

# The Barrowmaze

## Session 53 23-01-25 The Road to Milborne

Next Session 30/01/25 19.00

Thursday the 12th day of Setherius, 23:30, The Golden Lion Inn

Following their dinner with the Ironguards and their advisors, The Hammers relax in their rooms at the Golden Lion Inn. Expecting to depart the following day they spend some time discussing Fenella's choice of spells but all decide that the current selection is probably ok for now so they retire, waking early next morning.

Friday the 13th day of Setherius, 06:00, The Golden Lion Inn

Secretary Dalen arrives promptly at 08:00 to hand them Lord Ironguard's letter of authority which Leo tucks away into a pocket. Dalen spends some time with them carefully explaining the details of the assignment and answering any relevant questions to ensure they understand everything correctly. This done he departs with a broad grin and a jaunty wave, wishing them luck. Reme receives a message and explains to the others that he has business elsewhere so unfortunately cannot join them on this expedition, he will join later if he becomes available. With this the Ranger hurries off with the best wishes of the rest of the Hammers.

They prepare to leave and Priscilla Trumm arranges for the horses to be brought to the Inn along with a set of supplies and provisions suitable for a few days living on the land should that be necessary. They settle their bills. Armoured-up and politely in accordance with the local laws, leading their horses, they depart Ironguard Motte, mounting and heading to the east along the packed dirt road.

It is a chilly grey day and they are glad of their winter cloaks as they ride onwards, noticing the way beginning to rise as they head towards Haranshire. Travelling at a steady pace they reach the broad high point which marks the end of the Ironguard Motte District and the start of Haranshire below them. Descending the gentle slope they note The Lyrchwood forest close to the north and as the light fades they make camp just off the road.

Fenella takes a long deep breath of the crisp clear air and almost smiling declares how pleased she is not to be in some dank, undead-infested pit of darkness deep beneath the ground for a bloody change and the others find it difficult to disagree, it is indeed good to be out in the open.

Setting the fire Gerald suggests they make it big and bright, boldly announcing their presence with perhaps the sort of fire that might just attract the attention of bandits. The others see no reason not to, "and it will discourage any wild animals too", adds Fenella. They set watches and spend a peaceful night, waking with the dawn on another chilly, grey day.

### **Camped near The Lyrchwood - Saturday the 14th day of Setherius 06:00**

As they continue their journey, Gerald wonders about a cover story. What might be their reason for wandering the lands of Haranshire? After a bit of discussion they settle on; wealthy Knight, Sir Leonidas is considering a purchase of land in this area. They listen to Arnd's advice about not embellishing the story too much, "keep it simple and don't over-explain." Deciding that their cover is good enough, quite plausible in fact, Leo and Fenella take an interest in the nearby forest and they are able to establish that it is worked forest, with wagon tracks and evidence of careful felling evident.

As they descend further into the Haranshire lands the forest starts to recede from the road and the glistening reflections of Cutter Brook are visible when the sun peeks through the low cloud base. They note that a lot of the land around the brook is waterlogged and there is abundant standing water visible also sparkling in the light.

About 3/4 of a mile ahead of them they see some figures moving about the road and they hear in the distance the sound of steel on steel as weapons clash and a bright flash of magic is visible briefly coruscating around the distant group.

### **A fight on the road**

It looks like trouble and the trouble is happening without them present which is surely some mistake, so they urge their horses forward at a controlled canter to investigate. Closing quickly they see a melee in full swing with several blood soaked bodies already motionless on the ground. There appear to be two groups, the nearest seems to be surrounding a smaller group and fighting furiously while a smaller group to the northeast leads a pack mule away from the fight.

They urge their horses forward with Leo and Gerald in front, cantering down towards the melee. Gerald thinks the two leaving with the mule are thieves and he intends to stop them regardless of the melee combat in the other group. Both Gerald and Leo are quite convinced that the people battling for their lives in the melee will naturally perceive the approaching riders as good and therefore the "good" will move towards The Hammers.

Gerald rides up to the pair with the mule and rearing his warhorse shouts at them to, "hold!" Leo sees Gerald veer off and decides to support him, stowing his lance as he twirls the sword of Sir Chyde impressively, shouting at both groups, "Oi! stop this!" Fenella and Arnd ride up and dismount as Shadwell takes their horses and Arnd moves to stand slightly to the side in front of Fenella, brandishing his magical dagger and guarding her.

The melee group continue their battle regardless since to drop their guard for a second could well mean death and indeed you see one of the combatants fall dead to the ground as his opponent runs him through.

One of the mule party draws their bow and fires at Gerald, the arrow glancing ineffectively off Gerald's brightly shining chainmail. The other of the mule team tries to strike at Gerald but misses the armoured, mounted warrior, as another arrow bounces off Gerald's armour.

