

Peasant Camp

Game Master's Comments: With Kamran in the village and the rest of the group hanging back I wasn't sure what to do with Sir Reinhardt's player. I asked him what he wanted to do. He sent me a turn-starter asking me to fill in the descriptions and some of the dialogue. Basically, he took the initiative and created his own way to get some information about what was going on in the village. He also took control of Garoth, though I filled a good bit of dialogue in. The woman Ethne, while mostly controlled by your's truly, was the player's creation alone - and a suprise for me.

Reinhardt's Commentary: David and I sort of reversed roles for much of this scene. By now I have thrown off the role of "player" and am looking out for the story as the main focus over Reinhardt. I wanted to create a suprise for the characters, and make it look as if they may have stumbled upon some of Kural's men. Ethne and her girls were a vehicle to provide Reinhardt some information, and possibly create a new love interest for Garoth. Furthermore, I wanted them to tug at the reader's heart strings for the people of this village. David fell right in step and this is another of my favorite scenes for the raw emotion of it.

5 Helane 719, East of Caer Nurel

The sun had passed its zenith. Occasionally, it lit up the world in brilliant light when it could peek around the lazy clouds drifting slowly by. The wind had picked up, and now a then a river-wind from north would pick up, causing the branches around the three riders to creak and sway; the leaves flittered and rustled about. The noise helped mask their passing. They had turned off the main river road, and entered the wood at a place where the ground and foliage well hid their passing. To Reinhardt, it looked like another large clump of bushes and a ditch next to the road, but Garoth had spotted it as if it had a sign posted there saying, "Trail starts here." Garoth had explained, that the animals used the trail when they came drink from the river during the summertime, when water was harder to find. Thus, it was a game trail, used mostly by deer and a few other critters; Garoth had found no human tracks.

Reinhardt had sent the huntsman ahead; he knew Garoth would move quicker and quieter without Bvarlan, the horses, and himself clanking along. Reinhardt led his own horse, Fury, with Garoth's tied behind. Bvarlan led his own animal plus the packhorse in his train. They were walking due to the low branches on this particular trail. Reinhardt just kept following the deer tracks, for Garoth left no mark of his passing. At least, until Reinhardt came to a fork in the trail, where he found a single arrow laying in the trail pointing to the eastern branch. He picked up the arrow and followed the marked path.

After a little less than a mile they crossed a creek bed, dry now in late summer. On the other side of the creek, large boulders and rocks became visible as the grade became steeper here up the side of a hill. The trail skirted the base of the hillock. It was here that Reinhardt met Garoth coming down the trail, moving quickly toward him. Reinhardt could tell by the look on his face, that he had found or seen something. Reinhardt continued toward him for there was a small piece of flat land between them where the trail widened just a bit, and a fallen tree lay beside the trail from the previous snow season.

Garoth came close and spoke in a low tone. "Your Excellency," he started with a slight bow. Reinhardt frowned. He wasn't used to the new baronial title, but then again he figured he better get used to it. His men were aware that he didn't need titles away from court, nor did he expect them. However, the way Garoth said it, Reinhardt knew he was goading him with simple mirth.

"What is it, Yeoman?" replied Reinhardt facetiously.

"There seems to be a small camp up ahead," answered Garoth. "It is but two hundred yards up and around that rocky outcropping on the ridge above the village we've been working towards. Lots of cover, but a fine view of the slope and the village as well."

"Trouble?" asked Bvarlan as he came up with them, holding his horses reigns tight to keep the animal from wandering off the path to graze.

Garoth shook his head, "I don't think so." He looked back up the trail for a moment as if considering then looked back at Reinhardt. "I think they're run-away peasants." Reinhardt furrowed his brow. Garoth took the queue and expounded. "It can't be huntsmen, for the fire is built wrong and it's a terrible place for a hunting camp, other than the shelter from the wind and view provided by the rocks. It is not soldiers or miners, because the ground around would be littered with footprints and there are no signs of pack animals for supplies. In fact, there are not any signs of proper camping gear at all. I was going to go in for a closer look, but I did not want to possibly be captured without reporting this."

Reinhardt appreciated Garoth's tact, what he meant to say was that he did not want Reinhardt and Bvarlan blundering too close to the camp and alerting it due to the noise of their group.

