

The Seven For Thebes

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Michael Parkinson

Duration: 70 days (01 Fruit '800 - 10 Vintage?)

Player Characters

Sir Christopher	E&E	Human	Male	Leader
Lady Kathleen	E&E	Human	Female	
Caprice	Illusionist	Human	Female	
Tom	Air	Human	Male	Mil Sci
Douglas	Mind	Human	Male	
Tyro	Dark Celestial	Human	Male	
Aqualina	Water	Human	Female	Scribe

Plane: Alusia

Places Visited

Port of Freetown in the Islands of Adventure

The Ellenic States

Thought

Crisis

Tower Hill

Place of Goats

Argos (The Bright City)

The Oracle at Dolphin

Employer: Prince Ed from Tower Hill

Major NPCs encountered

Ezra Goodfellow - a hobbit from Tower Hill (arrived at the Guild with Prince Ed)

Lord Pharos - a vampire

Sir Ernest Drake - black dragon in Freetown

Don Fanthaceco. Destinian airmage

Father Pio - Michaeline priest

Pedro & Palo - two Destinians

Lord Afaro - Destinian 'tourist'

Elpenor (Man's Help) - guard captain at Thought

Prince ManyCattle - current ruler at Tower Hill

Princess SurroundedByCattle - the prince's wife

Bodyguard - Ellenic guard at Tower Hill

Cedric Swellfoot - a hobbit in Tower Hill and Ezra's brother in law

Don Juan di Quattro - second officer on Destinian main ship

Swiftwing - Ellenic airmage

Prince All-Eyes - Prince of Argos

Mission: To find out who is raiding the port towns in the Ellenic States

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Adventure Summary

1st Fruit

Met our employer, Ezra Goodfellow, and his companion, Prince Ed from Thebes (Tower Hill), a city in Cowland which is one of the Ellenic States. The coastal states have been plagued by a band of pirates that have been looting and carrying people off as slaves. Ed wanted to deal with the problem, especially since Cowland had been accused as being the cause as they hadn't been raided yet. The fact that Cowland didn't have a coastline seemed to be irrelevant. We sailed off in Ed's boat that evening.

7th Fruit.

Near the Five Sisters and encountered bad weather. Had to shelter in a bay near a village where we were attacked by a vampire, Lord Pharos, and his followers, including a wiccan. Finally we were allowed to leave.

11th Fruit

Reached Freetown, a port in the Islands of Adventure. Invited to the celebrations of the local Lord, Sir Ernest Drake, a black dragon. Received more astrology readings. Late that night, were smuggled on board the merchant ship *Dawn Treader*.

12th Fruit

Sailed off with Ed's boat in tow.

21st Fruit

Arrived in the city of Thought in the Ellenic States. Met with visiting Destinians, Don Fantaceco, Palo, Pedro, and a Michaeline priest, Father Pio. Looked around the city and saw another Destinian, Lord Afrio, who was touring the Ellenic States. That evening Christopher was attacked by Father Pio. After the fight, Pio was killed, Pedro captured while Fantaceco and the others fled. Tried to leave town but had to turn back.

22nd Fruit

Questioned Pedro. 'Pirates' are freedom fighters. Captives are being sold as slaves to raise money for a counter-revolution in Destiny. They are being led by Destinian Royalists, the Cult of the Martyrs for King Carlos. Fantaceco is a spy. The captive and body were turned over to the local authorities and we started sailing to Crisis.

23rd Fruit

Reached Crisis. Some of the party visited the Oracle at Dolphins but gained no useful information.

24th Fruit.

Left Crisis for Tower Hill and port town of Slip. Stayed at Tower Hill palace. Met interesting elf called Bodyguard who was very perceptive.

25th Fruit

Slip raided early morning. Unfortunately they got away. From witnesses, we concluded we could be dealing with invisible windwalking assassins. Three ships with cloaking devices were

involved. All the raiders were wearing black and spoke with demonic sounding voices. Later on, spoke to a local hobbit, Cedric. Arranged for skin changes. Went to the Place of Goats to wait for Destinians to raid it.

22nd Harvest.

Destinians finally show up. Use skin changes to turn into mice and sneak aboard ship in the grain sacks. Found the room with the cloaking device in it and nibbled our way in. It's a huge crystalline sphere on a metal dais surrounded by a cold iron cylindrical cage. Entire floor warded with 'Wrath of God'.

23rd Harvest

Watched as Destinian bypassed the ward with the phrase 'Long live Carlos the Glorious'

24th Harvest

Broke into the cloaking device room and got access to the sphere.

25th Harvest

Early morning, before dawn, the ships were approaching a target port. Ed removed sphere and teleported away with it. Some of the party crossed over to the other ship and destroyed the device there and captured the second officer. Much confusion resulted as we made our escape and landed on the coast at dawn.

Destinians had started to attack town but were fought off. Discovered two Destinian ships scuttled and partially destroyed on the beach. The third and larger ship got away. Claimed ship and fittings in exchange for weaponry. Flew to Tower Hill to find Ed.

Interrogated captive, Don Juan di Quattro. They had been going after healthy citizens, avoiding mages and pacted people. The people had been captured as slaves and were being sold to the Lunar Empire. The Cult of Carlos the Martyr was ruled by someone calling himself the ArchBishop who was originally from the Far East. The Government in Exile was also set up in the Lunar empire at a place called Imbrium. He didn't know how many cloaking devices there were but believed their manufacture was under the control of Il Barone, or the ArchBishop. An army was also being assembled, but he did not know if that was in Imbrium or one of the Islands of Adventure.

26th Harvest

Took Don Juan to Thought and reported to local authorities, then claimed ship and sailed home with captured cloaking device.

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Aqualina

What excellent timing. An adventure came up that required a Water Mage when I was ready to go out again. This adventure was announced by a halfling, Ezra Goodfellow, a merchant from Cowland, accompanied by a rather large muscular man, Prince Ed of Cowland a.k.a the Prince of Thebes (or as the guild chairperson announced it 'The Prince of Thieves' – probably a misprint on the note).

Ezra told the meeting that they were from the Ellenic States and that the neighbouring states to Cowland were being plagued by pirates. A party of adventurers were required to help Ed deal with the problem. Since Ed was the local hero he was to be the one to be seen to do it. As Ezra put it, we were to make Ed look good. They had come here by boat. Originally they had arrived at Nova Dom but the crew had been eaten by undead there. Only Ezra and Ed had made it here.

To complicate matters some of the other neighbouring states think that Cowland is behind the raiders, even though Cowland doesn't have a coastline.

In one of the meeting rooms I met my fellow adventurers:

Sir Christopher Reynard. A rather handsome human male, 5'10", dressed casually and carrying a rapier. He knows some E&E magics but prefers to concentrate on agility fighting. He's also a philosopher in religion and is pacted to Gabriel, one of the Powers of Light.

Lady Kathleen Reynard. A beautiful 5'8" woman with shoulder length light brown hair in a bun, wearing fine green courtly clothes as well as a truesilver estoc and main-gauche. She's Sir Christopher's wife, a courtier and also knows a smattering of ranger and merchant. She is also an E&E mage but prefers the ensorcelment side. She speaks elvish and hobbit. Turns out she's the only one of two party members who can converse with Ed as he only knows hobbit and Ellenic.

Douglas Walin. A tall 6' male human mindmage with blond hair wearing new leather armour, a long leather coat, and a bright shiny new short sword. a competent navigator and a beginner healer. He also speaks hobbit.

Caprice. Another stunningly beautiful woman, 5'6" tall with knee length black curly hair. I was starting to feel rather outclassed in the beauty stakes. Ah well. She was dressed as a gypsy and is an illusionist, troubadour and was versed in the use of a crystal ball and tarot cards. For a weapon she uses a staff. Also there is a snake wrapped around her wrist.

Tyro. Human male with brown hair and brown eyes wearing leather and carrying a tulwar. A Dark Celestial.

Tom. A thin human male with short dark hair, short dark beard and eyeglasses, originally from the Plane of Dirt. He's an airmage as well as a medium ranked military scientist and healer.

Finally myself, *Aqualina.* 5'1" human female from the islands of Pasifika. Brown skin, blue eyes and hip length dark hair. I'm a Water Mage, expert swimmer and can navigate and sail small

boats. Currently I was dressed in a parau.

Ezra wasn't coming back with us as he had family business. However he would stay around for a bit in order to translate for Ed. The principle language where they come from is Ellenic although Common is spoken near the seaports as a trade language.

We would have to sail south, then east, to get there. The Ellenic area is made up of several city states with wilderness in between. The wilderness contains monsters. Each city state has a prince which is either a hero or a descendant of one. Usually the only people to travel the wilderness are merchants or heros.

Ezra also told us that there were a few mages and they are either respectable priests of the local deities or really evil types. Some entities have strange talents, mostly passive ones. Lots of spirits were around so we were advised to avoid killing priests as the local spirits or gods would get annoyed and seek retribution, usually by laying a curse on the offender. Even the pirates have been avoiding killing certain people.

The ancestry of some people, especially the heros, can also be rather obscure, owing to the intervention of the local gods. It is believed that many of the heros may have one of the gods as a parent. Ed had been adopted by Ezra's brother in law, Cedric Swellfoot of Tower Hill, a neighbouring territory to Cowland. Cedric had been away on business and, as well as bringing back livestock, he also brought back a child who had been left to die in a jar on a foreign mountainside.

