Chapter 21: Daggerford

Finally, after several days, Nihm was able to attach the bison to the wagon. At first a couple of them, the male they now called Thumper (for stomping his front hooves from time to time) and one of the females they named Jasmine, were a bit more feisty about being attached to the wagon. Big Z complained they would break yoke and harnesses, but Baldoor’s stares quickly silenced the halfling. The other two that they had named Clover and Daisy seemed to be more accepting of the burden of pulling the wagon. This training went on for a few days as farmland began to replace the plains and forests. During this time the bison became more accustomed to pulling the wagon as well as wearing saddles. Though the bison were not perfect, they were on their way. Now, in a more ‘civilized’ area, the group could begin a bit more intense training and remain in one spot for a longer period.

After the success with the harnesses and beginning to pull the wagon for short stints, Nihm decided to try to saddle the bison. Two of the females, Daisy and Clover, didn’t seem to like it at all, though they didn’t mind the harnesses and pulling the wagon. However, to her surprise, Thumper and Jasmine seemed more comfortable with the saddles. Now, these saddles didn’t really fit, so they improvised with a blanket and ropes going around the bison’s waist/belly. Though they fidgeted, the pair of bison eventually, after 3 days, let Nihm and Kassuq climb into the saddles. They would certainly need proper fitting saddles to actually ride them for more than a minute or two at a time. So Nihm and Kassuq only rode them around the camp for short durations. In almost two weeks, Nihm, with some help from the others, had been able to get the bison to pull the wagon and even got a pair to accept the saddles and riders.

~\*~

A computer screen shot of a green and blue graph

Description automatically generated

They eventually reached the outskirts of Daggerford, noting a few haystacks and farmed fields along the river’s bank. From the top of the wagon, the lookouts could now see the bridge that Big Z had mentioned.

A map of a green island

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Big Z sighed with relief as they continued to approach the bridge.

When they finally emerged from the swamp, Lucky got down off of the wagon and joined Kassuq and Nihm out ahead of the wagon. As the road became more open and visibility improved, Nihm, Kassuq and Lucky rode a bit further ahead, but everyone kept their heads on swivels, looking all around for any threats.

Another few minutes passed, and the wheels of the wagon turned a few hundred more times before the wagon circled the town wall, and arrived at the front gate.

A person lying on a green and white plaid

Description automatically generated

Sentries at twin gates bookending the gate were already in position, and once within earshot they began to ask for the heroes’ identities.

A map of a city

Description automatically generated

Nihm and Kassuq pulled up their horses and waited for the wagon to arrive. Nihm then addressed the guards, “I am Nihm Tighthorn of Battledale, and these are my friends.” She then pointed to each as she gave their names, “Kassuq of Icewind Dale, Haal ven Hrambsing of Waterdeep, Baldoor Boulderbender of Vaasa, Amara Theren of Neverwinter and Lucky of Alaron.”

“Friends, eh?” asked one guard.

The other guard added, “They’re not *our* friends... and we’ve got all the friends we need. All others need to declare their identities and all armaments for the town’s records.”

The gate opened slightly and a scribe came out, followed by two pikemen. The scribe then invited them, “Please, come forth, and be warned that contingencies are in place should your motives be questionable.”

Nihm continued, “We are destined for Waterdeep then the icy north of Ten Towns. We plan to camp outside the gates for a few weeks while we complete the training of our newest members,” she then pointed to the bison. “However, the halfling, he will not be continuing with us and has relatives in the town. He can explain further as he is not a member of our troop, but a hired driver whose services are no longer needed.” Nihm then gave the guards a pleasant smile. Each member of the group waved or nodded their head as Nihm introduced him. Baldoor added a slight comment under his breath about Big Z being lucky he was still with them.

“Zeezee?” the scribe squinted and seemed to recognize the halfling.

“That’s me!” Big Z proclaimed. “You must be Nirf’s son.”

“The very one.”

They inquired about camping outside the city, and were pointed westward to a hilltop campground that remained dry even during the rainy season. Once everyone was checked in on the records, they were provided with some other helpful tips and a map of the town. They all decided it would be best to keep the bison outside of the town in the fields, setting up camp atop the hill that the guards mentioned. With the protection of the fortified settlement nearby, the group could relax and focus more exclusively on training.

A screenshot of a game

Description automatically generated

Baldoor and Haal headed into town, carrying only their warhammer and mace, respectively. Looking around the marketplace, they took in the sights of several vendors and shoppers in their line of sight, and noted a few of the folks wearing red sashes on their lapels. They’d seen this earlier on the guards, and had assumed that these were part of their uniform, but the civilians were sporting them as well.

A map of a town

Description automatically generated

One woman selling beaded jewelry and other accessories bid them a good morning as they made their way northwestward from the gate they’d just entered.

Haal replied, “Good morning,” and stepped over to her counter as Baldoor simply nodded and smiled. As Haal looked over the merchandise, he asked, “I hope you don’t mind me asking, but what are the red sashes that people are wearing for? I thought it was something related to the militia since the guards at the gate were wearing them.” Baldoor stood next to Haal, but he was more interested in the others walking around rather than the merchant in front of them.

The question was posed to a few others to get more insights into the situation, but in brief, the town had—as of last winter—been aided by those faithful to Red Knight, and depending on how they were worn, the sashes and other elements of regalia that the heroes could now identify symbolized either a gesture of gratitude to the faithful or a pledge of membership in the flock.

