Chapter 11: Llewellyn

As the Locust Swarm finally came into the port and tied off to one of the docks, the four heroes said their goodbyes to their new friends.

“Sorry you won’t be staying with the crew,” First Mate Azmul made eye contact with all of them before he and Durban rowed the dinghy back to the ship.

From atop the deck a few hundred feet to their south, the Captain bid them all a fair future with a tip of her hat.

They’d earned their passage on the Swarm, and were now hungry and hopeful. Making their way along the pier and boardwalk to the shantytown of Llewellyn, they took in their surroundings, registering with a human boy dressed in somewhat official clothing. “What is your business on our island?” asked the well-meaning knave as guards atop two towers surveyed the dozen or so civilians in sight.

Map

Description automatically generated

Standing on the wharf, they outlined their priorities. Nihm inhaled deeply the coastal breeze, wondering what wonders they would witness as they wandered here.

As they began walking towards the Smashed Skull, Nihm looked off into the distance. “I want to have a little look around before we settle in.”

Baldoor looked over, “You sure, lass?” A bit of concern was present in the dwarf’s voice.

Kassuq looked over at Nihm then Baldoor, “I’ll go with her.”

“OK,” Baldoor replied, feeling a bit better, “jus don’t go too far.”

“We’ll be fine,” Nihm replied with a smile, then motioned Kassuq to follow her. The two headed off at a jog, Nihm with her bow in hand. As they reached the edge of town, Kassuq transformed into a wolf and trotted along at Nihm’s side.

Haal watched them head out, then followed Baldoor to the Smashed Skull. “So, does she do that a lot—run off and explore—I mean?”

Baldoor looked off after the pair again, “Only when she’s bin penned up fir too long. I jus think she’s glad ta be back on land.”

Nihm and Kassuq meandered about 100 yards beyond the last cabin and found a clump of trees to climb up into. They almost instantly spotted an injured wolf in a clearing about 500’ away. It had felled an antelope, but not before the antelope had gored it in the neck, and now it struggled near the body of the well camouflaged antelope, which they hadn’t originally seen against the tufty, orange grass characteristic of the island.

Seeing the injured animal, Nihm motioned Kassuq to stay back, not wanting his wolf form to spook the injured wolf. She extended her hand and spoke softly to the wolf as it looked at her. “It’s okay, I’m not going to hurt you,” she whispered softly. “I’m just here to help you.” She repeated it over and over until she was sure the wolf would let her look at its injury.

The elf offered up a healing potion for the wolf to drink, using her everfull mug to let the canine lap it up. Kassuq stayed back and sat patiently, watching Nihm as she tended to the animal.

~\*~

Within minutes, the wolf was walking once again, and offered a bit of the antelope’s healthier organs as it gorged itself in the contents of the animal’s torso. Coated with blood the animal’s face betrayed a placid satisfaction as it fed further.

Nihm watched as the wolf ate. She moved closer and removed some meat from the deer and noted that the wolf didn’t get angry or try to stop her.

Meanwhile, Kassuq transformed back into his archon form, which got a look from the wolf, but not much else.

When the wolf finished its meal, it walked over and sniffed at Nihm, before laying down next to her and putting its head on her lap. Nihm smiled and stroked the top of the wolfs head. “So, what should I call you,” she said. The wolf looked up at her, twisting its head slightly as if trying to figure out what she said.

After a few minutes of sitting, Nihm got up, causing the wolf to stand as well. She looked at Kassuq, “We should head back before Haal and Baldoor start to worry.”

Kassuq nodded, “And what about your new friend?”

Nihm looked down at the wolf and pulled a piece of the meat she had cur from the carcass and gave it to the wolf. He chomped it down, swallowing it after a couple of bites. “We shall see what he wants to do. If he follows us, then we will keep an eye on him. If he heads back into the woods, then we will have served our purpose here.”

Kassuq nodded, “That is a simple, yet powerful philosophy.”

The two started walking and glanced back. The wolf sat and looked at them both for a moment. Then Nihm smiled and said, “Would you like to join us?”

The wolf got up and trotted over to her. He then followed them both back towards town. Nihm wasn’t sure that the wolf understood her words, but she was sure he understood her meaning.

