*Chapter 10: Sphinxes of Mulhorand*

The next day was only eventful in that the party shopped ‘til they dropped, and by the end of the day, they’d left their suits of armor at a now trusted smithy owned by a man aptly named Grogin Blacksmith.



The rugged man had lived the life of a barbarian for the first few decades of his existence, after which he’d caught the urban bug and made his home in the Trades Ward. They’d first happened upon him by chance, but in the last year they’d given him quite a bit of business. Some of them had entrusted their suits to Grogin for cleaning and upgrading; the rest had traded in their corroded armor for new duds altogether, and they were now dining in the outdoor section of the Tristine Choldrith, a pseudo-Lolth-inspired place that had become the trendy watering hole for would-be adventurers who’d gotten lured into the hustle of city living, and were now too busy to do more than talk about adventuring.

The two couples were sitting at dinner in a small room the innkeeper had reserved for them now that they were people of some renown. The men were amused by it all, while the women felt it was faintly ridiculous.

“I always feel undressed without my armor,” Angren sighed. “Thankfully, they are able to restore our enchanted items, but it’s taking some time.”

“Yes, but our clothes were just a mess,” Brene said. “My blouse was in tatters when we got into town, and I had to replace my backpack and almost everything in it.”

As they talked, Atlas noticed a tall woman pass through the doorway. The archivist rose to his feet. “Good evening, Madam.”

The other three rose and turned to look at her. She was the color of bronze, from her flowing hair to the skin of her face and arms, to her armor and greaves. A small trunk followed her in, levitated by some invisible means. She lifted her hand in greeting. “Good evening, fellow free thinkers. The Messenger of Io sends her greetings, and a gift for each of you.” The woman turned to the chest, and it moved up to the adjoining table and settled down upon it. She opened the chest and extracted a beautifully crafted chainmail jerkin from it. From the size, it was a perfect fit for Brene.

“Oh, how beautiful,” Brene exclaimed as she stepped up and took the offered item. “It’s so light, too!”

Others turned to see what was happening. One misguided fool actually approached, thinking *he* might get an item too.

“That is mithral, and it will not only protect your body, but your mind and soul, as well. There are others in this city who will also give you gifts to aid in your fight for Aasterinian.” She held out a paper to Atlas, and the archivist took it with a respectful bow. “See these folk on the morrow, and they will present what they have for you.” She stepped back with a smile. “Now, I will take my leave. May the Messenger of Io protect and keep you as you all labor in her service.” With that, the woman turned and left, leaving the chest behind.

The goddess looked at the misguided half-elf and shook her head a bit before the male nodded and took his leave.

They looked at the contents, and extracted two more sets of chain mail armor, and a set of plate armor that had to be for Atlas. “I don’t know that I can really use this,” he said.

Devrion hefted the breastplate. “It’s mithral, so you shouldn’t have problems with wearing it. Most clerics can wear heavy armor, and I think you said you’ve trained with chainmail and the like.”

Atlas nodded. “We will have to try it all on for size, but I suspect it will all fit us perfectly.”

The extradimensional chest had indeed housed a magnificent inventory of protective gear.

~\*~

The following day, the four went to the shops mentioned in the note, where they were given new items, traded some back, and had some items, like Angren’s sword, further enchanted to be more effective. By evening, they had completed the list, and had returned to the inn for dinner.

“Now, we get to go out and use these things,” Atlas observed. “May they prove to be useful.”

~\*~

Days later…

The Wastes of Mulhorand, Faerûn

Round 1

Atlas cast *Rary’s telepathic bond [expired on Round 1301]* upon his comrades, and looked into their eyes, implying that it was time to buff.

Map

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Round 2

The party could see the ruins of the sandhenge about 800’ to their east. They could snipe at the sphinxes, but had opted instead to ambush them by encircling them with a *dimension door* spell they’d purchased, which had a special Surround feature courtesy of a Shape Spell Metamagic boost.

Atlas tapped Steelshade with his eternal wand of *haste [expired on Round 7]*.

*All PCs gained +1 to BAB, AC, and Reflex saves, and either an extra attack or +30’/round to movement.*

Brene readied her shortbow.

Devrion cast *accuracy [expired on Round 1802]* on Brene’s shortbow.

