

The Dragon Horde [GM: Daryl Crosby] Winter 799

PARTY:

Leader: **Liessa**, Female, Mind, <William Dymock>.

Scribe: **Hagan**, Male, non-mage spy, 'smith, mechanician <Michael Parkinson>.

MilSci: **Eidolon**, Male, Solar, <Andrew Withy>.

Also: **Shemin-ah**, Female Plains-Nomad, Ice, <Rosemary Mansfield>;

and Tobias **Tilbury**, hobbit male, non-mage (1st Guild contract) <Michael Gee>.

EMPLOYER: **Jake Sterling**

AGENT: Cuthbert Worzy, representative of Jake Sterling, says the Employer wants a party skilled in the wilderness. There's lots of healing in the party, everyone but Tilbury, and the employer will boost Tilbury up to the level of the group (with a *Greater Enchantment* and, maybe, some items).

LOCATION: **Dragon Isles** (Alusia)

TASK: To escort Jake Sterling on a diplomatic/trade mission to **S'Garth City**, a city in an area that has been in turmoil lately. His purpose is to re-confirm trade links, *etc*, with the new authorities and investigate conditions to the south of that city. We are bodyguards rather than diplomats. It is expected that there will be several weeks travel through unsettled forests and mountains, known to be bandit-infested. The pay will be 5000 sp. each, already deposited with the guild. We have been allowed to take some in advance, for expenses (up to 2000 sp.). The employer will pay all travelling and accommodation expenses (and probably other stuff where needed).

The Original Astrological Reading:

Well we know where we're goin'
but we don't know where we've been
and we know what we're knowin'
but we can't say what we've seen
and we're not little children
and we know what we want
and the future is certain
give us time to work it out

we're on a road to nowhere
come on inside
takin that ride to nowhere
we'll take that ride

I'm feeling okay this mornin'
and you know
we're on the road to paradise
here we go, here we go

maybe you know where you are
I don't care
here is where time is on our side
take you there...take you there

There's a city in my mind
come along and take that ride
and it's alright, baby, it's all right

and it's very far away
but it's growing day by day
and it's alright, baby, it's all right
would you like to come along
you can help me sing this song
and it's alright, baby, it's all right

they can tell you what to do
but they'll make a fool out of you
and it's alright, baby, it's all right

BACKGROUND

THE JOB: Jake Sterling is a representative of **Nilreb**, the capital of **Dravogen**, smallest of the 4 main islands. There are currently major problems trading into the southern half of Dragon Isle, but

with little information as to why. Jake is to visit **S'Garth City**, the major town of the region, and then probably travel further south, which is a more unsettled area. There have been 4 previous Guild missions to the territory of the Dragon Isles (and/or the plane of **Faeleph**).

ASIDE: See the web site has scribe notes from all previous adventures: Dog Bothering (Spring 798), Rabbit Adventure (Autumn 797), Where is Gammy? (Autumn 796), Dorvogel's Dungeon (Spring 795).

THE REAL MISSION, as it was *eventually* revealed to us: we were actually there to protect Jake (when he wanted it) while he was spying, and to ensure that at least one of Jake or **Thornton** made it back to Civilization.

On Alusia, the Dragon Isles are a group of islands some 2000 miles SE of Seagate. Dravogen seems to be a settled, well populated, magic rich, and prosperous island. Nilreb is near its centre and has a good canal/river access to both north and south coasts.

Dragon Isle is by far the largest of all the other islands. There is a good trade route to S'Garth City (the town which lies vaguely in the middle of that adjacent island), which is a small-to-medium walled-town with a castle. S'Garth City is the administrative capital of Dragon Isle. A couple of years ago its lord was changed from **Gammy**, a dwarf, to **S'Garth Postlethwaite**, a human. (See previous scribe notes). S'Garth has encouraged an influx of orcs to settle in the town, and discouraged the dwarves, who have been moving out in large numbers. The southern half of Dragon Isle is reputed to be lightly settled, with large uninhabited areas and bandits. We have little information.

The Dragon Isles on Alusia have close links with a set of similar islands on the plane of Faeleph. There is a close link between the two places. While events are not duplicated the geography, political regions, significant personalities etc seem to have equivalents in both places. There are reputed to be many portals between the two planes. Throughout the mission we were afraid we might stray onto the other plane, but it probably never happened (we D.A.ed regularly). The guild later advised that Persons of Significance reside in one plane or the other, but may travel between the planes in order to meddle in the affairs of both.

