Chapter 13: The Wild Magic Swamp

The night passed uneventfully, and the heroes slept rather soundly, not having had to tend to security between sunset and sunrise. They struck camp, and headed once again for Pembroke, passing a handful of lesser villages and hamlets along the way, and reaching that settlement by the end of the day. The county of Stirgewick was a vast highland plateau, and Pembroke was its most notable town. Built amidst a clearing surrounded by intact forests, the town was as quaint as Llewellyn and Grady, but its architecture was better suited for the chillier winters characteristic of these highlands. Log cabins and longhouses with pitched roofs were the norm, and were quite ample, intended to house multiple families. There was a single inn—the Leprous Leprechaun—with two adjacent taverns, and a general store run by a blacksmith named Svarventin.

The merchants guided the horses towards the stables behind the Leprous Leprechaun, and they bid the heroes well without much ado. “We’ll be here until tomorrow if you’d like a ride back to Grady,” offered Jadziya with a smile as a pair of lads approached from a temple with the insignias of Lathander and Shaundakul emblazoned on the front doors.

“Friends!” one of the lads called out. “We were worried you’d been accosted by goblins.”

“Nay!” Bríjido assured them. “Waylaid a bit by a trio of hobgoblins, but we set them to rights. Here’s the one we captured,” the human announced as he pulled the tarp off of the rear wagon and revealed their prisoner.

A constable took notice and approached, greeting the merchants with familiarity, “Good job, brethren!” Within a minute, the hobgoblin duskblade was turned over to the constable, and the monstrous man was taken away.

Glad for the night’s rest and the ability to pray for new spells, the quartet had looked forward to their arrival in Pembroke. Now here, they thanked their hosts for allowing them to tag along and wished them all well on their return trip. “We will be remaining for a few days at least,” Haal informed Jadziya when she offered a ride back.

They’d collected their belongings from the wagons as their first priority, and now at the Leprous Leprechaun, they secured two adjoining rooms with a common door. They left a few things *[list anything you leave in the rooms]* and took a few hours checking out the town, noting that there were no other shops or taverns, though a few folks operated makeshift word-of-mouth businesses out of their homes. These were restricted to trades such as apothecaries, tailors, and scribes. With a better lay of the land,

“What did you ask that Constable earlier?” Haal wondered.

Nihm answered, “Oh, about leash laws. Apparently, the only requirement is that you have some means of controlling the animal and preventing an attack or accident.”

“Ah.”

“Well, it’s a wee town; we expected that,” Baldoor sighed.

“Tavern then?” Kassuq motioned, and upon the others’ nods, led the way.

“Which one?” asked Haal. “Left or right?”

“I like the vibe I get from this one,” Kassuq went with his instincts as they made their way to the one with the least amount of patrons in front.

They entered the unnamed bar, greeted the barkeep—a chubby half-elf who introduced himself as Fafred, the Archbishop of Brewing. They were duly intrigued.

It did not take long for the server and others dining to mention not goblins nor hobgoblins, but forest trolls that had attacked the town weeks earlier, and had stolen most of the foodstuffs in the Joint Mission of Lathander and Shaundakul just a few hundred feet up the road. The merchants had mentioned it in passing, but it had seemed very much over in the telling, while local word warned of impending follow-ups, given the success of the monsters on their previous raid, which had only barely harmed the fast-healing mongrels.

“Sleep lightly,” one of the diners—a dwarven woman with trimmed sideburns—cautioned them as she waited for her food to be served. “I can see you’re a stalwart lot, and we’ll likely benefit from your blades and crafts,” she almost asked of their assistance in anticipation of such a calamity.

Kassuq had counted the few Constables he’d seen around the village during the peak daylight hours, and as the afternoon sun dipped further towards the western hills, he calculated the odds that a full shift would be able to fend off a troll incursion. They’d asked how many there were, and six was the agreed-on count by the witnesses and their loved ones.

“So, we’ve stumbled upon the site of a possible troll invasion?” Baldoor knew well the answer, but asked aloud.

“We could mosey on away if we like,” suggested the free-spirited Nihm.

“What do we know of forest trolls?” asked Kassuq, turning to Haal, by “we” meaning Haal.