*Brene’s shortbow doubled its range increment.*

Steelshade cast *dragonskin [expired on Round 1702]* on herself, augmenting her armor even further.

*Steelshade gained +5 to AC.*

Round 3

Atlas prayed and cast *chasing perfection [expired on Round 183]* on Steelshade.

*Steelshade gained +4 to all primary abilities.*

Brene ensured that her Arcane Steel crystal was in her bow.

Devrion cast *mage armor [expired on Round 10803]* on himself.

Steelshade conserved her spells and waited for the others.

Round 4

Now warded, buffed, and telepathically linked, the archivist cast the *dimension door* spell, sending them to four different positions equidistant from a focal point that roughly coincided with the center of the sandhenge, with Atlas landing on a rocky ledge that rested about 15’ above the ground to his north, east, and northeast. The others were standing above inches of sand, and were now spotted by the sphinxes, who were anticipating the heroes’ arrival after a brief scuffle earlier.

The sphinxes were already inside the henge that buffed and warded them, but now they huddled with the loquasphinx in the middle of a star-formation.

Atlas stepped forward to where he and the sphinxes could clearly see one another.

Brene stepped into the shadow behind a dune’s summit with her shortbow ready.

Steelshade stepped into view with her sword and shield in hand.

Devrion levitated two feet into the air, and awaited developments.

Atlas spoke in a loud voice. “Stand aside. We have no wish to further harm you. If you stand aside and give us the ankh, we will not attack you.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Atlas, Diplomacy** | 10 | **Cha (+2)** | 0 | 12 | 5 – 10 | ?? |

*See below.*

The loquasphinx frowned at the words of the outlander as he formulated a reply in Muhorandi Common. “You! Dare! Come! Into! My! Abode!?”

Map

Description automatically generated

Round 5

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Group** | **Initiative** | **Roll** | **Modified Roll** | **Speed** |
| Brene | 1 | 6 | 20 | 26 | 30’ |
| Steelshade | 1 | 5 | 12 | 17 | 20’ |
| Atlas | 1 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 30’ |
| Devrion | 1 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 30’ |
| Sphinxes | 2 | 1 | 5 | 6 | See >> |

And it was at that moment that Atlas realized that they would have to wrest the item from this irredeemable sphinx’s claws. He sighed. “Fine. Try to not kill them outright.” He focused on the loquasphinx, and let out a *lion’s roar* *[expired on Round 185]*.

*PCs gained +1 to BAB*

*Atlas gained 5 + 19 = 24 temporary hps [****129****/105].*

*Brene gained 1 + 19 = 20 temporary hps [****125****/105].*

*Devrion gained 3 + 19 = 22 temporary hps [****127****/105].*

*Steelshade gained 5 + 19 = 24 temporary hps [****198****/162].*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *lion’s roar* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Loquasphinx | Fortitude | 11 | 2 | 13 |
| Crocospinx | Fortitude | 15 | 9 | 24 |
| Threskisphinx | Fortitude | 11 | 14 | 25 |
| Canisphinx | Fortitude | 8 | 6 | 14 |
| Hieracosphinx | Fortitude | 8 | 2 | 10 |

*Fail, success, success, fail, fail. Crocosphinx and Threskisphinx saved for ½ damage, and negate stun effect.*

*Dmg to Loquasphinx: 35 sonic + stun.*

*Dmg to Crocospinx: ½ x 37 = 18 sonic.*

*Dmg to Threskisphinx: ½ x 35 = 17 sonic.*

*Dmg to Canisphinx: 44 sonic + stun.*

*Dmg to Hieracosphinx: 34 sonic + stun.*

The sphinxes were disconcerted by the roar, and the leader and two weakest ones were stunned by the resounding cacophony.

Seeing that it was the most badly wounded, Brene fired her shortbow at the canisphinx.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +27 | *1* | 28 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 2nd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +22 | 17 | 39 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, *haste* | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +27 | 12 | 39 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Miss, hit, hit. Dmg: (3 + 2 + 30 Sneak) + (1 + 2 + 34 Sneak) = 35 + 37 = 72.*

The canisphinx flinched a few times, and stopped existing.



