A Paladin's Bargain

Season Two – Episode Five
Chapter Eleven: Welcome to Sunnyvale

ROLE	PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE
Rowan Lawson	X	X	X
Garnett	X	X	X
Artie	X	X	X
Despair	X	X	X
Ronnie	X		X
Primrose Milton	X		
Sibling Ascendant Wren	X		
Brother Owlbear		X	X
Brother Badger		X	X
Goblin #1 ZOG			X
Goblin #2 ZUG			X
Goblin #6 ELDI*			X
Verna			X
Sheridan "Shart" Smithwick			X
Brother Lotus			X
Xolo			X
Tusk Bloodbath			X

* Pronounced like the initials L-D. Short for "legally distinct."

Part One

[SFX: Indoors. Evening. Crickets. A very large and impressive gong]

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Greetings, of earth, sea, and sky.

[SFX: Rustling of fabric]

GARNETT
Despair! Bow!

DESPAIR
What? Oh!

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Welcome to Sunnyvale Monastery. I am Sibling Ascendant Wren.

[SFX: A smaller gong.]

And who are you, gentle souls?

ROWAN
Uh, I am Rowan, son of Lawrence, Sibling Ascendant.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Greetings, son of the eastern shore. I sense a great weariness within you. We offer respite, but none of the liquid comfort you desire. Know that you are safe within these walls.

ROWAN
Umm. Yeah. Thank you.

[SFX: A smaller gong.]

GARNETT
I am Garnett, Sibling Ascendant.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Greetings, daughter of the southern continent. I sense you have spent much of your life in the shadows, but know that you are safe here in our light.

GARNETT
I will try to keep that in mind, thank you.

[SFX: The same smaller gong.]

ARTIE
Um. I am Artie, of the Snake River clan, Sibling Ascendant.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Greetings, brother of the Westlands. Our hearts ache with you for the reunion you seek. I feel it is close at hand. May it be so.

ARTIE
May it be so.

[SFX: The same smaller gong.]

DESPAIR
I am Despair, and why do you people insist on so many freaking bells?

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
(chuckles) Greetings, daughter of the far beyond. You honor us with your presence. We hope to nourish your tender heart, but we will not provide the feast that ou seek.

DESPAIR
But really, why so many bells?

[SFX: The same smaller gong.]

RONNIE
I am Ronnie, daughter of Martha, Sibling Ascendant.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Greetings, sibling of the valley; heart of the heart. We welcome all that you are and all that you shall be.

RONNIE
Uh, thank you?

[SFX: The same smaller gong.]

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Brother Owlbear tells us you met our novitiate Lotus. What can you tell us about him?

GARNETT
We met him… Three days ago? It’s been a long few days. Mid-morning on Moon’s Day? At Temple Pass. He mentioned you and his initiation. While we were together, some bandits attempted to rob our wagon and later that night, we were attacked by three revenants.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Revenants?

ROWAN
Undead bodies that hunger for living flesh. Lotus helped us defeat the bandits and the revenants. And he intentionally stayed back to make sure we got through the valley safely. His actions are a credit to him and to your order’s ways as well.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Indeed. Thank you, son of Lawrence.

GARNETT
Honored Sibling, where is Lotus? We’d love to see him again.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
That is what I was hoping to ask you, Growltiger’s Daughter. Lotus has not returned to Sunnyvale. When last did you see him?

DESPAIR
He left down the Forest Road after we arrived at Gauntlet Station. That was the day before yesterday, around noon.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Our scouts have seen no sign of him and I cannot reach his thoughts by magical means.

DESPAIR
We may have some information on that. There is a goblin outpost in the Boar Forest and the entrances are shielded to block most forms of magic and telepathy.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
That would explain it. We will send a scouting party to investigate.

ROWAN
Hold on. A monastery has recon teams?

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Very skilled scouts, yes. I believe you met a few of them earlier.

ROWAN
Indeed, we did. Sibling Ascendant, with your permission, I would like to be a part of any mission going over to the outpost.

[ALL react.]

ROWAN
Lotus is a good person and I also believe one of our team may have been captured as well. I can not rest until we rescue them.

ARTIE
I'm sorry, **one** of your team? Did you forget about Xolo and Bau again?

ROWAN
I didn't forget about your packmates, Artie.

ARTIE
Look, don't get me wrong, Shart's a good guy. But from over here, it sure sounded you said "Oh wait, we couldn't possibly" when it was my fur and blood on the line. But now that some Dwarf you've know a few days is there? NOW you're ready to storm the halls and lay siege to the outpost?

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
Siblings, please.

ARTIE
No. I won't lay down and roll over. I want to know, Rowan: Why now?