As they arrived at the tavern, they saw Haal and Baldoor standing outside. Baldoor had a pint of ale in hand while Haal had a glass of wine. When they saw the pair coming down the trail with a wolf in tow, Haal spoke up first. “Is that another hound archon, or did you pick up a stray?”

Kassuq laughed, “No, he is a real wolf.”

Nihm turned to the wolf and rubbed his head. The wolf closed his eyes and seemed to be enjoying the scratching and rubbing. “He was injured when we found him and I tended to his injuries. He now seems to be attached to me.”

“I can’t blame him,” said Haal, who instantly blushed slightly. He quickly added, “He looks to be a very healthy specimen, have you chosen a name for him yet?”

Nihm looked at Haal and smiled, appreciating the comment. She then looked at the wolf, “Not yet. However, since it was lucky for him that we found him when we did, I was thinking of calling him ‘Lucky’.” She looked down at the wolf who was looking up into her eyes in return. “What do you think,” she said softly, “do you like the name ‘Lucky’?”

Lucky then stood on all four paws, his tail wagging, and barked several times.

“OK,” Nihm said, scratching behind Lucky’s ears, “Lucky it is.”

The wolf chewed a bit on Nihm’s hand, not piercing the skin but expressing a jovial playfulness, then nosed her lap before smiling at her.

They were able to check out some of the posts at the tavern. The professional work most desired was in the way of tannery, husbandry, and hunting, but there were some security recruitments and adventuring gigs as well. And as on the mainland, there were fares posted for the usual ports.

Nihm got into a conversation with a well-rounded apothecary who related that the wildlife in Alaron was mostly dwarfed. “Island dwarfism is a thing, deary,” she’d emphasized as she proceeded to point to various parts of the island map on the wall. “Llewellyn has been cleared of varmints, for the most part, but you’ll find goblins all along the north, mostly in the inland hills. Other monstrous humanoids, too, but you’ll definitely want to watch for goblinoids along the roadside unless you’re traveling along the coast.”

Baldoor expressed an interest in the deities worshiped in the area along with any information on undead in the area, and as on the ship, found himself in the company of Valkurites and other sea-god worshippers. There were also missions to Chauntea and other Faerûnian deities associated with agriculture and fertility. He thought to follow-up on this information and visit a temple or two while in town.

Haal, meanwhile, listened attentively as a halfling related stories of long-abandoned locations on the island. There were no less than three such sites on the north side of the island of Alaron, and these were all described as sites of former importance. “Looters have had their way with the upper levels of the Calidyrr Catacombs, but there are reputed lower levels that no one has ever found and returned to describe.

They learned about the [Moonwells](https://forgottenrealms.fandom.com/wiki/Earthmother), and Bhaal’s corruption of these wellsprings of magical goodness, and sought to visit one if they were in the vicinity. Chauntea’s avatar—the Earthmother—had successfully restored the majority of these Moonwells, but some were reputed to be hidden to Chauntea’s vantage by Bhaal’s successor—Cyric.

With no temples to any of their gods, the group decided to at least pay a visit to one of the local temples devoted to Valkur. Leaving a donation, they thanked the god for protecting them during their travels from the mainland.





Afterwards, they decided that they would head for the Calidyrr Catacombs, stopping in the closest town. Haal, checked a map to also see if any moonwells were in the area. He and Nihm would want to stop and visit one of the sacred sights if they had the chance.

They decided on the well-trod road that led through Grady, and then past Regent’s Field through patches of the Dernall Forest, occasionally settled by elven folks and other woodsy humanoids. The Dernall lands were the most plagued by goblinoids, and it was reputed that they were bolstered by at least one of the remaining corrupt Moonwells. Some of the smaller villages in the forest had already had to contend with the goblins and their ilk, and it was only a matter of time before they grew to a critical mass.

As they traveled, Nihm worked with Lucky to see just how much he could learn. Her main focus wasn’t on having him go charging into battle, but making him more of a protector or guard. With Kassuq’s help, she began trying to teach Lucky. The initial focus was on commands like ‘Down’, ‘Come’, and ‘Stay’ before moving onto the more complex purpose of ‘Guarding’ involving things like ‘Attack’, ‘Defend’ and ‘Guard’.

