

Hobbit's Home

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Francis

1 Meadow '99 - 4 Heat '99 (Duration 34 days)

Player Characters

Grendel	Mind	Human	Male	Leader
Sir Don	E&E	Human	Male	
Darkstar	Mind	Human	Male	
Eric the Red	Non-mage	Hobbit	Male	
Eltain	Earth	Hobbit	Male	
Barash-ku-kar	Non-mage	Orc	Male	
Phaeton	Solar Celestial	Human	Male	Scribe

Plane - Baal

Places Visited

The 'Temple of Stars'

The ship 'Seaflower'

The hobbit's main cityship

A city fortress of the Order D'Morte

Employer - The Hobbit Emperor

Major NPCs encountered

Lord Palanthis Grenabros the Third - in Seagate

Two elderly identical mages in the 'Temple of the Stars'

Brin Thudorn - a Red level slave in the cityship

General Emerica

Captain Baroch - the harbour master at the fortress city

Shantivaar - the member of the hive-mind captured

Bellahura - the High Priest

Lady Allina - the hobbit princess

Mission - To recover a hobbit princess from the Order D'Morte

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Adventure Summary

1st Meadow '799 WK

Party employed by a representative from the hobbit fleet armada on the Plane of Baal. One of their princesses was missing, presumably taken by the Order D'Morte (Order of Death). They worshipped a goddess of death and were invading from another plane.

2nd Meadow '799

Went out to rich quarter of Seagate and met Lord Palanthis Grenabros the Third who sent us through a portal to Baal. Appeared near a white tower. Entered the tower where we were greeted by two identical elderly mages. They welcomed us to the 'Temple of the Stars' then assured we were well fed by arranging to have whatever food we wanted conjured up on the table. Spent the night there.

3rd Meadow '799

Hobbit representatives arrived who were to take us to the main cityship where the Emperor was. Sailed off in the 'Seaflower'. This turned out to be a living ship and it was navigated by being sung to.

Were presented with a chest of gold dust - our downpayment. We were told that they had magics to extract materials from the sea and were curious why we wanted this stuff. Most of their trade is done by bartering.

That night we were attacked by a flight of four dragons ridden by members of the Order. With our help, they were driven off.

15th Meadow '799

Arrived at hobbit cityship which was a gigantic, slow-moving vessel. There we discovered the hobbits practised slavery as a slave had been assigned to us. He was a drow called Brin Thudorn. Also the slaves are controlled by pain. Rooms were assigned to us.

16th Meadow '799

Taken to the Emperor's presence. He told us that a Duke's daughter had been taken by the Order (described as a vile plague and stain upon the earth). She was being held in a city fortress. Our mission was to sneak in - and kill her. The general we spoke to later confirmed that the emperor was insane but that the girl's death would incite the other dukes to wage war against the Order D'Morte. We were told that members of the Order all wear black, ride dragons and were minor mages. They worship the Goddess of Death and Blood.

Later on, our quarters were robbed and nearly all of our equipment stolen. After reporting the theft, we went back to our quarters where we were struck by ravenous hunger.

17th Meadow '799

The hunger struck again that morning along with some aberrant behaviour. Our metabolisms sped up and we passed out. When we awoke, we had been shapechanged into half-animal form, a different animal each.

Went to find a priest who told us that we had been blessed by their Goddess of the Sea.

A short time later we located our equipment in an otherwise abandoned and empty warehouse which was full of wards. A mouse was sent in. As soon as it touched our gear, all the wards went off, destroying the warehouse as well as summoning a Greater Demon which set about destroying the cityship. (It too was sentient.) We had to resort to calling on our deities to destroy the demon and heal the ship and inhabitants.

We spent the rest of the time recovering. Fortunately all our gear was recovered. The general suspected it was an Order D'Morte trap.

27th Meadow '799

Set off towards the Order D'Morte's city fortress in a small, non-sentient, ship loaded with trade goods as we were posing as merchants.

30th Meadow '799

Arrived at the city. Met by the harbour master who explained a bit about the place. The city was under military law. There are six levels and we were only allowed in the bottom two. Being caught anywhere else resulted in the death penalty. We were also expected to attend at least one service to the goddess every day. Failure to do so also invited the death penalty.

After he left, the gold was hidden underwater near the docks. As the bells tolled for the dusk service, all active spells dropped off. The same thing happened at dawn.

1st Heat '799

Had our cargo inspected then went to arrange with the merchants to sell some. A copy of the Codex D'Morte was purchased which told us that they had already conquered seven planes and had spies on 60 more, one of which was Alusia. Also managed to determine that the hobbit was somewhere in the third level.

When we got back to the boat, we discovered there were two intruders. One was killed, the other captured. Discovered our captor was part of a group mind and that they had been sent to find out more about us. He told us that the hobbit didn't want to leave and was there because of the High Priest.

That night, snuck up to the third level and found the hobbit and high priest engaged in carnal activities. Defeated the high priest and convinced the hobbit princess to leave with us. Left very quickly out to sea as the alarm sounded.

2nd Heat '799

Ran into a bad storm. Discovered that the hobbit had been killed beforehand.

4th Heat '799

Finally reached the cityship. The head was removed and presented to the Emperor who declared war. We were intending to snatch the head so it could be re-united with the body on Alusia and the hobbit princess resurrected but were presented with our pay and banished before we had the chance. Fortunately we had enough extra treasure to cover the costs of regeneration. Some of us also had the shapechanges removed.

