

A SMALL PRESS AT GEN CON

ON THE CHEAP

This year, HinterWelt's third year attending GenCon, we tried something different. We went there as cheaply as possible short of cramming a room with so many bodies you sleep standing up. This meant a few things:

1. We stayed out at a hotel by the airport. Significantly cheaper.
2. We bagged a number of meals or ate at places like Subway, no Ram or P.F. Changs.
3. We went for only Friday and Saturday.
4. We did not have a booth but were repped through the Game Publisher's Association booth (thanks Dave Wainio).
5. Reduce new promo material purchases and reuse old ones.
6. Bought badges only for the days we would be running and targeted one day to run. We cut the badge costs by about ½ and similarly other duration related expenses.

In the above manner, we were able to reduce our total expense to GenCon by 80-85%. This makes a considerable difference in the bottom line for HinterWelt. Another reason for not having a booth is that Théoden is two and if you know anything about two year olds, even well behaved ones, it would be very difficult to manage a booth with one running about underfoot.

THE EVENTS

This approach also let us get into running events. A good lesson we took away from this GenCon is to be far more aggressive with the event schedule. We ran three Squirrel Attack! events and all were sold out within the first hours of registration opening. Shaolin Squirrels was, unfortunately, scheduled at the wrong time and had to be rescheduled but we still had two people show up and had a rousing game. Then came the fun.

The events were scheduled back to back (We thought we were being clever) but the first was in the Hyatt while the second in the Omni Severin then back to the Hyatt for the last one. Luckily, Linda and Théo were there to meet the players even if the GM was panting his hot and loaded down butt across the Indiana summer.



As mentioned, we only had two players for Shaolin but they were lively and very interesting to run for. I had a lot of fun with them. The second event, Squirrels Ahoy! Was packed with a all six players. The crew took their duties quite well and played it to the hilt. Grog, the drunkard pirate squirrel, was in the center of trouble but still found the key to the rum closet. Everyone seemed into his or her character's goals and they got t-shirts in the end. Finally, I ran The Pie Incident with the four players shown above including a woman from just a few blocks away from where we used to live in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. Grr, the timing of it all. The picture above includes "Murphy" the glow-in-the-dark squirrel. He was a big hit and the group with The Pie Incident ended up teaching Grandma Kitty and a few Catsassins what squirrels are made of (that being skulky hidey parts).

In the end, the events went off well and since they were only 2 hours long each, they were not too taxing. In retrospect I should have run more events.

MEETING UP WITH INDUSTRY FOLKS

At one point, I was at the Ennies and bumped elbows with Joe Browning. He gave me the look of "Oh! I don't know him but I should...ah, nod and be nice". This is fine and I had my full on Fu-Manchu for Shaolin Squirrels so I cannot blame him for not recognizing me. I attended with Zach Houghton (Linda being pooped and returning to the room with Théo) and we sat at a table with some other folks. Hobnobbing is a horrible weakness in my repertoire and this was no exception. I made a good show of it though, and Zach seemed to enjoy my company as much as I did his.



The next day we hit the exhibitor hall after a failed attempt to contact Zachary assumed that the game with Clash Bowley and Klaxon was off. In the hall, we found some of our most favorite artists like Jeremy McHugh and Storn Cook. We gave them dice and Jeremy a shirt (sorry Storn, but you were real busy) and chatted as long as we could before we had to run off to my Squirrel events.

After the events, I was hanging out at the Hyatt waiting for Linda to come back with some dinner as Théo slept on the dirty floor (I wish I could sleep like that) and while handing out squirrel dice, I met Sandy and Crissy Clark. Sandy is a writer and Crissy a Graphic Designer. We had a great chat and I learned a lot about how the TV industry works and Sandy had some great ideas. You never know who you will meet just by handing out a piece of swag.

That night I met up with Clash Bowley and his son Klaxon. We were going to play but until he called I thought the game had fallen through. This turned out to be so in practice but we talked about so much and exchanged such great ideas that I felt, at least, that it

was some of the best time spent at the con. Clash has a great head for science combined with balance in a game system and it complemented nicely my love of setting. I think it is very likely we will collaborate on either a Nazis in Space or, if I can sell him on it, a collaboration on Future Skein : Age of Iron.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Always be aware that handing out swag is an opening. Don't be pushy, but don't just dump the goods and expect the recipient to ask questions. Give them a lead in to know what they want to ask. Some folks just aren't going to be interested while others will want to talk for hours. Be prepared for both.
 - a. You never know who might be on the other end of your swag. Be ready for the "I am in the industry" and listen. You can learn from anyone and always make network connections.
 - b. Business Cards. Estimate how many you will need and add 20%.
2. Make sure you touch base with old contacts. Keep them in the loop as to what you are doing even if it is "Not Much". I missed a lot of opportunity here and should have done a better job at contacting people (Sorry Joe Wolz, I totally missed that one).
3. Plan your time wisely. Back to back events might sound good but they can be very tough to make on time if they are not all located in the same building.
 - a. Locate your games ahead of time if possible. Actually go to the location and know, without doubt, where you are going.
 - b. If you can, and you have multiple events back to back, coordinate with a front-runner to meet with your players to let them know you are coming. This helped a lot.
4. Transportation can be a snag when out at the airport. Plan to have time to drop off loved ones or make arrangements for rides or shuttles. This can cause difficulties and expense in parking. The event parking for the weekend is your friend.
5. Buy badges only for the day you will be running. This can be inconvenient but it is one way to reduce costs. Of course, if you are going to be playing in a game or need additional days do so.
6. Remember, it is a business expense and needs to be justified as such. Thus, decide if this is a sales event, a marketing event or a networking event or a combination of them all. Make sure you can explain it to your accountant (or auditor) at tax time.
 - a. Save your receipts. GenCon is an expense that can easily be written off but can sometimes be tough to explain. I usually go with "it's a trade show" combined with a pile of organized receipts.

