Oghma’s Faithful

by Alexis Álvarez & Deepseek

**Chapter 15: The Isle of Dread**

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**Abstract:** Taking a sabbatical to coach Sebenzi through her next advancement as a cleric of Oghma, Eldrin now found himself with his colleague in the Isle of Dread, a largely uncharted archipelago with a great amount of promise as a trade hub, though its current humanoid inhabitants were a xenophobic, cannibalistic people with a connection to an aberrant Outsider named the Devourer of the Deep.

The archivist and cleric discovered of two the sites of the cannibals’ rituals over the span of as many days, uncovering a plethora of artifacts related to the cannibals’ vile rituals, and on the third day, they happened upon a cave that seemed to hold yet more secrets for them.

They carried a wand of *teleportation*, seeing as this was to be both an academic pursuit and a goodwill mission to perhaps elevate the aberration worshippers to a more sustainable and peaceful way of life.

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The air was thick with salt and the cries of seabirds as Eldrin Thistlebrook and Sebenzi Wesibindi materialized on a rocky shoreline. The wand of teleportation, now two charges lighter, hummed faintly in Eldrin’s hand before he tucked it safely into his belt. Before them stretched a dense jungle, its canopy alive with the rustling of leaves and the distant calls of unknown creatures. Behind them, the waves of the Azure Sea crashed against the shore, their rhythm steady and unyielding.

The Isle of Dread loomed before them, a place of legend and mystery. Eldrin adjusted his spectacles and glanced at Sebenzi, his voice calm but tinged with excitement. “This is it, Sebenzi. The Isle of Dread. A place of untold knowledge and danger. Remember, our goal is to learn, to grow, and to serve Oghma’s will. Let’s tread carefully.”

Sebenzi nodded, her eyes scanning the jungle with a mix of curiosity and apprehension. She clutched her holy symbol of Oghma, a parchment scroll, and murmured a quiet prayer for guidance. “I’m ready, Eldrin. Let’s see what this island has to teach us.”

The pair took a moment to gather their bearings. The jungle ahead was impenetrable from their current vantage point, but a narrow trail led inland, barely visible beneath the overgrowth. The air was humid, and the scent of earth and vegetation was overwhelming. Somewhere in the distance, a low, rumbling growl echoed through the trees.

Eldrin was a cartographer, and got his bearings. By the looks of the stars, they were on the southeastern shore of the Isle of Dread.

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| **Eldrin:**  **Relevant Skills** | **Rank** | **Ability**  **& Mod.** | **Misc.**  **Mods.** | **Total** |
| **Craft: Alchemy** | 1 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 6 |
| **Knowledge: Arcana** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 13 |
| **Knowledge: Archit./Engin.** | 5 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 10 |
| **Knowledge: History** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: Nature** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: The Planes** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: Religion** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Search** | 4 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 11 |
| **Spellcraft** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 13 |
| **Spot** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 |
| **Survival** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 |

*Please use these totals as d20 mods to resolve any checks that would reveal information about the area.*

His knowledge was more vast overall and he hoped to glean something about the region, particularly what they could use to fashion a hut or shelter in case they needed one.

Sebenzi, on the other hand, was the duo’s scribe, and augmented Eldrin’s navigation and cartography with detailed journal entries that served as references for subsequent work.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sebenzi:**  **Relevant Skills** | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** |
| **Knowledge: History** | 4 | **Int (+1)** | 0 | 5 |
| **Knowledge: The Planes** | 2 | **Int (+1)** | 0 | 3 |
| **Knowledge: Religion** | 3 | **Int (+1)** | 0 | 4 |
| **Profession: Scribe** | 3 | **Wis (+4)** | 0 | 7 |
| **Spellcraft** | 7 | **Int (+1)** | 2 | 10 |
| **Spot** | 0 | **Wis (+4)** | 0 | 4 |
| **Survival** | 0 | **Wis (+4)** | 0 | 4 |

*Please use these totals as d20 mods to resolve any checks that would reveal information about the area.*

Neither one was a survivalist, but in their haversacks they had a tent, a bedroll, and a number of other things in case they couldn’t get a more permanent structure up.

Sebenzi was the first to cast *detect magic [expired in 5 minutes]*. Eldrin would wait until hers expired now that they were only a party of two. The jungle was dense and teeming with life, and the trail ahead was the only obvious path forward.

She surveyed the coastline and the jungle up to the 60’ limit of her detection spell, and said, “We should explore the coastline to get a sense of how many trails animals have blazed along every stretch of mile.”

“It seems a pleasant place,” Eldrin said, casting *barkskin [expired in 60 minutes]*.

Sebenzi was Chultean, and this Isle boasted that same warm-all-the-time climate with flora and fauna unaccustomed to seasonal shifts. It had been years since Sebenzi had been in the tropics, and decades for Eldrin.

Eldrin and Sebenzi moved cautiously along the shoreline, their eyes scanning the environment for useful resources and potential dangers. Eldrin’s knowledge of nature allowed him to identify several materials that could be used to construct a rudimentary shelter: broad leaves for roofing, sturdy vines for binding, and fallen branches for framing. The jungle’s abundance offered promise, but the clawed footprints near the trail reminded them of the island’s inherent dangers.

Sebenzi’s sharp eyes caught the details of the animal trails and the reptilian footprints. She pointed them out to Eldrin, her voice low. “Something large has been through here recently. We should be careful.”

The pair continued their exploration, eventually discovering a small, sheltered cove protected by natural rock formations. Nearby, a cluster of coconut palms offered a source of fresh food, and a narrow stream provided clear water flowing from the jungle into the sea. The cove seemed like a viable spot for a temporary campsite, though the jungle’s edge was still ominously close.

Sebenzi proposed, “I’ve prepared a *purify food and drink* spell in case we want to eat something we find, and drink some saltwater; the spell will desalinize it.”

“I like it. Let’s be conservative about dipping into our dry rations for now,” Eldrin agreed. “We’ll see to some food in a bit, but I’m trying to see if this cove is viable to build a shelter in. If the tide comes in and washes it away, it’s better to go uphill and inland a bit before settling somewhere for the next few days.”

Eldrin knelt by the edge of the cove, his sharp eyes scanning the ground for signs of the tide’s reach. A distinct line of seaweed, kelp, and other debris marked the high-tide points along the shore. The cove itself was situated just above this line, its rocky formations providing a natural barrier against the waves. Eldrin’s knowledge of nature confirmed that the cove was unlikely to be inundated by the tide, at least under normal conditions. However, a severe storm or unusually high tide could still pose a risk.

“The cove is safe from the tide for now,” Eldrin said, standing and brushing sand from his hands. “But if the weather turns, we could be in trouble. It might be wiser to move a bit further inland, where we’re less exposed.” He looked up at the sky to get a sense of their meteorological status, trying to predict tomorrow’s weather based on today’s barometric conditions and humidity.

Sebenzi nodded, her gaze shifting toward the jungle. “We’ll need to find a spot that’s defensible, too. Those footprints we saw earlier… I’d rather not wake up to a predator in our camp.”

Safe from normal tides and offering easy access to resources like coconuts and fresh water, the cove was ideal for now, and Eldrin and Sebenzi considered gathering palm leaves and branches to make the simplest of teepees rather than spending the majority of the day on something more lasting. This place might offer better protection from jungle predators who didn’t risk coming out into the open shoreline.

In the end, they noted it on Eldrin’s working map, and ventured inland via the widest path they’d seen so far.

Eldrin tilted his head back, studying the sky. The air was warm and humid, with only a few scattered clouds drifting lazily overhead. He noted the lack of storm clouds or any sudden shifts in wind patterns, which suggested that the weather would remain stable for the next day or so. “No signs of a storm,” he said, lowering his gaze. “We should be safe here for now, but it’s still wise to prepare for the unexpected.”

Sebenzi agreed, though after a brief discussion, they decided against constructing even a simple teepee. The cove was safe from normal tides and offered easy access to resources like coconuts and fresh water, but they didn’t want to spend too much time in one place just yet. Instead, Eldrin marked the cove’s location on his working map, noting its resources and potential as a fallback point. “We can return here if needed,” he said, tucking the map away. “But for now, let’s see what else this island has to offer.”

Sebenzi nodded, her gaze shifting toward the jungle. “That wide trail we saw earlier might lead to something useful. Let’s move carefully, though. We don’t know what’s waiting for us in there.”

The pair left the cove behind and ventured inland, following the widest of the animal trails they had spotted earlier. The jungle closed in around them, the dense foliage filtering the sunlight into dappled patterns on the ground. The air was thick with the scent of earth and vegetation, and the sounds of the island’s wildlife grew louder as they moved deeper into the trees.

As they followed the wide trail inland, the jungle became denser and more foreboding. The trail itself was well-worn, suggesting frequent use by animals—or perhaps something larger. They branched off to explore a narrower path leading uphill where less vegetation was likely to grow, and they might have a high enough vantage point to see the entire coastline at once.

Eldrin and Sebenzi paused at a fork in the trail, the wider path continuing deeper into the jungle while a narrower, less-traveled path branched off uphill. Eldrin glanced at Sebenzi, his expression thoughtful. “If we take the higher ground, we might get a better view of the coastline,” he said. “It could help us map the island more effectively.”

Sebenzi nodded, her eyes scanning the uphill path. “It’s worth a try. And if the vegetation is thinner up there, we might have an easier time moving around.”

The pair turned onto the narrower trail, which wound its way steadily upward. The incline was gentle but persistent, and the jungle’s dense undergrowth began to thin as they climbed. The air felt slightly cooler, and the sounds of the island’s wildlife grew more distant. After a short hike, they emerged onto a rocky outcrop that offered a clear view of the surrounding area.

From their vantage point, they could see the coastline stretching out below them, the azure waves crashing against the shore. To the north, the jungle extended as far as the eye could see, a sea of green broken only by the occasional rocky hill or clearing. To the south, the shoreline curved inward, forming a small bay that they hadn’t noticed from the cove. In the distance, a thin column of smoke rose from somewhere deep within the jungle, its source hidden by the trees.

Eldrin quickly pulled out his map and began sketching the coastline, adding details based on their elevated perspective. Sebenzi stood beside him, her eyes fixed on the column of smoke. “That smoke… it could be a campfire,” she said, her voice tinged with curiosity. “Do you think there are others on the island?”

Eldrin glanced up from his map, his brow furrowed. “It’s possible. But we should proceed with caution. Whoever—or whatever—is out there might not be friendly. I’m guessing that smoke is direct evidence of humanoid presence, so we should assume that there are people here. Whether they’re bullywugs or elves is another matter.”

Eldrin’s map was now more detailed, and they’d spotted a column of smoke rising from the jungle to the south. The smoke suggests the presence of a campfire or some other source of heat, but its exact origin is unclear.

