

# Baron On The Barrelhead

*Game Master's Comments: After the liberation of the villager's on both sides of the river, the player expressed a desire to address the villagers and "read himself in" as it were, and do some managerial tasks. This post deals with the first of those requests.*

*Reinhardt's Comments: Let's face it, being a Baron is not all fun and swords as the next few scenes dictate. I had to develop Reinhardt's governing philosophy. I seriously want to say on my next job interview: Oh yeh, try running a Barony some time. I wanted his philosophy to be different from the average Nobles. Reinhardt has been looked down upon most of his life as the "bastard." I figured he would be more sympathetic to peasants and coupling this with his chivalry and religion would create a true "Nobles Oblige."*

## **9 Helane 719, Caer Nurel, East Common**

It was late morning when the last boatload of men, accompanied by Bvarlan, landed on the east bank of the River Shem. There they were reunited with those members of their family who had been kept hostage in the village while they logged the king's lumber. It was a scene of tearful embrace, but given a few moments to reacquaint themselves, and to wash the blood and gore from their bodies, the scene turned to one of frolic, with men and boys diving and flapping and floating on their backs spouting water from their mouths in the river. Bvarlan did not remain with the men, moving instead to find Reinhardt.

He had found him on the West Common, talking to Kamran and Ian Fahy about the keep, which they had watched since Reinhardt and Bvarlan had pushed off in the boat earlier that morning. After the initial exchange with the men on the battlements - which had consisted of demands to know what was happening from the keep and catcalls and mooning from the villagers on the common - there had been no communication at all. Indeed, though the men on the battlements had fallen silent after the screams on the far side of the river were heard, they disappeared altogether when the first boatload of village men were seen returning to the village.

Having placed Oran and Dolan Baffel, twin hawk-nosed, stork-framed brothers, whom Ian Fahy had vouchsafed as being both eagle-eyed and lethal shots with a bow, the three newcomers returned to the rectory. There Kamran and Bvarlan washed their faces and hands in a large wooden bowl of water left by Mareth, while Reinhardt, having done the same, changed out of his armor and into his finest suit of clothes, which he had brought in roll of canvas slung over his back the night before. None of them touched the pitcher of small beer or cheese and bread that had been laid out for them. For several minutes they had spoken in desultory good humor about the probable tensions and situation in the keep, and about the brothers Baffel, who had served as talented game-wardens during Sir Vaern's tenure as Bailiff (they being chronic poachers whom Sir Vaern had opted to pay in an agreed upon number of bucks in order to avoid hanging them). Then Mareth and her two young boys came to inform them that Ian Fahy and Ardan - who was the Beadle as it turned out - had gathered all the villagers on the East Common.

A glorious late-summer day had emerged, cloudless with azure skies, a cool river breeze rustling in the trees, and Reinhardt, flanked by Kamran and Bvarlan, with Mareth and her boys in tow, set a slow, deliberate pace as he made his way down the road and then through the village. He could see some two hundred and twenty souls gathered on the East Common, and needed a moment or two to sort out his thoughts. As they approached Ian Fahy hobbled to meet them on his crutches and greeted them politely before leading the way to a large horse-keg and stepstool on the far side of the

common. The villagers, having heard their new lord was none less than the newly entitled Baron of Nurelia - a baron being a Godlike figure of myth and legend few peasants ever set eyes upon - they drew back with an unsettling reverence, making way for Reinhardt to pass with bowed heads and curtsies, the expressions of those he passed heavy with fear and awe. Reinhardt mounted the horse-keg and scanned the crowd. Ian Fahy, Ardan, and the Mangai were near and to his left, while Red Will and his brother's had shouldered their way close to the front in the center. The eyes Reinhardt met were clearly curious - some were equally unsure. Reinhardt cleared his throat to speak.