Duesday, 1st of Frost 799: We meet Cuthbert, collect scribe notes of previous parties, & go through portal to Nilreb late afternoon [Seagate time]. Those of us who have horses take them as well. The portal functions by "stepping into a room, turning right, stepping out again, and you're at the destination." When we arrive at Nilreb, it is about midnight; so we sleep in local inn.

2nd: We go to the city's castle to contact our employer; but he is staying at **Therlighten's Tower**, a friend's place, about an hour out of town, so we go there in the afternoon. **Therlighten** is a fire mage and his Tower is a fire mage community, with training, alchemists, *etc*. We muck around between town and the Tower while Tilbury is powered up.

During this time, the dwarves contact us, asking us to plant an item under the castle in S'Garth City. It is a teleport item so that the dwarfs can go and beat up on the orcs. We lead them on, to find out more about it, and then tell our employer (Jake) everything. He isn't really worried, but declines to get involved in what looks like a developing feud between the dwarves and orcs. Jake explains that Gammy lost lordship of S'Garth City after being accused of murder.

3rd: Eidelon goes pub-crawling (in *that* costume!). **Anancy**, who runs the Tower for Therlighten, invites the party to Dinner. We go up the tower many steps — in fact we go higher than it physically exists (atlas from the outside). The elf in blue ~~fowling~~ flowing robes is Therlighten. The food is good, but Jake is not present.

<THIS NOTE IS ATTACHED>

CONFIDENTIAL (these attached postscripts are NOT allowed out of the Guild Library):

One other guest at that dinner was a Bearded Dwarf in brown, female, who turned out to be Gammy. **Our meeting was hush-hush & was not mentioned to the Employer.** Gammy said there was trouble ahead for Dravogen & Dargen, fermented by someone in Dragon Isle. Gammy revealed that she had apparently lost a **Citadel**. She & some mates (including Steal, Fenris, Thum, & Kaynom) beat up the giant, orc, & human baddies (who used to own it) according to the traditional dwarven methods — *i.e.* blood everywhere. Gammy then left a skeleton crew of about 10, but she hadn't heard from them in a while.

The missing citadel was some 5-10 minutes down a side-canyon. Gammy gave us a ring that would alert the troops that we were in the vicinity (but if we took the ring off, they wouldn't be alerted); and, to identify us as good-guys, she also gave us a circular amulet on a chain — the device looked like a triangle with a dot in each corner. She asked that we hide citadel's existence from Jake.

One possible enemy was discretely mentioned: Rholf Ycart (*never* say his name aloud!) who was a superficially human baddy that had dogged Gammy's party & had done them over.

5th: We leave Therlighten's Tower, on the ring-road around Nilreb, with Jake Sterling & the rest of the caravan (all Human), heading towards Spire Mountain & other mountains — NB: Faeleph's Spire Mountain is taller. We get to double doors, which are wide enough for the cart to pass through, & enter the mountain. The horses are sent on ahead, along the Rayleway; and then we travel in a similar way, in boxes on wheels so cramped that only the halfling could stand up. By this stage Hagan has finished Tilbury's leather armor and accessories: a matching pewter round-bellied tankard.

6th: We exit the "back-door" & emerge into rolling hills. By midday we reach the coast in order to travel up the **Dragon Arm** (the name of the channel between the 2 islands). We get on a barge with a short stubby mast & sails. Its name is blacked out because, apparently, the locals indulge in piracy from time to time.

7th: Eidelon slaughters some bandits, by surprise, while Hagen runs interference. Liessa blabs about various Guildmembers (Turf & Blitzkrieg) to the strangers in the Caravan — does *anyone* know a mind-mage that isn't indiscrete? We establish a pattern of two party members scouting ahead & doing a little hunting.

8th: We cross the main road at Danumun Town (which contains mostly humans, with some hobbits & orcs). By early afternoon we reach **Thurston** & stay at "The Cockerel." We're not bothered by the thief during the night, but some other people are.

9th: We get to **Caseton** and stay at "Flying Squirrel." Jake goes out in the afternoon.