RONNIE
Hey! Because that team member – because Master Smithwick - got captured trying to protect me. I've seen him around the station my whole life. I wasn't even sure he knew my name. But he… He told me to cut left and then he turned to the right and got their attention to draw them away from me. I don't know what will happen, but he risked himself for me. And that's why I'm going with you, Sir Rowan.

ROWAN
Your family is worth it, Artie. I'm sincerely sorry that I made it sound otherwise. I wanted to be safe; try to prevent people from getting hurt. But with the possibility of Shart and Lotus and Xolo

and Bau all being held there? We can't let them continue to capture and abuse people. And now we have (several more good reasons)

[SFX: Fast footsteps and monkey noises]

ROWAN
What? Gods above, is that?

DESPAIR
Monkey?

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN (perturbed)
What is this animal? How did it get in here? And why is it offering me a yellow fruit?

GARNETT
Quick, D! Reach out to Lotus! Honored sibling, please hear me out: when we met Lotus, he had a magic cloak that could summon a monkey with a banana.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
That is a completely new sentence. (beat) Thank you, monkey?

[SFX: Ook! Poof!] (same as in season one)

GARNETT
If this monkey is here, that means that Lotus is alive and… somehow out from behind the lead walls?

DESPAIR (relieved)
I can hear him! Lotus is alive! He was captured on the Forest Road by a troop of hobgoblins. They take him out at night to work in another one of the caves?

RONNIE
Did he say anything about Master Smithwick?

DESPAIR
Crap! We got cut off – must've gone back underground – but he said there were several prisoners, including Xolo and Bau!

ARTIE
Sun and moon, thank you, Despair! That settles it. I'm going.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
It seems we all have reason to visit this outpost. From long experience, we know that goblins and hobgoblins are more active at night. A noon-tide foray would be more advantageous. But for now, gentle guests, we must insist: Lay down your burdens, if only for tonight. We will arrange hot baths and sleeping quarters, provide meals, and bind your wounds. In the morning, we will make plans to rescue your packmates, Master Smithwick, and our Lotus as well.

ROWAN
Wait, that sounds like you're planning an attack.

SIBLING ASCENDANT WREN
They have broken our truce and they have kidnapped one of my novitiates. I believe the phrase my acolyte used was, "Fuck those guys."

[Acoustic pause]

[SFX: daytime nature sounds]
[SFX: knock, knock, knock]

PRIMROSE
Come in?

[SFX: door opens]

GARNETT
Good morning, Rose. We wanted to check in on you before you left.

PRIMROSE
Oh yes, Miss Garnett, Sir Rowan. Please, come in.

[SFX: feet enter, door closes]

Thank you for stopping by. The temple has offered a pair of bodyguards to help me over Heart's Pass and find transportation east.

ROWAN
Well, Hightower is lovely this time of year. It's good to hear about the escort team. They are frighteningly efficient.

PRIMROSE
It's still a little intimidating: starting my life over again. I'm grateful I have a little seed money to help with that.

GARNETT
Seed money? That's an entire harvest worth of start-over money. Speaking of which, Ronnie said she left the real ransom from the Guild Bank with you?

PRIMROSE
Sorry, I was a little distracted last night. Here you are.

[SFX: A large bag of coins hits the table]

ROWAN
Thank you. G, we'll need to leave this with the Monastery until we get back though.

PRIMROSE
And I promised you payment for your protection last night. Will this be enough?

[SFX: A scoop of coins changes hands]

GARNETT (a little surprised)
More than enough. Thank you!

PRIMROSE
Thank you. If I had trusted Milton, I'd be dead and my body unburned. That's worth everything.

ROWAN
We're happy to be of service to you. Although it seems strange to call you Widow (trails off)

PRIMROSE
That man tried to murder me! I refuse to carry him around as "Widow Milton." I suppose I could go back to Magnolias-dottir. That's such a mouth-full.

GARNETT
Hold up. Primrose Magnolias-dottir? That sounds familiar. This is a long shot, but are you related to a merchant named Goodman Larkspur?

PRIMROSE (shocked)
You know my grandfather? How?

ROWAN
This is going to be a little awkward. Goodman Larkspur hired us to protect his wagon on his way to Gauntlet Station.

GARNETT
And in one of his many stories, he mentioned his daughter Magnolia having a daughter Primrose about… your number of years ago.

PRIMROSE
He likes to come for the Springsong Eve Faire, but I haven't heard from him. What happened?

GARNETT
That's the awkward part. I'm very sorry to say, your grandfather was killed by a group of bandits at Temple Pass.

