

Princes of the Apocalypse

As told by Groin, LLC.

episode 1: the triboar trail

As the band waited for the mine to finish producing the shipment and prepared to go on tour, Crotch Dynamight spent long hours studying and researching the maps that were found in Wave Echo Cave. After consulting various sources, including the arcane, he came to the conclusion that he was, in fact, in possession of a map of the entrances to the lost Dwarven city of Besilmer, which was founded nearly six thousand years ago in -4420 DR and abandoned only three hundred years later. Crotch wondered if he could be the second person to learn of its location in that span of time (second only to whoever drew the maps). Its existence was so far back in the mists of history that only a handful of non-dwarf sages had even heard of it. The only mention Crotch had ever heard of the kingdom was a single line in a song that was thought by most to be myth.

The shipment of Platinum was prepared for the voyage, taking up the entirety of six ox-carts each, full to the brim with platinum, then covered with a layer of assorted goods and sundries for cover. The caravan crew was contracted out by Halia Thornton. The Caravan was to be led by the identical twin brothers Haylor and Bailor Thommadur, veterans from Neverwinter who have a reputation for being punctual, and a willingness to work with the shady Zhentarim.



Hi, I'm Bailor, this's my brother Haylor, this' my other... shit, I should've made them triplets

They gave their men specific orders to stay with their cart “no matter what”, if there should be trouble on the road, they were not to go chasing after any bandits. Each cart was assigned two drovers and two Zhentarim thugs, with Haylor and Bailor each on their own supply cart accompanied by three thugs apiece.

The band, feeling the heat from some recent overdoses in town that may or may not have been the fault of one of their members, decided not to waste time in the town that they had so obviously outgrown.

With a party of seven, they left Tressendor Manor in the capable hands of the roadies and set out with the caravan to secure the trade route.



On the Road again...

The first three days of their trip were uneventful, other than the strange weather that has been generating discussion among the townspeople of late. The first day of their journey saw them nearly flooded off the road by a thunderstorm that came without warning, inundated them with what seemed like an ocean's worth of water, and then cleared away as quickly as it has arrived. The second day of their journey was markedly hotter than previous days, with an unusually warm breeze coming in from the east. This put a strain on the oxen, and caused the Thommadur brothers to grumble about "falling behind" and "fools over-watering the beasts". At some point during the day, it occurred to a few members of the party that the vultures, which had been circling overhead all day, were not as close as they first seemed. As one of them passed through a cloud, it was evident that they were extremely high up and, therefore, gigantic. They kept a nervous eye to the sky for the rest of the trip.

They rode hard on the third day. Being blessed with mild weather for once they managed to make up any lost ground from yesterday's reduced pace and by evening they were back on schedule. Ganon and Scrotus were discussing the circling vultures; they had both noticed that they were not behaving in a manner one would expect. Every now and then one would make a figure-eight instead of a circle, or one would circle in the opposite direction as the others. Haylor, in the lead wagon, found what would be their last campsite before Triboar, and began to steer the wagons into a ring. As the men began to reach for their bedrolls and make camp for the night taking in their surrounding they all looked up to see orange lights tracing arcs through the sky in their direction, coming from a line of trees further off the path. One particularly dim witted Zhentarim thug let out an "Ooooooh", and was promptly elbowed in the ribs by his partner as the volley of flaming arrows struck one of the wagons.

Instantly, Haylor and Bailor began shouting orders to the drovers and guards, "Keep the wagons circling! Eyes on the Flanks! PUT OUT THAT FIRE!!" The Zhents climbed back onto their carts, a few of them running to help put out the fire spreading over the wagon that was targeted by all 17 arrows and struck

by at least six of them. The next few moments were a blur of each person trying to cover their rear and flanks, not knowing what to expect as the second volley of arrows sails overhead. The field on the other side of the road was pretty clear of cover, so the attack definitely seemed to be coming from only one direction so far.

“Get that wagon away from the others!” Ganon shouted. Scrotus responded by walking over to the ox that was still harnessed to the cart and gave the beast one chance to comply willingly. When that failed, he grabbed it by the yoke and dragged it ten feet from the circle, to a corner of the clearing where the fire was less likely to spread.

