

The Best Laid Plans

Game Master's Commentary: In this scene I set out to heap more trouble on Sir Reinhardt's character, and to do some character development for Faranir as an important non-player character and Leonardo-esque dues ex machina for anachronistic "coolness."

Reinhardt's Commentary: I saw the possibility Faranir presented and ran with it. Reinhardt's goal was to better the Earla's strength and purse if possible. I had no idea at this time how it would effect me. I figured this was a great plot device that David could run with during the game, and he did.

1 Helane 719, Caer Gardiren, Garoth & Faranir's Chamber

Sir Reinhardt stood in the cramped room above Caer Gardiren's kitchen that served as Faranir and Garoth's quarters. A six by eight cell with a thick russet curtain for a door, there was just enough room for a grown man to move between the room's sturdy bunk bed and high bench. Aside from these furnishings, the room's contents consisted of the men's chests, stowed under the bottom bunk, a narrow arms-rack between the end of the bed and the castle's outer wall, and a standing candelabra. The room's arrow slit, set into the castle's northern wall, was shuttered tight against the evening's river breeze.

Faranir had filled the candelabra with rush-lights, woven rushes dipped in tallow, and lit them, providing the two men with enough light to examine the big man's drawings. He had unrolled a sheaf of parchments on the bench, making room amongst Garoth's fetching work, and explained each in detail. The drawings in of themselves were remarkable. The skill of the hand that rendered them far outstripped any craftsman's plans or monk's illumination Reinhardt had laid eyes upon. But they were more than that. Reinhardt had been well aware Faranir was skilled in his dormant trade, but the drawings before them revealed a vision and clarity of mind that was wholly unexpected.

Reinhardt could hear sounds of the revelers in the Great Hall who had lasted into the eighth course, with two more courses yet to come. Elsbeth's father, the leonine Hemisen Curo, had dug himself into an early grave with his teeth. And while Countess Curo did not share her father's legendary appetite, she did share her father's love of fine living and lavish entertainment. Pallon, well into his cups, had made a table-top call for the flower of Kaldor to be mustered and sent forth to pacify the marches during the seventh course, and had been carried out on a shield, to a chorus of hoots and whistles, during the eighth. And the celebration was still going strong. Such endurance seemed beyond the power of mere mortals. Even Elsbeth, who regarded this night above all others, had retired to her chambers.

"I'm humbled you believe I can do it, Sir Reinhardt," Faranir said, scratching his scalp with a rough hand. He frowned and tapped the top drawing with a thick finger. "But it's not as simple as forging a better sword. To win your bet we need to build a better forge. It has to be firebrick - not stone - to withstand the necessary heat. And to achieve that heat, and keep it constant - " Faranir shuffled through the drawings, skipping over illustrations of a water-powered triphammer, a suit of plate armor constructed from articulated steel plates, a massive counter-weight driven catapult, a repeating cross-bow, a "fire balloon" and "diving bell" - both of which boggled the mind - until he found what he was looking for.

"We need to construct this water-powered bellows I've conceived. I have the tools. I can build the bellows and the forge with the help of a good hand or two, but we'll need an acre of cleared land on a river-front, and we'll have to build the smithy - with a miller's wheel - around them. Even with the

land, and withou' the triphammer, it bein' fanciful for just one sword, well..." the big man's voice trailed off. He recovered the floor plan of the smithy from the pile of parchments and handed it to Reinhardt, pointing at the neatly ruled column of numbers in the margin. His expression was both resigned and apologetic. Over consumption of fine wine aside, there was no mistaking the numbers, so clearly and precisely written: 2,674d.

Reinhardt pulled one side of his mouth into a half-annoyed frown. He did the figures in his head. "That is roughly eleven pound," he said, then losing himself in thought. He began to scratch at the whiskers on his chin with the fingers of his left hand. After a few moments he looked at his dejected armsman.

"Nolus is yet eight months off, Faranir. How much time will you need to complete the new forge and make the sword?" Reinhardt needed to know how much actual time he had to play with.

Faranir half turned to Reinhardt, his expression incredulous. He was silent for a long moment. "Well, Sir Reinhardt," he said. "We have to commission the firebrick. Its not a regular item, but the potters guild here knows the craft. Master Vered has enough kilns to do it in a weeks - if we can press him to make it a priority..."

