*Chapter 13: Settling Down*

The rest of the day had gone well, and having found a cobbler-arcanist with an enviable reputation for having almost every type of magic footwear in the market, they’d swapped out their boots with a matching set of Flying Boots of Greater Agility. They were a bit slippery at first, but with a few minutes of practice, they managed to master the stride needed to maximize traction.

Then they headed back to their rooms, witnessing the queerest and most unexpected of things: a mid-aged gnome with a wide brimmed hat falling from the sky, then teleporting away seconds before hitting the ground, but not before an arch-devil materialized above him and swooped down to grab him. Seeing that the gnome had disappeared, the devil—too—cast some type of *planar shift* spell and probably followed the gnome into the next realm. This had all happened about 100’ north of them, and the brief spectacle left some citizens fleeing while others stood still and declared how amazing and nonsensical that was.

“Shit,” Brene sighed. “Here we go again.”

“What do you mean?” Atlas asked.

“Oh, like we’re going to just ignore that gnome, and the arch-devil that popped up right in the middle of Waterdeep.”

“She has a point,” Devrion commented with a shrug. “Aasterinian could well call us to chase them down.”

“Until she does,” Angren said as she took Devrion’s arm in a – for her – blatant public show of affection, “we are going to go rest. Which reminds me, I’d like to ask Rook if we can purchase a house with some of the money. That way, we have a place to call our own. He can use the rest of the building, but leave us our quarters.”

Everyone agreed that her idea was sound. They talked about what they might want on the way back to their rented rooms. “Here in Waterdeep, you mean, right?” Devrion confirmed.

“Yes,” Angren said.

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Once in their rooms, they left their boots—which now served as a kind of uniform for the quartet—on, and laid out the rest of their new inventory to appreciate the qualities of the new items.

Angren started off. “I’m still trying to decide if the extra spells in this ring of wizardry is worth not having the protection. The spells are good, so twice as many would be really good. The scabbard is a real boon, and the Bag of Holding is useful, too.”

“Just don’t but those bags of holding in your haversack,” Devrion warned. “I found an Ioun Stone which will help me better defend against spells, and a rod of reversal with which to surprise an enemy spellcaster. And then there’s this.” He took the Immovable Rod, set it just below arm’s length over his head, and then he performed a one-armed pullup with it.

“Cute,” Angren said with a laugh. “You now have a cloak hook to use at will.”

“I, too, found a rod that will help me against spells, plus a bag of holding and a wand that will cure diseases,” Atlas reported.

Brene lifted her new treasures. “Since I seem to be good with my bow, this quiver will give me some extra damage. This bottle of air will be handy if I get stuck somewhere without it, which seems more likely now that we’re traveling all over the Planes. And this,” she lifted an ebony rod that seemed to shimmer in the light, “will give us a bit more protection from different energy types. It will cover all of us, but only for a short time.”

A sudden and unexpected popping sound just outside startled them a bit, but by the time Devrion got to the window, there was nothing to see other than the southern part of the Trades Ward.

“Let’s gear up and see what that was,” Angren said.

The quartet did so, and they walked outside together.

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They were going to walk all around the building block, but instead flew to the rooftop, noting nothing out of the ordinary, and no one acting circumspect. “It sounded like the ‘bap’ that gnome made when it *plane shifted* earlier.”

“Could it be him?”

“Who is he?”

“I’ve never seen him before that night when Aasterinian appeared to us,” Devrion shrugged.

The city streets were bustling with the last affairs of the business day beginning to close. Discreet bag men could be seen heading to the financiers’ offices with daily earnings to deposit, and at one point, their mere presence and renown discouraged a ne’er-do-well from assaulting one of the more vulnerable-looking envoys of a nearby merchant.

There was a performance scheduled for tonight—the first of three consecutive nights—just across the street from their lodging, and many of the troubadours were already beginning to gather at the plaza that served as a notable nexus in the Trades Ward.

“Maybe it was one of their snare drums,” Brene posited.

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There was nothing else going on outside that intrigued the champions of Aasterinian, so they went back inside and continued to talk.

The foursome looked around from their rooftop vantage point, peering off in all directions. Finally, Atlas turned to Angren. “Whatever it was, it’s gone now. I’m pretty sure we will hear more about it later.” He walked to the roof’s edge and hopped down to the alley below.

Brene, Angren, and Devrion followed, touching down in like manner beside the archivist. “Let’s go talk to Rook about buying a place where we can have our *own* rooms,” Brene suggested.

With that, they made their way back to Rook’s church to present their idea to the inquisitor and his duskblade.

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“A free-standing building?” Rook asked before the conversation continued.

“Yes, preferably. Why do you ask? You have one in mind?” Brene asked.

“Well, it’s just that most of the architecture in the city is built adjacent to neighboring buildings, so unless you have an alley on all sides, a free-standing building is going to be a tall order within the city wall...” Rook said before inhaling and continuing, “... and you’re not going to get a permit to build anywhere near the outside of the city walls.”

“What’s the minimum distance to build?” asked Devrion.

“From any section of the wall, a minimum of a mile. That’s why you don’t see any peripheral agglomeration outside the walls like you do in most of the older metropoles,” Elaith answered.

Rook summarized, “Let me talk to an associate in real estate. He sold that house that Destiny’s Gambit liberated from Kaszüm the Acquirer.”

“The one with the portals to all the Planes?” asked Steelshade, familiar with the place.

“Not *all*,” clarified Elaith.

“Right,” Rook confirmed. “It was about 10, including the Material Plane. In any case, the man is well connected and has a fairly up-to-date account of what’s on the market within the walls. Any particular Ward you prefer?”

Atlas smiled. “We will defer to you to make that choice, since your people will have everything in it but our quarters. Maybe something with two or three floors, and we will take the top one?”

“Not sure what you mean by my people having everything in your prospective house but your quarters, but yes, we’ll go see a man about a house in a bit,” Rook responded. “In the meantime, join me for a game of chess.”

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One quick game consisting of five moves on Rook’s part and four on Steelshade’s led to a second game against Brene, and a third against Atlas. Rook’s prowess in strategy games had earned him renown in the City, and the demigods of Aasterinian could not defeat him in the game. “You want a round?” Rook asked Devrion.

The warmage chuckled, “Someday, in the arena maybe.”

“Ooooh! Ohhhhh! Awwwww!” a few acolytes of Red Knight cheered the taunt that Rook would have to accept.

“Very well, friend,” Rook had to accept. “How about we make it in one fortnight. You choose the place and if it’s far, maybe take care of getting me there.”

“You’re on,” Devrion said. “You Red Knight guys are alright.”

They spent a few more minutes in pleasantries and determining whether Rook and Devrion were actually going to spar, then the No Laughing Matter crew took their leave, resolving to meet here again tomorrow to see if there were any good leads on a house.

“We can split up and walk around this ward,” Brene suggested.

Angren removed her Amulet of Tears, and replaced it with her Farspeaking Amulet. She gave each of her companions one of the red crystals. “We will meet back at the inn for dinner.”

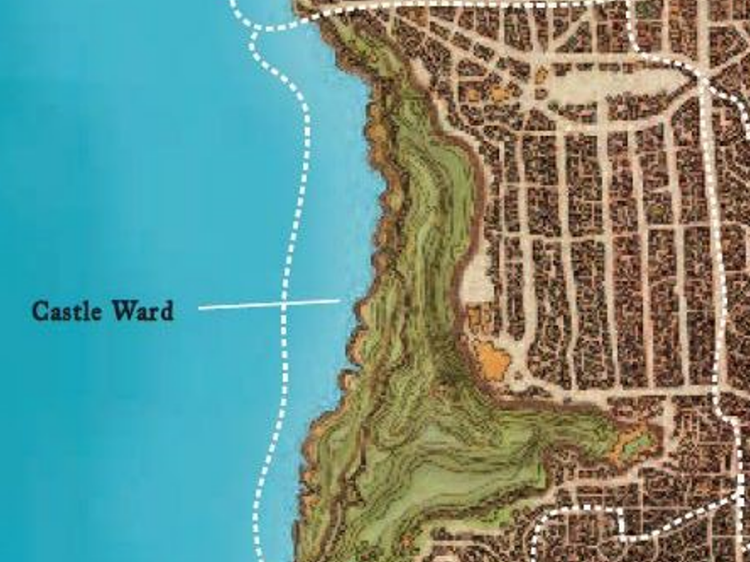
Brene and Atlas went to walk the streets north of Rook’s church, while Angren and Devrion went to search south. They were looking for a house as close to Rook’s temple as possible; something with a secure gate and at least two stories, though three would be better.