By the time Ed was four, it was obvious that he was a hero by performing feats of strength. So he was adopted by the current Prince of Tower Hill and his childless wife. While still a youth, Ed travelled to the Oracle of Dolphins & began a heroic career of doing good -- which culminated, some 20 years ago, in his slaying of a monster which was visiting grand destruction on Thebes (the main, and only, city in Cowland). The grateful citizenry married him off to the widowed but childless princess & they now have 4 children. and later became the Prince of Thebes for slaying a rampaging monster after the previous prince had died.

Most heros are more handsome than the average and most are male. Apparently there is a great market for sidekicks. Basically they travel with the hero and take care of all the mundane things, leaving the hero to do the heroic stuff. In this case we were to be Ed's sidekicks and point him at the problems for him to solve.

Very few of the city states are composed entirely of humans. For example, the city state of Thought, which is mainly inhabited by philosophers, has a large population of elves.

The pirate raids had been going on for the last ten weeks and they had been taking valuables, provisions, and people, mostly women. So far they had kidnapped 400 people with three quarters of them being female. They attack by surprise, wear masks, and speak Ellenic with a sinister tone.

I asked whether or not the local merfolk could help us trace these pirates but Ezra replied that they were rather barbaric. Even though they're hostile towards the Ellenic States, they're too barbaric to be conducting raids in this way.

Ed arrived in the room at that point. He was very solidly built, especially in the chest, with visible muscles. He was 5'5" in height, about 260 pounds, with a handsome face and golden, shoulder length, hair. His armour was made out of gilded bronze. He must have been drinking in the guild pub while he waited as his first comment was 'Those are real dwarves?'

Ezra and Ed then left us to sort ourselves out. After some discussion, Sir Christopher became the party leader, Tom was the military scientist, and I became the scribe. Also, as he was less experienced than the rest of us, Tyro agreed to half shares.

I was wanting to take my horse on this adventure but, given the nature of the boat, it would have been impractical. Caprice suggested that I talk to a wiccan about 'packaging my horse'. She also mentioned that the snake is poisonous and her staff bites as well.

It was possible that the pirates also had magical means and it was theorised that their ships may be invisible until they got close. That reminded me of Commander Fish's ship and I wondered if they were using that. However, I was told that another party had recovered that boat from the drow a few years ago and were paid by Il Baronie Scarpia from Destiny.

We decided to get some astrology readings with the following questions:

"Where will we find the pirates"

"What are the major dangers"

"What magics do the pirates use".

We split up after that. I went to check the boat that Ed and Ezra had come in. Ezra had previously told us that, after the crew had been killed at NovaDom, Ed had rowed it to Seagate taking seven days and nights to get there. That was really good going according to my calculations. Even though Cowland didn't have a coast, Ed had obtained the boat after defeating one lot of pirates.

Ezra had described the boat as long, narrow, and unstable, propelled mainly by oars but did have a small sail. He believed that it was of elvish construction although there was a possibility that it may be drow in origin.

It was certainly obvious which boat it was by the time I got down to the harbour. The name on it was the *Jalepeno* although Ed had told us it was originally called *The Winsome Gladiolus* when he had captured it. The *Jalepeno* was 60' long and 10' wide at the widest point. Most of the deck was open although there was a canvas cover near the stern. Checking the underside revealed a heavy keel running down the length of the boat which extended forward forming a ram. This meant that the boat was fast in a straight line but it was going to be difficult to turn. My intention was to examine the underside at close range but I discovered there was something about the keel that made me wary of getting too close. TDP came down later to have a look and he confirmed there was some sort of magical aura on the keel. Also the boat, in his opinion, was a hybrid design, half of which was drow. It had a 12 ton displacement.

I then went to try and obtain some coconuts with the intention of making some traditional cream to help protect the others from sunburn. The other benefits would be an additional food and drink supply. However the only ones I could find were very old and useless for my purpose. So I visited a herbalist who had a salve that would do the job.

Meanwhile Christopher was stocking up on other supplies such as spare wood, and extra

tarpaulins.

Christopher had offered Lesser Enchantments all around so I went and got one done before obtaining some Waters of Healing and Strength ingredients from the Water College. My plan was to make them up during the voyage.

The astrology readings came in a bit later in the afternoon. According to the astrologer, all the answers came to him in a vision although he suspected that the third one could be completely wrong. The first one was also suspect and he believed that there may be forces acting against the readings. It is known that certain individuals (e.g. certain guildmembers) cannot be guided or detected by Astrology. This is something similar, he imagines.

READING 1:

72 With mortal tug the wildered spirit clings
73 To its known shore of firm reality,
74 Yet feels drawn outward---like the ebbing sea
75 That hugs its beach so closely and in vain---
76 In this vast ebb of Being to its main.

77 And it is eerie in the night to lie
78 Lonesome, all naked to the awful sky---
79 This secret spawning-time of hell on earth,
80 When mist and midnight give the toadstools birth,
81 And worlds of shy leaf-shadowed life steal forth,---
82 What time the Powers of Darkness have their day;
83 Our world asleep and Heaven so far away:
84 When in the shroud-like stillness there may be
85 Shapes moving round us that we do not see!

READING 2:

1 Who hath not marked how graciously the Don
2 Comes smiling when some stormy night hath gone?
3 As Beauty lifts the heaven of her eyes
4 Full on you large with their serene surprise
5 That you should dream such gentleness could dart
6 The looks that hurt you to the very heart!
7 Calm eyes, that through luxurious reaches spoil
8 The richness of their rest upon the soil.

READING 3 (The astrologer apologised for the extreme length. In his professional opinion, either the answer is somehow concealed or protected, or the reading is a backfire.

1 Night after night I wakened with a start
2 That tore the curtain-cloud of Sleep apart,
3 As though I had been fettered fast by Death,
4 Who imaged Sleep to take away my breath.
5 The silence looked so ominous, the gloom
6 Just losing shape and feature in the room:
7 Had I but wakened sooner, without doubt,
8 I should have found some dreadful secret out!
9 Nothing to grapple with; nothing to see:
10 Yet something fearful there must somewhere be;
11 Some shadow of the Unapparent stole
12 Over me, with a shiver of the soul:
13 Dim horrors loomed from out each hiding-nook;
14 A strange life lurked in the familiar look
15 Of innocent things, as though upon the eve
16 Of issuing, terrible as its prey perceive
17 The Mantis in the likeness of a leaf,
18 Changed in a moment to a Murderous Thief.

19 I peered out of the window,---nothing there
20 But the vast heavens with all their liveness bare---
21 The phantom presence of Immensity
22 That from behind its dumb mask whispered me.

23 At times a noise, as though a dungeon door
24 Had grated, with set teeth, against the floor:
25 A ring of iron on the stones; a sound
26 As if of granite into powder ground;
27 A mattock and a spade at work! sad sighs
28 As of a wave that sobs and faints and dies.

29 And then a shudder of the house; a scrawl
30 As though a knife scored letters in the wall.
31 About the room a gush and gurgle went,
32 As if the water-pipe got sudden vent;
33 Drop after drop, I heard it plop, and ping,
34 Into some vessel, with metallic ring.
35 Yet, on these very nights there was no rain;
36 And then, betwixt the ear's suspense and strain,
37 A faint voice crying in the air or brain.

38 The wind would rise and wail most humanly
39 With a low scream of stifled agony
40 Over the birth of life about to be.
41 Through all the house its coldest wave hath rushed,
42 Although a moment since the night was hushed.
43 And ere the hurried gust had ceased to moan,
44 The dreaming dog would answer with its groan.

45 At times I seemed to waken at a call,
46 And rose up listening for the next footfall
47 Which never came, as though it could not keep
48 The step with that my spirit caught in sleep;
49 For I, in waking, must have crossed the line
50 Bounding the range of spirit-life from mine.
51 I felt the Presence on that other side
52 Grope where some secret door might open wide.
53 I knew the brain might strike the electric spark
54 Which should make live this phantom of the Dark.

That evening, we set off on the outgoing tide. According to my calculations, it would take 210 active hours of Mage Current to get us there. I put a Ship Strength on the boat then provided a Mage Current to help push us along.

.2.

However, I have to keep reminding myself just how wide that current is. Once I noticed that other moored boats were being affected, I cancelled the spell and asked Tom to provide a Mage Wind. Besides I wanted to see how this boat performed under sail.

Ezra was on the dock, seated in a palequin, with bearers supporting it. He waved to us as we sailed out. Kathleen waved back but I had a sneaking suspicion she had actually cast a spell. Still, it's none of my business.

Anyway it didn't take long to determine that this boat looked like a fish, moved like a fish, and steered like a cow. That keel provided so much mass that it was taking a lot of my strength to force the tiller at the stern to move. The only way I could see to manoeuvre was to turn the Mage Current and have the boat dragged along with it. I just hoped we didn't have to turn in a hurry.

Finally we were in open water in Confederation Bay. I pointed the bow due west then produced a Mage Current. Soon we were speeding over the water. Once out of the bay we would then head generally south then east again towards the Ellenic States, island hopping all the way.

