

THE BANDITS OF BREE

© Joe Mandala, 2002

The Bandits of Bree

Written by Joe Mandala, 2002

Introduction

In the years leading up to the War of the Ring, all the roads of northwest Middle-earth became less safe. The old Dwarven road which led through Mirkwood was nearly impassable. The passes through the Misty Mountains were closed. Even roads that were once considered safe were becoming dangerous. The Greenway, the old North Road, is no exception. As traffic from the south (particularly from Dunland) increased, so too did the opportunity for thieving gain. Bandits began prowling this once-safe (though little-traveled) highway, and their numbers increased yearly. The Rangers did their level best to keep the way safe, but their concern was centered farther north, around Bree and the Shire. Though many of the immigrants coming north were genuine refugees, some were spies of Saruman and agents of other corrupted rulers. Some turned aside from the way and preyed upon their own people.

The Story

Maxen Brudda had come north from Dunland looking for a suitable place to move his family. War was gathering in his homeland, and he wished to remove from there to a safer home. Leaving his family in the care of relatives, he journeyed toward Breeland. On his way north, he came across the remnants of a waylaid family who had taken the same road earlier, only to be set upon by bandits. The man was dead, cruelly slain and left for the animals. All belongings of worth had been taken, as had (presumably) the family of the man. Maxen was torn between the fear of going back to Dunland to stay with his family through the war that was coming, and the fear of bringing them north through the threat of vicious bandits. He decided to travel to Bree and enlist what help he could to free the road of this threat. Bree was less than two days' travel, after all, and the people of that town could just as easily be threatened.

When he arrived in Bree, he found little interest in his proposal to find and bring the bandits to justice. The only help he could find was at the Prancing Pony. A group of inexperienced local adventurers offered their help, and Maxen took it. As they departed Bree they were stopped by two tall armed men. Feredir the Ranger and Thorlag, a loremaster who was not soft, warned the group to turn back – that this was a danger beyond their abilities. Undaunted, the group threatened to go on alone. The ranger relented, and the group of six prepared to travel south to exact what justice they could.

Kharu is an Easterling who has come west to take what he can and to prey on the weak and undefended refugees from Dunland. Nobody knows why he has come this far, and he is not one to talk of his past. With his loyal crew of 4 soldiers, he has recruited what local ruffians and bandits he could and built a sizeable band of outlaws – 14 in all. Kharu is a cruel and merciless man, long in the employ of evil leaders. He is currently reporting to a mysterious sorcerer whose name he does not know. The sorcerer lives somewhere in the wilderness of Cardolan, but even Kharu is unsure of where. Nearly a week ago, his bandits attacked a family traveling from Dunland to Bree. They killed the husband, took everything of value, and have enslaved the wife and three children. Kharu is pleased that he now has someone to cook and clean for his men. He treats his captives roughly, and has claimed the woman as his own, against her will.

Always looking for the easiest money he can find, Bert Cowleaf has fallen in a bit over his head. He was recruited earlier in the year (after his trip north to Fornost) by a mysterious armed man. He was hired to act as a go-between purchasing supplies in Bree, and delivering them to predetermined spots in the countryside. There was always a bag of money waiting, and Bert did not ask questions. He suspects that his benefactor is not entirely honest, but does not know his true nature. While Bert is a cowardly and low man, he is not a murderer and does not know that he has fallen in with men who would murder for very little cause.

The PCs must discover where the bandits are, and stop their depredations before more innocents suffer.