That, at least, was in their favor. Gardiren Town, which had been consumed by fire twice in living memory, was the only township in the kingdom where tiles were used as a roofing material. It was one of the innovations Hemisen Curo, the Countess's father, a lover of innovation, had put into motion during his reign.

"...I can oversee most of the construction work myself, but it will take longer if I do the work by myself," Faranir said, working it out as he spoke. "With a journeyman woodcrafter to help, and a few strong backs, we could have the smithy up, with the water-wheel, in a month. Add a week to clear out and level the site. We have to have the forge in place, first, though. I can build the forge myself - in a week. So six weeks to have the forge and smithy up. Then there's the bellows and triphammer. I'd say three months to do it. If I can keep the woodcrafter, and he's got good hands and a feel for wood, I can do it in two."

"And the sword?"

"Swords are easy," Faranir answered without hubris. He was talking about what he knew, with a master's surety. "I can forge a mastercraft blade in the traditional way in three weeks - that's without making it pretty. This will take more time, though. I'll have to work with the steel and get the process just right. I'll need to make three or four attempts. With some room for error: three months. And if you're presenting it to the king, I'll want to do some aesthetic work. Hiltwork and engraving and such. I don't like making promises with so many things up in the air, but total time? Six or seven months - dependent on having the forge and smithy in place before the first snow, else we can't begin until spring."

Faranir was quiet for a moment. Both men knew the autumn harvest would begin in a fortnight, and that the first snows were only a short month behind the first fall of the scythe. "That means we have to have the labor and break ground within the week, and even then, we're cutting it dangerous-fine, Sir Reinhardt."

"Fret not, Faranir, your problem now is forge construction and smithing. My problem is land and coin acquisition. Tell me Faranir, if this works and you create this new forge and sword. What will set it apart from our current weapons? What will its wielder benefit from in combat?"

Faranir brightened perceptibly. If his commander thought he could overcome the obstacles, Faranir had little doubt he would. The big man grinned: "My technique will result in a lighter, stronger, springier blade. You'll be able to swing it faster and longer, and with more control, it bein' lighter. It will be much harder to break, being steel through and through, and having more give. But the heart of its superiority is this: the way we forge now, we have to pick sharpness or strength. A sharp sword is brittle, a strong sword is dull. My sword won't just be stronger than the blades we know: it will be sharper; it will hold an edge. A keen, killing edge."

"Provided ample material and your own group of laborers, how many of these new quality weapons could your forge produce in a month?"

Mass produced, with assistants? I'd say three score - far more with the second wheel and triphammer. The triphammer is the key to the whole operation in that regard. But even with full-steel blades, there will be common blades and mastercraft ones. The mastercraft ones will still have to be made wholly by hand. You can't infuse a blade with soul using triphammer. It's got to be hammered by hand. A month for the blade; a month for the aesthetic touches. With competent workers I can just oversee their work, and focus wholly on the mastercraft blades; the kind of swords kings and potentates pay ransoms for. I could make ten or twelve a year, with the fine aesthetic work. And then there's the armor, which I'd like to take a crack at."

"It looks like we shall need a sponsor or two. However, this is a delicate matter. If your weapon can do what you foretell, it could affect the balance of power in this region. There are those who would like to ensure that does not happen, so we must be cautious and discrete, letting everyone think this is a wild goose chase. Nobody needs to know anything other than the fact you have been commissioned to build a new forge by the river to do extra smithing for the Countess."

Faranir nodded, his expression solemn. "I take your meaning, Sir Reinhardt."

Reinhardt was not naïve to the fact the Countess had enemies. If they even got a hint that she might be developing some new war machine, it could bring unwanted spies and threats. His petty little bet suddenly escalated in his mind into a diplomatic crisis. Paranoia? Perhaps, but nevertheless, now after seeing what he thought Faranir could do confirmed by his incredible drawings, Reinhardt felt it his duty to bring the matter before the Countess. Further prudence told him to wait until the morrow, but he also knew that Pallon was currently retired by drink. Reinhardt needed to talk to Elsbeth when Pallon could not interfere.

He needed to go tonight, but not alone. It would be terribly bad form and fuel for the rumor mill for him to be seen knocking on Elsbeth's bedroom door at this hour and alone. "Gather your scrolls Faranir, we are going to see the Countess. This matter concerns her in more ways than I fathomed before."

— *David Queenann* 2006/02/16 01:58

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