

Lost in the Silent Forest

Cast:

Ruther – Level 5 Wolf Barbarian. Superstitious about the supernatural and magic as whole. Hates all magic that doesn't come from his allies.

Calvin – Level 5 Bat Ranger. Cocky when it comes to plant and wildlife. As far as the party knows, he can back up said snark too.

Fonne – Level 5 Fennec Fox Alchemist. A well-rounded and good-natured experimenter. Tries to have a potion flask for nearly every obstacle.

Pierce – Level 5 Deer Druid. A wise forest dweller who can make many wild plants or animals love him. Absentmindedly, says certain things in Druidic, confusing his party members.

Saffron – Level 5 Rabbit Bard. Has the most wits and a highly effective silver tongue. He strives to live a glorious life and write epic poems for himself and all of his fellow party members.

Chapter 1

Town Marketplace

The party found themselves at a loss walking out of the mayor's home. Once again, no leads as to where the Almanac Stone was. While the mayor was helpful in general, she gave no different answers that the Guildmaster at the Mage's Guild didn't give either. While everyone slowly walked to the center of the marketplace, a blue rabbit carrying a rapier and a small harp on his back hopped on top of a crate and yelled to the heavens in frustration.

"WHY IS EVERYONE IN THIS FREAKING TOWN SO USELESS!?" The rabbit panted heavily after his outburst. A comforting hand would find its way onto his shoulder. He glanced at the hand annoyingly, seeing it led back to a smiling white deer.

"It's not all that bad Saffron. We now know the next Mage Guild's location! We can always go there."

Saffron shook his head. "That's not good enough Pierce. We only have a week to find that stone! And, if we don't, some evil is going to find it first."

A large dark red wolf would come and sit next to the two on an adjacent crate. Him moving prompted everyone else in the party to sit nearby too. "Saf's right. We can't afford to keep bouncing around from town to town like this. Not only will we make Albert mad if we miss the deadline, but we risk letting our enemies get closer to it as well. Time ain't the best of friends to us right now."

Pierce looked downtrodden as a silence fell over the group. It would be the off-yellow, oddly dressed fennec fox who broke the air. "Soooo... Anyone have any other ideas then? Cause... I'm pretty sure sitting here doing nothing is quite possibly the worst thing we could be doing."

One-by-one, they slowly turned to a bored looking silver bat. The bat was busying himself tweaking his bow the whole time. As soon as he felt the party's eyes on him, he met them with an annoyed look. "...What?"

The wolf leaned closer to the bat. "You heard Fonne mister snarky idea guy. What's our plan?"

The bat eyes widened, ““OUR”!? Why are you relying on me!? Saffron’s the idea guy not me!”

“Well Calvin, this idea guy has run out of ideas. Both you and me make the team’s plans and, right now at least, this rabbit’s all burned out of ideas.”

“So? What makes you think I could have a better one?”

“We’ll wait for you have a better one.”

Calvin held a deadpanned expression before making a delayed sigh. “Alright then...” He began to stow his bow and stand up. “While you all sit here and do nothing, *I* will heed your requests to solve every single one of the party’s problems.”

Saffron looked quizzically at him. “What? Wait no! That’s not what I said at-”

“Bye bye~ Saffron. I’ll make sure to pick up some food from the vendors.”

The party could only watch as Calvin disappeared deeper into the marketplace. Saffron would turn back to everyone with a confused face, a shrug was all they could give.

Town Marketplace, Unknown Alleyway

Calvin browsed the many merchant stores with a bored look. A bunch of armor and weapons vendors all with weapons of various qualities. There were a few enchantment stores dotted in between them too. Everything looked pretty normal, all except for one thing... Food.

The more Calvin browsed the more annoyed he became. How could a marketplace have vendors for everything except food? How does this town even eat? He may have found Saffron antics annoying but rarely was the bard ever wrong, the town freaking sucks!

“Hehehe~ So it’s food and knowledge the bat seeks for his party...”

Calvin’s eyes widened and he readied his bow towards the voice’s location. However, instead of seeing some kind of enemy, he just found a group of surprised and concerned civilians. Calvin scowled at himself internally. He lowered his bow and looked around the marketplace for any wild animals.

Calvin’s Perception Check: Successful

There were many birds who sat on the roofs of the merchant tents and stores. A few stray animals also seemed to occasionally dart between the other civilians around him. Perhaps his sensitive bat ears accidentally translated one of those animals. Hunger pains really were messing with him that much huh? Thankfully no one from the party was here to comment.

Calvin stowed his bow and apologized to the surprised civilians. He kept a lookout for a food stall of some kind. He walked deeper and deeper into the marketplace, finding only more things he and his party had no use for.