Enemies

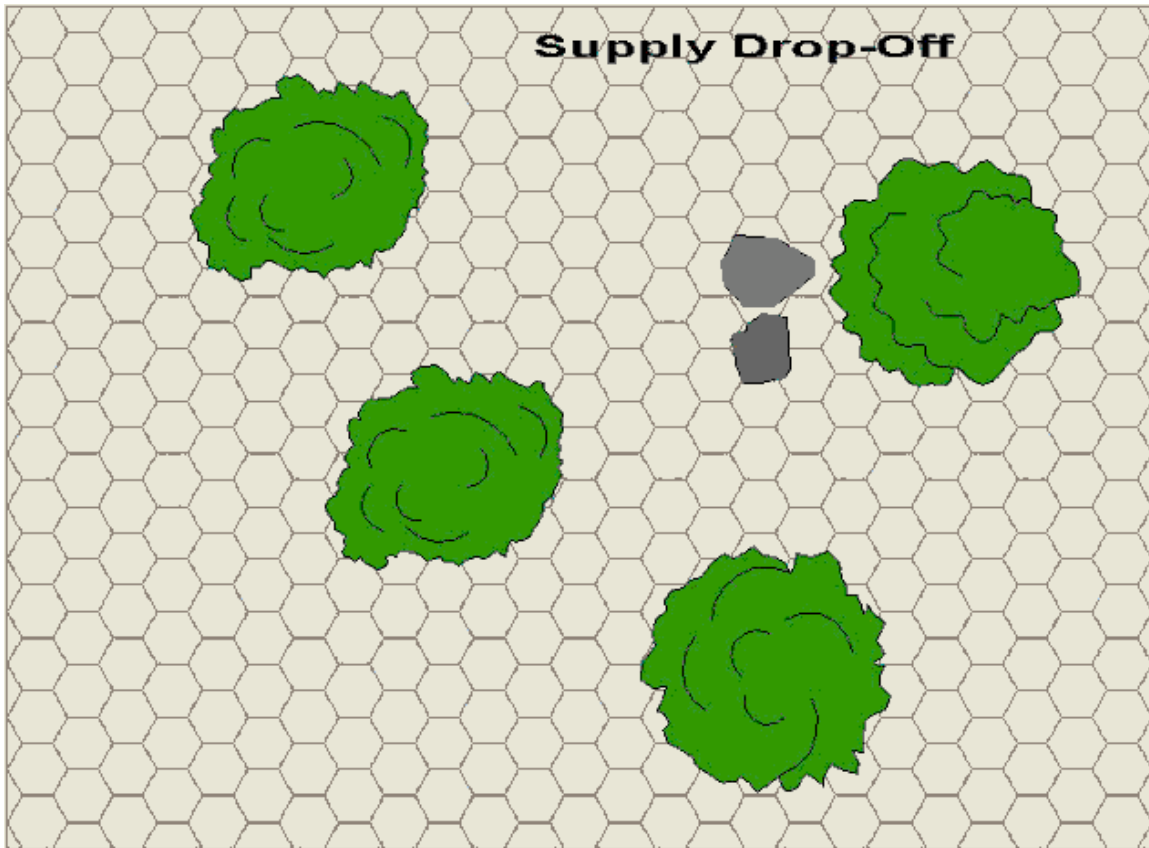
The primary enemy of the group is **Kharu** and his bandits. The bandits are holed up in the ruins of an old castle some 3 days south of Bree. They are a mile or more from the Greenway, but have easy enough access to the road through the hilly countryside. Kharu is an accomplished warrior, as are the four men he brought with him into Eriador. The remainder of the bandits are local ruffians, and none of them are very exceptional in anything except their murderous habits.

Bert might be considered an enemy, but he will not fight the PCs unless he has no choice. He is unaware that the man he sells supplies to is a killer. If confronted, he will tell them all he knows, which is not a lot.

Another enemy of the PCs is time. If they take too long in catching up to and dealing with the bandits, another attack will take place. This time several will die, and things will quickly worsen from then on as the bandits become even bolder. Eventually they may even attack towards Bree (though by then the Rangers should be dealing with the issue in full force).

The Adventure

As the newly formed group assesses its options, a hint should be dropped that the bandits must be getting their supplies somewhere. If any of the players picks up on this, and decides to ask around in Bree, have them make an Inquire roll with a TN of 7. It should be relatively easy to find out that Bert has been making large provisions purchases, and paying in silver coin. If confronted, Bert will not reveal his purposes unless threatened (Intimidate TN 6) or told about the possibility that the ones he is purchasing for are the same ones that have been ravaging the refugees. If this happens, he will reveal that he has a drop-off to make that very night at a spot a few hours south of town (by horse). The PCs should then formulate a plan to follow or attack the pickup men. These pickup men are **two** of the local bandits with mules to carry the supplies (Bert delivers them in a small wagon). Remember that night-time activities such as fighting incur a -5 penalty.



