

Standing Room Only

I am used to hosting 4-6 player games, but yesterday I hosted my largest private group yet!

Eight players and I immersed ourselves into the first chapter of my campaign, The Hoarfrost Invasion[®]. In complete disclosure: I was a bit worried an 8 player party might not run smoothly but I could not have been more pleased with my players.

Our group consists two highly experienced Pathfinder players (star rated GMs), two game storeowners, a thespian, my brother, my son-in-law, my son and of myself as GM. For more information on the members and their characters feel free to visit:

www.hoarfrostinvasion.com.

Synopsis of Session 001:

The intrepid adventurers who all grew up together had once again reunited after years of separation while studying and growing in their respective classes. Gathered around a table in the Corn Tassel Inn they found themselves searching the bottom of nearly empty coin purses to pay Old Man Stanis. They all admitted it was time to hit the road and find some opportunities for coin. Agreeing to meet at Small Castle's gate the following morning after spending one more day saying their goodbyes to friends and family, they paid Stanis and left the inn.

The following morning, finally standing alone outside the gate, the last person seeing them off heading back into town, the party was ready to set off on their adventure. The party, however, found themselves immediately assaulted by an onslaught of unexplainable 'natural' events that culminated in an encounter with an ancient being of power. The party was told Gaea was in peril and that they themselves formed a very important cog in complex machinations being put in place to save her. The Ancient, called by his sister, departs abruptly. Left with nothing but a cryptic poem, they set off for the port town of Yendis by way of Twin Oaks... in search of a monkey?

The adventurers had several encounters with various personalities on the road to Yendis. The first day's travels brought them head-to-head with a very nervous and overprotective (of his daughters in particular) father and his family. Although the father remained wary, the wife and children warmed up quickly with the aid of calming words from Theo and the entertaining bravado of Yurgi. The children were particularly impressed when Yurgi lifted a pony, and the deliriously pleased son riding it, high into the air. Completely unbeknownst to the family, Dot Nic stealthily examined the back of the cart to ensure the father was being true to his words. The party learned the family had just left Twin Oaks; a town on edge due to some recent thefts and even an attack that left a man dead. After a rib-crushing goodbye hug from Yurgi, the father and his family were on their way. In response to a last minute question from Xerxes and Theo, the children yelled from the back of the retreating cart, "Look for an old man and his monkey back in Twin Oaks."

On their first night at camp, very careful plans were made for watches but not quite so much in picking a safe spot to set up camp. Much to Dot Nic's surprise she woke enveloped in slithering serpents for they had set her bedroll atop a snakes nest. In the end the party learned an important lesson on fighting a swarm. Dot Nic had suffered but minor wounds from the serpents (albeit the poison) but suffered major damage from her mates in their attempts to aid her. Between Yurgi's blows, Desdemona's fiery blasts, and Lord Gideon's devastating slash it was nigh a miracle she survived! After some major healing by Rune Bridger and his fellow healers they continued their nights respite in peace.

On the second day's travels they had a chance encounter with a troupe of entertainers and their caravan. Greeted by their gregarious leader, Carl, and his twin, Jordan; they were entreated to join the troupe for an impromptu meal. Carl, ever a showman, was disappointed he didn't have room in his troupe for a powerhouse like Yurgi. He did, however, show a strong interest in Desdemona, and let her know he felt she would be an attractive and curious addition to his troupe.

During the feasting and celebrating the Party learned a bit more about the troubles in Twin Oaks. They also picked up rumor that there might be a growing crime issue in Yendis, a port town traditionally known for its safety and lack of corruption. Finally they hear of a strange blue creature found dead, and so buried, on the road a few miles back. Carl felt, although he had never actually seen one, it might have been a Mite but couldn't explain why it would be so far from its natural environs.

Amidst a tumult of children, song, cooking, conversation and scenes of passion; the party, although careful of their purses, still managed to lose a few coins to deft and practiced hands. Much to Dot Nic's professed chagrin for not noticing the thievery, before leaving a few in the party checked their purses and found out about the transgression. Xerxes and Desdemona were particularly incensed. Carl, usually confident in his troupe's ability to handle any situation to their benefit, cowed quickly before the very intimidating demands of the ghoulish sorcerer and the scowling axe-wielding dwarf. He returned the party's money and then some. Lord Gideon in his traditional forgiving nature, unaware of Xerxes sly gaining of a few extra coins, refused the return of his coin. Carl, after making known his disappointment in the matter of how his hospitality was repaid, gathered his troupe and continued toward Small Castle.

Having learned from their first night's experience the group had a much more successful and uneventful second night's camp.

On the third day's travels the party crossed paths with three very powerful female adventurers atop warhorses in full plate barding. The three women, one particularly gruff, said they were on their way to the Southern Stretch to help protect folks from growing Goblin and Orc raids. They corroborated rumors that with the outflow of protectors heading to the join events in the North, bandits and raiding races were getting bolder and bolder in the south. The band of women moved on but not before recommending an inn just up the road and mentioning that; curiously they had heard a violin tune while camping the other night but upon waking they found no evidence anyone had been nearby.

