

# Mission to Malachandra

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Jacqui Smith

1 Fruit '98 - 27 Vintage (Duration 87 days)

## Player Characters

Ghengis	Fire	Human	Male	
Hargan	Non-mage	Human	Male	Scribe
Grendel	Mind	Human	Male	Military Scientist
Vila	E&E	Human	Male	Leader
Ishmael	Dark Celestial	Human	Male	
Phaeton	Solar Celestial	Human	Male	

Plane - Alusia

## Places Visited

The planet Thunor

Malachandra

Karsoon - Seroni city dedicated to Athena

Biblis-Fons - Seroni city dedicated to Zeus

Tharsis - Seroni city dedicated to Hera

Ascaraus Lacus - Seroni city dedicated to Aphrodite

Candor - Seroni city dedicated to Hermes

Lunae Lacus - Seroni city dedicated to Artemis

Idaeus - Seroni city dedicated to Demeter

Niliacus - Seroni city dedicated to Demeter

Oxia - Seroni city dedicated to Apollo

Dinsoor - Seroni city dedicated to Dionysis

Cydon - Seroni city dedicated to Dionysis

The Face of Mars

Employer - Princess Annelsie from the mer-kingdom of Pasifika

## Major NPCs encountered

Dakota Brown - representative from Gentlefolks Society

Miri - young Malachandrian girl

Cassandra - her mother and leader of the Mutiny

Warlord of Malachandra - Tuku

Hyoj - Uross fisherman

Captain Cassandra - Guard captain at Karsoon

Augray - Seroni Bardic mage at Keroon

Theadorn - Priestess of Athena at Keroon

Ares - God of War

Mission - To explore beyond the recently reactivated portal to Malachandra

# Mission to Malachandra

## Phaeton

1st Fruit '98 WK

At last. Guild meeting time again. There were other missions that were of interest but the one I finally selected was announced by Princess Annelsie from the mer-kingdom of Pasifika. Yes, she was a mermaid but on this occasion she was in human-form. She was a tall, olive skinned woman with long, dark hair and was currently wearing a blue-green gauzy long dress which fortunately hid more than it revealed.

The bit that held my interest was the fact that this mission had to do with the Seven Cities of Pasifika, which I had taken an interest in. Apparently they used to be inhabited by philosopher/mages and I suspected that many secrets of Magecraft was still hidden there somewhere waiting to be discovered. This mission involved the Central City, named Pasifika, which had sunk beneath the sea at about the time of Penjarre. It, and the other cities, had a set of six trilion portals which connected that city to the others. At this time most of them had been deactivated.

Princess Annelsie told the assembled that the portal to the city known as Malachandra had been reactivated just over three months ago and her father, King Kierl, wanted a party of adventurers to go through and see what was on the other side. So far, nothing had come through but guards had been posted at this end, just in case. From my researches I knew that Malachandra was located on the world of Thunor, the fourth planet out from the sun (Alusia was the third) and that city was associated with the element of fire. Thunor itself appears as a red, starlike, object in the sky and, astrologically, is also associated with fire.

Payment for this mission was to be 2000sp, a Pearl of Waterbreathing, and salvage.

So I assembled in the meeting room with the other members of the party. These were:

Ghengis - 'I hit it'. He called himself a Holy Warrior, sworn to smite the forces of evil where-ever it is found. He's also a beginning firemage. He's stooped and bucklegged from several years of horseriding and had buck teeth which he was proud of.

Hargan - 'I don't do the swimming thing'. He's a non-mage but does have the Detect Aura talent. He prefers using ranged weapons since he's Life Aspected and is also a good cook. In appearance he's 6' tall and a bit bulky and is dressed in sandy leather armour.

Grendel - The only one I had adventured with before. He's a Mind Mage, as well as a warrior/military scientist and more mature than when we had first met. He's 5'9" with one emerald green eye and the other being sapphire blue. Also his hair is red with white streaks. He was clad in hard leather armour and carried a black orcish staff.

Vila - a rather well known E&E thief. Also has a low ranked Remove Curse and is a low ranked Healer. He's 5'6", well dressed, and appeared to be in his early twenties.

Ishmael - A Dark Celestial mage and one who seems in need of redemption. Struck me as a rather

blood-thirsty type, especially when he said he was an assassin. Long curly hair and rather rough clothing.

Finally I'm Phaeton. 5'4" sandy hair and tanned skin. I'm a Solar Celestial, and Master Healer as well as being a mid-level alchemist, artist and philosopher specialising in magic. Because of my pact with the Healer God, Diencecht, I'm not allowed to kill, which suits me just fine.

After some discussion, and a feeling that the scribe notes needed to be kept secure by encryption, Hargan became the scribe while Grendel was the Military Scientist and Vila the party leader. Hargan had suggested that I become the leader. Thanks but no thanks. That's one job I definitely don't want.

We then spoke about what we needed. The Princess's astrology reading indicated that the other side of the portal was very dry so we decided to stock up on food and water. A small handcart was obtained to help carry the supplies.

Afterwards I obtained a Rank 11 Greater from Vila which cost 2000sp then a Lesser from the Guild Earth Mage for 600sp. Vila also had some 10pt Wiccan Restoratives which he distributed to the mages - one each.

That night I tried Reading the Night Sky but the sky was too cloudy.

#### 2nd Fruit

Spent most of the day in the library searching to see if anyone else had been to Thunor. Couldn't find anything but did find a set about a trip to it's equivalent off-plane. Vila reckoned it could be helpful.

That night could see enough of the night sky around Thunor to do a reading on what we could find there. What I got was:

"Thunor rides high and bright in the constellation of the Scales. It is a time of judgement for the red planet. The scorpion's claws reach out, but grasp only emptiness. Death (the Scorpion) is separated from life (the Maiden) by judgement (the scales)".

Extremely obvious as Thunor was currently in Libra which lay between the constellations of Virgo and Scorpio. However it did imply that events on the planet could also be in the balance.

#### 3rd Fruit.

Did two astrology readings. One was what we would find there and the second was what dangers await. Curious though. After the second I started getting this strange tune in my head and had to find someone to interpret it. Turned out to be a song about some sort of revolution. Hargan should be happy.

The two readings were:

Astrology Reading One: 'What may we expect to find on the Red Planet?'

As Time and Space come bending back to shape this star-speckled scene,  
The tranquil tears of tragic joy still spread their silver sheen;

Along the Grand Canal still soar the fragile Towers of Truth;  
Their fairy grace defends this place of Beauty, calm and couth.  
Bone-tired the race that raised the Towers, forgotten are their lores;  
Long gone the gods who shed the tears that lap these crystal shores.  
Slow beats the time-worn heart of Mars beneath this icy sky;  
The thin air whispers voicelessly that all who live must die --  
Yet still the lacy Spires of Truth sing Beauty's madrigal  
And she herself will ever dwell along the Grand Canal.

Astrology Reading Two: 'What dangers await on the Red Planet?'

Do you hear the people sing?  
Singing a song of angry men?  
It is the music of a people  
Who will not be slaves again!  
When the beating of your heart  
Echoes the beating of the drums  
There is a life about to start  
When tomorrow comes!

Will you join in our crusade?  
Who will be strong and stand with me?  
Beyond the city walls  
Is there a world you long to see?

Then join in the fight  
That will give you the right to be free!

Do you hear the people sing?  
Singing a song of angry men?  
It is the music of a people  
Who will not be slaves again!  
When the beating of your heart  
Echoes the beating of the drums  
There is a life about to start  
When tomorrow comes!

Will you give all you can give  
So that our banner may advance  
Some will fall and some will live  
Will you stand up and take your chance?  
The blood of the martyrs  
Will water the deserts of Mars!

4th Fruit

It was time to go so we met at the docks. Our conveyance turned out to be an extra large bivalve

half-shell which was being pulled by three large orca. Several mermen were working around the shell while Princess Annelsie, her handmaiden, and her bodyguard/captain - a rather large and muscular man - were supervising. Most of the shell was left open but a small area had been partitioned off. Several boxes and crates were being loaded on board.

For some strange reason Vila presented a bunch of flowers to the princess as we descended the gangplank to the shell. Once our gear was secure we found places on the deck, out of the way.

Finally we sped off, travelling through the day and resting at night. Only the Princess knew Common while both her and the Captain both knew Pasifikan. This gave Grendel the opportunity to practice his Pasifikan and merfolk. Soon we were all having impromptu lessons in both languages.

#### 13th Fruit

Finally we arrived above the sunken city. The spot was marked by a large raft, put there by the Gentlefolks Society. Several small boats and some outrigger canoes were moored along side. A building had been constructed on the raft and we could see various Alusian humans working around it.

Upon arrival we were met by the current Society representative, a Dakota Brown. He told us that the portal was about 50ft below. The raft was moored above the central pyramid.

