

The Barrowmaze

Session 76 02-09-25 A Strange Alliance

Next Session TBA 19.00

Thursday the 23rd day of Vadrius 16:00, Ground floor Dining Room

"So, we embark on a strange alliance... and when the cult is defeated my group leaves with all the treasure and no funny business."

Hakhan, The Bandit Leader.

After Luna's unexpected and courageous intervention to release them, the newly re-armed Hammers agree to an alliance with the bandits. They will combine forces to dispose of the evil death cult of Nergal then with this accomplished, both groups will go their separate ways. Hakhan has his sergeant, Della, bring in the five Bandits on guard duty and they also agree to the terms. In discussing the details of the deal Hakhan explains they do not have any of the small items taken from The Hammers; rings, pendants and such, apparently these were taken by Jelenneth.

With all of this agreed, Hakhan and Leo shake hands as Hakhan declares that should there be any reason to end the partnership it should be done with distance between the parties, "no backstabbing, no sneaking. This is an up-front alliance," he orates, clearly enjoying himself as the centre of attention. Luna is not convinced by these promises of reasonable behaviour from any of these people but she refrains from comment for now, keeping her eyes and ears open and her wits about her.

With the agreement made the groups confer discreetly amongst themselves and taking the opportunity whilst screened from view by the armoured warriors in the party, Fenella hands over the Stoutblade dagger to Luna, informing her of the fine weapon's efficacy especially when used to backstab. Luna takes the dagger, smiling in satisfaction as she slides it snugly into her belt sheath.

Gerald tries to question Hakhan regarding the cult's numbers and movements and a suitable time and place where they might make an attack. The Bandit Leader pauses to give Gerald a perplexed look before replying with more than a hint of sarcasm, "I don't know Gerald, they walk around the place doing their own thing." Gerald asks, "so we just pile in down there and take them on individually then?" Hakhan and Leo exchange a glance before Hakhan suggests, "how about we just take a look first?" Leo asks if they know how many cultists there are and Hakhan replies, "around 15 or so, maybe a few more? The trouble is there are these undead wandering about, and well, there are these four women Priests, you've encountered them, they look a bit like Ranchefus with face paint and tattoos, they're very impassive and they basically give everyone the creeps..." murmurs of agreement pass around the bandits.

Hakhan goes on, "and there's of course the one you killed, Leo; now walking around as a Zombie, it's like, when it looks at you, it sees things inside you... it's chilling, unnerving to be in the same room." He pauses, clearly disturbed as he describes the strange women, before continuing, "...and some that I believe you haven't yet seen, sort of like monks, bald-headed and in robes with an armoured breastplate, I think there are maybe 4 or 5 of them?" Speaking more forcefully Hakhan complains, "and then there's the bloody undead! When it all started the idea was that the weird stuff would stay in their cavern but little by little, they are emerging and it's like there's a increasing chill in the air... the people don't like it and neither do I," as mutters of nervous agreement ripple through the bandit group.

Leo nods, and surveying the assembly explains confidently, "well, we have more than a little experience in dealing with the undead and we have a few tricks up our sleeves." Whether they like it or not, the bandits find themselves warming to the charismatic Knight and his no-nonsense approach as he confers with their leader. Fenella finds herself wishing that their good friend, Bella the Priest; the Hammer of St Ygg and scourge of undead, was here but with the bandits to help and Gerald's power of Turning... probably it will be alright.

Hakhan explains that the cavern is off to the northeastern side of the keep, within the rock massif that the keep is built upon and therefore quite close to the village. In fact there is a concealed entrance which they have used to transport supplies up from the river. It leads through the cavern and up into a storeroom in the keep. Questioned by Leo, Hakhan reluctantly admits that they would hope to get the treasure out this way and Leo realises he has discovered another reason why the bandits might want to work with them. If the way is blocked by undead then at least if they eliminate them in league with The Hammers, they will then have a good route to the river and their boats to haul off their loot.