Hobbit's Home

Phaeton

The party I find myself with this time were employed by a representative from the hobbit fleet armada on the Plane of Baal. Whether this had something to do with the demon of the same name I had no idea. We were told that the plane wasn't very magical and the pay was 10,000sp/person.

Our employer wasn't very forthcoming in facts but we were told that we would be going through a portal to get there, most of the mission would be on water as all the hobbits took to sea after their lands were overrun, and the Princess of the Sea was missing, something to do with a group called the Order D'Morte (Order of Death). I presumed our job was to find her but, before we could discuss details such as downpayments etc, the party employer beat a hasty retreat.

The makeup of the party were as follows:

Grendel - a mind mage that I had adventured before. He became the party leader and the military scientist

Sir Don - a human E&E

Darkstar - a new member of the Guild, an elven mind-mage.

Eric the Red - A non-mage hobbit.

Eltain - an Earthmage hobbit

Barash-ku-kar - An orcish non-mage, also new to the Guild.

Grendel suggested that we continue discussions in a nearby pub. It turned out to be a real dive, probably had to be to let the orc in. I just hoped it wasn't his regular. They didn't had water so I had to settle for the white wine. Fortunately Grendel knew how to transform it to water.

Basically Grendel wanted two clauses added to the contract. The first was what used to be known as 'the Spandex clause' which stated that any member who was exceedingly stupid, according to the rest of the party, was to forfeit half their treasure share. The other clause was currently unnamed but it basically was to allow us to abandon a party member if it was felt it was too risky to retrieve them.

As far as special treasure, Grendel's quest for more Water Magics was noted and Sir Don was looking for magical short swords.

Apparently Sir Don and Eltain had been to this plane before. To get there, they had gone to this well to do, aristocratic, but not quite with it, mage in the rich area of Seagate. He had sent them through a pentacle and they arrived in an illusioned tower. Their hosts were two 'insane' elder wizard/illusionist twins. They also mentioned that the food turned to dust as soon as it went outside. Speaking of outside, the weather changed so fast that there were four seasons in one day. A short walk took them to the beach where they were picked up by a hobbit ship. More like a floating mobile home they said. Rumoured were large floating hobbit cities. They were dumped onto the shore of a land that took bureaucracy to the extreme. Permits were needed for everything everywhere and they only liked humans. It was also a very powerful theocracy. They had paladins i.e. holy warriors and detested mages. All the cities had paranoia

as a way of life. They sneaked out via the river in the dead of night.

Their story got a bit vague after this, probably the effects of the beer, but they warned us about messing with the gnomes. Apparently they were in this valley guarding a mystical portal and the party went in it, after the gnomes said that they were going to kill anyone who came out of it. Afterwards they ran afoul of some demon and had to spend several years in servitude before being returned to their original point in the timestream.

Once the meeting was over I went to get my Pearl of Waterbreathing recharged by Aqualina, obtain a Waters of Strength for Grendel as well as picking up Amie for a rather late lunch. Since she didn't have anything planned for the afternoon we went into Seagate and helped me select what I would need for this trip.

2nd Meadow

That morning I spent in Seagate with Amie, in order to pick up the goods I had previously ordered. The instructions were to meet outside the same pub at midday but I was a bit late, after being button-holed by Lath and her party wanting to know about the bandits that I had encountered in North Carzala a while ago when I had a party looking for my missing brother.

Finally I turned up to find most of the others waiting. There was a guy selling 'sausages in a bun' but no one was keen to buy - except the orc. However, when he switched to cream buns, he was crowded by hobbits.

Once everyone arrived (I wasn't the only late comer) we headed out to the rich quarter of Seagate and found a large mansion made from white stone with cat statues and gargoyles on the roof. When the knocker was used it sounded like a bell. Finally the door was opened by a very old guy in blue robes who introduced himself as Lord Palanthis Grenabros the Third.

He seemed to think we were here for a group therapy session as he kept consoling us on our losses and wanting us to talk about them. Must ask Starflower if she makes housecalls as I was quite convinced this guy was suffering from senile dementia even though he was perfectly healthy - in body at least.

We finally convinced him that it was the portal we wanted although he kept going on about people having never returned through it. Guess the party employer must have come a different way. However he did recognise the two that he had sent through before. I was beginning to think we should have obtained some Banishment potions beforehand. He also told us that the portal had been modified and enhanced since it was last used.

It turned out to be a large archway covered in runes. Lord Grenabros drew a circle and incanted. Once the space within the archway began glowing we jumped through and ended up in a snowdrift. It was very cold although as we headed towards the tower the snow rapidly melted and it started to get very hot. Someone warned us we had to be on stones at midday but he didn't say why. Land sharks we thought. It was nearly that by the time we were on the stones surrounding the white tower. Clouds were coming in rapidly as we searched for the way in. There was no visible entrances so Sir Don knocked on the stone. A glowing arch appeared and we hurried inside. The stone wall closed behind us.

We were greeted by two identical elderly mages wearing white robes and carrying staffs

topped with a large crystal. They spoke together speaking each alternate word. They welcomed us to the Temple of the Stars and suggested we partake of food in the dining room.

So we did. The table was set up for dinner but no food was laid out. However, as we sat down, goblets and other foodstuffs floated in on trays. On a hunch I DAed the food. College:mind/illusion, nature:purification with some power/channelling thrown in. So I started digging further to find out which power was involved. The answer was Baal so Grendel and I decided to abstain for a while in case we were in violation of our pacts. However, when it was shown that it was in our best interests to partake we did so, especially when it was discovered whatever foodstuff we desired would appear. So Grendel conjured up chocolate covered strawberries for dessert.

