

Worts and All!

(Find The Worts)

by Phaeton d'Tama (edited by Brigetta McLeod)

Adventure by Craig Beere

31/6/96 - 21/7/96 or (1/8/96 depending on counting)

Player Characters

Liessa Varden	Mind	Human	Female	Leader
Phaeton d'Tama	Solar	Human	Male	Scribe
Callis Venedici	Earth	Human	Female	Mil Sci
Brigetta McLeod	Bardic	Human	Female	
Glod	Earth	Dwarf	Male	
Gustav	Non-mage	Human	Male	
Pinefeller	Mind	Human	Male	

Employers

Mr Edmund, a "sociologist"
Mr Randolph Williams, an archaeologist
The Church of Diancecht

Plane - Alusia, in the present, and approximately 4000 AP

Places Visited

The Sea of Grass
The Valley of Naud
The future Seagate
The future Slippery Rock
The future Duchy of Carzala

Principle NPCs

Drelli, Karak, Kleta, Atelk, all of the Boyle tribe
Tellack, a sociologist
Delhanna, female elven air-mage and philosopher aka "The Daughter of the Past"
Ratho, a Power
The Tribe of the Feathered Bear at Seagate
The Daughters of Agan at Slippery Rock
Basa of Clan Ubrick
The R'evalon
Darren, dark-skinned R'evalon namer and ranger
Orchid, Wort spokesperson
The Children of the Traveller.

Mission - To find more Worts

Worts and All!

Adventure Summary

A strange portal had appeared in a Guild casting chamber after I had done an astrology reading. A party was formed to investigate and to find some Worts. Determined that the portal led to the golden disc called 'The Heart of Ratho'.

03/07/96

Took a chain of runeportals to a mountain range then flew to the Valley of Naud. Reached Fort Seine.

04/07/96

Went to the scene of the Wort's genocide. Met the Carzalian team studying the Boyle culture.

05/07/96

More meaningless divinations. Went into the Wort's underground complex. Found nothing of significance.

06/07/96

More exploring. Discovered a side chamber with a roof of black rock with a pattern of shining sparks embedded in it. Looked like the night sky of the future. More meaningless divinations.

07/07/96

Completed our explorations of the Wort complex and emerged back onto the surface. Talked to the Carzalian philosophers (sociologists/archeologists, linguists), who were studying the Boyles and the remains of the Worts for a while.

08/07/96

Left the valley and took the rune portal road back to Seagate.

18/07/96

Had done quite a bit of research, especially the runes around Ratho's disk. Managed to confirm that the pattern was the stars in the future.

Decided to go back up north to see what Ratho had to say in the matter. He wants us to take the portal, which will lead to another near the Heart and to use it to bring back some Worts.

19/07/96

Finally went through the portal and found ourselves under the lake, near the gold disk (the Heart of Ratho). Managed to activate the other portal in the Heart and we found ourselves in a desert. Nearby was an obelisk with some writing on it referring to the Daughter of the Past.

Discovered that here, the sun was setting in the east, according to the ranger sense of direction. Concluded it was actually pointing south. As the stars came out, the pattern was like that in the cave.

20/07/96

Continued walking through the sand. Managed to read the aura of a lichen and confirm that this was indeed Alusia, although one that was hotter, drier, and closer to the sun.

21/07/96

Reached the hills at the edge of the desert then carried on to a petrified forest. Suddenly realised we had just walked from Confederation Bay, now a desert, and reached the Stonesborough Forst in North Carzala.

22/07/96

Flew to the remains of Seagate. Could see ruins of four great temples, one to each Power of Light which weren't there in our time. Settled down for the night near the North Road and were attacked by wights, the undead remains of the Seagate Militia. Once we sorted that out we discovered that they had died 780 years ago in 4545AP.

23/07/96

In the morning we went down to the ruins of Seagate. The bridge had two huge holes in it. In the place of the Guild was a large crater. The mana in the area of the crater seemed seriously wrong and spells didn't have the desired effect.

People were watching us, a tribe of desert nomads, that were likely to be the descendants from the past inhabitants of Seagate. All of them were dressed in rags, half starved, and suffering the affects of various diseases. Finally we had to resort to evasive tactics before they'd let us leave.

We headed towards Slippery Rock and camped at Arne's Ferry - where the ferry service used to be.

24/07/96

Followed the old road south and met up with representatives of the Daughters of Agan and were led to their camp of Slippery Rock. After the ritual of sharing water, they told us of the Summoning of the Four they do not name, followed by the summoning of the opposites. The resulting devastation was all over at least half the continent. Also at some point the number of days in the solar year had changed indicating that Alusia had moved inside the orbit of Freya, over a period of sixty years.

They also told us that they had heard of the Worts, through a tribe called the R'evalon. From the description they could be Erelain. Four of their war-dancers would come with us.

25/07/96

At sunset, we started out to find the R'evalon tribe and flew north. The flight took us over the remains of the Stoneborough forest and to the mountains beyond. Our target was a valley in the mountain range. Found some human tribesmen in the valley, Clan Ubrick. We were shown a picture of a Wort on a rocky overhang.

Went towards the next valley and camped 10km away.

26/07/96

Approached by two R'evalon scouts who wanted to know what we were doing there. After we explained, he went to get someone who we could negotiate with. While we waited Liessa managed to decipher the astrology readings. Basically they told us what to do to return to our

time and indicated they were written by Ratho.

27/07/96

More R'evalon arrived. They told us they would help us if we would assist them to dig a well into a cliffside. This we agreed to do.

They also told us of a tribe that worshipped the site of the Guild Fortress where a great explosion took place 720 years ago. According to the legend they caused the great slide that transformed Alusia into what we had encountered. About 1400 years ago, four temples to the Powers of Light were built and magic stopped working properly. So the Guild summoned the Powers of Darkness, in the vain hope that both sets of powers might then depart. But it didn't work. Instead both sets decided to stay and continue their conflict. They held out for hundreds of years. The Guild tried one last attempt to send them all back which resulted in a vast explosion of light. Even after that the powers still did not leave, their conflict causing dramatic change, not until the plane became as it is now. Last known they had headed west, presumably to Terra Nova.

28/07/96

With the aid of a couple of Tunnelling spells, and a Wall of Stone, the tunnel was dug into the cliff, giving access to an underground lake. The original scout, Darren, was then assigned to take us to the Worts.

29/07/96

Attacked by magic that morning but the assailants got away once we were alert. Darren arrived at our camp and, late afternoon, we flew off. Landed in a clearing where the remains of a square hut was. Brigetta discovered one cursed ward inside and Callas successfully removed another. Underneath the second ward was a metallic chest containing transportation crystals and a box containing a game of Romani, a strategy game. The game also contained several souls.

30/07/96

In the morning Darren divinated the box. It gives bonuses to military scientists but there are five souls trapped inside because of a curse. Apparently they had died while playing the game.

Walked through the stone forest and reached a dried up river bed. Ahead the canyon was blocked with boulders and several 'Keep Out' signs. Suddenly we were attacked by Mind magic. Then a voice sounded in our minds 'Speak Now!' We told our story and were told to wait before being allowed to advance. On the other side were a couple of Worts.

We were escorted to a jungle clearing. Then a large Wort came out of the ground and introduced himself as 'Vein, Speaker of the Valley'. We told him our story and why we had come. Gustav showed him his Guild badge which matched a crest that had been carved into a rock a very long time ago, It represented their past, of life from death, of a debt redeemed, of a people who committed a great evil and repaid with a greater good.

Some of them agreed to come with us back to the past. We ascertained they had appeared in the Sea of Grass but had to move when the weather turned. Then they told us that they worshipped someone called the Traveller. The same one that the Children of the Traveller worship?

