

The Barrowmaze

Session 99 05-07-26 Gerald's little holiday

Next Session 12-07-26

Saturday the 17th day of Haenubrius, 17:50, The Brazen Strumpet, Helix

Helix Rest Home

Gerald is in a bad way; the constitution drain inflicted by the Barrow Wight almost did for him, pale and gaunt, he is in no shape for expeditions to the deadly Barrowmoor even if he is sure he could manage; he just needs rest in order to recover his indomitable spirit. (GM Note - Simon will play Phineas during the Barrows portion of this session.)

The other Hammers turn their attention to upgrading Shadwell's gear now that he is a fighting man. They discuss the balance of using heavier armour against the ability to move more freely with lighter armour. Eventually they decide on studded leather armour to slightly improve his defence without affecting his mobility. He already has a shortsword, gifted by Phineas and Leo is happy to purchase the studded leather armour whilst Fenella provides a brand new crossbow to their newest man-at-arms. Shadwell proudly shows off his new gear and accompanied by Morgaine and Phineas, heads off to the butts for some target practice.

They examine their various unguents and powders, looted from Barrow 30, stowing them in Shadwell's backpack for later use:

- Restorative Ointment * 4
- Incense of Meditation * 4
- Dust of Disappearance * 2
- Dust of Sneezing and Choking * 2

Bella examines the Clerical Scroll they recovered from Barrow 30's depraved and obscene library, discovering the following four spells:

- Quest (5th level)
- Detect Evil (1st level)
- Sticks to Snakes (4th level)
- Continual Light (3rd level) - cast immediately

Clerical spells can be cast at any level hence even powerful 5th level spells are available to Bella, a level 5 Priest who would normally be restricted to a maximum of 2nd level spells. Well aware of the utility of having a much more convenient continual light source rather than lanterns and torches, Bella casts the Continual Light on Shadwell's pendant which he can conceal using a small leather pouch when the light isn't required. This leaves the party with multiple magical light sources and no need to use their old-school lantern on a stick. Truly they have come of age!

The Hammers' Light Sources following recent acquisitions:

- Fenella – Continual Light pendant
- Shadwell – Continual Light pendant
- Gerald – Magical Continual Light Shortsword
- Fenella – Magical Continual Light Scimitar

They consider setting out again the next day, leaving Gerald to rest for the time he will need to recover (8 days in total) however Leo points out that they have set a gigantic smoke signal over the moor and it might be wise to let a couple of days pass to avoid returning to a potential welcoming committee.

Concerned about their exploration of a Barrow dedicated to pestilence and rot, Leo arranges for all of their gear and loot to be scrubbed down and cleaned with care by the staff of the Brazen Strumpet. Bollo the landlord is an ex-adventurer and knows well the hazards of dungeon exploration so he will supervise the process. He enjoys some amused speculation as to what they might have blundered into this time but you are able to tell that his humour masks his genuine concern at the state Gerald returned in and he re-iterates that the Inn will take good care of the stricken Paladin.

With their business arranged and Gerald safely looked after and frequently attended by Bella, they retire for the night.

Sunday the 18th day of Haenubrius, 08:00, The Brazen Strumpet, Helix

Gerald recovers a little and looks a little less like he could expire at any moment but he has some time yet to go as he is fussed over by Bella and the staff. Since he can still use the Paladin's Laying on of Hands power, he piously makes sure (the others assure him) that no other more deserving case requires it more before applying it to himself.

Fenella wants to delay another day before setting out to really give the smoke a chance to subside and the others agree.

Fenella also tests the command word of her magical scimitar, finding it emits a bright, pleasantly emerald-tinged continual light. Saying the word again triggers its spirit mode, causing twisting vines to emerge from the leaf motif on the hilt. Fenella somehow finds herself knowing that this will improve the weapon's utility against extra-planar creatures (it will be +3), after ten minutes the vine aspect subsides but the light continues until she dismisses it. Fenella sheathes the weapon with a satisfied smirk.

Monday the 19th day of Haenubrius, 08:00, The Brazen Strumpet, Helix

Gerald's constitution continues to gradually return as a slight blush of colour begins to reappear on his unnaturally pale face but he is still exhausted and doesn't even object when confined to his bed, sleeping for most of the day. The others however are ready for another sortie to the Barrow Moor so they set out, leaving their holy warrior safe and sound at the Inn.