Steelshade cast *Bigby’s clenched fist [expired on Round 22]*, dropping it in right behind the threskisphinx, and directed it to attack the creature.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Bigby’s Clenched Fist | 1d8+11+stun | +0 | 18 | 2 | 20 | Fortitude DC 21 |

*Hit. Dmg: 4 + 11 = 11 + stun.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  Stun | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Threskisphinx | Fortitude | 11 | 3 | 14 |

*Fail. Stunned.*

Devrion gestured in a complex pattern with his fingers. “Sajátságos!”

*Cast weird, centered on the loquasphinx*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *weird* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Loquasphinx | Will | 7 | 3 | 10 |
| Crocospinx | Will | 7 | 15 | 22 |
| Threskisphinx | Will | 10 | 16 | 26 |
| Canisphinx | Will | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| Hieracosphinx | Will | 5 | 14 | 19 |

*Fail, fail, success, fail, fail. See below.*

*Dmg to threskisphinx: 8 + stun + 4 Strength damage.*

None of the four moved closer to the sphinxes, and they remained outside of the circle.

The loquasphinx collapsed and died.

A statue of a person with wings

Description automatically generated with low confidence

The crocospinx also died on the spot.



The threskisphinx was stunned, and appeared to be doing its best to writhe away.

The hieracosphinx was the last to fall at the casting of the *weird* spell.



Map

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Round 6

The heroes stood or levitated around the stunned threskisphinx. They looked at one another as the poor beast tried to take flight.

Steelshade stepped up to the struggling creature. “Do you yield?”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Diplomacy** | 5 | **Cha (+4)** | 2 | 11 | 10 – 15 | ?? |

*Very cuspish. See below.*



“Mmmmrgh!” the winged creature with the lion’s body and the ibis’ head struggled as it dealt with the pain of the blows and spells it just sustained. “You’re a bitch, boo, but yeah, I wanna live, so I’ll probably yield until you get ridiculous with your demands!”

Its vernacular was not Mulhorandi, but the half-drow understood.

Round 7

Angren couldn’t help but to smile slightly. “I have been told that before. Maybe this will help improve your opinion... slightly.” She intended to activate her healing belt and gently touched the creature’s wing, and began making her way over across the sand. The others stayed at a judicious distance, and looked around for the ankh they’d come to retrieve.

The ground then rumbled, barely giving the heroes time to react. Atlas and Brene then read the sphinx’s grinning beak and realized that the stunned and writhing villain was stalling them.

A colossal purple worm emerged from the center of the sandhenge, swallowing the threskisphinx whole, and now beholding the four strangers around it. “Fools! I am the Quizat Haderach, and I will make a meal of you!”

A picture containing reptile

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The oversized, talking, Fiendish worm hissed and roared as it came at Devrion.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Quizat Haderach | Bite | 2d8+12 | 16 | 9 | 25 | 14 | 39 |

*Hit. Dmg: 8 + 12 = 20 [****107****/105]+* *Improved Grab.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | | | **Attack Type** | | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Quizat Haderach | | | Grapple | | 16 | 24 | 40 | 3 | 43 |
| **Devrion** | **Atk** | **Roll** | | **Check** |
| Grapple | 12 | 19 | | 31 |

*Grapple in place; worm poised to execute Swallow Whole on next round*.

Devrion ended up between the three inhospitable mandibles of the quasi-reptilian worm.

Unfortunately, the *haste* spell expired.

Round 8

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Group** | **Initiative** | **Roll** | **Modified Roll** | **Speed** |
| Devrion | 1 | 6 | 16 | 22 | 30’ |
| Steelshade | 1 | 5 | 15 | 20 | 20’ |
| Brene | 1 | 6 | 7 | 13 | 30’ |
| Atlas | 1 | 2 | 10 | 12 | 30’ |
| Quizat Haderach | 2 | -2 | 7 | 5 | 20’/20’b |

Already 20’ up, and needing to emit no somatic gesture to invoke a *dimension door* spell, Devrion uttered two words: “Méretek ajtó!”

Devrion aimed at and teleported to a spot 100’ straight up, continuing to levitate.