31/07/96

We, and the Worts, were taken by Earth Elementals back to Seagate. Then we fulfilled the terms

of the prophecies, one of which was 'visit the four towers'. Inside one we found the twins Atelk and Kleta who had come here accidentally. Another was 'Curse my name'. So Ratho was summoned and a Greater Curse thrown at him.

Once all was done, a portal appeared and we went through it. Around us, time began rapidly running backwards. Finally we found ourselves above the Valley of Naud. The twins were dropped off there while the rest of us went to the Sea of Grass and ended up near the Children of the Traveller. The date of our arrival was the 21st of July '96AP

Darran had also come back with us and he decided to work for the Duke and maybe able to prevent that future from happening. Brigetta composed a ballad to warn future generations.

We spent the evening with the Children of the Traveller and helped the Worts settle in to their new home.

22/07/96

Returned to Seagate and collected our rewards.

Worts and All!

by Phaeton

Edited by Brigetta McLeod

Now that the problem with my family had been sorted out, it was time to do something about the Worts. Problem was, we hadn't a clue where they might be found. Which meant that I'd have to set about making some. And there was only one way I knew to do that was to read the night stars. I waited for a clear night, then made my prayers to Diancecht and began. This is what the stars said:

The Scholar says:

Around dawn, attend the portal.

Ritually ask, ask, go! Arriving or dying?

Ritual is:

Arguing, seven apostles, penitent, ennobled, at dawn announce it.

Didn't make much sense, I'd hoped for something clearer. I wrote down the reading, and decided to sleep on it. As I left I noted some commotion in the room next door. It seems that a portal had appeared in mid air just as I completed my ritual. Oops! It couldn't possibly be a coincidence, could it?

Of course it wasn't. Some days later I found myself in a guild meeting room along with the two co-sponsors I had found. These gentleman had purchased information from the Guild regarding our previous adventure and had been researching the Valley of Naud. There was Mr Edmund, who styled himself a "sociologist". He was a effete and wealthy human, powdered and perfumed, who obviously preferred to employ others to do the rough work. By contrast, Mr Randolph Williams, the archaeologist, was a sprightly halfling of middle years, and evidently not afraid to get his hands dirty. Both were keen to obtain an introduction to the worts. Their investigations had so far revealed the curious fact that Boyle children were no longer receiving their unique talents at puberty. Had Ratho left the Valley?

The rest of the prospective adventurers came into the room. Two of them had been with me on the previous excursion. These were:

Glod, a doughty dwarf in leather armour, a Druidic Earth Mage, who now wielded a hammer which introduced itself as Beltor.

Brigetta, a redheaded female Bard and Master Troubadour, wearing handsome green leather armour and a plaid. She carried a harp and a battle-axe.

The others joining us were:

Callas, a blue-eyed, buxom blonde, a Druidic Earth Mage of some repute, wearing a summer dress and sandals.

Liessa, a blue-eyed red-head, a military scientist and experienced Mind Mage, and one I knew to be stubborn and domineering.

Pinefeller, another mind mage, with a large sword permanently fixed to his right arm. The sword granted him some celestial spells from former victims. In return it demanded the sacrifice of an entity once a month. May Diancecht forgive the maker of this thing!

Randolph explained that the Guild would be paying us at the standard rate of 200sp per week, which would be matched by himself, and also by Edmund. On hearing about the Guild Healing potions he offered to purchase two for each of us as a down payment.

They told us how they had set up a chain of rune-portals from Seagate to just south of the mountains which surround Naud, to support their investigators. Might be useful, after all I had long thought that other wort seeds might be frozen among the mountains.

The employers left and we proceeded to the signing of the contract and the election of party officers. Much to my dismay, Liessa was chosen as Party Leader. I took the role of Scribe, and Callas that of Military Scientist.

Then we went our various ways, agreeing to meet the following day to discuss arctic survival with a specialist ranger. Liessa and Callas said they were going to read the scribe notes (both sets). Brigetta thought she might have a look at the portal, so I tagged along. There were people already there, divinating the glowing, shimmering door which stood in the middle of the room. We waited for them to finish, and learned that the portal went to a geographical location corresponding to the Valley of Naud, or somewhere pretty close. So we will be going back.

Brigetta took her turn then, and after an hour sung the legend of the portal:

Seven heros in a circle
Around the Heart
Ritually invoking
They vanish
The Heart remains

Fascinating. Does the portal lead to the golden disc we knew as the Heart of Ratho? Perhaps.

03/07/96

But as it turned out, Liessa insisted on the alternative route. We had long duration shadow wings cast on us, and followed the rune portals north. Each runestick stood in a tent and was watched over by a guard, presumably ensuring that the stick was not disturbed. Finally, after dozens of tents all roughly the same, we came to a larger encampment. These was the end of the rune road. From here we took to the air, and flew over tundra, then up and through the mountains. Brigetta led the way since she had learned ranger and had been here before.

Ahead we saw a great white dome. With the help of a Resistance to Light spell, I recognised this as the magically held cloud which covered the valley. Brigetta didn't hesitate, but dived straight down into the mist, a foolhardy move I thought as she may not have enough room to pull out before hitting the trees. Liessa tried casting Mindspeak on the rest of us and ended up broadcasting all her surface thoughts. The next attempt was more successful and we made a more casual descent.

Once through the cloud layer we spotted Brigetta heading towards a Boyle settlement on the edge of the lake. I recognised it as Fort Seine. Then, as the others started landing, we were fired at by the Boyles clustered on the rooftops. I peeled off out of range as the others landed, dodging bolt spells all the way in. Finally someone rushed out to meet the party and activated the speaking stick. Turned out they had seen our black shadow-wings and took us for demons.

We all assembled outside the fort for a conference. We were told that life had got better since Ratho had got rid of the Worts but now Ratho appeared to have gone. Gustav and Brigetta took off to look around the valley since they had triple-effect wings. All they found was the twin's raft - abandoned. The other thing we noted was evidence of Carzalan trade goods in the fort.

04/07/96

The plan was to go to the scene of the genocide. So, that morning we set off with a Boyle guide, Brelli, the same one that the previous party had used to visit the twins - and left on their raft. But with his help, we spent most of the day going through the jungle, crossing two rivers, until we reached the cultivated area to the north of the lake. There, stood a newly constructed tower containing another outpost of Boyles. As we approached we spotted a gentleman, wearing Carzalan style clothing, come down the tower. This turned out to be Tellack, one of the sociologists. Him and three others had been studying the Boyle culture in the last few months. The other three were at their camp further to the north but he was expecting the team's linguist, Delhanna, sometime tomorrow morning. She was also the Air Mage that had flown the expedition in.

We spoke to the local leader, Karak, and explained that we were here searching for something of importance. By mutual consent no-one mentioned Worts - or any of the deities names in case they showed up again. However we were told that no-one had seen a Wort about for quite some time. After that Tellack told us about some of the Boyle culture and taboos they had found out about - in a style that reminded me of some long-winded philosophers. Several of the others got bored quickly and curled up somewhere to sleep but we did find out that they had only deciphered a small fraction of the Wort history on the tunnel walls. While he spoke I took the liberty of removing the toxins from his system.

.2.

05/07/96

Divinations that morning produced the following:

A turbulent river. Seven fish swim upstream in a line.
A net descends, traps the second fish and lifts it out of the water.

(Hmmm... being second in the marching order might be unhealthy).

The God says:
Assistants, call my name!
Acolytes, tutors, priests, assembled beasts,
At noon, empower me.

Brigetta got that in response to her question with regard to the fate of Ratho. She seemed to think it was instructions for getting him back. Liessa was not amused.

We set off with our goal of reaching the entrance to the Wort complex that day. As we were leaving, a female elf entered the clearing. That had to be Delhanna. She turned out to be a typical elf and her comment about 'the lesser races' did not endear her to the party. Still we must be tolerant - even if the other person isn't.

