

ON THE ROAD

A RuneQuest Scenario Set in a Trading Caravan by Anna Price

A perilous journey through the vastness of the Plains of Prax with inter-adventure suggestions for Gloranthan RuneQuest.

INTRODUCTION

Characters in fantasy role-playing games sometimes need to trek long distances. It is possible for the GM to say, 'That took three weeks, you arrive safely', or to roll random encounters. The first option is flavourless, the second tedious, so here is an alternative, in scenario format, to slot in whenever the players set off on some journey.

The referee will need *Cults of Prax* and *Cults of Terror*, but the adventure can take place in any world: I have avoided any place names associated with Glorantha. Cults can easily be changed if Gloranthan religions are not appropriate to your campaign. Stats have been given for *RuneQuest* but it should be an easy matter to convert the scenario to the fantasy role-playing system of your choice.

Most journeying in the ancient world was done by water. The players may find their characters can do likewise. Travel by river would be quite safe and reasonably inexpensive, but a sea-voyage would be costly and potentially dangerous.

Weather and pirates used to be the traveller's major worries, apart from having to raise the money for the fare. Moreover, anyone trying to make a cut-rate journey had to be tough and lucky. Many passengers on such ships woke with aching heads and bound arms to find themselves half-way to the nearest slave-market.

The cheapest and most flexible way to travel was to gather together a large group going in the same direction. This could take a long time, so, in game terms, it will usually be more convenient for the characters to join an already-formed caravan. The next time your players do so, try them with something like the following adventure. This scenario is different to the usual scenarios presented in *White Dwarf*—there is no map provided and referees will have to do some work in setting the adventure in their world.

It helps to have a map of the route, but since the party will not get lost (the caravan leader will have travelled this way many times) and is unlikely to go off in an unexpected direction, the map need not be extensive.

It would cost characters 5 Lunars (or 5 Silver pieces) per week, or part of a week, to travel with the caravan, no food supplied. Or it would be possible to hire on as a guard or scout, pay 2 Lunars a week, food supplied, 10 Lunars bonus per attack beaten off. Double for

mounted scouts. A Healer (only one in each caravan) gets paid 5 Lunars a week.

THE JOURNEY

A caravan can travel up to 30 kilometres a day, in good weather on a decent road. It will usually do less.

The following chronological scenario outline suggests a route around which the adventure unfolds, but can easily be altered to fit your map. Encounters like the river and the mountain pass may be shifted in time, to match your geography. The following should be used as a general guideline of events—players' actions will probably modify the structure slightly.

Day 1

Dvarhelm, the merchant-trader running the caravan, will set out at dawn. People and creatures present are as listed on the Victims Table, except that the Bearwalker, trollkin slaves, 'peasant', and the Flesh Man cultists are not yet there. Dvarhelm's packhorses are led by the Lunars and the Baboons.

A poorly-repaired but adequate road runs north-west from the town or city they start at. The first day's travel is deliberately short and easy. At midday they arrive at a human village, do a little trading, then make camp. A peasant named Clid, not bright but friendly, joins the caravan. He says he is going to become an adventurer.

Some supplies will be bought here (it is cheaper than in town) and from now on the caravan will stock up every time it stops at a settlement.

Day 2

The caravan is still able to follow the old road, but is going through hilly country, travelling north.

At midday it arrives at a troll settlement. Dvarhelm trades as usual, swapping some gaudy cloth for 43 trollkin slaves. They are set to lead the packhorses, which they seem to quite enjoy.

Days 3-4

The caravan leaves the road, moving off north-west, following a faint track into the hills. A hard day's travel brings the caravan through the hills onto the plain beyond, arriving at nightfall in an isolated human village.

Dvarhelm spends next day trading. A couple of travellers leave the caravan, and six human women join it. They do not wear armour, seeming poor and meek. If anyone questions them, they

will claim religious necessity prevents them stating the purpose of their journey.

They are eager to talk about their sect, since it is so obscure most people think it does not exist. They are quite boring on the subject. Their god is Flesh Man, who asks only that mortals lead reasonably useful (to their society) lives, promising in return an afterlife like this life, but without the problems. They are all initiates, and initiates are the moral advisors who define for lay members what behaviour is considered useful.

