

Positive

The patrol's path leads through bushes smothered with little pink flowers, the bright flashes of colour catching your eye as you push through. The branches catch on your arms and armour, but there's no time to take this slowly - your spirit-unicorn is growing ever more frantic, flashes of colour from his coat appearing between the leaves as he leads you to somewhere where someone desperately needs your help. If you weren't trying so hard to keep up you might question why he's being so reticent on the details but he's never led you wrong before, and trying to keep up with him despite the footing and the undergrowth leaves little room for thought.

You hear the trouble long before you see it; rough men's voices calling to each other, and over it the shrill scream of an equine in serious pain and distress. Your spirit-unicorn almost dances in obvious frustration on what must be the edge of the clearing, unable to help directly himself - but that's why he brought you here. Pausing only to get your breath you cautiously approach the edge of the trees.

The scene that meets your eyes is worse than you thought. The unicorn - clearly very young though full-grown, and just as clearly a stallion - is still fighting vainly against the chains holding him down and the bandits trying to subdue him. His eyes are glazing with exhaustion; the white brilliance of his coat is liberally stained with blood where the chains have cut into him. Most of the men, probably bandits from their dress, are either hanging onto the chains or wielding clubs and staves, shouting instructions or just catcalling. But your eye is drawn to the only quiet one, waiting patiently to one side with a bone saw in his hands.

There is no need to think. No one with even the smallest chance at goodness in their heart would try to cut the horn from a living unicorn. You call a challenge even as you start to run at the nearest chain-holder; he swears and drops the chain, struggling in vain to get his sword unsheathed before you reach him. The bandits with weapons already out stop concentrating on the unicorn and converge on you instead. You drop the first bandit easily - barely resisting the urge to go for the kill and taking out a leg instead - and move on to dealing with the rest.

With your anger at the unicorn's plight driving you forwards the fight is short and brutal; it doesn't take long for you to leave all of the bandits either groaning on the floor unable to walk or quietly unconscious from careful non-lethal blows to the head. The sole exception is the bandit with the bone saw, who now sports two broken arms. Carefully you start to disentangle the chains still draped around the unicorn who stands quiet, trembling with pain and exhaustion, nose drooping almost to the floor. The chains now pooled around his hooves, he doesn't flinch away as you gently place your hands on his shoulder and will him to be healed. The power flows out of you in one joyous burst; the unicorn stops shaking and slowly straightens up, then turns and nuzzles you carefully - you only realise he's checking you for injuries in return when some of the bruises stop throbbing. He whinnies, the sound curiously unhorselike and more like someone laughing with glee.

"His name's Bryn," your spirit-unicorn translates, picking his way over to you, hooves not even bending the grass, "And...he's been looking for you since he was old enough to go his own way. I suppose you could say he is a Paladin of sorts for our kind, and he knew there was a mortal out there pure enough of heart to be his partner on his questing, although he never imagined meeting them like this. Are you willing to be that partner, Glamoria Roskin? He's willing to share you with Lucius, have no fear on that front."

You look into Bryn's deep green eye; there's no way you could refuse. In that moment you suddenly feel the sense of love and pride for you he's feeling, understand what he's saying without words. Bryn kneels to make it easier for you to mount; you clamber onto his broad back, and seconds later you and Bryn stand as one. The spirit-unicorn rears in joy, the pinkness of his coat shining brightly - as he turns and gallops away, where he stood you see the patrol waiting for you.

Neutral

As the party come to a rest you stop and look around; you look up and notice the colour of the sky shift and take on an unnatural pink tinge. Looking away from the sunset, you once more check the flyer you grabbed in the market. A village in need of help because it was being plagued by terrible monsters. Lucius is away on a patrol, but as soon as you saw the flyer you knew you had to go help - never mind your oaths, your heart demanded it. You've left a note for him in your kitchen, telling him where to go and asking him to check on the elderly neighbour next door for you while you're away.

Entering the village you could immediately tell something was wrong. The villagers were clearly all terrified, all of them hidden indoors when you came to town. It took searching around before the mayor finally came out to meet you. She was acting weirdly as well, not willing to talk to you about the monsters - clearly they were far too unsettling - but she soon pointed you in the right direction when you waved the flyer at her.