10th: We view S'Garth City in the distance: a walled city with a Church (on the left) & a Keep (on the right) projecting above the walls. The main river is to the right of the town. Outside the city we encounter caravans that once were gaily painted. Unfortunately "our" mindmage tortures a little old lady who said her a Sooth. As Eidelon observes: "Lies doesn't appreciate the truth." Obviously the bint hasn't heard about gypsy curses, either. Although she thought the Sooth was bad enough to be

paid for by cruel mental pain, Liessa also thinks it important enough that we should know what was said.

From the Old Woman [the Gypsy, that is, not Liessa]:

You've travelled far these last few days
Whilst you travel to the haze
Fancy clothes will bring you ire
So beware the funeral pyre
Hark the Herald! news travels fast
Bad news travels like a hurricane's blast
Traveling from now, you have far to go
But alas, you travel too slow

The town has orc-guards. We go up Castle road & enter the barbican (guards politely stepping aside). Eventually some chap comes out & chatters to Jake; and we're finally shown to quarters, after certain people learnt the hard way not to leave us loitering in the corridors. Jake introduces us to **S'Garth Postlethwaite** (human). We attend dinner [Eidelon asks, by D.A., "highest ranked professional skill" & gets "No answer." Liessa observes "Well, that's a Noble for you."]

11th: At breakfast, Jake says he'll spend the day with S'Garth & he suggests that we spend the day investigating the town. Tilbury goes to the Church: "Surely a place this large must have a big Kitchen." He is soon confronted by a local cleric, but replies innocuously "I was just admiring this fine ... [*whispers (aside):*] what am I looking at?"

At midday, servants come with messages that Jake has decided to leave early & he will meet us at the Far gate. Apparently S'Garth had been avoiding all his questions all morning about the trouble down south; even though talk in the city was that S'Garth had raised taxes *because* of the attacks down south. — PS (added the next day): Jake admitted that S'Garth even said that there was NO trouble, but that Jake didn't believe him.

When out of sight of the city, we turn south, but send the caravan along the road northwest. A farmer coming to town warns us about the brigands.

12th: Shemin-ah & Eidelon ride ahead & they encounter "farmers" standing about who have weapon skills & one was definitely a spy (for **Drucker Adno**, as we discover). As the party draws near (about 150'), Liessa *Mindspeaks* to us & she reads the "farmer" minds while the spy falsely answers Eidelon's questions. Sammad the spy is not truly one of the locals; and he lies that Drucker Adno is in S'Garth City — but actually D.A. is in the South.

Eidelon then prepares a spell, & the spy tries to attack but is felled by an Endurance shot from Hagan's bow & from Shemin-ah's ice-shuriken [*"Snowflakes of Death"* as they were called]. A few seconds later, Sammad the spy is unconscious & restrained, 1 peasant is dead and 1 wounded. The locals don't believe that Sammad was a spy for the troublemakers; they actually think he is a hero. We intercept & temporarily delay — getting stuck in a 20-foot tower of ice *will* do that — the kid they send to warn the brigand leader (**Sendem**) who is in the camp in the next valley over. There's some sort of "**silver dragon**" symbol associated with the rebels.

Shemin-ah hypothesizes that there is an Orc Native Uprising underway, against the imperialist human invaders: 25 years ago the castle was built; 15 years ago the town was founded when Gammy beat up the local leaders; fields were then pushed North & South, as the forest was cleared and the human settlers poured in.

Jake admits that S'Garth may be taxing overly just to aggrandize his own position. Jake says that if there is an army down south it *probably* does not belong to S'Garth. Liessa interrogates Sammad

the spy/farmer & gets the rebel leader's name — **Nat Signek**. The Orc believes that the might of the orc "nation" will prevail (especially with their allies & the allies' magic).

We make defence on one of the hilltops; 3 horsemen (horseorcs, actually) ride past; 1 in the road & 1 either side; followed by 200 orcs. This is Sendem's band.

13th: Just after noon, two envoys appear and talk to Jake in Orcish, which none of us understand; and Thornton listens in by magic. Jake then speaks to Sendem himself, who wants us to meet guides at that same place, in two days' time, to be taken to another place for trade-talks. We agree & initially fly north, getting a farmer to take our horses to the caravan. But when out of orc-sight, we fly south instead (under Jake's *explicit* orders, breaking his own word). We then fly over rough canyon-filled territory and camp beyond it that night.

