**Oghma’s Faithful**

**by Alexis Álvarez and Microsoft Copilot**

**Chapter 10: The Turnpike**

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**Abstract:** Arriving at the crossroads that led travelers to and from Waterdeep, Daggerford, and Secomber, the party settled into the roadside hamlet called the Turnpike, and soon found a ne’er-do-well courier whom they followed into the diabolists’ grotto. After some retconning, Banshee secured the perimeter, and they rushed into the sole entrance that they could see, using *detect magic* to discern a path that would not trigger the glyphs that would alarm the diabolists.

They witnessed people eating other people, people bound to rocks with digits and limbs removed, and the like, and soon happened upon the diabolists in the midst of a séance. Alerted to the heroes’ presence, Farleigh cast defensive spells and took a measure of the heroes as a dozen of his thralls mobbed them. Eldrin had procured a sole scroll of *dimensional anchor* for this mission, and successfully cast it upon the diabolist who was known to *teleport* out of sight and throw his followers under the proverbial wagon.

After some summonings, buffs, and dispellings, the heroes were successful in dealing with the mob and the handful of would-be threats who died in sacrifice to their master, Professor Farleigh. The heroes of Oghma managed to get six surviving cultists to repent and answer for their crimes in Secomber, as well as one unrepentant drug courier who would certainly face justice upon their return to Secomber.

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They’d trekked “next door”, which was about a quarter of a mile away from Rhilos’ home, and finally happened upon the log cabin where Nevra and her man, Moab, lived. They were a welcoming couple, who offered lots of mint-based treats before setting off, seeing as that was the main herb growing all around their cabin.

 

Nevra was a self-styled nature witch, a mixture of druid and cleric of Solonor Thelandiira, who concocted potions for the townsfolk, rendering them hardier and more capable of farmwork and husbandry. Moab was more of a free spirit, concocting a wider variety of things to help out the animals in the area. As a druid-rogue, he enjoyed breaking into his neighbors’ homes to water their plants, and pet their animals, and he fancied himself a singer, though he was no bard.

Having said their goodbyes to Rhilos, who was about to go take his siesta on a hammock in his stepdaughter’s grove, they took care of their respective biologicals, and were off westward, turning back onto the main road from Secomber to the Turnpike, and heading to the latter.

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As the group trudged along the main road from Secomber to the Turnpike, they couldn’t help but marvel at the scenic beauty that surrounded them.

With a sprig of mint pending from her mouth like an unlit cigarette, Artemis smiled, inhaling deeply. “The air here is so fresh! Oghma must have had a hand in crafting this paradise.”

Banshee, always alert, scanned the trees lining the road. “It’s nice, but let’s stay vigilant. The cult could have eyes and ears everywhere.”

Eldrin adjusted his glasses, squinting at the distant horizon. “The topography here is fascinating. Look at the gentle slopes and the way the Delimbyr River meanders through the landscape. It’s almost poetic.”

Sebenzi, riding beside Eldrin, added, “The druids must have a strong presence here to keep everything so balanced. It’s no wonder the townsfolk thrive.”

Nevra, leading the group, turned back with a grin. “You’re right, Sebenzi. Moab and I work hard to maintain the harmony. The herbs and plants you see are a testament to our efforts.”

Moab, humming a tune, pointed to a cluster of wildflowers. “See those? They’re known for their healing properties. We use them in our potions all the time.”

The sun began to set, casting a golden hue over the rolling meadows. As they neared the Turnpike, the view of the Sunset Cliffs took everyone’s breath away. The cliffs towered majestically, their rocky faces glowing in the fading light.

Eldrin couldn’t help but document the scene in his journal. “This is magnificent. The natural beauty here is unparalleled.”

Artemis nodded in agreement. “We’re truly blessed to witness this. It’s moments like these that remind us why we fight to protect the realms.”

Eldrin and Banshee—the two whisper gnomes—rode their Moonshaean wolfhounds as the larger humanoids rode horses towards the Turnpike, and soon, the first houses along the Y-intersection were visible.

Artemis said a prayer to Oghma, vowing to resolve the conflict with the diabolists one leader at a time. “Today is the Professor’s turn.”

“We’ll teach him a lesson,” Sebenzi understood, and assured her friend. She had a potion of *owl’s wisdom* that she’d been saving for a special occasion, and thought to chug it before reaching the Turnpike.

“There will be one or two goons on the side of the road pretending to be a proper toll charger. Last time we came, it was 2 gold per head,” Moab let them know.

Banshee cast *eyes of the avoral [expired in 5 hours]*, and petted her doggie, Deneir.

A few minutes later, as they were about 400’ from the nearest houses, Eldrin cast *barkskin [expired in 50 minutes]*, and wriggled in his saddle to get his body ready for any scuffles.

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“Hooold!” a guard with a veiled face put up his hand, and the druids led their horses and the others towards his two younger associates, both dressed in rags with their faces showing, who asked the men and women to dismount.

A brief round of questioning was followed by more gold being exchanged than requested, and the veiled man smiled under his veil and nodded to the group, “Yes, let them pass.”

They mounted up on their horses and wolfhounds again, and ventured a few hundred feet further into the actual Y-intersection of roads. They were now looking at the road that left northwest to Waterdeep, the road that led southeast to Daggerford, and the one they’d just taken that led northeast to Secomber. A single place of business—serving as an inn, tavern, and general store—greeted them with an open patio where a handful of adults smoked, ate, and watched their children playing in the middle of the roundabout that linked the three causeways out of the village, which was barely larger than Deluvium.

They dismounted again, tethered the horses to a recently filled trough, and led the doggies to a table in the front of the establishment where they sat for a moment before a young man approached and took their orders.

One of the men formerly smoking was now passed out, resting his head on a table as he snored, while others laughed or just stared into space.

As the group settled at the table, they began discussing their immediate priorities.

Eldrin leaned in and whispered, “We need to gather information discreetly. Banshee, can you use your skills to eavesdrop on conversations and pick up any useful intel?”