After a few more minutes he would stop near an alleyway. He sighed, looking around at the merchants again. Still no food stalls. Perhaps he should have just asked someone for directions but, then again, he also really hated that idea. But he's also not going to get any less hungry so he might as well-

Calvin's Athletics Check (Disadvantage): Fail

A lithe hand grabs Calvin's wrist and forcefully pulls him into the alleyway. The bat could only get out a slight yelp before a hand was forced over his mouth and his arms were held back. He struggled to reach for his dagger to fight his assailant but was held fast by them.

"Shh... It's okay Calvin."

The bat widened his eyes at the familiar voice. It was the same one that was giggling at him before. At first he thought it was the wild animals but, hearing it a lot more closely, the assailant sounded so much more familiar. Who was this?

Calvin's Recall Knowledge Check (Disadvantage): Fail

"Hehehe~ I know my voice sounds very familiar to you. Too bad my magic makes it too hard for you to recall..."

Calvin shivered as the voice breathed down his neck. They were a magic caster? Then he definitely knew this who guy was. Come on! There were very few magic casters remaining that would have wanted him dead! That should have narrowed it down so much!

The bat struggled to collect his thoughts and decipher the voice. Meanwhile, he could feel something akin to chains on his hands. "Let me get you comfy... and more agreeable~"

Calvin's Athletics Check: Critical Fail

Calvin did not like the sound of that at all. He panicked, dropping his cool and struggling against the magic restraints and his enemy again. He flexed his wings and attempted to use their weight against themselves. Calvin heard a relieving grunt of surprise from his assailant as they both fell to the ground

Calvin smirked at himself before attempting to use the nearby wall to stand up. Well... He thought he was using the wall.

The bat felt his advancement stop and then quickly for him back to the ground. "OOF. Fuck!" The bat grimaced hearing laughter envelop his ears.

"Hahaha! I didn't realize you were that eager Calvin."

The bat opened his eyes back up. They were met by an unhooded rat with a devious smile on his face.

Calvin growled at the familiar face. "Kalbaz the Rat Witch..."

The black furred rat chuckled with glee at Calvin saying his name. "It's been a while hasn't it, Calvin~?"

The bat had no time for this lowly wannabe witch. "What do you want? I have much better things to be doing than deal with your weak attempts at being a magic user."

Kalbaz kept his smile on his face as he spoke, "Oh, don't worry. I'm not here to show you my "party tricks" as you like to call them. I'm here for something else..."

"That being?"

"Revenge~"

"Wha-"

The bat never got to finish his words before gleaming lights pulsed from the rat witch's eyes. The lights were blinding yet alluring, pulling Calvin deeper into them every second...

Calvin's Will Check: Critical Fail

It took only seconds for Calvin's eyes to begin pulsing with the same rhythm. The swirling patterns filled the bat's brain with calmness and relaxation. Time seemed to slow down, becoming an afterthought above everything... He began to feel drool slip out of his mouth... He began to only focus on the rat in front of him... He began to feel obedience set in... He was ready to be a good boy...

Kalbaz laughed at the dopey looking bat. All of his snark and pride was washed away. Replaced only with thoughts of the rat he wanted to obey. “Good boy~ Now we can be more amicable, no? Let’s get started~”

Calvin didn’t respond at all. He was so deep in the lights that time seemed to both accelerate and slow down. He didn’t know where he was but that was okay. The colorful lights were all he needed...

Town Marketplace

Calvin vigorously shook his head. He felt like he had one of the best naps of his life while also having an annoying headache. In his stupor he nearly ran into someone, stumbling and nearly dropping the basket of food he was carrying... Wait... what? When did he buy food?

A hooded rat-like figure came to his side, his voice was full of concern, “A-Are you okay Mr. Calvin?”

Even though his current situation deeply confused him, Calvin found solace staring at the rat. He may not have known their name nor what they looked like but they were helpful... Wait... They can be helpful!

“Y-Yeah, I’m fine. I just got lost in my thoughts a bit...” The rat helped him stand up straight. “Sooo uh... can you remind me of what I’ve been doing?”

The rat gave him a quizzical look. Or that’s what Calvin assumed. It was pretty hard to read the rat’s face and emotions through their hood. “You were looking for a food store and wandered into my store...” The bat nodded slowly, looking at the purchased food again. “Then, you mentioned you and your group’s frustrations about not finding the powerful Almanac Stone- ”

Calvin grabbed the rat and pulled him up to his chest, “Wait! You know about the Almanac Stone!?”

The rat’s look was filled with worry and surprise. “Y-Yes sir. That’s why you told me to come with you.”

Calvin paused and released the rat. Right! Of course, he did! He, the best party member of all, managed to find this helpful rat before anyone else on his barely useful team did. Now he was walking back to deservedly gloat on his team.

