

PELC'S CURIOSITIES

CHE PARTY STANDS OUTSIDE PELC'S Curiosities, the door slightly ajar. Suspecting intruders, Whisper closes her eyes while softly purring "Maior et Fortior". The air around her shimmers momentarily as she draws on her inner ki in concentration. She then peers through the doors and windows of the building. Despite her efforts, she cannot make out very much, though she hears enough rustling to make her hairs bristle. It sounds as though there are several inside ransacking the place. Scarlet joins Whisper's investigation, attempting to divine whether the noises might simply be animals, yet she senses no wildlife inside.

Preparing for potential conflict, Kragor stands up straight and stretches out his arms as if to grasp a weapon. In a loud yet distant voice he exclaims "Malleum Evoco". Suddenly ethereal shadows stream in from all directions and coalesce into an obsidian black war hammer with an angular and brutal head. Its every surface is etched with subtle twisting runes. Kragor hefts the weapon with both hands, then widens his stance with feet planted firmly on the ground.

The goliath Halite likewise readies himself, his massive frame towering above even Kragor. With deliberate, practiced movements, he adjusts his gleaming bronze shield, its surface etched with intricate clan markings. In one enormous hand he carefully grips his trident, its three wickedly barbed prongs designed not just to pierce, but to tear and rend flesh. The trident promises not just death, but a savage, lingering demise.

SURPRISE

Inside Pelc's Curiosities lie the answers to the freezing curse. Anxious for action, Elara takes a deep breath, tapping into her well of magic. Her fingers trace the air, summoning the rhythm of a battle drum. Her magic ignites, sending an illusory racket echoing from

within the shop's shadowed walls. Startled into silence, the adversaries within hold their breath, their schemes momentarily unraveled. As Whisper crouches beside her, she senses the tension mounting. Without warning, a crossbow bolt whistles past, narrowly missing her. Elara's calculated ruse works, urging their foes to react blindly. The door slams shut, a temporary barrier between them and danger.

"So much for the element of surprise," mutters Kragor.

Undeterred, Elara shoulders the door open again. Darkness seeps around her like ink in water, yet her keen eyes, accustomed to shadow, discerned the outlines of two startled bandits amid the cluttered ruins of the shop. Ancient relics lay strewn about like casualties of an invisible war; toppled bookshelves and shattered relics spoke of a hasty, chaotic search.

The bandits, their nerves frayed by Elara's eerie magic, released their crossbow bolts in a jittery frenzy. The bolts missed their marks, striking harmlessly against worn brick and aged wood. Assessing the chaotic tableau before her, Elara hesitated; caution whispered in her ear, suggesting a withdrawal from direct assault into strategic retreat.

INSPIRATION AND FOG

She retreats to her waiting comrades, her mind spinning a fresh tapestry of strategy. Checking again her surroundings, Kragor meets her gaze with a blend of curiosity and gruff admiration. Her eyes locked with his, and in that silent exchange, understanding was born. Elara struck her hand drum, each beat a pulse of power transmitted through the air, wrapping around Kragor like a cloak of inspiration. The rhythmic symphony reignited his focus, sharpening his spirit for the clash ahead.

But as this is happening, Scarlet quickly reacts. “Voco Nubes!” she bellows while raising her gnarled staff to the sky. Her eyes close in concentration as she summons nature’s veil. Wisps of mist curl around her fingers before surging toward the building. The vapor seeps through cracks and under doorways, expanding rapidly into a dense, swirling fog that blankets the room. The once-clear space becomes an opaque, ethereal haze, obscuring vision and muffling sound. The druid smiles, knowing the shrouded interior will confound any occupants, granting her allies the advantage they seek within the murky cover of the fog cloud. She wastes no time taking advantage of it herself: she sneaks into the building and hugs the wall, moving to the right. She can hear others moving inside as well, but can make out nothing through the fog.

FIRST BLOOD

Watching one of his allies attacked and another diving into the fog and what must certainly be mortal danger, Kragor strains to think. He feels like a sitting duck outside with obscured enemies inside, ready to make a pincushion out of him with their crossbow bolts. Taking a deep breath to overcome his fear, he too rushes through the doorway into the shrouding fog, gripping his massive conjured war hammer tightly. Unable to see, he positions himself protectively before where he believes Scarlet to be, straining to detect any threats hidden in the mist. A sudden noise to his left spurs him into action. He swings wildly, the war hammer arcing through the air, and feels a heavy impact followed by a muffled crunch. The enemy’s body collapses to the ground with a lifeless thud.

THE ROOF

Outside, Whisper’s sharp tabaxi senses are attuned to every movement around her. As her gaze sweeps upward, it catches upon an unexpected anomaly: a crouched form perched on the rooftop. Though the figure’s features are obscured by distance, their posture is a

tapestry of uncertainty, a riddle waiting to be unraveled. Without hesitation, Whisper draws upon her innate agility, launching herself up the building’s facade, her movements a dance of precision and power. Within moments, she alights upon the roof beside the puzzled figure. As she closes in, a momentary clumsiness intrudes upon her fluid motion; her limbs entangle with the figure in a grapple that is awkward but surprisingly effective. Despite the ungraceful tangle of arms and legs, her determination holds fast, securing her quarry beneath the vast blue sky. The figure, now clearly a rogue based on their dark attire and tools of the trade hanging from their belt, desperately attempts to free themselves from Whisper’s grasp, to no effect.

