

RATS, RATS, RATTIES

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Phil Judd

01/01/92 - 07/01/92

Player Characters

| | | | | |
|------------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| Kynn | E&E | Female | Erelhein | |
| Feyan | Earth | Male | Elf | |
| Dalran | E&E | Male | Human | |
| Blitzkrieg | Non-mage | Male | Human | Leader |
| Flamis | Fire | Female | Human | |
| Basalic | Earth | Male | Human | Scribe |

Plane

Matigon

Places Visted

Artrenz - Duke Cumberland's province

Phant - neighbouring province

Yiddish - next province past Phant

Employer

Jack Hernley - envoy to Duke Cumberland

Major NPCs encountered

Duke Cumberland - a giant

Mary - Healer at village hospital

Bast - Cat breeder in Yiddish

Carl Veretty - a bandit

Rats: Matty, Catty, Datty, Bossy/Iatty, Gatty, Latty, Natty, Jatty

Mission

To remove a rat infestation from the Duke's castle

RAT, RAT, RATTIES

Adventure Summary

31/12/91

Found out about an adventure that involved ridding a giant's castle of rats. Rats were over five feet long. The giant wanted us to firstly retrieve his wedding ring and his salt cellar and secondly fetch a new cat.

The envoy from the giant was human sized but he explained that there were two classes of objects in his plane, standard and giant sized. The plane was called Matignon and could be reached by a rune portal in a tree about 25 miles from Seagate in the direction of Brasta. We were also told by the envoy, one Jack Hernley, that the giant, Duke Cumberbund, is the lord of their province, called Artrenz, ruling the smaller folk, that he lives alone in his castle, and that he breeds cows.

01/01/92

Went through portal. Went to the village then on to the giant's castle. Introduced to the Duke. Shown to 'dollhouse' where we would be staying. Days last a week.

02/01/92

Started explorations looking for ratholes. Found some as well as pivot doors. Went in hole and Dalran was sliced in two by giant rat trap. Took Dalran to the hospital for resurrection. Discovered giant DAed as human, standard sized humans DAed as miniature humans.

Started exploring tunnels starting with the one in the library. Takes longer to fall here. Caught a rat in Hands of Earth. Found out that there are about 26 rats in the castle ruled by Bossy Rat. Got Matty Rat to take us to Bossy. Roof collapsed. Ambush? Removed the rat corpses. Took Matty back to dollshouse.

Dalran was back and had retrieved saltshaker. Matty attacked by Duke's kitten and killed. Went back in tunnels and attacked by more rats. Flamis was killed so took her to the hospital for resurrection. Rats being affected by strange object causing mutations.

03/01/92

Message arrived. Rats want to discuss terms on giant's tabletop. Will return missing stuff. Rats willing to move if somewhere suitable could be found. One of the Duke's colleagues had dropped the mutation causing item.

Spoke to the Duke who would organise some large rocks for the rats to live in.

04/01/92

Flew to Phant to organise second cat for the Duke as well as setting up runeportal. Discovered historical information in the library when we returned.

05/01/92

Showed some of the rats where their new home would be. Warded off attack by owl. Duke left to get cat.

06/01/92

Attacked by human sized bandits inside the castle. Turned over survivors and bodies to local sheriff.

Met up with the rats to help them move. Saw strange spherical object. Was highly magical and physically warm. Wasn't safe to approach. Got earth elemental to try dragging it out. After a while (and a few elementals later) object started glowing. Shafts of purple light erupting from it. Got brighter as we headed towards Alusian portal.

After we got through there was a flash of purple light through the portal. Part of the castle missing. Huge crater nearby. Large mushroom cloud of mutation magic had formed overhead. Decided to get Air Mage to get rid of cloud and evacuate the nearby village.

Checked over castle. Found several dead rats and some dead cows. Duke arrived back. Top soil needs to be removed. Blitzkrieg and Kynn went to deal to remaining rats. Only Bossy unaccounted for.

07/01/92

Mapped the rest of the rat tunnels. Looked like tunnels were closing up. Discovered human type room.

Had to fight off another owl. Collected salvage, pay, and returned to the Guild.

RAT, RAT, RATTIES

- Basalic

31/12/91

There were two adventures that sounded really good. My personal favourite was one that was to descend into a gold mine to find the body of a miner and retrieve the nugget he had. Flamis wanted to go on one that involved ridding a castle of a rat problem. Sounded ho-hum until we were told that said rats were exceedingly large (reaching over five feet long) and had already disposed of the giant's cat. The giant wanted us to firstly retrieve his wedding ring and his salt cellar and secondly fetch a new cat. I'd rather be down a gold mine but Flamis was so excited at the thought of exterminating rats that I thought I'd better go along and keep an eye on her, just in case she decided to exterminate the rats by burning down the castle.

The envoy from the giant was human sized but he explained that there were two classes of objects in his plane, standard and giant sized (by a factor of twelve i.e. 1 inch to 1 foot). The plane was called Matignon and could be reached by a rune portal in a tree about 25 miles from Seagate in the direction of Brasta. The giant had been probing for help (he was a runemage) and had touched our plane by pure chance. The portal would remain in place for a month.

Payment was going to be three of their gold coins. Seemed a pittance until it was realised that they were giant sized coins and each one was worth 20736sp each. One had already been forwarded as an advance. We were also told by the envoy, one Jack Hernley, that the giant, Duke Cumberbund, is the lord of their province, called Artrenz, ruling the smaller folk, that he lives alone in his castle, and that he breeds cows.

Besides Flamis and myself our fellow adventurers were:

Kynn - a 6'4" female Erelhein (a dark-skinned elvenkind), with long, dark, hair (when it wasn't jammed under a helm). She was wearing black dragonskin armour and had the reputation of being a very good Enchanter. She had also been awarded Bravest Adventurer, on her last outing, for attacking a Pact Mage as her Master was appearing.

Feyan - 5'11" slim, handsome male elf, wearing brown/green robes with leather armour. Like me he was an Earth Mage but, unlike me, he was more into the ancient druidical practices of Earth magic, those involving destruction, while I followed the pacifistic policies. He was also very experienced.

Dalran - a 6'6" human male who was grey all over and had glowing red eyes. It turned out, on a previous adventure, that he had been partially turned into a stone golem. The rest of the party were able to intercede before it went too far. Now his skin was partially stone and he could sharpen weapons on it. He was also an Enchanter.

Blitzkreig - Human male, 6'1", thin, blond, with a pageboy haircut. He was dripping with weapons and was wearing heavy plate mail. A definite warrior non-mage.

As for Flamis, she's cute, blonde, 5'6", always wears red, and I don't think she's ever going to grow up. Needless to say, she's a Fire Mage. She also likes banging away at bits of metal in the guild forge, and tinkering with locks and traps, and things like that.

Finally, there's myself, Basalic. I'm 5'10", fairly well built, and I dress in earth colours, brown and green, as is typical for members of the Earth College. Flamis tells me I'm ruggedly handsome. I carry a sword, and sling a crossbow over my shoulder.

After introductions we went our separate ways, in order to prepare for the New Year Festivities that night. I stocked up on mistletoe and various other herbs then went shopping for other sundry items, including two new crossbows, a large one and a small one. All up that little lot cost me 819sp.

01/01/92

It was rather late in the day when we finally departed, guided by Jack, but that was to be expected on New Years Day. Kynn offered us all Greater Enchantments at cost price, much cheaper than the guild. I went for the maximum, a rank sixteen that would last three months, as did everyone else. It cost 8500sp but it would be worth every penny. Then Flamis insisted we all come over to the Fire College so she could protect us against magical fire, warning that some of her spells are getting to be positively lethal.

The ride to the portal was quite uneventful. I noticed that Feyan had a really unusual horse, a black beast with glowing red eyes. I later found out that it was, of all manner of equines, a beast out of dreams, a nightmare. Blitzkrieg had brought two horses for some unknown reason. One was his warhorse, a white creature called Frost.

Finally we reached a farm, called Emmerdale, where Jack had paid the farmer to watch over the portal. Jack led us there. A patch of inky darkness gaped like a gigantic black knothole in the side of a oak tree. One by one, it swallowed us up as we entered another world.

We found ourselves stepping out of another tree. To the west we could see a HUGE castle, while to the north was Jack's village. Surrounding the castle was an area of giant grass, literally as tall as an elephant's eye. Giant cows contentedly munched on blades as broad as my sword. The boundary between the giant area and the rest was very sharply defined.

The sun was close to the zenith. Jack explained that each 'day' lasted a week by our time. Their village basically had six days to the solar one, and it was now late afternoon. It was near lunchtime for the giant, however. He went by the solar day. There is something more than a little strange about this place.

Jack suggested that we proceed to the village so that is what we did. Upon arrival we were told that we were to be presented to the town as diplomatic envoys from Seagate to the Duke. The fact that he had a rat problem was to be kept secret. While we stayed in the inn, a town meeting in the square was being convened. About an hour later Jack conducted us to the meeting and introduced us all. After that Jack led us towards Duke Cumberbund's castle. I idly read the aura of the grass on the way there and determined that its true name was miniature grass. The generic true name of the giant grass was 'grass'. More puzzles. Flamis wondered aloud whether or not we had somehow been shrunk.