“I think we need to find something that doesn’t stand out,” Devrion opined as he offered his arm to Angren. “Just an ordinary house would be great.”

“Let’s see what we can find,” Angren replied with a smile.

The two pairs began their search of the Castle Ward for anything suitable.

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Having split up into two pairs, their respective tours of the Ward were informative and inspiring in terms of the properties there, though vacant properties weren’t advertised as such to passersby, so they still didn’t have a good sense of what was available. Still, their conversations matured as the hours progressed, and by the time night had arrived and they’d again coalesced, they knew the layout of the city’s most opulent sector quite confidently, and had developed preferences and nuanced distinctions among the promenades that crisscrossed the mostly rectangular blocks that comprised the Castle Ward.

They headed back to Rook’s temple to see if he’d been able to get any good leads, and indeed, the inquisitor had inquired well. He presented a few illustrations along with a short but worthwhile manifest of the dozen or so properties that matched their needs and other criteria. “There’s plenty of variation to choose from, ranging from a cramped fixer-upper overlooking the coast, which was recently *fireballed*, to a five-story tower formerly occupied by the late Svarf Middlesex.”

“The transmuter?”

“The very one,” Elaith confirmed. “Died a tenday ago... of natural causes, they say. His Estate is managing the sale, and it’s expected to last one or two business days on the market.”

“You don’t say...” Brene looked to Atlas and the others.

Devrion perused the list. “And what of this two-story site on Herald Avenue?”

“Which one is that?” Rook asked, looking at the parchment to remind himself. “Oh, yes, this is one that has a central area set up as a dojo within a courtyard partially moating the dojo with a stream-shaped pond. It has some nice, collapsible bridges that were built with defensive considerations. It’s of Rokugani design, and has underground space that’s been used as an armory and repository, though it could be converted to some type of living space. The second story is all one open space separated by movable partitions.”

Rook took a few moments to relate the details that his contact had given him, adding context to the illustrations that complemented the inventory that they would later use as an itinerary. “And so there you have it. I imagine we’ll be neighbors as soon as you’re ready to.”

Elaith added, “But I’d move now on the hotter ones if you’re serious; otherwise, the professional speculators will always sweep the keepers out from under you.”

“Noted,” Steelshade said, looking to her mates. “What, then, would be our next steps? How do I get in touch with this realtor?”

Rook shifted in his seat as if from a standby position, now leaning forward. “Sure. Now that we know there are some places that you would seriously consider committing to, the next step for you would be to narrow down this list to two or three places, and I can confirm the tentative time tomorrow that I set up with Pikaks; that’s his name. He normally has a hefty queue, but he’s just hired an assistant that can give us a tour between the 11th and 12th tolls.”

“Nice.”

“Pickaxe, huh?” Devrion already wanted to fight him.

“Well, it’s the Elven term for ‘elected’, ‘selected’, or ‘chosen’; not really a cognate of ‘pickaxe’ in Common,” shrugged Rook, only cursorily familiar with the language.

Devrion decided he would be polite to the docile civilian he hadn’t yet met.

Rook continued, “Your renown speaks for itself, heroes, and holds a type of currency with a realtor who would consider it marketable to brag about having sold a property to the likes of you.”

They understood the motive, but hadn’t considered that although they were among the wealthiest people in the city, they would likely get a break on the price that others would not. If they’d had a paladin among them, this might have created some strain, but this quartet had come to see this as part of the spoils of war, and a legitimate transformation and redistribution of the wealth they’d liberated from the dragon that had hoarded it.

And so they spent some time pacing the temple garden and discussing what was most important to them: separate living spaces, sound tactical and defensive masonry, garderobes, empty land around the structure, escape routes, vantage points, cellars, and the like.

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The next day, they all met at a plaza in the Castle Ward, and Rook introduced the quartet to Pikaks.



To the human eye, he looked like a young kid, but he was probably in his sixties, and was one wily half-elf who’d preserved well and lived even better. If the best revenge was a life lived in comfort, this man’s enemies had been bested for sure. He spoke with the deference deemed appropriate for the moment, and acknowledged the heroes’ reputation. With as much respect and confidence over his profession, he then dove straight to business. “I’ll be respectful of your time, and try to narrow this down to one or two sites to show you today.”

They related their preferences to the realtor directly, and as he nodded, it was evident that he was trimming the list down mentally. “Yes, the Herald Ave. house is indeed a fine choice, but this one here—I believe—is the gem you’re looking for,” he pointed to the entry for a place on Haltover Street. “It’s nothing fancy; just a small sitting room and dining area on the first floor, with a kitchen in the back. The second floor has a library and a bedroom, and the third floor has two bedrooms. All the bedrooms have wash basins with plumbed water and a water closet. The house isn’t very large, but the group is going for something that blends in with everything else around. It does have a small courtyard with 8’ tall walls and a cellar accessible from the kitchen.”



That sounded lovely, so they went to go check that place out first.

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It was indeed what they’d been hoping for, minus a few elements that could be improved upon with some masonry or a *stone shape* spell, and they only needed about 30 seconds to decide on it. “This one’s going for a fair price: 161,300 ₲. We haven’t discussed forms of payment yet, but we’re in a position to negotiate, given the unremarkable interest there’s been on this one,” Pikaks pointed out.

“We plan to liquidate a vast hoard over the next few days,” Angren replied.

Atlas specified, “If I recall, a tenday’s time is the standard escrow period. We can certainly come up with a 20% down payment by close of business tomorrow, and the rest of the 161 by the time the deal is sealed.”

“But if I may,” Brene interjected, “why has there been such little interest in the place?”

The realtor disclosed, “Much of it lies in the specialized add-ons that don’t work for the average prospective buyer; that neighborhood isn’t so much for retired adventurers as it is for old money that’s generally looked down on the sellswords they mostly keep around for security.”

“I see,” Devrion read between the lines, “we’d be the help.”

Steelshade argued with the man who would adore her, “We’d be the heroes of the block... not some sellswords. We’ve altered the balance of the multiverse. If you’re saying we’d be in better company in the Docks Ward...”

Pikaks didn’t let the half-dragon finish that thought, “Oh, Heavens, no! You *will* be well received. This is not pogrom country; we are a civilized people... and your names here are indeed synonymous with heroism.” It was evident that Devrion was the loose cannon in this quartet, and his prowess with Evocation spells was a known statistic on his scorecard, so the realtor cleared his throat and offered, “Ehem! The fireproof walls in the underground portion alone make the property well worth the price for someone such as yourselves, but you can understand why a merchant or aristocrat would be less likely to want to pay fair price for amenities from which they would never benefit.”

Brene had caught something in his wording earlier. “You’d said ‘mostly’. What other reasons would there be for the mild enthusiasm in this property?”

“Oh! Well, the other reason is really part of the first,” shrugged Pikaks. “A former adventuring company owned the place until a few years ago, when the current owner bought it. Their exploits and experiments caused such ruckus that the neighbors are highly guarded of their peace, and the place itself carries a reputation that—as I implied earlier—would be neither false nor tarnishing for such illustrious vanquishers of demons.”

