

The Brave Ballad of the Battle of the Seven's Sawmill

As transcribed by clcman

Dramatis Personae:

Ignus, a human Sorcerer

Anya, a dwarven Cleric of Sarenrae

Bellona, a half-drow Magus

Señor Bastonne, a dwarven Monk with delusions of eagleness

Xiulan, a kitsune Sorcerer

Baldrick, a halfling Ninja

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"I really wish Baldrick was here" Ignus muttered as they crept up the sawmill stairs.

"Well he's not" snapped Anya, trying her best to move without her chain mail jingling. It wasn't working.

"Where *did* he and Xiulan end up?" Bellona asked.

"I assume that nothing short of vital ninja business would keep him from meeting us at the agreed time" said Señor Bastonne from the front.

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"Are you sure we have time for this?" Xiulan asked as she and Baldrick entered the shop.

"What? Yeah, we totally do" said Baldrick, checking his watch. "We're not supposed to meet up by the sawmill until 9:00. That's in forty minutes."

Xiulan frowned. "You said 'forty minutes' two stores ago."

Baldrick paused, bit his lip in thought for a few seconds and then stared at his watch for several seconds.

"What do you know?" he said. "My watch has stopped."

"Excuse me, ma'am" said Xiulan, turning to the nearest store clerk. "Do you know what time it is?"

"9:15" said the clerk.

Xiulan and Baldrick looked at each other in panic before dashing out the door as fast as their legs could carry them.

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"We wouldn't have had to use the godsdamn wind chime three times if Baldrick were here" muttered Ignus.

"Hey, I *almost* got it on my own" said Bellona.

"Your plan was to yell at the lock while you stuck the lockpicks in!"

"It helps me focus, okay!" the half-elf snapped back.

"Seriously, guys, let's try to be a *little* quiet, alright?" Anya said, her armor picking that exact moment to jingle loudly.

"Let's face it, Anya" said Ignus. "We'd actually be stealthier if we replaced you with a genuine pack mule."

"Silence, convocation-mates!" whispered Bastonne, cutting off Anya's attempt to strangle Ignus.

"Convo-whats?" Ignus asked.

"A convocation is a what you call a bunch of eagles" Bellona answered, resigned to her apparent role as the party's nature expert.

"I said quiet!" grunted Bastonne. "I hear voices. Other than yours."

Sure enough, over the hum of the sawmill's machinery, the party could hear a collection of indistinct voices coming down from the floor directly above. The voices all seemed to be saying the same thing, but what it was, none of the party could tell.

"I shall go" whispered Bastonne. "Stay still, fletchlings."

Before the rest of the party could react, the dwarf crouched low and slipped up the stairs. As he approached the top landing, the voices became clearer. Though Bastonne did not understand their words, it was clearly some sort of collective chant.

As cautiously as he could, Bastonne peeked his head over the edge of the stairs. Sure enough, there was a single room full of a dozen or more individuals of indeterminant race wearing strange masks. Their backs were to the stairs as they focused their attention on a table on the other side of the room. Chained to that table appeared to be a man of some sort. Standing next to him was a large elf in baggy robes holding a knife and a slender woman with silver hair (perhaps an aasimar?), several scars on her exposed midriff and one on her cheek, a red and distorted left arm and a very large sword on her back.

Bastonne was about to creep back down the stairs when the elf stared directly at him.

"INTRUDER!" he shouted, pointing at the stairs.

Bastonne hit the floor as the crowd turned around and drew hand crossbows, filling the space where he had just been with bolts.

"I found them!" the dwarf shouted as the rest of the party charged up the stairs, Ignus casting the spell Haste while Bellona cast Mirror Image, summoning three additional versions of herself into existence.

Bolstered by the Haste and not casting a spell of her own, Anya was the first to reach the top of the stairs. It took her less than a second of observing the situation to recognize all of the signs of a Lamashtu cult. And that was before she saw the scarred woman at the back of the room.

"Nualia" Anya spat.

"It's the so-called 'Heroes of Sandpoint'!" the woman shouted at the same time. "Slice them to bits!"

