

## **A Meeting in the Mines**

by Patrick Goodman

The rhythmic footfalls of their approaching foe continued to echo through the corridors; Nazul could feel the matching vibrations in the stone floor now. Turning to the former Atlantean Demi-magus next to him, he asked, "What should we expect, brother?"

Sham-rin spoke up before the Demi-magus could answer. "A foe worth our efforts, I hope," she snorted, looking around her at the scattered Atlantean bodies that she and the Sun-hunters had already dispatched. "This lot wasn't worthy of an Amazon," she continued, and then fixed her gaze on Nazul. "Or the Galeshi." She walked away, seeking a better position for the fight that was about to begin.

The sprite, Autumn, looked up from her perch on Nazul's shoulder and shook her head. "She's going to make someone a fine slave-driver someday," she said, not quite as lightly as she could. "I think she's got her eye on you as a subject."

Nazul smiled uneasily. "You're so encouraging." Turning back to Chromazar, he said, "Now, about this monster we have to destroy...."

The Demi-magus was about to speak when his face hardened. Pointing to the end of the corridor, he simply said, "See for yourself, brother. It's here."

The huge Golem had rounded the corner, and stood facing them. It was twice as tall as a man, with the face of a demon. Its bronze skin reflected both the torchlight and the magical energy shimmering from the Magestone in the walls. In its right hand was a gigantic axe; its left arm ended in a long tube.

"Is that a cannon?" Autumn asked. Nazul nodded. "I think we should be elsewhere," she continued, as the Golem aimed at them.

"Good idea," Nazul said as he dived after Chromazar and Sham-rin into a crossing corridor. Behind them, the floor where they'd been standing violently exploded into flame and stone shrapnel.

Autumn was the first one back on her feet. "Allow me," she said, and flew back into the main corridor. The others followed in time to see the Golem, confusion on its metal face, floating in the air. A heartbeat later, it flew backward and collided with a Magestone deposit at the end of the tunnel. It lay there a moment, stunned.

But then it rose to its feet, a look of rage on its metal face.

The other heroes charged into battle, weapons drawn. Autumn said, "Just once, I'd like it to be that easy," before she flew in to join her friends.