PRIMROSE
I always said that stupid run was going to be the death of him. (sigh) Now I'm right and I don't want to be. But thank you for telling me. I'm sure you did all you could. (beat) You said at Temple Pass?

ROWAN
Yes. There's a clearing with a rather special tree?

PRIMROSE
There's a nice little circle, eh? That's where I married Milton. "Til death do us part," indeed. (beat) And to be sure, you burned my grandfather's body?

ROWAN
Eventually?

PRIMROSE
What about the bandits?

GARNETT
Captured, dead, and burned.

PRIMROSE
They can rise and rot for all I care, so long as they're dead.

ROWAN
Wait, you know the dead around here rise up if they're not burned?

PRIMROSE
Of course. Most folks in the valley know.

ROWAN
Did they ever say what’s causing it? Or how long it’s been happening?

PRIMROSE
No reason, but it’s been long enough that necessity has blurred into tradition.

GARNETT
Sweet mercy grace. You'd think the word would get out.

PRIMROSE (laughs)
Are you kidding? With the trade between Deepwater and Hightower drying up, the only reason Gauntlet Station stays on the map is because of a couple centuries of propaganda. Young adventurers show up, find treasures in the Boar Forest, and spend some of it in town. If word got out that the place was cursed, the station would wither and die… faster than it’s dying already.

ROWAN
Gods above and devils below.

PRIMROSE
Can you imagine the new advertisements? (mocking announcer voice) “Welcome to the Gauntlet Valley! Come for the adventure, stay for eternity.”

[commercial break]

ANNOUNCER
And now a word from our sponsor: Bard *Community* College

THE VOICE OF BARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
It’s time for everyone’s favorite musical event of the year: the National Bard Community College Recorder Festival!

This weekend only at Midsummer Park,
Friday 2-6, Saturday 10-10, and Sunday at Noon!

Bring your own folding chair, picnic, and earplugs to celebrate the end of the BCC academic year. The traditional favorite Beginning Recorder Recital closes the event at 10 am Sunday. Be advised the finale has a DC 16 constitution check!

Buy tickets and tour shirts at the box office at 12-1234 Magical Mystery Way, Deepwater.

Your future is in your hands!

They said you couldn’t do it, now it’s time to prove them wrong.

[SFX: BCC signature power chord]

ANNOUNCER
We return to: A Paladin’s Bargain.

Part Two

[SFX: knock knock]

DESPAIR
(muffled) Come in!

[SFX: door opening]

ARTIE
Hey, Despair! I was heading over to the battle planning. Are you coming?

DESPAIR
Let me finish up. That knob is driving me crazy though. I can't figure it out at all.

[SFX: Door closes and footsteps on wooden floor.]

ARTIE
What about the staff?

DESPAIR (heavy sigh)
It's a healing staff alright. I feel pretty stupid about that.

ARTIE
Hey, whoa. You had no way of knowing. Glow or no glow.

DESPAIR
I know but I failed to see that a butt-ugly hobgoblin was charming me. That's stupid and Lawson says stupid will get me killed.

ARTIE
You're not stupid, you're actually really smart. You're in a new place. You'll learn.

DESPAIR
Thanks. Everything has been so new for me this week. I don't even know where to begin. I tried talking to Miss Garnett and Lawson, but as soon as I started asking about magic, he started yelling again.

ARTIE
He IS good at yelling, that's for sure. So, what sort of magic questions do you have? Anything I can help with?

DESPAIR
So, when I woke up, this book was here next to me. Do you know what this is?

ARTIE
Hon, just because we Canidae may not read, doesn't mean I don't know what a book is.

DESPAIR
No, no. I didn't mean it that way. This book is… special. It's a gift from my patron, but it's also a contract. If use this, it'll really increase my ability to help with everything.

ARTIE
At that would be a good thing, but I feel like there's a "but" coming.

DESPAIR
But, it means I'm locked in to doing things one way. HIS way.

ARTIE
And you're not sure if you're ready for that level of commitment? You like your patron fine but think maybe you should see other cosmic horrors, too?

DESPAIR
Stop it, I'm serious. Let me ask you this way: I remember reading that druids worship trees. But the maps I've seen, there are no trees in the Westlands.

ARTIE
To the surprise of no one, they got it wrong. The land doesn't ask me to pray; it asks me to listen. Everything in this world has something special about it. Our stories teach us how to tap into that and how to shape it into something we can use.

DESPAIR
But what do you pay for it?

ARTIE
I don't understand. Pay?

DESPAIR
Magic takes out. What do you put back in?

ARTIE
No, no. There is no “out” and no “back.” It’s all part of the same closed loop. OK, look out there at that oak tree. You see the tree? I see the acorn, and the first sapling shoots, and the fire’s ash all in there. (beat) But hold on. I’m not the smartest puppy in the pile, and you’re telling me that your magic costs you something?