“Uh...” he stumbled through his memories for a moment, “*We* know them to be more feral than the more common hill trolls, but like their more intelligent kindred, these creatures have no fear of death and attack unceasingly when hungry.”

The group left their backpacks behind in the room, taking their belt pouches and coins with them. They went to the tavern that Kassuq suggested, and planned a trip to the scribe in a bit. The tavern yielded little other local lore, and so off to the scribe they went.



The scribe was a human male whose background in the performing arts was salient in his mannerisms and accessories. His establishment’s walls were lined with small instruments and other accoutrements, and his three shelves suggested an affinity for arcana. “Oh, sure! I have plenty of scrolls for you to choose from,” he assured them. “What are you looking for?”

When the Scribe welcomed them, Haal inquired, “I’m looking for any clerical spell scrolls that you may have for sale? Also, if you have anything on the moonwells in the area, either written information or stories you can share with us.” Haal looked around at the instruments and wondered how long the man had been a bard.

“Oh, I regret that you’ll find nothing in the way of divine scrolls here; just arcane is what I deal in. The Mission has a strict monopoly on the divine stuff,” he sighed and shrugged.

“Does that include any information or history about the moonwells and perhaps any other local history and lore?” Haal asked further. “We plan on being in the area for a little while, so anything could be potentially useful.”

“Oh, it’s *lore* you seek!” the scribe quite literally donned a feathered hat, and offered the party a seat in the cloistered corner that could best be described as a collective reading nook. He proceeded to impart—in iambic pentameter—some of the woes of the moonwells. “Malevolent but wise, the will of moonwells’ lords…” his words rang out with confidence as another patron walked in and approached to hear the ode, or whatever it was.

Within minutes, the heroes and the newcomer had been entreated to a few bits of lore that they could confirm/correct by doing a bit more mingling and exploring.

* The Moonwells were indeed a manifestation of Bhaal’s corruption.
	+ As previously known, 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.
	+ Bhaal was reputed to have died during the Time of Troubles (1358 DR), but it was implied that Bhaal and Cyric were now a single deific manifestation.
* The poetry also echoed the aforementioned quintet of Moonwells, each about 20 to 40 (previously reputed to be 30) miles away from Pembroke.
	+ Each of these previously served as wellsprings that sustained tiny hamlets and nearby druid circles; all of these people have either abandoned the area or have become corrupted by Cyric’s will.
	+ The roads that linked Pembroke to its nearest settlements were blazed to be fairly equidistant from the nearest Moonwells, so at least one Moonwell was about 20 miles from a wagon-suitable road.
	+ Though smaller trails led the way to these, they were now overgrown due to little traffic, and the trip to each one involved at least a small bit of climbing along steep terrain that horses could not traverse.
	+ Trolls were not part of the imparted lore around the moonwells, but goblins and hobgoblins did come up in a few unsurprising references. Their numbers had allegedly risen in concert with the corrupting of the Moonwells.
* The notable humanoids that still dwell there include:
	+ a cult of demonologists
	+ a cancer mage
	+ a vermin lord and lady duo
	+ a true necromancer
	+ an entropy mage
	+ a blighter
* There are also monstrous humanoid groups that might be encountered, including:
	+ Goblinoid bands habitually stalk wanderers and plunder them, or worse.
	+ Bullywugs live in the swamps and ponds that surround Pembroke. They are not outwardly hostile to local humanoids, and default to unfriendly unless they have a reason to do otherwise.



As they looked at the map, Haal asked the scribe, “Are there any guides for hire, someone familiar with the area. We have a good ranger in our company,” he pointed to Nihm, “but someone familiar with the area would be helpful. Plus, an extra bow or sword would also be good.”

He didn’t really know how to answer the question, and admitted so, adding, “There’s not a soul in this town that I would knowingly send to a Moonwell these days. If you can cajole some fool at the pub into taking you part of the way there, I’ll applaud *your* performance skills.”

They all nodded, then Nihm asked, “When was the last time anyone visited or tried to visit one of the ‘Wells? If no one will guide us, then perhaps a more detailed map of the area would suffice. For now, we just would like to get an idea of their current state. It would be worth the effort to return them to their former, natural, uncorrupted states.”