And the aid had come in the form of defense against the Poisondusk tribe of lizardfolk that the Blackscale tribesmen had warned them about. Allegedly, they had quickly grown in numbers for an unknown reason, and were increasingly encroaching upon the swamps outside their traditional realm as well as into town. Fishing and riverside farming families had been murdered in the dead of night within the last few tendays, and the warrior-priests were even now patrolling the woods bordering the estuaries and swamps for any possible Poisondusk incursions.

The scent of culinary delights wafted across their path, and the dwarf and human considered eating and maybe bringing back some food for their friends. There were other shops in the vicinity that they’d identified on their map and had some desire to go check out, and there was even a small library across town.

“Quaint place,” Haal thought aloud, wondering about the town’s history, of which he was unaware.

~\*~

Nihm and Kassuq discussed how best to allow the bison and horses to range in this unfenced area. Lucky and Xena frolicked under the afternoon sun, and enjoyed the warmth of the grassy hilltop. Amara studied the panorama before her, including the town to their immediate east. The bison and horses were already grazing where they stood, though the former were still tethered to the wagon and consequently their feeding envelope was about to be fully grazed, meaning they’d have to move to continue eating.

Nihm, Amara and Kassuq worked on training the bison, using the horses to demonstrate some tasks that they know as needed.

They used the remaining feed as an incentive and reward for the bison as well.

Haal and Baldoor would return with a load of feed, or have it delivered if they could get a large enough amount for a reasonable price.

While the trio was working with the bison, they were glad they were on the hilltop and away from the main road. They saw the traffic, though not a lot, going in and out of the city and knew that it would be a distraction for their trainees.

The training was broken up to allow the bison to either graze or to play. Though, one thing had begun to become clear, the bison considered the humanoids, the wolf and weasel all part of their herd.

Coyotes were first smelled by Lucky and Kassuq, then spotted upwind to the northeast as they contemplated messing with this band. Xena scurried into Amara’s vest, while the horses neighed nervously.

~\*~

A cartoon of a person in a red garment

Description automatically generated

A small procession of Red Knight worshippers passed by, politely keeping to the middle of their path to steer clear of any wares or customers. They were led by what they would later learn was a legionnaire of the faith in the Lady of Strategy, and though she moved gracefully, she kept the pace with a certain level of calculation of every step, sometimes pivoting as to correct their path, albeit symbolically.

A person in armor holding a sword

Description automatically generated

Behind the legionnaire was a male half-elf whose face reminded everyone else of someone else, and whose regalia suggested the rank and class of a ranger of Red Knight, perhaps even with some paladin certifications.

Spotting the dwarf and human with their fine armor and gear, the legionnaire slowed down and greeted the two travelers, “Strangers, beware!” she began as the vendors and other townsfolk turned towards her. “And neighbors of Daggerford: we’ve just received a dispatch from our picket at Ambrosia’s Estuary that the Poisondusk are amassing and preparing for a raid upon the town.”

“Arm yourselves,” the half-elf ranger decreed. “… and see to fortifying the western wall without losing sight of the rest of the perimeter. Remember the encircling tactic they exercised the last time.”

A few of the townsfolk jogged over to their residences, which weren’t more than a block or two away, while shopkeepers closed up their shops and went to their respective destinations as well. Some of them were volunteers in the local defense force, and headed to the gate or to the garrison further north.

The legionnaire redirected herself towards Baldoor and Haal, asking, “Heroes, it is by no magic that I can confidently guess the two of you have seen your share of battle.”

Neither of the two shook their heads before she continued, removing her helmet. “May we count on your warhammer and mace to aid us in trying to put down their offenses before they can reach our peace-loving town?”

Haal and Baldoor looked at each other, then back at the Red Knight representatives before them. Haal spoke up, “Yes, we have seen battle, though nothing to brag about. We are happy to assist in the defense of the town, but we do have friends and equipment outside of town upon a hilltop that would need to be brought in. However,” Haal glanced at Baldoor then back at the mortal representative of the ‘Lady of Strategy’, “we have a group of animals we rescued and are in the process of training. They would likely need the assistance of a calming spell to enter the city, or someone capable of handling them.” Haal paused for a moment, “Has anyone tried negotiating with the lizardfolk? We ran into a different tribe in the swamps and they did warn us about the poisondusk lizards. However, that doesn’t mean that can’t be reasoned with.”

The ranger explained, “The Poisondusk are not known for their negotiating skills, as they don’t regard others as equals, even their fellow lizardfolk from other tribes. I am Albrecht,” he directed himself towards Baldoor and Haal.

*OOC: Dialogue with the Red Knight crew can continue here during a few brisk minutes of heading over to the hilltop.*

~\*~

Seeing the coyotes, the three put themselves between their animals and the predatory pack. Nihm called Lucky to her side as she pulled up her bow and sent an arrow at the closest coyote. Amara also decided not to wait and launched a series of *magic missiles* at one of the coyotes. They hoped to scare them off rather than kill them all.

Behind them, they could hear the approaching voices of their familiar friends and a variety of armored strangers.

The noise of so many approaching humanoids made it rational for the coyotes to scurry away, and by the time they were out of Kassuq’s olfactory range, Baldoor and Haal were back with a half-dozen red-clad strangers.

The legionnaire removed again her helmet, introduced herself as Xiomara, Priestess-Legionnaire of Red Knight, and proclaimed, “Your allies have pledged their time and effort to defending this town from the Poisondusk tribe.”

