

Neighborhood Watch

by

Celli the Happy Go Lucky Celliphopod

Set to Paper in the Earthen Realms

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and so on and so forth

“Hello. My name is Pete,” Pete says slow and easily over the din of the bar. He half expects the occupants of the inn to say, Hi Pete, in return as if this were some sort of Adventures Anonymous meeting, but no one acknowledges Pete’s presence and none of the side conversations cease, but Pete continues nonetheless.

“Most of you know me already. I’m Pete the Paladin. I’ve seen most of you off-and-on at the church... or around town,” he adds diplomatically. Most of the goblins in attendance have never shown up at a service, and well, it would be simply silly to expect a Bog Wight or a Depth Fiend to ever step a foot inside a holy building. The fact is, most of the hordlings present look nervous, as if the dwarves, humans, or rogues in the tavern might turn on them at any moment. And I don’t mean to imply that some of the rogues aren’t human, or that some of the humans aren’t rogues, but that there are plenty of both groups in attendance, and so splitting them up into two separate camps makes sense.

It is clear to Pete, if no one else, that he is nervous. His mind is wandering. He’s stumbling for footing, and if this were a random encounter, it is clear to everyone present that he would have lost the initiative by now.

“Shut up!” shouts a Mind Reaver from where he is lazing in a corner booth next to a dark succubus, a princess that needs rescuing, and one of those ever-present elvin NPCs with an 18+ charisma. He is the DM, or if you prefer, he is the narrator, or if you prefer, he is just darn sexy, in like a way that is totally

irresistible to all of the lady folk in the realm -- or at least the aforementioned girls.

Though, even with this being said, it must be admitted that there are those in the kingdom who merely deign to put up with and/or tolerate the DM/Narrator/Dark Reaver and his antics. For instance, players, especially those sitting in the next booth over, tend to object to the DM/Narrator/Dark Reaver playing a character in his own campaigns, books, stories, and whatnot, but to these critics he has but one reply, Tough Cookies! and so we too shall leave it at that.

“Shut up!” the Mind Reaver shouts again. “Next one who talks gets a -4 modifier to all rolls for the next... ten turns.” We shall not go into the fact that everyone had already stopped talking after the first time he yelled, Shut Up! (he has that sort of commanding voice, after all) or that he hasn’t got the slightest idea how long a turn is. As such, one can imagine the degree to which campaigning with the DR -- as he sometimes calls himself -- is a bit... of a chaotic affair (and by chaotic, of course, we mean completely devoid of rhyme or reason, but then you will see this for yourself I imagine before we are through).

“It’s all yours,” the Mind Reaver says to Pete nonchalantly when the extraneous commentary is over, and then goes back to enchanting the three damsels with whom he intends to share the evening. If I did not mention it before (and even if I did, it bears repeating), the trio consists of a sultry Succubus, a Pretty Princess of the type that needs saving, and a prototypical Elvin lass that just so happens to have a charisma of at least 19... if not more. I wonder if you can see the running gag of an ever increasing charisma taking hold? (And I’m guessing after a hint like that, it shouldn’t be too terrible difficult.)

“Um. Right. Yeah,” Pete starts again as he looks to the Mind Reaver for guidance. And really, if you’re wondering why a paladin might look to a Mind Reaver for guidance, just let it go. Pete is just sort of confused. I mean, he’s a good guy. He takes his paladin oath’s of chastity, poverty, and etc. seriously. Of course,

anyone who has ever campaigned with me or read any of my stories, will immediately recognize etc. as an admission that I've never bothered to figure out what the other oaths might be, but whatever they are, rest assured, they are completely extraneous to the story. Anyhow, being good-natured and quite nonjudgmental, Pete sometimes just sort of falls in with the wrong sort -- which in this case would be the DM'ing sort. I'm sure you know what I mean.

"You better ease off on that DM stuff," suggests one of the players. He is a portly man. Not much to look at really, but the sheer amount of arcane knowledge the man's got tucked away in his noggin regarding all thing Tokenesque, Potteresque, or Geek Festesque is truly amazing. And so, as unwelcome as his words are, we must take them for the gems of wisdom that they are.

You will perhaps note at this juncture, how a narrative comment like that tends to kill the flow of a story dead...

"You don't want to overdo the narrative thing either," the man suggests, as if the flow needed any further killing.

At this point, things are positively stagnant. So, I guess there is absolutely no other option other than getting on with the actual story.

"Ixnay on the story-ay," Don suggests, as if it was possible for me to run a game without giving it away that it was a game, or that I was capable of writing a story without referencing the fact a zillion times within the context of the story, as if the story itself was actually the story: sort of like a self referential story about a story that focuses on the fact that is in fact a story.

