

The Barrowmaze

Session 80 09-10-25 The Road to Ironguard Motte

Next Session 16-10-25 19.00

Monday the 27th day of Vadrius 08:00, Thurmaster

The Hammers intend to travel to Milborne and then on to Ironguard Motte to enjoy the winter months in the comfort of the big city.

It's a cold damp morning in Thurmaster with a chilling sleet-like rain limiting visibility to around 80 yards at best. As they prepare to leave, Shadwell does his best to help Luna feel at home in The Hammers, checking that her horse is satisfactory and that she has everything she needs. Everyone is in full health and feeling hale and hearty despite the conditions.

They take the river road, since the lower fields and grasslands are probably waterlogged by this time of year and therefore hazardous to travel on horseback, choosing the southern side of the river since Oleanna the feral forest Druid is to be found in the Thornwood to the south and Gerald has fond notions of alerting her to Jelenneth's treachery and providing her with a list of stolen goods. Fenella points out that Oleanna is unlikely to place much value on possessions so not to set his hopes too high.

Enroute to Krynen's farm they encounter a group of three young adventurers, heading in the opposite direction so they dismount to chat for a while and exchange information. They are; Fischer, an affable but somewhat cheekily self-assured young man wearing leather armour; Z'denza a tall heavily muscled warrior woman with apparent contempt for the cold and wet conditions, dressed only in a belted chain mail shirt and sturdy boots who plants her greataxe firmly into the ground before her; and Leylia a Priestess of Pelor of the shining sun, proudly wearing the burning sun device of the god on her tabard and shield. Gerald, recognising a Priest of a fellow good-aligned deity greets her warmly.

Apparently, the three are well-aware that sensible adventurers consider this the off-season but they seem to know well enough what they are doing and claim that they see an opportunity while other groups are wintering in comfortable towns or cities and with the recent expansion of Thurmaster, perhaps they have a point. Fenella notes that given Z'denza's dark, slightly grey/green skin colouring, a glimpse of slightly pointed ears, and the size and obvious strength of her build that she is most likely a Half-Orc, probably of the northern barbarian tribes.

They part amicably but Leo still seems somewhat suspicious although for Gerald all was in order when he saw they travelled with a Priest of a good-aligned deity.

They arrive at Krynen's farm without further incident and spend a peaceful night. They observe that Krynen is still finding it difficult to accept his son, Maxim, as the werebear he is, regarding the condition as a curse. Maxim, at least, seems calm enough regarding his changed life, especially after having been tutored by Oleanna and Fenella on how to better accept and manage his animal side.

Tuesday the 28th day of Vadrius, 08:00

They discuss trying to find Oleanna in the forest but on reflection The Thornwood is very large and there is no guarantee that they will encounter the arboreal Druid so they abandon the idea. Fenella points out that Milborne is on the north side of the river so they cross the Churnett via Krynen's small ferry, a service gladly provided for free to Haranshire's heroes.

Kuiper's Farm

They arrive at Kuiper's farm finding Kuiper very keen to hear their news, almost dragging them into the house, then hurriedly serving hot drinks and scones. "So," he asks, "what happened? Did you find my friend Jelenneth?" Gerald delights far too much in mentioning that Leo can explain everything, so the Knight stoically gives the edited highlights of their story including the betrayal, with Gerald frequently interrupting to explain how she stole his items.

Kuiper is quite taken aback by the revelation of Jelenneth's treachery, he mentions that he had hopes that she might be interested in a life at his farm. Leo nods sadly and agrees, "yes, she fooled everyone, especially me," as Fenella and Gerald joyfully chime in to explain in detail how she used people in *all sorts of ways*.

Kuiper is grateful that they are frank with him and they are reminded of Kuiper's status as a "watchman" on The Great Rock Dale and High Moorland to the north where many dangerous tribes of Orcs and other humanoids war against each other. In the past they have tried to attack peaceful Haranshire but were repelled by the local militias and soldiers from Ironguard Motte. In any event, Kuiper and his people keep a careful eye to the north, watching for any sign, considering it best not to prod the wasp's nest as he is fond of saying.

Offering his apologies for delaying them, he tells them they can make Milborne by night, although they will ride for the last hour or so in darkness but since they can follow the river there should be no problem.