Ed settled down for what turned out to be a twenty hour nap. Before that, it was obvious that he had taken a dislike to Christopher, probably because of the curse Christopher had. Tom was looking rather ill so Kathleen sent him to sleep. Douglas offered to try and cure Tom but Tom wasn't keen on how Douglas intended to do it – with hypnotism.

Later on, once he was feeling better, Tom sorted out the watch order. Since I had to spend much of the day steering, I was excused night watches. Also Tyro volunteered to sleep during the day and stay awake during the night. Makes sense to me. So the watches became Caprice/Tyro, Tom/Tyro, Christopher/Tyro, Kathleen/Tyro and Douglas/Tyro.

7th Fruit 800WK

The previous five days of sailing had been reasonably calm although I had to use Wave Control spells at some points to flatten out the swell. The weather had been mainly fine and rather warm, apart from some bouts of heavy rain, so I was down to a basic two piece costume with a parau over top. Caprice was doing miracles with our supplies making food that was delicious, as well as flirting with the guys, including Ed. Also I had produced four Waters of Strength for Christopher. The fifth attempt had failed. By now we were in the vicinity of the Five Sisters.

On the sixth day, just after I had done my morning Waterbreathing on myself, Christopher announced he could detect bad weather ahead. Sure enough he was right and it looked like it was going to be a rather bad storm. We needed to head towards the nearest land, preferably the leeward side. Unfortunately, when I said that, my companions burst into laughter. To my chagrin, I then remembered that particular piece of coast belonged to the Alusian main continent.

As we got closer to the shore line, made up of rather steep cliffs, whitecaps on the water betrayed the presence of submerged rocks close to the surface. Even one of those was enough to tear a hole in the bottom of the boat. So I went to the bow to watch for more and to change the current when required while Douglas took my place at the helm.

Tom Windwalked off to scout ahead. Soon he found a gap in the cliff which lead into a bay, near which was a village. He could see six to eight buildings but there may have been more as camouflage had been used to hide them.

We dodged the rocks and headed for the gap. I turned the mage current off as I was sure we were travelling too fast to be able to navigate the gap properly with it but Christopher insisted on having it back on so we could be pulled through in the right direction. Unfortunately I wasn't fast enough in getting it going in the right direction and, as we passed through, the boat scraped against the side of the cliff. Ed did a marvellous job of fending us off but it wasn't enough to prevent damage to the side of the boat, fortunately above the waterline. It would take at least a week to repair it properly.

As we entered the bay we could see a reception committee standing on the jetty. I aimed the boat at the jetty, intending to reverse the current at the proper moment and bring us to a graceful stop alongside. There were four people there, two with bows, one carrying a large sword, and another who was dressed as some sort of chief. As soon as we sighted them, Christopher and Kathleen

decided to make everyone, except Ed and Douglas, invisible.

Just then a cloud passed over my mind and I lost track of what was going on as the boat continued towards the shore. Then something rather hard hit me on the back of the neck and I lost consciousness.

What had happened was that these people had decided to be hostile. Two arrows thudded into Douglas. I had been put under a mind compel, presumably to be used against my companions later. Christopher had realised this and rendered me unconscious with the butt of his sword. Ed and Tyro moved forward to engage the enemy when the boat struck land. Ed struck a heroic pose over my prone body.

My aim must have been slightly off as the boat struck the jetty, knocking Christopher, the chief, Kathleen, and one of the archers into the water. The current continued pushing the boat onwards demolishing most of the jetty, and trapping the archer underneath it, before coming aground on the beach. The others jumped onto what was left of the jetty and engaged what was left of the opposition. However, initially, it didn't look good for our side.

.3.

The chief was soon shown to be a Mind Mage vampire and identified as Lord Pharos (thanks to Douglas's telepathy. He and Christopher were tussling underwater during which Christopher recognised him as a vampire. He suddenly went gaseous and vanished.

There must have been a wiccan out there as well as Caprice was cursed with a century long sleep. Tom succeeded in windwalking the swordsman. Caprice was attached to Ed's back and everyone regrouped on the shore, among the trees. Ed was carrying me. There was enough of a pause in order to heal up those that needed it.

Douglas determined that the pause was because the villagers were waiting for 'Lucy to deal with the intruders'. We presumed Lucy was the wiccan. A Mass Fear hit the group which affected Tyro and forced him back into the boat. One of the villagers (presumably controlled) as he spoke slowly) asked our group to surrender or face the consequences.

Tom succeeded in putting up Barrier of Winds around everyone but, as he finished, he was turned into a frog. So he sought the relative safety of Christopher's pocket. There was no sign of the wiccan through the searching wizard eyes but Douglas detected a malevolent mind in a group of rocks nearby. Just then someone flew up from them. The party didn't get a good look but got the impression of someone at the short end of human.

Just as the fighter came out of windwalk, he was blinded by a flash of light then set upon by Ed and Tyro. Ed soon vanquished him. Christopher was then knocked out by a phantasm.

For some reason the vampire, through his controlled servant offered us our freedom if we didn't loot the fallen bodies and we left by sunset. This seemed surprising as they still seemed to have a tactical advantage. If they were slavers, as we suspected, maybe they figured we may have been more trouble than we were worth.

However that was what happened. I recovered consciousness soon after. Christopher and Ed

pushed the boat away from the remains of the jetty and I cast a Ship Strength to repair the damage. We had to wait four hours until the storm passed but, once it had weakened, one mage current later and we were off.

Caprice was woken from her sleep by Ed kissing her. We knew it had worked when she kissed him back. Tom had to be fixed by a remove curse ritual as we didn't have a suitable princess. In the meantime I made sure he was looked after and protected from harm, especially from Caprice's snake.

Near sunset, we were overtaken by three Destinian vessels, *La Fanciulla del West*, *Suor Angelica*, and *La Mariposa*.

11th Fruit

After four days we were finally among the Islands of Adventure and coming into a port called Freetown. There were lots of vessels in the port of assorted types. Ed told us that this was a place full of seafaring people, many of which could be pirates or other dubious characters. Basically this place is similar in reputation to Sanctuary. Ed was hoping we would get some useful information here.

I followed his directions and soon we were docked. Waiting on the wharf was a dwarf who was dressed in the style of an arabic vizier. Six large eunuch guards with rather impressive swords were standing behind him. He requested that we attend the evening celebrations in the castle of his Lord, Sir Ernest Drake, a well known Lord of the Sea. They would be taking place tonight. Ed decided to accept, especially since he had declined the invitation previously and, to do so twice, would be taken as an insult. The dwarf then cast a spell that allowed us to comprehend all languages.

We were to proceed to the castle where we could freshen up. On the way, Ed warned us about the dwarf as he was evil and not to be trusted. From the stories I've heard, I'm beginning to wonder if that is part of the job description for vizier. Most of the population we passed were humanoid and all were armed. There were a couple of centaurs and even a few beings that reminded me of sylphs.

Douglas had a telepathy up and, as we walked, he detected that there were quite a few people eyeing us up as potential slaves – me especially. In fact, some of them were thinking that they should attempt to kidnap me at the first opportunity as I'd be worth quite a lot, even more than Caprice.

.4.

Finally we reached a very impressive castle. The common room had thirty foot tall doors and the ceiling was 40ft tall. We were beginning to suspect that Sir Ernest Drake was an actual dragon. Because of the danger to me Caprice used an illusion to make me look like Kathleen. She took a risk as we discovered shortly afterwards that no spellcasting was allowed without the express permission of Sir Ernest. Meanwhile Kathleen used a special item to turn her into a man and told us to call her Robert.

We had a look around the town, in a group, then returned and freshened up for this evening's revelries. An elf led us to a large circular chamber with a domed roof, 200ft in radius and 120ft

high in the centre. We weren't the only group here either. On our left was a group of traders from the Baronies who greeted us warmly, much in contrast to the group on our right who were a surly bunch from Arabique. As we sat down, Douglas discovered that his telepathy, which was working as we entered, had suddenly dropped out.

Sir Ernest was also there and, as we suspected, he was a large black dragon, dressed in some sort of radiant toga and a large gold choker was around his neck.

We were just in time for dinner. The first course was chilled monkey brains served in animated monkeys who walked into the banquet area. Ed had already warned us that it would be an insult if we didn't eat what was given to us but Tom was rather worried. He told us that he was a vegetarian. I presumed it was an obscure religious sect.

Ed portioned out the brains to all of us, as is the custom, and we all tried some. Unfortunately Tom had an adverse reaction and was ill.

Next course was a whole roast cow per group. When it was opened, a roast chicken dropped out. During that course some servants arrived and served up wine and water to each table. Another group cleaned up the mess Tom had made and made it quite obvious what they were doing. During that, a lot of people were staring out our group. One group were drow, and one of them gave Christopher a throat cutting gesture. Christopher sent him back a note with a number on it.

One of the reasons we were getting stared at was that there was a faint glowing nimbus around Robert/Kathleen and Douglas. It was gilded with hints of silver and fire.

After the main course Sir Ernest said that he had a prophecy to give those that would help him and wanted to know what each group was going to do. One person wanted to remove the head from the most obnoxious person in the room but Ernest replied that he liked him. Robert/Kathleen told him that we were engaged in helping Ed save his lands then volunteered our services to Sir Ernest. There was a large round of approval from various people in the room. The drow spokesman offered the head of a Parshak from Uricstarn. Finally a special yellow wine was passed around. Ed recognised it as a special resined wine that is served in the Ellenic states which implied it was being served in honour of him.