Whatever. I'll leave it at that. I would try to explain it further, but I'm pretty sure that I would only make things worse.

"Um. Yeah. Right," Pete continues from where he was mere moments ago. "As you all know there has been a rash of crime in the neighborhood..."

"Those PC's are killing everything in sight!" one of the goblins complains loudly.

"Um. Yeah," Pete agrees.

“We don’t kill everything,” suggests Don, the aforementioned man of large stature, and broad intellect.

“I thought I was going to be Crazy George,” Don complains.

“You’re not him,” the Mind Reaver points out, and before Don can argue or lodge a formal complaint he continues, “Besides he’s showing up later. It wouldn’t look right if there were two Crazy Georges in the story.”

“But you promised,” Don replies with much petulance -- not that I could even begin to tell you what that particular word means. (And basically, whenever I’m using a word more than two syllables long, you can be sure my grasp as to its meaning is hazy at best. Perhaps that’s one of the reasons why I surround myself with characters of superior intellect???)

As if on cue, Crazy George announces, “I’m here! I’m here!” as he runs through the door and then bends over out of breath. Being a man of breeding and politeness, he just barely manages to hold it open for the old crone who walks in behind him. “We were just having a professional meeting,” he explains hastily between wheezes. And just to sort of confirm this, the crone sort of rearranges her clothes, as if to indicate it was that type of meeting.

“No, really. Just a meeting,” George insists between huffs. “She’s a sorceress. I’m a wizard. We do that. Collaborate and stuff.” (Stuff being one of those highfaluting words I was alluding to previously.)

“Call it what you will,” the old crone snickers as she leaves her escort at the door and finds a much younger rogue to sit next to. The rogue in question is a character named the thief and he may, or may not, play a role in the future of this tale, but with a name like the thief, you might want to keep an eye on him either way -- and for Gra’gl’s sake don’t lend him any money.

And perhaps right there, after introducing basically the entire cast, I should probably make some sort of disclaimer. I’m not really big on descriptions. You may have noticed this. Crazy George looks like a slightly demented wizard. The old crone is,

well, old -- and then she's a crone, but maybe you guessed that already. The thief looks exactly like a thief ought to look, while Don looks just like a middle-aged gaming geek. Did I leave anybody out?

"Us," an indignant goblin remarks, but then seriously folks, if you don't already know what a goblin looks like, you're not really trying... and if you're not going to put forth the effort, than neither shall I.

"I'm a Paladin," Pete says helpfully from up near the bar. He I suppose I should describe. He is wearing armor, and he is holding a sword. He uses said sword -- shiny, bright, and sharp -- to pistol whip (no mean feat with a sword either mind you) that blabber mouth goblin that has been interrupting the proceedings so, and who has thereby -- almost single-handedly -- preventing the story from getting underway.

"If there are no more preliminary questions then?" Pete asks as he looks around the room expectantly, and perhaps if truth be known a little eagerly. I should probably point out that he's got a bit of an itchy... um, sword finger, and leave it at that. "OK then. Let's get this thing going," Pete continues.

"It's about time," Don remarks.

"Watch it," the Mind Reaver warns, but as the elvin lass sitting next to him is busy earning a +1 to her Charisma for the next 2d6 rounds (whatever that might mean), it's a comment that is not to be taken seriously.

This side discussion, of course, has once again stopped Pete dead in his tracks.

"Just get on with it," the Mind Reaver commands, but then realizing Pete is never going to get on with it, he instructs Suzy -- the Succubus -- to take over.

"Oh, yeah! Now we're talking," Don remarks. Need I mention that both he and every other male in the establishment suddenly becomes alert, at full attention, or something ridiculously and equally salacious as that.

“Here’s the thing,” Suzy says as she jumps onto the bar and proceeds to show off her good side (and this being a story done in good taste, I’m just going to let you figure out what that means.)

But don’t think just because her little shenanigans go unrecorded, they go unnoticed.

“Cowabunga!” Don declares.

Suzy just sort of looks at him as if he were a worm or a dead bug. “Cow-a-bung-a? This is what comes to mind when I do this?” And then of course she does this again, before she mocks him again and repeats his line again derisively, “Cow-a-bung-a?”

I’m sure Don has some sort of witty remark, but as our gaming sessions only last so long, and in the interest of actually getting this story underway, or at least sort of rambling on in the proper direction, we shall ignore him for the moment, and let Suzy get this community crime watch meeting underway.