"You did the right thing of course," said Reinhardt. He looked over at Bvarlan. "Let us secure the horses to this fallen tree, and the three of us will investigate the camp. If there is trouble, we stand a better chance together." The fallen tree still had many branches protruding, and it was easy to secure the horses. At Bvarlan's suggestion, the horses oat bags were put on, to let them feed and keep them quiet while the group headed up the trail.

It did not take long to move up close to the campsite. Garoth pointed to the smoke that was peaking up alerting anyone approaching to the camp's existence, then shrugged his shoulders. Garoth skillfully led the trio up the side of a rocky outcrop. He stopped just below the ridge and pulled out his bow. "From here we should be able to look down into the campsite, but stay to this side of the big rock. We don't want sharp eyes below to pick us out," said Garoth as he began to string his bow. Reinhardt looked at Bvarlan, who nodded and the two eased up the rocky face to peek over. Garoth joined them seconds later, bow ready.

The camp was in a sort of gully, where big rocks had come down off the hill and came to a stop at the base. Three larger boulders formed the semblance of three walls; the fourth side opened up to the forest. Hundreds of other rocks were littered about from various other rock slides. An area had been cleared of all the smaller stones for the campsite. A small fire burned in a small ring of stones and a terribly formed lean-to made from large tree branches covered with ferns and pine branches served as the only shelter. They watched and waited for a couple of minutes, everything seemingly quiet, as though the inhabitants were away.

If that was the case, they had not gone in the direction from which the trio had come, that was for certain. Suddenly, there was movement. From inside the lean-to the leaves rustled and out of the side popped a small dirty face, it was the face of a child. It quickly disappeared back into its hiding place. Reinhardt looked at Garoth on his right and then Bvarlan on his left. It seemed both of them were waiting for him to decide their course. He was about to act, when across the camp some rocks scattered. Around the bend came a young peasant woman, possibly in her early twenties. Her clothes were torn and she had no shoes.

As she came closer, Reinhardt could see that beneath the unkempt shell she was very comely; her golden hair was a tangled nest, but her skin was relatively clean and fair. She had blue eyes the color of the little flowers that Elsbeth was fond of in her garden. In her hands, she carried something bound in a stained piece of cloth. They continued to watch her. She made her way painfully over the rocks in her bare feet and entered the camp. Out of the lean-to bounded not one, but two children, both girls. One looked to be child of six or seven, the other not much older than a toddler. They rushed to their mother, each grabbing a leg. She knelt down, and opened her package. Inside, there were a few handfuls worth of berries. The older child reached to take a berry, but the mother shook her head, saying something. Then all three of them bowed their head in prayer over their food. After thanking God no doubt for providing for them, the children began to eat the berries like starved animals. The trio on the rocks watched the scene nearly mesmerized by the raw nature of it. Soon, the few berries were gone; Reinhardt noted the mother had taken none for herself.

The trio scooted back down below the ridge. "Bvarlan, I would like you to go back down and bring the animals back up in train," said Reinhardt. "Garoth and I will go speak with the woman."

"As you wish, Sir Reinhardt." The one-eyed warrior whispered with a slight inclination of his head. "Tis a good spot. Easily missed and out of the way, but still within striking distance of the village."

Bvarlan disappeared down back down the trail toward the horses. Garoth and Reinhardt worked their way quietly down the bank and walked easily around the rocks until they were in view of the camp. The older of the small girls was the first to see them. She shrieked and ran to her mother. Quickly her mother gathered both the girls up and put them in the lean-to, then swung around hoisting a crude branch club in both her hands. She was no match for the two men now facing her, but Reinhardt respected the determination in her eyes as she stood over her girls. Reinhardt put out his hands, displaying he held no weapon, and Garoth swung his bow. "It is all right mum," said Garoth. Her eyes darted to Garoth.

"Yes, we mean you no harm," Reinhardt told her. "My name is Sir Reinhardt Maddox." The woman looked back to Reinhardt; she was frozen a in a moment of difficult decision. Then it was like a river flood crashing through a dike. She wavered for a moment and then the strength left her, he knees buckled and she fell to them on the ground crying. "Please have mercy milord," she sobbed. "Have mercy on this poor woman and her children." Her voice was sweet, but full of anguish. The girls seeing their mother down rushed to her side. The little one began to cry with her, the bigger one picked up a rock to defend her mother.

