

Adventure Log -- Rescue Charlotte Gore

7/5/04

The players were rounded up by Rosie in the early evening and asked to meet with Simon Gore. He told them about the kidnapping of his daughter Charlotte. The militia of Gore's Cliff consists of four 1st-level fighter types, no match for the enemies who had taken Charlotte, so Simon asked the players' help. He is well off but not rich -- in fact, he does not have the money for the 150,000gp demanded in ransom -- but if the players can rescue his daughter, dead or alive, and destroy the band of thugs who took her, he will deed to them his most valuable land asset: his father's castle. He read them the ransom note, which said:

Simon Gore:

We have your daughter. At the moment she is unharmed. To see that she stays that way, deliver the sum of 150,000 gold pieces to the ancient oak. You have five days starting today; if the money is not there by nightfall on the fifth day, your daughter will be sold to the highest bidder.

The players talked to Osgood and learned the circumstances of the crime. He, Charlotte, and two guards had been on the road to Crossroads. At mid afternoon, they were attacked by ambush by a group of men in black leather armor using bows and swords. The guards were killed instantly and Osgood was injured. He was knocked unconscious as the bandits bound Charlotte to her horse. When Osgood awoke Charlotte, her horse, and two others were gone; the dead guards and a dead horse remained. Osgood was found by another party and taken into Crossroads, where a cleric healed him. Authorities in Crossroads said they could not help because the party was attacked outside the city. He drew them a facsimile of the rook symbol worn by the kidnappers and answered general questions about enemies Simon may have had.

That night the Ranger went out toward the ancient oak to recon and was shot at by a crossbow from cover. He retreated. During the day, the Bard hung around near the site for a while talking to animals for clues. All the chipmunks said was, "Don't stay here ... bad people here ... hurt people."

Also that next day, some of the party took Osgood and went to investigate the crime scene. They found the spot but there was nothing of interest left behind.

Early in the morning of Day 3 the entire party, plus Simon, set out for the ancient oak. Simon traveled openly with the Cleric, Wizard, Sorcerer, and Barbarian bearing an

arcane-locked chest meant to look like the ransom payment. The rest of the party traveled separately through the woods in stealth looking for anyone staking out the tree.

A battle ensued when the stealth group encountered four armed men hiding in the bushes around the tree. They killed two and incapacitated two, including the leader of the group. Through forceful interrogation, the players learned that Charlotte had been taken by thugs working for Silas Rook, a local figure who leads the road bandits. Rook has been working from a new base at Bainard's Keep, which had been known generally as a retreat for clerics. Rook's men, aided by a mysterious and powerful figure known as The Dark One, took the Keep by force and killed all but one of the clerics about a month before the kidnapping, holding one cleric hostage as their in-house healer.

The group also learned that Rook has somewhere between 12 and 24 men in his force, some of whom are always out looking for fresh victims or acting on orders from Rook. Rook's underlings are almost exclusively human. His inner circle consists of his girlfriend Velana, two bodyguards of unspecified ability, and The Dark One. The players learned that Velana is a "strange, dark woman" with some kind of spellcasting ability, that Rook's attitude and dealings have turned darker since he met her a year before, and that it was likely Velana who introduced him to The Dark One. The Dark One is of unknown race and profession but the captive's story suggests he has advanced arcane spell abilities at the very least.

After learning that another band of four men would be coming at nightfall to relieve the defeated group, the party covered their tracks by having the wizard cast Hypnotism on the two captives and have them remember that a group of stray adventurer-types had come upon them and attacked them, killing two before being repelled. The spell worked on the captain, who was highly motivated to forget having given the party information, but failed on the underling. They took the underling back to Gore's Cliff to be held as an accessory to the kidnapping.

Back at Gore's Cliff, Simon was confronted with a message from DeWitt and Clancey, a known law firm based in the city of Crossroads. The message indicated that the lawyers had a confidential client who wished to make an offer on the Castle of 200,000gp for immediate sale. Simon bristled at the offer because the castle is worth 500k, and because he agreed with some in the party that the anonymous "buyer" is probably Rook or some associate of Rook's trying to squeeze him into selling the castle for a fraction of its value to raise the ransom.