“Bottom line, there’s been too much crime in the neighborhood,” Suzy says decisively.

And is it just me, or isn’t that always the way? It’s always either too much or too little. Never the right amount. Never the happy medium.

“Way too much,” agrees the cobalts’ spokesperson.

“Here. Here,” the rest of the goblins agree with uncharacteristic solemnity.

“It’s those players fault,” an ogre sitting in the back suggests; but really, he has gone to far.

“Shut up! And let the lady speak,” Pete suggests as he... um, quiets the... um, monster.

I mean, I don’t want to seem... like I’m playing favorites or anything. The lady was talking, and these folks -- or more accurately, that monster -- was interrupting her. And the point is, Pete does have those vows. “I get a +10% to experience whilst role playing a character flaw in an appropriate manner,” Pete explains merrily as he sheaths his sword. And then, thinking it over, feels the need to amend his previous statement. “Not that I consider my oaths flaws mind you,” and not that Pete is a PC (and

so doesn't really qualify for the +10% bonus), but you get the point, or you would if you were some sort of gaming geek, which you're probably not, so I'll just let it go. The fact is, Suzy has the floor, and she's going over some neighborhood watch thing. The author may have been to one of these meetings in real life recently, and if you were there, you'd have realized that it was just begging to be made fun of.

Don just rolls his eyes. "I hate it when you," meaning the author, "try to bring real world events into the campaign, or your stories... er, that is, I love to hate it," he corrects as he notices Pete -- the defender of truth, justice, and the DM's way -- walking in his direction. "Boy! Do I just love to hate," Don continues with a somewhat obvious -- and therefore failed -- attempt at sincerity.

"I thought you'd see it my way," the Mind Reaver replies nonplussed, sincerity not being a high priority for him. And then with that said, there is nothing to do, but yield the floor once again back to Suzy the Seductress.

She is standing on top of the bar, sort of unconsciously swaying her hips this way and that, and it may be odd that the narrator hasn't described the first thing about anything -- the locale, character descriptions, or anything -- but this, the swaying of hips and how sexy Suzy is, somehow seems to be important to him. As is the fact that Suzy is chewing on some bubble gum, sort of blowing those small little bubbles that cute girls sometimes do, twirling her hair about on her finger as she looks over the notes, which Pete has given her that more or less outline how one can go about organizing a community watch. "Let's see," she says distractedly, like some teenage sex symbol might say who realizes that whatever they say will be acceptable to any male in the audience, and I think it's safe to say that the men outnumber the women in these here parts.

"It says here that the neighborhood watch is just supposed to watch," Suzy says with much seriousness. Got to love her. "They're not supposed to carry weapons, arrest people, try to get in the way, or take vigilante action."

“That’s ridiculous! No way!” a goblin retorts.

“We’ve got rights!”

“I’m just reading what it says,” Suzy says innocently -- if an evil, bad to the bone, soul snatching Succubus can be considered innocent. “All a neighborhood watch is supposed to do is observe. It’s for the police to take action... I guess that’s you Pete,” honey, babe, darling.

And with that, there is an almost universal uproar.

“Oh! No!”

“He’s in with those PCs.”

“They don’t go anywhere without Pete.”

“Hey, don’t look at us,” Don -- as the spokesman for the PCs -- interjects. “It’s not our fault the DM... or, er, Mr. Mind Reaver, or whatever he’s calling himself these days, insists on playing a character in his own campaign.”

“Pete’s not my character,” the Mind Reaver corrects. “He’s an NPC, and like all NPCs I control his actions.”

“Oh, BS. He’s never missed a save in his life,” Don says, speaking the heretical.

“Me and Karthrax have an understanding,” Pete replies matter-of-factly as he -- once again I might add (need we do this every night) -- explains the logic behind his uncanny luck.

“Karthrax is my patron saint, and he’s got my back, so like it stands to reason that I’m never going to fail my save.”

###A Very Poor Transition###

“This is what we’re talking about,” an amazingly insightful and perhaps unbelievably well spoken goblin points out.

“What?” Pete asks as he turns around and starts to approach the offending creature. “No talking,” he reminds the doomed monster.

“But you’re talking?” the creature argues, indicating Don and the rest.

“We’re PCs. We get to talk. It’s what we do,” Don explains.

“What about Pete then?”

“He’s the voice of the DM,” the DM -- or is it DR (short for the Dark Reaver) -- explains.

“See what I mean?” Don quips.

“We do. And do you see what we mean?” the goblin asks hopefully.

“Um, no,” Don concedes.

Daring to affront the approaching paladin, the goblin continues. “The whole reason we want to form a neighborhood watch in the first place is because of all the people you guys are killing.”

