Session Notes: Adventure 13A04 part 1: Highclan

Downtime

Gwindor finds a jeweller who will purchase the gems and jewels the party acquired in the Gearwork Dungeon without ripping them off too much. After redistributing the proceeds, the heroes find themselves unusually flush with cash. Yria continues to work on her perfect armour, completing the shoulder pieces, whilst Gwindor and Yrion head out into the wilderness to experiment with the earth node gifted to them by Rondo Silverheart. They find that when the command word is spoken, a small circle of earth about 10 feet in diameter shakes briefly, overturning anything on it. Yrion thinks this could be used in a scam to sell a magical goat that causes earthquakes with its bleat, but Gwindor doesn't seem too keen.

Soril travels to Axis to continue his investigations into Master Ebroc. Following his previous lead, he gets a temporary secretarial job at the mansion of the Valentyrs. He learns about ***Emis Valentyr***, the elderly and sickly head of the family, his daughter ***Minora***, a worshipper of the Priestess, and ***Helven***, the scion of the family, who is a follower of the Crusader. While filing papers he comes across a bill from Master Ebroc for "medical services". Following this up, Soril makes friends with a local doctor who is annoyed that she has been supplanted by this medic whom no-one seems to know anything about. She speculates that Ebroc has something on Emis. Soril arranges for a wood elf contact to keep an eye on comings and goings at the Valentyr household.

Kavan also goes to Axis, where he meets a contact from the legions who has been impressed by his loudly stated antipathy to the Orc Lord. He tells Kavan that orcs are manoeuvring in the Frost Range and have also been seen in the vicinity of Drakkenfell, the Blue Sorceress' city, for the first time in many years. Kavan uses all his spare cash to pay some workers in the poorer parts of Axis to keep an eye out for suspicious activity that might suggest that followers of the Orc Lord are at work.

Yrion and Yria receive letters from their parents, *Ariana* and *Elwyn Goldblade*. Yrion's praises him for landing the killing blow on the evil Fire Giant that was guiding the Gearwork Dungeon (evidently word somehow got back to the Court of Stars). Yria's letter chides her for letting Yrion do something so dangerous. Yria crafts an icily polite response.

The Call

At the beginning of the sixth week of Autumn, the heroes' guild pins call them back to Bladeby, this time asking them to hurry. When they get there, Selena tells them that the summons is not actually from her, but from Odilla Ma in Horizon. She needs a group with experience of barbarian cultures and traditions, specifically those who reside on koru behemoths, the giant turtle-like creatures that follow a fixed migration path around the edges of the Dragon Empire. A contact will be waiting to meet them in Horizon. The heroes are also advised that they will need to travel out into the wilderness and to prepare appropriately.

The party purchases tents and food; Soril gets some new leather boots and Gwindor acquires a spare cloak. The heroes travel on a military ship with members of the 9th Legion who are starting a tour of duty in Horizon. En route, Kavan explains that he is familiar with koru behemoths because the migration route passes close to Moonwreck, the land where he grew up. He has met some villagers from ***Highclan***, the koru behemoth most well-known for carrying passengers.

The party arrives safely in Horizon, checks into Highhouse in the Outercity, and prepares to navigate the annoying portal/street maze to reach the Adventurers' Guild. Yria elects to stay behind because of the Strikefast/beholder-eye gate situation; Yrion offers to leave Shadowjumper behind as company, but Strikefast says that Shadowjumper is "boring".

Needless to say, the route to the guild has changed, but with the help of some friendly students the party arrives safely. They are greeted by Odilla Ma and a young wood elf dressed in a hooded cloak and green tunic and trousers, with large hoops in her ears. She introduces herself as ***Ufi*** and explains the following.

- The koru behemoth Highclan has departed from its normal migration path and is heading towards the town of Innocence Falls at the south-west corner of the Abyss. It has already passed through the southern end of Dire Wood and will reach Innocence Falls in a few days if it continues its current trajectory.
- The concern is that it will trample the town and / or fall into the Abyss. The mission is to find out what has caused the behemoth's aberrant behaviour and to get it to change course.
- Finding Highclan shouldn't be hard – if it maintained its current path and speed, it will be 30-40 miles west-southwest of Innocence Falls and it will be visible from 10 miles away.
- The villagers already tried talking to ***Ozen Morul***, the Knight Commander of Innocence Falls, but got a rather hostile reception.
- The villagers don't have much, but obviously saving their ancestral home is important to them so they will give what they can. Maybe 70 imps each.
- Ufi provides a map of the general area, including Highclan's location as of a few days ago. She lives in Horizon where she is the leader of the local druid community, so she can't guide the heroes. The villager who sought Ufi's assistance had to go back because he said that they were "having trouble".

Kavan and Soril express some trepidation about their ability to wrangle a mighty behemoth when the villagers who know it best are unable to do so, and speculate darkly on what the "trouble" could be. They ask Odilla Ma to send out messengers to check if the other behemoths have also changed course, but Odilla says that they would not report back in time.

