

# Middlemarch

## Cover Sheet

(Adventure by Paul Schmidt)

1<sup>st</sup> Meadow - 22nd Meadow 800 WK

### Player Characters

Scratch	E&E(?)	Human	Male	
Hope de' Winter	Necromancer	Human	Female	
Glynn	Air	Elf	Male	
Grendel	Mind	Human	Male	
Silverfoam	Namer	Elf	Male	
Michael	Solar Celestial	Human	Male	
Fizzgig	E&E	Hobbit	Male	
Phaeton	Solar Celestial	Human	Male	Scribe
Callas	Earth	Female	Human	

### Plane

Elushia/Greyhawk/Ethereal/Elemental Air

### Places Visited

City of Greyhawk (on Greyhawk)  
Djinni stronghold (plane of Air)  
The Twist - a middlemarch  
Ganlion Hill in Brastor

### Employer

Ignatius Knobnose

### Major NPCs encountered

Lorefakir

### Mission

To rescue a kobold 'deity' from a stronghold of goblins

# Middlemarch

## Adventure Summary

### 1<sup>st</sup> Meadow 800

Hired by Ignatious Knobnose to retrieve a treasure.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Meadow

Went to Greyhawk to visit Lawfakir. Discovered he was having trouble with his library. Glynn managed to get lost in it. Grendel somehow managed to acquire Scratch's hump. Received 20pt Enchantments off Lawfakir then went to see a surgeon who did hump transplant. Fizzgig acquired a giant rat companion whom he christened Swag. Returned to Alusia.

### 6<sup>th</sup> Meadow

After making preparations, headed towards Brastor.

### 7<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Entered the Dark Circle

### 8<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Arrived at fey inn, built into an oak tree, located on the road to Brastor. Discovered from Ignatious that we were actually going to break into a goblin stronghold in Gunlian Hill, 20 miles south of Brastor, and recover a kobold avatar called Kurtulmak. Decided to go their via the Ethereal Plane.

### 9<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Entered the Ethereal and Hope got lost. Followed her to the Elemental Plane of Air and became guests of a group of djinni. They located Hope for us.

### 11<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Arrived back on Alusia, no closer to our target. Decided to use the Faerie Way that could offer some protection from the effects of the Dark Circle. Left on the Silver Road at twilight. Entered a valley, called the Twist, which is a MiddleMarch, not part of the Plane of Alusia, Attacked by ettins.

### 12<sup>th</sup> Meadow (subjective)

Met up with halflings. Tried to fly over an evil tainted forest but it had a distance distortion on it. Attacked by a cockatrice and forced to land in the forest. Three party members were petrified so had to steal three cockatrice eggs to reverse their condition. Managed to leave the forest then were attacked by plant people, the People of the Pines. Hope was captured and partially transformed into a plant before we rescued her. Grendel managed to open a gateway to the Guild where we discovered it was still the 11<sup>th</sup>. Time stands still in the outside world while you're in a Middlemarch.

### 14<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Acquired more healing potions then re-entered the Middlemarch.

### 15 Meadow (subjective)

Reached the end of the valley. Along the ridge are goblins and hobgoblins ready to attack the

halflings and gnomes who live here. Get rooms for the night.

#### 16 Meadow (subjective)

Worked our way up the ridge at night.

#### 14 Meadow

Topped the ridge and re-entered Alusia, near our objective. Worked our way into the hill and through hobgoblin guards plus some trolls and assassins. Rescued a collection of local gnomes and humans then worked our way down to a pit where we rescued a gnome prisoner. Left rapidly and reported to Ignatious. Turned out we had rescued a high ranking gnome illusionist.

#### 17 Meadow

Ignatious returned and told us that the illusionist had been instrumental in mounting a successful raid on the hill and rescuing Kurtulmak. Visited Greyhawk City as Scratch wanted to do something about some strange children there. He wanted to find some 'essence of childhood'. We ended up consulting a diviner.

#### 22<sup>nd</sup> of Meadow

Discovered that the children are some sort of constructs and they serve a Master. The Master could be the Gaunt Man who could also be behind Rashak and the Dark Circle. We went back to the Guild to warn them of this.

# Middlemarch

## Phaeton

This adventure seemed to be the most interesting of what was offered. The employer was a gnomish gentleman by the name of Ignatius Knobnose. I knew him to be an associate of the Archmage Lawfakir on the Plane of Greyhawk. Apparently some gnomish treasure had gone missing and we were asked to help track it and retrieve it. We could have what we wanted except a special item of the gnomes. He didn't say who had taken it but, when pressed, admitted the entities in question were large, winged, and reptilian.

Also I had recently discovered I was on the Dark Circle's hit list and was wanting to either go on an adventure against them or, go offplane. Looks like its going to be the latter.

So, upon reaching the meeting hall, I discovered my fellow adventurers were:

Scratch - a 5'4" personage with a hump and can be very unnoticeable. I think he's an E&E but he has several unique talents and spells, such as glitterdust and spirit sight. He's a diplomat, thief, acrobat, and can stick to any surface.

Michael - a merchant adventurer. Well dressed in a green/silver outfit topped by a purple sash. He's a human, a merchant prince and another Solar Celestial.

Hope de'Winter - Another diplomat and spy. She's a young 5' tall human female in a white dress and, dare I admit it, cute. A necromancer and ranger.

Glynn - a 6'8" elf wearing ornate leather with sheathed tulwar and dagger. He's an airmage and I had adventured with him on the previous outing.

Grendel - I had adventured with him several times. He's a 5'9" mindmage, with several watermage spells. 5'9" tall, waist length hair, leather armour and mis-matched eyes. He's pacted to a water deity.

Silverfoam - Well known elven namer, military scientist and dilettante. He's also a troubadour and philosopher. A 6' tall elf carrying a staff and wearing blood-red samurai armour and a stylish hat.

Fizzgig - a 3'7" plain looking male hobbit, bristling with weapons. He's an E&E, spy, thief, merchant. Can disarm wards and make lucky charms - at a price.

Phaeton - 5'3" male human wearing white robes and a rainbow cloak. I'm a Master Healer, Solar Celestial mage, and philosopher in magic. I'm pacted to a healer god and many of my spells specifically target the undead/unholy.

Ignatius told us that we had two days to prepare before we went to Greyhawk. So all the party, including me, went down to the Water College to place our orders for Waters of Healing and Strength. I also got accosted by Brigetta's adventuring party to put StarWings on them all.

3rd Meadow '800 WK

Two days later, we were led towards Dead End Alley. Ignatius handed out jade bracelets to everyone except Scratch and me. Since we had been here before, the ones we had, just reappeared. So we entered the alley. As we did it got very foggy.

A tentacled entity was waiting in the shadows as we passed. Before we could stop him, Silverfoam DAed it. The creature treated that as a hostile act and attacked, knocking him out. After distracting it with a handful of copper coins, we hurried on, conveying the unconscious body of Silverfoam with us.

Shortly we arrived at Lorefakir's house and Ignatius knocked at the door. A dwarven servant let us in, who began eyeing up Hope. He then led us to a waiting area as Lorefakir was extremely busy at the moment. Far in the distance, we could hear muffled swearing. As we progressed down the corridor, a purple glowing eye materialized behind Scratch and followed him, obviously keeping him under observation.