Milborne, 19:00

On arrival at The Baron of Mutton, they are greeted by Andren the Innkeeper where they're anxiously asked whether they've found Jelenneth yet. Andren goes on to explain that although he's not the best-looking guy in Haranshire he had hoped she might take to settling down to Inn life with him. He looks sadly off into the distance as they inform him that Jelenneth has left the district, apparently for a new life elsewhere. Andren and Leo sigh in concert as Gerald rolls his eyes.

Wednesday the 29th day of Vadrius 08:00, Breakfast at The Baron of Mutton

Over breakfast Leo continues to bear the brunt of Fenella and Gerald's Jelenneth jibes with his customary good humour, whilst bearing the undercurrent of his feelings, "it will pass though," he thinks... "with time."

They are joined by the sturdy presence of Garyld the district Constable who sits down and helps himself to tea and toast. They relate the events of the past days to him, carefully editing out any mention of the dragon Inzeldrin. He is stunned by the revelations regarding Jelenneth, "she lived here for two years!" Gerald says, "that's her talent, charming everybody," and Garyld exclaims, "I bloody well know that for sure!" before colouring slightly and gazing down into his mug. Gerald is not at all surprised to hear this and takes the moment to remind Leo that he knows all about this doesn't he. Leo, attempting to get a word in, agrees, yes, he does, now can he say something else please? Banging his mug down rather forcefully, Leo finishes the story and gives Garyld a copy of Shadwell's list of the stolen items. After a bit of thought they remember they left Semheis at Krynen's to recover.

Garyld explains they will need to meet Carman to report this morning, in about half an hour as Garyld orders some more tea and toast and a few slices of bacon to add to their bill as he points out, "there will be a few things to discuss I think, because I notice you didn't mention prisoners."

Luna's Problem

This gives Luna some serious pause for thought as Garyld leaves for a moment to visit the privy. She is really worried about going to this meeting with Carman and the others know that Carman is nobody's fool and is also very detail oriented so her concerns are very real. She wonders if she should avoid the meeting but Leo points out that Garyld has noticed her and will wonder why she's not there, drawing even more attention to her.

Luna becomes quite indignant that The Hammers have placed her in an exposed situation in the upcoming meeting, especially with Gerald expressing his reluctance to lie, as she gives him a poisonous look to punctuate her frustration. Thinking fast she quickly concocts a cover story where she was also a prisoner and managed to escape, then going on to free the others. Keep it simple she thinks, taking several deep breaths and another opportunity to scowl at "Mr Honesty".

A Meeting with Carman

Carman rises to meet them as tea is served by Jaspar the butler and Garyld settles himself into a chair to the side. "So, what's been happening Hammers?" he says, as he looks around you all, pausing for a while at Luna then moving on.

Leo relates the story of their adventures, and Carman is aghast at the revelations regarding Jelenneth. "That lass was going to be an asset for Haranshire, she was going to be our very own Archmage!" Carman exclaims indignantly. Leo explains she fooled a lot of people himself included as it becomes apparent that Jelenneth seemed to have a knack for telling each person exactly what they wanted to hear. Carman continues to puff and bluster for at least another minute before finally calming himself with good swig of strong tea.

He then begins to question them more specifically about having found the bandits and in particular why there aren't any prisoners, looking enquiringly at each of them, and especially the new face of Luna as he probes into the events of the last weeks. "So, it were Bandits and an evil cult," Carman summarises.

Leo continues and completes his account and Carman again becomes focussed on how many prisoners they took since they had managed to corner the bandits in their lair and there is an awkward pause during which Luna concentrates intently on not shifting nervously in her chair as she mentally reviews the distance to the door, or even the window perhaps. Carman reiterates that banditry is a serious crime in Haranshire and he will need to string up any prisoners in short order.

When he can finally get a word in Leo explains he (and he takes the responsibility as the military leader) assessed the situation and decided that it was necessary to make an alliance with the bandits in order to overcome the worse threat of a death cult of Nergal with the ability to raise an army of undead soldiers to ravage Haranshire.