The Oghmanytes’ curiosity got the best of them. The cleric was already documenting the smoke in her journal, and the cartographer was adding a notation at the spot on the map where the smoke was emanating, writing, “Conflict?”

“This could lead to an encounter with other inhabitants of the island, friendly or otherwise,” Sebenzi warned herself and her adventuring partner.

The whisper gnome tucked the map away, and proposed taking a meandering path rather than heading directly towards the smoke. “Let’s err on the side of the narrower paths where smaller animals tread as we make way there. Narrower trails might keep us out of sight of anything—or anyone—larger. And if we’re lucky, we might learn more about the island.”

Sebenzi nodded, her journal already filled with notes about the smoke and its possible implications. She closed the book and secured it in her pack, her expression thoughtful. “Let’s move quietly and stay alert. If there are others here, we don’t know if they’ll welcome us.”

The pair left the rocky outcrop and began their cautious descent, following a narrow game trail that wound through the jungle. The path was uneven and overgrown, but it offered some cover from prying eyes. Eldrin’s small stature and natural stealth allowed him to move almost silently, while Sebenzi did her best to tread lightly despite her larger frame.

As they made their way toward the source of the smoke, the jungle seemed to grow quieter, as if holding its breath. The usual sounds of birds and insects faded, replaced by an eerie stillness. Eldrin paused occasionally to listen, his sharp ears picking up faint rustling in the underbrush, but nothing approached them directly.

*[Sebenzi’s detect magic spell expired after 5 minutes.]*

After a while, the trail began to curve toward the south, bringing them closer to the column of smoke. The air grew warmer, and the scent of burning wood became more pronounced. Eldrin held up a hand, signaling Sebenzi to stop. Ahead, the jungle thinned slightly, revealing a small clearing. In the center of the clearing was a crude fire pit, its embers still smoldering. Around the pit were signs of recent activity: trampled grass, discarded bones, and a few crude tools made of wood and stone.

A cartoon of a person with a hood

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Eldrin crouched low, his eyes scanning the clearing for movement. “This looks recent,” he whispered. “But whoever was here is gone now. Let’s take a closer look—but be ready for anything.”

Sebenzi cast *longstrider [expired in 5 hours]*, adding speed to her steps.

They continued at half the pace they’d been making earlier. This would allow them to move silently through the jungle, better able to hear any movements around them.

As they moved cautiously toward the clearing, the dense undergrowth of the jungle muffled their steps, but the oppressive heat and the faint scent of smoke made the environment feel tense. The clearing ahead was oddly quiet now, but the signs of recent activity—trampled grass and discarded bones—suggested that whoever had been there might not have gone far.

The air was thick, the humidity making it harder to stay quiet, but with Eldrin’s careful watch and Sebenzi’s enhanced speed, they managed to keep their approach subtle. The fire pit, though cold now, was still surrounded by remnants of charred wood and ash, telling the tale of a recent campfire.

Eldrin continued scanning, his eyes flicking over the crude tools scattered about—primitive weapons, perhaps, or tools used in some sort of ritual. They might provide more clues about who or what had been there.

Sebenzi, with her *Longstrider* still in effect for a few moments longer, moved quickly enough to get close to the scattered tools and inspect them without drawing attention. The jungle hummed with the quiet buzz of distant insects, the only sound accompanying their steps.

Eldrin kept his eyes and ears (Spot and Listen) open for any movement nearby, trying to catch a glimpse of anyone still hiding in the jungle. He wouldn’t put it past some blowgun-toting illiterate to come at them for no reason. It had happened before at the hands of troglodytes and kuo-toa.

Sebenzi examined the tools and bones to determine what kind of creatures or people had been there recently.

Eldrin crouched at the edge of the clearing, his sharp eyes scanning the surrounding jungle for any sign of movement. His ears strained to catch the faintest sound, but the jungle was eerily quiet, save for the distant hum of insects. He remained vigilant, his hand resting on the hilt of his dagger, ready for any sudden threat. The memory of past encounters with hostile creatures like troglodytes and kuo-toa lingered in his mind, and he wasn’t about to let his guard down.

Sebenzi, her steps quickened by the *longstrider* spell, moved cautiously into the clearing. She knelt beside the scattered tools and bones, her trained eye examining them for clues. The tools were crude—sharpened sticks, stone blades, and a few pieces of bone fashioned into crude needles or hooks. They appeared to be the work of primitive hands, lacking the refinement of more advanced cultures. The bones, however, told a more troubling story. They were large and jagged, some clearly belonging to animals, but others... Sebenzi’s stomach turned as she realized that at least a few of the bones were humanoid.

“These tools are primitive,” she whispered, her voice barely audible. “But the bones... some of them are from humanoids. Whoever was here, they’re not just hunters. They’re... something else.”

Eldrin’s expression darkened as he processed her words. “Cannibals?” he murmured, his voice tight with concern. “Or perhaps they’re using the bones for rituals. Either way, we need to be careful. If they’re still nearby, they might not take kindly to intruders.”

Sebenzi nodded, her gaze sweeping the clearing once more. She noticed faint tracks leading away from the fire pit, deeper into the jungle. The tracks were large and clawed, similar to the ones they had seen near the shoreline, but these were fresher. “There’s a trail,” she said, pointing. “It looks like they went that way. Should we follow it, or retreat and regroup?”

Eldrin and Sebenzi moved cautiously through the clearing, their eyes scanning the ground and the surrounding foliage for any additional clues. The fire pit, now cold, still emitted a faint smoky odor, and the scattered tools and bones hinted at the recent presence of the island’s inhabitants. Eldrin knelt beside the fire pit, sifting through the ashes with a stick. He found a few fragments of charred wood and what appeared to be the remains of a small animal—likely a meal cooked over the flames.

Sebenzi, meanwhile, focused on the edges of the clearing. She noticed a patch of disturbed earth near a cluster of bushes. Brushing aside the leaves, she uncovered a shallow pit containing a few crude items: a necklace made of animal teeth, a small clay figurine resembling a humanoid with exaggerated features, and a bundle of dried herbs tied with vine. The figurine’s face was twisted into a grotesque expression, and the herbs gave off a pungent, earthy scent.

“Eldrin, look at this,” Sebenzi whispered, holding up the figurine. “It looks like some kind of idol. And these herbs... they might be used for rituals or medicine.”

Eldrin joined her, examining the items carefully. “This could be evidence of a tribal culture,” he said, his voice low. “The figurine might represent a deity or spirit they worship. And the herbs... they could be part of their rituals or healing practices. We should document this.”

Sebenzi nodded, pulling out her journal to sketch the figurine and make notes about the herbs and necklace. Eldrin, meanwhile, continued to search the clearing. Near the edge of the fire pit, he found a small, sharpened bone that had been carved with intricate patterns. The carvings resembled waves and spirals, possibly representing the sea or some natural force.

“This bone is carved with symbols,” Eldrin said, holding it up to the light. “It might be a talisman or a tool for divination. Whoever made this has a connection to the island’s environment.”

As they finished their search, Sebenzi noticed something else: a faint trail of broken branches and trampled grass leading away from the clearing in a different direction than the clawed tracks. This new trail was narrower and less obvious, as if someone—or something—had tried to move quietly.

Pocketing the sharpened bone carved with wave-like patterns, Eldrin—an alchemist—tried to determine the ingredients in the mixture of dried herbs.

Sebenzi carefully slipped the necklace of animal teeth over her head, the rough edges of the teeth brushing against her skin. She tucked the grotesque clay figurine into her pack, making a mental note to study it further when they had more time. Eldrin, meanwhile, examined the bundle of dried herbs, his alchemical knowledge coming into play. He crushed a small portion of the herbs between his fingers, sniffing the fragments and tasting a tiny amount on his tongue.

“These herbs are a mix of medicinal and ritualistic plants,” he said after a moment. “I recognize some of them—valerian root for calming, and maybe a bit of sage for purification. But there’s something else here... something bitter. It might be used in a trance-inducing brew or as part of a ritual offering.”

Sebenzi nodded, her expression thoughtful. “We’ll have to be careful if we encounter anyone using these. They might have practices we don’t understand.”

With the items secured, the pair turned their attention to the narrow trail leading away from the clearing. The path was faint, marked by broken branches and occasional footprints in the soft earth. Eldrin took the lead, his small stature allowing him to move quietly through the undergrowth. Sebenzi followed close behind, her enhanced speed from *longstrider* making her steps swift and light.

The trail wound deeper into the jungle, the dense foliage pressing in on either side. The air grew heavier, the humidity clinging to their skin. After a short distance, the trail opened into another, smaller clearing. This one was different—less disturbed, with no signs of a fire pit or discarded tools. Instead, the ground was covered in a thick layer of leaves, and the trees here were taller, their branches forming a dense canopy overhead.

In the center of the clearing stood a large, flat stone, its surface worn smooth. Around the stone were several smaller rocks arranged in a rough circle. The arrangement looked deliberate, almost ceremonial. Eldrin approached the stone cautiously, his eyes scanning the area for any signs of danger. As he drew closer, he noticed faint carvings on the stone’s surface—symbols similar to the ones on the bone talisman he had found earlier.

“This looks like some kind of altar,” he whispered, running his fingers over the carvings. “The symbols... they’re the same as the ones on the bone. Waves and spirals. Maybe it’s connected to the sea or some natural force.”

Sebenzi knelt beside him, her journal already open. She began sketching the altar and the symbols, her hand moving quickly across the page. “This could be important,” she said. “If the island’s inhabitants worship something here, we might be able to learn more about their beliefs—and how to avoid crossing them. I recall that bard, Bowik, telling us about a woman who was mistaken by cannibals for their deity, and was worshipped by them,” Sebenzi recalled.

Eldrin added, “Yes, I know that tale, but anthropologically speaking, that’s likely a redacted version of the story. Worship for cannibals usually involves sacrificing the perceived avatar of their deity after a long, meaningful ordeal.”

As she finished her sketch, a faint sound reached their ears—a low, rhythmic chanting, coming from somewhere deeper in the jungle. The sound was distant but unmistakable, and it sent a chill down their spines.

Eldrin, stealthier than Sebenzi, crept at half speed. This made any noise that Sebenzi made irrelevant to his stealth as he trekked 100’ ahead.

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| **Eldrin:**  **Relevant Skills** | **Rank** | **Ability**  **& Mod.** | **Misc.**  **Mods.** | **Total** |
| **Listen** | 3 | **Wis (+2)** | 2 | 7 |
| **Move Silently** | 6 | **Dex (+2)** | 0 | 8 |
| **Search** | 4 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 11 |
| **Spot** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 |
| **Survival** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 |
| **Tumble** | 0 | **Dex (+2)** | 0 | 2 |

*Please roll any relevant checks to determine what he sees and if he’s heard.*

Eldrin motioned for Sebenzi to stay back as he crept forward, his small frame and natural stealth allowing him to move almost silently through the jungle. The rhythmic chanting grew louder as he advanced, the sound guiding him deeper into the foliage. He moved at half speed, his senses heightened, every step deliberate and cautious.