Banshee nodded, her eyes sharp and attentive. “I’ll keep my ears open. With the effects of *eyes of the avoral*, I’ll be able to spot anyone acting suspicious.”

Artemis glanced around, her gaze lingering on the children playing nearby. “We must be cautious. We don’t want to startle the villagers or cause a panic. Let’s keep our presence low-key for now.”

Sebenzi agreed, adding, “I’ll observe the patrons and see if anyone seems overly affected by the drug. Their reactions might give us clues about the suppliers.”

“I’d say that feller there,” Moab pointed to the unconscious man, “counts as being overly affected.” Already familiar with the area, he leaned back in his chair. “I can chat with the locals and be my usual, carefree self. Nevra can do the same, but focus on the other druids. They might have insights on the diabolists’ activities.”

Nevra nodded, her expression serious. “I’ll blend in and see what I can find out from the townsfolk. They trust me, so I should be able to gather information without raising suspicion.”

The group quietly strategized, each member knowing their role. They understood the importance of their mission and were determined to stop the diabolists’ operations.

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| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Artemis, Diplomacy** | 1 | **Cha (+3)** | 0 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| **Artemis, Gather Information** | 0 | **Cha (+3)** | 0 | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| **Artemis, Perform: Storytelling** | 1 | **Cha (+3)** | 0 | 4 | 9 | 13 |
| **Artemis, Profession: Storyteller** | 2 | **Wis (-1)** | 0 | 1 | 10 | 11 |
| **Artemis, Sense Motive** | 1 | **Wis (-1)** | 0 | 0 | 19 | 19 |
| **Sebenzi, Diplomacy** | 2 | **Cha (+0)** | 0 | 2 | 10 | 12 |
| **Sebenzi, Gather Information** | 0 | **Cha (+0)** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **Sebenzi, Sense Motive** | 0 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 3 | 14 | 17 |
| **Banshee, Gather Information** | 8 | **Cha (+1)** | 2 | 11 | 10 | 21 |
| **Banshee, Sense Motive** | 7 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 10 | 13 | 23 |
| **Banshee, Spot** | 4 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| **Eldrin, Gather Information** | 2 | **Cha (-1)** | 2 | 3 | 14 | 17 |
| **Eldrin, Sense Motive** | 2 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |

*See below.*

Eldrin and Sebenzi observed the patrons, taking a measure of the mental state of each one, but it was really Banshee eavesdropped on a few folks and approached others, gleaning the most information regarding the drug smuggling and humanoid trafficking activities. Moab and Nevra also succeeded is gathering corroborating hearsay on both topics, and within the hour, they had regrouped at the same table in the front patio of the nameless establishment, where Artemis was finishing a story for some children, who now thought she was the best thing to happen to the roadside hamlet of Turnpike.

Banshee divulged to her fellow heroes, “In a few moments, those two men are going to be approached by a bagman, who will leave a payment at their table, and I imagine he’ll be handed a satchel full of meimer. The bagman is coming from the diabolists’ hideout, and when he returns, we can tail him. Or rather, I can tail him and you all can tail me from afar.” Her stealth had been compromised a time or two by Artemis and Sebenzi, and the sensitivity of the matter required surgically precise subterfuge.

“Understood,” Sebenzi was wise enough to concede that she and the favored soul were the least stealthy.

The druids nodded as well, Nevra saying, “You are prudent to use stealth. We will return to Deluvium and send word back to Secomber via *sending*.” They imparted some things that confirmed Banshee’s understanding, wished the heroes well, then mounted their horses, and left town via the northeasterly route.

“So you propose we leave our mounts here?” Eldrin asked.

“It’s best if we go on foot, yes,” Banshee proposed based on what she’d overheard. “I’ve asked the kids to be kind to the hounds and horses.”

And so, the gnomes and humans gave a few treats to the wolfhounds and horses, and ordered some lunch while they waited. Banshee continued to propose strategies, and the others vetted the proposed tactics against their own specialized understandings.

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**OOC: This D&D 3.5 adventure is set in the Forgotten Realms in 1372, and showcases a party of Oghman heroes investigating a diabolist cult trafficking humanoids and meimer (an addictive drug) across the Sword Coast. Please use OOC (out of character) and IC (in character) tags to distinguish your text, and post IC text in past tense narrative. The story begins at the Y-intersection that links the road heading northwest to Waterdeep, with the leading southeast to Daggerford, and the one they heroes have just taken that led northeast back to Secomber. About a mile east of this hamlet (The Turnpike) is the diabolist enclave.**

IC: The bagman had come and done exactly as Banshee had said, staying around to have a drink, then leaving the way he came.

Banshee nonchalantly got up, and pretended to go take a pee behind a building, then did her best to follow the man along the increasingly woodsy path without being seen.

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| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** | **Notes** |
| **Banshee, Bluff** | 0 | **Cha (+1)** | 0 | 1 | 19 | 20 |   |
| **Banshee, Hide** | 1 | **Dex (+3)** | 3 | 7 | 12 | 19 |   |
| **Banshee, Listen** | 4 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 7 | 9 | 16 |   |
| **Banshee, Move Silently** | 1 | **Dex (+3)** | 3 | 7 | 3 | 10 |   |
| **Banshee, Sense Motive** | 7 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 10 | 15 | 25 |   |
| **Banshee, Spot** | 4 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 7 | 19 | 26 | Eyes of the Avoral +8 |

*See below.*

Eldrin followed a minute or so later.

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| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Eldrin, Hide** | 5 | **Dex (+2)** | 0 | 7 | 18 | 25 |
| **Eldrin, Listen** | 4 | **Wis (+2)** | 2 | 8 | 2 | 10 |
| **Eldrin, Move Silently** | 6 | **Dex (+2)** | 0 | 8 | 13 | 21 |
| **Eldrin, Spot** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 | 5 | 7 |

*See below.*

They were able to stay a few hundred feet behind the man without him realizing it, though he did look back a few times out of caution, seeing nothing out of the ordinary. The whisper gnomes crouched stealthily every time, then picked up their pursuit.

