

The Barrowmaze

Session 56 13-02-25 Thurmaster

Next Session 20/02/25 18.45

Tuesday the 17th day of Setherius 08:00, The Kuiper Farm and Ferry

After spending a comfortable night semi-camped in one of Kuiper's barns The Hammers are ready to leave with Kuiper and Maxim for The Krynen farm. They cross the river with Kuiper's skiff and head for Krynen's farm, following the edge of the forest. Gerald leaves a small bouquet arrangement as a possible gift or offering for Oleanna as they ford the Hog Brook.

They arrive at Krynen's Farm around 11:00, standing discreetly apart from the group as Kuiper talks to the family explaining the situation. After an emotional reunion, Krynen himself strides over to thank The Hammers for their efforts protecting his boy and tell them they will always be welcome at his farm. Krynen considers the were affliction to be an unwanted curse on his son but accepts that it is one he will have to learn to bear.

Regarding travel to Thurmaster, they can choose either the north or the south bank since Krynen also has a skiff for crossing the river. Krynen says he would take the south route following the river path but they could go directly southeast to Thurmaster as the river turns to the north. They take the southern path and cut across the fields and grasslands to the southeast arriving in Thurmaster at 16:00. They see a slightly dilapidated stockaded village and they take the ferry across the river to arrive at the entrance.

At the gates they see a couple of bored-looking regular militia who greet them politely and welcome them to Thurmaster. It's not really a bustling place but they can see people going about their business in the small village. They note some abandoned buildings being cleared and rebuilt outside the wall on the northeast side of the village. As they enter they find The Hound and Tails, a plain but functional inn where they can stable their horses and spend the night. They are pleased to find the prices are in silvers as seems usual in Haranshire, quite a bit cheaper than Helix or indeed Ironguard Motte prices. They are shown their rooms by Weismar the owner and they settle into the somewhat spartan accommodation.

Fenella notices a tower to the south of the village and Weismar confirms that it is indeed Tauster's residence, so they proceed to deliver the chest and documents to the wizard. They find a modest two-story stone tower nestled next to a plain wooden house with a pleasant garden, currently a little sparse due to the season but obviously well-tended to.

Tauster

The door is opened by a short (158cm) round old man in his 70's with wispy, sandy-coloured hair and beard. On meeting the adventurers, he attempts to discreetly rise a little on the balls of his feet and upon noticing Arnd, tries even harder to be taller at least than the Dwarf. He is very impressed with the delivery service made by a Knight and retinue and bids them enter and offers refreshments as he takes delivery of his chest of materials.

He notes that the original couriers were ambushed by bandits and thanks them for rescuing them and completing the delivery... "so this explains the delivery by a Knight," he chuckles to himself. Fenella begins to interrogate Tauster regarding the bandit activity but he says he has no knowledge of any bandits, indeed this is the first news he's heard of it.

The Hammers can recollect that apart from their rescue of Felicity and Nathan Short they have only heard of two other reported bandit incidents in the previous month and they were from Garyld the constable of Milborne so it's not really surprising that Tauster has no idea about any bandits. He explains he lives in Thurmaster because it's so quiet and he likes a quiet life; as he checks the chest, peering inside after unlocking it with a gesture.

After further enquiries regarding the quiet place that is Thurmaster, Tauster informs them that about 15 years ago, before he arrived to live here, the area had a big problem with Lizardman raiders, hence the palisade surrounding the village. But the previous Squire Parlfray raised a force of his own guards, militia and local fighters also hiring a party of skilled adventurers to lead an attack on the Lizardmen, killing their chief and most of their warriors. Since then things have been quiet and the rather elaborate defences have gradually fallen into disrepair. Leo concludes, this might be why there is new construction in progress outside the walls.

Tauster explains that to receive their earnings they should take this counter-signed document to Magistrate Marlen for exchange to hard cash. As they are well-aware, this is quite often done for travel with valuables, using a promissory note in lieu of gold.

As they are preparing to leave, Tauster asks, since they have come from Milborne perhaps they have seen his apprentice Jelenneth who is overdue? Leo imparts the bad news that Jelenneth indeed appears to be missing but one of the tasks they have given themselves is to search for her. You notice that Tauster has gone pale... "Bandits, you say, kidnapping spellcasters, hmhhh". He looks both annoyed and worried at the same time. He explains he didn't really want an apprentice but she kept pestering him and eventually he started teaching her about two years ago and was initially surprised to find her a very good student. "Over time I have become very fond of her", he mumbles as he slumps disconsolately, no longer bothering to try to look taller.

Fenella asks whether Jelenneth would have magical abilities of her own and Tauster explains that under his tutelage she has become a capable Magic User, of course with more to learn but with her own spellbook and all the usual arcane accoutrements she would not be an easy target for any bandit attack.

He advises they should explain all of this to Marlen when they convert their note to gold and on the spur of the moment, he decides to accompany them to better explain the situation to the magistrate in person.