Brene took in the argument: while this house was likely haunted with the stigma of negative karma from the neighbors accrued over years of legal but encroaching activities on behalf of the previous adventurers who’d made this their home, as well as by their potentially antisocial successors who still owned the place. Nevertheless, what better way to heal such scars than to dispel the notion that adventurers were ubiquitously tiresome and inconsiderate neighbors. Perhaps there was no better site in the city for their living space.

“Will the seller accept the funds in coin?” asked Devrion, unfamiliar with customary procedures around land transfers.

“Nay!” the realtor held back a chuckle, wishing not to offend the warmage. “Once you have the funds...”

“Oh, we have the funds!” Brene said.

“Well, then in that case, let’s go look at the property.”

~\*~

By the hour’s conclusion, they’d seen what they had to, and discussed it briefly before proceeding to the final stage. “I think you’ve made a fine choice,” Pikaks nodded.

They’d opted to deed the title to Rook’s temple charter—legally an Estate—in order to keep a low profile and fortify the relationship with the church of Red Knight. “The students will be so grateful,” Rook commented as they went to the notary public’s office to take care of their end of the paperwork. The offer would still have to be accepted, of course, but given that they were willing to pay the ticket price up front, this should be done by tomorrow, and escrow could ensue.

The notary’s office was adjacent to the financier that Pikaks used to secure the bond for the house. A series of complex formalities on paper were passed around, and Atlas took a few moments to review the fine print, finding nothing out of order. The heroes had meanwhile opened up their haversacks and other extradimensional baggies, dumping the foreign coins into a machine that separated them by metal type, then weighed each bulk sum to determine the sum total of each element or compound, then spat out a manifest of each bulk’s value at current market prices. This took about as long as Atlas’ review of the documentation, so by the time one ended, the other was wrapping up as well.

Once the tally hit a market yield of 161,300 ₲, they stopped feeding the loot into the funnel, and this portion of the deal was complete.

Rook thanked and congratulated the heroes once again, and they took their leave, resolving to return in the morning to finalize the paperwork. In the unlikely event that the offer was rejected, Pikaks would contact them via *sending*. “Atlas, should I contact *you*?” Pikaks asked the most bookish among the quartet.

“That’ll be fine; thanks!”

And with this, they set off to spend one of the last remaining afternoons in Waterdeep as temporary lodgers. For the immediate future, they would be residents!

The four returned to Rook’s office and paid him 100,000 ₲ toward the staff and property maintenance. “Let us know when those funds get low,” Angren said with a smile. They took their leave of the bemused cleric and his wife, and went back to their lodging to pack. Then, they took their possessions to their new home, set them inside, and surveyed the house, making lists of what they needed to purchase. “I think we need to split up, with two of us staying here with our loot, and the others going out shopping,” Brene suggested.

“That’s fine, but we need cleaning supplies and some groceries first,” Angren replied.

They decided that Angren and Devrion would make a grocery run, pick up cleaning supplies, and go back home. Then, Atlas and Brene would go out and order linens, furniture, cookware, tableware, and the like for the house, having them delivered as soon as possible. They still had the Farspeaking Amulet for communications, and they set to the process of making their house a home.

And so the evening went as planned, and the next morning, they met Rook and Pikaks once again, this time at the latter’s office, and met the executor of the seller’s Estate: a young human named Estela Faithmystra.



Given the intensity with which the heroes had lived their lives recently, this was about as uneventful an event as they’d experienced in a while, though Brene felt butterflies in her stomach at the thought of the upkeep.

“With the coin we have now,” Devrion assured her, “Maintenance will be something we can outsource.”

Atlas added, “There are druids among Rook’s acolytes; they can certainly tend the outside while others care for the inside as part of their training. *Prestidigitation* alone should keep the arcane initiates occupied.”

And so they bought their house, and went back with Rook, Elaith, and three of their students to the temple to celebrate the first day of escrow. “I’d forgotten that we had to wait a tenday,” the duskblade admitted, and they all giggled.

~\*~

4 Alturiak, 1384

The tenday was nearly half-way through, and Atlas scribbled a new entry in his log of recent events.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***No Laughing Matter: 1384*** |  |  |  | x |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Event*** | º | R |  |  |
| The party vanquishes a macrodemon lodged in the mantle of Krigala (Beastlands) | Highsun | 15 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party helps a band of unicorns to fend off a hostile herd of centaurs in Krigala | Morning | 17 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party plane shifts to Faerûn, just outside Waterdeep, and encounters the avatar of Aasterinian | Night’s End | 18 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party walks to Waterdeep, stocks up, books passage to the Whalebones, and wakes up in an inn | \* | 18 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party sets sail towards the Whalebones | Sunrise | 19 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party encounters a gang of crazed kuo-toa who command an elasmosaur | Highsun | 21 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party arrives at Sedesty Island, finds it deserted, and fights a crypt chanter and its minions | Morning | 22 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party fights Graz’zt’s avatar near the northern coast of Sedesty Island | Highsun | 23 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party slays a Juiblex-Graz’zt avatar, and destroys one of Pale Night’s wombs, a conduit ferrying Abyssal creatures into Faerûn | Morning | 24 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party wakes up in Waterdeep, then returns to Sedesty, and makes its way to another small island, which they tentatively name Juiblex Is. | Midnight | 24 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party enters another Abyssal conduit, and slays a formidable Juiblex avatar in the form of a Colossal elephant | Morning | 25 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party is regaled with new armor by Aasterinian’s envoy; they also begin to unravel mysteries around Pale Night | \* | 26 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party confronts an arch-sphinx that wronged them in the past, and who is now in the service of Graz’zt | Highsun | 28 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party confronts Rhylon and a few of his apprentices, taking [ITEM?] from his hoard | Highsun | 28 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party vanquishes Dynasty and confiscates the Recurve Grip of Alacrity from her possessions |  | 28 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party confronts Cheyn, a white dragon, and his half-dragon apprentice, then vanquishes an opportunistic beholder trying to loot the hoard |  | 29 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party funnels a few hundred thousand G into the Material Plane, and they re-equip and seek out a permanent house in Waterdeep |  | 29 | Deepwinter |  |
| Rook helps the heroes find a realtor who in turn finds them a house that suits their needs and preferences; the title is deeded to Rook’s temple |  | 30 | Deepwinter |  |
| The party pays for their house in Waterdeep, located in the Sea Ward bordering the Castle Ward, effecting a tenday-long escrow period | Highsun | \* | Midwinter |  |
| Escrow ½-way through | \* | 4 | Alturiak |  |
| Escrow closes. The PCs and Rook’s team move furniture into the new place | Highsun | 9 | Alturiak |  |

He penciled in an entry for the day that they were planning to move in their things, as well as some furniture for the handful of young people who would be occupying the two lower levels of the building.

Rook had selected from his students the lot less likely to want to practice a lawful lifestyle in the household, which mainly consisted of the paladins, knights and clerics of Red Knight. This still left plenty of others among the student body, and he knew capacity was limited, so he narrowed it down further to the bards, druids, and the factotum who’d recently shown up at the temple doors. He’d provided the list of halflings and humans in question to the real but unofficial owners of the property: Karina Juhl, Samark Elffred, Armand Hagalotodo, Pehar Ar-mar, Cassandra Took-Took, Chelan Niward, and Madelgarde Silverstring.

They were suiting up to go visit Rook at the Temple of Red Knight, particularly to speak to the seven students who would share their living space with them. They were knaves at their respective crafts, but given enough time, might become great heroes unto themselves. For the moment, though, their comings and goings would help to preserve the air of normalcy about the residence.

They’d decided to distribute some of the remaining wealth, leaving about 500,000 ₲ for themselves, and then giving away the rest. How each of them would store his or her 125,000 coins had not yet been determined. In any case, they had sought out a handful of deity-affiliated orphanages in Waterdeep, and would later arrange for donations to be personally bestowed. They also named a few helpful clerics in the areas where they had grown up, and thought to *plane shift* to those stomping grounds and possibly give appropriate, and quiet, donations to them as well.

