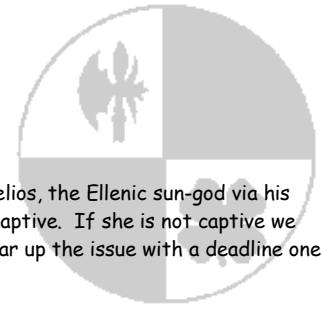


A Cunning Rescue

(An adventure by Michael Parkinson)



2nd Day of Summer, 803

Seagate the city of beggars, Despotism of Cazarla, this guild meeting we have been hired by Aetes, the son of Helios, the Ellenic sun-god via his Wizeer to recover his daughter, her holyness, Médea (Cunning) whom Pearl, the duchess of Avenal claims to have captive. If she is not captive we need to confirm she is well; evidence is not necessary as our minds will be read. We have up to seven months to clear up the issue with a deadline one week before the winter solstice.

We will be paid each a valuable magical item for a successful mission and are given some potions with any left over being ours to keep as a sweetener, any legitimate treasure found will be taxed at fifty percent by having us make two piles and Aetes choosing one, generally a pile more than a hundred pennies richer will always be chosen. The Wizeer will transport us & our equipment (to a limit) wherever we want to go, presumably our employer's court, for more details and then to Avenal, where it is winter being in the south, or elsewhere, although he lets us know it is a very unsubtle method of transport.

The party due to their moral code decides that there will be no enslavement of captives, preferring to execute/murder them instead. Summoning demons, gods and horrors or their minions is to be avoided. Torture of captives is also to be avoided due to Kit's delicate sensibilities.

The Wizeer is a dwarven Bard who drinks small beer, which is never a good sign in a dwarf and had a permanent silver tongue upon him. The guild had performed a ritual of truespeaking to allow us to question him:

Background Ellenic History

Her holyness is the high-priestess of the goddess of magic, Hecate, and was married to King Goatish of Thought, who died. She fled tower hill (Cornith) with her otherwise legitimate heir, Medus, after reputedly trying to kill King Goatish's bastard child He-who-Deposits. (He-who-Deposits was expelled by factions within the city and Thought is now a democracy).

Five months ago her holyness passed through the Ellenic states on her way, she claimed, to Lutice in Raniterre to see what happened to a pen pal of hers, an old girlfriend with whom she exchanges recipes and who is, or was, a councilor loosely attached to the Royal court there and who hadn't answered her crows for several years. Apparently she had a reading suggesting that the friend may have died or been transformed a few years previously.

On her way to Raniterre, she apparently passed through Avenal (although it's not on the direct route) and was reputedly captured by the duchess there, who happens to be a mind-mage. The duchess' hobbies include interfering in foreign politics, setting up criminal empires, civic building (prisons or trapped subterranean complexes are her specialty), and revenge. Those of the party who had met her previously described her as being very beautiful, in her late forties and a little vain, although I suspect this may just be envy on their part.

Four months ago a herald arrived from Avenal demanding an impossible ransom, the sort you don't expect to be paid, it included a thirty year peace, no wharf fees and 5% duties (protection money) instead of the normal 7-10%. Evidently Aetes cannot see her holyness which means she is either dead, underground or only comes out at night; she had not previously met the duchess.

Aetes sent two groups to attempt rescue prior to hiring a guild party, none being successful which is surprising since he has the power to choose the right group for a given task, and leads me to suspect that the task may be different to what he believes. There is no ransom for any members of these groups.

Our Employer

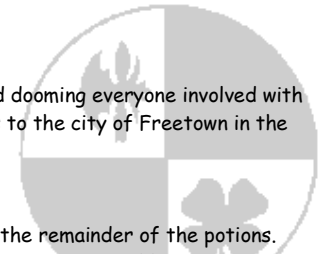
Aetes (mighty/eagle) is the son of Helios, the Ellenic sun-god and his mother is the oceanid Perseis ('destruction'); he is believed to be the same as Sir Earnest Drake, the ruler of Freetown -- a haven of independent commercial maritime traders & transporters (pirates) in the Isles of Adventure, a few days sail from the Ellenic coast. Sir Earnest appears variously as a human or a Black Dragon [Mind college]. It is advised against wearing anything which may be construed as insulting by his court as they will take revenge, dragon skin armour and black clothes are not part of a suitable wardrobe, nor is casting or wearing magic, especially mind cloak, in his presence; bringing gifts is not a bad idea also.

Research and Rumors

Chevalier Roke uncovers that there are lots of large emeralds coming out of Avenal, however few sapphires or rubies as these have been mined out by the drow who particularly like these stones. Much of the trade in Raniterre is controlled by monopolies and the church, black pearls are very popular.

Wild rumors coming out of Avenal suggest..

- They are using the wealth from their emerald mines to increase their military strength.
- They are going to declare independence from the kingdom.
- There is a new portal which is being used to trade spice and may go to Malacandria (where the Olympian titans reside).
- The duke is divorcing duchess Pearl due to her past, she does not seem the sort of lady to take such things well.
- Duchess Pearl is in fact Margarita Sforza Cubo of destiny and has a long history of killing guild members.



3rd Day of Summer

After a smelly morning spent getting greaterers, dumping all our bad karma upon the people downwind in Seagate and dooming everyone involved with multiple astrology readings, we leave midday upon a titan family-sized (15*20 foot) flying chariot which is to fly us to the city of Freetown in the isles of adventure.

3rd - 4th Day of Summer (Mostly around the world in eighteen hours)

We fly for eighteen hours during which time I divinate the chariot (honest I had no intention of stealing it) and the remainder of the potions. The chariot is drawn by the sun, taking off, flying and landing at midday, solar aspected people love it. Whipping the reigns at midday triggers it to fly (at about 1000 miles per hour), however it can only be flown by someone with 'permission'. It can only move about 5 degrees north or south as it flies by leaning it slightly to one side and is very dangerous to land, especially after being awake flying it for a day or more without rest.

Some of us get quite sunburnt at the high altitude it flies, however given our speed we outrun and avoid all mundane difficulties normally encountered flying over Terranova, the slaver lands and such. There is a magical field around it and anything inside which leaves this field is instantly accelerated to a thousand miles an hour (don't poke your head out, and don't be alarmed by bird strikes).

4th Day of Summer, Freetown

Freetown is located upon the coast of a mountainous island, a long thin town it creeps along the waters edge and only travels a little ways up the mountain with a sea-side fortified palace of the ruler. Landing on the mountain side we travel down not failing to notice the busy port contains fifteen vessels, three of which are destinian. The voices drifting up from the city are in common, Ellenic and the smattering of drow poison sellers.

Retiring to the inn of st George we are invited to dinner, getting freshened up with new clothes for those of us with all black wardrobes. The new republican destinian style appears to be flamingo (black clothes with a colorful sash), but most people here wear white.

Dinner with a god

Dinner goes off without a hitch, dining in comfort with thirteen drow wreathed in shadow, who may well be Aeetes' assassins getting a good look at us considering all guild parties have dined with groups of drow, and two Arabic nobles, one of whom has a blue halo -- which is what happens if you are mind cloaked. It is a meaty Arabic affair with lots of gelatinous servings of spiced animal parts and no entertainment.

Aeetes /Sir Earnest appears fashionably late in diaphanous black silks which fail completely to hide the beautiful encrustations of gems and gold upon his fine draconic form. A large diamond hangs from a golden chain about his neck. After a beautifully poetic welcoming speech, no doubt enhanced by bardic magic, in which we are welcomed as hero's, then the nobles and finally the drow (who eat with silver rather than gold), we have our hands and feet washed by servants and feast while discussing inconsequential pleasantries although at one point the mind-mage Arabic noble goes completely white, (possibly being a spy of Aeetes using telepathy upon us).

Meetings in the Library

After dinner we meet Aeetes in his small library, who now appears as a human with all his accoutrements scaled down and a titanic aura about him. After receiving our gift courtesy of Gerrard, four bottles of twelve hundred year old wine; I quiver at the thought of wine needing that much cellaring, he informs us of recent developments. Duchess Pearl has annulled her marriage, becoming queen of the new kingdom of Bretlond, which includes the duchy of Avanan and all the monster filled jungles to the south. Queen Pearl has no demonic allies, however she has won the allegiance of a large group of champions, has a few favors from powerful individuals which she could call upon in need and is one of the mistress' of the cardinal.

