

The Stolen Seal

The Adventurers:

Amaranth: A blonde human enchanter, quite an experienced and sensible person, a merchant and a lady. Party leader.

DeVere: Also human, also blonde, and also female, but dressed in plate and built most powerfully. Unfortunately she is exceedingly outspoken, though a fine fighter.

Spinner: Another enchanter, a slim male human, dark of hair and clothing. I have had the honour of adventuring with him before.

Dramus: An exceedingly tall, thin elf, dressed entirely in black robes, and a white hooded mantle which completely concealed his face. When pressed he admitted to being a necromancer.

Kelovar: Another elf, a celestial shadow mage.

T'ana Starflower: Myself, your scribe. Elven of race, beautiful of face, a healer, and a mind college mage.

31 March 1991

A representative of a company of merchants addressed the guild meeting requesting a party to track down a company seal which had been stolen. The item in question cannot be located, magically or otherwise, and it is extremely urgent that it be found, before it can be used to forge any documents. It seemed to me that a member of the college of the sorceries of the mind might be of use in this quest, so I made my way to the appropriate meeting room.

There I met a very mixed group of adventurers. Three male, three female, three human, three elven. A woman fighter, one DeVere, immediately set about making herself obnoxious. She succeeded in provoking both Kelovar and myself into threatening her, though I suspected that she knew her weapons well, and would trounce us both in a fair fight. Though if I had time to render myself indetectable... In any case, she refused to be made party leader, and Amaranth was speedily selected for that honour. I asked to be scribe, since I keep this diary, and this offer was accepted.

Our employer entered the room, introduced himself as Howard Lambert of Camber and Company, and proceeded to divulge further details of the situation. His company were apparently attempting to set themselves up in a new area, the city of Matzdorf, five hundred miles north of the guild, when their company seal was stolen. This is apparently a shaped item, with the ability to implant mana into the sealing wax, so that its imprint cannot be forged. Obviously this item is quite irreplaceable. Furthermore, it resists attempts at location.

However, when it was being transported out of the city because the company had failed to pay their taxes to the city council, the seal was stolen. They had refused to pay because one of their competitors was being charged a lower rate. Under-the-table-payments were suspected, but nothing proven. The thief returned to the city, sold it to a fence named Sytol Thrap, then took ship with the proceeds. A few miles out to sea a storm blew up, and the vessel was sunk.

After sorting out the contract, getting some lesser enchantments and healing potions, and then

collecting our equipment, we met Mr Lambert, at the tower of the Lord of the Bats. Amaranth cast an enhance enchant, so that we would be able to fly the whole way to Matzdorf. And so we did. Seven hours of shadow-wings. Five hundred miles. I was cold and tired by the time we landed, at one o'clock. We camped, and I must admit I felt better by the time I woke at five, ready to begin ritual purification.

1 April 1991

Mr Lambert explained that he would remain outside the city, staying on a farm. We would be on our own from now on. The question of a cover story was the item to discuss. After considering the possibilities of being merchants, then mercenaries, we hit on a much more obvious use of our talents. We would go into the security business. Finding missing items, looking after property, that sort of thing.

Now organised, we made our way east to the city, hitching a lift on a passing hay cart. The guards on the gates wanted to know if we were new to the city, and when we said we were, they explained some rules. No murdering, or raping on pain of death (self-defence is considered a possible excuse, but only if it can be proven, which means witnesses). The city cats are considered the personal property of the warlock. He has the right of punishment in their regard. They asked if we had anything to declare, and we demurred. Then we asked for directions, and were told that the cartographers were to be found in Normal Way. Follow the Matzdorf Road, turn right, then left.

We found them easily, and purchased a map. Amaranth remembered to get a receipt (Mr Lambert said he would reimburse us for reasonable expenses), and we chatted for a while with the mapmaker, mainly about the cats.

When we left the mapmaker Kelovar took a long look at a cat. "It's a short-lived sentient," he stated. "And the college of last spell to impact is mind." We stared at him, as he fixed on another feline. "Long-lived sentient. Last spell to impact - indetectability." I couldn't believe this, and asked the party to gather round me, as I cast telepathy. Normal mana. Great. Spell worked. I focused on the cat, now in Kelovar's arms. Cat thoughts. Food, sleep, food, meow. "It's a cat," I said. "Thinks like a cat, so it is a cat. Kelovar, why don't you try disbelieving that aura." After a long minute he answered, "The aura's changed. Living animal. No answer." Fascinating. Why should cats be given illusory auras?

We carried on down the road looking for an Inn. The first was halfling-sized. The second proved to have a low mana level. It didn't help when DeVere announced the fact to the innkeeper, and then tried to explain it. The innkeeper wanted to know if Dramus (who looks the part) was a warlock. We left that inn rather hastily.

The third inn, "The Pegasus", was much the same, only Amaranth found that the mana was normal outside, low inside. Strange. Still we booked our rooms. We had a long talk with the innkeeper. About cats, and warlocks, and the city in general. Apparently the warlock's wife is responsible for nice weather at festival time. "Air mage!" The innkeeper has seen people torn apart by the warlock for abusing his cats. "TK rage?" Probably not. Spinner suggested people being sliced up by illusory swords. Sounded more likely, but nasty.

Dramus and I went for a walk out towards the lumbermill. He wanted scraps of wood. I wanted to try to pick up thieves thinking thieftish thoughts on my telepathy before it ran out. But I found

none, except the pickpocket in the market earlier. Meanwhile DeVere was writing a notice to put up, advertising our services as a security company. She was talking about an arena when we got back. She wants to show off. Methinks we might accompany her, but Dramus seemed more interested in the casino. DeVere took off to sign up at the arena, and put up some of her notices.

Kelovar was detecting auras of cats again. This time asking (at Spinner's suggestion) for generic true name. The tabby's a giant?!! And the black and white is an oak tree?!! A living plant?!! This I could not believe, and neither could Kelovar. Sure enough they reverted back to cats. I was convinced the

Warlock had to be an illusionist, so I suggested that instead of last spell to impact, he try last magic. Illusion. I knew I should have listened more carefully to that discussion about the changes to the illusionist college back at the guild meeting. I remember something about illusory auras, and about making illusions permanent, but what... And why is the Warlock giving the cats false auras anyway?

It occurred to me that it might not be a coincidence that the mana level was normal along Normal Way, so Spinner and I went off to check out my theory. Not only was I proven correct, but the normal mana continued past the west end of Normal Way, and we found an Inn, "The Sheep's Head", right on the line. It was far too poor a place to stay at, but I still booked the innkeeper's best room (four silver the week). We could use it as a casting chamber.

When we got back, Amaranth was having words with Dramus. Apparently he went down to the better end of town, and had been asking about the casino. Only authenticated nobles may enter, and Dramus is from another plane. He wouldn't be in their book! So, he made an appointment to see the Warlock. Might as well as shout from the rooftops that there's a bunch of magic-users in town! Spinner revealed that he is the seventh son of a baron, and a lesser noble himself. He intends to find out if he is in the book this afternoon.

DeVere returned with news about the arena. She is booked in to fight this evening. The place is run by their best fighter, a halfling! No magical or thrown weapons are allowed. She will earn 250 silver to fight, and 500 if she wins. Apparently the fight stops at the first major wound. Not like at Seagate, but down there a fight to the death isn't often permanent. We have to be there at six o'clock. Some of us will accompany DeVere, the rest will watch from the stands.