Nihm nodded, “We were warned about them by the Blackscale lizardfolk on our way into town.”

“Aye,” Xiomara was not surprised, “The Poisondusk make enemies of everyone, and they now grow in numbers faster than hatch-rates can explain.”

Haal relayed to the Red Knights what they’d learned about the Poisonduck lizardfolk, and Xiomara filled in a few gaps in his understanding, making them all the more prepared for what was to come.

Nihm added, “We can assist in tracking them down. I am a decent tracker and myself and the Archon can both be stealthy when needed.”

Haal and Amara both nodded, “We are also willing to come along and add our magic and weapons to the mission,” Haal put in.

Baldoor was not fond of going back into the swamps again and having it come up and over his waist. He responded, “I’ll remain here and keep an eye on the beasties, make sure they don’ wander off.” At that point one of the bison snorted and shook its head.

Smiling, Nihm looked down at Lucky and said, “Guard,” as she pointed at Baldoor. Lucky let out a couple of barks then trotted over to Baldoor’s side and sat next to the dwarf. Baldoor smiled and patted Lucky on the head, “Good lad,” he added as Lucky seemed to smile as well.

~\*~

They traveled west, then south, and now for a brief moment eastward again, with the two scouts leading Nihm, Kassuk, and Xiomara, who were followed by Amara, Haal, and the remainder of the Red Knight worshippers.

*R R R R A N R*

*R PLX*

*R R R R H K R*

The Sword Coast was mostly an intermittent hodgepodge of sandy beaches and impassable cliffsides overlooking the ocean. On occasion, one noted archipelagos of micro-islands and jutting rocks along an unnavigable isthmus, but estuaries and swamps were a rare sight, let alone a complex of them so wide that it took days to traverse it, even by the most capable lizardfolk or bullywugs.

The party could both smell and see the patches of swamp around them, though they were still at an altitude about 20’ above sea level, and the trail was dry and solid beneath the hooves and feet of the cavalry and infantry.

~\*~

Moving out into the swamp: Nihm and Kassuq fell into line 10’ behind the two lead guides that were more familiar with the area. Haal and Amara fell in behind Xiomara and in front of the rear group of Red Knights. All four were on foot with Kassuq in his humanoid form.

As they entered the swampy area and Amara got the impression that everyone was a bit more on edge, she cast *mage armor [expired in 6 hours]* upon herself, adding additional protection for the next 6 hours.

*Amara gained +4 to AC.*

Nihm and Kassuq scanned their surroundings as frequently as possible, especially when the scouts in front of them would pause to study something or to look around themselves.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Kassuq, Spot** | 7 | Wis (+2) | 0 | 9 | **6 – 10** | ?? |
| **Nihm, Spot** | 7 | Wis (+2) | 2 | 11 | **11 – 15** | ?? |

*See below.*

Their efforts were redundant with those of the scouts, which was not a bad thing at a moment like this. If one pair failed to spot something, the other would be there as a second layer of surveillance, not to mention all the others who were keeping their eyes peeled for anything foul.

Once they’d turned westward again and were now headed on a downgrade into the swamps around them, one scout knelt down to study tracks they’d just come upon. “They came in through here,” she pointed southward, “and continued west along the path.”

The party caught up and heard the exchange between the Legionnaire and her scouts. “Looks like they were soaking wet when they got on the trail, and quickly dripped dry by the time they got over there,” the leader pointed to where the drips stopped collecting earlier that day.

“It’s scaly folks for sure,” the male scout posited. “They can shake themselves dry in no time.”

“Keep a wary eye,” the Legionnaire said as she cast *owl’s wisdom* upon herself.

*Legionnaire gained +4 to Wis.*

“Scouts, we are in dark mode now, and with enough evidence to warrant a fully defensive stance; go on ahead and use stealth at half speed. We will follow 50’ to 100’ behind,” the leader then gave the scouts a head start before reprising the march at half pace.

Since most of his spells would only last a few minutes, Haal held off on casting any spells at this time, as did Nihm. Kassuq, during the brief pause, asked the scouts if he could cast *aid [expired in 4 minutes]* upon them. With their agreement, he cast it on each of them, then on himself, and then Nihm since the two of them would be in the front now.

*Kassuq, Nihm, and the scouts gained +1 to attacks and saves against fear effects, plus 5 + 4 = 9 temporary hit points.*

Amara took a moment and cast *cat’s grace [expired in 6 minutes]* upon herself, increasing her agility.

*Amara gained +4 to Dex.*

A few potions were quaffed, and other buffs were applied courtesy of Red Knight.

Round 1

“Tread warily,” the Legionnaire spoke through her helmet.

Grogg cast *detect magic [expired on Round 31]* and scanned for auras as they continued.

~\*~

Round 48

Following the tracks for maybe five minutes, the scouts spotted a pair of Poisondusk sentries up ahead, then ducked behind a row of bushes and signaled this to the others with the premeditated gesture. Pointing their longbows, they knelt in anticipation of skirmishing the identified enemy. The Red Knight contingent mobilized. Xiomara gave a somatic command for those assigned to stealth to advance, which were Duchess Rafina of the Dallas Meadow and Sister Ritika Zhardhavi.