Anyway we were invited to stay for lunch - Pasifikan style. As it turned out this took quite some time to prepare but when we got it, about mid-afternoon, it was delicious. The roast pork was the best I had ever tasted. While we were waiting we arranged to have our equipment waterproofed.

Afterwards we were shown examples of the local culture. It was 'interesting'.

#### 14th Fruit

Finally we were ready to go. Before we left, waterbreathings were cast on us all and we were handed the Pearls of Waterbreathing for the return trip. We slipped below the waves. Down below we could see the sunken city stretched out below us. The central pyramid was the most distinctive feature. Four large roads radiated out from each face. Four large buildings were placed equidistant around the pyramid all surrounded by a circular road. Other buildings and more radial and more concentric roads made up the town.

The west main road led to a large square. Arranged around the square, two to each non-road side were the trilithon portals, 8ft high and 5ft wide. Around one of the northern trilithons was a collection of merman guards. It was this one we were led towards.

.2.

The plane of exit of the portal was also Alusia. From somewhere, Ghengis produced a live pig, put a rope around it and tossed it through the portal then pulled it back after a minute. The pig was still alive. Last magic to impact - Translocation. Ghengis then broke the pig's neck and offered the corpse to Hargan as dinner. Hargan refused as he's a cook, not a butcher. Meanwhile Grendel did a Limited Precog and saw the party in a dark corridor with torchlight shining at the far end.

It was dark down here so Ishmael put witchsights on the rest of us. While the rest of us dithered, Ghengis went through the portal and was back a few moments later with a young girl in his arms. She looked Pasifikan and was dressed in a kilt, shawl, blouse and sandals. My empathy detected something odd in her mind, as if something had broken. Bit out of my league unfortunately. The Generic True Name of the animal that provided the wool was something called a 'Martian Merino'.

Ghengis told us what he had found. It was dark and cold, but dry, on the other side. A road led from the trilithon square and went towards a walled city, inside which was a pyramid. He had seen her with witchsight and decided to bring her back for questioning.

Just then she woke up and began to scream hysterically before babbling something in a language similar to Pasifikan. One of the merfolk tried translating but all he could make out was that she had been sent to watch if something came through and something about a prophecy.

It was finally decided to take her back in the hope that she would calm down in familiar surroundings. So, once we had Resist Colds, all round we went through.

It was dark on the other side alright, mainly because it was night. My eyes quickly adapted and I was able to recognise several familiar constellations, enough to tell me we were somewhere just north of the equator. The city and the road was there, just as Flash said, but he failed to mention the fire burning on top of the pyramid. The road led to a large gate in the city walls, about a mile away, and, around us, we could make out other structures. Just then we saw a fast moving object rising in the west. It looked like a small moon.

The girl (Generic True Name - Human) was gesturing frantically at us to follow her so we did. Just before we left I quickly checked the other trilithons. No other portal keys were in.

The other structures around the portal square proved to be mausoleum and it was towards one of these we were led into. She did something to a panel in the side of the crypt and a section of floor opened up showing rough hewn steps leading down. After we entered the trapdoor, the girl closed it behind us by using a lever on the tunnel wall.

It was dark down here and all we had were our witchsight. So I cast a Friendly Light on my crystal dagger which only Grendel and myself could see. The steps went down 600ft before reaching a rough hewn tunnel which we proceeded along.

As we walked we noticed that the air was thinner here than it was on Alusia but we weighed less, about half of what we were on Alusia. The girl was looking very nervous, especially at the point where we estimated we were passing under the city walls. After about a mile or so, the tunnel walls changed from rough-hewn to brick and it was obvious, that we were in a sewer. Finally we reached a junction of sewers which formed a large, circular room. A platform had been built over the ground, on which was a large table. Two other exits led from here and, at each exit, including the one we came through, were a couple of guards. Another couple were at the table talking. All were dressed similarly to the girl in dark colours. When the girl saw them she became relieved, shouted something out which Grendel interpreted as being 'They're here' and rushed up onto the platform. At this everyone, including the guards, became excited.

Ghengis strode boldly up the steps to the platform and introduced himself as 'Hope of Mankind'. The woman at the end of the table, who the girl was currently hugging, looked rather quizzical at that. She then rubbed an amulet around her throat and, in perfect Common, introduced herself as Cassandra and the young girl as Miri, her daughter.

Cassandra told us that they were what was left of the Mutiny against the Warlord who had been ruling Malachandra for as long as could be remembered. All the citizens were geased by the Warlord and his priests so that they couldn't leave the city. I DAed a couple of guards and discovered that the geas rank was 10 and the MA of the caster was 23. The priests worshipped, and were pacted to, a god called Ares and they sucked the blood of innocents by sacrifice when Terror and Fear rode high in the sky. The Warlord was a combination fire/mind/necro mage and his priests are a mixture of mind and necro mages. He resided deep in the middle of the pyramid and his priests/minions wore his symbol - a rams head over flames. While she was explaining Ghengis was working his way through a check-list of evil. It looked like he wanted to serve the Warlord with a citation or something.

She then told us that a blank tablet in her possession suddenly had writing appear on it. From it's directions they had found the portal key then dug a tunnel to the portal square, inserted the portal key in the appropriate trilithon, and waited for heros to come through to help remove the Warlord. The way to do this was to find his death which was currently located under the Face of Mars, and return it to him. I suspected that the Warlord was undead.

Once the information on how to destroy the Warlord had been placed on the tablet it had erased itself as many of the original mutineers were wiped out in the subsequent battle. The information was supposed to have reappeared in twenty years but, instead, it took 400 years. Someone forgot to carry the two?

To make things worse, the Warlord was planning a grand project, designed to help him invade the third planet - ours. This consisted of a large magical cannon which was being built on the slopes of the nearby Great Mountain.

The only beings who might know where the Face is are those that dwell along the canals. They are called the Seroni and are tall, thin beings with pointed ears, probably this world's equivalent of elves. Their skin is so pale to be almost white. A few canals ran through the city so we guessed it would be a matter of following one until we found some.

Just then there was an alarm from the guards. Something was coming down all three passages. The guards went down one, just as a Wall of Stone appeared over a second, courtesy of Cassandra, and we could see some humanoids approaching down the third. At first I thought they were undead but they proved to be some of the Warlord's minions. They were all dressed in grey. Cassandra later told us they were Grey Guardians. They are Mind Adepts. There were also Red and Black Guardians which are Fire and Necro Adepts respectively.

All of them were protected by Undetectabilities so we could only see one or two each. There proved to be five. Three were charging down the front, a fourth was right behind while a fifth (with more rank symbols than the others) lagged back preparing to cast spells. Since we knew them to be Mind Mages Ghengis and Hargan went forward to meet them while Grendel dropped a Mind Special Counter on

the platform. Ishmael blasted the area with Blackfire then went in himself. Vila starting casting Quicknesses.

Just then Ghengis fell over, the victim of a Mental Attack and there was nothing I could do about it. Grendel went in to fill the gap by standing astride Ghengis's supine form.

There wasn't a lot I could do to directly affect the opposition so I dropped Coruscades on Grendel and Ghengis (just before he fell over) while Ishmael put Shadowform on Hargan. Following that, I put a Wall of Darkness behind the spellcaster in the corridor to block off their retreat.

Meanwhile the frontline fight was raging on. Two had already dropped, one courtesy of Vila's Sleep spell. Both Grendel and Hargan were showing battle damage so I went behind Hargan to assist with Healing spells. Grendel backed off to let Ishmael in. Hargan was badly stunned for a short while, another effect I wasn't able to do much about, but he was lucky enough to recover quickly. Then Hargan took a mighty blow which laid him low. At that moment I felt a Trollskin spell impact on him but realised that a Healing potion was required quickly in order to give him a better chance of survival. So one of my 20pters went down his throat.

By then it was all over. The remaining guardians were either dead or slept. Cassandra's guards had also been victorious in their fight and returned. They wanted to immediately kill the ones we had slept - so did Ishmael.

.3.

Fortunately we were able to talk them out of that. One of the guards were dead, another had a broken arm, and a third had a nasty slash on the leg. While I was dealing to them, Genghis was eagerly disposing of the bodies by stuffing them in something he called a 'Well of Worlds'. He was so eager that I had to stop him from grabbing the dead guard as well.

Just then there was an alarm that there could be more coming so we all decided to bug out. We headed off down the sewers, crossed a few ramps, before reaching an area where a crude settlement had been built, deep under the city, way out of telepathy range.

The dead and injured were rapidly conveyed to their infirmary where their healers were waiting. Their leader, a Rank 6 Healer, was rather surprised, and a bit annoyed at us for bringing in a dead body but his expression changed after the resurrection worked. It was a pity I couldn't communicate with the other Healers though otherwise I could have apologised for being pushy in his infirmary. Also, much to Cassandra's surprise the guard's geas was gone. Could be useful. This led Hargan to suggest a 'sure-fire' method for removing everyone else's geas. A death and life mission he called it. Rather too drastic for my tastes.

