

The Barrowmaze

Session 75 28-08-25 Escape

Next Session 02-09-25 19.00

Wednesday the 23rd day of Vadrius 14:00, The Guardroom

Luna

Luna, the Bandit Thief contemplates her miserable situation as she stands on duty in the guardroom with the odious Barzl, her awful mongrel and even worse an impassive Zombie. The Half-Elf has become increasingly unhappy with their peculiar circumstances and seeks an opportunity for a way out. As she ruminates, a cult Acolyte enters the guard room and summons away Barzl, her vile hound Fido and the other guard for intimidation duty so Luna is left on guard with only the Zombie. Sensing an opportunity, Luna approaches the Zombie which is impassively blocking the corridor as usual. She orders it to step aside and after a moment of undead sullenness the Zombie does as it is asked. Taking the bunch of cell keys from the hook on the wall Luna approaches the first cell.

Standing outside Fenella's cell, Luna opens the viewing panel and explains that she wants to get out of this unpleasant situation and maybe Fenella could help if she were to release her. Fenella agrees, "hell yeah!" but objects to the fact that a bandit guard is telling her this unlikely story. Luna explains she is a Thief not a cultist and she wants no part of this lunatic necromantic business so if Fenella is willing to take a risk, she'll let her out. Fenella doesn't like it, pointing out that she's been double-crossed and triple-crossed in the last couple of days but, "what the hell, yes, as long as you release the rest of my friends too." Luna agrees and unlocks Fenella's cell before moving to the next occupied cell. Still rather dubious of her rescuer, Fenella gestures for Luna to lead the way since having an armed Thief behind her in an ideal backstab position makes her understandably nervous.

They arrive at Gerald's cell and Luna slides open the plate to regard the gently seething righteous fury within. Fenella hisses, "it's me, this Thief will let us out." A highly sceptical Gerald declares he is prepared to consider trust when he has a weapon in his hand. Striding up to the cell window Gerald demands his weapons right away! Luna begins to have second thoughts as to whether she should release this aggressive and angry man. She interrupts his tirade explaining that she can help him get his weapons but for now he seems very hostile and she's afraid to open the door. Fenella chips in, "Gerald, stop being an idiot! You can't do anything locked up in a cell for heaven's sake!" With difficulty Gerald masters his righteous indignation and agrees to behave. Luna turns to Fenella and asks, "can I trust your friends? Because this one makes me nervous." Fenella explains, "Gerald is actually good, just so good it's fucking annoying! If you're not actively evil then you have nothing to fear from him but yes, I understand your reservations." Luna asks Gerald, as a condition of his release, to promise not to aggress her and he agrees, albeit with his typical lawyerly disclaimers. Deciding that she needs to get out of here and Gerald is one of the instruments assisting in that goal, Luna takes the risk and unlocks the cell door, releasing the pent-up Paladinic righteousness that is Gerald into the world.

Gerald bounds out into the corridor and stands behind Fenella, demonstrating unusual sensitivity by giving Luna a bit of space since she is clearly nervous of him. Fenella explains that their retainers, Phineas and Morgaine are also imprisoned here, and as loyal retainers and friends also need to be released, plus they are both handy Fighters. As they are discussing this, they hear a groan from the next cell. Luna decides to release the two retainers before investigating the other cell.

Joined by a grateful Phineas and Morgaine they turn to the mystery cell. Gerald slides back the panel to see a man, curled up and groaning softly in the corner, now sporting a growth of straggly beard but still recognisable as Semheis, the missing Priest from Milborne. Fenella rushes in to examine him finding him exhausted and sallow and somewhat disorientated. She casts a CLW on him which seems to do him some good since he now recognises them. Phineas and Morgaine help him to his feet and it seems he can manage to walk albeit weakly by himself.

Newly freed, Gerald demonstrates his gratitude to Luna by ordering her around and demanding to know where their weapons have been stored. Luna is not sure but she suspects there might be a secret door close to the guard room door in the northern wall where she has previously noticed furtive activity by the cult and bandit leaders. Before moving on however, Luna has the bright idea of trying to persuade the Zombie guard to go into a cell, it's worth a try she thinks.

Approaching the impassive figure of the Zombie she forcefully orders it into the nearest cell. With her charismatic leadership Luna prevails and the Zombie obeys her without question, lurching obediently into the cell. Luna quickly closes and locks the door then leads the group to the guard room.

