

THE ENCHANTER'S BOX

The Characters:

<i>Gustave</i>	Human warrior, big guy tanked up in plate mail. Obvious choice for party leader.
<i>Silverstone</i>	Human, amateur mind-mage. Quiet type.
<i>Caskette</i>	Short, round human. He's another mind-mage, and eats a lot faster than he moves.
<i>Kelovar</i>	Handsome elven shadow mage, but I won't hold that against him - seems lots more sensible than Whisper.
<i>Dramus</i>	Skinny elf in black robes, likes playing with skulls - so he has to be a necromancer but I gather he isn't a vampire like Dilvish. Can't see his face.
<i>Quasar</i>	Another celestial mage, but a star mage, and human. He likes to live inside dark blobs.
<i>Adam</i>	Huge white-haired fire giant. My kind of person, except that he's a stick-in-the-mud (earth mage).
<i>Flamis</i>	Me. I burn things. I'm a fire mage, you see, and I've got blonde hair, and people say I'm cute - but only when they don't think I'm listening. I might burn them... And I can fly real good!

December 31st 1990

They didn't tell us what this adventure would be about. Only that it wouldn't be too difficult. That got me curious, so I went along to find out what was going on. The party introduced themselves to each other. Gustave got elected party leader, and I said I'd be scribe (Basalic keeps telling me to keep a diary, anyhow). Then, in came Herkum, the head of the guild council. A very important person.

Anyhow, he told that he had this simple delivery type mission for us. All we had to do was to get these 50,000 silver pieces (in SILVER - heavy) to this person called Kenrik at the Inn of the Laughing Gnome in a place called Dunkirk, about 200 miles north-east of here. He would give us a wooden box, which we would bring back to the guild. Without opening it. Dangerous.

Herkum told us that this Kenrik person would only be there for only two days, but that wouldn't be a problem because he'd get the Lord of the Bats to give us shadow-wings so we could fly up there. Then he gave us two things. A map with a landing spot marked. Thirty miles from Dunkirk! That'll be a hike, but can't scare the natives... The other thing was a ring with curious geometric patterns on it, by which Kenrik would be able to identify us. The guild would provide anything else we might need, within reason.

Herkum left, and we set to arguing about how to approach the problem. We figured it might be best to fly at night, so we wouldn't be seen, and decide to leave at 2am in the morning, over Caskette's vigorous objections. He don't like flying at night, 'cos he don't see too well in the dark, and he said he had "some preparations to make". I reckon he wants to party tonight. We booked the shadow wings, and then went to see the guild Earth mage to arrange for a "strength of stone" spell to be cast on the giant just before the shadow wings. So he can get to carry all that silver. Caskette had snagged the ring, but after I whispered to Gustave about my necklace, he made him give it to me. So I've got the ring, tucked into my magic purse.

Then I went to the fire college, and used the big bonfire there to do a protection against magical

fire spell. Which worked first time. I think I'm getting better at this sort of thing. It'll last a week, so we might be back by the time it wears off. Then I got some sleep, before seeing the New Year in, at the big party in the common room.

By half past one everyone was gathered together. Quasar had been star-gazing, and had an astrology reading for us. Didn't make any sense, but then, they never do. It read:

"The Kraken dies in the desert sun.
Pandelon takes home his prey.
The winged unicorn has his fun,
And goes on his snowy way."

We were all ready to go, except we couldn't find the necromancer, until Kelovar remembered that he had tripped over a body on the way in. Apparently Dramus had been skulling, really got into the spirit of things, and was now dead drunk. Of course, the Lord of the Bats refused to cast wings on him in that condition, and when I offered to do a fire-flight on the drunken elf, Gustave didn't think that was a good idea either. He'd probably end up flying into a tree at a hundred and twenty miles an hour, and find out what being a corpse really feels like.

So Gustave had to get a "strength of stone" too, so the giant could carry the elf, and we'd just have to split the silver among the rest of us. I suggested that Dramus might be a bit more sober after three hours at a thousand feet up, and that we could stop, and I could cast a fire-flight on him then. But it wasn't enough. After some calculation we realised that we couldn't carry the elf and the silver. I was going to have to stay put, and fire-flight us up there tomorrow.

Gustave quickly copied the map for me, and the others prepared to leave. Then we realised that Caskette wasn't in the room, so that was that. I'd have to find the lazy lump, and either get him off the ground right away, or fly him up tomorrow. Oh, joy. My head aches already at the thought of all that spell-casting.

1 January 1991

Predictably, Caskette decided to stay put, and to use fire-flight in the morning (my infravision doesn't work through the fire-corona, and if I can't see, I can't fly). I woke at six-thirty, had a hot meal, and purified. Then I went to the library, and made a map of the route north-east, taking note of suitable landing-places. One thing, the fire-corona should keep us warm. Imagine flying at a thousand feet on shadow-wings, in the dead of winter. Brrr...