We slogged on. It must have been about mid-afternoon by the time we reached the entrance to the Wort tunnels. A camp had been set up nearby and it was here we found the other two philosophers.

We conversed with them a while but didn't learn much. They hadn't seen any live Worts and were still trying to work out what the writing on the wall meant but they had mapped the tunnel network. One thing triggered our curiosity. The Worts had been digging a tunnel due north out of the valley through solid rock - something that is very hard for them to do. It appeared that they had been working on it for hundreds of years. But there was no clue of where they were trying to get to. An escape route out of the valley?

The philosophers had rigged a rope and pulley system over the hole so we were lowered down. The tunnel was only five foot high so all of us (except Glod) had to stoop. Guess I'd be fixing stiff necks for a while.

After a while we reached the main Wort city and we split up. Pinefeller and I went to where the Wort bodies were. By now they were in an advanced state of decomposition. I pointed out to Pinefeller where I had taken my biopsies but we found other marks where the philosophers had also taken samples. But there were still no viable seeds to be found.

The others were poking around in the caverns below the complex but hadn't found anything of note. Except someone thought they saw a floating invisible ear. Brigetta denied that it was one of hers. Was someone listening to us? The only thing we could think of doing was to try another divination. So Callas did and got the following:

The Freeman sayes:
Attackers four, against you.
Their mood amounts few.
Again fought, attrition bought,
At the pew.

Again late at temple confession. If asked, be gallant.

Brigetta also tried to seek a legend for the dead Worts, but could only report a sense of coldness and dread.

.3.

06/07/96

We slept, purified and ate, and then explored some more. On finding the entrance to the Worts' tunnel we discussed methods of exploring it to its far end. Brigetta suggested making a cart which would be dragged by the dwarf under a Strength of Stone spell, which might have been practical if there had been anyone in the party who knew how to build a cart. Then she tried to divine the legend of the tunnel, but ended up singing an obscene ditty currently popular in some of the less savoury taverns in Seagate. Quite clearly a failure.

Pinefeller tried to cast a precognition spell, but backfired, and one of the others had a vision of Pinefeller touching a bronze disc. He disappeared, and then was seen appearing on an island in a river of lava. A turbaned efreet bowed to him politely and said, "Welcome to the Elemental Plane of Fire."

I collected some samples from the Wort corpses to see if the poison was still active, but I knew I'd need an alchemist's lab to test them. We explored some more in the caverns below, and found something very strange. In one side chamber the walls and ceiling were covered in black rock with tiny glowing sparks embedded in it. It could hardly be the work of the sightless Worts, but the pattern almost seemed familiar, as if it was the night sky somehow changed. I decided it was worth a try, and performed a ritual of Reading the Night Sky. It worked and I obtained the following:

The Warrior says:
Avaunt! Nigh is night! Attack!
After you muddle around,
Attempt to own levelled ground, asleep.

Then I tried asking where and when I might see the stars like this and got:

Away, below, out of sight,
Far from stars, but still at night
Seven there are, full of might
Do what you're told and be all right

Brigetta tried to divine the legend of the place and saw a vision of a blank sheet of music, the staff and clef drawn, but no notes. She took this to mean that the pattern in the stars was one that was not yet formed, one that would exist in the future.

07/07/96

The next day Gustav carefully copied one section of wort runes from the wall where Brigetta had obtained a translation in a divination last time we were here. We figured it would be a big help for Delhanna. Then we headed back along the tunnel and came out at Throna. There was no sign of the surveyors, but the rope was down so we figure that they must be in the tunnels somewhere. Madoc and Galran appeared at dinner time and we shared with them. They showed us a herb which when burned kept away the caterpillars.

We walked back to Fort Agrie which was looking nearly finished. Brigetta and Gustav had a chat with Delhanna, and the elven scholar agreed to a payment of 300sp each for Brigetta's translation and the matching wort script. Delhanna explained that she was an Air Mage and had been instructed to provide flight spells should we require them. There was also one Zannis on the raft who could arrange for Water-breathing and Fire-proofing.

After checking with Liessa that it was okay to tell Delhanna about the thing in the middle of the lake, Brigetta explained about the bronze disc and the runes on it. With some light hypnotism, she and Glod were able to draw a representation of the object. Delhanna identified the runes as an early post-Penjarre runic script called Qatarran Fancy, once used in a region to the south of Carzala. She identified the words: "Dawn", "Acolyte or Student", "Heart" and letters making up the name "Ratho" which left a number yet to be translated. By the time we got that far it was after midnight, and we slept.

08/07/96

In the morning we made preparations to leave. It was obvious that we weren't likely to find out

much more here, and with the resources of the Guild we might be able to figure out where to go next. After Callas cast a Strength of Stone on Delhanna, she set about casting Flying, Resist Cold and Feather Fall on the party.

Up through the mist we flew. It was incredibly disorientating. I found myself returning below the mist more than once before I got out. To find Glod wearing a confused expression. It seemed that Ratho had spoken to him, and told Glod that we were going the wrong way and that he'd hellfire him. Callas responded that "If R wants something done by the Guild he's going to have to goddamn pay for it!". Glod did not appear to be hellfired, and we flew on.

We flew north in an attempt to investigate the area the Worts' tunnel appeared to be heading for. Gustav, as the best of our rangers, led the way and we landed in the approximate location, a valley filled with snow, ice and boulders that the rangers called a glacial moraine. I was greatly taken with the stark beauty of the place, and vowed that I would paint it. But that would be later. We flew south, but had to land short of the camp to cast Starwings on some of the party. It didn't help when I badly misjudged the final landing at the camp and took some nasty cuts and bruises. We took the rune portals back to Seagate, and returned to the Guild having agreed to a lunchtime meeting the following day with our employers.

.4.

It was a clear night that evening so I read the night sky and obtained the following:

The Sailor says:

Obvious! Before the gate appeared, approach, Aye!

15/07/96

A week passed. The astrologers wanted us to get rid of the portal so that they could use the room again. They did determine that using that portal wouldn't involve a time shift for us. Sorting out my notes I found a scrap of paper with the following on it, though I didn't recognise the handwriting:

The Priest says:

Is war acceptable?

Arise victims, afflicted, tired, accursed, defiled.

When I showed it to the others, Brigetta seemed to think that it might refer to the war between the Worts and the Boyles, and that it meant that the Worts would arise.

We had the runes translated by a Rune mage. It was written in High Qatarran. It says: Heart of Ratho. Arguing, seven apostles, penitent, ennobled, at dawn announce it. Gate Fire, Gate Water.

Brigetta said "That's the scholar says." He looked very strangely at her, and said, "Of course, it is." She looked back, but didn't reply.

No reference to Ratho was found in the library, but we were able to confirm that the star patterns did refer to some time in the future.

18/07/96

On the morning of the 18th we decided to find out what Ratho had to say on the matter. We all travelled to the end of the rune portal line, after a nasty encounter with a stuffy accountant who really annoyed Callas by demanding a fee. Callas and Gustav flew off on shadow-wings to find Ratho, Liessa maintaining contact through Mindspeech. Meanwhile Brigetta attempted to entertain the three bored soldiers, not a difficult task.

After we returned to the guild, Callas and Gustav shared what had happened. They had landed by the Valley of Naud, and called on Ratho. He promptly appeared, but seemed nervous and agitated, as though someone was after him. He is not allowed to give us direct instructions, only hints. The portal is his, it leads near to the Heart. Which is another portal, but with at least three possible destinations, not the two we had assumed. It also contains a substantial fraction of his power. He is desperate for us to bring back the Worts and remedy his mistake. What's more, he's willing to pay. Not that I personally would be able to accept a reward from such a source. Not without my Lord Diancecht's express permission.