After racing through the giant's garden, we reached the castle. It was more a keep actually, but three hundred high. There was a standard size door cut into the giant's door which we used to gain entry. By our standards the hallway was monstrous. A hundred feet high, seventy-two feet wide and five hundred feet long with stairs each step ten feet high at the other end.

Shortly afterwards the Duke arrived. Jack unfolded a large megaphone and used it to introduce us. By speaking slowly, deeply, and loudly, I was able to greet him properly. He seemed to appreciate that. He suggested that we stay in the 'dollhouse'. Hey what? On a hunch I read the Duke's aura. Short lived sentient. Generic true name: human. This was getting really strange.

Jack explained it was a normal sized house tucked in a recess on the middle floor (this place had three). The way we were to get us, and the horses, up the stairs, was some sort of trolley system using pulleys. From the gleam in her eye I soon figured that Flamis wanted to take the thing apart. It took quite a few trips before we were all up. It was possible to stable the horses on the ground floor of this house and we took up rooms on the floor above. One each. So much for Flamis and I sharing. Like the castle the 'dollhouse' had three floors.

It was getting late by now so we settled down for a nights rest. Each of us stood a watch in case of a rat attack. Fortunately there were no giant rat holes in this area. Flamis got to speculating about why a structure the size of the giant castle didn't collapse under its own weight. Feyan suggested that the walls and floors might be made of Bound Earth and confirmed this from its aura. That meant that we Earth mages wouldn't be able to anything with it. No Tunnelling or Hands of Earth. And as for Feyan's Diamond Tipped Javelins, or Sinking Doom.... Not a chance. Somehow I'm almost relieved.

.2.

02/01/91

Nothing unusual happened during the night. I was able to get in a couple of hours purification before breakfast. Kynn dished out some Enhance Armours all round. I also tried a spell to enhance my tracking abilities but it didn't work however I did feel mana impact as if I had successfully resisted a backfire. I also put a Speak to Animals on myself so I could talk to anything that we encountered and also to reassure Sod. He was rather nervous.

First thing we decided to do was to visit the Duke and ask him to cast illusions of his wedding ring and salt cellar so Kynn could get a Locate on them. So we all rode up to his study on the top floor (there was quite a bit of argument about the way the floors should be numbered. I was going for 1,2,3 but some of the others, mainly Flamis, were arguing for Ground, 1, 2. Finally we settled on Bottom, Middle, Top). When we got there Feyan flew up, on his horse, to the table and put our request to the Duke. He agreed to do it and told us it would take two hours to fashion each runestick. In the meantime we went looking for more ratholes. We had already been told that all the doors were going to be left ajar so we could get around.

Nothing was found in his study, or in the workroom next door. However, in the storage room we did find some rat droppings and I noticed that some of the sacks had been chewed at. No ratholes here though. The next room I wasn't sure what was used for. It mainly consisted of a large tube object on a pedestal in the centre of the room. Flamis excitedly identified the tube object as a telescope. That made this room an observatory. No ratholes here either, nor in an empty room next to it. The library had a large collection of books, or maybe that should be, a collection of large books. Anyway there were quite a few. Shelves lined nearly all the walls stretching from floor to ceiling. We couldn't see anything but there was a possibility of rat holes behind the books. There was an alcove in the corner of the room with a ladder leading up and down.

Kynn made a sound like a rat so Dalran could use ventriloquism to imitate it rather loudly, in an attempt to attract one. A few minutes later a book dropped from one of the higher shelves and thumped to the floor, just missing Blitzkrieg. Feyan flew up to have a look. When he got back he said that there was a rathole up there and that he saw a rat, but it had run away when he tried to talk to it.

The central corridor was also clean so we went down to the middle floor. The first room we checked was the master bedroom. Under the wardrobe we found rat droppings. Flamis generated a light on the end of her staff and poked it underneath. In its light, we could see a hole in the bottom of the wardrobe. So Blitzkrieg clambered up to have a look. Meanwhile Flamis wandered off to explore the area under the bed. I went with her in case she encountered trouble. By the time we got back Blitzkrieg had determined that one of the Duke's shoes had a shoelace missing and another one showed evidence of scratching. There was no sign of ratholes in the wardrobe.

The next room was the ensuite. Flamis refused to go in here as there was too much water. I decided to stay with her, just in case.

A short while later there was an exclamation from inside. I hurried in with Flamis close behind. What they had found was a pivoting door that was set in flush with the wall as so to be nearly invisible. The door was made of Bound Earth, but the area around it was not. Flamis muttered something about the rats not being very good mechanics. On the other side of the door was a rough hewn tunnel, about six foot tall. After a short distance it bent towards the stairs. We also discovered that the Bound Earth in the walls only extended a little way into the walls as the tunnel walls were not bound. We decided to leave exploring these tunnels to a later time, after we had completed our survey of the walls.

The next room was the spare bedroom. It didn't take long before another non-bound area was spotted. It proved to be another of those pivot doors. Behind it was another tunnel which angled back towards the master bedroom. We surmised that this tunnel went towards the door in the ensuite. There was nothing in the bathroom or in another spare bedroom. The last room on the list was the storeroom. We already knew there was one rathole in here but there may be other signs. There was. Some rat droppings were discovered in one corner. We also noticed that the area around the rathole was unbound earth.

Flamis and I stepped cautiously into the tunnel, with Dalran close behind. I kept close to one wall as so to preclude attacks from that side. Just then I stepped on something soft and yielding. I read its aura. Formally living, human. My first thought was that it was a corpse but subsequent examination showed it to be a bit of cast off skin. I supposed that the next thing we would find is giant toenail clippings.

We advanced more cautiously. Soon we discovered that the tunnel opened up and went left and right. There seemed to be some sort of alcoves on each side. Dalran went to investigate one.

Suddenly there was a loud SPROINNNGGG followed by a THUNK! Flamis and I hurried over to investigate. What we found was a grim and grisly sight. A large iron bar had landed on Dalran neatly bisecting him. As we shone the light around we discovered he had been caught in a giant rat trap. Oh great! And none of us was a high ranked Healer. The others soon arrived, attracted by the sounds and Flamis's shrieks. Some rather bad jokes at Dalran's expense followed. Finally Blitzkrieg and I took a half each and went back up to the Giant's study to see if he knew of

anyone who could resurrect. Otherwise we'd have to take him back to the Guild.

When we explained our problem the Duke suggested trying Mary at the hospital. Apparently she is able to work miracles. Blitzkrieg also asked him if there were any more traps scattered around the place. He replied that he had removed all the ones he had set as they were ineffectual but he would check to see if they were all present. When Blitzkrieg told him about the hole in the wardrobe he was definitely not pleased and stomped off to have a look. We headed off to the village.

There were no incidents on the way out. I was speculating about the sight of Blitzkrieg attacking giant sized ants with his lance. He reckoned beetles would be more fun. That led to the subject of cockroaches. We finally concluded that they would be a menace.

When we reached the village hospital Blitzkrieg explained our problem to the receptionist. She immediately went a slight shade of green and rushed off. Shortly a doctor arrived. He had a look at our patient and also went slightly green. He departed, looking for an orderly and a trolley. When they came back Dalran's body was put on it and wheeled away for Mary to look at. I was able to read the aura of the orderly and saw that he was a Short lived Sentient, Generic true name: Miniature Human. Another piece of the puzzle.

Once we got back we resumed our survey of the bottom floor. As we examined the ballroom a rat scuttled past the hole we already knew about. Unfortunately it went too fast for me or anyone else to do anything about it. In the kitchen we spotted the pepper-pot on the table, and some discussion followed as to how the rats had got up there. Flamis found claw-marks all the way up a chair leg, and we guessed that the rats had climbed up the chair-leg, and leapt from the chair onto the table. Though what they had wanted the salt-cellar for we couldn't imagine. Nothing else was found in the ballroom, the dining room, or the cloakroom. After what happened to Dalran we decided we weren't going to explore any more holes without adequate precautions first. Kynn proposed that the floor naming should now be Bottom, Dalran, Top.

Once we had completed the survey we went back up to the top floor to report to the Duke. He told us he had checked his traps and there were three missing. When we told him about areas not being bound earth he looked rather apprehensive as the binding added to the structural strength of the building and that he could fall through unbound areas. The runesticks were ready so he followed us down to the 'dollhouse'. The first one he triggered was the saltcellar. Kynn concentrated on it for a minute or two. Then the ring appeared, a plain gold band with an inscription inside written in an unknown language. Again Kynn concentrated on it. Finally she told us that the ring was somewhere above us and the saltcellar was below us.

Blitzkrieg asked where the ladders in the alcoves went up to. The Duke explained that they provided access to the battlements on the roof. He also handed us a couple of sticks (sticks to him, logs to us). They were runeportal sticks. Once activated we could use them for instant transportation. We decided to put one in one of the spare rooms in the "dolls house" and keep the other with us.

.3.