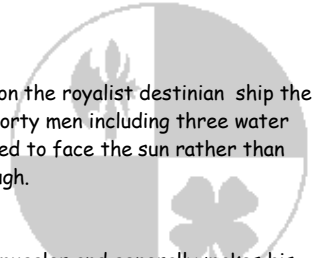
Raniterre is very poor with the only trade being a few emeralds, the odd ancient drow artifact and the arms trade, which may be what is being exported off plane, although Aeetes believes the portal to Malacandria story to be disinformation and is interested in anything we find out. Raniterre is so poor in fact that they don't use invested items / potions or scrolls but poor substitutes instead. Most nobles are pacted to a demon and due to their massive population they can field armies of tens of thousands of men. Most of the destinian loyalist/rebels (Carlos supporters) have moved from the serene republic to Avanan.

Her holyness' friend was elven centuries old when she was killed by a previous guild party and had been swapping recipes for two centuries. A titan /nymph, her mother being Eidyia ('the knowing'), her holyness is definitely not human and is skilled in shriving magic's. Much to our disappointment however no potions were left lying about, Aeetes hopes that the mana storms are not due to her actions.

The two parties he sent were a complete failure, one was a unsubtle but well equipped military group and the other a group of desperate and disorganized men. The herald sent by the then duchess was ignorant of what was occurring but did know of hobbits riding albatross's for sea patrols and vultures used over the desert for spying by the cardinal. We decide to send the chariot south as a diversion (it appears as a comet in the sky) while we travel south by ship. Cashing in my truesilver I am provided with freshly minted st Carlos and st Arnaud coins.

5th -6th Day of Summer

We stay in Freetown while some mind cloak potions are made for us and we arrange travel out by ship. Investigating the fine city of Freetown we enjoy our rest before the sea voyage and make the acquaintance of numerous delightful young ladies, feast and shop. I recommend paying generous tips to the staff of the inn as in return we were well protected, a drow assassin / thief being 'convinced' by them to leave us in peace.



7th day of Summer to 12th Day of Winter

We travel from Freetown to the island of St Charles which is located one hundred miles off the coast of Avenal upon the royalist destinian ship the divine grace. It is an immaculately presented, one could even go so far as to say courtly, ship with a crew of about forty men including three water mages. The mobile court of some don who is the younger son of a bishop, it came complete with flatterers and tended to face the sun rather than the direction we were moving, there was no navigator and sailors were incompetent, however the marines looked tough.

13th Day of Winter - St Charles

Staying upon an inn at the end of a causeway leading into the city we chat with the innkeeper, Steinfeller. He is a smuggler and generally makes his money moving brandy although this has become far more risky as the Avenal navy can now see in the dark. He arranges guides to take us into the city and lets us know that the deamon worshippers in the town will leave us alone if we spend sufficient money. The inn itself is a partially converted sanitarium and many of the rooms still have bars upon the windows, it is secure and warm if a bit deserted.

Our merchants find the following information about Avenal and the Duchess.

- Lots of oranges are coming out of Avenal.
- A bridge has been constructed downstream near the coast, previously the only bridge was at the capital fifty or more miles upstream.
- The president of St Charles visited Avenal several months ago but has not returned, she has sent messages saying not to worry and she is well, although most seem to think this highly unlikely.
- Huge amounts of unusual items have been purchased from St Charles to take to Guido City and Pearly bay (naval capital) including two tons of oyster shells, herbs and brooms. Nearly all the chocolate (a drow luxury) has been purchased.
- There are very few dyes or colored inks here as this trade broke the elven monopoly and the person responsible died with no one willing to continue the trade.
- The gold being traded is of two types, one off planar with St Michael on one face and Empress Victoria on the other and the other being freshly minted Bretlond coins with Carlo Magno (King of Bretonia) on them.
- The emerald and spice trade must be huge to give them the money they appear to have.
- Queen Margarita is pregnant and is the acting regent for the king of Bretonia, Carlo Magno. The father is unknown, but not st Michael and the pregnancy has been official since beltane (1st Day of Winter)
- Queen Margaeta's marriage to the duke was annulled four months ago.
- There is a new religion St Michael, peril of the sea (powers of light) in the area with those pious worshippers of the old church of all saints (72 demons) being given money to emigrate to Raniterre (Steinfeller has managed to get paid to leave three times) . The old church of all saints has been converted to the new religion and the church of Forneus on a pier appears deserted or those who enter don't leave.
- Trade is bypassing St Charles now and the town is a bit deserted, devoid of street performers and needing only some tumbleweed, with many people retiring due to the fortunes they amassed selling their stocks and due to migration to Guido city.
- It is unknown what exactly the relationship exists between margarita and the vampire cardinal of the church of all saints, but heavy bribes may play a significant role.
- They seem to have cleared over four hundred square miles of forest in four months, which would require a vast labor.

Information and guesses from party members and their otherworldly contacts reveals

- Queen Margarita's baby may be Carlos reborn as she was previously pregnant with his child but it was halted. Many party members are keen on a bit of regicide (I believe the fourth time for some). Some go so far as to think that the nobles may be being improved by having their virtue shriven off which is to be given to baby Carlos.
- Media and her friend have the ability to turn sheaves of corn into extremely powerful elven soldiers and nobles into trees

Being somewhat less skilled at gathering information I visit the local sights including the church of all saints which seems to be more a place to hire assassins and bodyguards rather than a place of worship, although some of the statues are quite accurate. Visiting Sad Mary's bar and girl I pass time and keep out of trouble.

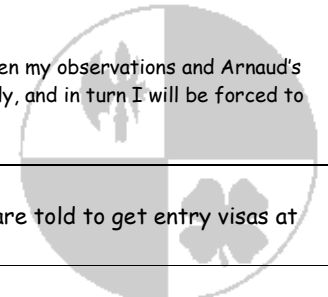
14th Day of Winter

We travel by fishing boat for twenty hours to the coast just north of pearly bay (the naval capital) with the party disguised as dead fish, which while smelly, especially when Motley is sick, seems to evade detection. Arriving on shore we are disguised as a group of short destinian gentry having a picnic two hours before the dawn.

During the journey discussions seem to indicate that the party, who include several multiple-regicides, are very keen on murdering Queen Margarita and her unborn child, whom they suspect is Carlos reborn. Protests that this is not the mission I hired on for resulted in some ill will and divisiveness in the party.

15th Day of Winter (Full Storm Moon Tonight)

Spied upon by a halfling on an albatross we realize that a pre-dawn picnic is a bit suspicious, especially as we are missing a blanket, wine etc. Shortly afterwards the albatross flies off south and four heavily armored michaline knights on huge warhorses return wearing helmets which would stack beautifully -- especially with the head still in them. Roke (who is the only one who can speak dago) chats to them, later telling us they were at first concerned for our welfare as the north is controlled by deamon worshippers before tricking him by asking if he was staying at a fictitious inn. Exposed we draw weapons and ...



I, Kit, continue as scribe from where the Demon Arnaud left off, albeit with a different viewpoint. Perhaps between my observations and Arnaud's fuming a careful reader may find their own Truth, for while Arnaud told few lies, he used truth even more sparingly, and in turn I will be forced to gloss over certain delicate matters best left unmentioned.

Moonday 14th Meadow - Fort Avenal

We do a meet-and-greet with the locals at Fort Avenal, and organise resurrections in contrition. We are told to get entry visas at Guido City.

As dawn breaks over the unfortunate battlefield, the fog of war lifts, and we can see the fallen. The Michaelines surrender, but Arnaud accidentally smites one repeatedly unto death with his axe of hellfire. We tend to the two fallen Michaelines but discover they have passed on, so talk to the two living knights - both are local Bret Michaelines, and amiable enough, once we present our credentials - apparently it is not unheard-of for people to accidentally slay Destinian Michaelines on first meeting them (the two deceased are both Destinians). We amble back towards Fort Avenal, technically under arrest, and chat about local politics and events with Sir Guthlac. Brightflare feels it may be better if he doesn't enter the Michaeline fort because of his affliction, which had led the knights to attack in the first instance. He flies back to the Isle of St Charles. Arnaud also leaves, in a puff of smoke.

Fortunately, a stray burnt and bleeding war-horse precedes us into town, so the full military escort is ready, and the local court is already preparing for us. We talk to a Gabrielite priest, who helps us prepare our defence, exchanges local coinage for us, and helps us to change for court. Lord Bothways, a very traditional and provincial noble of Bret, and bureaucratic self-important cipher, holds our trial. We pay for the resurrections and the healing for the horse, which costs more than the resurrections. We learn that the horses have Greater Enchantments and protections against magic - transferring undesirable effects to their riders. The Knights are apparently easier to acquire, train and resurrect. We are also ordered to travel to Guido City (previously known as Gaviston), the new mercantile capital of Britannia, to get passes to allow us to travel in Britannia. As we wish to visit the Pearly Gates (the royal and administrative capital), this detour may cost us several weeks, but we abide by the court ruling and prepare to travel with our escort of Sir Guthlac to Guido City. Sailing should take a day, riding a week, but Sir Guthlac seems uncomfortable about what we might see on the way if riding, so we elect to ride, leaving the following morning. We send a message to our host at the Isle of St Charles for the demon worshippers to meet us at Guido City on the 22nd.