“It’s not that many,” Don objects.

“Oh, yeah? What level are you?” the goblin prods.

“I think that’s confidential,” Pete replies jumping in for Don.

“It would ruin the flow of the quest,” the DR agrees. “No in game talk... in the game?”

“What?” pretty much the whole room asks at once, but the DR is used to others questioning his calls. “You heard what I said. No table talk.”

The goblin shakes his head. “Fine. Whatever. I’m sure that makes some sort of sense in whatever world you live in, but we’ve got real concerns. We need to reduce crime!”

“Have you tried making an inventory of your goods?” the roguish looking young man sitting next to the crone suggests -- the one who’s name (i.e. the thief) sort of belies his true interest in this meeting, but such labels seem do seem so judgmental and quite frankly limiting, so he prefers the more ambiguous role of rogue. Errol Flynn was a rogue you know. As was Burt Lancaster, or maybe that was... Well, that other guy.

“What?” the goblin says again to pretty much all of the foregoing. And then, getting back to what the thief said about taking an inventory, he asks, “Why would we do that?”

“For insurance purposes and to aid in recovery. You just mark everything with your name, take an inventory, and then write it all down somewhere and keep it safe,” replies the thief, who is

not only happy to be of service, but who, also, once he has been distracted by all this shop talk, quickly forgets his concerns over that the whole label thing.

“You mean like a treasure map?” the goblin asks in disbelief.

“Yeah, I guess you could call it that,” the thief agrees, but before he can continue and try to convince the goblins to write down the value of everything as well, he is interrupted by an ecstatically joyful Don, “Treasure Maps! I love those. Are you going to start giving the goblin’s treasure maps?”

“I don’t know, let’s see,” the DR replies casually.

“I think I speak for every goblin here when I say that we are not going to itemize everything we own just so you can use the information as a shopping list.”

“I guess that means they can’t write,” Don suggests.

“No. It doesn’t mean that,” the goblin shoots back angrily. “Look. Can we just get this meeting moving along. The purpose is to form a neighborhood watch.”

“Don’t look at me,” the DR responds as he flicks his fingers -- perhaps as if he was twirling dice idly -- and indicates Suzy. “This is her gig.”

“Lots of this stuff is boring,” Suzy observes. “Police officer availability is limited, whereas citizen availability is unlimited.”

“Please. Can we keep it in game format,” the DR suggests, “Or better yet, forget the whole game thing, and just stick to straight fantasy metaphors.”

“I think it’s straightforward,” the goblin replies. “You don’t value goblins’ lives.”

“Or any creatures of the horde,” the Mind Reaver agrees.

The poor little goblin looks noticeably put out -- i.e. unhappy.

“Oh, don’t be looking at me like that. I’m a Mind Reaver. Crank open a reference guide. I’m evil.”

The word sort of catches Pete’s attention. “I thought you said you were reformed?” the paladin says sort of conversationally as he fingers his sword and walks nonchalantly towards the Reaver. I suppose I could point out how blatantly foolish it is for a NPC to

try and get the drop on the DM, or for a character in a story to try and get the drop on the author, but it's probably easier to just let the Mind Reaper lie. "I'm reformed evil. It's sort of like anti-good only it doesn't have the class restrictions, also I get a few random pluses when I go for a befuddlement roll."

"Oh," Pete says (making a critical fumble).

"See. He doesn't always make his save," the Dark Reaper points out to Don, but the man only says, "Uh-huh," which sort of sounds noncommittal to me.

"Can we get back to the neighborhood watch" the goblin suggests. "That is what this meeting is about, right?"

"Right sure. Whatever," the Dark Reaper agrees. "I'm cool with that."

"And?" the goblin says encouragingly.

"And what does that handout say there Suzy?"

"It says to start a neighborhood watch, you need to get a coordinator. The coordinator selects block captains, who in turn organize the rank and file watch members."

"Fine," the goblin says trying to move this thing along. "I'll be the coordinator unless somebody else wants to do it."

Oddly no one else wants to do it. In fact, some of the goblins are already sneaking out the back door, but it seems best to ignore them and just let them go.

"Gee," the Dark Reaper says as he looks up from a rule book. "I mean it's great and all that you want to take an interests, but you're just a goblin. You'd pretty much have to be a hobgoblin at least to be a captain, and -- to keep game balance if nothing else -- and for the coordinator you'd want a monster of name level. Something like a Withering Defiler... I think I saw a Withering Defiler here earlier..." the Reaper says as he looks around for the multi-tentacled monster with a rather morose disposition.