It was finally decided that we would explore the tunnels starting at the top and working down. Fayan offered to summon an Earth Elemental to assist us. I wasn't too keen on the idea as those

things can easily get out of control, especially if their summoner is killed, but I'd feel safer with one on our side. It could go first and trigger the traps, without being harmed. Blitzkrieg agreed so Faylan went downstairs with Kynn, and outside to perform the summoning.

Once they got back, accompanied by an elemental who Faylan introduced as Fred, (according to him, all earth elementals are named Fred), we proceeded upstairs to the top story storage room, where Kynn's locate spell indicated the ring was hidden. Once we got there she soon confirmed its position by triangulation, as being about thirty feet up inside the wall, straight ahead of us as we entered the door. We did a more careful check of the room, but discovered no unbound areas.

The nearest rathole was in the library so that was where we went. The problem was, how were we going to get up to the hole fifty feet up between the books? Faylan solved that by producing a rope ladder from his 'luggage'. The luggage was a sort of ambulatory chest, following Faylan around on more legs than a football team, and containing most everything on the guild list of potentially useful adventuring equipment. Faylan then flew up, on the Nightmare, in order to remove a couple of books that were covering the hole. Kynn was ferried up next to assist.

Once they had the books clear, the rope ladder was fastened and the end dropped down. Flamis clambered up. I was not nearly so successful, and managed to slip while clambering onto the shelf. For some strange reason I found I was falling more slowly than I ought to have been. Something was definitely not quite right. As I picked myself up off the carpet, I was thinking I was thankful to be alive. Dying from falling off a bookshelf might have been enough to overshadow Dalran's certain nomination for Best Death. I then noticed that Flamis was jumping up and down, on the shelf. It seemed to me that it was taking her significantly longer to rise and fall than it should. Furthermore she seemed to be a prime candidate for the Seagate standing high jump record. Most odd. She excitedly prattled on about how that proved that the giant wasn't a giant, and that we really had been "smallered". That I hadn't fallen fifty feet, but merely four feet. Kynn decided to check this theory by jumping off the shelf and landed gracefully, on her feet, by the rest of the group. She then commented that maybe we should leave that sort of thing to the experts.

My next attempt at getting up the ladder was considerably more successful. Soon the rest of us were clustered around the hole. Since it was going to be dark inside the tunnel, Flamis placed a Firelight spell on my sword. The rest of them could all see in the dark. I didn't want to use my Amulet of Witchsight unless I had to.

While this was going on, Fred had been stationed inside the hole with instructions to stop any rats from getting at us. When we finally joined him, we discovered that the tunnel opened up into a wide T branch. We decided to head left. To forestall any rats coming at us from the other corridor, Faylan cast Hands of Earth in the other corridor. One of the Hands came up stunted. I suspected there wasn't quite enough unbound earth to complete the spell. The corridor was only wide enough for us to proceed in single file. Fred was sent first, followed by Blitzkrieg, then myself, Flamis, Faylan and Kynn brought up the rear. I spotted some loose stones on the ground so I slipped a handful into my specimen pouch.

The corridor veered left, doubled back for a short distance, then continued on, parallel to the wall. Another ten feet along and it opened up. Faylan thought he saw a rat vanish down the tunnel ahead of us so we stopped. Fred was sent ahead to block the other hole while we searched the area. Once we were satisfied it was safe to proceed, we joined Fred at the other side.

After a while a right hand side passage was discovered. Kynn stayed to keep watch while the rest of us proceeded on. We soon discovered that the tunnel curved to the right and abruptly terminated. Flamis spotted an unbound area in the wall at the dead end so Fayan instructed Fred to punch a hole in it. Fred did, literally, stirring the solid stone like dough. Beyond was another passage.

Just then we heard a 'thump' from behind us so we sprinted back to where Kynn was. No sign of her, but there were some tracks heading back the way we came so that's where we went. We finally found Kynn and a rat which had been caught in one of the Hands of Earth. Definitely the better rat trap! Kynn was squeaking to it. She said the rat wanted us to let it go. I read its aura. Short lived animal. Last spell to impact, no answer. So they're not sentient, after all. Thank goodness. I then cast a Speak with Animals.

Kynn was also able to detect whether or not the rat was lying so we were able to ascertain the following information. The rat's name was Matty. There were twenty-six other rats, with names like Hatty, Catty, Fatty, Batty, Patty, Ratty, Tatty and Scatty. There was also one called Bossy. They were the only creatures living in these tunnels which they had dug (Matty lied about that and I could detect nothing unusual about their teeth). Bossy was a smart rat and had a small group of elite rats known simply as 'da boys'. Matty reckoned he hadn't seen the ring but Kynn determined that he was lying about that too.

We decided that Matty was going to take us to Bossy. For some reason Matty was rather afraid of going there. Fayan released Fred then put a Control Animal on Matty. He then dispelled his Hands, to let Matty free, and I replaced them with a fresh set.

We followed Matty back the way we had gone. I had to cast another Speak with Animals because the first had faded because of casting the Hands. At the junction point we took the right hand branch which, shortly after, curved to the left. We passed a hole in the wall which we soon recognised as being the other side of the one Fred had punched through. A short distance on Matty stopped. There was a pit in front of us with spikes at the bottom. These rats are more cunning than we thought. And nastier. The corridor dead ended fifteen feet further on. As far as we could tell there was no way around the pit.

We backtracked a bit and discovered a branch to the left. It soon swung right so we were again paralleling the wall. As we progressed, Matty detected another rat which he identified as Tatty. Kynn was also able to determine that the ring was in the same place as Bossy. This led Flamis to conclude, a bit later on, that Bossy was wearing it as a crown. Soon the passage sloped down spiralling one turn before going straight again.

Most of us were rangers of varying expertise, and so I'm not sure who first recognised the next section of tunnel as being a great site for a potential ambush. Kynn questioned Matty about it and he said that there were side passages with concealed entrances. Once any intruders were between the entrances they could be attacked from front and back. Fayan's reply to the threat was to put Walls of Stones down both sides of the tunnel to block the first set of entrances before we proceeded.

As we continued there was a rumble. Suddenly, ahead of us, the roof of the tunnel collapsed, blocking the way ahead. We had no choice but to retreat. There would be only one way to get through. Park Matty back in the Hands of Earth and summon up another Elemental. However

Fayan was running low on fatigue. I offered to give him a Strength of Stone to boost his fatigue level and ended up reducing the net fatigue of the party. It took me four attempts to get it right.

Once that was done, Matty was put back in the Hands and Fayan summoned another Elemental. This one was also called Fred. "Fwred too..", quipped Flamis. "More like Fred Twenty-Seven," replied Fayan. Once we got back to the cave-in, Fayan sent the elemental through to scout around. We heard the sounds of squeaking, followed by several thumps. Then there was silence. Fayan announced that the elemental had somehow ceased to exist in an instant. Dissipated? We had no choice but to summon another one and have it dust down the barrier. Meanwhile we prepared for a possible counterattack. Blitzkreig and I crouched down with loaded crossbows. Kynn stood behind me with a loaded longbow while Flamis was behind Blitzkrieg preparing her favourite nuking-things spell. When the elemental cleared the barrier, there was not a rat in sight, not even a whisker. Trails of blood showed where the wounded had been dragged away. We investigated the side passages and found precisely nothing. The cave-in had revealed a passageway above so the elemental lifted Kynn up so she could have a look. The tunnel she was in ran parallel to ours and sloped downwards so we concluded that they met up further on. This was confirmed about twenty metres further on.

We followed the blood trail. A little later on Kynn informed us that the salt cellar had been moved. Twenty or so metres on, we encountered a dead rat. Blitzkrieg asked me to confirm that. I did and it was indeed formerly living. No magic on it either. It definitely looked like it had been pounded by an earth elemental.

The trail of blood continued on. Shortly the corridor dead ended but the trail curved to the left. Flamis determined that the wall there was unbound so Fred knocked a hole in it. We discovered the back end of a book. According to our calculations we were now in the study. The trail of blood went between the book and the wall so Blitzkrieg pushed the book out of the way and we progressed along the ledge. The trail turned right and headed towards the wall where another patch of unbound earth was seen. Fred knocked out a hole and we carried on down another tunnel. Shortly we discovered another dead rat. Again definitely dead, and with no residual magic. The tunnel continued down. Again it dead-ended but we discovered another of those concealed pivoting doors. We stepped out at floor level in the Duke's study.

.4.

We decided to return the way we had came, but first we dragged out the rat corpses for the Duke to dispose of. We also informed him of what we had found out so far. The Duke stomped off with the corpses. The trip back through the tunnels was without incident and soon we were back where Matty was parked in the Hands. He was still there. It took me three attempts to Counterspell them so we could get Matty out. At the same time Fayan put another Animal Control on.

We made our way back to the dolls house. I attempted to interrogate Matty for more information, but he was unresponsive. As we approached Kynn noticed that the Locate arrow for the saltshaker was pointing towards the dollhouse. We soon found it stashed in the stables. Had the rats returned it?

