

The Rescuers Campaign (2023)

Dramatis Personae

Billy (Chris) – half ogre fighter, not a great swimmer
Blaymarch (Marc) – elven conjurer, a summoner of violent beasts
Kyspar (Claire) – pixie ranger, capricious and wearingly cheerful
Lathander Banks (Buff) – halfling rogue, allergic to dire weasels
Montogor (INdran) – true elf druid, boa constrictor wrangler
Moonlock (Jake) - elven western monk, wise friar of Lugnae
Oberon Kempe (Neil) – human bard, noted actor (often disguised)
Sinchi Marstroy (Malcolm) – minotaur druid/monk, easily possessed

Ye Olde Campaign Logge

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[SESSION 01; 21/10/2023] The campaign begins at the Willow Tree tavern deep in the least salubrious portion of Nyr'Danr. Located in the Poor Quarter in the south-west of the city, the tavern is a renowned cesspit both figuratively and literally, standing as it does at the head of an open sewer that pools into a fetid bog outside the front door. A lonely willow tree, after which the tavern was named, sits on a small island in the slime. In addition to being a handy source of typhoid, the tavern is also the headquarters of the thieves guild and a good meeting place for undesirables and those conducting business outside of the eyes of the law.

It is in this latter capacity that the party at the centre of our unfolding horror are visiting on this oppressively warm and fragrant evening. They don't arrive together, and they don't all know each other but they have answered the summons of a human named **Giffrey**, who has promised gold for a little job far from the Nyr'Danr.

Kyspar believes that the pub is being watched, possibly by the guard and turns herself invisible. Shortly after a human the party take to be Giffrey enter the tavern. He is accompanied by an unassuming human, dressed as a soldier, a well-built but unarmoured dwarf that carries the symbol of Orath, and an 6 ft. tall cross between elf and ogre whose lank black hair and coarse demeanour marks him as the ugliest creature in the Willow. A not inconsiderable achievement.

After taking possession of a private room, Giffrey approaches the party and has them file in. He introduces the soldier, dwarf, and half-ogre as **Selwick**, **Ulbrecht**, and **Brugan** respectively. Brugan notices that Kyspar is invisible, and asks her to reveal herself for the duration of the meeting. Ulbrecht steps outside the room to watch the door, while Giffrey settles back to reveal "the job".

It's a simple job, he lies. Giffrey says he's acting on behalf of a patron who wants to rescue a noble lady. A **Lady Beren** specifically. The lady is held in a magical prison in another dimension. In return we will receive 42,000 aruns in payment split equally among us. At Oberon's asking, Giffrey qualifies that the total sum will be split between the surviving party members. 10% will be paid in advance, and the rest on completion of the mission.

Giffrey says that Brugan, Ulbrecht and Selwyn will be accompanying the party to add additional expertise. Brugan is apparently a "noble academic" with magical powers. Billy, voicing what everyone else is thinking, asks why this lady has been imprisoned in the first place. What did she do? Giffrey simply replies that she was a threat to Aragorn, and Aragorn removed the threat by having her locked up.

There is of course a very famous Lady who upset Aragorn and got imprisoned because of it, and the realisation of this dawns on a number of party members. No one voices it though, although Kyspar is moved to cast *detect evil* and see exactly what sort of employers she is dealing with. The spell is disrupted when Kyspar is hit with a tankard that Ulbrecht has casually thrown through the window. Remonstrance follows, but the situation is eventually defused.

Giffrey provides the party with a magic scroll that Blaymarch takes possession of. It will transport the party to the prison dimension where Lady Beren is held. It doesn't provide a way to return, however. The Lady herself should be able to provide that once the party frees her from her gaolers. The scroll should not be used within the city, Giffrey advises getting at least a few miles out of town. The party receives 40 rilks and 4 sapphires as the meeting disperses.

Oberon suggests that it's probably best to leave town immediately. There's bound to be someone who wants to prevent this mission from succeeding, and the group should get a headstart on them. Blaymarch says he can cast a *Leomund's Secure Shelter* outside the city, which will be a safe place where he can examine the scroll and work out if it does exactly what Giffrey says it does.

Moonwick says he will join the party later, as he will pray at the local temple before departing. Ulbrecht announces he will accompany the friar, and Brugan acknowledges that he too has other business to conclude before leaving the city. Oberon isn't keen on everyone splitting up, but the he and the rest of the party follow Blaymarch outside the city. Once they are beyond the pauper's cemetery and the common land, Blaymarch casts his spell.

Montogor and Sinchi don't want to stay in the magical shelter and head off to camp in the wilderness as befits servants of Allaveer. Meanwhile Blaymarch determines that the scroll contains a heavily modified *plane shift* spell that only goes one destination: a demiplane of undetermined characteristics, a prison plane.

Back in the city, Moonwick decides to cast a *divination* to get an idea of dangers and chance of success the party faces. The reply from Lugnae is somewhat cryptic: "Beware of the gods you can trust, and the gods you can't trust."