"He had to go. Something about picking the kids up from school," a Bog Demon supplies. And really, what would a story like this be without a random aside or two, so I'll just mention that

on a scale from 1 to 10, Bog Demons are at like minus suck. If you ever have to be a demon, be anything but a Bog Demon.

“I don’t need this abuse,” the demon points out.

“No! Wait! We’ll be loyal,” the goblin promises, but in a puff of Bog -- and how wimpy is that -- the ‘Demon’ is gone.

“I’ll be the Nemesis,” Crazy George offers.

“You’re in with the Reaver,” the goblin objects. “Everyone knows that.”

“Yeah. But I can’t die. I’m in too many of his stories. No way he’d let me die at this point.”

“True. True,” the goblin acknowledges as he thinks the offer over.

“What are you doing?” the author, and I believe author is the right word to use at the moment -- if not creator or artist, but then, yes, author seems to be the right word. So author, we’ve settled on author, the man behind it all, the motive force, the...

“Just get on with it,” Don suggests. “You were going to say something? Make a point?”

“Oh, yeah. Right. Aren’t you afraid of this role impacting on your popularity, George? Or, I guess I should say, if you had any popularity, wouldn’t it impact on that?”

“Nah,” Crazy George assures the avant-garde artist otherwise known as an author. “I’m crazy,” as are perhaps you, but he not insane (or suicidal) and so he leaves this last part off and instead picks up with, “Besides, this is a neighborhood watch. It’s for a good cause. It’s a good thing to have on my resume if I ever wanted to get into politics.”

“You want to get into politics?” Truthfully, I thought that I’d be making this comment, but it is Suzy who says this. For some reason, the mere idea of a man with power sort of turns her on. Go figure. “I can help,” she suggests.

“This isn’t some sort of trick?” the goblin asks suspiciously.

“I’m in,” Pete says suddenly.

“Huh... Wh’re’d that come from?” Don asks suddenly slurring his words together in his eagerness to get it all out at once.

“I don’t know,” Pete admits. “It just seemed like the thing to do.”

“We’re going to get creamed,” Don notes. “He’s going to get the whole town against us.”

“I’m in,” the dwarven commander suddenly says over the player characters discussion.

“Us as well,” a high minded elvin something or ‘nother says as well. Not that I know who he is, but he’s a high muckety-muck, and if he says the elves are in, the elves are in.

“This is no good,” a random gamer notes, but Don is not to be outdone. “We’re in too,” he shouts at last.

“What?” His teammates are aghast, but Don stands his ground. “We’re in,” he repeats.

“We don’t want you,” the goblin remarks.

“What?”

Crazy George has been looking over the guidelines, some sort of gaming supplement for running a neighborhood watch in your campaign, or maybe it’s the handout that the author got at his local town meeting and that he has sort of been using as a crib sheet to write this story. Whatever the case, Crazy George notes that, “It says right here on the first page, and I quote, ‘Who can participate in the neighborhood watch?’ and the answer is ‘honest citizens.’ Sorry guys, love to have ya, but it ain’t going to happen.”

“Give me that thing,” Don says as he rips the offending piece of paper out of George’s hands.

“Oh. Woah there, big guy,” the Mind Reaver advises him solicitously (perhaps being one of those words I just like the sound of and don’t really know what it means). “Whatever happened to the sanctity of the shield?” the DM screen, or whatever.

“So this is how it’s going to be?” Don asks, as he changes tacks.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” the Reaver admits. And basically I don’t.

“So this is how you’re going to exact revenge,” Don continues. Notice that it’s not a question anymore, but still, I haven’t a clue.

“Don’t give me that. I’m some walk on character. Heck. You didn’t even know my name till the third time you introduced me, so this is how you get rid of me.”

“I think you’re over reacting...”

“Listen you little punk,” and basically I’d remind him that as a Mind Reaver I’m not so little, but he seems to have gotten the drop on me. Don’t ask me how... or even why, but he’s sort of got me in a one hand stranglehold, so I think it just might be best to pay attention and listen to what he has to say. “It’s obvious,” Don begins again anew, once he is satisfied that he has my undivided attention. “You’re stalling. Anyone can see that you’re flaying around helplessly. You’re done with the story. You said what you need to, and now you need an end, but you don’t have one. Do you? You don’t know how you’re going to get out of here? Admit it!”