Dramus was going on about another scheme of his. He wanted us to go to the cemetery, and dig up some skeletons. So they can be hidden, outside of town, where he could animate them. Crazy idea! Amaranth wondered aloud why we let people like him out of the guild. Dramus seems determined to get into trouble. Next he wanted to see a priest, or a seer or something. DeVere restrained him, and Amaranth insisted he stay with the rest of the party.

When we got back to discussing our real mission, we discovered that there are a number of pieces of information we simply didn't have. Like the identity of our employer's main competitors. Amaranth decided that she and I would go talk to him and find out. We hired horses, telling the innkeeper that we fancied a ride in the country, and headed for the farm. About ten minutes from the farm, I called a halt, dismounted and tried to cast telepathy. And failed. Twice. Amaranth asked if it was difficult, and I admitted that it was. So she did an enhance enchant. Much easier! It felt like I was casting at twice the rank.

Of course Mr Lambert managed to resist, so it was wasted effort. But we did get some answers.

His company was trying to work both ends of town, silks and gems for the rich, general merchandise for everyone else. Their competitors are called "General International Brokerage", and they have several warehouses, besides two or three shops in the main road. There are thieves in the city, but as far as he knows, they aren't organised into any thieves' guilds. He told us more about the theft. The seal was in a lead box, inside a safe, which has been found. One of the people who had been guarding it took off with it. No magic is suspected, and the seal wasn't the only item taken.

By five o'clock we were back at the inn. Spinner said that his name was in the book, but that he wasn't allowed to take more than a partner, and maybe one retainer into the casino with him. I offered to be his partner, knowing that I could look the part. Dramus had locked himself in his room. Apparently Spinner had said something about parents. Amaranth used magic to open the door (now I know how Vila does it). Dramus was sitting huddled up in a corner, looking very depressed. He wouldn't move, so Amaranth locked him in.

Time to go to the arena. Amaranth and Kelovar would accompany DeVere, while Spinner and I practised our couple act. I insisted on ring-side seats and was rewarded when one of the fighters was killed in an early round (I must visit these places more often). DeVere's turn came at last. We called for a bookie, and both placed a hundred silver pennies on her. It looked like she was winning, twin estocs against mace and shield, but then her opponent, one Krith dealt her a wounding blow. He walked away, having decided the fight was finished, and then she attacked him in the back. Not nice. Next thing, she was shot by three crossbow bolts from officials under the stand.

We watched another three bouts, and then left, intending to find DeVere and offer our services as healers. But she wasn't at the Inn. We returned to the arena, and got hold of Amaranth. She didn't know where DeVere had got to either. So Spinner cast locate. No DeVere within fifty miles. Was she dead? Try again, assuming corpse. Still no DeVere. Strange.

But DeVere's big glaive was located in her room at the Inn, with her armour and other gear. About this time someone noticed that the door to Dramus' room was damaged, and he was missing. Kelovar explained that Dramus warps wood. Oops! And Spinner couldn't get his locate spell to work. When we went back inside, we found DeVere. Looking as if she had never been injured. She said she certainly couldn't be located. Because she didn't want to be. The two enchanters looked at each other. I wonder if she can keep out my telepathy as well. DeVere then said that she was off to find someone.

I got the innkeeper to boil a kettle, and made us some herbal tea. Feeling somewhat revived we set off to find some trouble. Outside the inn, Amaranth does an enhance for me, and I start casting. First telepathy, then indetectability. We head off for the warehouse district, Amaranth and Spinner about fifty feet in front.

After a few minutes, we heard a scream. I cast about with my mind. Got him. Clumsy thief, had fallen off a roof. My telepathy lead me straight to him, and I collared him from behind. He couldn't figure out what was happening, and drew a pair of daggers, so I swapped my hold to his wrists. He was scared stiff by these invisible manacles, and when Amaranth and Spinner arrived was quite willing to stay put and answer questions. I poked around in his mind, and passed Spinner extra snippets of information. Like the fact that his name was Peter, and that the head of North's thieves guild, to which he belonged, was called George. This confused him further,

especially when Spinner demanded a share of the bonus for recruiting us. We got the address of their headquarters, and then let him go.

Then I left Spinner and Amaranth, and went to search for the General International Brokerage warehouses. These occupied an entire block and were themselves occupied by a variety of thugs, some of whom were actually guarding the premises, but most were amusing themselves with playing cards and the like. The offices were unguarded, though locked and I was able to see several locked cabinets in the darkness. Thinking Amaranth might be interested I returned. She noticed that someone was watching from a roof, and I ran after him. He must have perceived me for he fled, and I lost him in the slums.

It was half past one by the time we got back and went to bed. Dramus' door was back to normal, and we guessed he was back.

2 April 1991

I woke at quarter past seven, took a quick breakfast, and retired to my room to purify, leaving a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door, marking with the time "10.30". I had only just finished, successfully I might add, when there was a knock at the door, and my room was invaded by the rest of the party. Amaranth explained that the party had had a visit from a member of the North's thieves guild. A meeting was scheduled for one o'clock. The representative, one Cantol Hicks, stated that they were concerned about our "security system". They were keen to get rid of us, and certainly didn't want it within a mile of their headquarters. Apparently one of their members was having to take a short holiday after a rather nasty experience last night...

We spent the rest of the morning wandering around the upper class section of town, seeing the sights, and doing some shopping. I spent a total of 250 silvers on a green silk dress, a brown velvet cloak, some fine leather shoes, and a gold circlet to keep my hair back - instead of the leather thong I usually use.

Back at the Inn, we lunched and then our visitor arrived. There was some fuss about removing cats from the room, and Amaranth and I took the opportunity to go upstairs so that I might cast telepathy. To my relief not only did it work, but Mr Hicks failed to resist.

Amaranth explained that we were in town for a single purpose, the recovery of a specific item, thought to be in the possession of one Cytol Thrap. Hicks seemed relieved. He told us that Thrap is in town, but has made himself scarce. His was thinking that he didn't know where Thrap is, but George does. Hicks went on to explain that he was the thieves' guild expert on a "certain field". His thoughts told me that he already had me pegged as the Mind Mage, and was wondering about the others. Except DeVere.

He proposed a meeting with Thrap. At the Sheep's Head Inn, in the slums, and right now. He claimed the place would be warded to stop us casting spells, but I knew he was lying. Kelovar's talent didn't detect any aura about the place either.

We got to the room and there was Mr Cytol Thrap. He was hesitant to begin with but Hicks told him that he might as well tell the truth, that we would know it anyhow. I figured he knew I was reading his mind. What he didn't know was that Thrap had resisted, and I wouldn't have known whether he was lying or not. Thrap explained that he had sold the item to a Mr Bob Kelf, a forger, for 5000 silvers, two days ago. Hicks agreed to find Kelf for us. Apparently he wasn't

at his "shop", a nearby cartographer's establishment.

On the way back to the Inn Hicks explained that part of the Warlock's agreement with the town is that he would deal (nastily) with any mages that disrupt its smooth running. We had better be careful...

We spent the afternoon at the Inn waiting for news of Kelf. Hicks popped in every hour, shaking his head to indicate failure. I played endless games of chess with Amaranth. Eventually we became so bored that I ran after Hicks, and we got him to let us into Kelf's shop. Inside, we found a large individual asleep on a couch. He took a lot of waking up, but turned out to be some kind of bodyguard. Hicks waved a piece of paper at him and he talked. He didn't know where Kelf was, just that he was "out". Visiting someone in the warehouse district. He thought that Kelf had put something which might be the object we were looking for in the safe. Amaranth had the safe open in no time, and inside was a pile of papers and a box. The box! It took both Hicks and Amaranth some time to open it. But it was empty. The seal had gone.