Leo's carefully considered plan is, "get out there!" and the rest of them agree enthusiastically so they set out for the Barrow Moor arriving without incident. They see the smoke is no longer visible but Luna advises that it would be wise to approach another part of the moor, just in case.

They note that Barrow 26 seems to be the westernmost of the so far unexplored barrows that doesn't require a full excavation so they head directly northeast in a beeline towards the barrow, passing the ominous monolith on their way. Without Gerald to rant and complain at the monolith, they just walk past it and soon arrive at Barrow 26.

Barrow 26 - Demonic Discourse

Leo and Luna circle the barrow, one in each direction, discovering the slab-sealed barrow entrance on the northern side. Thirty minutes of assault from Leo and Luna see the slab cracked open and removed and despite the noise, they are not disturbed.

They move into the dark corridor, rearranging themselves to cover for the absent Gerald, with two Continual Lights brightly beaming ahead. Luna sighs and gives up on any idea of stealth reconnaissance so they just walk down the stairs into a large circular chamber. At the front, Leo sees two columns emerging from the darkness. The columns are adorned with exquisitely detailed carvings of screaming faces, contorted in agony and torment. Leo shrugs and walks forward, followed by their light sources which reveal the whole chamber. They see a matching set of similar columns across the room and centred in a bright red painted circle of strange symbols on the floor stands a sturdy black iron brazier, full of coals, that seem to be somehow alight with a dull red glow yet they radiate no heat whatsoever.

Fenella examines the vibrant scarlet symbol circle on the ground and remarks that it looks demonic, whether Chaos (Demon/Tanar'ri) or Law (Devil/Baatezu) she cannot tell. Leo notices there are four circles as part of the design and wonders whether standing in them might be of use. Luna is absolutely not keen on standing in one of the circles. They search the chamber for secret doors not finding anything concealed. It really seems to be just these horrific columns and the brazier in the centre of the bright red circular symbol.

Chaos Knight Leo, steps into a circle, "anyone with me?" he asks and is immediately followed by Phineas and Fenella, so three of the circles are occupied, as Luna takes a few more steps away. Morgaine laughs and declares loudly that she doesn't care and steps into the remaining circle.

The brazier immediately glows brighter, emitting a fierce heat as flames begin to lick upwards in a sort of column of fire, increasing in intensity as the colours change from red, to orange, to green; then purple fire and finally a bizarre tower of black flame, within which the hideous horned and fanged form of a demonic head appears within the flaming column, managing to simultaneously stare directly at each of four adventurers standing within the red circles.

Three Questions

In a great booming voice, it announces itself to the "feeble mortals" attending... "I Glaaziphinkkrwlfarnargoth will answer three of your questions, and then you will begone... state your questions."

As the others discuss what they might ask this devil or demon Fenella perks up and asks, "What is the greatest evil in the Barrowmaze?" The entity immediately stirs and announces that the greatest evil in the Barrowmaze is The Tablet of Chaos, the dark, god-powered talisman that Gerald has dreamed of after reading his second runic tablet and taken a vow to destroy.

Leo asks, "where can we find this tablet?" The thing replies that it is located in the far east of The Barrowmaze and describes its immediate environment so they will be able to identify when they find the area containing it.

Fenella asks the final question, "how do we destroy it?" And the demon replies mockingly to the gathered "feeble mortals" that the tablet is impervious to spells, physical attacks and most magic items. The Tablet can only be destroyed by sundering a powerful lawful-aligned magic item or weapon against it.

The demon thanks them for their pathetic questions and wishes them hideous and painful lives of misery and despair before abruptly vanishing along with the flames, leaving the brazier exactly as they first encountered it.

They don't see any particular reason to disbelieve the demonic entity and its answers agree with the information they already have regarding the Tablet of Chaos. They wonder what Gerald will make of it, agreeing to prevent him immediately heading off to destroy it, after all this is the greatest evil in the Barrowmaze and they are not even on the eastern side yet and are still having a hard time battling the foes where they currently stand. In addition, they no longer have a powerful artifact of Law, having used the Orb of Law to shut down the Pit of Chaos, with Gerald himself hurling the blessed artifact into the Pit thus ensuring the mutual destruction of both, so they need to somehow find another powerful Lawful artifact.

