

DRAGONQUEST

The Quest in Search of the Missing Melanie

The Adventurers being:

Amaranth: Party Leader, Human, Enchanting Lady.

Delvish: Vampire Ex-Elf, Necromancer, possessor of Little Bones, the Vampire Furball Necromancer.

Strangely Brown: Nubian Human Fighter, Son of a Duke in the Lunar Empire (and something of an Illusionist).

Ho Tan Shu: Chinese Human, Illusionist, Military Leader.

Clayth: Elf, Celestial Shadow-mage, who wishes he wasn't.

Whisper: Lady Elven Celestial Shadow-mage.

Flamis: Lady Human Apprentice Fire-mage, Weaponsmith and your Scribe.

Of Contacts and Contracts

30 June

After the meeting I, having decided that a mission in search of a young girl not unlike myself would suit me, met others interested in this quest in one of the rooms off the main Guild hall. A most oddly assorted group they proved to be. A person in a dark voluminous robe introduced himself as Delvish, a Vampire!!! A Guild representative presented us with further details regarding Fugelheim, and the contract which had been sent to the Guild. It seems that a previous party had rescued the King and Queen of that region from incarceration upon another plane. Thus the Guild is in good favour there. However that party did not travel near the Village of Maltain to which we must travel to begin our quest. Passage is booked north by sea for our party to the region's capital, a city named Port Artz.

After some debate, and electing one Amaranth as Party Leader, we signed our contracts, beginning with Strangely. Each contract split in two, providing each of us with a thousand silver pennies in rather unusual gold coins, in a remarkable purse, which according to the description cannot be forcibly removed, nor opened by any save the owner. A useful item, indeed. We each felt a geas laid upon us to go north and seek out our employers.

Of Ship and Storm

30 June-12 July

Thence we proceeded to the docks, where we located the vessel, named "SeaHorse", a fine three-masted schooner, on which we are to travel. I am nervous about this idea of travelling upon the water, the element being in opposition to my own, but not so fearful as the vampire. Indeed, as we were investigating our quarters, he called up a swarm of rats. One strayed to near to my feet, so I burnt it, to the displeasure of Strangely Brown, who stomped upon the fire to put it out. It seems that people do not like fire on boats.

Delvish got a cabin to himself. He said he likes to sleep hanging from the ceiling. I hate to think... Amaranth, Whisper, and I will share, as will Strangely and Tan. Clayth had the remaining cabin. As we left the ship, Delvish pointed out that a number of rats were also leaving, swimming for shore, and he became very concerned that the ship might be doomed to sink. So while we collected our equipment, he arranged for an astrology reading regarding the vessel. He returned, even more concerned about the fate of our ship; but I found the reading to be more reassuring than otherwise. We embarked at seven pm, having eaten at the Guild, and left harbour at eight.

Next morning, I was pleasantly surprised to find myself unaffected by the motion of the vessel. Not so for Strangely Brown. He managed to coat half the passageway with vomit. The smell!!!

Quite enough to put anyone off breakfast. And by the time I got to the galley, there was only porridge left to eat. And a tiny fire in an iron box. Pitiful!!! The cook suggested I might like to catch a fish, and offered to fry it for me. I said I'd rather fry it myself, but I took him up on his offer of hook and line. Boring... I didn't catch a thing, fell asleep, and got mildly sunburnt.

Ten days later, we were nearing our destination. Amaranth called a party meeting. She stated that as an enchanter, she might be able to locate the missing child, but what could we do? Not a lot it seems. We have no ranger; and none of us are much use at combat. Later that day the fog set in. Unpleasant stuff. I stayed below decks, wishing it would go away.

At daybreak on the next day there was a commotion on deck. Rather than adding sail the sailors were reefing it in, preparing for a blow. Amaranth spotted the Captain upon the quarterdeck. We had not seen anything of him thus far on the voyage. He told Amaranth that a storm was coming, and she came below to tell the rest of us. I was badly frightened, and so according to Amaranth was Dilvish. He was "difficult" she told me afterwards, and Clayth ended up with vampire for company. One of the sailors brought down covers for the portholes. We rode out the storm for hours. A horrible time. Could not sleep, could not eat, could not read. I became hysterical, and Amaranth put me to sleep with a spell. But the noises... Once there was a great grinding sound that made the whole boat shake. I hope it wasn't one of the masts.

Towards evening on the next day the storm abated. Warily we made our way up to the hatch, only to find it jammed. All we could hear was swearing sailors. Heading for the forward hatch we looked out to see that the centre mast had indeed fallen. We went below once more, and slept.

Of Vampire Revealed

13 July

I woke feeling much better, and hungry. After breakfasting we went on deck to find a bright sunny day; and things much tidier. Captain Sealegs was up on the quarterdeck. Amaranth spoke to him, and he told her that the storm had blown us in the right direction. We are about two days south of Port Artz. But it would be best if we stayed below decks, out of the way...