We were then shown to our rooms, via some sort of translocation device that would allow us to visit where we wanted to go. However we were told that the top 7 levels of the 27 level tower were off-limits but there was enough to keep us amused i.e. large library, baths, recreation rooms etc etc. The rooms allocated to us, on the 15th level, seemed to be very close to the 'ideal' room we would have created for ourselves - just as if they were reading our minds to seek our desires, something I very strongly suspected they were doing.

Our hosts then left us to our devices, but not before informing us that representatives of our employers will be arriving tomorrow at 11am.

Somehow later I found myself in my room and was lulled to sleep by the sounds of some distant music despite my efforts to stay awake.

3rd Meadow

After purification and breakfast I spent the morning studying non-magical means of healing. Some of what I found suggested techniques and technologies that were not yet possible on Alusia but I did find techniques I could employ such as simple surgical techniques and resuscitation methods. It was rather fascinating and I quickly lost track of time, not realising when it was until half the hour past eleven.

Meanwhile Grendel was also researching, only he was doing something I should have done, i.e. finding out about the world we were in. The hobbits were all seafarers and the oceans were divided into domains for each clan. In total 18 clans, 52 sub-clans, and 1300 families with an average of 3000 hobbits per family. Each clan was ruled by a duke and the emperor is elected from one of the families. No maps could be found on the hobbit's territories and there were no records of them engaging in slavery.

When I suddenly realised what time it was, I found Grendel and together we rounded up the others and hurried down to the lounge. There were waiting three hobbits wearing seagoing clothes, tattoos and large scimitars. After we apologised for being late, one of them introduced himself as Cuthlar of the Third Fleet of the Family of Cumryth of the Clan of Salt. He had been requested by the Emperor to pick us up and transport us to the main city ship. The journey would take eight days.

So we headed down to the shore. On the way we were asked whether or not any of us were 'blood' mages, i.e. used blood in our magic. When we reassured him we weren't he was pleased as such mages wouldn't be allowed aboard. He then told us that the ship was the

home/temple aspect of the god, in fact the ship is part of the god whom he described as harsh but fair. I presumed he was talking about some sort of water deity. We weren't to be disturbed by sightings of water elementals and the ship 'Seaflower' crewed by 300 able-bodied hobbits. Also when we reached the Emperor we were to show deference by removing footwear etc.

There was a short walk to the beach where a long-boat was waiting. Just out to sea was a three masted scow which took up further out to a 350' long galley. This was the 'Seaflower'. It consisted of wood but we suspected it wasn't constructed as there weren't any visible seams.

The cabins allocated to us were hobbit sized which meant the tallfolk in the party had to stoop a bit. They had allocated four cabins to us which meant we had to double up (except for the orc). I ended up with Darkstar.

Once we were settled in we were shown to the Captain's cabin at the stern of the ship. As we went there we noticed that the ship wasn't rolling. When we got there the captain sang something and the large central table sank into the floor. I was getting more suspicious that the ship was actually a living entity.

He told us that they navigated the ship by singing to it although there were several things that were still done the way we were used to. He also mentioned that the hobbit nation was currently at war with rather unpleasant people that were new to the plane, known as the 'servant of the goddess' who were expending from their initial land. They had aerial transport.

I offered my services as a Healer and was told that they only had three cases in the infirmary, caused by carelessness. When I went to examine them it was one broken arm and two sprained wrists. So I used my skills to accelerate their recovery. As I did so, a jolt told me that we were underway.

Grendel insisted that we spend a half a day per day learning the hobbit language. Some of the party had sailor experience so, when we weren't training, they helped out where they could.

Dinner we spent with the rest of the crew. Of course, it was fish. After dinner everyone was issued with a tot of rum. I wasn't keen on drinking it but one of the sailors offered a rather nice shell for it. I accepted, thinking that the shell would make a nice gift for Amie. As the voyage progressed, I amassed several such shells.

Later on that evening, we were visited by a couple of sailors carrying a chest. Inside, it was full of gold dust. This, we were told, was our down payment. According to my calculations there was quite a lot of dust in there - at least 10,000sp worth. The sailors were curious about why we wanted such stuff as it wasn't worth much to them at all. All they use it for is ornamentation. One of them showed us just how easy it was to get by getting a bucket of seawater, singing a song over it, and the water disappeared, leaving behind a small amount of gold dust. Then, much to the surprise of most of the party, he threw the gold out the window. I was able to DA it before he did that and discovered that the last magic to work on it was Purification. From what we could ascertain most of their trade is done by bartering and what they prize most is salt.

The evening was spent playing deck games. I spent most of that time refining my chess game so I could finally beat Amie. For some reason Sir Don had a great aversion for the game -

probably because for his servitude he had to play it continuously.

Midnight and we were woken by a loud female voice saying 'Ware the skies'. When we got out on deck we discovered that the ship was being attacked by several flying creatures. As the ship sped up they divebombed us and we could see each was carrying an armoured rider and the creatures looked like horned dragons.

.2.

