Chapter 13: Suzail Nights

*[Based off a highly modified version of Dungeon 143’s Mask of Diamond Tears…]*

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agpie wandered through the Royal Museum of Suzail, thumbs tucked into her belt, admiring the art and casing the joint, trying to determine just what she’d come back later that evening to steal. Sadly though, she noticed a bit of a scene that cooled her ardor to rob the joint. Someone had beaten her to it. She casually listened in as the Museum’s curator told the guard that someone had stolen the Mask of Diamond Tears the night before. Magpie had never heard of that particular map, but it sounded valuable.

After the guard left, Magpie approached the human woman and gave a little wave, “Hey, I’m Magpie. Sorry to bother you, I know you’ve had a rough day, but I couldn’t help but overhear that someone stole one of your artifacts. I just happen to be a vacationing adventurer who cannot help but get involved in mischief that I have no business being involved with. If there’s a reward on the table, I could be convinced to help retrieve your thingamabob.”

“Oh, I know who stole it. I can’t prove it, but it was that no good, two timing scoundrel, Thaddius Tannebbaum III.” There was no attempt to disguise the scorn in her voice.

“I’ve always believed you can’t trust a person who appends numbers to their name.” Magpie replied, patting the woman’s arm. “Why do you think it was him?”

“He seduced me so he could learn all about the mask, then had his pet rogue steal it. I should have known better than to trust an illusionist. He… he just said all the things I wanted to hear. He’s favored by the nobility, so the guard won’t believe me.” She hung her head with a sigh.

“Well, good news. Unlike the guard, I don’t need proof to act. I’ll go check out this Thaddius guy. If he has your mask, I’ll take it from him.” She tilted her head up at the woman, “Where could I find him?”

Later that night, Magpie stood outside Chateau Tannenbaum. She popped her neck, turning her head one way then the other, then cracked her fingers before starting to cast spells. First, Nondetection, which would last 14 hours, and make it so anyone trying to use a divination spell upon her would need to first pass a DC 29 caster level check. Then, she cast Greater Invisibility, True Seeing, Arcane Sight (which would all last 14 Minutes, and then Dimension Door to pop into the home’s grand hall.)

The manor was filled with illusions of all sorts, but the True Seeing made them largely irrelevant.

An image of an attractive human male with dark hair that greyed at the temples and piercing blue eyes popped into the Great Hall, one Magpie recognized as a ‘Project Image’. A useful spell indeed. It spoke, “Welcome to my home, gnome.” Given that it was speaking into open air, it probably couldn’t tell where she was. “I trust you are here for the Mask. I would advise that you give up this quest. It’s too dangerous for the likes of you.”

As a full round action, Magpie used a Silently cast Major Image spell to appear and speak to him from the other side of the hall, “You’d be surprised what’s too dangerous for the likes of me, Tannenbaum.”

Magpie Bluff: 34

Tannenbaum’s Sense Motive: 16

The projected image cast a Waves of Exhaustion onto that side of the room, so Magpie had her illusionary double groan and slump visibly. “That was hardly fair.”

“That’s the one warning you get. You are clearly talented, but you are messing with forces beyond your comprehension.” The image held up a wand threateningly.

“Yes, yes. Doom and gloom.” The illusionary Magpie waved a dismissive hand, “I’m a caster. Being tired isn’t that much of a hindrance. If you were serious, you’d have feebleminded me. Unless you either didn’t prepare it, or you were saving it for someone else.”

The illusionist flinched slightly, “What do you know, gnome?”

“It’s Magpie, human.” The illusion replied. “I know you went through trouble to steal the mask. I know you’ve bunkered up in your house and haven’t fled, despite there being evidence that you took it. That tells me you aren’t worried about the guard, you’re worried about something that can come for you regardless of where you run, so you’ve chosen your sanctum to make a stand. I know you’re scared, but not necessarily of me. So, why don’t we cut the bullshit and talk this out before our spells expire, or fight it out. Either way works for me, but I think a fight might be taxing on you if you’re expecting other guests.”

Magpie Diplomacy: 20

The image frowned and lowered the wand. “Fine. You are correct, somewhat.” He rubbed his carefully groomed beard. “The mask is a powerful extraplanar artifact that allows it’s user to call alternate versions of people from other dimensions.”

Magpie was dumbfounded, and that showed on her image’s face. “You utter git. That’s a horrifying item.”

“That’s why I couldn’t just leave it with the museum… but, there’s a problem. It… it was stolen…” The image winced, “By an ethergaunt.”

Magpie’s Knowledge Planes: 15

Magpie pretended she knew what one of those was, “Of course it was. Do you have any idea how bad you’ve cocked all of this up.”