Baldoor was happy to jump in and help in whatever role was needed. Haal likewise, though, tended to prefer to do as much studying as he could. He looked over any maps they had. The idea of Moonwells hidden and still corrupted intrigued him, and he hoped that maybe, through some missed clue or overlooked text, they might find one and restore it, thus lessening the hold of the goblinoids in the area.

~\*~

With only the provisions they’d carted over aboard the ship, the party set off northward on foot with full bellies and hopeful hearts. At a moderate pace, the 40-mile trek to Grady would take two full eight-hour days of waking, which they could probably do in less, but they’d arrive fatigued and ill tempered.



They walked at this leisurely pace, taking the time to smell the wild roses growing along the roadside amidst other foliage. Making their way around yellow-eyed grass fields peppered by the occasional araguaney and poinciana trees, the quartet found itself taking delight in the smells of Flamerule’s warm caress upon every petal, blade, and leaf in sight. The prior day’s rains were even now evaporating from the surface of the land, and as they ventured further into the inland highlands, they put the thought of returning to Llewellyn behind them.



Hours passed, and they were now in a woodsier area where the fiery orange leaves of the araguaneys spanned across the blazed trade route that led them to Grady. They’d passed two horse-drawn wagons by now, and had also spotted some exotic birds under the trees’ canopy. With no guide, and a small map they’d purchased for less than a gold coin, they continued northward until they heard yet another wagon approaching, with the clippity-cloppity of at least two horses pulling it.

When they heard the approaching wagon, they moved off to the side of the road (to the group’s right) and waited for the wagon to pass. They made their presence obvious as they did not want to startle those in the wagon or give the impression that they were bandits.

The gnomish wagoner spotted them, and bid them a good day, prompting a woman—likely his bride—to draw open a curtain and peer through the wagon window. She smiled politely, then drew the curtain closed again as the pony-drawn wagon went on about its southward way as the party looked to the north once again.

~\*~

A field of colorful flowers with Lake Tekapo in the background

Description automatically generated with low confidence

They continued along the path for quite a few hours, and by the time the sun was dipping into the western horizon, the path wound towards the coast and presented them with a spectacular view of a snapdragon-covered slopes that surrendered into the coast.

They were weary from a day’s travel, and as they’d predicted, about half-way to Grady. No more wagons had passed them, suggesting that anyone who knew how to plan a trip along this path did their best to avoid it at night.

“We should set up camp,” suggested Baldoor.

“I agree,” replied Haal. He was happy to stop for the night. So far he’d been on quite the adventure with his new friends. Tracking down drow, sailing across the ocean, and now headed off to encounter who knows what.

After they found a spot giving them a good vantage point on the road as well as decent concealment, Kassuq pulled the tent from his haversack. He and Baldoor quickly set it up while Haal looked around at the flora, determining if any were edible or had medicinal uses.

There were a few herbs that they could forage, as well as blueberries that grew by a stream that skirted the road to the west.

Nihm kept busy with Lucky, working on some commands and improving their bond. The wolf seemed took to the training with enthusiasm and intelligence. Once the tent was set up and a fire made to cook their meals, Baldoor suggested, “Haal, you’ll take tha first watch since yer human eyes, aren’t so good in the dark. I’ll take second watch.” He then turned to Nihm, “You and yer wolf kin take the third watch en tha kid,” he finished looking at Kassuq, “Will take tha last watch.”

Everyone set up their bedrolls. With what promised to be a dry night Nihm and Kassuq placed their bedrolls outside of the tent while the other two set up inside. After eating their meal, the three headed off to sleep, leaving Haal on watch.

~\*~

Nothing truly harrowing happened during the night, though at one point, Lucky darted off towards the stream, and it took Nihm longer than she’d cared to spend searching to find him with a rodent in his mouth.

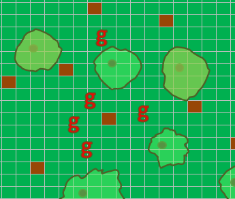
By Dawn, they’d started to wander about on pee outings and blueberry pickings, and by the time the sun was fully in view, they’d struck camp and continued on north.