Surmising that Kelf had taken it with him to sell, we investigated the warehouses. Nothing. Just business people talking boring business, and a warded safe full of jewels. No seal.

Hicks found us to tell us that he had found Mr Kelf. We hurried back to the shop and there he was. He had been at North's, complaining about the theft of, you guessed it, the seal. Last night. From a locked box, inside a locked safe, inside a locked room, with a sleeping thug nearby. And all but the box left that way...

We got back to the "Pegasus" just before dinner was about to be cleared away. Afterwards DeVere said she'd be going out for half an hour. Going south. The rest of us discussed the situation. I pointed out that we had a real problem. An object which we can't locate, and we have no clues as to who stole it. None at all. The only thing I could suggest was that we try to find out who knew about the seal. Who had Thrap and Kelf spoken to?

Hicks came in at eight, and Amaranth asked him who might know about the seal. He didn't think North's did, but agreed to arrange another interview with Thrap and Kelf. He left just before we had another visitor. One Fred Biggs, looking for Miss DeVere. Apparently General International Brokerage wants to hire Acme Security. Little do they know... We promised to pass the message on.

Minutes later DeVere turned up. She'd been to South's thieves' guild, and had found out that there is a third thieves' guild, operating in the wealthy end of town, somewhere east of Rich Street. Entitled "Richtofen's Gentleman's Guild." Such a silly name could only have been invented by a bunch of arrogant male humans! When told about the security job DeVere decided to go straight off to see them, with Kelovar in tow.

Hicks came back, with news of a meeting arranged for nine o'clock at the "Sheep's Head." We talked and I read Kelf's mind (Thrap resisted again). All we achieved was a rough timetable of events.

21st March - Micheal Crozier (independant member of North's) steals the seal. Asks North's for names of fences, refusing to say what he has to sell.

28th March - Cytol Thrap buys seal from Crozier.

29th March - Crozier is ship-wrecked.

30th March - Note recovered from shipwreck by Camber and Company. Howard Lambert flies south to Seagate.

31st March - Guild Meeting. Cytol Thrap sells seal to Bob Kelf. Kelf places seal in safe.

1st April - Party arrives in Matzdorf. Kelf contacts North's, seeking documents to test the seal on. That evening, the seal is stolen again from Kelf, by person(s) unknown.

We returned to the Inn to find DeVere waiting with news of the contract for General International Brokerage. She was introduced to a Mr Sear, their Manager of Operations for Matzdorf. They want two shifts; guarding the vault, and roving; from 8pm to 1am, and from 1am to 6am. Night shift. There's a big shipment due next week, and they need some extra help. They'll pay us ten silvers a night, more if there's trouble. And DeVere accepted! I don't believe this! Are we expected to sleep on this adventure? Speaking of sleep...

3 April 1991

Had some difficulty purifying, so I didn't actually surface until quarter past ten. Amaranth and Spinner were the only two up before me anyhow, and Spinner took off to purify himself. Amaranth told me there'd been a guard in, talking to the innkeeper about a big fire last night. In Crozier Street. I did a double take. It couldn't be. I pulled out the map and showed Amaranth. North's thieves' guild. Right at the end of Crozier Street. She pointed out that there were lots of houses in Crozier Street. It was very unlikely to be that particular building that got burnt down. But there wasn't anything else to do, so we went for a walk.

We got to Crozier Street, but there was no sign of a fire. I asked a guard, pretending to be a curious idiot, and was told it was down the north end of the street. I asked him to show me where on the map (rubbing out the mark I'd made earlier first). He pointed out the spot. The same spot. "Told you so," I said to Amaranth, getting a funny look from the guard. We carried on down the road and saw the ruins of a large burnt-out building, cordoned off, and full of guards sifting through the ashes. Slipped back to the "Sheep's Head" and cast telepathy (hoping to find some clues). Amaranth located Hicks, and we found him near the ruins. It was the guildhouse. They've lost eight people, all in one dormitory. We offered our assistance in finding the culprit, and he accepted, saying that he rather like Kelovar to go over the place. After the guard had finished of course. He'd fetch us when they were ready.

Dramus came down while we were eating lunch. He'd been to the graveyard the night before and couldn't get over the feeling of something different about the place. I offered to hypnotise him and help him to remember, promising not to drop any nasty post-hypnotic suggestions in. Amaranth would supervise. I gather some mind mages are not so scrupulous about such things. It turned out to be all in his imagination. I did one slightly unethical thing though. Got him to tell me why he'd taken his mask off. Seems that it was the end of fifty years of mourning since his parents had died. Killed by orcs on that other plane he comes from. That accounts for a lot. Hope this guy doesn't go adventuring with Eric... or Ug Bash.

After lunch we went to collect our new clothes. Very nice. Hicks came to see us at three. Seemed to think that the room where the eight died might have been locked. There is some evidence that an accelerant may have been used, which suggests arson. They suspect South's thieves guild, but who knows? They are also concerned about a wolf seen on the rooftops in the slums. Could be a lycanthrope. Anyhow the authorities are still searching the ruins so we will

have to wait until tomorrow. Hicks will call us at eleven. George has spoken to Richtofen's, and they deny all knowledge of the seal. We decide it's time to get some sleep, before the night shift...

When Spinner woke me at eight, Dramus, Kelovar, and DeVere had already left for the warehouse. I asked Amaranth (who is skilled at such things) to assist me with my makeup. With that and the new dress, I looked stunning. Or at least that's what I deduced from Spinner and the innkeeper's reactions. We told the innkeeper we were heading for the casino, and that Spinner is a minor noble. He asked us to tell our friends down south about his establishment. He obviously doesn't have any idea what he's letting himself in for.

So, off to the casino we went. The closest spot on Normal Way to the casino was near the monument, so we hid in a convenient alley and started casting our spells. I almost didn't believe it. This area was HIGH mana! In a city! Then something glinted at the corner of my eye. The monument. Covered with a film of ice! Oops... We'd triggered a ward. Couldn't disbelieve it, so we figured it was that Air College "Ice Creation" spell. I guess we can hope that nobody noticed...

Spinner's credentials got us into the casino. We weren't exactly the most glittering of the patrons, most of whom were filthy rich and liked to display it, but there were plenty of admiring glances. Their thoughts seemed to run to "Where did he get those two? Lucky man." Spinner tried his hand at something called "Blackjack", and then I had a go at "Poker". I'd learned to play that one from Vila, but I must confess I hadn't got the hang of the gambling bit. Knowing what everyone else's cards are may stop you from losing much, but it doesn't help you win. Not with the cards I was getting.

In between hands, I got down to business. Scanning the building with my telepathy, I first discovered where the really heavy gambling was going down. Upstairs, near what I surmised to be the manager's office. Checking out the dealers showed this to be an honest house. Almost. The man behind the "Lost and Found" counter was thinking that he wished he was back at Richtofen's. Gotya! Seemed that they had a nice little racket going, with people ransoming back their "lost" property. I asked Spinner to memorise the man's face, so that we could locate him (his nameplate said Harold) later. Hopefully at Richtofen's. We cashed in our chips and left, mission accomplished.