That wasn't it. We found Dalran upstairs in his room, looking none the worse for his mis-adventure. He told us he had found and returned the salt cellar. First off he had entered the hole on the ballroom level and explored many of the tunnel branches. He had then gone up and

explored the hole that he had got killed in and found the salt cellar. In the process he had managed to find, and kill, three rats, one by burning it with grenades. One of them had been Batty who had asked him to surrender or they would feed him to the cat. Cat? The rats are friends with the cat?

Dalran was looking the worse for wear so I gave him an Earth Mage Healing spell while Faylan dealt with the skin disease that Dalran had acquired as the result of a backfire. We then decided to rest up a bit. Faylan served up one of his herbal meals which are very restorative. Blitzkrieg wanted to go and have a look at the Duke's kitten so Flamis and I decided to go with him. We made our way to the master bedroom. Blitzkrieg used a grappling hook and rope to enable us to climb up to the surface of the bed. Curled up in the middle of the bed was the biggest kitten I had ever seen. According to its aura, it was two years old and the last magic to be used on it was rune mage healing.

Blitzkrieg approached the kitten which immediately began purring and rubbing against him, nearly knocking him over. That guy definitely has a way with animals. I attempted to question the cat to see what it knew about the rats. It seemed to show fear when I mentioned rats and was rather concerned about the smell of rats on us. I told it we were rat hunters. Flamis was having fun scratching the kitten behind the ear with the end of her staff.

After a while we decided to leave. Blitzkrieg lured the kitten away with his grappling line while Flamis and I slid down the bedcovers. We then raced off on our horses. To our consternation, on the way back we noticed that the kitten was following us. Faylan had put Matty rat in the stables with instructions not to move. Oops! While Blitzkrieg started delaying tactics, I shot off ahead to warn the others. I couldn't find them. All I could do was close the stable door.

Whatever Blitzkrieg had done it hadn't worked too well. Moments later the kitten came bounding around the corner. It must have caught the trail. Then it came right up to the house and began rubbing against it and pawing at the stable door. I could feel the whole house shaking. Blitzkrieg rode up a short time later and quickly appraised the situation. Clearly the kitten wasn't going to be satisfied until it got hold of the rat. So Blitzkrieg instructed me to open the doors. When I did, the ensuing fight was shortlived and one sided, the rat being under a control spell. Soon the kitten wandered off, purring, with a rat's tail dangling from its mouth. There wasn't much else left. Flamis claimed some whiskers to use for a ritual. Meanwhile I went in search of a shovel. The stables were in a mess.

It took me nearly an hour or so, but I soon had the remains of Matty heaped up in a pile outside. Flamis incinerated it in a pillar of fire, while I went to have a hot bath. Very interesting. Hot and cold water on call just by turning a tap. While I was doing that, the kitten wandered back, but wandered away shortly after.

Finally we were all set to carry on with the rat hunt. Kynn gave us Enhance Armours all around. We were just about to set off when the kitten poked his head around the corner. Kynn distracted it by throwing an apple past its nose. First off we went back to the library tunnel, intending to explore the tunnel to the right. But the rope ladder had gone. So we decided to do the hole in the middle floor storeroom. Dalran had already been in part of this area. It also seemed to be the one most likely to lead to the location of the ring which was currently straight above.

Before we entered, Dalran used a Wizard Eye to map out the tunnels. He spotted two rats in the upper levels. They were both in deadends, however I suspected hidden entrances. Faylan conjured

up another elemental and we progressed inwards, heading towards those rats.

Up ahead, we knew was a large room where five tunnels met. The dead ends we were interested in ran from there. As we approached the room, Blitzkrieg and Kynn suddenly went on alert. I soon saw why. There was a rat up ahead. It was soon joined by two more which came out from behind a central pillar.

One of the rats squeaked a warning as the elemental went around one way, while Kynn and Blitzkrieg went around the other way. Kynn stunned one rat while another one attempted to back away. I was currently working my way around the wall to get a good position to fire my crossbow when we suddenly spotted another seven rats turn up. They were led by a bigger rat, one of 'da boys' I reckoned.

I spun around and fired at the big rat with my crossbow. However, before I had a chance to draw my sword, I was jumped on by a rat. That hurt, a lot. Meanwhile Faylan was firing Diamond Tipped Javelins at one behind him and killed it. The Earth Elemental splattered another one. Blitzkrieg later commented that must have been Splatty Rat. Faylan was still firing DTJ's. Suddenly some Hands of Earth shot up capturing three of the rats. Kynn was leaping about while attacking. It didn't take her long to kill another one.

By now I was in deep trouble. Another rat was having a go at me as well and there wasn't much I could do about it. I fought them off as best I could but soon lapsed into unconsciousness.

When I came around, my first emotion was surprise. I wasn't dead. As I felt my endurance returning, I realised someone had cast a Trollskin spell at me, which certainly saved my life. The battle was over but not without cost. I discovered to my horror that Flamis had been killed. Apparently a rat had sneaked up, and knocked her over from behind. There was a rat in the Hands and I checked its aura instead. So I did. Last magic to impact was Mutation. One of the corpses had it as well. And whatever this Mutating magic is, it doesn't have a College. I was also told that three of the rats, two of which had been in the Hands, had vanished. There's something rather strange going on here. At that moment however, I had a more pressing concern. Flamis.

.5.

All the corpses aura's read as "rat" so whatever the mutation was, it's not manufacturing new species. Maybe I should have made the question 'Nature of Mutation?'. According to the rat still in the Hand, the mutations were caused by a big roundish thing that was mostly made of metal. It's currently being held somewhere in the vicinity of Bossy rat. He also told us that the mutation had caused his skin to be made tougher. Another rat, one called Datty, was the one able to carve the tunnels in the bound earth. While the interrogation was going on Dalran was using a Wizard's Eye to explore the remainder of the tunnels. He finally found a hole into the middle floor storeroom.

Blitzkrieg decided to leave the rat in the Hand with a message attached to it. It read 'Leave castle and return stolen stuff (or else)'. Meanwhile we were going to take Flamis to the hospital. So I picked her up and we progressed on. Someone had cut off the rat tails from the corpses so we took them along as well. Later on Dalran offered to help me with my burden which I accepted.

We first stopped off to find the Duke. He was pleased when we told him we had located the

saltshaker. We offered to deliver it but he told us to just leave it in the dollshouse and he'll retrieve it later. Apparently the roof lifts off. So much for locking up the house securely. He also gave us three of his silver coins to give to the hospital to boost his account.

We went back to the dollshouse, had a short rest, then headed off to the village. I asked Kynn and Blitzkrieg what I should have done about those rats. Kynn suggested that I learn how to use a dagger because it is a good weapon to use in close. Blitzkrieg reckoned I should have gone for the sword first. Upon reflection I agree with them. Kynn's advice I shall definitely take as soon as we get back.

Once we got to the hospital we delivered the coins and told the receptionist our latest problem. She said they would get right on to it, but the staff were rather fatigued. Fayan offered them some of his restorative potion to help them. Apparently this place specialises in healing as there is the occasional war with their neighbours. The giant intervened once by using a broom. When we were told that Flamis's resurrection should take about an hour, I decided to wait in the waiting room. The others decided to go to the inn across the street.

I was just about to start pacing the waiting room when the receptionist returned with the news that Flamis was recovering. I rushed to her side. She was weak, but at least she was alive. Not surprisingly she was looking rather chastened. I gave her a really BIG hug then helped her across the street to join the others.

I found the others tucking into dinner so I ordered a plowman's lunch for myself and something hot and spicy for Flamis. I figured she'd appreciate something like that after what she had been through. It was getting rather late by the time we got back to the dollshouse. Time for a good night's sleep. However Blitzkrieg wanted us to stand a watch each, all except Flamis. It worked out to one & one half hours each.

03/01/92

I had just finished my watch, and had woken Blitzkrieg for his watch, the last one. Instead of going back to sleep I decided to start purifying. But not for long. I had just settled down when I heard a 'thump' from the front door. When I got there I found Kynn and Blitzkrieg staring at an arrow that had been embedded in the door with a note attached to it. Blitzkrieg wanted its aura analyzed to see if it was magically trapped but I couldn't detect anything of that nature. Kynn looked at it and discovered the same message written in Common, Elvish, Dwarvish and Orcish, all of which she understood. The note was signed Callisan with Bossy scrawled underneath. It basically said that they were willing to negotiate terms at a neutral point such as the giant's tabletop in two hours. They will return the ring and other stuff.

Before we left for the meeting Kynn passed out another set of Enhance Armours all around. She also renewed the Greater Enhancement on Flamis. When that was completed, about an hour later, we all trooped downstairs to the dining hall. Flamis was rather disappointed that there wasn't a fire in the fireplace but she soon found one in the kitchen which she employed to redo her Protection from Magical Fire. She also cast Heat-proofing on Dalran, myself and herself.

After a short while we heard a disturbance coming from the fireplace and watched as a rat rolled a silver coin before it with a note attached saying 'Peace'. Neither Fayan or I could detect any aura on the coin. While Kynn scrambled up the table leg, Fayan produced a ladder from his luggage.