Having learned that Rook's gang has taken over Brainard's Keep, Simon told the players that Brainard's Keep was founded by the Cleric Brainard, a friend of Simon's late father Marcellus. He searched his father's old papers and found construction plans for the first two levels of the Keep.

The players held a strategy discussion and decided to head out for the Keep immediately to do a night-time recon. They interrogated their low-level captive about security and learned that the Keep is guarded by men during the day who will shoot anyone who approaches who is not wearing Rook's mark. At night the men sleep and the place is

guarded primarily by a pair of hellish wild animals that Velana conjures up who will attack anything that moves near the castle.

The group spent the rest of the day traveling north across the plain. They stopped and camped about an hour's walk from the Keep. The Ranger, Rogue, and Wizard then advanced on the castle to scope it out. They waited for nightfall and saw the animal guards come out of the castle and begin walking laps around it. They timed the laps and estimated that it takes the animals about six minutes to complete a circuit of the grounds.

The Rogue agreed to enter the castle and take a closer look. He timed his move to the pattern of the guard animals to avoid detection and walked through the front gate, which had been destroyed and not replaced. In the first yard he found a stable with about seven horses, a well and water trough. He explored the stable and discovered an office area in the back where a teenage-looking boy slept. There was some mundane paperwork relating to buying supplies for horses and work schedules (apparently the sleeping boy was Robb and he alternated shifts with Dave) but nothing of interest. The Rogue retreated without waking the stable hand or being detected by the patrol animals.

The Ranger expressed surprise at how little security there seemed to be and suggested an immediate night raid. The party agreed. They entered the Keep at midnight, avoiding the patrol animals. They ducked inside the left entry tower and ascended to the upper level undetected. On the outer battlement they encountered a watchman who was quickly dispatched by the monk before he could raise the alarm.

The party set a first goal of entering the main tower. The walkway they were in did not have a door to that section. The Wizard used Tenser's Floating Disk to fly them to a nearby inner walkway, then climbed across the gap herself using the stable roof for support. They were then able to enter a secondary tower, one of two that flank the main tower. They made it a policy to bolt the doors of the towers as they left them, hoping to retard the progress of any defending forces.

They found nothing of interest in the flanking tower other than, perhaps, noting that the levels within the towers are not all linked together (ie, you can't climb stairs from floor to top within the tower). A narrow catwalk running between the two gave them a view of the entrance hall of the main tower.

At the end of the session, the players decided their next action would be to enter the hall and explore the main tower.

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The players resumed play at 00:30 game time in one of the round corners of the main tower. They found the entrance hall and examined the carvings on the interior door, which depicted the ArchCleric Bainard and displayed his holy symbol, the symbol of Pelor. This told the troupe that the clerics had been followers of Pelor, a well-known NG deity of honor and strength.

The Halfling listened at the carved doors and detected voices beyond. Before stepping into a likely encounter zone, the Rogue and Monk opted to do some quiet recon. They discovered a map room and library above the main hall and a suspect space that, they surmised, was probably a hidden room.

As they were filling in the rest of the group, the carved door opened and a rogue in black leather appeared. The rogue seemed surprised to see the players but not suspicious -- he said something about them being early, and invited them into the main hall. The players followed, closing the door behind them.

Inside the main hall they found themselves in the presence of Silas Rook, who sat on a wooden throne in the back of the hall. Velana sat by his side, and a total of six men rounded out the group. Rook examined the group suspiciously, questioning whether they were truly the group he was expecting. He mentioned that the Dark One had left the previous day, and that he wasn't expecting to see the adventurers until the following week. The Sorcerer, speaking for the group, repeated that they had been sent by the Dark One and sped on their way with a Haste spell.

Rook, unconvinced, asked a test question: the color of the Dark One's eyes. The Wizard cleverly replied that nobody who wishes to live looks at them, but Rook rejected that answer and ordered his minions to attack.

