

• The Shadow • over Darkbank



This scenario is set on a canal in the Midlands. For further background, Keepers should refer in particular to the sections on *Canals* and *Mummerset* earlier in the book.

Introduction

Our intrepid investigators are taking a short holiday away from the daily grind of grappling with the Like of Which Man was Never Meant to Know. They have retired to the Golden Lion, a small country hotel on the Staffordshire-Shropshire border. All is peace and tranquility. They arrive on Sunday evening, perhaps spend Monday quietly fishing, and are enjoying a pleasant salad in the lounge of the hotel on Tuesday lunchtime when they overhear an argument in the nearby public bar.

It isn't easy for the investigators to make out what is going on, partly because of the heavy, wooden door in the way, and partly because of the thick Midlands accents of many of the participants. However, the general flow of the discussion seems to be that someone who sounds reasonably well-bred is trying to hire some men to do something, and they - local working men by their rough language - are adamant that no amount of money will get them to do the job. After some ten or fifteen minutes of heated discussion, the noise comes to an abrupt halt and a gentleman comes through into the lounge.

The visitor looks somewhat harrassed, and kindly investigators will no doubt offer him a drink and ask to share his troubles. However, if they feel it impolite to butt in, the stranger soon makes it clear that he is eager

to talk. He is Gregory Longthorpe, an engineer for the London, Western & Welsh Railway Company (this fixes the date of the adventure as pre-1923, but Keepers could easily date it later by the excuse that none of the 'Big Four' wanted the Cuthdon branch line). He has been attempting to hire some local men and has met with conspicuous lack of success.

Longthorpe's problem is simple. The LWR owns the local canal system, and there has been a rockfall in Darkbank Tunnel which, by ill fortune, sunk a passing narrow boat and blocked the canal. Longthorpe was trying to hire a bunch of local quarrymen to clear the blockage, but they have come out with some superstitious twaddle about the tunnel being haunted and are not interested.

"It's not as if there's anything difficult involved, at least not yet. All I need to do at the moment is get to the blockage and take a few measurements to find out how difficult it will be to clear. It may be quite a simple job. I went in yesterday to fit a few instruments, but I couldn't manage much with only one pair of hands. Well, we can't afford many staff these days, so I was hoping to hire a few local men to help. Unfortunately, they seem somewhat reluctant. I say, I don't suppose you chaps would mind helping out, would you? I mean, I wouldn't insult you by offering you what I'd pay those ruffians, but you might find it interesting and it would get me out of a most awful hole."

How can the investigators refuse? Of course, they may ask Longthorpe why the locals are so scared of the tunnel, but he just says that the ordinary folk neither like nor

trust canals and canal folk, and have all sorts of stupid superstitions about them. The Keeper should use Longthorpe to plant the idea of boat people as a 'race apart' in the minds of the investigators.

Assuming the investigators agree, Longthorpe will ask them to meet him at Darkbank Junction Maintenance Yard at 10:00 the following morning. They now have half a day in which to follow up local stories about the tunnel. They should find enough to raise their interest, but by no means the whole of what is available. The locals from the other bar will have disappeared. It is necessary that the investigators should be keen to get a look at the tunnel.

Into the Tunnel

On arriving at the maintenance yard, the investigators are met by Longthorpe and the yard foreman, Walter Braithwaite. Longthorpe explains that he has just had word of a landslip on the railway and is urgently required there. He asks the investigators if they would be willing to take a look at the blockage themselves, and presents them with a collection of detailed drawings, various instruments and explanations as to how to use them. The investigators should by now be keen to get a look at the tunnel and will go ahead. If not, the Keeper should prod them along by having Braithwaite make sarcastic remarks about fine folks who go back on their promises, and Longthorpe moaning about how much work he has to do.

Braithwaite will show the investigators to an inspection launch and give them some quick