After dealing with that, I asked to examine the tablet that had been found. It proved to be a thin sheet of metallic material closely inscribed with Pasifikan runes. The metal is a bronze alloy and was preserved against corrosion. The runes themselves are similar to those found in the ruins at Pasifika and Serendip. I couldn't detect any other magics on it.

Once we had the runes translated they gave directions to a trove of items useful in the plan to defeat

the Warlord and a letter from the past. The letter read:

'To Katelina, our child and our hope...

Our names are Sione and Akenese. We are your true parents, but by the time you are able to read these words we will be twenty years dead, having given our lives for the eventual freedom of the people of Malachandra.

The auguries tell us that this is the only way. We have concealed the last of the keys to the portals which stand outside the city in the secret place. You should place the key in the gate in the hope and expectation that others will find it. These others will be able to leave Malachandra and seek the Warlord's death in the place where it is hidden, under the Face of Mars. We do not know where this is, but believe those who dwell outside may know of it. It is not unguarded, this we do know, and we can but hope that those who come to explore through the gate will be strong and will be willing. The death must then be taken to the Warlord and touched to his cursed flesh. We have also placed a certain amulet in the secret place that will allow you to speak with them if they know not our tongue. There are other things there that may be useful, or may serve as reward for those who risk their lives for freedom.

Our hope and prayers go with you. May Tane Mahuta smile on you, our child

Sione

Akenese'

But because of the error in the original enchantment the tablet had been passed down from descendant to descendant. Cassandra was that descendant.

We then checked out the treasure cache. Not many items there but there was one for each of us. Curious though, it was as if whoever had put them there knew roughly who would be coming through. Mine was a device that, when triggered, projected a view of the night sky as seen from that point in time. Very useful for reading the night sky rituals. There was also a feature that would identify the location of known astronomical objects.

We spent the night in a six bed bunkroom.

15 Fruit

Next day a young girl came in with breakfast. While the others went off to 'interview' the prisoners I checked on the patients in the infirmary.

A while later Ghengis came rushing in. The first one that they had woken up had killed himself with a hollow tooth containing a rather virulent poison. Vila wanted him resurrected so I did so. The other one, a woman, also had a poisoned tooth so that was removed. Then the guy tried killing himself again, this time with poison under the fingernails. Again I was able to neutralise it. However Vila wasn't able to get any useful information out of either of them so we gave up in the end. Let Cassandra's people deal with them.

There wasn't much more information we could gain here so we set off on our mission. Before we left

Vila had managed to convince Cassandra to pass over her throat translation amulet. Hope he remembers to give it back.

It was night as we made our way through the City of the Dead and headed towards the south-west canal. This was the only one that was still full of water and was the most probable one to lead us towards a Sauran city. There was a good chance that someone there would know the location of the Face of Mars.

We climbed over the canal stopbanks and reached a path that ran alongside the canal. Soon we were heading away from the city, upstream. Phobos was streaking overhead and I noticed that the night was darker and there were more stars. Hargan was doing leaps and bounds as we progressed.

It took us two and a half hours to reach the edge of the farmed area around the city. We were all Unseen so it wasn't too hard to evade the guards.

#### 16 Fruit

Five hours later it was dawn. In the dawn's pink light I could see Freya and another bright 'star' which I surmised to be Alusia. We could see a black figure in a boat up ahead who was fishing. At first glance it looked like a humanoid seal completely covered in fur and with long whiskers. Ghengis commented that here was a good market for razors. Vila, Ghengis, and I went to have a closer look.

#### .4.

The entity's name was Hyoui (GTN = Uross) and he told us that his village was several miles further up canal. At this close range he looked more like an otter than a seal. He offered us a few of the fish he had caught. Generic Martian Trout they turned out to be. According to him they were good eating. They were too when we had them for breakfast, along with some of the red moss growing nearby.

No he hadn't heard of the Face of Mars but the village priest might know. He worshipped Poseidon.

Hyoui went upriver in his boat while we walked. On the way there was a lot of banter between Ghengis and Ishmael. Vila thought they were both mad. He's probably right.

A couple of hours later we reached the Uross village. It was surrounded by a wooden stockade fence and was built into the canal side of the embankment. Two guards wielding spears were at the entrance but we had no difficulty in getting in.

Once inside we found the local priest. Yes the Seroni probably would know where the Face was but we had missed their trading ship by four days. It would take us a month or so to walk to their city. (Incidentally he referred to Malachandra as The Dark City. No one went there).

I decided to cut to the heart of the matter and asked, through Vila, whether or not the priest knew the location of the Face. He didn't but offered to do a Waters of Vision. We accepted so he removed the cover off a font, which contained some oddly blue water, and incanted over it. The picture formed of what appeared to be a humanoid face mask, made out of stone, looking straight up, resting on a sandy red plain. There was no sign of anything green in the area. It looked very old and weathered but didn't

appear natural.

As far as the priest could tell it was a very long way off and he suggested that we should see the Seroni first.

After a lunch of red bread and marinated fish we headed off again. Since it was going to take so long to walk I decided to cast Wings on myself and do a test flight. The best I could get was 100ft above the canal where the air was moist enough to provide lift. This was only 10 odd feet above the height of the embankment. Away from the canal the air was thinner and I couldn't fly very high, about 20ft max. We finally settled on 50ft above the water, just about the same height as the path. So I cast Wings on the others and we all flew off.

Near the horizon, out in the desert, he spotted a dust cloud which didn't seem natural. He believed it was a small horde (a hordette?) of Thark which were on their way to attack the Uross village we had left.

From what we could see it was a good possibility that he was correct in his supposition so we U-turned to tell a nearby Uross workcamp, who were making repairs to the embankment, then, as they left rapidly to alert the village (one of them was a Water Mage with Mage Current) we flew off to intercept the Thark.

As we did so the Thark horde swept into the arable area along the canal. We could see a small group of seven riding eight legged lizard like creatures, later identified as thoats. The Thark themselves looked like a cross between ogres and lizardmen.

We landed near a grove of trees that the Thark were passing and, while Ghengis challenged their leader, Vila Quickened us while I put Coruscades on Ishmael and Hargan. Hargan had his bow out and was shooting at the opposition as they charged at us.

The leader ignored Ghengis's call for single combat so he flew back to join us. Ishmael then wanted me to put up a Wall of Starlight with the reasoning that since these looked like lizards they were Dark Aspected. I thought he was wrong since that didn't logically follow, especially since they were operating during the day, and said so, but I did it anyway. Turned out that I was right. They were Light Aspected. So much for that wall.

The fight was fast and furious - well fast for us anyway. Several of us had to dodge trample attacks from the thoats, including the ones without riders. In fact the Thoats proved to be semi-sentient, more so than the average warhorse and fiercely protective of it's rider. The Tharks were attacking with large battleaxes which was causing Ghengis some difficulty.

It was magic that turned the tide, between Grendel's mental attacks, Vila's slowness and Ishmael's Blackfire, that gave us the victory in the end but at the cost of the party extremely fatigued and some members badly injured. The Tharks and Thoats gave no quarter and fought to the bitter end. We were forced to kill them all, just to survive.

The Tharks didn't have much in the way of salvage either. Fortunately for us, a bunch of Uross showed

up, with the intention of aiding us in the battle but arrived too late, and one of them was able to create Waters of Healing. Unfortunately none of them had any Restoratives.

.5.

Hargan examined the Thark hide and announced it would make very good leather so Ghengis and Ishmael started putting in orders for boots, belts and other stuff. Vila objected to us carrying around smelly hides with us. Finally Grendel zapped the hides back to the Guild for safekeeping until we got back.

The next Uross village was 10 miles further up-canal so, after looting the bodies, we flew over there and spent the night.

17 Fruit

Before leaving Hargan was presented with two Waters of Strength. We flew off and camped somewhere along the canal.

18 Fruit

More flying. Passed the 500 mile point from Malachandra. Landed at another Uross village where Ghengis nearly managed to insult the chief and probably got nearly got us fed to the Hanakra - crocodile-like toothy creatures in the canal. Hargan paid for our stay by teaching the natives about bows and arrows.

19 Fruit

More flying. Grendel was scanning the canal for a Hanakra as he wanted to catch one as their hide also made good armour. Vila decided to fly behind Grendel so he could watch the spectacle of a Hanakra leaping out of the water to gobble up the Mind Mage that ventured too close. I believed Grendel's attempt was doomed to failure as the canal was nearly a mile wide, telepathy only ranges for a few hundred feet and we were flying close to the edge. Hanakra are more likely to be in the middle.

Finally we landed somewhere along the canal.

