

Of Dungeons and Dragons

"Alright, you're a pretty much an unknown group of adventurers trying to get into the town of Appleton. To do so, you need recommendations from three outlying town leaders. Currently you are on your way to Fruitvale to meet the duchess..."

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The band of travelers traversed the recurring terrain, large trees lining the rolling dirt road. Dust kicked from the leaders' horses drifting into the faces of those behind, causing an occasional cough and repositioning of their mount.

Elyas, a halfling no higher than four feet, rode silently among the leaders. Even on his warpony, he scarcely stood as high as the adjacent horses flanks'.

Dashiva and So Tr'p rode beside, and slightly in front of Elyas, occasionally turning their armored torsos atop their warhorses, sheathed swords swinging, checking in a condescending way typical to humans, to see that he hadn't fallen too far behind.

Following the leaders rode Boba, waving his arms and muttering incantations as he practiced healing spells. Next to him rode Anuth, tall, fair-haired, the elf kept sharp look out, easily seeing over Elyas.

Trailing the others, Nevskii, a half-orc, pale green, and Bede, a human monk, guarded the rear.

Coming over a rise, they spotted an Imperial Patrol heading towards them. The four guards approached, their leader raising a hand in motion to stop.

"Halt! There is a 200 gold toll to use this road," The guards, stone faced, stared at the travelers.

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"You guys don't remember there being a toll here before," Mike addressed the players, sitting around a ping-pong table, fireplace burning in the background.

"Ah, can we please kill them?!" Brad's eyes lit up.

"We should try to talk to them, explain how the duchess would be upset if we were stopped," Bob interjected.

"What if we try and intimidate them?" James added.

"I like Dad's plan, its more diplomatic," Danny stated, brining nods from the rest of the group.

"Alright, let's do that, and if that doesn't work, then we'll intimidate them," James added. "Let's do it."

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"I don't remember there being a toll here," Dashiva boomed. "Let us have your names and rank or step aside and let us pass."

The guards obliged. "It is costly keeping these roads safe. Now pay up!"

"We are on our way to see the duchess," Boba stated. "She would be most displeas if we were stalled."

"We didn't ask for your opinion, cleric," venom seeped through the guards lips.

"He said we're going to see the duchess," Dashiva straightened in his saddle, laying a hand on the pommel of his sword. The rest of the band followed suit. Bede cracked his knuckles as Nevskii reached for the battle axe strapped to his back; Elyas and Anuth brandished their knives, previously hidden up their sleeves, and Boba laid a hand on his mace; So Tr'p gripped his sword, knuckles whitening.

"Well I, uh, if you need to see the duchess then you best be on your way," the patrol quickly trotted past the group, trying not to show haste.

It was late when the band arrived in Fruitvale, stars pierced the sky, and only a few Houses still bore light. A small castle loomed in the distance, and the troupe made their way to it.

"What time does the duchess see people?" Dashiva inquired of the guard on duty.

"If you're here for the contract, most Troupes get here at nine in the morning."

"Many thanks. Also, is there a new toll on the road?"

"I haven't heard of such a thing. Why do you ask?"

Quickly Dashiva recounted the earlier events, leaving out the how they got escaped the toll.

"You best see talk to the captain in the morning. He can be found in the guard tower."

"Alright, thank you then."

The band searched for an inn, wandering the vacant streets. Finding one, they rented rooms and stables for their animals, growling as they tossed their silver coins to the innkeeper, heading immediately to bed.

The sun poured into the room at eight in the morning, waking the troupe. Crawling out of bed, slowly, they equipped their weapons once more.

Dashiva and So Tr'p took the lead, leaving Bede and Boba to follow to the captain; the other three members branched off to wait in line for the duchess.

The receptionist looked up from his work as the four humans entered, "What can we do for you?"

Dashiva gave a very brief explanation, the receptionist immediately fetching the captain.

"What's the problem?" hard faced, the captain spoke in a deep clear voice.

The group again explained, in greater detail, finishing by giving the name and rank of the patrol.

"These are very serious accusations. We will have to check it out," he fingered his chin. "How would you boys like to earn a few coins? If you are willing to ride back a ways, disguised as merchants with a couple of my men, we could bring these men down."

"We would, but we are seeking the contract with the duchess."

“This can wait until you have time; it should only take half a day at most. See me when you can.”

“Will do. Do you perchance know what this contract is about?”

“There have been several attacks on the town, we think by goblins. We don’t have the manpower to deal with it right now, so she’s looking for some mercenaries to take care of it.”