Anya took one look at the well-sharpened war razors that the cultists were drawing from beneath their cloaks and cast Fireball, aiming for the center of the group. Unfortunately, one of the cultists closest to the stairs shifted position and intercepted the spell before it reached its target. The explosion engulfed him and several of his compatriots, but the blast was closer to the stairs than Anya intended and both she and Bastonne ducked as the heat washed over them.

Bastonne was back on his feet in an instant, somewhat singed and smoking but otherwise intact. The same could not be said for several of the cultists on the ground, seemingly dead or incapacitated. Unfortunately, half of their number still remained.

"I've got this!" Ignus shouted as he reached the top of the stairs and hurled a Glitterdust into the middle of the room. The cultists flinched as sparkly lights washed over them, but they quickly resumed their advance, seemingly unimpeded.

"Or not..." gulped Ignus, retreating back down the stairs.

Bastonne locked eyes with the elf by the table, who seemed to be the leader of the group. Sensing a challenger, the dwarf dashed across the room, hoping to rush the elf before he had a chance to cast a spell or strike the man chained to the table. Bastonne ducked under a swipe from one cultist and cartwheeled past another before bumping straight into a third and falling on his back.

"Ha" said the cultist, smirking (or, at least, Bastonne assumed he was smirking beneath his mask) as he slashed at the prone Bastonne. Bastonne rolled to the side and sprang up, catching the cultist on the chin with a kick so powerful that the man flew upwards and struck the ceiling before plummeting back to the ground, unmoving.

"Nualia, deal with this" said the elf, disappearing. The aasimar nodded and unsheathed her bastard sword.

"CA-CAAWW!!" shouted Bastonne, trading blows with two other cultists. "I AM SEÑOR BASTONNE, EL AQUILA ROJA! FEAR MY TALONS AS I-"

"No one cares" grunted Nualia as she appeared in front of him, slicing his arm open with her sword. Bastonne grunted in pain and was about to retort when he realized that he was surrounded on all four sides.

"A little help?" he squeaked.

"How about THIS!?" Ignus shouted, reappearing and casting another Glitterdust. The cultists, Nualia and Bastonne grew even shinier, but the cultists continued to attack while Nualia seemed mildly annoyed at best.

"I think their masks are blocking the dust!" shouted Anya as she swung her scimitar at a cultist in an attempt to clear a path to Bastonne.

"Oh, uh, then I'll just be down here" muttered Ignus, retreating down the stairs once again.

"Suit yourself!" shouted four Bellonas as they vaulted over the stair railing in sync, their four longswords each sparking with electrical energy from the magus's Arcane Pool.

"This looks like fun!" Bellona said as she sank her sword into the back of the cultist behind Bastonne, giving the bloodied dwarf a chance to escape from his encirclement.

"Many thanks" he said as he backed into Anya's hand, already charged with healing energy. "I dislike that lady" he said as Nualia charged them. Anya nodded.

Back on the stairs, Ignus was running calculations as to how he could use Web on an obviously agile bunch of enemies without tying up his own party members when he heard a little voice in the back of his head.

"Ignus... They have this under control. Why don't you just go home?"

Ignus frowned. He hadn't thought about that...

"There is no reason for you to be here. Go home and be safe and comfortable."

Ignus found himself nodding, though he was unsure why. Being safe and comfortable were things he enjoyed.

"Yes, Ignus... Let the real heroes do their work. You'd just be in the way."

Ignus took one step down the stairs and then stopped.

'Real heroes'? He was just 'in the way'? That didn't sound like thoughts he normally had. He was, after all, the famous, well-loved and totally badass leader of the legendary Heroes of Sandpoint.

I'm being hit with a spell! he realized. Quickly, he grabbed his arm and pinched himself, trying to clear his thoughts.

The voice in his head sighed. *"Very well. If you won't leave, how about you just stay still for a while?"*

Ignus feels his muscles tighten as an invisible force started to paralyze him.

"How about... NO!" the sorcerer shouted, flexing his arms and breaking free of the partially-complete Hold Person spell.

The voice growled. *"As you wish. Don't say I didn't give you a chance to survive. Talvor, filet him."*

Ignus was about to start trying to cast another Glitterdust to try and reveal the probably-invisible threat when one of the cultists fighting Anya broke off and dashed past her onto the stairs.

