

The Pocket Universe
Summer 804

Adventurers:

Falco – a slightly dodgy looking human who admits to being a thief and a Shadow Celestial

Ashlon Goodlight – an elf of the E&E college and courtier and our party leader

Yvette de Clare – a Mind mage, as well as healer, troubadour and our military scientist

Robert McLeod – a Mind mage

The dona – a namer

and me – Mira Stuart – a fighter and sometime Earth mage – our scribe.

1st Meadow

We gather in one of the many rooms of the Seagate Guild, and once we have all arrived, someone from Guild Security appears. They aren't too sure about this mage called Curtains, but he seems honest enough about employing us. Apparently he lives in a pub that appeared recently in Seagate – it seemed to make room for itself between two buildings that were once adjoining. He hinted that the Guild might be interested in more information about how the pub managed this. Apart from that, he gives us a small sparkly marble – apparently it's some new toy from the Guild. If we break it, it will send out a distress signal, and the Guild will send out a party to get us – or at least try to. Very experimental.

As he has nothing else to add, he goes and brings our employer into the room. He is an elderly gentleman obviously dressed as a mage. He rambles on about how he creates these pocket universes using these tomes he found in his library, and that one of them has been invaded by hordes of men in horned helmets, and trolls and undead and dwarf like creatures – and he wants us to stop this invasion. Falco gets a DA on him, and he shows up as human-like aura, of a race called create-lets. We attempt to get more information, but he suggests we continue the discussion at his pub. We agree and he wanders off. I cast lesser enchantment on those who need it before we head off.

A short time later, we all gather at the pub – called The Black Rose. The staff in the pub don't look Alusian – a few DA's later reveal them to be from a plane called Finia. As the drinks are on the house, we enjoy the evening. At some point, we see someone who looks like Curtains leaving the pub. We ask the staff, and they say, no – it's Dane (whoever that it). Eventually we sit down with our employer and the bar staff after closing. Talking to Curtains is interesting. Sometimes it's like he doesn't even recognise us, and we have to remind him who we are – I hope he remembers when it's time to pay us. Anyway, after some roundabout questioning, we find out that he hired us because he thought we would have more appropriate skills than the bar staff, who double as his bodyguards, to deal with the problem. The staff admit to working at the pub, but are very evasive about who they work for. Other important information found includes that items brought out of the pocket universe stay around – we admire an armband of defence and a ring of protection from spiritual attacks that the bar staff have. The creatures can be killed by normal weapons, however the body disappears as soon as you kill it, then the creature reappears alive and in one piece 10 minutes later.

After we try to get straight answers about the pub and Curtains again, they try to distract us with some fancy flaming drinks. I decline, and see that it was probably a good decision when Falco manages to set his hair on fire. At some point during the distraction, Curtains gets up and leaves. After the drinks, we are offered a tour of the pub and we accept. Nice bedrooms upstairs, with a spa pool, another spa pool on the ground floor, and in the basement, the sarcophagi used to transfer you to the pocket universe, the library, and three private quarters – Curtains, Dane, and a third person called Joshua. However we'll have to get permission before we can use the library.

Before we retire for the night, we manage to pry a bit more information from the staff – apparently the pub moves quite regularly – it can move with very little warning if it is in danger. It chimes before moving – and the troubadour demonstrates on her harp. Also, we are probably going to have to carry all our food supplies – they saw no sign of any food in the universe. By this time it's 4am, and most of us retire for some sleep. I think some people decide to try out the spa pools.

2nd Meadow

At some ungodly hour of the morning, I am woken up by chiming. After a moment of confusion, I realise it is the warning that the pub is about to move. I get dressed in record time and head downstairs, meeting up with the rest of the party doing the same thing. After a short discussion we decide to stay in the pub, as there is no sign of Curtains, and the staff are very reluctant to go and wake him (and we do want to get paid). Shortly after that, the universe turns inside out. I don't remember much about it – I passed out, as did most of the party and some of the staff. When I wake up, we are somewhere else. I DA Ashlon, and last magic to impact is universe transportation. Meanwhile, outside we can see that we are on an island in a lake, and it appears to be surrounded by a peat bog.. The buildings in the town we have appeared in are smaller than in Seagate, and the people on the street look vaguely like Caledonians. They don't seem surprised that they suddenly have an extra pub, in fact they bang on the door, and ask the pub to open as they want a drink!

The staff open the doors and people come in. DA's are cast, and apparently we are on the plane Carfella. As we watch, we notice someone looking just like Curtains come up from downstairs and head in to the pub's lounge room. One of the staff brings him some breakfast. We head over to him, and after some roundabout questions we find out that we are talking to Dane – who we saw last night. We eventually manage to figure out that he is a universe creator as well, and despite the fact that he and Joshua and Curtains look the same, they are not brothers – we can't get a straight answer over what relationship there is between them – this is getting frustrating! Anyway, we find out that Dane creates different universes to Curtains – Curtains likes peaceful universes, Dane's universes have people in horned helmets and trolls and dwarves fighting each other – and lots of mountains. This sounds interestingly like the problem Curtains is happening. We ask a few roundabout questions about links between his universe and Curtains, don't get a straight answer again, and then he gets annoyed with us and leaves.

A few minutes later, another old mage who looks like Curtains enters the lounge. More roundabout questions reveals this to be Joshua. We ask if he creates universes as well, and he does – and his are full of undead (he likes them for some strange

reason). We ask some more questions about these universes, and manage to get him to admit that he would quite like us to fail in our job to fix the problems in Curtains universe. Ashlon suggests that it would be good to be able to communicate with him when we are in the universe, and Joshua agrees. He puts his hands on Ashlon's forehead, and Ashlon screams in pain and passes out. My DA on him now says last magic to impact is remote viewing magic. Joshua then gets up and leaves.

Just as we get Ashlon back on his feet, a bar fight breaks out. Robert is closest to the door and is attacked by a man. Robert responds by hitting him with a sap, and the guy falls to the ground unconscious. A second guy tries to attack Robert as well, and manages to hit him fairly hard. Robert decides to fall back and Ashlon deals with him. We can hear more fighting in the bar, but before we can go do something about it, the barman kicks everyone out of the pub. While this is happening, Thedona decides to go through the pockets of the unconscious man – he has some coins, tobacco and a magical dagger of virility. As we doesn't want to be labelled thieves at this early point, we convince Thedona not to take anything.

