

Episode 2: Borc, Ook, Spelunk 2.0

ANNOUNCER

A Paladin's Bargain is rated somewhere between PG-13 and R for fantasy violence and occasional strong language. Listener discretion is encouraged. Full transcripts of each episode can be found at our website www.paladinsbargain.com.

Episode 2: Borc, Ook, Spelunk.

ROWAN

This is not the retirement I had in mind. Settle down, have a little farm, maybe have an extra room with a bed to let for travelers. I'd even make them breakfast! I'd... (groan)
Alright, Captain. You can do this. Arrow's set. Sword guard's loose. One, two.. (yelling) Garnett! Disengage and get back!

GARNETT

Don't shoot! Everything's alright!

ROWAN

But! You screamed! And that orc is wearing the same cloak as the... corpse.

GARNETT

No corpse. Same orc. Well, half-orc, really. And Ro? There are these things called breathing and a pulse. Imagine our surprise when "the corpse" sat bolt upright.

ROWAN

And who are you, then?

LOTUS

Oh, hello! I am Brother Lotus Bloodbath.

ROWAN

I'm sorry, Lotus what?

LOTUS

Lotus is my novitiate name, Bloodbath is my family name. The good siblings at the Sunnyvale Monastery took me in after my parents died.

GARNETT

Sunnyvale is the monastery that Larkspur told us about. But he said it was a Gnomish order?

LOTUS

Most of my siblings are Gnomes, yes. But they raised me as if I was one of their own. Or, I suppose, "One of their Gnome."

ROWAN

Only, you know, seven feet tall and pitch black. So, you're a half-orc monk.

LOTUS

Yes!

ROWAN

Raised by Gnomes.

LOTUS

Yes!

ROWAN

Did you hit your head a lot?

LOTUS

Oh, yes!

ARTIE

Brother Lotus was telling us about his journey.

DESPAIR

AAAAH! Great Baalzebub, it's a borc! Run away, Miss Garnett! I'll save you!

GARNETT

It's fine, Despair! It's okay. Power down. We're all safe.

DESPAIR

I'm confused.

ROWAN

Get in line.

GARNETT

Goodman Larkspur? Our new friend here says he is with the Sunnyvale Monastery.

LARKSPUR

I don't believe the order has started tattooing their members.

LOTUS

The tattoos are from when I was a child, before I arrived at the monastery.

LARKSPUR

Tattooing children? That seems rather... Orcish, I suppose. Nevermind. Excepting that rather bright yellow cloak, his robes look like those from Sunnyvale's elemental order, yes. I haven't been that direction in quite a few years, and the monks usually avoid going too deep into the Gauntlet valley. There's been a rash of kidnapping along the forest road. So no, we haven't met. I would remember him, certainly.

GARNETT

And you, Brother Lotus, what brings you this direction?

LOTUS

I pretty much grew up in the monastery. Last year, the Council decided it was time for me to follow the teaching of the Second Western Brother Ascendant and walk the earth for a while.

ROWAN

Walk the earth?

LOTUS

Yes! They said I should walk from town to town, meet people, and have adventures, and (1)

LOTUS and ROWAN (together)

Walk the earth.

ARTIE

And now?

LOTUS

Yesterday, I received a sending from Sibling Ascendant Wren! They said that if I felt I was ready, I could return and take my vows as a fully ordained monk!

GARNETT

That's wonderful! Congratulations, Brother Lotus.

LOTUS

Thank you! When I received the message, I was in Summerfield. It was faster to come this direction rather than go all the way around the Aurgelmir range.

ARTIE

Well, you don't want to be late.

ROWAN

Hold on. You say you received the message yesterday, in Summerfield? That's a three day ride south of here.

LOTUS

I missed my siblings. So I ran.

ROWAN

You ran from Summerfield to here in a day?

LOTUS

To be fair, I left yesterday morning and it is almost noon today, so it has been a day and a half. I sat down under this beautiful tree and I must have fallen asleep.

GARNETT

Now that you mention it, that tree is amazing.

ROWAN

But! Summerfield! It's!

DESPAIR

This tree is full of... things?

ARTIE

Are those keys? Tied on strings? Or ribbons? What is that?