Local Ruffian

Attributes

Bearing 4 (+0), Nimbleness 8 (+1), Perception 6 (+0), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 6 (0).

Reactions

Stamina +2, Swiftiness +1, Willpower +0, Wisdom +0

Skills

A.Cmbt:Blades(s.sword) +5, R.Cmbt:Bows(s.bow) +5, Observe (spot) +5, Run +4

Special Abilities

Leather armor (2), small shield (+3 parry)

Health: 10

As you await the arrival of the pickup men, you hear the sounds of the night around you. It is a very dark night – overcast with little moonlight. You soon hear the soft clink of harness and the plodding of hooves. They are approaching, and you can hear muffled voices, speaking about the trip back to the “fort” and the obstinacy of mules. The sounds suddenly become louder as at least two men approach.

The men will quite possibly give themselves up if they think that they are far outnumbered. If, however, the group has decided to follow them, then have the bandits make an Observe (hear) test with a TN of 8 (with a skill of 0) before they leave with the goods. If the PCs have horses with them, decrease the TN by 2. Have them make the test again with a TN of 10 just before dawn. The bandits will not stop until nearly noon the next day, when they will camp off the Greenway in as secluded a place as they can find.

They will set out again after sleeping two two-hour shifts (one apiece), and will stop again the following morning (around sunup) for another similar rest. Have them make another Observe (hear) test with a TN of 10 at this point. This close to their base, they will likely flee if they discover they are being followed. They are on horseback – any PCs that chase them on horseback need to make three consecutive Ride tests with TNs 10, 8, and 6. If they all succeed, the bandits will be caught. If any do not, the bandits will get away. Barring a chase, they should arrive at the bandit encampment near sundown that night (just shy of two days' travel total). At the end of the march, have each PC (except Feredir) make two consecutive stamina rolls against a TN of 10. Two days of nearly constant travel will force them to get a full night's sleep before any lost exhaustion is recovered.

The weather clears as you travel south into old Cardolan. Following the bandits is rather boring, especially as the need for silence precludes any conversation. The terrain becomes hillier as you travel south, the trees giving way to the high chalk downs of the eastern Tyrn Gorthad. The bandits still seem completely unaware of your presence. [If the PCs have arrived unnoticed] – The bandit camp sits atop a small hill. There is a small ruined manor there, and there seem to be several fires. The encampment is busy with men preparing for night, and you can hear sounds drifting to you occasionally.



There are several tents scattered over the hilltop. The Easterlings (including Kharu) have the southeast corner of the hill to themselves. Kharu has his own tent, while the four warriors share two. Their horses are picketed near their tents in a small copse of trees. The remaining horses (5) are kept in the ruined building. The main encampment includes a large communal tent that is

used for dining, meetings, etc. It also boasts four smaller tents, two of which are used for storage. None of the “locals” share a tent. The captives are kept in the small tent inside the ruined building (many nights the woman is in Kharu’s tent). There are always two sentries at night. They normally hang around the fire at the main encampment, periodically making random forays around the camp.

There are several ways that the PCs can approach the situation. Waiting until nightfall and covertly sneaking into camp to slay the unwary bandits in their sleep is one option. Another is to try to take out the sentries, then to withdraw. If they can figure out where Kharu’s tent is and take him, things might be a bit less tricky the next day. If there is a fight at any time, and Kharu thinks that he is losing, he will flee to the east with as many of his warriors from home as he can.

Local Ruffian (7-9)

Attributes

Bearing 4 (+0), Nimbleness 8 (+1), Perception 6 (+0), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 6 (0).

Reactions

Stamina +2, Swiftiness +1, Willpower +0, Wisdom +0

Skills

A.Cmbt:Blades(s.sword) +5, R.Cmbt:Bows(s.bow) +5, Observe (spot) +5, Run +4

Special Abilities

Leather armor (2), small shield (+3 parry)

Health: 10

Easterling Warrior (4)

Attributes

Bearing 6 (+0), Nimbleness 10 (+2), Perception 8 (+1), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 7 (0).