Duesday 15th Meadow to Sunday 20th Meadow - Avenal to San Carlos

We undertake a quiet journey along the river; learning much about the quaint lifestyle of the locals, and their Destinians guests. We also learn about the Queen's Paladins.

We ride towards San Carlos along the main road, making good time, and learning the habits and culture of the native Bret people on the way. In general, the Bret people are somewhat rustic and simple, but short-tempered and quick to take offence. Every freeman carries a short sword or "bret" at all times, and they are quick to half-draw them, though we see very little bloodshed. They are proud but not fighters or killers, and can be talked down from hasty violence. They also reek of garlic. There are towns frequently, and the townsfolk keep up with events by reading the hill-top semaphore signals. To slow this exchange of sensitive military information, the semaphore codes are changed frequently, but some townsfolk still know of the circumstances of our arrival at Fort Avenal, by the time we arrive and cheerfully discuss it with our escort.

Since I last travelled through Avenal, coinage has replaced barter, and horses & oxen are much more common. The general wealth of the common folk has lifted considerably, and the necessity for gentry to wear ribbons as the only affordable means of decoration has passed.

One evening, we dine with some Destinian merchants, and learn their slant on the new order. They feel that while much money is flowing, there is a fundamental flaw in the scheme. There is no guarantee that the situation won't change again just as rapidly. The Destinians have put a great deal of money and effort into establishing Avenal as the Kingdom of Britannia, but have little more than an alliance of convenience with the Queen. The Destinians also tell us about the Queen's Champions, twelve awesome warriors in totally-covering plate mail, of who even the Destinian Michaelines are wary. These twelve Paladins appeared a couple of months ago, and are said to be incorruptible. They travel in pairs, on foot or by horse, and they use a variety of heavy weaponry.

Moonday 21st Meadow - Arrival near San Carlos

Eventually arriving at the quiet village of Badly-on-sea, we take a well-deserved break.

We ride into the town of Badly-on-Sea, across the river from Guido City, just before dark. The town is not particularly special, except for its proximity to Fort San Carlos, a large castle with a variety of large stone buildings inside its walls, which guards the north end of the bridge. Badly-upon-Sea is 2 miles west (downstream) of the bridge. There is a 600 yard cleared killing ground around San Carlos. The bridge itself is made from the road that previously connected Pearly Gates with Oberthal - a distance of some 300 miles, but only a day's ride on this magic road. The road was destroyed to make this bridge, several hundred miles away. The bridge seems almost nave-like with its high arches with the twin golden guardians of Michael & Gabriel atop them, which almost seem to touch. The bridge is pitch-black. Sir Guthlac is particularly twitchy, but we are all so tired that we go to bed early.

Mooneve 21st Meadow – Bridging Worlds

Taking to the waters for refreshment, we instead witness a huge yet secret inter-dimensional portal intimately involved in the spice trade, and probably travelling to Malacandria.

At around ten o'clock the party is restless and, leaving our guide to sleep, we quietly head out of town. The half moon is due to rise at midnight, and in the dark we wander quite close to the bridge. San Carlos is full of light and sound, and we see many patrols on & outside the walls. As we pause and take our bearings around eleven o'clock, a family of halflings wanders down to the river to fish. Intrigued, we follow them down to the water's edge, and then slip into the river, swimming up easily against the current. As we stop to rest on the bank a couple of hundred yards beyond the bridge, we notice that Guido City on the far bank has been obscured by a large irregular area of bound mist. The golden bridge guardians start glowing. At quarter to midnight San Carlos's gates to the bridge open, and a dozen 4 & 6 wheeled large wagons pulled by horses and oxen emerge, shepherded by two of the Queen's champions. The wagons contain well-bound crates - perhaps half a ton of goods each. The river current stops, but the water is not bound. St Elmo's fire suddenly illuminates the delicate strands of the bridge as there is a graunch and a snap from over the water; then a bright light appears briefly in the middle of the bridge, followed by an indirect ruddy glow (more sunset than fires-of-hell). The wagons are hurried towards the opened portal, with guards pushing the wagons to speed the transit. As the last of the wagons disappears through the portal, a number of people run out of the portal and head towards San Carlos - those aiding the wagons are left behind, however. The portal closes in a blink a few instants after the last of them leaves. Meanwhile, the level of the river has dropped maybe eight foot. Over the next few minutes, the mist "naturally" rises from in front of Guido City and the water starts flowing, at its currently reduced level. We head back to the inn, noting the easy fishing the reduced level has created for the net-wielding halflings.

Later, we find out that the portal works on a cycle averaging 3 weeks, revolving around Thursdays - Malacandria is also known as Thunor.

Duesday 22nd Meadow – Guido City's Foreign Quarter

Guido City's foreign quarter is very busy ...

We head across the bridge into the foreign quarter of Guido City, which is vibrant and cosmopolitan, full of Destinian, Bret and Common speakers. The gate guards recommend The Colonel's (owned by Dunstan Ridondo) or The Drow's (owned by Ethelbert Chuckwood), as other hostels would not be able to manage such a mixed group. We decide on the Colonel's (at 1 shilling a night each), and meet our halfling host Wolfstrom and long-lost travelling companion, Brightflare. Sir Guthlac farewells us and reports to the main Michaeline barracks.

The Foreign Quarter is busy but not crowded, with perhaps 1500 humans, a hundred hobbits and the odd drow or elf. It is surrounded by 60 foot walls, and comprises mainly two storey houses, with occasional bigger buildings or hills rising out of the surrounding streets. Many of the buildings are converted barns.

We ask around for transport, and discover we can get a cart, oxen & a driver for 2 pennies a day, to go to Thal, or can fly by cloud from the main city. We learn more about the borders of Britannia - Thal is in the Kingdom, Oberthal is not.

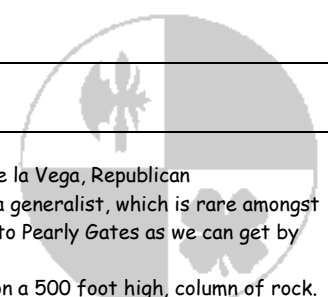
Wodensday 23rd Meadow – Interview with a Urielite

... but not as busy as the priests after we talk to them.

Father Leofric, the Urielite Inquisitor, comes around the next morning for a chat and to authorise our arrival paperwork. He is a little concerned with the number of mages, and particularly with Brightflare, until he suddenly comes to the conclusion that we are a Gabrielite hit squad, here to destroy traitors and heretics. I'm not sure why, but something to do with the timing of previous visits to Raniterre and the Cardinal's base in the Mountains of Madness seems to have triggered a connection. Being a smart man, Leofric is happy to give us all the paperwork we required, after checking we aren't aiming for anyone in the church, and phrases his questions carefully so we don't have to give him too much information. I am required to vouch for Gerard's and Brightflare's responsible use of magics - one of the more difficult oaths to take. Once we get our passports, Leofric and I pass the time with chit-chat about local events and occurrences. I am also given a range of code-words for sending urgent messages via the semaphore towers, which are good for the next couple of months.

A couple of weeks ago (about the time that a large chariot of Helios was crashing into the sea off the coast of Britannia), there were rumours of a star falling and omens being fulfilled. A number of hither-to unknown covens were found and destroyed by the Michaelines & Urielites running around on high alert. Other than that, it has been quiet lately. Only around 5% of the old inhabitants were actual demon worshippers, although a larger percentage than that have moved to Raniterre, taking advantage of the relocation costs being met. Trade with the drow, who provided a range of alchemical goods, stopped once the Raniterrans stopped selling "souls" or their equivalent in trade - although possibly supplies just ran out. The explanation for anything weird that happens is "ancient drow stuff", so our search for drow artefacts is very believable.

The main part of Guido City is more crowded than the foreign quarter, but has real shops and buildings, and is more civilised and a lot cheaper - three pennies a night is a reasonable cost - we stay at the Sewell Arms at a shilling each. Nobles living here include Bishop Geronimo (Michaeline) and Duke Guido, but not the Queen. Limited magic (air, earth, and water), healing and alchemy are now available from some businesses - they are signposted with a sword to show they are approved. Spells typically cost a couple of shillings a cast. Foreigners may not carry weapons around.