“Alright, thanks for your time. We will come see you soon about catching those thieves. “

The humans found the rest of the band playing dice, waiting for the guard to let them in. They joined the game, quickly packing it up when a servant summoned them and the two other groups waiting.

The duchess sat in her chair, garbed in a fine blue dress, fitting of a lesser noble. Guards stood on both sides of her, tall, unblinking statues.

The duchess addressed the groups, “We have had some attacks on the city, goblins, we think. We need them dealt with quickly. Each of your groups must name a price and convince me you are the best for this job.”

The first group consisted of ten local men, each wearing various pieces of rusted armor, none of them matching. They named their price at 1000 gold pieces, saying they this was their home which they would defend to the death.

The band went next, Dashiva speaking for them, asking only for a recommendation and the cost of expenses up to 500 gold and explained how they'd been companions for several years.

"And what do you call yourselves?" the duchess asked.

"The Band of the Red Hand, my lady."

The duchess nodded thoughtfully, motioning for the last group, looking more respectable than the first, to come forward. These men were more aged than the others, but the six men wore matching tunics bearing the crest of Fruitvale, long swords hanging at their hips. They explained their experience in the town watch, asking for 800 gold.

"Return tomorrow at noon and I will have chosen which of you gets the contract."

The groups left, The Band of the Red Hand returning to the guard captain, asking to start the mission.

The merchant cart thumped down the dark road, Boba and Bede sitting out front, weapons hidden beneath layer of plain clothing, driving the horses onward. Dashiva, So Tr'p, and Nevskii sat immediately behind the horse drivers. Two of the captain's men, both dressed as merchants, rode in the back with the crates of goods. Anuth and Elyas rode just inside the tree-line, shadows hiding from the moon.

Seeing the guards looming ahead, Bede slowed the horses.

Raising his hand, the officer brought them to a halt. "We don't get many merchants out here at night. What goods do you carry?"

"Have a look for yourself," Boba replied.

Opening the back, the two disguised men moved aside, exposing the contents of the crates.

"Looks fine. You are free to go after you pay the toll of 400 gold."

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"So can we kill them now?" Brad asked.

"Uh, yeah. The captain's men did see that you were telling the truth."

"We should try to capture them before we kill them," Danny pointed out.

"Fine, let's do this," Brad conceded.

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"On behalf of the imperial army, we are placing you under arrest. Either come peacefully or we will use force," Bede flexed his fist.

Wide-eyed, the patrolmen immediately turned heel, spurring their horses ever faster.

Anuth and Elyas drew back their bows, unleashing their arrows. The arrows glanced off the retreating patrols shoulder plates.

"You did what you were asked," the captain's men explained, "No need to go further. "

The band turned around, heading back to Fruitvale.

Returning in the wee hours of the morning, the group slept for a few hours, visiting the captain when they awoke.

The captain nodded as they gave him an account of the incident.

"That account matches the one my men gave me. You have done well, a pity you couldn't have captured or killed them. Never the less, you deserve a reward for your work." The captain handed them each a bag filled with gold, "there's a hundred marks in each of these, to show our appreciation. Let me know if there is anything else I can help you with."

"Actually, there is," Bede replied. "We are trying to get into Appleton, but we need three recommendations. If you could write us one, we would be most grateful."

"Of course, just a moment," the captain quickly scrawled a short recommendation for their 'admirable skill and bravery'. "Here you go."

Muttering their thanks, the group took their gold sacks and letter, heading off to the castle.

The guard ushered them in, where the other two groups already waited, as did the duchess.

"Ah yes," the duchess muttered, "the final group."

Addressing everyone in her most regal voice, the duchess began, "It was a most difficult decision, and almost all of you are probably capable of the job. Still, I have decided that the contract will go to The Band of the Red Hand, for the cost of a recommendation and up to 500 gold marks in expenses."

The duchess went on as the other groups left, "There have been attacks on the city recently, some of our citizens have gone missing, and it's getting less safe to travel the roads. We believe it is goblins, but we are not certain. Find and eliminate the problem, and report back to me when it is done. I will allow you a few days to rest before you must begin. I also heard from the captain of what you did last night, you have my thanks."

The band bowed gratefully, expressing their appreciation, and returned to the inn to sleep the rest of the day.

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Yawning, everyone listened to Dylan snore.

"Ugh, we didn't kill anyone," James rubbed his forehead.

"Well, when can we play again?" Mike asked.

"Probably not 'till next friday," Danny answered, "I have school all this week."

"I really don't want this to end up as another campaign we play once and then quit," Mike grumped.

The players agreed, and began bidding each other goodbye. Hugs were dealt and the people left, leaving behind character sheets, pencils, and dice scattered around the table.

