

2/28/2026 - The Day the World Changed

We were still recovering from the massive fight at the base of that structure. No spells left. No safe place to rest. Everyone worn thin. Barty was worse. He'd been bitten — and not in a way one forgets. He tried to cauterize it himself. It was brave. It was determined. It did not go well. The wound sealed, but something in him dulled after that. The Blight had its hooks in him, and he could feel it.

We all could.

But the river did not care.

The crane above the debris was the only way forward, so Eggie climbed to the control tower while the rest of us took positions below. That's when he found the levers — and the reason no one else had succeeded. Whoever tried before had lost their fingers to the mechanism. Weeks old. The crane demanded sacrifice.

And then there was the rope.

Pristine. Metallic. Resting there like it belonged.

When Barty picked it up, it shifted. Just slightly. Enough that we all noticed. It coiled faintly in his hand, like it was testing him, then went still. Not normal rope behavior. Not even slightly.

We didn't have time to unpack that.

Agnes and Emonie dropped down to hook the crane to the debris. Emonie landed like she expected applause. Agnes followed with priestly grace intact. Eggie lowered the crane perfectly, and we began to push.

It was heavier than it had any right to be.

We strained together, iron groaning under pressure. It started to move.

And then I pushed too hard.

The bar snapped.

The crane whipped backward like an angry god. Agnes went into the water. The control tower collapsed with a crash so loud it rolled across the marsh like a challenge.

Something answered.

The ground shook.

“They’re coming,” Barty said.

And the rope slid free and coiled around his arm like it agreed.

What rose from beneath the structure was not subtle. The Blasphemy emerged half flesh, half liquid, with yellow eyes and the confidence of something that had never once lost a fight. She slammed Eggie with terrifying force, and for a moment I thought we had lost him.

We didn’t panic.

We retreated very deliberately.

Elandra tried to suggest the creature back into the muck. It did not appreciate that. Shamblers closed in. A Broken Lord joined the fray. A Wretched lunged at me and missed, which I would like noted for the record.

Agnes planted herself like a boundary marker, her Toll ringing out again and again. Emonie hauled people back toward the barge. Barty struck fast and disengaged faster. I insulted things until they hesitated. It’s an art.

The Blasphemy melted across the battlefield like she wasn’t fully committed to having bones, reviving shamblers we had already dropped. Steely Dan fell in the chaos.

We didn’t try to win.

We tried to live.

Step by step we withdrew to the barge. When I nearly got cut off, the rope extended toward me on its own. I grabbed it and made it aboard as the others shoved us free.

Behind us, the Blasphemy just stood there in the shallows, watching.

We drifted into the mist.

Alive. Barely.

Later we found a dock with an iron bell and a crow pecking at it like it was being paid. Archimedes reacted strongly to the rope, which helped exactly zero. Eggie fire-bolted the bell. Nothing answered.

Inside the nearby boathouse, Agnes and Barty heard faint chiming. Not wind chimes — religious fetishes arranged in the symbol of Lathander. Six of them. Three with silver inlaid.

Agnes replaced the silver with copper of equal number. Respect given where it was due.

That night, she told Barty quietly that if the Blight took him, she would see him sent properly beyond.

He did not sleep well.

In the morning, we learned the rope's nature: a Rope of Climbing. A relic. Loyal, apparently. Eggie rebuilt Steely Dan into something sturdier and renamed him Jericho.

We continued downriver.

Gibbets lined the banks. Some empty. Some moving.

And then we saw the monastery.

It was enormous — more temple than monastery — gold sun iconography blazing across its stonework. Dedicated to Lathander. Beautiful. Immaculate. Unsettling.

Inside, the air smelled of incense and mildew, not death. Doors were barricaded from within. Something struck one as we passed.

At the end of a candlelit hall sat Brother Durst — ancient beyond reason, sharp blue eyes under a curtain of white beard. Alone for a year and a half. In service for nine centuries.

He knew we were coming.

Lathander had told him.

He gave us a box meant for Lady Elspeth of Ebonmoor. The Emberglass. He warned us not to touch it directly if it broke. He said he would join his brothers after we left.

Agnes stayed behind to speak with him a moment longer. He told her she was doing holy work.

We left.

The stained glass shattered before we reached the doors.

Fireballs tore into the sanctuary. Flames devoured pews and pillars alike. Nine raiders waited outside. Two with pistols. One with a silver dagger. Jorick's name surfaced in accusation.



We charged.

The fight was chaos. Fire behind us. Steel ahead.

Agnes fell while still holding the box.

It broke.

And then—light.

Not firelight.

Not magic.

White brilliance burst outward from the shattered crate and swallowed the burning monastery in radiance. It drowned the flames. It forced every shadow to retreat.

From the splintered wood rose a hexagonal shard of gold-veined glass, hovering in the air. At its core something pulsed. Something breathed.

It called to Agnes.

She reached for it.

When her hand touched the Emberglass, her wounds vanished. She rose to her feet, standing in the inferno as the light wrapped around her like dawn itself had chosen her.

Everyone saw.

The light burned brighter than the fire consuming the holy place. It felt like something ancient had just opened its eyes.

The Emberglass hovered near her, then settled into a calm, dormant state — but it was awake now.

And as it did, Barty straightened.

The creeping weakness inside him stilled. The Blight stopped advancing. The mark remained, but it no longer spread.

The relic had chosen us.

When the raiders lay dead, we searched them and found:

- 120 gold pieces
- 3 silver coins
- 60 iron clinkers
- 300 copper pieces
- 1 silver dagger
- 2 pistols
- 1 potion of healing

I took the silver dagger.

Eggie claimed the pistols.

The silver was divided.

Barty kept the potion.

And we stood there in the ashes of a monastery, holding something that had just changed the shape of the world.

We had awakened the Emberglass.

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