~\*~

Once at Rook’s temple, they relaxed a bit and went over their immediate plans. “Ah, great choices of orphanages. I appreciate you helping out our own orphans,” he used the term literally only for two of the youngsters who would bunk in with the heroes, but generally, his students shared the predominant background of being lifelong outcasts or outsiders before he took them under his red wing.

Angren sat next to Devrion as they relaxed after a light lunch with Rook, Elaith, Atlas and Brene. The foursome had already set a roughly equal value of coins and gems aside for their joint expenses, the total being five hundred thousand gold in all. That amount they would save in thirds, one third at home, and two thirds with investments in Waterdeep’s guilds and investment houses, as they could make deals with them. That left two million in gold and gems to give away, even after what they’d given to Rook’s church.

“I still can’t believe how much money we’ve collected,” Brene said with a shake of her head. “We could build a small city, well, almost, anyway.”

Devrion nodded. “Beyond a certain point, it really does little good, unless you have a guild or some other tradecraft to fund, like building ships or large buildings.”

“We have neither the time or the inclination to run a business,” Angren said, “which is why I’m supporting the idea to give to those who care for the sick and the needy.”

“So, I propose that we purchase enough scrolls to transport us to and from each destination we wish to visit. I know it costs more, but we can use Rook’s strong room to store everything, and just take what we’re leaving at each destination,” Atlas began. “Now, let’s decide on where we want to go.”

The four conferred as Rook and Elaith listened. The consensus was that they would pick a city and visit the most altruistic clerics and temples they could locate. There, they would ask about what the people in the area needed most, and donate to those who were involved in solving the problem. In order, they would visit Telflamm in Thesk, Mezro in Chult, Athkatla in Amn, and Loudwater along the Black Road.

“Of course, we should also help here in Waterdeep, unless you’re doing that, Rook. We’d work through your people, in any case.”

That all sounded fine to Rook. “Sometimes I long to cast off the mantle of Chief Knightpriest and join you all in your various endeavors,” he sighed.

Elaith echoed, “The adventuring life does have its charms, but then, so does urban sedentarism.”

*[Any other IC interaction]*

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The group then set off for their inn, though they never made it there.

~\*~

“Where are we?” asked Atlas in the midst of utter darkness, hearing his friends’ familiar voices as they were whisked from their positions in the multiverse and brought to a place without light.

The scent of dead flesh and dry grass narrowed down the possibilities around what had just happened to them, but ambiguously so.

Steelshade could see in the infrared spectrum, and described the flatland around them out to 60’ of her position. They were about 5’ apart from one another, and nothing else around them—not even a breeze—stirred.

The duskblade looked around as she drew Arkenlyl and settled her shield on her left forearm. “If we show a light, every creature within a mile will be able to see us.”

Brene pulled her goggles over her eyes. “I’m good.” She readied her bow.

Devrion touched his headband. “I’m okay for an hour.”

Atlas murmured a brief prayer *[true seeing, expired in 19 minutes]* and touched his eyes. “Okay, I can see now.”

And as they blinked and took in their surroundings, those who could do so began to see past Steelshade’s 60’ radius of vision, noting a ring of hills blocking a line of sight to anything beyond a few hundred feet of their position. Then they noted the morphic quality of the earth at their feet, and felt a tremor.

*Earthquake*

*1d100 = 05, 97, 77, 81; Atlas slipped into a fissure in the ground.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Save vs.**  *Earthquake* | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Altas, Reflex** | **6** | **Dex (+7)** | 13 | 26 | 13 | 39 |

*Success. Avoided falling in.*

The heroes activated their boots and flew upwards a bit.

Round 1

Then they saw a figure twice as large as them emerging from the ground. It bore the likeness of Graz’zt, and got onto his feet once the fissures closed back up.

Time and space were warped so much that it was impossible to tell whether they were 5’ or 50’ from one another, and Graz’zt was anywhere between 30’ and 3000’ away at this point; it was unclear.

Atlas tried to determine exactly where Graz’zt was, hoping that his true seeing spell would be helpful, while he considered the creature’s weaknesses.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Notes** |
| **Atlas, Know: The Planes** | 22 | **Int (+8)** | 5 | 35 | 19 | 54 | Trivial Knowledge, **best of 2 rolls** |
| **Atlas, Know: The Planes** | 22 | **Int (+8)** | 5 | 35 | 12 | 47 | Trivial Knowledge |

*Success by >20; +3 to attacks vs. Graz’zt.*

Steelshade cast dragonskin *[expired on Round 1,801]* on herself, flew up another ten feet, and circled around to Graz’zt right.

*Steelshade gained +5 to FFAC and AC.*

Devrion cast *mage armor [expired on Round 11,401]* on himself and hovered in place.

*Devrion gained +4 to TAC and AC.*

Brene moved to Graz’zt’s left in a bid to flank him, and readied her bow.

Round 2

<< P’rnixh jyab-freem! >> he said in Abyssal, which Atlas misunderstood to mean, “My dishes are underwater.” The heroes shuddered at the sound of the heavy words.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Save vs.**  Fear | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Notes** |
| **Atlas, Will** | **11** | **Wis (+6)** | 13 | 30 | 16 | 46 |  |
| **Brene, Will** | **6** | **Wis (+5)** | 3 | 14 | 19 | 33 | +2 vs. Fear |
| **Devrion, Will** | **11** | **Wis (+3)** | 3 | 17 | 4 | 21 |  |
| **Steelshade, Will** | **11** | **Wis (+4)** | 3 | 18 | 8 | 26 |  |

*Success, fail, fail, fail. Brene, Devrion, and Steelshade became Panicked, suffering –2 to saves and checks for 22 rounds.*

*Atlas was Shaken for 1 round.*

Brene, Devrion, and Steelshade dropped their weapons and fled at top speed from the demon prince.

Atlas remained in place for the moment, confident that he could target his arch-nemesis with a spell. He roared *[lion’s roar, expired on Round 192]* at the demon, and then moved back away from him.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *lion’s roar* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Graz’zt | Fortitude | 27 | 11 | 38 |

*Success. Saved for ½ damage. Dmg: ½ x 41 = 20 sonic.*

*PCs gained +1 to attacks and saves against fear, plus the following temporary hit points:*

*Atlas: 7 + 19 = 26 [****131****/105].*

*Brene: 5 + 19 = 24 [****129****/105].*

*Devrion: 2 + 19 =21 [****126****/105].*

*Steelshade: 3 + 19 = 22 [****220****/198].*

Atlas could tell that Graz’zt was both weakened and injured, and considered that they might have an easier time with him than with other avatars of the demon lord.

“Saaaayy...” Brene told her friends as they took heed and slowed down, “We really shouldn’t be susceptible to the frightful presence thing. We’ve faced this fuck several times, and taken on a lot of other scary bad things, like ancient dragons and a beholder.”

“You’re right,” Devrion agreed as they turned around and started making their way back to the weapons they’d dropped. “Scampering away doesn’t make sense; maybe that’s part of the chaos.”

Round 3

Graz’zt noted Steelshade returning, and waited a second or two before slashing at the unarmed half-drow.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str**  **Mod+** | **W+** | **Power**  **Attack** | **Total**  **Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Graz’zt | Acidic Burst Bastard Sword | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 27 | 13 | 1 | -3 | 38 | 2 | 40 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 2nd Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 22 | 13 | 1 | -3 | 33 | 1 | 34 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 3rd Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 17 | 13 | 1 | -3 | 28 | 12 | 40 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 4th Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 12 | 13 | 1 | -3 | 23 | 10 | 33 |

*Hit, miss, hit, miss. Dmg: (13 + 18 + 6 acid) + (9 + 18 + 3 acid) = 31 + 27 + 9 acid = 67. Acid damage negated [162/198].*

*NOTE: Power Attack bonuses above were forgotten, and won’t be added for these attacks.*

*Concealment was also ignored, so it’ll be rolled twice on the next round.*

Steelshade pointed out, “We’ve faced lesser avatars of this fuck; this particular one may have some new mojo up his sleeve.”