GARNETT

Some are keys, yes. There's a ring over there. That one is a coin with a hole in the middle - Dwarven by the look of it. That's some beautiful white silk on that bag... looks like maybe a scrap of a wedding dress. All this treasure and it's all been here quite a while.

ARTIE

This place, this tree is clearly sacred.

LARKSPUR

Indeed it is, Artie. This area was once the temple for the Order of the Silver Circle and the embarkation point for taking people through the Gauntlet valley.

DESPAIR

But there's nothing else here.

LARKSPUR

Sadly, the Order has been gone for a long time. But people remember. They tell stories to their children and their children's children, like your grandmother and you, Sir Rowan. The tree has become a sort of folk shrine. Those bits and pieces hanging in the branches mark celebrations and remembrances. In another century or so, I'll wager there will be a new pantheon of good and lawful gods with Siegfried Silverhand as its chief deity.

ARTIE

Goodman Larkspur, how old are you?

LARKSPUR

Old enough to resent being asked that question, my young friend.

ARTIE

Respectfully, you're not being completely honest with us.

LARKSPUR

(sigh) Can't put anything past the nose of a Canadid. Next Midsummer's Day, I will be 307 years old.

GARNETT

Half-elven?

ROWAN

No. Half-Elves can make it 180 years, but you don't look much older than 50 or 60. And you don't have Elvish ears.

LARKSPUR

And when two Half-Elves have a child, about one in four of us end up as I am. We are people without a place. Humans think we're too Elvish and Elves shunned us as a sign of double contamination. As to my ears, let me say that one would be amazed at the lengths a person would go to in order to fit in.

DESPAIR

But that means those scars on your ears are... Oh.

LARKSPUR

That is why I approached you and Garnett in the tavern for the job, Sir Rowan. And also why I am fine adding to our entourage. None of us really fit into this society, but I thought that perhaps we could all "mis-fit" together, if only for a short time.

ARTIE

Man, that's some racist bullshit your people pulled on you.

LARKSPUR

Very true, lad. Now, I believe we should be going. But first... Miss Garnett, on the other side of the tree, is there still a disc about three feet across with three stubby metal legs underneath?

GARNETT

Let's see.

GARNETT

Sure enough. A little overgrown though. It's full of... ugh. Slime and mold. But hey, no slime molds.

LARKSPUR

I always leave a coin when I pass by, in honor of Siegfried and the Silver Circle. And, I'll be honest, for good luck in the passage.

LOTUS

Thank you for sharing this with me, Goodman Larkspur. I will add a coin in celebration.

ARTIE

And, I need all the luck I can get.

GARNETT

Us too.

DESPAIR

And one for me!

DESPAIR

WHATWASTHAT!?!

LARKSPUR

Oh my!

ROWAN

Not good, not good, not good! Everyone get back!

- I N T E R M I S S I O N -

ANNOUNCER

And now a word from our sponsor: The Deepwater Health Department.

THE VOICE OF DEEPWATER HEALTH

Is it true love that burns in your soul? Or could it be SDH, Sumac Dryad Hex? SDH is a common sexually transmitted curse which causes leaf sprouts, lichen, burning, and itching. The good news is: it's curable with early detection and a regimen of simple healing spells. If you have symptoms, and you've been frolicking in the mountains of Eastern Deepwater, you might have been exposed.

Free SDH testing, arborist consultations, and healing scrolls are available at the Deepwater Health Department office, 1347 Black Death Memorial Parkway. Just down the hall from the Early Orcish Education Center and Daycare. Stay healthy, Deepwater!

ANNOUNCER

We now return to: A Paladin's Bargain.

- R E T U R N -

ROWAN

Not good, not good, not good! Everyone get back! Weapons up, arrows nocked, and fingers... loaded. No weapons, Lotus?

LOTUS

I have all I need.

ARTIE

I'm ready.

GARNETT

That is a remarkably large club you have, Artie.

ARTIE

That's what all the girls say.

ROWAN

Not now, people.

GARNETT

What is it, Ro?

ROWAN

I don't know. That bell even surprised the old man.