"Before God, I would see no harm come to you or your girls this day, lest by some deceit you be a villain," said Reinhardt quietly; he was moved. Garoth set down his equipment and began to move over slowly to the woman, reaching into his satchel for a parcel of smoked jerky wrapped in cloth. The feisty older girl with the long blond hair and a head scarf widened her eyes and raised her arm to release her volley, but her mother looking up and realizing the imminent assault, pulled her daughter down to her with one arm and gathered the crying toddler to her with the other.

Garoth slowly made his way to them and knelt; he withdrew the parcel of jerky and presented it in both hands. Primal urges took over and the mother took two pieces of the jerky and gave them to her girls. They both stopped crying as their attention now turned to consuming the new food in hunger. Seeing their willingness to accept the food, Garoth withdrew three pieces of hard tack and pressed them into the mother's hands.

"Bless you sir," said the woman. looking up at Garoth with teary eyes.

"Never you mind that mother," said Garoth tenderly. It was like Garoth took on a whole new persona,

amazing Reinhardt right before his eyes. "We have plenty more where that came from. I am going to make a nice fire and a proper meal for you and your young ones." She tried to be brave and smile, but could only nod her head in stunned agreement. "Just come sit here with your girls and speak with Sir Reinhardt." Garoth took her hand and helped her up. He made her comfortable by the fire-pit, with her girls on either side. Within ten minutes, Garoth had rearranged the stones and stoked the fire three times as large with less than half the smoke as before. He had everything set when Bvarlan came up with the animals.

The woman had said nothing, and neither Reinhardt nor Garoth had pressed her to. She would be more open once she felt more safe and comfortable around them. Garoth's meal was the perfect remedy. Reinhardt had taken a quick tour of the camp, the poor soul had nothing, not even a good knife or blanket. 'What was she doing up here alone with two young children?' thought Reinhardt. This was the answer he soon hoped to have.

Soon Garoth had a pot of barley and salt pork started. Bvarlan had gone to the brook for the water and was now tending the horses. "She is from the village, from Caer Nurel. I saw her there my last visit." Said Bvarlan quietly to Reinhardt, who stood near the horses. "I'm not sure who she is though. The clothes, torn as they be, don't seem right for a peasant. A guildsman's wife, perhaps?" Reinhardt nodded and looked to the fire. Garoth had parceled out some dried fruits to the woman and her children, and was stirring the pot, adding herbs and some mushrooms he'd found nearby as he talked quietly, of nothing, in soothing tones. He waited quietly for a time, letting Garoth work his unexpected magic. The meal would be ready soon, and it was clear she was becoming more comfortable with their presence.

Reinhardt walked over the campfire and sat down. It was time for her to talk. "I need to ask lady," he said, gesturing to the woods around them. "How did you get here? Are you from Caer Nurel?" The woman had not seen him approach, and started in surprise. She fell to her knees beside the fire, bowing her head before him. Her hands were clenched in a combined fist over heart; it was almost like she was praying.

"How may I serve you milord?" she said submissively. Reinhardt looked to Garoth. Both men were taken aback. Deference in a peasant was one thing, if she was a peasant, but this was closer to what one would expect from a slave – an abused slave.

"My good woman, you may pick yourself up and sit to eat your meal. You do not have to bow to me in such a way," said Reinhardt. She seemed to consider his words for a moment, and then did as she was told. "As you like it, milord." She answered quietly. "I am from Caer Nurel." Garoth sniffed the pot and dished up a bowl for the woman. He watched as she sipped it, nodding in encouragement, and then served Reinhardt and the little girls. A moment later Bvarlan approached and served himself before withdrawing several feet and sitting against a moss-laden tree. One of the children looked into the pot.

"Don't you be worrying little one," said Garoth. "There is more there; enough for everyone." The little girl gave him a sweet little grin and coyly hunched her shoulders. Garoth smiled in response. Reinhardt noted the huntsman had yet to eat anything himself.

"What is your name?" asked Reinhardt.

