

WAHANISH BRANCH

Wa-Hah-Nish means “Low Standing” in the language of the Mountain People, and the first settlers took it as the name for their town. In time it grew to be a prosperous little community of sheep and cattle ranching high in the southeastern foothills, with a mixed population of Faithful and unbelievers. The Faithful are outnumbered by about three to one, but things are usually very cordial.

The Steward, brother Amos Mock, owns the largest store in town, the Tree of Life Cooperative. He is also the chairman of the school board.

SOMETHING’S WRONG

The Dogs arrive for the annual Independence Day celebration, which occurs in early July. Independence Day is not a holiday recognized by the Faith, which has a somewhat strained relationship with the government Back East, but in communities with large unbeliever populations (such as Wahanish), it can’t be avoided. It is a time for community picnics, friendly contests, brass bands, patriotic speeches, and parades. God’s Watchdogs will, no doubt, have a grand old time.

Here’s the thing – in Wahanish, the various contests have gotten a little out of hand, and the reputation of the Faith hangs in the balance – at least to the Faithful of Wahanish. A lot of people are focused on winning blue ribbons, to an unhealthy degree. Since they are vastly outnumbered, and it isn’t even an important holiday for them, the Faithful traditionally don’t do very well. This year, though, it will be different!

PRIDE

Brother Amos, the Steward, has put subtle pressure on those in his Stewardship to demonstrate the superiority of the Faith through achievement during the Independence Day competitions. He’s not only treating his Stewardship like power, he’s also playing favorites and spending a lot of time and energy on those most like to “make a good showing”. Others – heads of households – are following his example, and everyone is tightly wound with anticipation and anxiety. The most foolish of the Faithful, spurred by the Steward, have loudly and arrogantly proclaimed that this will be “their year”.

The Ladies Sewing Circle, led by Sister Tamar Ward, has created a parade float. They’ve chosen, as their patriotic theme, “The Women of the Great Rebellion”. To impress the judges, Sister Tamar has gathered the most attractive Faithful girls and dressed them in soldier’s clothing, ragged from battle in interesting and exciting ways. They carry old-fashioned muskets and escort flag-draped cart carrying a papier-maché bust of Liberty, naked and golden. All of this has been done in great secrecy, and the bawdy float wagon is under a tarp in the Ward’s locked barn. The Steward, who sold them the notions and gold paint, has a good idea what’s going on.

The boys of the Faith, led by Jesse Van Der Hayden, have rigged the foot race, which is the biggest sporting event of the day. The local unbeliever church and the Branch each field a team of their best young runners, and they race on either side of the creek for about a quarter mile. Each night for a

week they have been busy “watering” the unbeliever side of the river bank to reduce the firm clay to wet, slick mud. If all goes as planned, they will win for the first time ever.

A bunch of Faithful men, without the knowledge of the Steward, have bet pretty heavily on the outcome of the foot race. Brother Balt Van Der Heyden leads this group of a dozen men, mostly fathers of racers.

INJUSTICE

Righteousness suffers. The people of the Faith must either answer the call of their husbands, fathers, and Branch Steward and sin, or defy them and humiliate the Faith in the eyes of the greater community. Of course this isn't exactly reality, but that is how people see it.

SINS

Worldliness – Sister Tamar and her sewing circle are greatly looking forward to their startling parade debut as alluring re-enactors. In fact, they've enjoyed trying to outdo each other in designing the most artfully revealing “uniform”. The costumes don't look much like what soldiers wore in the Great Rebellion, but they are eye-catching.

Worldliness - Balt Van Der Hayden and his pals are gambling, for money, without knowing that the race is fixed – not that this will matter to the losers when it is inevitably revealed. Balt's son Jesse has promised him that they will win, and that was good enough for Balt to put down fifty dollars. Others soon followed suit. This is one area where the potential for violence is high.

Deceit – the Faithful boys, led by Jesse Van Der Hayden, are flat-out cheating to win a race against stronger, faster opponents. They feel that the Branch is depending on them not to fail, and certainly feel justified in “evening the playing field”. After all, the unbelievers have three times as many boys to choose from!

DEMONIC ATTACKS

Demons don't need to get involved for this foolishness to serve their purposes. The women's parade float will be a scandal; the boys cheating will be uncovered; the gamblers will be held accountable. The reputation of the Faith will be badly tarnished.

WHAT DO THE TOWNSPEOPLE WANT FROM THE DOGS?

Everyone – from the Steward to the kids in the foot race – desperately want the Dogs to enter various contests showcasing their unique skills – there should be something happening for every Dog, from axe-throwing to trick riding. If the Dogs get involved, the Branch's own guilt will be lessened.

Of course, they also want the Dogs to approve of their behavior and machinations, and will spill the beans when appropriate – hopefully after the Dogs have solemnly promised to participate in the festivities and signed up.

The only Faithful who is not caught up in the madness is Brother John Ward, husband of Tamar, who knows what both she and the Faithful boys are up to, but is too timid to put a stop to any of it. The Steward's son, Henry, is missing his lower left arm and wasn't chosen as a runner. He's fully up to speed on the boys' tricks and is conflicted between reporting a sin and ratting out his pals.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT?

They'd love it if the Dogs fell into some prideful posturing of their own, but they'll be pleased if the Branch's plans simply unravel amid accusations and fisticuffs.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT THE DOGS TO DO?

Have a good time. Showboat. Show those unbelievers how cool you are.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE DOGS DIDN'T COME?

After a public spectacle and humiliating revelations of gambling and cheating, the branch would hunker down to prepare for the next Independence Day celebration, with extra Sin and a liberal dollop of False Doctrine added in.

WHO'S WHO

Brother Amos Mock, Branch Steward, owner, Tree of Life Cooperative, Chair of the Wahanish school board, float judge

Silla Mock, his wife

Henry Mock, their son, missing part of his arm

Brother John Ward, farrier, husband of Tamar

Sister Tamar Ward, leader of the Ladies Sewing Circle Float Committee

Balt Van Der Hayden, owner, Wahanish Beacon newspaper

Jesse Van Der Hayden, Balt's son, runner and cheat

Luther Sibley, Mayor and owner, Wahanish Federal Bank, float judge, unbeliever

Cordell Bryant, Sheriff of Wahanish, float judge, unbeliever

Fred Hall, Lazy D ranch, cattle baron, float judge, unbeliever