Trying to assess the situation, the party all took what cover they could find... all except for Scrotus. The arrows came from a copse of trees that *should* have been just out of range for a bow, and as everyone else tried to gauge how to get to the trees without drawing fire, Scrotus made an instant break for the tree-line screaming with rage.

At the same time, the fire on the wagon was getting out of hand. As the two Zhent Thugs assigned to it struggled to smother the fire, one of them got the idea to knock the burning items off the cart. This worked great, as the men could now put out a fire that was at their feet instead of reaching up on top of a cart. Unfortunately, even from the trees the bandits could see the firelight glinting off the brilliant platinum that was now revealed.

These two things happening in unison, the platinum being revealed and a Goliath Berserker coming at them full speed (and fully enraged), led to about half the bandits yelling “they’re loaded! It’s Platinum! Get them!” and the other half yelling “AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!! They have a GOLIATH!! HE’S COMING!!!! RUUUUUUUN!!!!!!!!!!”



Fire at ME from the bushes!?!?

As Scrotus, Diamachus, Perry, Skelator, and Crotch all advanced into the tree line, Ganon and Kassius were left with the caravan in case there was a second wave on its way. Haylor and Bailor were arguing about the next logical move. Haylor was adamantly insisting that they move the caravan, and run hard to reach town by midnight. Bailor was just as sure that they would be doing exactly what the bandits wanted, and that they would be disrupting the enemy's plans if they were to hunker down and defend their position. The debate went on as the wagons continued to circle until eventually, the Heroes managed to convince the brothers to at least temporarily stop the wagons.

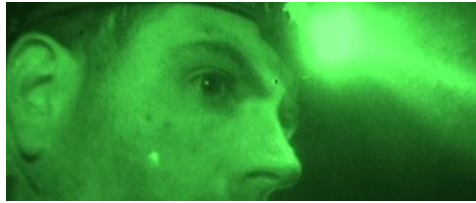


Who was supposed to bring the hot dogs?

With arrows passing inches from his head and shoulders, Scrotus reached the tree line and was immediately attacked by a figure darting from behind a tree. While he dispatched his attacker, his allies had made their way to both of the tree line's flanks. The ring of steel and crackle of the arcane began to weave between the trees. Perry managed to gain the advantage of surprise on an archer who was still looking for targets in the clearing. He disarmed and disabled him, and when a nearby bandit fired an arrow in defense of his friend, the Halfling Monk caught the arrow and threw it back. Perry's counter attack missed but managed to scare the bandit enough to make him turn and run, only to be immediately tackled by Scrotus. The bandit proved to be stubborn as he managed to free himself from the hands of his attacker, scrambling another fifteen feet away before finally ending up securely in the possession of an angry Goliath. On the far end of the tree line, Crotch and Skelator had busily taken out their share of bandits, and as the Dragonborn's eldritch power fried his third victim, the blue crackling light emanating from his fingers reflected off the backs of the remaining bandits, all in retreat. The advancing party had managed to rout the bandits, sending those who were still able fleeing down the steep slope behind the trees, and disappearing into the thick brush beyond. The conflict was short, and almost seemed too easy to put the men at ease. Scrotus carried his prisoner back to camp, with Crotch and Skelator close behind. Perry and Diamachus decided to follow the fleeing bandits and see where they may have gone (without telling the rest of the party).

After identifying a number of deer-paths that led into the brush Diamachus arbitrarily picked the second path on the right and they started creeping along with Perry in the lead. After a short distance, Diamachus began to hear murmuring voices. He pulled on the back of Perry's shirt, and tried to signal

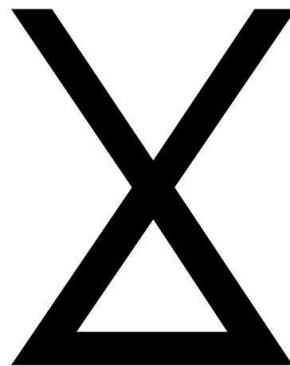
that he had heard something, but the voices abruptly stopped. Diamachus and Perry had a little bit of a Destination Truth moment as they tried to freak out as quietly as possible.



SHUSH! Did you hear that??

Unfortunately, they didn't freak out quietly enough, and the bandits sent out a few scouts to see who was approaching their rendezvous. After a few moments of quiet the scouts were upon them and a brief melee broke out.