Things quickly quieten down, and shortly after they do, another elderly mage appears. This time it's Curtains. We decide to talk to him openly about our belief that we think that it is creatures from the other mages universe that is causing his problems, and he agrees. Why he didn't just tell us that I don't know. Turns out it happens with all the universes they create, however he can't sort it out with the other two, and he wants us to stop it happening in this universe. When we ask how to do this, he says once we go into the universe, we need to find the elf who is in charge and ask him for a quest. He'll ask us to 'go deal with the ravening hordes of horned men', and we can take it from there. We ask about food supplies, and he says that we should take our own. We also ask if we can enter and leave the universe several times, and he says that it is OK, however there could be problems if we come out and meet one of the other mages instead of him. We discuss this, and settle on getting him to be in the transfer room at a certain time each day, and we'll try to come through them.

Curtains then asks if there is anything we would like to help us on our quest, and says he can make us luckier. We work out that it is some form of Greater Enchantment, using an amulet that needs to be surgically implanted. Yvette and Ashlon already have permanent Greater, and so they start negotiating for something else. Also Ashlon asks if Curtains can remove the remote viewing magic on him, and Curtains says he can and does so. My DA on last magic to impact now comes back as dispel remote viewing magic.

Curtains heads off, presumably to attempt to find the amulets, while we pack. When he returns, he has a collection of magical items for us – some healing potions of various types, a staff that enhances the Namer college, which Thedona claims, an amulet of Trollskin that Robert claims, and 4 Greater Enchantment amulets of various attributes. Robert claims the vodka greater – so will spend the adventure drunk or in search of a drink, Thedona gets the Gold Enchantment as she needs the extra protection it gives, and Falco and I take the Blue Greater. He also gives us a final briefing – go to Tir-na-Mbeo and seek out the elf called Fagan, and ask for a quest. We also get some final info from his staff – apparently they left someone behind, a necromancer called Nine Lives. He died, but was not resurrected like everyone else was – I think they wanted us to keep an eye out for him. They also give us a copy of

the map they made of the area.

Once all this is done, we sort out some final code words with Curtains, then we climb into the sarcophagi, and the lids are closed. After a few moments, we are suddenly standing in a field. Looking around, we can see a forest and a town to the south, and a river to the north, with a bridge across it. There are a few creatures around – a mudman and some water beetles (strange, the names just appear in our heads as we approach them). They're neutral and don't attack us. A quick check reveals that we can all draw mana normally. After a short discussion, we decide to head to the bridge over the river. As we approach, we see a man standing on the bridge. He is a fisherman called Mannix, and he and Ashlon have a chat that seems to be mainly a waste of time – the only useful information we get is that the town to the South is called Ardee. A quick check of the map shows that we are north of Tir-na-mbeo, so we say goodbye to Mannix and head to Ardee. There we find various merchants – all selling very standard fare. We stop for a while for lunch, ask around about getting to Tir-na-mbeo, and we are directed to the stables. Turns out they have a magical transport system, however it only goes to certain places. We purchase tickets to Maymell, which is close to Tir-na-mbeo, at 5sp each, then head out – the journey takes 3 hours and is totally uneventful.

Maymell is much the same as Ardee, and the magical transport doesn't go to Tir-na-mbeo, so we decide to walk. As it should only take about 3 hours, and it's currently mid afternoon, we decide to set out immediately. A short way out of town we find a group of skeletons. As they look particularly weak, we decide to find out what fighting is like here. We manage to draw one skeleton out and kill it, then a second, then we are attacked by 8 at once. During the combat, one of the original skeletons reappears and joins the fight. However we still quickly dispatch them all, and decide to move on before they all reappear again. After collecting the loot of course – we find a total of 67 cp, a dagger, a 2 rings and some bracers. Once clear of the combat area, we DA the items, and find we have bracers of defense of some sort, a ring of aiding quickness, a ring of defense +2 and a dagger of extra damage. We agree to get them properly identified at the next town and continue on.

Eventually we reach Tir-na-mbeo. A quick trip to the merchants reveals we have a dagger of +1 DM & +5% SC, bracers and 2 rings of +5% defense, and a ring of initiative +1. That goes to Thedona, the defensive items are sold for 20sp total. We then locate Fagan in the central building. He is an impressively dressed elf, who welcomes us warmly. We ask for a quest to save the world. He somehow manages to look even more impressive as he straightens and looks at Thedona! He says 'You must find the King of the Pookas, who lives north of the river at Ardee. You must then render him unconscious and place this bridle upon him. It will give you control over him. Then return to me with the King of the Pookas. Within him resides another creature. We will free it from the pooka, and you must take it to the Frontier Lands, and find the sleeping god, the oracle.'

Wonderful. We ask for a description of a pooka – it's horselike, with a long spiralled horn on it's forehead. We then pointedly ask Thedona a question and she admits to being a virgin – that explains why Fagan spoke to her – apparently she is the only one who can use the bridle and control the Pooka King. Fagan notices our lack of knowledge of the realms, and says he can give that knowledge to us. He singles out

Ashlon and Falco, and murmurs some spells. Apparently it fails for Ashlon, but Falco's is successful.

It's getting dark, and we decide to settle in for the night in a quiet spot in the town. Falco explains that every town has sentinels which protect them from all the creatures outside. We still set a watch, but have a quiet night.

3rd Meadow

In the morning, we get magical horses north, stopping on the way at Tir-na-nog, the largest city in the realm. It's an elven city, full of merchants and magicians. We make a few enquiries, but nothing stands out as worth paying for at the moment, so we continue north to Ardee.