There is one aspect of their cult they do not mention to outsiders. Each initiate must, every season, send a sentient being to join the dead. They do this with their version of the Peaceful Cut, using a garotte [see *Cults of Terror*], in which all initiates have at least 45% skill. The victim must be someone they are acquainted with, and not an enemy slain in battle. They have joined the caravan to fulfill their religious obligations.

Day 5

The group travels east over rolling grasslands. Rejoining the road, they cross the deep river where it is bridged, then leave the road, and go north. That night for the first time, they must make camp.

As they do so, a thick-built man appears as if from nowhere and approaches Dvarhelm, to whom he speaks briefly. Dvarhelm looks dubious, then nods.

Dvarhelm, who has met him before, and indeed owes him a favour, has agreed to let Albrecht the Bearwalker join the caravan. It is a couple of days till the full moon, and Albrecht intends to let his new companions get to know him before announcing his race. He wears no runes, but, if asked, will admit he follows Daka Fal.

Day 6

Roll on the victim table to see who died at the hands of the Flesh Man cultists during the hours of darkness last night. Since this victim was taken totally by surprise and had no chance to resist, reroll if a player character is indicated, or if it is Albrecht.

In future, an attack will be made each night (unless the caravan is in a settlement) and will succeed 90% of the time, except against Albrecht or a PC. The players must roll POWx5 to wake in time, then fight normally, remembering they start on the ground. Albrecht has an 80% chance of driving off his attacker.



If the victim rolled is not present (dead, left etc.) then assume the guards spotted the intruder and chased them off. Otherwise there is a 1%+1%-per-3-guards-posted chance per night that the assassin will be scared off before attacking.

A search for the weapon will only succeed if someone with garotte skill makes a Spot Hidden roll, since the Flesh 'Manites' use their silken sashes, which most people would not recognise as weapons.

Victims who survive will remember only a cord round the neck and a small, shadowy figure which fled when attacked.

If asked, Dvarhelm has enough hides to provide everyone with 2 points of neck armour protection: no more can be worn while sleeping. He will charge 10 Lunars per strip of leather, 2 Lunars to anyone in his employ. He will not protect the slaves.

Dvarhelm knows *create market*, which he will cast each night in the wilderness, after the first assassination, excluding a different group every time. However, it will have no effect, as the Flesh Manites regard their victims as friends to whom they are doing a favour.

They travel north-west towards the hills. During the day a player character is approached by Zivgi, a wealthy member of the baboon troupe (although not well known to the others), who has a proposition.

He says that Clid, the would-be adventurer, intends to finance his new career by selling a gem. Clid thinks the stone is worth a few hundred lunars, but Zivgi, a jeweller, claims it is worth thousands. He is not carrying much money, but will pay 100 Lunars, if the party will put up any money over the amount that Clid demands.

If the party agree, Clid will bargain hard, starting at 900L, and not going below 350 Lunars. It is worth around 350 Lunars. The jewel is a turquoise carved into the shape of a flowering tree. It has some curiosity value, as it was carved by elves. It is worth around 50 Lunars.

Zivgi and Clid will drop out of the caravan at the next settlement after their scam succeeds. If the party refuse the bait, Zivgi and Clid will con the baboons instead. If they can do so without too much danger, they will steal back the gem just before they leave.

Add them to the Table of Victims when two people are dead.

That evening, Waku (who is illuminated) will start investigating the killings

in his own way, by asking a Nysalor riddle each night until he is prevented, or the murderers are found.

Day 7

The caravan is about to enter a narrow pass in the hills. The Centaur-guards have scouted ahead, and say they suspect something, although they have not seen anything definite.

Dvarhelm would like someone less conspicuous than a centaur to see if they can find out what is wrong. (This is a chance for the party to use a variety of skills.)

It is not hard to spot the 1d10+10 broos waiting in ambush but, unless the scouts are actually among the broos, it requires a critical Spot Hidden to see the camouflaged pit across the track.

In fact, there are around 120 broo of fighting age, most relaxing in their nearby cave homes (where they have stored their treasure: mostly in trade goods and equipment to the value of 9,058 Lunars, plus 1d4 magic items).