Ganon, trying to get a little information out of their new friend, found that their prisoner was immune to his attempts at both good cop *and* bad cop. Scrotus, Crotch, and Skelator left camp to find their two missing companions. They managed to discern which path they took by following the freshest tracks, and caught up with them just as Diamachus finished off the last scout. They investigated the bodies, finding evidence that these men appeared to be of a nautical vocation. They smelled like saltwater, they had shells woven into their hair, one of them had a shield that was made out of some type of shelled creature, and most of them had tattoos of anchors, steering wheels, and mermaids. There was one other tattoo that was found on all but one of the bandits (generally less beat-up looking than the others, she was assumed to be a new recruit), a sigil that nobody had ever seen before:



Knowing that Scrotus was of barbarous origins, and might have experience skinning and tanning hides, Perry asked if he could remove the tattoo so they could keep it as evidence. Scrotus looked at him funny, picked up the corpse, and proceeded to pluck the arm right off as if he were picking a flower.

Perry, eyes wide, accepted the arm with a stammered "thanks".

Back at the campsite, they made a combined group effort to interrogate their prisoner. The first method they tried was waterboarding. They held his body down, put a cloth over his face, and poured

the water. The party had never tried waterboarding someone, but they had reasonable expectations. They expected coughing, they expected sputtering and they expected spitting. They even expected some screaming in between buckets of water being poured. What they did not expect was to hear chanting. As the water was poured onto his face he began a fast string of syllables that repeated, and, in between phrases, continued to breathe normally despite the water. He even laughed a little at some point, breaking the trance this seemed hold over the party. They all snapped out of their frozen, confused stares and took a moment to reassess.

Kassius took a step back to study their prisoner. While he had chanted, there was something strange happening. In the back of his mind Kassius felt and heard something faint and far. It was the rage of his patron, a dark ancient being lurking at the far end of the universe. He could feel the familiar madness that his master usually brought as the presence grew stronger and the screaming in his mind grew, only dying down after the chanting stopped. Something about this magic had angered an Old One...

After spending a good deal of time trying unsuccessfully to get him to talk using almost every form of compulsion they could think of (even going to the lengths of using a bandit corpse to attempt a bit of theatre in which they interrogate and dismember one of his allies), it looked hopeless. This guy simply wouldn't talk. They were just about to give up when, inexplicably and to the astonishment of all, this tight-lipped captive who had refused to yield a single word suddenly began pouring out the answers to every question they had asked, and more. The man, now freshly soiled and dripping with blood, sweat, and urine, was unloading the whole story;



Jonas had been a sailor up until a few months ago. He had decided that, in order to make a real living, it would be better to drop the oar and pick up a sword. Being a mercenary on a ship not only paid more, but also looked like a lot less work than nautical labor. He joined up with a group of mercenaries who were patrolling the Dessarin River, guarding the busy trade lanes from pirates. As their ranks swelled and they successfully managed to curb piracy on the river, the nature of his missions started changing. Instead of only attacking ships that flew black flags, they had begun receiving orders to hit ships that appeared civilian. They were told that the pirates were merely disguising themselves as merchants, which was very believable. He had noticed, however, that the "pirates" were very poorly armed, and did not fight with the conviction of a criminal. Then things really changed...

Jolliver Grimjaw, the big hairy brute of a man who led the mercenaries at Riverguard Keep, had begun sending his men on "Land Missions", which not only didn't make sense, it went against all their training. The reavers and pirates that made up their ranks were simply not accustomed to working on dry land, and it showed in the effectiveness of their tactics. Not only that, but their orders seemed to drop all

pretense of legitimacy and started using language like “plunder”, “raid”, and “steal”. As it became clear that they were slowly turning into the pirates he had sworn to fight, the reason became even clearer; Riverguard Keep was being taken over by water-worshipping mad-men. Even Grimjaw was beginning to sound like a zealot, and Jonas had to wonder if they believed the things they said about one day ruling over a world covered by water.