Feeling somewhat bored, I decided to ask Strangely Brown for something different to read. I found him alone in his cabin with a pair of bats. Bats? On a ship? Not realising that they were Dilvish and Little Bones, I stood perplexed as Strangely demonstrated a game he called "batting". The bats ended up hanging from his wrists, and refused to let go. Strangely took them on deck and endeavoured to shake them loose over the side. He succeeded but the bats found a new perch on his earrings. So he asked me to attempt my pyrogenesis upon them. It failed, fortunately, since the bats metamorphosed into Dilvish and his furball. This surprised me, but scared the wits out of the crew...

Amaranth, hearing the noise, came out on deck to find me explaining to Dilvish how I didn't know it was him, and that I would not have tried to harm another party member. Strangely had taken off. Amaranth gathered us together to explain what had happened. We tried. A sailor came below, requesting that Amaranth go and explain what was going on to the Captain. The Captain demanded that we either hand over a substantial sum of money, or get rid of Dilvish. Amaranth returned to us, with this ultimatum, and a plan. Han would create a Dilvish illusion, and we would throw the illusion overboard. Dilvish would spend the rest of the voyage in the more appropriate form of a rat (he demonstrated that he could transform into mist, rat and wolf, as well as bat and "vampire").

It worked amazingly well. Han is not at all bad at this illusion-creating lark. Dilvish made a really nice rat, although he didn't think much of my chilli and garlic sauce. I wound up with two rats for company for much of our journey.

Of Arrivals and Introductions

15 July

Around lunchtime the ship entered a wide fjord leading inland to Port Artz. After disembarking (with Dilvish hidden in my pack), we decided to head for an inn. Port Artz proved to be an impressively clean and tidy city, with wide streets, and no alleyways. Everyone we passed seemed to be on horseback. Amaranth spoke with a passerby who directed us to a good inn, where she was able to negotiate us a suite of rooms. Inspecting the rooms, I discovered that Dilvish was no longer in my pack. I reported this to Amaranth, when we were interrupted by a messenger. We had a visitor.

Amaranth went down, and returned with a middle-aged man who introduced himself as Samuel, and a pair of rats. The rats jumped to the floor, and straight up onto my shoulder. Dilvish and Little Bones... Samuel is to be our guide to Multain. We explained about Dilvish, and he transformed back to humanoid form. Then Dilvish explained that he cannot enter an inhabited dwelling unless he is invited inside. Amaranth asked Samuel to explain how people hereabouts feel about vampires - they are not at all popular!

Samuel went on to tell us rather more about Melanie. The lost girl has some kind of invisible magical companion; with powerful telekinetic abilities and aligned to the powers of light. Her own magical talent seems untrainable in any of the colleges, but she is adept at minor magics, and can shapechange into the shape of a white dove. She is likely to be physically unharmed, but has been rendered unlocatable by magical means - so much for Amaranth's location spells. She had previously been known to go missing for up to two weeks at a time, but after she had been missing for a month it was apparent that something might be seriously amiss. The villagers sent for help to their King and it was he that recommended our Guild.

After that we went shopping. They have unusual currency here. Their gold crown is worth 25 of our silver pennies; an eighth is therefore slightly more than 3 silver pennies; and a silver quarter is about of a silver penny. Strangely took off by himself, saying something about visiting a scriptorium. Dilvish and Samuel remained at the Inn. The rest of the party decided that we ought to do something about transportation, so we asked the Innkeeper for the name of a good horsetrader. He recommended one Chris Castlelain. We investigated and found that we would have to purchase the horses, but that he would be prepared to give us a good price on our return. We then spent some time selecting horses. A big black stallion proved to be the only horse suitable for Strangely, and he didn't come cheap. I requested a roan. It transpired that such are rare in these parts, but that some were available at the "farm", and could be sent for. One in particular was good for the mountainous territory we would be traversing. Good enough for me. A quiet grey was selected for Clayth, and Amaranth got a particularly spirited Appaloosa gelding. Should be fun...

We returned to the Inn to find Samuel and Dilvish conversing in our suite, in a fluid tongue which was apparently Elvish. I took the opportunity to get Dilvish to tell me about himself.

By dinnertime Strangely had turned up again. He spent most of dinner trying to beg food from the rest of the party - without much success. He claimed that he had no money left. Then he took off. I spent the evening in the bar pleasantly conversing with a young apprentice armourer named

Harold. He told me that he will be heading up to Maltain himself in a week's time, to collect some high quality armour from the master smith there. He offered to introduce me to the gentleman, whom he described as rather taciturn.