The dragon then pontificated with the following verses:

And if we count among the needs of life
Another's Toil, why not Another's Wife?
Useful, we grant, it serves what life requires,
But dreadful too, the dark Assassin hires:

Trade it may help, Society extend;
But lures the Pyrate, and corrupts the Friend;
It raises armies in a Nation's aid,
But bribes a Senate and the land's betray'd.

Oh! that such bulky Bribes as all might see
Still, as of old, encumber'd Villainy!
In vain may Heros fight, and Patriots rave,
If secret Gold saps on from knave to knave.

Dessert was a mixture of fruits, flavoured ices, and frozen milk. I really enjoyed the frozen milk and had quite a lot of it. Tom identified one lot as Neopolitan ice-cream. I was sitting next to him

so we started discussing how we could make it and how well it would go with chocolate.

After dessert Sir Ernest left and, in dribs and drabs, everyone else left. Dessert left us rather full so we went straight back to our rooms. As we did the nimbus faded and vanished.

Twenty minutes later, the dwarf arrived as he had to recast the Comprehend Languages. Also Sir Ernest wanted to see Ed and entourage in his library. When we got there, we discovered that he was in his humanoid form, either a short giant or a large human.

He hoped we succeeded in our quest and told us that the traders, that were sitting to our left, were going to Thought and maybe we should go with them. Also he was giving out a couple of Greater's and mementos to those that deal with the pirates as they were bad for business plus their activities were tarnishing his reputation as the people see him as the Pirate King.

Ed had previously dropped off some riddles and prophecies from the Oracle of Dolphins here as Sir Ernest was fond of them. He also had some more of his prophecy for us that he had found in his library. It read:

Blest Paper-credit! that advanc'd so high,
Now lends Corruption lighter wings to fly!
Gold imp'd with this, can compass hardest things,
Can pocket States, or fetch and carry Kings;

A single leaf can waft an Army o'er,
Or ship off Senates to some distant shore;
A leaf like Sybil's scatters to and fro
Our fates and fortunes as the winds shall blow;

Pregnant with thousands flits the scrap unseen,
And silent sells a King, or buys a Queen.
Well then, since with the world we stand or fall,
Come take it as we find it, Gold and all.

Sir Ernest wasn't willing to give us an interpretation, claiming that would ruin the fun of us finding out. We surmised that the pirates could be Destinians, probably Royalists, driven down from Destiny after the political turmoil caused by the death of King Carlos.

Sir Christopher believed that both readings were connected. The pirates were stealing women, probably as wives or concubines and there were quite a few hidden references to gold. Going up against the leaders directly would be too dangerous. Also they may be 'authorised' in some way by a political power.

Later on that night, while we were in our room, some people arrived to 'pick up some packages' and 'take them to the right ship'. We were very suspicious of that, especially when we were told we were going to be rolled up in rugs. It would be so easy for at least one of us, and no prizes for guessing who, to be hijacked before anything could be done about it. However, Douglas's telepathy showed nothing amiss.

So, after being wrapped up in rugs, we were carried off and taken to the merchant ship *Dawn Treader*.

12 Fruit

We sailed away on the predawn tide. From the feel of the ship I figured we were being propelled

by a Rank 20 Mage Current. At that rate, we'd be in Thought in four days. One of the ship's crew, Eric, told us that they were a trading unit that was now permanently out of Novadam. We were to stay in the hold for the duration of the trip. Our boat was being towed behind, invisibly.

They would be staying in Thought for a day but, if we required it, could take us further on to Tower Hill.

So we stayed in the hold. I spent some of the time making up the potions that everyone wanted. I did the one of each that Tom wanted but, I was still three Waters of Strength potions short for Christopher, even after using my spare ingredient packs. For some reason the spells were failing more often than usual. Most annoying.

On one of Eric's visits, he told us that I was worth 35,000sp or a free pardon, even more than their Water mage would be. Are Pasifikans more desirable around here or is there something else going on?

A scroll was delivered to the ship by what Eric described as a 'canary from Hell'. On the outside was written 'Three answers, or possibly one.' It must be from Sir Ernest.

The contents read:

219 Secure, thro' her, the noble prize to carry,
220 He marches off, his Grace's secretary.
221 Now turn to diff'rent sports (the Goddess cries)
222 And learn, my sons, the wond'rous pow'r of Noise

239 Ah, think not, Mistress! more true Dulness lies
240 In Folly's Cap, than Wisdom's grave disguise.
241 Like buoys, that never sink into the flood,
242 On Learning's surface we but lie and nod.

433 I tell the naked fact without disguise,
434 And, to excuse it, need but shew the prize;
435 Whose spoils this paper offers to your eye,
436 Fair ev'n in death! this peerless Butterfly.

Kathleen thinks that the first section refers to Don Carlos's secretary, whoever that was, and the third may have something to do with undead.

21st Fruit

Finally we arrived at Thought after having to lay over a few times to avoid storms. It was built on top of a large hill and we could see large animals, called mammoths, hauling carts up towards the city. Eric told us that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, that they would have to stay here for two days and nights but they still would be going to Tower Hill afterwards. We would need to let them know if we decided to head off earlier.

As we prepared to leave, we saw a Destinian messenger ship arrive in port. Caprice quickly put a disguise on me, just in case, and I finally agreed on the name, 'Anna'. Christopher was also disguised as a philosopher. We also arranged with the merchants to sell our cargo of pig iron. Caprice was rather dismayed when she saw our boat. Someone had done it up as a 'pleasure' vessel.

We headed up to the city by mammoth cart. At the gates, Ed was being hassled by the guards as

he was being evasive about our origins but they finally let us through. We were given tags to identify us as Ed's companions and we were being put up in an inn, as political refugees. Only a couple of rooms in one wing were available as there were other occupants.

Upon reaching the inn, which was surrounded to a bronze railing fence, we discovered that the other occupants were Destinians. Their leader introduced himself as Don Fantatheco (Fantaceco actually – he had a lisp) and he was a Destinian of the old school. He told us he was also known as Baron Eastwood, a title which had been bestowed upon him by King Carlos. The other two, Pedro and Palo, were wannabe officers and his fourth companion was a Namer and a Michaeline priest, Father Pio (highest ranked spell – Wrath of God). They were accompanied by two servants and two hired musclemen. Fantaceco was an Air Mage and Palo was just learning the College. They were all Royalists and insisted we drink a toast to King Carlos. Pio was convinced that Christopher was in need of absolution or penance.

We had to be back at the inn an hour before sunset but there was enough time for Ed to take us out for a look around the town. When we passed a tavern, he insisted that we go inside for some real food and drink. So we went in. There I got a real shock. Pinned on the wall was a series of wanted posters, put up by a group called the 'Friends of the Cult of King Charles the Martyr'. They looked like they had been up there for several months and one of them was of me. The picture was a poor likeness but it certainly explained the high price. Starflower was also there, listed at 45,000sp. The others listed were Engalton, Bozo, and Kryan. All of us had been a Guild party that had run into Don Carlos on the island of Alba Longa several years ago. The only one missing was Brightflare. Had they already found him?

.5.

We continued on and entered the Inner City where we found the merchant's area. We ended up purchasing three Rank 4 tulwars, 1 Rank 5 dagger, and a Rank 5 shortsword, all silvered. I wanted a trident, and there were some magnificent specimens there, but Caprice wouldn't let me. I was keeping an eye open for Waters of Strength ingredients but there were no herbalists. In fact, most of the products here were finished items although there were a few bolts of cloth.

Several inhabitants, many of whom were elves, were also in evidence. The predominant mode of dress were white tunics. There were some priests as well, many of whom had animal companions, probably familiars. Some of them acknowledged Ed but only a few approached to converse, one of whom being a priestess with an owl who is also a bardic mage. From what we could follow, she was telling Ed of another attack on Tower Hill, a few days ago.

We also noticed a Destinian talking to a merchant and a priest of Hephestis. It's easy to spot the Destinians as they're the ones who insist on wearing black. He was Lord Afaro and the impression we were getting that he was quite liked by the people he had met. He's been through several Ellenic states with a Cowland servant as a guide.

A group of elves showed up and the priestess greeted them. They identify Prince Ed as 'The Riddler'. Curious that. Ed later told us that the priestess is related to his latest adopted family and could be the next High Priestess of Thought.

As we headed back to the inn, Douglas was wondering if Afaro was a contact for the 'Friends of Carlos' group, but we could not see an easy way of testing the theory. Douglas was very keen on

spying on him.

We also noticed a few groups of well turned out soldiers, dressed in leather and bronze armour and wielding sword and spear. They also had shields and I saw three different devices, a Medusa head, a perched owl, and three swords.

Back at the inn, Tom reorganized the watches coming up with Caprice/Tom, Christopher/Douglas, and Tyro/Kathleen.

Christopher went to see Pio in order to reach an understanding. Kathleen was listening outside the door while the rest of us waited nearby in case something went wrong. At first they were having an amiable conversation and it was sounding like that they had reached an understanding when, suddenly, Pio treacherously stabbed Christopher with his hand and a half sword, while yelling "He's a fake!"