The aristocrat-wizard and monk caught up with the scouts, who got back on their feet and walked in tandem with the monk and diplomat along the trail.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***First*** | ***Last*** | **Group** | **Race** | **Class** | **ECL** | **Sex** | **Age** |
| ***Legionnaire Xiomara*** | ***of Red Knight*** | Red Knight | Human | Paladin (5) Pious Templar (3) | 8 | F | 36 |
| ***Duchess Rafina*** | ***of the Dallas Meadow*** | Red Knight | Human | Aristocrat (5) Wizard (3) | 8 | F | 37 |
| ***Straubry*** | ***Srebrenovich*** | Red Knight | Human | Scout | 7 | F | 32 |
| ***Visigo*** | ***Pathfinder*** | Red Knight | Human | Scout | 7 | M | 25 |
| ***Captain Serge*** | ***Castout*** | Red Knight | Human | Ranger | 7 | M | 29 |
| ***Kalishna*** | ***of Red Knight*** | Red Knight | Human | Paladin | 6 | F | 31 |
| ***Iñigo*** | ***Katsuro*** | Red Knight | Human | Samurai | 6 | M | 42 |
| ***Dame Fucscia*** | ***of Red Knight*** | Red Knight | Half-elf | Knight | 6 | F | 77 |
| ***Sister Ritika*** | ***Zhardhavi*** | Red Knight | Human | Monk | 6 | F | 28 |
| ***Sir Pontif*** | ***of Red Knight*** | Red Knight | Human | Cavalier (PrC) | 6 | M | 33 |
| ***Grogg*** | ***Twothrows*** | Red Knight | Half-orc | Fighter (3) Cleric (3) | 6 | M | 35 |
| ***Donatus*** | ***Daggerfreud*** | Red Knight | Dwarf | Warrior | 5 | M | 61 |

The scouts then signed, “Approaching…”

The party could hear the approaching reptilians’ dialogue, and they could either stay where they were—and be in plain sight in about 30 seconds—or try to hide behind a bush.

The Duchess cast *shield [expired on Round 128]* upon herself.

*The Duchess gained +4 to FFAC and AC, and immunity to magic missiles.*

Straubry and Visigo remained vigilant as Captain Serge tiptoed very slowly towards the front, already having his longbow out.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Check** | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Serge | Move Silently | 8 | 12 | 20 |

*Result uncertain.*

Kalishna held her greatsword aloft, its blade a visual border between her symmetric halves. The pious templar remained in place, meditating on the inevitable confrontation. Near the monk, Donatus tugged at his beard as he cracked his neck in anticipation of a good fight.

Iñigo drew his katana simultaneously with Dame Fucscia draw of her falchion. Both looked at one another, and the samurai and knight nodded in confirmation of the contingencies they’d discussed on their way here.

Sister Ritika’s walking stick was her quarterstaff, and she now ducked behind a large-leafed philodendron that hid her from the incoming lizards, nodding at the scout next to her.

Sir Pontif joined the samurai and knight, making a triangular formation as they anticipated the confrontation or pursuit.

Grogg had already used up his *detect magic* spell, and it had expired a ways back. He had no other preemptive spells to cast, and thus waited behind a bush, hoping to end this quickly.



Round 49

*All friendlies except Rafina, Ritika, Kassuq, and Nihm are subject to a Move Silently check unless they stay put. All friendlies are subject to Hide checks if they get any closer than the scouts are to the lizardfolk.*

Duchess Rafina had let the others know earlier that she could cast *ghost sound* in a situation such as this one, and now thought to do so, centering it on an area just east of their position, so as to divert their attention. The Legionnaire put up her palm and shook her head, suggesting that this was not the appropriate moment.

Haal prepared to cast either *spiritual weapon* or *bull’s strength* upon himself, deciding to hold off the casting to see at what range they would engage with the enemy.

Amara decided it would be a good idea to be in a position to surprise the lizardfolk or follow them if needed, so she cast *invisibility [expired on Round 649, or upon committing an offensive action]* on herself, and moved to the forest and to the edge of the clearing to view the lizards.

Nihm, with the enemy in sight and in easy range of her bow, held her position and prepared to let loose a volley of arrows.

Kassuq, not fond of ranged combat, was prepared to charge in, sword in hand, ready to face their foes once the command was given.

The Red Knight worshippers held their ground, and waited for the Poisondusk lizardfolk to pass, which they did, and caught sight of Kassuq and Captain Serge Castout. They immediately yelled, “Trespassers!” and started running northward.



Round 50

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Group** | **Initiative** | **Roll** | **Modified Roll** | **Speed** |
| Nihm | 1 | 4 | 18 | 22 | 30’ |
| Amara | 1 | 4 | 16 | 20 | 30’ |
| Red Knight Worshippers | 1 | 3 | 9 | 12 | 20’ |
| Kassuq | 1 | 6 | 5 | 11 | 40’ - 60’ |
| Poisondusk Lizardfolk | 2 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 40’ |
| Haal | 1 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 30’ |

Nihm quickly took a step to her right (5’ step) and fired off as many arrows as she could.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Notes** |
| Longbow +1 | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | 3.0 | +9 | 16 | 25 | +1 within 30’ |
| Longbow, Rapid Shot | 1d8 | 1 | 1 | x3 | 100’ | - | +9 | 10 | 19 | +1 within 30’ |

*Hit, hit. Dmg: (4 + 1) + (6 + 1) = 12.*

One of the scouts took both arrows and died.

Amara could see the lizards now, and pursued them on foot, remaining *invisible*. Once she was past the narrow threshold, she stayed out of the line of fire of the Red Knights and others.

The Red Knight worshippers also ran after the dwarf-sized lizardfolk.