If the broos are slain, the treasure must be divided amongst all who fight, around 100, with the magic assigned by lot – unless anyone has done something exceptional, in which case the hero or heroes will be voted one of the items each, if there are enough.

Only five of these broo carry disease, so each person must roll 96%+ to catch a disease from wounds or treasure, one roll per wound, plus one for the treasure. Roll 1d6 times on the table of victims for diseased NPCs, minus one per party member who is infected.

Roll 1d20-2 times to see who, if anyone, dies in the battle. The party will, of course, fight normally, being attacked by 1d4-2 new broo each round for 1d6+2 rounds. A minus figure means that one or more of the broo fighting that character will break off. At the end of the 1d6+2 rounds the broo will be practically defeated, and characters in trouble will receive aid in 1d4 rounds.

The broo in the caves will snipe from cover with slings until the attackers can clamber up to them. The caves are not very high: 1d3 damage to anyone who both falls and fails a POWx5 roll. Anyone charging the ambushing broos will fall into the pit: taking no damage, but being put at a disadvantage.

However, Dvarhelm will not be eager to face the broos. He will argue for going around through the hills. If he persuades the party, roll random encounters three times a day for 1d4+ days, as they try to

find a way through. From now on, add the extra time take to the day-number.

The rest of this day will be spent either in the hills or traversing the pass.

Days 8-10

Coming out of the hills, the caravan will move south-west, to arrive at evening in a human township. The people will be grateful for news of the broo-ambush, and very grateful if the broo have been wiped out. No garotting will happen that night. The baboons leave the caravan here, intending to go south.

Day 11

The caravan makes poor progress today. It is raining heavily, and they are moving on a dirt track through woodland. Wheels frequently have to be unstuck.

There will be another killing in the night. By this time the party should have some idea who is responsible. Certainly accusations and counter-accusations will have been thrown around: the party will come under suspicion.

From now on the Illuminated One will have a 10% cumulative chance per day of realising the Flesh Manites are responsible. On a 96%+ he accuses someone else: roll on the Victim Table to find out who is wrongly accused, substituting Dvarhelm for Watu and his servants when you roll.

If the Flesh Manites judge anyone is getting suspicious they will creep away in the night.

Days 12-13

It is still raining heavily. The caravan comes to a river, to find that the ford is flooded. A way must be improvised to get men, beasts and waggons across. Dvarhelm will welcome suggestions.

Even after sensible precautions are taken, there is a 25% chance that someone or something will be swept away by the swift-flowing river. The caravan is held up for a day.

Day 14

A soggy caravan treks north-west, skirting a range of mountains to the east. During the day the rain slackens. Roll a random plains encounter.

Day 15

The rain finally stops. Moving north, the scouts find a wounded griffin. If it is aided, it will be grateful, helping by scouting from the air. Its name is Lerao.

A band of mounted nomads can be



seen in the distance, pacing the caravan. (They are watching its progress through their territory, and will try to avoid contact. They think trading is demanding, and distrust the caravan, but will only fight if provoked.)

In camp that night, 'To cheer you all up,' a woman named Ganza will demonstrate a game of skill, played with three small goblets and a pea. It is called Find the Lady. Ganza has Sleight of Hand 75%, and any round when she makes her roll it will take a 20% of normal Spot Hidden to Find the Lady. An ordinary Spot Hidden will be enough if she has failed her roll; a critical then will make it plain she is cheating.

Ganza will accept bets on only one cup per round, offering odds of 4 to 1. She has 500 Lunars, but will not accept bets above 50 Lunars.

Days 16-19

Heading North, the caravan comes to a human township at midday. Dvarhelm will trade. If the Flesh Manites are still around and are unsuspected, they will leave the caravan here. So will the Illuminated One.

The wagons will be overhauled, and animals rested. Dvarhelm will stock up carefully on supplies, especially water.

Day 20

The country through which the caravan is travelling deteriorates into scrubland: Dvarhelm is taking a shortcut, going north-west across semi-desert. This is dangerous country, the Scorpion Men hunt in packs, though, unfortunately, only at night.

There is a Dwarven fortress in which Dvarhelm expects to take shelter that night, for the modest sum of 1 Lunar per living creature.