20 Fruit.

Still more flying. Just before we landed we could see something glinting in the distance ahead. It was probably the Seroni city so we flew an extra hop that night so we could walk in the next morning.

21 Fruit

The light of the dawn showed the city in all its splendour. Several spires rose into the sky. Around the city was a 50ft wall, the only major gap being where the canal went in. Around the city the ground was cultivated. Boats were sailing in the canal and others were floating in the sky - a combination of a material called liftwood and air magics. Both sets were under sail. Several people were out doing early morning tasks in the fields and on the water. Their clothes appeared to be simple tunics. Obvious guard posts were placed near the city walls and on the perimeter of the fields.

We walked in, still with our wings on, and were immediately spotted by the guards and intercepted. They spoke something similar to elvish, but related to that as much as Eralein is. From what they were

saying this was the city of Karsoon where the Goddess dwells.

The guards took us to a large gate in the city wall. There, we were put through formalities before being let in. Also Ishmael counterspelled the wings.

We then met with Captain Cassandra. He was tall with white skin, blond hair, and pink eyes. Almost albino looking I thought. Ghengis decided to be completely honest with him and explained the whole story. 'You don't look like mighty heros' he said at one point. Ghengis replied with 'Looks can be deceptive - in this case we're undercover, really deep cover'. Cassandra told us that we'd be better off speaking with the Chief Librarian. Apparently this place had a huge library. I was getting rather interested in this until I realised that all the books were in a language I can't read. What a disappointment.

He also told us that this city was dedicated to the Goddess Athena, the Goddess of wisdom and of military matters. This was because of the threat of the Warlord and his minions down the canal. Also worshippers of Ares and Athena just don't get on.

We were given an escort and led through the city. There were lots of wide white streets and the buildings were whitish as well. The main thing that broke the white was the odd tree located in the middle of plazas. On the way we passed a large ornate building, the Palace of the Prince, Prince Zotekos.

After crossing a bridge over a dried-up canal, we reached a parthenon area in front of the library. We were asked to wait while the guard had a quiet conversation with someone inside. He came back later with a young male elf. In perfect Common he introduced himself as Augray. It didn't take us long to determine that he was a Bardic Mage.

Once inside the building we were led into a waiting room and Augray went off to pass on our requests. Food and drink arrived while we waited. Finally he returned and told us it would take at least a week for them to find out what we needed and the suggestion was that we should contact the Oracle at the temple.

There wasn't much more we could do at this time so we were taken to a guesthouse. There we were treated with hot baths - with attendants. I waved mine away indicating I was quite capable of taking care of myself. We had a room each, all surrounding a central atrium.

## 22 Fruit

We were all invited to the temple to an audience with the priestess. I didn't want to go as my pact with Diencecht says I should limit my association with other deities. However Ghengis insisted so I went - under protest. When we arrived inside the main feature was a large statue of the goddess depicted as a maiden wearing a gown and carrying a spear and shield.

The priestess arrived shortly after. She introduced herself as Theadorn and was told of our adventures and reasons for being here. She seemed to know quite a bit about us somehow, probably because of a combination of DAs and quick divinations. She then wanted to speak to us individually.

I was dreading this when it came to my turn. However she reassured me that Diencecht didn't mind me being here. She also said that 'wisdom doesn't come just through knowledge but through experiences as well. Don't neglect the emotions.' I left, puzzled by what experiences she meant. However there was a parting gift as well. I had been blessed so I could read the books in the library for the week that we would be here. At least that would help stave off boredom.

Once we regrouped we discovered that Ghengis had accepted a pact with Athena, Ishmael had managed to ditch his demon and was now swearing allegiance to Hades and Grendel had his pact with Itemanuka affirmed. The strangest one was Hargan though. Apparently his gloves had a couple of twin souls inside them and they would be able to get them out if he could find bodies for them to occupy.

As far as transportation to the Face was concerned, the best that they could do was to arrange for us to take regular shipping flights to the nearest city. After that, we were on our own.

.6.

That night, in an attempt to find out what we would encounter in the Face, I did a Reading the Night Sky ritual and got the result 'Helga and Murlyn meet in the Claws of the Scorpion while Fear rides overhead'. That led me to theorise that we were going to meet both weapons and magic.

The fastest route to the city of Cydon, the closest one to the Face was worked out but the next airship going in that direction wasn't leaving for another week. I spent the time researching in the library as I wanted to find out as much as I could about the world we were on.

#### 29 Fruit

Finally it was time to go. We climbed up to the top of one of the spires and boarded the ship going to Biblis-Fons. It was called the 'Wind of Truth'. Once aboard, we were shown to our cabins, one each. The ship was 300ft long and 75ft wide and carried cargo as well as 25-30 passengers. After settling in I went up to the observation deck to watch the departure. After all moorings were removed, the Captain cast Mage Wind and the sails filled with air. We were on our way, 500ft high, following a ribbon of green. The canal itself was dry and empty.

Most of the flights were uneventful as we moved from city to city. Each city was dedicated to a different deity which was dominant there and we had to spend 1 to 5 days in each one. It was going to be a very long trip. Also we noticed that each captain and ship mates were all air-mages and devotees of Zeus.

#### 01 Harvest

After a 800 mile flight NE we arrived at Biblis-Fons, dedicated to Zeus. Managed to get the next flight that afternoon to Tharsis. Again it was a long flight of stairs up to the ship. I was speculating on lift-wood platforms that could convey people up and down. We boarded the 'Tempest' and again followed a dry canal. Most of the trips I spent making sketches of the scenery.

#### 03 Harvest

700 miles to the NE was Tharsis, a city dedicated to Hera. All five canals leading out of here were dead.

#### 04 Harvest

An early morning start to Ascaraus Lacus, located another 700 miles to the East. I had a bad feeling about this city as it was dedicated to Aphrodite. I hoped for a very short layover.

#### 06 Harvest

Unfortunately my wish was not granted. The next outgoing ship was not for another five days. Ghengis and Grendel were interested in finding out what had happened to the planet to cause this decay into dryness as our travels had indicated that this planet had been greener.

So we went to the library attached to the temple of Athena, where I found that my blessing to read the books had been renewed. Also Grendel had been giving me elvish reading lessons to pass the time. What we discovered that the planet had been greener but had fallen under the effects of a curse and had gradually dried up so canals had been built by the Selini and the Uross to bring water from the poles. The curse was now gone but the effects still remained. Ares had been partially responsible. Also the Tharks preferred a drier climate so they had been destroying Uross settlements as well as parts of the canal system. After learning this Ghengis was definitely considering racial genocide. The cities not supplied by working canals were supplied by some sort of small portals but it was a temporary system at best.

#### 10 Harvest

Finally left Ascaraus Lacus on the 'Whisper Wind' and followed a live canal east for 700 miles.

One feature we did see was that, near Ascaraus Lacus, the ground below us was blanketed in fog. We were told there was a swamp under there where a major earthquake breached the canal walls. Lots of dangerous creatures lurked down there. Occasionally we could see flying reptiles.

#### 12 Harvest

Reached Candor, a city dedicated to Hermes.

#### 13 Harvest.

Left Candor and followed a working canal NE.

#### 15 Harvest

650 miles later we arrived at Lunae Lacus, a city dedicated to Artemis. The last 200 miles we had followed a dead canal north after reaching an intersection between two canals. The water in the Grand Canal was prevented from flowing into the other one by a Uross built levees.

#### 17 Harvest

Sailed on the 'Sunrider' in a NE direction following a working canal.

#### 19 Harvest

Arrived at Idaeus, a city dedicated to Demeter.

#### 20 Harvest

Left early morning and headed ESE along a dry canal. Late that day we encountered a green area, the bottom of an ancient sea.

### 21 Harvest

500 miles along the canal was Niliacus, another city dedicated to Athena.

### 23 Harvest

Finally left Niliacus and headed east towards Oxia, following a water filled canal. Arrived there at the end of the day. Oxia was dedicated to Apollo and, as well as being the Sun God, was the local Healer Deity as well. I was hoping to learn from them - with Diencecht's permission.

### 24 Harvest

I did manage to help out a bit and discovered that they were able to use their empathy to monitor several people at once, without needing to concentrate. Wish I could do that. Could come in very handy - especially in combat situations. Maybe I should research this when I get back.

Anyway we left Oxia and followed a dead canal to the NE. Our next destination was Dinsoor, located three days and 900 miles away.

### 26 Harvest

The trip was taking us over mountains. I was making sketches of the view and muttering something about 'if this keeps up I'll be out of red pigment'. Vila was lounging in a deckchair nearby while Grendel and Ghengis were practising swordplay with each other. They were a little cramped for space though.

Suddenly the pink clouds ahead turned reddish and the ship shuddered to a halt. Crewmen began running to the nearby ballistae. It was then we noticed that a flight of pterries were coming towards us, each one being ridden by a Thark. Ishmael and I put Wings on ourselves just in case.