I went up to our rooms and discovered that all the rooms save one of the doubles were taken. I barred the door with a spike from my pack after concluding that the one missing party member had to be Strangely Brown. He was still missing at breakfast. The last to see him was Amaranth, whom he disturbed around midnight. She is still looking rather annoyed. However, she thinks he is quite big enough to take care of himself. Eventually he turned up, at about half past nine, by which time he was distinctly unpopular. And his idea of presents for Amaranth didn't help any.

From Port Artz to Maltain

16-20 July

We left Port Artz on the morning of the sixteenth. Strangely kept on complaining that he had no money left. His problem. At least until Dilvish gave him a hundred silver pennies. An altruistic vampire? What next? There was a good road, with solid stone bridges so Dilvish could cross, and way-stations so we could sleep in comfort (even Strangely). On the fourth night we reached a Chateau, which had a magnificent view. I had to share a room with Dilvish. He has some strange eating habits. I found myself explaining a few things - like why he could not take one of the horses into the restaurant for lunch.

The following afternoon we spent two whole hours riding past a huge herd of horses. That evening we camped out and I was allowed to build a nice, big fire. That felt good... We posted a watch, but nothing happened, except I spotted Dilvish having a nibble at one of the horses. His, I think.

Of Mystic Village and Magical Waterfall

21 July

In the morning we rode along beside a river, until we turned a corner, and there it was, the Village of Maltain. And a waterfall, flowing upwards... There was even a watermill with the wheel turning the wrong way. The river divided the village in two, with thirteen huts on the near side, and seventeen on the other. Two larger buildings can be seen, one either side of the river.

Samuel explained that the whole area was infused with an unusually high level of mana. The waterfall is a place of power for water magic. Ugh! Samuel warned Dilvish about the water. It has some of the properties of holy water, and could hurt him. He also warned Dilvish about a couple of the huts, and against raising any of the dead in the graveyard here.

We walked down beside the falls, and crossed a solid stone bridge to one of the large buildings. This, we were told, was the Inn. Its counterpart on the other side of the river was the council hall, where we would meet the Council of Maltain that evening. After we had settled in at the Inn (four twin rooms provided) Strangely Brown wandered off again. I asked the Innkeeper about one house which had intrigued me because of its five chimneys. He told me that it was the home of the local fire-mage, who has a red-hot temper, and doesn't like being disturbed. We rested until dinner, which we all enjoyed, except Strangely, who wasn't eating for some reason. Then I went upstairs, and changed into formal costume for the meeting.

At the doors of the Council hall we were greeted by a large man in chain mail, carrying a fine, and magical sword, and a mace. He asked who we were, and then knocked three times on the door with his mace. A man in red robes opened the door and we entered a foyer. Dilvish had some kind of aversion to this person (later we were told that he was the Village priest). The doors in

front of us opened as we approached, and in front of us were seven persons, seated behind a semi-circular table. The Chairman stood and welcomed us, then asked us to introduce ourselves, which Amaranth did. Then he introduced the council. They are:

Eleanor - an elderly human, and village healer.
Dorothy - an amazing beautiful elf, historian.
Gavin - ancient human, shaper.
Saul - council chairman, elderly human scribe.
Victoria - a middle-aged portly human namer.
Samuel - enchanter, and ambassador, our guide.
Leslie - young female human artisan (a weaver).

Saul then went on to discuss our mission. Amaranth said she wished to know more before we discussed matters of payment and conditions, so Saul began to explain...

Melanie was born to ordinary farmholders, but her magical aptitude is exceptional, well above racial maximum. Her shaping of mana is somewhat unique, and apparently untrainable, except in minor magics. While she was still a baby, her parents were killed in a fire, and she was sent to a local lord to be cared for. She became part of the baronial household when her power began to manifest itself, and it was at this time she acquired her companion. When she became too much for the royal namer to handle (he was forced to invent a cantrip counterspell), she was sent to Maltain, where Dorothy has been her guardian.

The companion has a distinctly separate aura from Melanie's. It is an immortal sentient, aligned with the powers of light, and somehow composed of pure mana. While it is a prankster, none of its jokes have ever harmed anyone. The council are concerned about Melanie, in part for her safety, but also for the harm she might do... She was last seen taking the eastward trail, apparently to a favourite fishing spot, to "skip some stones". The ranger sent to track her lost her trail among the rocks. And location spells didn't work...

Samuel offered to try again. He cast... and announced that he had a fix on Melanie. Due north-west. Not the gate... He went off to see the local air-mage who can help him triangulate, and thereby gauge the distance.

Melanie's main motivation is simple curiosity, she has an excellent attention span, and loves to study things. The villagers are simply too busy to do anything about her disappearance, hence their request to the guild. Astrology readings say that she is safe, but under some kind of restraint. The matter of payment was then broached. The party would receive:

1000 gold crowns for her safe return.
750 gold crowns for a proof of her safety.
500 gold crowns for information leading to her recovery.