“I don’t think you’ll find a map with recent entries in it. The historical maps are well outdated, and the trails and clearings between swamps and forests haven’t been kept up, not by any cartographer who’s passed through here,” shrugged the human. “The Missionaries might be your best source for any pointers on how to skirt trouble, but that’s more along the road. Get off the beaten path, and you’re the pioneering trailblazer.”

Again they all nodded. “Thank you for your assistance,” said Haal, “perhaps, if we return, we can give you some interesting stories to pass along and possibly earn a few extra coins as well.”

The group departed the shop, purchasing the most recent map and a few scrolls of recent history of the area. They then headed to the Mission to see about some clerical scrolls and also see what they had to add about the Moonwells.

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The merchants who had brought the heroes here were in the courtyard as younger people cleaned the wagons and tended to the horses. They were in their own discussion with one of the clerics, who nodded to the newcomers as they were led into a ceremonial pit whose crude, centuries-old craftsmanship was preserved with great care.



Baldoor was familiar with such sites, which were built with the intention of having a Permanent, hemispherically shaped *zone of truth* area of effect in the depressed area, and often a *silence* spell area of effect atop it. Incantators trained in Shaping and rendering their spell effects Permanent were often inspired by Lathander and Shaundakul, and in this area, these gods seemed to have a great deal of clout. At the center of the pit were two women, one young enough to be the other’s daughter. They bore somber looks as they exchanged information, then turned politely to the heroes as the elder greeted them.

“Cormyrson,” she then asked the disciple who had brought them. “To what do we owe the pleasure of these visitors’ company?”

“Priestess Sorce,” the young human replied to the woman with the painted face, relating, “These heroes came with the Grady Road Four, and helped fight off some hobgoblins, including the duskblade in custody.”



Both women nodded with respect at the heroes, and the younger woman looked them up and down before asking, “If you wish to trade, go see Delia,” she pointed back towards where they’d come from, and Cormyrson nodded, taking them to the scroll lady.



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“We’re looking for those that are fire based to use against the trolls,” the least diplomatic among them blurted out shortly after Delia and her two acolyte were introduced to the four humanoids and the wolf.



Cormyrson related the synopsis of the newcomers’ purpose here, and Delia motioned for her drow apprentice to assist the four in their procurement of divine scrolls.

As the looked over the scrolls, Haal and Baldoor each decided to add a couple to their arsenal. Baldoor said, “*Call lightning* can be useful, especially outdoors. I’ll take two of those scrolls if you have them handy.”

*375 x 2 = 750 x 110% = 825 gp.*

When the priestess returns and informs him that the scrolls will be delivered shortly, Baldoor smiles, and pays for them, adding, “Thank ye, lass.”

Nihm, though not one to normally use scrolls, decided that having a couple might be useful. She inquired, “Do you have *entangle* and *magic fang* scrolls?” When the priestess replied that they did, Nihm nodded adding, “Then I will take 4 of each of them.” She then paid the 220 gp for the scrolls and was informed they would be delivered to her shortly.

*25 x 8 = 200 x 110% = 220 gp.*

Haal spent a bit more time looking, distracted by the vast number of scrolls, but magical and mundane, and also distracted by the beauty of the priestess throughout the temple and library. All of them as pretty as, if not prettier, than Nihm. When he finally found the ones he wanted he requested them. “Um, I would like to obtain four *flaming sphere* scrolls.”

*150 x 4 = 600 x 110% = 660 gp.*

When the priestess returned and informed Haal that the scrolls would be delivered later, Haal nodded, smiling a bit more than necessary, paid for the scrolls and said, “Thank you very much.”

“So, it’s a guide you seek...” the leather-armored human ranger spoke up, her codename being Archer. “... to the Moonwells!”

Delia followed up, already smiling, “I don’t size you up to be of evil disposition, but I’ve been fooled before.” She then cast *detect evil* with no shame about doing so, as if offering them to do the same. Satisfied as the seconds drew out and she sensed no triggered auras, the shamaness of Shaundaukul extended the courtesy, “You seem like a fine enough lot, and there is indeed a guide that knows the way to the Wild Moonwell.”

The four heroes were intrigued, and allowed the half-elf scroll scriber to elaborate.