“Damn,” Kassuq mumbled, knowing that the lizards saw him, and joining in the pursuit in his humanoid form.

The remaining Poisondusk lizardfolk ran northward.

Haal moved to a spot where he could see the retreating lizards and, using his Gloves of the Starry Sky, sent a series of *magic missiles* after the lizards.

*Dmg: 9 + 3 = 12 magic.*

The damage took off the lizardfolk’s right arm, but he kept running away in panic, screaming, “Hossstilleessssss!”

A aerial view of a forest

Description automatically generated

Round 51

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Group** | **Initiative** | **Roll** | **Modified Roll** | **Speed** |
| Kassuq | 1 | 6 | 13 | 19 | 40’ - 60’ |
| Amara | 1 | 4 | 13 | 17 | 30’ |
| Nihm | 1 | 4 | 13 | 17 | 30’ |
| Haal | 1 | 0 | 13 | 13 | 30’ |
| Red Knight Worshippers | 1 | 3 | 8 | 11 | 20’ |
| Poisondusk Lizardfolk | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 40’ |

Kassuq transformed into his wolf form and then continued to run after the Poisondusk lizard, then attacked, attempting to trip the Poisondusk lizard.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Touch | +9 | 7 | 16 |

*Hit. See AoO below.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Strength** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Kassuq | +9 | 13 | 22 |
| Poisondusk Commando | -1 + 4 size | 3 | 6 |

*Trip succeeded.*

The lizardman took the opportunity to swipe at Kassuq’s aggressive snout before it fell.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Poisondusk Commando | Claw 1 | 1d6+4 | 3 | -1 | 2 | 15 | 17 |

*Miss.*

Amara continued to run after the fleeing Poisondusk lizard, weaving through the Red Knight followers, saying, “Coming through’ as she passed them.

A person with blonde hair and elf ears holding a bow and arrow

Description automatically generated

Nihm held off on another volley of arrows and joined the pursuit after the others have run by.

Haal attempted to redirect his *spiritual mace* to a spot where it could attack the Poisondusk lizard.

“P-p-p-pleasssse, sssspare meee!” the almost dead reptile hissed in common, its forked tongue flailing to get the words out.

The Red Knight worshippers caught up to the front of the formation, and saw the helpless lizardfolk now realizing that it was outnumbered. The Legionnaire responded, “Drop your weapon, and rise that we might consider your plea.”

The Poisondusk lizardfolk did as told, barely holding the weight of his bleeding body up as his missing arm rested along the hedge where Iñigo stood.



Round 52

With the lizardman down, and the others there, Kassuq trotted a bit further north and hid among the bushes to watch for approaching lizardfolk.

With all the others surrounding the lone lizard scout, Amara followed Kassuq, saying, “I’m right behind you.” When Kassuq stopped, Amara moved 35’ ahead to see further along the path the lizardman had been headed.

Nihm moved off to the side and concealed herself in the bushes as well and watched to the north for any approaching lizardfolk. She had an arrow ready in case she saw anyone coming.

Haal, seeing that the Red Knights were showing some mercy, walked up to the lizardman, “Allow me to help you before you answer their questions. It won’t do to have you drop dead on us.” The lizardman agreed, and Haal cast *cure minor wounds* and do whatever else he can to stop the bleeding and keep the lizardman from collapsing from blood loss.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal: Heal** | 7 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 9 | 19 | 28 |

*Wound healed, 1 hp restored.*

Some of the Red Knight worshippers frowned at the lizardman, and asked that he specify the number of braves in their group.

The Poisondusk male replied, “Only a few dozen... b... but hundreds more are on their way.”



Rounds 53 – 56

Nihm, seeing the others fanning out across the opening simply watched, arrow ready to fly should she see any threats. She squinted at the blue sky above them, noting the puffy whisps of white dotting the coastal horizon, and the singular hawk that flew overhead.

Kassuq and Amara remained off to the side in some bushes for concealment, though Amara was still invisible, she wanted to be out of the way should any fighting start.

Haal looked at the lizardman and asked, “When are they due to arrive and how far away is your camp? If we can get your people to reconsider and leave peacefully, then so be it, but it’s apparent you intend to do battle with the folks of Daggerford, so we shall defend them as they defend themselves.”

The kobold tallied something akin to:

* 10 warriors
* 5 rangers
* 5 scouts
* 2 clerics of Sess’innek
* 1 knight
* 1 favored soul of Sess’innek

They were allegedly only about 2000’ from the cluster of warriors and others now eating.

Xiomara confirmed the suspicion that there was a favored soul among them, but they had assumed this band worshipped Semuanya as did most other lizardfolk.

They could not get a good sense of the level of prowess of the warriors and other specialists, but it seemed that they were far from outmatched, particularly if they used the elements of stealth and the higher ground as they continued to descend into the swamps.

As they considered their options, they took in the evidence of their circumstance. The ground at their boots was already damp if not muddy.

Those on the lookout for incoming lizardfolk saw nothing, which was either good news or the precursor to the daunting realization that they’d been snuck up on and an ambush was underway.

Haal turned to Xiomara, “OK, so what is the plan, negotiate or go in swinging? My friends and I are along for the ride, whatever the case.”

Kassuq, Amara and Nihm all held their positions, waiting to see what the band of Red Knights had in mind.

“We exhausted all diplomatic options to avoid their previous siege,” Xiomara replied. “Our mandate is to neutralize this force. This one will be left alive to tell the tale to their reinforcements.”