14th: We hear 3 sets of drums. Climbing a tree, we see orcs mobilizing, flyers (even **dragons?**), and *Fire-flight* trails shooting East & West. We carefully fly back to the meeting place.

15th: We are met by 2 orcs, our guides, and we all ride south. That night, Tilbury & Hagan go hunting.

16th: In the evening, we meet "merchants" who claim that they're going North; but D.A.s & *Telepathy* reveal them to be adventurers from Faeleph & Alusia (Human, dwarf, Orc). The dwarf earthmage denies being a mage. Tilbury & Hagan go hunting again. Subtle ranger-type stuff confirms that these "merchant-Adventurers" have been in the area for a week or so. *Telepathy* confirms that the adventurers (Earth, E&E, Fire & fighters) were expecting us & have been here a good week; however they don't attack us because they haven't had orders to.

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14th: Tilbury & Eidelon eventually encountered Gammy's dwarves.

15th: That night Tilbury & Hagan went hunting, to establish it as a regular occurrence, so that our guides would not be suspicious when we snuck off to meet the Dwarves.

16th: Tilbury & Hagan went hunting again, to encounter the dwarves & explain about the invasion. The dwarves confirmed that the "merchant-Adventurers" had been in the area for a week or so.

17th: we press on.

18th: there's more traffic on the road; we pass troops heading north.

19th: we press on, still. we see fires in the distance.

20th: We don't reach the river, but turn instead towards the camp & meet the sentries. We approach high cliffs and go through them (*Illusionary Terrain* ritual — typically deceitful illusionist magics). We see a flat valley with many campaign tents (perhaps 1000); and an orange-yellow glow emanating from the centre of the camp. We spy as much as possible. The Boss tent glows gold, guarded by four 2-headed **drazzards**. **Lionids** are about. As night falls, Eidelon puts up a pillar of light which sets off all sorts of alarms & is magically cut down to 30.'

21st: Shemin-ah & Hagan go to the forge & stables, with a legitimate excuse, but actually to check out the horses (how many, & what they're probably to be used for). Tilbury apparently runs amok, giving Eidelon & Liessa an excuse to chase him & spy some more.

Later that day, Jake goes to the Golden Tent whilst Hagan returns to the forge to get more information from the human slave and the horses. Soon afterwards, inside the party's tent, Thornton shrieks & clutches his throat. The only witness is Tilbury who rushes over to pull Thornton's hands away from his throat. Eidelon enters the tent and, in his military scientist way, he quickly perceives what is going on. "Well I guess it's clear who got the last mushroom," he remarks. Thornton gasps that Jake is dead (hardly a surprise! It *was* something the party had been predicting for the past fortnight).

The party-members get winged up, grab Thornton, & fly to the Stables to collect Hagan — shortly pursued by **monkey-lizards** on faster shadow-wings. As the party flies north over the forested terrain, they hear war-drums and sometimes observe orcs mobilizing.

The overall pattern of the flight was this: The pursuers are better and faster fliers, and overtake the party, driving them down in several waves — principally by dove-bombing repeatedly through the party's *Starwings*, or by grappling the party members (with expertise, they generally pick on the poorer fliers in the party). The party does manage to kill a few of the skirmishers: Shemin-ah & Eidelon indulge in skilled aerial acrobatics; Hagan just grapples back & punches out a few out; Eidelon gives some of them a severe case of sunburn (atlas one fatally). Liessa clutches one and they both plummet to the ground; but, at the last moment, she goes ethereal and sinks harmlessly into the ground. The Saurid sinks into the ground also, although not as far or as gracefully. When split from the party by several hundred feet, Hagan turns on his pursuers, swinging a 15-lb anvil on 100' of rope; taking out a few of the enemy.

When the party first lands, because it has become clear that flight is impractical, Eidelon directs them to land in a suitable clearing. Only as the party lands do they notice the chain-clad Orcs already there. The orcs are killed, fortunately none actually dying until after the combat. Shemin-ah's *Snowflakes of Death* are even more effective than the last time; and Tilbury is also brave & willing. The party relaunches, soon chased by the hunting-lizards. It later is apparent to Liessa that the pursuers are sentient, but not overly bright; they are merely chasing us as they had been previously instructed.