4 April 1991

After getting changed back into adventuring gear at the Inn, and headed for the warehouse. DeVere stationed me by the offices. I had just enough time to decide that guard duty is even more boring than being on watch, when I heard her call my name. Quickly I made myself undetectable, then ran down the stairs, to find the warehouse under attack by a group of thieves. I waited by the end of one row of crates, as two of the brigands headed my way. It was obvious that neither could see me. Great. I howed into one with my tulwar but seemed only to slice him mildly. Then I felt a death. Better still. The death lust took me. Kelovar couldn't see me either, as he attacked the same thief from the rear. I'm not sure who dealt the final blow. I turned and saw another thief crawling along the top of the shelves. Then DeVere swept him down with her huge glaive.

Who next? I cast telepathy. One of the bastards was getting away. I ran after him, loading my crossbow. Through the door, and into the streets. I was the faster, and he could not lose me. I shot him again and again. I felt him scream as a crossbolt bolt stabbed into his arm. He slowed,

but didn't stop. Fool! My next shot killed him. Even as I felt the death glow, I realised that I hadn't really meant to do that. That frightened as he was he didn't deserve to die. But by the time I reached him there was nothing a healer could do. I dragged his corpse into an alley, rifled his clothing, finding only a few coins. Make it look a mugging... I ran back to the warehouse.

By the time I got there the door was shut and bolted. I tossed stones at it, knowing that the others were inside, and eventually it opened. One of the thieves poked his head around the door. I hardly needed to read his mind to realise that he was under duress. Of course, he thought that there was no-one there. I quickly wrote a note, "It's me, Starflower," and tossed it through the door. Dramus caught it, and I sensed his thought, "Front door's open..." But it wasn't. Lying little toad. I rattled the door, and then picked up Spinner's thought, "Counterspell it, Starflower."

I felt like a fool as I cast the counterspell, and became visible. Then they let me in. DeVere seemed very annoyed at me.

They had sorted the thieves into three piles. Dead (Four), Unconscious (Two), and Tied-Up (Two). I borrowed one of the tied-up ones to hypnotise him. I found out that he and his friends had been hired by a Mr John Merry (a tall dark man with a moustache). They were members of North's thieves guild, but this was not a guild sanctioned operation. Thank goodness. Their leader, the one who made the arrangements with Mr Merry, was Bob, the one that Kelovar and I had killed. Great. I told the thief to forget it, and brought him out of it.

Meanwhile, one of the guards was sent to fetch the boss. I found Amaranth in the office with DeVere, checking out the desk drawers. Nothing important. Then Amaranth spotted the safe. She decided not to open it, but got Kelovar to do a Witchsight on her, so that she could poke around with a Wizard's Eye. More documents. And something under a velvet cloth. It couldn't be... No, it wasn't the seal. Instead it was some kind of crystal ball. A crystal of vision?

Just as she finished I picked up the guard coming back with the boss. Suddenly the boss stopped, and telling the guard he'd forgotten something started running away. I sensed him desperately trying not to think about whatever it was he had forgotten. I ran after him. Abruptly his mind vanished from my perceptions. Still in range. I stopped, and was overtaken by DeVere and Amaranth. They found the boss talking to a town guard. He said he'd forgotten to inform the town guard. Humpf! More like he'd forgotten to trigger a Mind Cloak. But how did he know... I ran back to get Kelovar to detect the last spell to impact from the man's aura, but he'd already used it. Grr...

Further questioning of the thieves with the town guard's help told us how they did it. One of the thieves hid in a "crate of tea" which was smuggled into a shipment around 6pm yesterday. He didn't know how this was done, just that Mr Merry had organised it. I want to meet this "Mr Merry." The thief seemed to think he might be staying at the Horse's Head Inn.

Things quietened down, and the boss slipped into his office. Spinner quickly cast a Wizard's Eye, and had a look. So... checking on the crystal ball. Must be important. The rest of the watch passed without further ado. Dawn was breaking as we went back to the Inn for a council of war. In my room. I explained about the one who didn't get away, and about the weird thing with the boss. We decided that both he, and that ball warranted some investigation. Then we had breakfast and I spent the rest of the morning purifying, and resting. At eleven o'clock I went downstairs to meet Mr Hicks, with Dramus and Kelovar. I apologised about the North's members that we killed last night, but he didn't seem to mind. They were clearly incompetent, more for not

properly "casing the joint", than for losing to us.

We spent the next hour happily exploring the ruins of the thief's guild. Dramus amused himself "asking the dead". Trouble was the ones he managed to ask were all asleep when they died, and couldn't tell us much. Dramus spent ages trying to find out who might have a motive to kill the first one (thievery is a hazardous occupation, not unlike adventuring, and thieves, like adventurers tend to acquire enemies). I became bored with this as wandered over to see how Kelovar was doing. He was playing with bits of wood. I suggested trying to find the seat of the fire by asking when they burned, but he had a better idea. "Was the fire that burned this piece magical in origin?" Jumping to conclusions? As it happened the correct ones. He identified the spell a Rank Eight Celestial "BlackFire". Not nice. When we told Mr Hicks he muttered something about getting out of this town... And then said he'd better go see his superiors about this.

By half past twelve I was back at the Inn. I thought I'd better wake Amaranth to tell her the news. The bad news. Then I got some sleep.

We'd forgotten to check out the monument, so we decided to have a look after dinner. So, at six o'clock, there we were. Kelovar found the ward all right. At around the monument. But fortunately not encompassing the entire high mana area. Amaranth and I found a great spot further down the alley we'd used the night before. The mana level dives within inches from high to low, with no normal level inbetween. Truly weird... I checked the monument. Where the founder built his home... Really. I wanted to find out more about this founder person, so Dramus and I dropped in at the Town Hall on the way back. Well... The guard said I wanted "Information". "Information" informed me I wanted "History and Records". "History and Records" told me to go talk to "Tourism". Who weren't a lot of help, babbling on about treaties with the elves and such like. Strange to think that this whole town has grown from nothing in less than my lifetime. Humans do change things so quickly. Anyhow the "Tourism" man finally suggested we chat to some of the senior townsfolk. Such as old Jim McKenzie. Tomorrow, perhaps.

Back at the Inn we found the arguing had already begun. It was settled that I should accompany DeVere to see the boss (and try to read his tiny little mind) while Amaranth and Spinner located the Richtofen's Gentlemen's Club. So off we went to the Sheep's Head to cast our spells.

Spinner located the man from the casino without a problem, and some minutes later he and Amaranth were standing at the end of a dead end street in the rich end of town, looking at a sign announcing that the building in front of them was "Richtofen's Gentlemen's Club". Perhaps it pays to advertise. They took a table at a nearby restaurant, and scrutinised the passer's by as they partook of dessert. It seemed that the Richtofen's Gentlemen's Club was quite a popular haunt for many a beau and his belle. They were just finishing their coffee when Spinner spotted a familiar-looking cart surrounded by guards, heading into the alley beside the Club. The cart they used to cart away dead bodies. As Spinner settled the bill, Amaranth excused herself and headed for the powder room. To cast a quick Wizard's Eye. Sure enough one of the young dandies was being loaded on the cart. With an extra eye in his forehead. Due to a crossbow bolt.

The rest of us found the boss in his office. At least his body was. As for his mind I couldn't tell. He paid DeVere and then surprised us all by saying that after tonight he wouldn't be requiring our

services. He explained that one of his bosses, from out of town, had arrived recently, and was insisting on increased security. Company security, not outsiders like us. DeVere protested, but with no effect. So much for that. I decided to make use of my telepathy while it lasted, and went for a wander.