The cleric and favored soul departed maybe two minutes after Eldrin, walking faster once they were out of the village until they had Eldrin in their sights, maybe 200’ ahead. He turned back to nod at them as Banshee led the pursuit, remaining about 300’ behind the bagman.

Almost a mile of travel later, Banshee cleared a tree-covered hill and spotted the entrance to the cave that she’d learned of. Crouching on one knee, she waited for Eldrin and the others to catch up, and they lay down in a spot about 20’ off the trail to get a better sense of things. The cave entrance was about 300’ from them, which was the limit of a clear line of sight among the trees and bushes.

Banshee and Eldrin crouched in the underbrush, observing the cave entrance from their hidden vantage point. Banshee’s keen eyes and ears picked up on subtle movements and sounds, while Eldrin adjusted his glasses, thinking through their next steps.

Banshee suggested taking a few minutes to quietly scout the perimeter of the cave entrance. She believed this would help them identify any hidden guards, traps, or alternative entrances.

The others agreed, and stayed behind a few minutes. Meanwhile, Banshee did her best to manage the hazards put in place for her.

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| **Banshee, Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Reflex** | **4** | **Dex (+3)** | 0 | 7 | 17 | 24 |
| **Balance** | 0 | **Dex (+3)** | 0 | 3 | 11 | 14 |
| **Climb** | 1 | **Str (+0)** | -2 | -1 | 7 | 6 |
| **Escape Artist** | 0 | **Dex (+3)** | -2 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| **Handle Animal** | 0 | **Cha (+1)** | 0 | 1 | 9 | 10 |
| **Hide** | 1 | **Dex (+3)** | 3 | 7 | 19 | 26 |
| **Jump** | 1 | **Str (+0)** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| **Knowledge: Nature** | 0 | **Int (-1)** | 2 | 1 | 15 | 16 |
| **Listen** | 4 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 7 | 15 | 22 |
| **Move Silently** | 1 | **Dex (+3)** | 3 | 7 | 9 | 16 |
| **Search** | 1 | **Int (-1)** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **Spot** | 4 | **Wis (+3)** | 0 | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| **Survival** | 0 | **Wis (+3)** | 3 | 6 | 12 | 18 |
| **Tumble** | 0 | **Dex (+3)** | 0 | 3 | 14 | 17 |

*See below.*

The whisper gnome did her best with the traps and other natural defenses around the cave, slipping and catching herself a few times on some of the steeper slopes near the hilltop grotto. She climbed a short stint, barely making it, and jumped across a chasm, nearly falling, barely catching herself and pulling herself up. She later happened upon a patrol of skinny, bald humanoids wearing robes. There were too many to confront, and thus she remained quietly hidden for a few minutes. She considered creating a distraction to draw out some of the cultists, imitating the sound of a wounded animal to lure them away from the entrance, but it might backfire, and get her pursued.

The others whispered various contingencies, Eldrin emphasizing the need for a clear infiltration plan. He proposed a staggered approach wherein Banshee was followed closely by Eldrin, and Artemis and Sebenzi remained at a safe distance but within quick reach to provide backup.

During their 11-day trek here, they had established a system of simple signals to communicate silently, and had a fallback plan in case things went awry. Sebenzi—a connoisseur in the way of evil deities antagonistic to Oghma—began to feel that something was off. They’d been following clues for over a tenday now, which had them pursuing Cyricists, but the unholy symbols she was now seeing from a few hundred feet off seemed to be less crude than what a Cyricist cult would fashion. She kept a mental note of it for the moment.

Banshee came back injured. She’d had to squeeze through a strangling vine that she culled, and her escape artistry wasn’t what it used to be. She drank a potion to cure herself, and briefed the others on the traps she’d circumvented, and the one she triggered and had to consequently tumble out of the way out of a poisoned dart that lodged itself into a trunk instead. “There’re not just traps, but the terrain itself is really tough to navigate. They chose the spot well,” she warned. “There’s no other way in or out, as far as I could tell, which is both an advantage and disadvantage.”

“If true, it means that without an escape route, the diabolists’ leadership will *have* to confront us,” Eldrin surmised.



They saw a few humanoids exiting the grotto’s entrance 300’ away, taking in a measure of the weather, and one of them entrusting another with a package. The second figure took the package, and started walking towards the village... and towards the heroes.

Still crouching behind a summit, they immediately retreated about 100’ and went into the foliage. The cleric and favored soul—encumbered a bit by their suits of armor, sat and did their best to stay put so as to not alert the incoming figure to their presence. The whisper gnomes—on the other hand—were more proactive, and prepared to ensnare and silence the outgoing courier if he spotted them.

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| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Courier, Spot** | 0 | **Wis (-1)** | 0 | -1 | 10 | 9 |
| **Hide** | 1 | **Dex (+3)** | 3 | 7 | 20 | 27 |
| **Hide** | 5 | **Dex (+2)** | 0 | 7 | 19 | 26 |

*See below.*

The two stealthy gnomes held their positions, the archivist ready to cast *silence* on the human male as he passed by. He failed to spot them, and went towards the town without ado.

When he was out of sight and earshot, they carefully returned to the summit, seeing no one about. Banshee nodded to the others, and proceeded, with Eldrin making eye contact with Sebenzi and Artemis before following Banshee at a 100’ distance.

The urban ranger made it to the cave entrance, and saw figurines and hexes decorating the ground. She motioned for the others to approach, as she was unable to discern any magical wards that might accompany the witchy hexes and fetishes sticking out of the ground. Sebenzi cast *detect magic* as she and Artemis joined Eldrin, who was now upon Banshee. Together again, the group saw to their next steps.

“I *am* seeing auras on all those fetishes and wards,” Sebenzi reported. “We must tread along a thin trail within the wider path that the residents know of,” by the looks of how they emerged from the cave unscathed.”