“And more *will* come,” forecast Captain Serge.

As the Red Knight crew started moving towards the lizardfolks’ encampment, the heroes fell back into the spots they were in before reference the marching order. Kassuq remained a wolf for now.

A person in a red armor

Description automatically generated

Legionnaire Xiomara of Red Knight—a human paladin and pious templar—led the band into the fray. The half-armed battalion was busy munching on manticore meat when the legionnaire’s trotting was heard. The woman made no secret of their incursion once they’d spotted the contingent, and though the warriors grabbed spears and bows, they could already tell that they were in for a challenge.

“For Red Kniiiiight!” the legionnaire planted her standard into the ground and drew her greatsword, inspiring others to action.

A person in a black dress

Description automatically generated

Duchess Rafina of the Dallas Meadow—a human aristocrat and wizard—cast *melf’s acid arrow* upon one of the warriors as soon as she and others were in range.

A person in a garment

Description automatically generated

Straubry Srebrenovich—a human scout who’d done most of the guiding so far—got into position to skirmish, and targeted one of the unarmored leaders who was about to run away. Her arrow struck true, and disabled the spellcaster’s left arm.

A person in a garment

Description automatically generated

Visigo Pathfinder—the group’s other human scout—positioned himself next to Straubry and also let go a single arrow, aiming at the same fleeing leader’s leg, though he missed.

A person with long hair and a beard

Description automatically generated

Captain Serge—a human ranger—shot a single arrow straight into the chest of one of the warriors, ending his career as a warrior.

A person in a garment

Description automatically generated

Kalishna of Red Knight—a human paladin—charge-attacked the favored soul of Sess’innek, identified by his or her headgear.

A drawing of a person in a samurai garment

Description automatically generated

Iñigo Katsuro—a human samurai—charge-attacked one of the clerics of Sess’innek, identifying them by their elaborate and vile regalia.

A person in a garment

Description automatically generated

Dame Fucscia of Red Knight—a half-elf knight—also confronted the two clerics, preventing them from producing the material spell components for which they were both reaching.

A cartoon of a person with red hair and a sword

Description automatically generated

Sister Ritika Zhardhavi—a human monk—went toe-to-toe with one of the rangers, defending herself against the lizardman with her bare hands.

A person in a red armor

Description automatically generated

Sir Pontif of Red Knight—a human cavalier—spoke a few words in his local dialect of Common, challenging the favored soul of Sess’innek to a one-on-one *[Knight’s Challenge]* and positioning himself in a proper place to help Kalishna to flank the leader.

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Grogg Twothrows—a half-orc fighter-cleric—cast a buff upon himself and walked towards one of the rangers, choosing his steps and timing per the guidance of Red Knight.

A person with a beard holding a glass of beer

Description automatically generated

Donatus Daggerfreud—a dwarven warrior—wasted no time in charge-attacking one of the Poisondusk rangers or scouts; he couldn’t tell.

A lizard in armor holding a spear in front of a pyramid

Description automatically generated

Amara and Haal spent a moment studying the battlefield, and cast spells upon those with lesser morale, killing one and stunning the other for the moment.

A lizard with a spear in front of a pyramid

Description automatically generated

Kassuq went to bite the stunned scout as it tried to crawl away from the battle.

A lizard in a garment

Description automatically generated

Nihm planted two arrows in a warrior’s skull, dropping it to the ground immediately.

A lizard in a garment

Description automatically generated

The Poisondusk favored soul did his best to manage his battalion, but he was facing multiple melee assailants, and would not likely survive the next few seconds. Nevertheless, he persisted in fending off the greatsword coming at him, and yelled orders in his slithery language.

This cycle of arrows, blades, spells, and clubs repeated, and by the time the favored of Sess’innek dropped his scepter, and hissed his surrender, he had only a handful of remaining troops, specifically:

* 2 warriors
* 1 scout
* 1 cleric of Sess’innek
* 1 knight

Some of the Red Knight worshippers dragged dead, reptilian bodies out of the shallow, stagnant waters and onto firmer ground. Others held blades to the necks of the bested survivors of the Poisondusk contingent.

“I was told the Poisondusk never yield,” Xiomara spoke to the leader in Common, retrieving the standard she’d planted into the muddy embankment. “What manner of cowardice is this? Or is it trickery?” the pious templar prodded the captive with words.

He looked at her, and without warning, hissed and lunged at her for pressing him on the role conflict he was already experiencing. Having anticipated such a reaction, the paladin had already been prepared with a dagger, which she now thrust into the favored soul’s throat, making yet another example for those who resisted.

And sure enough, some of them did, and were swiftly put down by the swords and maces of the faithful, leaving only a single scout and his warrior friend alive, plus the sentry that had pointed out the encampment.

“Well now,” Captain Serge counted, “Perhaps we leave this one to spread news of our resentment for their siege of Daggerford, and these two we take back to town for questioning.”

The rest were even now being impaled on their own spears which had been planted into the muddy soil in the same manner that Xiomara had set her battle standard, and now a score of skewered lizardfolk decorated the bank overlooking an expansive estuary.

And so it came to pass that they released the one-armed lizardman, letting him rush westward into the slow-flowing waters that he might warn his tribe of the consequences of pressing further into Daggerford’s greater realm.

They tied the other two together at the wrists and necks, making them walk in tandem behind Captain Serge, who held their tether like a leash.