There were ten of them in total. While Grendel went Undetectable, Ghengis grabbed Grendel's crossbow and managed to score a brilliant hit on a pterry. The pterry was knocked out of the sky but it's rider managed to leap onto the side of the ship. Meanwhile Ishmael and I were trying to dissuade them with Bolts of Starfire. As a Quickness descended upon us, I noticed that one pterry was losing height and didn't seem to be in control of itself. It finally smacked into the side of the ship.

By now the Tharks were leaping onto the deck, six on the forward deck where we were and four at the rear deck where the Captain and crew were controlling the ship. The Captain and mate both fired lightning bolts while the ballistae crews also fired. One bolt hit a Thark point-blank.

By now it was down to personal weapons. The Tharks were using spears. Ishmael was hit and Ghengis nearly got skewered. My first attempt at a Coruscade failed but, after a short while, managed to put them on those two. Meanwhile Vila had dropped Quicknesses on everyone on the front deck (except the Tharks of course) and was heading off to the rear deck to do some there.

Three Tharks had arrived on the starboard side and the other three on the port. The starboard three were quickly knocked down but the defenders to port were not doing so well. One sailor was already badly hurt so I went over there to do what I could. As I finished with him, another was knocked over. It was fortunate I was bending over as two of Hargan's arrows passed over my head.

The rear defenders were also faring badly. The Captain was already badly hurt but that seemed to whip

up the rest of the crew into a battle frenzy. After putting up the Quicknesses Vila also turned the tide by Slowing the opposition.

Finally we defeated the Tharks but several of the crew were badly injured. So was Grendel. Unfortunately he was Undetectable so the only way I found him was spotting the spreading pool of blood then literally tripping over him. Fortunately Ghengis could see him so, between the two of us, he was healed up.

.7.

The Captain started a ritual and, after an hour, the storm ahead dissipated and we were on our way again.

#### 27 Harvest

Arrived at Dinsoor that morning. City dedicated to Dionysus, God of wine. I just hope the others weren't planning on getting too drunk. The next flight to Cydon, also dedicated to Dionysus, left in the afternoon. Between the two cities was a dry canal. Arrived in Cydon that evening and were conducted to a hostelry.

Ishmael borrowed a Crystal of Vision and cast out for the Face. He went east for 50 miles but didn't see it. That night I did an astrology reading in order to determine where the Face was. The answers I got were 'When Darkness looks to the dawn, truth looks to the sunset' and 'Further than you thought but not as far as you may think'. Both answers were rather cryptic and I had to remind the others several times that I don't do chicken entrails.

So we went to the Temple of Athena and spoke to a librarian in the hope that there was a local map or someone had recorded the position of the Face. When I showed him a picture of the Face he pulled out a scroll. On it was a report from an explorer who had been captured by the Thark and escaped. The ones to the north-west talked about the Face of Ares and, 400 years ago, many of them had been shanghaied into building it. They also spoke of the dead who walked and the red men. At that, the librarian looked at us strangely. Hargan pointed out "We aren't red - quite unlettered actually'.

It seemed likely now that the Face was somewhere to the west. In that direction, a few hundred miles, was a marsh. "What lives in the marsh?" Ghengis asked. "Marshians!" replied Vila.

Later, Ishmael used the crystal again, this time going 80 miles WNW. Bingo! His view was a couple of miles up and he could also see pyramid shapes in the vicinity. Another ruined city?

#### 28 Harvest

We headed out of the city before dawn and Ishmael did witchsights on us all. Once the sun came up I cast Wings, enhanced by Vila, and we flew off into the desert. I was glad the idea of flying at night was vetoed as we could only fly 20ft above the ground and there were several mesas and lumps of rock we could fly into. The ground and rocks were various shades of red. We also saw the occasional Thark and encampment.

Finally we saw the Face. There were no Tharks in the vicinity or any sign that they had been here. I suspected they deliberately avoided the area. The Face was 800' long and 200 ft wide and nearly 100ft

high. There was no sign of an entrance at ground level so, with the assistance of the Wings we managed to reach the top. There, in one of the nostrils, was a door which was trapped with Necrosis. Grendel detected several minds below.

I put a Necro Counterspell on Vila and he succeeded in removing the trap and opening the door. There were stairs leading downwards into darkness. Before descending, I cast a Friendly Light which affected Ghengis, Hargan and myself.

The stairs led down to another door which Vila opened. On the other side were two skeletal like creatures, seated at a table, which immediately got up and attacked. A flash from Ghengis's sword blinded one and he and Hargan attacked the other. Ishmael leapt on to the table and had a go at the second, with Grendel close behind. I was considering a spell but decided not to as it wasn't long before the first one crumbled, but not before hitting Ghengis. Instead I DAed the second one and discovered it was a Skeletal Guardian. Grendel then finished it off. Ishmael cast Shadowforms all round.

Vila poked a Wizard's Eye in the other door and discovered there were 18 skeletal opponents in the other side, 8 bowmen, 8 swordsmen and two of them had what looked like wands containing Investeds. This could be nasty. We had just had the entree, now it was time for the main course.

.8.

Then I felt magic impact - twice. Vila quickened us all as Hargan opened the door a fraction. An Agony suddenly fell upon us all but I was able to hit three of the bowmen with a Sunray. Suddenly Ishmael charged through the door and attacked. He was hit by several blows, and an arrow, and was frozen in fear as he beheld the two wand wielders. These were not ordinary skeletons, these still had the ability to cast magics. One was necro, the other mind.

My second Sunray attempt failed as Ghengis decided to use my delayed action fireball scroll in an attempt to take out the mages. He then sent a flash of light from his sword just as Ishmael collapsed. So Ghengis leapt out and stood boldly over Ishmael as arrows flew towards him, none penetrating. But the Mental attack did and Ghengis was slumped over Ishmael. More skeletons got the Sunray treatment and Hargan managed to slip out and retrieve our fallen comrades.

Clearly we needed to regroup and think about this so we bugged out back up the stairs. Ishmael and Ghengis were restored to consciousness and I strapped up Ishmael's chest which had taken a grievous wound. Meanwhile Grendel cast special mind counters all round.

Vila and Grendel went down below in an attempt to do something about the spell casters. Vila's attempt to TK the agony wand failed but Grendel was able to teleport it away and to us. Hargan and I both analysed it and found it to contain four charges of Rank 10 Agonies with a 70 percent chance of working.

So we tried again. Vila handed me a 5pt restorative with an instruction to use it only when necessary. Before going in Vila Quickened us then Slowed the two mages. Meanwhile Grendel went Indetectable. I just hoped he didn't get too badly hurt as only Ghengis could see him. I put down a Necro Special on the area we were standing on.

Vila said 'I reckon we should go in there and blast the shit out of them' and that was basically what we did. I put up a Wall of Starlight to cut off one set of bowmen while Hargan went in and started dealing mighty blows which soon wiped one out. Even skeletons must suffer when hit in the groin. Just then another slipped through the Wall and slammed the door shut leaving me and Vila on the other side. It was also jamming it making it impossible for me to open it. All I could tell how the battle was going was the sounds of weapons hitting bone and the cries of my comrades.

Finally I managed to get the door open, probably because someone had removed the blocking skeleton. Just as I did, Vila pushed me from behind, being uncharacteristically keen to join in the fight. I was hoping to Sunray the two mages who had a fallen Ghengis between them but a couple off arrows and an attacking skeletal swordsman took care of that idea, and my conscious state.

It had been fortunate that Vila had been quick on the mark with Healing potions otherwise the outcome might have been a lot different than it was. Many of us had been close to dying. Vila later commented that, if Hargan had fallen over as well, he (Vila) could have been a candidate for the Star of Alusia.

All we could do now was rest up and heal. This room had been cleared out but it had taken quite a lot out of us. I suspected that it would get tougher as we got close to the Warlord's Death. I pray to Diencecht that we would have the strength and will to succeed.

.9.

Once all the opposition had been dealt to, we rested then Vila cast about with a Wizard's Eye. Most of what he poked into seemed to be storerooms, kitchens, and barracks although I believed that the ball of string could be useful. The chests under the beds could also be interesting. I was also hoping he'd find the library. Ghengis agreed with me. He said a fire would be useful.

One of the rooms found was rather ornate and nearby was an alchemical lab so it looked like there were quite a few places to look at. So, after some healing was done, we set out on a looting mission. The chests under the cots had assorted coins plus other miscellaneous gear. Total worth: 320sp. There were also four bits of amber, one of which had an insect encased inside. Once that was done we went to the kitchen and had a hot lunch.

Down a nearby corridor we found a black armed statue. We decided to leave it alone in case it animated as we approached. Instead we found a bath house but there was nothing interesting there. Not so in the following room. There, we encountered seven skeletons, armed with tulwars, seated around a table playing cards. When they saw us they rose to attack. The door was swiftly closed.