Samuel returned with enough information to mark a rough target zone on our map. It turned out to be a mountainous area, well away from the gate, but very close to a gem stone mine. A very special gem stone mine, the stones from which are much more readily shaped than usual. It is the property of the King and Queen of Flugelheim, and run by some of their top miners. The entrance is both sealed and hidden, and magically guarded.

After some discussion we settled on a spell of my own College of Fire Magics called "fire-flight", as the fastest and most effective means of getting there. This pleased me greatly. We asked the

council if any useful items might be available, and were offered a pair of "amulets of communication" so we could talk to the council, but they had only a hundred mile range. Amaranth decided that we would take them both with us in case we get separated.

I insisted that we follow the council's recommendation that we contact the King and Queen and get their permission to enter the royal mine, and eventually the party agreed, in spite of the delay this would entail. Homing pigeons would be used, and the reply would be received around midday tomorrow. We made arrangements for a number of special spells to be cast over us, which should make us stronger and harder to hit.

We returned to the Inn to get some sleep, except Dilvish who said he was going to the graveyard.

Of Firey Fight

22 July

In the morning there were doughnuts for breakfast. Whisper ate lots. Where she puts it, I don't know. She must be half hobbit. Tan was still busy purifying, and Dilvish was still out at the graveyard. I went to get him, and found him in a pool of darkness, sitting on one grave he liked much better than the others. It even had a blackened headstone.

When we got back Tan was making faces at his share of the doughnuts, and then Samuel arrived with his apprentice who cast a spell called "Lesser Enchantment" over each of us. This is supposed to make us luckier for the next couple of weeks. Strangely wandered off again. Dilvish asked about that grave he liked. He was told that it belonged to a black mage, and had been "consecrated" to his master.

Just after lunch the pigeon returned with a message "Permit one group entry to royal mine", with the royal seal and dated to be valid for the next three days. So we were ready to go.

The Earth mage cast spells called "Armour of Earth" and "Strength of Stone" over us. The Rune mage made us some magical weapons. The Fire mage made us resistant to fire. The Shadow mage tried to give us all witchsight, but backfired. So Whisper tried and she backfired too...

Then we went outside. The Fire mage cast "Fire-Flight", and one by one we each developed a corona of flame. It felt great, like being in a fire. And then we took off, like flaming meteors. After a few minutes Amaranth stopped to cast her location spell. It worked, and now she led us as we flew across the country.

Amaranth led us to a valley. Melanie is somewhere near here. We flitted over ridges and valleys following Dilvish the bat. Eventually we stopped and Amaranth used the counter-spells the Fire mage had give her to flick out the fire-flight spells. But mine stayed on. No, I wasn't resisting... I didn't mind, especially when Amaranth gave me one of the communication amulets so I could talk to her. The others ate lunch. Strangely tried toasting a sandwich in my corona, but it burned. Amaranth then decided to do some magic. She sort of vanished, but then she accidentally made herself blind. She can't even locate Melanie any more.

Some magic hit us. Little Bones fell unconscious, then Tan and Amaranth. I shot straight up, hoping to get out of range. But nothing happened. One by one the others woke up. Dilvish fluttered among the trees. Strangely had run away. I use the amulet to talk to Whisper, and we figured out that it had to be a Mind mage attacking us. So we decided to start thinking "we have permission to be here" type thoughts.

Whisper and Tan went into the forest following Dilvish. She reported that there was some kind of magical wall in there that they couldn't get through. The ward around the mine? I started to wonder what had happened to Strangely, and flying above the site, spotted him over by a boulder. He went around the rock and then disappeared. I flew down and landed on the rock, but couldn't see him anywhere. Dilvish joined me, and we searched the rock, finding nothing. The others joined us. Han and Whisper said they could see some kind of magical aura. They placed Amaranth's hand on the boulder. She spoke a spell, and a door opened. We stared into the darkness, and as we did so, my firey corona switched off.

Of Miners and Magical Gems

22 July

Looked through the doorway we saw a ladder leading down a good twenty feet. We descended, with Tan invisible, and in the lead. It was dark, but I could still see. Witchsight... A long passage led straight under the forest. After we had walked a few hundred yards, we heard footsteps coming towards us, then whistling. Dilvish said that someone was coming our way. A small someone. Whisper cast a spell, making first me, then Amaranth and herself, unseen.

The dwarf had no difficulty seeing us, in spite of the magic. He told us to follow him. We were led down a passage, past an odd looking statue - or at least a statue in an odd place, and into a guard room. And there was Strangely Brown, with a human dressed in some kind of uniform. We were required to explain what we were doing, and why. Whisper got our permit out of Amaranth's pack, and showed it to the guard. Strangely complained that he'd already been through all this, and then asked if she'd seen Fred. It transpired that the statue was the mind mage.