I revived Silverfoam and we were served tea and biscuits. When we asked about how long Lorefakir was going to be, we were told that it could be a while. Apparently the last Seagate party had managed to do something that had caused Lorefakir to be shut out of his own library. We could still hear him, muttering curses at the name of Turf.

Fizzgig was also a locksmith so he offered to have a look. I followed, out of idle curiosity. Most of the rest of the party followed except for Scratch, Hope and Michael. Michael preferred to wait out of the way while Scratch decided he was going out. Not sure exactly what happened to Hope.

We found Lorefakir at the end of a corridor facing a solid steel door with no visible lock. Wards were detected all around. Lorefakir did something to deactivate them so we could pass safely and Fizzgig tried one of his door opening spells. It worked and the door swung open. On the other side was some steps leading down and several ibis head motifs, the symbol of Thoth, a god of knowledge.

Lorefakir stepped through but ran into a ward which impeded his progress. More cursing followed. We could go through but it was obvious he couldn't. So Silverfoam started divinating the area. A sofa was provided so he could divinate in comfort. He later concluded the ward was similar to Turf's exclusion ritual.

Out in the street, Scratch was desperately attempting to avoid the local children. Seems there's something odd about them. Finally he takes to the roof and notices a large dwarf who seems to be gathering taxes from the locals. So Scratch went in the direction the dwarf came from.

Meanwhile Glynn, Fizzgig and I had reached the bottom of the steps and could see the library. Nearby was a table with a lamp sitting on it. Beyond were library shelves full of books which stretched seemingly into infinity - and probably did as this library was transfinite. I had used this library before and was aware of it's hazards so decided to stay right where I was. However Glynn and Fizzgig wandered into the stacks.

Fizzgig soon returned but there was no sign of Glynn. We waited for a while but still no sign. So Fizzgig went to find Lorefakir. He came back a little while later and consulted the Table of Contents while using the Lamp of Illumination.

Glynn was still wandering about and had found himself facing three images, a river, books, and a dagger. He chose the books and found himself facing a shelf of books with a compulsion to remove some. After he did, he felt older and was back facing images of a river and dagger. He touched the dagger.

As we watched, Glynn staggered out of the shadows, looking a lot older. An empathy check confirmed this. Fizzgig told him "you're going to sit on the steps and be quiet now". He then disappeared between the shelves, returned carrying a hat, and took it up to Lorefakir.

Now Lorefakir had the solution to his problem, he was able to enter the library and find out how to fix Glynn's problem. Glynn was told to find the river glyph. After some experimentation he discovered that proceeding upstream de-aged him.

Scratch was getting hungry by now but he decided to bypass the Stone Parrot Inn and try the second best one in town. After some discussion with the cook and trying some rather exotic foods, he ended up with a thousand year old egg.

Glynn had returned and Grendel was interested in finding out more about Water magics. So he entered the library. He found himself at the shore of an ocean that was lined with gems. He entered the water but then discovered bits of him were dropping off as gems. So he gathered up as many as he could identify and retrieve. During the process he gained a hump.

Several hundred metres away, Scratch's hump suddenly vanished. He headed straight back to Lorefakir's place to find out what was going on. He wanted his hump back.

Grendel managed to make his way back to where we were waiting. It seemed to us that our memories were changing and Grendel had always had that hump.

Finally we all got back together. Lorefakir performed rituals that would give us twenty point enchantments for the duration of our employment. After this Ignatius took us to a place that could do a hump transplant between Grendel and Scratch.

The place looked and smelt like a butcher's shop rather than a healer's clinic. The place was filthy and rats scurried all over the place outside. Some of them were rather large and had suckered feet.

Most of us decided to wait outside while the 'surgery' took place. However I was called inside and warned by Scratch to be careful as high ranked people around here tend to be 'collected'. The procedure was to use some sort of guillotine to quickly remove the hump off Grendel and then transfer it back to Scratch by Scratch having to swallow it. So Grendel was strapped down. I was quite sure I was going to have to do reconstructive healing on him after this.

Outside, the rats were closing in around the rest of the party. So Michael created a Ring of Light. It started to fade away as if the mana was being sucked out of it. Somewhere a bell started ringing.

The rest of the party dived into the building except Michael and Fizzgig. Not even the rats were game to go in there. Then there was the sound of approaching heavy footsteps and a squad of local guardsmen arrived to arrest Michael on the charge on using unlicensed magic within the

city walls. Unnoticed, Fizzgig faded into the background. They were rather surprised when Michael didn't resist.

By now the operation had been completed and Scratch had his hump back, although it felt a bit different. The guards wanted to know our Colleges and we would have to sign a writ and register as mages. Hope was going to be a problem though. She told them she was a white necromancer but the guards were very suspicious and wanted to take us all away for 'further questioning'. Fortunately Lorefakir's house was on the way and we manage to get Lorefakir to vouch for nearly all of us. The guards let us go.

Now that we had our enchantments, we headed back to Dead End Alley and, after avoiding the tentacled entity, we were back in Alusia. I immediately insisted that we head back to my clinic so I could examine Grendel and Scratch.

Everyone seemed normal except that Grendel had picked up a Cerebral Parasite. They're ethereal creatures that are attracted to mind activity, especially mind mages, and basically suck out their minds. Fortunately the cure was simple. I created a Wall of Light and got Grendel to walk through it a few times.

Fizzgig had turned up again and we noticed that one of those large rats with suckered feet had followed him home. Scratch called it 'a pack rat'. After some discussion Fizzgig called it 'Swag'.

Finally we prepared to follow the trail of the treasure, east towards the Sea of Grass.

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### 6th Meadow

We had spent the last few days preparing. Scratch had managed to obtain 14 Rank 6 Trollskins (BC 89%) from Dido which were passed out - two each. Silverfoam obtained an old cart and a horse to pull it. In case there were Dark Circle spies on the gates we left, disguised as travelling players. Also we went north, intending to swing to the east the next day.

Ignatius told us he would meet us at an inn near the Brasta area in two or three days as he had other business to attend to. If we had difficulty we should look for a lightning blasted oak tree. He handed us a special coin and told us that would help us find the inn.

Those that wanted them had witchsights on. With those we noticed we had travelling companions. A boggle was sitting on the horse and three more, plus a Killmoulis. They, and virtually all the fey folk, are abandoning the area as the Dark Circle advances, hitching rides with unsuspecting travellers. The pixies and brownies were the first to leave. Silverfoam suggested there was a mansion up north that was highly suited to their needs. It would be interesting to see how Silkin handles unexpected house guests.

We travelled for the rest of the day and camped the night. Watch order was:

1. Phaeton/Michael 2. Glynn/Scratch 3. Fizzgig/Hope 4. Silverfoam/Grendel

I tried an astrology reading to discover what we were likely to find on our journey and received one word - Danger.

### 7th Meadow

The cart was left with the brownies and they continued north while, after ditching the mummies

outfits, we walked eastish. The marching order from the front was: Scratch/Grendel, Glynn/Fizzgig, Phaeton/Silverfoam, and Hope/Michael. Silverfoam started drawing a map.