We rushed in as fast as we could and discovered Fantaceco and Pedro were already there. Both Pio and Fantaceco were still attacking Christopher's fallen body. Kathleen and I were first in. Kathleen went for Pio while I tried to block Fantaceco's attack. Fantaceco claimed that we were protecting a false priest but, as far as I was concerned, we were protecting a comrade that had been unprovokedly attacked.

Shortly the others showed up and the battle raged on. Flashes of Light told me that Caprice was doing her best to blind the opposition. Already she had affected Pio.

Finally I managed to hit Fantaceco with my new tulwar. As I contacted, I felt like I had been hit. What sort of demonic protection did he have? I also discovered he was an expert with the rapier. His next hit got me in the eye and I went down. Fortunately Douglas was in the process of firing healing spells about and I was targeted by the next one.

By the time I got up, I was really seeing red, and it wasn't just because of the blood on my face. However Fantaceco had fled, like the coward he obviously was, even though I had only barely scratched him. So, with a savage feral growl, I leapt into combat with Pio. Fortunately there was room. Only Tyro and Kathleen were attacking him at the time. However, Sir Christopher was miraculously standing. I was sure one of those attacks had completely shattered his hip.

Kathleen had knocked Pio down and I was just about to deal the death blow. But I decided not to. Instead I said that he didn't deserve to die with honour in battle. It was a pity he wasn't conscious to hear that. Instead he decided to die anyway. Someone must have given him a bleeder earlier on. Meanwhile Pedro surrendered.

Kathleen's Locate showed that Fantaceco had flown off. So Caprice was Windwalked but she didn't see him. He was probably windwalking as well. She did see a group of figures flying near the inner city.

A search and magical check revealed that Pio's sword and dagger were magical and so was his hat. We couldn't tell what the magic on the hat was but the sword dealt our variable damage, probably to do with the victim's level of piety.

The two musclemen had also surrendered when Ed intercepted them on their way up, so they

were hypnotised to believe that Fantaceco had killed Pio. Meanwhile Pio's body was bundled up in a carpet and we headed down to our boat. Pedro was hypnotised to come with us.

.6.

To make things easier for the carpet carriers, I did Waters of Strength for them. We managed to get through the top gates without difficulty but, half a mile down the road to the docks, we encountered a small group of guards led by a priest wearing a symbol of an upheld sword, the symbol of Ares, the God of War. He told us his name was Elpenor or Man's Help (in Common) and he told us that we wouldn't make it down to the docks by curfew and that the docks area was basically being locked down owing to the pirate threat. It was strongly suggested that we go back up with them.

It was then I noticed that the carpet was dripping blood. Already a large stain was spreading on the surface and a pool was forming on the ground. So I casually leaned on it to hide the stain from view.

We followed them back but they were setting up such a fast pace that we had to drop back. We also needed to ditch the carpet and body somewhere. So it was decided that Tom would windwalk the carpet down to the boat and return. To make it easier, I gave him another Waters of Strength.

We were partway up when there was a shout from ahead. Shortly a guard rushed down towards us and we were told in no uncertain terms to stay put as they were 'investigating a matter'. They must have spotted the blood trail we had left. Fortunately, when the rest of the guards and Elpenor showed up they failed to notice the absence of the carpet and Tom.

Already we had planned our excuse. I had a wet, blood stained, cloth and Caprice altered my illusion so that my head wound was visible. Elpenor empathised me and I noticed that his touch was very cold. However, he seemed satisfied by the injury and our explanation but he detailed two guards to escort us back to the city and towards another set of quarters. I thanked Elpenor in halting Ellenic but did not use his name in case I got it wrong. In some cultures, mispronouncing someone's name is taken as an insult and I suspected that was the case here.

These quarters were much nicer than the ones we were at previously. Here, we met up with an elf called Tusa. He told us he was an official informer and if we did anything wrong and were arrested, he got a percentage of the take. The local healer, Fixen, arrived and examined my injury. There wasn't much she could do to repair the damage but we could try going to one of the Healing temples and see what they could do. Of course, that would cost us a lot and citizens get priority treatment.

Just in case things went bad, I memorised what scribe notes we had then they were destroyed. I then made a Waters of Healing for Christopher but, when I tried to make one for myself, I suddenly felt very tired. Maybe I'll do it in the morning.

Christopher changed the watch order again. This time it was Tyro/Tom, Tyro/Douglas, Tyro/Aqualina, Christopher/Kathleen, Christopher/Caprice. Night passed without incident although Tusa kept popping in to see how we were doing.

22nd Fruit

I woke up, feeling more refreshed, and successfully created the Waters of Healing which I used to heal my remaining wounds, apart from the eye. That would require some very specialised work.

Kathleen had established that Fantaceco had flown off to sea, about 180 miles away. He had either landed on an island or even on an invisible pirate ship.

Pedro was hypnotised and questioned. It didn't take long to realise that Kathleen had been affected by Pio's death curse. Now, every time she heard a question, she had to answer truthfully to the best of her ability. Christopher had to take her away.

Pedro told us that the 'pirates' were duly appointed freedom fighters. The women are being sold as slaves in order to raise money, presumably to buy weapons for a counter revolution. Other things were also going on but he wasn't privy to that information. A cabal of Don Carlos' supporters, otherwise known as Loyalists, Royalists, or Calosians, were in charge but he didn't know who. There may be a Michaeline religious cult which is only for the 'high-ups'. They also may be trying to destabilise the Ellenic States in preparation for a takeover.

Don Fantaceco was an official spy and he goes out once or twice each night on 'business'. He also receives messages from afar, probably by magical means. Somehow he had known that Prince Ed was coming, along with an entourage who he considered to have something strange about them.

Don Afaro, who was also the Baron of Death Island, was a contact. He is non-colleged and doesn't have many men with him, most likely one or two local thugs.

He knew about Pio's sword. Apparently he uses it on himself on occasion which makes him feel good.

As far as the wanted posters were concerned, as far as he knew, they were the ones who had killed Don Carlos.

The questioning took most of the morning. Douglas and Tyro went to see the Temple of Ares to see if they could prevent us from leaving. No they couldn't but, if we left, and something odd happened, usual notifications would be posted.

Meanwhile Christopher and Kathleen had discovered that we had earned 5 1000 drachma receipts plus 225 drachma in loose change, a total of 5225 drachma for the pig iron that had been sold on our behalf. Each drachma is a silver coin and is worth 3sp. Also there was a cloud leaving for Crisis that afternoon. At least one went per week although usually it was two or three.

Ed had a lunch appointment with the priestess of Thought we had met up with yesterday and we accompanied him. It was a rather lavish affair and lasted well into the afternoon. So far in fact that we missed the cloud, much to my relief. During lunch we discovered that this area doesn't like mind mages, calling them 'dreamreavers' and that the punishment for misuse of mind magics was very severe. Usually there wasn't enough of the mind mage left for resurrection.

The priestess, after hearing about what had happened, suggested that we go to the Temple of

Ares, confess what had happened, and pay a fine. However, we should sort this out quickly. However, if we could prove that the Destinians were against the piracy, then they may be very lenient about the whole affair. So, after lunch, Pedro was charmed and we headed for the temple.

.7.

We explained things to the authorities, and paid out 200 drachma to them to take care of Pio's body and resurrection. Pedro was also left there for 'questioning'. However, when we got back to our quarters, we discovered Kathleen and Christopher had already left for Crisis on the cloud.

Crisis was 300 miles north of Thought and the next cloud wasn't due for another few days. So we decided to take the boat. Fortunately the merchants were also ready to leave and they were going that way so we got a lift. We learnt from them that there was a festival in Thought in ten days, something to do with wine and the harvesting of grapes.

That evening, we reached the canal that cut across the neck of the peninsula between Thought and Crisis. It wasn't allowed to go through the canal at night so we stopped at the harbour of Slip. In the distance, we could see Tower Hill. The rest of the party went for a walk into Slip while I stayed on board the boat, just in case there were more wanted posters around the place.

Once in Slip, the party headed for the taverns. Slip was mostly populated by humans although there were a few hobbits and even one centaur. Unlike the dock area of Seagate, this place was clean and well lit. Generally people were ignoring Ed and were minding their own business. A few people were wearing laurel wreaths on their heads which indicated they were local heroes. Several drachma were spent on drinks during the night.

23rd Fruit.

We sailed through the canal. A similar port to Slip was located at the other end. Mid afternoon we reached Crisis. The water here was a deep blue and the buildings were a brilliant white. The town went right down to the water's edge. No surrounding walls could be seen.

We were told that Dolphin was 40 odd miles inland and there was a road going inland. There was talk of hiring horses but then someone noticed that there was a cloud getting ready to depart.

Caprice attempted to put her disguise spell on me but something went wrong and she forgot how to do it. So we had to improvise with a white facemask and some cantrips. Unfortunately, when I tried one, my hair started falling out. Basically I was not happy about this, but at least it'll grow back – unlike my eye. So I improvised a scarf.

The cloud operator told us that Kathleen and Christopher had caught a cloud yesterday and were dropped off somewhere near Dolphin. After some discussion it was decided to go to Dolphin. Unfortunately, they decided to go by cloud.

It cost us five drachma apiece and we, along with other passengers bound for Thought, got on. I headed as close to the centre as I could and tried to forget that I would soon be several hundred feet in the air. As a total contrast, Tom stayed close to the edge.