Given the hypothesis that dragonbreath was magical and that the ship was an entity, I tried putting a Fire Special Counterspell on the ship. Unfortunately the spell failed. Meanwhile the hobbit crew were trying to point their ballistae at the rapidly approaching dragon but couldn't elevate them high enough. So, even though Barash wasn't familiar with the use of the weapon, he ripped one off its mount, aimed, fired, and scored a hit on the shoulder. Didn't stop it though. It passed over and breathed fire on the rear of the ship - right where the Captain and the helmsmen were. Also the dragonfear was affecting most of the crew, including Barash and myself. As a consequence I didn't see much of the battle. Grendel managed to mental attack one of the four dragon which sent it crashing into the sea while Sir Don charmed another rider.

Finally they left, after another dragon retrieved the dragon and rider that had fallen. As they flew away, they faded into insubstantiality. The dragonfear had ran out and I was busy assisting in triage, and treating the more serious cases. Virtually all of the injuries were massive burns, shock and other traumas. There was no sign of the captain. Either he had sank beneath the waves or had been ashed. I also did some soothing pain and healing on the ship.

4th Meadow

A few more of the burn victims died during the night. I was seriously considering resurrecting them but decided that their injuries were just too severe to guarantee a safe recovery. Besides it was more important to deal with the living.

The rest of the trip was uneventful with the routine of healing, hobbit lessons, rests, and more healing (at least in my case). The ship was still damaged so we were reduced to a slow pace.

15th Meadow

Finally arrived at the hobbit cityship, which was a gigantic, slowly moving structure, about 4 kilometres long and 1.5 kilometres wide. We entered a tunnel and found ourselves on a canal. Soon we reached the docks and were told to wait in a warehouse nearby. So we did. A short while later we were approached by a tall slender figure wearing silks and a turban. He had pitch black skin and pointed ears. I didn't need a DA to tell me he was a drow. He prostrated himself and bade us welcome to the mothership. He introduced himself as Brin Thudorn and told us that the Emperor would see us at his earliest convenience. He then handed us a rod and told us that it could be used to summon and control him at our pleasure.

He then explained he was a Red slave. There were three levels. Blues were still under 'training' (by continuous application of pain) which lasted for the first 100 years of their lives. The next are the Greens which takes the next 150 years and finally the Reds for the last 100 years of their servitude. At higher levels the slaves were given more latitude and responsibility. I didn't feel happy about this setup at all and, by the look on Darkstar's face, he didn't think much of it

either.

Some Blues were summoned to carry the luggage and we were taken to our rooms. I asked about the library and was told it was restricted to upper nobles.

Once we arrived at our rooms we discussed what to do next. Brin was still hanging around, waiting for further instructions so Grendel, believing that we would be unlikely to hear from the emperor for a day or so yet, suggested that we have a look around the city. So Brin started the tour at the docks then we went to the marketplace. There, the others began dickering with a weaponsmith about weapons. Metal weapons were forbidden so these ones were made of wood. A weird sort of wood too as I couldn't get a GTN from it. Grendel finally traded some candy for a battleaxe which would take two days to craft. Darkstar traded his boots while Sir Don traded a Crystal of Vision. The weaponsmith was interested in what potions I could create but I told him "I don't do weapons".

Unfortunately we didn't have time to get to the gardens before dinner time but when we got back, we were told that the Emperor would see us tomorrow at 11am. An escort would arrive to pick us up.

16th Meadow

The escort arrived (a rather arrogant hobbit) who introduced himself as Simin of the Royal House. His sedan chair was borne by four Blues and we had to follow along behind - on foot. Upon reaching the royal apartments we were conducted to waiting rooms and told to wait. A female Blue arrives and offers us refreshments.

Finally we are led into the throne room and announced. We approach the emperor, with the correct protocols. He tells us he has a task for us, a dangerous task. A Dukes daughter has been captured by a 'vile plague and stain upon the earth'. She is being held in a city fortress to the west. Our mission is to sneak in ... and kill her. I was so sure he was going to say rescue that I just stood there, stunned so I nearly missed the bit about being well rewarded. Besides no price is high enough for a life. As far as I can make out this emperor is insane.

We were then casually dismissed and led back to the waiting rooms where we met up with a military type hobbit who told us to follow him. He introduced himself as General Emerica then said "You've met our emperor and yes he is quite mad". Once in his office, he told us that the daughter of Duke Tumier of the Third Section of the Clan of Star and Fish, had been taken by the Order D'Morte and her death would incite the other dukes to wage war against the enemy. She had been taken off a ship and the ship decimated. He had a map which showed the coastline and the city, including a large fortress. Travellers and merchants can reach the outer part of the city but we had to gain entry to the inner section. She is in one of the 18 odd towers. Presumably she's the only hobbit in there. Our orders were to return her head on a platter to the emperor as proof that the mission had been successful. I started to wonder if this person was insane as well.

We would be dropped off in a small boat, an hour away from the city. Once inside we were to register as merchants. Trading goods are being provided. We would be leaving the main ship in eleven days and another couple of days would see us at the drop off point.

Members of the Order all wore black, rode dragons, and were minor mages. The spells they

had seen were flight, flames, ice, lifting, limited teleportation and magical weaponry. They worship the Goddess of Death and Blood. It is believed that the dragons came from off-plane.

By the time we returned to our quarters I was greatly troubled by what we had been asked to do. It was soon obvious that the others were too. Just then Darkstar sensed pain and blood within the hour as well as a growing sense of hostility towards us in the populace for a reason they didn't know. When Sir Don used a Crystal of Vision to determine where it was coming from he saw a picture of the city. Could the city itself be annoyed with us for seeming to agree to do what the Emperor wished? There had to be some way of reassuring it.

.3. & .4.