The opposite room contained good quarters and a chest so Hargan began DA practise. The chest contained clothing and a few silver coins. The next room was also ornate, There was no chest but a loose stone in the wall was discovered. Behind that was the chest. Vila dragged it to the centre of the floor to work on it. Inside was 220 silver, 10 gold, a pair of non-magical gold earrings worth 20gp, and a non-magical gold armband worth 80gp. The next row we only found 15sp.

Apart from dealing to the possible animated statue, our only choice was to deal with the skeletons. There were two ways of getting into that room so we decided on a two pronged attack. I put on a

Friendly Light to help my cast chances while the others rushed in. Ghengis shield barged one while Hargan and Grendel both dealt mighty blows. However even the Friendly Light didn't help as all three of my Starfires fizzled. Grendel was hit badly but the others waded in. Soon all the skeletons had been shattered.

I split one of my 20pt Healing potions between Grendel and Ghengis while the others searched the room. They turned up 81 silver coins and a handful of bone dice. Also a secret door was discovered behind an old battle scene tapestry.

Vila insisted that we go back to Cydon so we did. It was evening when we arrived.

We spent two days in Cydon arranging for as many Rank 11 Waters of Healing that we could afford. Nearly all the accumulated treasure was used as well as what monies we had on us. I chipped in 600sp. We ended up with two each except for Vila and I who had three - a total of 14.

### 29 Harvest

The next morning we flew back to the Face on Ishmael's Wings. I was trying to put Coruscades on everyone when a miniature raincloud appeared above me, complete with lightning bolts and heavy rain. Hargan said that it would last nine hours. I had to improvise a hat to keep the rain out of my eyes.

As we re-entered the Face, we noted that the rooms we had already investigated were still clear. Finally we went through the secret room. On the other side was an ornate room. On the wall was sword and scabbard. Its aura indicated it was cursed and modified the wielder's behaviour, probably berserking. Someone suggested that it get mailed to Guild Security. Ishmael demolished the desk and found nothing. Meanwhile Hargan rolled up the carpet and discovered a trapdoor in the floor. A rope ladder dropped to a corridor below. A ladder at the other end went up to another trapdoor so Ishmael dropped down for a look.

When he opened the other trapdoor, he noticed it was very dark in there. In the light of his torch he could see two mounds of metal getting up so he threw his torch in and closed the door, but not before getting hit by a giant glaive. Vila sent in a Wizard's Eye and could see assorted weapons around the walls. Guess this must be the armoury. It was guarded by two iron golems, based on Tharks, so it was suggested that the 'rust mage' be sent in. I think it would take more than a little rain to stop those things.

Next we found a bas-relief set into the wall and the mouth was magical with the nature being Opening. Vila tossed an Opening spell at it and the wall swung open. On the other side was a rich looking bedroom. The bed had bronze bedsteads. The icon of Ares on the wall was destroyed and the carpet rolled up and placed on the bed, along with the gold candlesticks. Inside the desk was several sheets of parchment. Grendel determined they were philosophy of magic notes.

The next room along was a study/chemical lab. All the equipment was there but no ingredients. Those were found on the other side of a secret door once the Rank 20 Darkness, the TK Rage ward (which slammed some of us against the far wall), and the Undead Guardian were dealt to. I had to drink a WoH after that.

So we went into the storeroom. Ishmael spotted a leather covered chest which had somehow been covered with an Undetectability. Grendel put a Counterspell on it so we could all see it. Once Vila had it open we discovered a bag, a book, and a box in it. The book had Necromancy all through it's aura while the box contained an assortment of Healer potions. 'Healer in a Box' someone called it. The bag contained loose coin, 50 gold and 50 silver. The book was carefully put away then we searched the shelves for something that would be useful against the iron golems. The strongest I could find was sulphuric acid. Everything else suitable had gone off. Then someone asked how much would the golems be worth as scrap metal. Ishmael replied 'We're not scrap iron merchants - scrap gold maybe'. Meanwhile Grendel and I were scavenging as much lab equipment and chemicals as we could as we had agreed we were going to combine efforts to make our own lab, in the next building from my hospital.

Back to the statue. Couldn't find any animation wards, or any other kind but a tapestry nearby had a secret door in it. On the other side was a corridor with monks cells along it. In each cell was a spirit guardian. Another room contained enough priestly robes to equip the entire party. Right at the end of the corridor was a painting of Ares. Beyond that was a the remains of a library with a couple of books on the table. A dark chamber lay beyond that. Somewhere in that darkness was a mind.

It was decided to take out the guardians so we waited by the statue while Vila Slowed them while Grendel put down some counterspells. There was no reaction so we went in. This was supposed to be done one room at a time but Hargan and Ghengis did the first door while Grendel went through the second. Just then I was Mental Attacked and lost consciousness.

By the time I woke up it was all over. Grendel had been badly damaged but Villa had already dealt to most of it. No treasure was found in the side rooms.

While Vila opened the door at the end, Hargan picked up Ghengis claiming he was preparing a paladin. I wondered just what rank he had in that weapon. Just as the door opened we were all blasted with Blackfire. It was then I remembered there was something vitally important I had to do in a side room. After a short while I rejoined the some of the others. Ghengis, Hargan and Ishmael were currently engaged in fighting something in the magical darkness beyond. So I threw a Light in - and wished I hadn't.

By the time I recovered from the shock of seeing the gruesome thing Ghengis had finished it off. It collapsed into a pile of black armour, black cloak and black gloves. The armour and cloak were non-magical but the gloves were toxic. Also two silver candlesticks were put in the treasure pile.

While the statue to Ares was demolished, Vila found the door that his Eye had already determined there was sold rock behind. Instead, after it was opened, we found what appeared to be a black tunnel leading into the distance. It was a portal and we soon surmised it led back to Malachandra. We would need such a short cut if we had any chance of getting back by the next Guild meeting however I suspected it led straight to the heart of the Warlord's seat of power - probably to the Warlord himself.

I gave away my two remaining Waters of Healing to people who needed them as we were running low. Shortly we discovered a lightning ward between two false doors, designed to trigger as soon as

someone stepped into that area of the corridor. So a barricade was built to deflect the bolts before the ward was triggered.

Once that was done it was decided to go for the golems so Ishmael loaded a mana tear with Whitefire. Vila triggered it through a Wizards Eye but nothing happened. So he decided to give up for the day.

Back into town again.

### 30 Harvest

Again it was decided to cash as much of the treasure, including all the healer potions (2 20pts, 2 skin salves, 2 bone salves and 2 tissue salves) for as many Waters of Healing as we could get. Also the necromantic book was ritually burnt in the temple of Athena. Finally we received 16 more Waters of Healing. I ended up with another three.

### 01 Vintage

Back to the Face. This time the golems were our target. Hargan used his magical grillet to burn a hole through the trapdoor while Grendel made himself, Ghengis, Ishmael and Hargan Undetectable and I provided Coruscates. Then they went up the trapdoor and attacked the golems. I was going to provide covering fire from the ladder with Bolts of Starfire but I just couldn't get them to work. One of them actually caused pain when I cast.

Finally the golems were destroyed. None of the weapons were magical but all were silvered and some were extremely well made. There seemed to be enough tulwars to equip Guild Security.

.11.

Well maybe not quite but there were certainly quite a few weapons in here. I picked up a selenium dagger, very similar to the ones we had found on the moon. Grendel already had one of those.

Once all the weapons were examined and stashed, it was back to where the lightning ward was. Beyond that was a trapdoor, our way down to the next level. Fortunately it wasn't trapped.

There were stairs below and Vila noticed that the fifth one down was dodgy. So we threw things at it. As the first objects hit, the stairs folded into a ramp and a pit opened at the bottom. It reset five minutes later. So we went down and carefully jammed the step so it couldn't trigger the trap.

A cavern opened up beyond the stairway and we could see what appeared to be a water filled canal crossing it. Ishmael claimed both for the 'Ishmael Development Corporation.' We were rather suspicious about the canal by the time we got there so it was completely DAed over. It proved to be an illusion even down to the raft floating downstream. It was something similar, but not identical, to an Illusionary Terrain. Sine our Wings were still active, we flew over it.

On the other side were a collection of earth mounds. Just then Grendel's danger sense went off, just as undead began rising from the mounds. Many of us were affected by the fear aura but I did get in a Bolt of Starfire on one before we were all blasted by at least three lots of Blackfire. We beat an 'orderly' retreat - well sort of.

Vila figured they were nightgaunts so, after healing up (another Waters of Healing downed) Ishmael put Special Knowledge Celestial Counters on us all. Ghengis and Grendel went Undetectable and Vila Quickened us before we went back for another go.