COUNTERATTACK

Halite now grasps the perilous choice the party has made in their recklessness. With a fierce resolve etched in the hard lines of his goliath visage, he charges through the fog-choked doorway, instinctively veering left to secure the flank opposite Scarlet and Kragor. The mist clings to him, a shroud of uncertainty, yet he moves with the confidence of one accustomed to the unseen. A bandit lunges at him, the attack a mere whisper of danger that dissolves into emptiness. Seizing the opportunity, Halite’s fingers tighten around his trident, that harbinger of despair. With an expert thrust, the weapon slices through the fog, hungry for blood. It strikes true, embedding itself deep within the bandit with a sickening resistance, as though the weapon savors its work. Halite has to struggle to wrench it free from the bandit with raw power, the action accompanied by a dreadful noise that the fog quickly absorbs.

While recovering his favored weapon, Halite hears the “whoosh” of a crossbow bolt. He flinches, but he is not the target. He hears Kragor cry out in desperate pain. The bolt strikes Kragor just below the collarbone, close to his heart. Blood flows unchecked, staining his leather armor.

Seconds later, another bolt pierces Scarlet and a sharp pain flares beneath her ribs. Blood seeps into her cloak, mingling with the forest's earthy scent.

ROGUE FALL

Whisper, poised at the edge of the rooftop's precipice, maintains a firm hold on the rogue. Despite the rogue's cunning and agility, he struggles to free an arm to launch a counterattack with his dagger. Nevertheless, Whisper's sharp claws and expert grip keep him securely restrained. Beneath her, the store's chaos swirls, a symphony of survival and sorcery; each cry, each clash a note struck sharp in the chord of battle below. Her decision solidifies with the clarity of ice forming, abandoning subtlety for swiftness. With a sudden, fluid ferocity, she thrusts the entangled rogue from the roof, the figure plummeting and landing with a sickening thud upon the hard earth. The world contracts around her as she vaults down, feline grace reclaiming momentum in mid-air, her heart a steady drumbeat beneath her silken fur. She lands silently, flowing through the doorway like a stream of midnight water into the tempest of friend and foe, ready once more to thread her prowess into the weaving of combat's fierce tapestry. The thrown rogue, battered and broken, lies forgotten amidst the rubble.

Elara is startled by Whisper's sudden reappearance. Despite this, she remains focused on the building, her senses registering enough to grasp that her companions are in grave danger. She urgently calls out to Scarlet, telling her to dispel the fog cloud, which Scarlet promptly does. Without hesitation, Elara rushes to join her and Kragor inside. Whisper follows but pauses in the doorway, alert for threats inside or out.

MEDIC!

Surveying Scarlet and Kragor's injuries, she quickly assesses that Kragor's condition is more critical. She places her hands gently on the grievous puncture wound left by the

crossbow bolt, her touch glowing with divine energy. The healing light rapidly closes the wound, restoring vitality to his mottled green-gray skin. Kragor, caught off guard yet deeply appreciative, meets Elara's kind gaze, and a silent bond is forged between the orc and the aasimar.

FINAL BLOWS

As Elara is tending to Kragor, Scarlet runs towards a nearby bandit that is just now orienting themselves after the fog dispersed. Eyes glowing with untamed magic, Scarlet calls upon nature's wrath. With a fierce, primal incantation, her fingertips elongate into razor-sharp claws, dripping with corrosive acid. In a swift motion, she lashes out, and her savage strike lands true. The bandit staggers back, pain etched across their face as the toxic claws rend through leather and flesh, leaving a searing wound. The druid's usually gentle demeanor is momentarily overshadowed by raw, feral power, as the bandit teeters on the brink of defeat, humbled by nature's unforgiving might.

Halite steps forward with a grim determination, his massive form casting a foreboding shadow over the bandit struggling to stay upright from Scarlet's fierce attack. With a swift and fluid motion defying his immense size, Halite shifts his weight back, then lunges forward with an uppercut trajectory. It pierces through the air with a whistling sound, meeting the bandit's chest in a visceral collision. The force of the jab lifts the bandit off his feet momentarily, his final gasp cut short by the weapon's deadly embrace. Life flickers out of his eyes, and the limp body slides down the trident's length. Halite grimaces, more out of reflex than malice, as he shakes the bandit free with a swift, practiced motion, the lifeless form dropping to the ground with a thud.