“There may be other explanations,” Eldrin posed. “If the fetishes cause Evil damage, the diabolists would be immune to it.”

“Good point,” Artemis hadn’t considered that.

Sebenzi described the path she saw between the magical auras, and proposed, “Perhaps I should lead the way for now... until a point where we’re past these,” she hoped that would be shortly after entering.

They agreed, and the cleric led the way into and for about the first 20’ of the cave entrance, then said, “No more auras up ahead,” and then fell silent as she heard a maniacal laughter echoing from the torchlit chamber ahead.

Banshee took the lead, glad her wolfhound was back at the roadside hamlet. They made it another 50’ ahead and around the gradual bend of the tunnel, they witnessed two unclad humanoids crouching over a dead body, digging for organs, picking them out, and eating the bloody contents of the deceased two robed, hooded humanoids holding whips and watching the gory sight with approval.

The whisper gnomes and humans retreated about 10’ to ensure they weren’t seen or heard whispering, then huddled and planned their next steps. Being spotted by the two whip-bearing figures would surely lead to them raising some alarm throughout the tunnels.

Sebenzi had already cast her Extended preparation of *longstrider*, and now drank her sole potion of *owl’s strength [expired in 4 minutes]*.

*Sebenzi gained +4 to Wisdom.*

Artemis murmured the verbal component of her *comprehend languages [expired in 50 minutes]* spell in case the diabolists were speaking Infernal or something else.

“There, now,” one of the hooded people was probably speaking, and the human heroines stayed put while the whisper gnomes advanced 10’ again to get a line of sight to what was going on.

“There, you’ve had enough,” one of the whip bearers cracked his whip and motivated both of the cannibals to get up, their hands and mouths dripping with blood and tissues.

They led them westward, further into the tunnels.

About thirty seconds later, the gnomes and humans followed, passing the bound bodies of two wood elves their abdomens and torsos opened and emptied of their organs. Eldrin cast *barkskin [expired in 50 minutes]* upon himself.

*Eldrin gained +2 to AC.*

They made it another 50’ before they came upon two other bodies, these still alive—it seemed—bound and gagged, as if waiting to be sacrificed. They ducked back, plotting their next steps. Sebenzi was particularly curious as to the practices of these evildoers, as her background involved yuan-ti, who engaged in similar pain-oriented rituals.

They began to smell cooked meat, probably humanoid meat by the looks of what they’d just passed. It was time to prepare for a showdown. For Sebenzi, it was not enough to *detect magic* at this point; she cast *find traps [expired in 5 minutes]* to further enhance her field of vision, and scanned the area, finding no traps at the moment.

Eldrin followed his previous spell with a casting of *protection from evil [expired in 5 minutes]*, feeling the warm shroud of Good dousing and anointing him now.

*Eldrin gained PfE bonuses.*

As they walked, and Sebenzi continued to see hexes etched along the walls, she began to get more of a Loviatar vibe than Cyric, seeing as the main theme of the depictions were around agony, and not deceit, though Trickery was a Domain shared by both deities, and they often motivated their faithful to impersonate each other’s worshippers. Perhaps this was such a farse.

They made it another 100’ along the westward and downward passage until they reached a T-intersection decorated with three long-dead skeletons, still shackled to the walls. To the east was the stench of feces and gore, while to the west was that cooked meat smell. They opted for the latter passage until Banshee saw what might have been someone standing guard.

She motioned for them all to stop, and said, “One lookout, totally naked and emaciated. Beyond her are figures dancing around a fire. I only saw the shadows cast along the passage... there must be at least a handful of people there.”

“It sounds by the commotion that there are more, and that this is their sanctum,” Eldrin noted by the pictographs that none of them could discern. They were likely deliberately misleading the heroes, seeing as the cleric that led this cult was reputed to rely on the Trickery domain.

The cleric was also said to be in Waterdeep, and the apprehension or neutralization of his conjurer counterpart would render a just nail in the coffin of this nefarious cult.

Artemis clumsily shifted in her stance.

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| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Artemis, Move Silently** | 0 | **Dex (+1)** | -2 | -1 | 1 | 0 |

*See below.*

<< Fu lhsasteth? >> the starving woman with no clothes called out in Infernal.

Having cast *comprehend languages*, Artemis had to touch the speaker to understand her, and wasn’t about to do that, though they could tell by her tone that the woman would likely approach if they did not respond properly. Artemis did speak Outlander, which had a significant amount of overlap in vocabulary with Infernal, Abyssal, Celestial, and other Outer Plane languages. As such, she surmised that the woman was asking them to identify themselves.

Her heuristic sense of the moment told Artemis that the woman was about to approach with caution, possibly alerting leadership or backup as to a problem. “We must act now!” Artemis whispered with urgency.

The others nodded, looking to Banshee to initiate the strategy.

Rounds 1 – 4

Banshee waited long enough for the woman to approach a bit longer, and as soon as she heard her ask the same question again, the urban ranger cast *silence* upon herself, then rushed towards the woman, and enveloping her in the hemisphere of *silence* around her almost immediately after getting into her line of sight.

Eldrin took his cue, and along with Sebenzi, cast *shield of faith [expired on Round 51]* in the interest of a better defense as they navigated the next few minutes.

*Eldrin and Sebenzi gained +2 to AC.*

They moved forward and saw Banshee trying to grapple the emaciated elven woman.

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| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Banshee, Grapple | 1d3 | +0 | -1 size | - | Bludgeon | - | +4 | 5 | 9 |
| Guard, Grapple | 1d3 | +0 | 0 | - | Bludgeon | - | -5 | 13 | 8 |

*See below.*

The halfling was able to pin down the elf with quite a bit of effort, and the others joined in the complete silence within the spell effect. Eldrin kept half an eye out for anyone coming from the entrance.