It occurs to Fenella that she might use the skull of paralysation to stop this fight, after all paralysis won't harm them even some of them turn out to be "the good guys". While she is stepping forward to see if she can get them in the skull's effect, Arnd activates the Clasp of Elvenkind and disappears from sight.

Gerald strikes his nearest opponent from his rearing warhorse, instantly killing him. Leo attacks his closest, also finishing him in a single blow as Fenella activates the skull of paralysis. Several of the melee group resist the magic but one collapses just in time to be fatally backstabbed by the invisible Arnd lurking behind him.

The melee continues to rage as Leo sees one of the attackers shouting instructions, so taking him as the leader rides up and slashes his sword down wounding the man, who snarls in rage at the attacking Knight.

Not intending to miss all the fun Fenella dashes in and spears and injures one of the group that seems to be dressed like a lightly armoured farmer. He strikes back, slightly wounding the thrill-seeking Druid.

### **Hostage negotiation**

The female archer in the mule party takes a step away from Gerald and reaching beneath a tarpaulin on the mule, drags a captive woman by the hair and placing her dagger on the woman's neck snarls, "piss off or I'll kill the girl!" Her captive, a young woman, has clearly been brutally beaten and is incapable of any resistance, she stares groggily in terror as the blade breaks the skin at her throat, one twitch away from death!

Gerald is torn by the situation, should he attack, he is prepared and can strike but he will need to kill her in one stroke. Gerald shouts, "release the girl and you live, I swear it!" as he hovers between possibilities. Leo strikes at the apparent leader and kills him instantly, a look of furious surprise on the man's face as he sags to the ground. Fenella feels a bump next to her as the invisible Arnd manoeuvres to strike, stabbing the bandit dead, re-appearing with a grin.

The woman with the hostage, scowls at her attackers shouting, "back off, back off now and I'll let her go!" as she takes another few steps away, dragging the wounded girl roughly with her.

Meanwhile back with the melee group one of the injured men drops his weapons and falls to his knees raising his hands, appealing to Fenella and Arnd, "I'm not a bandit, I'm a guard, please don't attack me."

Gerald walks his horse slowly towards the Archer, who glares back at him, "I told you to back off!" as she drags the girl a few steps further. Gerald replies, "you are not leaving here with that girl, you leave her and you live".

With the bandit archer's attention on Gerald, Leo takes his chance, urging his warhorse to leap the distance in a flash and with a blur of his sword arm, he precisely decapitates the archer, her head spinning into the air, landing with a thud as the wounded girl falls away from her captor's collapsing body.

Gerald curses at Leo for endangering the hostage's life whilst simultaneously admiring the dashing strike. In his heart he knew it could well end like this but the Lawful Good Paladin doesn't have to like it.

Leo calls for Fenella to attend the stricken young woman and the Druid hurries over, noting the many bruises and open wounds she bears, probably repeatedly beaten down with clubs she thinks, it seems they wanted her alive... mostly alive at least. Casting Cure Serious Wounds (CSW) Fenella much improves the girl's condition as most of the cuts and bruises fade. Shadwell chats to the surviving and now surrendered "guard" who does seem to be what he claims to be.

The young woman is in some distress, worried about her brother, Nathan... he seems to be one of the dead in the melee, indeed one of the last to fall, a minute or so ago. In tears she kneels at his side until Fenella thinks, only just dead... hmm perhaps. Quickly rushing over, Fenella examines him and indeed if moved or left he will be dead within in a couple of minutes but using her remaining Cure Light Wounds (CLW) she brings him to stability. Smiling (just a little) at the distraught girl, she informs her, "your brother will live" to which she cries even more.

Fenella advises they can't move Nathan until he has had a night's rest as the girl introduces herself as Felicity Short and the guard as Sven. Sadly the other guard, Morris was killed in the fight. They were attacked by bandits in two groups, one masquerading as a group of friendly farmers on the road and the others bursting from cover under a shower of arrows. She was able to get off a magic missile spell before being mobbed and clubbed to the ground.

Gerald also Lays Hands on Nathan which ensures he will recover quickly even in the field and by next morning he will be able to travel. Felicity is beside herself with gratitude as Shadwell bandages the injured guard.

Felicity is concerned about the goods the mule was carrying, in particular, a chest and a book which are both in bags slung over the mule. Leo resists his first impulse of rifling through other people's belongings and instead just leads the mule over to where they are setting up a camp, just to the side of the road where he also resists his second impulse to rifle through other people's belongings after a pointed look from Gerald.

Examining the now dead attackers, they seem to be a mixture of lightly armoured farmers with clubs and daggers and a group of more properly equipped with leather and chainmail armour, including two archers with decent gear. It looks like some "bully" recruits and a hardcore of real bandits. Searching the "leader" reveals nothing at all, it's as if he didn't want anything identifying himself and unfortunately he is now dead along with the rest of the attackers, so his story remains untold.

They busy themselves setting camp and tending to their wounded charges.

Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Setherius, 15:00, Camped near the Cutter Brook ford.