Steelshade sent the clenched fist against the worm, and attacked it while channeling the *stored vampiric* touch spell in Arkenlyl.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Falchion +4 | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | 8.0 | +31 | 18 | 49 |
| Falchion +4, 2nd Attack | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +26 | 17 | 43 |
| Falchion +4, 3rd Attack | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +21 | 16 | 37 |
| Falchion +4, 4th Attack | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +16 | 15 | 31 |
| Greater Crystal of Arcane Steel | +1 to touch spells | 1 | +1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Hit, hit, hit, hit. Dmg: (4 + 9 + 3) + (7 + 9 + 3) + (5 + 9 + 3) + (6 + 9 + 3) + 40 Vampiric = 16 + 19 + 17 + 18 + 40 = 111.*

*Lauren gained 40 vampiric hps [****262****/198].*

Brene shot the worm with her shortbow.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +26 | 7 | 33 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 2nd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +21 | 11 | 32 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Hit, hit. Dmg: (2 + 2 + 23 Sneak) + (3 + 2 + 35 Sneak) = 27 + 40 = 67.*

They were putting a decent hurting on the behemoth, but this was veritably the biggest specimen they’d ever encountered.

Atlas prayed for his *spiritual weapon* and deployed it against the worm. A light crossbow appeared before the worm, and started shooting automatically, much like had happened to the charnel worm a few days earlier.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Light Crossbow | 1d8 | wild | 0 | 19-20, x2 | - | - | +14 | 6 | 20 |

*Hit. Dmg: 7 + glitterdust.*

Aside from impaling itself into the worm’s carapace, the bolt poofed a patch of *glitterdust* upon the worm.

The Quizat Haderach contorted before striking out at Steelshade, who now threatened it the most.

*1d100 = 91, concealment bypassed.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Quizat Haderach | Bite | 2d8+12 | 16 | 9 | 25 | 16 | 41 |

*Hit. Dmg: 7 + 12 = 19 [****243****/198]+* *Improved Grab.*

If she didn’t *dimension door* out of the mandibles’ pincers, she might become the meal of their ill-willed host.

A picture containing diagram

Description automatically generated

Round 9

Devrion pointed down at the creature. “Borzalmas hervadás!”

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *horrid wilting* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Quizat Haderach | Fortitude | 17 | 18 | 35 |

*Success. Saved for ½ damage. Dmg: ½ x 63 = 31 fire.*

Steelshade swift-cast *dimension hop*, placing herself behind the creature’s head. She cast *swift fly* to stay airborne, and attacked the worm while channeling *inflict serious wounds* through her blade.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Falchion +4 | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | 8.0 | +31 | 20 | 51 |
| Falchion +4, 2nd Attack | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +26 | 9 | 35 |
| Falchion +4, 3rd Attack | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +21 | 1 | 22 |
| Falchion +4, 4th Attack | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +16 | 19 | 35 |

*Hit, hit, miss, hit. Dmg: (3 + 9 + 3) + (8 + 9 + 3) + (4 + 9 + 3) + (13 + 15 inflict serious wounds) = 15 + 20 + 16 + 28 negative energy = 79.*

Brene sniped the worm again with her shortbow.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +26 | 19 | 45 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 2nd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +21 | 2 | 23 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Hit, hit. Dmg: (3 + 2 + 37 Sneak) + (2 + 2 + 38 Sneak) = 42 + 42 = 84.*

Atlas’ spiritual weapon shot at the worm.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **Critical** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Light Crossbow | 1d8 | wild | 19-20, x2 | +14 | 7 | 21 |

*Hit. Dmg: 6 + 6 minor orb of cold = 12.*

The Quizat Haderach was done pussyfooting around with Pussyfoot and friends. Seeing no other enemies on the horizon, it emitted a burst of fiendish energy upon the party, then contorted so as to face Atlas.

*Dmg to Devrion (Good): 11 evil [96/105].*

Atlas displaced himself 20’ back with his dimension stride boots, and readied his crossbow. He now found himself at the bottom of the 15’ cliff atop which he had been standing moments earlier. With the wall to his back, he could retreat no further without climbing or teleporting to the summit.

A picture containing map

Description automatically generated

Round 10

“Ow, damn you,” Devrion snapped. He pointed at the worm. “Erő szféra!”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| *orb of force* | 10d6 force | +4 | 1 | - | - | - | 16 | 3 | 19 |

*36 + 4 = 40 magic [force].*

The worm squealed as its viscera spewed all over the sandy battlefield.

