

OVER THE NEXT HILL

THE MEDIEVAL LORD'S MANOR



WRITING	PHILL HARMON
COLOR ART	INDI MARTIN
CARTOGRAPHY	MIK HOLMES
EDITING	MIKE MYLER
LAYOUT	FRANK MICHENZI

OVER THE NEXT HILL FOCUSES ON

small settlements that can be dropped into a campaign with minimal preparation. The following pages present several detailed NPCs, points of interest, and loose plot hooks that can be developed during play. This installment of the series details the Manor of Baron Alexander

Ouer Middleton.

Overview

In 1066 when the Duke of Normandy became the King of England, he gave the knights who supported him land in return. Yet this land was not without obligations; these knights were required to pay the king tributes, thus setting up the feudal system. The Barony of Alexander Ouer Middleton is one such fiefdom, ostensibly autonomous yet owing its creation and existence to a reigning regent. The Baron owes his wealth to his past deeds, and his future to his regent's favor--or perhaps the assistance of some intrepid adventurers.

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Geography

Baron Middleton's huge tracts of land have been divided into parcels occupied by villeins (feudal tenants and subjects who pay dues and provide services in return for land to live on and the Baron's protection; **commoners**). Surrounding the Baron's ceded land should be at least one major highway and one major waterway. The latter provides power for the mill, which grinds grain and provides trade with nearby major settlements. The highway likewise provides a road on which to drive livestock and otherwise support the community. Territory around the manor can be verdant and forested or barren and rocky, depending on the game's mood and theme, but it's best if the areas bordering Baron Middleton's lands are untamed and potentially dangerous, providing a platform for adventuring opportunities.

Baron Alexander Ouer Middleton

A full two decades ago Alexander inherited his father's sword and fealty to the royal crown, and five years later a great battle was fought and he formally inherited his father's title. His lands are troubled on all sides by hungry beasts, pestilence, and even creatures of legend, all while it is attacked from within by gluttony, laziness, and cowardice. The Baron himself is aging, slightly portly but still surprisingly agile, and has a deep rumbling laugh. He fastidiously polishes and shines his hand-me-down rapier and breastplate--one of the few tasks which he has never entrusted to an underling.



BARON ALEXANDER OUER MIDDLETON

MEDIUM HUMAN, LAWFUL NEUTRAL

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 52 (8d8+16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +4 Wis +2

Skills Animal Handling +3, History +2, Intimidation +5, Perception +3, Persuasion +5

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Baron attacks twice.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage.

Leadership (1/Short Rest). The Baron uses his action to compose himself and fully assume the regal authority of his title. For 1 minute, once each round when the Baron sees a friendly creature within 30 feet of him make an attack roll or saving throw, he can utter a special command or warning. As long as the creature can hear and understand the Baron, it adds a d4 to its roll.

REACTIONS

Parry. The Baron adds 2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit. To do so, the Baron must see the attacker and be holding a melee weapon.

The Reeve

Part bailiff, part manager, part boss, and part accountant, the reeve was both elected by the villeins and appointed by the Baron. As such, she or he needed to toe a fine line between pleasing their lord and accommodating serfs. The Reeve was historically left in charge when the Baron was summering in better weather or otherwise not residing in the manor, and he or she needed to run a tight ship ensuring profitable conditions and keeping accurate ledgers. They even had the right to determine whose herd would

graze first, thereby adding value to any individual villein's holdings. Though typically drawn from the common class, the Reeve needed to be more intelligent, knowledgeable, and persuasive to rise to his or her position and remain there.

For lower tiers of play the Reeve should be a gatekeeper between the party and the Baron. He or she is fussy, particular, gruff, and busy, assigning mundane tasks to the PCs so they may prove their legitimacy and meet the Baron. The Reeve can be any standard humanoid race, but halflings are recommended for their attention to detail, deceptively diminutive stature, bravery, and resilience. GMs that choose a different race should add the new racial traits and remove all of the Reeve's current traits.

THE REEVE

SMALL HUMANOID (LIGHTFOOT HALFLING), NEUTRAL

Armor Class 12 (leather)

Hit Points 6 (1d8+2)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +4

Skills Animal Handling +4, Insight +4, Nature +5, Persuasion +6, Survival +4

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Halfling, one language spoken by a majority of the villeins

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Brave. The Reeve has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Lucky. When the Reeve rolls a 1 on the d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, they can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Halfling Nimbleness. The Reeve can move through the space of any creature that Medium or larger.

Naturally Stealthy. The Reeve can attempt to hide even when they are obscured only by a creature that is Medium or larger.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4+1) piercing damage.

Significant Areas

The following areas are likely to feature prominently in the adventurers' interactions with the Baron but the GM should also include any locations they need to encourage the party's roleplaying (like an on-site blacksmith or other crafting expert).

1. The Manor House

Baron Middleton's home is a two story stone building with brightly painted wooden doors and window shutters. The interior is well-appointed with heavy wooden rustic furniture in cheerful, countryside colors. The first floor contains a large den with windows along two walls; these are always open in the daytime to let in natural light and fresh air. Servants' quarters border the kitchen, from which the smell of fresh-baked bread and pies wafts. A wash-room, mud room, and two guest bedrooms make up the remainder of the first floor. Upstairs is the Baron and his family's bedrooms as well as an oak-paneled library featuring mostly common and easily found books. Baron Middleton typically retires to this library in the evenings for a glass of wine and a pipe of the best tobacco his lands can produce.