This time as they rose, Ishmael and I dropped Counterspells in those areas while Ghengis and Grendel charged, Vila Slowed then and Hargan shot arrows at them. Ghengis's target didn't last long and the other one in that area began smoking from a Sunray. Once the closer ones were wiped out I switched to Starbolts. It didn't take long before all the Undead were vanquished. Unfortunately, no treasure. Ghengis and I sanctified the mounds before we continued. I scrounged a gutbuster off Vila and followed that up with a Waters of Healing.

Beyond the mounds was a three sided pyramid. A massive door was in the side facing us. Vila poked around inside with a Wizard's Eye and discovered that the interior consisted of four rooms, an inner triangular one surrounded by three corridor-like rooms. The inner room contained a triangular table, set for dinner. Frescos of people feasting lined the walls. Two of the other rooms, not the one immediately through the door, also had frescos on the walls. The one on the right were of a gladiatorial scene while the one on the left showed a battle.

Vila got the door opened and we stepped in. No wards were found in here but part of the floor was found to be unstable. Again that was jammed so it couldn't collapse.

We went right towards the gladiatorial room. As the door opened a voice sounded with the words 'Praise Ares, may his ...' The rest of the words were drowned out by several loud raspberries from the rest of the party. Also the mosaics flared into light.

After a minute or two, two figures leapt from the frescos and attacked. One was wielding a net and trident while the other was in full plate with a sword. They appeared to be some sort of illusion/phantasm which was confirmed when the net was dropped then appeared back in the wielder's hand. Grendel managed to split one in half and it disappeared, but reappeared in the next second. Also my special anti-magic bolt caused the other one to flare.

Then I DAed the fresco's themselves and determined that what would deactivate them was a Mind Special Counter. Unfortunately it was too far away for me to cast the spell but Grendel was able to withdraw and do so. The figures disappeared.

We checked out the rest of the pyramid and found no treasure. All the other frescos were also hit with a Counterspell before we entered the room. However, under the central table, I found a trapdoor in the floor. Below that was another set of stairs terminating at a set of black double doors.

.12.

Vila poked a Wizard's Eye through and saw three undead guardians accompanied by several skeletal guardians. The biggest guardian appeared to be conducting some sort of ceremony in front of a blood encrusted altar.

One of them saw the floating eye and at least three sets of Telepathy sort us out. I managed to resist

two of them. That was quickly followed by the wave of Agony. Ghengis was still keen on giving them a right royal hiding but saner heads prevailed and we retreated back up the stairs.

Grendel put Mind Special Counters on us all while Vila was renewing his Wizard's Eye. Suddenly hair was sprouting all over him. He looked very shaggy and there wasn't a lot anyone could do about it for a while. He then sent an ultra-powerful Evil Eye through it but it seemed that they resisted. One of the skeletal warriors used a bow to shoot at the eye and managed to hit it, causing it to dissipate.

I put Coruscades on Grendel, Ghengis and Ishmael then Ghengis and Grendel went Indetectable. The plan was that the fighters would go in behind a barricade while Vila and I would fire spells from the rear. Lanterns were set up to increase my chances of getting my Sunray off and Vila had set up an Enhance Range area so the spell would reach the Guardians at the other end.

So that's what happened. The doors were flung open and the charge occurred. It wasn't long before the barricade was sprouting arrows. Unfortunately my first two Sunray's failed. The fighters then shifted the barricade to the left to attack the skeletal warriors there. This left the right side bowmen free to fire and one arrow found its mark while I was preparing spell number three. Fortunately I didn't lose it and it blasted into the guardians at the same time Vila slowed them. However, they countered that by drinking Quickness potions. I then moved so the barricade could provide more cover then drunk my last Waters of Healing.

That was basically how it went. Lots of hack and slash (from both sides) accompanied by the occasional spell blast (when I got the spell going. I'll have to rank it - it's too useful not to). About halfway through the fight, I noticed that Vila had summoned his pet skeleton, Gerald, to join in the melee. Plus their mind spells weren't touching us, a fact for which we were grateful. The most unusual thing that happened was that Grendel grew an extra head which immediately began arguing with the original one. I hope I don't have to amputate it.

There was an explosion at the rear. Vila had thrown a grenado. One of the guardians was using a Fear Rod on Ghengis because he was doing the most damage, but Ghengis was staunch.

Finally I was down to my last Sunray. I cast it, but instead of getting a blast of light, a cast-iron frypan appeared in my hand. Fortunately it was non-stick and I was able to drop it. If it's permanent, I'll gift it to Hargan.

The thought of him prompted me to check on the status of my comrades and, through the fight, I could see Hargan was down with a guardian standing over him. I charged over there while preparing a 20pt Healing potion and, while the Guardian was otherwise occupied, by Ishmael, I stabilised Hargan's condition.

By then there wasn't many of them left and it wasn't long before they were vanquished.

The weapons and wands were examined. The Fear wand was empty but the Agony wand has charges. Meanwhile the Vampiric Touch spell that had been placed on the swords, which had sucked life force on successful hits was already fading. Curious though, it was a Mind College spell rather than the

Necromantic one I thought it would be. Something to do with vampires being Mind Mages I suppose.

I gave Ghengis a 20pt potion and did what I could for the others, even though I was feeling rather fatigued. Vila cast about with a Wizard's Eye and discovered a circular room containing coffins, another that contained the remains of a library, and a third that contained a black altar and a pulsating heart plus something that made him rather fearful. Meanwhile Grendel picked up quiescent minds in a similar direction.

Because many of us were rather fatigued, Vila insisted that we should go back to Cydon to rest up. He also 'suggested' that we spend at least a week training, especially my Sunray spell.

So that's what happened. I ranked Sunray to Rank 6 (I had also ranked it during the long voyage here) and also Healing to 7. Ishmael wanted to sell my services as a Rank 8 Healer but I refused, insisting that healing should be freely available to all. I only accept donations.

08 Vintage

Finally it was back to the Face. Vila did a Wizard's Eye and discovered that all the undead guardians could see it. After I did a Friendly Light, it was Mind Counters and Coruscades all around. We suspected they knew we were coming. Also I put a Sunray in both of the two mana tears that Ishmael had.

Vila wanted to deal to the other rooms before doing the altar room so that we wouldn't have opposition coming at us from behind. So another Wizard's Eye was sent out to check out the rest of this area. The circular room contained five coffins, arranged four around one. The four contained crumbling corpses but the centre one contained a human female with a very pale complexion. All of us thought 'Vampire'. I was rather surprised when Hargan replied that he didn't have any garlic cloves in his cooking supplies. 'Stakes, garlic, a frypan is the next thing that comes to mind' was someone's remark.

Another room nearby had fifty humans in glass topped coffins. A few were mummified but most were perfectly preserved. These were where the quiescent thoughts had come from.

To get to the round room, we went through a secret door then down the corridor. Vila suggested that I put up a Wall of Light in case the vampire tried to retreat. So I did. Unfortunately something went wrong and the range value dropped to zero. This resulted in the Wall forming around us causing Ishmael some damage because of his Aspect. The next one did work.

Once at the room Grendel opened the door. Just then the four outer coffins were hurled away from the centre one, because of a TK Rage ward, smashing against the walls. One of them was thrown into Ghengis. Someone described a cacophony as 'the sound of falling coffins'. Hargan I think. Grendel then teleported the lid off the central coffin. When Ghengis looked inside it was empty. Ishmael poked around with a sharpened piece of wood and discovered it was indeed empty.

Just then Vila was treacherously attacked from behind by the vampiress who stabbed him in the back then sank her fangs into his neck. I had been in the process of building up enough righteous anger in order to generate a Sunray to wipe out this evil temptress but Ishmael beat me to the draw with a Whitefire. The vampiress turned to dust. Instead I cast Healing spells on Vila.

We found our way to the room with the glass-topped coffins and discovered that the preserved people were still alive but in a state of suspended animation. From what we could tell they were not undead and not evil. There seemed no way to open the coffins and the glass proved to be magically unbreakable. Also here were traces of a necromantic life-linking ritual. This led me to look for similar life-linking threads like I had seen on Greyhawk. Once I had cast a Witchsight on myself I could see them. There were two sets. One was leading from the coffins and headed up to where I suspected the portal was and the other set went to the room that had the heart. This led me to theorise that they were linked to the undead in the heart room. That meant if we damaged the undead, they would heal themselves by draining the humans - not a desirable outcome. As far as I could see we had to get that heart out without encountering the undead guardians and Grendel had already used his object teleport for the day.

We went back to Cydon to think about this. I tried an astrology reading to determine what could be used to neutralise the links. My attention was drawn to the red star in the heart in the Scorpion. That meant that the answer had to do with the Warlord's Heart. Grendel also did a divination with a similar question and got the reply 'Touch the Death to the Undying One and Life will return to the Unliving'. We came to the conclusion that bringing the Heart to the Warlord would snap the links and allow the people to be revived.