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Early in the day Moonwick, Ulbrecht and Brugan head out of town. Brugan needs to make a quick stop at the Willow Tree to pick something up, but is worried by what he finds there. There is a group searching for the party that left town early. The trio leave the city and hurry to their companions, arriving at the *secure shelter* shortly after breakfast. However, they are not long there before a man in leather armour carrying a short sword arrives in camp.

He says that he is looking for Oberon Kempe, saying that the noted actor has "upset" the wrong sort of people. Oberon, currently disguised as an old man called Albert, attempts to toy with the visitor but to his shock the man sees through his utterly convincing disguise. Oberon refuses to go with the man, and none of the rest of the party are willing to give Oberon up. The armoured man shrugs and says that he will come back in force.

Once the man has gone, Oberon confesses that everyone in the party has a reason for wanting to get out of Nyr'Danr... his is just a little more pressing than most. It's an interesting tale involving unanticipated arson, a local crime lord and a schnauzer but perhaps is a story for another time. Oberon advises that before the criminals return in force they should find Montogor and Sinchi and get the hell off this plane of existence.

The party only just makes their escape. Even though they did their best to cover their tracks, mounted agents of the Comorri family charged the group just moments before Blaymarch was able to cast the spell from the scroll and spirit them all away into another dimension.

The party appear in a bright sunny day, and are greeted with a fantastic view of pastoral magnificence. A great forest stretches behind them, the trees in full blossom. Unfortunately, it becomes apparent that the reason the view is so fantastic is because they have materialised forty feet in the air, and are descending slowly toward a massive thicket of the most deadly looking thorns any of them have ever seen.

There is certainly something magical about this extensive brier patch. Even Kyspar, who normally has no trouble flying, can't seem to escape its pull. All eleven are drawn into thorns, and each discover that escaping is something of a puzzler. Regular magic doesn't seem to stop the thorns from inflicting fatal damage. Magical transportation is redirected back into the thorns, etherealness doesn't seem very helpful, and even the druids can't command the plants to simply step out of their way. Blaymarch produces a ladder from his coat and climbs up to get his bearings, and eventually the party escape by a general willingness to embrace laceration and transforming Billy into a troll.

Outside of this thorny hellhole is a fortified cottage. The party is approached by a local farmer and cottage-owner, **Adamath**. After relating their story to him, Adamath says that the briars are a barrier to keep out the Falkovnians. None of the party know who they are, but they sound dodgy. Adamath recognises some of their accents, and says that his wife **Orva** is an elf from Kursaval. She was drawn to this place through the "Mists".

A cup of wine and several bandages later, the party have met with Orva. Orva says that she was part of an adventuring party hired to rescue some captive merchants in the Ukrall. One of her companions, **Skerridge**, went screamingly insane and murdered the merchants and goodness knows how many others. The mists came down and Orva found herself in the town of Smallbridge with her companion **Nessain**. They've since parted ways, but Orva found a reason to stay. She doesn't want to go back to Hurssia, but if the party do find their way home they could perhaps tell Orva's parents, **Belanna** and **Kelek**, that she is alive and happy.

The party asks about the surrounding area. Smallbridge is the nearest town. The viscount died in a tavern fire about seven years ago, Falkovnia invaded back three years ago... A convent has been established in a local fort. The prioress is a good egg called **Mercia**, and they worship a goddess of agriculture called Sularia.

Orva doesn't think this castle is the prison the party are looking for, though. She has heard of Lady Beren, and can tell the group that she is being held in a special prison in Falkovnia. She says that a Kursavallian wizard called **Ablet** came through town about a year ago. He was definitely trouble, but said he was on his way to see Lady Beren. He walked up the thorns and the hedge turned into a road. Orva hasn't seen that happen again. She suggests the group can find out more in town and they could do worse than speaking with Emile who lives at the watermill.

Bidding farewell to their suspiciously helpful and accommodating hosts, the party take the short walk toward Smallbridge. Soon they arrive at the mill, which is bedecked with advanced technology seldom if ever seen in Kursaval. As the party marvel at the wonders of indoor plumbing and mechanical mincers, they are treated to a pleasant afternoon by Emile, his wife **Brea** and their nauseatingly adorable children. There's food, music, dancing. Lathander falls into the pond. A good time is had by all.

They do notice that they are being watched by someone else from one of the upstairs windows of the mill. But this is no secret. It is the simple-minded Dendrim, who is an emancipated Falkovnian. The king of the Falkovnians apparently does terrible things to his soldiers, and even if Dendrim will never truly recover he can at least live out his days contentedly here.

As dusk falls the party take the short walk into town. Smallbridge was once a defensible walled town, but that has been subsumed by decorative stonework, stained glass windows and hanging baskets filled with flowers. Oberon begins to consider simply moving in. Crossing a wide cobbled bridge the party encounter a guardhouse and speak to **Captain Manning**. They are welcome to stay at the local tavern, but he insists all their weapons are left with him. After some grumbling the party agree and head into town.

The tavern is very comfortable, and due to the upfront payment from Giffrey the group can all afford their own rooms. During the evening Kyspar has the whacky idea of poisoning the party with a strong hallucinogen just to spice things up a bit. A bizarre sequence of events best left unrecounted swiftly ensues, which ends with Montogor almost eaten by a boa constrictor and Blaymarch wondering why everything was hit fault.