~\*~

Highsun

Lucky had warned them of something awry up ahead, and fortunately, they were downwind of the danger. At the wolf’s behest, they’d veered eastward off the trod road, and eventually happened upon some goblins, who had spotted them first. There were about 20 visible, and one by one, they drew their weapons and started charging from about 200’ away. With only a few small trees in their path, the goblins would be upon them in a few seconds.

*Each “g” represents a cluster of 4 goblins occupying a 10’ x 10’ square.*



Round 1

The goblins seemed to be smaller than the usual mainland variety, noted Nihm and Haal.

Seeing how clustered the goblins were, Nihm quickly cast *entangle [ranger, expired on Round 21]*, hoping to catch as many as she could. She then drew her bow and said “Guard” to lucky and pointed to Baldoor. Nihm could not readily identify the goblin in charge, at least not yet.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *entangle* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| 4 Goblins | Reflex | 1 | 11 | 12 |
| 4 Goblins | Reflex | 1 | 15 | 16 |
| 4 Goblins | Reflex | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| 4 Goblins | Reflex | 1 | 11 | 12 |
| 4 Goblins | Reflex | 1 | 3 | 4 |

*Fail, success, fail, fail, fail.*

A picture containing screenshot, green, pattern, colorfulness

Description automatically generated

And though a quartet of goblins got caught in the spell, the others were well outside it, and made way for the heroes.

Baldoor moved to pace himself in front of Nihm. He then pulled out his shield and war hammer, content to wait for any of the tiny goblins to reach him.

Kassuq, seeing how many goblins there were, decided against a head long charge into their midst. Instead, he drew his sword and advanced with Baldoor, remaining on the dwarf’s right side and waiting for any goblins to reach them.

Haal tried to recall any weaknesses that he knew about goblins. He then grabbed his Infinite Scroll Case and called forth one of the *summon monster I [expired on Round 2]* scrolls, calling forth a Celestial dog, sending it to stand and guard Kassuq. Haal, using his knowledge will look for the leader of the goblins and point him out to the others.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal, Knowledge: Local** | 4 | **Int (+2)** | 0 | 6 | 1 – 5 | ?? |

*No significant results.*

Lucky looked at Nihm then headed up to Baldoor, standing on Baldoor’s left and growling at the goblins.

The goblins charged, some of them frothing at the mouth with fierceness.

*Ignore all Gs except the one being attacked by the spiritual weapons below.*

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Round 2

The first few goblins nearly reached Baldoor, Kassuq, the wolf, and the dog, and prepared to charge-attack them.

Baldoor and Haal cast *spiritual weapon [expired on Round 7 and 6, respectively]*, each attacking the closest goblin. Nihm drew her bow and began shooting at the goblins at the fore.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Notes** |
| Longbow +1 | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | 3.0 | +8 | 6 | 14 | +1 within 30’ |
| Longbow, Rapid Shot | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | - | +8 | 15 | 23 | +1 within 30’ |

*Miss, hit. Dmg: 6 + 1 = 7.*

She managed to hit a burly one with a menacing, horned helmet, and saw that the others were quite concerned with this one’s wellbeing. “That’s the leader!” she pointed out the rearmost coward as said goblin ripped her arrow out of his shoulder.

Baldoor’s *spiritual hammer* and Haal’s *spiritual mace* hammered one of the goblins.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Hammer | 1d8 | 1 | 0 | x3 | Bludgeon | - | +5 | 15 | 20 |

*Hit. Dmg: 3 + 1 = 4.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Heavy Mace | 1d8 | 1 | 0 | ×2 | Bludgeon | - | +3 | 11 | 14 |

*Miss.*

A Celestial dog appeared to Kassuq’s right, and attacked the already wounded goblin.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Dex Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** | **Threat** |
| Celestial riding dog | Bite | 1d6+3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | **20** | 23 | þ |

*Threat. 1d20 = 2 + 3 = 5, not a critical hit. Dmg: 2 + 3 = 5.*

The lead charger died as three others vied for his prestige.