Once we reach Ardee, Falco uses his new knowledge of the realm, and leads us north of the town, across the river and into the forest. After a bit of looking around, we spot some Pookas, and shortly after, the Pooka King (his name appears in our heads again – very strange). Also around are 'pooka friends' – smaller, different colour, and more aggressive says Falco. We watch for a while, and work out a battle plan. We cast lots of spells – armour, witchsight, walking unseen, invisibility, quickness etc, then carefully approach the king unnoticed. Once in range, Robert and Yvette cast Mental Attack and Ashlon casts Enchanted Sleep on the King. One of them works, because he falls over. Thedona then heads in to put the bridle on him, with Ashlon, Falco and me close behind as protection. Robert and Yvette stay put and ready more Mental Attacks – all necessary as there are about 7 pooka friends, and several pookas heading towards the fallen king, and they don't look happy. Thedona puts the bridle on the King, but a quick DA from Falco reveals that it didn't work. It takes several more attempts before Thedona gets the bridle on successfully. In the meantime, the rest of us try to keep the pookas, and pooka friends off her. The battle is messy and painful – I take a painful crushing wound when a pooka falls on me, then even worse, damage my sword. Eventually the bridle is on the King, and we get Thedona to mount, then ride off towards Ardee. The rest of us quickly recast walking unseen on ourselves, collect up the loot in the area, then follow.

We all meet up again at Ardee – we have taken some serious wounds, and Ashlon busies himself making us feel better. We have also picked up a collection of diseases and death curses which need seeing to. Yvette arrives last – turns out she had backfired a spell, and spent the second half of the combat unconscious – and we couldn't tell because she was invisible, however it meant the Pookas couldn't find her either. The loot is identified as 2 pooka skins, 2 pooka horns, 12 pooka friend eyes and 19sp. The skins are not magical and we sell them for 5sp each, the horns can detect poison, and the eyes can absorb one evil eye spell each.

Once all that is sorted, we have an uneventful trip back to Tir-na-mbeo. Fagan is happy to see that we have been successful, and gives us 100sp. He then takes us to a ritual circle nearby – stone altar, lots of druids etc. Thedona leads the Pooka King to the altar, and he is sacrificed. A small winged creature is freed from his body, caught by the magic of the ritual, and then given a new host – Thedona. Fagan then informs us that we travel North – through Drum Ligen, across the Burning Plains, through the Razor Mountains and across the Plain of Bones to the Black Glass Mountain, where the oracle lives.

It's late afternoon, so we decide to leave in the morning. We ask a few questions about the ritual creature – Thedona reports some strange sensations, and it is apparently attuning itself to her body. We also ask about the oracle – apparently it's a balron – a cross between a dragon and a balrog. We then spend another quiet night.

4th Meadow

At first light we use the magical horse transport system to go to Drum Ligen. It's a big defensive fortress. Inside we find more merchants, including a special one who sells transport necklaces. Apparently these will take us to strange and wonderful places – Atlantis and the Shrouded Isle were mentioned, as well as Guildhouses. He may even be able to make necklaces for the Seagate Guild of Adventurers – worth remembering in case things go wrong. However nothing else is of interest, so we head North out of the fortress into the Frontier lands. Apparently this is an area which is ringed by smaller fortresses, the nearest is a couple of hours walk away. We meet a group of rangers, who tell us this path should be safe as they clear it of intruders regularly – things like giant scorpions, burning men, and various other large desert creatures can be found. We keep to the path and reach the fortress safely, and from there can see the Black Glass Mountain.

After a bit of discussion about how to cross the desert, Yvette suggests we travel at night to avoid the worst of the heat – as it's afternoon we rest up for a while and chat with the guards. They report unusual numbers of undead, and frequent earthquakes in the last month or so. In fact as we speak a skeleton wanders out of the desert and up to the fortress. Falco attempts to talk to it, and then we DA it – it's creator is Nine Lives – the necromancer we had been asked to look for. The guards then decide enough is enough and kill it.

Eventually it gets dark and we head out into the desert. Before we leave, Yvette casts a Limited Precog spell, and says we should have no trouble for the first hour, and this is true. She then casts a second spell, and foresees combat in the next hour – scorpions and other things, so we cast defensive spells and continue on. Sure enough after about 30 min we are attacked, but not by scorpions. Suddenly the ground under our feet disappears, and we are sliding down the side of a large pit, with a very large mouth with lots of teeth at the bottom. Ashlon is the only one not to get trapped in the pit. Robert and I quickly end up inside the mouth – the teeth are VERY sharp, while Thedona suddenly develops the ability to levitate, and escapes (I suspect the creature inside her is protecting itself). Falco and Yvette manage to stop their slide before the mouth, then attempt to stun the creature – as killing it looks impossible. I concentrate on trying to get out, with help from Ashlon with a rope, and eventually succeed, only to fall back in when the creature suddenly whips around and falls over. We are also attacked by some large carrion wasps that live in the creature's mouth – I get stung and paralysed, falling further into the mouth, and into a pool of acid. I can see the others trying to get me and Robert out, and eventually they succeed and move us out of range, then everything goes black.

5th Meadow

When I wake up, I am by the river at Ardee, where we first appeared in this place, and alone. I guess I must have died. A quick check shows I have all my equipment, my greater enchantment still works, and that I am a bit injured. I head into Ardee, find

the healer to deal with my wounds, then use the magical transport to travel to Drum Ligen – where I find the rest of the party – Falco's realms knowledge had suggested that I would reappear at Ardee, so they had returned to Drum Ligen to wait for me. It also suggests that we should 'bind' to this place so that if it happens again we will reappear in here instead of Ardee, this we do. We have a chat to the rangers again – they know of the creature we encountered, and suggest a few ways to avoid it when we try to cross the desert again.