Banshee’s first thought was to bind and gag the woman to ensure she remained silent and subdued. She reached into her belt pouch and retrieved the silk rope she carried with her. With practiced efficiency, she began to tie the woman’s hands behind her back, ensuring the knots were secure yet not overly tight to avoid causing unnecessary harm. As she worked, she kept a vigilant eye on their surroundings, ready to respond if anyone approached.

With the woman’s hands bound, Banshee then retrieved a strip of cloth from her belt and fashioned it into a makeshift gag, carefully placing it in the woman’s mouth to muffle any potential cries for help.

Once the woman was securely restrained and gagged, Banshee motioned for the others to approach. Eldrin, Sebenzi, and Artemis joined her within the zone of *silence*, their movements careful and deliberate to avoid drawing attention. Eldrin continued to keep watch on the entrance while Sebenzi and Artemis prepared for the next phase of their infiltration.

Round 5

No sooner had they secured the woman than another lookout noticed she was not at her post and came looking, finding the four heroes standing and crouching over his fellow sufferer and congregant. “Intrudersss!” the skinny, half-elven male yelled out, and all those in the adjacent chamber stopped their banter, and began to mobilize.



Hearing the acolyte’s heeds, Farleigh cast *mage armor [expired in 7 hours]* upon himself, commanding others to retreat along the westward passage.

*Farleigh gained +4 to AC.*

Hearing the male voice casting what Artemis and Eldrin identified as a *mage armor* spell. “The conjurer!” said Artemis, recognizing his voice from their confrontation in Secomber 12 days prior.

“The Professor!” Sebenzi declared as well.

As soon as the half-elven lookout cried out, Sebenzi’s training kicked in. She knew the group needed to act fast to avoid a horde of cultists descending upon them. The enemy conjurer’s voice echoing in her mind only strengthened her resolve.

First, Sebenzi cast **Sanctuary** on herself. The protective spell would shield her from attacks while she continued to bolster her allies.

*Sebenzi gained sanctuary (Will DC 15).*

Sebenzi would have to abstain from casting a martial spell to retain this protection.

“Artemis, get ready to cast **Summon Monster III** if things go south. Eldrin, be prepared to shield us. Banshee, your agility will be key in taking down any threats swiftly,” she instructed in a low voice, ensuring they remained ready for what was to come.

Artemis quickly readied herself and cast **Shield of Faith** on Banshee to enhance her defenses and ensure she could continue leading the charge without being easily overwhelmed. The shimmering shield of divine energy enveloped Banshee, providing her with additional protection.

*Artemis gained +2 to AC.*

Artemis whispered to the group, “Banshee, you have my blessing. Let’s push forward and take down the conjurer before he can cause any more trouble.” With the divine shield now bolstering Banshee’s defenses, the party prepared to face the incoming cultists. Artemis stood ready to support her allies with additional spells and aid as the battle unfolded.

The time for stealth was over, and they needed to prepare for a direct confrontation.

Eldrin cast *sanctuary* as well.

*Eldrin gained sanctuary bonus (Will DC 16).*

Banshee charge-attacked the alarming lookout with her kukri.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Kukri+1 | 1d3+1 | +2charge | 1 + 2charge | 18-20/x2 | Slashing | 1.0 | +8 | 16 | 24 |

*Hit. Dmg: 1 + 1 + 2 charge = 4.*

The emaciated fool died where he stood.

A crowd of bone-thin worshippers—some with clamped ears, nostrils, genitals, and other protrusions—came into view, charging towards the heroes, their frontmost freaks about 20’ from Banshee now.

Round 6

Professor Farleigh cast *greater mirror image* upon himself, his first figment coming into view in the tunnel.

“There he is!” Banshee pointed him out, not realizing it was one of his illusions.

Eldrin made sure his *dimensional anchor* scroll—which he’d gone to great lengths to acquire before setting out—was at the ready. He wanted to ensure that this boss wouldn’t get away this time as he had back in Secomber.

He ventured forth alongside Sebenzi, both warded against the attacks of the cult leader’s weak minded thralls.

*Will saves automatically fail.*

Coming into view of the head diabolist and his *mirror image*, Eldrin knew he was risking losing his spell on a figment of his imagination, so he cast *dispel magic* on the spot between the two images of the Professor, being sure to catch the real one.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Dispel Magic | +5 | 19 | 24 |

*Success.*

The *greater mirror image* dissipated before it could manifest additional copies, and the spellcaster was identified once again.

Sebenzi took the opportunity to cast *omen of peril*, taking a few extra seconds to divine the information revealed.

The crowd of filthy, shorn, starved pain-lovers came at the ranger and favored soul, and both took action with their blades, hoping to only have to fell a few to give the others a chance to think about living to see another day.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Longsword | 1d6+1 | 0 | 1 | 19-20/x2 | Bludgeon | 8.0 | +4 | 18 | 22 |
| Kukri+1 | 1d3+1 | +0 | 1 | 18-20/x2 | Slashing | 1.0 | +6 | 8 | 14 |

*Hit, hit.*

*Dmg to Thrall 1: 4 + 1 = 5.*

*Dmg to Thrall 2: 3 + 1 = 4.*

Both of the diehards died hard.

*Dmg from mob Artemis: 1 [19/20].*

*Dmg from mob Banshee: 2 [28/30].*

Round 7

Sebenzi received a revelation suggesting that the enemy needed to be anchored, or he would cast *dimension door* or a similar spell.

Casting *invisibility*, Farleigh became invisible to most, though Eldrin and Sebenzi could still *detect magic*, and could see his aura.

Eldrin wasted no more time, casting *dimensional anchor* from his sole scroll with this spell.

*1d100 = 42, concealment bypassed.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Ranged Touch Attack | *Dimensional anchor* | +3 | 13 | 16 |

*Hit. Dimensional travel prohibited.*

This was the most crucial step in the process. Farleigh assessed what had just happened, and grew furious.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Spellcraft** | 7 | Int (+4) | 0 | 11 | 13 | 24 |

*See below.*

He realized he’d been anchored to this place, and could only escape by flying away or via a means the like, so he ran towards the escape route.

