

The Barrowmaze

Session 86 11-03-26 Missing Mother Birch

Next Session 18-03-26

Thursday the 1st day of Haenubrius 19:10, The Hag's Lair Cavern

Leo looks down at the Hag's treasure chest full of gold coins and joined by a wide-eyed Luna they wonder how they might get this weighty treasure back to Helix.

Bella frets a little over the body of Mother Birch before deciding to consult Fenella on what to do with the corpse of a "pagan". Fenella rolls her eyes and explains pointedly in her best schoolteacher manner, that the method is not prescribed, however the intent is. The physical body must be entirely returned to nature and not entombed or preserved in any way to deny or defer the entropic process of the natural world. Burning the body is often the most convenient method to achieve this state in an environment where others might be disturbed by just leaving a corpse to be devoured by scavenging animals, also a perfectly natural process. "So, we'll burn the body then," sighs Bella, almost wishing she hadn't asked.

With this decided they have at least reduced their potential load by the body of one sturdy old lady. They would obviously need some wood so Fenella asks Tamson the Ranger to sort some out and pile it up outside before noticing that he is still quite badly wounded. Tamson grins through the pain and asks if he might have a cure first so Fenella casts a highly effective CLW on him which leaves him mostly healthy again.

Fenella wonders about arranging some sort of a stretcher for Gerald so Tamson and Leo head off to the surface to arrange things and in addition to see if any of the Hag's twisted reality still remains after her death.

The building is all still there looking much the same as it did before. Leo is keen to get on with it and realises there are things in the house that could be of use, as Tamson perks up and suggests the ladder leading to the top level as a good frame for a stretcher. The Ranger confirms the sturdiness of the wood so they detach it from the wall. Leo is able to find some blankets in a storage cupboard so after taking a quick look around outside and seeing the same landscape as previously observed they descend to the cavern, just about wrangling the long ladder through the twisting passageway.

As they view the grievously wounded Gerald attended to by Bella, they marvel at how his naturally wavy hair is still sitting absolutely perfectly, without a hair out of place leading Fenella to speculate whether St Ygg is actually the patron saint of hairdressers or as Leo suggests, "St Wig." They do their best to suppress their giggles as Bella gives them a "that's not funny" glare, so they quickly busy themselves with various preparations for the journey with just the occasional, stifled, "St Wig hehehe."

Eyeing up the unwieldy ladder Leo sees that it's too long to use as a stretcher so he uses Gerald's black iron shortsword's lower serrated edge which works splendidly just as a saw, allowing Leo to cut the ladder down to a more suitable length as he muses upon the notion of a Paladin of St Ygg carrying a weapon that would look more at home in the hands of an Orcish warrior.

Tamson and Leo are able to collect enough kindling and with the wood from half a ladder and a few smashed up crates they set a decent fire in the cavern which is quite smoky but still tolerable in the large space.

Tamson asks Luna to accompany him on a search of the limits of the cave system to which she reluctantly agrees, really not enjoying the thoroughly creepy atmosphere of the Hag's bloody cavern. They search and don't discover anything hidden or concealed.

They arrange their watches to allow Fenella and Bella enough time to sleep to recover spells and also stand watches the following morning.

The Next Morning - Things to Do

They are preparing to set out with Gerald carefully lowered onto a comfortable blanket on the ladder. Fenella points out that there is a considerable amount of treasure that needs to come back to Helix with them to which Luna nods vigorously in agreement. Fenella also points out they should properly cremate Mother Birch's body. Tamson seems to be unnaturally optimistic that they can carry 7000 coins shared in their rucksacks but this is not at all feasible as they realise when they think about it for a minute, it's just going to be too heavy.

Tamson, carrying Mother Birch's body and accompanied by Leo head up to the surface to create a funeral pyre as if that's what he had been thinking all along before Fenella had pointed it out to him and Fenella attends whispering a few words before tossing a lighted torch into the dry wood and the old wise woman's remains are consumed by fire and returned to nature as she would have wished.

They ferry the gold and silver up to the surface using their backpacks and bring the empty chest up with them. After some exploration Tamson discovers a recess in a group of boulders, forming a small natural cave which they can seal off by pushing a boulder to conceal the entrance, so they place the chest inside and fill it up from the pile they have brought upstairs. Tamson pays careful attention to the surroundings and makes some markings on the nearby stones to hopefully allow him to identify the place again.

They can manage to carry on average, 400 gp each by leaving quite a few bits of adventuring gear from their backpacks behind as Leo keeps complaining about delaying their departure just for gold, he clearly wants to get on with it.

Leo is delighted to finally be able to leave so they return to Gerald and carefully place him once again onto the blanket on their improvised stretcher and Bella carefully ropes him to it so he is safely secured.