The remaining goblins attacked.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** | **Targeting** |
| Goblin | Morningstar | 1d6 | 1 | 1 | 2 charge | 4 | 14 | 18 | Kassuq |
| Goblin | Morningstar | 1d6 | 1 | 1 | 2 charge | 4 | 7 | 11 | Kassuq |
| Goblin | Morningstar | 1d6 | 1 | 1 | 2 charge | 4 | 11 | 15 | Kassuq |
| Goblin | Morningstar | 1d6 | 1 | 1 | 2 charge | 4 | 6 | 10 | Kassuq |

*1 hit vs. Kassuq. Dmg: 2 [34/36].*

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Round 3

The Celestial dog disappeared as the scroll’s spell expired.

Satisfied with her results, Nihm now began targeting the closest goblins caught in her spell.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Longbow +1 | 1d8 | 1 | 1 – 2  range | x3 | 100’ | 3.0 | +6 | 3 | 9 |
| Longbow, Rapid Shot | 1d8 | 1 | 1 – 2  range | x3 | 100’ | - | +6 | 13 | 19 |

*Miss, hit. Dmg: 7 + 1 = 8.*

She managed to hit one with her second shot, and pierced its skull, killing it instantly. The goblins near it were now panicked, and trying their best to get out of the *entangling* vines.

*Maybe one or two get free and start moving towards the edge of the spell’s effect.*

With only 4 goblins to deal with, Lucky lunged and the closest one, biting at the little monster, Kassuq swung at the same goblin that Lucky had attacked.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Dex Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Lucky | Bite | 1d6+1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 15 |

*Hit. Dmg: 2 + 1 = 3.*

The already wounded goblin grimaced and began to die.

Haal directed his spiritual mace to attack one of the goblins in the back of the group of goblins attacking Kassuq and Lucky. He remained where he was and watched the other goblins to see if any got free.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Heavy Mace | 1d8 | 1 | 0 | ×2 | Bludgeon | - | +3 | **20** | 23 |

*Threat. 1d20 = 14 + 3 = 17, critical hit. Dmg: (2 x 4) + 1 = 9.*

That goblin in the back died a gruesome death, and would never again be recognized by its mother.

Baldoor directed his *spiritual hammer* to attack the goblin next to the one that Haal had just slain with his magically conjured mace; he then moved next to the wolf.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Hammer | 1d8 | 1 | 0 | x3 | Bludgeon | - | +5 | 19 | 24 |

*Hit. Dmg: 1 + 1 = 2.*

The only goblin remaining in their midst was the guy with the biggest hat, and the burliest physique, and he now turned tail, heading first towards his *entangled* underlings, then darting to the northeast to not be caught in the spell.

A picture containing pattern, green, child art

Description automatically generated

Round 4

Baldoor watched the goblin that was likely the leader running away. “Let ‘em go,” he said before Lucky or Kassuq got a chance to chase after the goblin.

Baldoor then said, “Let’s get movin’. They kin stay in yer spell ta let us get some distance.”

The group headed northwest and back onto the road they’d been travelling. Kassuq, as they passed close enough to the goblins for him to yell, said—using his Tongues ability—“Follow us and we’ll kill you all.” He added a menacing growl for emphasis.

Haal watched and observed the goblins as they walked past, his spiritual mace hovering near a couple of the goblins.

Nihm kept and arrow ready to fire as they walked away, watching for any of the goblins to make a move to throw or fire something at them.

The goblins snarled and sniveled until the heroes left.

~\*~

They were about an hour’s leisurely march away from Grady, the next settlement on their itinerary, and with a view of the sun setting over rolling hills all around them, they continued along the hillier path they’d chosen to take in lieu of a more meandering way around the hills.

A sunset over a snowy mountain

Description automatically generated with low confidence

As they descended towards the flatter plain that gave way to Grady, they passed the first sign of sedentary folks since they’d left Llewellyn yesterday morning.



This was still a far cry from the reputed town of a few thousand locals: just a cobbler whose shop housed a variety of general tools, and whose wife ran a modest inn and tavern just across the barely trod road. This was more of a home-turned-business than a standing industry, but it was the first welcoming architecture—fuming with some recently baked goodie—that they’d beheld in some time, and they marveled at the balance between the desolation around them and the domestic vibes they got from the lady who now came out of the inn and greeted them from afar. “I say, travelers, you look weary. Care for a pint, perhaps turkey stew?”