The guard seemed satisfied, and told us to go through a certain door to meet the mine manager. Tan led the way. As he stepped through the doorway, he flickered into full visibility. We followed, and as we did so all our spells came off, and so did the curses, to the delight of Whisper, Amaranth, and Clayth. Through another doorway, and into a room full of busy people, mainly humans, but some dwarves. Many openings led from this room, into tunnels. At a table sat the manager. Amaranth explained our purpose in being here, but no, they hadn't seen Melanie. And the locate spell can't be used in this area. We would have to go down into one of the tunnels. Knowing of Melanie's curiosity, Amaranth asked which would be the most interesting. The manager described a new shaft, which had just been opened, and pointed out the third tunnel from the left. He offered us a guide, and armbands which would permit us to go anywhere in the mine.

Once in the tunnel, Amaranth tried to cast her spell, but she made herself deaf - and then ran out of fatigue. Not her day. Back through the magic-nullifying doorway she went, and then a person called Mike introduced himself as our guide. He told us more about the mine, as we started down the tunnel. Magic is really dangerous down here. The gems react in all sorts of weird, and unpredictable ways. After walking for half an hour we reached a way station. Food... Even for Dilvish and Little Bones (who had been hiding in my pack in rat form). They went off to find a cat snack, and came back looking much happier. Amaranth went away for a few minutes, returning with the information that she had a locate arrow, that it was in this direction, but pointing somewhat upwards.

We marched on and on. Soon it became noticeably warmer, and not just to my infravision. At about 7.30 we reached the third way-station. Amaranth said that the arrow was now pointing up, about 45. And Mike told us that the workface is only about four hundred yards away.

We marched on. After a little while, the rock changed. It looked as if mining had been going on here. A miner came past, pushing a cart full of tailings. He told us of a strange pool of lava which had been found near the workface, and of the gems themselves. It seems that they are quite rare, but those found down this lode are particularly fine.

Then we reached the rockface. The lava pool was easy to spot. It was radiating, but not as much as it should. Tan said that it was magical, sort of like firey liquid mana. I was fascinated. Could it be a fire magic place of power? But before I could even try to find out, Dilvish started to act oddly. Amaranth had said that her arrow was pointing straight up, and now something, or someone was coming down. I turned to Mike, but he seemed to be asleep, and would not wake. The miners had stopped...

A glowing patch appeared in the ceiling. Strangely called out "Melanie, Melanie". A column of light descended. It asked "Who are you?" We explained, and the column opened, revealing a young girl. Melanie. We started to tell her how the elders had become worried, and sent us to find her. She was about to communicate with them, when suddenly... Magic.

Of Powers of Light and Darkness

22 July

Tan, Little Bones, and I failed to resist whatever it was, and found ourselves in a large cavern. The walls glowed a bluish green. A shadowed something was lurking down the far end. Little Bones was frantic. He had lost his link with Dilvish. He bit me as I picked him up, but slowly settled. I called through the amulet "Amaranth, Amaranth", and was very relieved when she answered. Don't panic now, but...

The others of the party, and Melanie had resisted the magic. They believed they were in the same place, but it was now totally dark. Even the lava pool was not shedding any light. Melanie's companion had gone...

Amaranth cast a locate spell on me, and discovered that we were somewhere above them. Apparently Melanie had been here. Her companion had had something to do here - some ritual...

Tan and I approached the shadowed region. I could see through the shadows the heat-image of some kind of altar. Little Bones did not seem at all affected by it. This was not good. Uh, Oh...

Tan walked around behind the altar looking for whatever was generating the shadows. He returned stating that there was an entity there, and that its name was "demon". I knew what that meant. Help!!! Amaranth!!! Where was Melanie's companion when we needed it? And just what had it been doing here? I wanted out of that place. Tan and I feverishly explored the walls, trying to find an exit. The blue-green stuff turned out to be some kind of plant.

Amaranth described how Melanie was able to simply pick up some of the lava. Apparently she just didn't want it to hurt her, so it didn't. She also has two of the gems. Dilvish can't touch them, and neither could Melanie's companion. They are magical...

Strangely said that they can't get out. Some kind of teleport effect was bouncing him back down the passage. But it didn't effect Dilvish. Melanie did something, and everyone was able to leave the darkness. As she walked past its edge, Melanie's companion returned. And did it have a lot to tell us...

The companion was a demi-angel. It had been assigned to Melanie and may not leave her. It was

with her in the darkness, but rendered powerless, and unable to speak to her. The dark region had been "deconsecrated" to the demon - its name was "Anshar", and it was a Celestial Shadow mage - and the companion cannot enter the darkness willingly. It knew about the cavern that Tan and I were in, and even as Tan found a fissure, it described the exit to Amaranth.