2. The Chapel

This small, white painted, single room affair is filled with benches facing a simple altar. The GM can choose which local deity is most appropriate for their setting, but it should be one which focuses on nature or agriculture. An **acolyte** lives in one of the servants' quarters in the manor house, providing weekly services and maintaining the chapel. They have been pressing the Baron to build an addition to the chapel in which they can reside, and is nearing success.

3. The Guard House

Sir Thrush (a **knight**) resides here with 3 **guards**. They are meant to provide security for the Baron's land and act as a sort of police force for its residents (should the need arise). However in recent years they've grown fat on the backs of the villeins' work and

consider themselves too good to consort with such common folk, spending most of their days drinking and gambling. The Baron has grown increasingly frustrated with them, but as Sir Thrush fought by his side long ago, their bond (plus the lack of any suitable replacement) has kept him from pressing the issue. The knight and his guards cannot be counted on to aid the PCs in any task unless they succeed on a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check (for the guards) or DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check (for the knight), and even then the knight and his guards flee at the first sign of trouble.

4. The Mill

This structure mills whole grain (such as wheat or dried corn) into finer granules, even as far down as flour. These milled grains are easily stored and useful in cooking, making the function of the mill essential to medieval life. A miller lives in and runs the mill, which uses the energy of the river to drive a gear system grinding two massive stone wheels together. The miller is responsible for running the mill, as well as maintenance and upkeep on the structure and device. Next to the mill is a simple dock where boats headed for the town downstream pick up the milled grain. A few years ago to avoid a conflict with a nearby tribe of savages the Baron agreed to raise one of their misfits, assigning the old miller to take care of the boy. Last year the experienced elder passed away, leaving his apprentice to take over. The miller can be any standard humanoid race, but half-orcs are recommended for their brawn and toughness, their physical traits making them well-suited to contrast with their relative inexperience. Should there be a need to lure the PCs out into the wilderness, the miller can easily be that link (whether over wavering loyalty between the orc tribe and the Baron, or involvement with the bandits in the Wagon Trail plot hook). GMs that choose a different race should add the new racial traits and remove all of the miller's current traits.



MILLER

MEDIUM HUMANOID (HALF-ORC), NEUTRAL

Armor Class 11 (leather)

Hit Points 11 (2d8+2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2, Investigation +3, Nature +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Relentless Endurance (1/Long Rest). When the miller is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, they can drop to 1 hit point instead.

Savage Attacks. When the miller scores a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, they can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

ACTIONS

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6+2) bludgeoning damage.

Light Hammer. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) bludgeoning damage.

5. Farmsteads

The vast majority of the Baron's holdings are divided into farmsteads worked by villeins. Though crops are rotated seasonally, the Middleton Barony primarily produces wheat or corn. Several plots also produce grapes and wine, and each season one or two plant tobacco. Every farmstead has one simple house in which the villein and their family live (most are quite large as children are necessary to help with the farm work). Each farmstead has a barn for livestock, which vary from chickens and other fowl to cows, sheep, and pigs, as well as a small vegetable and herb garden

from which the villein and their family feed themselves. One farmstead houses a small winery, another has a butcher and tanner who prepare meat from the farm animals, and one does the drying, chopping, and then storing of tobacco.

Rumors and Plot Hooks

- **Call to Arms.** War is brewing on the horizon and the Baron is expected to pledge his help yet again. For lower tiers of play this could simply be a request from the king to defend the borders from a roving tribe of **orcs**, but at higher tiers attach the PCs to a large and well-equipped militia that are outnumbered by an army of epic proportions.
- **Enemy Without.** The villeins on the outskirts of the Baron's lands have reported attacks on their crops or livestock. For lower tiers of play these can be perpetrated by something as simple as a pack of **wolves** or a **swarm of rats** (led by a **giant rat**) which have moved into the surrounding forest or caves. For higher tiers of play either use more enemies, such as a large tribe of **goblins** or **orcs**, or more difficult enemies such as shrewd **giant apes** or even a **green dragon** with a taste for sheep.
- **Enemy Within.** Someone within the Baron's organization has designs on taking it over. At the lowest adventuring levels this could simply be Sir Thrush (who feels he and his family should have been ceded the land). At higher levels replace the acolyte who runs the

chapel with a cult fanatic and have him slowly poisoning the minds of the villeins against the Baron. With some investigation and evidence gathering the PCs must prove the **cult fanatic** is responsible, then make a compelling case to the Baron or the Reeve. At the highest tiers of play this cult fanatic should be part of a larger conspiracy which spans neighboring baronies and perhaps the whole kingdom, orchestrated by one or more truly evil creatures notorious for controlling the minds of others.

- **Lost Boys.** The Baron's offspring have gone off to a nearby cave, ruin, dungeon, or similar locale in search of adventure, glory, or treasure--and have not returned. This plot hook requires preparation beyond the scope of this article but allows the GM to start a dungeon crawl from the Baron's Manor instead of the typical village pub. Baron Middleton is willing to pay handsomely for their safe return and will of course entrust the party with more tasks should they succeed.
- **Wagon Trail.** Grain is transported to the mill to be ground and sent downriver at regular intervals, and heads of cattle or other animals are driven down the main road. Recently these shipments have fallen prey to a group of **bandits**. The PCs should escort the next shipment and insure its safety. At higher tiers of play the robbers are more experienced (**bandit captains**), more numerous, well-organized, and part of a larger and growing threat to trade in the region. 🐉