Thursday 24th Meadow - Durance Vile

We volunteer to go to Durance vile, which seems nice enough for a military fort and work camp.

Early the next morning, we head to Guido city's resident transport mage, Juanita de Squirrel Cove (Grafin Diego de la Vega, Republican extraordinaire, is Mayor of Squirrel Cove, but Juanita seems a staunch Royalist). She is a Destinian air mage, and a generalist, which is rare amongst Destinian mages. We take the cloud to Thal (2½ hrs), then decide to continue on to Durance vile, which is as close to Pearly Gates as we can get by nightfall. Apparently it is very dangerous to fly a cloud after dark.

As we approach Durance vile, the most obvious feature is "The Crag", a 300 foot high, ½ mile diameter hill raised on a 500 foot high, column of rock. The Crag is off-limits to flyers and pedestrians alike, and is apparently a Michaeline responsibility. The Pool, apparently the source of the navigable river that runs from Durance vile to the sea 100 leagues away, the Armoury, the tented work camp, and the nearby village of Bath are the other noticeable features as we descend.

We enter through the south-facing gates of Durance vile, noting the pleasant and helpful nature of the Michaeline guard. He suggests that the Raphaelite brewery might be the best place for our mixed group. We head to the north end of town. On the way, we note the 30-40' walls, the killing zone inside as well as outside the walls, the new military-style construction which makes up 90% of the buildings, the absence of ground-level windows, and the lack of shops or markets. The centre of town is still cleared, waiting to be built - presumably civic buildings are not a high priority at the moment; and neither are shops - the artisans all make goods for export orders or for the military. The Michaeline chapter house is by the docks and Armoury; the Gabrielite nunnery is by Bath. The brewery / monastery is probably the only Raphaelite cloister in Britannia. Our theory is this is a town under siege, attacked by forest beasts nightly, and supplied from garrison stores refreshed by river barges. This is borne out by the nature of the food served to us that evening - very nice, but primarily beef & grain - no cheese, vegetables, etc. I would estimate that the town has 5,000 people and the work camp at least as many again, although Bath has only a few hundred people including the nunnery.

Other local information we discover includes: There is no wall along most of the 600-700 yard river frontage, and parts of the northern end of town consist of older village-style buildings. We are warned not to go out of the town at night, or in bad weather or mist, which is apparently quite common hereabouts - there's always a silver lining. Our hosts are Raphaelite brothers, and include hobbits. Most of them appear to be immigrants from the Isle of St Charles. We also see an elven Raphaelite brother. Parties are common here - every two or three nights - probably as a way on maintaining morale. One of the guest rooms has a scry-guard that we can't crack, and an armed guard at the door. We are curious but polite.

Thursday 24th Meadow - Scouting the Crag

We rent a Room with a View, and admire the landscape.

After a quiet and pleasant dinner, we retire to our rooms, and observe the town and surrounds from our windows.

The town is fairly deserted - not even guards patrolling the walls, although a pair of starving peasants are spotted sneaking into town, stealing some food and tools, and sneaking out of town to a group of trees in the swamp, where they meet up with 20 others.

The Pool is several hundred feet deep - probably 400 feet to an inscrutable source. The entire source of the river is from here - sparkling fresh and pure water appearing at the rate of hundreds of gallons a second. Further downstream, run-off from the marshes adds to the flow and hides the purity. It is likely that a portal to the elemental plane of water was recently added to the source of a small marshy creek to create a navigable river to this spot. We estimate that blocking the flow of water (if this was possible) for even five minutes would cause a disaster destroying much of Durance, including the Armoury. There are ruins to the north-east and east of the pool.

At the top of the 500' sheer sides of the Crag, a fortification nearly blends in with the eastern cliff face. This fortification is accessible by basket from the ground, and guards the start of a tunnel complex. Two of the Paladins (Blue plume & Turquoise sash) stand there talking in Ellenic. They sense nearby scrying. We translate through repetition of Ellenic phrases, transcribed into Reich-spiel, then Common. Some information is garbled, so we only learn a little: They are looking after Medea (Great Lady, Maid of Mountains, Mistress, etc) on behalf of Queen Margarita. It has been too quiet lately - they prefer it when she is too busy to see them. In Raniterre, people's heads come off too easily when punched, so they need to use their swords. It's worse through the portal - everything weighs less and people are even more fragile. We believe they refer to the mythical world of Malacandria, a red world on this plane, which several adventuring parties have visited. One of the Paladins got stuck on the low-weight world last month. Another two of them have yet to be woken "for watch" this month. It is unclear whether months are lunar (new to new) or calendar.

Thursday 24th Meadow - Wildlife spotting

The wildlife is quite unique, including reptilian birds and Ellenic rodents.

We spot a flying creature lurking high over the crag. It appears to have featherless wings. Size and positive recognition escape us initially - although we later determine it is a death-flyer.

A further reconnaissance of the mountain by a little owl (athene noctua) proves fruitful. It spots a rabbit on the top of this inaccessible hill, and swoops upon it. The rabbit runs in terror, and falls over the edge to its death. The owl then hunts further, and finds two white rats. The rats try to fight it, and talk to each other. We resolve to rescue the rats & rabbit, believing they may be failed adventurers shape-shifted by Medea. Motley & Clem fly out there, and convince the rats to travel with them. Meanwhile, the owl scrapes up most of the rabbit, and returns it to our room. We have a quick rabbit stew, resulting in the rabbit's resurrection.

The rats are Prince Theseus and Princess Lita of Thought, and the rabbit is using the non de lapin of Pentheus (a King of Thebes who crossed Dionysus and was killed by Maenads).

Thunorseve 24th Meadow – Ellenic History Part II

We talk to the rodents and learn about their complex histories, which confuses most people. Most of the confusion proves to be because of falsehood, proving the innate intuition of adventurers, again.

Pentheus claims to be an immortal from the dawn of time, pre-dating most magic, and indifferent to the gods. He is a perfect archer, and a powerful "mostly-earth" mage who seems to only have mind magics, and all at Rank 20. He is an old enemy of Medea. Theseus and Lita are great-grand children of the original "Old" Theseus and thus demi-god heroes. They claim that Medea stole their right to be rulers of Thought by killing Old Theseus, "rightful" claimant to the throne. They went to the Delphic Oracle, who apparently said "Theseus shall not regain his throne until Medea is dead". Commentary: Old Theseus (He who deposits) or his children were not killed by Medea, although she may well have schemed against him, since she probably does not approve of a hypothetical bastard turning up and trying to disinherit her humanoid children. Medea's children by her publicly wedded husband King Ageus (Goatish) of Thought were legitimate, whereas Old Theseus's mother Aethra (Brightsky) was unmarried & of loose morals, and Old Theseus was keen enough to pass himself off as the son of Poseidon when convenient, casting more doubt on his parentage. The reading that Young Theseus claims to have from the Oracle at Dolphin is in suspiciously clear language. Much later we will discover that this oracular reading was planted by Pentheus.

Pentheus helped the princelings to track down Medea, on a nine week journey from the Ellenic states. About a week ago, they arrived at Durance vile, and walked up the mountain (Pentheus does "earth-walking" - TK) then "tunnelled" (Transformation) past the fortified entrance to the tunnels. They were looking for a geonode, a spherical chamber of crystals which is a centre of the labyrinth. The tunnels are navigated by astrological symbols, and the "Twins" tunnel proved Pentheus's undoing - a spell rebounded and took him out, then they all got changed into animals and somehow wandered through solid rock until they got to the surface - they were as confused about events as you will be after reading this. Medea, being High Priestess of Hecate, the Goddess of Moon & Magic, has powers that wax and wane with the moon. Thus just before New Moon is an ideal time to look for Medea, and near the Full Moon, be very cautious about approaching her. The Ellenics miscounted the lunar calendar and paid the price. As you will see, we simply disregarded the calendar altogether.

Frysdag 25th Meadow – A Guided Tour of Durance Vile

We re-register our demon worshippers with the Michaelines, find out the latest gossip, and wander around the area, looking for opportunities to find out information.

Bright and early, we rise, and invite the mysterious stranger from the scry-proof room to breakfast. His Lordship declines our invitation, and leaves shortly thereafter - we do not see him at any time. We transform Pentheus to a human shape, although reduced to a height of just over a foot. We change Theseus Jr into a Mountain Lion, and thence transform him to a full-sized Ellenic hero. We do not change Lita. Pentheus can maintain their forms using Transformation effortlessly (rank 20 ish).