It's taken a couple of hours of walking, but you're now close to where you were directed. Just over the rise is where they were said to live. Drawing your sword you go to face whatever dangers lie ahead; striding purposely forward you wonder what could be terrorizing them so, just as you have for most of the journey.

When you reach the top of the rise you're surprised to see a village; you can see people working in the distance, and there are what look like pigs in pens and lines of washing out to dry in the last hours of daylight. The only thing wrong with the picture is the remains of a burnt down house on the edge nearest you.

Confused, you sheathe your sword and make your way down. Doors open and smiling faces greet you. Small children come running up to you, their mothers following behind - you're offered food and drink, asked if you're tired from your journey. Every part a perfectly normal village, even if...every single one is a half-orc?

You take up an offer and you're ushered inside, given drinks and asked a hundred questions about yourself, being a paladin and the adventures you've had. You lose time chatting away trying to work out where you might have taken a wrong turn on your walk. Before long the woman's husband comes in, tidies away his hoe and shakes you heartedly by the hand.

You ask about the burnt out building, and they tell you about the night raids on the village by a mob of humans. Each time the half orcs have fled hoping their village would be there when they return. So far they've been ok, but they've lost a few animals and the last time they found their mayor's house on fire. Asking questions you soon recognise the leader of the mob; it's the mayor of the village who placed the flyers.

You promise to go and sort out the problem so they'll never be threatened again. A little girl hands you her dolly. She asks if she and the dolly can be a Paladin like you; you smile and nod, lifting the dolly up to give it a better look. The pink ruffles of its frock fill your vision briefly, and as you lower your hand to give it back to her, you instead see the forest and the rest of the patrol.

Traumatic

The patrol stops for a welcome break, and you take the opportunity to put down your shield for a moment, the weight a drag on your arm. As you lean forward to put it down a gust of wind throws your cloak over your face. You push the washing to one side, ripping it carelessly off the line, trampling a pink smock under your bare feet. Somewhere nearby there's food - you can hear it whimpering, smell its terror, and it only makes you hungrier still. There. Hiding behind a water barrel might have worked better if it hadn't dragged a toy with it - you can see the doll's leg twitching. Drool dribbles down the side of your mouth around your tusks and off the end of your chin as you stalk forward, just about restraining the urge to growl in anticipation...you pounce and block off the only chance of escape, the food looking up at you with tear-stained, terrified face, and draw back your claws to strike.

Something big and heavy barrels into you with a cry. You crash to the floor, momentarily stunned - not so much by the impact as the voice. Something deep inside responds to that voice, crying out to be freed - you shake it off as you angrily realise that this male has stolen your food, now in the arms of some green-wearing pinky. The anger only rises when the male points a sword at you.

"Glamoria?" he asks, sounding uncertain. The sound means nothing. You growl-

A long fall down into darkness. No light, no noise except what you make. No rescue.

The fear in the memory cuts across you knife-sharp. Why were you afraid? You love the darkness - you are the darkness! Slowly you begin to circle this impertinent male that's clearly trying to take over your territory.

The sword point follows you as you move. "Glamoria?" That noise again. Some other sounds, finishing on one that again sounds odd and familiar - "Lucius". Is that pity in his eyes? How *dare* he pity you?!

Licking water off the walls to survive. Eating whatever else had already died before you down in the bowels of the earth. Refusing to give up. Slowly going mad.

The female pinky makes some noises behind him, the oddly familiar ones mixed in, cradling your food in her arms. She sounds disgusted and sad all at once - you can fix that, if she'd only get closer.

Slowly starving. Near to death. ...a light. Noise. Stalking - catching! Screaming! Killing! Hot blood, down in the dark, running down your face as you feast.

The male responds, heated this time, as the memory of that first feast intensifies the hunger-pangs in your stomach. You creep forward while he's distracted, but he sees and forces you back. If only he'd stop making those sounds and putting you off balance! There's a third sound now - "Eirlys" - you can almost remember what it means.

A way out, the light almost blinding! Nightfall. The nest below - sneaking through a hole, grabbing food, getting back to your den with it squalling and wriggling.

The pinky female says something but you ignore it, concentrating on the real foe; with one arm wrapped around food to stop it getting away, she raises the other hand to her mouth and whistles. Almost immediately something heavy falls upon you from behind - a heavy weighted net. You snap and snarl and lash out but this only tangles you up more.