"Slicey, slicey!" cackled the cultist as he advanced towards Ignus, twirling his war razor.

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Bastonne had finally managed to grapple one of the cultists and was in the process of reconfiguring the man's limbs. Anya tried to turn around help Ignus, but was interrupted as Nualia's sword nearly took her head off.

"Sarenraen!" the aasimar shouted. "You will pay for saving Sandpoint!"

As Nualia brought down her sword again, it was intercepted by four longswords moving as one.

"Hey, Nualia!" said Bellona, sounding deceptively cheerful. "Haven't fought you in a while. How's the hole Hoshi put in your face?"

Instinctively, Nualia started to move a hand to touch the scar on her cheek, but she stopped herself and growled.

"Come on" said the four Bellonas as they began the hand motions to cast Frigid Touch. "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

Nualia grunted and swung at Bellona, who ducked easily as she completed the spell, her sword now charged with blue energy.

"You'll have to do better than that!" the half-elf shouted.

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Back on the stairs, Ignus backed up slowly, barely dodging a series of slashes from the cultist's war razor.

"Tell me, wizard" laughed the cultist as he continued to attack. "What cowardly spell do you have up your sleeve?"

"Funny you should say that" said Ignus, drawing his wand of Shocking Grasp from sleeve. "Why don't you come and find out?"

The cultist lunged but Ignus sidestepped and poked him, delivering a small electrical shock.

The cultist stumbled slightly, but seemed otherwise unarmed. "Is that the best you've got?" he shouted.

Ignus poked him again.

"Stop that!" cried the cultist, more annoyed than actually hurt. Ignus poked him a third time, but overextended himself and was unable to leap back as the cultist retaliated, slicing the sorcerer's arm and knocking the wand away.

"Now what do you have?" chuckled the cultist. "An actual spell?"

"Nope" said Ignus, grabbing the hilt of his short sword. "You see, I am not any old spellcaster. I am Ignus Dragonbane, Hero of the Four Empires and Additionally Sandpoint! I have slain demons and the vile warlord Ripnugget without using a single spell! FEAR MY MASTERY OF THE BLADE!!"

With that, Ignus drew his sword. Or, to be precise, he ripped his sword, sheath still attached, from his belt before holding it in the most intimidating two-handed stance he could.

The cultist stared briefly at this before exploding into laughter.

Ignus's cheeks grew slightly red before he slammed the hilt of the sword into the cultist's temple, slamming the man's head against the wall and causing him to tumble limply down the stairs.

"I warned you" said Ignus as he charged up the stairs, sword (and sheath) still in hand.

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Back upstairs, Bellona thrust her sword at Nualia, only for the blade to, once again, deflect off of the aasimar's breastplate. Bellona frowned. Her third physical hit, and she'd still been unable to discharge the Frigid Touch spell into Nualia's actual flesh. That armor was proving more problematic than she'd thought.

Nualia raised her bastard sword above her head and brought it down straight towards Bellona. Backed up against the stair's railing, Bellona had no room to dodge and instead blocked with her sword. The sheer force of the blow knocked the magus backwards and she and her three Mirror Image selves slammed into the railing.

"Strike her!" Nualia shouted as she started to swing again. Two cultists materialized, one on each side of their leader, and the three struck as one, each blade penetrating a different Bellona.

For a second, the illusions flickered before dissolving, revealing each struck Bellona to be merely an Image. Meanwhile, the real Bellona, crouched downwards, had found a weak point in Nualia's armor.

"Missed me!" the half-elf shouted as she stabbed upwards, her sword tip striking the unarmored array of scars on Nualia's midriff and going through.

Nualia screamed and stumbled backwards, ripping Bellona's sword out of her hand as the aasimar twisted away. Her own sword dropped from her hands as the Frigid Touch spell dropped her body temperature, sending shivers through her torso.

Bellona tried to advance and recover her sword, but the cultist to her left attacked. She dodged to her right, grabbed the man's wrist and twisted before punching him in the face and hurling him at the other cultist.