19/07/96

So before dawn on the morning of the 19th we got ourselves all spelled up and ready to go. Strength of Stone, Water-Breathing, Fire-proofing, Protection versus Magical Fire, the lot. Then we each marched up to the portal, and found ourselves in hot water. Boiling water, just a few feet from the Heart of Ratho. We had concluded that we had to be here at dawn, but had no idea what the precise nature of the ritual was, until Callas read aloud the words of "The Scholar Sayes". The cylinder rose in the water, surrounded by a cascade of bubbles. There was a blinding flash, and suddenly we were elsewhere. We stood in a desert. Sand dunes rolled away to the horizon. The sun beat down hotly, seeming twice as big as it ought to be. Near us in the sand stood a time worn obelisk, the writing on its side barely readable. Strangely for such a place, the writing was in the common tongue. What we could decipher read...

Find the daughter of the past
Hear her m... of the last
First open the door, show your light out strong
Second let her in, don't make her wait too long

Gustav climbed to the top of a dune, and looked around with a spyglass. He reported that the sands stretched for miles in every direction. Beyond that was something strange, like a forest, but unlike a forest, and then hills rose to mountains. I cast star-wings on myself and flew up to get a better look, and had a near miss with an air elemental. No flying here it seems, so we decided to set off on foot to the nearest sign of something other than desert, to the south.

By dusk we were half-way there. The sunset was spectacular, with blazing colours ranging through the entire spectrum. As the light faded we could see streaks of lightning just above the sun in the otherwise clear sky. A trumpet sounded to the east, but it could be miles away. I overheard the rangers arguing. It seemed that to their direction sense, the sun had set in the east! A clear impossibility. But one which had brought on the perennial argument as to whether Alusia is a ball or a disk. It seemed that Brigetta had also sailed around the world on a flying ship, and was defending the ball theory. As the stars came out their pattern was like the one we had seen on the wall. Were we in the future? And had the world somehow inverted itself? It was quickly decided that we would go with the sun and call the ranger 'bump' of direction south, instead of north. This meant we were actually heading north.

20/07/96

The trumpets brayed at regular intervals all night. There was no moon, and the morning star glinted redly in the east as the dawn arrived. It looked more like Wayland rather than Freya but it was brighter and higher in the sky than Wayland usually gets. Again the sky was clear except for a few thin wisps of high cloud which soon disappeared as the sun rose. We marched for some hours before coming upon another obelisk. Here the writing was completely worn away, but this time Brigetta was successful in her ritual of recitation. She sang in a sad voice and in a minor key...

We can't tell what the daughter of the past say,
'Cause its all worn away.
What did the daughter of the past say?
We cannot find our way.

We rested out the heat of the day, sweating in the poor shade of our tarps. That evening we marched past the end of the sand, onto rock. In the crevices in the rock we found a tiny orange and green spotted lichen, and at last I was able to confirm that we were indeed still on Alusia, albeit an Alusia much changed. Still the trumpets sounded periodically in the west, as we set up camp.

21/07/96

In the morning, before sunrise, I read the stars once more. They said:

The shore of a turbulent river.
A hunter has just netted a fish, but it is too small to eat.
He throws it back in. The fish swims off and lives to a ripe old age.

At the same time, Brigetta performed a Ritual of Recitation, wishing to learn of how this came about. She sang a very martial song in a deep masculine tone. We could only conclude that all this was the result of a war. After that, in the cool of the morning, we trudged on, across the barren plain, towards the grey forest. By mid-morning we had reached the hills, and Callas used Earthwalk on herself, Gustav and I; and we shot to the top of a ridge. From here we drew a rough map. All we could see through the heat haze was barren; sand, hills and the strange grey forest. The sand stretched out to the west, surrounded to the east by plain, and hills to the north and south. It looked strangely familiar.

We rested in the shade of the ridge, then walked through the afternoon to the forest. A forest turned to stone. Gustav broke off a bough and there was a scent of ashes. The power inside had a faint aura which was enough for me to determine that not only was it formerly lived, but that it had been 245 years since it lived. Pinefeller identified the tree as a beech. As we examined the trees, Pinefeller had a sudden flash of insight. No wonder the map had looked familiar, it depicted Confederation Bay, the sea turned to sand. We were standing in Stonesborough Forest.

As night fell, Brigetta and I did our rituals. Her Recitation resulted in a melancholy funeral lament which echoed through the barren forest. Many, many people had died here. As for me, I read in the stars:

The Ranger says
Cruelly baying at the moon,
Awful trolls, looking at me!
Staking their mindless aspect.

22/07/96

Next morning, after walking out of the forest, we decided to fly to Stonesborough and then on to Seagate. If we kept low over the barren plain, we should be safe from the air elementals. And so it proved. Stonesborough was a blackened, burned and broken ruin. Reasoning that the most likely place to find something undamaged was below ground, Callas tunnelled to the cellar beneath the manor house. We found two skeletons in the remains of a wine cellar. Dates on the corks gave us 1995AP as the latest. Meanwhile, searching the rubble above had turned up copper coins dated 2043, 2045, and 1991. The disaster must have happened not many years after we left...

We flew on to Seagate. From a distance we could see the ruins of the four great temple spires that we had read about in Starflower's article in the Seagate Times, from when her party went into the future. The Duke's castle was utterly destroyed. Not wanting to venture into the city, we found a place to camp for the night on the outskirts of Seagate, not far from the North Road. As we settled down to sleep we could hear the horns faintly across the bay.

I was on watch with Glod when we saw an army approaching. They wore the Duke's colours, but were patently not alive. We woke the party, and Brigetta and Gustav ran for it, panicked by the very sight of the undead. Liessa rallied them, and we hid, behind the broken walls, as the army marched by, heading for Seagate. As the rearguard filed past, an officer doffed his cap to us. We had just started to settle down again, when they came running back, retreating from goodness knows what. Callas put a Wall of Stone across the opening in the ruin. Then they came, straight through the Wall of Stone. Some appeared right in our midst. The fight ensued. Pinefeller stopped one with that great sword of his, which, it seems can stun things that normally do not stun. Another attacked Brigetta, another Glod. One went for me, and managed to drain some of the life from me, but Gustav went for it, and I got the chance to check their aura, which revealed that these were wights. This was serious. Then Brigetta went down, and before anyone could stop it, the wight standing over her unconscious body reached down and drew out her soul. I knew then that I would have to resurrect her before dawn. The battle was over soon after, and the others, those dressed in Seagate uniforms, finished them off, then surrounded us.

We found that we could communicate only by purely visual means, by sign language and by writing. Through this we discovered that the wights who had attacked us were servants of the Powers of Light or Dark, they weren't sure which, and it didn't matter to them. Curiously enough, not only did we perceive their auras as wights, they saw us as wights also. Their auras had told us that they had died 780 years ago, and we were able to establish that they believed the date to be the year 4545 AP. Apparently the people here had taken upon themselves to summon the Powers of Light (a bad idea), and in response others had summoned the Powers of Darkness (a worse idea).

I spent the next hour restoring Brigetta's life to her. She came back to life with a groan, and her voice shook as she described nightmares of the red eyes of the wight boring into her as it tore her soul from her body.

23/07/96

We rested for the remainder of the night, and in the morning went down into the ruins of Seagate. The bridge was there, still standing, but with two huge holes torn through it. The guild was gone, and in its place was a huge crater. Pinefeller said he thought he saw something strange down there, right in the centre. Callas and Brigetta, in the process of trying to cast defence spells, discovered that there was something seriously wrong with the mana here. It was there, but felt slightly off, and the results were not those intended. Wild mana? To our delight, a spring of clear water sprang up from the ground some twenty feet from the crater. Brigetta tested it and pronounced it unpoisoned. We gratefully refilled our water bottles. Then we walked down into the crater, and found that there was a blackened glassy pool at the bottom, which proved to be a no mana zone.