There seemed to be an inordinate number of town guards around so I headed for the guard house, and found an open-minded Colonel. He was worrying about the thief's guilds. Assassinations, arson, territorial infringements, all sorts of mayhem they'd been committing on each other. He started thinking about extra guard patrols...

Losing interest, I remembered something we hadn't done. Checking out the Mr John Merry at the Horse's Head. It wasn't hard to find. Rather disreputable, but then it wasn't in the best part of town. The innkeeper hadn't heard of John Merry. No-one had been staying there who fitted the description. And I knew from his mind that he was telling the truth. I ordered a wine, and scanned the room. There. In the corner. A little man, rather pale, thinking furtive, thievish thoughts. I strolled over to his table, and asked him what the problem was, explained that he looked a bit ill, and that I have some healing skills. He muttered something about "losing his job", and I glimpsed an image in his mind of his throat being slit. Then he got up and left. I followed him, keeping about a hundred feet behind. After a few meanderings he entered a tavern with a very large bouncer person in front. Another quick scan from across the street was enough to identify the place. South's thieves guild. It didn't surprise me to find that they were worried. About arson. Assassinations. But there was something odd. I got the impression that the person in charge hadn't been in charge for long. And that only yesterday he had been some way down the chain of command.

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That was about it for my telepathy spell, so I took off back to the Inn, and got a few hour's sleep. Then off to the warehouse for my stint on duty, hand on sword. Yes, I was getting paranoid! Things could only get worse. When I got there, DeVere told me that Hicks had been in to say that he was getting out of town. George was dead, and so were half the hierarchy of North's. It's a disease... One man had been shot at twenty foot range. Inside their guild.

Amaranth then explained that she had checked out the safe, and the crystal ball was gone. She and DeVere wanted me to go with them to find out if it wasn't at the boss's house. Spinner made us Walking Unseen while Kelovar did Witchsight spells. So we could see each other. But I still couldn't see Amaranth. He can't have got it right. Anyhow, we got to Normal Way. Amaranth did an Enhance, then while I did Telepathy, she located the crystal ball. Right on target for the boss house.

I still couldn't find his mind, but I did find what felt like his sleeping wife and kids. And a guard. Thinking bored. Amaranth snooped around with a Wizard's Eye, finding another guard. Inside the back door. Mine was inside the front. Well, if you can't get in through a door try using a window, which is just what Amaranth did. She had found the crystal ball, in a drawer in what appeared to be a study. When she opened the drawer she found a rack of potion bottles next to the ball. Mind cloak potions, I bet. Then, she rummaged around a bit to make it look like a real burglary, grabbed a small crossbow, just for good measure, and down she came.

Back at the warehouse, and a quick discussion about what to do with the potions. I suggested Dramus' favourite dead end, the graveyard. There ought to be a fair few freshly dug plots, and

if you're going to bury something... Dramus and Amaranth headed off, with Kelovar in tow. He was going to read the potions' auras.

They came back, Kelovar happily announcing that they were indeed Mind Cloak potions. Worth five thousand in silver each, we calculated. Then I realised that Kelovar had done it again. He didn't get the Rank!!! I still don't know how long that blasted Mind Cloak our ex-boss has got is going to last. Grrr...

Nothing happened in a particularly boring way for the next few hours on guard at the warehouse. I am glad we don't have to do any more of this. Back to the Inn at six, resting and purifying until noon. After lunch off to the other Inn to cast some spells. We're being followed. All the way to the GIB warehouse to collect our pay. The boss wasn't even in! Secretary gave us the money, and told DeVere that Mike would be back around one. Funny thing, he didn't even know about the big boss who's meant to be in town.

On the way back to the Inn Amaranth noticed two more followers. Then a guard joined the procession. DeVere turns to ask the guard why he was following us, and next thing Dramus opened his big mouth and the guard wanted to take us in for questioning. I pointed out that the he wasn't the only one interested in us, and next thing the guards had one unconscious "follower". They could question him!

Well, we got half-way to the guard-house when a Guard Captain approached our escort. They were to let us go... Now, this was getting damn peculiar, and reading their minds wasn't helping. Orders... So we took off back up the street, and Spinner and I decided to try to catch us a tail. But it didn't work. Someone blew a whistle and they were off. Still no sign of the boss, so back to the Inn. Past the guard-house. DeVere decided to go inside to ask about the "follower". Needless to say the paperwork wasn't finished, but there had been five of them following us.

DeVere decided to go to check out South's while we returned to the Inn. There was a message waiting for us. Addressed to DeVere and Company, with all our names on it. When Amaranth opened it, the message proved to be a invitation to dine with the Warlock and his wife, at the Erickson estate just out of town at six tonight. Kelovar went white and ran out of the room. Wonder what was biting him.

When DeVere returned we told her about the invitation and we agreed we'd better go (all except Kelovar who was still gibbering under his bed). DeVere told us that she had discovered that all three thieves' guilds had been hit, and their current leaders were now busy negotiating some kind of agreement to stop the reprisals. She had spoken to the number two, who was interested in hiring our services. As protection. Does he know he's going to be bait?

Amaranth and I rode out to the farm to update our employer. He found the "communication" ball interesting, and might even pay us for it. As we rode back into town, I noticed that the flag on the Warlock's House was down. Doesn't that mean he's out of town? I asked the Innkeeper about transport for tonight, and when I mentioned the Erickson estate, he told me that the place had been unoccupied for years. Curious... However, the message had been delivered by a guard, and when Amaranth checked at the guardhouse, the seal on it certainly did appear to be genuine.

By half past five we were ready, DeVere in polished plate, the rest of us in our good clothes (and

armed). Off we rode, following the map that came with the invitation. We found a copse of trees and cast our spells. As we approached, I located four minds. Two cooks, a butler, and some kind of bodyguard. Yet there were no tracks, and the place looked distinctly unused. DeVere knocked and the door was opened. By the butler. He seemed a bit dismayed at our collection of cloaks and weaponry, and lead us to a dining room, with a table laid for dinner. At the end of the table sat a plumpish middle-aged man, and one of the most beautiful human women I have seen. He introduced himself as the Warlock, as the butler showed us to our seats.

Then he got down to business. What were we doing in this town? Amaranth explained about the seal. Why did he invite us here? Because of a complaint from an acquaintance - Mike, the manager of the GIB warehouse. Mike was pretty certain that one of us had used a Quickness spell, suspected that Fire magic might be involved, and was worried about Mind magic. So he should be! The Warlock had himself sold Mike the Mind Cloak potions.

However, the Warlock was concerned about the recent trouble between the thieves' guilds, and offered to pay us to sort out the mess. The payment would be in the form of ten pounds of invisible weapons, composed of bound air. He would take orders for more, but he and his wife could only spare so much time at their mountain retreat. Then he demonstrated a dagger of air using a fish tank. Very sharp, hard to break, but don't use it on bound earth! After dinner (very tasty) he gave us badges to identify ourselves to the guards, but cautioned us to remain cautious about the use of magic.

After we got back to the Inn, we had another of those "what are we going to do next" arguments. In the end DeVere gave in and agreed to take us to South's. I insisted on spell-casting first. As we approached the thieves' guild I was relieved to find that no-one was following us. The rooftops were abnormally clear, and the reason became evident as we stopped some distance from the guild. Most of the thieves (except some that had gone to ground for the duration) were inside, drinking or playing some kind of game with throwing darts. A notice on the wall announced that "Hostilities were to cease immediately" etc. etc.