ARTIE

I can't smell anything different. Sir Rowan, can you sense anything?

ROWAN

I'm not sure. Everything is washed out with Miss Horns so close by.

DESPAIR

But I'm a good person!

ROWAN

I believe you. You also recently got off of the Brimstone Express. Good or not, you smell of the Infernal.

LOTUS

What is it you fear, Sir Rowan?

ROWAN

Third time's the charm: I don't know!

LARKSPUR

I do, Sir Rowan. I may be sentimental, but I am a sentimental miser. I dropped a copper coin in that bowl. I will wager that Artie, Lotus, and Garnett - you all dropped copper coins as well, yes? Despair?

DESPAIR

I didn't do anything wrong!

LARKSPUR

No dear, you did something right. Sir Rowan, put your sword away and come here, please. Look in that bowl. Tell me what you see.

ROWAN

It looks like a piece of junk.

LARKSPUR

Look deeper. It won't bite. Let your mind empty the rainwater, remove the rotten leaves, polish the metal.

ROWAN

That's a gyfu rune. That's the glyph of gifts and exchange.

LARKSPUR

Gifts, exchange, and obligation, yes.

ROWAN

And around the lip. That's an old writing style. "That which you seek,"

LARKSPUR

"You must first give." This was the embarkation point for the Silver Circle escort team. Their price for protection?

ROWAN

Despair? You dropped a silver coin, didn't you?

DESPAIR

Yes?

ROWAN

Congratulations, you are now under the protection of the Order of the Silver Circle.

DESPAIR

That's good, right?

ROWAN

Other than the fact they've all been dead for fifty years.

DESPAIR

Oh! That's fine. Some of my best friends are dead!

ROWAN

Same here, kid.

LOTUS

But what about that bell, Goodman Larkspur? It sounded as if it surprised you too.

LARKSPUR

The last time I heard that bell, this tree was still a sapling. And it sounded exactly the same as it did back then.

ARTIE

Do you think we activated something? Like some old contingency spell?

LARKSPUR

This may come as a surprise, but I don't know everything.

GARNETT

Do you think we should investigate? See what else is around?

LARKSPUR

I would like to make it to the Station before dark, but I often stop here for lunch. And I believe we've had our random encounter for the day. Have fun. Be back in an hour.

GARNETT

Understood, boss. Who's in and who's staying?

ARTIE

I'll keep an eye on things if you want to go, Sir Rowan.

ROWAN

Explore the ruins of my childhood heroes? What could possibly go wrong?

DESPAIR

Oooh! Can I come too?

GARNETT

Sure. Brother Lotus?

LOTUS

The elders specifically said I should meet people and have adventures.

GARNETT

This counts. Goodman Larkspur, we'll be back in one hour.

LARKSPUR

I promise to scream if I get shot.

Acoustic pause

ROWAN

That bell sounded like it came from over... Hey Artie! Drop another silver!

ROWAN

Thank you! Yeah, this way.

DESPAIR

Brother Lotus? Did I hear correctly? All those red marks are tattoos?

LOTUS

Oh yes.

DESPAIR

There are so many! Did it.. Hurt?

LOTUS

Well, I was very young, and I don't remember much from before the monastery. I am told that all Orcs in my tribe are marked this way.

GARNETT

So Brother, I have got to ask you about that cloak!

LOTUS

I'm so happy it came into my life! Watch this! (clears his throat) I would like a banana!

ROWAN

Well, I suppose it's nice to want things.

LOTUS

Wait for it.

GARNETT

What's that noise? Footsteps? Running?

LOTUS

Just wait.

ROWAN

What the?

DESPAIR

MONKEY!

ROWAN

Monkeys do not live anywhere on this continent!

LOTUS

Yes! Thank you, monkey friend!

DESPAIR

Awww, where'd the monkey go?

LOTUS

Would anyone like a snack? These bananas always make me feel better.

GARNETT

I'm sure Rowan would love a magical banana.

ROWAN

Thank you, Brother. I have now officially seen everything. Oh wow.

GARNETT

Magic monkey medicine?

ROWAN

Magic monkey medicine. I mean, it's subtle, but it's... And just... any time you want?