Atlas saw them come back, and started giving everyone advice on how to kick Graz’zt’s ass. “Thought you’d left me without a paddle.”

“We left you with Arkenlyl,” she motioned to the blade that she was now approaching. “And these other fine paddles with which to punish this fool.”

Steelshade and Brene picked up their dropped weapons and prepared to attack. Graz’zt got another swing in on Steelshade as she bent down and exposed that perfect bottom.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str**  **Mod+** | **W+** | **Power**  **Attack** | **Total**  **Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Graz’zt | Acidic Burst Bastard Sword | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 27 | 13 | 1 | -3 | 38 | 13 | 51 |

*Hit. Dmg: 3 + 18 + 5 acid + (2 x 3) Power Attack = 27 + 5 acid = 32. Acid damage negated [135/198].*

Devrion pointed at Graz’zt, reciting the command word: “Furcsa!” and invoking the *weird* spell.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *weird* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Graz’zt | Will | 20 | 16 | 36 |

*Success.*

*Dmg to Graz’zt: 11 + 3 Strength + Stun.*

Atlas prayed briefly *[chasing perfection, expired on Round 193]*, and then he touched Steelshade as she went by.

*Steelshade gained +4 to all primary abilities [173/****236*** *due to increased Con].*

Round 4

With the enemy stunned, the heroes went into action.

Steelshade shrugged off the demon’s attacks and counterattacked furiously. She channeled her sword’s stored *vampiric touch* spell, and empowered her strikes (+4).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Shattermantle Bloodstone Falchion +5 | 2d4+4d4 AS | +7 +5 + VT | 7+4 AS | 18 | 2 | Slashing | 8.0 | +39 | 11 | 50 |
| SB Falchion +5, 2nd Attack | 2d4+4d4 AS | +7 +5 | 7+4 AS | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +34 | 4 | 38 |
| SB Falchion +5, 3rd Attack | 2d4+4d4 AS | +7 +5 | 7+4 AS | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +29 | 16 | 45 |
| SB Falchion +5, 4th Attack | 2d4+4d4 AS | +7 +5 | 7+4 AS | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +24 | 12 | 36 |

*Hit, miss, hit, miss. Dmg: (3 + 7 + 5 + 11 AS) + (2 + 7 + 5 + 14 AS) + 32 Vampiric Touch = 26 + 28 + 32 = 86.*

*Steelshade gained 32 hps [215/236].*

Atlas prayed *[chasing perfection, expired on Round 194]* and touched Brene as she went past.

*Brene gained +4 to all primary abilities [143/****119*** *due to increased Con].*

Brene then picked up her bow and resumed her plan to flank the demon lord.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Rapid Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +28 | 16 | 44 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, Rapid Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +28 | 7 | 35 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Hit, miss. Dmg: 4 + 36 = 40.*

Devrion lifted up enough to not hit his friends with his spells, then pointed at Graz’zt, casting *horrid wilting*. “Borzalmas hervadás!”

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *horrid wilting* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Graz’zt | Fortitude | 27 | 4 | 31 |

*Success. Saved for ½ damage. Dmg: ½ x 59 = 29 negative energy.*

Round 5

“You dare *confront* me? You should have surrendered the moment you saw me,” Graz’zt said as he came out of his stunned state.

Graz’zt slashed again at Steelshade, who was no longer disarmed.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **W+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Graz’zt | Acidic Burst Bastard Sword | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 27 | 10 | 1 | -3 Power Attack | 38 | 10 | 48 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 2nd Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 22 | 10 | 1 | -3 Power Attack | 33 | 16 | 49 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 3rd Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 17 | 10 | 1 | -3 Power Attack | 28 | 1 | 29 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 4th Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 12 | 10 | 1 | -3 Power Attack | 23 | 10 | 33 |

*Hit, hit, miss, miss. Concealment 1d100 = (83, 46 [1st hit]), (97, 14 [2nd hit]); first hit negated.*

*Dmg: (8 + 18 + 3 acid + 6 Power Attack) = 31 + 3 acid = 34. Acid damage negated [184/236].*

“I will shit your bodies out half-digested, and raise them as my minions. Then I will—”

“Shut the fuck up!” one of the heroes interrupted the talkative Abyssal elite.

Atlas said a brief prayer *[protection from evil, expired on Round 195]*, flew up behind Steelshade, and touched her. He then moved back to start his next prayer.

*Steelshade gained PfE bonuses.*

Steelshade again empowered her strikes (+4) and channeled *inflict serious wounds* through her blade.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Shattermantle Bloodstone Falchion +5 | 2d4 + 4d4 AS | +9 +5 | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | 8.0 | +42 | 12 | 54 |
| SB Falchion +5, 2nd Attack | 2d4 + 4d4 AS | +9 +5 | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +37 | 11 | 48 |
| SB Falchion +5, 3rd Attack | 2d4 + 4d4 AS | +9 +5 | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +32 | 15 | 47 |
| SB Falchion +5, 4th Attack | 2d4 + 4d4 AS | +9 +5 | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +27 | 14 | 41 |

*Hit, hit, hit, miss. Dmg: (6 + 9 + 5 + 6 AS) + (3 + 9 + 5 + 12 AS) + 15 negative energy = 26 + 29 + 15 negative energy = 70 + (-4) SR.*

*Dmg: 5 + 9 + 5 + 10 AS = 29.*

Brene fired on Graz’zt again, staying at 30’ away so that she could place her shots.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Rapid Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +29 | 15 | 44 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 2nd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +24 | 19 | 43 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 3rd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +19 | 19 | 38 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, Rapid Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +29 | 14 | 43 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Miss, miss, miss, miss.*

“Rats!” Brene cursed her aim, which was almost true on every shot.

Devrion pointed at the demon lord again. “Implózió!”

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Bypass Spell Resistance | 19 | 2 | 21 |

*Fail.*

The spell failed to affect their arch-nemesis.

Round 6

Their arch-nemesis was badly damaged, but fought back against Steelshade with ferocity, deeming her the most immediate threat in the quartet. He dispensed with the Power Attacks now, preferring accuracy over might to take down the stalwart duskblade.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **W+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Graz’zt | Acidic Burst Bastard Sword | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 27 | 10 | 1 | 38 | 3 | 41 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 2nd Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 22 | 10 | 1 | 33 | 6 | 39 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 3rd Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 17 | 10 | 1 | 28 | 10 | 38 |
| Graz’zt | Bastard Sword, 4th Attack | 2d8+18+1d6**[10]** acid | 12 | 10 | 1 | 23 | 5 | 28 |

*Hit, miss, miss, miss. Dmg: 11 + 18 + 4 acid = 33. Acid damage negated [155/236].*

Steelshade continued her assault, channeling *vampiric touch* and empowering her attacks (+4) as she went toe-to-toe with the demon lord.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Crit** | **x** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Shattermantle Bloodstone Falchion +5 | 2d4 | +9 +5 + 4d4 AS | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | 8.0 | +42 | 1 | 43 |
| SB Falchion +5, 2nd Attack | 2d4 | +9 +5 + 4d4 AS | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +37 | 8 | 45 |
| SB Falchion +5, 3rd Attack | 2d4 | +9 +5 + 4d4 AS | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +32 | 12 | 44 |
| SB Falchion +5, 4th Attack | 2d4 | +9 +5 + 4d4 AS | 7 + 4 AS + 3 DK | 18 | 2 | Slashing | - | +27 | 5 | 32 |

