

The Watch Campaign

Session 22

15 June 2015

26 Deepwinter 1166

Arnlaw is the duke of Urridge. Technically we should declare ourselves and our mission to him, so that he can offer support. Flay thinks that they should definitely do that, but will of course defer to Amatlo's judgment. He sharpens his pencil in expectation of any further breeches in protocol.

It's eleven miles from here to Gellenden. About 4-5 hours in this snowy weather. We stop here for lunch and then press on. Nerull notices that down in a dip just off the road is a finely saddled horse... it's been left. It's not tethered. We stop and look around. We can't see anything but the aspect of the land seems perfect for an ambush - we're halfway down a gentle hill that is lightly wooded. It's the southern edge of the King's Wood.

Nerull sneaks down toward the horse. Thinks it came there from further up the hill. Nerull tries to lead it back to the rest of the party, which she does successfully. Flay frisks the horse. It has a military saddle, a military blanket with a symbol on it - Flay recognises it as the royal coat of arms. The queen's personal seal. This is reserved for the royal household only. Flay turns white, and orders Adam to do some tracking. Look in saddle bags: trail rations, water, spare clothing. It's probably one of the Queen's guard's horses.

The tracks go on for 40-50 yards and then travel back onto the road. There are a fair amount of tracks on the road. Something evidently happened to the rider further along the road, and the horse travelled down this way alone. A quarter of a mile up the road we turn the bend and are faced with a scene of carnage.

There's a wagon and a royal carriage, 1-2 dozen bodies strewn across the road, including the drivers. Four horses have been slain: they seem to have been ripped them to shreds. It's a proper mess. Over a dozen royal guards dead. Flay says that there could also have been two ladies in waiting. We notice that the corpses are covered in a sticky black substance. Adam has found the tracks of a quadruped, 20 feet in length, forked tail. When it left it dragged the bodies of two of the horses beside it. Not a dragon. Hooved feet. There may have been a single person with it, because we also find the tracks of a person heading off to the north in the same direction as the creature - either with it, or after it.

Amatlo thinks that this probably happened first thing this morning. It is now mid-afternoon. We are about half-way to the village of Moorcot (it's four miles away). Flay and Nerull look through luggage and provisions. The royal carriage's luggage has been stolen. Was there anyone else here? Was the Queen here?

Someone of import must have been in the carriage. Flay doesn't think it could have been the Queen herself, but could be another member of her family. In the royal court there are only three women of direct importance Queen Tulia, her sister Princess Jekkie, and Lady Branwen. If not them, then the watch are looking at wives of important figures? Most of the royal court

are too young to be married. Only the queen, lord chamberlain, lord magistrate or lord wizard would travel under that sigil. Flay is getting progressively more worried.

Yorgill is commanded to ride off to Moorcot (30 minutes away at speed) taking the royal horse. He is to find the squire and summon help. Meanwhile, Adam follows the beast with Flay as his minder. The rest stay around the wagons and the rest of the bodies. Yorgill gets about 500 yards before falling off his horse and having to come back for another one...

Adam tracks the beast. The black ichor mixed in with the blood from the horses makes it easy to track. By the time the tracks go down into a gully Nerull has caught up with Adam and Flay to offer her help. The trio see a cave mouth. Flay stays here while Adam nips back to get Caius so he can cast *invisibility* on Nerull before she enters. Once this is done, Nerull casts the *message* spell and heads inside.

The stench of death is overwhelming to Nerull. There's three dead horses in the entrance way, and a passage going off to the left. She casts light under her cloak and sneaks in. About 70 feet in, she starts to hear the crunching sound. She looks up and sees a ledge about 12 feet high. The noise is coming from over the ledge. Nerull climbs up and peers over.

There's a chamber about 30 feet in diameter. As she shines her light in, four heads on slender necks turn to look at her. A fifth head is eating a horse. It's a hydra! Nerull quickly descends. She can't find where the foot hold is. She panics. She throws her light away. The hydra lumbers toward her. Nerull whispers "run" to the others. The hydra lumbers past Nerull and off toward daylight. With it gone Nerull begins to search the nest; in doing so she discovers a second passageway leading out of the chamber. There is a dim glow of light coming from within.

Outside, Caius, Adam and Flay prepare to lead the hydra back to the rest of the party. Flay hopes that together the whole group can take it out. They have to try: they can't leave this creature roaming the wilderness.

Inside the cave, Nerull sees a figure come out of the passageway holding a lantern: "Doris! Doris! Come back, what are you doing?" The figure is calling the hydra back. But the hydra isn't listening.

Outside, 'Doris' sees Flay who starts to run away. Adam shoots at the hydra with an arrow. He goes for one of the heads, and hits it. It charges Flay, and gets within twenty feet of him before the half-orc retreats. They all flee... run! run!

In the cave, the guy with the lantern dowses his lantern and start looking around. Nerull just sits there in the dark. Listening. Nerull conjures an unseen servant with the intention of giving it a pebble with light on, to carry away from her.

Flay is pacing himself to stay about 30 feet ahead of the hydra in order to keep Doris interested. Caius is going to run full pelt back to camp and warn everyone. Adam is trying to get the range to shoot another arrow at it. Eventually the hydra gives up and moves to return. Flay stops and yells at it, and throws a dagger at the beast. It still runs away. Now in the chase is reversed in a Benny Hill-esque fashion with Flay yelling and Adam firing arrows.

"Why don't you come out and talk about this?" says the figure in the darkness... Nerull is compelled to reveal herself and answer all of the bad guy's questions. He says that Doris is his pet. He says that he has everything he wants. He tells Nerull to go away and never come back. Nerull thinks this is a very good idea. He asks: "Who was the rich person in the coach?". "Oh, she ran away - I wasn't interested in that."

The hydra returns to the cave mouth. It has been regenerating its wounds and is now no longer damaged. Nerull emerges from the cave, and is insistent that we should leave. Flay is suspicious of Nerull's behaviour. He orders Adam to remain and takes Nerull back to the others.

Meanwhile, Yorgill has reached Moorcot. There's a moat and palisade here. Yorgill is let through and directed to the sheriff's house. There's no knight here. A woman opens the door, and calls for a middle aged bloke: the sheriff Kerrinwell. He summons "the boys", and after half an hour he gets his horse out, and with another half a dozen men they head off down the road.

Amatlo and the rest of the party have been sorting out all the dead bodies. They are put on the wagon covered them up. Eventually the sheriff and Yorgill arrive. Amatlo, Flay and the sheriff talk. They determine to go up there and take out the hydra and the wizard, and potentially "rescue" the missing passenger. Nerull says that she escaped. "Nerull," says Flay, "I think it's time to entertain the possibility that the evil mass murderer may have been lying to you."

Caius and Nerull seem to recall that hydra regenerate at a fast rate. So you need to keep up the damage, or sever the heads one at a time and cauterize the stump. No-one is thrilled to be facing this fight.

We head up there, burning torches in hand...