“Regarding the trolls you mentioned earlier, yes, they were six formidable foes—one of them possibly a fledgling. It was two tendays ago now that we sustained that siege, or sacking of our stores, and I will warn that they headed northwest, though they could be anywhere by now.”

The drow handed each furled and tagged scroll to its respective purchaser, adding, “We lack the forces to face off that many trolls on their terms, though we’ve been fortifying in anticipation of another siege.”

“A success on their part is often followed by a more emboldened reprise,” the woman in charge of the scroll exchange said. “Two consecutive successes constitute a viable livelihood for them.”

“Understood,” Kassuq said, though he was trying to understand how the rugged life out here could muster such youthful beauty in these three women.

Cormyrson smirked, suspecting that Kassuq was thinking such thoughts, and then announced, “Priestesses Sorce and Delilah.”

The two women they’d seen before joined these three and there the stood—all bearing emblems of Lathander, Shaundaukul, or both—as if studying the party of scroll purchasers.

“Priestesses, we were just discussing the prospect of guiding these good people to the Wild Moonwell,” Delia related.

“Sensible,” Priestess Sorce replied, “given Zhrezia’s familiarity with the area.

The drow smiled, not having stated her name before, “I suppose I *could* do this, but as you all know, there’s bad blood there.”

Priestess Delilah proclaimed, “There is a site on the way to that Moonwell where Zhrezia’s family once lived.”

“Surface drow,” clarified Zhrezia. “Fairly well meaning and egalitarian. Now what most think of as drow.”

Cormyrson—who had hosted a refugee family from there—added, “Truly an unfortunate tragedy that befell that community.”

The head Priestess got them back on track with, “We appreciate your interest in the Moonwells, and consider it a blessing from the deities when someone of goodly disposition expresses interest in the wellbeing of this land. The corruption that has beset every known Moonwell *will* someday be vanquished, and we need to be the participants in this initiative.”

Priestess Delilah turned to her elder and offered, “I will arrange a nutritious feast for tonight, and tomorrow we can set up a pack mule with a tent and gear.”

Sorce nodded, and praised Lathander and Shaundaukul. “Aye! Let it be so!”

And with very few words on their part, the four heroes were for all practical purposes conscripted into the Mission’s services. They’d initially been led to expect little interest in guiding them to the Moonwells; now they were feeling some informal pressure to aid these people in restoring at least one of them.

Nihm smiled at the priestesses, “Thank you for your assistance. We’d been led to believe that going to the wells was a fool’s errand. However, perhaps with your assistance, we will have a chance at success.”

Baldoor nodded, not as enthusiastic as the others, but willing to help the Earthmother, if that’s what restoring the wells would do. “I’m wonderin’, though,” Baldoor interjected, “if we should wait a couple of days before headin’ out. Just in case them trolls come back. Wouldn’t want ta leave the town short-handed in its defense.”

The other three nodded as Baldoor finished speaking. Haal adding, “Yes, there is no rush. We are eager to see the wells and possibly even assist in restoring one. But that will do no good if we do not have a safe town to return to.”

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The feast was more of a purification ritual, with foods served being intended to purge the digestive system within hours, such that adventurers could be readier for all other activities when their heroism was most needed. Teas were brewed with the goal of spurring peaceful slumber, and offers to polish their armor and other gear were made and insisted upon.

As they ate, the four spoke to those that would be joining them the following day. Trying to find out their fighting techniques and their spell preferences. Knowing who preferred ranged combat and who was better going toe-to-toe with the enemy was helpful. Kassuq also added, that, when they got close to the location of the Moonwell, he could cast *message* on several of them, so if they had to split into pairs, then they could still communicate. They could determine whom to cast the spell upon when they got closer.

They also mentioned that they priestesses should bring some healing potions as well. The group had some, but having more was always helpful. Haal also inquired whom to see in the morning about additional trail rations in case they are out for several days.

“We have a full crate,” Delia referred to the 24 individual flasks inside a wooden, leather-bound case.

When polishing armor and tending to other gear was brought up, Haal stated, “My armor is fine, but I do have a couple of daggers that could use some cleaning and sharpening. Thank you very much.”

Baldoor nodded, “Thank ye, me armor en shield could use a bit o’ polishin’. As fir me weapons, I kin handle cleanin’ and polishin’ them.”