*Miss, hit, miss, miss. Dmg: 8 + 9 + 5 + 14 AS + 19 VT = 55.*

*Steelshade gained 19 hps [193/236].*

Steelshade botched most attempts to connect with Graz’zt’s flesh, but one managed to channel her *vampiric touch* spell, making Graz’zt squeal. The night was young, and she still had a good reserve of mojo left.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ring of Wizardry** | **Daily Duskblade Spells** | | | | | |
| Worn | **0th** | **1st** | **2nd** | **3rd** | **4th** | **5th** |
| **Duskblade Spells** | 6 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 3 |
| **Intelligence Bonus** | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total Daily Spells** | **6** | **22** | **10** | **9** | **7** | **3** |
| **DC** | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| **Cast?** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **4** | **3** | **0** |

Brene muttered something vile under her breath about needing a better bow, and then she fired on Graz’zt again.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Properties** |
| Rapid Shortbow +2 | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | 2.0 | +29 | 7 | 36 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 2nd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +24 | 2 | 26 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |
| Shortbow, 3rd Shot | 1d4 | 2 | 2 + 3 DK | x3 | 60’ x 2 | - | +19 | **20** | 39 | Sneak Attack 10d6 |

*Miss, miss, threat. 1d20 = 16 + 19 = 35, not a critical hit. Dmg: 3 + 38 = 41.*

The rogue’s third arrow seemed to do Graz’zt’s left arm a disservice as he pulled it out and gushed some green blood upon Steelshade and the ground at their feet.

*Dmg to Steelshade: 7 acid, negated.*

Atlas prayed once more *[cure moderate wounds]* and moved to touch Steelshade and then he backed away.

*Steelshade gained 9 + 10 = 19 hps [174/236].*

Devrion focused on his next spell as the last one failed to affect the demon: *finger of death*. “Halál ujja!”

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Bypass Spell Resistance | 19 | 19 | 38 |

*Success. SR bypassed.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *finger of death* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Graz’zt | Fortitude | 27 | 4 | 31 |

*Success. Saved for diminished damage. Dmg: 8 + 19 = 27.*

It wasn’t quite enough to bring down the arch-demon, but it made another dent in his corporeal integrity. Devrion also checked his mojo reservoir, finding it ample to finish this tonight, particularly given their adversary’s debilitated state.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Warmage Spells by Level** | | | | | | | | | |
|  | **0th** | **1st** | **2nd** | **3rd** | **4th** | **5th** | **6th** | **7th** | **8th** | **9th** |
| **Warmage Spells** | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 |
| **Charisma Bonus** | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | **1** | **1** | **1** | **0** | **0** |
| **Total Daily Spells** | **6** | **8** | **8** | **8** | **7** | **7** | **7** | **7** | **6** | **4** |
| **DC** | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| **Cast?** | **0** | **1** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **1** | **1** | **1** |

Round 7

Atlas had studied Graz’zt during their handful of encounters so far, and he could tell by the demon’s body language that he was about to *plane shift* to fight another day. Atlas—and only Atlas—had the alacrity to act before Graz’zt, and prevent his escape before they brought down their critically wounded foe. The archivist murmured a few words, and then he roared at Graz’zt.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Bypass Spell Resistance | +19 | 17 | 36 |

*Success. SR bypassed.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *lion’s roar* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Graz’zt | Fortitude | 27 | 13 | 40 |

*Success. Saved for ½ damage. Dmg: ½ x 38 = 19 sonic.*

*PCs gained +1 to attacks and saves against fear, plus temporary hit points that I haven’t rolled for; see below.*

Graz’zt exploded, gushing loads of acid and other energy-based nastiness in all directions.

*Damage equal to the temporary hit points gained above.*

Brene, Devrion, Steelshade, and Atlas counted their blessings, and their fingers and toes, then witnessed the fluids that comprised the demon lord coalescing once again, though not in an embodied form but in a spacetime void that began to grow.

Atlas instantly identified this as an anti-singularity: a locus of destructive power manifested by the death of such a massively potent being. Within seconds, they would be engulfed by the anti-singularity if they did not put at least one planar border between themselves and the phenomenon.

“Come on,” the archivist called. The others didn’t have to be told twice, they flew back to Atlas’ side and reached out to touch him as he recited a brief prayer, invoking a greater plane shift that took them back to their room at the inn.

They sighed and shrugged at the seemingly simple melee that had altered the balance of the cosmic powers in the multiverse.

~\*~

The anti-singularity consumed all that existed within Graz’zt’s morphic pocket plane, leaving a cancerous void in the Abyssal space around it.

~\*~

“Now what?” asked Brene.

“We check our equipment for damage,” Angren began.

“And we check you for damage, too,” Devrion finished. “You took a beating.”

“Shouldn’t we try to contact Aasterinian,” Brene asked. “Surely, she’d want to know what happened.”

Atlas smiled at his diminutive lover. “She has a way of contacting us when she wishes to tell us something. I have every confidence that she will do so again in her own time. So, I say we prepare anew to begin our travels, first to Telflamm.”

~\*~

They’d checked their equipment for damage, and addressed the minor scuffs and acid corrosion with some *mending* scrolls they had on reserve, and were now lounging in the patio just outside their room: an upstairs courtyard of sorts, built upon a deck that itself had been built around the existing palm and fern trees that had called the open area home for a few decades by now.

Atlas had brought a book out from the extradimensional library in his bag of holding, as well as a single-leaf parchment that referenced the main scriptures pertinent to his work thus far.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Faerûnian Deity*** | ***Greyhawk Deity*** | ***Worship Structure/Title*** | ***Primary Scriptures*** | ***Accompanying Texts*** |
| **Azuth** | **Boccob** | Circle | The Supreme Cantrip | Hymns to the Lord of All Magic |
| **Bane** | **Hextor** | Raiding Army | The Price of Order | Prophecies of the Overthrow of Herioneous |
| **Corellon Larethian** |  | Fellowship | Theography of Corellon Larethian | The Craftself’s Guide / The Twelfth Elf, Himself |
| **Cyric** | **Erythnul** | Gang or Cult | Threats of an Angry God | The Morningstar After / Battle Curse Directory |
| **Dumathoin** |  | Clan | Under the Mountain | What Manner of Dungeoneer Ar’Ye? |
| **Garagos** | **Erythnul** | Advance | Fresh, Red Blood | There Rages a Tempest Outside |
| **Garl Glittergold** |  | G’tixin | The Golden Tablets | Life, Death, and Mining /  Unto Thee, I Grant the Gift of Trickery |
| **Graz’zt (demon lord)** |  | Coven | Depravity Unchained | How to Use Souls to Benefit Oneself |
| **Gruumsh** |  | Clan, Tribe or Nation | The Chieflord’s Roar  (only read by clerics) | Grunts of the Insatiable /  Your Orcish Anatomy: Around 50 Reasons for to not Betray Gruumsh (only read by clerics) |
| **Helm** | **St. Cuthbert** | Missionary Groups or Inquisitions | The Law | The Tao of Toril / Closer to Ao |
| **Hoar** | **St. Cuthbert** | Retribution | Days of Vengeance upon Us | And This Is How I Cope with… |
| **Ilmater** | **Pelor** | Individuals or parties | Chronicles of the House of the Rising Sun | Bards’ Tales / Daylight |
| **Juiblex (demon lord)** |  | Clutch | Corrosive Readings | Ooze, Booze, and Cooze: Nobody Slides for Free |
| **Kelemvor** | **Wee Jas** | Coven | The State of Naught | Come Forth and Carry Me Home / The Wake |
| **Lathander** | **Kord** | Congregation | The Tearstained Tome | none |
| **Lolth** | **-** | Dynastic Hive | The Weavings | A Bitch’s Manual / Glory to the Dark Mother |
| **Loviatar** | **Hextor** | Coven | The Innate Selfishness of Humanoid Nature | Hold My Liquid Pain / Depravities Too Personal Not to Share |
| **Malar** | **Nerull** | Coven | The Calling (oral tradition) | literate covens record tribal misdeeds on stones and other landmarks |
| **Mask** |  | Guild | Rumors Confirmed | Allegations Denied / Manual of Conduct |
| **Mielikki** | **Ehlonna** | Grove or Township | The Nature of Nature | none |
| **Moradin** |  | Clan | By Moradin’s Hammer | Chiselings of the Dwarffather |
| **Mystra** |  | Fellowship | The Seven Tenets | Hail, o, Defender / The Burdens of Salvation |
| **Oghma** | **Olidammara** | unstructured | The Slash and the Swipe | Seconds Away from Capture |
| **Savras** | **Boccob** | Divination | The Third Truth | The Third Truth from the Fourth Perspective |
| **Selûne** | **Fharlanghn** | Devotional | Twice under Moonlight | How to Interpret the Flickering of Flames from Votives and Torches |
| **Shar** | **Vecna** | Coven | Anarchy and Entropy | Raven Hair and Ruby Lips |
| **Shaundakul** | **Fharlanghn** | Nomadic Networks | All Roads Less Travelled | The Traveler’s Guide to the Soul /  The Long and Winding Road |
| **Silvanus** | **Obad-Hai** | Grove or Township | Song of the Shalm | La Chanson du Shalm (Translated for Mystran worshippers with excessive creative license) |
| **Sune** | **Olidammara** | Entourage | Beyond Æsthetics | Handbook for Bards and Lovers of the Arts |
| **Talona** | **Nerull** | Coven, Gang, Militia | The Grim Grimoire | The Bone Oracles / Tales Dead Men Tell |
| **Tempus** | **Kord** | Fraternity | 99 Paths to Virtue | Nutrition and Karma |
| **Torm** | **Heironeous** | Order | Staying True | The Paladin’s Guide to Just about Everything |
| **Torm** | **Pelor** | Order | Staying True | The Paladin’s Guide to Just about Everything |
| **Tyr** | **Heironeous** | Clan, Knightship, Congregation | The Grand Task | Ways to Beat Hextor’s/Bane’s Hoods |
| **Uthgar** | **Kord** | Confederacy | The Twenty-Three Tribes | Tales of Things that Happened |
| **Velsharoon** | **Vecna** | Gang or Cult | Whisperings | Shhh, Strangers Listen /  Every Imp’s Guide to Scrying and Spying |
| **Yondalla** |  | Hamlet | The Meek Who Shall Inherit | Half an Apple a Day |