Nualia recovered her footing as she began to cast a healing spell. She'd been wounded worse than this before, back at Thistletop. All she needed was a chance to...

Something struck her right leg and sent her to her knees. Nualia began to turn around to see her new attacker, but only had the chance to see its silhouette.

It looked like... a bird.

"CA-CAAAAWWWWWW!!!!!" shouted Bastonne as he struck Nualia in the head with a powerful flying kick. The aasimar's head snapped back and she collapsed.

"Nice hit" said Bellona to Bastonne as she grabbed the hilt of her longsword and ripped it from Nualia's stomach.

"She was very mean" said Bastonne. "She didn't even let me finish my catchphrase!"

Anya was struggling with the last of the cultists when Ignus appeared from the stairs, bleeding and waving his short sword like a madman.

"IGNUS DRAGONBANE THIRSTS FOR BLOOD!!" he shouted as he charged Anya's opponent. The sorcerer's swing missed by a mile, but it threw the cultist sufficiently off-balance for Anya to connect her scimitar to his neck.

"You last name isn't Dragonbane" said Anya, confused.

"Shut up" replied Ignus.

Behind them, the elf rematerialized, his invisibility having worn off.

"You have cost me my children" he said. "You shall pay dearly for that."

"I don't know, man" said Bellona. "I think you should probably give up now."

"Now?" asked the elf, smiling. "When you are about to destroy yourselves?"

The mask covering part of his face began to glow, and the adventurers felt a rush of strange and confusing thoughts enter their minds.

"Was that the best you had?" Ignus said, smiling confidently as the thoughts receded without leaving any apparent impact. Bellona and Bastonne nodded.

"I've got it!" shouted Anya. "He's right! He wants us to defeat ourselves, so the only way to stop that is to stop ourselves from defeating ourselves!"

She then grabbed her scimitar with both hands and smashed herself in the face with the flat of the blade.

"Uh..." Ignus started to ask, concerned.

"Just charge him!" Bellona shouted, running at the elf and swinging her sword at him.

Bastonne grunted in agreement and leaped onto the elf's back. The elf grunted and grabbed his holy symbol. There was a grey flash and Ignus, Bellona and Bastonne all stumbled as negative energy irradiated their bodies. The elf grabbed Bastonne by the neck and tossed him onto the ground.

"You will kneel before Lamashtu!" the elf shouted. "Even if I must cut your legs off!"

"Guys, we can't kneel!" Anya shouted. "We have to make sure we can't kneel!"

She struck herself in the face again and collapsed in a heap.

"I'll... uh... help her" said Ignus, dashing away from a sword slash from the elf.

"Suit yourself" said Bastonne, sliding under the elf's feet and grabbing him from behind.

"Release me, ignorant dwarf!" grunted the elf, slamming his back (and Bastonne) into a wall.

"I. AM. AN. EAGLE!" Bastonne replied, tightening his grip and pulling his foe's head back.

"You're insane" realized the elf.

"You know, if you can't say anything nice..." Bellona shouted, stabbing the elf in the throat.

"...don't say anything at all!"

The elf struggled a bit more as blood ran down his chest before collapsing, his eyes glazed over.

"But, yes, he is insane" Bellona admitted.

"Did we get him?" asked Anya as Ignus helped her up.

"Got him" replied the half-elf, giving the cleric a thumbs-up. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine" said Anya, running over to the cult's apparent sacrifice, still chained to the table.

"But this guy isn't! I need to heal him ASAP!"

She drew her wand of Cure Light Wounds and began to cast it, slowing the unconscious man's bleeding.

"Well, I'm glad to see that whatever came over you is gone now" said Ignus.

"Yeah" Anya replied. "That was weird. I was saying things that I thought made sense, but they really didn't." She put away the wand. "Okay, he should be stable now. Let's get these chains off of him."

And with that, she grabbed the manacle around the man's left wrist and slammed her forehead into it as hard as she could.

"I don't think the thing totally wore off" said Bellona as Anya collapsed into unconsciousness once again.

Bastonne frowned. "I agree. Even I knew that wouldn't work!"

Ignus looked at Anya. "So, do we just leave her like that for a minute?"

The others shrugged.