Chapter 20: The Blackscale Swamps

They’d come upon a less sharp grade that allowed for a straighter path northward towards the Trade Way, which was mostly built atop swamplands, and they had by now reached the outskirts of Daggerford, where they were now. This was a portion of the Trade Way that had fallen into disrepair, and the path was quite eroded by a few seasons of rainfall.

“We should be arriving within the hour,” stated Big Z, anxious to reach his cousin’s home and be done with this impetuous lot.

Lucky had been restless most of the morning, and thus had been let out of the wagon to patrol the path just ahead of the horses. It was an honor for him to lead such large beasts through what they knew to be lawless lands. The scent of lizardfolk, bullywug, catoblepas, and other swamp life let him know that monstrous humanoids dwelled nearby and had likely passed through here recently.

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Xena also smelled the bullywugs and other coldblooded creatures, as well as fish that she’d love to chomp on.

A foggy lake with trees and grass

Description automatically generated

They were skirting the bank of the estuary that led to a higher ground to the east, and still an hour or so away from the greater confines of Daggerford.

Baldoor had grown sullen as they’d continued along the mostly northwestward trek, and he now daydreamt as they walked, slipping into a puddle and soiling most of his right boot with silt and detritus. “Aarrgh!” he held back a curse as he pondered on Moradin’s intended fate for him.

The group kept their attention on the swamp and the path ahead. Everyone had their heads on swivels, shooting glances in every direction, wondering if their luck had run out and something was waiting for them.

Then, as the water level came to the horses’ and bison’s knees, there came the realization that they’d blundered into a choice ambush spot.

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Round 1

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Group** | **Initiative** | **Roll** | **Modified Roll** | **Speed** |
| Haal | 1 | 0 | 20 | 20 | 30’ |
| Big Z | 1 | 3 | 10 | 13 | 20’ |
| Amara | 1 | 4 | 8 | 12 | 30’ |
| Baldoor | 1 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 30’ |
| Kassuq | 1 | 6 | 4 | 10 | 40’ - 60’ |
| Nihm | 1 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 30’ |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk | 2 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 40’ |

Haal identified a handful of blackscale lizardfolk, coming at them. He cast *spiritual weapon [expired on Round 5]* and sent the magical mace off to attack the closest lizard. He also tried to recall what he knew of the lizard species and told the others some useful info he could recall.

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| **Knowledge Devotion** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Knowledge: Nature** | 3 | **Int (+2)** | 0 | 5 | 7 | 12 |

*+1 to attack and damage for the remainder of the conflict.*



As Haal informed the others of the lizardfolk, they all began picking out their targets.

With the windows on the carriage open, Amara looked to the north as Baldoor looked to the south.

Seeing the two lizards to the north, Amara focused on the one further away, sending a series of *magic missiles* at the lizard.

*Dmg: 9 + 3 = 12 magic.*

One of the missiles nearly took off the warrior’s left arm, but the man was still charging.

Baldoor saw that the lizards were far away, and yelled to Big Z and Haal, “Keep that wagon here so we kin defend it!” He then climbed out the back and positioned himself to face the lizard approaching from the southwest.

Kassuq decided to wait for the lizards to get closer, so he held his position and cast *aid* upon himself.

Nihm looked to the north and fired off a series of arrows at the closest lizard and yelled to Lucky, “Stay, Guard!” so the wolf knew not to go charging off.

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| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Longbow +1 | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | 3.0 | +9 | 18 | 27 |
| Longbow, Rapid Shot | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | - | +9 | 15 | 24 |

*Hit, hit. Dmg: 2 + 8 = 10.*

Big Z did his best to bridle the horses to remain calm as the blackscale lizardfolk charged towards the humanoids.

The warrior that Nihm had pierced attacked her with fury.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 2 charge | 9 | 16 | 25 |

*Hit. Dmg: 6 + 6 = 12 [24/36].*



Their shaman adept shook a fetish in one hand and a bladed weapon in the other, casting a buff spell upon himself as the warrior who’d been struck by *magic missiles* charge-attacked Kassuq.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 11 |

*Miss.*

Another lizardman charge-attacked Baldoor while the fourth warrior did not yet reach the fray.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 17 | 26 |

*Hit. Dmg: 12 + 6 = 18 [24/42].*

The shaman yelled in Draconic, “Death to the mercenaries! Death to the Poisondusk and all of their ilk!”