"My name is Ethne, and this is my daughter Gretchen", she said touching the older girl. "And this little one is Marta."

"Why did you bow like that good woman?" asked Reinhardt.

"All at Caer Nurel bow thus, we must treat nobles such, or we are..." she stopped, uncertain for a moment.

"It is all right mum," assured Garoth. "Sir Reinhardt is here to aid you; you can trust him." She looked at Garoth and nodded.

"If we defy any of the Bailiff's wishes or decrees we are punished most horribly," she said.

Reinhardt frowned. "Please, tell me how you came to be here."

"It was shortly after the village priestess was," she paused again, but a nod from Garoth reassured her and she continued. "Before she was violated and killed by the Bailiff's men. My father tried to stop them, but they killed him too." They could hear the bereavement in her voice. "The ones that killed her started harassing me. My husband, Roderick, was the village cooper, but they had made him go work in the woods across the river." The emotion was rising again in her voice. "The Bailiff's men tried to have their way with me, but only the interruption of the Bailiff's summons spared me. They tore my clothes." She fiddled with the tear at her left shoulder.

"That night, my husband snuck across the river and decided we were to flee the village. We almost escaped, but were spotted on the edge of the village by the Bailiff's men." She swallowed hard; a tear started its journey down her cheek. "Roderick told me to take the girls and flee into the woods, he would find us. Then he turned and went to delay the guards. I took the girls and ran and ran for as long as I could. We hid in a large dead stump for a whole day. We wandered here, waiting and waiting for Roderick, but he never came. They killed him, I'm sure." She started to sob again. "I couldn't go back and I couldn't go to Tonot; I have people there, but the Bailiff would surely be looking. I didn't know what to do..." she finally broke down and cried again.

Garoth lent the woman a shoulder and gave Reinhardt a furious look that foretold blood and revenge. Reinhardt had heard of the atrocities in Caer Nurel second hand and they had infuriated him then. But to hear the story first hand wrenched his heart. He looked at Bvarlan, who had pulled out a pipe and was puffing it slowly to life, the grizzled warrior just gave him a sagely nod of recognition.

Reinhardt looked back at the sad scene. "Take heart good woman, God's judgment is coming to Caer Nurel. Countess Curo has heard the cries of the people there and has sent us to help you. We will bring love and warmth back to your village. We start here with you and your girls. You will stay here under our protection until the village is safe for your return."

"It's a good site for our camp," Garoth said. "We can have the tents up and I can set some snares for game before sundown. If you don't mind sharing my tent instead of your pavilion, Sir Reinhardt, then we'll have a proper shelter for Ethne and her girls. And we may have some clothes to spare."

"Yes," agreed Reinhardt. "That will do nicely. Anything we have to make our guests more comfortable need not be spared."

"Young master Kamran may be the night," Bvarlan said. "And he'll not know just where we are. We'll want to find a direct path to the village from here, and keep an eye on what goes on there."

Reinhardt nodded, taking in the advice and devising their course of action. "And then there's the men on the other side of the river," the one-eyed warrior continued. "We'll need to find a way of fording the river, so as to make contact when the time comes. At the very least we'll want to reconnoiter the area and see what the situation is."

“Very well,” said Reinhardt. “When everyone has rested, we shall proceed thus: you will find and watch the direct path to the village Bvarlan,” Reinhardt always tried to speak very clearly when giving instructions. “Ethne may have some words of wisdom as to the best approach. With the route established, return and then strike out to meet Kamran at the location we previously arranged with him on the ‘morrow.” He looked over to Garoth. “And a busy night for you. I want you to scout the surrounding are from here to the village and the river. Find us a ford for morning time that will ensure our passage goes unnoticed. I would like to draw up a map from what you learn.” He knew Garoth could accomplish this if the moonlight held and the clouds did not move in. “I shall stay here and build up the camp; giving our wards their first fearless sleep in a while and gathering further details as I may from Ethne as to what we face ahead.”

— *David Queenann* 2006/02/16 10:10

From:
<https://curufea.com/> - **Curufea's Homepage**

Permanent link:
https://curufea.com/doku.php?id=roleplaying:hero:resources:counterharn_logs_caernurel_turn_ten

Last update: **2006/02/16 20:16**