Kassuq shook his head at the offer, “There is no need. I have no armor, just my sword and amulet which I can clean.”

Nihm bowed, saying “Thank you.” She was happy to have them clean and polish her armor, rapier, dagger and longbow.

They took the items, and nodded politely, working on them just down the way along with other people’s equipment.

They were presented with such finely polished and restored equipment that they suspected magic was at hand, but no, as far as they could tell, only able hands were at hand.

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The next morning, they awoke and broke fast early, and were nearly completely suited up by the time some adolescent boys showed up at the inn to convey that the Missionaries were ready to guide them to the Wild Moonwell.

During the night, the group had slept well and had all prepared a slightly different set of spells for the day’s journey. When they woke, they had fruit, eggs, some bread, and juices before preparing for the day. They were almost completely ready to go when an adolescent boy showed up and told them that the Missionaries were ready to guide them. Haal nodded, “We will be ready in a moment.”

There was a bit of excitement in their step as they made their way to the temple. When they arrived, Haal bowed, “Sorry for our late arrival, but we are ready to proceed as soon as you are.”

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal, Diplomacy** | 4 | **Cha (+2)** | 4 | 10 | 1 – 5 | ?? |

*See below.*

“Well, you may not be prompt, but you are resplendent,” commented one of the Elders of the Mission. “Some of you,” he added, then noting that some suits of armor hadn’t been tended to at all.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal, Sense Motive** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 | 16 – 20 | ?? |

*See below.*

The air of passive tolerance for their slight delay was tested, and the litmus paper in Haal’s mind found it necessary to add, “We... meant no sleight by our unpreparedness. I assure you; we’re ready to face whatever is out there.”

The three guides came forth, having been presented with some of the Mission’s best gear suited to their stations and specializations. Archer, Delia and Zhrezia were now better armored, and wore regalia emblematic of Lathander and Shaundaukul. They had been anointed with ceremonial clay paint that would mostly wear off in the next few hours, though it would fortify their spirits and resolve in times of strife.

The ranger, druid, and favored soul of Shaundaukul led the way to the pack mule, and offered, “You can load up a few of your things, but we don’t want to test Agatha’s strength.”

The wolf growled at Agatha.

“Uh, oh!” Delia said, looking to Nihm to settle the matter.

Nihm quickly knelt down next to Lucky and put her hands on his cheeks and turned him to face her. In a gentle voice, she said, “Friend, she is a friend,” as she rubbed his cheeks. She wanted him to understand but also not feel like he was being scolded. Nihm then stood and walked over to Agatha, stroking the donkey’s neck, again saying, “Friend, she is a friend.” Now, with Agatha’s scent on her hands, she walked back over to Lucky, and allowed him to sniff her hand. Allowing him to pick up both Agatha’s scent and her own. Again, she repeated, “Friend, she is a friend,” in her soft but firm tone.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Nihm, Handle Animal** | 5 | **Cha (+1)** | 0 | 6 | **6 – 10** | ?? |

*See below.*

Round 1

The wolf wasn’t having it as far as decorum went. This was a perfectly healthy smelling mule, and its meat would make a good meal. No, Lucky wasn’t backing down, and rushed and snapped at the ungulate.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Lucky | Bite | 1d6+3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 16 |

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

Looking up at Delia, Nihm hastily did her best to restrain the wolf, and said, “I apologize, he did not react like this to the horses as we traveled with the merchants here. Perhaps he caught an unfamiliar scent that he didn’t like. If I need to, I have a collar and leash I can use.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Touch Attack | 1d3 | 0 | 0 | x2 | Bludgeon | 0.0 | +4 | 5 | 9 |

*Miss.*

Nihm was unable to restrain the wolf that caused the mule to panic, and kick at Zhrezia, who stood behind the mule.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Mule | 2 Hooves | 1d4+3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 9 |

*Miss.*

The druid wasted no time in casting *hold animal* upon the wolf.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.***hold animal* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Lucky | Will | 1 | 6 | 7 |

*Fail.*

The wolf remained in place as Archer tended to the mule, separating it from the wolf before the wolf could wrest itself free of the *hold* spell.

“No, this will not work,” Delia said after casting the spell. “You must leave brother wolf behind if we are to guide you to were you wish to go.”