DESPAIR
Yes, every spell I cast, every eldritch blast.

ARTIE
What exactly does it cost?

DESPAIR (timid)
Blood?

ARTIE
So all the post-combat nosebleeds you get… that’s payment?

DESPAIR
That shaman last night said he didn’t need to hit me. He could wait until I cast so many spells that I bled to death.

ARTIE
I beg your finest pardon and hold your very delicious horses. You are fine with offering your own blood in payment for magic? And I’ve watched you spill plenty when we fought goblins or revenants.

DESPAIR
Any of the other people we fought.

ARTIE
But you who spilled so much blood, cried about the rabbits Miss Garnett caught for dinner?

DESPAIR
The folks we encounter are consciously doing bad things. We try to stop them; to even out the balance. The rabbits are looking for food and a safe place to sleep and trying to be happy with their cute little rabbity friends. But do I have the right to ask some terrified rabbit to be my dinner?

ARTIE
I mean, circle of life and all that.

DESPAIR
But more and more, there are times when I wonder if we're doing the right thing, you know? Like, if the people we're calling bad people aren't also trying to find food and a safe place to sleep and be happy? Why do we get to decide?

ARTIE
Woof. That is a lot for me to wrap my head around. I don't know what to tell you.

DESPAIR
That's alright. I've got a lot to think about.

ARTIE
But I can say this: If the only reason you get magic is because you're feeding your blood to someone or something? You're not a devotee, you're prey.

[SFX: that same smaller gong]

ARTIE
Alright, paws on the floor. We've got to get going to the planning meeting.

[SFX: feet on wooden floor]

DESPAIR
Yeah, let's get going. Everyone seems so set on doing this raid, but it feels so overwhelming.

ARTIE
Yeah, it does.

DESPAIR
What if we die?

ARTIE
Lemme tell you what my Aunties taught me: When I was born, the earth made me. The summer winds became the air in my lungs; the streams flowed into my veins; the plants *and the animals* I ate became my body. When I die, my last breath will feed the winds; my blood will flow back into the streams; my body will feed the mushrooms, and probably a few other things. This world is what I'm made of and when I die, the world will be made of me. That won't change, no matter if it happens today or a hundred moons from now.

DESPAIR
Oh wow, when you put it that way, it’s really beautiful.

ARTIE
And if it happens today, it will suck. Because it will mean we failed Xolo and Bau and Shart and Lotus. So let’s try to make sure there are a few other options before we get to the “cosmic recycling center” part.

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Footsteps stop. Knock knock]

GARNETT
(muffled) Come in!

[SFX: Door opens]

GARNETT
Oh hi, you two. We were discussing the map with Brother Owlbear.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
No, I was telling you this is impossible. (beat) Artie, Despair: while they are working things out, is there anything else you two need? Any assistance we can provide?

DESPAIR
One thing? We found this knob last night on one of the hobgoblins. I can tell it’s magical, but I have no idea what it is or what it can do. Do you have someone who could identify it?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Oh, I know exactly who can help you with this. [spellcasting voice] Brother Badger, please report to the Dogwood room, Brother Badger.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
The person who can help you will be here shortly. In the mean time, perhaps you two can talk some sense into your friends, please? Look at the map. It’s a hundred yards of open field between either of the bridges and the cave entrances. With a guard tower in the middle! And day or night, there are always at least six guards on patrol plus a hobgoblin officer. You might get one or two people past them at night, but in the daytime? There’s no way.

ROWAN
Seven of them, five of us. Those aren't horrible odds.

GARNETT (musing)
That's not what you said at bandit camp.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
This isn't a team of seven out in the woods with no support. We hit one of the goblins on the perimeter and their friends in the tower start banging on the alarm gong. If they do that, all our heads will be on stakes before sunset.

BROTHER BADGER
Excuse me. Someone was looking for me?

DESPAIR
You're Brother Badger? I was told you might be able to identify something we found?

BROTHER BADGER
(GASP!) MY KNOB! What? Where? How did you find it?

DESPAIR
We took it from a hobgoblin in the Boar Forest?

ARTIE (giggling like a 13 year old boy)
Could you tell us a little bit about your… knob there, Brother?

BROTHER BADGER
Of course!

ROWAN
Gods above, the doorknob has an origin story?

GARNETT
Hush. Let's start with: How do you know it's yours?

BROTHER BADGER
It's got my name on it, see? Hog-gles-bog-ger.

BROTHER OWLBEAR (like he's explaining to a child)
Brother Badger, pretend for a moment that our guests do not know your history. And, in case you hadn't noticed, they aren't Gnomes.