To his distress, the price has gone up to 15 Lunars each: the Dwarfs have a new party in power. He will go in with his wagons and animals, but employees must pay for themselves. There is only a 20% chance that any NPC group will stay outside.

Any party which does stay out will be attacked in the night by 1d8+2 Scorpion Men.

Day 21

The caravan is moving back into fruitful, settled land, arriving that night at a thriving human town.

The party have now been travelling for three weeks. This may be their destination; or possibly they must leave the

caravan here and go on alone; or the caravan may go further in their direction. This depends on the GM's plans and the geography of his world.

Victim Table

d100

- 01-21: Party (give each a number) plus other adventurers, merchants, etc.
- 22-24: 3 Centaur guards, Hram, Bramj and Dohm. They are Eirithans.
- 25-28: 4 general servants. They groom the animals, drive waggons, cook, etc. Lay members of Chalana Arroy.
- 29-31: Watu the Illuminated and 2 acolytes. They wear runes appropriate to Seven Mothers worshippers, and are lay members of the cult. They do not, of course, announce themselves as Nysalorans.
- 32-49: 18 Lunars (10 men, 8 women), all of whom, except the woman Ganza, worship the Seven Mothers. She worships Eurmal the Trickster.
- 50: Albrecht the Bearwalker, Daka Fal lay member.
- 51-66: 12 Baboons, including Zivgi the 'Jeweller'. Six are Sun Dome Templars, and one is a Rune Priest, who will hold service each Fireday. Zivgi and the other five worship Issaries.
- 67-75: 9 nomads, Waha cultists.
- 76-00: A party of 27 Daka Fal pilgrims, of mixed races, but mostly human. They are seeking 'a place where magic and death join hands with plenty'.

OTHERS IN CARAVAN

- 1. Dvarhelm the leader, Issaries Rune Lord.
- 2. Wharj the Dragonewt, who will be totally indifferent to anything which happens, unless he is slain and his body maltreated.
- 3. A 'peasant' called Clid, with a valuable gem hidden in his cap.
- 4. 6 Flesh Man worshippers. Female, human, softspoken, friendly. And deadly.

SUMMARY

There are about 110 humanoid members of this caravan, plus waggons, pack-mules and 43 trollkin slaves. Eight people, plus the trollkin, are not present when the caravan sets out.

Any assassination attempt which is rolled against a person who is not present (gone, dead, etc) is treated as an

unsuccessful try. Otherwise 1+(guards/3)% chance to abort the assassination.

Nysalor Riddles

Possible answers are suggested, but other right answers are certainly possible. Players should write down the answers, not call them out. Add more riddles if you need them.

1. Where is the best place to store scrolls of wisdom? Answer: In the mind; or, anywhere but in Lankhor Mhy's temples. (Read Native Tongue).

2. What is taller than a giant? Answer: A taller giant, a dragon and a mountain. (Climbing).

3. Where does your breath go when you die? Answer: Where it always went, into the wind. (Hide item.)

4. You draw your sword. I draw my sword. You fight with me. Are we friends or enemies? Answer: For my part, I am your friend (or enemy); or, it depends on what you mean by 'fight with'. (Shield parry).

5. What flies faster than any bird, yet has no wings? Answer: the sun and the wind and a lover's heart to his beloved. (Tracking.)

6. If I breathe I die. Where am I? Answer: Underwater; or, in a cloud of poison. (Swimming.)

7. Are dreams true? Answer: Only to a sleeper; or, if the dreamer makes them so. (Map making.)

8. When is a man not a man? Answer: When he is a woman; or, when he is a corpse. (Speak Native Tongue.)

CONCLUSION

There are no statistics, because monsters should be adjusted to match your player characters, and stats for caravan members will probably not be needed. Any stats you need can be taken from *Foes*, prepared beforehand, or just taken from the average stats given in the rules.

Having seen this outline, you should find it easy to prepare other caravan trips, if they become necessary. Here are some basic ideas for more caravans which you may find helpful: Escorting food to the heart of a famine area. Attacks by the starving.

Unknown to everyone, the caravan leader is a slaver, who is looking especially for unusual slaves.

Someone on the caravan is carrying an item sacred to the nomads through whose territory they are travelling.

A route must be established across a newly-appeared area of chaos. □