When we got out of the crater, we saw some people watching us, half a mile away to the east. Naturally we went over to talk. They proved to be a tribe of desert nomads, white-skinned though, as you might expect if they were descended from the past inhabitants of Carzala. There were about sixty of them, men, women and children, all dressed in rags, and obviously half starved, and infected with a variety of minor diseases. They all seemed awed by us, staring at our dress and equipment. One of them stepped forward and knelt before us. He told us in their strange dialect of common that the place was called See-ga-tay.

They led us to the place they called "brill", under the bridge. We saw that the second statue was to an adventurer who had won the Star of Alusia. They explained to us that they are the tribe of the feathered bear. There are other nomadic tribes, but they avoid them. We got the distinct impression that these people run away from everything and everybody. They come on pilgrimage to this place, to the place of the four fingers and the thumb. Brigetta asked what they knew of the Daughter of the Past, but although they knew of her, they did not know what she said. We then tried to extract information about the worts, and were told of several dangerous creatures of the desert. One, which they called a snuffle-wumpus sounded something like a wort, but when Brigetta tried to get them to identify it by colour she found that they had lost the words for colour. Very sad. I wanted to heal them, but was restrained by the party leader, who pointed out that they'd get sick again in a hurry, so there wasn't much point.

It was getting towards evening, but the tribe wouldn't let us simply leave. We had to evade them, Brigetta and Gustav attracting their attention by signing, while the rest of us went invisible. Brigetta and Gustav took off at a run, and then, having put a respectable distance between themselves and the following nomads, spread their starwings and took to the air, much to the consternation of the nomads. After meeting some distance down the river of sand which had once been the Sweetwater, we flew east along the river, heading for Slippery Rock, and looking for ripples in the sand, which might indicate the presence of a "snuffle-wumpus".

That night we camped at Arne's Ferry. Not much need for the ferry now. I tried to pray to Diancecht, asking forgiveness for not healing the poor nomads, but could not make contact. It was as if a vast distance separated me from him, and I felt very lost and alone. Shortly after nightfall, Pinefeller noticed two people flying north at something like 45 miles per hour. A few minutes later, they were spotted again, heading south. There was a soft thump as something hit the ground. It was a stone, wrapped in cloth. There was writing on the cloth, in runic script, but in common. It read: "Meet here 3 days. Opportunity for profit - Agan." The fliers continued due south, straight for Slippery Rock. Well, so there is not only life here, but intelligent life.

24/07/96

Next morning, we headed south, following the old road. Abruptly, four figures appeared in the road ahead of us. Four female figures, armed and armoured, tall and well-muscled. I immediately thought 'Trap'. When Liessa started to ask questions, they informed us that information does not come without a price, and suggested that we follow them to their camp, at Slippery Rock. We did so, and we were greeted by a group of over sixty, all female, encamped near a massive standing stone. These women seemed far healthier than the nomads, and many had Colleges, mainly Wiccan, Bardic, and Dark Celestial. They were called the Daughters of Agan. The leader stepped forward and offered to share water, and Liessa accepted, seeing that there was some ceremonial importance to this. They half-filled a beaker with their water, and we filled it up with ours. Then, one by one, we and they drank from the combined cup.

First we discussed their past, our future. They spoke of the summoning of the four they do not name, followed by the rulers calling down the opposites. The dragons did not interfere, since mortals did the summoning, and it was only justice for mortals to suffer the consequences. The resulting devastation is all over, at least everywhere they have been, or had contact with, which amounts to at least half the continent. Maybe Brigetta was right, and something really has moved Alusia inside the orbit of Freya. There seemed to be the right number of days in the year for that. I also found out that the shift had occurred over a period of sixty years.

If we wanted anything more specific, we'd have to pay. The payment was to be in the form of our men, except the one with the demon sword. It seems that they'd seen that thing before, and wanted nothing to do with it. When it was clarified that what they wanted was simply our services for a number of hours we came to an agreement, which included not only the information, but four of their war-dancers to accompany us. Liessa told them about the worts, and they told us that they have heard of the creatures, through another tribe called the R'evalon. We would have to learn the protocols for approaching these people, who could be dangerous. It was Brigetta who asked, "Do they have pointy ears?" The reply was that they did, and were dark-skinned. Drow? or Erelein?

.6.

They feasted us as the discussion continued, and the party were much impressed by the sword dance of the war-dancers. Brigetta observed that she hadn't thought of using the Dance of Swords spell like that. We found out some more history when the subject of shapers came up. It seemed that the nature of shaping changed markedly in 1997 AP, when the Great Shaper arrived, coincidental with the freeing of the Powerful One. Curious. We also learned that the air elementals follow the sun, so flying at night is relatively safe. The undead commonly roam at night in places of death. And these people are nocturnal. I checked. They are dark-aspected.

Pinefeller brought up the subject of what the witches did with boy children, and insinuated that they would sacrifice them and use their fat to make dead men's candles. I was quite shocked by this suggestion, and even when Gustav discovered the truth, that they aborted male babies at an early stage of pregnancy, decided that maybe I should not service them myself. However, I decide to make certain, and read the night stars to determine what sex any offspring would be. The stars said 'Male'. In that case the whole thing would just have been a waste of time. Moreover I got the impression, while meditating, that Diancecht understood their reasoning but disapproved. So the Outer Powers are still here.

25/07/96

The sun rose. Gustav spent three hours with six women in the tent while the rest of us slept.

At sunset, we started out for the R'evalon tribe. The two warrior women, or sword-dancers as they called themselves, were introduced as Talia and Davi. We would fly most of the way then walk in. So I started casting Starwings on the party. But my first three casts failed to work so one of their Shadowmages offered to help. Between the two of us the entire party were ready for flight but, during the process, I noticed she faltered one of her spells. So I checked her aura for Curse in Effect and got the answer Creeping Senility. Fortunately they still know the Curse Removal ritual so I told her to see someone about that as soon as possible. Before doing that she cast Witchsights on those who needed it.

Then their Bardic Mage cast Dance of Swords on those who requested it. During that process she also backfired, this time with migraines. So I did a Soothe Pain on her. She also did a Rank 20 Singing Sword on that sword of Pinefeller's. I could swear that the sword was purring with pleasure after that.

We flew north from Slippery Rock, with the sword-dancers in the lead. Our course took us over the remains of the Stonesborough Forest and into the mountains beyond. Our target was a valley in the mountain range. The sword-dancers told us that if the R'evalon were camped, they would be there. So we landed near the entrance and walked in along a path. A short while later we could smell green plants and hear the faint sound of running water. Then we reached the lip of the valley and beheld the most wondrous sight I had seen for a while. Here was an oasis, the first sign that not all of Alusia had been transformed into a barren wasteland. No sign of people though. No fires either. As we turned to leave, Pinefeller spotted a light at the far end of the valley which flashed on and off. Obviously a signal of some kind so we turned and walked back into the valley to investigate. We noticed that in the bottom of the valley that the plants had been pruned hard back.

Standing in the middle of the path was a man in a loincloth, definitely human and rather undernourished. Pinefeller asked, "Are you the Freeman?". He replied, "No, I am called Basa." Liessa introduced herself and us as her companions. He didn't understand that, but did understand "friends". He told us that he represented Clan Ubrick so Liessa asked to speak with the Clan. Basa was obviously working hard on looking calm and collected but many of us could tell he was rather concerned about us. He led us to the tribal encampment which we noticed was well shielded from outside onlookers. All the tribespeople were dressed in loincloths. They looked undernourished, but content with their lot. Liessa explained that we were looking for intelligent plants and I produced a picture of a Wort. So Basa took us to an overhang and showed us a crude painting on the wall. It depicted what could only be worts. With something like water above them. Other pictures showed humanoid figures attacking worts, some with spears. The drawings were done by some people who are in thrall to the R'evalon, and from the description, they could be orcs, or an orc-like race. We were also told that part of their travels had taken them to a great forest, under a curse. In the middle of the cursed area was an oasis.