After moving about’ feet ahead, Eldrin crouched low behind a thick bush, his sharp eyes scanning the area. The jungle here was slightly thinner, and through the gaps in the foliage, he could see a larger clearing ahead. In the center of the clearing was a group of humanoid figures, their bodies painted with intricate patterns of mud and ash. They were gathered around a large, crude totem made of wood and bone, their voices rising and falling in unison as they chanted.

Eldrin picked up fragments of their chant. The words were in a language he didn’t recognize, but the tone was unmistakably reverent—and ominous. The figures moved in a slow, deliberate dance around the totem, their movements synchronized with the rhythm of their chant. Quietly, he produced his sole scroll of *comprehend languages* and cast it, continuing to listen to the tall and lean people with elongated limbs and sharp features. Their skin was a deep, earthy brown, and their eyes glinted with a feral intensity. They wore little clothing, adorned instead with necklaces of bones and feathers. Some carried crude spears or clubs, while others held bowls filled with what appeared to be blood or some other dark liquid.

Eldrin remained undetected; the figures seemed entirely focused on their ritual, their attention fixed on the totem and the chanting. He could tell they weren’t goblinoids or other monstrous humanoids, but wasn’t sure if they were half-elves, humans, or something else at this distance.

He looked back to Sebenzi, and shook his head for her to not approach. Eldrin crouched low, his sharp eyes fixed on the ritual unfolding before him. The figures were too far away to identify their exact race, but their movements and appearance suggested they were humanoid—possibly humans, half-elves, or another similar race. He glanced back at Sebenzi, shaking his head firmly to signal her to stay put. She nodded in understanding, remaining hidden in the foliage.

Eldrin focused his mind, casting *detect evil* first. The spell swept out in a 60-foot cone, its invisible energy probing the area. To his relief, the ritualists did not radiate strong auras of evil. There were faint traces, as one might expect from any group engaged in primal or violent practices, but nothing overwhelming. The totem itself, however, gave off a faint, lingering aura of malevolence, as if it had been used in darker rituals in the past.

Next, he cast *detect chaos*. The spell revealed that the figures were not chaotic in nature. Their auras were neutral, suggesting they followed some form of order or tradition, even if their practices seemed savage. The totem, however, radiated a subtle chaotic energy, as if it were a conduit for wild, untamed forces.

Finally, Eldrin cast *comprehend languages*. The chanting, previously unintelligible, now became clear. The words were a mix of reverence and supplication, addressed to an entity they called “The Devourer of the Deep.” The ritualists were pleading for protection and strength, offering the dark liquid in the bowls as a sacrifice. The language itself was archaic, a dialect of Common that had evolved over centuries of isolation.

Eldrin carefully retreated from his vantage point, moving silently back through the jungle until he rejoined Sebenzi. Her eyes widened with curiosity as he approached, and she leaned in close to hear his whispered report.

“They’re performing a ritual to an entity they call ‘The Devourer of the Deep,’” Eldrin explained, his voice barely audible. “They’re offering sacrifices—some kind of dark liquid—in exchange for protection and strength. The totem they’re using has a faint aura of malevolence, but the ritualists themselves aren’t inherently evil or chaotic. They seem to follow some form of order, even if their practices are... unsettling.”

Sebenzi frowned, her mind racing. “The Devourer of the Deep... that sounds like a primal force, maybe tied to the sea or the island itself. If they’re offering sacrifices, they might see us as intruders—or worse, as potential offerings.”

Eldrin nodded. “Exactly. We need to tread carefully. If we approach them, it could go badly. But if we avoid them entirely, we might miss an opportunity to learn more about the island—and possibly even gain their help.”

Sebenzi considered this, her fingers absently tracing the necklace of animal teeth she had taken earlier. “What if we try to communicate with them from a distance? Show them we mean no harm, but keep our options open if things go wrong.”

Eldrin’s eyes narrowed in thought. “It’s risky, but it might be our best chance. We could use the items we found—the necklace, the figurine, the bone talisman—as a way to show we respect their ways. But we’ll need a plan in case they don’t take kindly to our presence.”

Sebenzi cast *omen of peril*, prompting Oghma to reveal any imminent danger in the direction of the cannibals. She closed her eyes and clasped her holy symbol of Oghma, murmuring a quiet prayer. With *omen of peril*, she sought divine guidance about the dangers that lay ahead. For a moment, her mind was filled with a vision—a fleeting image that Oghma granted her. She saw an open book, its pages fluttering in the wind. The pages were pristine and unmarked, a symbol of safety and clarity. The vision lasted only a second, but its meaning was clear.

Sebenzi opened her eyes and turned to Eldrin. “Oghma has shown me a vision of safety,” she said, her voice steady. “If we proceed carefully, we should face no significant danger for the next hour. But we must remain vigilant.”

Eldrin nodded, his expression thoughtful. “A vision of safety is reassuring, but we should still approach with caution. These ritualists may not be hostile, but their practices are unpredictable. Let’s use the items we found as a gesture of goodwill and see how they respond.”

Eldrin held the sharpened bone he’d found as they got back to the position where Eldrin had still been able to hide earlier,

Before approaching the ritualists, Sebenzi drank a Potion of Wisdom, and produced the figurine, noting that it looked like her in an archetypical way: bronzed-brown skin, black, braided hair, and wearing a robe. “We should observe the ritual further,” she murmured as she made sure the necklace that she put on was now visible.

A person in a white robe holding a book

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

She said as seriously as she could: “Here: hold this and pretend to worship me when we get there.”

“Sinful Pete!” Eldrin exclaimed frowned as he took the figurine in his free hand, still holding the wave-symbol talisman in the other. He wasn’t expecting her to say such things, and then put it in context. “Oh, for theatrics, for the cannibals... sure.”

They got closer, but were still out of sight. They remained quiet for 18 seconds (3 rounds) to see how the ritual had progressed.

Eldrin and Sebenzi crept closer to the ritual site, their movements slow and deliberate. Eldrin held the sharpened bone talisman in one hand and the figurine in the other, his expression a mix of apprehension and determination. Sebenzi, her senses heightened by the Potion of Wisdom, kept the necklace of animal teeth visible around her neck, the figurine’s resemblance to her adding an eerie weight to their plan.

They stopped just short of the clearing, crouching behind a thick bush to observe the ritual. The chanting had grown louder, the rhythm more intense. The ritualists, their bodies painted with mud and ash, moved in a slow, hypnotic dance around the totem. The dark liquid in their bowls was now being poured onto the ground in intricate patterns, forming symbols that glistened in the dim light filtering through the jungle canopy.

The leader of the group, a tall figure adorned with feathers and bones, raised his arms and began to speak in a guttural, commanding voice. The words were still in the archaic dialect of Common, but Eldrin’s *comprehend languages* spell allowed him to understand.

“Great Devourer of the Deep,” the leader intoned, “we offer you this sacrifice, the lifeblood of our prey, in exchange for your protection. Grant us strength to face the invaders who defile your domain. Let their bones join the others in your sacred depths.”

As the leader spoke, the other ritualists began to sway more violently, their movements becoming almost frenzied. The air grew heavier, and a faint, unnatural mist began to rise from the ground around the totem. The symbols drawn in the dark liquid seemed to shimmer, as if responding to the leader’s words.

Sebenzi’s sharp eyes caught a detail she hadn’t noticed before: scattered around the edges of the clearing were more bones, some humanoid, some animal, arranged in a rough circle. The bones seemed to pulse faintly with a dark energy, as if they were part of the ritual itself.

The ritual has intensified, with the leader invoking “The Devourer of the Deep” and offering sacrifices for protection against “invaders.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi remained hidden, their eyes fixed on the ritual as it unfolded. The chanting grew louder, the rhythm more frenetic, and the air seemed to thicken with an almost palpable energy. The leader of the ritualists raised his arms higher, his voice rising to a fevered pitch.

“Great Devourer of the Deep!” he cried, his words echoing through the clearing. “We call upon you to rise from the depths and claim what is yours! Let your hunger cleanse this land of those who would defy your will!”

As the leader spoke, the symbols drawn in the dark liquid began to glow faintly, their light pulsating in time with the chanting. The mist around the totem thickened, swirling into a vortex that seemed to draw in the very air around it. The bones scattered around the clearing began to rattle, their dark energy intensifying.

Suddenly, the ground beneath the totem trembled, and a low, guttural roar echoed from somewhere deep within the earth. The ritualists fell to their knees, their chanting now a desperate plea. The leader stepped forward, holding a bowl of the dark liquid high above his head.

“Accept our offering, Devourer!” he shouted. “And grant us your power!”

With that, he poured the liquid onto the totem. The moment the liquid touched the wood and bone, the totem erupted in a burst of dark energy. The mist coalesced into a shadowy, serpentine form that coiled around the totem, its eyes glowing with a malevolent light. The ritualists prostrated themselves before it, their voices trembling with fear and reverence.

Eldrin’s eyes widened as the shadowy, serpentine form coalesced around the totem, its malevolent glow casting an eerie light over the clearing. He glanced at Sebenzi, his expression tense. “This is beyond us,” he whispered urgently. “We need to leave. Now.”

Sebenzi nodded, her face pale but determined. She clutched the figurine tightly, her other hand gripping her holy symbol. Without another word, the two began to retreat, moving as quietly and quickly as they could through the dense undergrowth. The chanting and the low, guttural roar of the entity faded behind them, though the oppressive energy of the ritual lingered in the air.

They retraced their steps along the narrow trail, their senses heightened and their movements swift. Eldrin’s small frame and natural stealth allowed him to move almost silently, while Sebenzi’s *longstrider* spell gave her the speed to keep pace without stumbling. The jungle seemed to close in around them, the shadows deepening as they put distance between themselves and the ritual site.

After several minutes of hurried travel, they reached a small, secluded area away from the trail. The sounds of the ritual were now distant, and the oppressive energy had dissipated. Eldrin leaned against a tree, catching his breath, while Sebenzi knelt to the ground, her journal already open as she began to sketch the entity and the ritual they had witnessed.

“That was... something,” Eldrin said, his voice low. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Whatever that entity is, it’s powerful—and dangerous.”

Sebenzi nodded, her hand trembling slightly as she wrote. “We need to be careful. If the ritualists are summoning something like that, we can’t afford to draw their attention. Or its attention.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi consulted their map briefly, their eyes tracing the contours of the southeastern peninsula. “If we head southwest,” Eldrin said, his voice low, “we can follow the coastline. The terrain might be easier to navigate, and we’ll avoid the denser jungle where those ritualists are.”

Sebenzi nodded, her gaze shifting toward the southwest. “The coastline could also offer resources—fresh water, shellfish, or even signs of other inhabitants. Let’s move carefully, though. We don’t know what else is out there.”