The next morning they broke camp and cautiously made for Triboar, reaching it by late morning with no sign of a second attack. The band dispersed into town, each with their own agenda;

Kassius kept watch over the caravan, wanting to stay close to their prisoner. It was clear that these two men were uncomfortable around each other, though none could see why, in particular. Skelator, being the band’s manager, had business to attend to regarding the upcoming show. He gave flyers to Diamachus and Ganon, who both walked about town handing out the printed sheets. Diamachus managed to appeal to the town’s seedier residents by handing the flyer over with purchase of his “spell components”, while Ganon relied on his charm to win the town’s good folk over with the natural appeal of a Paladin. Scrotus decided to set up his Great Drums and do some busking just outside of town, at a junction where anyone who wanted to travel in or out of town would have to pass within ear splitting distance of the furious racket. After a few hours, he was seen leaving the area with a group of Human Barbarians, his drums held over his shoulder and a flagon of mead in one hand.

Crotch Dynamight was initially handed a stack of flyers, like Ganon and Diamachus. This proved to be short lived, however, for when the three adventurers on “Flyer detail” walked into the first tavern they came across they were greeted by the merry cheers of three Dwarves, travelers who were glad to see their first fellow Dwarf in two tendays. Crotch immediately handed his stack to Ganon and said “I’m busy” then to the barkeep “Next round on me, FILL’EM UP!!” The Dwarves cheered again.



Beldrin



Rhundorth

Beldrin was the first to introduce himself and his party. He explained that he was Rhundorth's assistant "which means I do all the real work so he can just swing his sword", and that they were part of a very important delegation from Mirabar on the way to Waterdeep "getting our asses kissed by every town-master, mayor, and councilman we meet!" Rhundorth, he explained, was a great warrior who had served all his life in defense of Mirabar and was being honored in Waterdeep with a statue for saving the life of some noble's great-granddaddy in his youth. He introduced Bruldenthlar, "our professional reader", who gave a polite nod as he puffed his pipe, but remained quietly tied to the book he was leafing through.

As the day went on, and Crotch's rowdy drinking songs gave way to ballads, he chose to play the song that had been on his mind since his work on the map. It was the song that mentioned Besilmer. At this, Bruldenthlar lowered his pipe, closed the book and his eyes, and listened. When the song had finished, he leaned forward and immediately dragged Crotch into a conversation that dominated the rest of their time together. As it turns out, Bruldenthlar had just finished a treatise on the nation of Besilmer, his latest in a series that was to be placed in one of Waterdeep's most prestigious libraries at the end of their journey, where he would spend the rest of his days as curator. He was quite the leading historian on many different subjects, and Besilmer was one that had always fascinated him. "Just imagine, a nation of Dwarves *above* the ground, with fields of crops to tend..." Crotch told him about the map, and his theory on its content. "This would be quite a find, if it's true. I would love to see this map!" Unfortunately, the map was back with the caravan, and the Delegation was being summoned for one last round of ass-kissing before heading along on their journey. This dilemma was resolved with the realization that the Delegation should end up arriving in Red Larch ahead of Groin, and was planning on spending a few days there. This would not only give them a chance to discuss the map, it would also give the Delegation a chance to see Groin play, something they were all looking forward to after making such fast friends with Crotch.



Bruldenthlar Stahl

After bidding his new friends a safe journey, Crotch met up with the rest of his party, who were all at the caravan discussing the absence of Scrotus. They asked around a bit, and heard that he had been seen leaving the area with a group of barbarians. The caravan was starting to move with or without them, so they were forced to leave town short one member.

As the caravan lumbered east along the Evermoor Way, everyone was on guard for another attack. The bandits knew what was in their carts, and as a horn sounded from a nearby hilltop, Jonas, their captive from the first raid, chuckled. “*there’s* the conch...”

“What’s ‘the conch’?” Ganon asked.

“you know, those shells... they’re about this big...” he held his bound hands up to show size.

“We know what A conch is, what does the signal *mean*?” interrupted Diamachus.

“oh, well...” Jonas replied, and looked off into the distance expectantly. Another conch sounded from farther up the trail, accompanied by one more that came from back the way they had come. Jonas smiled despondently. “Here they come.”

Another half-minute later a second pair of horns could heard, as if from even farther in either direction. The caravan kept moving as everyone tried to prepare for what they knew was coming. It started with five flaming arrows from a rank of bandits that hadn’t even bothered to take real cover, they stood atop a ridge off the trail. As they reloaded their bows, a second rank released another volley. The two ranks were close together, and in the same direction. Haylor and Bailor began laughing despite themselves at the amateurish tactics these bandits brought to the fight. “Do we even need to watch our flanks this time, brother?” one of them asked. “They know what’s in these wagons,” replied the other, “they’ve been up all night planning on how to spend the money! They forgot to plan an attack! Hah!” Swords drawn, the two veteran mercenaries stood atop their carts and shouted orders to their men.