After a spot of armour repair for me and Robert (acid damage from the creature's stomach), we head back to the frontier fort, and again wait until dark before attempting the crossing. This time it's uneventful, and about midnight we reach the Razor Mountains. The rock is hard and shatters into very sharp pieces easily – falling rocks happen often and look lethal. A quick scout around and we find the path through – however a quick check by Yvette reveals creatures waiting to ambush travellers not far along. A few undetectability spells later, and we sneak past them. Further on the pass splits in two. We take the right fork and it leads to large valley, with caves along the walls, lots of sculptures, murals and carvings, as well as hundreds of skeletons. Falco volunteers to go through the valley to see if the path continues out the other side, however he makes a sudden detour part way across and heads into a cave. Deciding this is not good, we immediately run after him. Luckily our walking unseen and such spells hold, and we eventually catch up with Falco deep in one of the caves, where we see many more undead, and greater undead, and a human matching the description of Nines Lives, however he seems to have grown fangs. Falco suddenly snaps out of whatever he was under, and we quickly leave the cave and head back to the valley entrance, then back to the fork to have a look down the left hand path. This leads to a cave, and given it looks like a bad idea, we decide to let Yvette try limited precog on our options. These reveal that if we go into the cave we will see lots of fighting, then all die, but if we are careful, we should be able to cross the valley. So we head back there, use lots of spells and manage to creep across. It's getting close to dawn, so we find a good campsite and take a break. Strange – I've just realised I'm not hungry – at all.

6th Meadow

After resting for part of the day we continue. A little further along, we meet a large sphinx, who tells us we must answer a riddle to be able to pass. We get a practise riddle first – 'At night they come without being fetched, at day they are gone without being lost' – we correctly answer 'Stars'. The main riddle is 'I, never was, but am always to be, no one ever saw me, nor ever will, but I am the confidence of all to live and breathe on this terrestrial ball.' We correctly answer 'tomorrow' and the sphinx grants us passage, but also says if we answer a second riddle, she'll give us a magical item. We decline but before continuing we chat for a while – apparently we are in a much older universe than Curtains' – this one was made by the Toymaker, and it connects to all the newer ones. Also she says that Nine Lives came past a while back, and returned a few days later.

A short time after saying goodbye to the sphinx, we come across a large lake with an island in the middle. Something doesn't seem right, and DA's reveal the water is magical and drains life. We carefully skirt the lake, and continue along the path on the other side. It's getting dark, so we again settle in to camp, then decide it's about time to head back to see Curtains. We use the coins he gave us, and reappear back in

the inn. Curtains is there – and we confirm it's him using the passwords and DA's. We ask him about the Toymaker, and Curtains says he's been gone a very long time, and that he made the inn, but apart from that is unhelpful. We decide to stay the night at the inn – a delicious looking meal is brought out, and I suddenly realise that I am still not the least bit hungry, and get Ashlon to check me out. Seems that in dying and coming back, I've lost my stomach and a few other organs – Curtains says I've been templated, whatever that means. Anyway, I don't seem to need food any more. The healers should be able to fix it when we get back to Seagate. The rest of the party enjoy the meal, and we all get a good night's sleep.

7th Meadow

We're all up early, and head for the sarcophagi to go back into the universe. Curtains says they are malfunctioning a bit – sometimes the person disappears, then reappears back in the sarcophagi instead of in the universe, however there's nothing we can do about this, so we all hop in and are back at our campsite – minus Yvette. We wait a while, then decide she must be safe back with Curtains and continue on. After a short walk we find the Valley of Bones. Aptly named, it looks like it's covered several feet deep in bones – DA's say of up to 10,000 years old. We can see skeletons and human like creatures out there.

Suddenly Ashlon spots someone trying to sneak up on us. We turn to confront them, and he becomes visible, and calls out to us. We let him approach, and ask who he is. It's another Guild adventurer, a dwarf called Garrick. Apparently he missed the Guild meeting and was in a pub afterwards when he and his mercenary drinking partners were approached by Joshua (Curtain's brother), and hired to do much the same as we were, however his other party members had died a few times, and then decided not to return, and his sphere that should have got him back to a sarcophagus wasn't working. He also has a key – a black skull, and he says that it is a race – first one to get the key to the oracle wins. We let him join us with the agreement that he lets our key go first. Besides, he appears to be a reasonable fighter, as well as an illusionist.

We quiz him about the valley, and he says his party went most of the way across, and then decided to fight some mountain guardians. This turned out to be bad, and is what caused the rest of his party to leave. He managed to get back safely by sneaking – despite being a dwarf, he seems to be good at moving quietly. There are also lots of skeletons, night gaunts and other undead out there – and they keep fighting with the guardians. We go for the sneaking option, cast walking unseen, undetectability and armour spells and set off. We can hear the sound of digging and scraping from under the bones – something lives down there, however it doesn't seem interested in us. We manage to avoid everything and several hours later we make it to the base of the Black Glass Mountain.

As we look around for a way up, we discover two mountain guardian warriors, one mage and one ranger attacking a fire mage with an impressive knowledge of swear words. We quickly attack, managing to take out the mage, then the two warriors with various spells, and then kill them. The ranger is up on a ledge and proves more difficult, but eventually one of our mages gets close enough to take him out and he falls off the cliff and dies. Thedona collects up the treasure – 2 rings, a bracer, a cloak, a dagger, a bow and some arrows, while Ashlon heals up those who need it, including the fire mage, who isn't very grateful about being rescued and healed.

As this happens, we realise Falco is missing – we then spot him out playing tag with a night gaunt and some skeletons. He runs back past us – allowing Ashlon to recast quickness on him, and us to DA the night gaunt – it's a celestial mage. Falco tries again to lose them, and fails, so he brings them back towards us and we prepare to fight. Thedona casts Celestial special counterspells on all of us, then they arrive. The battle is short but painful – we quickly take out the skeletons, but the night gaunt gets off a few celestial special spells – a web of darkness, then a ball of light that hits Ashlon, Falco and Robert. Ashlon and Robert fall down, and things are looking bad when suddenly the fire mage joins the fight, casting a fire spell at the gaunt that kills it.

A quick check shows that Ashlon is dead, and Robert nearly so, but not bleeding. While I cast a few Heal spells on Robert, the others convince the fire mage to resurrect Ashlon before his body disappears – and a short time later he is back with us. We gather up the treasure – 1 small bone and 1 white sphere from the night gaunt. A chat with the fire mage reveals that his name is Joakath, and a DA shows him to have magic of several colleges – Fire and E&E among them, and he is from another plain called Erea. We discuss what he is doing here, and he says he likes the area, and offers his services as a guide. But he is very elusive about exactly what he is doing here, and then takes offense at something Falco says, and demands a duel to first blood. Falco declines but Garrick takes him up on it, and manages to win. Joakath looks at us with a bit more respect after that, but we still don't trust him and turn down his offer of a guide, and he wanders off. However before he goes, he does mention that he has died at least twice, and that you get your stomach back after the second death – worth noting, but I won't try that cure just yet.