The pair set off, their path taking them through the thinning jungle toward the rocky shoreline. The terrain here was uneven but manageable, with fewer thick vines and underbrush to slow their progress. The sound of the waves grew louder as they approached the coast, and the salty breeze provided some relief from the oppressive humidity.

Here I sit beside my soul
I’ve learned enough to survive
Listen to your conscience and you’ll
Stay alive 

You never lea...

After a short hike, they emerged onto a stretch of rocky beach. The shoreline was dotted with tide pools and clusters of seaweed, and the waves crashed against jagged rocks further out to sea. To the south, the coastline curved inward, forming a small bay. To the west, the beach stretched on, eventually giving way to more jungle.

Eldrin knelt to examine the tide pools, his sharp eyes spotting small crabs and shellfish. “We could gather some food here,” he said, “but we’ll need to be careful. These waters might hold more than just crabs.”

Sebenzi scanned the horizon, her eyes narrowing as she spotted something in the distance. “Look,” she said, pointing toward the bay. “There’s a structure—or what’s left of one. It’s hard to tell from here, but it might be worth investigating.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi exchanged a glance, their curiosity piqued by the sight of the structure in the bay. “Let’s take a closer look,” Eldrin said, his voice tinged with excitement. “It could be a ruin—or something more.”

Sebenzi nodded, her hand instinctively brushing the necklace of animal teeth she wore. “If it’s a ruin, there might be clues about the island’s history. Or even something useful.”

The pair made their way along the rocky shoreline, their steps careful to avoid slipping on the wet stones. As they approached the bay, the structure came into clearer view. It was a stone building, partially collapsed and overgrown with vines and moss. The architecture was ancient, with weathered carvings of waves and spirals adorning the remaining walls. The roof had long since caved in, and the interior was open to the elements.

Eldrin’s sharp eyes caught the glint of something metallic among the rubble. “There’s something in there,” he said, pointing. “Let’s take a closer look, but be careful. This place might not be stable.”

Sebenzi followed him into the ruin, her journal already open to document their findings. The interior was damp and smelled of salt and decay. The metallic object turned out to be a rusted sword, its blade pitted and worn. Nearby, they found fragments of pottery and what appeared to be the remains of a wooden chest, now rotted and broken.

As they explored further, Sebenzi noticed something carved into one of the walls—a series of symbols similar to the ones they had seen on the bone talisman and the altar. “Eldrin, look at this,” she said, running her fingers over the carvings. “These symbols... they’re the same as the ones from the ritual site. Waves and spirals. This place might be connected to ‘The Devourer of the Deep.’”

Eldrin examined the carvings, his brow furrowed. “You’re right. This could be a temple or shrine dedicated to the entity. If that’s the case, we might find more clues here—or more dangers.”

Eldrin stepped closer to the wall, his eyes narrowing as he studied the carvings. The symbols were intricate, their lines worn but still legible. He traced the waves and spirals with his fingers, his mind racing to decipher their meaning. The patterns seemed to tell a story—a tale of the sea, of sacrifice, and of a powerful entity that demanded both.

Sebenzi watched him intently, her journal open and ready to record his findings. “What do you think they mean?” she asked, her voice hushed.

Eldrin frowned, his brow furrowed in concentration. “These symbols... they’re a warning,” he said after a moment. “They speak of a pact between the island’s inhabitants and ‘The Devourer of the Deep.’ The waves represent the sea, and the spirals... they’re a symbol of cycles, of endless hunger. The carvings suggest that the entity demands regular sacrifices to maintain its favor. Those who fail to appease it risk its wrath.”

He paused, his eyes scanning the rest of the wall. “There’s more here. These smaller symbols... they look like instructions. A ritual, perhaps, to summon or placate the entity. But it’s incomplete. Part of the wall has crumbled away.”

Sebenzi quickly sketched the carvings in her journal, her hand moving swiftly across the page. “If this is a ritual, it might explain what we saw earlier. Those ritualists were trying to summon or appease the Devourer. But why? What are they afraid of?”

Eldrin shook his head. “I’m not sure. But if this entity is as powerful as the carvings suggest, we need to be careful. If the ritualists see us as a threat—or as potential sacrifices—we could be in serious danger.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi exchanged a determined glance before turning their attention to the rest of the ruin. The partially collapsed structure was damp and overgrown, but they methodically began to search through the rubble, their eyes sharp for anything that might shed more light on the carvings—or the entity they referenced.

Eldrin moved toward the rotted wooden chest, carefully sifting through its remains. Among the decayed wood and fragments of pottery, he found a small, water-damaged scroll. The parchment was brittle, but the ink was still faintly visible. Unrolling it carefully, he saw more of the wave and spiral symbols, along with what appeared to be a map of the island. The map marked several locations, including the ruin they were in, the ritual site, and a spot near the central plateau labeled with a symbol that resembled the totem they had seen earlier.

“This could be important,” Eldrin said, holding up the scroll. “It’s a map of the island, and it marks several key locations. This symbol here,” he pointed to the totem-like marking, “might be where the entity is anchored—or where its power is strongest.”

Sebenzi, meanwhile, had been examining the rusted sword. As she wiped away some of the corrosion, she noticed faint etchings along the blade—more of the wave and spiral symbols. “This sword might have been used in the rituals,” she said, her voice thoughtful. “Or it could have belonged to someone who tried to oppose the entity. Either way, it’s another piece of the puzzle.”

As they continued their search, Sebenzi noticed something glinting in a corner of the ruin. Brushing aside the debris, she uncovered a small, intricately carved stone box. The lid was sealed with a wax-like substance, but the carvings on the box matched those on the walls. She carefully pried it open, revealing a set of bone dice inside. The dice were carved with the same symbols, their surfaces worn smooth from use.

“These look like they were used for divination,” Sebenzi said, holding up one of the dice. “Maybe to determine when or how to perform the rituals.”

The scholars took a few moments with their respective tasks. Eldrin copied the notable points on the damaged map to his own rendition of the island while Sebenzi scribbled notes in her journal’s left page, while drawing the sword on the right page. Sebenzi then turned to documenting the dice, and Eldrin coached her in her field note structure, mentoring her into her next ascent as a cleric, though he was merely an archivist with no ecclesiastical rank among the clergy of Oghma.

As the waves splashed nearby, they continued to take in the details of the items and information they’d just uncovered. “I wonder why the cannibals don’t just take this place over,” Sebenzi said.

Eldrin carefully copied the notable points from the water-damaged scroll onto his own map, his hand steady despite the excitement of the discovery. The symbols and locations were now clearly marked, providing a clearer picture of the island’s key sites. Sebenzi, meanwhile, focused on documenting the rusted sword and the bone dice. Her journal pages filled with sketches and notes, her hand moving swiftly as she captured every detail. Eldrin occasionally offered guidance, his voice calm and instructive.

“Remember to note the context of each item,” he said, leaning over her shoulder. “Where it was found, its condition, and any symbols or markings. This sword, for example—its etchings might tell us more about its purpose. And the dice... they could be a key to understanding the rituals.”

Sebenzi nodded, her brow furrowed in concentration. She sketched the dice with precision, noting the wear on their surfaces and the intricate carvings. As she worked, she couldn’t help but voice her thoughts. “I wonder why the cannibals don’t just take this place over,” she said, her tone thoughtful. “It’s clearly connected to their rituals. Why leave it abandoned?”

Eldrin paused, considering her question. “It’s possible they see this place as sacred—or cursed,” he said. “The carvings suggest that the entity they worship is both revered and feared. Maybe they avoid this ruin because they believe it’s too dangerous to disturb. Or perhaps they only come here for specific rituals, like the one we witnessed.”

Sebenzi glanced around the ruin, her eyes lingering on the crumbling walls and overgrown carvings. “If that’s the case, we might be safer here than we thought. At least for now.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi made their way back to the cove, the rhythmic crash of the waves against the shore providing a steady backdrop to their thoughts. The sun was beginning to dip lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the sand. They settled near the makeshift shelter they had considered earlier, the bone dice laid out carefully on a flat rock between them.

Eldrin picked up one of the dice, turning it over in his hands. The carvings of waves and spirals seemed to shimmer faintly in the fading light. “These dice are more than just tools for divination,” he said, his voice low. “They’re imbued with meaning—each symbol tied to the entity and its rituals. If we can decipher their purpose, we might learn more about how the ritualists communicate with—or control—the Devourer.”

Sebenzi leaned in, her journal open to a fresh page. She sketched the dice quickly, noting the placement of the symbols and the wear patterns. “Do you think they’re used to determine when or how to perform the rituals?” she asked. “Or maybe to interpret signs from the entity?”

Eldrin nodded. “Possibly both. The wear suggests they’ve been used frequently, and the symbols align with what we’ve seen in the carvings and the ritual. If we can figure out how they’re used, we might be able to predict the ritualists’ actions—or even disrupt them.”

He set the dice down and began to arrange them in different patterns, testing their alignment and the way the symbols interacted. Sebenzi watched intently, her pen poised to record any insights. After a few moments, Eldrin’s eyes lit up. “Look at this,” he said, pointing to the dice. “When arranged in this pattern, the symbols form a sequence—waves leading into spirals, spirals leading back to waves. It’s a cycle, just like the carvings suggested. The rituals might be tied to natural cycles—tides, lunar phases, or even seasonal changes.”

Sebenzi quickly sketched the pattern, her notes filling the page. “If that’s the case, we might be able to anticipate when the next ritual will occur. Or at least understand the timing behind their actions.”

Eldrin smiled and said, “I bet you thought I wasn’t going to do this,” and then produced his haversack, opening it up and taking out most of the reference library he kept in there.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Qty.** | **Wt.** |
| Atlases | 2 | 8.0 |
| Cartographer’s Kit | 1 | 10.0 |
| Books on Dark Knowledge | 0 | 16.0 |
| Books on Superstition | 6 | 22.0 |
| Dictionaries, Polyglot | 2 | 10.0 |
| Personal Documents | \* | 1.0 |
| Records of Previous Cases | \* | 2.0 |

He left the rope, clothing, and other heavy items in there, and got to looking up everything he could in his books on lunar cycles, tidal-related deities, and all the things they’d learned today.

Meanwhile, Sebenzi went to pee and take a look around to make sure there were no cannibals or other predators.

Eldrin’s smile widened as he unloaded his haversack, spreading out the contents with the care of a scholar preparing for a deep dive into research. The atlases, cartographer’s kit, and stacks of books on superstition and polyglot dictionaries formed a makeshift library on the sandy ground. He flipped open a well-worn volume on lunar cycles, his fingers tracing the pages as he muttered to himself. “Lunar phases, tidal deities, cyclical rituals... there’s a pattern here, Sebenzi. We just need to piece it together.”