Bella (she insists) and Luna act as Gerald's stretcher bearers with Leo, Fenella and Tamson as mobile guards. "Finally," exclaims travel twitchy Leo and at 10:30 they depart.

Departing the Swamp

As they travel both Tamson and Fenella notice that parts of the original forest seem to be poking through into the swamp environment, like something natural is trying to emerge or transform. They all feel quite good about this as they continue carefully along the path. Over time as they travel, they notice more of the natural growth and with some relief they notice that rocks and stones do not seem to be changing so they still have high hopes of being able to return to their stash of loot.

As they continue, they see the transformation is becoming more complete until they leave the swamp area behind, returning to the more familiar surroundings of the Blackened Forest's coniferous trees. Fenella is sure that the transformation is continuing behind them as the forest reclaims its natural state from the twisted enchantments of the Hag. She allows herself a smug smile as she happily considers the ultimate futility of opposing nature.

After a while they spot the eerie phosphorescence of the Spider colony ahead but Tamson navigates them carefully around it as they keep a wary eye on the skittering movements within. Eventually they pass without any incident, noting that it does seem that the Spiders are acting more normally again and not attacking everything that passes, yet more evidence of the end of the Hag's malign influence. Leaving the colony behind they continue on the path.

The Beetles Reunion

As they trudge along, expecting to soon reach the edge of the forest to join up with Shadwell and the horses, a swarm of giant beetles burst from the undergrowth and scurry to attack!

Fenella immediately begins to chant and gesture as Bella and Luna carefully set down the improvised stretcher and draw their weapons.

Tamson shoots an arrow but misses as Fenella's entangle spell causes the undergrowth to burst from the ground trapping four of the six attacking Beetles. Two of them are fully entangled but another two are only partially held and will shortly be able to struggle to the edge and escape the spell. Leo strides forward and completely destroys one of the still mobile creatures in a single stroke. Bella steps between Gerald and the attacking insects and brandishes her hammer menacingly.

One of the Oil Beetles sprays its toxic oil over Fenella causing her skin to painfully blister and almost burn. It doesn't reduce her health but she finds with the pain in her hands it will penalise her attacks. Luna rushes around to support Fenella attacking with her dagger but misses the fast moving creature. One of the trapped Beetles manages to escape the entanglement and sprays at Luna but misses as Fenella's attacker scurries forward and bites the now very annoyed Druid.

Tamson shoots another arrow into the entanglement but misses again and Fenella painfully attacks with her spear but just misses. Another beetle bites Luna injuring her quite badly and confirming to her that there are very good reasons why she hides in shadows just as Leo stampedes around the group and cleaves his mighty sword into the Beetle attacking Fenella.

The second entangled Beetle breaks out and attacks with a spray on Tamson who is hit and blistered. Luna attacks again and just misses. Fenella stabs furiously, despite the pain, driving her spear into the Beetle, wounding it badly.

Leo shoves his way around to attack the Beetle attacking Tamson but slips on an oil patch and misses as the beetle tries to attack Tamson but he evades. Combat twitchy Bella raises her hammer but just misses the Beetle as the one fighting Fenella turns and flees. Tamson stays consistent with his terrible luck and misses yet again. As Luna melts into the shadows and manoeuvring around Fenella she strikes at the beetle attacking Tamson but also misses. Perhaps it's her proximity to Tamson because as he attempts to attack his Beetle he misses yet again!

Fenella takes a long strike with her magical spear against the remaining Beetle hitting it for a serious wound as Leo pounds around the stretcher to finish the job and show Tamson how it's done.

They burn the soon to expire entanglement, easily incinerating the two oily beetles within. Fenella reviews her and Luna's skin blistering and gauges that a CLW will be able to cure the condition. She casts CLW removing the blistering from Luna and she casts CLW on herself to do the same. Bella offers her cures and casts CLW on Luna to restore some of her health.

They continue their trek and by midday they reach the treeline and re-unite with Shadwell and the horses.

Returning to Helix

Shadwell points out that they could, if they wished, send someone back to retrieve the loot by leading a few horses there which could carry the load between them. Tamson is quite keen on this for some reason or other and Luna strongly backs him up but Leo wants to just return to Helix with Gerald. They can't ride quickly since they need to move at the speed of the stretcher bearers. Fenella agrees and they decide that they will concentrate on getting Gerald safely to Helix first.

Luna looks ruefully back down the track as they set out hoping that their treasure remains unmolested and that nobody in the Thieves Guild ever gets to hear about the time she left about 6000 gp unattended in a hastily improvised hiding place.

A few hours later they walk into Helix and tuck Gerald into bed at the Brazen Strumpet where he is solicitously tended by the staff and an ever-present Bella.

Friday the 2nd day of Haenubrius 16:00, Helix