

Shadowdark Session Report 2

Date: Saturday Night 03/0/25

Location: The Road to Grimwild

It began in the coastal city of Sunharbor, where the sea air carried the scent of salt, rot, and cheap fish oil lamps. Five adventurers, each hungry for gold or purpose, took up a simple contract: escort the merchant Aleric through Mirkwood Forest to the village of Grimwild. Three days on the road, guarding a wagon, with little promise beyond gold and the vague sense that something waited at the journey's end. The road out of Sunharbor was supposed to be simple. But nothing involving Mirkwood is ever simple.

The Party:

- Merlin, the elven Wizard: His spellbook crusted with salt and ink stains, his nerves unraveling fast.
- Keldar, the human Gunslinger: Quick hands, low on powder, smart-mouthed
- Naruto, the human Monk: Barefoot, calm, and terrifying.
- Rabbit, the dwarf Fighter: Axe, shield, and a vocabulary made mostly of grunts.
- Arthur, the human Sea Wolf: Pirate-turned-mercenary, with a past as stormy as the sea that spat him out.

The first day on the trail was uneventful. The party kept a steady pace until dusk. They discovered a gorgeous grotto not far from the main road and hunkered down for the night.

Day Two: The Spiders' Trap

By the second day, the path through Mirkwood was a half-flooded strip of mud and bramble, with twisted roots that reached for their ankles. The air hung heavy and wet. Aleric muttered prayers under his breath. While each step closer to Grimwild only made him quieter, until all that remained was the sound of boots sloshing and the forest breathing around them.

That's when the webs began. At first, just tattered strands stretched between trees, barely visible in the dim light of Merlin's torch. Then thicker. Rope-thick silk, glistening wetly. Rabbit muttered something about turning back, but Aleric insisted they press on. The cargo, he said, was worth the risk.

They didn't make it fifty paces further before the spiders attacked.

The Spider Horde

They came from above, from below, from every shadow too dark to see through. Dozens of them some the size of dogs, others no bigger than a fist, all teeth, legs, and hunger.

- Merlin hurled his spells wildly, blasts of flickering flame barely keeping the swarm at bay.
- Keldar fired until his pistol clicked dry, smashing the nearest spider with the butt of the gun when powder ran low.
- Naruto fought with terrifying calm, his hands crushing carapaces with each blow, webs tangling around his arms.
- Rabbit stood like a boulder in the road, axe rising and falling, splitting bodies and sending legs flying.
- Arthur fought like a man possessed his cutlass cutting paths through the swarm with brutal efficiency.

The fight dragged on until the forest floor was carpeted with twitching spider corpses, their black ichor seeping into the mud. They stood, breathing hard, every torch guttering low. Keldar in a

bewildering move picked up a small injured spider. He set its broken leg, bound it, and then placed it in his backpack.

And that's when they saw the wagons.

The Wreckage

The ruined caravan was barely visible through the mist and gore. Shattered wagons, ripped-open crates, and horses flayed to the bone. The spiders had left nothing untouched.

The party rummaged through the wagon's belongings and pillaged the dead. Keldar found two silver goblets. Merlin discovered an ancient scroll. Naruto found spices and a dagger. Rabbit discovered a cursed rusty sword but refused to touch it and left it where it lay. As they searched, Arthur's boot kicked aside a broken chest and there it was.

The Mask.

It was silver with tarnished tentacles and in its center, it formed into a leering grin that seemed to shift when no one was looking directly at it. Its surface was slick, almost like skin left too long in seawater.

Without a word before anyone could even shout, Arthur bent down and placed the mask on his face.

It fused to his skin instantly. He staggered, clutching his head, but the mask stayed put. That's when the whispers began: sibilant, ancient, half-drowned voices only Arthur could hear.

Aleric's Change

Even after the mask incident, the group's attention had shifted to Aleric. He'd been acting off since they set foot in Mirkwood, but now it was worse. His hands trembled not from fear, but with something like hunger. His prayers didn't sound like prayers anymore they sounded like conversations.

It was Narto who noticed first: Aleric's skin taking on a sickly pale hue.

Later, around the campfire, Arthur and Narto quietly compared notes. Both men had seen possession before and both knew that whatever Aleric carried inside him wanted something. Maybe from the mask. Maybe from Grimwild. Maybe them.

Into the Dark

Grimwild lay only a day ahead but now the road was haunted by more than just the forest.

- Arthur wore a mask that whispered to him constantly.
- Aleric was possessed by something no one could name.
- And Mirkwood itself felt more alive the closer they got to Grimwild.

With low-burning torches, bloodstained boots, and curses muttered under their breath, the party pressed on into the deep dark.

Day Three: The Hunters Return

The dawn of the third day in Mirkwood broke weak and grey, mist curling low around the party's boots as they followed the crumbling path toward Grimwild. Aleric was worse now. Pale, sweating, eyes flicking toward shadows only he could see. The mask whispered constantly to Arthur, but he tried to ignore it.

Then the chittering started again.

At first, it was soft branches creaking leaves rustling. But as the sun climbed, it became clear: something was following them. Tracking them.

That something was two massive spiders easily the size of draft horses moving through the trees, eyes glittering with unnatural intelligence. And they were hunting for one thing: the baby spider Keldar had taken after the battle with the horde.

The Battle

The first spider a male, sleek and fast plunged directly onto the trail, cutting off their path forward. The second a larger female, bulkier and scarred crawled from the underbrush behind them, flanking the party.

- Keldar cursed aloud, pulling the struggling baby spider from his pack and placing it on the ground. Its frantic hissing only drew the adults' fury. He then blew a chunk out of the rushing male's eyes.

- Rabbit charged the male, axe swinging wide and brutal, driving the wounded creature back in a storm of blows.

- Merlin unleashed a magic missile, searing the female's front legs and driving her into the trees.

- Naruto vaulted a fallen log and leaped off landing a precise kick to the male's eyes, cracking its carapace.

- Arthur stood oddly still, the mask whispering to him.

The male spider died screaming under Rabbit's axe, its body collapsing into the mud. The female, seeing her mate slain, grabbed the baby spider in her mandibles and fled into the forest, her massive body disappearing into the mist.

Aftermath

The battle left the group battered but breathing, and the forest eerily quiet again. But they knew the peace wouldn't last.

- The spiders would be back
- Aleric's condition was deteriorating rapidly. His skin had begun to take on a gray hue.
- Arthur's mask whispered constantly.

With Grimwild finally close enough to smell wood burning in the air the party pressed on.

To be continued