Pierce was the first to notice the bat's return. "Hey! Calvin's back! [Druidic]! And he's brought a friend!"

The party stopped the small talk they were having as the silver bat walked towards the group with a hooded figure close behind him.

Saffron immediately rolled his eyes at what was about to come. Calvin had that cocky smile on his face. That same cocky smile that always held the air of "I told you so!" and "I'm the greatest Ranger and greatest Adventurer ever" all over it. He had to be honest, already feeling disappointed at the town itself, he didn't need Calvin's snark to be added on top of it.

Calvin walked up to the group and pulled over two crates for him and the hooded figure to sit on. The figure looked hesitant but sat down after Calvin's encouragement. The party stayed silent as Calvin began his speech:

"Yes! It is *I*, Calvin, returning to my lazy party members again with food and good news~"

Saffron at least felt relieved that the bat took the time to pass out the food basket to everyone before continuing. The tone in Calvin's voice still bit him though.

"Now that the food has been settled, on to the good news!" Calvin gestured over to the hooded figure. To everyone except Calvin, the figure looked familiar but they couldn't tell much else besides confirming that the figure's species was that of a rat. "This lovely rat merchant happens to know how to find the Almanac Stone!"

The dark red wolf practically jumped up and shook the rat's hand, "Nice to meetcha' stranger! The name's Ruther, a barbarian if you couldn't tell!"

The rat tried to make a move to speak but was interrupted by the giddy wolf.

Ruther began to gesture to everyone else on the team. "That little weirdly yellow fennec fox there is Fonne our main support and tech expert, the eccentric white deer over there is Pierce, and- "

Calvin put a hand on Ruther's mouth. "Shut up Ruther, you're scaring him! Plus, I've already told him about us."

The wolf backed off of the rat, an embarrassed look was on his face. "Sorry about that, we've just had a long day with no leads."

The hooded rat let out a light chuckle. “Haha~ D-Don’t sweat it Ruther, I can understand your team’s pain. The Almanac Stone is very coveted by many, yet many don’t even know where it lies.”

Saffron wasn’t having any of this. This rat just felt so familiar and wrong to him. Weird did they come from and how do they know about the stone and its location? Something had to be wrong...

Fonne spoke up, “We’re glad that you know at least. Mr. uuuh...”

“Karby! You may call me Karby. I apologize for not introducing myself.”

Pierce and Ruther couldn’t hold in their laughter. Calvin would soon join in too. Karby gave them a questioning look under his hood, “... Errr... May I ask what’s so funny?”

Ruther badly responded in between his laughs, “HAHAHA! W-What’s with you rats and loving the letter K for your names? Hahahaha!”

Karby’s face became downtrodden. “T-That’s just how rats like to name each other in this part of the region...”

Fonne would give each of them a kick in their shins, turning their laughter into cries of pain. “S-Sorry about that Karby... Our group has just had a few run-ins with rats... It’s kind of a stigma with us about them.”

Karby gave a delayed nod, looking to Saffron for his reaction. The rabbit was noticeably frowning but the reason didn’t seem to be from the group’s laughter but aimed at Karby directly instead.

The rat would wait for the sounds of pain to die down before continuing. “The stone you seek, the Almanac Stone is a place both near and far from here. It resides in a place accessible only by magic.” An audible groan was heard from everyone, it was eerily in unison with all of them. “Said place is known as the Silent Forest.”

Fonne spoke up yet again, “And how do we reach this, “Silent Forest”?”

The rat reached deep into his cloak and pulled out five small, glowing orbs. “These are how you get in...”

The rat personally handed each orb to the party members. “The entrance to the forest is about 3 miles from here. Once you make it there, you all will have to crush the orbs at the exact same time. If even one of you fails... Well... Don’t fail please...”

Saffron finally stood up, he couldn't take this feeling anymore. "What do you mean "don't fail please"?"

"I-I mean to say that Silent Forest is a very hard dungeon. If you're not careful, you may end up never coming back..."

Saffron suspiciously nodded. "... Passable... I guess..."

Saffron unsheathed his rapier and pointed it in the direction Karby stated. "Alright team! We have our next goal! Break into the Silent Forest and take the Almanac Stone within! Everyone ready?"

"YEAH!" Everyone followed up on the rabbit bard's inspiring words. And ran to the stables on the town outskirts.

It took every part of Kalbaz to not break his character right then and there. The party had no idea what was coming to them. The future images prophesized to him by his familiar and patron looked glorious! For many Seasons, he's waited for this. Suffering humiliating defeat after defeat. Each one having the party degrade him more than the last...

Now the tables will turn...

And Kalbaz and the Silent Forest will have their revenge...