Fenella also points out that there might also be other items and allies that can aid them plus she very much doubts that The Hammers have yet made it to the level of ability to be able to take on this sort of terrible threat, they must first bide their time and build their strength as Sir Guy de O'Veargne bade them do.

Luna mentions that she is a very cautious Thief, not given to reckless or ill-considered action and would very much like to live to her old age and enjoy the profits of her adventures rather than rushing off to her doom at the first opportunity.

With these thoughts fresh in their minds, they leave Barrow 26 and survey the moor, spotting Barrow 32, another sealed barrow that they can enter reasonably easily.

Barrow 32 (28)

It's midday as Leo and Luna demolish the slab and crack open the entrance revealing the usual dark passageway. Leo leads the way, descending the stairs into an octagonal chamber decorated with bizarre painted symbols and glyphs in many different colours, both beautiful and yet somehow menacing. As they advance both Luna and Leo see a stone lectern in the centre of the chamber and upon the lectern there lies a large leather bound tome, handsomely adorned with metal fittings and corner pieces.

Fenella identifies the symbols as arcane and therefore Wizard's or some sort of Magic User's magic. If she had to guess she'd say it's probably a spell book. Leo asks Luna to search for traps etc, which she does, not finding anything. Leo picks up the book, which is a heavy tome. He tries to give it to Fenella but she brusquely declines and instead Shadwell holds open a sack into which Leo can stow the book without anybody else touching it.

Luna wonders if all of the symbols and formulae on the walls might be protecting the book from being removed so Leo tests the assertion by carrying the sack out and nothing seems to happen so he shrugs and beckons them to join him.

Demonstrating a very level-headed attitude they decide they've done enough for one trip to the Barrows so they head for the Westland swamps and eventually the road to Helix, arriving safely at 16:30. Phineas and Morgaine head for the pub and drag Shadwell along with them and Gerald joins the others, leaning heavily on a staff as he demands to visit Mazzahs along with them. Deciding to humour the invalid they let him come along.

Mazzahs

Mazzahs greets them warmly in his usual rumbunctious manner. Leo pulls out the book and starts to speak but on sight of the book Mazzahs exclaims loudly, "gadzooks! a spell book, hand it over!" grinning broadly in anticipation. Leo hands over the tome and Mazzahs sniffs it warily, turning the large volume over in his hands as if trying to unravel some sort of meaning from the tactile contact. "Hmmm, could be dangerous to open," he mutters before breaking into an even wider grin, "ha! let's open it!"

The wizard flips the book open and promptly vanishes as the book drops heavily to the floor. There is a moment of stunned silence before a spate of excited babbling breaks out. "Whoops," says Fenella, surreptitiously checking the exit isn't blocked and shuffling away a bit. In a hoarse voice Gerald asks, "what else did you do while you were out there?" Luna reacts as the others look around guiltily, "nothing!"

Gerald wants to report it to the proper authorities and spends some time wondering out loud who that might be... basically running through anyone with even a modicum of authority in Helix before moving onto Ironguard Motte and anywhere else he can think of. Leo seems to think they should talk to a Priest about it and as Bella pokes him, he adds, "a senior Priest."

They decide to just wait a while and see if maybe everything will be alright if they just do nothing so they wait for 30 minutes but nothing changes. Luna wonders about searching the Wizard's tower but gradually cools on the idea as traps, wards, glyphs and guardians are mentioned. Leo thinks sending a letter to someone might help... perhaps they should call in the area's best known troubleshooters and local heroes? ... Oh, that's us, they realise.

Gerald still thinks Othar the Priest should be able to do something about a missing solitary Wizard despite Bella telling him that Othar knows nothing of Wizards and will just tell Gerald to trust in St Ygg, which is what he should do, she says firmly.

Fenella delivers her deeply considered and brilliantly intelligent recommendation, "walk away and don't tell anybody, pretend it wasn't us..."

Monday the 19th day of Haenubrius, 17:00, Mazzahs' Tower, Helix