BROTHER BADGER
Oh, right. Most big folks can’t see Gnomish runes worked into the metal. To you, it probably looks like scratches or imperfections, but it’s as clear as day to us.

ARTIE
Because?

BROTHER BADGER
Because we don’t make imperfect things, obviously. (tsk) Before I came to Sunnyvale, my name was Nelwyn Hogglesbogger. I worked as an artificer in Hightower with a half-elvish wizard named Cyanocitta the Blue. Crazy sonofabitch.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Brother!

BROTHER BADGER
If you’d met him, you wouldn’t argue.

ROWAN
Cyanocitta the Blue? Any guess why crazy wizards like the middle name “The”?

GARNETT
Not now, Ro. Go on, brother.

BROTHER BADGER
We were working on pocket dimensions, bags of holding, portable holes, that sort of stuff.

DESPAIR
Oooh, neat!

BROTHER BADGER (really freaks you out)
Not neat! Terrifying! Did you ever hear the expression, “I looked into the abyss and the abyss looked back”? That’s because the abyss has eyes. Like thousands and thousands of eyes! (And it looked at me. Some were blue and some were red...)

BROTHER OWLBEAR (interrupting)
Brother? Come back to the now. Focus on the now.

BROTHER BADGER (deep breath)
The last thing we worked on was a portable door, accessed by this knob. We designed it to connect with another door somewhere else. But sometimes it would glitch and open any random door.

DESPAIR
What do you mean by “any” door?

BROTHER BADGER
I mean we accidentally opened the door to the governor’s “private dungeon.” If I never see another pair of fur-lined manacles in this life, I will die a happy Gnome.

DESPAIR
Why would they be fur-lined? That would make interrogation much more difficult.

ARTIE (sly)
Oh, it could definitely make something harder.

BROTHER BADGER
Here, let me show you what my knob can do! You stick the knob into any blank wall, like this.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Brother, is this wise?

BROTHER BADGER
It’s not wise, it’s science!

[SFX: Click, hummm, steadily growing louder, like a microwave]

DESPAIR (excited)
That door frame wasn’t there before!

BROTHER BADGER
Yes!

GARNETT (worried)
It’s glowing!

BROTHER BADGER
That means it’s working!

[SFX: hum stops & a little ‘ding’, followed by a door creaking open]

BROTHER BADGER
Where is it? Oh, it’s hot in there!

ARTIE
That’s (sniff) salvia and (sniff sniff) hierochloe? Let me look in there. (continues sniffing)

DESPAIR
What do you see, Artie?

ARTIE
Tanned leather door drape, pelts over branches to make a roof, and a bunch of hot rocks but no fire? That, my friends, is a sweat lodge. (very contented sigh of relaxation)

DESPAIR
What’s that bowl over there?

ARTIE (quickly)
Don’t touch that, it’s holy.

DESPAIR
But I’m a good person!

ARTIE
Didn’t mean it that way. From the smell of it, there’s ayuhuasca in there. The good news is: you’ll see god and probably get some answers to those questions about how magic works.

DESPAIR
And the bad news?

ARTIE
You’ll spend the next two days vomiting up everything you have ever eaten in your whole entire life.

GARNETT (interjecting)
We’re good. Thank you, Artie. Close it down please, Brother?

[SFX: Door clicks closed]

ROWAN
Hunh. That seems simultaneously creepy and useful.

BROTHER BADGER
Alright. Bad example. Let me try it again, will you please? It’s been a few years since I’ve used my knob, I’m a little rusty.

GARNETT
But you’re saying if you focus, you can open one door in particular. Could it get us into the goblin caves?

DESPAIR
I doubt it. That lead paint blocks everything else.

ROWAN
Hold on. Brother Owlbear, tell me more about that watchtower in the field, please?

BROTHER OWLBEAR (duh)
It’s a tower. They watch from the top of it. Something goes wrong, they bang on a big gong and all sixteen hells break loose.

DESPAIR
Wait, what?

GARNETT
Not now. But it’s a gong, not a horn?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Our scouting reports say they use horns for stuff far afield, like the forest. The gong is for stuff closer to home.

ROWAN
Every guard tower I’ve ever been in has a weapons locker. Brother, if someone opens the real door while the portal is open, could you pass through into that other space?

BROTHER BADGER
Maybe? Or it could glitch and you’d be ripped in half. Fifty-fifty.

ROWAN
Look at the map. Do you think you could use your knob to get us into that weapons locker?

BROTHER BADGER
I’m not sure. I’d have to get pretty close.

GARNETT

Did you miss the part about getting ripped in half?