"Look you can't get College of Magic from a picture!" Liessa to me as I contemplated the drawings. But that gave Brigetta a thought. "I think these paintings are drawn with a mixture of soot and animal fat. Why don't you check the aura, and determine the age of the paintings." So Callas did and established that they were but thirteen and a half weeks old. Much more recent than we'd expected.

After taking our leave, we flew around towards the next valley. There was more than a little trepidation in our hearts, after all these were Dark Elves we were going to meet. It smelt of trap, but we had no choice. We camped about 10 miles from their valley, and rested until about one o'clock in the morning and had a nice hot meal. What do you call lunch when you eat it in the middle of the night? We discussed whether or not to sneak into the valley, and decided it would be more sensible to enter openly, but spelled up and ready.

26/07/96

We had just set off when Callas told us that she'd spotted an Earth Elemental. We couldn't see anything, but when we went down to grab our gear, a monstrous fist reached up out of the ground, and punched Pinefeller then grabbed his pack. He wrenched it free, but then we could all see the thing, and took off with alacrity. We flew a short way and then Pinefeller and Callas went to land so she could heal him. To our dismay, she badly misjudged the landing, and when the rest of us went down, we discovered that she had broken her hip. So much for meeting the dark elves tonight. Gustav and Brigetta went to check out the area on shadow-wings. When they returned we thought that they'd drawn a blank when Gustav spotted movement, headed our way. They landed, and we got ready for trouble. Liessa cast telepathy, and soon detected a mind, curious as to the two people they saw on shadow-wings. Soon we could see them, sneaking towards us. Then Liessa called out "Hello out there, you on the ridge!"

"Gratings" they called in reply. Liessa invited them to come down and talk in a civilised manner. They declined, and asked what we wanted. Liessa told them that there was something we were looking for, that they might know of. They stalled, saying that they were only scouts, thinking that there was help on the way. He said that his name was Darren then asked just what we were looking for. Liessa replied that we were looking for intelligent plants and her telepathy had them wondering why we wanted those things. She used bardic voice to charm them, and they acquiesced, and came over to us. Liessa spotted the back-up, across the canyon with bows trained on us.

As they approached, we could see that they were wearing some kind of heavy hide armour, and the leader had a wraithcloak spell. He asked why we sought the plants. Liessa said that she wanted them as a component for a ritual. The leader was clearly of elven kind, and his aura said elf, however dark his skin, but the other two could only be orcs, the skinniest orcs we'd ever seen. He suggested that we should pay for the information, but he would not barter himself, not being a merchant. So he agreed to bring someone who could barter, two or three hours after sundown. They left, not without leaving a guard at the edge of Liessa's telepathy range, and we settled down to camp. I continued to work on healing Callas's broken hip, while we rested.

Meanwhile Liessa collected every astrology reading she could lay her hands on, including the copy of the writing on the obelisk and was studying them intently. Occasionally she'd make notes then screw the piece of paper up in disgust. Then, a short while later, she started swearing rather intently and at great length then frantically started scribbling. It turned out that the readings contained a code and every second letter of each word spelled out another message. If the last line of the writing on the obelisk was misread, it would say "Second let-ter in" which gave her the key.

Anyway, the decoded readings were:

Scholar : Ratho is sorry, is repentant

Freeman: To go home, go to the gate of sea
Warrior: Visit four towers
Sailor: Be happy
Priest: Sacrifice
God: Say a curse to me
Ranger: Ratho wrote this.

27/07/96

We were expecting company and sure enough, two hours after sunset the next night, Liessa detected minds approaching. Then a voice, we recognised as that of the scout Darren, called out to our camp. They came forward and Darren introduced an elf named Egreon who would negotiate for them. He produced a charcoal sketch, which was easily identified as that of a wort, and asked if that was what we wanted. Liessa confirmed that it was, and he told that they knew where they could be found. He then asked what were willing to give for the information. The discussion soon got onto the subject of what services we could supply. First they wanted to know if either of our Earth mages had a means of moving rock in quantity. Liessa asked why, and they admitted that they knew where there was water about 40 feet behind the stone of what used to be a waterfall. As an alternate, they wondered if we would help them potion a certain defence spell that the Daughters of Agan used. Liessa asked that they leave so we could discuss the matter among ourselves.

We came up with two plans to dig their well. Callas suggested casting a tunnelling spell, but pointed out that it wouldn't last long. So Pinefeller proposed following it up with a Wall of Stone within the tunnel, the idea being that the Wall would prevent the tunnel from completely closing when the spell expired. Then when the Wall disappeared, a hole would be left that the water could flow through.

They also told us of a tribe that worshipped the site of the Guild Fortress where a great explosion took place 720 years ago. According to the legend they caused the great slide that transformed Alusia into what we had encountered. About 1400 years ago, four temples to the Powers of Light were built and magic stopped working properly. So the Guild summoned the Powers of Darkness, in the vain hope that both sets of powers might then depart. But it didn't work. Instead both sets decided to stay and continue their conflict. They held out for hundreds of years. The Guild tried one last attempt to send them all back which resulted in a vast explosion of light. Even after that the powers still did not leave, their conflict causing dramatic change, not until the plane became as it is now. Last known they had headed west, presumably to Terra Nova.

After a while the merchant and his guards left, leaving Darren and two "walkers" with us. He seemed very uncomfortable (although he didn't show it) until Gustav went over and made conversation. He ended up joining us for a meal, and showing us an edible plant like a cactus which tasted of chilli, and warned us from sleeping in a place where a snake would travel in the dawn. The walkers were undead as I discovered when I tried empathy on them.

28/07/96

We rested most of the day until dusk then Darren led us to the place where the water might be found, a dried up water course in front of a rockface where there was once a waterfall. There were some three score goblinoid slaves with digging implements, watched over by R'evalon with whips,

which seemed alive. We were led through them to the face, where a R'evalon with a sextant showed us the place where the water was closest and the direction. Callas started by placing a wall to catch the water. The tunnel went in, and then the water came out. One of the R'evalon asked, "Is it safe?" Callas reached down and tasted the liquid. "It's water!" The R'evalon commanded the slaves down into the bowl collecting water. Then she put the walls in. We hastily got out of the way, and suggested to the R'evalon that they do likewise. They neglected to get the slaves out. We waited. There was a boom and a cracking sound as if the mountain was breaking apart. Rock spat out of the hole in the mountainside. The bowl echoed with screaming from the slaves, many of them badly injured. There was a second cracking boom... and two orcs were decapitated as a length of stone shot out of the tunnel like a giant spear from the hand of a god.

There was left a tube leading into the hill. Callas and Darren went in and reported water. About a swimming pool's worth, in a limestone cavern. We took the opportunity to refill our water-skins, as the R'evalon set up a goblin bucket chain. One of the higher ranked R'evalon called Darren across. When he came back he told us that he had been ordered to take us to the worts, and that he would meet us an hour before dawn.

.8.

29/07/96

I was on watch with Gustav when suddenly I felt mana impact. Gustav fell back onto the ground, so I sent out my ranged empathy and discovered that he was asleep, just as mana impacted again. I shouted "E&E" and the others snapped awake and alert. Liessa ordered me to cast light, and Brigetta to try to wake Gustav which she did with the flat of her axe. Callas cast a wall of stone around us. Nothing much happened for some seconds, except people casting spells. Brigetta cast quietness on Callas and Gustav, and they went off to track whatever it was.

About an hour later they came back, telling us that they'd followed the trail back into a neighbouring valley and managed to sneak up on a couple of half-orcs, neither of them the mage they were looking for. It appeared that there was a tribe of them there, and that they were terrified of the dark elves.