I found the necromancer eating breakfast, and told him to go to the fire-college, and wait for me by the big fire. Caskette was still asleep, and insisted on feeding his face before we left. I took the opportunity to pack a few things I'd left out last night, since we weren't carrying any of that confounded silver, such as my tarp. Good thing as it turned out.

It was ten o'clock before we took off. Caskette didn't look even slightly stung by the fire-flight going on. I must be getting better. The two of them played loop-the-loop, while I cast it on myself. I think I've made a pair of converts there! We shot up to a thousand feet and headed north. Forty minutes later, and Dramus managed to crash-land which is pretty hard with fire-flight, which sort of lands you on your feet, but apparently he'd managed to break both his legs last time he flew with shadow-wings. Is he accident-prone, or what?

After a hot meal, and a fire, I felt ready to cast again, but missed a couple of times, and knew I'd have to rest soon. Sure enough, I fell asleep as soon as we landed. I woke some hours later, to find Caskette had put up my tarp over me, and that he had built a fire ready to prepare some dinner. But it was nearly sunset, and when I pointed out that there was just enough daylight left to fly to our destination, they agreed that we'd better take off again. So we did.

Twenty minutes later, we were flew over a road heading north-north-east, with the forest on either side. Looking awfully like the one on the map, but too far north. Opps... We flew back, and landed at the cross-roads. It still wasn't the right place, but they ought to find us here. It was getting COLD!!!! We built a fire from what wood we could find, ate, and then tried to get some sleep, huddling together in our sleeping sacks and cloaks to prevent ourselves from freezing to death. I picked the only hot spot, right on top of the embers, 'cos I was still heat-proofed.

At nine o'clock I heard shouting, and woke to find that the others had arrived, with another tarp, and blankets! Back to sleep, and woke next morning feeling much better. Dramus had found a novel use for one of his necromantic spells; warping a wet log inside out, so that it would burn. I like that.

2 January 1991

After breakfast the two elves took off at a fine pace to the next village to get some horses, while the rest of us trudged along at Caskette's best walking speed - dead slow. Caskette's got a cold too. The elves came back after an hour or so, riding two palfreys, and leading a third. It got the baggage, including the dratted silver, I got to lead it, Caskette got to ride, and things got much faster.

A few miles past the second village, I heard Quasar yell my name. "Flamis, watch out!". I turned just in time to duck, as a disembodied skull whizzed through the air, straight over my head. It shot towards Silverstone, and took a chomp out of his neck. He did a runner, obviously badly scared, as the thing started back again. I tried to prepare a spell of dragon-flames, but before I could cast it, the skull was heading for me, and I had no choice but to evade, taking a swipe at it with my quarterstaff and missing.

Brave Gustave drew his sword, and as I tried to get out of the path of the flying skull, so I'd have a chance to cast at it, he attacked it, but missed. Quasar flung up a column of starlight around it, but the skull flew up, and out, heading back for us. Kelovar called out, "It's a non-sentient undead!". I continued to back off, as it went for Gustave. He swung his sword, but missed, as the skull bit at his neck. Then he went berserk, chasing it into the forest, where it disappeared among the trees before I could cast again. Swear! And the skull-bites turned out to be infected.

It was past dark when we got to where we were going. The village of Dunkirk was altogether too quiet, just a few lights shining here and there among the homes. Nobody was outside as we crossed the town square toward a lighted building, which we assumed to be the Inn of the Laughing Gnome. What's more, the big double doors at the front of the Inn were locked.

Gustave knocked on the doors, and a man's voice called out "Who's there?". Gustave answered that we were a band of travellers looking for somewhere to stay the night. The man opened the doors to let us in, and then closed and barred them behind us. As he showed us to the stable, Gustave asked him if a person called Kenrick was staying here, but the gateman hadn't heard of

him.

After stabling the horses we entered the common room (all except Adam, who being a giant, was too big for the doorway), and Gustave made the necessary arrangements with Carlan, the innkeeper. Forty silvers for bed and board seemed a bit steep, but far cheaper than another night in the open in this weather. He explained that we'd have to sleep in a dormitory upstairs, since they're expecting a number of merchants for a mead festival. Their mead didn't taste half bad, either.

There were only five people in the common room, a party of three chatting quietly, and a pair drinking noisily. I had already taken the ring from my purse and put it on my finger, and I knew that my job was to find out which, if any, of these people, might be Kenrick. I wandered over to the first group. They were locals, come to the Inn for dinner. Hadn't heard of Kenrick. Gave me a funny look when I asked them if anything strange had been going on hereabouts.

One of the two drinkers was getting very drunk. He was a local, but the man he was sitting with was a traveler. When I asked him about Kenrick, I got the distinct impression that he knew who I was talking about. He wanted to know why I wanted to know, and I explained that we had some money for Kenrick, and had something to collect from him. He didn't seem impressed. I found out later that Kelovar had read the man's aura - he wasn't Kenrick, but knew of him.