During flight, a bird landed on Caprice. It had a message attached to it which simply read 'Land now!'. Tom windwalked to have a look and spotted three riders below. A bit later on, a hawk

flew in, from the direction of Crisis. It too had a note, presumably from Christopher, which read 'Land at Crisis!'. Sixty drachmas later, Caprice had convinced the pilot to turn around and take us back. The other passengers weren't too happy about this, especially when it meant that they wouldn't reach Thought until after dusk. Can't say I blame them either. Muttered comments were made that it was all coming out of Christopher's share. When Christopher found out about, he was not happy.

Shortly before dark, Christopher and Kathleen rode in, accompanied by a groom. Kathleen said that she had an intermittent deafness curse and she must have still had the truth curse as she said that we weren't to ask her anything and that there were things about her and Christopher that we shouldn't know. Before retiring, she told us that she was able to locate Fantaceco in Thought.

Christopher told us that they had gone to the Oracle but had not determined any useful information. So that put paid to our chances to seeing the Oracle – and I had something personal to ask.

The discussion turned to how we could deal with the raiders. I figured it would be easy to detect them by their wake as they wouldn't be using Mage Current close to shore. Any cetacean should be able to detect them. However the trick would be getting that information fast enough to us so we could intercept them.

Also we needed a way to immobilise their mages. The suggestion of weighted nets came up and I was wondering if we could get some that had cold iron fibres in them. I'll have to talk to Hagan about it when I get back.

24th Fruit.

Left harbour in our boat for Slip and Tower Hill. As we left, an amphora of wine was pressed onto Prince Ed. It must have been my day for casting as my daily waterbreathing tripled duration and also did the Mage Current. Once we approached the canal, I made sure the mage current was off and, while through it, we encountered a large Ellenic boat which Ed identified as a Pentaconta.

Finally reached Slip. The idea was to see if Ed's first adoptive father, Cedric Swellfoot, knew anything. Apparently he had contacts in all sorts of places. This meant going up to Tower Hill but, since Ed was under a curse that he was going to kill his father, presumably the current Prince of Tower Hill, he was staying on the boat. However, he managed to arrange for us to stay at the palace by way of a letter of introduction.

Christopher had performed a Remove Curse on Caprice so she was able to disguise me more effectively. A chariot arrived to pick us up and Tyro, Kathleen, and Caprice were invited to ride on it. The rest of us followed on foot.

At the palace we met the Prince, ManyCattle, and his wife, SurroundedbyCattle. They were pleased to see us, especially since we had news of Ed and were associated with him. She was saying that Ed should call in more or at least write letters more often. I suspect we are meant to pass that on. There were quite a lot of hobbits here as well.

Another interesting character was a tall elf in silver armour wielding a large thin sword. He was introduced as Bodyguard. As the evening progressed, he had a quick word with all of us,

presumably to find out more about us. He's an E&E.

Basically we had an enjoyable evening and retired to our quarters. Once there, Kathleen told us that she had figured out that, when Don Fantaceco had left Thought, he had met with Don Afaro then flew to the coast, up to Tower Hill and around the north coast of the peninsula. The height he was flying at indicated that he was on some sort of avian creature, probably nocturnal. These creatures could be helping the Destinians in their raids. Either that he had some sort of demonic power to allow him to reach, and survive, those altitudes and to be able to recognise landmarks from that height.

She also interpreted an earlier astrology reading to indicate Ed's parents, i.e. the King and Queen, being involved, with Ed being foretold to kill his father when he finds out about it. Hence the phrase 'sweet turns salty', his family relations being tinged with tears.

25th Fruit

Three and a half hours before dawn, we were woken by a huge commotion in the palace. Slip had been raided.

.8.

Kathleen located Ed, who was still in the harbour. Fast horses were arranged for us and we sped down to the harbour, even though we knew that the raiders had left at least an hour ago. They could be at least forty miles away at a speed that was much faster than I could swim.

We found Ed at the port, looking a bit woozy. He had taken out quite a few that had attacked him but he was hit by something that hurt a lot then knocked him out. Someone else found him and woke him up. We ascertained that Ed had been hit by a lightning bolt then sapped from behind, then healer skills used to put him in a deep sleep.

Ed hadn't seen a ship come in, especially since there was a major storm raging at the time. We suspected it was magically summoned. His attackers had some sort of thin demonic masks and were wearing dark clothing. Scraps found indicated it was made of linen although Ed suspected they were wearing silk as well as leather armour underneath. Indications were that the cloth was waterproofed as well.

Other witnesses were also questioned. We were told that the raiders spoke Ellenic with unworldly accents, and only to issue commands. They didn't talk among themselves, except in sign language. They were very stealthy but were bulky. Ed had seen a squad of 12 which implied that there were probably 30 or 40 on this raid with, possibly a few more in reserve. No one else saw any ships.

Guards had been posted but some of them had consumed the local wine and were knocked out. We later discovered that the wine had been drugged with a sleeping draught. Sealed amphoras were still safe. All the wine was 'impounded' as evidence. Other guards had been sapped and couldn't remember being snuck up on. We could be dealing with invisible, windwalking, assassins.

In all, 20 people, including some of the guards were missing. According to Kathleen, Fantaceco was still in Thought.

Tom started a Windspeak ritual. Meanwhile I summoned a dolphin, in the hope I would obtain a witness. Unfortunately, it proved not to be so. The dolphin took quite a while, to arrive and was a deep water species. He was rather annoyed at being summoned all this way into a dirty harbour and was muttering something about 'getting their own back if they ever got a human-summoning spell. Also, he wasn't willing to help people as many of them caught his kind in nets. I had to agree with him on all those counts, especially about the dolphin-killers. I don't like them either.

Unfortunately, he didn't know anything useful. He had heard about 'ghost ships' but didn't believe their existence. So I summoned a school of mackerel as compensation for his inconvenience.

Just as the dolphin left, Tom completed his ritual and got a wind. The wind mentioned three ships, in a pack, that had cloaking devices. One of them was very nice looking. There were people on board, all wearing black.

There were two towers, where signal rockets had been mounted to alert Tower Hill. Unfortunately the bad weather meant that the rockets couldn't be launched. Since this was the first raid that a summoned storm had been used, we concluded that they had somehow known about the rockets, and had used to the storm to thwart their use. Only the guards had known about the rockets existence.

There was no more we could do here, so we headed back to the palace and rested. Sir Christopher insisted on a race back to the palace.

We had a hasty breakfast of bread and milk, after Tyro roused the cooks, then dashed off for an appointment with Cedric, which had been arranged the previous night. The list of instructions that had been obtained led us down a maze of alleys then to a door which we knocked at. Then, a figure came out of a door opposite, attracted our attention, then beckoned us towards the door. Once we were in, it was barred behind us. Fortunately there were small windows in the walls.

A hobbit came out and introduced himself as Cedric. Douglas, who had previously put up a Telepathy, handed a small pouch over, containing coin, then gave him a second. Obviously the first one wasn't quite enough. He hadn't heard anything about the slave trade and the raiders were crippling Elvenic cities. He also knew about Afaro. It was likely that the raiders were basing themselves at sea and selling to the Lunar Empire. Apparently there were two groups here, one who were legal trade representatives, and whom we hadn't met, and this lot. When asked about the Cult of King Charles, he had heard rumours of something odd going on inland which could be a western cult, but doesn't put much truth to them. He then named a few places that hadn't been hit yet, including Piza and the City of the Ropemakers.

He can let us have four skin changes at 120 drachma each but we decided against them when we discovered they were fawns. After Caprice asked about rat or mice skinchanges, he thought he might be able to get us some at about 50 drachma each. Douglas got the impression he could get human skins as well.

Meanwhile Kathleen had detected a Bardic Ear in the room. Casting about with a Wizards Eye, she discovered someone in the next room was writing a complete transcript of what was said. As we were about to leave, she demanded the transcript. Cedric offered to send us a summary but refused to release the full thing. We decided not to push it.

I was also getting the impression that he was sizing me up as well, for potential sale, so I was relieved when we finally got out of there. After getting some food at the marketplace we decided where to go next. The consensus, for some reason, was a place called the Place of Goats, on the northern coast of the isthmus. So, after making our farewells at the Palace, we set off by boat.

We found that our boat had been serviced, provisioned, and extra equipment added to replace what had been damaged. Even the hull had been patched up. Once we were out of the harbour, the boat was systematically searched in case something had been planted on us. I even went over the side and checked the underside. Christopher called it 'keelhauling' but I commented that being pulled along underneath by guide ropes would be really fun if it wasn't for that magical keel. Ed looked really strangely at me but Caprice explained it as me being a Southerner and having strange customs.

Anyway, nothing unusual was found, and we arrived at the Place of Goats. It was a reasonably large town that ringed a wide bay. Upon arrival, late afternoon, we rented an entire inn to ourselves and set up a watch and early warning systems. Tyro came up with the interesting idea of enclosing a lantern in a box that had a hollow tube coming out of one side. The light could only be seen through the tube which meant that placing it at one end of the bay meant that it could only be seen at the spot at the other end where the tube was pointed at. If someone watching the light saw it disappear then we knew that a ship had intersected the beam. Plus, because it was a narrow beam, meant that it was unlikely anyone on the ship would see it. Certainly an interesting idea but would require a bright light.