That got us as far as a chair. Once we got there, Kynn lowered a rope. Meanwhile Fayan and Flamis had flown up on Fayan's Nightmare.

We found the remains of the giant's lunch on the table. Dalran then moved between the salt cellar and the pepper cellar, while Flamis clambered on top of the toast rack. She seemed to think it was the only appropriate spot for a fire mage.

Just then the cat wandered in. Dalran started making loud barking sounds and using ventriloquism to throw them at the cat. The cat's fur fluffed up and it started scuttling sideways looking for the source of the sound. Eventually he managed to scare it out. In the nick of time too. Just after the cat beat a hasty retreat a grey object was observed by the fireplace. Blitzkrieg waved a silver and black pennant at it. The object was soon revealed to be a rather unhappy looking rat with a white flag tied to its tail. Two more emerged bearing what looked like a pole but had the aura of a rune stick. They put it by the door and somehow activated it causing a runewall to block the door. That should stop the cat coming back.

As those rats climbed up the chair, two more emerged dragging a large sack. Blitzkrieg insisted that the sack be opened before it was brought up. Inside was the gold ring, a coin, and other bits and pieces. The ring had a visual illusion in it from the illusionist college on it at rank fifteen. No aura could be detected on the coin. As Fayan conducted his aura tests, he waved his hands a lot. One of the rats got so nervous that it backed off, right off the edge of the table. Once we were satisfied the rats put everything back in the sack and started dragging it up. Meanwhile other rats were dragging out more runesticks and dumping them in a corner.

A rat started pushing the jam jar closer to the edge of the table. Once he finished, a hole in the wall appeared and a rat with a big crossbow shot a line to the table. The rats on the table tied it to the jar. Some sort of handheld trolley was hooked to the line which was grabbed by a rat. We noticed that its claws looked very dexterous.

One by one, rats dropped down the line and landed on the table. A couple of them slammed into the jar. One of those rats we recognised as being the one we had left in the Hand of Earth. These rats looked like 'da boys'. Fayan checked the aura of one of them. Living animal, nature of magic - duplication. He also managed to cause another rat to fall off the table with his hand waving.

Finally there were six normal rats and six of 'da boys' on the table as the last rat descended. Dalran had gone unseen and was now perched on top of the salt cellar. This rat was carrying a knapsack. He soon spotted Dalran. Kynn acted as Blitzkrieg's interpreter and struck a regal pose. Meanwhile I used my own Speak with Animals to listen in. From what I was able to determine, the rats were willing to move if something suitable could be found. The thing that had caused the mutations had been dropped by one of the Duke's colleagues. The rest of the coins they had would be deposited in the middle level storeroom. It was interesting to note that a small rat was acting was some sort of advisor to Bossy.

Once the meeting was over, we discovered that we were trapped in the dining room. Bossy offered to get a rat to cut a hole in the wall but Fayan had a better idea and flew out the window on his nightmare. After a few minutes, during which the rats left, the Duke arrived and dispelled the wall. Before the rats left we arranged another meeting in the second story storeroom in a couple of hours.

We discussed the matter with the Duke. He finally decided to order some rather large rocks that could be bound. The rats could live comfortably in there. He'd order them first thing in the morning. He also wanted maps of the tunnels and all the traps removed. To assist in negotiations he also offered to have Jack look after the kitten for a few days.

Soon we were waiting in the storeroom as the rats filed in, leaving three giant silver pennies in the corner. It took a little bit of persuading but we finally got them to agree to do the map. I think we're going to have to check it very carefully. We're sure they're trying to hide something.

.6.

That night we slept with the same watches as last night but with the addition of Flamis to the roster. Nothing unusual happened.

04/01/92

I started off the morning with exercises, breakfast, then did a bit of weapon training with Blitzkrieg. After a while we wandered up to the storeroom to see how the rats were doing. They were still packing and the map was still in production, so there wasn't a lot we could do. So Blitzkrieg declared that we could have a day off. I wanted to scout around the outside of the castle, looking for entrances, but he reckoned it wasn't worth it. After all, they could always dig their way in, at least until Datty is disposed of.

We went to find his Grace to ask him whether he wanted us to do anything about procuring another cat for him in the meantime. He told us he had arranged with a breeder to purchase a white, long-haired kitten. The breeder lives in a country to the north east, a place called Yiddish. It's about sixty miles away. The neighbouring country, between us and Yid is called Phant. It didn't seem far until we realised that it was sixty giant miles i.e. 720 of ours. It would take ages to get there. So Flamis suggested we fireflight there and runeportal back. After all we still had the pair the giant had made for us. The giant offered to produce another pair, in case the first pair didn't activate. We also asked him for a map.

We all assumed it was another place of giants we were going to, until Duke Cumberbund told us the breeder was a human. A human breeding giant cats! This must be one brave dude. What's more, we would have to put a kink in our flight path because of a place called the Wild Wood. It was a forest of giant trees, a high mana zone, and very dangerous. Fayan was fascinated.

An hour or so later we were ready to go. Blitzkrieg, Flamis, Dalran and myself were going. Flamis had calculated the trip was going to take seven stages and she would not have enough fatigue for the whole party. So Fayan and I were going to boost Flamis's fatigue with Strength of Stone spells.

We went outside and the giant lit a fire. Flamis cast four Fireflights and soon we were away. The trip itself was relatively uneventful. Blitzkrieg suggested that we fly very high near the vicinity of the Wild Wood in case something in there decided to have a go at us. Nothing did. At the third landing point we managed to startle a flock of sheep and a small shepherd. We also noted rather a lot of military activity as we flew across Phant.

Finally the city was in sight. Blitzkrieg advised it would not be advisable to fly over the city, but

to divert and go around the far side. As we did so, I noticed someone with shadow-wings circling the castle. An aerial guard, I supposed. As we landed outside the city, a calvary troop pulled up. Blitzkrieg introduced us as emissaries from the Duke and asked to see someone about the kitten, and about setting up this end of the runeportal. So we followed the calvary inside the Palace and met the Chamberlain. The gentleman in question was dressed up like a story-book wizard, with stars and things on his white robes. An obvious Celestial. It transpired that he was indeed the head of the Celestial College here. After soon discussion it was decided to place the runestick in the courtyard near the castle wall.

We were than taken to see Bast, the cat breeder. He was with the cats at the moment, supervising their training. The kitten that had been allocated for the Duke was currently asleep in the stables. From what I could tell it was very well looked after and happy. Flamis wanted to stroke it, but was told not to. By the time we had finished making the arrangements for the Duke to collect the kitten in a day or two, we were told that the rune portal was ready. A group of soldiers had just finished planting it. We touched it and ended up back in the giant's study.

After we reported to the Duke, he informed us that the rats' block had been carved out and would be ready for placement the next day - his day. That puts it sometime in the next week. Fayan had dinner ready. I asked Kynn and Dalran what had happened while they had gone. Kynn said that she had found some standard sized books in the library which had been fascinating. Flamis looked very interested. So the two of us went book hunting.

We finally found them on some small shelves by the top of the table. They were originals. The giant had been making copies his size. Some of the stuff I found was very interesting. It appeared that the giant folk had been the original inhabitants and the smaller people had arrived a few thousand years ago. They had mysteriously arrived near the coast and had rapidly spread throughout the land. In no time at all, at least to the giants' perspective, the entire area had been converted to support the little folk. Fortunately for them the giants were rather easy going. It was only this continent that had been affected. Other places were still giant land. There was even one area that no one lived on. I also discovered references to giant elves and giant dwarves as well as to small elves. Interesting.

By the time we got back it was time to settle down for the 'night'. Same watches as before. Again nothing unusual happened.

05/01/92

It was getting dim in the castle as evening developed. The Duke was getting ready to go and get the cat. He offered to show us where the block was going so we all climbed into a wicker basket and he carried us out. It was the roughest trip I had ever been on. Worse than a stormtossed ship. The spot had been dug out and was located at the bottom of the giant's garden. There were some trees nearby.

We were dropped back at the dollshouse. While I recovered from the basket trip Blitzkrieg went with the Duke to get the cat. When he got back we decided to inform the rats of developments and to suggest to them that they'd better make haste.

Two of 'da boys' arrived, who turned out to be Gatty and Datty. I attempted to read their auras to determine what was the cause of their mutations but failed. I am beginning to think that they

are blocking my attempts. They told us to meet them near the front door and offered to take us through the tunnels. We declined.

When we got to the front door they were waiting beneath a pole with a white flag on it. There were also three mousetraps piled up in one corner. So we led them down the garden path and showed them the prepared site for the block.

On the way back we heard a deep hooting call. A giant owl. It was getting dark by now and difficult to see. We froze still but the two rats made a break for the castle. The owl immediately swooped down. Flamis put up a pillar of fire to scare it off then followed that up with Dragon Flames. The fire enveloped the owl and several feathers were singed. Dalran also fired an energy bolt at it. Maybe their efforts seemed unnecessarily destructive, but they did have the desired effect. The owl flew off.