The attack began with the lower-level soldiers striking at the party with short swords while Rook and Velana assailed them with arrows from their longbows. The party soon discovered that Rook had the Manyshot feat, enabling him to fire multiple arrows at once. They also noted him singing to inspire courage in his men, revealing that Rook's profession was that of a bard. The Gnome Bard sang her own song to provide a similar lift to the party's fortunes.

Rook's junior men were cut down quickly by the more experienced party. Facing charges from the strong fighters and a series of offensive spells from the Sorcerer and Wizard, Velana conjured an obscuring cloud of mist that hid herself, Rook, and one of Rook's bodyguards from view. She also summoned three black bears, which appeared through a magical portal and attacked the party. The bears fought more effectively than the rogues had, but were still outnumbered by the group. One was slain by the Cleric even as she escaped its grappling claws; one was badly damaged by a Sorcerer's spell and finished off by the Barbarian; the third fell to a slew of missile attacks.

Meanwhile, Rook and Velana continued their magical assault. As the Ranger and Monk

entered the cloud to find their enemies, the wooden floor shook beneath them and the combat area filled with sharp wooden spikes, like giant thorns, that grew from the floor. Another portal opened and deposited two dire badgers into the melee. One nearly ate the Halfling before being distracted by missile fire from the Bard.

The Wizard battled Velana magically, attempting to disburse the cloud. The attempt nearly succeeded, but Velana was just slightly too powerful (or too lucky). Determined that two could play the supernatural aid card, the Wizard summoned a trio of celestial dogs, bidding them enter the cloud and attack the party's enemies. The density and magical properties of the cloud prevented anyone from observing, but the sounds of growls and bites confirmed the dogs had found their targets. The Wizard then increased the attack power of the group by casting Haste on herself and several others, helping to put a faster end to the badgers.

Meanwhile, the Ranger felt a touch from within the cloud and fell victim to an enchantment of uncontrollable laughter, disabling him for several minutes and filling the cloud region with the sound of his false mirth. As the obscuring mist began to thin, a ball of flame shot out at a concentrated group of the player force, dealing more magical damage. The Ranger recovered and, working with the Monk, began systematically searching the mist for their quarry. Arrows nipped at them both, but without the deadly accuracy of the early rounds -- clearly the mists hindered Rook's aim as much as his opponents'.

By the twelfth round the mist cleared completely, exposing Rook and Velana to attack by the entire party. With her spells used and strength waning, Velana endured a series of missile hits long enough to drink a potion that caused her to assume gaseous form. Now immune to attack but unable to help Rook, the Druidess escaped by flowing through an archer slit into the night sky.

Rook had one more trick to try. In a desperation move, he cast Invisibility on himself and tried to escape the battle scene. The party moved quickly to block access to the doors. The Wizard and Sorcerer used their Detect Magic ability to spot Rook and direct the fighters' attacks. Soon the Ranger scored a hit and the Barbarian ensnared Rook in his net. As the invisible bard struggled to free himself, the Barbarian struck him with the death blow.

What had once been the chapel for Pelor's clerics was now a bloody mess. The Cleric used all of her healing powers to help the most wounded. The party wasted little time, opting to press on and find Charlotte as quickly as possible. First they revisited the library, where the room dimensions suggested a secret chamber may exist. The Bard detected an oddity in the bookcase construction and before the Rogue could check it for traps she triggered a spray of poisoned needles. Thanks to luck and reflexes only the cleric was affected, becoming weak and ill for several hours.

Behind the bookcase was, as suspected, a hidden room. It contained treasure of a sort: gold, a few gemstones, an art object or two, and a large chest bearing an insignia nobody

recognized. The Wizard noted that it didn't seem like much given Rook's large crew and level of activity. Was this the cleric's strong room, undiscovered by the crooks? Unlikely, as the chest appeared new.