Well I could have been wrong about the city being hostile. Eric decided to go out drinking with Barash and Eltain. On the way all three of them got mugged and their possessions stolen. Eric ended up stuffed down a sewer. Grendel and Sir Don managed to get wind of this and went off to rescue Eltain while Darkstar and I stayed put. That may have been a mistake as our rooms were invaded, our equipment stolen, and Darkstar and I were tied up and stuffed in a closet. That was not pleasant.

After Eltain was rescued Grendel and co went to see the General's second in command but didn't learn anything new. So they returned to our rooms where they rescued us. A little while later, Barash staggered in, covered in cuts and bruises.

Grendel had already reported the thefts to the watch tower so, after I was satisfied that Barash was healed, we headed back to the watch tower to see if there was any further information. As we progressed Grendel concluded we were being followed by two individuals. Also I felt spell impacts. So some of us ducked into an alley and went Undetectable while Barash lifted a full water barrel then strode back into the open in an attempt to intimidate. Nothing happened so he put it back down again.

Finally we reached the watchtower. Since Grendel was undetectable I was appointed as spokesperson. Fortunately we had a Mind Speech up. The Watch captain didn't have any further information or any leads so I described the two hobbits that were following us. The captain agreed to check it out and promised that the required information would be obtained by severe interrogation. I suggested that they use some more psychological techniques and gave them a couple of examples that they hadn't heard of - such as the Kinlu Water Torture.

We headed back to our quarters to rest. A short while later Darkstar said that he was feeling ravenously hungry and started on the food that had been supplied on the table. I checked his aura and found that it was a spell effect and it was permanent. Just then the same effect happened to all of us. After a while it abated and we rested.

17th Meadow

It was the third watch, sometime in the early morning, when we all awoke, feeling ravenously hungry. As well as that, everyone was showing aberrant behaviours, Barash locked himself in his room, Sir Don challenged Grendel's leadership and I was getting rather paranoid of the others. Also I was getting a longing for fruit, especially bananas. Whatever was causing this wasn't a curse, instead it seemed to be a blessing, even a gift.

Just then I felt my metabolism speed up. I tried to call out to Diancecht but passed out. When I woke up, an hour or so later, I discovered that we had all undergone a shapechange, which was still slowly progressing. Even our Generic True Names were changing, for instance, I was turning into a monkey, Grendel as a wolf, Darkstar as a bird, Eltain as a rat, and Sir Don as a cat creature. During the intervening time, Barash had left.

It was only a short time until the morning so we waited until then before going to find a priest. Before leaving I absentmindedly filled my pockets with fruit. We soon found one at the temple and he agreed to divinate us individually. I soon found out that his idea of divination didn't match ours, more like the reading of the runes.

He told me that the metamorphosis was caused by an outside force but he wouldn't specify which one. He also said that he believed that I needed to love more and perform more community service which was why the change had occurred. He asked me whether I thought the change was beneficial. I replied that I was ambivalent at the moment. He then declared the divination at an end and asked for the next person. Basically we learnt little. I just hoped that this change wasn't permanent.

.5.

Grendel suggested it was time to find our stolen gear. So Eltain, and I volunteered to accompany him while the others returned to our rooms to wait. Before we left, I put Unseens on everyone. Meanwhile Grendel used his location device to find his javelin. We set off, following the arrow.

Finally we reached the front of a building. The door had a barred door in front of it with a large lock. The only windows were two in the top story, also barred. The door behind was solid with no keyhole or handle.

Eltain tried the barred door. It was unlocked. The door behind was a thick, solid iron door. Eltain pushed at it. To our utter surprise it slowly moved open. The interior of the room was in pitch darkness. After several attempts I finally managed to get a Friendly Light up (must rank that more - a lot more) and we looked inside. The room was empty except for all our stuff piled up in the centre of the room. A trapdoor in the ceiling was located in the rear.

This smelt of a trap but Eltain stepped forward before we could stop him. Immediately he was hit in the shoulder by an arrow trap. Even from the doorway, I could tell it was poisoned.

Before rushing in, I checked the area for wards. The area was still warded with a Rank 15 Hellfire. There was indications that there was another ward underneath that. So I checked the area fifteen feet in. The first ward was Air but there was a Necro ward under that. Neat trick. We can't do that on Alusia but who says that offplaner magic works the same way as home. I can see how the triggering conditions could be adapted. However I digress.

The air above the ground wasn't warded, offering us a possible way in. Also it was only the direct path that was warded. Our stuff was sitting on the third ward in containing the colleges Time and Blackfire, and a possible third, as yet unidentified. By now Eltain had made his way back to us and I proceeded to neutralise the poison.

Grendel cast Control Animal on a mouse then had it sit on a piece of wood with small wheels

which the mouse used to propel itself to our gear. Then he had it step off and onto the pile.

It was then that all hell broke loose. First off the room was filled with a shimmering blue haze and the mouse stopped moving. Then the area was consumed in a black coloured fire. Finally a shape appeared. Before all the other wards in the area went off I identified it as a Greater Demon - a Balrog. The third ward must have been a summoning ward.

This was definitely out of our league so we made a strategic retreat just after Grendel teleported out his javelin. As Eltain put it 'Personally I blame the mouse'.

Just then we heard a high pitched feminine wail. It was the city-ship itself sending out the alarm as the balrog caused massive destruction in the area as it tore a hole up to the top levels in order to escape. After a short while the ship began to list and the wail turned into a death keening. Something had to be done.