ROWAN
(to her) I've faced worse odds. (to Badger) Close like maybe fifty yards or so?

BROTHER BADGER
And I'd need some time concentrating.

GARNETT
We're planning to leave in about four hours, will that be enough?

BROTHER BADGER
(immediately) Certainly! (beat) I think.

ROWAN
Sounds like we have a plan. Everybody rest up and gear up, we leave at noon.

(beat)

ARTIE
So Brother, why did you give it all up to join the monastery?

BROTHER BADGER
I woke up one morning and Cy was gone.

GARNETT
He left you in the night?

BROTHER BADGER
Not judging by the puddle of goo at his workbench. It was one close call too many. At Sunnyvale, I took a vow to alleviate suffering in the world, and I hoped it might scrub some of those images out of my head at the same time.

ROWAN
But you took the knob?

BROTHER BADGER
The pointy-eared loon stiffed me my last paycheck. He owed me something.

DESPAIR
But how did the hobgoblin get it?

BROTHER BADGER
A few years ago, I was part of a failed scouting mission in the Boar Forest. Hobgoblins may be dumb, but they got suspicious when the shrubbery starts sneezing.

ARTIE
Druid verified – shrubs do not sneeze. But Tieflings do. How's your allergies, Despair?

DESPAIR
Don't ask.

[commercial break]

ANNOUNCER
And now a word from our sponsor: Hogglesbogger’s Wonder Emporium

THEODORA HOGGLESBOGGER
Ouch, my elbow! Apply wipe on the forehead!

Mrs. H’s Healing Word disposable wipes combine the soothing properties of Slaadi snot with the pleasing scent of natural eucalyptus!

Ouch, my foot! Apply wipe on the forehead!

Mrs. H’s Healing Word disposable wipes provide up to 10% reduction in superficial pain for up to 2-5 minutes.

Apply wipe to the forehead and breathe deeply while the natural essences activate. Don’t let pain get in the way of your next adventure. Pick up your pack of Mrs. H’s Healing Word disposable wipes today for only 15 silver at Hogglesbogger’s Wonder Emporium, 5055 Enchanted Alley, Deepwater.

Disclaimer voice: Wipes have not been tested in clinical trials. Claims of efficacy are not guaranteed in all situations. Eucalyptus may burn if applied to mucous membranes. Do not use if allergic to Slaadi.

ANNOUNCER
We now return to: A Paladin’s Bargain.

Part Three

[SFX: Outside, day]

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG) (Goblin voice with English overlay)
Hey! Zug! Zug! No sleep! We watch!

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG) (Goblin voice with English overlay)
Ugh! So tired. Where First Team?

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
First Team go into dirt. We watch.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
ALL First Team go into dirt?

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
True. Captain Bonebreaker and Little Ghost-talker go into dirt too.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Oh. Bad. Who talk to ghosts now?

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
Big Ghost-talker. But Big Ghost-talker mad.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Why mad?

[SFX: Fleshy smack upside the head. Zug reacts.]

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
Because Little Ghost-talker go into dirt!

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Oh. True. Red King know?

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
Red King know everything. Red King BIG mad. But Red King say new team come soon.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Good. New team come. Zug sleep more.

[SFX: Click, hummm, steadily growing louder, like a microwave]

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
Stop. Hear noise.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Bang gong?

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
No. Find noise.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Tell Captain?

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
No. Find noise.

[SFX: hum stops & a little ‘ding’]

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
Noise in spear place.

GOBLIN #1 (ZOG)
Open spear place.

GOBLIN #2 (ZUG)
It (look)

[SFX: Door slams open. Squelch! Zug cries out.]

ROWAN
One!

[SFX: squelch! Zog cries out.]

ROWAN
Two!

(From a distance, you hear an arrow and a goblin cry)

GARNETT
Three!

(Eldritch blast, another goblin cry)

DESPAIR
Four!

(another arrow and another goblin cry)

RONNIE
Five!

BROTHER OWLBEAR
‘Scuse me, coming through! Woohoo! (as if he’s jumping off the tower)

[SFX: Body thud, stab, stab, hobgoblin grunt, big thud]

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Six!

ROWAN
Where’s seven? Anyone see number seven?

GARNETT
There! He’s running for the cave! (arrow fires and misses) Dammit! Some help, Artie!

ARTIE
Already on it! (spellcasting voice) Tie and bind, tie and bind. Grow the vines to tie and bind!

[SFX: Some sort of foliage sounds. Goblin grunts a muffled yelp.]

ARTIE
How you like that?

ROWAN
Perfect. Let’s get these bodies out of sight.