As the sun comes around from the side of the Crag, the leading penumbra forms an area of concentrated magic, giving one effectively a death aspect for magic casting, and acting as high mana. This makes its way down the town between an hour after dawn and almost eleven in the morning, and careful planning could allow a ritual to be performed in the penumbra with some movement.

Prince Theseus and myself make our way to see the rulers of the town, to formally announce our presence and gather information. Again, the Gabrielite reputation produces miracles, with the Michaeline Bret Father Cadman happy to talk shop. Local dangers include "death flyers", who are a cross between a wyvern and an eagle, and are not killed despite frequent casualties because apparently they also keep the bad things away. Various lizard-kin are also common here, growing to extremes in the heated marshes. Sea snakes, large crocodiles, and a Koat (Ko-at) a snake / dragon used as a mount in Plas'toro and as tall as a horse - its length must be extraordinary. There are a few foreign insurrectionists left, although the locals have all been dealt with - they seem interested in the Crag. The Crag is a special project of Queen Margarita's, doing magical research in a central chamber in the hill. We are offered a guided tour and opportunity to use the facilities in the Crag for our own magical endeavours. The Michaelines comment on the Paladins - they respect them as direct servants of the Queen, but would prefer if they followed the Powers of Light.

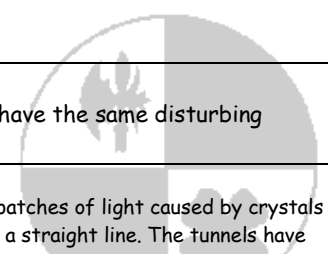
Motley and Arwen investigate the local mercantile activity and find an active naval shipyard complete with ship's chandlers, specialist navigational equipment, etc. Most of the expertise comes from St Charles immigrants, who have also brought their Arthurian legends and anti-Plas'toro rhetoric - it seems no one knows the Queen's previous career. The rest of the party potter around with ruins around the Pool, but find nothing of interest.

We resolve to take a tour of Bath for the afternoon, and head off along the series of causeways and bridges. On the way to and from Bath, we discuss our findings and resolve to visit the Crag on the morrow. Bath itself is as most mineral-pool villages, although a little more organised due to the nuns and Rev Mother Mildred, the abbess. The nuns can also bring people back to life if they didn't die from natural causes.

Satyrday 26th Meadow – A Guided Tour of the Crag

We take the Michaelines up on their offer to escort us into the Crag, past the Paladin guards.

Early the next morning, we meet Father Sarlich - the Urielite Inquisitor. He is one of those dangerously alert people, spry and active, although in his (apparent) fifties or sixties. He is disapproving of the party on moral grounds. However, he does lead us to the base of the Crag, beneath the fort. There, he blows a horn (short, short, long G') to summon the basket. Two or three people can fit in it at a time, and the basket takes 10 to 12 minutes to reach the fort 500' up, so it takes an hour for the party, the Ellenics and Father Sarlich to reach the top. The fort contains three rooms, the winch room, the main room, and a watch room. There are also tunnels for the servants. The servants raise & lower the baskets from a hidden location. We meet the two Paladins we observed on Thorseve, and an orc-like sentient golem servant called Xantos - one of several "brothers". We are given directions to a casting chamber (left, right, right, Aries, descend), and a warning not to disturb the mistress, then left without a guide.



Satyrday 26th Meadow – An Unguided Tour of the Crag

The tunnels within the Crag are weird, and the closer we look, the odder they seem. The instructions have the same disturbing properties, as do the servants.

The tunnels are unusual. They are around 8 foot wide, twelve foot high, with an arched ceiling. There are indirect patches of light caused by crystals that are not directly visible. All direction senses are suppressed, and it appears that the party is always walking in a straight line. The tunnels have many branches off them, and sometimes bifurcate, splitting left and right with both seeming to be straight ahead, and the split only visible to those further back as the party divides in half. Further investigation showed that as someone walks away from you, they may slowly spiral up a wall, turn around a corner, or go up or down - yet to the walker, they are still walking straight and level. Shutting your eyes and walking straight can get you hurt, but is also a good way to find permeable sections of the wall, which are impermeable when you see them. Behind the secret exits are metal spiral stairwells with their own local sense of down, bridges across chasms, and other infrastructure and servants passages. We see several Xantos using these routes. Above the ceiling, again accessible through lack of observation, is a crawl space, sometimes with a solid floor, sometimes an illusion, which seems to lack the space-bending properties of the main tunnel, so curves and inclinations can be estimated. The tunnel seems to travel in a spiral pattern near the outside of the Crag, slowly descending.

Our first true intersection is a choice between Libra and Scorpio (left - Libra), our second between Sagittarius and Capricorn (right - Capricorn), our third between Aquarius and Pisces (right - Pisces). Each time, we follow our instructions. Finally we come to a chamber with seating and four exits marked with symbols, which correspond to Aries, Gemini (the twins, where the Ellenics went wrong), and presumably Taurus and Cancer. While all the symbols have been archaic and faded, they have been discernible up until now, with "no horns" and "scales" crudely written under Sagittarius and Pisces respectively as reminders for dim locals. However, our choices of MT, squiggle, blank and two lines (Gemini) are a little vague here, and we pause to discuss for a while. Summoning a servant proves no use, so we boldly set off down MT on the spurious grounds that it is better than arguing further.

Satyrday 26th Meadow – The Plan Crystallizes

We get frozen in time inside a mana-enhancing crystal maze, until we resort to brute force.

We rearrange ourselves into the semblance of an order, with Roke, Motley & Arwen leading, followed by Theseus & Brightflare, then Kit, Gerard & Pentheus, then Clem and Lita. After a hundred feet or so, we see some curtains angled in front of us blocking progress and vision. The illusionists note that there are several other curtains beyond them at odd angles, slowly forming a regular hexagonal pattern of six foot wide cells several layers of curtains in. We scry several hundred feet in, and believe there is a hollow centre just beyond our vision. The curtains are reality boundaries, and part of a single magic. After a few curtains, the ceiling lifts, eventually reaching 40' near the centre, where there is a sound of water trickling. Motley notices that the light becomes purplish in the distance.

We decide not to cross a single curtain, and start to back out. Despite the hilarity caused by this manoeuvre, it is futile - as we head back along the corridor, the ground is sloping, and we are cut off by further curtains leading to a different segment of the pattern. We are within the maze.

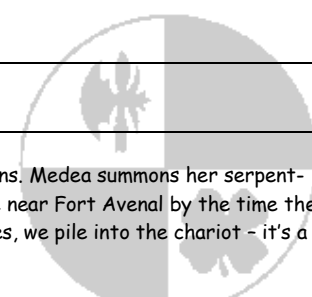
We decide that, not being able to leave, we should press on to the centre. As we step in, we discover it is (usually) high mana. Magic works a little more easily, gaining a rank or two. This effect becomes more noticeable as we progress. As we head towards the centre, we keep spiralling away to the right - making alternate left and right choices for a cell exit does not work. The pattern is similar to that of the seeds on a sunflower - that is, the spirals to the left and right from the centre are of different lengths according to the golden ratio. A polka proves to be the best dance to keep vaguely straight of the next step to take, and leads us in around 50 cells or 100 yards. At this point a small experiment with a curtain by a nameless but curious bear proves our undoing. Suddenly the curtains turn to solid sheets of crystal, and the party is split into four cells.

Many experiments ensue. Magic does not easily travel between crystal cells, and when it does, spells become random magical effects. Vision and hearing are reduced to one crystal-thickness, isolating the ends of the party. We try rituals, which appear more successful. By turning the crystal maze into a crystal ball, we can see Medea outside our crystal, neither her nor an open flame moving - our actions seem to be happening in a single frozen point of time. Hunger and thirst are also suppressed. However, as subjective time passes, we decide that a more direct plan is required. A titan-sized axe is summoned, and proves too large for its cell. When the unbreakable crystal meets the irresistible force, a small crack is heard, followed by an almighty crash as thousands of slivers of crystal rain down on the party as the ceiling, walls and floors explode. Arwen throws herself over Roke and Motley to protect them. Lita is protected by Clem's pack. Pentheus is at ground zero and his small body proves insufficient - once again, we have a dead rabbit.

Satyrday 26th Meadow – Telegram for Medea

We pass Aeetes' message to Medea, and leave with her, in the nick of time.