Seeing the *invisible* man now running for the westbound exit, Sebenzi cast *summon monster III*, not sure if she could conjure a monster to put in his way in time.

Banshee killed another man while Artemis missed a lady with her longsword.

*Dmg from mob Artemis: 1 [18/20].*

*Dmg from mob Banshee: 1 [27/30].*

Round 8

Banshee killed yet another man while Artemis got the lady this time, and culled her as well.

*Dmg from mob Artemis: 2 [16/20].*

*Dmg from mob Banshee: 1 [26/30].*

“Your efforts will do you no good!” Artemis spoke her deity’s wisdom. “Cease now, and have chance to repent in this life.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability****& Mod.** | **Misc.****Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Artemis, Diplomacy** | 1 | **Cha (+3)** | 0 | 4 | 18 | 22 |

*See below.*

Some of the starving sufferers hesitated, backing away to let the more eager among the damned continue their onslaught.

The *invisible* Professor ran away, calling for backup. Footsteps from the west could already be heard, and they now hastened. “We’re coming, Master!”

Sebenzi finished conjuring a Celestial dire badger as far as she could from herself, which was still about 20’ shy of the fugitive leader. A handful of armed thugs came running towards the badger, two of them confronting it, and three others running towards Eldrin and Sebenzi.

The badger sprinted towards the diabolist leader, attacking the leader of the knaves now coming to their final battle.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** | **Crit** | **Threat** |
| Dire Badger | Claw | 1d4+2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | **20** | 24 | 20 | þ |

*Threat. 1d20 = 2 + 2 = 4.*

The warrior before the badger did not quite die, but she experienced a good amount of pain. The sadist reveled in this, however, and became emboldened by the rabid badger, jabbing at it with her short sword.

*Hit. Dmg: 2.*

The other three sacrificial fools entered the room where Eldrin and Sebenzi were, and attacked the gnome and human.

*Miss Eldrin.*

*Hit Eldrin. Will save vs. sanctuary successful. Dmg: 2 [36/38].*

*Miss Sebenzi.*

With an active *longstrider* spell, and still *detecting magic*, Sebenzi wasted no time in pursuing the *invisible* fugitive.

*AoO hit Sebenzi. Dmg: 3 [32/35].*

She caught up to the badger, and they both sped towards the running man. His sole bodyguard attacked the badger.

*Miss.*

With an active *sanctuary* spell around him, Eldrin dealt with the three individuals before him by conjuring one of his signature apes. He cast *summon monster III [expired on Round 13]*.

Artemis was able to talk a few more diabolist cultists down from their enraged frenzy.

Round 9

Banshee killed another woman, and held her blade pointed at the next one, giving her a chance. “There are only two ways this day ends for you: as your first day of repent, or as your last day on Faerûn,” she swore.

Artemis spread a layer of diplomacy over the threat, coating the moment with a more positive spin. “Now then, sit down to communicate your remorse for your actions, and pain will haunt you no more.”

In the adjacent chamber, the woman who had hit Eldrin with her mace a moment ago did so again.

*Dmg: 2 [34/38].*

The others were unable to penetrate his *sanctuary* spell.

Sebenzi attacked the man who was running almost as fast as she was down the tunnel.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Quarterstaff | 1d6+1 | +0 | 1 | x2 | Bludgeon | 8.0 | +4 | 16 | 20 |

*Hit. Dmg: 4 + 1 = 5.*

“Ow!” the diabolist complained, not being fond of pain. He broke his *invisibility* by casting *vampiric touch*.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Touch Attack | +2 | 5 | 7 |

*Miss.*

The spell was wasted, the man was visible, and the badger now attacked him.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Dire Badger | Claw | 1d4+2 | 2 | 2 | 2 flank | 6 | 10 | 16 |

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

The diabolist’s bodyguard attacked Sebenzi.

*Miss.*

Sebenzi attacked the man again.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Quarterstaff | 1d6+1 | +0 | 1 |   | Bludgeon | 8.0 | +4 | 1 | 5 |

*Miss.*

Eldrin finished the *summon monster* spell, and an ape appeared next to two of Eldrin’s three foes, attacking one of the so-far unharmed ones.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **Ranged / Finesse** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Dex Mod+** | **W+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Ape | Claw 1 | 1d6+5 | q | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 15 | 22 |
| Ape | Claw 2 | 1d6+5 | q | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 15 | 22 |

*Hit, hit. Dmg: (2 + 5) + (3 + 5) = 7 + 8 = 15.*

That ended the life of the shortbow-wielding halfling.

The other two were humans, and were duly frightened by the ape, turning on it for the moment.

Round 10

The two humans attacked the ape.

*Hit, hit. Dmg: 2 + 2 = 4.*

The ape attacked the injured human, and then the uninjured one.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Ape | Claw 1 | 1d6+5 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 17 | 24 |
| Ape | Claw 2 | 1d6+5 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 17 |

*Hit, hit.*

*Dmg to human 1: 1 + 5 = 6.*

*Dmg to human 2: 3 + 5 = 8.*

Both of the minions died where they stood.

Eldrin ran westward to help Sebenzi, looking back to see Artemis and Banshee bringing the frenzied mob to reason.

The diabolist and his bodyguard did their best to kill Sebenzi.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Cloud of Knives | 1d6+2 | 0 | 0 | 19-20, x2 | 30’ | 2.0 | +7 | **20** | 27 |

*Threat. 1d20 = 16 + 7 = 23, critical hit. Dmg: (2 x 4) + 2 = 8 + 2 = 10 [22/35].*

*Bodyguard miss.*

Round 11

Eldrin saw the melee 50’ ahead, and had his ape follow him towards the melee.

The ape didn’t get quite far enough, but would be in a position to charge-attack soon.

Eldrin shot at the bodyguard with his crossbow.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Light Crossbow | 1d6 | 0 | 1 – 4Melee | 19-20, x2 | 120’ | 4.0 | +2 | 17 | 19 |

*Hit. Dmg: 4.*

The bodyguard remained barely alive, and attacked the badger again.