Haal watched as the last couple Poisondusk warriors were killed. He was not surprised they attacked, though he felt Xiomara had antagonized the creature into the final assault.

~\*~

They had been sighted by one of the pickets in the periphery of town, who had ridden in to alert the town as to what he’d seen: two bound Poisondusk lizardfolk being ushered by the entirety of the expeditionary force.

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Their arrival had been heralded by the town crier by the time, and Baldoor had met a fellow named Kelvar Warpike, who had filled him in on the lizardfolk incursions and what he called the *Red Knight protection racket*. “I’ve no bedrock evidence,” he admitted to Baldoor, expressing a bit of a distaste for some of the individuals donning the red sashes emblematic of the presumptuous faith. “Clangeddin Silverbeard has just as much claim to establish laws here as their deity does, but they’ve pretty much taken over the town’s mayorship.”

Baldoor saw his friends coming in along with the Red Knight contingent, and Xiomara planted her standard into a public sconce at the first fork in the road past the entrance. The town crier had a prepared speech, which he confirmed upon identifying the two Poisondusk captives. “Hear ye, who hail from here and far, that the faithful Red Knight—and their honorable friends—have brought back two prisoners from the Poisondusk tribe!”

Captain Serge propped the two prisoners into the fore of a demonstration. “Behold, two we let live out of two dozen who were coming to slay us once their reinforcements arrived. They shall answer for their plots.”

~\*~

The Poisondusk captives were taken to the town’s single brig, where they would be interrogated for fear that the lizardfolk had not yet learned their lesson.

In the meantime, Baldoor and his friends learned from Kelvar and another few bystanders that the Church of Red Knight had taken over all civic functions effective a tenday ago, and new decrees were being posted almost daily in anticipation of a siege and consequent lockdown of the fort town.

Leading the faithful of Red Knight was a woman named Jericho, and two of her closest associates, a man named Drole, and another simply called Big Brother by everyone in town.

All in all, Daggerford was a charming town with a quaint atmosphere and a population of mostly tolerant and diverse folks, though it was evident that the Red Knight sash was a symbol of class distinction here, and from what they were hearing, it was a new development based on a band of clerics who had been all but strangers just a few months ago.

Big Brother was pointed out to the heroes by Kelvar as the former walked by with a contingent of what might have been bodyguards. Munching on a hunk of meat held in place by twin slices of bread, the Inquisitor of Red Knight wore his regalia with distinction, letting all who passed him know his function by the insignia on his lapel.

As Haal and the others watched the Red Knights finish off the last couple of Poisondusk lizardfolk that they, Haal was certain, provoked intentionally, he shook his head. Then when they started impaling the bodies and hoisted them up, Haal protested. “That will not have the intended reaction you think it will. That is, unless you want them to continue their attacks. That treatment of their dead will only anger them and strengthen their resolve to continue attacking.”

Haal and the others then moved to take down the lizardfolk and remove the spears, leaving the bodies on the ground where they could be buried with respect. Though Haal didn’t believe in the ways of evil that the lizards followed, nor did the rest of the Heroes, they also believed in being respectful of your foe, and this behavior was far from respectful or civilized. In Haal’s mind it was simply barbaric.

There were others whose names Haal had forgotten by now—some of them drunk already—who were not afraid to whisper slurs about the Red Knights, but one thing the outlanders noticed was that no one disrespected them to their faces.

The modal rumor was that a few of these men and women had arrived back in Mirtul, taking up residence at the town’s big inn, the Clever Vesper. At first they were just another handful of adventurers making their way to or from Waterdeep, but upon the first of the Poisondusk incursions—which was staged against a merchant’s stagecoach not far from the town—they sent for their friends, who then sent for more friends, and in time, Daggerford was wading in a river of Red Knights.

They respected their own laws, and expected all others to do the same, though it was peculiar how swiftly they’d come to dominate the legislature, citing malfeasance and fraud on the part of their predecessors, some of whom had left the town altogether.

The Knights had also appropriated a formerly abandoned and rundown temple of Mystra. With enough *stone shape* and *make whole* spells, the structure was nearly fully refurbished, and stood out as a remnant of a bygone time to those who had lived here long enough to remember it.

As the prisoners were being walked away, Haal asked, “Can a couple of us come with to witness the questioning? We would like to know more about what is going on so we may be of more assistance if possible.”

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

*See below.*

They reluctantly allow Haal to attend, but no more than him. He wanted to make sure the prisoners weren’t tortured, as that never truly worked. The others returned to the wagon and checked on their animal friends and companions. Kelvar joined them out of curiosity and because a fellow dwarf was there. He was not fond of the knights, and if someone else was willing to stand up to them, he was willing to join in the fun.

A few other commoners and stragglers ended up coming with, and all in all, they were good company. While Haal was observing the interrogation, they partook of a variety of sundries that others had brought with them, and had a good conversation. Kassuq and Nihm were keen to pick up that the Red Knights were not as welcome here as they posed, and that their power structure would eventually crumble, though speculations ran wild as to how and why.

The bison were quite fond of the dogs that played near them, and to Nihm’s surprise, they did not budge or fuss about when one of the dogs nuzzled at their hooves.

*OOC: Let me know if these PCs are looking for any other information, or using any other social skills right now.*

~\*~

Haal was in a waiting room—a lobby of sorts—expecting to be let into the interrogation room at any moment. He’d been questioned himself in order to clear him for this type of security level in the eyes of the township, which really meant in the discretion of the Red Knights.

