

The Barrowmaze

Session 52 09-01-25 Dinner with The Ironguards

Next Session 16/01/25 19.00

Thursday the 12th day of Setherius, 06:00, The Golden Lion Inn

After an excellent meal at their comfortable new lodgings in The Golden Lion Inn, they retire to the bar for a while and then to bed. Waking on Thursday morning at their customary 06:00 they rise at a leisurely pace and take breakfast before their 09:00 meeting with the Ironguard's secretary. He arrives promptly and introduces himself as Secretary Dalen. The secretary is a small, grinning, fussy fellow; perpetually busying himself with multiple leather satchels crammed with documents that he hauls around with him. He quickly arranges things for the dinner appointment with Lord Ironguard and informs them of the formal dress requirement and that some of Lord Ironguard's advisors will be present. They are to arrive at the castle gate at 18:00 where Dalen will meet them and usher them in. With this business concluded he rushes off to his next appointment leaving the Hammers at their leisure in the city.

Exploring the city

They start by heading east from the Inn's crossroads strolling along a road signposted as Backfields where they find various traders of typical sorts and some more esoteric, such as a Geologist, an Alchemist and even a Brothel, Madame Laticia's. They notice that while there are buildings all the way up Backfields on the northern side, the southern side has some fenced off gaps where they can see a large arable area partitioned into small plots growing various plants and herbs. It seems some of the precious walled city land is reserved for cultivation which cheers Reme up. Reaching the end of Backfields they follow the cramped East Wall Road south until it turns westward onto Griffen Street.

They again see many different traders and an Inn but in this road no sign of any brothels which is hardly surprising now they notice the large building that is the Temple of St Ygg loom into view. Rubbing his hands together in anticipation of some proper piety, Gerald leads the way. As they mount the steps they see a woman clad in shining armour hurrying down from the Temple. It seems she has important business elsewhere but upon seeing The Hammers she quickly changes direction, calling out loudly, "Gerald of St Ygg... yes?" before hurrying over and clasping Gerald by the hand in a warrior's handshake, grinning broadly as she exclaims, "brother!". Vivacious and with a beauty immediately appealing to Gerald and indeed the others of the party, she introduces herself as Temple Guard Captain Sind and explains that the temple has had news of their exploits in The Barrowmaze culminating in the destruction of the pit of chaos. She is clearly very pleased to have run into the Hammers and their dashing Paladin but she has to excuse herself since has business elsewhere. She suggests they speak to Friar Fergus, one of the second priests of St Ygg who is in attendance. With this she bounds off giving a cheery wave, as Fenella rolls her eyes while Gerald gazes after her retreating figure. "Is it going to be like this every time we meet some tart in armour?" drawls Fenella as they ascend the steps.

Entering the Temple they quickly find Friar Fergus, a friend of Othar of Helix and one of the second priests of St Ygg. He is a sturdy jovial fellow who greets them warmly and invites them into a side chamber, calling for a scribe to take notes. A young priest named Jinalla joins you, quill at the ready and you sit down with Fergus and bring him up to date with your activities, culminating in the destruction of the pit of chaos.

While discussing the matter both Gerald and Fergus mention Gamdar the half-orc acolyte who was sent by Othar to Ironguard Motte to discover information regarding Sir Guy. Fergus explains he was indeed here studying the records and surely you must have passed him on the Helix/Ironguard road because he left to return to Helix on the same day you arrived. Although there were a few travellers on the road none of them were Gamdar, at least as far as the Hammers noticed. Continuing with the results of their consultations, Fergus explains that it seems that Sir Guy was active about 600 years ago, so The Hammers have closed a vile blight that has plagued the land for hundreds of years and put to rest the spirit of a holy paladin, no wonder the Temple is so collectively impressed, thinks Gerald. Gerald also mentions that the spirit of Sir Guy referred to another evil further to the east which they cannot allow to remain unexamined.

Fenella yawns and catching Reme's eye, mumbles something beneath her breath as the enthusiastic followers of St Ygg continue with their happy congratulatory fervour.

It is clear that the Temple of St Ygg is best pleased with events in The Barrowmaze and delighted to have the holy Paladin himself and his party of assistants here in Ironguard Motte! After much mutual backslapping, hand shaking and congratulation, the Hammers take their leave.

Dinner at Ironguard Castle

After a nice day of sightseeing around Ironguard Motte they head to the Lord's Gate at the castle at 18:00 for their appointment with Secretary Dalen. He guides them into the castle walls, pointing out the various buildings as they walk through another portcullis and approach the dining hall and kitchens of the castle. Sir Leo is not sporting any heraldic devices as is his wont, so he is politely addressed in the same manner as the others rather than "Sir Knight".