As we progressed, the area seemed to be getting darker. Silverfoam DAed a nearby flower, a fuschia, and discovered that it had only been in the influence of the Dark Circle for the last two days. Meanwhile I checked another plant and detected a faint magical aura, presumably caused by the Circle. The primary College involved was Namer.

At the end of the day we estimated we were halfway to the inn. As we settled down, I cast Witchsights on all those who needed them, including Swag.

Glynn was taking to an entity, later established to be a Summer Sprite, when it suddenly fell over and died. A patch of grass sprang up where it fell. Also it seemed to be getting colder. So, as more of them turned up, we left in a hurry. Curious though, the cold seemed to follow us.

Once the stars came out, I noticed that they appeared brighter and clearer. Well that seemed to be one advantage to the Circle but it is probably the only one and the disadvantages far outweigh it. It's going to have to go.

### 8th Meadow

Scratch had been having trouble with one of his instant travel spells during the night so Silverfoam divinated him. Once the results were in, Scratch wanted to know just what a strange entity had done to make him feel strange on a previous mission.

"It took a look at your soul" - Silverfoam

"That was pretty good, being able to find it" - Fizzgig

"Yeah. I don't usually take it with me" - Scratch

Then when Fizzgig mentioned he had an amulet he had obtained from a certain balrog prince, Scratch retreated to the other side of the campsite. This caused Fizzgig to comment that he now had a 'Protection from Scratch' amulet.

A while later we were walking down the road and were passing bunches of happy, healthy peasants. At least half the party were suspicious of this so, several DAs were thrown out. We found out that they were contented because they were attuned to Life and Death. Further probing showed that this was because of Silvanus, a deity associated with nature.

A short while later we encountered a short humanoid sitting on a treestump, a gorb. He wanted payment to guide us to the inn. I thought he meant the coin that we were given so I gave it to him. Unfortunately it wasn't, he wanted silver but he pocketed it anyway. Uh oh!

Silverfoam offered something called choco-lat, a combination of chocolate and chili. The gorb tried it. I'm sure I saw steam rising from his ears. Fairly soon it and Silverfoam were swapping all sorts of consumables. At one point, it appeared that Silverfoam was transforming into a male dryad - assuming there is such a thing.

Anyway after sampling various elven wines, the gorb fell unconscious and Fizzgig was able to check it's purse and retrieve the coin I had given it. That purse was bigger on the inside than the outside and held quite a lot of coinage, however we left it alone.

Once it recovered, we were led off through a forest until we reached an old mossy circle of standing stones. We prudently decided not to touch it but we were led three times around it. At the end of the third orbit, we found ourselves near the road to Brasta. It was late afternoon. Several halflings and gnomes were working in the fields.

Soon after that we reached a 15ft diameter oak tree. Attached to the oak tree was an inn, which several members of the party were sure that hadn't been there the last time they had been here. I suspect the inn is slightly displaced from the human reality.

Ignatius was there waiting for us and he led us up to our rooms which were waiting for us. Once there he told us the real reason we were employed.

*<<<WARNING. This section of the scribe notes has been put under a security seal and left with Ignatius. It may only be opened, in the presence of Guild Security, at the completion of our mission, or at the next Guild meeting which ever comes first >>>*

Ignatius took out a black gem and told us that we could not reveal what we were about to find out. When we agreed to this, a compulsion was laid upon us.

Basically we were to break in to a goblin stronghold of the Crooked Fang Clan and steal their prisoner, known as 'The Kobold' or Kurtulmak (I think). They intend to kill him at a certain time, the new moon of the next month. That places it at the 12th of Heat.

He was the life prisoner of the gnomes but they keep him in such a way that he's not really aware he's a prisoner. Besides they want him alive. Apparently the kobolds worship him as a god and if he was killed, they'll probably start worshipping someone else. His hiding place had been secret but a large hobgoblin had found it.

The goblin stronghold was located somewhere south of Brasta and, as well as the goblins, we could expect to find lesser undead. The goblins also stole several objects including large gem-like objects.

There were several ways of getting there such as astral, ethereal, along the roads, or through the Shadowplanes. The roads are probably crawling with undead. After discussion it was decided to go via the Ethereal Plane.

*<<< END SECURITY SEAL >>>*

During the night, Grendel put up a Mind Speech but also got many of the local inhabitants which annoyed them greatly. I suspect that, because they are fey folk, that they have negative magical resistance.

### 9th Meadow

After some Potions of Etherealness were handed out we were to drink one each then walk widdershins around the tree six times, to fix the location in our minds. During our circuits we were pelted with fruit and there were several chants of 'Go home mindmage'. Absentmindedly I picked some of the fruit up and put it in my pocket. Apparently I missed Fizzgig's warning last night, probably because I was in my room studying, that eating fey fruit is not such a good idea. To all adventurers, please take note of this.

After the sixth orbit we found ourselves in a misty area and could move in any direction we wanted. This was the Border Ethereal, a part of the Ethereal that co-exists with the Prime Material and Elemental Planes. The Border Ethereal of each plane are connected to each other via the Deep Ethereal.

Both Michael and I discovered that we had achieved a sense of direction, much like a Ranger, except it was aligned with the Quasi-Elemental Plane of Radiance. Glynn also had a similar sense except his was pointing towards the Elemental Plane of Air.

Just then we noticed that Hope had vanished. Had she not come through with us, had she wandered off and was somewhere nearby in the Border Ethereal, or had she taken a right turn to reality and was now in the Deep Ethereal. All she would have done to achieve that was to will it so. If that was the case we had no means of tracking her.

We waited. After a short while she had still not appeared and she was not showing up on locates. The third possibility was beginning to be the much more likely one. While we waited, I pulled a piece of fruit out of my pocket and absentmindedly nibbled on it. Just as I began to feel strange, I realised what it was and dropped it. It looked like an apple but, since I was appearing to change into a crab, it must have been a crabapple. Fortunately Scratch was able to return me to my original form by having me consume a mandrake. However it had a rather unfortunate side effect which I won't go into but, at least Hope wasn't here to make comments. I may need to undergo emergency surgery.

After enduring Fizzgig's lecture, I ditched all the remaining fruit which Scratch decided to acquire. He's welcome to them. Some of the other varieties also had odd properties. For instance, the cherries and the pineapples were explosive. Thank goodness I didn't eat one of those.

We decided to go Deep in the hope of locating Hope. It was like stepping into a rolling bank of mist then we found ourselves standing by a shimmering turquoise curtain, the vaporous curtain to the Prime Material. Around us it looked like we were in the middle of a thick soup so we couldn't see very far. Another attempt was made to locate Hope but that too failed.

Fizzgig managed to create some sort of telescope out of the surrounding Ethereal Matter and used it to see Hope near a silvery brown curtain. I presume that was the entrance to one of the Demi-Planes but I have no idea which one. Scratch thought he knew. He believed it was a place where devas are created. It'll take a while to get there.

So it was decided to try to summon Hope back. Scratch used the telescope to concentrate an amount of charm and send it off in that direction. However, what he attracted was not Hope, but a love-sick Kua-toan. Silverfoam had to banish it back to the Elemental Plane of Water.