We progressed onwards. There was no sign that either rat had been caught. Dalran picked up a rather large, scorched, owl feather. Someone reckoned it would be a real feather in his cap. There was probably enough feather there to make a whole cap out of it. Once we reached the front door we discovered the two rats and we followed them up to the middle level. They told us they would remove the strange object last as there would be problems getting it through the tunnels. Blitzkrieg seemed rather perturbed about this.

.7.

We went back to the dollshouse. The conversation turned to speculation on the quality of the steaks obtainable from the giant cows. We finally concluded that they would be tough. Too much fibre. Not much else was going on. There was a few hours spare before dinner so I went up to my room and wrote up recent events in the diary. Meanwhile Dalran was staring into a crystal and Flamis was staring into the fire in an attempt to see what the rats were up to. Dalran was having considerably more success. I suspect that the rats don't light fires for Flamis's ritual to work through.

06/01/92

I was woken abruptly as the piercing sound of Flamis yelling 'Wake up, Wake up' splintered the night. It must have been just past midnight (our time). I grabbed my sword and hurried out to see what the matter was. When I reached the hallway, I smelt smoke. I could hear the horses getting rather agitated in the stables below and decided to deal with them first; to calm them down and make sure they weren't in any danger.

The others were now alerted. Blitzkrieg was frantically strapping on armour, just as a volley of arrows thudded into the side of the house. To Flamis's vexation these were flame tipped arrows. She'd have to deal with this problem before attempting to nuke the bad guys. Already spots on the wall had caught alight, but not for long, as she started casting extinguish.

Just as I had managed to calm the horses by talking to them in equine, I heard Kynn yelling 'Half a dozen hostile humanoids'. In the castle? The Duke won't be pleased when he finds out. Once the horses were calmed I set about releasing them from their stalls, just in case we had to make an emergency exit. I was also contemplating organising a cavalry charge.

Flamis was frantically trying to extinguish the line of oily rags, outside that house that had caused

all the smoke, and the spots on the house as more arrows thudded in. Kynn was firing arrows back.

I had gone to the stable doors and had opened them a crack in an attempt to see what was going on. I also had my sword prepared just in case. At that moment the door was yanked open. I was just about to strike at what ever it was when I realised, just in time, that it was Flamis. So I grabbed her and hurriedly pulled her into cover. I prepared a Strength of Stone for her, as she was looking a bit fatigued, while she continued with the Extinguishes. Soon, the spot above the stable doors was out. Meanwhile Blitzkrieg and Fayan arrived in and headed towards Blitzkrieg's warhorse.

It took three tries but I finally gave Flamis the Strength of Stone. I then followed it with a Walking Unseen. By now Blitzkrieg was ready, with lance prepared. We flung the doors open as he galloped off.

In moments he was upon our attackers. Literally. Kynn was still taking potshots at them from an upper window and making them keep their heads down. Somehow Blitzkrieg disappeared from on top of his horse. He can't have gone invisible. A well aimed arrow passed straight over his saddle without stopping. The warhorse was making short work of the guy under it. Ugh. Messy.

A second arrow managed to hit Flamis, even though she was Unseen. Maybe these guys have Witchsight as well. Fayan reached out and dragged her back behind cover. This, of course, rendered her visible again. He then fed her a strong healing potion.

Blitzkrieg, and his horse, were soon making short work of the opposition, using what Blitzkrieg described as the hit, stun and trample technique. Already two of the opposition was down. The other two decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and dived off the balcony to the ballroom below. Another was trying to reach the balcony. Dalran had arrived down by now and he cast Quickness on himself and Flamis. I gave him a Strength of Stone. The guy looked like he needed one. By now the last of them, the semi-toasted one, had also jumped off the balcony.

While Flamis went upstairs to put the fire out, Fayan and Kynn flew off on Fayan's nightmare. They soon discovered three of them flying above the path using shadow-wings. They gave chase as they headed towards the village but decided to give up the pursuit as they gained altitude and veered off in the direction of Phant. One of the remaining opposition was still alive. I joined Blitzkrieg who was examining the corpses. As far as we could tell they were non descript mercenaries. Could the rats have hired them? Or was there something more sinister going on?

By the time we got back Flamis had succeeded in putting out the fire. It was interesting watching the fire going out, chunk by chunk. The entire third floor was extensively damaged. I said that I expected we would have to evacuate it. Blitzkrieg replied that we might have to abandon the dolls house completely. So where were we going to hole up? In an abandoned rat tunnel?

.8.

Several minutes later, I managed to discover that the aura of a bangle that our captive was wearing indicated it was magical with speed magic on it. That has to be a Quickness spell. Also a foot long wand had an Invisibility spell on it. I handed them to Fayan for further analysis. On each of the bodies was a scroll case. Inside was a scroll which said that each person had an

account at the hospital to be used in case of death. They identified our captive as Carl Veretty and the two corpses as the MacKenzie Brothers.

Carl was willing to talk. He told us that they had been contacted by a Charles Emerson that told them that the giant was going to be away for a week so it would be an ideal time to loot the place of riches. They had thought we were some sort of guards and had decided to attack us first. Somehow this Emerson chap knew that there was an enchanter and probably an earth mage among us. Nothing about fire magic. As I said to Flamis, I smelt a rat.

Carl also said that he would turn over his 'life insurance' funds to us in return for safe conduct and the resurrection of the other two. Fair enough, though we had planned to get them resurrected anyway. So Carl signed a writ. Kynn informed us that the others were hovering around about ten kilometres out. Maybe waiting in ambush or perhaps it was prearranged rendezvous. Blitzkrieg decided not to take any chances and sent Fayán off, on his Nightmare, to fetch some guards from the village.

It didn't take long for Fayán to return. Meanwhile Kynn was checking on the rats' progress. So far they seemed to be going in the right direction. Along with Fayán were a couple of the town guard, the sheriff and his deputy. So with Carl suitably manacled, we headed off into the village. The trip in was without incident. Once we got to the hospital we delivered the bodies and collected Carl's funds. Carl was handed over to the sheriff. As we approached the castle on our return Kynn reported that the little advisor rat was around the back of the castle. Nowhere near where the new site was. Now that seemed suspicious so we decided to investigate to see just what he was up to.

Kynn's Locate arrow led us around the castle wall. I noted that the plants near the wall were dead, killed by some sort of poison. The only other incident on the trip was having to carefully circumnavigate a cow. Then we ducked low as an owl winged its way overhead. A while later Kynn's arrow was pointing straight down. There must be a rat tunnel below us. As we put the horses under cover, Fayán summoned an earth elemental to dig a hole to intercept with the tunnel. Soon we were back on the trail.

It didn't take us long to catch up with the advisor rat, who told us his name was Iatty. He had Catty with him as well. Apparently a small band of rats, led by Gatty, were against handing over their loot and had deserted. Iatty and Catty were going to fetch them back, by force if required. We decided to leave them to it and headed back to the horses. Once we collected them we made our way back to the dollshouse and rested.

The original agreement was that we would meet the rats at six in the morning to help them get their equipment over to the new site, including that strange object. So it was at the crack of what would have been dawn, if sunrise wasn't a week off, that we were up again. Kynn reported that Gatty was now back with Iatty and they were with the others. I was starting to wonder just how many rats she was tracking.

As we passed the kitchen on the way, we noticed that the table was still covered in dirty dishes. Someone remarked the giant needed a housekeeper. Finally we found the rats, about sixteen of them, clustered in the entrance of a hole. One of the wimpy rats was up a bush keeping a lookout. He didn't look too happy being up there. We asked for Bossy. Somehow we weren't surprised when Iatty stepped forwards and told us he was actually Bossy. He gestured to a large pile of loot

that was lying by the hole. Most of it was miscellaneous bric-a-brac, but we did find a gold coin and half a runestick.

Just then all the rats rushed out of the hole. It looked like something was scaring them. All we could get out of them was that it was Jatty's pet. One of the other rats pointed out Jatty and Blitzkrieg, through Kynn, asked him what the story was. It turned out that the 'pet' was some sort of invisible entity that caused auras to disappear. No wonder I was having trouble with my Detect auras on these guys. Latty had no aura at all and Natty had a very faint one. This aura sucker follows Jatty around at a maximum distance of 100 feet. We couldn't think of anyway to deal with it, or even to detect it, so Jatty was ordered back up the tunnel away from everyone else.

The strange object was still in the middle floor storeroom, waiting to be taken away. It was wrapped up in sacking and gold lined book pages, probably from the giant's library. While we contemplated just how we were going to move it without going within 150 feet (we reckoned that was the closest we could get without being affected) Kynn asked Bossy whether or not he knew a Charles Emerson. It turned out that Emerson buys things for Bossy, such as exotic cheeses in exchange for coin slivers and information. He had been there yesterday. Kynn suggested that Bossy break off his dealings with Emerson as he wasn't a very nice person. Kynn then went on to describe what had happened earlier on. Bossy reluctantly agreed to do so.

Flamis peered at the object (from a safe distance) and reported that it was physically quite warm. What's more it looked magical, more magical than anything she had ever encountered. 'More magical than these?' Kynn remarked as her starsilver claws appeared from her knuckles. Flamis looked from one to the other and then said that it certainly was. The object was spherical so it was decided that Fred would roll it. Hopefully it shouldn't affect him too much. Meanwhile we stayed well out of the way.