*Hit. Dmg: 3.*

The badger attacked the bodyguard.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Dire Badger | Claw | 1d4+2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 8 |

*Miss.*

Professor Farleigh was satisfied with his *cloud of knives* spell, and threw another knife at Sebenzi.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Cloud of Knives | 1d6+2 | 0 | 0 | 19-20, x2 | 30’ | 2.0 | +7 | 3 | 10 |

*Miss.*

Round 12

The badger again attacked the bodyguard.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Dire Badger | Claw | 1d4+2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 6 |

*Miss.*

The ape charge-attacked Farleigh

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Ape | Claw 1 | 1d6+5 | 2 | 5 | 2 charge | 9 | 3 | 12 |

*Miss.*

Farleigh attacked Sebenzi.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Cloud of Knives | 1d6+2 | 0 | 0 | 19-20, x2 | 30’ | 2.0 | +7 | 7 | 14 |

*Miss.*

Sebenzi attacked Farleigh.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Quarterstaff | 1d6+1 | +0 | 1 | x2  | Bludgeon | 8.0 | +4 | 5 | 9 |

*Miss.*

Eldrin reloaded and shot into the melee once again, hoping to hit Farleigh.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Rng.** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Light Crossbow | 1d6 | 0 | 1 | 19-20, x2 | 120’ | 4.0 | +6 | 13 | 19 |

*Hit. Dmg: 1.*

It was proving to be a war of attrition to the west, while in the eastern passage, Artemis and Banshee had reduced the number of living cultists to six, and they were all at least acting repentant.

Everyone missed the bodyguard.

Round 13

The leader wasn’t about to get caught up in the fistfight that the ape was now initiating, so he cast *fly [expired on Round 83]*on himself and booked it 60’ westward, speeding up.

*Attacks of opportunity.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **D+** | **TH+** | **Critical** | **Type** | **Wt.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| MW Quarterstaff | 1d6+1 | +0 | 1 |   | Bludgeon | 8.0 | +4 | 15 | 19 |

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **W+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| Ape | Claw 1 | 1d6+5 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 flank | 7 | 12 | 19 |

*Hit. Dmg: 2 + 5 = 7.*

“He’ll be gone within the minute,” Sebenzi urged herself, then cast *fly [expired on Round 63]* on herself and pursued the man.

Eldrin, the ape, and the badger culled the bodyguard.

Round 14

“Might need backup to the west!” Eldrin called out to Banshee and Artemis.

Artemis looked to Banshee. The latter said, “I’ve got this.” She turned to the others and said, “This will be your first test of virtue.”

Artemis trotted westward, not quite catching up to Eldrin and the conjured animals.

Sebenzi saw the light at the end of the tunnel, and the diabolist’s flying silhouette about 15’ from her. “You shouldn’t have gotten separated from your mates,” the human conjurer then turned around in midflight and proclaimed before casting *orb of force*.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **D+** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Ranged Touch Attack | *orb of force* | 6d6 force | +3 | 9 | 12 |

*Hit. Dmg: 21 force [1/35].*

Sebenzi was nearly dead after that blow, and slowed down to regain her wits.

Meanwhile, she heard the others pursuing on foot.

Eldrin caught the situation, saw the end of the tunnel, and figured the villain would fly to his freedom if he got away. He wasted no time in casting *footsteps of the divine [expired on Round 19]* and flying past Sebenzi and towards Professor Farleigh. The ape and badger followed behind, with Artemis catching up gradually.

Round 15



Farleigh reached the exit that Banshee had missed while scouting the perimeter.

Eldrin tried to overrun the diabolist in midair.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Melee Weapon** | **Dmg** | **TH+** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Grapple/Touch Attack | 1d3 | 2 charge | +5 | 8 | 13 |

*Miss.*

Sebenzi used her *clairvoyance* spell to cast *cure serious wounds* on herself, then continued flying westward to join Eldrin.

*Sebenzi gained 17 + 5 = 22 hps [23/35].*

The ape and badger exited the cave, and threatened the Professor, who now flew up 20’ to avoid the land borne foes.

Artemis reached the exit, but did not have a moment to cast a spell just yet.

“You all dieeee!” the diabolist yelled.

Rounds 16 – 17

The ape and badger dematerialized.

“I don’t think so, ‘Professor’!” Eldrin muttered before casting *searing light*, and hurling it at the conjurer.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ranged Weapon** | **Dmg.** | **Atk** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| Ranged Touch Spells | 2d8 positive energy | +5 | 9 | 14 |

*Hit. Dmg: 8 positive energy.*

This was enough to cause the Professor to become unconscious, floating motionlessly as his head drooped.

“Woohoo!” Artemis proclaimed as Sebenzi and Eldrin both approached him cautiously in order to drag him downward.

“You think he’s faking?”

They read the man’s body language, and Sebenzi gave him a kick. He floated away from her without any fuss. They grabbed him and put him down

Artemis put her leg on his chest to hold him down until inertia settled him

Farleigh died of internal hemorrhage and organ failure. His soul summarily left his body, and descended transplanarly to a layer of Baator where the devil with whom he had made a pact now awaited the shipment of psychic mass that had been a man’s twisted will.

They cheered again as they could tell that the man was no more, and only stopped when the handful of remaining survivors walked uneventfully out of the cave, followed by Banshee.

“What do we do with them?” asked Banshee.

Sebenzi knew the code, “We bring them back to Secomber for judgment, along with the body of their leader for further investigation by Municipal Diviners.”

Artemis shrugged her shoulders, and asked, “Are they reimbursing us for the extra horses we’ll have to procure here?”

Being the most well off, Eldrin assured her he’d cover the expense, and took a measure of the four women and two men—barely adults—starved half to death and deliberately mutilated here and there. There would be questions along the way back to the city, and Eldrin would reluctantly come to know far more than he bargained for about the dealings and motives of the nefarious cult.