“Yes, yes I do. But it’s going to meet me any minute now in my observatory to negotiate. Except I think it’s going to try to kill me so no one knows it has the mask.” The image swallowed, “Will you… uh, help me deal with this?”

“Why not? Cleaning up messes caused by other people seems to be all I do anymore. Lead the way.” Magpie’s illusionary double twisted the Owlfeather’s ring as the beguiler dismissed the illusion, making it look like she’d just used a ring to turn invisible again.

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Part 2

Magpie invisibly followed the illusionist to his observatory. Their conversation hadn’t taken more than 10 minutes, so she had plenty of time left on her spells to deal with whatever was in the observatory… right?

As it turns out, an Ethergaunt is a horrifying, gangly mess of nonsense. It’s just a weird looking, long, spindly legged extraplanar aberration. This one was wearing a diamond mask. And it seemed to know where Magpie was even if she was invisible.

“Ritharius, I’ve come to parlay,” Thaddius Tannenbaum III declared theatrically. Before walking into the room, he’d cast Mage Armor, Protection from Electricity, Shield, and Mirror Image.

“No, human.” The creatures voice was a discordant collection of scratchy whispers born straight from nightmare. “You’ve come to die.”

Suddenly, two other figures appeared in the room. One looked very much like Thaddeus, but was leaner, less well kept, with a dramatic scar across one cheek. The other was a rock gnome who could have been Magpie’s twin sister. Her dark hair was shaved on the sides and sculpted into a fierce, spikey Mohawk with red tips. She carried an oversized crossbow that burned with abysmal flame and wore a holy symbol of Cyric around her neck.

“Oh, for gods’ sake.” Magpie muttered.

Initiative

• Tannenbaum 21

• Willowedge (Mirror Universe Tannenbaum) 16

• Shrike (Mirror Universe Magpie) 14

• Ritharius 10

• Magpie 8

Round 1

Tannenbaum cast Maze on the ethergaunt, shifting it off the board so they could deal with the clones.

Willowedge seemed very invested in murdering Tannenbaum, as evil Mirror Duplicates usually were. Rather than being an illusionist, however, this one appeared to be of the roguish nature. He danced up to the Illusionist, drawing a blade as he did so. He attacked with his punch dagger.

Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+19 = 30. 1d6 for Mirror Image = 1. It hits Tannenbaum instead of a duplicate, for 5 points of damage and 1 point of Constitution, which was far more pressing.

Shrike couldn’t see her enemy so quaffed a potion of Detect Invisibility.

Caster level check versus nondetection: 1d20+3 = 14 Fail.

Still unable to see Magpie, Shrike cast Swift Invisibility.

Ritharius, finding himself in a maze, considered using his scroll of plane shift, but instead just tried to use his inhuman intelligence to work his way out of the Maze.

Intelligence Check 1d20+10 = 21. Success! He popped back in at the end of the round.

Before he had a chance to come back, Magpie decided to cast a Dominate Person on her evil doppleganger, since her True Seeing made the invisibility moot.

Shrike’s Will Save: 1d20 + 4 = 18. Fail.

Shrike’s eyes glazed over and Magpie felt very odd about this turn of events.

Round 2

Tannebaum took a 5’ step away from his evil doppleganger, cast a Quickened Displacement, then cast Baleful Polymorph.

Willowedge’s Fort Save: 1d20+7 = 22. Success! He does not turn into a toad.

Willowedge does, however, step forward and start stabbing.

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+19 = 32 Displacement: Miss

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+14 = 17 Displacement: Miss

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+9 = 20 Displacement: Hit. Mirror Image 1d5 = 4. A mirror image pops.

Shrike delays, waiting for instructions from Magpie.

Ritharius, as a free action, slips his mask down, revealing the non-Euclidean horror he calls a face. It’s so ghastly, all no ethergaunts need to make DC 16 Will saves or it damages their brains.

• Tannenbaum 1d20 + 12 = 27

• Willowedge (Mirror Universe Tannenbaum) 1d20 + 8 = 16

• Shrike (Mirror Universe Magpie) 1d20 + 4 = 23

• Magpie 1d20 + 15 = 22

No one was terribly phased. Frustrated, the ethergaunt cast a Forcecage around himself so he could observe the fight without being attacked.

Magpie suspected it was the Ethergaunt that was the real concern, plus, he had her mask. Mentally, she commanded Shrike to kill Willowedge, then cast Dimension Door to teleport into the Forcecage with the ethergaunt.

The extradimensional horror looked down in her direction, saying in its nightmare voice, “This is no concern of yours, leave and you can live.”

“Give me the mask and you have a deal.” Magpie counteroffered.

Shrike, with orders, looked at Willowedge’s back, lifted her crossbow and took aim. With a meaty sounding ‘Chunk’ she sent a bolt hurtling toward his spine, then reloaded.