He did his best to infer from what he knew of the Planes what would transpire, and as a soft rain started to trickle, he pondered on the future of the multiverse without the demon they’d just vanquished.

And then Devrion noted the color of the rain to be blood red, and said as much. “The blazes!?” he protested.

Atlas identified it as blood rain, and though its cause was uncertain, it stood to reason that a power vacuum was being refilled across the planes. “Friends, I’ve been studying up on what might transpire after Graz’zt’s demise. As often happens with divine beings, there is an entire alternate biography for Graz’zt—a separate life he enjoyed with an arch-demonologist named Iggwilv—which he kept secret from most of the rest of the multiverse.



“I see where this is going,” Brene prepared to hunt down the arch-demon’s clandestine lover.

Atlas smirked, “Well, I don’t think we’ll be able to track her down.”

Devrion shrugged, trying to stay under the table umbrella that normally kept them shady on the deck. “Then we just do what we’ve been doing, and call her out to play with us.”

Steelshade always vetted her friends’ words through a tactical lens. “Hm...” she huffed through her nostrils, then parted her lips to say, “It’s true that Graz’zt signed himself up for a quick demise by initiating that offensive and teleporting us to that pocket realm.”

The others nodded.

“I half-thought that it was so easy to kill him,” Steelshade continued, “that it had to have been a lesser avatar or a simulacrum of some sort... but if Atlas is confident that we did the demon lord in for good, and this blood rain is a further testament to the tipping of the scales across the multiverse, then it may be worthwhile to try to taunt Iggwilv into coming for us.”

“We can do this at a time of our choosing,” Atlas proposed. “Deferring a bit would also allow us to gauge whether we’re already in her sights if she presents herself before we make any overture.”

Brene liked that idea, “And it gives us time to further train.”

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Angren plopped down on the wooden floor with a sigh of pure exhaustion. “That went well,” she said sourly. She looked up just in time to catch a waterskin before it hit her in the chest.

Elaith chuckled as she sat down beside Angren on the salle’s floor. “You’re just lucky Lauren’s in town for another tenday. I didn’t expect to see her at all, to be honest.” They both looked to where the ashen woman was dunking her head in a washbasin after stripping to the waist.

“I feel badly for her,” Angren said quietly. “It’s one thing for a spouse to die, but this seems to be even harder.”

“I know,” Elaith sighed. “Speaking of, when are you and Devrion making things official?”

“I think we are,” Angren shook her head at Elaith’s arrested expression, “but I just can’t seem to take that last step with him.”

“Lots of women have sex, Angren.”

“Then there’s this blood rain, and who knows what will happen with that.”

“Rook and I went through the same thing, except that he’s in the usual human hurry. It comes down to us having whatever time, whether we’re together or not.”

Lauren turned and laid aside the towel she’d used to dry her face. She had her waster in hand, and she hadn’t bothered with her breastplate. “If you two are done wasting time, we will work on some combinations. You’re both a lot faster, but you need to get more accurate, as well.”

Angren and Elaith groaned in unison as they stood to face their friend and mentor.

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“Are you still seeing that hunky Theskan, Pussyfoot?”

Brene struggled with her bonds, rolling on her side on the rough wooden planks she was tied to as she slipped one of her bonds. “Atlas and I are doing fine, Darkweather.” She twisted back the other way, releasing one of the leather buckles that held her in place.

“You’re doing better,” her mentor, one of the rogues’ guild’s master trainers, said with a grin. “Now, though, there is that padlock with which to contend.”

Brene twisted to reach into her boot, but Darkweather stepped in and scooped up her Rod of Cats before she could deploy it. “No cheating.”

“If you’re not cheating…” Brene began.

“You’re not trying hard enough,” Darkweather finished as they both laughed. “Okay,” she said after a moment, “keep working. I have a couple of newfangled locks you can work on next. Assuming, of course, that you can get off my table so I can serve lunch within the next hour.”

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Atlas sat alone in one of Rook’s study rooms since their new house was still in disarray. The inquisitor had amassed an impressive library, especially now that he had funds enough to purchase many more of them, even those from across Faerûn, and a few from other places in Toril.

He contemplated his arrival at the end of his archival studies, and the testing he would have to undertake within the next five days. He was fortunate to find three other archivists in Waterdeep, one of them senior enough to serve as his proctor.

His studies necessarily included even more time praying to Aasterinian, and he’d applied himself to his devotions, spending half of his working day writing in his journal and mediating on her teachings. He’d hoped for another visit from her, but she hadn’t yet chosen to grace him with her presence.

Atlas rubbed his bald pate, a habit he’d acquired when he was deep in thought. He closed the tome he’d been reading from and rose to select another from the library’s shelves.

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“Erőszféra!” Devrion barked. A shimmering sphere, only half seen as it streaked through the air, slammed into the wooden target with bone-shattering force, sending oaken splinters crashing against the stonework ten feet behind the target.

“By the gods,” one of the acolytes sitting safely behind a magical barrier whispered to her friend. “They say he can cast much more powerful spells than that.”

“Yeah,” the redhead turned to her with a grimace. “I hear he could bring this whole building down. He is a warmage, after all.”

“If you two are finished, maybe our guest can get back to his training,” one of the mentoring wizards, an elf of indeterminate age and the stuffy personality of their kind, sniffed at them over her reading glasses. Everyone knew that she had perfect vision, but the elven woman affected them for some reason.

“Yes, Mistress,” the acolytes said in unison.

The mentor turned back to where Devrion was hovering five feet off the arena floor. “For the rest of your training, we will have to move to a nearby island, where we won’t destroy anything important.”

