Session 12: When the Heart Shall Wake

□□ Music / Podcast

Placeholder for the approved Session 12 soundtrack, cover art, audio player or podcast link.

□□ Images

Replace the following placeholders with approved BookStack gallery images. The accompanying VTT screenshots provide location and scene references, not finished art.

- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Vorgrath's journey and the encounter in Baldur's Gate; source references: 01-flashback.jpg, 02-flashback.jpg]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — dragon lighting the city's braziers; source reference: 03-chonky-dragon.png]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — the Shattered Spire or Darklake Brewery; source reference: 04-darklake-brewary.png]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Errde Blackskull's sealed message; source reference: 05-letter-for-help.png]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Iragon's finished armour and the Gracklstugh shops; source references: 06-shops1.png, 07-shops2.png]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Overlake Hold, empty throne and Errde's meeting chamber; source references: 08-throne-room.jpg, 09-errde-blackskull.jpg]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — East Cleft streets and hidden cave; source references: 10 through 14]
- [IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Buppido at the bloodied shrine; not yet generated]

□□ Trailer

Placeholder. Add only if a Session 12 trailer is produced.

□□ Campaign Arc

Campaign	Out of the Abyss
Dungeon Master	Reuben / Rewrock
Session Number	12
Working Title	When the Heart Shall Wake
Real-world Date	4 November 2026
In-game Time	After midnight following the alley battle and into the next day; exact Kythorn date unconfirmed
Setting	Gracklstugh: the Darklake District, Shattered Spire, Darklake Brewery, Gilded Gryphon, Overlake Hold, East Cleft District and a concealed shrine cave; Vorgrath flashback to the road to Baldur's Gate
Player Attendance	All five active player characters present, including Mike as Vorgrath

□□ Previously On...

Following the two-headed giant's death in the Blade Bazaar, the party had found temporary shelter at the Darklake Brewery. By morning, their derro companion Buppido had disappeared without a message. The search for him became entangled with the pursuit of Droki, a small, hatted thief who had waved at Varang and fled. That chase ended in a narrow street where a drow recognised the travellers as escaped prisoners. Edric's Fireballs and the ensuing fight left the drow and opposing Stone Guard dead, including one drow who had surrendered. Droki escaped, and the group was left among the bodies with no clear idea how the authorities would respond.

□□ Overview

The Road After the First Rage

The session began with a memory from Vorgrath Kael's past. In the days following the deaths of Randall and Aaron, Vorgrath crossed an unforgiving stretch of desert and stony country alone, carrying the guilt of having failed to keep them alive. He recalled the goblin attackers and their red sashes, and his anger threatened to rise again. Instead, he held it beneath the surface. His grief hardened into a private resolve that no one under his protection would be lost in that way again.

On the trade road towards Baldur's Gate, caravans warned him of goblins and bandits troubling travellers. Vorgrath reached the city's outer district and approached Flaming Fist soldiers for information. A lieutenant could not tell him where the goblins were, but supplied directions towards Commander Lothan, who was recruiting people to patrol the roads and attack bandit hideouts.

Before Vorgrath could pursue that lead, a hooded woman fell into step beside him. She questioned whether he sought justice or vengeance, spoke of restoring balance rather than merely spilling blood, and slipped a torn piece of paper into his hand before vanishing. The contents and meaning of that paper were not revealed.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — the hooded woman approaches Vorgrath in Baldur's Gate]

Blood in the Street, Fire Above the City

Back in Gracklstugh, the party resumed immediately after the previous session's alley battle. Rather than remain among the dead, they searched the fallen drow and the apparent leader of the dwarves, collecting weapons and **62 gold pieces** before trying to slip away. They wiped their blades, attempted to draw as little attention as possible, and moved out into the Darklake District.

At around half past midnight, a massive dragon passed over the city and moved from one elevated bronze fire basin to another, igniting them with its breath. The spectacle revealed an unexpectedly practical role for such a fearsome creature: keeping Gracklstugh illuminated. Edric's incredulity at the idea of a dragon serving as the city's torch-lighter briefly interrupted the tension of the escape.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — the dragon ignites Gracklstugh's great braziers]

A Tavern Without Beds

Hoping to avoid returning directly to their known rooms, the travellers followed the sound of bagpipes, lute music and revelry to the **Shattered Spire**, a crowded tavern reached by a bridge over the docks. Its keeper welcomed trade but had no available accommodation. He nevertheless allowed the bloodstained group to wash themselves and their clothes, and they stopped for drinks and questions.

The conversation brought practical information about the city. The keeper described the derro neighbourhoods on either side of the great Furrow, warned that foreigners were unlikely to be warmly received, and spoke of the derro's history of enslavement and their present status as free inhabitants. He also mentioned increasing visits by myconids and drow, with the latter still a danger to anyone vulnerable to being taken as a slave. None of this gave the party Buppido's location. They eventually returned quietly to the **Darklake Brewery**, avoiding unwanted attention on the way.