+2 Great Crossbow w/ poisoned bolt 1d20 + 20 = 26. Hit! Damage 2d6+6 + 7d6 sneak attack = 37 pts of damage.

Fort Save vs Wyvern Poison 1d20 + 7 = 18. Success!

Round 3

Tannenbaum takes another 5’ step back and casts a silent Phantasmal Killer on Willowedge.

Willowedge Will save: 1d20 + 8 = 28. Success!

Willowedge, in a surprising twist, steps forward and continues stabbing.

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+19 = 39 Displacement: Hit. Mirror Image: 1d4 = 3, an image pops.

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+14 = 26 Displacement: Miss

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+9 = 14 Miss.

“Mmm, let me think,” Ritharius replied to Magpie’s counter offer, then cast Polar Ray at her.

Ranged Touch Attack: 1d20 + 13 = 27 Hit! Miss Change = 17. Miss. (Whew!)

Magpie meeped, then said, “Okay, fair enough. Screw you too, buddy.” She whipped out the big guns and cast Feeblemind on the otherworldly horror.

Ritharius’ Will Save: 1d20 + 12 = 22 – 4 for being an arcane caster = 18… Fail! It was hard to tell if he suddenly looked stupid because his face was so freaking horrifying.

Shrike cast Swift Invisibility, repositioned, and fired another bolt at Willowedge.

+2 Great Crossbow 1d20 + 20 = 22. Hit! Damage 2d6+6 + 7d6 sneak attack = 40 pts of damage.

Round 4

Tannenbaum took one last 5’ step back and cast Enervation on Willowedge.

Ranged Touch 1d20 + 9 = 15 Miss!

Willowedge neatly sidestepped the beam and got to stabbin’.

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+19 = 34 Displacement: Miss

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+14 = 24 Displacement: Hit Mirror Image 1d3 = 1 Hit!, 1d4 +2 = 5 damage, 1 Constitution.

• Attack: +3 Wounding Punch Dagger 1d10+9 = 22 Displacement: Hit Mirror Image 1d3 = 2 an image pops.

Ritharius blinks and drops his mask as he scratches the side of his head.

Magpie gingerly grabs both the Mask and a scroll of the thing’s belt.

Shrike fired another bolt at Willowedge.

+2 Great Crossbow 1d20 + 20 = 28. Hit! Damage 2d6+6 = 11 pts of damage. Willowedge, collapses, blood pouring from his mouth. His body doesn’t disappear.

Battle done.

Thaddius watches Shrike suspiciously, but the spikey haired gnome doesn’t attack him.

Magpie dimension doors back out of the Forcecage and looks over the scroll. She nods a bit and sighs, looking over at Thaddius, then Shrike. “Okay, here’s the deal. I’m taking this back to the museum and telling the lady there what this actually is.”

Thaddius started to object, but Magpie interjected, “I just shattered the ethergaunt’s mind, and I can do that a few more times today. You really want to give me grief right now?”

The illusionist frowned, “As you say. What about your evil doppleganger?”

Magpie sighed and walked over to Shrike, “The Ethergaunt is dead. Answer me honestly, if I send you to another plane, will you hunt me down?”

“Yes.” Shrike replied, “And I’ll find you and kill you. But, I’ll do my best to ensure you don’t see it coming.”

“I was afraid you’d say that. Fair enough. At least I’ll get myself a head start. Don’t resist this spell. I’m going to send you to a different plane, where you won’t be under my control anymore.” Magpie recited the scroll, and Plane Shifted her evil doppleganger into the middle of the Elemental Plane of Water. Hopefully Shrike couldn’t breathe water.

“That was pretty cold.” Tannenbaum commented.

“So’s leaving a brain damaged ethergaunt in a Forcecage in your observatory, but I’m still going to do it. Later!” Magpie Dimension Doored away.

The next day, Magpie returned the Mask of Diamond Tears to the museum, carefully explaining the dangers it represented. While part of her was tempted to keep it for herself, some things are too dangerous to toy with.

Still, if there was a reward to be had, she wanted it. Not like she does these things out of the goodness of her heart, after all.

Fin.

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Caleb was the most studious and least debaucherous of the group. He found a comfortable inn and spent his tenday studying, researching, and reading the tomes in his possession. Once he discerned the nature of each magical tome, he gifted a few to his mates.

 “Tough Guy’s Journal of Being Tough”

*Caleb permanently gained +1 to Constitution.*

“The Better Part of Valor”

*Caleb permanently gained +1 to Wisdom.*

“The Quick and the Nimble”

*Jason permanently gained +1 to Dexterity.*

“How to Win Friends and Influence NPCs”

*Jason permanently gained +1 to Charisma.*

“Maximizing Upper Body Mass”

*Kali permanently gained +1 to Strength.*