The companion offered to transport the party up, as near as it could to our location. There was a problem. Dilvish. He could not willingly approach the companion. So he agreed to transform into mist form, and entered a bottle which Strangely provided. The bottle was sealed. The companion gathered the party together, spread its radiance around them, and up they came, through the solid rock to a small cave.

Tan and I made our way through the narrow fissure, until after several hundred feet, it became too narrow. I cast my Spell of Light. It worked, amazingly well. Triple duration, and much brighter than usual. Like brilliant sunlight... There was a way through, but only six inches across. I attacked it with my hammer and chisel, but the rock didn't want to be mined. Then I noticed that Little Bones wasn't with me any more.

A fissure lead from the cave where Amaranth was into darkness. The darkness? They could not see my light, and they had to be in range. There was some kind of commotion, and then there was Dilvish and Little Bones standing beside me. But there wasn't much he could do to help us. He couldn't even see. What was bright sunlight for Tan, Little Bones and I, was utter darkness for Dilvish. Weird...

A snake came slithering through the crevice. Amaranth said that it was Melanie, and she shape-shifted as she reached us. She did something to Tan and he was able to walk through the rock. But she couldn't do the same thing to me. Apparently she cannot do the same thing twice within six hours. So Dilvish demonstrated his mist form, and then she turned me into mist. It felt weird, but it worked. Dilvish did rat, and Melanie followed suit, scampering through the crevice after him. Together we reached the edge of the darkness. But Tan and I couldn't get past. It was like an invisible wall. Oops.

I asked Tan when he last tried reading our own auras. He used his detect aura. Yes, we were under the influence of magic. We had undergone some kind of plane shift. Melanie took our hands, and somehow twisted us back into reality. Everything went dark. And Melanie had somehow projected herself onto yet another shadow plane. She tried to come back, and vanished. Her aura was still there, as were the auras of the demon and the companion. It transpired that the companion was on the Alusian plane of light, the demon on the Alusian plane of darkness, and Melanie on the Alusian plane of shadow. The demon, and the companion appeared to be fighting over Melanie. Not good.

Tan tried to get in the way, casting some kind of illusion. Strangely tried throwing holy water at where he guessed the demon was. I sat down and prayed. Help!!! Amaranth was busy trying to cast a spell. Then something worked. Amaranth started speaking to Melanie. Melanie was stuck. She could not survive for long where she was, and was being forced to choose between light and darkness. She could see around her four doors, one black, one white, one grey, and one coloured - all kinds of colours, and yet no colour.

Amaranth suggests a fifth alternative. Choose not to choose. Come back to reality. You are too young for this, Melanie. And Amaranth told Melanie to create a fifth door, a trapdoor back to us,

to the real world. A square shape appeared in mid air before us. Bit by bit Melanie came into view, as she climbed through the trap-door. Melanie was back.

Of Bats and Cats

23 July

Abruptly the cave went dark, save for the meagre light shed by Strangely's lantern. Gradually we realised the difficulty of our situation. We were in a cave deep in solid rock, with no idea whether a way out to the surface even existed. The fissure leading to the main cavern continued on the opposite side of the cave. We asked Dilvish to check this out first, but he was back within minutes. No way out that way. So we suggested the chimneys Tan and I saw leading up from the fissure. Dilvish turned to mist, and went to investigate.

Meanwhile Melanie tried playing with the magic lava, and discovered that she could melt rock with it. She tried it on the narrow part of the fissure, and it worked. We could walk through! So we did, and stood under the opening of the first chimney. We called for Dilvish, but he didn't come, so I cast my light spell, and shone it up the chimney. The chimney looked climbable, but we couldn't see very far. Amaranth and I went down to the next chimney, and as I shone the light up, a mist came down and formed itself into a vampire. He told us that the two chimneys joined a little way up. And a few hundred feet further up there was a cavern full of bats. Dilvish snack... no wonder he took so long.

Amaranth gave Strangely Tan's half of the amulet, and Strangely and Melanie started to climb while the remainder of the party rested. Tan woke us two hours later, and I got Dilvish to put my anvil in his pack before we started climbing. So we climbed, upwards in the dark, using our magic to enable us to see. It wasn't too bad at first, until the chimneys joined and became one wide chimney. Then it got harder. I slipped once and stood on Whisper's hand, and Tan nearly fell. He isn't all that agile.

When we reached the cavern I could that the ceiling was covered with bats, including Dilvish and Little Bones who are somewhat cooler than normal bats. By now Melanie was wearing a whole shirt of magical lava. Neat trick, but the stuff wouldn't let Strangely, or even me, the fire-mage, touch it. They had been resting, and we all took the opportunity to get a good, long sleep. Dilvish seemed to think that the bats ought to know a way out from here, but that we should wait until they woke up. We felt much better after that.

Amaranth woke us all much later, and told us that Dilvish had said that there were two ways out. There was the long way, and the short way, but the short way was blocked by some kind of invisible wall. That got us interested, so we decided to try the short way...