We reappear high above Medea, growing rapidly to full size and feather falling, as the central crystal in her ceiling explodes outwards. Medea and her two Paladin guards are a little surprised, and we have time to inform Medea of the message her father before anyone reacts. The Paladins leave for instructions and reinforcements, showing a surprising lack of initiative and violence. Medea is affected by a magic - probably Bound Will - which stops her from doing what she wants and refocused her on the task at hand, after a second or two. We offer her a potion that will reduce her age by 30 years, effectively stopping all magic after that date, and we drink our healing potions at the same time. This snaps Medea out of the effect, and she decides she cannot stay to face the Queen, but should flee immediately, while we are welcome to a reward for stopping the Queen. Given that Medea is fleeing, we demonstrate the better part of valor, and create enough barriers to slow down the paladins as we tunnel out with earth elementals, tunneling and transformation, while other party members pick up everything not nailed down, including a huge table. We fall slowly down the cliff while Roke organizes Juanita to meet us outside town, and Kit brings the unicorn and spare gear.



Satyrday 26th Meadow to Wodensday 30th Meadow - Travel to Freetaun by serpent chariot

We pass Aeetes' message to Medea, and travel with her to Freetaun, leaving in the nick of time.

Juanita casts flying on us, and we leave as a flash of light near the Crag's base indicates the arrival of more Paladins. Medea summons her serpent-drawn chariot, but it takes a couple of hours to arrive, as it is not handy - probably stored in Pearly Gates. We are near Fort Avenal by the time the chariot arrives. We ask Juanita to sign us out of Britannia and give our regards to Sir Guthlac, and when she leaves, we pile into the chariot - it's a tight squeeze, but more room is made as needed. We head back to Freetaun.

The lack of supplies means that we need to stop a few times and hunt. This delays our trip such that it takes near-on a hundred hours. We eventually land outside Freetaun in the early morning on Wodensday. On the way, we stop Theseus from taking Medea's items while she is distracted, and find out the truth of the Delphic Oracle's reading for him. We decide that Pentheus is not a nice person. Medea believes he is

Wodensday 30th Meadow to Thursday 8th Heat - Brewing Trouble

The thin line between heroism and assassination is explored while planning an attack on Margarita.

In Freetaun, Aeetes is happy to see Medea, though surprised that we have not caused huge carnage, including killing Queen Margarita. As an immortal, he is cautious about building up bad karma, so won't directly encourage us to go back and finish her, but Medea and the party were quite keen enough. He delivers the promised gifts for our message delivery, and they are very nice.

We prepare a plan to deal with the Queen. Our major concerns are her ability to teleport away, or teleport reinforcements, her Amazon bodyguard, and the paladins. Medea has learnt that Margarita has earrings that control the wearers of some crystal necklaces, a diadem protecting from physical and undead attacks, planar-range mind speech, and has given sashes to the paladins to help her teleport them. We decide to try to feed her another 30-year potion, as the ironies of her becoming the baby the Michaelines are waiting for appeal to most more than assassination. Aeetes is prepared to nurture and raise her as a way of ensuring the 30 year peace she demanded from him. Medea produces an oil-based variant of her potion of youth. A number of invested plates are made by Gerard, storing dragon flames, and other utility spells. We completely rule out an aerial assault or escape, due to the amount of bound air and number of air mages. Water mages rule out an aquatic approach or escape. Celestials prevent approaches through the ethereal. We plan to try to keep the bodyguard alive and portal everyone to the lost isle of Thermiskrya to prevent reinforcements from the Destinian naval fleet in Pearly Gates. This also should allow us to hand the bodyguard over to her mother - a high-risk but honourable tactic to save the innocent. The details of the plan are derived by Kit and kept from the rest of the party, to foil the enemy's extensive astrology resources. The AA Michael is also kept in the dark, to prevent unnecessary Michaeline deaths.

Frysdays 9th Heat to Moonday 12th Heat - The party arrives at the Pearly Gates

We head back to Britannia by chariot, landing 15 miles upstream of Pearly Gates, and enter the city.

Another four long days in Medea's serpent chariot, crammed together with pagans and demon worshippers. At least there is no dead rabbit, unicorn, or rat. We eventually get out of the chariot and have a nice 15 mile jog through the night-time forest towards Pearly Gates. Fortunately, the forest creatures are not as hostile as the jungle creatures inland, or considerably smarter, for we are in no mood to consider animal welfare.

We enter the city and find a place to stay without much difficulty. We rest and recover from the journey.

Duesday 13th Heat - Never send a man to do a hobbit's job

Motley infiltrates the Palace kitchens and prepares a loaded pickle. Roke infiltrates the higher echelons of the palace.

Motley infiltrates the Palace kitchens with surprising ease, and uses his culinary and hobbit-charming skills to draw out others on the nature of the Queen's current dietary idiosyncrasies. It seems that, being pregnant (false or otherwise), she is demanding odd food. One of her favorites is a chocolate-coated pickle - a craving she restricts to two a day. Various snacks are sent to her every hour or so. Motley finds out that there are five levels, with four staggered staircases connecting them. At the head of each stair is a guard. The Queen and her body guard Diana are located in one of several suites on the top floor, along with four paladins. The kitchen takes the food to the third floor, and then a senior footman is responsible for taking the food to the Queen. Motley observes the chocolate-coated pickles and borrows some ingredients to prepare a duplicate.

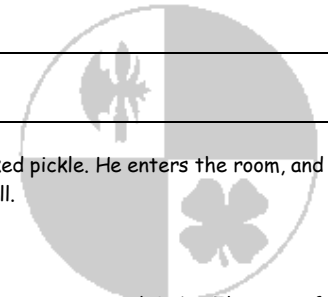
That night, Motley informs the party of his progress. We track down a senior footman and waylay him, stashing his sleeping body in a safe place where he will not be found before the following evening. Roke takes his place, returning to his home.

The next morning, the rest of the party is turned into invisible rats, and accompany Motley and Roke to the Palace. They start a normal day's work - Motley is now a junior gherkin-hand. Sometime mid morning, the Queen requests a pickle. Motley replaces the pickle with the one soaked overnight in the oil of youth, and coats it in chocolate. He passes through the house to the third floor, where Roke changes him into a rat, and takes the pickle further upstairs.

After passing the guards on the final stairs, Roke gets lost in the various royal suites. He changes back all but Motley and Kit into their normal forms. They wait in a room at the far end of the corridor from the queens' chambers. Everyone is doubly quickened.

Duesday 13th Heat – The Not-Assassination of Margarita

A fight breaks out. We are all teleported to Thermiskrya. Somehow we win.



Roke walks down the corridor to the Royal chambers, past two Paladins, holding the golden tray containing the spiked pickle. He enters the room, and Margarita takes the pickle. As he leaves, he gives the five-second signal to those waiting on the far side of the wall.

The combat starts well.

Pulse 0: Kit & Motley change back into their natural forms – Motley is nearly twenty foot, and falls over in an attempt not to crush Roke. The rest of the party appears at the far end of the corridor.

Pulse 1.1: Brightflare DFs the Paladins. Clementine teleports through the wall in bear form. Kit tries to grab Margarita but her bodyguard Diana intercepts him. Margarita rushes towards an alarm bell, and puts the pickle in her mouth.

Pulse 1.2: Arwen DFs the Paladins. The Paladins dive through side doors to avoid more fire. Clementine tackles Margarita and pins her, knocking the pickle across the floor. Kit kicks Diana across the room. Both flip to their feet. Motley is now standing. Roke prepares a net.

Pulse 1.3: With no one to attack, the corridor crew stand overwatch. Clementine tosses the bag of wind. Roke nets the Queen & Clementine, preventing them from using magic. Motley takes the bag and inserts the pickle into Margarita mouth. Diana runs across the room towards Margarita, but is brought down by Kit.

Pulse 2.1: The corridor crew run towards the chambers. Diana is pinned by Kit. Margarita attempts to teleport and fails, prevented by the net. Motley prepares the bag of wind.

Pulse 2.2: The Paladins re-emerge from the side doors as the party runs by, leaving Brightflare, Arwen and Gerard surrounded by Paladins, and Theseus trailing. Arwen takes down a Paladin with a clean aorta strike. Theseus and the Paladins thump people in front of them. Roke Necrotises the enemy and another Dragon Flames goes off – a second paladin goes down. Kit and Diana wrestle.

Pulse 2.3: Motley rips the Bag of Wind and sends everyone to the isle of Thermiskrya (we hope) via hurricane.

At this point, the prearranged plan goes wrong.

Pulse 10 – The party starts fainting in the hurricane.

Pulse 30 – the paladins start falling unconscious.