Before dinner we went outside, and gathered our gear, and at least some of the silver, and stowed it upstairs. Adam would stay in the stable overnight, while the rest of us did watches down there. We came down, to find our dinner being served. A tasty stew. And mead or ale. Silverstone got distinctly tiddly, and had to go outside. I don't think he's had beer before. Dramus and Casket got into an argument about feet and stones, and how tall they were. I tried to explain and even got my measuring string from my toolkit to show Dramus how long a foot is, but he wouldn't believe me, insisting that his overlong elven clodhoppers were each a foot long, instead of a good sixteen inches. That he said, made him about five feet tall. Shorter than me! Idiot! I gave up in the face of his stupidity and went upstairs, to sit in front of the fire, and do a flame sight ritual. I might just get to see into the future.

As I looked into the flickering flames, I saw the party, searching and investigating, though for what and where I couldn't tell. Strange, the visions are usually much clearer. I went downstairs to tell Gustave. He told me how the innkeeper had asked about us, whether we were mercenaries, since we went about armed. They had told the innkeeper about the problem we had had on the road here by way of explanation, and asked after Kenrick. The innkeeper didn't know Kenrick, but said that he could have been on a carriage which had been involved in some kind of incident on the way here. The carriage was in the stable, and the driver, someone called Park, was staying somewhere in the village.

I remembered two carriages out in the stable, and Gustave and I went out to investigate. I wanted a piece of carriage to burn in a flame sight ritual. We found Dramus outside chasing around the courtyard, apparently after an unseen Quasar. Idiots! Don't they know about not doing magic where the common people might catch you at it! We left them to sort things out, while we looked over the carriages. There wasn't much to see. One looked more recently used than the other, so I collected a fitting from that one, then the other. Both were unlocked, but empty.

I took the piece of carriage upstairs and again performed the ritual. In the flames I saw a vision

of people fighting, and looting. I couldn't make out the box in the confusion, but... I went straight down and spoke to Gustav, who was by now on watch in the stable. Then I went to bed, close by the fire.

3 January 1991

Woke at six and purified for two hours. The others were asleep when I finished except Quasar who came up from being on watch, but they weren't asleep for long. Quasar discovered that some kind person, (probably Dramus) had put horse dung inside the toes of his boots. He complained loudly, waking everybody, then tried a cleaning cantrip. Which cleaned the boots alright, but didn't get rid of the dung. Reasoning that the stuff would burn, I unlaced the boots, took them over to the fire, and tried pyrogenesis on the dung. It worked on one, but not on the other. And the smell! In the end, Gustave told him to wash them out, and leave them in front of the fire. Which he did. The rest of us went down to breakfast, and began to discuss the problem. Dramus tried healing Silverstone, then Caskette. Gustave had a serious talk to Quasar and Dramus, and I threatened to burn them if they didn't behave. They act just like my next older brothers.

We figured that the bandits (or whatever) who done over Kenrick's coach must have opened the dratted box, and let out the nasty whatsit that we weren't supposed to be capable of doing anything about. Well, we're gonna have to now. Or else these villagers are in heap big trouble!

The innkeeper came over, and asked Gustave to come with him. They went outside, and when they came back, Gustave told us that he'd been talking to one Tristan, head of the local militia. Gustave got us all together out in the courtyard (so the giant could join in), and told us that they had been thinking that we was the bandits. Indeed! Then he said that several of the villagers had been attacked by these "flaming heads" as they called them - and some of these attacks happened BEFORE the carriage was attacked. So much for that theory.

When we went back inside the traveller was there - turned out that he was Kenrick's driver, William. He and his carriage had been hired by Kenrick at Midshire. He described Kenrick as a noble, fine-looking fellow, about thirty years of age; of fair complexion, with short, dark hair and a neat beard, well-built and well-dressed; carrying rapier and dagger. William offered to show us the place where the carriage, after about half an hour, giving us time to get organised. Silverstone had the bright idea of making a net to catch the skull-thing, so I went to the store, but they didn't have any net, so I bought some twine and a handful of lead weights. Gonna havta figure out how to turn this into a net. Can't be too hard...

William led us to a spot not far from where we were attacked by the flying skull. On the way he explained what happened to him. How a skull had shot out of the woods towards the carriage as they travelled at dusk. He had called a warning, then halted the horses, and ran for it, hiding behind a tree, as several humanoid figures (it was too dark to see them clearly) ransacked the carriage. When he went back they had taken everything - even worthless things. And they made no noise that he could hear.

We carefully looked around the site, but there wasn't much to find. Caskette found some marks where William had been hiding, behind a tree, but I couldn't see a thing. He must be a really good ranger. William pointed out where the bandits had gone into the forest, and then since there wasn't much more he could do to help, he went back to the village.