The entrails and other leavings of a freshly butchered turkey lay on a slab where a few scavenger birds now pecked and made the body parts disappear.

Lucky snarled at the birds, probably hoping to get some part of the bird.

The woman—a half-elf—turned to her husband, who nodded to the heroes from across the street.

A cartoon of a person holding a sword

Description automatically generated

Seeing the adventurers haggard and ragged, the human male offered, “I see you’re headed towards Grady; we’ve a wagon to take you the rest of the way. Holler if you want I should get it ready. It’d be five gold coins for the lot of you.”

Baldoor was very tempted, a meal AND a ride into town, that was an excellent offer. Haal also liked the idea of a ride the rest of the way into town. This had been more walking and traveling than he had done in a couple of days than, well, ever.

Baldoor looked around at the others, smiling when Lucky growled at the birds. “That’s a kind offer. I think we kin all use a good meal, and a ride into town would be appreciated.” Looking at the others, “I think 2 gold apiece would do.”

Baldoor collected the gold pieces from everyone, understanding that they were giving the man and woman a good tip, and handed over ₲8 to cover the ride and meal, which consisted of a bowl of stew and some bread. Baldoor and Kassuq enjoyed a pint of ale while Nihm and Haal opted for a glass of wine with their meals. Nihm also asked, “Do you have any bones for my friend, perhaps a few I can take for later as well?”

Ersilan—the woman with the flair for homy décor—asked the heroes, “By the gods that graced you on your path here,” the woodsy innkeeper smiled, “do regale us with tales of your adventures.”

This was not an uncommon ask from sedentary folk whose lives were only punctuated by the seasons that brought them harvests and shivers in cycles of never-ending monotony. Haal was the least accustomed to the prompt for his origin story, so he let the others go first.

~\*~

As the four sat down for their food, Baldoor talked about how he had met Kassuq. “Me en a patrol I was with came across his tribes camp. A group o’ giants had attacked, leaving only tha lad en a few others alive. So we got them to the Ten Towns area where they could recover. However, tha kid insisted on comin’ with. So he followed his uncle Akiak who helped us track down the giants a couple of days after their attack. With tha lad, Akiak, en me dwarf brethren, we slaughtered the 5 giants. After that, tha lad’s tribe decided to settle in the Ten Towns area and work more closely with tha towns folk. Kassuq,” Baldoor looked at the hound archon, “was a sponge, learnin’ everything he could. I taught him a bit about dwarven culture and how ta work a forge ta make weapons. When he was a bit older, we started escortin’ caravans south durin’ tha short summers. Eventually we bumped into tha lass here and a friend o hers.”

Nihm smiled and before she could speak, Haal added, “That friend wasn’t me, I just recently joined these three.” He then looked at Nihm who phaned offense at the interruption. Smiling after a long moment, Nihm began. “I am from Battledale, where I learned to track and deal with giants,” looking at Kassuq and Baldoor, “not unlike my friends. When I left, I arrived in Beregost. While there, I happed to run into a man named Leelusham Moontracer, or Lee for short. We were both working as scouts for the local militia or as guides for trappers and hunters or as guards for caravans headed in and out of Beregost. It was a decent living. We had several run ins with goblins and orcs as well as a few ogres. Eventually, when Baldoor and Kassuq came into town with a caravan, we got to talking. We agreed to work together and escort some larger caravans to make more money. That’s when we got hired by the zoo on its trip to Candlekeep. We fought off a minor attack or two along the way, but the fun really started at Candlekeep.”

“That,” Haal added, getting a smile and nod from Nihm to proceed. “That is where I came in. A group of elven supremacists known as the Eldreth Veluuthra organized an attack on Candlekeep. I was working there as a scribe, scholar and researcher when the four of them arrived. When the attacks became more serious, the city called for more warriors or anyone to help.” Looking at Nihm, “That was when the four of them headed out, unfortunately, Lee was killed while they were out tracking down some of the culprits.”

Nihm nodded and Kassuq spoke up, “I did avenge Lee’s death,” he also looked at Nihm for a moment, “but we had to carry on our mission, so we blessed his body and buried him before moving on. He deserved a better burial, but we know that he would understand.” Nihm nodded and gave Kassuq a smile of thanks.