An hour before dawn, Darren turned up, dressed in serviceable travelling gear. He was told what had happened and that we would rest until late afternoon. I cast Starwings on everyone and we took off. We flew over forest for some time, and landed in a clearing, some of us not too well. In the clearing was the remains of a square hut, and Brigetta wandered over to investigate. She stopped suddenly, and said, "One of you lot come over here and DA this." Liessa asked what had happened. Brigetta replied that she'd heard a voice in her head and that it hadn't sounded like Liessa. It had said "You will die, and die and die again before seeing your home again." Her aura showed that she had been struck with a major curse, a doom with a magical aptitude of 27. She stated that she didn't believe it. I got the distinct impression that she believed that the curse couldn't effect her if she refused to believe in it!

We discovered that there was a second ward in the corner. Callas got rid of that by walking into it and resisting. Then Glod and Gustav set to digging. It was hard-packed earth, but that meant nothing to people under the effect of Callas' high-ranked Strength of Stone spell. Soon Glod's spade went clunk, against a metallic chest. It's aura was checked, and the chest lifted out of the ground. It was opened, revealing eight crystalline objects, and a wooden box. Runes on the crystals resembled the runes on Ratho's disk. The nature of magic on them was "transportation" and divination showed them to be invested with six charges of Rank 11 Wind-walk spells and one of Rank 10 Whispering Wind. "Here we let it rest forever, may the gods have mercy on our souls"

was written in common on the wooden box. The nature of the magic on it was "aquamarine". Or was it... It kept changing.

The box's aura was investigated, and in the process it tried to eat Darren's rank. Before it succeeded he established that it comes from a plane called Australia, as does Glod's "kangaroo". He also found that the box contained several souls, that it was a game which wants to be played, and was called Romani.

Brigetta performed a ritual of recitation in the house. After a hour she raised her head and sang in a sad voice:

Three daughters, a son, incest the sin
Cold iron the night, let the fire in
Out beyond the fence, the soldiers draw
Flaming cross and noose of rope, red pointed claw

Witch of Hedge, Wizard Small
Burn. Burn. Burn.

We had mentioned the name Ratho in our discussions, especially with regard to the crystals, which certainly seemed to have his mark on them, but were surprised when Darren said that he recognised the name Ratho. He couldn't remember where from, so at Brigetta's suggestion, Liessa hypnotised him.

He started to speak:

"The woman came into the hall. A tall elf with a sword. I tried to read its aura. It hurt my head to try. She walked straight to the inner door, past the bureaucrats. She yelled, "Servants of Ratho, where are they?" Her aura said, long-lived sentient, whirlwind vortex, philosopher. She stormed out muttering, "Where are they, they must be here... Maybe they're not here yet..."

The description sounded very like the philosopher we met in the Valley of Naud. We all agreed that allowing that sword to meet itself would be a BAD thing. A little like finding out what happens when a Lightsphere meets a Darksphere. One of those experiments no sane entity wants to try.

Darren warned us that the place was dangerous, so we not only set a watch, but Brigetta put an alarm in place and Callas set a ward. The additional precautions proved unnecessary because we were woken up, in the middle of the night, by the watch. They had spotted some odd-looking spiny humanoids that Darren identified as Underpeople. Brigetta cast Comprehend Languages to no effect. It was apparent that they had no spoken language, only silent tongue. They managed to communicate that they wanted to trade, wanted sugar for herbs, but Callas managed to convey that we wanted information. We learned that they traded with the Worts, and that the Worts were quick to anger, and don't like anybody else. They'd also seen the elven woman with the sword. Four weeks ago. After they left Darren said that he was surprised that they didn't attack us.

30/7/96

In the morning Darren asked if he might divinate the box. The box was indeed a game, some kind of strategy game, with the property that it never loses its pieces and the pieces move themselves.

The effect is to add temporary bonuses to military scientist rank. However, there are five souls trapped in the box, and they may be able to be freed. They had apparently died while playing the game. One was much stronger than the others. Darren explained how he had lost rank in Detect Aura before, in the city to the south where the four ruined towers were. He had tried to read the aura of a icon in one of the temples. This was before the towers fell.

Brigetta took the box for an hour, and recited a story of sorrow and loss, from the point of view of a junior officer. She sang of two armies fighting. The generals decided to settle the issue in a game of Romani. An assassin stabbed one general from behind. With his dying breath the General cried, "Curse you for your lack of honour, join me in undeath, in death shall you be as in life!" The souls of both Generals, the Assassin, and the Aide who had hired the assassin were sucked into the game. The conflict was ended as the army whose General had dishonoured them by hiring assassins laid down their weapons and surrendered.

That accounted for four souls, but not the fifth. I did an astrology reading to try to find out how he had got stuck in there. It seemed that he had foolishly bet his soul against the box in a game of Romani and lost. Effectively he had cursed himself, and now he wanted out. We rested until about ten in the morning and ate breakfast. Darren described the valley for us, saying that it was only known as the "Valley where the plants are." It was a narrow valley, which broadened out where two rivers had once met.

We walked through the stone forest, and climbed down into a broad dried-up river bed. Brigetta asked Darren whether the Worts would attack on "sight". He said that they would, and when she said "That could be a problem," Liessa replied, saying "That will be a problem". Ahead there was something sticking out of the river. As we got closer we saw that they were stakes, crosses with "Keep Out" written on in many languages. Beyond them another two hundred feet, boulders blocked the canyon.

Suddenly Darren fell down. Apparently he had been mentally attacked. Then the most hideous monster appeared from among the rocks. It wanted me, I knew it. In actuality it was a phantasm, and as it came rushing forward, Liessa cast a counterspell, and it vanished. Then a voice spoke in our minds, "Speak now!" One of us must have been thinking something right, because the voice came back with, "I will fetch somehow who can speak with authority. You wait there." We waited for a matter of minutes. Then the voice came back, "You make considerable claims. What explanation can you make?" Brigetta began to chant the story of the Worts. The voice came again, "You speak of our pasting, that we cannot speak of. We would speak more, but we must have your guarantee that you will not harm us." We each gave our word, and were called forward. Beyond the boulders we saw two worts. Two very large and somewhat lighter coloured worts that we had seen before.

After a short walk we found ourselves in something very like a jungle. Wort tentacles hung down on either side. Two worts met us and escorted us down to a clearing. A huge wort came tunnelling up out of the ground. Soon we were surrounded by five large worts. The fifth one barrelled up out of the ground, and introduced itself as "Vein, Speaker for the Valley". He said, "You speak of things in the past as if they they were in the future. Would you like to explain this?" Liessa started to explain that we had come from the past to take some of them back with us. They asked for proof of who we were and Gustav produced his guild badge. They moved aside some creepers revealing the same crest, carved deeply into the wall. It looked very old. They said that their oldest legends say the symbol represents their past, of life from death, of a debt redeemed,

of a people who committed a great evil, and repaid it with a great good.

We spent some time discussing how to get the worts to their proper place. They agreed to come with us. Their legends indicated that they had originally landed in the Sea of Grass, and been forced to move when the weather turned. Gustav asked if they worship anyone. The Worts pulled across another screen. There was a picture of a man, dressed simply. They did not know the name, only that he was called the Traveller. Could this be the one followed by the Children of the Traveller we had met in the Sea of Grass?

That evening I did a reading of the night sky, asking "What is an appropriate sacrifice?", and obtained the answer, "Something of value." Brigetta asked if I would find out if the "Daughter of the Past" and the woman with the sword were one and the same. The stars said that they were.

31/7/96 to 21/7/96

Vein came out carrying a decorated staff, which was highly magical. The earth-mages started summoning Earth elementals. Vein snapped the stick, and cast the pieces into the open ground where the elementals were to appear. A glowing figure of a man appeared, who looked like the "Traveller". Then the first earth elemental came up from the ground. It was huge, ten times the height of a man.

The glowing figure said "Stop", in a language we did not know, and raised his hand.

"Honour the agreement made," he added.