We headed off in the direction where we believed Hope was. It was heavy going and after a while many in the party were getting tetchy. Michael was muttering comments about irresponsible females and how they all seem to be like that. Privately I was agreeing with him. Finally we had to stop and rest as we were just too tired to continue.

<< *Hope's Adventure* >>

She had gone through the shimmering curtain and found herself on a beach. There was no Border

Ethereal around this demiplane. Alabaster white statues, some broken, were scattered about. She decided not to stay but retreated back into the Deep Ethereal and wandered for a while before reaching a blue curtain.

After going through this, she left the Border Ethereal and found herself in the Elemental Plane of Air. All around her was the sapphire blue colour of a summer's day, broken only by flecks of other matter floating about in this infinite expanse. It was then she realised she was falling.

After quite a while, she passed a large rock which was covered in buildings. It was also surrounded by a shell of ballistae bolts, all pointing outwards, and all just floating motionless there, ready to launch. Something then caught her and conveyed her to this rock. There she met the caliph of the local Djinni, Abdul, and after having dinner, ended up in his harem. She also received his signet ring.

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Finally we reached the demiplane Scratch was thinking of which was called the Boundless, according to the aura of the curtain. Silverfoam divinated the curtain and discovered that an entity had entered then exited. We figured that must have been Hope. She still didn't show up on a locate so we created another of those telescopes and saw Hope dressed in a semi-transparent outfit lounging on a set of large cushions. A rather large muscular gentleman, wearing nothing but trousers in an arabic style and a large scimitar was in the background. Through a keyhole shaped window, the sky was a bright sky blue. She was either on the Elemental Plane of Air or an alternate Prime Material.

"We're either going to be employed by the houri or the dey" - Silverfoam

Various means of tracking Hope were put forward and rejected. Finally the idea was put forward of setting a Phantasm on her and following it. This we did. Those of us that could see it observed that it was sucking ethereal matter into itself which caused it to take on some sort of material form. Suddenly it turned and attacked us and, unfortunately, I was the target. My Mind Counter failed to stop it so I teleported five feet straight up while Silverfoam dealt to it.

Once we healed up, I had the idea of trying again but using my mathematical and navigational skills to determine the direction relative to Glynn's and my North sense. So we did. Silverfoam determined that a Binder Special Counter would slow down the matter accumulation. Soon I was able to determine that we were heading towards the Elemental Plane of Air. Finally we reached the azure coloured curtain. When the phantasm contacted the curtain, it dissipated.

"The winds around here would probably have an opinion" - Scratch to Glynn when Glynn suggested casting a Flying spell on us.

After going through into the Border Ethereal and into the Elemental Plane itself, we discovered we were falling. Fortunately it didn't take us long to agree on which way was down. I had previously explained that, in theory, it was possible not to fall by consciously deciding that no direction was 'down' but it was obviously much harder than that. Guess people are too used to the concept of falling to perceive of anything else. Glynn's suggestion of a featherfall spell of vetoed on the grounds it would limit our ability to manoeuvre.

Not very much impeded our journey. At one point Grendel grazed a vacuum bubble. Glynn tried

asking a flock of birds we encountered but none of them had seen anything. There was the earth pocket, with buildings including a large citadel on it, surrounded by spears, all facing outward. We also observed a large glowing hook, the business end of a Summon Elemental Ritual. Elementals were flocking around it like moths to a flame.

Finally we were heading towards some cloud banks. Just then we spotted a very large bird. Lightning was flicking around it and we could hear the boom of thunder as it flew. It was correctly identified as a thunderbird. With it was a large flock of ravens. As they turned in our direction, Silverfoam cast Air Counters on us all.

The ravens swooped on us and we had to manoeuvre to avoid them. It was soon apparent that we were being herded back to the earth pocket. A voice called out inviting us to dinner. A short time later, we were intercepted by a small flotilla of flying carpets, with pilots, and invited to come aboard.

After zig-zagging through the defence sphere we landed at, what we discovered as a djinni citadel. This was ruled by Ibi Padishar Harif the Third. After landing we met the vizier and were assigned to quarters to freshen up before dinner.

At dinner we noticed the Pahisha and a marid at the head of the table. We were about a third down. The marid was enveloped in a column of water and Scratch recognised him as one he had met before. This was the one who Corel had been working for.

However, the Pahisha announced that there was one among them that deserved their honour and a toast was made to Scratch. It turned out that a previous party that Scratch had been in had been asked to destroy a powerful efreeti. However Scratch had managed to sic him on to a powerful drow mage in the Greyhawk Underdark. The mage destroyed the efreet which pleased the djinni greatly.

The marid was also looking for Corel and asked for news. Apparently Corel had a contract with the marid but had reneged on it. As proof he showed us Corel's testicles on a string. Also he told us that Corel had been selling the names of Guild adventurers to demons. Guild Security will be very interested in that bit of news.

The Pahisha offered to help us find Hope by sending messages throughout his realm. He estimated that would take a couple of days for the replies to come back.

During that time the following things happened. Glynn decided to learn a lightning bolt spell. To do this, it involved climbing up the top of a metal tower, read the spell from the underside of the thunderbird (which had all the Air College inscribed under its wing) and being hit by lightning so he was immersed in the spell. Thank goodness it wasn't whirlwind vortex. Somehow he survived the experience.

Grendel spoke to the marid about learning more water magic. So a deal was struck. Grendel would receive instruction in return for three months service in the marid's harem. He agreed to this so they briefly went to the marid's palace in the Elemental Plane of Water to formalise the contract and make the necessary arrangements including the preparations for Grendel's new role.

We discovered that the djinni had a prophecy about a Great Healer who could raise the dead who

would come among them and help them in their war against the efreeti. The healer would also be the Son of Lugh. I didn't really want to be involved in a jihad so I decided to keep quiet about my abilities.

Unfortunately they found out. Either someone let it slip or the djinni used divination techniques. In any case I was put in a situation where I had to attempt to raise dead djinni, currently in gaseous form. Fortunately it worked. Unfortunately I was then hailed as the Great Prophet. I was rather concerned about the consequences of this but at least I was allowed to leave to continue adventuring. I would return later. Honour, and my conscience, demanded it.

### 11th Meadow

Hope had been found and brought here. After some arrangements we were sent back to the inn by the tree. So now we had to find another way as we were short of etherealness potions. It was finally decided to use the fairy ways which could offer some protection from the effects of the Dark Circle.

.4.

There was one surprise though. Callas, a female earth mage and guild member, had arrived to join us on our mission. There was time to purify and cast necessary spells before we followed a gnome, called Maybeso. Before we left, we had to deposit a silver coin in a cup at the inn, presumably to serve as an anchor point. After a while we reached a cleft in the ground, which soon grew into a small, grassy, valley. Or did we shrink to fit in it?

"There are a lot of creeps in the Guild" - Callas

"Me! I'm one!" - Scratch

We were told that it was best that we travelled along the Silver Road at twilight and, if we do, it will be twilight all the way. So we waited.