Steelshade’s *clenched fist* was prepared to attack the worm upon command, so she pointed at the worm. “Go get it.” She allowed herself to drop to the ground as she attacked the creature again, once again channeling *inflict serious wounds* through her blade.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Bigby’s Clenched Fist | 1d8+11+stun | 18 | 11 | 29 | Fortitude DC 21 |

*Hit. Dmg: 1 + 11 = 12 + stun.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *clenched fist* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Quizat Haderach | Fortitude | 17 | 6 | 23 |

*Success. Stun negated.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Falchion +4 | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | +31 | 7 | 38 |

*Hit. Dmg: 7 + 9 + 3 + (18 + 15 ISW) = 17 + 33 = 50.*

“She’s comin’ down,” warned Atlas at the first forecast of the enemy’s imminent fatality: the dropping of entire organs onto the sandy ground.

Confident that she could take the creature down now, Brene once again fired on the worm. “Die already,” she muttered as she placed her shots into the creature’s tough hide.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +26 | 9 | 35 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 2nd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +21 | 15 | 36 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Hit, hit. Dmg: (4 + 2 + 32 Sneak) + (1 + 2 + 33 Sneak) = 38 + 36 + =74.*

Atlas’ *spiritual crossbow* continued to assault the worm.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Light Crossbow | 1d8 | wild | 0 | 19-20, x2 | 290’ | - | +14 | **20** | 34 |

*Threat. 1d20 = 18 + 14 = 32, critical hit. Dmg: 2 x 6 = 12.*

Atlas drew his crossbow—already loaded—and shot the worm.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Seeking Light Crossbow +2 | 1d8 | 2 | 2 | 19-20, x2 | 120’ | 4.0 | +17 | **20** | 37 |

*Threat. 1d20 = . Dmg: 11 + 17 = 28, critical hit. Dmg: (2 x 6) + 2 = 14.*

Despite appearances, the Quizat Haderach still had a fight left in it, and said a few garbled words with its broken jaws as it partly submerged itself before emerging and snapping once again at Steelshade.

*1d100 = 69, 39 concealment bypassed on bite.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** | **Notes** |
| Quizat Haderach | Bite | 2d8+12 | 16 | 9 | 25 | 2 | 27 | Improved Grab; Swallow Whole |
| Quizat Haderach | Sting | 2d6+6+ Poison | 16 | 4 | 20 | 14 | 34 | Fort DC 25; 1d6 Str >> 2d6 Str |

*Hit, miss. Dmg: (14 + 12) = 41* *[****218****/198]+* *Improved Grab.*

As the creature attempted to grab Steelshade in its jaws, she used her newly-taught ability to fight in close quarters and struck at the creature.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Falchion +4 | 2d4 | +9 +3 | 3 | 18 | 2 | Slashing | 8.0 | +31 | 13 | 44 |

*Hit. Dmg: 3 + 9 + 3 = 15.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | | | **Attack Type** | | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Quizat Haderach | | | Grapple | | 16 | 24 | 40 | 16 | 56 |
| **Steelshade** | **Atk** | **Roll** | | **Check** |
| Grapple | 28 | 10 | | 38 + 15 = 53 |

*Grapple in place; worm poised to execute Swallow Whole on next round*.

Impaling the draconic drow’s shoulder with its stinger and grabbing her with what was left of its mouth, the boss of this stretch of nowhere prepared to feed once more.

A picture containing diagram

Description automatically generated

Round 11

The spiritual crossbow fired once again.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Spiritual Light Crossbow | 1d8 | wild | 0 | 19-20, x2 | 290’ | - | +14 | 11 | 25 |

*Hit. Dmg: 5 + 2 lesser orb of fire = 7.*

The worm was visibly done for, though it didn’t realize it yet. One blow away from annihilation, the monster reeled in order to better munch on Steelshade before settling on its next course.

*Bigby’s hand* did the job of ending the monster’s existence.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Bigby’s Clenched Fist | 1d8+11+stun | +0 | - | - | - | - | - | 18 | 3 | 21 | Fortitude DC 21 |

*Hit. Dmg: 5 + 11 = 16.*

That punched a hole in the midsection of the purple worm, and the Quizat Haderach was no more.