Round 2

Nihm pulled out the collar and leash, slipping it over Lucky’s head and then turned to the druid, “Release him. We will remain behind, the rest of you can go.”

Delia shook her head, “Nay it is, then, adventurers. May you fare well on your travels.” She indirectly asked the party to kindly leave, and her acolytes led the mule away with casual goodbyes.

When Lucky was released, Nihm offered him a treat from her rations, and led him away without looking back.

The four heroes and the wolf returned to the hotel, where Nihm spent some time working with him in an open field or area near the hotel. She tried to improve their connection and bond while working on skills and tricks.

By the end of the day, the wolf was responding much better to handling and general management, but alas, Lucky was still a wolf. As she led him back into their room, she noted the somber looks on the faces of her male companions.

“What is it?” the intuitive ranger asked the men, who were making no efforts to hide their expressions.

There was a brief moment of heightened unease in the already tense air before Haal spoke, “We’re... getting... some unfriendly vibes from the townsfolk.”

“How’s that?” asked the elven archer.

“The Mission is the main purveyor of information here,” Baldoor spoke, followed by Haal, who clarified that the innkeeper himself was a devout member, as was about half of the town’s permanent population.

“So, they’ve blacklisted us?” asked the woman.

“One woman spat on the path before my feet,” Kassuq qualified the situation.

“What, over Lucky?” Nihm was now approaching outrage.

“Not exactly,” Baldoor motioned for Haal to again articulate.

“They seemed intent on going to the Wild Moonwell only when we showed up, and the way we heard the story related back to us about an hour ago, our advent here was allegedly the answer to some prayers, and we’re now being branded as shirkers of our destinies.”

“Shirkers…?” Nihm had never heard the word before.

“One bookish-looking woman said something about the Mission being an inevitable zelekhut, and not to fuck with Lathander and Shaundaukul,” Kassuq smirked and shook his head at the end of the sentence.

Baldoor added, “I don’t want to peer too deep down their philosophical abyss, but it seems to me that they’re taking a fanatical stance on both deities dogmas.”

“And I’m assuming you’ve discussed possible next steps,” Nihm admitted.

“We can check out and leave now,” Kassuq began.

“Or not check out at all,” Baldoor proposed. Being the Lawful representative of the group, it had become his function to delineate the distinction between unlawful and immoral, and a note on the table stating they weren’t coming back was legal enough for him. They were paid up, and had no obligation to stay.

With that option came the question of the direction in which to head. They’d been on a northeastern course since leaving Grady. They were in Stirgewick County, the majority of which lay to their north, and none of them had any firsthand knowledge of any area not recently traversed.



 

*OOC: The PCs have incurred a variable modifier to their Charisma-based checks while in Pembroke, though the mod is +0 for NPC nonbelievers in Lathander/Shaundaukul.*

As they were about to decide what to do, a knock came at the door. “Nihm?” Delia’s voice rang from the other side of the wooden door.

Nihm opened the door, while the others readied their weapons and fangs.

Delia and Archer stood at the door, looking at everyone, lastly at the wolf. “We...” began Delia. “... would accept your proposition if you muzzle our fuzzy friend until we feel more comfortable with his company.”

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*[DM assumption]* Having accepted the druid’s hand as a gesture of acceptance, the party now gathered their gear and came down the stairs with Delia and Archer, instantly regaining street credit with those present, and those to whom they would soon gossip.

They made their way back to the Mission, which faced the back of the village’s main road, particularly the inn where they were staying, and regrouped with Zhrezia, who was tending to a flock of pheasants in a corral.

They had agreed to keep Lucky on a leash unless there was need for him to scout ahead or help to fight off a minor threat, and as she secured the muzzle in place, Nihm gave Lucky a reassuring petting behind the ears. “This’ll be a nice hike,” she predicted as she motioned for him to stay at her side as she had taught him earlier today.

“Very well. We have lost a day in misunderstandings,” Delia said after spending about 10 minutes in the company of Lathanderites and Shaundakulites specifying the conditions under which they would agree to take the wolf, and discussing the comparative tactical merits of bullywugs and lizardfolk.

“We will bring our crate of healing potions, but *do* come prepared, fed, and rested.”

“Yes,” Nihm spoke for them all. “We will return in the morning, and come prepared.”