At twilight, Ignatious arrived with another guide, a sprite called Bumble. He was a Bumbling, otherwise known as backward sprites. Ignatious told us that our destination was Ganlian Hill, 20 miles south of Brastor. There were an enormous number of goblins in there. Nearby is a group of caves, which were old mine workings, that could lead us into the hills. Not much lives there, probably because they're full of undead.

The valley we were in was called the Twist. It was inhabited by dwarves, halflings, ettins, the odd fire giant, and the Darkness that lives in the forest to the west. There was some discussion about which way we should go. There were creatures that ran along the valley ridges, hydras that lived in the caves and the things we really needed to be worried about were the ffolk that came out of pine trees. There were no undead, probably because it was too dangerous for them. The only safe places to stop were by the cairns. Scratch wanted to go the most dangerous way but we finally got Bumble to head towards the silvery tinted river which was lined with silver birches.

Once we got to the river, wood was collected and Grendel used a magical figurine to create a boat which he christened 'Mermaid 4' The current was rather quick as we progressed and soon we noticed that the valley was getting narrower. Four hours appear to go by but I get the feeling that we're taking shortcuts through reality. Just then we can see a weir blocking the river ahead, just as a rock splashed down nearby.

An ettin was throwing rocks at us. One impacted on the boat and it began to sink. So we tossed spells at it. It looked rather unhappy after that and collapsed. Then we noticed that a shack was located just off the river bank and another ettin was coming out of it. The next lobbed rock caused the boat to capsize and we were all tipped into the water. Just as I triggered my Waterbreathing, I was grabbed by Scratch and dragged up onto the weir. Meanwhile Glynn fired a lightning bolt at the ettin and he staggered backwards. Meanwhile the female ettin grabbed a harpoon, threw it, and grazed Glynn. The next throw hit Callas and she was reeled in. Michael rushed over and cut the rope. Just then we noticed a landshark going for Scratch.

After a short while the landshark was vanquished and it turned into rock. Meanwhile the second ettin surrendered after taking a lightning bolt.

We rested. I healed up Callas and Grendel recreated the boat. I was then made undetectable. Callas reported seeing a silver pole on one side of the river downstream of where we were.

When we got closer, we could see the pole looked more like a spike and there were runes on it. The silver spire had a magical aura, the nature of which was earth. The runes had a different aura. Bumble suggested that this may be a cairn and the aura of the ground around it tended to confirm this. So we set up camp. Soon a fog sprung up around us.

Come midnight and everyone who were sleeping in trees thudded to the ground. Glynn used a wind to blow the fog out and we found that the trees had vanished. Instead we were in open terrain. A brook ran to one side and a silver line ran across the ground. A nearby twig looked like it was made of a silvery metal, very similar to my selenium dagger.

Callas decided to summon her deity, Selene. She told us that the ridge runners were cursed to run forever and they can entrap other beings into joining them. Something like the Wild Hunt. The darkness in the woods is an ancient evil and was caused by the anger of the wood. The hill, to which we were going, used to be the point where the silver road ended but it was cut back because of the growing evil there. There is a cockatrice under the hill and the people there are allied with the Dark Circle. I'm not sure how it happened but, somehow, Selene charged Scratch with a divine duty.

### 12th Meadow

We travelled down the silver road and came out near another cairn. We soon determined that we were in another part of the valley. Here, it was wider. There were some small farmed areas and a silver road, parts of which was broken.

This was halfling country so Fizzgig went ahead, followed by Scratch. He met up with a group of halflings who told him that there was a thin bit of forest ahead and that it was always night in there. We could fly over but that might attract unwanted attention. Going by the river was not recommended and the only other way was the ridge. There are creatures in the forest that turn halflings into plants. Undead and ettins are beyond the forest. There are hills 4-5 days away by pony.

.5.

As we progressed towards the section of forest we started picking up an entourage of halflings. In a short while it became apparent that they were forming a circle around us. So Fizzgig asked them just what they were really up to. Crendel had a telepathy up as well. Basically they wanted

at least 1000sp each as a form of tax and they were waiting until there were 80 of them before they tried to mug us.

So Scratch decided to take the direct approach by sneaking up and backstabbing the leader, an abhorrent act in my opinion. Surely there was a more peaceful way of sorting this out. Anyway general mayhem occurred. An old granny, who was carrying a large book, had a heart attack, most likely due to someone's fear spell. I rushed over to tend to her while someone else went for the book and the feather that was stuck in it.

It turned out that Granny was a Lesser Summoner and both the book and feather had magical properties. We found out from her that the people of the pines use bows and spears and attack from ponies that had also been transformed. Also the trees talk to them.

Without the halfling escort we reached the edge of the forest. Scratch still had the halfling leader as a hostage. The final decision was to fly over however a limited precog caught a glimpse of a cockatrice above the trees.

The idea was to fly low and fast just over the trees. Glynn cast the flying spells and we took off, leaving Scratch's hostage behind. Since we may be dealing with a creature that had petrification attacks I suggested that Special Earth Counters be cast on us all in case that would help protect us. Callas did so.

The tree canopy ranged from between 30 to 40 ft high and, as we flew, the valley seemed to get wider and the other side looked to be a lot further away than had first appeared. I suspected some sort of distance distortion was active here Unfortunately none of us had Dimensional Weaving Counterspells which may help nullify it.

The sky started getting cloudy and the wind picked up. Just then a creature was spotted in the canopy on an intercept course. Suddenly it cleared the canopy. It was a twenty foot long cockatrice and it was closing fast. Its tail was thrashing about.

Scratch hit it with a glitterdust and that seemed to confuse it for a while. I hit it with a bright blue bolt, which is more effective against creatures of earth, and it did seem to do more damage than usual. However, Callas tried to petrify it and much of the damage was healed.

Fizzgig threw a small cube at it, something he called a 'boom cube', and it exploded on impact. The cockatrice looked like it had been plucked. Scratch turned and bravely attacked it. Unfortunately, even a slight touch produces petrification and a stoned Scratch plummeted to the ground. Glynn's featherfall slowed Scratch's descent. Fizzgig went down after Scratch and they both dropped below the canopy.

My next bolt failed to go off but Callas's Tunnelling caused a large scour to appear on the cockatrice's body. Grendel also became petrified, but more slowly, when he touched the creature's mind with a mental attack. So was Michael when he hit it with a sword. The cockatrice then went for Callas. The graze caused a small area to petrify but it went away, However the tail hurt her badly. Glynn's lightning bolt and my Starfire hammered into it and it started to waver and fall in flight, trailing a line of pebbles behind it. Callas' next Tunnelling changed the pebbles to boulders and the creature crashed to the ground.

Fizzgig was below rounding up our fallen and stoned comrades. However, when he tried to fly above the canopy he found he couldn't. The higher he got the taller the trees around him were. From our perspective, he was getting slower and slower as he got closer to the canopy. I tried lowering a rope to him but, no matter how close I got, the rope was always just out of reach. Another result of the distance distortion.

Scratch tried threatening the trees with Solar Flares if they didn't allow the grounded members of the party to rejoin us. All that happened was that the winds grew stronger and a storm brewed up. Lightning rained down upon us and we were all forced below the treeline. Once that happened, the storm went away.