Caskette and Gustave tried to find signs of the bandits' passing, but it wasn't easy. It had snowed since, and there was little to track them by, except the odd crushed bit of undergrowth. I amused myself collecting wood, figuring I'd need a fire sooner or later. It was more sooner than later when Caskette and Gustav gave up, saying they'd lost the trail. Adam tried talking to the trees, but they didn't know anything much. Kelovar tried to cast something, but the spell back-fired, giving him some kind of phobia, according to Dramus. So I started fire-building, after suggesting to Gustav that I scout ahead with a fire-flight. He didn't like the idea to start with, but after they all figured out that tree-climbing was likely to get someone killed, flying sounded a whole lot better.

Not that I achieved much. I cast, then flew up, and then along the direction that Gustave and Caskette had been rangering. Nothing. Except trees and more trees for miles. A few farms to the west, the odd clearing, but mostly trees. I couldn't spot anything in any of the clearings either. So I gave up and flew back.

Dramus had a suggestion. He proposed doing a ritual, which would summon and hopefully bind one of the skull-things. So maybe it might tell us something useful. But we'd have to sit inside this big star in circle thing he called a pentagram, for two hours. And it mightn't work, and then the thing would attack us. I figure I might as well as do a bit of ritualising of my own so I got Caskette to go get some of the undergrowthy stuff that he reckoned had been trod on. It took him half an hour, but he got me two bits. Dramus started doing his ritual, and I started on flame-sight. First bit. Vision of being squashed by many pairs of feet. Second bit. Vision of being squished by enormous splayed hoof. Very useful, I must say. Still, Casket seemed pleased. Means they really came this way. Oh well.

Dramus finished his ritual. He stood up, and warned us that something might be coming, and that we'd better get ready. A minute and a half later a skull came shooting out of the trees, heading straight for us. Oops, I thought, he's not got that thing under control. Kelovar called out something unintelligible, as I stood in the fire and prepared to cast dragon-flames. It didn't stop. I cast. Blammo! I felt the spell double-effect. The skull flared like dragon's breath, then crumbled into ash.

Dramus was furious. Seemed he did have it under control, after all. I think I goofed. Oh, well, at least I had the ashes to flame sight on, I thought, as we walked back to the village.

The village healer woman turned up after dinner, and took each victim in turn to another room. She charged heaps, and she couldn't do anything for Kelovar. Whatever he got himself scared of, he's still scared of. Meanwhile, I asked William which coach was his. I had got the right one. So I went out to the stable, and gave it a good going over. Nothing much, a few threads and stuff, not enough to use for flame sight. I told Adam about the healer, and suggested she might know where to find some of those herbs he wanted. Turned out, she did. In her own garden. At least they weren't quite so expensive.

Then, I went upstairs, and tried to flame sight the ash. Absolutely nothing. Both times. I figure the most significant thing that happened to this stuff recently was me burning it. Ever tried seeing flames against flames?

4 January 1991

Good thing I went to bed early, because Gustave wanted us ready to go by 7.00 am. Still got in my two hours purification after a bad start, so I was late to breakfast. Not as if we got away before 7.30 anyhow. Some people had to go to the shop to get some wet weather gear. It was a horrible nasty sleety morning, not fire mage weather at all. I could have happily stayed inside all day, but Gustave insisted. We were going out! So I put on my leather, my heavy cloak and boots, and sulked down the stairs.

Gustave and Silverstone had cooked up a plan. We'd spread out in a line, and comb the forest, heading north from the clearing with the pentacle. Quasar tried a witchsight spell, and backfired. I gathered from Dramus's and Adam's comments after laying hands on him that the unfortunate star mage is going to turn into a frog. Or at least will think he is. Ribbet, ribbet!

We walked (Caskette rode) for an hour through the forest, covering only two miles. Finding nothing. In front of us was a farm, outlying from the village. Leaving the others up on a hill, Caskette and I (being the least odd-looking of the party) went down to talk. But the farmer didn't want to. He wouldn't even open the door. How rude! He did tell that he'd heard about the skulls. But he hadn't seen any.

Back over the hill, and Dramus did another summoning undead ritual, while we rested under the tarps, had lunch, and tried to get warm. Caskette cast a spell on Quasar to make him think he wasn't turning into a frog. All inside the necromancer's pentacle. But nothing undead came. We were running out of ideas. I offered to fly back to the guild and tell Herkem what had happened. Let him sort this mess.

Dramus and Kelovar fell to arguing about who ought to go with me.

By the time we got back to the first clearing, Gustave had persuaded Dramus to try again. From here. And it worked. Sort of. A skull, not unlike the first, came swooping out of the trees towards us. I prepared to blast it, but it stopped, just outside the pentacle, glaring at us with its red eyes. I noticed that it was warm. Like something alive. But those red eyes glowily hotly. Of magic.