All around was death and destruction as we headed back. The balrog was in the process of crawling upwards through the levels. Eltain decided to head on after it while Grendel threw a Mental Attack at it. Nothing happened so I fired a Holy white bolt of Starfire. There was a bellow as the bolt impacted. Then we were all blasted by black flames which left us very close to unconsciousness.

I knew that there was nothing more I could do by myself so I called on a Power greater than myself. It worked. I was surrounded by Diancecht's presence and he told me I could call on his power twice and channel it where I wanted. I could sense the ship was in it's final death throes so I selected the first blast at the ship mind itself. Instantly I felt the raw power coursing through me. The keening stopped. My empathy told me that the ship's condition was stabilised so when I was asked where to send the next blast, even though I was risking my mental well-being, I asked for enough power to heal as many of the injured as possible. Again I felt the power go through me. At the end I collapsed. As I did I felt someone kiss me on the forehead.

While I was doing that, Grendel had vanquished the balrog by calling on Itimanuka to send a water spout against it as it flew off.

18th Meadow

I woke up in the local infirmary along with the rest of the party. My mental state was virtually wiped out but most of it would come back. I had lost two points of Willpower permanently and had the symbol of Diancecht permanently imprinted on my forehead in living blue flames. Grendel had a scroll on a string around his neck. It was a gift from Itimanuka, the spell of Waterspout.

A short time later, the general arrived and thanked us for what we had done. He told us that the balrog was summoned by the Order D'Morte. I wasn't about to dissuade him of that notion. Also all our equipment had been recovered and was in guarded storage.

27th Meadow

The rest of the time we spent recovering. I basically read and practised my chess game (when Sir Don wasn't watching) during that time as my mental faculties grew back.

It was this day that we finally reached the rendezvous point. It was decided to get on with the

mission. A single masted ship (non-intelligent) was provided to us loaded with trade goods. No extra crew would be required to run it.

29th Meadow

Reached the coast and headed towards the city.

30th Meadow

Arrived at the city docks.

.6.

Later on that afternoon we sailed into port. The flags I could see flying mainly consisted of a claw and talon crossed against a deathhead with a blood-red background. Just after we docked we were approached by a 6'2" heavily scarred and tattooed human wearing hard leather armour. His aura told me he was a necromancer. Once aboard, he introduced himself as Captain Baroch and greeted us 'in the name of the Empress'.

Grendel introduced himself as the captain of our vessel and explained this was our first visit. So Captain Baroch explained a bit about the place. The city was under military law and we would only be allowed on the lower two levels, the dock level and the merchant level. Being in the top four levels was a hanging offence. Docking fees were 3% of our tariff in cargo value or 100sp a day whichever was higher. The maximum stay was two weeks if we were trading or 3 days if we were just laying over. Services to the Goddess occurred every day at sunrise and sunset and we were expected to attend at least one service daily. Failure to attend was also a hanging offense. The major temple was on the fifth level, in the merchants area. He also mentioned the town guards - the black dwarfs.

Our cargo was to be inspected the next morning so, at the first opportunity, Grendel and Barash swam down and hid the chest of gold underwater near a wharf pylon. Before they left I dropped a Friendly Light, Walking Unseen and Witchsight on Grendel. Grendel also had a Waterbreathing on the rest of them. However, as they did so, the temple bells started tolling - and all active magics dropped off. They continued tolling for the next fifteen minutes and, during that time, spells just wouldn't stick. Fortunately Grendel and Barash arrived back before things got bad for them. While the services were going on the temples on each level had a dragon on them although the one at the top looked more like a multi-headed hydra.

1st Heat

The next morning, I was up before the dawn to welcome the rising sun. As the dawn light spilled over the buildings I attempted to draw the scene but the picture didn't turn out too well. Besides the light wasn't interacting with the buildings as I expected. They still looked extremely dark, foreboding and gloomy. Also the bells were ringing again.

Captain Baroch arrived a bit later with a inspection team to look over the cargo and see if there was anything illegal. From what he was saying it appeared that this place was in the market for weapons and other manufactured goods. Magic items were also in demand and these would be snapped up by the Church. This prompted Grendel to suggest that this may be a good place for me to sell those magical wine goblets I had. So I saw Baroch and asked him how much they would be worth. He said he'd give me an answer tomorrow.

Grendel, Darkstar and I then went up to check out the merchants level and also to get a better

idea of the lay of the land. While up there he used his location device to get an idea where the missing hobbit was. From what we could tell she was somewhere in one of the upper levels but not in the top two.

Up at the merchants quarter, there was an area where lots of stalls were set up. Most were occupied. I tried a pheasant in a bun for breakfast then checked out a merchant who was selling books. Among his stock was the Codex of D'Morte so Grendel bought it off him. From what we could determine the Order has outposts in seven planes and spies in 60 more. One of the 60 was Alusia and we recognised the name, Sir Agrivane, one of the recently new Guild members. When he introduces himself he declares himself to be a member of the Order D'Morte and announces that the plane is going to be invaded and resistance is futile. Nearly everyone laughs at this but I suspect Guild Security is keeping an eye on the situation. I bet it'll be interesting when the Order and the Calimar clash. Maybe we can arrange this to happen - hopefully not on Alusia.

It was a requirement that we register with the Merchant Guild's office so we headed there. On the way I spotted one of those black dwarfs. - non-mage, highest rank skill, interrogation.

On the third floor we met a portly gentleman in an office where we registered and were assigned a stall where we could conduct business agreements. Now we were set up with our cover, we could get on with the real mission.

.7.