Ufi invites Soril as a fellow scholar to take a look at the guild's medicinal herb garden and has a quiet conversation with him. Her opinion is that something has been introduced that is perturbing the Wild. Her contacts have not reported anything untoward happening in the area.

The heroes stay for supper before heading back to Highhouse. Yrion recalls the legend of Greywatch-on-Oldwall, a town that was perversely built on the koru behemoths' migration route by renegade wizards in the Age of the Ascent. It had a magical protection or agreement that caused the behemoths to step around or over it, and at one time its bardic and wizard colleges rivalled those in Horizon. It did not last long, however - the protection was broken during an attack by the Three, and the behemoths subsequently stomped it to dust.



Ufi's map

The Journey to Innocence Falls

The heroes set out early the next day, Fifthday of the Sixth Week of Autumn, aiming to reach the Holdfast Inn and then strike south to find Highclan. The travel is easy due to the well-maintained road which wends up and down through an open landscape of scrubby trees and small hillocks.

The Holdfast Inn is a fortified building with a courtyard and a stout outer wall to protect against the owlbears and other creatures that occasionally emerge from the Dire Wood twenty miles away. At night the western horizon is lit by the unearthly green light emanating from the Claw Peak hellhole, but fortunately its nightmarish denizens choose not to go raiding. The heroes admire the demonic bat's head that dominates the communal room, a memento of one of the Order of the Wyrm's periodic raids on the hellhole, and talk to the residents who are a couple of merchants and a small detachment of guards. They have heard of Highclan's unusual route but are unconcerned, assuming that Ozen Morul has got it under control.

The next morning dawns windy and stormy, so the heroes change their plans and hire horses to ride to Innocence Falls. It is a miserable day's travel, huddled in hats and cloaks, but they make good time and approach Innocence Falls as dusk is falling. It looms over the surrounding fields that are kept watered by the spray from the enormous thundering cataract that gives it its name, a walled town of red-brown stone dominated by a rectangular keep. Order of the Wyrm paladins patrol its walls and man its gates. Soril explains their mission and the guards grudgingly let them in, advising that they stay at the Demon Throat Inn.



Innocence Falls

The town has the bustling order of a military camp, with a central market square surrounded by warehouses and food stores, all heavily guarded. To the east a set of watermills make use of the fast-flowing waters of the Lost River to grind corn. The Demon's Throat inn is located just off the square and can accommodate the heroes, though it isn't the liveliest place in the world, being full of paladins quietly talking to each other over very small flagons of ale.

Yria is hailed by some paladins who recognise her from an inter-order tournament and invited to join their table. She drags Yrion with her, despite his protestations that he would rather talk with the farmers at the other end of the bar. One of the paladins confirms that a couple of Highclan villagers arrived and asked to talk to Ozen Morul, but he refused to see them as he had more important things to attend to. The general opinion is that Ozen Morul is a strict adherent to the rules, but respected. Another paladin jokes that he is a bit surprised that Yria and Yrion were allowed in through the gates after what happened the last time a Golden Order follower came to town. It seems that about six weeks ago, a cleric was thrown out for proselytising in the town square. He accused the Order of the Wyrm of being corrupt and made dark threats about "a coming retribution". His name was ***Leoven Alderheart***. Yria and Yrion have heard of him – he is well known in the Golden Citadel for having a zeal for the Precepts of the Map Maker that he sometimes takes too far. He seemed weirdly obsessed with the number of cattle grazing in the fields around Innocence Falls, claiming that they were being used to "feed the Wyrm's appetites".

Yrion, Soril and Gwindor pick up on this hint when they talk to the local farmers. Yes, there are too many cattle. Been getting worse over the last 20-30 years. Means there's less grain for bread. The farmers have complained but no-one listens - "orders", apparently.

Finding Highclan

The next day dawns cloudy but rain-free and the party heads out to look for Highclan. For the first ten miles they follow muddy tracks between freshly ploughed farmers' fields. Beyond, the land turns into dry scrub full of gullies winding between steep rocky crags dotted with bushes and trees. Getting a view of the horizon is frustratingly difficult – Yrion scrambles up the highest nearby crag but loses his footing and severely grazes himself sliding down. Eventually, after

some hours of wandering through gullies and crag-climbing, Gwindor spots Highclan on the horizon, about 8 miles away, a vast 100' high turtle-shaped creature hundreds of yards across with eight massive elephant-like legs. He also hears a regular rumbling thud every few seconds as one of its feet takes a step.

It takes three hours to reach the creature, by which time dusk has fallen. Closer to, the heroes can just make out the behemoth's turtle-shaped face, with its small rheumy eyes and fringe of large undulating squid-like tentacles. They also catch sight of Highclan village, low-rise wooden buildings scattered among small trees and bushes that grow in crevices in the creature's back. It also becomes clear that not all is well. Huge bird-like creatures are circling and dive-bombing the village and arrows are flying.