Pulse 120 – Diana says "I'm going home!" and passes out.

Pulse 183 – we land on the island. Everyone is unconscious, except for Kit who is still holding Diana; and Diana who recovers on landing.

Pulse 190 – three of the four Paladins are now up and active, including the one Arwen killed, and are fighting Kit, getting better as they thump him.

The rest of the party is still unconscious. Kit tries to convince Diana to stay neutral.

Pulse 196 – Roke wakes up. Diana tells every to stop fighting and flies off, to get her Mother, Queen of the Amazons. Everyone stops fighting.

Pulse 197 – the fight starts again.

Pulse 202 – Gerard and Motley stir. One of the Paladins' strike chance reaches 300% – Kit is getting wobbly-kneed.

The fight swings back our way. Gerard & Motley engage a Paladin each.

Pulse 208 – One paladin is being sat on by Motley – the other is inside a roofed ring of iron. The rest of the party wakes.

Pulses 210-220 – Roke gets serious and casts Flash Flood, Earthquake, Immolation, and Necrosis in quick succession. Brightflare uses Dragon Flames and Arwen summons Earth Elementals. The Paladins finally die. Motley, Clem and Margarita are lost at sea in the Flash Flood.

We lie back and enjoy the earthquake, but there is no rest for the wicked.

Pulse 240 – as the Earthquake ceases and our Quickness runs out then reverses, the bodyguard and her mother the Queen of the Amazons arrive, with their royal guard.

Pulse 241 – We start talking, fast. Our line is "We've rescued your daughter..."

Duesday 13th Heat – The Aftermath

We agree to give Margarita a fresh start with the Amazons.

Fortunately, Queen Hippolyta recognises Arwen and Kit (as Sister Christine) as previous guests. Hostilities are suspended despite egging on from Diana. Hippolyta is not happy with the flash flood creating the river, but the damage to her city by the earthquake is more aggravating. Arwen and Kit promise to help repair it, and introduce the rest of the party. Clem finally returns from the sea, where she was washed to – no sign of Margarita. We don't mention Theseus is a descendant of Old Theseus, the kidnapper of a previous Queen Hippolyta of the Amazons!

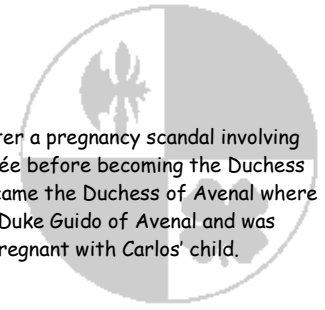
We retire to the city, and rest, while discussing strategic politics with Hippolyta. Diana is not convinced we have done right, but a quiet late night meeting convinces Hippolyta to agree to a risky but morally preferable course of action. Diana is sworn to protect Margarita for a year and a day, in return for Margarita not invading Thermiskrya. Putting aside the protections of Poseidon, the only way this deal could be arranged is if there are standing orders for the Destinian fleet to invade Thermiskrya if Margarita goes missing – precisely to deal with the situation we find ourselves in. Clem tells up Margarita drowned. We resurrect Margarita, hopefully preventing further evidence of her death from reaching the fleet. Our plan is for Hippolyta to raise her as an Amazon, thus allowing Diana to protect her, while preventing her from repeating past mistakes. Given her current corruption and memories, we feel she needs a fresh start befitting her fresh role in life. We thus attempt to wipe her memory using the water of Lethe that we have handy. Unfortunately, she is too powerful a mage, and the effects do not hold.

Wodensday 14th Heat to Wodensday 21st Heat - Tidying up

There is much running around as we travel via god-storm to ensure Margarita has a pleasant childhood. We then go home.

We have to get more Lethe water from Medea. On the other hand, we don't want to expose Margarita to Aeetes, so we decide to wait until Medea will be almost home, to ensure she is at Freetaan when we arrive. This gives Wodensday, Thunorsday and Frysdag for us to recover, bicker about our plans, and help rebuild the Amazon city. The solstice party of Thunorsday is particularly fine. Early Satyrday we set out in a boat, and, after making our way through the protective storms around Thermiskrya, we find our selves about 50 miles from Freetaan. We meet Medea and Aeetes there. Medea helps us to apply waters of Lethe so that they are more effective, and then Aeetes insists on spending some time with the young Margarita. He allows Diana to stay, and we get some further assurances from him, but cannot prevent him from bleeding her (and who knows what else) - presumably he can now trace / control / influence her in some way. Medea settles up the payment for Margarita's fresh start in cash. The next day, we head back to Thermiskrya - the storm front is still waiting, so we arrive back before nightfall. Moonday 19th is spent in prayer and meditation - or running around and riding horses for the less devout. Margarita seems to have not thrown off the protective magics we have used. We decide it is safe to head back, say goodbye to the Amazons, and head off before Theseus, Brightflare, or Roke can get us in further trouble. We sail back on the 21st, and arrive in Seagate after dusk.

Appendix A - People and Groups



Magaretta Sforza Cubo was born into the Sforza family of Destiny, but was forced to flee Destiny at fifteen after a pregnancy scandal involving then-Don Carlos, son of the Marquis of Calatrava. She moved to Lutice in Raniterre as Cardinal Messepain's protégée before becoming the Duchess of Plas'toro and crossing several guild parties. After the destruction of Plas'toro by a guild party, she fled and became the Duchess of Avenal where she employed a couple of guild parties in conjunction with il Baroni Scarpia. She recently annulled her marriage to Duke Guido of Avenal and was crowned Queen of the new kingdom of Bretlond. She lost thirty years to fifteen again - which was when she was pregnant with Carlos' child.

Medea

Medea is the daughter of Aeetes and a Titan. She is the immortal high priestess of Hecate (goddess of magic), a rank 12 alchemist, and is very knowledgeable about potions and prophesy. She is probably a witch. She has a bad reputation amongst the current set of Ellenic rulers, but seems no worse than most. She is brutal, cunning, violent, ruthless, loyal, vindictive, and honourable. Don't cross her.

Aeetes

Aeetes, a.k.a. Sir Ernest, Pirate King of Freetaun, is probably the oldest gold dragon in Alusia. He is in the guise of a black dragon. He has strong Ellenic ties. He has crossed the Guild's path several times, as employer, enemy and dangerous neutral third party.

Paladins of Britannia / Dragons Teeth of Aeetes

Rolland & Olivere; Gerin & Gerier; Ives & Ivor; Ottone & Berenger; Anseis & Sanson; Gerard & Engelier.

The Paladins always work in pairs. There are four with the Queen at all times, two with Medea, two with the portal when it opens. Otherwise they may be hibernated or visiting parts of the kingdom. They are seen around Guido city sometimes, where they stay in the Guard house or perhaps the palace. The Queen can easily teleport the Paladins around due to an item. The Paladins are heroes grown from teeth from a dragon killed by Cadmus for Athena. Those teeth which Cadmus did not sow immediately came to the possession of Aeetes, and thence Medea, then Queen Margarita, to whom they imprinted (like ducklings).

King Carlos de Calatrava (DEAD) was the first and last king of Destiny. He was destined to be the Michaeline-anointed leader of the mortal wing of the Angelic hosts come Judgment day for this era. He made Destiny into the power it is today, through naval superiority, expansionist and aggressive policies, colonization, and information gathering. He was also only able to be killed when he became the worlds greatest swordsman which occurred on 4th Seed 799 by the Gabrielite knight Christopher, on the island of Alba Longa, a long mountainous wild island less than an hour's flight from Destiny. Carlos was in the company of the demon Bathin at the time, and was a greater summoner, although this is not widely known in Destiny. Several attempts have been made by the Carlists to reincarnate him, but have been foiled by various forces, including a group slain by orcs (organized by Loki) on Alba Longa on the anniversary of his death; a guild party stopping his reincarnation into his son Goatstrength; and a further party stopping Carlist Don Antonio summoning him as a hero using the faerie flag. His soul was possibly last sighted in an insane lost elven mind as Hadarin, an insubstantial entity capable of driving people insane and manipulating his surrounds by thought.

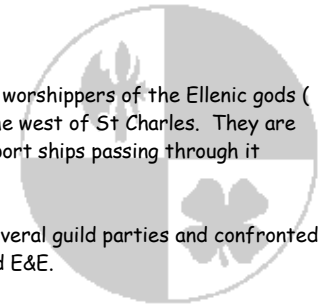
The Republicans are the supporters of the Council of Ten, current rulers of Destiny. They are also known as Flamingos (due to wearing coloured sashes showing which faction they support) or Counter-revolutionaries.