Fred managed to get the thing down to the ballroom floor then a strange thing happened. The elemental sank into the floor. That shouldn't have happened as the floor was bound. It now appeared that we had a Bound Earth Elemental to deal with. To make matters worse Fayan had lost control of it. He was now resolving not to go anywhere near the floor as the elemental would now be attempting to destroy him. I knew there was a catch to summoning those things.

After some discussion it was decided to make some sort of hammock and get another elemental to pull the thing along at a safe distance. So Fayan went rummaging in his ambulatory luggage for suitable materials such as rope and tarpaulins. He found something in there that surprised him, a rather large tree trunk which had originated on this plane.

As well as the hammock, there was a requirement to construct some sort of automatic braking system (ABS as Fayan put it, or as Flamis called it, a "stoppity thing") in case it got away on us. Flamis set to work tying ropes and building a wedge-shaped device. To complicate matters, the object started sinking into the floor. Fortunately it stopped after only embedding itself about a third of the way.

Fayan conjured up another elemental and got it to push the object out of the crater it had created for itself and into the hammock. He then got the elemental to grab the long rope and start pulling. To his surprise the elemental saluted him and rushed eagerly to the task. Usually those things have to be controlled all the time. Could we have created a pacifistic elemental?

Soon the ball had bounced down the steps and into the garden. At that point the elemental stopped pulling, rushed over to a nearby bush, then returned wearing a flower. Flamis squealed in delight that had to be "a hippy elemental". Fayan decided to conjure up another one that would keep its mind, or whatever passed for one, on the job. I was attempting to read the auras of the plants that the ball had passed over in an effort to determine just how this thing was causing the mutations. Without much luck. I watched in amazement as one grass blade uprooted itself and ran off. A fly that tried to land on the ball exploded as it came in contact.

Iatty (aka Bossy) arrived at this point to see what was going on. We told him about the Bound Earth Elemental and he agreed to get Catty and see if there was something they could do about it. Already we had seen arms coming out of the wall reaching out in Fayan's direction. I cast a Strength of Stone on Fayan as he was looking a tad fatigued. The next elemental grabbed the rope and stomped off, pulling the thing behind it. As it progressed, we noticed that it was stomping more and more heavily into the ground. Soon it was making imprints up to its knees. Fayan said it was getting more and more angry so he decided to dispel that one as well.

As Fayan got another elemental to start pulling, Flamis remarked that the object was glowing brighter. I was discovering that the grass here was a bit tougher to cut through with by sword than I expected. I decided to back off another fifty feet. This Fred seemed to be a speed freak as it began pulling the thing faster and faster. Too fast for an earth elemental. Once it tripped but it soon picked itself and continued on at an ever increasing pace. Soon the stress got too much for the rope and it broke. Fayan immediately dispelled the elemental and it disappeared in a flash.

By now the globe must have been getting very hot as the top of the sacking caught on fire. I suggested to Flamis that she try to extinguish it but she replied it was a bit out of her range and it looked far too dangerous to approach. That I could agree with. It was starting to remind me of an extra large grenado just about to go off. Already shafts of purple light were shooting up in the air from the thing, getting bigger and brighter.

We decided that the whole thing was getting out of control. Dalran put a Quickness spell on Fayan and his horse. Fayan galloped in and put a Wall of Stone around the object. He then put a cap on top. Nervously we waited to see what would happen. I remarked to Blitzkrieg that it might be safer waiting in Alusia.

Instead we headed for the castle and hid around the corner. Fayan managed to produce a large mirror with a rather garish frame. We all agreed that Fayan had dreadful taste in mirrors as we hurriedly propped the thing up, angled so that we could watch what was happening while sheltering around the corner of the wall. Then we waited to see if there was going to be any fireworks.

Fayan remarked that the area around the thing was high mana. Flamis had an idea. She prepared a spell, and promptly announced that mana was flowing towards the object as if it was sucking it up. I started having visions of a mana overload explosion and started calculating how long it would take for us to reach the portal to Alusia. We didn't have long to wait. Soon the Wall of Stone was shaking. I could feel faint vibrations in the ground. A split second later, purple light was spilling through gaps in the wall and the ground. Blitzkrieg gave the order to bug out.

We did, at the fastest possible speed that our horses could carry us. Of course Fayan got well ahead of us. He was waiting by the tree as we arrived, having already established that the portal

was still there and that it still led to Alusia. I had to cajole Flamis to keep moving as she was hankering to look back and see the explosion. I pointed out that it would probably be the last thing she ever saw. Already the light behind us splintered the night, exploding in brilliant flashes of purple mixed with actinic blue. The air rumbled with a sound like a volcano about to erupt. The ground shook as part of the castle, the tower nearest the thing, collapsed.

Finally we reached the portal. We shot through it as if Death himself was after us (he probably was) and appeared into early morning sunshine, with birds singing in the farm from which we had left. We watched and waited by the inky black portal.

Suddenly a flash of purple-blue shot out of the portal. We waited. The portal remained inky black. Kynn argued with Blitzkrieg about some point of honour and then she jumped through the portal. I was all set to follow her, but Flamis stopped me saying that I wasn't going back through that thing without her. Fayan confirmed that it would be a right foolhardy thing to do. Guess he's right. We waited. To our relief Kynn popped back through a few minutes later. She reported that there was now a huge crater by the castle. A large mushroom-shaped cloud had formed, full of that mutating magic. She judged that it would be necessary to evacuate the nearby village.

It was soon suggested that someone go back to the Guild and fetch an air mage to blow the cloud away. Fayan had access to some sort of teleportation device so he used that. About quarter of an hour later, he returned, accompanied by the Head of the Air College. We all trooped back through the portal. My first thought when I beheld the scene before us was that the giant was going to be mightily angry. Over half of the keep was destroyed and what was left was on fire. A big menacing cloud was glowering overhead. Blitzkrieg asked the air mage to create a wind to blow the cloud to an area which we believed was uninhabited. Flamis offered to fly ahead and check.

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I was considering using one of my Shadowwings to overfly the area and see what had happened but Blitzkreig vetoed the idea. Instead he opted for one of Flamis's Fireflights. I put a Strength of Stone on Flamis and both of them took off. Meanwhile the rest of us went down to the village. Already quite a few lights were blazing down there.

When we got there, the sheriff was desperately trying to keep order. Kynn dismounted and went over to help. Soon they had managed to disperse the crowd, promising that a full investigation would be launched into the welfare of Duke Cumberband. We then headed for the sheriff's office where Kynn explained about the 'magical accident'. We then went around the village to reassure the inhabitants. I ended up with Kynn and wisely decided to let her do all the talking while I observed her interesting style of diplomacy.

After a while the others returned. The area where the cloud was going was desolate wilderness and they had found a dead end canyon to park it in. Blitzkrieg went off to find the air mage. When he got back we went to see what had happened to the area. I couldn't detect any signs of fallout until we got within 1500 feet from the crater lip. The facing wall of the castle was completely gone and we could see fires within. Fayan and Flamis flew in on Fayan's nightmare and soon came back bearing what gear we left behind and the giant runesticks. Flamis reckoned the dollshouse was safe. She also had managed to put out the fire in the library saving all the books except for the ones in the early part of the 'A' section, then did the one in what was left of the study.

Meanwhile we circumnavigated the hole at a range of 1500 feet. The ground beyond was soaked in mutating magic and all the grass in the area had been burnt off. The back of the castle had acted as a blast wall so everything back there was intact. Some dead cows were lying on the ground and I soon determined that the cause of death had been a cerebral implosion.

Once the others arrived back we went looking for the rats back door. We soon found it, along with several dead rats inside it, who had tried to flee from the blast. Flamis decided she wanted a rat's skull to take back for Dramus. Someone then suggested that we should take back a cow's skull. It would be big enough for Dramus to sleep in.

A count of the bodies showed there were five of 'da boys' and five of the small rats, as well as one human. Two magical rings were found. One was ice projectiles and the other was some sort of protection storage. Still unaccounted for was Catty, Gatty, Iatty and three of the little rats. Flamis started chopping away at Datty in order to remove the head. Soon some of the others helped. Once that was done we headed back to the village.

It was about four in the afternoon when we woke up in the village inn. Flamis was feeling very bouncy. It was still dark outside but we could see that the castle wasn't on fire any more but there was quite a bit of light emanating from it. We decided to investigate. When we got there we discovered a Yiddish guard who wanted to know what our business was. When we told him who we were he explained that the Duke was back and he wanted to speak to us. It transpired that, when the Duke realised his rune portal wasn't working, the Yiddish Celestial Mage had flown another one down. Oh well, so much for our idea of firelighting up.

We found the Duke surveying the damage. The light was emanating from his runewand as a beam. It was overpowering bright when he shone it on us. He didn't seem too pleased when Blitzkrieg told him what had happened and muttered something about having to redecorate. He concluded that the first priority was to decontaminate the soil.