They are shown into the large dining hall that could impressively seat up to two-hundred people before they are handed over to the castle servants and ushered into a more intimate dining area as Dalen departs. Servants are present and the Hammers are graciously served drinks as Leo nods in satisfaction at the arrangements. Within a few minutes Chancellor Dorwellan, a tall dark man with a courtly manner enters and greets them, fastidiously shaking everyone's hand. Reme declares it a great honour and Fenella grandly offers her hand to kiss, which Dorwellan elegantly and impeccably does, bowing with a slight, old-fashioned flourish. Not bad, thinks Fenella, she could get quite used to this. Introductions made, further guests enter and are announced by the servant herald.

A handsome dark-haired man, Lieutenant Hardaway, the Garrison Guard commander enters and briskly shakes hands. He is followed by an exotic looking gentleman in flowing robes who introduces himself as Segrath, Wizard and advisor to Lord Ironguard. He regards the party with a clear intelligence in his dark twinkling eyes. He conducts himself meticulously and neatly and answers only briefly although with civility in conversation.

A few minutes pass following Segrath's arrival before there is a brief bugle fanfare as Lord Kell Ironguard enters. He is dressed in a military fashion wearing attire that resembles the cut of a fine suit of armour as if he prefers that style, even at his leisure. Lord Ironguard is a sturdy, powerfully built man in his early sixties with a full beard which matches his head of thick grey hair. He moves a little stiffly, presumably suffering from rheumatism or some similar ailment. His dark brown eyes regard you with some scepticism as he is presented to each of you by Dorwellan. He naturally takes up conversation with Sir Leo, while the others enjoy the delicious canapés. Lord Ironguard notes that Leo is a Knight Errant, "quite an unusual phenomenon, wouldn't you say?" Leo smoothly replies that they have been on a rather unusual mission confronting the unusual and notices the slight flicker of a smile across the Lord's face at Leo's witty riposte.

Leo recounts one of his adventures in The Barrowmaze, telling the tale of the magical mirror that caused him to duel his evil double, which clearly entertains his Lordship. Gerald negotiates a series of pleasant non-alcoholic drinks for himself while Reme quickly finishes another plate of the delicious appetisers. Lord Ironguard informs the gathering that his wife, Lady Ironguard will be joining them for a while as they move to the table and sit for dinner.

Almost immediately, the herald announces, "Lady Winona Almaroth-Ironguard of Ahlissa" and everyone stands as her Ladyship enters; an elegant, beautiful, slightly severe looking woman of about forty years of age, dressed in a long, high-collared formal gown with the Ironguard coat of arms displayed on a brooch at the neck. She moves first to her husband, offering her hand for him to formally kiss, which they notice ends with both briefly squeezing each other's hand and sharing a barely visible smile before attention is turned to the Hammers. She greets everyone easily, in the fashion of one used to diplomatic negotiation and gestures for all to sit. Her keen intelligence is clear from her actions and manner.

The dinner proceeds and is excellent. There are many courses of small, succulent and delicious dishes and the conversation dies down a little as the meal is consumed and the talk moves on from the polite greetings and small talk into particular details.

Sir Leo's conversation

Leaning in towards him Lord Ironguard engages Sir Leo in conversation, gradually steering the discourse to a subject of interest. Meanwhile Lady Winona engages the others in a broader, livelier topic of conversation which allows Lord Ironguard to give his full attention to Sir Leo who takes note of the flawlessly executed diplomatic manoeuvre with admiration.

He begins by discussing the Knight errant mission of the Knights of Lord Chekhov and their deeds and reputation, complimenting the activities of the order and their activities, "which, while obviously good are of course... obviously, obviously carried out in a spirit of a somewhat more casual knightly execution at least in the eyes of the knightly orders used to more orderly activities and the fashion of operating in a more... let us say... lawful, manner of operation. Which of course raises the question... of course, that sometimes, chaotic endeavours can be opposed to lawful activities... Would you say that Sir Leo? That chaos and law can have cause to be opposed?"

Leo understands the weight and thrust of this enquiry and considers quickly before making his careful reply, "In the face of the battle against evil where the orderly might well be used, there is also value in the virtues and characteristics of chaos as a way of combatting the forces of evil, in effect, when we are in the field facing evil then we use whatever we have to combat evil regardless of philosophy. After all we are both representing the ideals of good, our execution just happens to differ." Lord Ironguard leans back in his chair and holding Leo's gaze, he declares, "well said Sir Leo, I can't say that I can in good faith subscribe to your odd philosophy but a common enemy does inspire a good alliance!"