Sebenzi chuckled softly, shaking her head. “I should’ve known you’d have a library in that haversack. I’ll leave you to it. I need to... take care of something.” She stood, brushing sand from her robes, and added, “I’ll also take a quick look around to make sure we’re still alone.”

She walked a short distance from the cove, finding a secluded spot among the rocks to relieve herself. Afterward, she circled the area, her eyes scanning the jungle’s edge and the shoreline for any signs of movement. The cove was quiet, the only sounds the gentle lapping of waves and the distant calls of seabirds. Satisfied that they were alone, she returned to find Eldrin deeply engrossed in his books.

Eldrin glanced up from his books, his eyes distant as he recalled the night sky. “The moon is waxing gibbous,” he said, his voice thoughtful. “Nearly full. If the rituals are tied to lunar cycles, the next full moon could be a critical time. We might have only a few days before the ritualists perform another ceremony—or before the entity’s power peaks.”

Sebenzi nodded, her expression serious. “Then we should prepare. If we’re going to confront this ‘Devourer of the Deep’ or its followers, we’ll need to be ready.”

The pair began to settle into the driest part of the cove, arranging their gear and setting up a small, sheltered area for rest. Eldrin continued to pore over his books, cross-referencing the symbols and patterns with his notes on lunar cycles and tidal deities. Sebenzi, meanwhile, gathered driftwood and started a small fire, its flickering light providing warmth and a sense of security as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Sebenzi was in her night clothes, having undonned her chain shirt, and had rolled out her magic bedroll while Eldrin set up their tent. Oghmanytes prepared their spells at dawn, so for now, they had the remaining repertoire at their disposal. Sebenzi had two preparations of *purify food and drink*, and thus they gathered some kelp and a few dead fish they’d found on the shore, and cast both spells until they were basically clean, fresh fish and kelp. They gutted and wrapped the three fish in kelp, skewered them on a stick, and roasted them over the open flame within the cove.

As the fire crackled and the smell of roasted fish filled the cove, Eldrin and Sebenzi settled into a rare moment of quiet reflection. The moon hung high in the sky, its waxing gibbous light casting a silvery glow over the waves. The two Oghmanytes, though united in their devotion to the Binder of What Is Known, found themselves diverging in their interpretations of his dogma.

Sebenzi, her chain shirt set aside and her robes loose and comfortable, leaned back against a rock, her gaze fixed on the fire. “Oghma teaches us to seek knowledge for its own sake,” she began, her voice calm but firm. “To observe, to understand, to preserve. Sometimes, that means stepping back and letting things unfold as they will. Not everything needs to be... notarized.” She shot Eldrin a playful smirk.

Eldrin, ever the meticulous archivist, adjusted his spectacles and frowned. “Knowledge without action is like a book left unread,” he countered. “Oghma’s gift is meant to be used—to guide, to protect, to *do good*. If we see injustice or chaos, it’s our duty to intervene. The written word isn’t just a record; it’s a tool for shaping the future.”

Their debate continued, weaving through topics like the ethics of intervention, the balance between detachment and engagement, and the role of knowledge in a chaotic world. Sebenzi argued for the purity of observation, while Eldrin championed the power of action. Yet, despite their differences, their mutual respect was evident. They were two sides of the same coin, each embodying a facet of Oghma’s teachings.

“Oghma teaches us to seek knowledge for its own sake. To observe, to understand, to preserve,” Sebenzi proclaimed.

Eldrin professed, “Knowledge without action is like a book left unread. Oghma’s gift is meant to be used—to guide, to protect, to *do good*.”

Sebenzi espoused, “Sometimes, stepping back is the most profound act of understanding. Not everything needs to be... notarized.” She emphasized the importance of detachment, arguing that true knowledge comes from observing without altering.

“The written word isn’t just a record; it’s a tool for shaping the future.” Eldrin stressed the importance of using knowledge to enforce Law and Good, believing that inaction in the face of chaos was a betrayal of Oghma’s teachings.

Their debate highlighted the tension between Sebenzi’s neutral, detached approach and Eldrin’s Lawful Good pragmatism. Yet, their shared devotion to Oghma and their mutual respect for each other’s perspectives kept the conversation productive. They agreed that both approaches had merit, even if they couldn’t fully reconcile their differences.

After their philosophical discussion, the pair spent another half-hour chatting about lighter topics—the stars, the tides, the surprisingly good taste of the roasted fish. As the fire died down, Sebenzi cast *light of Lunia*, the soft glow illuminating their makeshift camp. They used the light to finalize their notes, Eldrin updating his map with the day’s discoveries while Sebenzi added sketches and observations to her journal.

When the light finally faded, they sat in companionable silence, the darkness of the cove wrapping around them like a blanket. Eldrin reached out, taking Sebenzi’s hand in his. They sat like that for a while, their fingers intertwined, occasionally murmuring about the stars or the rhythmic crash of the waves. For a moment, the weight of their mission lifted, and they were simply two scholars, sharing the quiet beauty of the night.

Eldrin was a light sleeper, and thus they decided to have no night watch tonight. They discussed tentative plans to hike to the central plateau in the morning, and laughed at moments from recent adventures. Each of them got up a few times during the night to pee, and during those moments took a quick look around to make sure nothing stirred in their midst.

The tent stayed warm in the ensconced cove.

~\*~

The night passed quietly, the cove’s natural shelter providing a sense of security despite the island’s many dangers. Eldrin, ever the light sleeper, stirred occasionally, his ears attuned to the sounds of the jungle and the waves. Each time he or Sebenzi rose to relieve themselves, they took a moment to scan the surroundings, their eyes piercing the darkness for any sign of movement. But the cove remained still, the only sounds the gentle rustling of leaves and the distant crash of waves.

Inside the tent, the air was warm and still, the magic bedrolls ensuring a comfortable rest. Eldrin and Sebenzi had spent the evening discussing their plans for the next day, their conversation punctuated by laughter as they reminisced about past adventures. The central plateau loomed large in their minds, its mysteries calling to them like a siren’s song.

“If the map is accurate,” Eldrin had said, tracing the lines with his finger, “the plateau is where the totem-like symbol is marked. It could be the heart of the island’s power—or its greatest danger.”

Sebenzi had nodded, her expression thoughtful. “Either way, it’s where we need to go. But we’ll need to be careful. If the ritualists are tied to the Devourer, they might see us as a threat.”

Now, as the first light of dawn began to creep over the horizon, the pair stirred from their rest. The tent’s warmth lingered, a stark contrast to the cool morning air outside. They emerged, stretching and blinking in the pale light, ready to face the day’s challenges.

Eldrin prepared his daily prayers.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Prayer** | **Level** |
| Purify Food & Drink | 0 |
| Detect Magic | 0 |
| Detect Poison | 0 |
| Mending | 0 |
| Comprehend Languages | 1 |
| Cure Light Wounds | 1 |
| Obscuring Mist | 1 |
| Sanctuary | 1 |
| Shield of Faith | 1 |
| Cure Moderate Wounds | 2 |
| Barkskin | 2 |
| Hold Person | 2 |
| Hold Person | 2 |
| Spiritual Weapon | 2 |
| Footsteps of the Divine | 3 |
| Call Lightning | 3 |
| Stone Shape | 3 |
| Dispel Magic | 3 |

Sebenzi also prayed to Oghma for her daily favors.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Spell** | **Level** |
| Detect Magic | 0 |
| Detect Magic | 0 |
| Mending | 0 |
| Purify Food & Drink | 0 |
| Read Magic | 0 |
| Vision of Heaven | 1 |
| **Longstrider** | 1 |
| Sanctuary | 1 |
| Omen of Peril | 1 |
| Summon Monster I | 1 |
| **Detect Thoughts** | 2 |
| Enthrall | 2 |
| Find Traps | 2 |
| Lesser Telepathic Bond | 2 |
| **Fly** | 3 |
| Fly | 3 |
| Clairvoyance | 3 |

They then packed grabbed the dice and other things they’d studied last night, and journeyed to the central plateau, discussing strategies for dealing with potential dangers on the way.

“Based on the size of the tracks,” Eldrin estimated. “The size of the apex predators on the island ought to be no bigger than a horse. Island dwarfism greatly impacts the maximum food intake for a carnivore based on the limited availability of prey in a confined area such as this. We should be fine.”

“If not, we have our *teleport* wand,” Sebenzi reminded him. “No sabbatical is worth dying over.”

“Right.”

The pair moved northward, their path taking them deeper into the jungle. The terrain grew rougher, the ground rising steadily as they approached the central plateau. The air was thick with the scent of earth and vegetation, and the sounds of the island’s wildlife grew louder around them. Eldrin’s sharp eyes scanned the trail for signs of danger, while Sebenzi kept her senses alert for any hint of magic or traps.

As they climbed, the jungle began to thin, giving way to rocky outcroppings and sparse vegetation. The plateau loomed ahead, its towering cliffs a stark contrast to the dense jungle below. The map had marked this area with the totem-like symbol, and Eldrin couldn’t shake the feeling that they were walking into the heart of the island’s mystery.

Eldrin and Sebenzi paused at the base of the plateau, the towering cliffs casting long shadows over them. The path ahead was steep and treacherous, with loose rocks and narrow ledges. Eldrin glanced at Sebenzi, his expression serious. “Let’s take a moment to scout ahead. We don’t know what’s waiting for us up there.”

Sebenzi nodded, her hand already moving to her holy symbol. She murmured an incantation, and her eyes glowed faintly as she cast *detect magic*. The spell swept out in a 60-foot cone, revealing any magical auras in the area. Eldrin, meanwhile, focused his attention on the terrain, using his keen senses to search for traps or hidden dangers.

The *detect magic* spell revealed a faint aura of transmutation magic emanating from a cluster of rocks further up the path. The aura was weak but persistent, suggesting that the rocks might be enchanted or part of a larger magical construct. Sebenzi pointed it out to Eldrin, her voice low. “There’s something magical up there. It’s faint, but it’s definitely there.”

Eldrin’s Search check (1d20 + 11) revealed no obvious traps or hazards on the immediate path, but the loose rocks and steep drop-offs were dangerous enough on their own. He frowned, his eyes narrowing as he studied the enchanted rocks. “We’ll need to be careful. If those rocks are part of a trap or a ward, we could trigger something if we’re not cautious.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi exchanged a glance, their curiosity piqued by the faint magical aura emanating from the cluster of rocks. “Let’s take a closer look,” Eldrin said, his voice low. “If those rocks are enchanted, they might be part of a trap—or a clue.”

Sebenzi nodded, her hand still glowing faintly from the *detect magic* spell. “I’ll keep an eye out for any changes in the aura. You check for physical triggers.”

The pair approached the rocks cautiously, their movements slow and deliberate. Eldrin knelt beside the cluster, his sharp eyes scanning for any signs of mechanisms or hidden compartments. The rocks were jagged and uneven, their surfaces weathered by time and the elements. As he examined them, he noticed faint carvings—more of the wave and spiral symbols they had seen before.