After much waiting, two men, then a third, entered the room, and the third man said, “We are ready.” Haal got up and all four headed further down the hall to the interrogation room where the two prisoners were duly bound. The scout and warrior were stripped of half of their regalia, and were visibly demoralized in the process.

Haal had no taste for the methods they used, which were not quite torturous, though their threats were paving the way for a nicely crafted admission of untruth on the part of the lizards. He held back his tongue, which sought to instead persuade with diplomacy; he’d heard plenty about the Poisondusk to not speak.

In time, the conversation did yield some useful information, and the lizards were taken back to their cells once the scribes had gotten all the details down. In sum:

* The Poisondusk had been encroached upon by the local bullywugs, who had found an artifact called the Gravid Gem that allowed them to lay egg clutches in far greater numbers than under natural circumstances. Their quick development rate had—in the course of a few seasons—rendered a formidable army that was too cumbersome to stay within their estuarial confines.
* Having suffered the bullywugs’ offensives, the Poisondusk soon discovered the source of their adversaries’ fertility, and promptly stole the Gravid Gem, and for the last few springs, women have been laying up to ten times more eggs than normally. The first generation of these younglings constitutes some of the combatants that the heroes had just faced, but there were dozens more coming to town, and eventually, hundreds.
* The Poisondusk have all but obliterated the bullywugs by now, and their offensives against the Blackscale lizardfolk, and the town of Daggerford was described by the prisoners as *valiant reclamation campaigns*.
* The Blackscale tribe has lost its leader in recent tendays to the Poisondusk attacks, and their clans are now squabbling over claims to succession.

Nihm and Amara had done their level best to diplomatically learn what they could about the higher ranking individuals of the Red Knights, as well as any information about the reputed ‘resistance’ that was fomenting, though most of what they witnessed was bravado and articulation of grievances, not quite the organized coordination of an oppositional movement. In short, the Red Knights were mostly disliked, perhaps even resented, but there was no hard evidence of malfeasance; no smoking wand in broad daylight, or anything like that. Kelvar took things further and introduced Baldoor to anyone he knew in town that was not a fan of the Red Knights, and among them all, they gathered that the best way to understand the situation was to experience the Knights’ ideology firsthand.

“So we should go to their temple,” Kelvar proposed.

“They’ve established a temple here?” Baldoor had previously not understood.

“Yes, it used to be a temple to Mystra, but it was abandoned and lay in disuse for some time,” the dwarf politely reminded him.

“Ah, right,” said Baldoor.

Public services were held regularly at the stroke of Highsun and private “lessons” were scheduled with generous patrons.

*[… anything else regarding the Red Knights…]*

When the topic was resolved, Haal suggested contacting the Blackscale lizardfolk again with the goal of destroying the gem.

Haal had been researching the Gravid Gem, though all materials tangential to the topic were checked out from the local library. He inquired with a local scribe and wizard, a woman named Ripleigh, and learned only that it affected any oviparous female humanoid’s fertility such that her eggs multiplied shortly after conception, generating multitudes of clutches of young every season.

Ripleigh added, “It’s something that’s never been seen in these parts before, and I’ve heard tell that it’s from the Beastlands, which is sensible to assume, though I don’t know.”

“Does it affect dragons?”

A person in a person garment

Description automatically generated

“Probably.”

“If reaching out to the Blackscale tribe is something you want to do,” one of their new friends interjected, “I’m one of the few who joined in the expeditionary force that met these sensible lizards. I knew their late Chieftain, and I can likely broker the parlay of which you speak.”

“What is your name again, friend?” Haal asked.

“Kelvar Warpike—herald of Clangeddin Silverbeard—at your service,” proclaimed the dwarf, rubbing his own silver beard.

Haal and the rest of the group went with Kelvar to talk to the Shadowscale tribe, though they did not let the Red Knights know about the plan, and left directly from the hill with their wagon and buffalo.

A map of a city

Description automatically generated

Approaching a pair of sentries at the bridge, Haal hoped the Shadowscale would also remember the heroes from before.

“Where fare you to, brothers and sisters?” asked one of the red-sashed sentries.

“Good day,” Haal called back in response. “We are headed south to make sure that none of the lizardfolk are trying to get around the southern flank. We should be back early tomorrow. If not, it likely means we’ve run into a bit of trouble.”

The other man asked why they were taking the wagon, to which Haal responded, “We don’t want to look like a military caravan, we are trying to be as inconspicuous as possible.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Haal, Bluff** | 0 | **Cha (+2)** | 0 | 2 | 16 – 20 | ?? |
| **Haal, Diplomacy** | 4 | **Cha (+2)** | 4 | 10 | 6 – 10 | ?? |

*See below.*

The man seemed to buy the story, and nodded in a rather dismissive way before the two parties parted company and continued on their respective paths.

A bridge over a river

Description automatically generated

It was now Amira, Baldoor, Haal, Kassuq, Kelvar, and Nihm, traveling with the bison and wolf.

Haal smiled as they crossed the bridge, having told the guards what he felt they wanted to hear. As they rode, Kelvar was leading the way on his goat, with Kassuq and Nihm right behind him and Lucky trotting along with them as well. Haal was handling the duties as the driver of the wagon now, with Amara seated next to him. Baldoor was seated on the roof of the wagon, just behind Haal and Amara, his feet dangling just above the seat. The three had their heads on swivels, looking around for anything that might be a threat.