The Carlists, Royalists or Renegadoes are the conservative rump of Dons who wish to bring back the "good old days" of King Carlos, plus anti-republicans and other traditional enemies of the new Council of Ten, and also include many of the more global-thinking, expansionist and entrepreneurial merchants. They have strong ties with the Carlist religious cults. The more extreme members have moved into piracy, slavery, and invasion to support their lifestyles. They had four undetectable "cloaked" ships, but lost two. They have placed bounties on several guild members.

The United Church of the Powers of Light

The Powers of Light have many sects closely tied up with the different political movements, but the church as a whole is politically neutral and concerned with doing good works and spreading the word. In Britannia and Destiny, the Michaeline branch is by far the biggest and most influential, followed by the Gabrielites. There are many Gabrielites and Urielites in Guido City, Gabrielites in Charleston and Durance vile, and a few Raphaelites in Durance vile, but most of the church knights and priests outside Guido City are Destinian Michaelines.

President Diana of St Charles is a Themiskryan (Amazon) princess and the wife of a hero of the revolution of St Charles. She is acting as the bodyguard to Queen Margarita and is indefeasible in a fight. She is very fast and can act in time to counter other's actions - also parry arrows, etc.



Bit Parts

The Amazons are a group of about two hundred skilled female warriors each with a single magical talent; they are worshippers of the Ellenic gods (mainly Poseidon). They live without men upon the island of Themiscrya somewhere within a few hundred miles to the west of St Charles. They are currently incommunicado and their island is surrounded by a magical storm controlled by Poseidon which can transport ships passing through it anywhere on the ocean.

Il Baroni Scarpia (DEAD) Carlo's spymaster and in charge of Destinian holdings in the south. He has both hired several guild parties and confronted others. He was killed by guild adventurers in Spring 799 in a sea battle (the same group later killed Carlos). Skilled E&E.

Black Bishop (DEAD) was the ruler of the eastern Destinian holdings based in Toledo, who took over the moral leadership of the Carlist religious cults when Carlos died, and began slaving operations against the Hellenics. He was Erehleine, and a puissant Michaeline knight. He was killed in Autumn 802 in the Hellenic states by Borghoff.

Circle of King Charles the Martyr the major religious cult that has sprung up on the death of King Carlos. They are a core of powerful and fanatical Michaeline Knights who believe that Carlos is destined to lead a grand Michaeline army against the forces of Darkness. The sect is estimated at 200 members equivalent to "Medium" guild members, and perhaps 50 "High" knights, which utilise magic and items and kill both traditional powers of light enemies and those considered politically undesirable. They have attempted to bring him back from the dead on many occasions. They serve the forces of light but worship vengeance (a trait of Gabriel), attempting to destroy anyone they perceive as having aided their enemies; this had made many semi-neutral parties their enemies.

Goatstrength, wished by Carlists to be king of destiny as he is the closest to being a true heir, a fence-sitter he has neither accepted or refused the position. He is currently avoiding the Carlists and supporting the Republicans who have acknowledged he is Carlos's heir, given gifts, guards, trade agreements etc. The bastard son of Carlos, he was adopted by king and queen of bright city, leaders of the Argolid Empire in the Hellenic states.

Ringed Four refers to four or five Destinian-linked rulers currently possessing rings to stop location, astrology etc. Until recently, these were King Carlos, Cardinal Juan de Fuca, Donna Astoria de la Vega, the Black Bishop of Toledo, and Don Jon Fenris. However, apart from Don Jon Fenris, all these have changed hands recently. Queen Margarita of Britannia and Grafina Diego of Mmhs are two of the recent possessors.

Appendix B - Days of Significance

4th Seed - Anniversary of Death of Carlos

Beltane - Full Moon, 1st Day of Summer

1st Meadow - Summer guild meeting

14th Meadow - New Moon

28th Meadow - Full Moon

12th Heat - New Moon

15th Heat - Summer Solstice or Winter Solstice

26th Heat - Full Moon

3rd Breeze - Day of Death (Gold Rings, Elixir of Youth, MA Potions, Elixir of inner transformation all expire today)

10th Breeze - New Moon

24th Heat - Full Moon

Lugnasad - 1st Fay of Autumn

The party

Chevalier Roke	A polyglot and keen of observer of the human condition, as well as a gentleman. Part-time party leader, powerful mage.
Clementine	An ursine hobbit who needs to consume more honey. Part-time party leader. Has a unicorn companion.
Brightflare	A follower of the Leopard Duke, given to conflagration, but he can be polite and reasoned. Military leader & combat mage.
Motley	A giant pixie warrior with more common sense than he admits to, and a pacifistic streak down his back.
Arwen	A firmly grounded and civilised young woman with a streak of practicality and violence.
Gerrard	A tall beautiful human man with a good tailor, he claims to be wealthy, intelligent and witty.
Kit	Acting secretary to the Chevalier, Gabrielite Inquisitor, historical scholar, and scribe.
Arnaud	Ex-party member.

Quotes

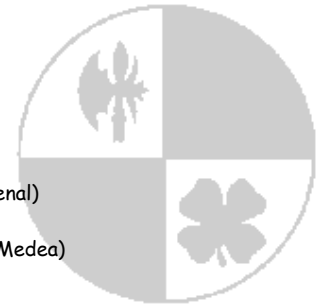
Roke	"People scare me"
Clem	"We're the rescue party" - I pop him into a sack.

Watches

We had a watch scheme, but I fear that I never fully understood it. Depending on the relative danger of different times of the night, two to four people stood guard. The scheme varied by the available fatigue of the support mages. Fortunately, we were never attacked during the night, so we never had to confirm whether we had the optimal spread of vision, skills and numbers. However, one should give full credit to Brightflare and Roke for devising and implementing the watch scheme, and I would heartily recommend it for advanced students of warfare.

Each watch is four hours long. Gerard & Clem start at 8. Roke starts at 9. Kit starts at 11. Brightflare starts at 12. Arwen and Motley start at 2.

Appendix C - Astrology



Astrology #1

Question...

What are the feelings of the major players in this situation? (Guessed Identity)

Answer ...

R---: I can bring whole cities to ruin (?Raum? ?king of Raniterre?)
 Duke: I know I should go, but I follow you like a man possessed (Duke Guido of Avenal)
 QueenM#2: No you see you and me wouldn't be very regal (Margarita/Medea)
 QueenM#1: I'm under a spell; God how can this be, playing with my memory. (Margarita/Medea)
 King: Wish I could play the father and take you by the hand (Carlos)
 Strophe: Is she looking for a pot of Gold? (Destinian Royalists)
 Antistrophe: Beady eyes is right - we're needed; or we could just sit around and glare (Destinian Republicans)
 Princess: I think I've paid more than my share; I'm just a poor girl, don't you care? Hey I'm... (Diana)
 Rabble: We can tell the end is near; where do we go from here (Party)

Astrology #2

Question...

What is the Duchess up to with Medea?

Answer ...

A mightier power the strong direction sends
 And several men impels to several ends:
 Like varying winds, by other passions tossed,
 This drives them constant to a certain coast.

Comment

This is too vague and general, so we got a supplementary question. The Duchess is one of the Ringed Four.

Astrology #3

Question...

What is known by those in the know about the duchess' plans, particularly as they involve Medea?

Answer ...

Trade it may help, society extend.
 But lures the pirate, and corrupts the friend.
 It raises armies in a nation's aid.
 But bribes a senate, and the land's betrayed.
 In vain may hero's fight, and patriots rave;
 If **secret gold** sap on from knave to knave.
Pregnant with thousands flits the scrap unseen,
 And silent sells a king, or **buys a queen**.
 But nobler scenes M----'s dream unfold,
 Hereditary realms, and worlds of **gold**.
 "Virtue, brave boys! 'tis virtue makes a king and advocates
 For folly **dead** and gone (My **heir** may sigh, and think it want of Grace)
 Nor more of bastardy in **heirs** to crowns. In all debates
 Much do I suffer to keep in peace this jealous, waspish, wrong-headed, race"

Ellenic Astrological Symbols

The Ellenic Astrological symbols differ slightly from the Western Kingdom, and there is even some transposition.

	Libra (air, cardinal)		Aries (fire, cardinal)
	Scorpio (water, fixed)		Taurus (earth, fixed)
	Sagittarius (fire, mutable)		Gemini (air, mutable)
	Capricorn (earth, cardinal)		Cancer (water, cardinal)
	Aquarius (air, fixed)		Leo (fire, fixed)
	Pisces (water, mutable)		Virgo (earth, mutable)

Map of Durance vile