Haal then continued, “When the city found the possible entrance and gathering place of the Eldreth Veluuthra, the asked these three and myself to go in and see what we could find. Cutting to the chase, we were able to get the patrons not involved out of the inn, then engaged the drow and drow-loving elves. After a tough fight, we were able to subdue many of them and take some prisoners. The city then thanked us and released us from our duties. That was when we decided to sail out on some new adventures. So far,” he looked at the other three, “it has been in interesting trip. We already encountered our newest member of the group,” he pointed to the wolf sitting next to Nihm gnawing on a bone, “Lucky. Nihm found him injured and nursed him back to health. Then,” he looked at their two hosts, “we got ambushed by a group of about 20 goblins, but managed to kill a few and scare the rest off.”

“Ah, yes. Goblins,” sighed the innkeepers almost at the same time. The wife continued, “We’ve had to deal with the buggers in recent months. Our neighbor’s a druid, and he’s got snares and other rigs in the area that give us all notice when the community’s in danger.”

The conversation continued, and with one topic leading to another, the innkeepers related the tale of Whisper and the Rumors, a band of shades and their nefarious minions whose mischief had rendered tales that had reached their ears.

*The PCs are now aware of the narrative in “Origin Stories ~ Whisper & the Rumors”.*

Having paid for the bones and all else, the party now decided on whether to stay the night, or have Ersilan’s husband—Zevin—take them into town before it got dark.

~\*~

The hop onto and stroll aboard the wagon were as pleasant as they were uneventful, and in little time, they were at the foothills of the rolling slopes they’d spent the majority of yesterday’s afternoon traversing.

Located along the High King’s Road in southern Callidyrr in the county of Stirgewick, the small coastal town of Grady sat along the eastern coast with the Strait of Alaron just west of Rushdown Wood. All the lands between here and Llewellyn—and far beyond to their north—formed part of the kingdom of Callidyrr, though evidence of goblin raiders and other uncertainties told the heroes that the hinterlands belonged to monsters yet.

Zevin unfolded the wagon’s flap, revealing the heroes to the town, and the town to them. “We’ve arrived, friends,” he announced jovially. He’d been paid a handsome coin, and would remain here until the next bell’s toll purchasing legumes, tubers, roots, and other vegetables, as well as some fish and butchered meat for the missus. He bid the heroes well, and gave the heroes some pointers and recommendations. “The Mahogany Manticore is your best place for eating, drinking, and lodging, though there are plenty of other taverns with no inns annexed. And the smithy covers all armory-related needs.”

This place was—they had to admit with a sigh—about as Podunk as Llewellyn, if not more. The port was a way down the hill, and as with Candlekeep Docks, was really a separate part of this settlement of fishers, farmers, husbands, and tanners.

“That wolf needs to be on a leash!” a middle-aged constable approached, then greeted the heroes. “I can see you mean well, but we’ve had more than scares with wolves here, and if you mean to make it your comrade, it needs to be collared and leashed.”

Nihm nodded to the constable, “Very well.” She was not thrilled with the idea, but went shopping for a leash and collar. She’ll get the bets collar she can find and a 6’ leather leash, letting go of a single coin in the exchange.

Other than that, the heroes learned that local customs here were fairly lax, and as long as the newcomers were willing to pay, there were plenty of basic services here to be enjoyed. The fishery in particular offered a smorgasbord of bounty from the adjacent sea.

It was no special day, and yet a half-dozen young people sang and danced around a fire about 100’ from the nearest building, ushering celebrations of life’s victory over their daily hardships.

Once the collar was purchased, they walked around the town, reserved a room at the Mahogany Manticore, then looked at the other shops and dining establishments, noting nearly the same menus featuring local and imported ingredients. They found a place where they could sit outside that had a good variety of fish, meat and stews or soups, which was right across from the Manticore. It was called Eat at Æsholef, and the stew was a rich, starchy, delicacy that the heroes were urged to try by just about everyone within earshot of the question when Haal posed it to the host.

“We will eat well here,” commented Haal, noting the locals’ emphasis on hospitality as shopkeepers’ and innkeepers’ employees lit various torches and other light fixtures outside their establishments.