The heroes are trying to work out how to climb up onto the behemoth when they hear a "psst!" from a nearby bush. A gang of human- and wood elf-appearing children ranging from 5 to 13 emerge. Some of the oldest have baskets on their backs with arm and leg holes containing smaller children. The oldest, ***Ishe***, explains that they have been sent away by the villagers for safety. The attacking birds are night phoenixes from Dire Wood, who were angered when Highclan stepped on their nests as it passed through. They have been attacking the village regularly ever since. She urges the heroes to go and help.

The heroes swarm up the nearest of the rope ladders that hang off Highclan's side. Yrion gets his legs entangled and ends up dangling upside down; Yria shouts at him to stop hanging around while the others climb over the edge.

Highclan's back is rough and rocky and studded with bushes and fruit trees growing in crevices. The villagers' huts are scattered among them, with firewood piles and huge water butts standing nearby. At the highest point is a long hall and in front of it stands a totem with a fire pit. Three night phoenixes – huge, angry, black-and-purple birds - are dive-bombing the buildings and the people defending them, breathing streams of ice shards. Several of the huts have had large chunks of their roofing ripped off and some of the trees and bushes are frost-damaged.



Night Phoenix

An elderly wood elf in druid's robes comes up to the heroes. "Are you here to help? Good. My name's ***Quigo***. We need to protect the water butts."

The Phoenix Attack



Highclan's back

Round 1: Drive-by talons and a fearless paladin
One of the circling phoenixes spots Kavan's crescent moon shield and dive-bombs him. Kavan is raked by icy talons and staggers back as the phoenix flies away. Quigo makes a series of passes at a phoenix that is hovering over one of the huts, outlining it in ethereal blue flames, while Gwindor performs a sonic drum roll like the one that took out the azers in the Gearwork Dungeon, but with rather less effect. The enraged phoenix swoops down on Quigo but backs off when Yria interposes herself and instead emits a chilling screech that leaves Quigo cowering but Yria unmoved. Having at last untangled himself, Yrion crawls over the edge in time to see Yria yell a battle challenge at the hovering phoenix, which is drawn towards her, and give it a solid thwack with Strikefast. Kavan takes the opportunity to invoke the moon's blessing on the battle and the strength of the moon on Yria.

Meanwhile a tough-looking barbarian woman who is standing near the fire pit uses a mounted cross bow to shoot a flame arrow at the third phoenix, which is attacking some villagers who are shooting at it from the shelter of the long hut. The phoenix breathes ice at them but misses, damaging the corner of the long hut.

Round 2: A fire elemental and a fortunate dodge
The phoenix that attacked Kavan is hovering off Highclan's left side, looking for another opportunity. Soril moves toward it and tries to send it to sleep, which does not work. The phoenix screeches and swoops in on Soril who dives out of the way just in time. It appears that the spell did have a dazing effect at least, for the bird is unable to pull out of its dive and crashes into the fire pit, taking some damage. Seeing an opportunity, Quigo quickly performs a summoning gesture and a burning elemental rises out of the fire pit. It lashes out at the injured bird with a flame whip, tying it down. Sensing that this will not hold it for long, Soril makes a dash for the cover of some nearby bushes, casting a spell that blurs his appearance.

Yria and Gwindor are taking on the faerie fire-outlined phoenix. Gwindor misses and the phoenix gets a good claw attack in on Yria, but opens itself up to a blow by Yrion from the side. Yria is inspired and lands a solid blow on the beast, which goes limp. Its form disintegrates into a bright blue-white ball of magic that goes shooting up into the Overworld. One phoenix down.

Round 3: Belabouring with sticks

Kavan sends a series of crescent moons in the direction of the phoenix that is once again breathing ice at the villagers, forcing them to retreat. Gwindor and Yrion get out their bows and fire at it but miss. The phoenix notices Yrion's shot, turns and strikes with icy talons, almost carrying him off, which allows Yria to charge in and give it a solid hit.

Back near the firepit, the downed phoenix breathes ice on the elemental, snuffing it out in a cloud of steam. The barbarian woman fires another powerful shot at it from point blank range, while Quigo and Kavan both summon javelins – Quigo's fiery, Kavan's ethereal – that strike the stricken bird. Soril performs the coup de grace by summoning a set of ghostly hands that pick up burning sticks from the fire pit and belabour the beast until it collapses into a cerulean ball that heads for the heavens. Two phoenixes down.

Round 4: Healing and final hits

Kavan runs over to Yrion and fully heals him while Quigo casts another flame spear at the final phoenix, bringing it down. Gwindor fires again; he misses, but Yrion is so energised that he runs over and runs the bird through with Shadowjumper. It too collapses into a ball of light and disappears into the sky.

The barbarian woman puts down the crossbow and comes over. "That was well fought," she says. "My name's ***Shakeetha***. Come into the long house and let's talk."