I attempted to heal Callas of her injuries, using the Healing spell but something went wrong. As the spell went off, Callas was transmogrified into a tree stump. Then, and I'm quite sure I had nothing to do with this, the tree stump further transformed into a large oak tree.

At about this stage Glynn was investigating the fallen cockatrice body. He decided he wanted a feather from it. As he touched it, he was instantly petrified. So another statue joined the collection.

Silverfoam divinated the statues and the cockatrice and determined that the touch of the tail would be enough to cure those that had bravely attacked it. That would take care of Michael and Scratch. As for the others, they would require a cockatrice egg. So Silverfoam went and retrieved the tail, managing to resist the petrification in the process.

He used it to bring back Scratch then Scratch used it to bring back Michael. The Callas-tree was becoming increasingly agitated so Scratch touched the tree with the tail. It petrified. Now we needed three cockatrice eggs.

"It went off in my hand" - Scratch.

I was in the process of performing a Remove Curse ritual on Callas at the time but was interrupted as the others wanted to go egg hunting. After a short search we found a rocky outcrop, on top of which was the next. Scratch and Fizzgig crept up to have a look.

What they discovered was another cockatrice and an 8ft long similar looking creature but was bright red in colour. This was determined to be a pyrotrice. Nearby was a chicken on top of two halfling bodies and three black eggs. Just then another egg was laid and one of the halfling bodies vanished. The egg turned black. Another egg turned red as the halfling blood dripped on it.

"It's an enchanted chicken" - Scratch

"More like a dis-enchanted chicken" - Silverfoam

It was decided for Scratch and Fizzgig to steal the eggs and replace them with something else. Each of them decided to use a Candle of Shadows to stealth up there and a Candle of Spell Storage to store Counter Earth Specials to be used when they got there. Scratch had two eggs of travelling and Fizzgig contributed an 8-ball, a weaponsmithed rock that was spherical in shape and black except for a white circle with a black 8 painted in it. The fourth replacement was an egg shaped rock that was colour cantripped red.

So they snuck up and carefully made the exchange. As they rejoined us there was a tremendous flash of light from above and the cockatrice took off, followed by the pyrotrice. Following them was another creature that looked like a cockatrice but had a silvery-blue colouration. One of Scratch's eggs had hatched.

We headed back to where the statues were. Also required was the cockatrice's comb so Scratch went to get that. He succeeded in doing this. Each egg was cracked over each statue and the comb was waved over each one which restored those party members. I then performed the curse removal ritual. As I did so, Scratch amused himself by carving messages in the tree bark. When the ritual was complete the tree was transformed into a thirty foot woman.

"Now would be a good time to apologise for the carving" - Fizzgig

After a bit of experimentation it was discovered that Callas could reach the canopy if she climbed a tree but not if she jumped. It was decided to petit-mort all of us, put Necro Counters in a spell storing candle then Callas would use a Crystallised Horizon to get us out of the forest.

We ended up on a riverbank on the edge of a forest. We could see bulky looking guys on horses flitting among the trees, presumably the plant people. Basically we were out of the frying pan into the fire.

.6.

Actually a fire would have been useful at this point as we were dealing with plant people. While we were figuring out what to do, Callas vanished. Her last words were 'Damn you Turf!'. And Turf could have damned us as well as there went all our Armours of Earth, Strengths of Stones, Hands of Earth, Trollskins, and Walls of Stones - all spells which, as it turned out, would have given us a decided advantage. Fortunately the ones that Callas had cast on us before were still going, and would continue to do so for the next few days at least.

Some of them charged at us. Assuming that these creatures were Light Aspected (after all, plants require sunlight to grow) I put up a Wall of Darkness. At the same time, Glynn let loose with a massive lightning bolt that split one of the plant people in two. Its horse proceeded to drag the body back into the trees. My wall proved ineffective as they went through it and Glynn was peppered with arrows from the archers left behind. He collapsed. Grendel neatly split a horse with his axe as they went past, and Michael struck down another but the rest of us got run over.

Once Fizzgig's Quickness cut in, the battle became fast and furious. Michael and Fizzgig were making short work of their opponents. So was Grendel until he fell. Glynn tried a cockatrice feather and succeeded in petrifying his opponent. The feather disintegrated. Meanwhile Hope had been grabbed by a horse and rider and was being dragged off. We tried to prevent this but Hope's arm, that was in the horse's mouth, was pulled out. I dealt to the injury while Michael and Scratch attacked the horse. It dropped the arm which Scratch retrieved.

The creatures retreated back into the woods and we headed into cover. We hadn't won, more like a stalemate, as we were still being peppered with arrows. It had been a costly stalemate too. Many of us had been close to death and we had been forced to use much of our healing potions and Waters of Healing. I was completely out. Scratch was still attracting arrow fire from the trees. Silverfoam had determined that their GTN was People of the Pines but their aura was human tinged. The plan of going invisible was vetoed when it was discovered that they could see

invisible.

Just then more horses and riders charged out of the trees, managed to lasso Hope, and dragged her into the forest. Glynn fired a lightning bolt after them and Scratch followed up with a grenado, hoping to cause a fire. I followed up with a red/orange bolt of starfire. As the spells impacted, the slight breeze picked up and we could hear a moaning sound through the forest.

The fire didn't last long and, when the smoke cleared, the pine people had gone. Witchsights were put up on those who wanted them, Silverfoam gave us Earth Counters, and we set off into the forest, following a Locate arrow.

On the way we passed a few bodies of various humanoids, some of which had been partially turned to wood. After a short while the forest thinned out. In the clearing was a hill. Just then we heard bells and a really tall thin elf appeared who could help us find Hope. His name was Ferrana and he was a Celestial Mage.

He told us to follow him and we walked widdershins around the hill seven times. As we did, the hill turned into a castle.

"What does that mean?" - Scratch

"Traditional" - Silverfoam

The stars looked closer than before but were not in a recognizable pattern. However, according to the grass, this was still Alusia. Once inside, food was provided and the offer was made to stay the night. After some hesitation we ate the food but decided not to stay as we were in haste to find Hope.

It was said that the food provided introspection and healing. I'm not sure about the former but it certainly cured all our wounds. Scratch expressed interest in something called the Simerals and he was taken downstairs. I got the impression later he was locked up for a time.

I'm not sure exactly how this occurred but, something Silverfoam said, prompted our host to transform Scratch into a pony. Scratch immediately attempted to attack Silverfoam. Ferrana attempted to then tether Scratch with a silver string but Scratch wasn't having any of that. As far as I could tell, Scratch wasn't under a transformation curse so I suspected a powerful illusion.

Once everything calmed down we were given a bag of hazelnuts that would help us lay a trail to Hope and rapidly escape. We would need to remove them on the way out. We then left. Upon leaving the castle, Scratch returned to normal. The first nut was planted and we were rapidly translocated a mile or so in the direction of Hope. I put a Preserve Dead on Hope's arm with the intention of reattaching it later.

Finally, we reached another clearing. Inside were pine warriors, Hope's body, the body of a horse, and a rather large mean looking ent. Hope's head was partially detached and the ent was pouring a mixture of brain and chalk into the horse's skull cavity. The GTN of the ent was Black Ent and it's highest ranked attack spell was Blackfire. So our Earth Counters were swapped for Celestial. I must rank my Counter after this as Silverfoam pointed out that Celestial Specials contain most of the really deadly spells.