LOTUS

I find if I ask more than once a day, the monkey gets a little grumpy.

ROWAN

How grumpy?

LOTUS

He broke my nose after the fifth request one day.

ROWAN

If it's any consolation, most healers feel the same way.

DESPAIR

Where did you find the banana cloak, Brother?

LOTUS

Oh, I got it as a reward after my friends and I robbed some drug dealers.

ROWAN

I'm sorry. It almost sounded like you said you robbed drug dealers?

LOTUS

Yes! You see, last autumn, there was a great sickness at Wyvern Hall.

GARNETT

Oh, I remember hearing about that! Some sort of wasting curse and the only sorcerer in the area wanted something like a thousand gold pieces to lift it.

LOTUS

Yes! My friends and I decided to relieve that suffering by visiting those who had already caused other suffering. The dealers had the gold and the curse was lifted.

ROWAN

Is theft a regular part of your training at the Sunnyvale Monastery?

LOTUS

Oh no. However, the Patriarch of the Dog Star Temple did teach us, "I don't mind stealing bread from the mouths of decadence, but I can't feed on the powerless." That is what my siblings call an "expansive interpretation of scripture." (2)

ROWAN

I think my regimental chaplain just rolled over in his grave.

DESPAIR

What's that over there?

GARNETT

Where?

DESPAIR

There! Behind the big boulder.

GARNETT

There's been a rockslide here, sweetie. Several, from the looks of it. Which boulder do you mean?

GARNETT

That works. And yes, that certainly looks like something. How did you see that from all the way over here?

DESPAIR

The aetherial glow, obviously.

GARNETT

The... Of course. And uh, going forward, let us know if you see any more glowing doors obscured by boulders, please?

DESPAIR

Alright, if you don't see them first.

ROWAN

"Ordo Circulus Argentum." Well, if we had any doubt. These rocks must have hidden this entrance for decades.

GARNETT

The boulder did a number on that left door, though.

ROWAN

Yes, but I think the right... Stuck. Brother, give me a hand, please?

ROWAN

Bats! Watch out! Eh. Must've disturbed their roost. Magical, but mostly harmless.

GARNETT

Phew! They hit the back of your armor pretty good though.

ROWAN

Of course they did. I can't see much inside, but it looks like some stairs going down into the hill.

GARNETT

All those in favor of going into the creepy cave? Aye.

DESPAIR

Me! Me!

LOTUS

Certainly.

ROWAN

It's completely dark down there.

GARNETT, LOTUS, and DESPAIR, separately
I can see in the dark.

ROWAN

And my pack is back with the wagon. Let's try some of this broken wood can...

LOTUS

Allow me.

ROWAN

Thank you, Brother. One improvised torch. I'll go first.

GARNETT

I better not get any cobwebs in my fur. Despair?

DESPAIR
OK, I'll

DESPAIR
OW! That door has teeth!

ROWAN
Some sort of ward. Brother Lotus, I can't guarantee this will work, but would you be willing to try?

ROWAN
Well, this is some bullshit. (3)

- I N T E R M I S S I O N -

ANNOUNCER
And now a word from our sponsor: Krusk Family Restaurant.

THE VOICE OF KRUSK FAMILY RESTAURANT
Half-Orcs! You have traveled far! You have found victory!

You have found treasure!

But you have not found: Krusk!

Come to Krusk! The only traditional Orcish restaurant in Hightower. Our menu includes authentic Orcish food such as Krusk squirrel skewers or Krusk boar tartare. Or indulge with our exclusive Krusk Halfling burger. (Breaks voice) Wait, what?

BOOTH TECH
Legal checked it. They say it's a translation thing. "Halfling burger" is as close as they could get to half and half - one scoop of squirrel and one scoop of boar - served with a slab of Dwarven bread.

THE VOICE OF KRUSK FAMILY RESTAURANT
Come to Krusk! Just like Dad used to burn. Open seven days a week, from noon until midnight. 157 East Coli Way, Hightower.

Healer General's Warning: Consuming raw or undercooked meats may increase your risk of foodborne illness. Humanoids other than Orcs, consult a racial physician to confirm if your digestive system can handle this food. No Halflings were harmed in the making of this commercial.