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Round 2

Haal had his hammer follow the lizard, striking it as it was attacking Nihm.

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| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Heavy Mace | 1d8 | 2 | 0 | ×2 | Bludgeon | - | +8 | 12 | 20 |

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

Amara stepped out the back of the carriage as she targeted the lizard attacking Nihm with another round of *magic missiles*.

*Dmg: 7 + 3 = 10 magic.*

Baldoor finally had a target and didn’t hesitate, swinging his warhammer at the target in front of him.

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| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Warhammer | 1d8 | +1 | 1 | x3 | Bludgeon | 3.0 | +4 | 8 | 12 |

*Miss.*

Kassuq attacked the lizard that was now standing in front of him, swinging his sword.

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| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Longsword +1 | 1d8 | 6 | 1 | 19-20/x2 | Slashing | 4.0 | +10 | 2 | 12 |

*Miss.*

With all opponents still standing, Nihm yelled to Lucky, “ATTACK!” The wolf then attacked the lizard that had attacked Nihm.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Lucky | Bite | 1d6+3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 19 | 22 |

*Hit. Dmg: 6 + 3 = 9.*

At the same time, Nihm led her mount 5’ back *[move action]* before firing on the lizard with her bow.

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| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Nihm, Ride** | 3 | **Dex (+2)** | 0 | 5 | **6** | 11 |

*See below.*

Unable to steer her steed, the archer fired.

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| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Notes** |
| Longbow +1 | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | 3.0 | +9 | 13 | 22 | +1 within 30’ |

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

Big Z referenced the now embellished encounter with the forest trolls and displacer beasts, and urged the bison westward, careful to avoid the jutting palm trunk that the current had pushed onto what used to be a functioning road.

The charging lizardfolk reached Kassuq, and did his worst.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 2 charge  2 flank | 11 | 9 | 20 |

*Hit. Dmg: 7 + 6 + 2 charge = 15 [21/36].*

His accomplice beside him had wanted to attack the dog-faced man’s horse, but he did the more tactically sound thing, and swung at the dog-faced man’s leg instead.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 2 flank | 9 | 1 | 10 |

*Miss.*

With Haal’s spiritual mace behind him, and the lovely Nihm before him, the third lizardfolk cursed in Draconic, << Fools! The blackscale will *never* surrender these lands! >> He then tried his best to fell Nihm.

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| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 7 | 14 |

*Miss.*

Kassuq and Nihm understood.

The warrior facing Baldoor grimaced and swung again.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Blackscale Lizardfolk Warrior | Greatclub | 2d8+6 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 19 | 26 |

*Hit. 10 + 6 = 16 [8/42].*

Their shaman adept crept another 40’ closer, squinted as he took a better measure of the humanoids and their wagon and bison, then proclaimed, also in Draconic, << We hooold! >>

The three warriors took a step back.

*Baldoor, Kassuq, Nihm, and Haal’s spiritual weapon can execute an AoO at your discretion.*

Holding onto a prepared spell ready to be triggered, the shaman adept, then spoke in broken Common, “You are *no* mercenaries, yes?”

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Round 3

Haal looked around as he stood on the carriage next to Big Z. “No, no we are not,” he replied as he looked at the shaman. “We are travelers on the way to Daggerford and then on north from there. Is that why you attacked us? You thought we were mercenaries?”

The adept clenched his fist and dismissed his spell’s casting as Haal began to climb down from the wagon, walking toward the shaman as he allowed his *spiritual weapon* spell to expire.

The others kept an eye on the warriors just in case it was some sort of ruse, including Lucky who growled. Nihm and Kassuq also took the time to dismount and tied off the reigns from their horses on a nearby plant.

Big Z kept urging the bison forth in case the situation went sour again.

Baldoor took a moment and cast *cure serious wounds* upon himself, losing his *stone shape* spell of the same level.