DESPAIR
Push them into the river?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
I drink from that river, thank you.

RONNIE
I’ll move them out of the way, but not in the river, I promise.

ARTIE
C’mon, I’ll give you a hand.

GARNETT
Thank you, you two. Heyya, Owlbear, nicely done on the hobgoblin.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
What? It was no big deal.

GARNETT
I meant the part where you leaped from the guard tower, did a double somersault and landed on the guy's shoulders before you gave him some mental floss with your daggers.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
You know I'm a monk, right?

GARNETT
Badass monk is more like it.

BROTHER OWLBEAR
That's redundant.

ROWAN
Humble monk, not so much. Will you look at this hobgoblin? He's covered in electrum. Exactly like the his friend at the crossroads.

GARNETT
Not now, Ro.

ROWAN (calling out)
Heyya, Badger! Knob worked perfect! Close it up and come on in.

BROTHER BADGER
No way! I'm more brainy-brainy than sneaky-sneaky. I'm going back to the monastery.

ROWAN
What? You signed up for this!

BROTHER BADGER
My door, my choice!

[SFX: Door closes]

ARTIE
All done. Does anyone want to question this squirmy little fella before I snap his neck?

ROWAN
Hold on, Artie. Can’t do that. We have to leave him tied up somewhere in the forest.

BROTHER OWLBEAR (sarcastic)
That is very kind of you: offering a gift-wrapped meal for the beasts in the forest. Pity about the “getting eaten alive” part.

ROWAN
So, we’ll put him in a tree?

ARTIE
I’m sure Stella would LOVE that.

ROWAN
I’m saying we can’t kill him.

ARTIE
No, YOU can’t. Would you mind turning around for about six seconds?

ROWAN
Paladin’s Bargain, y’all. He’s been captured and is at our mercy.

GARNETT
And what about the fact that every time we try to do this, they end up escaping and betraying us?

DESPAIR
Or coming back from the dead and trying to eat our brains?

GARNETT
Your justice fixation is going to get us killed.

ROWAN
I have to give them the chance to make a good decision. If they choose poorly, that’s on them. But before we do any of that, does anyone speak Goblin?

BROTHER OWLBEAR
A little. (A hesitant sentence, something like:)
Gabata hoo-tah. Neko peti ee-pah?

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
No kill Eldee! I speak you speak. No kill Eldee!

BROTHER OWLBEAR
Problem solved.

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
You Goblin-speak doo-poo. No kill Eldee.

GARNETT
Shhhh! Shhh! Tell us true; we no kill Eldee.

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
OK, OK. Eldee tell true.

GARNETT
Where you keep… prisoners?

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
Eh?

ARTIE
People look like me.

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
Oh! Slaves! Why no say slaves?

[SFX: smack]

ARTIE
Cay-ni-dae. Cay-ni-dae. Say it.

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
Cay-ni-dae.

ARTIE
Good boy.

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
Cay-ni-dae. Hunh. New word for slave.

[SFX: smack]

Aii! No kill Eldee!

GARNETT
No time for language lessons. Where… (sigh) Where slaves sleep?

GOBLIN #6 (ELDEE)
That cave, that door. Count three door, open this door. No kill Eldee.

GARNETT
D? Any read on him?

DESPAIR
He’s terrified but he’s not lying.

ROWAN
That’s putting a lot of hope on some head nods and a little pidgin.

GARNETT
At this point, it’s all that we’ve got.

ARTIE
I’ll take it.

[acoustic pause]

[SFX: Cave]

NOTE: Everyone, whisper, please. You are deep in the enemy’s caves. One wrong move and you will have hundreds of people gunning for you.

ARTIE (whispered to the party)
So far, so good. The little pest hasn’t steered us wrong yet.

ROWAN (whispered to the party)
These caves are weird.

GARNETT (whispered to the party)
Do you mean the creepy red glow? Or the cave walls that are so clean and straight, they look Dwarven made?

RONNIE (whispered to the party)
I vote for the creepy red glow.

DESPAIR (whispered to the party)
But if Lotus was right and the caves are built on slave labor, maybe they ARE Dwarven made?

RONNIE (whispered to the party)
Miss Garnett, do you think the red light is for the Blood Emperor?

GARNETT (whispered to the party)
You mean like themed mood lighting? Maybe. I'm more wondering if these caves have residents who can't see in the darkness.

BROTHER OWLBEAR (whispered to the party)
Can we discuss the racial makeup of Team Evil at another time, please? If the goblin was honest, this is the right turn after the third door. But I can't hear anything. Artie?

ARTIE (whispered to the party)
I can smell someone cooking further down. I can smell Xolo and Bau, but I can't tell if they're here or just passed by recently.