Not just hostilities, but almost all thieflly activities had ceased as far as I could tell. DeVere went upstairs and chatted to the current number two, one Bevan Downsworth, but failed to convince him that we were needed. They wanted to use locals. Ironic that, in view of what we were to discover...

We left DeVere, Kelovar, and Dramus to head for the Inn, while Spinner, Amaranth and I decided to try to track down the three current guild heads, who were still in negotiation. First stop, Richtofen's, and to my great delight, their number two, Henry Fitzgerald, had a suitably open mind. Standing in the street below I found him, in his office, wishing his superior would get back. I grasped a picture of a meeting place, somewhere in the centre of town. A room above a drapery store. Then the sign. "Robin's Fabrics". Got you!

Minutes later we were standing in an alley, just down the road from a fascinating meeting. Assorted guards on the roof, and inside. Then the three leaders (Richard the fourth of Richtofen's, Jim the eighth of South's, and Bob the seventh of North's) two of their minds open to me, finished negotiating, now discussing their plans. Plans to rid the thieves' guilds of outside spies. To bump off the warlock! He will be pleased. They seemed completely unconcerned for their own safety, and were waiting for someone. Someone they defer to. A messenger called "Kevin". They would meet with him here, at nine tomorrow morning.

Amaranth and Spinner exchanged glances as I repeated aloud what I was reading with my mind. At last, a definite lead to the real people behind this. Outsiders obviously, probably using magic. Certainly using these people to take over the town. DeVere is going to want to kill! Anyhow they both made sure they had a good look at all three of the guild heads, so they could be located later.

Back to the Inn. Bed, purify, breakfast. Plans to get a look and hopefully read the mind of this Kevin. And then everything went wrong. As I cast the telepathy spell, I felt my most of my mind blank out. Amnesia. Turning to Dramus (who resembled most my father), I cried "Daddy" in Elvish, the only tongue remaining to me. Needless to say he got the job of escorting the suddenly child-like Starflower back to the Inn. How am I going to live this down?

Meanwhile, DeVere turned herself undetectable, and made her way into the meeting room above the Drapery, then concealed herself in case she should be perceived. Amaranth and Spinner cast their location spells, each picking up a guild head. Approaching the shop. As they entered Amaranth spun a Wizard's Eye, and it was she who spotted the fourth person, a plumpish man in black, matching the description of John Merry, coming DOWN the stairs. DeVere listened and overheard some tasty tid-bits of conversation. The takeover and amalgamation had proved successful. In spite of the interference of a certain group of people. Us, from the description, though there was no mention of our magic. They began talking of a new combined headquarters, somewhere in the centre of town, almost on Normal Way. More people may need to be eliminated. Eventually they leave. Except where is Kevin?

Amaranth sped back to Normal Way and located him. Moving east. Rather than following the arrow she attempted to triangulate. Then as she returned to the Inn to meet the rest of the party, she found the arrow had gone. Suddenly. A second locate, and he was out of range! More magic, and a rune-portal sounded likely.

Back at the Inn, little Starflower was being naughty, wanting to amuse herself with these sharp, pointy objects she found scattered around her person. While bed seemed logical to everyone else, she wasn't feeling at all tired and wanted to play. Eventually, she was lured upstairs into her room, her armour removed by Amaranth, who finally put her to sleep. Though it wasn't easy. Even magic didn't work first time. By now Amaranth was exhausted and ready to sleep herself, along with Spinner who had transferred fatigue to help her earlier.

Still, by mid-morning a plan was hatched. There wasn't much chance of finding the rune-stick, or whatever, and someone was threatening us. We'd best get out of here. The Effrickson estate sounded like a good place. Amaranth and DeVere would fly off to find the Warlock, and fetch him back. Then capture the thieves' guild heads, and attempt to substitute party members wearing illusory disguises ready for the next meeting. But the best-laid plans.... There were a few obvious holes in this one, but I wasn't exactly able to point them out.

Amaranth and DeVere hired some horses and rode off to the estate. Nice and empty! So trigger invested, and fly away on shadow wings. Meanwhile, operation abandon Inn! Problem. What to do with a soundly sleeping elf? Spinner and Dramus went off to organise a cart, and meanwhile Kelovar discovered that he really didn't know how to dress a lady. Things got worse when he tried to get Starflower downstairs and was noticed by one of the guard. Who wanted to know what was wrong with her, and threatened to take her to hospital. Spinner and Dramus returned to find Kelovar

showing the guard the Warlock's badge, and then bundled Starflower onto the cart, out the back door, and off to the estate, where they set up shop in the barn.

The fliers passed over a quarry full of gnomes, and then a forest. Suddenly they noticed a huge sign in black lettering on the ground. "HI THERE!". It changed to "WHY DON'T YOU COME DOWN FOR A VISIT". Amaranth and DeVere flew on, and then a rather short elf came flying up to greet them. Amaranth explained that they were in a hurry, and promised to drop in on the way back.

They found the Warlock in a hut just below the peak of a mountain. Amaranth told the story, highlighting the threat to the warlock's life, and explained the plan. The Warlock agreed that it might work, but they would have to wait while his wife completed the ritual in progress. Then they waited another hour while the lady summoned up the most efficient method to get home, an air elemental. A sort of perambulatory people-carrying miniature tornado. A lot more restful than it sounds. On the way they stopped to talk to the elves, who wanted news. It turned out that another guild party had been through here only six months ago. Something to do with a coup in the hobbit village. Must have been that job that Brightflare went out on, the one when that invested hellfire tripled and turned seven hobbits to ash in one pulse. Anyone the warlock traded a air invested for some useful spells to be cast on DeVere and Amaranth. Strength of Stone and Armour of Earth. They also discovered that one of the hobbits is able to remove curses. Wonderful!

Back to the estate, and soon enough Starflower was off with the Warlock's wife to the hobbits to be de-cursed. They were expected back at two o'clock next morning.

The Warlock quickly changed his appearance, and off they went on the cart to the first of the thief's guilds; South's. On the way they noticed they were being followed, by two boys, one short and fat, and the other limping. Who would employ such poor footpads? They were lost easily, and on the party went.

DeVere and Spinner went ahead into South's. DeVere demanded to speak with Jim the boss, and was only admitted after she and Spinner had handed over all their visible weapons. Even then two thugs with broad swords remained in the room. Threats were exchanged. DeVere produced the Warlock's badge and demanded that Jim accompany her. He refused. She produced an enormous two-handed sword from nowhere and charged the guards. Spinner found himself in the way of a broad sword, and choosing the lesser of two evils, leapt through the window, landing headfirst on the cart in a shower of broken glass.

Seeing that the "come quietly" approach had failed, Amaranth began tossing quickness spells at everyone else. After casting a "walking unseen" Kelovar took off around to the front, only to find a big bouncer blocking the front door. Kelovar attacked with his tulwar, and being quickened, had little difficulty knocking the brute down. Dramus followed, and promptly attempted to zombie-ise the poor guy. Meanwhile Kelovar opened the door and was shot at by the bar-tender. Both shots went wild, but Kelovar was angered, and promptly killed the unfortunate man. (I'm starting to wonder if I'm not the only death-aspected person in this party) Quickly, he snatched up some coin, and DeVere's weapons which had been left on the shelf.