We're all a bit tired after the fighting, so we look around for a campsite. We find a very nice cave, but a few checks reveals it to be alive and hungry, so we settle for a small crevice in the rock. We DA all the treasure we have found – the white bone does regeneration when close to other bones (like a graveyard), the white sphere helps celestial mages manipulate the white light spell, one ring generates silence, the other is transferring stiffness. The bracers add 1 to defense, the cloak allows the wearer to see through the weather (like fog), and the dagger can cast one weakness spell on a successful hit per combat. The bow is not magical, but the arrows are – and grant a +30 to hit and +4 to damage. Just as we finish, Yvette suddenly appears – the sarcophagi has finally worked. We rest for a few hours.

After the rest, we head on up the mountains, following a faint path the rangers have found. We are suspicious that Joakath is following us, but we can't seem to catch him at it. It's getting very cold, and starts to snow as we climb – and we spot large white flying creatures above us – they look like butterflies, and seem to be shaking something into the snow. A quick look around and we spot an overhang just off the path, and head for shelter before any of it hits us. We all make it safely, and it was a good idea to do so as a DA on the magical snow shows it to cause freezing on contact. Eventually the butterflies leave, and we continue on up the mountain, until we reach the base of the black glass mountain – and there we find a large door. DA's show it to be magical, locked but not trapped. Garrick suddenly notices that his key – the skull – is humming and pulls it out of his pack. Ashlon holds it up to his ear to listen, and the skull bites off his earlobe! It then chews on the flesh happily, with blood going

everywhere. Garrick has a flash of brilliance, and lets some of the blood fall on the door and it opens.

Beyond the door it is dark, but we can see stairs going down. We get out the lanterns, enter the cave, and head down. At the bottom of the stairs, we see another door like the first, but this one has carvings on it – of a skull biting pieces out of a person, and eventually eating the entire body. However ours is behaving itself at the moment, and Ashlon sacrifices another earlobe to get the door open. Beyond we can see a T-junction, going left and right, and note that the walls are made of good quality masonry – it's not a natural cave. After some debate and use of limited precogs, we head to the left, and come across another skull door. Yvette volunteers to feed the skull, and lets it take a piece of her arm, however it's not satisfied with this and keeps eating. She loses most of the flesh off her arm before Ashlon manages to pull it off. It then starts eating the flesh off Ashlon's hand, and we are forced to cut the hand off to stop it eating. Garrick manages to get some of the blood on the door to open it, then puts the skull in a bag, and we all head through the door. Beyond is a room about 30ft square, with another door on the far side, thankfully not a skull door. This one is not trapped or locked and opens easily. Ashlon and Yvette use their healer skills on themselves, then we head up the stairs that are beyond the door.

About half way up the stairs, we notice that we are getting short of breath, but figure it's the exertion, and continue. At the top, we find a passageway about 120ft long, and more stairs going down at the far end. We set out along the passageway, and then realise that it is getting very hard to breathe. Ashlon casts quickness on us, and we run along the passage and down the stairs at the far end, only to find another skull door, and the air is still bad. Robert volunteers an ear, and the skull takes the entire ear, and tries to take more (it's noticeably bigger than it was before), then we manage to pull it off and use the blood to open the door. We get a brief puff of good air as the door opens, but nothing more, and there is another 30ft room, with a mechanical door on the other side. I go to DA it to check for traps, but Garrick beats me to it, runs across the room and goes to open it. There is a big explosion as all the gas catches alight, and I realise I am lying on the floor, unable to move, although I can see Thedona moving about unhurt. After about 10 minutes, everything goes black for a moment, and I am in Drum Ligen – our bind point - and the rest of the party is with me, except for Thedona. We all swear at Garrick for a while.

Once we calm down a bit, we track down the healer, and get healed up – one good thing is that all the flesh we lost to the skull is healed back as well. Ashlon checks us over, and I have my stomach and all other organs back, but the rest of the party have lost theirs – looks like Joakath was right about that. We also decide that since dying seems to be common here, we should see if we can get someone to join us who can resurrect, and we track down a druid who agrees to come along. Since we are all a bit worried about Thedona, we then immediately set out for the border fort, reaching it just after dark. We then use all we learnt from our previous travels to go across the Burning Desert and through the Razor Mountains until we reach the sphinx. She demands we answer another riddle to get past, and asks 'Runs over fields and woods all day, under the bed it sits all night, not alone, tongue hanging out, waiting for a bone.' We answer 'boot' and this is correct. She again offers a magical item if we answer another riddle, but we drag Ashlon away before he convinces himself to try.

8th Meadow

We continue on, crossing the Plain of Bones, and climb back up the mountains until we reach the first skull door. I suggest that to trigger the skull we feed it by cutting off a piece of flesh rather than letting it bite us. It seems a bit unhappy at this, but it works, and we go through the door, and retrace our steps through the caves. The bad air is gone, so we make it through that passage easily and reach the room where we died, and find Thedona asleep.

We try to wake her up, and fail – a DA shows last magic to impact is enchanted sleep. Ashlon manages to counter this and she wakes up. Turns out she was waiting for us to make it back when Joakath showed up. He opened the second door, and tried to get her to go down the corridor beyond it ahead of her, but she refused, and they went down it together, she then caught him preparing to cast a spell, and cast fire and E&E counterspells on him, but he must have managed to cast the sleep spell anyway. We will have to have words when we catch up with him. He also took Thedona's namer staff for some reason.

We check out the corridor – it's about 100ft long, narrow, and with a high ceiling. There are holes in the ceiling and walls that look suspiciously like a trap, but we can't find any trigger, then Robert casts ESP and detects lots of sentient entities above the corridor – looks like they will pour various nasty liquids down the holes if we enter the corridor. We stage an obvious retreat, then Robert casts Undetectability on all of us and we return and head along the corridor to the end, where there is another skull door. Another chunk of flesh is sacrificed, and it opens, and we quickly go through before this is noticed.