DESPAIR (whispered to the party)
Everyone hush. We're inside the painted boundary, so I should be able to reach him. (sending voice) Shart. Are you awake?

SHART (sending voice)
I am now. How are ya reaching me?

DESPAIR (sending voice)
We're here to rescue you… I think.

SHART (sending voice)
Ya think?

DESPAIR (sending voice)
We might be in the right place or we're walking into a trap. Can you cough twice?

SHART
(Coughs twice) [SFX note: This sounds a little muffled.]

DESPAIR (whispered to the party)
That's him!

BROTHER OWLBEAR (whispered to the party)
Ask how many guards are in there.

DESPAIR (whispered to the party)
Step ahead of you. Only one guard. To the right of the door. And he's starting to fall asleep. And the door hinges are well oiled. Your paranoia has taught me well, Lawson. Thank you.

ROWAN (whispered to the party)
It's not paranoia if they are actually trying to kill us. Now what?

DESPAIR (whispered to the party)
He said he was going to distract the guard?

BROTHER OWLBEAR (whispered to the party)
But did he say how he was going to do that?

SHART
[sings a soft, gentle song]
Fear no more the heat of the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages
Thou worldly task has done
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages

GARNETT
That is my cue.

[SFX: Door quietly unlatches and opens.]

SHART
Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

[SFX: Three stabs and a muffled scream from the hobgoblin.]

GARNETT (from a distance)
Shart, that was beautiful, thank you. Lotus, good to see you. Good afternoon, everyone who can understand me. Please remain as silent as you can, but we are here to rescue you. (calmly) All clear, folks, come on in.

VERNA
It's about time!

EVERYONE shushes her.

GARNETT (pissed)
Miss, silent means not yelling.

VERNA
I was told that someone would be coming to get me yesterday. Yes-ter-day. Why did it take so long for you to get here?

SHART
Before this one sucks all tha air out of tha room, would someone mind unchaining tha rest of us? Tha key ring is on that post on tha wall. And close that door. Voices carry in the halls.

RONNIE
I'll get the door.

BROTHER OWLBEAR (cutting her off)
I will get the door. You can reach the keys.

VERNA
Me first! I've been waiting the longest to get out.

XOLO
No, you have not.

ARTIE
Xolo! (gasp) Bau!

XOLO (truly surprised)
Artemis? What are you…? How did you find us?

ARTIE
I've been tracking you since they took you. But what happened to Bau?

ROWAN
I'm working on that. (spellcasting voice) O mickle is thy powerful grace.

[SFX: Choir of angels]

Despair, we could use some of that healing staff, please.

XOLO
They've been working us in deep caves. Too much bad air and it knocks you out cold.

GARNETT
Miss, we are all getting out of here.

VERNA
Do you mean to tell me that Milton paid the ransom for all of (you can hear the disgust) them?

GARNETT
Hold on. Milton?

VERNA
The Guildmaster of Gauntlet Station, my fiancé.

ROWAN
Heh. This one is all you, G. I'm getting everyone a little closer to healthy. (spellcasting voice) O mickle is thy powerful grace.

[SFX: Choir of angels]

RONNIE
So, let's see… You're Xolo? (click) So this must be Bau. (click) Master Smithwick, it's good to see you, sir. I owe you a lot. (click) And you must be Brother Lotus?

LOTUS
Yes! Thank you! And who are you, please?

RONNIE
I'm Ronnie, I'm nobody special. But you've had some folks very worried. (click)

LOTUS
Oh you're more than that, Ronnie. You're our liberator! Thank you.

RONNIE
Umm, you're welcome? I… I should move on. Oh! And who might you be?

TUSK BLOODBATH
No speak common.

LOTUS
Oh, don't be silly. You spoke with me fine. Everyone: This is Tusk Bloodbath! He's my cousin!

RONNIE
You both have such amazing tattoos. I wasn't sure if you were family or besties.

LOTUS
It’s alright, Tusk. These are my friends. Even the ones I haven’t met yet.

VERNA
No!

EVERYONE shushes her again.

VERNA
He… He can’t be dead! We were… I was going to… No!

SHART
Stop her!

[SFX: a smack and Garnett hisses in pain with a thump to the floor. The door slams open and Verna runs down the hall, sobbing at volume.]

ROWAN
You alright, G?

GARNETT
(wheezes) Sucker punched me. Somebody stop her before…

[SFX: Very loud gong crash.]

GARNETT
Never mind.

[SFX: a chunky thud, like opening circuit breaker.)

RONNIE (very afraid)
Did the lights just go out for everyone?

ROWAN
Oh, shit.

SHART
Language.

[End credits]