They sat next to an off-duty constable as they ordered the stew and a few sides, and Haal knew by now that he should be the social bug in the quartet—quintet if one counted the wolf—when the occasion called for it. He struck up a conversation with the fellow human, who was probably put off by this type of thing normally.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal, Diplomacy** | 4 | **Cha (+2)** | 4 | 10 | 6 – 10 | ?? |

*See below.*

“Oh, mainlanders, eh?” smirked the guard. “I wouldn’t have guessed.”

Haal and Baldoor noted the sarcasm in the tone, but took it to be jovial, not confrontational. Haal replied, “I imagine one out of three or four people here are passersby.”

“That’s about right,” the volunteer guard said. “Merchants from the north come to trade with our fisheries during the winter months, and this is the peak season for the Llewellyn folks and a ton of outlanders to come this way for holiday. We don’t have much to offer here in the way of amusement, but we’re near a fair number of places that are.”

He provided the names of landmarks that they’d already noted in their journal, though they weren’t on the map, they appeared to be some of the noted the sites of the Moonwells.

The guard finished his meal right as the heroes were having theirs brought out, and he said, “Ah, Æsholef’s stew. Coming for that tomorrow, maybe.” The waiter told him some local idiom about caterpillars and armadillos with which the guard agreed, and off he went after leaving some coins on the table.

They didn’t catch his name, but with such a small standing population, they’d probably see him again.

The other diners near them were: a pair of women discussing something sotto voce, a half-dozen rowdy loggers with sawdust snowing from their clothing and hair as they toasted to some fallen brother’s memory, and a lone figure with slim features and a wide-brimmed hat. The loggers were surely from nearby, but the others wore clothing emblematic of a larger settlement.

Haal noted the locations that the constable mentioned. When the man walked away, Haal considered his options. He wanted to find out a bit more, especially if there were other dangerous creatures about and if so, where and how recently they were seen. Not that he was afraid, he just wanted to be prepared.

As Haal thought, Nihm got up and walked over to the lumberjacks. “Pardon me,” she said as she pulled a chair up to their table, Lucky sitting down at her side, looking at the lumberjacks. “It sounded like you were toasting a friend; may I ask what happened if I buy you all a round?”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal, Diplomacy** | 4 | **Cha (+2)** | 4 | 10 | 16 – 20 | ?? |

*See below.*



“His name was Garthol Creapurr,” one of them announced, then proceeded to recount tales of the half-orc’s exploits in the midst of the woods.

“No one could bring down timber faster’n Garthol, boy!” another lumberjack added as Haal received many thanks for the round of drinks. Ale was the drink of the evening, and the next gesture came with an invitation to join tables. The waiters were fine with it, and nodded to Haal.

Baldoor and Kassuq watched the lumberjacks’ reaction closely while Haal turned his attention towards the others in the room. He was debating talking to the women or going over to the stranger in the corner hiding under his hat, but the conversation was just getting started with these fellows and gals. Their names—as best as the heroes had come to understand—were: Samhain (m half-elf), Voivod (m human), Exuma (f dwarf), N’lundra (f human), Pi’Krug (m half-orc), and Quartzmallet (m goliath). They had not a gray hair among them, and they were all deeply rooted in this community, spanning a handful of generations at least.

Like the guard, they worked mostly for goodwill, clearing the forest, and providing lumber for the local mill, a modest, but active business that supplied the slow but steady construction and renovation of infrastructure in and near the village. The economy here seemed to be robust, given the bounty of resources that the land yielded, and that merchants brought to enrich the diversity of available nutrients, textiles, and in the case of these lads, lumber.

Lucky seemed nonplussed with the loggers, but neither was he distressed by them, even when they blurted out in vulgar laughter after an unexpected punchline, farse, or some other folly.

With the conversation going well, Haal turned to the others in the room, “Come, join us.” He then began telling the tale of their battle of the ramfish on their voyage to Llewelyn. He embellished a little to make it more exciting, giving a good amount of detail.

It was a bit weird for the two women and the lone man to just come join them, so these folks just kept on eating their food.

As Haal told the tale, Baldoor ordered another round or ale as well as some bread, cheese and meat for the table, offering a handsome tip.