Meanwhile Caprice offered to take me to the local Healer Temple to see if anything could be done about my eye. I was a little uneasy about this but, when Kathleen offered to take me instead, I got rather worried. For a while I had the suspicion that some of the party wanted to sell me off and collect the reward.

So I decided to go with Caprice. Meanwhile Tom and Lady Kathleen went off to visit an Air Temple to see if they could get some skin-changes and/or Restoratives there.

At the Healers, they had a look but said it was beyond their abilities. I had a sneaking suspicion that would be the case.

We returned to the inn just before Tom and Kathleen did. Tom had cashed in one of the 1000d chits and returned with 2 Rank 7 restoratives, 50d in coin and a 500d chit.

Nothing happened that night apart from Sir Christopher trying to remove Lady Kathleen's honesty curse while she slept, with the help of magic.

26th Fruit

It wasn't until lunchtime that Sir Christopher finished the ritual and I don't want to know how they kept Kathleen blissfully asleep through the whole thing. Fortunately for Sir Christopher, it worked. Caprice was off at the Healer Temple all day.

We also set up a rotating watch system on the bay, including waiting underwater, in case the Destinians turned up. However, nothing happened.

27th Fruit

Still nothing and we continued training except for Caprice. Apparently she was still up at the temple, only coming back long enough to renew my disguise. Sir Christopher removed Lady Kathleen's deafness curse.

28th Fruit.

It's either a miracle or Caprice had managed to arrange something. Whatever it was, when I woke up, my eye had been restored. No matter how she arranged it, and I don't think I want to know, I'm still grateful. I'm indebted to her.

Later on, some skin changes arrived from Cedric, 1 skin per person, including Ed, and one spare. Two of the skins were rats, the rest were mice.

.9.

Lady Kathleen began learning Wiccan Counterspells so Douglas wouldn't be the only person who could counterspell the skin changes.

During this time we received reports that other places had been hit.

16th Harvest

We were well into the light half of the moon, between first and last quarter, and the Destinians don't usually raid during this period. So Caprice, myself, and Douglas, decided to go to Dolphins and see the Oracle in case we could get more information. I had a personal question to ask, if they'd let me. So we took the boat to Crisis and had to wait for the next cloud.

18th Harvest

Finally arrived at Dolphin. We were allowed in. The temple was in a cavern in the side of the mountain. Fumes issued from the floor which the oracle priestess was breathing.

21st Harvest

Finally arrived back at the Place of Goats. When we got back we discovered that the city of the Ropemakers was hit on the 4th and one of the two Kings were taken. A big storm was in progress at the time. It seemed most unlike the Destinians but maybe they were escalating their plans. Could Thought had done it instead?

More time passed and, as the moon passed last quarter, we resumed the watch. The idea was to try and sneak aboard the Destinian ships. Several plans were discussed and discarded until someone came up with the brilliant suggestion that we should hide among the food as rodents. So that's what we decided to do.

22nd Harvest

Finally, that morning, just after dawn, under cover of heavy fog, two ships were sighted in the bay. Long boats were rowing in containing what we estimated to be 36 Destinians.

We became rodents, mice for us and Ed got the rat skin, presumably so we could tell which one was him. Just then a fear spell washed over us, presumably to clear everything, including people and normal rodents, out of the warehouse. I burrowed deeper into the grain.

Finally the bag we were in was lifted into a longboat and rowed back to the smaller ship. The

sacks and barrels on board were put into a cargo net and hoisted up to the ship. The whole operation only took about six minutes and it was only then that we heard screaming from the town.

Douglas was probing minds and got the impression that the Destinians considered the Ellenic people to be their enemy. Also the Captain was Lord Rorley. The ship we were on was called *Grace of God* while the larger vessel was *Carlos the Glorious*, but more commonly known by the sailors as *Big Charlie*. There was a third ship, the same size as *Grace of God* somewhere nearby named *Defender of the Faith*.

We scurried out of the sack, up the rope and onto the mast before the food was passed through a Wall of Light to kill off any vermin. In our present state it would not have been good for us. Slaves were being loaded onto the other ship. Ten minutes later we were underway. After watching the water around the ship, I concluded they were using Bound Water. Hmmm.

We were currently perched high on the mast and I was trying hard not to look down. After a while we headed down to the hold. Down here was loaded with grains, meats, barrels of wine and water plus other foodstuffs. There were also a few rats lurking about as well as a cat. Some party members wanted to take it on.

Douglas continued mind-probing while the spell was still active. The Destinians were quite happy with the outcome of the raid although they were expecting a local hero to show up. Lord Rorley was a Water mage and there was a mixture of air, water, and a few celestials on board. Also on board were a bunch of devout Michaelines. There was something that the Ellenics did that really upset the Destinians. Then I realized what it was. According to the scribe notes I had read and what I had discovered from Phaeton, via Aimee, that the Themyskirans, a group of Amazons, with a very similar culture to the Ellenic people, had aided the Guild party that had caused the demise of Carlos. Now they were blaming the Ellenic States for it as well as the wrong Guild party.

That afternoon we were heading south. Late afternoon and we had stopped or were moving very slowly. The air here was cold and oppressive. When we peeked, we noticed that we were leeward of a very rocky island. The impression was that there were some women on the island that were allies against the Ellenic people. The sailors were very nervous about them. I was guessing sirens.

The cloaking device was located near the middle of the ship on the keel line. The room had a reinforced floor and after several hours we were able to nibble our way in from below at one corner. The room is 15' by 20'. The device is a large sphere, with a crystalline surface, on a metal dais, surrounded by a cylindrical cage made from cold iron bars. The entire floor was warded with the spell 'Wrath of God' which was triggered by any sentient, or part thereof, who entered without performing the disarming procedure. The only magic on the device, apart from cloaking and permanency, was a cantrip of dusting.

23rd Harvest

We were watching through the hole when an officer, followed by an apprentice, opened the door. Both of them said the phrase 'Long live Carlos the Glorious' before stepping in. The apprentice, who was an air mage, cast a cleaning cantrip on the device, then the two left. The officer didn't have a college.

24th Harvest

This time it was another officer, but the same apprentice. Again they said the phrase, did the cleaning, and left. A bit later we could feel the ship picking up speed and soon we determined we were going south again, accompanied by the bigger ship. A bit later, we turned east, probably heading towards the Bright Coast. We were wondering if they had received an urgent message from somewhere.

A bit later on, Christopher suggested that some of us should be on the other ship.

.10.

Initially I was against this as splitting up the party before a potentially combat situation is, to say the least, not wise. But, what he wanted to do, was to somehow destroy or disable the cloaking devices on both ships simultaneously. The timing needed to be accurate enough so that the ships would become visible and be seen from shore before they attack, and give the defences time enough to react. Hopefully the Destinians on board would not be aware of what had happened before the counterattack started. If possible, Ed could teleport away, using my Ring of Returning, with one of the devices. Maybe one of their philosophers could figure out how it worked and develop a defence.

Christopher: Kathleen and I have had practise in not talking to each other

Kathleen: Yes. We've been doing it for several years.

It was a good idea but working out the details involved much plotting, scheming, loud squeaking and tail biting. Finally it was decided to steal the one here and send the strike force through the Ethereal Plane to take out the other one and maybe capture the Captain of the *Big Charlie*.

From our speed and position we figured the attack would take place just before dawn so we wasted no time in enlarging the mouse hole to one a human could get through. Also we all practised saying the disarming phrase for the Ward. It may be the only Destinian I know but it would make a great party stopper.

Finally the hole was done. Caprice, Christopher, and Kathleen were made human again and they set to work cutting through the bars, with a couple of hacksaws, under a couple of Caprice's Illusionary Terrains. Finally, three bars were cut, enough for Ed to get through.

25th Harvest.

Shortly after midnight I tried changing to merform. We weren't sure what would happen i.e. whether I would become a mouse with a fish tail but it turned out that the lycanthrope curse overrode the skin change and I became a normal mermaid. Fortunately I had already dressed appropriately, just in case. I cast Waterbreathings on everyone and a Resist Cold on myself then found the ring and an extra Restorative for Christopher. Once done, I returned to mouseform.

Finally we came within visual range of the shore. Ed was made human, and, after taking a Waters of Strength, he went into the warded area and began to pull the sphere out from between the columns. For a while it wouldn't budge and we could see Ed's muscles rippling with effort. Finally it came out. He then activated the ring and vanished. I hope I get that ring back as it has great sentimental value. Plus it was a gift from Lord Shaygin of Lorgos.

We could hear a celestial mage casting witchsights on the deck above as the Destinians prepared to attack. Christopher rendered himself, Kathleen, and Caprice ethereal and they headed off to the other ship. We weren't sure if they would get there because, if the ship was surrounded by Bound Air then, according to Phaeton, that would also cause a barrier in the Ethereal. But, either Phaeton was wrong or there was no Bound Air, as they successfully made it over to the warded area on the *Big Charlie*.

While they were doing that, the rest of us succeeded in getting up on the deck and slipping over the side. We bounced off the Bound Water, which extended a few feet around the ship then dived into the ocean. Once there, I began the change into merform.