"People of Caer Nurel," he said. "My name is Sir Reinhardt Maddox. Let my presence here today be tribute to God's eternal generosity and will; His acknowledgement of many tearful prayers from this village in the darkest hours of the night." He saw a few nods and knuckles touching hearts and heads. "Let my presence also be evidence to your cries for salvation being heard by your Countess, Elsbeth Curo at Gardiren. Through the grace of God, the Countess's wisdom, and the blessing of King Mingath himself, this land has been eneofed into a new Barony, and I am to be your first Baron."

A ripple of surprise went through the assembled villagers, many exchanged private looks, there was an undercurrent of dubious excitement. Reinhardt continued: "You have toiled and suffered under the current Bailiff. He has committed crimes against the people of this village, against his Countess, against his King, and against God Himself. His day of judgment will soon be at hand. Let this be clear: Kural's power over this town is finished. You and yours need no longer fear his thugs or retributions - my men and I will deal with him."

The crowd was expectant; they knew there was more: "As Baron of Nurelia, I promise before God to be as fair and just a liege as any man may ask for. This does not mean that I will not expect much from you. I pledge to see to your protection, your needs, and guide you through the difficult times ahead. I expect you to obey the laws; those given by noble decree or those written in God's word. God is returning to Nurelia. We will rebuild the church, we will send for a new priest to minister to us, and we will lift our voices and pray to God to see us through the difficulties ahead, including the coming winter...."

There were several "hear, hears" and a few "amens" among those nearest the Reinhardt's barrel. One man was heard to mutter "We'll damned well need it unless he's a miracle worker, too," but Reinhardt, paying the man no mind, forged on. They were listening. Whether he had them depended on him and him alone: "All I expect from each of you is to do your best, and to do what you are best at. Therefore, as of this moment, Ian Fahy is appointed once again to serve as Reeve..."

There was a ripple of pleased laughter, and several men began slapping Ian Fahy on his back in congratulatory happiness, one so hard that the restored Reeve almost lost his balance on his crutches and had to be righted before he fell. There were catcalls and hoots as Red Will turned crimson in impotent rage. One old man spat at the ground at Red Will's feet and snapped: "I knew your parents Red Will - a shame on their memory you are, turning your back on your people, you arse-kissing little wanker!" Red Will stepped towards the man, raising a massive fist, sputtering a furious response.

"As for you, Red Will," Reinhardt said, drawing the big man up short, his voice filled with dreadful authority. "I am appointing you as lackey to Ian Fahy. You will obtain a hand cart, and push him around, wherever he wishes to go be it fields or structure. You will be at his beckon call day or night, rain or shine, until the summer harvest and winter planting is complete. If I am given any reason not to be satisfied with your efforts the period of your lackeydom will go well into the coming year." The crowd broke into a spontaneous cheer, but after a moment Reinhardt held up his hand and the crowd fell silent: "And if I hear of anyone else having benefited from Kural's reign at the expense of the others in this village, you had better be honest and tell me straight in the next few days. I'll be far

more lenient now, than if I uncover such treachery on my own in the future.”

There were somber nods of approval from some, Reinhardt sensed the crowd remained with him. “There is much to do!” He said, returning to the business of the village. “Ardan will remain Beadle. He and Ian Fahy will be putting you back to your proper duties. Listen to these men and their wisdom in the days to come. There is much work for us to do to prepare for winter, it will mean long days for every man, woman, and child. Know this: Every single family will have their basic needs met in this village, before any levy is taken by me this winter. Any extra stores the Barony can spare will be shared to meet the needs of the village. I have ordered further supplies to come up river to supplement what the village has stored. Further, if we liberate any stores in the keep they will be distributed as needed. Let me put it this way: I will not sit in that keep and have a fine meal and a warm bed while any of my people go hungry or shiver. If the harvest goes bad, and the Barony suffers, then we will all suffer as one and pray harder that the next year’s crop is bountiful.”

“Much change will be happening in this area as we build our village and keep into the foundations of a true Barony. New faces will be joining us. We will be building and expanding. We will be visited by other nobles, the Countess, of course, and others. It is important to take pride in our homes, that they and the village be clean and well kept. But most importantly, fun and love is to return to our village. We will celebrate the holidays in true spirit; hopefully the Lord will grant us many births, few deaths, and loving marriages.”