It was late afternoon by now. I DAed the Codex and discovered it was magical with the Nature of Blessing. Meanwhile Darkstar decided to wander over to the temple.

When he got there, he noticed that the building was surrounded by statues of priests, warriors and twelve headed hydras. He was then approached by a priest and got the guided tour of the place. Visitors have to stand while knights and priests sit. The ceremony incorporates manifestations and lasts for 15 minutes or half an hour for festivals. There's also chanting, hymns, and meditations. Devotees can sacrifice blood. The next festival was in 13 days.

Once Darkstar returned he told us what he found then went back for the service as it was believed he'd be missed, especially since he told the priest he would return. The rest of us hid out in the stall. Once, a patrol could be heard going past but we weren't discovered.

Once the time for the service was over, we headed back to the boat. On the way Grendel triangulated the hobbit's location. My calculations put her somewhere on the third level.

When we got back to the docks, it became obvious that we had at least one intruder on the boat as one of the hatches had been opened. I put a Witchsight on myself while Grendel did a mindsweep. He detected two minds in the hold, both rather pleased with himself. Darkstar was the first down and, within a short space of time, we heard a scuffle. Grendel successfully mental attacked the other then went down to help while I filled the area with a soft light.

As I descended the ladder, one of the thieves triggered some sort of concussion grenade and we were flung away as if caught in a TK Blast. To make matters worse, it kept emitting waves of TK every five seconds so Grendel translocated it into the ocean.

The thief had managed to defeat Darkstar and was in the process of dragging him deeper into the hold when Grendel chased after him. So he dropped Darkstar and beat a hasty retreat. I wasn't too far behind so I was soon neutralising all the poison in Darkstar's system and wishing I had asked Aimee to fetch me some Waters of Healing.

All this time, Eltain had been working his way towards us from the other end and finally encountered the thief. After a short battle the thief was skewered but not before he and Grendel were momentarily overcome by sneezing powder.

The other one, who had been rendered unconscious by the Mental Attack, was in the process of being restrained by Eltain when Eltain managed to poison himself on one of the myriad of poisonous objects that the person was carrying. After I detoxified him, Eltain and Sir Don carefully removed all the lethal devices before securing him very thoroughly.

While I slept, Sir Don and the others interrogated the prisoner. His name was Shantivaar which meant 'descended from the Blood' and he was one of the ruling rank of priests. He was sent by the goddess, via the oracle, to investigate the boat since the goddess wanted to know who we were. The plan was to steal some items and divinate them. They were also watching and were intending to make a decision about what to do with us for the good of the goddess.

It was around then that things got really strange. He then told us he was actually twelve beings, all permanently mind-linked. The ones that were on this plane, one was dead (the other one that had sneaked aboard), one was in the city, one was in the air, and the other was at sea. What one knew, all the others knew. The one in the city was in the main temple on the first level in a tower with his dragon. The dragon was also very interested in what was going on. He would be very honoured if we were to visit the temple and view his beautiful house. A pickup can be arranged. Sir Don decided to take a rain check on that offer although Grendel offered to visit in a week or two once we had settled in more.

He then said that they had decided not to kill us and sacrifice us on the blood altars. Apparently they like us. Their people were actively involved in fighting the hobbit race and they felt it was only a matter of time before the hobbits were vanquished as they (not the hobbits) had air superiority.

The hobbits were described as an 'annoying' race. When Sir Don asked about the one we were looking for we were told that she won't leave. Ever since someone introduced her to cream-filled buns, she chose to stay. The chef involved has since been severely punished. Apparently she talks too much and has plans of conquering the empire with cream buns. However the High Priest has decided to keep her here. Usually she travels between the second and third level but sometimes goes down to the marketplace in a divan.

.8.

We figured that if we were going to rescue the hobbit we'd better do it soon before even more interest was taken in us. So our prisoner was magically slept and we left the boat. It was nearly midnight by now, well after curfew so we stealthily made our way to the wall separating the 6th and 5th levels of the town. All of us were also rendered Unseen. The wall was made of stone, 12.5 feet tall and I couldn't detect any magic on it so we climbed over.

We then headed for the next wall. For a while, Sir Don thought we were being followed but we couldn't see anyone. Finally, after a 'slight' diversion (someone led us the long way around) we reached the next wall. This one was 25ft tall and no magic was detected. There were no sign of guards and the only thing we heard was an animalistic scream from the distance.

Eltain was the first over the wall followed closely by Darkstar. Once we were all over, Sir Don heard a patrol coming so we hid in the shadows until they went by. It was two of those dark dwarves armed with spears.

A bit later, Eltain fell unconscious, reason unknown, and became visible. Shortly he woke up again with a lump and concussion. I treated his injuries then made us both Unseen again.

The area we were in was clearly residential. Another patrol went past, this time with a pack of dogs, so Darkstar did something to the lead dog to make it think there was something odd in another direction. Even so two of the dogs reacted as if they could smell us, which they probably could. However the patrol led them off.

Just before we reached the next wall, two women spotted Darkstar so Sir Don slept them. This wall was also 25ft tall and non-magical so Eltain and Darkstar went to the top. What they saw was an expanse of parklands and mansions. The rest of us quickly scrambled over, and just in time too, as a patrol then passed along the top of the wall.

We were now in a well lit area and could hear music in the distance. So we quickly, but quietly, headed off in the direction we suspected the hobbit would be. This took us through gardens, past hedges, bird baths, fountains etc. Soon we reached a 50' wide hot pool. However, this was no time for pleasantries as we had a mission to accomplish. Eltain must have thought differently as he leapt right in. Suddenly bubbles erupted from the middle of the pool but I couldn't detect anything else living in there. After a short while, Eltain exited the pool and wandered over to some apple trees where he started eating apples.