Carman is a bit nonplussed at this but allows Leo to continue to explain that it simply wasn't possible to overcome the cult any other way, so they compromised the bandit's previous employment with the cult under the condition that the bandits left Haranshire immediately after, by the most direct route (to the south by boat).

Gerald points out the cultist prisoners were executed in Thurmaster which cheers Carman up a bit as he imagines them swinging in the breeze. Gerald also admits to torturing the cultist prisoners by reading endless lessons of St Ygg to them, from memory of course which caused them much anguish and discomfort on the road to their doom.

Carman leans in towards Gerald looking him right in the eye... "you monster!" he grins as the entire assembly bursts out laughing, dissipating much of the tension in the room. Carman chortles happily to himself, "ahhh, that must 'ave been painful to the ears of the evil," as Leo gets a further laugh from all by adding, "not just for the evil!"

As the laughter subsides, Carman zeroes in on Luna, fixing her with a gimlet-eyed gaze as he asks, "and you Miss, who might you be?" Gerald starts to interject before Carman holds up his hand, "I was talking to the lady, lad, you shouldn't interrupt when a gentleman is talking to a lady," and he turns his attention back to Luna; who is concentrating mightily on not sprinting for the door as she, as outwardly calm as anyone else in the room, explains that she was a prisoner of the bandits and had managed to escape but instead of just fleeing she remained, at considerable risk to herself, in order to free The Hammers, throwing in her lot to fight alongside them in the battle against the cult. Leaning back in his chair Carman considers the whole story and nods sagely in agreement. It is clear to all that Carman has bought the story and is satisfied as to Luna's role and he nods again in agreement with her account as she does her best not to sigh hugely in relief.

Carman grills Gerald a bit more on the bandits and is finally somewhat satisfied concluding, "I can't pretend I'm not disappointed but needs must when in the field I suppose." In any event he supposes they'll be other criminals to catch and string up in future and with this pleasant thought he brightens up.

Carman thanks Luna for her heroism and calls for another pot of tea and cakes too as the conversation turns to more mundane matters and polite chatter, with Carman talking about the rebuilding of the Milborne bridge with a proper lifting centre section and well-built stone pillars.

With great relief they take their leave from the Master of Milborne.

Thursday the 30th day of Vadrius, 08:00 Milborne

Next morning they depart Milborne and head west on the main road, crossing the Cutter Brook ford and continuing to their customary campsite just south of the Lyrchwood. A large roaring fire is made and Fenella decides to make use of her newly gained level of Druidic awareness to stand her watch in the form of a grumpy looking Screech Owl, amazing the whole party with her first ever animal transformation.

They spend a peaceful and for a change, dry, night.

Friday the 1st day of Draconis 08:00, The Hammers Corner Campsite

They set out for Ironguard Motte arriving in the late afternoon and Luna remembers the three adventurers they met on the road had mentioned Ironguard Motte, apparently, they had travelled from there. The city sprawls considerably beyond its sturdy walls and they ride for a while along the straight Unicorn Run thoroughfare which leads to the busy Gate Square just outside the defensive ditch and main gates. With Sir Leo's impressive heraldry on display they are quickly beckoned over to the gates to register their visit with a friendly guard. Fenella is pleased to notice that the intriguing official, Beryl Pizzak is on duty and as she catches the Druid's eye, Beryl brightens and calls her over. As Leo and Shadwell arrange the formalities Beryl and Fenella chat pleasantly, renewing their acquaintance and arranging a dinner for two at the renowned Jason's Arms, the finest restaurant for many miles around, at Beryl's expense, she insists and they arrange to meet at 19:00 at the restaurant.

Fenella rejoins the rest with an uncharacteristic smile on her face and they set off to The Golden Lion where they are lucky enough to get the same very pleasant first floor suite overlooking the crossroads before Lords Gate. They settle themselves in comfortably as Fenella prepares herself for dinner at a fine restaurant.

As Fenella glides out of the apartments in her simple yet elegant formal dress, the rest of the Hammers go down to eat in the hotel restaurant, where they find a note from Secretary Dalen indicating he will meet them the next morning at their convenience, hopefully 09:00 would be suitable. Leo dashes off a reply confirming this is satisfactory and they look forward to the meeting.

Friday the 1st day of Draconis, 19:00 Ironguard Motte