*Baldoor gained 13 + 6 = 18 hps [26/42].*

The blackscale lizardfolk adept nodded and commanded the warriors to stand further back. A tense moment of silence passed as the reptilian men studied one another. The charm-toting medicine man then nodded a few times as he stepped forward amidst a foot or so or water at his feet, and simply said, “You may pass. Be warned: the vile Poisondusk will not offer this courtesy; neither will us if us learn that you in league with them.”

Baldoor turned to the wagon and yelled at Big Z, “IF YOU MOVE ANOTHER INCH I’LL FEED YA TO THE NEXT GATOR WE SEE!” The dwarf then began slogging his way back towards the wagon.

Haal gave a slight bow to the shaman, “Thank you, and if I may ask, who are the Poisondusk? We are not from the area, so I’m not familiar with that group or cult.” Haal wasn’t sure what they were, but hoped he could get some information from the lizardfolk as they seemed to be friendly enough.

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

*The shaman summarizes the information in MM III (pp. 96 – 97) on the poison dusk lizardfolk, which I spell as “poisondusk”. Assume the PCs now know enough to not be surprised by their unclassed stats if they encounter any.*

After Nihm and Kassuq had mounted their horses once more and moved towards the wagon, Nihm taking hold of the lead bison’s reins/halter, keeping the wagon from moving again.

Amara walked up next to Haal and also gave the shaman a bow out of thanks and respect.

Haal again bowed and thanked the shaman for the information. “Can you point us in the best direction to get out of this area, preferably without crossing into ‘poisonduck’ territory?”

“You keep along the road; not far now,” spoke the blackscale, sizing up the party as potentially lethal to them, had they kept on attacking.

“Thank you again for calling off your attack. We did not mean to trespass and, perhaps, if we are ever back this way, we can talk again. Be well, and may you and your tribe prosper.”

“Same,” said the sail-tailed adept.

Back at the wagons, they decided to alter their strategy a bit. Baldoor, Amara and Lucky all sat on the roof of the wagon where they looked for any ambushes. Haal took the passenger seat next to Big Z doing the same, looking around for any threats.

Nihm and Kassuq remained out in front of the bison and the wagon leading the way, stopping from time to time to look and listen for any threats.

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The group had been moving along slowly the last couple of days due to the injury to one of the horses pulling the carriage. Haal had been tending to it, but it was still a little ways from being fully healthy. During a stop near a clearing, Lucky and Xena both heard a commotion and got the attention of Nihm and Amara. With Kassuq, the three heroes and their two animal companions went off to see what the source of the commotion was. When they arrived, they saw a band of about 20 gnolls all surrounding a small group of bison.



There was already one dead bison, and though the gnolls may have been out hunting, their actions were not that of hunters. Instead, they were harassing the bison, one of which had a leg caught in a trap and couldn’t move. The others were doing their best to defend the smaller bison. The gnolls were taking turns rushing in and jabbing at the bison, killing them slowly with a thousand cuts instead of just finishing them off mercifully.

Angered by this, Nihm sent Kassuq back to get Baldoor and Haal so that they could put an end to this torture. To make it quicker, Kassuq transformed into a wolf and ran back to get Baldoor and Haal, returning to his archon form and quickly explaining the situation. The three then ran back and saw Nihm and Amara both intently watching the horrifying scene in front of them. Turning to the men as they returned, Nihm quickly outlined a simple and straightforward plan. Amara would turn invisible and sneak behind the leader of the gnolls. She would use *true strike* before bashing the beast with her mace. That would be the signal for the others to attack. Nihm would try to finish off the leader with her bow while the men, including Lucky, charged into the gnolls on their side of the field. Hopefully, they would be surprised enough to give the outnumbered heroes an advantage. Nodding their agreement, Haal and Baldoor also decided on what spells they would use as they charged in.

Amara looked at the others, “Keep an eye out for me to reappear,” she said as she finished casting *cat’s grace*, *mage armor* and *invisibility* on herself. She then headed off, trying to be as quiet as possible. The gnoll that appeared to be in charge was about 100 yards away. As Amara moved off, Haal and Baldoor waited 30 seconds before they each cast *bull’s strength* on themselves and Kassuq drank a potion of *bull’s strength* as well.