Jimjar recalled that Buppido had been restless in bed before disappearing, while Eldeth had no useful new information. The brewery keeper again described Buppido leaving normally and of his own accord. Before sleeping, Edric arranged magical *Alarm* protection for the rooms, and the travellers completed a long rest, waking around mid-morning.

The Message from Errde Blackskull

When the party returned to the brewery's common room, **Keeper Dwaylin** handed Varang a sealed letter. Varang broke the seal and read it. Its author, **Errde Blackskull**, said she knew about the previous night's events and needed help with local corruption. She instructed the recipient to bring the letter to **Overlake Hold** for admission. The party did not yet know whether this was an invitation, an attempt to recruit them, or a trap. They chose to follow it.

> **Help needed**
>
> *I know about last nights events, and need help with some local corruption seek me out at the Overlake Hold present this letter for admission.*
>
> — Errde Blackskull

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — insert the supplied image of Errde's letter here]

Armour, Shops and Shared Gold

Before visiting the hold, the party made use of the day's trade. Ront, Eldeth and Fargus went to investigate the derro districts on the party's behalf, with the Darklake Brewery established as their meeting point. The main group returned to the **Gilded Gryphon**, where Iragon's commissioned plate armour was waiting. The finished suit was fully articulated, lightly decorated with runes and tinted gold-bronze. Iragon paid the outstanding portion from the shared party funds and arranged to sell his previous chain mail for **45 gold pieces**.

The others browsed the district's merchants, handled shared treasure from earlier adventures and discussed practical and unusual equipment. They also discussed selling surplus valuables and allocating approximately **500 gold pieces** to each of the five adventurers. Purchases and transfers were handled through the shared *Lofty Thieves* inventory; only clearly established acquisitions are recorded below. Varang looked for a magical cloak but found none at the shops visited.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Iragon wearing the completed gold-bronze plate armour]

The Captain Who Knew

At **Overlake Hold**, the letter gained the party entry. While passing through the administrative chambers, they glimpsed the empty throne associated with **Deepking Horgar Steelshadow V**, but the king did not appear. A guard led them instead to Errde Blackskull, who asked them to close the door before speaking.

Errde made clear that she already knew about the deadly fight in the alley. From her perspective, the party had stumbled upon an arrangement between some guards and drow slavers while following Droki. She said she would not press charges over the deaths because those guards had

been helping the slavers. But the incident was only part of a wider problem: some Stone Guard were turning a blind eye to slavery or actively participating in it, and she no longer knew how many of her own people could be trusted.

Errde believed **Droki** was working for or carrying out business involving the **Council of Savants**, the derro advisory body associated with the Deepking. She wanted the party to bring Droki to her and offered a reward. Varang made a counter-request: help locate Buppido, their missing elderly derro priest. Errde suggested looking for places of worship towards the edges of the **East Cleft District**, rather than the newer western district. She also spoke of reports of sick derro and increasingly tainted conditions in the clefts, though she did not claim to know the cause.

To make the search possible, Errde issued **12 Stone Guard insignias in total** for the party and their companions (five initially, followed by seven more). She explained that these would ease passage past checkpoints and into most city districts and caverns, but **not** grant admission to the Deepking's private hold. The insignias gave the party freedom of movement; they did not make them actual Stone Guard officers. Errde's suspicions remained broader than Droki alone: neither the extent of the corruption nor which officials and factions were involved had been established.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Errde Blackskull speaking privately with the party]

Through the East Cleft

On returning to the brewery, the party discovered that Ront, Eldeth and Fargus had failed to gain access to the derro neighbourhoods because Stone Guard had turned them back. With the new insignias, the travellers regrouped and set out again. During a search through the Darklake District, they spotted **Droki** heading south-east. They followed him towards the Furrow and showed their insignias when guards stopped them at the crossing. By the time they entered the East Cleft, however, the thief had slipped from sight.

The district descended along a narrow route into a crowded and impoverished tangle of ramshackle homes, rope bridges, fungal growth, hanging cages and smoky air. The drop beneath the bridges disappeared into haze. Derro watched the heavily armed visitors approach, but the party deliberately relied on its imposing appearance rather than trying to pass entirely unnoticed, and moved through without a confrontation.