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The party is woken at seven bells but a commotion in the town. Kyspar flies out to the bridge to find a man covered in blood by the guardhouse. It is Dendrim (the servant of the miller family). The rest of the party swiftly catch up and Blaymarch casts *detect thoughts* on Dendrim. The poor man's mind is somewhat fragmented.

Blaymarch sees a well-drilled army attacking a farm. Then the army is being routed. Then he sees a sword (possibly Dendrim's) hacking at various things. It is a scene of horrible butchery. Then Blaymarch sees a cave, the cave turns into a dungeon, the dungeon gets filled with torture devices, and then Blaymarch sees himself being tortured in said-dungeon.

[SESSION 02; 22/10/2023] After a quick chat with Captain Manning, the party (minus Montogor who is still recovering from snakebite) determine to head out to the mill to find out what happened. They are greeted with a scene of carnage, and after some clever detective work it seems as though ogres have either murdered or kidnapped Emile and his family. There are no bodies, but there is a lot of blood. Oddly, quite a few personal effects have been removed from the mill.

The party follow the ogre's tracks and eventually encounter them, defeating them in a heroic battle. However, there's no sign of the Millers or the belonging that had been stolen from their home. They discover that the ogres seem to have passed on their haul to some wolves, or perhaps werewolves. The party begin to follow the wolf tracks north.

While travelling, the group comes up with the implausible theory that Emile and his family (even the kids) were werewolves, and that the ogres may have just stumbled into something they didn't

understand. The wolf tracks come to a fast-flowing river and a small cliff (on their side) that leads up a cave. The cave that may or may not be the one that Blaymarch saw in Dendrim's mind.

Kyspar and Lathander check out the cave and are immediately jumped by a dire weasel. Lathander is horribly mauled and Kyspar puts her in a bag of holding for her own protection. However, the weasels get her as well before she can flee the cave, despite Oberon bravely releasing a house cat to help them. Blaymarch's raven familiar (**Gerald**) who had been living inside Blaymarch's shirt up until this point, hears Kyspar's cry. Billy immediately jumps into action, tries to scurry up the cliff, fails and falls into the river. He begins to drown with superhuman speed.

Oberon conjures a magic rope that wraps around Billy, and quickly hands the end of Sinchi before he is swept away himself. However, the river is so fast moving that Sinchi can't pull Billy ashore and the minotaur is dragged 50 feet down the river bank. Blaymarch meanwhile has managed to get into the cave, and throws down a rope for Selwick to join him. While the house cat continues to battle the weasels, Billy manages to finally pull himself from the river, just in time to see Oberon utterly fail to climb into the cave and drop into the river himself.

A lengthy pantomime ensues, and the dwarf Ulbrecht is swept away by the river never to be seen again. Eventually no-one else is drowning and Selwick, Moonlock, Blaymarch and Oberon enter the cave in search of Kyspar. There is an upstairs to this cave and evidence that someone was living here, but Oberon is magically disinclined to search further. Or perhaps he's just distracted by the dire weasels who have finished eating his cat and are still hungry.

Determined to fight weasels with weasels¹, Blaymarch summons his own dire weasel force that is immediately is wrenched from his control and set upon his companions. In one fell swoop he has doubled the party's enemies. Adding to the party's suspicion over whose side Blaymarch is on, the wizard seeks to solve the problem by fighting weasels with bears². The bears are also possessed by some external force and now the party have to deal with weasels, weasels, and bears. Oh my.

There follows a period of intense chaos.

After the fight, the half dead party have no choice but to set up camp for the night. They haven't known each other for long, but suspect that this has been no-one's finest hour. Of course, the worse is yet to come. Some malign force takes control of Sinchi and sets the near unstoppable minotaur against the rest of the party. He kills Selwick before he can be restrained.

As the party pick through the remains of their devastated camp, it becomes apparent that they are surrounded. The woods themselves have come alive, and they are surrounded by dire wolves and several werewolves of excessive size. It is fight they can't win, so fortunately they don't try.

Oberon speaks with the werewolf who, despite the anatomical challenges, speaks perfect Kursavallian. The werewolf remonstrates with the party, and makes it clear he is on the verge of killing them. Oberon launches into a extensive and humiliating apology, and the werewolf eventually agrees to guide the pathetic party back to Smallbridge on the understanding that they never, ever come north again on pain of a painful death. This strikes everyone as eminently reasonable.

¹ An old Kursavallian saying.

² This is not an old saying. It's just daft. Blaymarch's penchant for attacking party members with summoned animals does not go unnoticed.

On the way back, the werewolf makes it clear that he isn't open to answering any questions so, while they may have suspicions, the mystery of what really happened to the Miller family remains just that.

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The dishevelled and still heavily wounded party arrive back at Smallbridge. They meet with Captain Manning and tell him that the Millers are missing presumed dead in an ogre attack. The ogres themselves have been killed. It's not quite the truth, but none of them are mentioning the werewolf encounter to the town.

Our brave heroes return to the tavern to reflect on the fact they are not one inch closer to finding and rescuing Lady Beren than they were when they arrived in this plane.