“These carvings match the ones from the ruin and the ritual site,” Eldrin said, his voice tinged with excitement. “They’re definitely connected to the entity. But what’s their purpose here?”

Sebenzi’s *detect magic* spell revealed that the aura was strongest at the base of the largest rock. She pointed it out to Eldrin, her voice hushed. “The magic is concentrated here. It’s like... a focal point.”

Eldrin carefully brushed away the dirt and debris at the base of the rock, revealing a small, circular indentation. The indentation was lined with the same wave and spiral symbols, and it seemed to be designed to hold something—a key, perhaps, or a talisman.

“This looks like a trigger,” Eldrin said, his tone cautious. “If we had the right object, we might be able to activate it. But without knowing what it does, it’s too risky to try.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi exchanged a glance, their minds racing with possibilities. “If this indentation requires a specific object,” Eldrin said, his voice low, “it might be something we’ve already found. Let’s search the area—and check our gear.”

Sebenzi nodded, her eyes scanning the immediate surroundings. She began to methodically search the ground near the rocks, her sharp eyes looking for any small objects that might fit the circular indentation. Eldrin, meanwhile, opened his haversack and began to sift through its contents, pulling out the bone dice, the rusted sword, and the water-damaged scroll.

“The bone dice,” Sebenzi said, her voice tinged with excitement. “They’re the right size, and they’re covered in the same symbols. Maybe they’re the key.”

Eldrin held up one of the dice, comparing it to the indentation. The size and shape seemed to match, and the carvings on the dice aligned with the symbols around the indentation. “It’s worth a try,” he said, though his tone was cautious. “But we need to be ready for anything. This could trigger a trap—or something worse.”

Sebenzi stepped back, her hand resting on her holy symbol. “I’ll keep *sanctuary* ready, just in case. If something goes wrong, we’ll need to act quickly.”

Eldrin nodded, his expression serious. He carefully placed the bone dice into the indentation, the carvings aligning perfectly. For a moment, nothing happened. Then, with a low rumble, the ground beneath them began to shake. The rocks shifted, their surfaces glowing faintly as the magic within them activated.

Sebenzi drew her quarterstaff, and Eldrin his light crossbow, ensuring that the bolt was securely loaded.

The wave-symbol talisman does not fit the circular indentation as precisely as the bone dice, but it does align with some of the smaller grooves around the edges of the indentation. It’s possible that the talisman could be used in conjunction with the dice or as part of a secondary mechanism, but its exact purpose isn’t immediately clear.

Sebenzi gripped her quarterstaff tightly, her eyes fixed on the glowing rocks as the ground continued to tremble. Eldrin stood beside her, his light crossbow loaded and ready, the bolt aimed at the cluster of rocks. The air was thick with tension, the faint hum of magic growing louder as the mechanism activated.

The rocks shifted again, their surfaces now glowing with a soft, pulsating light. The wave and spiral symbols carved into them seemed to come alive, their lines shimmering as if filled with liquid light. A low, resonant tone filled the air, vibrating through the ground and into their bones.

Suddenly, the largest rock split open, revealing a hidden compartment. Inside was a small, intricately carved stone box, its surface covered in the same wave and spiral symbols. The box radiated a faint aura of magic, its presence both alluring and ominous.

Eldrin and Sebenzi exchanged a glance, their weapons still at the ready. “Should we open it?” Sebenzi asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Eldrin hesitated, his mind racing. “It could be a trap,” he said. “But it might also hold answers—or something we can use.”

OOC: Examine the box further using *detect magic* or other abilities to determine its properties.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Eldrin:**  **Relevant Skills** | **Rank** | **Ability**  **& Mod.** | **Misc.**  **Mods.** | **Total** |
| **Concentration** | 4 | **Con (+0)** | 0 | 4 |
| **Craft: Alchemy** | 1 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 6 |
| **Decipher Script** | 4 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: Arcana** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 13 |
| **Knowledge: History** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: Local** | 5 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 10 |
| **Knowledge: Nobility & Royalty** | 1 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 6 |
| **Knowledge: Nature** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: The Planes** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Knowledge: Religion** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 |
| **Search** | 4 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 11 |
| **Spellcraft** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 2 | 13 |
| **Spot** | 0 | **Wis (+2)** | 0 | 2 |
| **Use Magic Device** | 1 | **Cha (+1)** | 2 | 4 |

Please use whichever skills are relevant to analyzing any synergies, functions, or other properties of the box, talisman, dice, rocks, necklace, and other relevant objects in this caper, including the Devourer of the Deep.

Eldrin and Sebenzi divined and otherwise uncovered the following, with Sebenzi jotting most of their findings in her journal:

**Stone Box**

* **Detect Magic:** The box radiates a strong aura of **Transmutation** and **Evocation** magic. The Transmutation suggests it alters or transforms something, while the Evocation implies it releases energy or summons something.
* **Spellcraft (1d20 + 13):** The box is likely a **ritual focus** tied to the Devourer of the Deep. It may contain a fragment of the entity’s power or serve as a conduit for its influence.
* **Knowledge (Arcana) (1d20 + 13):** The carvings on the box match the symbols seen in the ruin and the ritual site, confirming its connection to the entity. It might be used to summon, control, or communicate with the Devourer.
* **Knowledge (Religion) (1d20 + 11):** The box could be a **sacred relic** used in the rituals to appease or invoke the entity. Opening it might trigger a divine or profane effect.

**Wave-Symbol Talisman**

* **Detect Magic:** The talisman radiates a faint aura of **Abjuration** and **Divination** magic. It may offer protection or provide insight.
* **Spellcraft (1d20 + 13):** The talisman could be a **warding charm**, designed to protect the bearer from the Devourer’s influence or to detect its presence.
* **Knowledge (Arcana) (1d20 + 13):** The wave symbols suggest it’s tied to the sea or natural cycles, possibly acting as a key to unlock certain mechanisms (like the rocks).

**Bone Dice**

* **Detect Magic:** The dice radiate a faint aura of **Divination** and **Enchantment** magic. They are likely used for ritual divination or to influence outcomes.
* **Spellcraft (1d20 + 13):** The dice are **ritual tools**, used to determine the timing or success of the Devourer’s rituals. They might also be used to communicate with the entity.
* **Knowledge (Religion) (1d20 + 11):** The dice are tied to the cyclical nature of the Devourer’s power, possibly used to predict its movements or demands.

**Necklace of Animal Teeth**

* **Detect Magic:** The necklace radiates a faint aura of **Enchantment** magic. It may have a protective or empowering effect.
* **Spellcraft (1d20 + 13):** The necklace is likely a **talisman of favor**, granting the wearer some measure of protection or status among the ritualists.
* **Knowledge (Religion) (1d20 + 11):** The teeth are symbolic of the Devourer’s hunger, possibly marking the wearer as a chosen servant or offering.

**Rocks and Mechanism**

* **Detect Magic:** The rocks radiate a strong aura of **Transmutation** and **Evocation** magic, tied to the mechanism.
* **Spellcraft (1d20 + 13):** The mechanism is a **ritual lock**, designed to open or activate only when the correct objects (like the bone dice) are used. It may also serve as a ward to protect the box.
* **Knowledge (Arcana) (1d20 + 13):** The rocks are part of a larger magical construct, possibly tied to the Devourer’s power or the island’s ley lines.

**Devourer of the Deep**

* **Knowledge (Religion) (1d20 + 11):** The Devourer is a primal entity tied to the sea, hunger, and natural cycles. It demands sacrifices and thrives on chaos and destruction.
* **Knowledge (The Planes) (1d20 + 11):** The Devourer may be a **quasi-deity** or **primordial force**, existing outside the standard divine hierarchy but wielding significant power.

The stone box is a ritual focus tied to the Devourer, likely containing a fragment of its power or serving as a conduit. The talisman and dice are ritual tools, possibly used to unlock mechanisms or communicate with the entity. The necklace may grant protection or status among the ritualists. The rocks and mechanism are part of a larger magical construct, tied to the island’s power and the Devourer’s influence.

Eldrin carefully removed the bone dice from the circular indentation, the faint glow of the rocks dimming slightly as the mechanism deactivated. He then took the wave-symbol talisman from his haversack, its smooth surface cool to the touch. The talisman fit perfectly into one of the smaller grooves around the indentation, its wave-like carvings aligning seamlessly with the symbols on the rocks.

As the talisman clicked into place, the ground beneath them trembled again, the rocks glowing with renewed intensity. The wave and spiral symbols shimmered brightly, and the air filled with a low, resonant hum. The largest rock shifted once more, revealing a second hidden compartment. Inside was a small, crystalline orb, its surface swirling with dark, liquid-like energy. The orb pulsed faintly, as if alive, and the aura of magic around it was overwhelming.

Sebenzi’s *detect magic* spell revealed that the orb radiated a powerful aura of **Conjuration** and **Evocation** magic. “This orb,” she said, her voice hushed, “it’s tied to the Devourer. I can feel its power. It’s... alive.”

Eldrin’s **Knowledge (Arcana)** and **Spellcraft** skills allowed him to recognize the orb as a **focus of summoning**—a tool used to call forth or control the entity it’s tied to. “This orb could be the key to summoning or banishing the Devourer,” he said, his tone grave. “But it’s dangerous. If we’re not careful, we could unleash something we can’t control.”

Eldrin hesitated for a moment, his hand hovering over the crystalline orb. The dark, liquid-like energy within it swirled ominously, and the aura of power it radiated was almost palpable. He glanced at Sebenzi, who nodded solemnly. “We can’t leave this here,” she said. “If the ritualists find it, they could use it to summon the Devourer—or worse.”

Eldrin took a deep breath and reached out, his fingers closing around the orb. The moment he touched it, a surge of energy shot through him, cold and electric. Visions flashed before his eyes—endless waves crashing against jagged rocks, a shadowy serpentine form rising from the depths, and a voice, deep and resonant, echoing in his mind.

*“You dare to wield my power, mortal?”*

The voice was the Devourer’s, and its presence was overwhelming. Eldrin staggered back, clutching the orb tightly as the visions faded. His hands trembled, but he held firm. “It’s... alive,” he said, his voice strained. “The entity—it’s aware of us now.”

Sebenzi stepped closer, her hand resting on his shoulder. “We need to be careful,” she said. “If the Devourer knows we have this, it might come for us—or send its followers.”

Eldrin nodded, his expression grim. He carefully placed the orb in his haversack, wrapping it in cloth to muffle its energy. “We’ll need to find a way to use this to banish the Devourer,” he said. “But first, we need to get off this plateau. If the ritualists sensed that surge, they’ll be coming.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi quickly moved away from the mechanism, finding a secluded spot among the rock outcroppings nearby. The plateau’s jagged cliffs provided ample cover, and they crouched low, their eyes scanning the area for signs of movement. Eldrin carefully unwrapped the crystalline orb, its dark energy pulsing faintly in his hands.