One mystery semi-solved, the group continued upstairs to the top floor of the tower. This was clearly a residential floor. One of the rooms had a special door with a man's face carved in it. As soon as the group touched the door it came to life and spoke to them. The door, it seemed, had originally been one of Rooks' men named Fred. Fred committed an indiscretion with the entrance password, allowing someone into the room without authorization. As punishment, the Dark One turned Fred into a door who could only open if given the correct password. The players took advantage of Fred's limited intellect to fool him into accepting a "changed" password from them and open.

Inside the room, of course, was Charlotte Gore. She was quiet and compliant, clearly under the influence of a powerful mind spell or potion. She readily agreed to accompany the heroes back home.

Their primary objective achieved, the players took a few minutes to check the other rooms for the captive cleric. They found Rook and Velana's chamber, which contained more material wealth than the vault in the library. They also found a room unoccupied but imbued with powerful aversive magic, presumably by the Dark One. They took what they found in the other rooms and descended to ground level.

At this point the party decided to pursue the final objectives: locate the captive cleric and kill or drive off the rest of Rook's men. They started in the upper courtyard, where they found and killed two of Rook's captains as they struggled out of bed. An infirmary held the cleric, shackled to the wall to prevent his escape. The cleric, named Hardin, had little knowledge of things outside his small room but in gratitude for the rescue he healed the party's remaining wounds and offered to take up arms with them against the remaining thieves. They located a fine suit of chainmail and mace that once belonged to the head priest and Hardin took possession of those.

Movement into the barracks area was impeded somewhat by the odd structure of the castle's walls, which did not always allow easy access from one battlement to another. Using their map and a rope, the players put archers atop the wall and had swordsmen climb down the wall. They surprised a group of six thugs in their beds and dispatched them quickly. Another two men in a different room met the same fate. The dining hall proved empty at that hour, as did the guard office above it. The group found a cache of arms in another upstairs room and replenished their supply of arrows and crossbow bolts.

Finally, the group worked their way to the stable and woke the sleeping stable hand. He was Robb, a noncombatant perfectly happy to accompany the group out of the castle. They took extra horses from the stable for Charlotte and Robb and rode back to camp, timing their exit to miss the still-patrolling dire wolves. The Barbarian kept watch while the rest slept.

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Now, to address some of the end-of-session issues:

1) As you passed the ancient oak you saw a body hanging from it: your hypnotized captain. It was a pretty obvious lynching, as his hands and feet were bound. At Hardin's insistence you cut him down and took him to town for proper burial. It was just daybreak when you reached the oak, and several of you are sure you heard scuttling noises in the brush, as if the second group watching the oak had seen the size and strength of your group and decided to get out of Dodge quickly.

2) Aside from that, you reach town without incident. Simon is delighted to have Charlotte back alive and well, and the constable is delighted to hear that Rook is dead and his band of thugs dead or scattered. Simon announces a victory feast at the castle's outdoor pavillion that evening, once you've all had a chance to rest.

3) Simon is surprised to hear that, having completed the mission, your group is now seeking to renegotiate the agreement to a lower reward. Surprised, but not displeased. He is perfectly willing to retain ownership of the castle and to provide enough domestic staff to keep it livable for you for as long as you choose to remain. Simon hires Robb to be your groom (barring objections from you, of course) and instructs him to take any feed and supplies he needs from Simon's stable. Simon also pledges to hand you 15,000gp in gold coin within 48 hours -- he's sending Osgoode to Crossroads to sell some precious stones to raise the cash because there isn't a bank or large gold store in town. (Don't worry, he'll make it there and back without incident.)

4) At dinner, Hardin announces his intention to retake Bainard's Keep and turn it back into a church of Pelor and shrine to the memory of ArchCleric Bainard. He figures to go to Tavor (3 days out), where there is a large Church of Pelor, and recruit a half-dozen clerics and hopefully as many well-trained paladins to help him take and hold the Keep. Hardin figures it will take him two weeks to raise the force he wants and get to the Keep.

Guests at the feast include yourselves, Hardin, Simon, Charlotte, Osgoode, the constable (chief of the town guard), the Mayor, all three members of the Town Council, and a handful of locals with influence. If you have questions you'd like to ask any of them, let's use the downtime to cover that. Send me the question and I'll get you an answer.