The worm’s head was almost 80’ up in the air, and now came tumbling down.

Steelshade cast *dimension hop* to extricate herself from the creature’s grasp, and to avoid the falling head.

Once everything stopped moving, the duskblade looked up at Devrion. “Do you see the ankh anywhere?”

“No, but I can look,” Devrion replied. He let himself down to within five feet of the ground, and started searching.

Atlas and Brene advanced toward the center of the circle, their weapons ready.

Rounds 12 – 14

They spent a few moments searching, and as he’d suspected, Devrion found the ankh on the loquasphinx’s torso, which was now separated from its more leonid rear segment.

The ankh was meant to boost a formidable *[+4]* weapon into a magnificent *[+5]* one, and in time, as it attuned itself to the falchion, it would also grant other properties that remained to be discovered.

They spent a few moments searching, and as he’d suspected, Devrion found the ankh on the loquasphinx’s torso, which was now separated from its more leonid rear segment.

“How is this supposed to be used?” Devrion asked. “Do you just carry it?” He handed the ankh to Steelshade. “I think this will do the most good with you.”

Steelshade knew from duskblade tales that the ankh would affix itself to the weapon upon contact, but unlike a crystal, the ankh could not be mundanely removed. Worn by the sphinx, it augmented the creature’s innate abilities, but for Steelshade, it would do nothing as a pendant other than to add flair to her outfit.

Atlas peered at the device as it changed hands, while Brene looked around for anything else, either interesting or valuable.

It was difficult to tell which sphinx had had each recovered item, but there were a few trinkets that Atlas now identified on sight: “Ah, behold!” he exclaimed as they all held out what they’d found. “These must be used quickly... within a tenday or so of leaving the sandhenge, or they will be useless.”

“What are they?” asked Devrion, an innate spellcaster with almost as much knowhow about Arcana as Atlas. In the case of these seemingly mundane items, the warmage was at a loss.

“Metamagic items. This is the Brooch of Empowerment, and here we have the Sash of Nonlethal Substitution, Meathook of Corruption, Dildo of Violation, Toering of Entanglement, Wristwatch of Lingering, Icepick of Reaping, Glove of Deceptiveness, Monocle of Invisibility, Chisel of Sculpting, Anklet of Chaining, Hourglass of Delay, Earpiece of Repetition, Tape of Extension, Whistle of Silence, Rattle of Stillness, Babooshka Doll of Widening, Cat’s Foot of Twinning, Hourglass of Quickening, and the Thrush Wing of Rapidity.”

“The Twenty-One Relics of Bahar Shemzin!” Devrion made a connection.

“Yes and no,” clarified Atlas. “The befabled Twenty-One Relics are an embellishment of an older story involving 21 warrior-priests. Regardless, these trinkets are single-serving versions of the so-called Relics, and were forged by the hundreds a few years ago by the beguiler-wizard who used this site as a sanctum, and now allegedly serves Dispater as a lesser devil in the Hells. He was a fan of the legend, and longed for the power attributed to each Relic, but he could not produce metamagic items with any permanence, and so these are limited edition boosts now that this madman’s memories and recipes have been lost to posterity.”

“Interesting,” Brene had not paid attention to the background on this place prior to their *planar shifting* here. “So they’ll augment your spells?” she asked.

Atlas explained that while he normally would have had to apply a metamagic property to a spell upon preparation, these items could be spontaneously used to augment spells—where applicable—on the fly. “We should determine which effects would be most useful to each of us, and to which spells.”

“With these boosts, we should be that much better prepared to engage our next mark,” Steelshade anticipated.

“What mark is that again?” Brene asked.

“Keygrodekkerrhylon *[Draconomicon, p. 206]*,” Steelshade pronounced the black dragon’s name as if she intended to write his epitaph. “His enemies call him Rhylon.”



Atlas elaborated: “We must go to the swamps of Chult, and seek out the ancient drake’s lair. He has ravaged every humanoid settlement bordering his swamp, and has stolen an item that will likely augment Brene’s shortbow, but first, we should return to Waterdeep, where I can prepare tomorrow’s spells.”