Beyond this door is a very large natural cavern. We can see a large chasm in the middle with a bridge across it, and at the bottom of the chasm we can see molten rock. Between us and the chasm is a mountain stream, about 20ft across. There is no bridge, and it looks very fast flowing and cold. Paths wind up the left and right hand walls. Robert and Yvette cast precogs again, and see a nasty combat in which we all die on the left hand path, and on the right, see us wandering for at least an hour in a maze of twisty passages, all alike. As both sound bad, we opt to cross the cavern, however DA's on the stream show it to be highly magical, and getting wet seems to be a bad idea, so instead we climb the right hand path until we are past the stream, then go to climb back down to the cavern floor. We find a perfect outcrop to anchor a rope, and send Falco down to check everything is OK. Suddenly the outcrop holding the rope disappears – merging back into the rock wall - and the rope, with Falco on it, falls. Falco reacts quickly, managing to get a handhold on the wall, then the path we are standing on also disappears, and we all fall. Ashlon, Yvette and the druid manage to grab a hold, Thedona's levitation kicks in, but the rest of us fall to the floor and are killed outright, however the druid is able to resurrect us before we disappear.

After dusting ourselves off, and reminding ourselves not to trust anything in this place from now on, we head over to the bridge over the chasm. This time we check it out carefully, and realise that the middle of the bridge doesn't seem to be there. So we send Thedona across to anchor a rope (ignoring all perfectly placed outcroppings), as she appears unaffected by the absence of part of the bridge, and the rest of us cross using the rope. Further on the floor of the cavern slopes steeply down. We cast DA's

and precogs to find out the slope is a giant trap triggered by pressure, with sharp blades underneath, and a mechanism designed to squash anything that manages to avoid the floor trap. A bit of experimentation shows that we can put stepping stones in the floor by rolling large rocks down it, however it still looks dangerous, so we decide to leave the rocks as a fall back measure (literally), and climb down the walls. There are lots of good, non-magical handholds, and we all manage to get down safely.

At the bottom we find a large room, with with a pool of water in the middle. There are no obvious ways out, so we check for and find an underwater passage from the pool. Ashlon is about to dive in to find out how long it is when suddenly Joakath surfaces in the pool and swims over to us. Naturally we are extremely suspicious of him, and ask some pointed questions about why he attacked Thedona. He apologises, and give her the staff back, and says that he was just trying to get home. Turns out he's been here a while and wants to go home, and he thinks there is a portal of some sort further in. He took the staff because he thought it could help him, but was unable to get through a door further in, and now wants to join us and see if we can get through together. We ask lots of questions about why we should, and he is still a bit evasive, but we eventually decide to let him tag along, but we'll keep a close eye on him. As a way of thanking us, he gives us each a water breathing potion to use to get through the underwater passage.

Using the potions, we swim through the passage and surface in another room with yet another corridor, down which we can see a door. DA's reveal the door to be alive, and it talks, refusing to let us pass without the password. Above the door is carved 'My name is Quentus Timjat', and we work out that this is the name of the door, and we need to door to say it out loud. Various methods fail, then Garrick hits on insulting the door by mispronouncing it's name, and eventually it gets so annoyed at Garrick that it says the password and then opens. The corridor continues on to yet another door – this one has no writing, carving or anything else, and is not trapped or locked.

We take a rest break, then open it up, and see on the other side a small room with three other doors. In the middle of the room is a large sphere, that starts humming a few seconds after we open the door, and the humming is increasing in volume. We close the door, staying in the corridor, and the humming stops. Precogs reveal it to be another trap, and the sphere will kill us all messily if we don't do things right. We carefully check over the room, and find that there is a ring attached to each door, and that the door we have been using has a larger ring on it than the other three. Multiple precogs later, we work out that the large ring signifies which door is safe to open, and that the rings can be moved, but they have to be kept the same distance from each other and the central sphere. Precogs also reveal the two side doors to be dead ends, so we carefully move the rings so the large ring is on the opposite door, and safely pass through to another corridor, with another door.

This door is magical and locked, and DA's reveal it to require the correct key to pass. Joakath produces a magical key that he tries – it works and the door opens. Beyond is a very large circular room, about 100ft across. Floating in the middle is a naked man covered in tattoos that keep appearing and disappearing – he appears to be asleep. We can also see images of creatures floating throughout the room – these are appearing and disappearing as well. Below him appears to be a large pit, and above the room

continues upwards further than we can see. The outside 10ft of the floor of the room is discoloured, and the air above it looks tinged with black. DA's show the floor and air are highly magical. On the far side of the room we can see a trapdoor in the floor.

As we consider our next move, Thedona suddenly says over Yvette's mindlink that she is not in control of her body. In the same instant, she and Joakath start walking forward slowly towards the room. Garrick and Robert try to stop them by knocking them out, hitting them just as they enter the room, and getting zapped by purple magical fire for their troubles. Despite the fact that Thedona has been knocked out, she and Joakath step forward into the room, and are instantly teleported across the 10ft of blackened air, and continue to walk slowly towards the human in the middle, who we can now see is surrounded by some sort of magical sphere. Also Thedona is taking off her clothes.

Yvette runs into the room, knocking Thedona to the ground to stop her, and gets zapped – Robert does the same to Joakath with the same result, while Ashlon Quickens everyone except Thedona and Joakath. Garrick throws his key – the skull – at the oracle, but misses and it falls into the pit. Noticing that those in the room seem a little transparent, I DA Yvette and find she, and probably all those in the room have been transformed into black mana. Despite this Garrick and I enter the room to help Yvette and Robert, until our druid friend casts a spell on Thedona and Joakath to hold them in place, while we figure out what to do. Much use of precogs later, we work out that the human is probably the oracle, and that it needs a key to wake up – either the one in Thedona or the one we realise that is in Joakath. However the process results in the death of the key carrier – the body falling into the pit. Also those who have entered the room can't leave – something to do with becoming black mana. While this is happening Garrick and I check out the trapdoor – under it is a passage leading to a ledge on the wall of the pit, and a ladder descending to the bottom – the pit is very deep, with black liquid at the bottom, and this appears to dissolve anything that falls into it.