Leo and Hakhan agree that they should send a couple of stealthy types to reconnoitre; he proposes himself, Luna and as fighting backup, Gerald. The three descend to the lower level, following Hakhan as he moves gracefully and silently down the stairs, Gerald doing his best not to clank. Emerging into the corridor they don't hear a thing but they do notice a trail of blood running the length of the corridor, leading to the treasure room secret door. Seeing a few gold coins scattered on the floor Hakhan hisses sharply, "the treasure! We need to check it!" Moving quickly he creeps down the corridor to the secret door, noting that the chapel to Nergal is empty as he passes and alarmingly... the secret door to the treasure store is open.

Hakhan stealthily enters the room and after a gasp of surprise calls Luna and Gerald in to join him. In the arch between the two storerooms hangs the horribly mutilated body of a bandit, swaying gently. Around its neck there is a sign written in blood, "come and get it". Looking past the body, they see the treasure is missing. Hakhan hisses, "they will pay for this!" Gerald suggests readying their combined forces to attack the cult and Hakhan agrees so they move carefully back up the stairs to report back.

Leo says we know what we have to do and we know where they are so they begin to plan around Fenella's mighty Wall of Thorns and Gerald's ability to Turn Undead. Leo warns the group to stay out of Fenella's way if she starts to mutter and wave her arms around while Hakhan sarcastically warns everyone to stay out of the way of his sword. They spend some time planning on how the attack should be conducted. Leo favours rushing in but Hakhan is horrified by the idea, instead suggesting "creeping" would be more appropriate, and for a change Gerald agrees with him.

Hakhan also suggests he command his bandits and Leo can command The Hammers, which they agree to. Gerald asks that Luna be included in The Hammers to which Hakhan appears somewhat surprised, "surely she already is," he drawls in his irritating know-it-all manner as he gives a Luna dismissive look. "Do as you wish," he concludes.

One of the Farmer Bandits volunteers to take care of Semheis. The poor Priest looks like he hasn't slept in weeks and lies slumped and exhausted on a bedroll in the corner. Looking a little relieved that he can avoid the fight, the bandit tends to his charge solicitously. Considering that Semheis doesn't have anything to rob, The Hammers conclude that he will be safer here than with them.

Gerald and Leo are pretty sure they know who tortured and murdered the bandit they found hanging in the treasure store, clearly it was that psychopath, Barzl. Hakhan is absolutely sure it was her and from the look in his eye he wants blood revenge. Hakhan suggests as a gesture of goodwill, he will lead his people down first and Leo agrees.

They form up into their groups and follow Hakhan and the Bandits down as he opens the outside secret door passing swiftly through Ranchefus' apartments and down into the cavern. Hakhan pauses to allow The Hammers to decide who leads into the danger zone as they hear growling and a swiftly cut off yelp from further down the corridor. Gerald wants to lead in but they would like the bandit archers to accompany them, Hakhan also decides to go with the front Hammers group asking Della to command the main body of bandits. They move as quietly as they can along the corridor with the bandits following about 30 ft behind.

Emerging from the shadows about 40 ft in front of them they see Barzl and her slaving hound, accompanied by what at first seems to be some of the bandits but with mounting horror they see the figures bear terrible wounds and realise they are now ghastly living dead Zombies. Hakhan draws a sharp breath and utters a stream of curses under his breath as he tenses for battle. Barzl yells at them, grinning horribly, her face streaked with blood, "come on, come on you vermin, I'll 'ave you, I'll slit yer gizzards and wear 'em as me necklace!" She raves on, boasting, "I killed Stef, I tore 'is gizzard out and strangled 'im wiv it, did ya like it?" The clearly psychotic bandit seems to have lost the last of her tenuous grip on reality, revelling in her torture and murder, "'e died screaming Hakhan, jus' like you will! Praise be to Lord Nergal!" she screeches as she taunts them.