“Aye, we should get some rest, and strategize how we’re going to take down this dragon, Rhylon,” Devrion nodded as Steelshade contemplated placing the ankh on the falchion.

Steelshade contemplated placing the ankh on the falchion.

Atlas stored all of the items they’d found, including the ankh, in his haversack. That done, he brought everyone back to Waterdeep.

Steelshade consulted with Atlas and a local sage before she consented to attach the ankh to Arkenlyl. She wanted to know more about what the device would do.

Said sage, Awgust, the spellscale, shrugged and said, “Yeah, it *should* take.”

It was a spectacle to behold when the duskblade put the ankh near the mercy of her falchion, and like a magnet, it just about flew onto the handle and wrapped itself around it, becoming little more than an ornamental etching on the otherwise unchanged hilt. The weapon glowed with a faint, light-blue hue, and resonated as if it has just been sheathed by an actor.

Atlas also studied more about their next target. The black dragon had been seemingly content to withdraw from contact with the world in its old age, so the archivist looked for anything that might explain the wyrm’s change of heart.

That evening, Brene pulled Angren aside. “So, how did it go?”

“How did what go?” The drow lifted an eyebrow as she looked down at her friend.

“Your bath with Devrion.”

Angren shrugged. “It was nice to have him wash me.”

“And?”

“And what?”

“Oh, good grief,” Brene sighed. “How was the sex, Angren?”

“He touched me, and it was nice. I touched him, and that was nice, too.”

“Okay, that’s good. How was the rest of it?”

Angren shook her head. “There wasn’t anything else.”

Brene shook her head and sighed. “You elves are just odd people, do you know that?”

Angren smiled. “No, we’re just not humans or halflings.” She gently grasped Brene’s shoulder. “I’m not quite ready for sex, and Devrion is perfectly fine with it. He and I have talked, and we are proceeding toward becoming mates.” She sighed. “I love him, and he loves me. That is new for me, Brene. No one has ever touched me with love before. Devrion has had heartbreak in his life, and he is cautious, too.”

“Atlas has told me that I need to stop bothering you,” Brene sighed. “I just love you both.”

“I love you, too. You might have to ask Devrion for his feelings, though.”

“Right,” Brene chuckled. “Okay, I’ll leave you two be. For now.”

Angren laughed and shook her head as the two of them finished dressing for dinner.

~\*~

A few days later, Atlas had exhausted his research, and had even sought out a diviner who helped him to locate the exact location of the dragon’s lair.

*See Draconomicon, p. 204.*

“Are you sure you can take us directly there?” asked Brene.

“No,” he finally had to admit, “I went to the general area yesterday, scouted it out, and can *plane shift* us to a spot a few minutes upstream of Rylon’s lair.”

“You did *what*?” Brene suspected he’d been up to something when he’d disappeared for a few minutes the day before.

“I was extra cautious. My spells were mostly prepared for stealth and reconnaissance,” he assured her.

She shook her head, her eyes shifting up at him.

“Well, what’s done is done,” the celibate warmage huffed. “I’m readier than a red-cheeked maiden.”

“You *are* a red-cheeked maiden,” Brene stretched the truth a bit.

The jungle half-elf looked at Steelshade, who smirked and unsheathed her falchion, gripping the ankh-emblazoned handle with renewed resolve after a few days of rest.

“Anyone need to long-term buff before we go?” Atlas asked.

With the Twenty-One Relics of Bahar Shemzin in his haversack, Atlas used his eternal wand of *haste [expired in 5 rounds]* on everyone just before they teleported out.

*The PCs gained +1 to BAB, TAC, AC, and Reflex Saves, plus either 30’ extra movement per round or an extra attack.*

Brene readied her bow, while Devrion cast *mage armor [expired in 18 hours]* on himself.

*Devrion gained +4 to FFAC and AC.*

Steelshade cast *dragonskin [expired in about an hour and a half]* on herself.

*Steelshade gained +5 to FFAC and AC.*

Atlas planned to cast *chasing perfection [expired 18 minutes from the time of casting]* on everyone before they actually encountered the great wyrm.

*All PCs would then gain +4 to all primary attributes.*