Leo and Jelenneth

Meanwhile Leo and Jelenneth are relaxing on a comfortable couch in Jelenneth's improvised living room, chatting pleasantly about this and that. Jelenneth leads the conversation to hear about Leo's adventures as a Knight errant and how he came to Haranshire and his activities in the Duchy in general. Although Leo is very open with her and tells her much of his life and experiences, his duty and honour as a Knight enable him to keep The Hammers' role as Lord Ironguard's special investigators a secret, even from the lovely Jelenneth. It's a matter of trust and even the closest of friends should not be burdened with this knowledge. After some time Jelenneth informs Leo that she is weary and wants to take a nap and that he can visit his friends if he likes.

Where's my Armour?

As she departs to her bed chamber, Leo leaves the room and walks along the corridor to the guard room unexpectedly encountering his friends at their liberty. "What's going on guys, who's the Elf?" he says in surprise. "We're getting the hell out of here and you're coming with us," Gerald commands in his usual manner. Leo is a little surprised, "but what about Jelenneth's plan?" he asks. Gerald states firmly that this is actually Jelenneth's plan, "look who's with us", he says, indicating Luna the ex-guard as proof. Leo suggests he could go and get Jelenneth so she can join in and lead the plan but Gerald explains there's no time. Still rather confused Leo asks, "ok if we are leaving then where's all our stuff?" Luna points at the blank wall, "I think it's here, give me a moment to search."

As Luna examines the wall Fenella expresses her disappointment that Leo didn't find out where the gear was hidden since he has had a privileged viewpoint. Leo explains he found where everything is but unfortunately that was pretty much all he was thinking about.

Interrupting the squabble, Luna manages to find the mechanism using her Half-Elf abilities and springs it open revealing a couple of rooms. Exercising proper caution Luna has Leo go in first. This is a treasure room and storeroom and Leo is delighted to spot his armour and the other gear. As the others enter they see all of their armour and weapons are neatly stacked but there is no sign of any of their smaller gear such as rings or jewellery amongst the fortune of gold and valuable items stored here. Phineas assists Leo to help him suit up in his full plate as the others excitedly retrieve their gear.

Poor Leo is somewhat confused as to why they are not coordinating with Jelenneth. Fenella tries to explain that the devious Mage changed sides in the middle of the fight and indeed led them here under false pretences in the first place but Leo says that was all part of the plan, now why don't they realise that? He confesses he is worried about her if there is going to be a big fight of some sort. Luna chimes in that there are a lot of bad people in here and if we got rid of them everyone including Jelenneth would be safer. The notion is appealing but Leo has seen Luna as one of the bandits, even though she clearly wasn't one of the leaders so he is still reluctant to take her word on the matter.

Leo agrees to help if the group want to escape, despite Jelenneth's careful planning to ensure their safety but Gerald points out that his thoughts are occupied with purging evil and not merely escape. Looking away Luna rolls her eyes and sighs resignedly, "if that's what it takes," she thinks to herself as she eyes up the dagger on Fenella's belt and recalls how the Druid retrieved it so carefully from the storeroom. Luna asks Fenella about the dagger and Fenella agrees that Luna could use it very well but decides to leave the matter for the moment at least. Unhappy with the general situation but knowing he is among loyal friends Leo decides to go along with them and not cause any problems for now with his conflicting loyalties.

Gerald leads them, as quietly as they can manage, straight along the corridor with Semheis tottering along behind. As they pass the opening to the makeshift shrine to Nergal, they hear some low muttered chanting. Gerald grinds his teeth and continues, catching sight of a kneeling Acolyte occupied in front of the altar. Moving carefully on they get to the spiral staircase and ascend.

Gerald chooses this moment to ask Leo what the plan is, "are we just going to escape?" and a slightly befuddled Leo replies, "that's what we said didn't we?" Fenella asks Gerald, "what else should we do?" and he replies, "murder the evil bastard, that's what we should do, for the sake of good." Gerald dithers a little before concluding that having some time to think in relative safety might be a good idea so he confirms that escape is the first priority.