Kelovar cast a spell so he could talk to it. But it wouldn't speak to him. Dramus couldn't make it do what he wanted it to, either. It must be under someone else's control. Caskette walked up to it, and remarked that it looked like the skull of a goat or a sheep. Kelovar read its aura. Its controller was north-north-west of it. Dramus was south! Caskette read its mind. It's enchanted, and it's watching us.

Quasar stepped out of the circle. The skull went for him, but he stepped back just in time. Silverstone suggested bagging it with a sack tied to a pair of quarterstaves, but it backed away out of reach, as Kelovar and I approached. Annoying creature. I was itching to burn it. Then I thought of getting the archers among us put out its eyes with a well-placed arrow (make that two; make that one arrow and a crossbow bolt). Adam got its right eye, and Gustave missed the left, still hitting the skull. With no effect. Except it retreated into the trees.

The skull glared at us from behind a tall oak. I tried to light the crossbow bolt with pyrogenesis. But the sleet put it out. Then it was as if the tree reached out and engulfed the skull, holding it tight. Yet another use for warping wood. Nice work, Dramus! Abruptly the eyes went out. It wasn't magical any more. Its aura had changed. Adam cut it loose, and it ended up in the sack, being taken back to the inn with us.

After dinner the innkeeper came over to speak with us. He had terrible news. A farm to the north of the village had been burnt down last night, and all the people killed. I was very upset. Fires aren't meant to kill people - good, ordinary people, that is. Tristan and the militia had gone off to investigate.

Gustav wanted to see Tristan, but when we got to the house he boards at, he wasn't home. On the way back to the Inn, I had a really horrible thought. What if the burning of the farm was in retribution for my burning the skull? Now I wasn't just upset, I was angry!

Anger doesn't help the concentration, and when I put a piece of the skull into the fire to flamesight it, I just couldn't focus. Didn't matter because the stupid thing wouldn't burn. The rest of my watch passed peacefully.

5 January 1991

When I woke up the next morning, Dramus told me that on the midnight watch, they had been alerted by shouting. One of the houses in the village was burning. No-one was hurt, the woman who lived there getting her children to safety. But I was still furious. Why didn't the stupid elf wake me? I could have saved the woman's home. Didn't the idiot know that fire mages can put out fires as well as start them? He seemed to think that it was too far gone, having started in three places at once. No accident, then. There's a pyromaniac on the loose, and it isn't me.

We organised ourselves. Gustav agreed that the skull should be taken back to Seagate and divinated. So in a clearing north of the village, a decent sized fire was prepared, and Kelovar and I set off. He was coming along to find out what he's scared of. At the first stop, I did a really interesting backfire. I teleported. At least that's what Kelovar told me. I had to rest at the next stop, and it must have worked because I double-effected on Kelovar. Talk about faster than a speeding arrow... 240 miles per hour... I caught up with him circling over Seagate. For some reason he hadn't landed. Maybe he didn't know where the guild landing strip was. "Follow me," I yelled, descending. But he didn't. I saw him land somewhere to the north. Wonder what's wrong. Could it be that phobia of his?

I dropped the skull off to be divinated, and made an appointment to see Herkum. Then I took off to the library, to see if I could find out who or what "Pandelon" is. I got given a book on Krakens, and one on Unicorns, but I couldn't discover anything helpful. So much for astrology readings. Back to the skull. The Namers told me that the magic had been in the skull, not on it, and that it had been crushed by Dramus's warped wood. He will be pleased. The magic itself was out-of-college, but appeared to be related to the Necromancers' spell of animate dead.

By the time I'd had some dinner, it was seven o'clock and time to see Herkum. He listened patiently (looking rather bored) while I told him our story. He did not know for certain what was in the box, but believed it to be a magical weapon of some sort. He did agree to give me a potion of location, which might help us to find Kenrick.

It's dark, and Kelovar hasn't turned up. I'm going to bed.

Meanwhile, two hundred miles to the north, and some hours earlier. Dramus tried to summon undead again, but couldn't concentrate, and ended up yelling at everyone for making too much noise. And he wouldn't try again. So they decided to hunt up the burnt farm. They got directions

from one farmer, past a strange oak, which turned out to have mistletoe on it. One jolly giant!

They found the farm building to be burnt almost to the ground. Searching revealed nothing until Caskette found a spot of blood by the east door. Someone died here. Dramus used his talent to question the dead person, who turned out to be the owner of the farm. He had been woken by the fire, and as he tried to leave, was shot by arrows from three different directions. I couldn't have saved him anyhow. He did not know who else died or how. Caskette and Gustave could find no sign of the archers.

Adam found a cellar, which had been almost emptied of wine. Dramus and Quasar fell to squabbling over the dregs, and Quasar ended up head first in a barrel before Silverstone stopped them by putting dirt in their wineskins.