Leo and Gerald spot a group of Cultists in robes and breastplates stealthily joining the enemy group as Barzl yells, "charge!" and the group rush to attack. Manoeuvring into a position where she can see the enemy, Fenella starts chanting and gesturing to cast a spell. Since Leo had expressly asked her to use a spell, he decides to hold his ground to give Fenella's magic some space.

Phineas runs forward to fire his crossbow at Fido but misses by a mile as a Zombie bandit lurches up and swipes at him. Phineas dodges the blow and begins to reload. An Archer Bandit fires at Fido and the arrow thuds home, causing the dog to squeal and screech horribly.

Phineas finds himself a little too far forward and as he reloads a Cultist reaches him, swinging with a heavy mace. Again, the agile mercenary dodges and the weapon thuds ineffectually into the cave wall. Unfortunately for Phineas the Cultist had a Zombie Bandit in tow and this monstrosity now swings a sword, striking Phineas for a nasty wound, just as Fenella's Wall of Thorns spell goes off.

A writhing, seething mass of viciously sharp brambles and vines explode from the walls, floor and ceiling, packing tightly into the enclosed space as they hear screams and howls of agony from within as the razor-sharp thorns slice through flesh. The dense foliage shudders and shakes as the enemies caught within writhe in agony from their wounds, struggling to escape they only inflict more wicked stabs and razor slashes upon themselves as a horrible wailing and screeching rises up from the tormented victims.

On the Hammers and Bandits side of the wall a single very surprised Cultist and an impassive Bandit Zombie continue to fight. Gerald attacks the Zombie, slicing a deep wound into it as Morgaine and the Bandit Archer line up their shots but hold their fire for risk of hitting Gerald in melee.

Luna slides stealthily along the cave wall and positioning herself at the side of the distracted Cultist fighting Phineas, slams a fierce backstab with the Stoutblade Dagger into the crazed wild-eyed enemy, wounding him badly.

Leo takes three quick steps forward and with a mighty blow of The Sword of Sir Chyde finishes the Zombie as Phineas deliberately drops his crossbow, then drawing and striking with the Barrows Broadsword in a single fluid move he kills the Cultist.

The Wall of Thorns shakes and shudders as a scream of rage, pain and anger echoes down the corridor while Fenella rubs her hands together in grim satisfaction. A final long drawn-out howl subsides and all is quiet, then a ragged cheer is raised by the Bandits before being quickly shushed by Hakhan and Della.

Fenella explains the spell will remain for 80 minutes as Hakhan congratulates her, "nice hedge you've got there."

Since they have a little time, Gerald wants a search of Jeleneth's apartments just in case their missing possessions are somehow concealed there. He thinks Luna and Fenella would be a good search party since they can both move quietly and Luna, being a Half-Elf Thief, will be expert at searching for concealed or secret doors.

The two agree and arrive at Jelenneth's apartments without incident. Noting luxury goods arranged haphazardly around the rooms and of course the splendid double bed, they also see Jelenneth's lovely outfit of fine silks thrown carelessly over the bed as if hastily discarded. A trunk at the foot of the bed is open and a few more mundane items of clothing lie in some disarray within, as if they have been rummaged through. Fenella looks out as Luna searches the entire area carefully and professionally. She is sure there are no secret doors or anything hidden. They return to the party and report back just as the spell is due to collapse.

Suddenly, as quickly as it appeared, the Wall of Thorns disappears revealing a sorry array of torn and lacerated bodies lying in slowly spreading pools of blood. As he passes Barzl's body, Hakhan kicks the head hard, swearing and spitting on its face.

Eagerly moving ahead as usual, Gerald is the first one to see into the cavern proper where Ranchefus stands tall before his altar stone, surrounded by Cultists, animated Skeletons and Zombies. He chuckles to himself, his voice amplified by the echoes of the chamber as with a low unpleasant laugh he mocks them, "I can't believe you fell for that one... come on in and meet the main event. Come and get your gold," he beckons, "come into the cold loving embrace of father Nergal."

Thursday the 23rd day of Vadrius 20:00, The Caverns beneath Broken Spire Keep