Carved messages covered the rock in several different hands. Edric used *Comprehend Languages* to read them. The warnings spoke of a stirring deep, dreams beneath the stone, horns of a maze lord, spores, hunger, the Darklake and an awakening heart. One longer sequence stood out:

> *When the crown whispers, the heart shall wake.*
>
> *When the heart awakens, the rot shall remember.*

Nothing the party learned established the writers' identities or how the messages connected, if at all, to the city's corruption.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — the fog-filled East Cleft and its carved warnings]

The Passage That Eyes Passed Over

At the far end of the district, Varang sensed that something about a rock formation was wrong. The others had passed it without recognising anything unusual, but Varang's familiarity with subterranean passages drew attention to a narrow opening that seemed strangely easy to overlook. Once it was pointed out, the entrance was visible to everyone. The group entered, passing into a cave network with high chambers and some very tight connecting tunnels.

Fungi grew along the walls. Stool's spores enabled him to explain two varieties: **Bigwig**, a purple-capped mushroom that could make the eater larger, and **Pygmywort**, a pale mushroom with a blue-spotted cap that could make the eater smaller. Edric collected one of each; other party members also discussed gathering samples. The mushrooms were not eaten during the recorded exploration.

Following the tunnels carefully, the group reached a bend from which a light could be seen ahead. They approached without immediately alerting whoever was in the chamber.

The Heart Upon the Altar

Inside a shrine chamber stood **Buppido**. Several dead derro and two duergar lay nearby, and the missing companion was covered in blood. At first, some of the party wondered whether he might have interrupted someone else's ritual. What they saw next undermined that explanation: Buppido was using a knife to carve runes into a derro's flesh. He removed the derro's heart and carried it to the altar. **It was not established whether that derro was already dead when the ritual began.**

Edric moved to stop him with *Web*. Varang prepared to follow with *Command* if the first attempt failed, while Vorgrath began rushing forward. The session ended at that instant. Whether Buppido had noticed the party, how the magic would affect him, and what the confrontation would become remained unresolved.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER — Buppido at the altar as the party intervenes]

□□□□ Party Members

Character	Player	Class / Subclass	Race	Status	Notable Actions
Aeris Naïlo 	Justin / Slitzer	Druid / Circle of the Land	Wood Elf	Alive	Asked about routes through the derro districts; supported the pursuit of Buppido; encouraged theatrically presenting the newly granted insignias to the companions.
Edric Faustin Valemont 	Rob / BaconBuff	Wizard / Abjurer	Human	Alive	Helped recover the alley loot and organise funds; protected the sleeping rooms with *Alarm*; deciphered the cleft inscriptions using *Comprehend Languages*; opened the shrine intervention with *Web*.
Varang the Ash-Mender 	Ben / Moose	Cleric / Life Domain	Chthonic Tiefling	Alive	Read Errde's letter and negotiated help finding Buppido; noticed the concealed cave entrance; offered Vorgrath a hunting trap; prepared *Command* at the shrine.

Character	Player	Class / Subclass	Race	Status	Notable Actions
Iragon Midsommar 	James / Sicareus	Warlock / Paladin	Eladrin	Alive	Collected his commissioned plate armour, sold his previous chain mail and joined the renewed search in the clefts; played along with the mock ceremony for the party's new insignias.
Vorgrath Kael 	Mike / MikeKong	Barbarian / Path of the World Tree	Orc	Alive	Featured in the opening flashback about Randall, Aaron, the Flaming Fist and a hooded stranger; accepted Varang's offer of a hunting trap; rushed towards Buppido when the ritual was revealed.

□□ NPC Tracker

Only people with important new developments this session are listed; previously established companions and factions are not repeated without a change.

NPC	Role	New Information / Status
Buppido	Missing derro former-prisoner companion	Found alive in a concealed shrine chamber, bloodied and apparently performing a heart-removal ritual. Motive and outcome unknown.
Errde Blackskull	Captain of the Stone Guard	Sent the letter, privately acknowledged corruption and the alley deaths, requested Droki be brought to her, and issued access insignias.

NPC	Role	New Information / Status
Droki	Elusive derro thief	Spotted again and followed towards the East Cleft; eluded the group at the crossing. Errde suspects a connection to the Council of Savants.
Keeper Dwaylin	Darklake Brewery keeper	Delivered Errde's sealed letter to Varang and again described Buppido's unforced departure.
Ront, Eldeth and Fargus	Travelling companions	Their separate reconnaissance ended at a Stone Guard checkpoint; they rejoined the party before the East Cleft search.
Stool	Myconid companion	Identified Bigwig and Pygmywort fungi in the concealed cave using his communication spores.
Hooded woman	Unidentified figure in Vorgrath's flashback	Confronted him with a question of justice versus vengeance and handed him a torn paper; identity and purpose unknown.
Commander Lothan	Flaming Fist commander, mentioned in flashback	Named as the person recruiting road patrols. No direct meeting with Vorgrath was shown.