He wrote in his journal: “The orb has an indelible connection to the Devourer of the Deep, a **primordial entity** or **quasi-deity**, likely an **Outsider** or possibly an **Aberration**.” “We need to understand this,” Eldrin then whispered, his voice tense. “If we can learn how it works, we might be able to use it against the Devourer.”

Sebenzi nodded, her eyes glowing faintly as she cast *detect magic* again. The orb’s aura was overwhelming, a mix of **Conjuration** and **Evocation** magic that seemed to thrum with a life of its own.

Eldrin focused his mind, drawing on his **Dark Knowledge *[puissance]*** to glean insights about the Devourer itself. He recited the knowledge he received summarily: “The Devourer’s power is tied to the tides and lunar cycles. Its influence wanes during certain phases of the moon or when its rituals are disrupted, so with every passing day for the next fortnight or so, it will grow stronger. It is a predator, driven by hunger and a desire to consume. It values sacrifice and chaos, and its followers likely act as its agents on the island. We need to find the command word to channel through the orb to destroy the Devourer.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Eldrin, Skills** | **Rank** | **Ability**  **& Mod.** | **Misc.**  **Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Knowledge: Dungeoneering**  **(if it’s an Aberration)** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 | 10 | 21 |
| **Knowledge: The Planes**  **(if it’s an Outsider)** | 6 | **Int (+5)** | 0 | 11 | 9 | 20 |

*Both rolls beat DC 15, but not DC 25. Eldrin and Sebenzi gained +1 to Saves vs. the Devourer.*

Sebenzi nodded, her mind racing. “If the orb is tied to the Devourer, the command word might be hidden in the rituals or the carvings we’ve seen. Or maybe it’s something symbolic—a word or phrase tied to the sea or the entity’s nature.”

Eldrin’s eyes lit up. “The carvings,” he said. “The waves and spirals—they’re not just decorative. They’re a language. If we can decipher them, we might find the command word.”

Their knowledge of Deciphering Scripts and Arcana was ample, and Sebenzi now augmented hers with a *read magic* spell.

Sebenzi murmured the incantation for *read magic*, her eyes glowing faintly as the spell took effect. The carvings on the orb, the rocks, and the other artifacts they had collected suddenly became clearer, their intricate patterns resolving into a coherent script. The wave and spiral symbols were not just decorative—they formed a language, ancient and primal, tied to the Devourer and its rituals.

Eldrin leaned in, his sharp eyes scanning the newly revealed text. “This is it,” he said, his voice tinged with excitement. “The carvings are instructions—a ritual to activate the orb. And here,” he pointed to a series of symbols near the base of the orb, “this looks like the command word.”

The word was a series of flowing lines and spirals, but with *read magic* active, Sebenzi could now interpret it. “It says... ‘*Khalath’Duum*,’” she said, her voice soft but clear. “That must be the command word.”

“We don’t have time to turn this into a full-blown lecture,” Eldrin prefaced, “but this really is an instance of the knowledge-is-power axiom.”

“Axiom...” Sebenzi absentmindedly said as she considered the command word. “It’s more of a maxim, but sure.”

The Lawful gnome insisted, “It *is* an axiom, but in either case, this is why the savages haven’t been able to overcome the Devourer; they’re illiterate bumpkins.”

“Don’t look down on them for that,” Sebenzi counseled her mentor. “We all came from such humble origins.”

“Hmmm, yeah, but it’s been a while since,” Eldrin mumbled. “We have to consider that this word may not destroy the monster, but rather summon it, or embolden it.”

Sebenzi sighed, expressing frustration, “So what now?”

“Unless you can think of a reason to stay, we should continue towards the plateau,” Eldrin said, and the cleric agreed.

Eldrin and Sebenzi packed up their gear, the crystalline orb carefully secured in Eldrin’s haversack. The command word *“Khalath’Duum”* echoed in their minds, a key to either salvation or disaster. The path ahead was steep and treacherous, the rocky terrain giving way to sheer cliffs and narrow ledges as they ascended the plateau.

As they climbed, the air grew cooler, and the sounds of the jungle below faded into the distance. The plateau’s summit loomed above, its jagged outline cutting into the sky. Eldrin’s sharp eyes scanned the path for dangers, while Sebenzi kept her senses alert for any signs of magic or the Devourer’s followers.

After an hour of careful climbing, they reached a flat area near the summit. The ground was littered with more of the wave and spiral carvings, and at the center of the clearing stood a large stone altar. The altar was covered in the same symbols, and a circular indentation in its surface matched the size and shape of the crystalline orb.

“This must be the place,” Eldrin said, his voice low. “The ritual site. If we’re going to use the orb, it has to be here.”

Sebenzi nodded, her expression serious. “But we need to be sure. If we activate the orb and it summons the Devourer instead of banishing it...”

Eldrin frowned, wrinkling his forehead under his Headband of Intellect, and checking his chronocharm and seeing 10:30 on the display. “We’ll need to double-check the carvings. There might be more instructions here—something we missed.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi set to work, their movements methodical and precise. Eldrin activated his *detect magic* spell, while Sebenzi maintained her *read magic* to interpret the carvings. The pair spent the next ten rounds meticulously examining the altar and its surroundings, their eyes scanning every inch of the stone surface for clues.

The carvings were intricate, their wave and spiral patterns forming a complex web of symbols and text. Eldrin’s **Decipher Script** and **Knowledge (Arcana)** skills allowed him to piece together the meaning of the carvings, while Sebenzi’s *read magic* spell illuminated the hidden layers of the script.

They came to understand:

**Carvings and Symbols**

* **Wave and Spiral Patterns:** These symbols represent the Devourer’s connection to the sea and natural cycles. They also form a language that describes the entity’s nature and the rituals tied to it.
* **Indentations:** The altar has several indentations that match the artifacts you’ve collected:
  + A circular slot for the **crystalline orb**.
  + A smaller indentation shaped like the **wave-symbol talisman**.
  + A series of grooves that align with the **bone dice**.
* **Additional Phrases:** The carvings include the phrase *“Khalath’Duum”* repeated several times, along with other words like *“Tide’s Embrace”* and *“Cycle’s End.”*

**Meanings and Functions**

* **Khalath’Duum:** This phrase translates to **“Unmake the Deep”** or **“Banish the Abyss.”** It is the command word to activate the orb’s banishing function.
* **Tide’s Embrace:** This phrase refers to the **optimal time** to perform the ritual—during high tide or a specific lunar phase when the Devourer’s power is weakest.
* **Cycle’s End:** This phrase suggests that the ritual must be performed at a **specific location** (the altar) and requires the **correct artifacts** (orb, talisman, and dice) to succeed.

**Ritual Instructions**

1. Place the **crystalline orb** in the circular slot.
2. Insert the **wave-symbol talisman** into the smaller indentation.
3. Arrange the **bone dice** in the grooves according to the symbols carved around them.
4. Speak the command word *“Khalath’Duum”* during high tide or the waning moon to activate the ritual.

Eldrin stepped back, his eyes wide with realization. “It’s a banishing ritual,” he said, his voice filled with awe. “The orb, the talisman, the dice—they’re all part of it. And the command word... it means ‘Unmake the Deep.’ This is how we stop the Devourer.”

Sebenzi nodded, her expression a mix of relief and determination. “But we need to time it right. The carvings mention ‘Tide’s Embrace’—we’ll need to perform the ritual during high tide or the waning moon. And we’ll need to be ready for the Devourer’s followers. They won’t let us do this without a fight.”

With the waning moon overhead, Eldrin checked his chronocharm again. “High tide is in a few hours. We’ll need to prepare.”

Eldrin began to make a science out of choreographing their actions between the present and the expected high tide.

With time to spare, Sebenzi proposed a plan. “I have one casting of *clairvoyance/clairaudience* prepared. I had intended to use it on the place where we saw the cannibals releasing that smokey, swirly evil stuff so we could see what was happening there today, but there’s a likelihood that nothing’s going on there, so better yet, we should get about 500’ to 1000’ away from here, where we can still hear the cannibals if they get here and start making their signature ruckus. Once the tide is high, and we hear them, I can cast *clairvoyance* and we can see what they’re doing. If it’s a summoning, this will allow us to come in—maybe flying—and put in effect the ritual to “Banish the Abyss”, she interpreted the writing slightly differently than “Unmake the Deep”. It’ll take me 10 minutes to cast the spell, and will last 5 minutes. How long does it seem like the ritual would take the cannibals? If it’s less than 15 minutes, this plan may be moot. Do we have to be at the altar to do this?”

“I believe so,” Eldrin said. “The talisman, orb, and dice all need to be here.”

Eldrin considered Sebenzi’s plan, his brow furrowed in thought. “If we’re 500 to 1,000 feet away, we’ll still be close enough to hear them if they arrive,” he said. “And your *clairvoyance* spell could give us a crucial advantage. But we’ll need to time it perfectly. If their ritual takes less than 15 minutes, we might not have enough time to intervene.”

Sebenzi nodded, her expression serious. “Then we’ll need to be ready to move quickly. If we hear them start, I’ll cast *clairvoyance* immediately. Once we know what they’re doing, we can decide whether to fly in and activate the banishing ritual.”

Eldrin glanced at the altar, his eyes lingering on the indentations for the orb, talisman, and dice. “We’ll need to set everything up in advance,” he said. “If we wait until the last moment, we might not have time. But if we place the artifacts now, we risk the cannibals discovering them and disrupting our plan.”

Sebenzi frowned. “It’s a risk, but we don’t have much choice. If we don’t set up the artifacts beforehand, we won’t be able to activate the ritual in time.”

Eldrin sighed, nodding reluctantly. “You’re right. Let’s set everything up now, but keep the command word to ourselves. If the cannibals find the artifacts, they won’t know how to use them.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi carefully placed the artifacts on the altar, their movements deliberate and precise. The **crystalline orb** fit snugly into the circular slot, its dark energy pulsing faintly. The **wave-symbol talisman** clicked into place in the smaller indentation, its carvings aligning perfectly with the surrounding symbols. Finally, they arranged the **bone dice** in the grooves, their wave and spiral patterns forming a cohesive design with the rest of the carvings.

As the last artifact was set in place, the altar seemed to hum with latent power, the air around it growing heavy with anticipation. Eldrin and Sebenzi stepped back, their eyes fixed on the altar as they waited to see if anything would happen.

For a moment, there was only silence. Then, a faint glow began to emanate from the carvings, the wave and spiral symbols lighting up one by one. The glow spread across the altar, converging on the orb, which pulsed with a steady rhythm. The air grew colder, and a low, resonant tone filled the clearing, vibrating through the ground and into their bones.