It wasn't all that short. Dilvish led us for an hour or more through passages, tunnels and caves, until we reached a cavern full of crystals. Not magical, though they shattered when I tried to chip one away. Dilvish pointed out a crack, and beyond that we walked into an invisible wall. Tan gave the wall a detect aura kind of look, and stated that what was required to pass it was a state of mind, a particular skill, and some thing. We tried a few combinations, and then Whisper said that what was needed was reverence, a fire-gem and troubadour/courtesan skill. Amaranth took a gem from Melanie, and leaning against the wall tried thinking reverent thoughts. About what, we all wondered. Suddenly Amaranth fell through the wall. None of us could even work out what she had been thinking about, until Clayth piped up and said "curiosity".

As if on cue, Strangely appeared from the crystal cavern, where he had been "on guard", collected

the other gem from Melanie, and waltzed straight through the wall. Without giving his amulet to one of us... So we sat, and waited... and waited. After a minute or two we heard an odd sound, emanating from the other side of the wall. A purring sound, like some kind of gigantic cat that had just got a bowl of cream. Then talking, and meowing???

Then Strangely and Amaranth returned, looking rather pleased with themselves. They told us of an altar, of a living cat-statue, which proved to be the cat-goddess Babstasis, and a font full of milky-white cat-stuff. Then I noticed that Strangely was wearing some kind of gloves, like leather cesti. And I could see that they were magical. He told us that the cat-goddess had given them to him, and demonstrated their use. He balled his fists, and claws snapped out of each glove, claws that could cut through solid rock. There was a beautifully-crafted mace, and a pair of rings, and Amaranth had a set of magical fingernails. Well...

Dilvish led us to the outside, and to a starry night. Amaranth planted an item by the entrance so she could find it again. Then Whisper and Tan did their thing with the magical items. The mace was for summoning, but who knows what. The fingernails enhanced thievery skill, which suited Amaranth. The rings are magical, even I could see that, but we could not discern what they did. All the items appeared to be shaped.

We gave up, and decided to make for the mine, feeling that we owed the miners an explanation - and a set of arm-bands. Reaching a pleasant meadow, we prepared to camp for the rest of the night. I made a nice fire, so nice that I cast the appropriate spell and rested within the flames. Dilvish returned after exploring the mountain. From his description Amaranth decided that the terrain was too rough to attempt at night. So we would stay put.

In the morning I got Dilvish to make me a wooden pot. He didn't really get the idea, and it was too flat, but I still managed to fire-proof it, and cooked a nice, spicy breakfast. Dilvish got busy purifying, and Amaranth decided to start without us, leaving me with an amulet. They came to a spot where the valley divided, and couldn't work out which way to go until Dilvish and I caught up and led them down the left-hand valley. But no sign of the forest, until after another hour and a half we turned a corner and there it was. Poking around with my staff I located the barrier, and then followed the others up the ridge. Then we sighted the boulder that Strangely had disappeared into. We climbed down, and Amaranth opened the door into the boulder. We followed her into the mine, and returned our armbands.

It looked as if we might have to walk back. Whisper said that she has a spell called "shadow-wings" that would enable us to fly, but she required the right lighting conditions. Amaranth pointed out the deep shade behind the boulder. Whisper began casting, and one by one we sprouted wings and took off. It didn't feel as good as the fire-flight spell, but it worked. Melanie turned into a little grey bat, and along with Dilvish and Little Bones, hitched a lift on me. Amaranth's wings had a double duration so, when the rest of us stopped, she went on, with Dilvish, Little Bones, and Melanie, the rest of the way to Maltain. I built a fire, and we rested. Strangely walked off somewhere. Whisper called Amaranth, and she said that they had reached Maltain all right, that Melanie was with Dorothy, and Dilvish was coming back to "protect us".

He brought a fine picnic dinner, with cream buns for Whisper, and news. It seems that Amaranth had crash-landed on her arrival at Maltain, rolling head over heels, and injuring Melanie, so that she had difficulty returning to human form. Whisper tried to talk to Amaranth, but she couldn't get through. Dilvish became very worried about Amaranth and wanted to go back... but decided

to say and "look after" us.

At about six that evening Amaranth contacted Whisper - apparently she had removed the amulet to have a long bath. Ugh! Whisper explained that Amaranth was going to be busy. I didn't really understand why, or in what way... We settled down for the night.

Of Smithing and Settling Up

25 July

In the early morning, during Whisper's watch she heard something rustling in the darkness. She spoke, and I woke abruptly. Dilvish was asleep nearby, so I woke him, and put him on my shoulder. He pointed out where the noise was coming from, and I cast light in that direction. A human form, clad in leather armour was revealed. It was a ranger, who introduced himself as Stewart. He was wondering what we were doing here, and why we had made no tracks. We did our best not to explain, and Whisper invited him to join us by the fire. I went back to sleep until after dawn, when Tan woke us. Stewart was cooking breakfast in a billy over the fire. Tasty it was too... I really must do something about making some cooking pots. Then I settled down to purify.