Kynn's Locate's showed that Catty was about thirty to thirty five miles away in one direction, while Gatty was about the same distance in another. There was no trace of Iatty. Either he was dead or out of range. Either way he was a long way off. Kynn reckoned that Catty should be neutralised because of his talent for neutralising magic. There was a bit of an argument about that but finally Flamis cast Fireflights on Kynn and Blitzkrieg and they took off. Flamis must have doubled at least on Blitzkrieg as he was flying rings around Kynn.

When Kynn got back she reported that Catty had died honourably in single combat with Blitzkrieg. However Catty had dispelled Blitzkrieg's fireflight so Blitzkrieg was coming back via shadowwings. Flamis cast another Fireflight on Kynn and she took off, (at speed - Flamis tripled) to deal with Gatty.

By the time she's back, after dealing to Gatty and two of the smaller rats (she let the other one go) Blitzkrieg had arrived back and I had just finished giving him some Earth Mage Healing. We then went off to find the air mage. I put another Strength of Stone to restore some of Flamis's fatigue and she cast Fireflights on herself, Blitzkrieg and Fayan. Blitzkrieg decided to engage in some skywriting before they raced off to help land the cloud and post warning signs.

According to Flamis, Iatty was either dead or fled. She decided to have a nap. Meanwhile Cumberband had checked the soil under the castle and announced that it was okay. Also it was just the surface that was contaminated. So he started scraping off the top soil. The air mage was riding on his shoulder. Fayan conjured up a 45ft tall elemental to carry the earth and dump it in the crater. Cumberband then decided he wanted to divinate the area so we decided to head off to the village and sleep. On the way we checked on a rather harassed Jack and the kitten. The kitten was happy. We finally caught another eight hours sleep.

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I managed to get in an hours purification and a little bit of weapon practise before we headed off. It was a nice night for riding. Fayan pulled out a black cloak and a sickle from his box and rode ahead of us. He made a great looking Death. Blitzkrieg was trying to keep us in formation and Kynn was doing the opposite. Blitzkrieg gave up in disgust.

The giant was still engaged in the divination ritual when we got there. Since we hadn't found a map in the stuff that the rats had left behind we decided to explore the tunnels and do our own. It was decided to start with the rats back door near the kitchen wall. Kynn cast some Enchant Armours all around and Fayan summoned an elemental before we entered.

The tunnel here seemed rougher than the others. I picked up a piece of Bound Earth as we progressed onwards and upwards. Dalran probed ahead with his Wizard's Eye. One side tunnel lead into the storeroom while another kept going ahead. We seemed to be somewhere in the back wall. All the walls were Bound. After a while Blitzkrieg commented that we must be in the stairwell. A short while later the tunnel ended but we found a hidden door in the ceiling. The elemental pushed through it. Up above was a cavity with some sort of plumbing. No other exits could be found. We decided to leave.

The next tunnel we explored went up a bit and headed towards the dollshouse over the doorway between the kitchen and dining rooms. It dead ended a bit later on so we abandoned that one and went to the next on the list.

This one sloped up to an area with an unbound roof. The elemental opened it and we found ourselves near where Dalran had a close encounter with the trap. This tunnel sloped downwards towards the middle floor storeroom. Dalran remarked that the tunnel was narrower. We examined the alcove where the mousetrap was. Sure enough the alcove was smaller. Now it looked like a hollow depression. There seemed to be some sort of changing magic in the castle. We decided to head off and see where Bossy had been.

That had been somewhere on the next level. Dalran reckoned the tunnel ended in a sack of grain. As we progressed Dalran continued to utilise his Wizard's Eye and discovered several side caverns off the main tunnel which was spiralling upwards. Finally we found a large cavern with a pile of woodchips in the corner. Definitely a rat bed. Flamis rushed over and started taking samples. There were two exits from the back of this place so Dalran sent his Eye through. To his surprise he encountered an area he couldn't penetrate, about 50ft radius. The other tunnel also entered this zone.

According to my Detect Aura, the entire area of the air in the doorway to this place was magically warded but I was unable to determine what it was. The elemental walked through. Nothing

happened to it but some magic had impacted on it. We finally managed to determine that the ward was a ward against magic. While the others argued what to do I removed my magical items, handed them to Flamis then stepped through. Well sort of. For some reason I tripped in the doorway and fell through it. My boots wouldn't go though so I checked their aura. Magical, some sort of strengthening magic. They must have been enchanted by the mutation magic in the ground. Dalran tried and he too, found that his boots wouldn't go through. So we removed our boots and stepped in. There were two runesticks stuck in the ground in that area. From what we could tell, they were generating the warding field. Dalran hacked at one with a crystal sabre and knocked the top off. The warding field collapsed. I retrieved my magical equipment from Flamis then we continued on.

Dalran's Eye was still active and he announced that he could see an open area with rugs, chairs and other household type stuff. For some reason he became obsessed with the thought of one of the rugs. So much so we feared that he had been affected by some sort of magical effect. We finally had to sit on him for a while. There seemed to be nothing odd in his aura. Finally we relented and got off him. Shortly we entered the area Dalran had described. To our surprise it was outfitted like a human room with a bed, desk, chair etc. One of the rugs had a rat motif and that was the one that had Dalran fascinated.

We checked the entrance way for magical traps and found one. There was some sort of rune magic in the doorway. Fayen sent Fred through. Instantly the way was blocked by a shimmering runewall. No problem, Fayen remarked and instructed Fred to knock a hole through. Meanwhile Dalran had determined that the exit at the back lead to a latrine. We had to be conscious of time as we had already determined that the tunnels were closing in very slowly as if the castle was repairing itself. Once Fred had completed the task we were in. Dalran immediately started rolling up the rat motif rug while the rest of us searched the place for anything valuable. Actually trashing the place seemed to be a more adequate description. All we found were two non-magical daggers which Kynn took.

I asked Dalran what he wanted the rug for and he said he wanted it to wrap a giant egg in. The rest of us looked at him rather oddly. He then announced that he wasn't a looney. That reminded me of a story that had been told a few Guild meetings ago. Apparently, on adventure, the party Dalran had been in had been mistaken for escapees from an asylum. He had attempted to avoid capture by yelling at the guards "I'm not a looney". Somehow they didn't believe him. He had been voted Stupidest Adventurer for that.

Once we got out, we went back to the pile of rat stuff to give it a more detailed search. When we got there we discovered that some of the stuff was missing. We did find a vial containing a Mindcloak potion, as well as the map. One of the packages was tied with a giant shoelace. Most of the stuff was junk but Flamis started collecting the giant pins. I think she's got an idea for some sort of weapons. As we did that the speculation was raised that Bossy was a shapeshifter.

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I then spot checked the horseshoes on our horses to see if they had been affected the same way as our boots and discovered that the palfreys had horseshoes of speed while the warhorses ones dealt out extra damage.

Flamis was hatching plans to extract the cow skull. Dalran decided he wanted the tail. Finally we

concluded that we would have to ask the giant to help. Just then we heard a loud twang, followed by some clattering. It turned out that Dalran had been into the giant's toolshed and knocked down a woodsaw. We decided to have a bit of a snooze while we waited for the giant to surface. Kynn helped the mood by playing lullabies.

The giant arrived and reported that the castle was semi-alive but not intelligent. He was considering keeping the portal open for a while longer as there may be the odd job for small parties. When we told him we were wanting the skull he looked rather puzzled then went to get his axe. Once the skull was off Blitzkrieg suggested boiling it to get the meat off. Furthermore it could make a nourishing broth. Cumberband went off to check his recipe books.

I was wondering how heavy one of those giant coins were so Kynn flipped one over. I decided to let it land on the ground before picking it up. I then amused myself for a while doing weightlifting exercises with it. A little while later we heard an owl. To it we probably looked rather succulent so we froze where we were. It probably would have been alright if Dalran had left it alone, but no. He decided to take potshots at it with energy bolts. Of course that attracted it towards him. As it flew down at him he triggered an Invested Hands of Earth, then dived under one. He was lucky he wasn't grabbed by it. Flamis let fly with dragonflames while I missed with my large crossbow. I dropped it and started preparing the smaller one. As the owl came around again, Blitzkrieg fired his crossbow and Kynn shot at it with her bow. Both hit. Flamis put up a Wall of Fire in order to deter it and I finally managed to hit with the smaller crossbow. Finally the owl flew away. A short while later Cumberband returned and said that he would prepare the skull for us. It would be ready in about five days.

There seemed to be little else we could do there so we made our farewells and headed for the portal. Fayan went off to the hospital first to negotiate the selling of some potions. When he returned we stepped through the portal. The air mage had already left for Alusia.

While Dalran arranged to borrow a cart to transport the giant tail to the Guild, the rest of us went on ahead. Upon arrival at the Guild we went in for debriefing and divination to see if we had picked up anything else. My boots turned out to grant me an extra point of strength if I was standing on the earth. In the subsequent treasure split I decided to go for the ring of quickness. It might come in useful. I also paid Fayan to do me an Invested Armour of Earth but something went wrong with the ritual. Oh well. I'll rank my own spell instead.

After that it was time for training. I decided to follow Kynn's advice and concentrate on weapons before going out again.

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