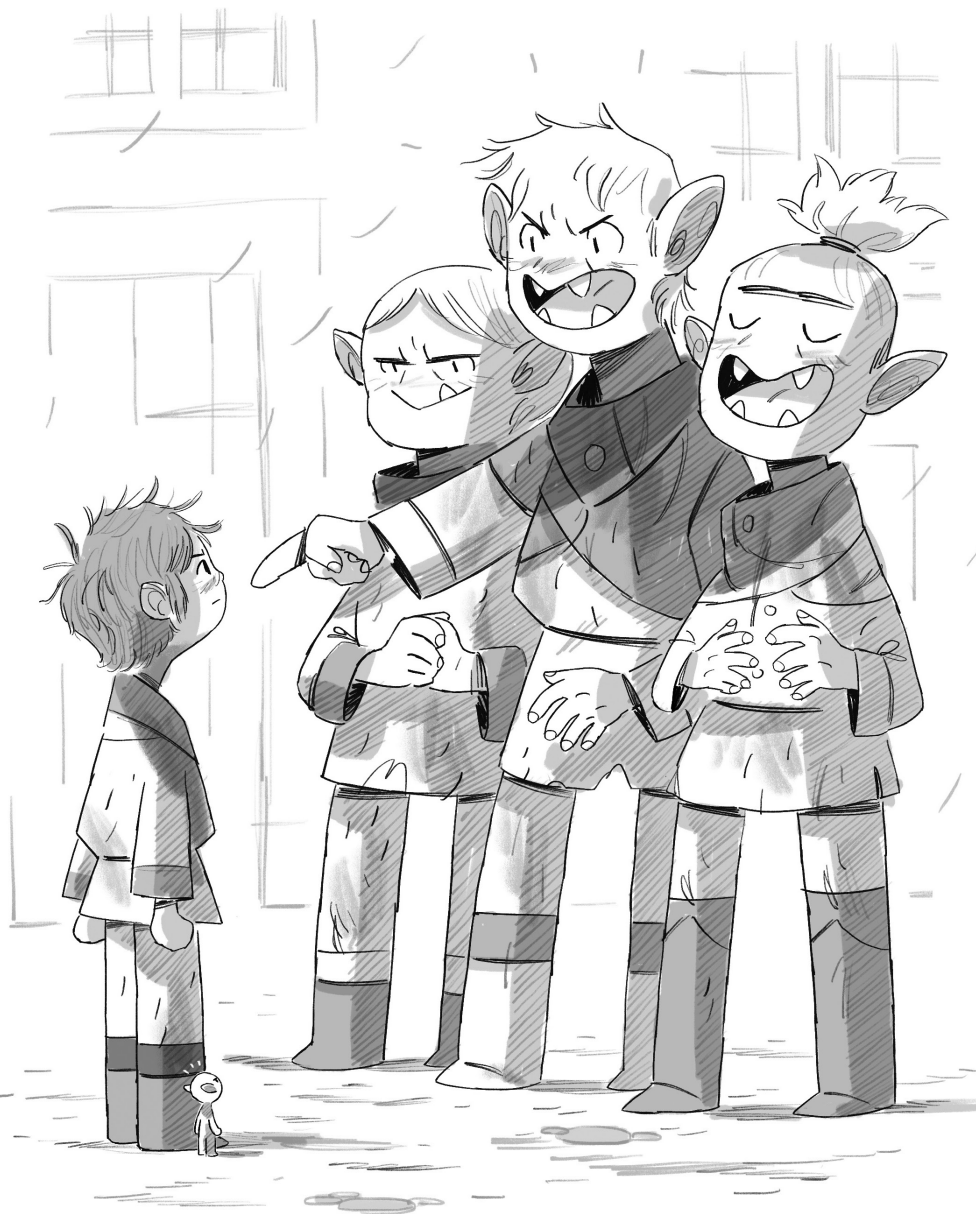
“You’re not a Runner!” Kit shouted.

“You couldn’t get through a dungeon if it was made of paper and you had a pair of scissors!”

“Oh yeah?” Breg took a step into the street and placed his fists on his hips. “Well, we’ll show you, because we’re going to enter the Dungeon Trial and we’re going to win, aren’t we?”

Breg’s two friends, Dora and Nora Lumber, nodded and smirked. They looked so smug that Kit found himself shouting back, before he really knew what he was doing.

“Oh *yeah*? Well, I’m going to show *you*, because I’m entering the Dungeon Trial as well and *I’m* going to win!”



At this the three bullies laughed harder than ever before. They laughed so hard that tears began to stream down their faces.

Finally, when they had stopped, Breg pointed at Kit and, with an evil grin on his face, said, “I’m going to hold you to that, Kit Kitson. And when you don’t enter – because you’re so *scared* – I’m going to tell everyone. And you’ll never be able to show yourself on this street again.”

Then Breg, Dora and Nora walked back inside, leaving Kit and Kleekoo standing there, dripping mud and feeling very awkward.

“Kookik Nook Klakkak,” said Kleekoo, shaking his head.

“I know,” said Kit. “That was a *really* stupid thing to say.”

But it was too late now. He had well and truly said it.