#### 09 Vintage

Next morning we were back there all powered up with Coruscades, Witchsights, and Mind Special Counters. I could see the life-links heading into the room but they didn't seem to be heading to where the heart was. When I told the others Ishmael wanted to know how I knew that "I'm studying Mathematics" I replied. "Just like a lighthouse in a desert." Ishmael replied. "Very bright and useless." I decided that wasn't worth a reply.

All the guardians were spellcasters so we wanted to get rid of them as fast as possible. Vila dropped an enhancement on the area so I could have a better chance of getting the Sunrays I was going to rain on them. So, once the door opened, Vila triggered a mana tear and I fired off the spell. Both worked but didn't destroy their targets. The two closer ones came into melee. So the Sunrays were directed at the meleeing guardians and the master guardian at the rear. Hargan was affected by a Fear and took refuge. Meanwhile Grendel killed a prepared mouse.

We basically had to cut them down as fast as possible while resisting their spells and dodging their weapons, some of which had the vampiric touch spell on. Ghengis blocked a blow with his shield which shattered it. The blow then went on and slashed his arm. I drained my power crystal with two Sunrays and one of the guardians vapourised. Ghengis managed to get the second. Two more came in.

After a while one of their fear attacks took hold and Grendel fled. That left only Ishmael and Ghengis fighting while Vila and I did what we could with spells. Four more were destroyed by various means by the time I ran out of fatigue. Grendel and Hargan had recovered and were on their way back however it was looking very grim for Ghengis. Another blow struck him and he was drained - dead. Ishmael had also been knocked unconscious but Vila was able to drag him clear while Grendel and Hargan continued the fight.

I took Vila's last gutbuster so I could continue casting. Fortunately I quickly recovered from the shock of the internal damage and tried to get another spell off. It didn't work, just as Grendel was cut down.

I was torn between trying to save the others by continuing to blast the Guardians or rushing in to try and save Grendel. I finally realised I only had one choice because of my Pact so I went in and stabilised Grendel while Hargan, and Gerald (Vila had triggered him as Grendel fell) held off the opposition. Then I let loose with another Sunray that vapourised another. The other two had also fallen. Only the Master was left and he had been proving resistant to my spells.

We backed off leaving Ghengis's body behind. Vila covered our retreat with a magical grenade. Fortunately the master guardian didn't follow us out but we realised we still had to destroy it quickly. So, for as long as I could, I kept putting Sunrays into a mana tear and Vila triggered them at the master guardian through a Wizard's Eye. Finally it was destroyed, using my very last spell. I felt so tired but there was no time to rest. Others needed my skills.

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There was nothing I could do for Ghengis at this time as I didn't have the energy to use any of my semi-magical Healer skills. Instead I patched up where I could. Meanwhile Vila discovered a coffin behind a secret door behind the fake heart which had the symbol of Ares on it. Prudently, he left it alone. Also he found a 20pt Healing potion on the master guardian. That immediately went into Grendel which meant I was down to my last one.

Once I was finished I followed the threads until they disappeared into the back wall. Vila found another secret door which he opened but careful investigation showed that the entire room behind was one huge pit trap. There was another secret door in the opposite wall. We were all too weary to cope with that so we retreated to the remains of the library.

What a library. All the texts appeared to be necromantic and evil and written in a foreign language. Nothing here of use at all. Rather disappointing really. Many of the worse looking books were stashed for 'later cleansing' as Ghengis put it.

We slept for quite some time and estimated it was mid-afternoon by the time we were refreshed. I put more Healing on Ishmael and Grendel as well as putting a preservation on Ghengis.

Now all raring to go, we took another look at the pit trap. Vila was able to bypass it and we entered the room, opened the opposite door and into the next room. Inside was a small pile of treasure in the corner consisting of a small chest, a pouch, a javelin and a couple of silk pouches. I recognised the javelin as being a javelin of shocking while the pouches both contained fine dust. One batch was Dust of Appearing while the other was the opposite type i.e. Dust of Disappearance. The pouch contained miscellaneous gems while the chest contained a Crystal Ball, some assorted coin, and four potions: Heat-proofing, Mind Cloak, Finding, and Heal Burns. It was about now that we noticed that all four walls, the floor and ceiling were all made with Cold Iron. Definitely a magic-free zone.

The threads disappeared into the back wall. There was no obvious way to get through so we burnt our way through the wall with carefully applied applications of sulphuric acid. Behind there was a cavity. Inside the cavity was a black box. Two sets of threads went into it. It seemed reasonable that the other set were going to the portal, two levels up. The box itself was locked and trapped but we needed to get inside to get the heart out. One of the magical traps was a very powerful Hellfire and the rest were

probably just as nasty.

It was decided to get it out and deal with it in controlled conditions at Cydon. Plus we needed to do something about Ghengis. Usually, someone who has been recently resurrected requires at least a month or so to fully recover but we couldn't afford that luxury. Maybe someone at the Apollo or Athena temples can speed things up a bit.

So we TKed the box out. I was a bit worried there would be an adverse reaction as we moved it but nothing happened. With that, and some of the necromantic books, we headed back to Cydon. Once there Ghengis was taken to the temple of Apollo.

#### 10 Vintage

Next morning Ghengis had been resurrected, feeling hale and hearty, and very keen to go back in. Meanwhile the box had been examined and the Hellfire dissipated. Vila was able to open it and found a beating heart inside it. We got it divinated and discovered it was alive, evil, completely full of necromantic magic, and linked to a group of people and one individual. As far as they could tell it was invulnerable to direct attack.

#### 11 Vintage

Back inside the Face to finish the job. The coffin only had dried earth inside it and looked as if it hadn't been used. We deconsecrated it. Couldn't find anything else down there so we headed back to Cydon.

The cash was turned into two Waters of Strength and four Waters of Healing. Meanwhile Grendel did a divination to determine the best time to attack and got the answer, "When others sleep, he wakes, and is closer to the gate". We finally concluded that attacking between midnight and dawn, Malachandran time, would be the best.

So it was early afternoon, Cydon time, that we went back to the portal and tried to go through it. However the cunning basket had put a brick wall over the other end. We needed to demolish that before going in but wanted to do that quietly. So the last of the acid was carefully used to dissolve the mortar and the bricks were removed, one by one.

On the other side was a room that looked like it hadn't been used in several hundred years. It was dark and dusty with a trapdoor in the ceiling. There was no catch on this side. Vila used a Wizard's Eye and discovered a carpet and a couch on top of the trapdoor. Also there were two grey guards by the door and a black and red garbed figure kneeling at an altar doing devotions. From the way the threads were angling, that had to be the Warlord. I was able to determine his approximate location in the room above by noting where the threads were going and marked that point on the ceiling.

We only had one shot at this and it had to be good. The crystal ball was employed so Grendel could see his target and he teleported the heart straight in, right over the Warlord's bowed head. It dropped on top of him and he screamed as he succumbed to the effects of galloping senility. Within minutes there was nothing left but a grey husk on the floor. The threads vanished.

The guards had been wary as they had detected minds below them where no minds should be. Now they were shell shocked. Ghengis chose that moment to burst up through the trapdoor, sending the

couch flying.

Just then, a rather handsome man wearing black leather, and a small black beard appeared in the room. This had to be Ares and he was thoroughly annoyed, demanding to know who had done this to his servant. Ghengis claimed responsibility. Ares glared at him, especially when he realised Ghengis was pacted to Athena and hence better left alone.

Ghengis then suggested that maybe the guards should be punished as they were lax in their protection. So Ares burnt them on the spot before heading off on a rampage. We disappeared back through the portal to check on the people in the glass coffins.

Halfway down the second level, we met a group of confused people working their way back up. It turned out those were them and one of them, Sione, was the guy who had written the original letter. Akenese was also there. The last things they knew was they had been captured by the Warlord - his name was Tuku back then - and imprisoned. As we made our way back, they were brought up to date.

When we got back to the temple, located somewhere in the pyramid, it was in a mess. Ares had sent many of his priests to a rapid end. I was sure he was going to regret that later. Also there was fighting in the streets. Many of the citizens were up in arms and in revolt against the Warlord Tuku's tyranny. Most of the others went to help but I managed to find my way to the revolutions headquarters and helped out in healing the wounded.

12 Vintage

By mid-morning some sort of order had been restored. Also, while going through the pyramid, they had found a box containing the rest of the portal keys. I showed them which was which and how the system worked. At least we were going to be saved a wet trip back via Pasifika. Instead I plugged in the Beth-Salem one which would take us to the Western Sea of Grass. From there it was only a few days back to the Guild. However, because of the slightly longer Thunor day, I discovered it was about the 27th of Vintage when we arrived back. Either that or I miscounted a day or so during that long trip around the planet.