There’s, like, 20 of us! We don’t need tactics!

Kassius sent a flare of blue energy in the bandit's direction, but the spell wavered and fizzled out before it reached them. As the motley assailants whooped in delight at this, Crotch set off a shattering blast that scattered their line. Skelator climbed on top of a wagon, and made an intimidating figure, using his breath weapon to destroy as many as three enemies with one blast, while using the advantageous position to stay out of melee. This sight, the Dragonborn atop the wagon spewing electrical death, shattered whatever resolve their knowledge of the prize may have given the bandits. Diamachus engaged one of the few to break rank and rush the caravan while Perry finished off a survivor of the dragon breath. Taking a defensive stance, the Halfling gestured for the large man he now faced to approach.

Having stayed on the other side of the caravan, Ganon and Kassius saw the approach of another group from the rear armed with crossbows and Ganon charged. Kassius let loose an eldritch blast which struck one man square in the chest, sending him flying into the woods.

Crotch ran into what remained of the two squads on his side of the line, engaging combatants who were suddenly more concerned with making an escape. The man facing Perry gritted his teeth and let a low laugh rumble from his chest as he advanced on the miniscule monk. With a blur of movement he was on the ground, dead with a Halfling standing on his neck.

As Ganon got within sword range of the remaining archers, Kassius' next blast did most of its damage to Ganon's back. Despite this, they managed to fight or scare off whatever archers were left as the field began to clear.

With the bandits broken, the team regrouped and managed to get the rest of the way to Yartar in peace, save for a few nervous glances at the sky from time to time. At least the vultures were no longer circling...

Yartar turned out to be a quick stop. The Platinum was sold, Wave Echo Cavern was credited and the party learned that within a few tendays they would be able to send for funds from Phandalin when a need arises. Ganon shook hands with a fellow Lord's Alliance agent at the caravan exchange who was glad to hear that some of the bandits had been taken care of. The group decided that they had gotten all of the information they would out of Jonas, and handed him over to the authorities in Yartar. Jonas himself stated that this was far better than being turned over to Grimjaw. As soon as the wagons had changed hands the Thommadur brothers were gone without saying goodbye, off to lead another caravan to Womford, and the party turned and headed back to Triboar. They had a show to play, after all.

About three miles out of the city, they noticed that the giant vultures were again circling. This time, something was different. There was a set of wings in the circle that was of a slightly different shape. As they looked up, trying to discern any other differences, they noticed that three of the vultures were breaking formation and had begun to dive in their direction.



The group scattered, all finding cover in nearby trees and brush. With the Barbarian gone, Ganon decided it was his turn to draw fire, and he stood in the middle of the path with his arms outstretched. Everyone else readied their respective attacks, weather with bow or spell, but were all caught off guard when the first two vultures broke their dive early and veered off to either side while spears were thrown by the riders that were on their backs. One arrow found its mark, but did not do enough damage to bring the bird down. The third vulture came in, and as the rider threw his spear the heroes faintly heard him trying to taunt them at the top of his lungs. The birds came in for a second attack, and were met with a volley of attacks from the ground. One was struck with a bolt of arcane energy and landed with a crash in the nearby woods. Skelator, unsure of whether his idea would work, began to call upon the power of his patron. He pointed his finger, now wreathed with blue light, at the remaining bird and in as forceful a voice as his Dragonborn throat could manage, commanded the bird to “GROVEL!”

As the Vulture rider let loose a string of insults aimed at the adventurer’s mothers’ attraction to various domesticated beasts, the bird interrupted its dive to hover in the air above them. While its rider screamed and thrashed the reins, the bird rapidly shook its head as if to clear water from its ears. It then looked at Skelator quizzically and landed in front of him. While the rider frantically wrenched out a sword to stab the disobedient vulture into submission, the bird rolled onto its back like a dog begging for a belly rub and looked to Skelator for approval. The muffled curses of the still mounted rider could be heard from deep within the giant pile of feathers and flesh.