Whisper did her bit, and we all took off to fly back to Maltain. Stewart didn't seem all that surprised. Maybe he had figured us out by then. When we arrived Amaranth was waiting for us. Strangely decided to land in the river for some odd reason. Amaranth led the way to Samuel's house where we all reported in, and discovered that the village council would be meeting that night. We returned to the Inn. When I came down after getting changed, the others had gone. The Innkeeper said that they were at Victoria's place.

I obtained directions, and followed them, encountering them as they were leaving. Dilvish told me what they were up to. Getting some items divinated. An invisible box, with scrolls in it, as well as the other stuff. Well...

Lunchtime came. Dilvish went out to feed on the horses, and after eating, I joined him. We noticed Strangely going past, making odd meowing noises. We followed him as he set off for the beastmaster's house. I think he was trying to obtain a cat. Peculiar... I became bored, and spotted the smith's house nearby. Looking inside I saw a young apprentice, making horseshoes. He told me his name was Alan, and pleasant conversation followed. I asked after his master, and was told that the master smith was at their small iron mine, digging for ore. I told Alan about our problem with the cooking pots, and he said I should return at four and see the master.

Returning to the Inn, I found that there were doughnuts for afternoon tea. Strangely and Amaranth have acquired a taste for milk! Back to the smithy, and I met the Smith. He was happy for Alan and I to work on some cooking pots. He made a billy and I made a frying pan... eventually. I botched my first attempt through nerves, and lack of practise, and was not yet finished at a quarter to seven, when Amaranth came to remind me about the council meeting. Quickly I finished up, cleaned myself magically, and ran down to the council hall, arriving just in time to catch up with the others.

We entered, and went before the council. Amaranth explained roughly what had happened when we rescued Melanie. They confirmed that we would be received the thousand gold crowns reward, and they would pay for our passage home. Dilvish stated that he would be remaining to get an item shaped. I thought that I might, if the Fire-mage is willing to teach me, stay to learn the fire-flight spell. Then I could fly home. Most of the others intend to ride back to the guild.

They might be willing to take my horse...

As we left the council hall, Dilvish said something to Amaranth and then took off. What had happened between then I don't know, but whatever it was it certainly wasn't good...

We returned to the Inn and Whisper talked me into buying a whole keg of beer (on the basis that it is some kind of guild tradition that a party member on her first adventure should buy the celebratory liquor). There was a message for Amaranth, and she went off to see the Rune-mage and the Namer about the magical items. She returned a few minutes later with a list of what they did and what they were worth. A little calculation showed that if I took my share in cash I would be a good 14,596 silver pennies better off even allowing for the tax I must pay to the guild. And that doesn't include my horse, or my magic purse. Cause for celebration indeed. For the first time in my life I got throughly drunk. I cannot recall anything of the rest of that evening.

The next morning I woke feeling absolutely terrible. I couldn't get back to sleep. I got up to meet Amaranth who was bringing me breakfast, and decided to go downstairs and join the others. After some food I felt much better, and able to join them in debating how we would return to the guild. I thought I would fly back, after getting the fire-mage to teach me Fire-flight. Strangely is returning overland, and he will take my horse. The others are going back through Port Artz, except Amaranth who will remain here for a while.

I went to see Rilsan, the Fire-Mage. Not only is he available, but he will teach me at 40 gold crowns per spell per week. Great. I can learn Fire-flight, Dragon flames, Wall of fire and the Flame-sight ritual all for 14,000 silver pennies. A bargain, compared with guild rates. My master will be pleased. When I got back I remembered that Dilvish had taken off last night, and hadn't been seen since. After asking we found out that he was at the Necromancer's residence. We sent a message, and he replied that he doesn't want any of the magical items. So I went to see him. He will take his share of the money, and he will be staying - to get an item shaped for Little Bones.

Two Weeks Later

10 August

The day was interrupted by a great explosion from the Shaper's house. Gouts of fire, and Gavin came out looking rather singed around the edges. An accident. So much for that project. He will now start shaping the fire-gem Whisper claimed. It will be ready in eight weeks. Amaranth and I will be well gone by then...

Eight Weeks Later

28 September

Having studied fire magic for the last eight weeks, I felt ready to fly back to Seagate in time for the September guild meeting. Amaranth left some weeks ago, and Rilsan was getting a bit boring. In the morning he cast his Fire-flight on me and off I flew most of the way back to Seagate. Landing before the spell wore off, I cast my own fire-flight, and flew nearly all the rest of the way, until I was within walking distance. A hour's walk and the guild compound at last. It was good to be back.