ANNOUNCER

We now return to: A Paladin's Bargain.

- R E T U R N -

ROWAN

So, you made it through, so it can't be a ward against anyone who isn't Human.

GARNETT

And Despair paid back at the dish, so it's not the price of admission.

ROWAN

Back then, they would have warded against both racial groups, especially Tieflings.

DESPAIR

But I'm a good person!

GARNETT

Of course you are.

DESPAIR

You keep saying that, but nobody believes me!

ROWAN

It's hard to take someone's word for it. You have to prove it. G, hold this. I have an idea.

ROWAN

OK, Despair? Lotus? The entrance door to the sanctuary is inside you. (4) Bless you, my children.

LOTUS

And with your spirit also. Now what?

ROWAN

And now, we try to get you through the door.

LOTUS

That really hurt the first time and... it worked!

ROWAN

One down, one to go. Despair? I got you.

DESPAIR

I don't know, I'm a little scared... Oh! It worked! Thank you! Big hug!

ROWAN

Despair! Can't! Breathe! Let's get going. I don't want to find out what happens if that blessing runs out before we leave.

SFX: Echoing voices while underground

GARNETT

Only one way to go... down the creepy stairs.

ROWAN

I'll take point.

GARNETT

You're my favorite meat shield.

ROWAN

Keep your eyes open for traps, please.

DESPAIR

Why would they trap their own buildings?

LOTUS

Why would they set wards against good people based solely on their race?

GARNETT

I have no idea. Judging people based on their race is stupid. Don't you agree, Ro?

ROWAN

I agree. I also never learned Speak with Dead and I don't have a Ouija board. (5) Please don't ask me to understand the logic of a different order from a different era. We're approaching the bottom of the stairs.

ALL

I know. Yes. Etc.

ROWAN

And what do we... have... wow.

LOTUS

Oh my! That tree is.. Carved into the rock wall?

GARNETT

Wall. Walls! The ceiling, too! Yeah! It looks almost exactly like the tree where we found you, Brother.

DESPAIR

What are those feet?

ROWAN

What?

DESPAIR

Over there, in the middle of the room. There are three little metal feet-things bolted to the floor.

LOTUS

That offertory bowl under the tree had three legs but no feet. This must be where it came from. That would make the tree up there a perfect replica of this room.

GARNETT

That would also explain those bits hanging from the branches.

DESPAIR

Those look almost real!

GARNETT

That's because they are real. You and Artie dropped silver coins in the offertory, yes?

DESPAIR

Yeah!

ROWAN

And there are two necklaces with silver amulets hanging up there. I'm not a smart man, but that is what folks call a sign. Take them. Can you reach?

LOTUS

It looks like there's a passageway over here.

ROWAN

Wait up. It's good you all can see in the dark, but let's not split the party. It looks like there's a fountain on this wall.

GARNETT

I wouldn't drink that.

ROWAN

Wasn't planning on it. But unless I'm mistaken... Reveal to me: art thou friend or accursed poison? It's been down here a long time. It hasn't dried up and it's not corrupted. That's holy water. Never hurts to have some. But my bag is back at the wagon.

GARNETT

Are any of those jars at your feet still solid?

ROWAN

Any what? Oh! Good thing they don't have teeth.

ROWAN

There. Now let's check out that passageway Lotus found. G?

GARNETT

Does everyone see that white rock in the floor about three steps ahead of me? Don't step on that.

LOTUS

What is it, Miss Garnett?

GARNETT

It's a pressure plate in a creepy cave. Let's not find out. Otherwise, it's clear of traps.

ROWAN

Thank you, my dear.

GARNETT

You may be a meat shield, but you're my meat shield.

GARNETT

And we have...

ROWAN

A chapel, from the looks of it.

DESPAIR

With bunk beds?

ROWAN

Military orders like the Silver Circle were very regimental.

GARNETT

I thought that meant you didn't wear anything under your kilt.

LOTUS

I'm not sure how I feel about this mural.

ROWAN

Wow. Yeah. That's some war porn right there. Big, bright, shiny Humans and Dwarves fighting off dark black Orcs and dark green Goblinoids. Not very subtle.