Most of the thieves had exited through the back door. The next anyone saw of DeVere was a

mailed foot smashing through a window, and Jim being tossed out. Followed by DeVere herself. Mission accomplished. Sort of. The warlock spun an illusion around the cart and off they went towards North's. DeVere flew off towards the estate to collect her giant glaive. The warlock was looking decidedly unimpressed and soon after announced that he wished to return to his tower, preferring not to be associated with all this mayhem.

The new North's building was not all that distant from the old. As DeVere flew back she spotted bowmen on the roof. When she landed there was quite an altercation. Amaranth and Spinner wanted to know what had happened to the subtle approach, and pointed out that they were both feeling tired. DeVere didn't stop to argue, but took off for North's. Spinner cast an unseen on Amaranth so she could sneak towards the thieves' guild. Up the wall she went, and finding an empty room, slipped inside. Meanwhile DeVere quit circling, landed on the roof, and started polishing off the guards. Didn't notice until she'd killed the last of them, that his hair had turned white. Must have thought the creature in the plate mail with the big black wings was just a tiny bit scary.

Amaranth had found a interesting door. Interesting because her locate told her that the person she was looking for was just on the opposite side. Nothing happened when she knocked, so she opened the door, entered and closed it behind her. Naturally the person inside was a bit confused. Especially after he got up, opened the door, and looked up and down the corridor. No-one there. Amaranth took her time, then cast, and failed, then cast again. Bob the seventh collapsed in his chair. After cleaning out his drawers Amaranth wrapped him up in a cloak and dragged him out into the hall. Just in time to meet DeVere who took Amaranth's burden and flew him down to the cart.

It was 5.30 by the time the party reached Effrickson's. The same time as a certain elf came groggily to herself, many leagues to the west. Surrounded by hobbits. Oh shit, I thought as I realised what had happened. Amnesia. Not again. Then it was "where am I?", "what day is it?", and "who are you?" time. The hobbits turned out to be those people that Brightflare had helped out six months ago. And it was only 5.30 on the same day that I had backfired. Better still there was an elven shadow-mage there, ready to give me wings to fly back to Matzdorf on. I asked the hobbit if he knew any spells that might help, considering that I could be flying into a heap of trouble, and he cast something called "Enchant armour" on me. Guaranteed to improve my armour and make me harder to hit. Then flap, flap, flap back to the city.

When I got to the estate there was no-one there. Oops! Missing party! So I headed for the high mana area around the monument, planning on casting a telepathy spell to help me find them. And there they were. I landed in a side street, and headed down the road, keeping in shadow as much as possible. For some reason the party seemed surprised, and not entirely pleased to see me.

They were off to Richtofen's to collect the third thieves' guild head. Hum... I took my time and cast telepathy, then indetectability. Funny, I was sure I'd got it wrong. I landed on a roof next to Richtofen's inside telepathy range, but outside of witchsight. I sensed three guards on the thieves' guild roof, and guessed that the remaining corner must also be occupied. I crept forward. Damn! Spotted! The elf on the near corner is too perceptive for my own good. Double damn! He's raising the alarm. The place is a rat's nest. Amaranth's going to be mad.

She was mad. But she poked her wizard's eye inside, and put Richard the fourth to sleep. He won't be going to any meeting. Curious. I picked up someone in there who had correctly

surmised that the big shadowy things were indeed magical wings. Someone in Richtofen's knows about magic.

Half past eight. Off to the meeting place. The warlock created an illusory wall for DeVere and I to hide ourselves and our wings behind. He disguised himself, Spinner and Amaranth as the guild heads, while Kelovar and Dramus made like guards up on the roof.

Nine o'clock. Nothing. Quarter past nine. Still nothing. Half past nine. Let's give up, they're not coming. We decided to go collect Richard from Richtofen's and proceeded to formulate a plan. When the proposal to set a fire to create a distraction came up, the warlock suggested using an illusion. He'd apparently been practising illusory fire, and we all agreed it might work. So, off we went. Amaranth did quickness, but missed me, so I wasn't all that useful in the ensuing combat. Essentially, the warlock set the fire, setting off the alarm. Then DeVere ran in the front door, through the flames, disbelieving, then up the stairs. I picked up thoughts of getting out through the fire escape, pointed the stairs out, and started picking off bowmen with my crossbow. The warlock seemed to be doing similar things with lighting bolts. Rather more effectively, as bodies tumbled from the eaves. Spinner and Amaranth started up the fire escape, as people started to emerge, but the next one out was DeVere, carrying the third thieves' guild head. Off we went. Three down... none to go.

What next? Amaranth tried locating Kevin again, and his arrow vanished again, somewhere in the south-east of the city. Back to the estate. Let's wake one up, and have a little conversation.

Richard was quite willing to talk, once the alternatives were pointed out to him. He wasn't feeling up to resisting either, and was quite open-minded. He told us how he and the other two had been approached three months ago by "Kevin". "Kevin" had introduced them to two handsome gentleman (unfortunately Richard's recollection was too hazy for me to get a good picture) who had offered to help them out. Using magic. They weren't very specific, but... Now we know how thieves get killed without anyone seeing the killer. Richard couldn't tell where to find these two, and their communication system wasn't much help. Leaving cryptic messages on the public notice-board. Apparently the nine-o'clock meeting had been moves after a complaint from the shop-owner that his shop had been broken into.

None of this was much help. Kelovar read their aura and told us the nature of the last spell to impact other than sleep. Charm! And the college was Enchantments and Ensoelments. It's an enchanter. Hum... It was also nearly ten o'clock and we still didn't have much to go on. The warlock excused himself. He had something to collect at his tower. It seems that a tube of bound air connects the estate with his home. No footprints. Wish he'd told us before we started flying around this city. On subject of flying...

I persuaded Amaranth that I should use up the remaining duration on both my telepathy and shadow-wings spells by doing an aerial sweep of the area where "Kevin" was last located. Off I flew, up and down the streets, finding nothing except for sleepy people, until a lighted building caught my eye. I swooped down. Busy minds. What? A man on a balcony. Looking up at the sky. Expecting his two friends to be FLYING in soon! On shadow-wings! Magic! It's them!

I took note of the place, then soared away back to the estate, wishing these wings would fly me faster. No-one in the barn save Spinner and Dramus, obviously purifying. I knocked at the door of the house, calling out to Amaranth. She soon realised it was me and opened the door, although

DeVere took some convincing. Excitedly, I told them what I had found, and they agreed it could not be coincidence. Moreover, time was most definitely of the essence. So Spinner and Dramus took the two sleeping thieves upstairs and dumped them in the air tunnel, while the rest of us argued about what to do with Richard. In the end we decided to take him with us and give him to the guard.

We headed into town. Past the warlock's tower. What used to be the warlock's tower. And was now a heap of rubble. How....

Minutes later we reached the monument. High mana. Cast, cast, cast. Amaranth cast counterspells on each of us. Let that enchanter just try anything! Then she did an enhance, followed by quickness and then I started. Telepathy first, and then... Suddenly I felt someone die. I rendered myself undetectable, then, feeling lucky, and knowing it might help, asked the others if they wanted to disappear. First Dramus, then Kelovar and Amaranth accepted. Let them try to perceive this party! A brief conference established that everyone could be seen by someone else. Then I realised who had died. DeVere had sliced Richard's throat. Not the most civilised thing to do, and how did she know to time it right at that moment?