More precogs show that we have a limited amount of time before the room's defenses trigger and we are killed, and we decide that the best option is to let Joakath reach the oracle, while we shelter in the tunnel under the trapdoor. As soon as Joakath touches the sphere around the oracle, he is drawn in. Something happens and we see the imp leave Joakath's body and merge with the oracle, who then wakes up – and Joakath's body falls into the pit. Suddenly the corridor out of the room disappears and we get the impression that the room is moving – there is a lot of grinding noises, and what sounds like large avalanches. Over the mindlink Thedona, who has woken up, sends images that appear to be coming from her imp – the picture of the black glass mountain that we are in unfolding into a large humanoid, standing up, and pushing a large black sphere into the sky, and the image of a forest and a plain, and the top of the black sphere being pushed up into this world from below, and suddenly lots of creatures appearing everywhere. She also says that the oracle's tattoos have disappeared, and that the images of creatures that were appearing and disappearing in the room have stopped.

Yet more precogs show we have about 5 minutes before the process finishes. Thedona's imp still wants to get to the oracle, and to stop that, we decide the only way is to kill her to get the imp to leave her body. Garrick volunteers with Ashlon using

his healing skill so Thedona doesn't feel the pain, and after a couple of stabs to the back, Thedona dies – our druid resurrects her in the safety of the tunnel, however powerful black creatures suddenly appear beside Garrick and Ashlon before they can reach safety, and they die very quickly – strange, their bodies disappear immediately, and Robert didn't get a death buzz as he has from other deaths. Meanwhile the imp merges into the sphere and disappears.

A couple of interesting precogs show that Ashlon and Garrick aren't really dead – that they have reappeared somewhere else - with all their equipment - however this will only happen while the oracle is moving. The rest of the party show supreme courage, leave the tunnel, and effectively commit suicide by letting themselves get cut down by the black creatures – Thedona has enough time to grab her weapons but not her clothes from the floor before she dies. Unfortunately her staff has fallen into the pit and been lost. Luckily the precog was correct, and we reappear unhurt with Garrick and Ashlon at the edge of the forest we saw in Thedona's vision.

9th Meadow (I think)

Yvette and I give Thedona some spare clothing, while Falco casts DA on a few things, and finds we are on the plain Carfella. This name is very familiar – it is the plain the pub was on before we entered Joshua's universe. Hopefully it is still here and we can track it down. Ashlon casts a locate spell on it, and it is out of range, then casts a second on Curtains, and it fails horribly, managing to summon a succubus. She seems to think Ashlon is very attractive, and pulls him off into the bushes. We look at each other then go to follow to make sure he's OK. Yvette goes first, then suddenly seems to fall unconscious. The rest of us quickly circle around, while Thedona and Robert put down some Mind College counterspells on the area. As we approach, we see the succubus has bitten Ashlon on the neck. It's not happy with us approaching, and suddenly flies up in to the air, taking Ashlon with her. Robert manages to knock her out with a spell, but she and Ashlon then fall to the ground and are killed, however our druid friend is still with us, and resurrects him. He seems a bit sheepish after that.

Anyway, looking around, we can see a black tower a couple of miles out in the plain, and from somewhere nearby we can here harp music. We decide to check this out, and find a bard playing to a group of plant-like creatures, which are dancing. Yvette gets close enough to him to cast mindspeech, and we ask what's going on. Turns out the creatures are mandrakes, and his music is the only thing stopping them from screaming – which is apparently a very bad thing. We consider our options, then use an item we found earlier to cast silence on the area the mandrakes are in, then invisibility on the bard, and he quickly leaves the clearing.

We chat with the bard, his name is Femilud ap Duna, and work out that the pub is somewhere in Erin, which is an island some distance away. Seems the bard is looking to go there as well, and he says we could probably get passage there on a boat owned by the nearby King Elric, son of Ulf, but he doesn't know what this would cost us. Another option would be that there is a druid who lives in the forest who is apparently quite powerful, and might have some teleport spells or something. We rest for a few hours, then head towards the middle of the forest and the druid.

After an hour or two, we spot a group of bandits – we hide and they don't see us. The bard says they could be heading towards the druid – they do some work for him, so we follow, and see them disappear into a circle of trees through a passage that closes behind them. We cast walking unseens on ourselves, wait until they come out, then sneak through the passage before it closes. Inside there is a clearing, with a large tree in the middle. There is a door in the base of the tree, and a balcony about 40ft up. We drop the spells and call out a welcome to the druid. He is not happy to see us and refuses to answer our questions, and tells us to leave or he'll attack. We go to leave, then Garrick asks one more question, and the druid activates some defensive spells. He throws a rope down on the ground, which animates and tries to wrap itself around some of us, while the trees start throwing large spikes at us. Also the passage through the trees closes, trapping some of the party in the clearing. Garrick is the only one who avoids the rope, and he climbs up the tree, confronting the druid on the balcony. He asks the druid to stop the spells, but he goes to attack, and there is a short fight that Garrick wins by knocking him unconscious. When he does, the rope goes inanimate, and so do the trees. The rest of the party climb in. Thedona has been killed, and Robert and I quite badly hurt in all of this, but a quick resurrection and a bit of healing later, and we are all OK.

We join Garrick in the tree, and do a quick search. We find a number of potions – 5 healing, barkskin, precognition, luck, knowledge, growth and diminish, as well as the druid's staff, which appears to aid Earth magic. We wake him up, but he is not cooperative, so we knock him out again, get Robert to cast Bind Will on him, and when this is successful, we try again. This time he is very helpful, telling us all about the stuff in the tower, however he has no teleport spells or anything else to get us to Erin.

Suddenly the druid collapses and starts talking about the black tower. He sees all the creatures around it multiplying, then the universe slowly collapsing in on itself. When he wakes up, we ask about this, and he says it was a prophecy. We ask about the tower and the creatures and apparently they appeared about two weeks ago, and the creatures are causing problems locally. We work out that it really has been two weeks, it's actually somewhere around 23rd Meadow. Anyway, since we seemed to have caused the problem, we agree we should try to sort it out, and say farewell to the druid and return to the forest.