They move to the door into the main room at the keep level but notice they can hear voices from the other side of the door. Luna listens carefully and recognises voices of the bandits hearing Hakhan and Della, the bandit sergeant are in discussion. Listening to their conversation they hear the bandits are not happy, complaining, "it's not honest banditry" and finding fault with the increasing numbers of undead lurking around. Hakhan explains they have a contract to fulfil and they should do that but he confesses to also having doubts about the whole venture.

Luna proposes that they enter the room and offer an alliance to the bandits or failing that, a fight. Leo agrees and Gerald is definitely interested, clearly considering a deal with criminals under the current circumstances. Luna reckons at least a few might join them which would even up the odds a bit. She explains she has overheard conversations between the other bandits expressing concern over the cult's plans. They know that the reason the cult is here is due to the stone altar below but also that this location was the site of a gruesome massacre many years ago and therefore the raw material for scores of undead is just laying around. Leo asks if Gerald's conscience can bear this and Gerald explains that his real problem is with the cult and if the bandits agree to leave after the cult is defeated then they can do so. He goes on to start positing further conditions for lawful compliance until Phineas and Leo interrupt him suggesting they should defeat the death cult first before setting any conditions for their potential allies? Gerald agrees to keep quiet... for now.

A Meeting with The Bandits

Gerald, Leo, Fenella and Luna step into the room with sheathed weapons, provoking a gasp of alarm, the half drawing of swords and the direct attention of all nine bandits in the room. "Luna!" Hakhan cries, "have they got you? Hand her over!" Leo spreads his arms showing he bears no weapon and says, "she's not a prisoner, we are allies, we don't want to fight you unless we have to." Hakhan glances at his people and back to the party, asking, "you want to parlay?" Leo agrees and Hakhan orders the bandits to sheath their weapons. He looks over at Leo very suspiciously as do the other bandits. "what's this about, Luna?" Hakhan asks not taking his eyes off Leo. Luna explains that she's not happy about the cult's activities and the increasing numbers of undead, now even roaming the upper corridors. She adds that others in their group are also similarly concerned leading to a few nods and muttered affirmations from some of the bandits.

Hakhan breathes out slowly and says, "ok Luna... you, Sir Knight, what do you have to say?" Leo offers up the evil Priest Ranchefus and his minions as a better enemy than friend and suggests that they join forces to achieve the cult's downfall. Hakhan considers Leo's words as an interesting proposition and asks, "what would we do if we were to make such an alliance?" Hakhan raises an eyebrow as Gerald speaks up, "I would have your group leave and not return, tell us how many undead and cultists there are, the layout of caves... just leave..." Hakhan interrupts acerbically, "can you shut up please, and can I please talk to somebody more reasonable? I don't want to negotiate with a religious fanatic."

Leo asks Hakhan, as Gerald quietly seethes, do they not want to see this evil defeated too, to which Hakhan replies, "your Paladin," and he says the word Paladin as if it were something nasty he had stepped in, "...your Paladin, wants us to leave, without our payment, that sounds a little ridiculous, after all, we have been doing this for a reason." Luna adds that she thinks they should join, it would be better for all. Looking down his nose at Gerald, Hakhan drawls, "or should we just go away?... or should we help you defeat the cult and as a reward we leave with all the gold and items? eh Paladin?" Gerald insists that they return their property but Hakhan says, "surely you are wearing your property?" Leo explains some items are missing (carefully avoiding the use of the word magical) and Hakhan shrugs, "no idea, but we get the gold and treasure, that's non-negotiable." He tells the party he will have to get the agreement of the rest of the group so he will send his sergeant, Della outside to inform them of the offer. After a few minutes Della returns and whispers in Hakhan's ear. Turning to regard the party, he says, "well, it seems we have a deal... and we have a Knight's word on it."

Hakhan explains, "there are about ten cultists that are Priests of some sort, so they can possibly cast spells. Then there is Jelenneth of course, I don't know what she wants... I thought I had something with her..." he sighs and looks over at Leo, "...but then you came along. I think however, I can be in love with the gold instead although I'd prefer that she's not harmed." Leo confirms that he feels the same and he will certainly ensure Jelenneth's safety. Hakhan goes on to add, "but I don't know what she will do, she is an enigma and most subtle and clever.... So, we embark on a strange alliance... and when the cult is defeated my group leaves with all the treasure and no funny business." He looks pointedly at Gerald. "Let's make our plans then," Hakhan concludes, inviting the party into the room to join the bandit group.

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