“OK! OK!” the author admits, “But killing myself is hardly the solution.” And it never is kids. Trust me. Things may seem bad. The future of the story may be uncertain. And I’m not saying there might not be bad times ahead. But with a little help, you can pull through. So word to the wise, don’t knock off the narrator. It tends to muddy the waters. People always ask, So if the narrator died, who wrote the story? And when the thing came back with a bunch of blue-lines from the editor, who touched it up? Well, they may not ask that specifically, but the point is, the narrator can’t die. It sort of throws a wrench into the whole narrator telling a believable story concept.

“Don’t think I’m going to let you kill me either!” Don remarks, but don’t ask me where that’s come from either.

“What’s gotten into you?”

“It’s obvious you going to do what you always do.”

“Always do? You’ve never been in one of these things before.”

“The other characters talk.”

“Yeah, we tell the new guys what to expect,” Crazy George supplies lazily. It would appear that the meeting has fallen apart into that after the presentation, endless milling about phase. “No,” Crazy George begs to disagree. “We just decided it was time to break out those orange puff things.”

“Oh, I like those,” the author suggests hopefully.

“Well, you’ll have to deal with that Don guy first,” George notes. He’s still kind of got me -- your humble narrator -- by the throat; and then, because it just sort of flows if for no other reason, the Reaver -- who is the author, but you probably know that by now -- anyway, the DR sort of casually and off the cuff request of George, buddy, old pal, “How about a little help? Us spell-slingers got to stick together.”

“You’re a psionic,” Crazy George points out distractedly, and as if that was there was to it, he turns his back on the whole thing and walks away.

“Look. We can work this out Don,” the author suggests.

“What do you want? I can do it all. Cars? Money? Women? I can make it so you’re sitting pretty. The girls will love you.”

“Don’t trust him,” the crone says as she jumps in -- pretty much like she usually does, just when she’s not wanted, but if there is one thing that she is used to by now, it’s ignoring the narrator. “Just don’t trust him. He’ll set you up, but he’ll tear you down. If you get lots of money, you’ll only get lots of bills. In fact, if I was you, I’d be worried about going to jail. How many goblins you figured you killed over the years.”

“I’m not going down alone,” Don threatens the author simply as he tightens his grip.

“You’re not going down,” the Reaver assures him. “It’s just a color bit. Heck, I don’t even know if there’s a market for this. Just relax.”

“So you’re not going to kill my character.”

“No.”

“And you’re not going to kill my character’s character,” and don’t even ask me why this matters, but, “No. haven’t they told you anything. I don’t off my characters, or my character’s characters. Not now. Not ever. It’s like an oath I took.”

“What about that goblin Pete hit early on?”

“The one that has been talking the entire story?”

“Oh, yeah right. So, you’re not going to try and get revenge on me for some real or imagined slight... or something you’re just going to make up to move the story along,” and that’s what really got Don concerned. That to just sort of switch gears I might mention...

But then, “No,” the author agrees. “I’m not going to screw you over just to end the story.”

“Then how are you going to end this thing?”

“Put me down first,” but Don doesn’t let go. “Just put me down. I gave you my word, you don’t end up dying, getting hurt, or anything.”

“You promise?” but there is no reason to answer this question again. Don has come to his senses and put the Dark Reaver down. Don’t ask me what he was thinking. Dark Reaver’s are very protective of their personal space, and talk about a creature with a violent rage...

Sadly, a promise is a promise.

“I was thinking about just having the two of us looking over at the rest of the party,” the author explains. “And just sort of take in their map of the town...”

“That really is something,” Don acknowledges. And it is. The map is huge. It takes up an entire wall of the tavern and it has little houses and garden plots drawn onto it and everything.

“Yeah. That map took me awhile,” (like two or three minutes to think it up and write it down). “But the real action is going on over here,” the Mind Reaver continues, as he indicates the table top model of the town overflowing with 35mm scale metal figures -- carefully painted except for the goblins, which pretty much only warrant a slop and go job. When you get right down to it, that’s

pretty detailed commentary, and pretty much not in keeping with the rest of the tale, so in a typical story that might be some sort of clue of the events to come, but really you've seen how I work. So, you can safely forget all about that 'slop and go' color text, and concentrate on the small mound of metal figures that is piled around the one of the buildings, presumably the tavern.

"And?" Don prods. "It's still not much of an ending."

Focusing on that are we?

"Well, there is this one lone figure running around on the outskirts of town."

"Who's that?"

"The thief."

"So he's robbing everybody blind while they're in here at the neighborhood safety watch meeting."

"Yeah."

"Seems kind of lame."

"Yeah."

I'm hoping I figure out something better in a day or two, but I probably won't.

"Nope, don't think you're going to," Don comments after a moment... a moment that seems to drag on like forever.

"So, I could always go back to wiping out the party over some imagined injury or slight."