Michael put Coruscades on us all (his are much more highly ranked than mine) then we sneaked into position. Once we were ready, I cast the signal, a red/orange Light, centred on the ent. Glynn simultaneously hit it with a lightning bolt. Fizzgig and Grendel went straight in, laying waste to the pine people with their axes. The ent swatted an approaching Scratch with a rather large arm while pine people on horses charged our position and succeeded in overrunning our defences. We were all knocked flying.

Trees began uprooting themselves as we fought off our attackers. In the resulting chaos, Scratch retrieved Hope, who was barely alive, and discovered the horse had to be retrieved as well as there was some sort of link between the two. Fortunately it was a small pony. Finally he managed to get out by pulling out something from under his cloak that turned into a social gathering. We didn't wait to see what happened next but hazel-nutted out quickly, taking the nuts with us.

Finally we reached the river and headed downstream away from the forest. After a couple of miles we stopped. I examined Hope and discovered that she was now part plant but the ritual hadn't been completed so she was still her own person and not completely bound to the pony and the forest as the others were. She bled sap instead of blood, her hair had turned leafy and her skin had taken on a more woodlife appearance. After doing what I could, I pulled out my sketchpad and drew a portrait.

Meanwhile Grendel decided to send a short message to the Guild using his translocation ability. However, when he did so, a micro-wormhole appeared which terminated somewhere near the Guild courtyard. Scratch cast a spell at it, not sure what, but the hole got mansized. It also looked rather stable and seemed to be pulling material into itself. I just hoped it wasn't behaving like a Darksphere.

Grendel went through and, as he watched, he was immediately grabbed by Guild Security who wanted to know just what was going on. They then wanted to speak to all of us so we all ended up going through. Some of the Ducal guard also arrived and, as the wormhole had appeared outside the Guild wall, it was in the Duke's jurisdiction. Apparently this wasn't the first time that had happened and they immediately started building a guardpost around it. This explains all the guardposts in strange places around Seagate. Of course we all had to swear an oath of secrecy about it.

Once they had finished with us we decided to stock up on healing potions. The Cauldron was still slightly unstable so Grendel found Aqualina and arranged for her to create more Waters of Healing, 10 for Grendel, 6 for Michael, and 5 each for the rest of us. Because of the war effort they now cost 500sp each and I got the impression she had been rather busy making as many as possible over the last few days.

Speaking of which, the current date was the same one that we had entered the Middlemarch, i.e. the 11th of Meadow. It would take three days to create all the required potions so we rested up. It would take much more time to return Hope to normal so it was decided to leave her that way. The other healers and I were successful in reattaching her arm.

While we had been gone there had been reports of rats floating out of the Seagate sewers and some of the Duke's guards suddenly dropping dead. It had transpired that those ones had been dopplegangers. Also the Dark Circle effect was somewhat muted near Seagate, probably due to the efforts of other Guild adventurers.

Glynn had also acquired a tattoo of a Scarab of Thoth as well, probably when he was in Lawfakir's library. He spent much of the intervening time being divinated. Meanwhile Michael went to pay Turf a 'visit' for summoning Callas away at the most inopportune time.

#### 14 Meadow

We were ready to go again and stepped through the new portal back into the valley. Grendel nearly got stung with the bill for the construction of the portal guardhouse etc but managed to sort it out.

Several hours travel later, we reached the remains of one of the Silver Road cairns. It looked like it had been lightning blasted. A spring bubbled nearby so we decided to stop and camp.

#### 15 Meadow

By evening we had reached the end of the Silver Road and found ourselves by a large apple tree. There were several dwellings around, occupied by halflings, gnomes etc. Ahead is the end of the valley and we could see a dark line on that horizon. So we went to the inn to obtain information.

What we discovered that there are a lot of goblins and hobgoblins on the ridge. They have been gathering for a while for an invasion of the valley. Also the Darkness is starting to impinge on the valley, however the magic in the valley is currently keeping the darkness at bay. Part of the Dark Circle I suspect. On the left side of the valley is an enormous hydra and there is something unknown on the right, something that no one has returned to tell about it. On the other side of the hydra are tunnels.

We discovered that the ent in the forest used to be friendly until an earlier party of adventurers (not Guild members) decided to steal it's treasure and set it on fire. Also the silver road was broken by the Necromancer Rashak, the one who had created the Dark Circle in the first place.

Finally we got rooms for the night.

#### 16 Meadow

The party were offered drinks that enhanced our abilities. I went for the nectar while the others drank something rather stronger. Also, we were all offered a small bottle of 'military whiskey' for later use. Apparently it has some rather 'interesting' effects.

The plan was to be disguised as a mixture of hobgoblins and goblins then head up the ridge. A guide went with us to show us the safe, but torturous, route around all the traps that had been set.

#### 17 Meadow (14<sup>th</sup> Meadow - realtime)

We finally reached the top of the ridge and could see the territory around the Gator Depression. Brastor and Ganlion Hill could also be seen. We decided to wait for night before making our way down towards the hill, avoiding any patrols. From what we could overhear, most of the main fighting is occurring sixty miles north of here.

The hill itself is 200ft across at the base and 150ft high. We could see cave openings in it. After circumnavigating it we decided to go in through the old mine workings nearby. Time to prepare the anti-undead spells.

Before going through the entrance, the top of the hill was checked to see if there was an easier way in. However, no such luck. It would have been too dangerous to go in that way. So it was through the back door.

We waded through a large number of hobgoblin guards and many spectacular blows were made, by skill and dumb luck. Many of the guards were killed but a few were left hypnotised by Silverfoam, not to raise the alarm. The clause he used would have made a lawyer proud as we were really confused by it. As long as it works. We did discover from the guards that there was a special device somewhere that distorted magic. It looked like a toroid. Also some floating multishot dart launchers were obtained.

The next group of opposition were trolls. Again, these were quickly dispatched, mainly by Scratch convincing them we were a surprise inspection and getting them to line up. A special crossbow bolt caused the entire line to fall like dominos.

Finally we made it to a large supply room but there was no time to loot as the watch change was in less than three hours. Our carnage would surely then be noticed.

.8.

Outside the supply room was a large room with five exits and a ramp going up. Some of the dead bodies were spoken to and we learnt that the toroid and the leaders are somewhere above and the main prison area, including a special guarded area was below. Looked like that was where the VIP prisoners were kept.

Hobgoblin guards were moving around this area so Scratch went out (disguised as a goblin) and managed to charm some. This probably saved him from being killed outright but didn't prevent him from being battered about and searched, especially when they realised just what was in Scratch's pockets. There were truesilver coins rolling around the floor. We had no choice but to take these guards out.

Fortunately, that didn't take long. During the fight, we noticed a door under the ramp. While Scratch recovered the contents of his pockets, most of which had been caught in Swag's fur, questioning the corpses told us that there was a special area guarded by trolls underneath the cell block. So that was where we went. Hope animated some of the corpses as zombies.