Sir Leo goes on to state explicitly that while in the Ironguard's domain he will honour and respect the laws and customs of the Duchy, which causes the Lord to exchange a quick look of approval with Chancellor Dorwellan as the atmosphere between the two knightly warriors warms a little. Leo realises that this was all about understanding the motivations of a chaotic good Knight without portfolio, riding into town without any pre-arranged mission... is he the emissary of an invading chaotic good force perhaps? Leo is pleased that he has answered Lord Ironguard's reservations and assuaged any concerns he might have had in that area.

Fenella's conversation

Fenella notices the darkly handsome court Magician, Sagrath, favouring her with a charming smile and giving her his full attention. The Druid stares directly back at him saving her smile for whenever it pleases her. Taking the previously general table conversation regarding herbalism as his subject he brings the discussion specifically to Fenella, as in the background Lady Winona recounts an amusing story concerning a joust that she witnessed as a girl back in Ahlissa.

Expanding the discourse, Sagrath moves onto Fenella's opinions regarding the cultivation and management of lands and forests and the building of stone settlements, he wonders what the druidic view might be of the people of the Duchy felling trees and clearing land for cultivation. "Is this against your beliefs?" he charmingly asks. Fenella is of course, not charmed at all and is also at least as intelligent as the court wizard, whom she regards with her usual slightly disapproving stare. "What exactly are you getting at Sagrath?" she asks, "complaining about something?" Sagrath continues his argument that without tilling of soil and management of land there is just jungle or wilderness which of course is no impediment for druids but for the people it is an untenable situation, "after all beavers build dams" he concludes with a suitable flourish.

Fenella fixes Segrath with her very best, "I will explain this to an idiot" expression and points out that druids represent balance in nature. This also includes the activities of humans who are also animals, "if you hadn't noticed, Segrath... anyway, provided logging and land management is performed responsibly then the human animal is just doing the same as the beaver even if that includes building cities and the like, as long as there is a balance then it is acceptable," she lectures, finally smiling, albeit patronisingly. Segrath smiles even more charmingly if that is even possible and quickly shares a glance with Lord Ironguard and Dorwellan.

It seems the Ironguards can rest assured that there is no green revolution led by a fanatical Druid about to occur. Fenella exchanges a glance with Reme who had one ear on the nature conversation as she gives her, "dodged an arrow there," look as the Ranger smiles back.

Reme's conversation

Lt. Hardaway takes the opportunity to discuss weaponry with Reme and after several attempts at subtly trying to raise the subject of Reme's favoured arms, which are largely ignored, he gets around to asking the Ranger what his favourite sword is? Looking up from the plate of food that he is currently devouring and the flagons of drink he is busy quaffing he snaps out, "one-handed, fast as possible," as he pulls off another chicken leg and makes it disappear.

Hardaway is interested in Reme's opinion on the classic broadsword which is by far the most popular weapon in the Duchy, would he use one of those? Reme says he would prefer a longsword and since he says what he likes, he says it again, however Reme's powerful magical weapon is actually a very fine broadsword and indeed the one he used previously was also a broadsword and Lt. Hardaway's guards had informed him when asked, that the Ranger was bearing a very fine broadsword, so Lt. Hardaway is somewhat nonplussed by Reme's reply. "Well, that's quite a radical notion Reme," he exclaims, "the broadsword is favoured around the Duchy for its superior heft that in the opinion of many, aids in the delivery of a good attack"... until he wonders, perhaps the Ranger is joking with him? A small jest perhaps? "Alright, alright, just my bit of fun," retorts Reme, confessing that indeed he does use a broadsword but in truth anything with a decent reach and edge to it would serve his needs. The Lieutenant laughs loudly sharing the joke around the table as Reme returns to his trenchmanship, hoping to be left in peace.

Gerald's conversation

Taking the matter of bearing arms as her subject, Lady Winona fixes her gaze on Gerald and leans slightly towards him as she projects her melodious voice clearly towards him. "Gerald, you are a holy warrior, of St Ygg," she states. Gerald answers briskly in the affirmative, somewhat unnerved by the full attention of this beautiful and commanding woman. "You are a hero, the destroyer of the pit of chaos," she says but he corrects her, "I am a member of a team, we achieved this together, working as a team." "Mmmm, modest as a true Paladin should be," she replies, watching him closely. "And yet you took this mission bravely upon yourself, an oath as I understand it, to destroy the terrible artifact of evil." Flushing slightly red, Gerald replies at length that he is no hero of the fables, merely a warrior doing his duty and it is only with his companions and the blessings of St Ygg, that he was able to achieve the destruction of the pit.