They all sat quietly, Lucky laying flat on the ground next to Nihm while Haal, Baldoor and Kassuq picked out their targets for their spells and their charge. Then, after almost a minute, Amara appeared behind the gnoll they thought was in charge, her mace crashing into his lower back with devastating force. The surprise and the impact sent the taller gnoll to his knees as the others all broke cover and charged ahead. Lucky quickly passed Haal as he and Baldoor cast their *spiritual weapons*. Each magical creation struck home on a pair of surprised gnolls, one of which was quickly torn down and mauled by Lucky. Nihm joined the fight as well, sending two arrows into the gnoll leader.

A hyena in a garment in a field

Description automatically generated

Before the gnolls had a chance to react, the heroes got in another set of licks. Amara finished off the leader with a series of *magic missiles*. Nihm then shifted her focus to a gnoll that was turning to charge at the sorceress, putting two arrows in its back and dropping it to his knees, though he was not finished. Having finished off one gnoll, Lucky charged off at another that swung at the wolf, missing as lucky leapt, grabbing the evil creature by the arm, and yanking it to the ground where Lucky prepared to adjust his attack to a more vital location.

Haal and Baldoor directed their spells again, striking at gnolls further away. Baldoor closed with the gnoll closest to him and the pair exchanged blows. The gnoll had already been hit by the initial attack of Baldoor’s spiritual hammer, so Baldoor’s assault was more than enough to finish it off. Haal slowed his charge, having no enemy close by, but he saw three gnolls all preparing to throw their spears. Quickly, he directed his spiritual mace against one and cast summon monster II from a scroll, bringing forth a celestial giant bee and directing it to attack one of the gnolls. Haal then directed his attention towards a gnoll that was now closing the gap with him.

A painting of a creature with a weapon

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Off to the right, Kassuq charged in, his strength boost helped as he met with his first gnoll. He plowed into the taller creature and sent it sprawling onto its back. As it tried to get up, Kassuq quickly attacked, slashing open its side, blood spilling forth in large quantities. It made a feeble attempt to swing at Kassuq, an attack the archon easily blocked then countered, finishing off the foul creature.

Two of the gnolls got off their spears as others, now realizing what was happening, began to charge the heroes. It hadn’t sunk in yet that their leader was already dead as they were reacting to the situation. Two spears landed near Haal, the third never threw his, using it instead to try and fend off the celestial bee. Two gnolls charged in to help the one that Lucky had yanked to the ground as the wolf went for the gnolls throat and missed, instead Lucky tore open the side of its face. Howling in pain, the gnoll rolled away and got to its feet. The three now squared off with the wolf as it growled.

A hyena with its mouth open

Description automatically generated

Haal, seeing Lucky outnumbered, charged towards the wolf. A quick glance allowed him to keep his *spiritual hammer* assaulting the gnoll that still had its spear. With the bee and hammer, the gnoll was quickly finished off. As Haal charged to help Lucky, a couple of arrows landed near him plus one grazing his arm. Nihm saw the archers, a group of 4 gnolls on the far side of the bison.

With all the chaos, the bison seemed to be trying to sort out the situation as they simply stood in a circle around the smaller, trapped bison, forming a defensive ring. Nihm fired off a couple of arrows at the gnoll archers, one striking home. Meanwhile, Amara activated her Anklets of Translocation and appeared 10’ away, next to the gnoll that Nihm had previously hit with a couple of arrows. Her appearance disoriented the gnoll long enough for Amara to land a blow with her mace, finishing off another gnoll.

Kassuq, looked up from the gnoll he’d just finished off to see three more coming at him. Kassuq smiling and howling unnerved one of the gnolls, but the other two continued to charge in. Kassuq and the three then began to exchange blows. Kassuq was quick enough to dodge several of their strikes, and tough enough that the couple that landed did little damage. He did his best to focus his attacks on one of them, landing a nasty slash across one of the gnolls chests. If he could take one down fast enough, that would help even the odds a bit.

Baldoor had called his *spiritual hammer* back, striking the gnoll he was fighting in the back. The blow nudged the gnoll off balance just enough so that Baldoor’s strike was enough to finish off the gnoll as two more closed in, trying to flank the dwarf. Baldoor smiled and simply said, “Which one o’ you wants ta meet his maker next?”