Now sufficiently recovered to rejoin the battle, Kragor focuses his attention on the bandit far across the room that he suspects of shooting him. Although he can't be sure of the bandit's guilt, he raises his war hammer toward his

target and shouts, “Te Exsecro!” The air shimmers with malevolent energy as a cold, dark aura coils around the bandit like an invisible serpent. Without hesitation, Kragor follows with another spell, yelling “Dolor,” and unleashes a surge of eldritch energy from his war hammer that strikes the bandit square in the chest. The impact of the blast results in an ugly wound. Immediately, shadowy tendrils twist and curl over the shredded flesh causing it to blacken and crumble, leaving the bandit teetering on the brink of death.

SURRENDER

Halite, his towering form casting an imposing shadow across the cluttered interior of the ransacked antique shop, moves with purpose toward Kragor’s target: a bandit whose bravado has been seared away by the crackling energy of the orc warlock’s magic. The air still shimmers with the fading traces of arcane power, and the bandit, already on the brink of collapse, can only watch as the goliath fighter closes the distance between them like an inexorable force of nature.

The trident in Halite’s grip gleams with an unsettling menace, its barbed points promising a swift and painful end should it be called upon to deliver one. The bandit, a mere lithe elf in the presence of such formidable warriors, feels the weight of his own mortality for what seems like the first time. His sword clatters to the wooden floor, a hollow sound that resonates through the shop, punctuating his surrender.

“I yield,” the bandit croaks, his voice strained with fear and desperation. He raises his hands, palms open and empty, a universal sign of capitulation. His eyes dart to his remaining comrade, wide with silent urging.

The last standing bandit, who watched the battle unfold with growing dread, knows the odds all too well. He witnessed the fate of their fallen companions— three already dispatched with ruthless efficiency by the duo of Kragor and Halite. The decision is not a difficult one.

He drops his own weapon, a well-worn crossbow, to the floor and raises his hands above his head in submission. “We don’t want any more trouble,” he says, his voice carrying a tremor that matches the frantic beating of his heart.

Kragor surveys the scene, his eyes, glowing faintly with residual magical energy, meeting Halite’s. An unspoken understanding passes between them— this victory, as hard-fought as it was, need not claim further lives.

With the tension of combat beginning to ebb, the antique shop’s air feels still, though the echoes of the skirmish linger. Surrounded by overturned furniture and scattered relics of a bygone era, the bandits’ surrender marks the end of the struggle, their lives spared by the mercy of those far mightier than they.

Whisper, having ensured the rogue she tossed from the roof was no longer a threat, finally enters the antique shop and closes the door behind her. As she did, the rogue moves to a crouched position around the corner, relieved that his theatrics were successful. Intending to enter the building when the coast was truly clear, he remains vigilant, pressing his ear to the cool glass of the window to eavesdrop on the victorious adventurers.

INTERROGATION

Elara and Scarlet eye the bandits with intensity, their curiosity piqued by the confession of surrender. “Who are you and what were you doing here?” Elara demands, her voice steady yet demanding answers.

The first bandit, regaining a bit of composure but still visibly shaken, replies, “We were sent by Hulil, a priestess of Tiamat. She instructed us to search this place. Two months ago, there was a robbery here, and now Hulil’s got this strange freezing sickness. She hoped we might find a clue here in the shop. But we found nothing.”

Scarlet’s gaze remains firm as she presses further, “Then why did you attack us?”

A hint of embarrassment colors the bandit's cheeks. "We were spooked. We heard some weird noise, then you guys barged in. Especially that chick with a horn on her head," he gestures toward Elara. "We panicked. We're not used to dealing with people like you."

In the meantime, the rogue outside, crouching below the window, absorbs the exchange, piecing together the dynamics at play.

Scarlet produces a weathered receipt with notations about Aeorian artifacts and presents it to the bandits. "Have you seen these items?"

"They're with Hulil," the bandit admits reluctantly, his eyes on the documentation with evident recognition. "She's at Croaker's Cave," confirming what the party had already learned from Hulil's sister, Tulgi.

Satisfied with the information, Kragor dismisses the subdued bandits in no uncertain terms: "Leave everything and get out." Seizing their chance, the bandits quickly discard their weapons and coins before hurrying for the door, the rogue outside remaining concealed until the coast is truly clear.

LOOT

After searching the bandits' leavings and their late compatriots' bodies, the party tallies the loot: 14 gold pieces, eight silver pieces, five crossbows, 30 bolts, five scimitars, and a dwarf-sized shirt blazoned with "Scanlan Shorthalt — The Meat Man Cometh". (Elara judges this last item to be a rare find and might fetch as much as two gold pieces.)

The party then turns to the antique shop, assessing the chaos that engulfed it. The room is in disarray, bookshelves overturned and trinkets strewn about. Amidst the disorder, they stumble upon a chilling sight— a frozen elf lying lifeless in bed. It is Verla Pelc, and the grim discovery confirms that the place has not seen tidiness for weeks.

In a thorough inspection of both the shop and the dead bandits' belongings, they discover two bows and various odds and ends. Deciding a

respite was in order, they plan to rest before heading to Croaker Cave.

WHO IS THIS GUY?

Unbeknownst to the adventurers, the rogue remains vigilant, listening to their intentions and preparing to bide his time until they left.