Lady Winona replies, "Which is interesting, is it not, when you consider that your companions are not in particular, followers of St Ygg." Gerald stumbles over his words in his eagerness to get them out, "We are followers of each other...We have bonds forged in blood, quite literally, yes some are of course rather more mercenary than others but we have become a team and when required to would fight for each other even to the death."

Tilting her head quizzically, she asks, "And would you say the powers of nature and the strength of those who walk the way of nature were key to this quest?" Suspecting he sees where this is leading and warning to his subject Gerald, true to type, launches into a homily, "Madam, nature, by its nature has laws and rules, does it not. Does the sun not rise every morning, does the water not flow to the valley, the seasons pass... there is law in nature. And my companions that fight in concert with nature, indeed have assisted me in that lawful fight against that which is decidedly unnatural.

Out of the corner of his eye, Gerald notices Fenella smirking at him from across the table as Lady Winona continues to focus her full attention on the pious Paladin. Observing from his place, Leo is more than a little put out, how come Gerald always gets the attention of the beautiful women?

Still gazing directly and unnervingly directly into his eyes, Lady Winona appears to consider. Then very slowly she raises her glass in a toast to Gerald. As Gerald returns the toast, she smiles and turns her attention elsewhere.

A concluding conversation with Lord Ironguard

As the rest of dinner guests depart discreetly, only Lord and Lady Ironguard remain and Lord Ironguard speaks...

"So you've come here to Ironguard Motte to pay your respects which you have done admirably and fortunately for us, you are not the vanguard of an invading chaotic good force, nor a natural revolution against the notion of building castles or cities," (not while you're serving food like this, thinks Reme), "and no holy wars are planned for the immediate future at least..."

With a smile, Lady Ironguard, excuses herself and departs, leaving you alone with Lord Ironguard.

Leaning back in his chair he passes his gaze over you, "So what might a group such as yourselves be doing in the near future?"

Leo informs Lord Ironguard that the Barrowmaze is inaccessible to them until the next season when they intend to return and finish the job but until then perhaps the Hammers could provide some assistance in anything that might need to be done elsewhere in of the Duchy of Aerik? Lord Ironguard cannot help but smile.

His Lordship explains that he has some concerns about activities in Haranshire, which is the larger part of the Duchy lying to the east and as he speaks a servant hands him a document which he spreads out on the table, a map of Haranshire. He points out that you have been operating in the northern part of the Westshire or Westland as it is sometimes known, but the larger part of the Duchy is east of Ironguard Motte. "We try to keep a light touch over the shires, the local villages have magistrates, sheriffs and jails, the idea being that they operate independently without everything having to come back to Ironguard Motte unless they call for assistance in any emergency."

He goes on, "We seem to be having an increase in Bandit raids. Normally this is not a problem, my men patrol and would usually apprehend or dispose of the villains but in this case the bandits seem to evade them. I would like a group of troubleshooters who can operate in open country, forest and villages, discreetly and with special abilities beyond that possessed by my troops. My men are soldiers, not investigators and they do not possess your... particular... set of talents. These troubleshooters would operate under a letter of authority signed by me that will stop the troops from interfering and also to explain the situation when you might have to use force... The troubleshooters would make a broad survey of the area tidying up any problems they might encounter and with the understanding that they may keep any treasures or gold they retrieve with the exception of any objects that might have been specifically reported stolen. I can offer an upfront sum of 600 gp to cover operations with the promise of more to come on successful conclusion of operations. Now, what would you say to that?" he asks, smiling at you.

Reme can hardly wait, it sounds just like the sort of thing he was dreaming of when they set out for the city and Gerald and Leo are in agreement that it sounds like an ideal job for The Hammers. Despite her habitual scowl, Fenella also seems to be keen, anything but undead in a dungeon, she thinks.

Lord Ironguard explains that Dalen can visit them tomorrow to finalise arrangements and he suggests that they enjoy Ironguard Motte at their leisure, departing for Haranshire when they wish. With this, they depart the castle returning to their rooms in The Golden Lion.

Thursday the 12th day of Setherius, 23:30, The Golden Lion Inn