Reinhardt paused for a moment and looked over the people as a quiet murmur rose amongst them. Before it grew too loud, he spoke again. “There is one issue that unfortunately must be addressed. Being on the borderlands, and as a Barony, we have certain military obligations to the Countess and King that must be met. All men between the ages of sixteen and fifty will be required to attend a monthly drill in arms. This militia will only be called in defense of our own homes,” this, he knew, was in line with Sir Vaern’s conduct and would not cause much surprise. “Also, all men between the ages of sixteen and thirty who wish to serve me in a martial capacity – are to report to Kamran on this common, tomorrow morning, so that he may take down your names and any note any martial skills or experience you may have. This does not mean you will be signed into my service, or turned into yeoman; many of you are too valuable to the village in your traditional occupations. Any man who does enter my service will have him manumission after five years good service. Not approaching Kamran does not excuse you from service, either. If it is determined that you can make a larger contribution to the Barony in my service, or as a yeoman, you will do so. Kamran will test you for ability, and I will discuss your role in the village with the Reeve. Anyone who served Sir Vaern in any other official capacity should also report to Kamran as well – I will consider all such posts when the keep falls and I have installed myself there. All of you will work as the village officers direct you to work.”

“Now the good news, Master Jared is indeed alive, though we kept this fact secret for his safety.” Reinhardt smiled apologetically at Jared’s brother Donall.

“He will be returning home to us when his health permits; he was indeed wounded at Gardiren. Ethne, the Coopers wife, and her two girls, were rescued by my men; they are at our camp, and God willing will be brought here safely by nightfall. For the rest of the day, enjoy your glad reunions and fellowship. I have asked Donall to open several kegs in the yard at the Peaceful Boar – drink and enjoy!”

The crowd erupted in a loud cheer. Reinhardt hopped down from the barrel and turned to Kamran: “See to it Donall opens the kegs. Jared’s new stores will be coming with Faranir shortly so he need not be concerned with running dry. He may deduct the cost from the rent he pays the fief,” He planned to say more, but there was a tugging at his leg and Reinhardt looked down to find a little black haired

girl with coal eyes and a button nose looking up at him. She was three, or four.

“You’re a laird?” She asked loudly with an excited grin, her eyes closed as she leaned into his leg like a sheep dog. Reinhardt placed his hand affectionately on the girl’s head, and said “Aye wee-one, I am at that,” as the mother, a pretty creature in a dusky peasant way, darted forward and pulled the girl away with an embarrassed, apologetic look, curtsying and saying ‘milord’ as she hurried the little girl into the now dispersing crowd. He turned to Bvarlan, who waited nearby with Arden and Ian Fahy, “Bvarlan, take two villagers and bring our horses with Ethne and her girls down from the camp. When you return we will break our fast and then meet with the village officers and the remaining Mangai at the Peaceful Boar.”

Then, turning to the Reeve, Reinhardt spoke with gravity, “Fahy, Her Grace has charged me with raising a troop of Heavy Horse. I realize these men are mostly farmers and herdsman, and that the only war horses here belong to my men, but I want you to think on this and give me as many names of men that could possibly be made into soldiers, and who would not cripple the village by their absence. I know this is a heavy bill to pay with the village in the condition it is in, and if I had any other choice I would leave the matter until spring.” Reinhardt took a breath and shook his head with a fatefully. “Just see to it.”

Finally, he spoke to the Beadle. “Arden, Beadle, you will send word to the leaders of the Forester and Charcoaler camps to come to the inn four evenings hence, that should be enough time to gather them.” He motioned for the man to follow, speaking to him as he returned the nods and greetings of a few lingering villagers. “Come with me, we are going to place our two wardens and instruct them on what to watch for and how to harass the keep into staying vigilant”

— *David Queenann* 2006/02/16 12:13

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