Magistrate Marlen

Marlen's residence is quite a large house with an attached side building that looks like a barracks for militia or soldiers. There is an office or a home entrance at the front as Tauster hesitates before reluctantly shambling forwards, opening the office door where they are shown by a clerk into Marlen's spartan office. Marlen is a wiry dark man, with a permanent 5 o'clock shadow and a face fixed into an irritated frown. As Leo is politely making introductions, he is brusquely interrupted by the Magistrate who demands, "What's going on, Tauster?" Tauster explains the situation with predictable interruptions by the Magistrate but as the story proceeds The Hammers notice Marlen taking more of an interest in them. "Bandits, you say?" he barks, managing to look even more irritated as if the word itself annoys him.

While he's chewing on this Tauster mentions that the couriers need to be paid and Marlen becomes all business, demanding, "the documentation please" and pedantically noting every detail at least twice over whilst muttering to himself about dotting i's and crossing t's. Eventually a strongbox, containing another strongbox is opened and with the inner one unlocked the gold pieces are carefully counted out by the meticulous official who proffers a receipt for them to sign. The paper is stamped to within an inch of its life and filed in a brand-new folder upon which Marlen encribes in a spidery hand, "Bandits" and after a moment's thought adding, "& Adventurers".

He asks if they have seen any bandits east of Milborne and notes that haven't seen any in that area. Leo asks, "can you tell us a bit more about where they might be coming from?" to which Marlen stares at him incredulously before snapping, "No! Can you tell me?" He remarks that for him, Tauster and his friends have turned up today with news about bandits, which is the first he's heard about it. The Hammers seem to be on the blazing edge of the horse-drawn news in Haranshire and not necessarily that popular because of it. The Magistrate declares, "it is likely a tall tale and asks where else has it even happened? Nowhere!" They leave him in a state where he seems to be very annoyed with "events" as he scowls thoughtfully into space.

Outside Tauster leans against the wall declaring, "nobody can stand that man, I'm going for a lie down now, this has all been very tiring." With that, the short round wizard waddles off towards his house.

Plans at the Hound and Tails

Talking to Weismar at the Inn they hear about the recent history of Thurmaster, about the Lizardman war around 15 years back and how quiet it has been since then. People are even building a few new homes outside the palisade as a result of the peaceful times. He explains that the river trade is largely to supply Parlfray's Keep which is a fortified manor house surrounded by other dwellings.

Leo asks about rising waters from the Shrieken Mire and in the area in general. Weismar replies he thinks it is all stable and not growing at all, also asking about why he asked, to which Leo explains the expanding New Mire situation. Weismar is sorry to hear that since he knows it was good farming land but nothing like it is happening here.

The party talk things over privately airing variously theories and plans. They review what they know about Haranshire's organisation. The western part of Haranshire is run by Master Carman from Milborne while over here in the east it is run by Squire Parlfray. Both of these men are effectively Squires who serve Lord Ironguard and own much of the land in their respective regions. Leo is interested in approaching Parlfray's Keep but Gerald points out that if Jelenneth has gone missing it seems to have happened further to the west, more towards Milborne.

Before turning in for the night, they settle on a plan to visit Parlfray's Keep followed by a return further west to search for signs of Jelenneth.

Next morning - into the mire

As they are preparing for breakfast there is a loud banging on their doors. Weismar is there with a pale and plainly terrified militiaman. He pleads with them, "something terrible's happened, you have to come and help, oh my gods, the fishermen, please come and look!" As they head into the Shrieken Mire the militia explain what happened. Local fishermen Bert and Harlan were out night fishing in the Mire and a boy bringing them supplies discovered the scene and called the militia. Both of the guards look shaken up by their experience.

Thirty to forty minutes into the mire they come to the river and the guard indicates, "they're just down there... I... can't look again." Examining the scene they see the wrenched apart remains of two men who look as if they have been hit so hard their bodies have exploded apart, it is a truly gruesome sight with pieces of their bodies missing and others strewn around. Gerald asks if Fenella has any idea what might cause this which she doesn't but she does know that this is definitely not a natural animal, this is something monstrous. As Leo uses his leadership abilities to steady the guards, Fenella and Gerald search around finding gigantic human-like footprints but these are twisted and deformed hideously. Gazing further south they see the footprints lead deeper into the swamp.

Gerald seems keen to have the guards tell the magistrate to re-build the walls of the village which just confuses them. They explain they went first to the Knight and the adventurers in town but they have sent someone to report this to the magistrate. The reason they went to you was that the magistrate would have told them to investigate themselves so they were most grateful to be able to enlist the aid of an experienced adventuring party. The Hammers try to follow the tracks. In general Fenella is able to keep them safe in the mire, helping them avoid quicksand and the like as long as they move carefully but she hasn't any special tracking abilities. Within the next 15 minutes they lose the trail as it disappears meandering towards the south. Leo is concerned whether this is the work of just one creature or are there more so they decide to follow the river south for a while keeping their eyes open. After a further hour of searching Leo concludes that it's a single attack and they turn north to head back to Thurmaster.

After a few minutes they hear a terrible cry to the southeast; of pure hatred, bile, malevolence and violence. They see a 14 ft tall twisted, horrible bipedal figure stamping and striding around bellowing its hatred to the heavens. It turns in the party's direction and begins to lumber towards you. It must be some sort of giant but The Hammers haven't seen anything remotely like this before!

Tuesday the 18th day of Setherius 12:00, The Shrieken Mire