Before anyone could act, the one set of wings that didn’t match the rest folded up and the animal fell into a steep dive. Right in front of them in less than a second the Hippogriff, with rider in full plate, was upon the prostrate vulture, kneading it to pieces with its massive claws and tearing off huge chunks of flesh with its razor sharp beak. As the vulture rider crawled out from beneath the mutilated beast, the Hippogriff’s rider removed his helm revealing the handsome face of a noble. Long black hair framed a square jawline. His features were finely chiseled, but his gaze was intense as he surveyed the scene before him. More than one of the members of Groin was taken aback by this striking figure, impressed almost as much by his looks as by his regal mount. He began to speak:



Thurl Merroska

“You have shown a considerable lack of judgment by choosing an opponent who you twice observed successfully fighting off attackers stronger in number than you. You have shown a considerable lack of character with your crude taunting and jeering. You have also shown a lack of faith in your mount, which was clearly not in control of its own actions.”

As the Hippogriff finished with the vulture he took one short appraising look at the slack jawed company of adventurers, now reduced to spectators. Without betraying a clue as to his verdict, he turned back to the fallen rider. The two remaining vultures landed behind some trees, near where the first had fallen.

“As a result of this, *you* do *not* get to fly.” He returned his helm and his mount began to beat its wings. “We shall leave you to your fate.”

As the majestic Hippogriff rose into the air the other two Vultures could be seen rising from the trees as well, having found and retrieved the first fallen rider.

With his back to the party, the ostracized vulture rider watched his former companions shrink into the distant skyline, his shoulders drooped. He turned to the grinning assortment of warriors with a wide eyed look of bewilderment that, after a split second, broke into a nervous laugh.

“Heh, ok... well, I guess I’m just gunna grab my sword over here and make my way back to...”

“Do not move.” Ganon said sternly, placing the tip of his sword at the man’s throat. This captive would turn out to have much less resolve than the bandit they had previously interrogated, and he answered all their questions with no hint of resistance. His story follows;

The young man was Norris Warrick, a Waterdhavian noble from the house of Maliz-Warrick, once famous vintners who sold their high-end wine and mead up and down the sword coast. About a year ago, a Griffon Rider in the Waterdeep Guard, Thurl Merroska (The Hippogriff Rider in the encounter), resigned his post to form a legion of “Arial Mount Enthusiasts” called The Feathergale Knights. He

recruited from the Nobility, trained his men to ride Hippogriffs, and made a pledge to The Open Lord of Waterdeep, promising to protect the air above the city. After a few months of talks, the Open Lord Neverember accepted them as a semi-official division of The Watch. They were all rich, fashionable, and glamorous, so Norris begged his parents to let him join. They saw the prestige attached to the playboy-knights as they made their way through the various circles and up the hierarchy of Waterdhavian society, and three months ago they finally relented. He traveled here from Waterdeep to train with them at their stronghold in the Dessarin Hills, known as Feathergale Spire. He couldn't give them a very good idea of its location, having only travelled to or from the site while airborne. His time with the knights had been less than glamorous. He didn't fit in at all, being the type to make up for a lack of any real ability or useful knowledge with a self-deprecating wit. Norris was an unapologetic smart ass, and Thurl simply couldn't stand him. Twice in the three months since Norris had arrived, Thurl had written his parents to inform them that their son did not have a future as a Feathergale Knight. Twice, his parents had responded with a sizeable donation to the organization and a plea to reconsider. Thurl, according to Norris, was more concerned nowadays with his religion than with his Knights. New recruits rarely come from Waterdeep's noble class anymore. Lately, he must only have been recruiting from temples and religious orders because all of the men who have come within the past few weeks have been feather-robed clerics, who spend all of their free time in their bunks meditating. He claimed that he hadn't even seen any of them eat a single stick since they arrived. Though the clerics tended to be no better at riding than anyone else, Norris claimed that Thurl was constantly showing them favoritism.

"Just look at what happened back there. One of those *priests* gets shot down, and he gets a ride back to the tower. *My* bird gets hypnotized by a freaking *spell-caster* (no offense), and I'm out on my own? Oh, Sorry, I didn't realize we were only allowed to ride birds if we *dressed* like birds! Hah! Oh, I think your high priestess wants you to stick another feather in your ass Merroska, you zealot!" He kicked a stone in frustration, and looked to the adventurers, who had agreed that he could walk with them to Red Larch, before continuing on to his home in Waterdeep. "thanks for not tying me up, by the way..."