Through the door was a short walk to a T-intersection. To one side was a torture room where a hobgoblin was repairing equipment. Beyond that was a row of cells. To the right was another row of cells, a guardroom containing five hobgoblins, and a door. The cells were full of a mixture of humans and gnomes, of all ages and sexes

While Scratch attacked the torturer, the rest of us dealt to the guards. One of them tried to raise the alarm but Fizzgig scuttled across the ceiling and cut the bellrope. A quick hackfest later and they were all down.

The prisoners were mostly local villagers and they were being used as sacrifices. They were all released and shown the way out. Meanwhile a special window was pressed against the far door so we could see beyond. Stairs led down to a set of double doors and the stonework glittered slightly. We soon determined that this was Bordering Earth, very similar to Bound Earth, which

prevented magical access including that from the ethereal. Some wards were also found but they were dealt to by Scratch and Fizzgig after they climbed through the window.

Off to one side, by the doors, was a room containing iron rings on the floor and the ceiling, a large anvil, and an anchor. All were covered in runes. From DAs we could tell that the anvil is used to make domain weapons, the anchor grounds spells and also acts as a scry guard while the rings disrupted magic.

Scratch opened the door to let the rest of us in and there was a faraway 'clang'. There seemed no need to stealth now so we raced through the door and closed it behind us as the toroid started up with a roaring sound. Something was jamming the doors at the bottom so Fizzgig used some faerie pineapples and a boom-cube to blow it open.

Invested trollskins had been obtained at the Guild and they were now utilised on us all. Just as well as four large trolls were on the other side. Three fired large crossbow bolts at us while the last one cast Quickness on himself and the other trolls. Silverfoam then slept the spellcaster. I succeeded in sending the first one to Anoon.

Grendel self-immolated himself and went into combat but was badly beaten up and managed to get skewered on a troll's spear.

"We can tell the trolls skin is working. The pilot light 's still on" - Silverfoam

While we were dealing with the trolls, a group of hobgoblin assassins rushed out of a secret door behind us. The first we knew of it was when we were attacked from behind. I was one of the victims. Meanwhile Michael was very enthusiastically chopping into trolls while Silverfoam also found himself skewered on the same spear Grendel was on. Glynn and Fizzgig turned to deal with the assassins while Michael and Scratch stayed with the trolls. Hope and I just tried to stay out of the way to get spells off.

I took a Waters of Healing then checked on Grendel. He was unconscious but stable. Even though Silverfoam was impaled he managed to feed Grendel a potion. Meanwhile Michael killed another troll and the body was tossed in Grendel's self-immolate.

"Throw another troll on the Grendel" - Silverfoam

More hobgoblins poured in. Hope sent her zombies to meet them. Meanwhile, Michael joined Grendel and Silverfoam on the spear. Scratch continued attacking the troll and it collapsed. Fortunately that was the last one.

Fizzgig threw a boomcube at the hobgoblins which exploded. Bits of hobgoblin flew everywhere. That gave us enough breathing space to jam the door they were coming through. I also dropped a Wall of Starlight in the hope of slowing them down when they do burst through.

After healing up the party (leaving me with 2 WoH left) we headed out. Soon we entered an L shaped room. There were no apparent exits but Scratch spotted some sort of opening mechanism on the floor, activated by two small keyholes which needed to be unlocked simultaneously then two buttons pressed. Both keyholes had necromantic lifedrainning wards on them.

Again speak with dead was employed to find out more. There was a being below and the builders of this place installed the locking mechanism. The being isn't a weapon and is not an ally. This caused us to believe that below this trapdoor was the person we were looking for.

So Fizzgig and Scratch picked the locks and pressed the buttons. The hatch swung open. Underneath was a pit containing a rather foulmouthed gnome prisoner. We pulled him up and he was rather annoyed that none of us were gnomes. I guess he was expecting his people to rescue him. He also demanded his hammer. That we didn't have but we promised to keep an eye open for it on the way out.

We bugged out, after picking up all the prisoners and headed for the hole to the Guild. Once we got back we saw Ignatious and reported. This wasn't Kurtulmak but was a high ranking illusionist. He said he'd get back to us.

### 17 Meadow

Three days later, he did, looking extremely battered. Turned out that illusionist had been instrumental in performing a successful raid on the hill which resulted in Kurtulmak's escape. Looks like we get paid after all.

.8.

Scratch wanted to tie up a loose end. Something to do with some strange children on Greyhawk. According to him, they had never had a proper childhood so he wanted to give them one. He wanted to obtain essence of childhood from dead children or, failing that, find the crystallised portion on the Para-elemental Plane of Ice. Also Fizzgig wanted to do further work in Lawfakir's library.

So all of us, (except Michael who was taking a break) went over to Greyhawk to see Lorefakir. Much to Fizzgig's surprise, he couldn't gain admittance to the library, even though he had rendered it safe earlier. Lorefakir claimed that it had become 'unstable'. Somehow, given the strangeness of his library, I'm not surprised. We were even wondering if it is a library or we only perceive it as such. We could be entering some Power's memories and ideas.

Anyway Scratch was still looking for this 'essence of childhood' so we went to the temple of Fharlanghn, the local God of Travellers, to see if there was any information there. Their head cartographer hadn't heard of such but he was familiar with the children in question. He was very interested in Silverfoam's maps as well. I was wanting information on the ethereal and elemental planes so he recommended I talk to the local druids who specialise in the raw elements. As for Scratch's request, he recommended a diviner called Jaftu who was at the local magic academy.

So that was where we went. Fortunately for us, he found this problem 'interesting'. However, he requested an extremely large fee from Scratch in the form of silver coin. I was rather amazed when Scratch paid up without battering an eyelid. Obviously adventuring is very lucrative for some people. Turned out he needed to construct some sort of simulcrin of one of the children and it needed to be as accurate as possible. This took five days.

### 22 Meadow

Finally it was completed. However, analysis determined that the children had no souls. Did this mean they were some sort of constructs? So a divination ritual was performed. Turned out they were the product of three wishes, an object and a pledge. The object was a chaos device, probably

a chaos sword and, as well as protecting their parents from any threat, the children also served the master.

So who was the Master? From what we could tell it was an entity bent on world domination within a year. His greatest weakness was Hope, but we don't think it meant our hope. Instead we surmised that the Master represented something like Despair and, as long as people remained hopeful, there was a chance of defeating him. His original plane of origin no longer existed but his current plane was Alusia. Now things were taking an ominous turn.

More questioning determined that his name started with S, but it wasn't the entity that had formed the Gator Depression a long time ago. However, he was either the master or the ally of Rashak, the drow necromancer that had started the Dark Circle. Finally we determined he was most likely an entity known as the Gaunt Man, a creature that took over other planes and ruled them by fear and horror, eventually consuming them in order to gain more power. Any adventurer could be a threat to him and there were two places that were hardpoints against his influence, Lorefakir's house on Greyhawk and the Adventurer's Guild on Alusia.

We decided to warn Lorefakir, in case he didn't know about it then headed back to the Guild to tell them. Also a gift had arrived for us, 30,000sp for rescuing the gnome illusionist. Useful. I decided to immediately learn the Dimensional Weaving Counterspells as I suspect they'll come in very useful.

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