The bard says he tried to get to the tower, and that the number of creatures increase as you get closer, and he couldn't find any sign of a door. Falco then agrees to drink the potion of knowledge we got from the druid, and using this we find out that the only way in is via the pub. So we head off to see King Elric to get passage on a boat to Erin. He lives nearby in a large port town, in a large fortress that is under some repair. When we enter, we see the King sitting at the high table, with a druid beside him. Femilud (the bard) seems pleased to see this and heads over to have a word with him and the king. When he comes back, he says the attacks from the creatures have been really bad in Erin, and the druid is here to get help. If we offer to help them, the druid might transport us there. Then the druid comes over. We tell him some general information about knowing about the tower, and believing we need to get to the pub to try and stop the universe ending, and he seems to believe us, but also believes that we know more than we are saying. He agrees to take us to Erin, but says we have to convince the Conclave of Kings of our story. He leads us out of the town to a nearby stone circle, and transports us all to Erin.

We appear in another stone circle outside a large town. We head on in, only to find that the Conclave of Kings has already finished, and the kings have taken out the army to battle the creatures, and orders have been left for the druid to join them. After a bit of thought, he decides to let us go to the pub, which from our description he says is probably in the town of Bunclody. He gives us some magical items that he says might help us – a clod of earth that allows the tunnelling spell to work on bound earth (I grab this), Thedona gets 3 twigs that can dispel magical effects, Ashlon gets a menhir that activates existing portals, and a chain that disrupts magical links, Yvette gets a potion that when drunk allows you to cast 1 special knowledge spell at Rk20 for 3 months, Falco gets a potion of immunity to magical fire for 6 months, Robert gets a potion that enhances any control spell to mass control with a 50ft range, and Garrick gets a dispel illusion grenade.

Anyway, we return to the stone circle, and the druid transports us to Benclody. By this time it's after dark, and although we locate a boat ramp, all the boats appear to be on the other side. We yell a bit, offer them payment, and they come and get us. Once in the town, we quickly locate the pub, and cast a few precogs. These show that the bar staff don't appear to be friendly to us any more, and that the doors to Curtains and his brothers' rooms appear to have been covered in bound earth. We cast invisibility and try to sneak into the pub, but the harpist starts playing an odd song that manages to dispel the illusion on all except Falco and Robert. These two make it to the stairs to the basement unseen, the rest of us act innocent and take a drink. They bring us some free beer, but we are suspicious, and a DA shows if we drink it we'll be affected by a Bind Will spell. We get up and leave to try a discreet entrance again.

This time we block our ears so we can't hear the harp, and this appears to work on the illusions, but unfortunately the harpist has changed her song again, and there is a fire protection spell on the doorway. Ashlon, Garrick, our druid and Thedona make it through OK, but Yvette and I are forced to wait outside. The barstaff are now very defensive, and we notice that the townspeople are all heading towards the pub, and seem to be under a Bind Will spell. Robert takes out the harpist, and Yvette and I get into the pub, and bar the door. The barman turns into a werebear, which Garrick and I distract until Yvette hits it with a mental attack. Falco takes out a third person on the stairs, and the rest of us continue distracting the rest of the staff until Robert drinks the Mass Control potion and casts Control person on everyone. We divest them of weapons etc, then head to the basement to look for Curtains. Ashlon's locate says he is there, but I will have to tunnel through the bound earth. I'm not too good at that spell, so the party lets me drink the Rk20 special knowledge spell potion for it. Using this and the clod of earth, I cast tunnel. It works, but is considerably shorter than expected – a side effect of the clod of earth probably. I cast two more to create an entrance into Curtains' room.

We all head into the room, and find Curtains sitting on a golden throne, with lots of rats scurrying around. We ask him what's been going on, and he says that he and his brothers have merged into one person, and that the tower is going to destroy this plane to allow him to recreate the three off the oracle's universe. When we ask him why, he says he is the shadow of the Toymaker, who he hates, and this is a Toymaker universe, so he wants to destroy it. It seems this was planned, and our quest was all part of this – getting the key to the oracle caused them to merge together, and started

the universe destruction. Also he has done this many times before. He seems to be a much nastier person now, and nothing we say will convince him to stop. He offers us a collection of magical items if we will leave – he has a portal to Alusia there.

We debate amongst ourselves, and cast a few DA's – the rats are fear rats, and Curtains can cast his spells at very high levels, also the throne is highly magical. However our conscience says we can't let him destroy the universe, and we attack. Ashlon casts quickness on us, then slaps the magical chain that destroys magical links on Curtains, Thedona, Robert and Falco try to hit him with the magical twigs that dispel magical effects, and the rest of us try to distract him into not casting spells. However things go bad when Ashlon's attack triggers a TK rage that throws most of us painfully back against the walls. Our druid friend heals those closest to him, and we try again. Falco manages to get the throne with a twig, as all the rats start casting spells – hellfire, mass fear, necrosis and much more – there are 35 rats. Thedona is frozen in fright, I get panicked by the rats, and let lose a DragonFlames from an invested item (I knew it would come in handy). This takes out many of the rats, but Curtains is immune, and I am then frozen by the next fear attack. Falco is unconscious as well, following by Yvette and the druid. Garrick, Robert and Ashlon continue the attack, but fail to stop Curtains using his staff to cast a banishment spell, and the next thing I know, I am somewhere in Alusia, with Ashlon, Robert, Garrick and Thedona.

Having no other options, we head back to Seagate, and find that the pub is back where we first found it, and Falco and Yvette are safe and well. Turns out a few seconds after he cast banishment, the chain broke the link between Curtains and his brothers, and they split back into three individuals, so when Falco and Yvette woke up they found them fussing over them and asking what had happened. Turned out they didn't remember being one person, and as they are much friendlier as three people, we just asked them not to send anyone else on any quests to the oracle. Oh, and Falco had convinced Curtains to let us keep all the magical items that were offered to us back before the combat. Apparently they are all cursed, but they might be worth something. Somehow it doesn't surprise me that he was tricking us. Anyway the pub stayed around for a little while, but I believe it has now moved on, Curtains and his brothers were last seen happily discussing creating new universes.