Haal and Lucky exchanged blows with the three gnolls they were fighting. Each of them took a hit from the gnolls, but gave back hits in exchange. Plus, Haal called his spiritual mace to attack one of the three, along with the giant bee. With his magic evening up the odds a bit, they took down one of the gnolls, making it a two on two fight.

Nihm continued to focus on the archers who had finally noticed her location. As several arrows landed near her and one cutting her shoulder, she returned fire once more. She again struck home with a couple of arrows, finishing off the gnoll she had struck earlier. Amara also noticed the archers. This time she went for a big effect and launched a fireball, exploding it in the middle of the remaining three archers. Two of them were killed immediately while the third began to flee, his clothing and fur singed and leaving a trail of smoke.

The audible explosion got the attention of all the other gnolls. Realizing that many of their comrades were dead, and finally noticing their leader dead as well, their morale broke. As they hesitated, the heroes took advantage and quickly finished off a few more gnolls before the remaining 6 ran off to the north.

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**The Aftermath**

With 14 gnolls dead and the rest running, the heroes took a moment to catch their breath. A couple of them had taken some minor injuries, which they would tend to soon enough. For now, Nihm walked towards the bison, Lucky, Amara and Xena close by as well. She motioned for the others to stay back, as the large herbivores still seemed a bit on edge. Nihm smiled at Lucky as the wolf came and laid down next to her side. She saw the cut on his side and pulled out her everfull mug, but did not call forth any liquid. She instead poured one of her potions into it and gave it to Lucky to heal his wounds. She then turned her attention back to the bison, softly speaking to them Elvish, [“You are safe now, we mean you no harm.”] She knew they didn’t understand her, but knew her soothing tone would help them relax.

Haal, Baldoor and Kassuq did as Nihm instructed, and moved further away from the bison. Baldoor turned to the other two, “I’ll go en make sure that runt of a halfling isn’t trying to ride off again. Meet me at tha camp when she’s done makin friends.” Haal and Kassuq nodded as they watched, both interested in how the ranger and sorceress would get the bison to calm down and help the injured one. Haal also wondered if there was a way that the bison could help them out. After all, they were stronger than the horses that had been pulling the wagon, however, they were still wild animals and any sort of training would take a while.

After a couple of hours, Nihm was finally able to get next to the four bison and was able to touch them. She was also able to remove the cord around the smaller one’s leg and looked over the injuries. Amara and Xena had also been able to get closer to the bison, while Lucky was laying in the grass close by. The bison seemed to be a little wary of the wolf, but didn’t do more than look his way from time to time. Xena, however, seemed to be a source of interest or amusement for the large herbivores. They would sniff at the weasel whenever she came close and also jumped back when Xena chirped at them.

With the smaller bison now loose, and the others seemingly calm, Nihm called out, “Haal, come here, see if you can heal this one.” Haal got up and walked over, slowly and cautiously, taking a few pages out of Nihm’s playbook, or at least trying to imitate what she had done and not upset the large animals. When Haal got there, he looked over the wound, “Nasty gash,” he added as he began to call forth the energy to heal the animal. After a couple of moments the wound began to close up and the swelling went down. The other bison seemed to take note as well when the smaller bison stopped squirming and ‘complaining’. Walking over, and gently bumping Haal out of the way, a large female bison began to sniff at the other’s leg where the injury had been. After a minute or so it seemed satisfied that all was ok. It then turned and licked Haal on the side of the face. His reaction drew a smile and a laugh from Nihm and Amara as he wiped away the slobber.

After she stopped laughing Nihm said, “Bring the wagon and horses here. Let’s see if we can get these bison to feel more like part of our ‘herd’ and make them more comfortable.” Nihm and Amara stood petting each of the bison as Nihm motioned for Kassuq to come over, adding, “Just move slowly, let them see you coming.” Kassuq nodded and walked forward slowly as he admired the powerful beasts. Haal headed off to retrieve Baldoor, Big Z, the wagon and horses. Though it was still early, they would likely not go far before setting up camp.