When we see dragons (plural!), we again land. By this time we know what Thornton has been keeping quiet — that Jake had believed that the Orc-loving S'Garth has been suborned, and that the Orc army is probably pressing Eastwards to the coast, to cross the Dragon Arm and invade the island of Dravogen, the home of their imperialist oppressors. Therefore we decide to head **Northwest**, in order to loop around S'Garth City at a safe distance, and then continue flying East to the coast & straight on to Nilreb itself.

However we are still being driven by the lizards who, chattering to each other, are agile & skilled enough to land & re-launch in the tree-tops and thus able overfly us (Wow! Shemin-ah is *really* slow when she doesn't have a horse under her). The lizards try to drive us into ambushes; and let me tell you that an unsuspected *Illusionary Forest* spell hiding an orc assault unit IS a highly successful ambush. Furthermore the mind-mage says she is picking up a lot less minds than expected.

We avoid several skirmishing groups of the enemy, and suffer only one significant engagement. The enemy catches Tilbury & Thornton in *Hands-of-Earth*; and then their foot-troops line up and

charged us impressively; but Eidelon smites many and Shemin-ah, protected behind Hagen, slaughtered most that remain. Whereupon the orcs' morale breaks and they flee; as does their Earth-mage commander. Liessa, however, *Mind-controls* their other two mages (Necro and fire), and the party presses on by foot. That evening, the party takes a quick rest-break & has a hot meal while Thornton, as the Rune-mage he *finally* admitted to being, sends a message to the King's forces on the other island. That night, the party avoids a large Orc war-band camped on the road — which isn't easy since sentries and officers are always *ever* so keen on the first night of the war.

22nd: In the morning, Thornton again contacts the King's forces & passes on the rest of the information we know. For the next 48 hours there is little time to write; avoiding enemy units takes all our effort. Most of the time, flying is too dangerous because of nearby enemy flyers.

24th: Finally the threat of immanent combat is behind us! We touched down on an eastern beach, hopefully far to the north of the main army. We warmed up with a smokeless fire, and ate the very last morsels of food. Then, with wings on everyone, we flew across the straits and eventually encountered the guards. We met the king and were debriefed in detail. Fortunately, despite Eidelon's nauseatingly servile attitude, the King had no specific jobs for us; but he did advise that Jake is recovering well (apparently Mr. Sterling had some sort of "get-out-of-Hell" card).

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21st: When we saw dragons, we again landed. For reasons of range, the party had to head towards the Dwarf Citadel anyway.

21st: In the early morning we encounter the dwarves, especially **Untharm** and **Thestrong**; and are lead into the Citadel though the entrance hidden inside a tree. When we enter the Citadel proper, we see a giant hallway, with dwarvish houses built on either side. When Eidelon mentions that we may have locate spells on us; they rush us (a very long way; giants obviously like citadels with lots of promenade built in) to a special room and shut the door. Magic doesn't work there & apparently any locates in effect are severed. Eidelon speaks to **Ashinu** the castellan and warns that the eponymous governor of S'Garth City has been corrupted to the Orc side.

22nd: Morning debriefing: We explain all to the dwarves. Thornton is let out of the room to rune mage to the royal forces, but only after the dwarves have beaten him up sufficiently that he wouldn't be locatable (they seem to enjoy the job). The Dwarves have Rk2 healer, no E&E, but they do have Earth magics.

24th: We are not allowed to leave until this day, because of dragon patrols & orcs in the woods. The dwarves are afraid that the citadel's presence will be revealed to their enemy. We jettison excess, non-valuable equipment & are strengthen up. So that Liessa, Eidelon and Hagan can carry the other three and only essential or expensive equipment. We fly away first north & then East making it to the beach in two flights. We warm-up and eat the last food at the beach. Then with wings on everyone we fly across the straits and eventually encounter the guards. We go meet the king and get debriefed in detail. Apparently Fortunately, despite Eidelon's nauseatingly servile attitude, the King has no specific jobs for us; but does advise that Jake is recovering well (apparently he has some sort of "get-out-of-Hell" card).

25th: we argue unsuccessfully with minor functionaries about our costs. Return to the guild. Guild reps try to go through portal, but find it closed.

4th of Snow (the next month): Jake came through, congratulated us, and paid us a bonus 4000 sp. each. The horses were returned shortly before the next Guild meeting, and the extra payment we received in compensation in case they were not returned was waived. Jake, to give the lying bastard his due credit, felt that we deserved more — considering the outcome. The party will be given certain privileges in Dravogen.