Key Locations

Location	Significance This Session
Shattered Spire	Temporary stop to wash and ask after derro routes; no beds were available.
Gilded Gryphon / Darklake shops	Iragon's armour collection and the party's equipment and currency transactions.
Overlake Hold	Errde's meeting and the party's first official means of passing certain checkpoints.
East Cleft District	Derro settlement with ominous inscriptions, poor visibility and a hidden passage.
Concealed shrine cave	Location of the revelation concerning Buppido and the unfinished confrontation.

⚔ Session Highlights

- **A personal vow resurfaced:** Vorgrath's flashback revealed the guilt and resolve carried forward from the deaths of Randall and Aaron.
- **The alley aftermath became a political opportunity:** Errde treated the fight against compromised guards as help, not an offence she intended to prosecute.
- **Restricted ground became accessible:** Stone Guard insignias allowed the travellers to press into the clefts and caverns.
- **The inscriptions gained a disturbing echo:** A warning about an awakening heart preceded the discovery of Buppido at an altar.
- **The search found Buppido, but not the truth:** The missing guide's circumstances were far more alarming than his original disappearance suggested.

□□ Key Scenes

Short, confirmed vignettes to guide later artwork selection; each focuses on no more than two named figures.

Justice or Vengeance?

On a busy street of Baldur's Gate, a hooded woman matched Vorgrath's pace and questioned the purpose of his anger. Before he could discover who she was, a torn paper was left in his hand.

Help Needed

At the Darklake Brewery, Dwaylin gave Varang an intact sealed letter. The message inside named Errde Blackskull and asked for help dealing with corruption in Gracklstugh.

Private Words at Overlake Hold

Errde closed her chamber door on the street outside. She knew about the alley deaths, but her concern was directed towards the guards who had cooperated with slavers.

The Knife and the Altar

In a cave shrine, Buppido carved into a derro's flesh and lifted out its heart. At the chamber's edge, Vorgrath began to rush forward while magical webbing was cast to intervene.

Ongoing Threads & Plot Hooks

- **Buppido's actions:** Why was he in the shrine, who were the dead, and what was the purpose of the heart and carved runes? His relationship with the party is now an immediate question.
- **Droki and the Council of Savants:** The thief remains uncaught. Errde's suspicions have not been independently confirmed, and the nature of any work he performs for the council is unknown.
- **Corruption inside the Stone Guard:** Errde believes her own ranks are compromised, but does not know whom to trust. The insignias offer access, not immunity from scrutiny.
- **The East Cleft's messages:** The references to the crown, heart, rot, spores, horns, hunger and Darklake remain unexplained. Their authorship is not uniform.
- **Vorgrath's torn paper:** Its text, the hooded woman's identity and the connection to his search for the goblin attackers have not been revealed.
- **Older unresolved threats:** The party has still not explained the unnatural rot encountered earlier in the Underdark, the two-headed giant's strange behaviour, or the full extent of drow influence around Gracklstugh.

Loot & Discoveries

Item / Transaction	Finder / Holder	Confirmed Outcome
62 gp	Shared party inventory	12 gp from the apparent dwarf leader and 50 gp from the drow bodies in the Session 11 alley.
Weapons from the alley	Shared party inventory	Three longbows, three rapiers, one shortsword and several weapons from the dwarf leader; some of the leader's weapon names are unclear in the transcript.
Commissioned plate armour	Iragon	Gold-bronze, rune-decorated full plate collected from the Gilded Gryphon. A 735 gp deposit had been paid previously; the balance was dealt with through shared funds this session.
Previous chain mail	Iragon / party funds	Sold to the armourer for 45 gp.
12 Stone Guard insignias	Party and companions	Errde issued five, then seven additional insignias. They allow passage beyond many checkpoints and into most city districts and caverns, but not the Deepking's private hold.

Item / Transaction	Finder / Holder	Confirmed Outcome
Bigwig and Pygmywort mushrooms	Edric; others possibly collected some	At least one of each collected in the hidden cave. Their size-changing effects were explained by Stool; none was eaten in the recorded scene.
Errde's letter	Varang	Read and presented for admission at Overlake Hold; its wording and sender are known.
Unidentified torn paper	Vorgrath, in flashback	Received from an unidentified woman in Baldur's Gate; its contents were not shown.

Noteworthy Discovery: The East Cleft Inscriptions

The VTT record also preserved messages including *“The deep stirs,” “They dream beneath the stone,” “Do not look into the Darklake,” “We heard the horns of the Maze Lord,” “The spores sing her name”* and *“The hunger comes on four feet.”* Their presence is confirmed; their meaning is not.

Cliffhanger

By the end of the session the search for Buppido had succeeded in the narrowest possible sense: the party had found him. He stood beside a shrine amid several bodies, holding the heart he had removed from a derro. Edric cast *Web*; Varang prepared *Command*; and Vorgrath broke towards the altar. The DM ended the session before the outcome of any of those actions was established.

The party had found their missing companion. It remained to be seen whether they could stop him.

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