Reactions

Stamina +2, Swiftiness +2, Willpower +0, Wisdom +1

Skills

Ride (horse) +10, A.Cmbt:Blade(shortsword) +8, R.Cmbt:Bows(shortbow) +8, Observe(spot) +7

Special Abilities

Can mount a horse as a single action. Chain armor (5), small shield (+3 parry)

Health: 11

Kharu

Attributes

Bearing 10 (+2), Nimbleness 12 (+3), Perception 10 (+2), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 9 (+1), Wits 8 (+1).

Reactions

Stamina +4, Swiftiness +4, Willpower +2, Wisdom +2

Skills

Ride (horse) +14, A.Cmbt:Blade(shortsword) +11, R.Cmbt:Bows(shortbow) +10, Observe(spot) +9

Special Abilities

Can mount a horse as a single action. Chain armor (6), small shield (+4 parry)

Health: 13

After the conclusion of the final battle and Kharu’s escape (which should be arranged, if at all possible), the group will need to regroup and investigate the camp. There isn’t much in the way of valuables in the general encampment (around 25 silver pennies in coin is all). There are a lot of supplies (food, equipment, etc) in the storage tents. In Kharu’s tent they will find quite a lot of money (the equivalent of 250 silver pennies in various coinages and mints), and some jewelry

and valuables (nearly 100 silver pennies in worth). They will find several cryptic dispatches from someone who signs with a “C” instructing Kharu where and when to position his men on certain dates. The seemingly newest dispatch speaks of Breeland, and includes rough plans on terrorizing the outlying farms of the region. The dispatches are written in Westron, but they are filled with code words for names and places. Thorlag is very interested in them, and will take them to bring back to Rivendell to be studied. Also in Kharu’s tent are various other small valuables (statues, artwork, etc) that might bring 50 silver pennies or so in Bree (more elsewhere). Specific items of note are:

1. A golden pendant – this pendant is imbued with magic, and gives the wearer +1 to attempts to influence others (persuade, debate, etc). It is Elvish in origin.
2. A jade statuette – this small (3”) sculpture is made in the likeness of a hawk, and is quite valuable (20 silver pennies) for its artwork alone. One who carries this statuette receives a +1 bonus to Observe (spot) tests.
3. A copper dagger – this is a ritual dagger carried by Dunlending shamans (Maxen will recognize it). It allows a spell caster to automatically succeed on a spell-casting stamina test once per day.
4. A battleaxe – this is a weapon of obvious Dunlending make that delivers +1 damage due to its superior construction.
5. A small wooden shield – this shield carries the emblem of a boar, painted in black on a red background. This is a well-made shield, and provides a +4 to parry instead of the normal +3 for small shields.
6. Wooden idol – this small carved statuette of a raven allows a spell caster to use any animal spell as if he had the *Increased Effect* spell ability. It is, however, of evil make. Each time the bearer casts an animal spell, he must make a corruption check. The bearer will feel the taint of the evil when he casts his first spell using it (casters of animal magic will feel drawn to it).

Conclusion

After defeating the bandits, Maxen will begin making plans to return to Dunland to fetch his family. Feredit promises to have this area watched more closely, and will soon leave to report the heightened danger of the bandits in the area to the other Breeland Rangers. Thorlag will depart for Rivendell as quickly as he can with Kharu’s dispatches. The others will return to Bree with the freed captives. Tom will compose a song (of course), and Rory and Harry will enjoy telling their stories. Harry will find his welcome home cold, though, as his father is quickly losing patience with him over these jaunts. His mother is distraught, and will worry over him as soon as he returns. Willie will “tut-tut” at Rory continuously, and will (again) put him right back to work. Willie will also arrange for the freed captives to be taken in by a local Dunlending family. Their grief at the loss of their father and husband will be writ large on their faces, and will dampen any feelings of celebration. Support for them will come from all quarters. Bert, in his shame, has left Breeland, and is nowhere to be found. The three adventurers from Bree can’t help but wish there would be a happier ending, and wonder if this is always the way of the outside world.

FIN