Dramus did something and the corpse got up. Zombie! I knew there was a reason why people don't like necromancy. It was dumped on the cart, and off we went. The building turned out to be a large villa, with a wall around it. Amaranth did a wizard's eye and drew up a map, as I rumaged around inside a few of the heads in there. I couldn't find the person I'd found before, but I did have an assortment of thugs guarding the place. Out-of-towners, I sensed. A crossbowman sat watching over half the ground floor through an open atrium. I couldn't raise either of the two in the top floor master bedrooms that Amaranth picked as the mages. But at least they were asleep.

Amaranth cast again. Sleep. On one of the mages. "It's gone black!" she exclaimed. Just those top floor rooms and the space below. I sensed people waking up, others readily weapons. Triggering that ward was the alarm, must have been. Well, here goes! I leapt over the wall followed closely by Kelovar. Suddenly DeVere landed between us and the door. She kicked at the door, but it didn't budge. Then again, and it crashed inward. Then she was up, away and gone. I ran in, followed by Kelovar, found a shooting position where the hall led into the atrium, and starting firing. There was a crash from the opposite side of the house. Kelovar slipped past as I re-loaded, and ran into the atrium.

Black fire leapt from the central pool, but bounced off Kelovar. Behind me I hear Amaranth swear as she walked into a room and triggered an energy bolt ward. Kelovar was on the stairs, fighting a thug with a javelin. By now DeVere was in the atrium and on the attack, so I drew my tulwar and waded into the melee. Ouch, a dart wounded me. Bastard. One of them on the top floor. I'll get him, I thought as I hacked at a swordsman who was attacking DeVere. Together we killed him. Then Amaranth joined in. I sensed several people recoil in fear as Dramus brought in the zombie. Someone came out of the darkness towards DeVere and walked into my sword, bowling us both over. I made short work of him, and looked around to see DeVere heading up another set of stairs.

I followed her, figuring she could trigger any wards up here, but couldn't get past DeVere, as she got into a fight, to get at the pest with the crossbow who was shooting at Dramus down below. She nailed that one then went after the one with the crossbow. Another thug walked out of a

room and straight into me. He seemed to be moving as fast as me as I attempted to grapple him with a dagger. To no avail. A voice called, "The game's up. Get out, boys," and my target took off for the stairs.

Wondering where the voice was coming from, I ran around the hallway, past Kelovar, who looked about to collapse, as if he'd tried to cast a spell and failed it good. I looked towards the atrium, and saw a figure standing there. I leapt upon it, and dealt a mighty blow. But my sword passed through air. Illusion. Where is he? Probably gone on shadow wings. Damnation.

I turned as the right-hand room lit up. Reaching the door as Kelovar raised his sword over a man asleep in the bed, I could not stop him from slashing the man's left arm. "No," I cried, grabbing Kelovar's sword-arm just in time to forestall a second blow. "Leave him. We need him. He can tell what we need to know." Kelovar started to search the room, as I found a curious necklace with a mirror pendant around the man's neck. I asked Kelovar and he said it was magical. Nature of the magic, reflection. As I cast my mind around I sensed Amaranth off down-stairs following her wizard's eye, down to some kind of laboratory. The rest of us trooped after her. She had found some kind of box with a hand in it. Magical, purpose information. Spinner was examining a leather-covered bench when he suddenly went, "Ouch!", and shook his hand. There were sharp, invisible things on that bench. Our bound-air weapons. How did they get here? I found the tulwar, took my own tulwar from its sheath, and slipped the invisible (if you didn't count the thread in the handle) weapon into its place. Amaranth yelled a cry of triumph, and held up a familiar-looking box. Inside was the Camber and Company seal. At last. And it wasn't even midnight. DeVere flew off with the seal, hoping to get it back to our employer before midnight, to get our bonus.

Upstairs, and Amaranth countered her sleep spell, and the man woke. He seemed willing enough to talk. His name was John, and he confessed that he was the celestial mage responsible for turning the lights out. His friend who had escaped was an enchanter, named Kerid. The person known as Kevin, real name Charlie, was not a mage - but had great skill with disguises - which was how he evaded the locates. He was an independent, hired by the two mages as a go-between.

John was most annoyed when he discovered that the only reason that we had become involved and foiled their plans to take over Matzdorf was that seal. They would have given it to us had they known! Kerid had killed the warlock by using telekinesis and a wizard's eye to put an invisible poison into his food. Nasty idea. Have to remember that one. It was the moment the warlock died that the tower blew up. Hum... Some kind of kill-the-person-who-killed-you mechanism? If so, it didn't work.

DeVere returned with the news that our employer was most pleased, and that he would pay us in the morning. Then we went to the monument, so a few locate spells could be tried. Spinner could not locate the warlock's wife, but he did manage to find the collar of her dress, ten miles down stream. DeVere took off to investigate. Meanwhile Spinner tried to locate the warlock. Nothing, dead or alive, but Spinner did manage to find the warlock's clothing. So we returned to the ruins of the tower, where the guards were still searching. We convinced them with our passes, and soon discovered a set of empty warlock's clothes under the rubble. At the end of one sleeve was a ring. We put it in the hand-box, to no result.

DeVere brought back similar information about the wife. Even that the buttons of the dress were done up at the back. There was only one conclusion. The warlock and his wife must have been

instantly transported at the moment of death to somewhere else, far away from here, possibly to another plane. Either way, it's no spell I've ever heard of, but I doubt that the Warlock is still deceased. DeVere suggested that they might have been extra-planar entities like Dire Wolves that return to their home plane at death. For some reason Dramus looked a bit worried at this. But plane of origin of the aura of a spot of blood on the warlock's clothing read as Alusia.

The Captain of the Guards told us that they had instructions to contact a Namer in the barony of Jessel, on the death of the warlock. Perhaps he might know something. DeVere and Amaranth persuaded John to cast shadow-wings on them, so they could investigate the mountain. But they returned some hours later having failed to locate them.

Meanwhile, Dramus and I went to the graveyard to retrieve the crystal ball and the potions, but found they had gone, to be replaced by an invoice for the broken window. The man is not serious, surely!

By the time we returned to the Inn it was 2am and definitely time for some sleep. In the morning, we collected the two remaining heads of thieves' guilds. They were still there, in the air-bridge, though they had awakened. For some reason they weren't keen on moving. We hauled them out and delivered them to the Guard Colonel for questioning, on charges of conspiracy to commit multiple murder and magicide. John remained free a little longer so he could cast shadow-wings on us, to get us back to the guild. Then he, too, was packed off to the Guard Colonel. I must admit that wandering around in a city in the daytime with shadow-wings is one way to get stared at. So our fee was collected and off

we went. Spinner and Amaranth had scored a triple effect and made it the whole way back. The rest of were not looking forward to a long walk, but when we landed DeVere produced a dumbbell shaped object and told us all to hang on. We found ourselves just ten miles from the guild, and were drinking in the bar by the time the two enchanters landed.

There is only one more thing I must report. There was some debate over certain of the treasure, so we diced for it. I was pleased to roll the lowest, and so acquired the tulwar. But then Dramus chose DeVere's estoc. DeVere was enraged by this and promised to kill the nasty money-grubbing creature when she next had the opportunity. Methinks a certain necromancer may be in for a deadly experience. However, I was most pleased when DeVere next selected the crossbow bolts which I desired, in order to keep them out of Dramus's hands. So, I received both the tulwar and the crossbow bolts. These shall be useful indeed.