"No. No," Don says with patented insincerity. "I like this ending. I really do."

"Um, you can't go," George says as he waltzes over again. He's got orange crumbs dripping down his beard. And in one hand he's got plastic cup filled with punch and in the other a half eaten brownie. "The Goblin's got another question for you."

"I thought we were done with him," Don says. And then, after a moment he adds, "I thought we were done with the whole shebang."

"Are you? Cool!" George says enthusiastically as he drops everything and calls over his shoulder. "Hey Suzy, time to go."

“Is it?” she says as she ambles over. I’m guessing amble is the wrong word, but Suzy isn’t so much the sashaying type.

“Just say, every eye in the room turns to watch her every move as the young men in the corner concentrate on committing every detail of the moment to memory,” Suzy suggests. “What?” she asks playfully in response to George’s look. “I’ve got to look out for my PR... Oh, you might also want to say that I put my arm around George in a suggestive manner; and as I do, the rest of the world disappears and the old man forgets everyone and everything else.”

“Here! Here!” George agrees with gusto as he raises his fruit punch in a toast to the fair maiden.

“No, I’m the fair maiden,” the elvin girl with a charisma of...

“What are we at now?” the Reaver asks as he lets the elvin lass sidle up next to him.

“I’m thinking 24-36-24...”

“Psst. You got that backwards,” Don suggests.

“Oh right,” the elf chick with an INT of slightly less than 6 agrees. (And don’t be blaming me, I’m not the one that declared it a rule that -2 INT can be traded for a +1 CHA.)

“Um, actually you did,” Don points out. “No one else plays that way. It’s a house rule, and oddly only applies to female NPCs...”

“Well, it’s a good house rule,” somebody somewhere must be saying, but it is once again time to move this thing along.

“Then get to the goblin and his question,” George suggests.

“What don’t I get to correct my CHA to 36-24-36?” the fair elvin handmaiden asks, but we won’t trouble her intelligence by pointing out that she just has.

“OK, Gob. What’s your question?”

“Gob?” the little guy asks disdainfully.

“You know, Gob, Gobber, Gobster, The Gobmiester...”

“Just ask your question so he shuts up,” Don suggests. “He can go on like this all night, but he usually uses up the good lines

first, so trust me, you're not missing anything if you cut him short."

"Fine," the Goblin agrees testily. "What I want to know is if I can use force if the situation warrants. You know, if some "adventurer" comes breaking into my house..."

"Hovel."

"What?" the goblin asks.

"Hovel," Don says again. "You're a goblin. You don't live in a house. It's called a hovel."

The goblin is noticeably upset. He adjusts his glasses (yeah, they just suddenly appeared -- deal with it) as he stands up straight showing off his full -- impressively tall -- three feet of gob-boy terror. "It's a home, and it's my home."

"I think he's just trying to say that 'home' is the goblin word for hovel," George says trying to help out and move things along.

And as long as moving things along is part of the game plan, Suzy asks, "I thought we were going to leave and go somewhere... fun?"

"Yeah. Well, we got to finish this. This is my bread and butter honey," George explains (and we're just going to overlook the fact that Suzy's befuddlement spell wore off so quickly... but then really, look at her. Who in their right mind would be anxious for her to leave?).

Of course, in response to the preceding, Suzy's face has grown long and pouty. I believe that those are the time honored somatic components of an ensnarement spell. So maybe we should just spend a moment and review. Suzy is a demon, and for fun -- and because that's what succubus do -- she's cast a little spell over George. It probably would be impossible for me to do justice to Suzy's description or the impact her facial features are having on George, in any other way, so just take it on faith that he is failing his save and it feels like his heart is being torn in two.

"Now don't be like that," George pleads helplessly. And then, turning to the author, he begs, "Just answer the goblin's question and let's be done with it."

“That really doesn’t end it,” the Mind Reaver replies. “I mean, all I have to say on the matter is that why would a goblin want to use force to defend his home.”

“It’s my home and I’ll defend it if I want to,” the goob-ball says.

Don would like to jump in here and say, See, I told you he used all the good bits up first, but there is no need to let him. Rather than having to deal with the limits of his imagination, the author is saved by the fortuitous appearance of Pete once again. If you’ll remember, he started this little gig, so maybe he should have a role towards the end as we bring this bad boy to a -- graceful -- conclusion.

“I think the point,” Pete begins, “is that it would be EVIL, to kill someone just to protect your belongings.” This sort of sounds reasonable, doesn’t it. And just in case the wisdom of his words is lost on the upset gobstopper Pete pats the sword hanging by his side for good measure. “You wouldn’t want to come across as EVIL now, would you?” he asks helpfully.