Eldrin used a scroll to cast *create food and water*, offering the starving a chance to fill their bellies as they spoke and experienced remorse. The first minutes of interrogation revealed that they were, in fact, a cult of the deity Loviatar and the devil Asmodeus. Their Archbishop—the Dishonorable Father Pompeii Vesuvius—derived his divine power from Loviatar, and Asmodeus was the patron of Pompeii’s warlock counterpart—Penelope Verminswarm. The cleric was said to be in or near Waterdeep, and the warlock was in Daggerford, sewing discord among the downtrodden there. They had been putting the blame on Cyricists in order to benefit from the distraction, and possibly to end the Cyricists’ operations, which were in competition with the cult of Loviatar and Asmodeus.

Eldrin made notations in his case journal, which he would notarize and share with the Secomber authorities upon returning.

**Thralls’ motives despite suffering:**

* **Fear and Intimidation:** The thralls were kept in line through a combination of fear, threats, and violence. They believed that leaving the cult or disobeying would result in even greater suffering.
* **Addiction and Dependence:** Some thralls are addicted to meimer or other substances provided by the cult, making them dependent on it for their next fix.
* **Sense of Belonging:** Even in a sadistic cult, the sense of community and belonging can be powerful. The cult offered camaraderie, purpose, and a place to be, however twisted.
* **Promises:** Thralls were promised a variety of rewards, protection, and status in exchange for their loyalty and suffering. Most endured pain as a vehicle to a better status within the cult and even beyond.

**The two well-to-do followers:** Two of the survivors were from wealthy families, and seemed to have arrived into the cult with evil intentions.

* **Pursuit of Forbidden Knowledge:** Formally educated individuals drawn to the cult in pursuit of esoteric knowledge or dark magic inaccessible through conventional means.
* **Thrill of the Forbidden:** The taboo nature of the cult’s practices, the danger of forbidden knowledge, and the breaking of societal norms was described as intoxicating for both.
* **Ideological Alignment:** The male from this pair might genuinely aligned with the cult’s philosophy associated with Loviatar and Asmodeus, believing in the inherent need for its presence.

**Long-term Goals of the Leadership**

**Professor Farleigh:**

* **Ascension:** Farleigh had aimed to rise within the ranks of the cult or even usurp Father Pompeii Vesuvius, seeking greater power and influence within the organization, and establishing a strong, secure base of operations, turning the Turnpike into a hub for their diabolical activities. He sought to expand the cult’s influence, recruiting more followers and spreading their operations to other regions.
* **Dark Experiments:** As a Conjurer and Diabolist, Farleigh conducted dark experiments and summoning rituals with the ultimate goal of unlocking forbidden powers or beings from Baator, where his soul was surely gravitating even now.

**Father Pompeii Vesuvius:**

* **Spread of Suffering:** Vesuvius focuses on spreading Loviatar’s dogma, inflicting suffering, and spreading fear across the Sword Coast.
* **Consolidation of Power:** He aims to consolidate his power within the religious hierarchy of both Loviatar and Asmodeus, seeking favor from both deities.
	+ He tolerates the warlock’s ushering of Asmodeus into their flock’s faith, but he has said he would eventually ditch the warlock and make his own pact with the archdevil. He also denies saying this.
* **Grand Ritual:** Vesuvius might be planning a grand ritual or summoning that requires a significant number of sacrifices or a large scale of suffering to bring forth a powerful entity or effect.
* **Political Influence:** He might be working to corrupt and control political figures, spreading the cult’s influence into the political sphere and destabilizing regions to create chaos.

The repentant thralls of Farleigh did not know much about Penelope, other than what they’d already divulged, and could only add that she was not an active communicator in the organization. “Usually, it is the word of Father Pompeii that envoys and emissaries bring,” the noblewoman among the repentant said as she chewed on some mutton.

~\*~

Eldrin looked up from his scribing, and noted the conversation between Sebenzi and Banshee as the famished men and women in their midst finished the last of their meal.

Artemis returned with some robes for the naked people to wear, and thus the heroes now led the handful of robed people back to the hamlet, shortly thereafter running into the courier they’d evaded earlier. The last of their spells were spent on the man, who was subdued, and eventually bound and gagged, as he was not as cooperative as the other survivors of the cult.

~\*~

Reaching the roadside hamlet with a sextet of recent converts to the Oghman faith, or at least its contemplators, along with an unrepentant, cuffed ruffian in tow, the heroes made eye contact with children who looked on with fascination; adults who were curious; adults who looked to be affiliated with the cuffed man, and were ducking out of sight; and guards approaching.

Eldrin already had his credentials prepared, and now unfurled the writ provided to him by the Municipality of Secomber. “We have been deputized with the provisional jurisdiction of bringing this man to justice, and these repentant folk to the opportunity of redemption,” the lawful good gnome proclaimed with a solemn tone.

The three guards representing the authority of this hamlet were hardly two men and one woman; the three humans couldn’t have been more than 20 years old, and they were aware of the meimer crisis, though certainly not of its scope. They all spoke for a few more minutes as the Oghmans provided a few bits of corroborating evidence, additional identification, and the testimony of the rescued sufferers.

The guards took statements and jotted down information as their patrol leader came back from a round of patrol, and officiated the intake of information, thanking the heroes for their service to the humble hamlet of Turnpike, and to all Law-abiding folks in the land.

They ordered a final round of food and drink for themselves and the formerly starving people, and eventually ungagged the unrepentant man, who had been left alone now that all his accomplices had fled town.

Within the hour, the hounds and horses had been fed and watered, and a wagon had been commissioned with room for the six new congregants, and the captive, who would be tried in Secomber as an accomplice to all the deeds evidenced in what they’d uncovered.

Everyone was on their way towards Secomber, and though it would take them 11 days in all to reach their destination, the journey would be an important pivotal point in this cult’s brief history, and with any luck, the cult would soon see its last days.