GARNETT

Is it still propaganda if they've already joined the order?

ROWAN

Who better to believe it?

DESPAIR

And in foot-high silver letters for good measure. "Kindle the Light; Shelter the Light; Be the Light." (pause!) Oh!

LOTUS

What's wrong?

DESPAIR

The light from his torch reflected off of that statue down there and it surprised me.

ROWAN

What sta... I'd heard the stories, but to see it in real life... That's... I guess Larkspur was right - Siegfried Silverhand! That's a real sword in the statue's hands!

GARNETT

This isn't only a statue. That pedestal is rather coffin shaped.

ROWAN

If my Gran could see me now.

LOTUS

Statue and grave... and altar. Look over here. I've seen marks like this back home. Those are footprints.

ROWAN

This is a stone floor, Lotus.

LOTUS

Yes! Same as in my temple. But if you have generation after generation of a literal army of people, standing in the same place and then kneeling in the same place, multiple times a day? (6) Watch. If I stand here, with my feet in these two divots. And then I put my right knee down, my knee fits in this other spot here, and my toes in that one back there. Or they would if I was shorter.

ROWAN

You're right. And martial orders would usually draw their swords to pray, so that would explain that single mark in front.

GARNETT

Hey Ro, what do you make of this? The sarcophagus reads, "If you would keep this -

ROWAN

you must first give it to me."

GARNETT

That's almost like the bowl up top. But keep what? Give what?

DESPAIR

Your sword?

ROWAN

Scoot over, Lotus.

ROWAN

Ummm... Siegfried Silverhand, I offer my sword to you in salute. Your works and deeds shall be celebrated from now until the final call. Well, it was worth a try.

GARNETT

Maybe... give silver? Stay there, Ro. No joy.

ROWAN

And I'll bet that sword is lodged in there tight, isn't it?

GARNETT

Let's see.

GHOSTS

GET OUT!

GARNETT

And it's time to go!

ROWAN

Agreed. Let's head out, people. Eyes open in case we pissed something off.

GARNETT

Skip that white patch. Same as on the way in.

DESPAIR

Miss Garnett. You've been very nice to me. One of these necklaces from the tree is for Artie, but would you like mine?

GARNETT

That's sweet, Despair. But you solved that riddle before we knew it was a riddle. It's yours.

DESPAIR

Oh! I know! Drop. Four. More. Silver. Coins. Please.

GARNETT

You can communicate with Artie from this far away and underground?

DESPAIR

Of course! I figured that was alright, so long as I wasn't reading his thoughts. You said that was rude.

GARNETT

I... will have to get back to you on that.

DESPAIR

That's strange. All he said was "Need pointy help."

ROWAN

Need... Oh no. Everyone, back to the wagon, NOW!

GARNETT

Ro!

DESPAIR

Well, at least we got out of the bitey door.

ROWAN

No talking. Running.

GARNETT

What are you doing? What's wrong?

ROWAN

Larkspur said the bandits only hit after the pass. Those goblins were before.

ROWAN

That's a body! Not one of ours. Good.

GARNETT

Nasty spikes, though.

LOTUS

Where's Artie?

ROWAN

Where's...

GARNETT

Larkspur!

ROWAN

Oh, no no no no no. G, tell me he's still hanging on.

GARNETT

No pulse. No breathing. He's dead.

- O U T -

Episode 2: Borc, Ook, Spelunk

- (1) "Walk the earth" parody of Pulp Fiction
Copyright 1993, Quentin Tarantino and/or 1994 Miramax LLC
- (2) "I don't mind stealing bread" (a very loving) parody of
"Hunger Strike" Copyright 1991, Chris Cornell (RIP) and
Temple of the Dog.
- (3) "This is some bullshit." parody of "Resident Alien"
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- (4) "The entrance door to the sanctuary..."
Jalal ad-Din Muhammad ar-Rumi (aka Rumi), public domain
- (5) "Ouija board" is technically a trademark of Hasbro, Inc.
The same folks who own WotC and Dungeons and Dragons.
- (6) Inspired by: www.mymodernmet.com/hua-chi-prayer-footprints/