"What?" boomed the elemental.

"Once, once only" he replied.

"... Rrrrrr. What is your bidding, Master?" rumbled the elemental.

"Carry all these."

"Too many..."

"Fetch others of your kind. Remember your agreement."

Several other smaller elementals come out of the ground. "WE HONOUR THE AGREEMENT" they rumbled. They stood still while the worts and the party climbed up. I climbed up the largest. It asked me "Which way?" and I pointed out Gustav who proceeded to direct the procession.

It was a strange and noisy journey. The elementals thundered across the barren landscape in a straight and direct path to Seagate, crushing petrified trees and pulverising rocks in their passing. The first we saw of the ruins was the towers outlined against the false dawn. Into the city our elemental transports marched, along the main road, to the market place. There we halted. My ears rang as the noise stopped.

"THIS ENDS OUR AGREEMENT," rumbled the huge earth elemental into the sudden silence. "It is paid, and paid well," replied Orchid.

Now we had to fulfil the terms of the prophecies. First "visit the four towers". We went to the nearest tower. Swords carved into broken pillars showed it to have been a temple of Michael. The interior was an almost total ruin. The high altar was in splinters. It looked as if a side altar had been picked up and thrown through the opposite wall. We picked our way up the stairwell, but there was nothing to be seen. Then we checked out the crypt, but it was empty.

Next we visited the temple of Uriel, marked by the scales. There was nothing there but ruin. Then we went to the temple of Raphael, with the sign of the shield. Callas noticed some movement at

the top of the stairs. It proved to be a very sun-burned Kleta and Atelk. They were very glad to see us, Brigetta especially, and explained that they had touched the disk at the bottom of the lake, and found themselves here, some weeks before. For some reason, Callas looked very irritated. We went next to the temple of Gabriel. As we entered there was a soft, but penetrating bell sound. "Bing." A voice said "One".

Second, "Be happy." We proceeded to make happy in the courtyard. It wasn't easy, but I managed to smile at the antics of Liessa, Brigetta, and Gustav. The bell went "Bing". The voice intoned "Two".

Third, "Sacrifice". We made sacrifices, there in the courtyard before the ruined towers. I poured out the last dose of vision toxin on the ground. Brigetta poured out a Waters of Healing potion. The others broke amulets and weapons. The bell went "Bing". The voice spoke "Three"

Fourth "Say a curse to me." We tried swearing and damning Ratho's name, but nothing happened. Brigetta suggested that the witches among the worts should cast *Damnum Minatum* at Ratho, but of course they couldn't, having no target. So she turned to Kleta and Atelk, and demanded that they summon Ratho. They chanted and danced, and gradually a familiar glowing form materialised. We all swore at Ratho, except Kleta and Atelk who couldn't be persuaded. With no result. The witches cast their curses, to no avail. Then Darren admitted that he had learned the Greater Curse spell, and cast, using the same words as the Doom on Brigetta. After backfiring once, and getting Glod, he cast the curse at Ratho. The bell went "Bing". The voice proclaimed "Four". Ratho vanished and a glowing portal appeared in his place.

One by one we touched the portal. First Liessa, then the rest of the party, then Kleta and Atelk, then Darren, and finally the worts. Finally we were all touching the portal or touching someone who was touching it. Time stopped. Then time began to run backwards. Items sacrificed reassembled themselves, and poured back into their bottles. After a bewildering succession of scenes of future history running backwards, we found ourselves hovering above the lake in the Valley of Naud. "Where to take you?" said the voice. "Here," said Kleta and Atelk, and they floated down to the water. "To the children of the Traveller." said Pinefeller. "To the Sea of Grass." said Brigetta. We felt ourselves fly to the camp outside the valley, then along the succession of rune-stick, so rapidly that the rune-sticks were destroyed behind us. Finally we stopped at the camp in the Sea of Grass. The guards looked very confused, but recognised the party. Brigetta's first question was to ask after the date. On hearing that it was 21st July 1996, she seemed very relieved. "I'll be able to get there in time," she said.

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Pinefeller didn't want to meet the Children of the Traveller with that sword still on his arm. "Why are you cutting your arm off?" Gustav asked. "It went bad." replied Pinefeller. I went to take him back to the Guild, put one foot on the runestick and nothing happened. When I tried to check its aura, it appeared to have become a dead mana zone. Obviously the sword didn't want to go. Gustav and Glod dug a pit for it. Gustav sliced Pinefeller's sword arm at the shoulder in one mighty blow with his hand-and-a-half. Pinefeller's arm and that sword tumbled together into the pit. Glod shovels dirt back into the pit to cover the damned thing.

Liessa and Callas fly to the Children of the Traveller. We have some interesting philosophical discussions with Darren. He wants to work for the Duke, and Brigetta thinks that this is an

excellent idea. We established in conversation that Darren had been/will be born in 2453. In 2500-2600 the Towers of Light will be built. Around 3000 the Powers of Light will be summoned, and about 3500 the Powers of Darkness will be summoned. If that is, we cannot do something to prevent that sequence of events. Brigetta suggested that Darren, being of elven heritage, may be able to be pivotal in this. She sung for us a ballad which she explained she intended to be remembered as a warning to future generations.

I met a traveller in a future time
Who told me a tale of pride and crime
Of towers built to touch the sky
Of men who summoned gods from high

Their plans so grand
Brought a barren land
A sea of sand

At the gate of the sea they formed their pride
Into four temples, whose spires the skies defied
Each to a power of light
Filled with glory and might

Their arrogance grew, on the powers they called
They summoned the Four, they were so bold
And to their priests the powers came
Such ones as men can never tame

The dragons looked on, even great Xanadu
As mortals chose their own doom and due
The mages wept as the mana died
And mystic power withdrew like the tide

In their fear and loss the mages summoned the dark
Daemon powers they called, each to its mark
To restore the balance they sought
But only war they bought

The war twixt the powers it ravaged the land
From rivers to plains, hills to the sea strand
The forests burned, the rivers boiled
As mana winds blew, and lightning roiled

The towers fell, the city died
In ruins lay every bastion of pride
In those streets remained only the wights
Fighting the same conflict all the nights

And when the battle was done
All was lost, no-one had won
Only burned the Sun, bloated and red

Glaring down on the millions of dead

Few survive in that future time
But wandering tribes in a desert clime
They told me this tale of pride
Their warning of woe betide

Of plans so grand
That will bring a barren land
A sea of sand

Three hours passed and there was the thunder of hoofbeats followed by the arrival of more than a dozen horse nomads, led by a handsome warrior woman I recognised. We introduced the Worts to the Children of the Traveller and then let them get on with it. Gustav went for a ride with one of the braves. Truly they are magnificent riders.

We decided to spend the evening around the campfire with the Children. They told us their legend of Verocca, the Traveller, and how he taught them the ways of the horse. Brigetta told them our story, giving great emphasis to the appearance of the Traveller. All the children went very quiet and listened in rapt attention as she got to that part. They told us the story of the search for the Chieftain's Daughter. Then the worts told us some of their stories. Most of the party got mildly drunk on Kumis, except me. I was just enjoying looking at the stars in their more familiar places.

22/07/96

We used the rune-portals to return to Seagate, giving the man at the portal the receipt. Then we walked back to the Guild. They checked us in, and Pinefeller went off to get his arm regenerated, while Brigetta went in for curse removal. Brigetta's curse took two attempts to removed, so it cost her 3600 sp. The accountants were very confused by our assertion that our time elapsed was not the same as the time which had passed at the Guild, and refused to listen to us.

We had earned a total 14991 sp each after tax, including the invested items and the box. Gustav took the box, and Callas and Glod some of the invested items. The Duke employed Darren, and we received word that he will allow Darren to teach major curse to members of this party only, when Darren has ranked it. It's good to know that we now have a contact in the Duke's employ.