“I think I see your point,” the goblin agrees. “But certainly I have rights. If someone breaks into my house and threatens my life, I have the right to protect myself.”

“Yeah. Sure,” Pete agrees. “But only as long as he is threatening your life. If he’s already running out the door, you pretty much have to let him go.”

“But I’d get a free opportunity called-shot-to-the-head while he’s disengaging from combat,” the goblin points out with a level of rules and tactical sophistication you don’t normally find in your typical horde creature.

“Yeah. I guess you would,” Pete agrees. “But then, you’d have to consider whether...” and here Pete breaks off as he considers how best to approach the concept, because believe it or not, Pete IS a good guy, and doesn’t really like the idea of any harm falling on the cute little goober. “How much treasure does a goblin usually carry on them?”

“I think that’s a bit personal,” the goblin demurs.

“Just take a guess.”

“2D6 coppers,” the Mind Reaver compulsively supplies.

“Yeah. I guess that sounds about right,” the goblin agrees reluctantly.

“Well. What you got to ask yourself,” Pete continues, “is whether a handful of coppers is worth the legal expenses, jail time, and possibility of being labeled a vigilante pariah in your own home town.”

“JAIL TIME! Oh, this is too much!” the goblin exclaims.

“You probably wouldn’t get convicted. I mean you’d get like +75% to your conviction roll for self defense,” the DR points out.

“So why are some things +1 and others +%,” Don asks out of nowhere.

“Do you want this thing to end or not?” the DR responds curtly.

“Who me?” Don asks. “I’m not going anywhere. I mean, those snacks are going to last all night. And from what I can see, the succubus is going home with George. You’ve got dibs on the elf. And that leaves the princess, all be her lonesome over by the punch bowl.”

“Well you better hurry up,” the author suggests.

“Huh? Why?” Don asks, not really noticing that The End really is just a few short lines away.

“They’re sending around the sign up sheet now... if she writes her name on that, she really will need rescuing. All her free time will get gobbled up by the neighborhood watch. The thing’s a time sink.”

Now. I suppose we could end it there. Everyone within ear shot making a mad dash for the door. Truthfully, I don’t know how it ended. Once it was clear that they wanted volunteers, I was gone. I mean if I stuck around too long, you know they -- someone -- was going to want me to figure out some sort of chart or table for the watch, determine patrol routes, and all that crap. I mean I haven’t got the time, and that’s just the start. I mean sure, I could

just call it a flat 10% chance of encountering the neighborhood watch between 6AM and 6PM (goblins are night creatures after all... figure it out), but that's just the start. The real problem is the park... er, I mean the dungeon. That we're all the real crime is taking place and who's going to patrol that? Even the cops... er, I mean the city guard are taking a pass on that one. I mean, everybody knows that if you want some action you go to the dungeon, that place is lawless... but I was wrapping it up, and not starting on a rant, so forgive me.

Like I said, seeing the writing on the wall, and being a good citizen and not wanting to get involved, I cut out of that there town meeting as fast as I could. But afterwards, I ran into Don -- like the very next day -- and told me the bad news. He said we were going to have to cut our gaming back to like five nights a week. Five nights! What the!

"Why?" I asked very slowly, very carefully, pronouncing every syllable as best I could. I'm sure if you've ever been in a similar situation, where your gaming group is falling apart before your very eyes, your campaign is on the edge of ruins -- well, more so now than seems normal, anyhow -- well, your mind kind of goes blank and all of your attention shifts to the frantic pounding of your heart as your chest feels like it going to explode and the roar of blood coursing through your ears shuts out all other noise.

It's not pleasant. Don didn't seem to notice, however. He told me this story (and let's just look over the irony of that, there he is a character telling me, the author, a story, but there it was all the same). Don ever so sweetly tells me how he put his name down on the sign up sheet -- happy as can be and of his own free will -- next to the princess' wherever it occurred, so from here on out, on Tuesday's and Friday's he's going to be 'Adventuring' with her. Can you believe that? And he actually called it 'Adventuring!' As if he was going to be earning valuable experience or something. It's just wrong.

Anyway, there it is. I don't know if that's happy ending, or just some terribly, terribly horribly wrong painfully awful ending,

but either way there it is. Or if that doesn't do it, I'll just mention how that appears to be the beginning of the end for our gaming group, and as to the story, well that's it. That's the end of the end.

Neighborhood Watch

by

Celli the Happy Go Lucky Celliphopod

Set to Paper in the Earthen Realms

+/- 6-26-08

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