The party encountered the “inn” about an hour later. It was simply an old farmhouse with a sign nailed over its entrance titled, “Inn.” The proprietor, a failed farmer, met them at the door and insisted on payment upfront due to an increase in seedy customers of late. Pleased with the intake of gold and some extra from Yurgi in exchange for promise of ever-flowing ale, he quickly vanished to his kitchen. As the party started to enter the inn, three female wood elves were simultaneously exiting engrossed in an argument with a small boy. The young half-elf, one of the women’s son, was throwing not a mild tantrum. They were heatedly arguing about something the boy had wanted and could not have. Theo used his gifts to calm the quarreling foursome and found it very odd that it didn’t seem to have any effect whatsoever; in fact they appeared, if anything, more upset. They barreled past the party, apparently too engrossed in their argument to notice their rudeness. In their passing Yurgi felt a strange tug under his loincloth and his initial glee was quickly washed away when he realized one of the elves must have nicked his sack (to be clear... his coin sack.) Without hesitation he grabbed the mother elf and demanded she return his coins. With that the two remaining elves unsheathed wicked looking scimitar’s and demanded their sister’s release while the boy bolted out the door. Just inside the inn Yurgi, Desdemona, Xerxes, and Lord Gideon demanded the elves drop their weapons; upon seeing they were surrounded and watching Yurgi effortlessly throttle their sister like a ragdoll, they quickly acquiesced and sheathed their weapons. Meanwhile outside Dot Nic with Rune Bridger’s aid tried to trip the boy in order to stop his escape. Although she managed to get him to stumble, he surprisingly nimbly caught his balance and started to deftly roll past them. They had however managed to slow him just enough so that Theo, who had just joined them outside, was able to cast a hold spell, thereby freezing the boy in his tracks.

After a conversation whereby the elves explained that there was no excuse for the son’s behavior, stealing money for a honey cake, but they were taking him to his father in Yendis. They made it clear the father would punish the boy appropriately. They pleaded, since the money, and a bit extra for their troubles, had been returned, that the party let them be on their way. Although Xerxes senses all warned they should not be let off so mildly, eye-for-an-eye after all, the more forgiving souls of the party managed to talk him down. They gleaned a bit more information from them on the old man and the monkey that may be in Twin Oaks and then they watched the foursome vanish up the road. They spent the night at the ‘inn’: Lord Gideon preaching/counseling Desdemona and Xerxes, Yergi drinking more than his gold’s share of ale, and the rest relaxing, happy to be off the ground for a night.

The fourth day of travels found the party well rested as they continued up the road that lead toward Twin Oaks and eventually Yendis. A few hours into their travels a strange old man with an unusually protuberant and rather hideous tongue that he seemed unable or unwilling to pull back into his mouth came skipping up the road toward them. He was swinging a large branch and singing to a monkey that was desperately clinging to it. The party peaceably encircled the man who appeared, for the most part, oblivious to their presence. The monkey leapt from the branch at site of the party and started flipping and screeching at them. To escape the man, his branch, and

possibly his singing, the monkey eventually ran off disappearing into the forest to the north. Dot Nic sure that this was the monkey they were meant to follow, made precise note of where the monkey disappeared from site. The old man desperately warned the party that a large musical tree had demanded he help them, and, if they followed him they would find a ring. The party chose instead to follow the monkey into the woods. Lord Gideon stayed behind for a bit keeping his eye on the old man before deciding it best to join his partners who were quickly disappearing deeper into the woods. Lord Theo, following Dot Nics directions, did his best with his exceptional speed to keep up with the monkey. Eventually the wood became too dense to keep up. When regrouped Theo told the party the direction the simian had last been heading, noting it had not once veered from its course directly north.

Together as a group they continued north into the woods doing their best to track the monkey. Eventually their task was interrupted when they heard a man's pain riddled scream. They carefully approached the direction of the sound to find, in the distance, a man bent in anguish over a man bleeding out on the ground. The three sister elves from the night before were demanding something from the man with scimitars drawn and raised. Before the group could discuss a plan, Lord Gideon fearing for the mans immediate safety and driven by his code to protect and serve yelled out, "Stop!" The three elves immediately turned toward the party and braced for battle. Yurgi was the first to charge the elves swinging at one and catching her in the side as she rolled past and behind him. She managed a weak riposte at Yurgi's back. Xerxes and Lord Gideon faced off with the other two blade wielding elves. Theo strengthened his comrades as Rune Bridger weakened their foes with a frightening Hex. Desdemona sent glowing missiles between the two elves attacking the paladin and the barbarian. Dot Nic, keenly aware of hidden combat, shrewdly realized that the elve's son was missing. She kept a keen eye out for his presence. As the battle ensued, the boy, unable to find a surprise opportunity due to Dot Nic's watchful eye, simply leaped into the battle. But he was literally too little, too late. Yurgi landed a flurry of miraculous brutal blows that sent his attacker's elven entrails exploding across the forest floor. With a group effort the other two elves were quickly dispatched and the boy once again 'held' by Theo's magic. They quickly bound the boy.

The party learned that they had arrived but a few minutes too late and that by the time they were able to offer assistance, Cedric Gramer, the apprentice to the old sage, had bled out and passed. Upon closer inspection and interrogation they learned the boy was an exceptionally disguised halfling. The halfling, Rodney, spilled out that he and his partners had heard rumor of a Thieves Guild forming in Yendis and they were simply making there way there in hopes of joining. After Rune Bridger healed the sage, Edwin Oakson, the party respectfully spoke with and consoled him. He had been out gathering herbs and mushrooms with his apprentice when they were set upon by the four brigands. With Edwin's help they returned the apprentice's body and the bound halfling to the inn where the sage acquired help bringing the culprit to Twin Oaks.

The party returned to where they had last left the monkey's trail and continued their search...