More bold - into the big pinky nest. More feasts. Growing stronger in the dark.

The male walks over and looks down at you sadly. The pinky female joins him, then others - they don't look afraid, they look shocked or sad, and...some of them you know, you think? The anger starts to evaporate, replaced by sick confusion as your thoughts suddenly fracture under the repeated assault.

Lucius, Eirlys, Thyrian, Alitae, Jed. Others less familiar. All looking down at you. The toddler still cradled by Eirlys.

Oh god, what have I done?

"I think you're right, Eirlys. It's for the best." You can understand the words now - if only you could remember how to make them! You try but only snarls and growls come out.

Lucius lifts his sword once more, taking up a position near your head. You realise what he's about to do; your attempts to speak die in your throat, the snarls fading to grunts, your lips desperately trying to shape Lucius' name. The sword rises high, glinting in the growing light - you close your eyes, the lids glowing pinkly on the inside from the rising sun, bracing yourself for the blow. When it doesn't come you cautiously open your eyes again, seeing only the trees above you and the patrol to Mad Ox around you.

Ridiculous

The real problem with woodlands that can't quite decide what they are is that sometimes the path briefly disappears; this time it's a patch of brambles that briefly tangles up the patrol, especially you and your cloak. When it disappears again a minute later by common consent everyone stops to sort out scratches and tears. With a sigh you start picking out thorns from your cloak, smoothing down the nap of the fabric, the world fading into pinkness as you concentrate on the task at hand. The glove brush easily grooms out the knots and snarls in the fur. The glove is a familiar warmth on your hand these days, the easiest way to sort out the plush of your 'working' outfit.

You have to admit, when the Paladins asked for volunteers for a long mission, this wasn't quite what you or Lucius expected...

Apparently it was something to do with a deal to rescue Paladin Archer from the Bloom. The combined forces of Order, Justice, Life and Freedom were somewhat at a loss for how to deal with an enemy that many of them felt in their hearts should be an ally...but the combined forces of the Church of the Creative Principle, incorporating as it did both the Freaks and the Young Ladies of Quality, and a rather touchy alliance between High Wizard Aurinyan and Master Arcos the Dwarf (Arcos supplying Aurinyan with a small army of constructs in exchange for help in getting the Kingdom off her back) had no such problems.

Paladin Archer had been rescued. The Bloom had been driven back in ways that could only be called disturbingly creative and direct. And then...came the question of payment. You and Lucius had volunteered together to provide an equivalent amount of assistance to the Church on the condition that neither of you would be made to break your vows or act against your Path. To begin with this had meant a rather dull time fetching, carrying and doing various heavy and dirty jobs - and then Marietta had joined the Circus. Before Marietta had been liberated from an unfortunate engagement she had been a trick rodeo rider, and an excellent one at that - but the Circus had no horses, and no real way to get hold of one.

Then Breeze and Biscuit had had the Idea. It was a confusing Idea, and Lucius often felt that it was really pushing on not breaking his Path through the sheer silliness, but it was an Idea that was a lot more interesting than moving boxes around.

As if thinking about him summoned him Lucius lifts the tent flap. "Glamoria? Show time." You grin at him and pick up your half of the costume. Today's a good day - you take it in turns, and this time you get to be the head. Together you walk to the back of the main tent and get ready, Lucius looking somewhat glum at the tail end - everything on, you fit together the two halves of the pantomime horse in all of its pink fluffy glory and wait for Marietta. It's not a long wait - she scampers around the corner, her costume all sequins and ruffles and feathers, and smiles a brilliant smile at the pair of you.

"All ready? Just give me a moment to get the tack on." It's a little unnerving, even though the bit and bridle go nowhere near your mouth, but Marietta needs it and the saddle for balance as much as control. In the main ring you hear Breeze announcing the trick riding act; Marietta leaps onto your back, and with ease of practice you and Lucius trot forward, your head at least held high. The head of the costume slips a little as you push through the curtain, briefly obscuring your view with pink fuzz - when you toss your head to clear it, not breaking step, you realise that you can no longer feel Lucius holding onto you from behind, and that the ring has been swapped for the patrol...