After that the party returned to the Inn. Gustave found Tristan, who was more than a little annoyed about the skull being taken to Seagate. He obviously didn't realise that we had an unusually rapid means of transport, and Gustave did not enlighten him. He's in for a surprise!

The militia had emptied the cellar, and removed the bodies. Burnt they were, but with arrows in them. Tristan could think of no motive for the killings.

Back to the Inn. They did not set watches, but resolved to be up by eleven and ready for whatever would come at midnight. They went outside into the darkened village, and lurked around the Inn, waiting. Tristan and two of the militia took up positions on a low hill that gave them a good view of the village. Watching. Waiting.

At the stroke of midnight they came. Two lights from the forest. Two skulls carrying lighted torches in their jaws. Heading for two of the houses. Most of the party converged on them. Adam shot a skull with his crossbow, but it continued. Then Gustave snapshot the other - an incredibly lucky hit! But the skulls continued, setting fires in the eaves of the house. Silverstone and Quasar tossed snow at the flames, successfully quenching them.

The skulls proved to be exceedingly hard to hit, continually eluding pursuit by escaping around other sides of the house. Then to complicate matters, Gustave was narrowly missed by two arrows, fired from somewhere hidden in the woods. He dodged back around the corner, but as Silverstone rounded the opposite corner he was shot and badly wounded. He took cover under the house.

The skulls had started on the next house, but by now the village was roused. Adam chopped a skull nearly in two with his axe, and crushed it underfoot as it fell to the ground. Caskette had caught up and was casting, as was Dramus, but it was Dramus who succeeded, warping the wood of a torch into the remaining skull. It fell, its magic destroyed. Tristan and his men had joined in the fire-fighting, but were hampered by the flying arrows. They failed to save the second house, but the people and most of their possessions were safe.

Meanwhile, Silverstone had tried to heal himself, and had backfired horribly. He ended up looking more than a little undead. Dramus and the others decided to sneak around behind the hidden archers. He crossed the stream to where Gustave could see a shadowy shape. Dramus heard a wolf growl. Then Gustave fired at the shadow. Nothing there! Dramus crept back, noisily and called out, "Illusions!". Quasar tossed a rock at Dramus, and hurt him. He told me

later that he was trying to get Dramus' attention, but at the time he yelled, "Dragons!". He's an even sillier celestial than Whisper, I'm sure of it. Nothing for it but a strategic withdrawal, back to the Inn.

It was soon discovered that Silverstone was suffering from an advanced case of leprosy. After Adam healed the damage, Gustave applied some of Adam's healing herbs, and a few minutes later he was cured. Then he went back outside to ask Tristram to keep people away from the far side of the stream. Adam joins him, intending to collect some of the arrows, and the silver daggers which had been thrown at the skulls. The daggers were nowhere to be found, but he gets some arrows (for me to burn - sensible of him).

Together they noticed that a crowd had gathered on the road. Looking to see what was attracting all the attention, they found a message crudely scrawled on the road. "REVENGE WILL BE MINE!" Gustave discussed this with Tristram, who could think of no reason for it, and arranged to meet at nine in the morning to chase the tracks.

6 January 1991

Back at the guild I woke early, purified, had breakfast, collected Flamefoot from the stables, and headed off to find Kelovar. I was stopped by security on the way out. Message for Thlamus. From Kelovar. Stupid celestial, can't even spell my name right. Said he was at the "Pink Dragon Inn", so I got directions and went to find him. Of course, when I got there, he wasn't there. He'd gone for a walk! Great way to waste time.

So I wasn't a particularly good mood when he wandered in, half an hour later, and informed me that he couldn't go into Seagate. He was scared. Of cities. I'd figured it might be something like that, so I persuaded him to let me tie him up, blind-fold him, and bundle him over my horse. I rode around the outskirts, and by the time we crossed on the ferry he wasn't so scared. But he was uncomfortable, so seeing that it wasn't far to the guild, I untied him. Big mistake. As we approached the built-up area around the guild complex, Kelovar decided it was too much like a city, and bolted. I rode after him, and tried to grab him with the rope. And missed. He escaped into some trees. I called out to him, and asked him to stay put, while I fetched someone from the guild. Well, I knew that it helped if remove curse rituals got done inside the truesilver circles they have at the guild, and I guessed they wouldn't want to try it out in the woods. I was right. But I did get this big guy from guild security to come with me. Big, and fast. Kelovar didn't have a chance. The security guy caught him, sapped him, tossed him over a shoulder, and next thing Kelovar knew he was sitting inside a circle, being de-cursed. Turned out that he had "metrophobia".