Eldrin’s sharp eyes scanned the area, his hand resting on his crossbow. “It’s working,” he said, his voice low. “The altar is active. But we’ll need to be ready. If the cannibals sense this, they’ll come.”

Sebenzi nodded, her grip tightening on her quarterstaff. “We’ll hold our ground. If they show up, we’ll use the command word and end this.”

Eldrin straightened, his expression thoughtful. “These phrases aren’t alternate commands,” he said. “They’re instructions. *‘Tide’s Embrace’* tells us when to perform the ritual, and *‘Cycle’s End’* tells us how. We need to wait for high tide and make sure the artifacts are arranged correctly.”

Sebenzi nodded, her eyes scanning the horizon. “High tide is in a few hours. We’ll need to be ready. If the cannibals show up before then, we’ll have to hold them off.”

Investigating further, they considered a ploy wherein Sebenzi would be disguised as some horrible manifestation of the Devourer, along with the tooth necklace, and she would try to pass herself off as the avatar leading the ritual.

Sebenzi added: “I can then motion for their shamans to conjure the Devourer, and you—my loyal subject—would be by the altar, and would set up the undoing ritual from there... I’d hand you the necklace at that moment.”

Eldrin worried: “It leaves a lot to chance. What if they don’t buy the farse? What if they want to sacrifice you as part of the ordeal?”

Eldrin frowned, considering Sebenzi’s plan. “The banishing ritual itself doesn’t require a sacrifice,” he said, his voice low. “But the cannibals’ summoning ritual likely does. If you try to pass yourself off as the Devourer’s avatar, they might expect you to demand a sacrifice—or worse, decide you’re the offering.”

Sebenzi’s expression was resolute. “It’s a risk, but it might be our best chance. If I can convince them I’m the Devourer’s avatar, I can buy you the time you need to activate the ritual. And if they try to sacrifice me, I’ll have *sanctuary* ready.”

Eldrin hesitated, his mind racing through the possibilities. “If we do this, we’ll need to be precise. The banishing ritual will only take me a few seconds, but if they see what I’m doing, they’ll try to stop me. You’ll need to keep their attention focused on you.”

Sebenzi nodded. “I can do that. I’ll use *enthrall* to keep them distracted, and if things go south, I’ll cast *sanctuary* to protect myself.”

Eldrin considered the details of the *enthrall* spell, his brow furrowed in thought. “If you cast *enthrall*, you might be able to keep them captivated long enough to convince them you’re the avatar,” he said. “But it’s a delicate balance. If they sense anything off, the spell could break, and they’ll turn on you.”

Sebenzi nodded, her expression determined. “I’ll need to play the part perfectly. If I can keep them focused on me, you’ll have the time you need to activate the ritual. But if things go wrong, I’ll have *sanctuary* ready.”

Eldrin hesitated, then sighed. “It’s too risky, and we will likely not accomplish much. The best we can do with it is to have you cast it *after* they’ve summoned the creature. You target the shaman and as many others as the spell will allow, and the rest will likely hesitate when they see their leadership enthralled.”

“That’ll buy you the time you need to get to the altar and undo the Devourer,” Sebenzi nodded.

Sebenzi nodded, her expression serious. “Then we’ll need to be ready. If the cannibals summon the Devourer, I’ll cast *enthrall* on the shaman and as many others as I can. That should buy you the time you need to activate the ritual.”

Eldrin hesitated, then sighed. “It’s risky, but it might be our only option. Just... be careful. When the Devourer is summoned, things could get out of hand quickly.”

“Agreed then,” Sebenzi smiled at her friend and mentor. “It’s good to be working with you, Eldrin.”

“Feeling’s mutual,” Eldrin replied. “Now, the cannibal settlement is to the south, so that’s where they’ll be coming from; let’s get about 1000’ north of here—almost ¼ of a mile—and make sure we have a vantage to this place.” He scanned northward, looking for any spot in that general direction to which he had a direct line of sight. “There,” he said, “let’s go behind those rocks.”

The gnome and human took the talisman and other artifacts with them, and made way there. “If we use the bushes and go the long way around, it’ll prevent us from being spotted until we’re about 100’ away from the altar. We’ll have to cover about 1500’ through that roundabout path there,” he pointed to a path that they could see only now that they’d been making way northward.

“Perfect,” Sebenzi liked their odds now. “I’ll cast *enthrall* as soon as we get to right about here, and you can maybe keep sneaking through those bushes and rocks there, doing gnome things until you get within the vicinity of the altar, whereupon you can interface with it, hopefully with a fully enthralled audience of cannibals around us.”

The archivist smiled. “Don’t count on them all being enthralled. Some of them will just be bewildered by the fact that their shaman is digging your vibe.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi moved carefully, their steps light and deliberate as they followed the roundabout path northward. The bushes and rocks provided ample cover, and they made good time, reaching their chosen vantage point without incident. From there, they had a clear line of sight to the altar, though they were far enough away to remain hidden.

Sebenzi crouched behind a large rock, her eyes fixed on the altar. “I’ll cast *enthrall* as soon as we see them,” she said, her voice low. “That should give you enough time to get into position.”

Eldrin shook his head, his expression serious. “Not when we see them; we’ll still be here, 1000’ away. You want to be about 100’ away, then, when they see you, you cast it.”

Eldrin’s correction made Sebenzi pause, her brow furrowing as she reconsidered her plan. “You’re right,” she said, her voice low. “If I cast *enthrall* from here, it won’t reach them. We’ll need to get closer—about 100 feet away. That’s where I’ll make my move.”

Eldrin nodded, his expression serious. “We’ll need to time it perfectly. If we move too soon, they might spot us. If we move too late, they’ll already be starting their ritual.”

Sebenzi glanced at the path ahead, her eyes tracing the route they would need to take. “We’ll wait until they’re fully focused on the altar,” she said. “Then we’ll move in. I’ll cast *enthrall* as soon as I’m in range, and you’ll sneak closer to the altar while they’re distracted.”

Eldrin adjusted his spectacles, his gaze scanning the terrain. “It’s risky, but it’s our best shot. Just... be careful. If they see you too soon, this whole plan falls apart.”

Sebenzi smiled faintly. “I will. And you—stay hidden until the last moment. If they see you too soon, we’re both in trouble.”

“Alright, and now, before anything else, I’m going to go poop,” Eldrin said. “This isn’t a movie, after all, and a dude’s gotta do his thing.”

“A girl too,” and they went off to relieve themselves, coming back a few minutes later ready for what might come.

Eldrin cast *barkskin [expired in 60 minutes]*, and missed his wolfhound back in Waterdeep.

Sebenzi cast *longstrider [expired in 5 hours]*, and said, “Another thing I’ll do before showing up and casting *enthrall* is to cast *omen of peril* prior to, and just see what kind of outcome Oghma says I should expect.”

“Just don’t get too confident if he says everything will go well; that just means we have to try that much harder to manifest that destiny,” Eldrin paraphrased some Oghman scripture.

“I can cast *telepathic bond* as well, making sure you and I are in communication the whole time,” regardless of where you’re sneaking about.

“Cool.”

Eldrin and Sebenzi took a moment to attend to their needs, finding a secluded spot among the rocks to relieve themselves. When they returned, they were refreshed and ready for what lay ahead. Eldrin cast *barkskin* on himself, his skin taking on a rough, bark-like texture that would provide some protection in the coming confrontation. As the spell took effect, he couldn’t help but think of his wolfhound back in Waterdeep, wishing for the comfort of a loyal companion in this dangerous place.

Sebenzi, meanwhile, cast *longstrider*, her steps becoming swift and sure. She then turned her attention to *omen of peril*, murmuring a quiet prayer to Oghma. Her eyes glazed over for a moment as the vision came to her—a fleeting image of a stormy sea, waves crashing against jagged rocks. The vision was neither reassuring nor dire, but it carried a sense of urgency.

“The omen is... unclear,” she said, her voice thoughtful. “A stormy sea. It could mean danger, but it could also mean change. We’ll need to be ready for anything.”

Eldrin nodded, his expression serious. “Just don’t get too confident if Oghma says everything will go well. That just means we have to try that much harder to manifest that destiny.”

Sebenzi smiled faintly. “I know. And I’ll cast *lesser telepathic bond* as well, so we can stay in communication no matter where you’re sneaking about.”

Eldrin raised an eyebrow. “Cool.”

Sebenzi cast *lesser telepathic bond*, the spell forming a mental link between her and Eldrin. She tested it briefly, sending a thought his way: *“Can you hear me?”*

Eldrin’s voice echoed in her mind, clear and immediate: *“Loud and clear. This will make things easier.”*

Sebenzi nodded, her expression resolute. “We’re ready,” she said aloud. “Let’s move into position.”

The pair crept closer to the altar, staying low and using the terrain for cover. They stopped about 100 feet away, close enough for Sebenzi to cast *enthrall* but far enough to remain hidden until the last moment. Eldrin found a spot among the rocks where he could observe the altar while staying out of sight.

Sebenzi crouched behind a bush, her eyes fixed on the path leading to the altar. “As soon as they arrive, I’ll move in and cast *enthrall*,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper. “You’ll know when to make your move.”

Eldrin nodded, his grip tightening on his crossbow. “Good luck,” he said, his tone serious. “I’ll be on comms the whole time.”

They held any further actions, watching the morning hesitantly unfold as the tide neared its zenith.

The morning sun climbed higher in the sky, its light filtering through the jungle canopy and casting dappled shadows across the plateau. Eldrin and Sebenzi waited in tense silence, their eyes fixed on the path leading to the altar. The air was thick with anticipation, the only sounds the rustling of leaves and the distant cries of seabirds.

Movement then caught their attention. A group of figures emerged from the jungle, their painted bodies and feathered adornments marking them as the cannibals they had encountered before. There were about a dozen of them, led by the shaman who had presided over the earlier ritual. They moved with purpose, their steps rhythmic and deliberate, as if in tune with some unseen force.

The cannibals gathered around the altar, their voices rising in a low, guttural chant. The shaman raised his arms, his voice carrying over the others as he began the ritual. The air grew heavier, the faint scent of salt and decay wafting through the clearing.

Sebenzi’s voice echoed in Eldrin’s mind through the telepathic bond: *“They’re starting. I’ll move in now.”*

Eldrin’s response was immediate: *“Be careful. I’ll be ready.”*

Sebenzi crept closer, her movements silent and deliberate. When she was within range, she stepped into view, her posture commanding and her voice ringing out with authority. “Hold!” she called, her tone sharp and imperious. “The Devourer has sent me to guide you!”

The cannibals turned, their eyes widening in surprise. The shaman hesitated, his chant faltering as he took in Sebenzi’s appearance—the necklace of animal teeth, the confident stance, the aura of power she projected. Before they could react, Sebenzi cast *enthrall*, her voice weaving a spell of captivation.