Ganon shrugged, "you're not a threat."

"...thanks?"

"If you tried anything, we'd fry you" Skelator added.

"you're all so kind..."

"like our *last* prisoner..." Perry continued.

Crotch grinned, seeing where this was going "Boy, that one soiled himself something awful, though... Do you still have his arm?"

"Oh, yes." Perry looked into his pack. "Want to see it, Norris?" he asked, his eyes wide and bright.

"Um... no, I'm fine." Norris walked the rest of the way in silence, to the amusement of the band.



The Swinging Sword Inn

As they arrived in Red Larch (only four hours before their show was to begin) it seemed everyone they passed was talking about the same thing, as if an important event had just taken place. Catching fragments of conversation as they made their way to “The Swinging Sword”, the venue for the night’s show, they had managed to piece together the fact that some type of tragedy the day prior had revealed an infiltration of their local government, and a trial was now under way in the town’s market. As they neared the tavern they saw that the area had been roped off to prevent anyone from travelling too close to the large gaping hole in the middle of the street.

Skelator and Diamachus sought out the owner of the establishment, one Jaylessa Irkell, to see about their musical engagement. While they met, the rest of the group decided to go to the town market and watch the trial. When the two groups eventually found each other at the end of the day, they were able to piece together a narrative of what had happened;

Their show was difficult to arrange. Groin was expected to bring in a crowd that wouldn’t fit in either of the town’s taverns. Tinder, who had worked with Jaylessa to figure out a solution, proposed the band play right out in the street. Yesterday, while a riser was being constructed to serve as a stage, a sink hole opened up right beneath the workers. Nobody was seriously hurt, but when a few of the constable’s men went down to retrieve those who had fallen in they found a network of caves beneath the town. After a short investigation bodies were found, as well as evidence of dark magic. There was found to be a few things linking the town’s elder council to the scene, but nothing definitive enough to convict without trial. The town in an uproar and without leadership, it was decided that Harburk Tuthmarillar, the town’s trusted constable, should preside over the trial and serve as interim townmaster until the matter could be fully investigated. The town was impatient for the trial to begin,

so it had begun first thing in the morning. The testimony of the town's elders revealed the nature of the tunnels. When the town was young, the tunnels were discovered by a few of the elders and kept secret. There were the long-dead remains of miners whom they called "The Delvers". It was believed that The Delvers haunted the tunnels, and were prophets who communicated with "The Believers" (the name the town elders used when referring to those of them who were entrusted with the secret) by moving a group of large stones that were in a specific chamber of the caves. "The Believers" used the movements of the stones as a type of oracle with which to administer the town's government. This had been the way of things for two generations until recently. The arrival of Larrakh, a priest who claimed an intimate connection with The Delvers, changed things. Larrakh proved much more adept at discerning the meaning of the stones and was even able to ask them direct questions, infallibly receiving a response the very next day. As he made the stones' messages more and more clear, things took a dark turn. The stones began commanding the Believers to commit acts of violence, sometimes against their fellow townspeople. No one dared question Larrakh's word, for after a short time he brought more priests who he called "the Bringers of Woe". They were powerful, intimidating, and cruel. While the group of elders slowly lost control of the secret society they had enjoyed, the stones had continued commanding more demonstrations of faith. Those questioning the elders seemed to believe that Larrakh was a phantom, created by the elders well in advance to take the blame should something like this happen.

Ganon interrupted the trial to voice concerns over the apparent partiality taking place, which led to a recess while the constable's men escorted Ganon to the Harburk's temporary office at town hall. After some unpleasantries were exchanged between the two, Harburk agreed to let the adventurers help the town in their time of need. He confessed that after the initial inspection he could not get his men to go back down into the tunnels to fully investigate what was going on down there, they had been spooked. He agreed that if the band would do this, they could play their show at the town market the very day the trial was concluded.



Sister Ghalaele

Before meeting with the rest of the group, Diamachus stopped by the Allfaith's Shrine to see if he could find Tinder. He found Sister Ghalaele tending the shrine, and she informed him that Tinder had recently left town with Reidoth the Druid. She handed Diamachus a letter from the Gnome...