I spent the rest of the afternoon getting a silvered broadsword for Quasar, doing myself a protection against magical fire, and organising some research at the library. Cost me a hundred in silver, but I finally got to find out what Pandelon was. Philosopher told me that the reference was a bit vague. Hadn't been heard of for two or three hundred years, but Pandelon was probably some kind of demon (I should have guessed, I keep running into those nasties). He was definitely associated with rituals on the High Holiday of the Dark, and used in Necromancy. It figures.

Four o'clock, and at last we were ready to leave. Packed stacks of firewood into Kelovar's pack - port-a-fire. I had a great time casting. Six fire-flights in a row, and they ALL worked. Could have tripled on one, but decided we'd better stay together. It was after dark when we landed, on

the road east of the village. We walked to the Inn, and by seven o'clock were asleep in bed. Gustave wants us up at eleven, ready for another midnight battle. Silverstone summarised the day's events for me.

Quasar was first up, and he hadn't been sleeping well. Part of the reason might be that he had acquired a wooden collar round his neck, and the rest might be due to thinking he'd backfired a spell. When the others woke they found him trying to whittle at this thing with a knife. Silverstone was first to recite the message inscribed on the collar, "Don't f..k with a necromancer. We bite". Hum... Dramus?!! Quasar's offended snarl caused hysterical laughter, from the elven necromancer's corner. A fitting punishment, I think. Tightly fitting. Gustave decided to leave them to it.

After nine o'clock, and Quasar wasn't popular. It was time to go, and he was still eating breakfast. The others decided to let him catch up, and went off to explore the woods. Gustave found his arrow. Stuck firmly into a tree. Caskette discovered tracks, which joined other tracks, and headed north-east to a road leading to some northern farms. They carried on, but suddenly Caskette's horse stumbled. Pit trap! With sharp stakes at the bottom. Cut around 21 hours ago, according to Quasar's DA. The pony's leg was broken, but Adam healed it. Two more traps had been dug on that road before they reached the second-to-last farm. Here the party stopped for lunch. The folk at the farm told them that there seemed to be a lot of wolves around, and that the wolves weren't acting exactly wolf-like.

Finally, the last farm. All is quiet. It was agreed that Dramus as the stealthiest should go unseen and approach the buildings. Quasar also decided to disappear and explore. That wasn't part of the plan.

Dramus sneaked down to the farm. Everything seemed typical, except that there is no sign of activity. He warped a hole in one wall. Into a storeroom. A dark and ransacked storeroom. Dramus called back to the others, "It's empty. Let's go home."

Not just yet. The rest of the party came down to investigate. Gustave opened the front door. Nobody home except a bad smell. A stink not quite like stale sweat. The interior had been trashed pretty thoroughly, but there was evidence somebodies unwashed and untidy had been staying here for a while. The cellar was ankle deep in mead and broken barrels. One room was full of rank hay, while another held two pallets made up as human-type beds.

Adam explored the barn. More foul-smelling hay. And some fairly fresh dung. With an aura that read wolf, only eleven hours old. At the back he found a small forge. Containing bones and ashes. Goat bones. No skulls. Surprised? Assorted samples were collected for the fire mage to burn. Thoughtful of them. After pottering around for a while longer, and discovering that the tracks vanished a short way further into the woods, the party returned to the Inn, arriving there some time before Kelovar and I flew in.

So much for sleep. I was rudely awoken at 10 o'clock, still tired from the day's spell-casting. Gustave told us that Tristan had come knocking. One of the village houses was afire. Ahead of schedule. We armed ourselves, and met in the courtyard. Gustave told me to do what I could about the burning house, so after triggering an invested unseen, I took off, followed by Adam and Dramus. I reached the house and made my way round to the far side where the fire had really taken hold. Good thing I was still fireproof. I set about methodically extinguishing the fire in five

foot circles, wishing I'd ranked that spell.

Caskette had cast a telepathy spell, and told Gustave that there was a man and a beast in the woods. Dramus was first into the woods, followed by Adam, Gustave, and the others. A wolf sprang out and Dramus was savaged, his left arm almost torn off. Adam shot the wolf before it could kill the necromancer, who was busy quaffing a healing potion. One wolf down.

Then Quasar entered the forest. Two arrows shot past. Gustave noted the two archers, dropped to one knee and fired. Quasar continued into the forest, and spotted two goblins, one writhing on the ground. Next thing he was on the ground skewered by an arrow. The goblins piled onto him and he was dead on the third blow, well before Gustave could kill the goblins. Three goblins down.

Gustave attempted to shoulder the corpse, and ended up dragging it. He heard movement as he struggled out of the forest, but nothing. I met him on the way out. I'd put out most of the fire, and fire-proofed Tristan, so he could get close enough to finish the job. I joined Gustave as he re-entered the forest. As we crept among the trees I could see one, then two, then three heat sources. I pointed them out to Gustave. He continued to approach as I prepared to cast, but before I could release the spell I was shot. Bastards could see through unseen! I was stunned for a moment, and then we retreated.