Devrion nodded as he went over his litany of spells in his head for the thousandth time this tenday. “I’ll be ready at your word.”

The mentor smiled. “The word for the next hour is ‘lunch’,” she said.

Devrion smiled in response. “That is a fine idea. Lead on.”

~\*~

Atlas added a new event to their journal after the “Escrow” entry.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Event*** | º | R |  |
| Escrow closes. The PCs and Rook’s team move furniture into the new place | Highsun | 9 | Alturiak |
| The heroes conclude an episode of intensive training in their respective specializations | \* | 24 | Alturiak |

1,384 had turned out to yield a cornucopia of unexpected accomplishments and boons, but the blood rain had persisted, and now the quartet was facing an investigation around it. They’d been summoned to Castle Waterdeep to be debriefed in a semi-public hearing initiated by the Planar Commission, which based its summons on evidence that the heroes had tipped the balance of power, and had incurred the wrath of Iggwilv. Atlas had reached this conclusion days before the Gray Hands had gotten the order to usher the heroes to the Hidden Lords’ public headquarters.

Rook had also been asked to testify, and had just given a lawfully sound and strong testimony on their behalf. The list of vanquished enemies—dragons, sphinxes, a beholder, and other beings of great renown—was headed by Graz’zt, and a slew of diviners, theologians, planar cosmologists, and other experts had gathered to vet the testimony and other exhibits.

The questions were posed to all four heroes collectively, seeing as they were not defendants, and did not need to be treated with disdain, but with gratitude, albeit with a measure of caution over the consequences of leaving such a volatile power vacuum in the Abyss.

“What motives had you for saying Graz’zt?”

“At the time, killing Graz’zt, or that manifestation of him, was done in self-defense,” Angren replied. “He brought us to this featureless place, and attacked us there.”

A few hatted academes nodded to and argued with one another before the clamor died down. “What did you anticipate would happen upon his vanquishing?”

“None of us had time to consider anything other than survival,” Atlas clarified. “Upon further reflection, I think it was a deliberate act on his part.”

“What?” Brene blurted out.

Atlas held up his hand. “Allow me to explain. In our other encounters, Graz’zt always had minions with him, sometimes very powerful ones. While it is true we four can do a great deal of damage, we have only spells enough for no more than five minutes of combat. After that, we are much less able to attack, and we would be forced to defend ourselves, and probably retreat. Graz’zt surely knew this. Further, he chose to attack Steelshade first in melee combat. He has fought her before, so he surely knew of her prowess with her blade and shield. While the rest of us are good at what we do, we would stand little chance in toe-to-toe combat with an arch-demon. He would have been much better served by bringing enough lesser beings to swamp us.”

“And yet, he didn’t,” Devrion finished. “Aasterinian sent us against Pale Night, and that’s how Jubilex and Graz’zt became involved. What their alliance was, or what goals they had, I do not know.”

“Does Aasterinian have a plan for Waterdeep, and if so, what is it?”

“Aasterinian hasn’t divulged her plan to us,” Angren explained. “Atlas, and the rest of us, have spent time in prayer, and so far, we’ve received no answers. I am confident that we’ve done her will thus far, and I, for one, will follow her commands again.” The others nodded in firm agreement. “Further, I have to agree with Atlas that Graz’zt had a bigger plan. Otherwise, why would he sacrifice himself? Also, is he truly gone, or has he shifted to another form of existence that is better than what he had?”

“What intentions do you have towards Juiblex, Pale Night, Iggwilv, and any other demon known to collude with Graz’zt?”

An Aasterinian*ian* priestess emerged from the crowd of content experts and legislators, removing the hood of her saffron robe. “Brothers and sisters in faith,” she began, instantly invoking in the heroes a sense of allegiance that transcended alignment, “we are cognizant that the confrontation wherein you vanquished Graz’zt was a manifestation of his choosing, but what we are at a loss about is how you all came upon Pale Night in the first place.

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The foursome related the following story:

Angren traveled with the caravans that plied the roads between the far-flung cities of the Westlands. The draconic-descended half-drow had been a caravan guard since 1376, where she’d earned the nickname Steelshade as an able practitioner of the ferocious, magic-using combat style known as a duskblade.

Aasterinian, her draconic deity, had called her two years ago, in 1382, at age 30, to begin a series of quests involving her family, the drowish one she’d never known. She’d been visiting her home in Loudwater when she first received her calling. That calling first sent her south to Amn.

Brene met Angren in Deepwinter 1383 while the half-drow was visiting Athkatla, the capital of Amn. Before then, the rogue had plied her trade in and around Athkatla. She joined Angren in her quests and started traveling east with her.

Atlas had met Angren and Brene in Mirtul 1383, when they crossed paths in Iriaebor. From his home in Thesk, the archivist had worked his way westward across the Sea of Fallen Stars, where he settled in Westgate for a time. His studies took him even further west along the Dragon Coast and the Trader’s Road to Iriaebor. He joined the ladies on their quests, traveling east along the Trader’s Road and eventually across the Dragonmere to Cormyr.

Devrion met Angren, Brene, and Atlas in Suzail during Kythorn 1383. The warmage had fought in the Border Kingdoms for a decade, and then he’d tired of the fighting and wandered north. He spent a year in the Gulthmere Forest, and he’d been in Cormyr for nearly a year when he met Angren and the others.

The group made their way from Suzail to Waterdeep, carrying out various quests for Aasterinian while traveling westward from Suzail to Waterdeep, culminating in their meeting with Lauren Maltholas at the end of 1383. The quests were invariably to set right something that was wrong; they would eliminate threats to the faithful, find things that were lost, or aid a group in a fight against a hostile group, all as Aasterinian directed them.

Then, in Deepwinter 1384, they’d taken their next quest – dealing with Pale Night.

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The heroes had divulged their origin story as it related to Graz’zt and Pale Night, and now walked out of Castle Waterdeep with a renewed sense of purpose, for not only had they dispelled any shadow of a doubt over their reputations, but three of the Hidden Lords had approached them as everyone was leaving, and had taken them aside for a moment to introduce them to Blackstaff Vajra Safahr—a prominent member of the Gray Hands—and impart on them an opportunity to make their city a safer place. If interested, they were to return at Sunset for dinner and discuss an impending investigation involving agents of Netheril attempting to disrupt power here within the Wards.

The Hidden Lords all wore single-colored sashes to denote their functions, and were verbally identified by these colors since their true identities were secret. The three Lords who had commended them and introduced them to the Blackstaff were the regarded as the Indigo, Verdant, and Saffron Lords, and it would be these humanoids who would dine with them in the third hall, which is where they should ask to be taken if they returned. It would not be taken as a sleight to the Executive Cabinet if the heroes didn’t show—there were always other matters to discuss, and other heroes to entreat into such demanding service—but the offer to participate in such classified work would not be made again.

Their résumés already had enough notches of valor, emblems of accomplishment, and vouches of gratitude from countless denizens of the multiverse, so this was in no way taking them to new heights, but it might be a nice bonus to have inside scoops from the Gray Hands from time to time.

Brene looked around dramatically as the group walked away from the castle. “What, that’s it? No triumph, no screaming crowds? I feel cheated!”

Atlas rolled his eyes and sighed quietly. “If these blood rains don’t stop, the crowd might be screaming to run us out of town.”

“Are we going to the party tonight?” Devrion glanced at Angren with a suitably bland expression.

“I don’t think it’s that kind of party,” Angren chuckled. “I think we should go.” She turned to Atlas. “The blood rain: what can we do about that?”

“I don’t know,” the archivist said after a moment. “I will study more about it, and apply myself to my prayers, too. Perhaps the rest of you should do the same.”

“We still have all this money to deal with,” Brene reminded everyone. “We have to make time for that.”

“Unless another arch-demon summons us to mortal combat, maybe we can start on that tomorrow,” Angren replied.