Meanwhile Christopher had somehow managed to summon a couple of 'heros' and instructed them to destroy the sphere. They then went looking for the person wearing the most elaborate braiding as, presumably, that would be the Captain. As they did, they noticed some people flying off, the advance strike force.

From below was the sound of breaking glass. At first, the Destinians must have thought someone had dropped a tray of glassware but, when the sound was repeated, they realised what it was. Pandemonium ensued and several Destinians rushed down and saw the two 'heros' pulverising the sphere. One of the Destinian crew stepped into the ward and 'ZAP!'. He was hit, and vaporised, by a large bolt of lightning, accompanied by a thunderclap, that seemed to emanate from the sky. So that's what 'Wrath of God' does. The flash would have been visible from shore. Presumably it's one of those spells that only leaves a pair of smoking boots.

By now, Christopher and his group were attempting to take out the captain but were not having much luck. So, instead, they managed to catch the first officer. A shield of wind was starting to go up around the *Big Charlie* at this point.

One of their Celestial mages was able to see and cast into the Ethereal so he blasted the group with Blackfire. Kathleen had to tackle Caprice before she ran off. Getting lost in the Ethereal is a really bad thing. The next Blackfire rendered Caprice unconscious but Kathleen proved herself to be very staunch. Meanwhile Christopher created an ethereal Wall of Stone as cover.

The person they had captured was trying to Windwalk off so Christopher had to take him out. He then took the body for later resurrection and questioning. They then headed down to the water, and Caprice turned them into fish.

By now I had completed my transformation and scooped up the mice. A whirlwind vortex was forming over the ocean so we dived deep to avoid it. Three tuna fish swam up and, together, with the help of a Mage Current, we swam towards land.

On land, somewhere on the Bright Coast, all the skinchanges were counterspelled and I retransformed back into human. A fire was lit and we warmed ourselves up and dried off. A column of smoke, ten miles away, indicated that the nearby city was under attack from the advance forces.

Kathleen tried to detect Ed but he wasn't in range. Meanwhile Tom windwalked up but couldn't see any of the ships. We wondered if they were going to take both ships away or scuttle one. If they did, we wanted to see if we could raise it as a prize. Certainly we could swim down and strip

it bare, if the Destinians hadn't already done so.

.11.

From what we could tell, it was Bright City itself that had been attacked. A Locate on the *Grace of God* showed it to be somewhere near the city but there was no trace of the *Big Charlie*. For much of the morning we rested then headed towards the nearest town, Asine. All of us were disguised as Ellenics with Cowlander accents. Douglas was carrying the Destinian body.

The guards were wary but they let us in. We then headed for the temple of the Artisan God, 'He who shines by day'. The idea was to find an Airmage who could cast flight spells that would get us to Tower Hill, where we would have the best chance of locating Ed. I would have preferred to swim or to take a raft but it was quite possible for the Destinians to be patrolling the waters and to have water elementals and other creatures out there helping them. I just hope the Air Mage could get us a very large cloud.

It was obvious when the Air Mage showed up. All those wing motifs on his robes sort of gave it away. His name was Swiftwing and, unfortunately, he was going to do flying spells on us. The best place to do that was on the top of a large hill outside of town. It would cost us 250 drachma.

So we headed out of town with the air mage and an acolyte. The acolyte was there to look after the adept in case he backfired. On the way Swiftwing warned us about the styphian birds on the north of the peninsula. We were also told to avoid the harpies nearby.

We climbed a steep hill and a magnificent vista stretched before us. We couldn't see much damage in the distant city but Swiftwing said that there was a battle in and near the harbour and a ship was on fire.

Swiftwing cast the spells and we were picked up by winds and carried aloft. I wasn't very keen on this as we seemed to be awfully high up. I just hope the wind didn't drop me. We flew near the city and, on the beach nearby, were two Destinian ships. One was burnt very close to the waterline while the other one looked reasonably intact. Ellenic guards were in the process of stripping the intact ship. Neither ship was the *Big Charlie* so the Destinians must have removed the cloaking device from their third ship, *Defender of the Faith*, to the *Big Charlie* before scuttling both smaller ships.

Everyone, except Tom and I, landed and Caprice, who was disguised as a man, introduced 'himself' as 'Number Ten Ox' and said that the ship belonged to 'him'. That may have been a mistake as the person 'he' was speaking to, Prince All-Eyes, had heard the rumours that the Cowlanders were behind the attacks. He was mollified when Caprice explained that Prince Ed had been instrumental in stopping the raiders and that he had thrown large rocks at them. The inhabitants were rather surprised when the boats sailed in and they were able to stop the Destinians from destroying both boats. So our claim was recognised and he handed Caprice a ring with a peacock motif and invited us to stay for a feast in our honour. Caprice said that we had urgent business elsewhere but we could be back tomorrow. That pleased Prince All-Eyes as it gave him more time to prepare. However he offered to put a blessing on us all so a runner was sent off to get a High Priest.

When the priest arrived, we were able to determine that he was an E&E so we got him to make

all of us invisible. It seemed rather stupid to me to do this especially since hardly any of us to see anyone else so I used a charge from my Witchsight ring so I could see everyone. Unfortunately it still didn't prevent me from being kicked in the head by an invisible Tom. As we flew off a large storm could be seen brewing on the coast nearby.

We reached Tower Hill late afternoon and headed for the palace. To our surprise, Prince Ed was there to greet us and handed back my ring. He had appeared, carrying the sphere, in his bedchamber, surprising his wife, who started making comments about him bringing his work home.

Bodyguard had already been expecting us and he admitted that he had some sort of tracer on one of us that would work through a disguise. He had also arranged for a very discrete master healer.

So the Destinian was resurrected and interrogated. His name was Don Juan di Quattro and was the hereditary military governor of that island. They had been going after healthy citizens, avoiding mages and pacted people. The people had been captured as slaves and were being sold to the Lunar Empire. The Cult of Carlos the Martyr was ruled by someone calling himself the ArchBishop who was originally from the Far East, probably one of Destiny's tributary duchies and is definitely the head of a crack team of Michaelines. It seemed strange to us that he was called the 'Black Bishop' as Michaelines are traditionally associated with the colours Red or Blue.

'His Sacred Majesty' (i.e. Carlos) had three all-powerful agents. They were Cardinal Juan de Fuca who controlled the home territories (he died last Spring), Scarpia in the south (he's also dead) and the Black Bishop in the east, so it seemed natural to the Destinians to look to the Black Bishop as their leader and head of the Government in Exile.

The Government in Exile is also set up in the Lunar empire at a place called Imbrium. He didn't know how many cloaking devices there were but believed their manufacture was under the control of Il Barone, or the ArchBishop. An army was also being assembled, but he did not know if that was in Imbrium or one of the Islands of Adventure.

Don Quattro was also sure that the *Big Charlie*, with a cloaking device installed, was originally intended for the Bishop. Apparently Carlos was preparing for some top-secret master strike, which was supposed to have taken place about the beginning of the year, but his death put the kybosh on that. He had no idea what it was.

26th Harvest

It was decided to take Don Juan to Thought and tell the authorities there what had been going on. So, next morning, before dawn, we set off with Wings.

The sun was just peeking over the horizon when we arrived at Thought. Maybe I'm getting the hang of this landing business as I was doing rather well. Most of us were as ourselves except I was disguised with the Anna disguise.

Caprice - "You're disguised as yourself so you're already disguised"

We entered through the side entrance and were met by Captain Cleone then conducted to the authorities. Once there we gave a short story about what had happened, gave them a description of the *Big Charlie* and assured them that Freetown is not involved. We also explained why the

Destinians were upset with the Ellenics at the moment and suggested that they have a few words with Fantaceco next time he's in town.

They decided to also question Afaro. Father Pio had been resurrected and, after questioning, he had been released. When last seen he was heading out to sea going south-west, probably to Freetown. They had concluded that he wasn't actively involved but was a sympathiser.

Our next stop was Argos, aka the Bright City, which we were told was the capital city of the Argolian Federation. Don Juan was also to come with us so he could give his statement there. I think the idea was for him to be 'toured' all over the place so most of the people would know first hand what had been going on.

When we got there, we found that the intact 125' long ship, which turned out to be *Defender of the Faith*, was no longer on the beach but was now moored in the harbour. Currently the mast was in the process of being 'repaired'. The *Grace of God* had been burnt to the waterline and only the figurine had survived. An inventory of the loot on board was made and most of it was iron weapons. We agreed to leave those with the Ellenics in exchange for the ship and a selection of the other loot. The cloaking device that Ed had retrieved was also coming with us for further analysis.

A scrumptious feast was presented in our honour then we set about our journey home.

We also found out from Don Juan about the reward posters. Apparently the Destinians had concluded that Starflower aka 'the evil mind mage bitch' was the brains behind the operation while my reward was high because basically the Destinians hold water adepts in high regard. Brightflare wasn't even included because he had managed to cut a deal with someone rather powerful on Alba Longa, probably that negotiator we had met.

Before we headed home, we stopped off in Pylos where the Ellenic contingent and Don Juan were dropped off then headed back to the Guild under heavy cloak, just in case other Destinian ships were about.

It took us nearly a fortnight to sail back and, after the Guild had examined the device, it, and the ship was sailed to Destiny. Once there a salvage fee for the ship, plus device, was received from the current ruling Council then, those of the party that went (I wasn't one) returned to the Guild.