Outside the forest were Dramus and Kelovar, throwing snowballs at the still-burning house. Four more arrows came past, and I discovered that the arrow stuck in me had an iron tip. No spells! Gustave got me behind the house and pulled it out. That hurt! But down went a healing potion, and I was feeling much better.

Dramus snuck back into the forest, as I lurked behind a corner of the house looking for targets. Dramus spotted a goblin, and warped some wood around its neck. It's squeal alerted Gustave, who took off, and I could just see two goblin-sized heat blobs. Party-time, I thought, as I prepared and loosed a dragon-flames. Triple effect. Goblin ash! Suddenly my view was obscured by a nasty cloud of yellow smoke. Seconds later, Gustave and Dramus appeared dragging a hog-tied goblin. Six goblins down.

Further away, Kelovar was creeping through the forest. He heard a low growl, and before he could react, a wolf charged into him, and by sheer luck he managed to fend it off with his quarterstaff. He even managed to hit the wolf before it bit him, but it was Adam who came to the rescue, slicing the wolf with his axe. He was joined by Gustave, and together they finished it off. Two wolves dead.

We gathered together. The fire was out. Six goblins and two wolves were captured or killed. But Quasar was dead, and both Kelovar and Dramus were out of it. We took them all back to the Inn, thinking it was time we found whoever was behind this, and dealt with them.

It was Dramus who noticed it first. The Inn door was ajar, and the wood round the lock looked a bit... warped. Uh.. Oh. But it was all okay. There were three bodies on the floor, and Carlan and the Gatekeeper with drawn swords. With blood on them. The bodies, two goblin and a human, were well and truly dead. The human's head was half hacked off. He was dressed in dark clothing. Behind me, Kelovar muttered, "It's the necromancer." Gussed that.

Dramus went into his "ask the dead" routine, and found that the necro's name was Ditar. He had captured Kenrick, that the box is with him, he is tied up and guarded by two goblins and two skulls, and that they are all around two to three hundred yards due west.

Cautiously we approached. Caskette said there's a mind out there, and it's thinking cold. As we got closer, I could see a wagon, with two skulls grounded in front. Still magical, but not going anywhere. No goblins. Gustave called out "Kenrick!". No response. He looked into the wagon, and there was Kenrick, all tied up. We got him and the wagon back to the Inn, and he told us his story.

Kenrick had been working as a courier for an undisclosed personage somewhere up north, who has been trading items with the guild. Travelling to the meeting place, he was captured and interrogated by Ditar, who was smart enough to realise that he might be able to ransom Kenrick for a substantial sum of money. Apparently Ditar had some bone to pick with the village. Ditar got one of the goblins he had hired to try to open the box. The goblin was killed by a vicious little trap, the kind that re-sets itself. Clever.

The box was handed over when I showed Kenrick the ring (I'm keeping it as a souvenir), and we gave him the money. Then we all went to bed.

7 January

While the elves took the horses back, I settled down to some ritual purification, heat-proofed myself, and then did an hour's spell preparation. Had to get Quasar's corpse (now preserved by the local healer) back to the guild within six days. So gotta fly! So havta protect that corpse against magical fire. So giant can carry it without it burning up in fire-flight corona. Well, it worked, partly thanks to the big fire Gustave and Silverstone had built in the square. Double effect. Why can't I do that on myself?

The others got back, and after warning a bunch of curious villagers to get back and watch the show from a distance, I started casting. Triple-effect on Silverstone. I think he thought I meant triple duration. The expression on his face when he took off at three hundred and sixty miles per hour! All the way back to Seagate.

The rest of us flew at a more normal pace. Made camp. Slept. Collected lots of wood. Next morning, purified, heat-proofed, then into the fire and cast. Two doubles this time. That left Dramus, Gustave, Caskette, and me.

Next morning things went badly wrong. Didn't backfire but could only get two to go before I started to run out of fatigue. So Gustave collected more wood, while I rested. In the end we had to leave it until the next day.

10 January

Mid-morning, and back at the guild. The others have been drinking. On Quasar. Who is back alive again. Unfortunately.

We reported back to Herkum, who told us to take the box to Wegan who would open it (we had

left it strictly alone). His secretary arranged for payment of expenses, and we were paid 5000 silver each. Not bad for a little over a week's work.

The skulls turned out to be magical, but needing a special ritual to activate them. Involving dark powers. They are very ancient, and each has a bit of solid mana embedded in it. But they can't be made to work, so they weren't worth anything. Oh, well. Dramus got one, and Adam the other. They wanted them and no-one else did.

Meanwhile I'm going to work on that extinguish fire spell. I've got this idea for a fire-fighting service for Seagate. Should earn lots of loot, at the same time as improving our public image. All Fire Mages don't spend all their time blowing things up. Just some of them. Some of the time.