Sir Don finally called him to heel and we continued. Later on, he sent Darkstar off to secure our escape route while we continued to the mansion. Once there Eltain went to find us a good hiding place nearby but, when he didn't return for several minutes, the rest of us went to investigate. We finally found him gorging on cherries.

Sir Don was not amused. "Don't play games with me" he said. "What about chess?" Eltain answered. That did it. Sir Don verbally ripped into Eltain. By the time he finally wound down, Darkstar returned.

Once Sir Don calmed down, he cast a Wizard's Eye and searched the mansion. Fairly soon, he found the hobbit. Just then, a dragon flight went over so we hid under a bush.

Darkstar climbed up to the balcony then climbed down again as a naked man (the High Priest) with a large sword and blasted the area with light. I quickly threw a General Celestial Counter at the light and it went out. He looked a little non-plussed at that then his sword burst into flame. Eltain and Darkstar charged in. Darkstar was hit and ended up dangling off the balcony. As the priest retreated into the house, I cast a Special Fire Counter. The sword went out. As Darkstar slid down to the ground, Eltain followed the guy in just as the sword burst into flame again and shot a fire bolt. It was fortunate that Eltain was wearing wet leather. I passed a

Healing Potion to Darkstar then followed Darkstar back up to the balcony as another bolt hit Eltain.

Eltain and Darkstar charged in and managed to pin the guy. Then the, equally naked, hobbit female came up behind wielding a chair. My Web of Light failed but Sir Don managed to charm her. Meanwhile I went up and sapped the priest. Eltain decided to grab the fallen sword. As he touched it, there was an explosion, and he collapsed - dead.

We left the priest lying, magically slept, and all tucked up in bed before we all went UnSeen. The hobbit introduced herself as Lady Allina and warned us that Bellahura (the priest) had already summoned his black dragon. We followed her out the back way.

As we moved through the garden, the dragon arrived and tore into the balcony. There were dazzles of light than a rage of anger - and it wasn't the dragon. We were quickly over the wall and into the residential area. As we neared the wall, a bell started ringing. By the time we were over the wall, more bells were ringing and dragons were starting to launch from the mountain top.

Up and over the next wall and flights were launching and heading off in all directions. Finally we reached the boat. By now all the temples were sounding the alarm.

We jumped on the boat and cast off without any running lights. I cast a Friendly Light so we could see what we were doing. People were moving around the dock but, so far, they weren't paying us any attention.

Once clear of the port, I went below and slept for the rest of the night.

2nd Heat

Once dawn arrived, I resurrected Eltain.

.9.

A bit later on Grendel spotted a squall heading our way. He turned the ship into it, then had me take the tiller while he, and some of the others, re-rigged the ship for storm running. They finished just as the storm hit. As the ship was tossed about, nearly half the party were sick. Meanwhile Sir Don tried to charm the storm and lost his sense of touch for a month.

I decided to try and go below to check on Allina. Just then a wave swept over the ship and Grendel was smacked in the face with a squid. Sir Don was nearly swept overboard then he crawled to the bow to 'surf the waves' as he put it.

Finally I got below decks and found the princess. She was dead and her body was very severely battered. However the storm wasn't the cause of death. Someone had killed her by cutting off the blood supply to the brain. After securing and preserving her body I headed back up to tell Grendel that we had an assassin on board. He informed me that Sir Don had done it and reminded me that we were required to present her head to the Emperor. I was not happy. The storm lasted the rest of the day before it finally abated.

3rd Heat

We rested and recovered from the storm. Nothing significant occurred.

4th Heat

We continued on course to the rendezvous point with the hobbit city ship. Finally we could see it on the horizon. Now was the job of removing Allina's head. I knew that I had the best chance of doing the job in such a way to make reattachment easier but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. It just seemed wrong. Eltain offered to do the job with an axe but I wouldn't let him. Finally Grendel convinced me to do the job especially since the plan was to teleport the head back to us and secretly take it and the body back for Alusia for resurrection.

Half an hour later we were docked at the city ship. Brin was waiting for us with a couple of Blues. He handed Grendel his control rod then told us that the Emperor would see us in the near future and could we proceed to our accommodations to wait. This is what we did. Our gear was stashed there.

Four hours later the escort arrived and we were taken to the royal palace where we waited for a bit before being admitted to the royal court. The Emperor asked us how the mission went. After we explained he said it was shocking and shed tears. Internally we admired his skill in courtier. When Sir Don presented the head in a casket, a few of the ladies swooned. The chamberlain then showed it to the Emperor who cried and lamented the loss of such a young life before declaring that they should make war on the invaders. The head was removed in order to prepare it for a state funeral.

We were then lead to an antechamber where General Emerica was waiting. He congratulated us on a job well done and wanted to know if we wanted to stay on as advisors in the coming war. Grendel refused on our behalf as we had obligations back home. He turned over all the maps and drawings he had made of the city.

A short while later the Emperor turned up and also thanked us. He then gave us our payment, 35,000sp each. Even after tax, that was more than enough to pay for the Greater. He had also figured out a way to get us home - by banishment.

As the money chests arrived, the Emperor left. The next person to arrive was the Namer followed by some slaves carrying all our gear. Then the Namer popped us all back to a spot just outside Seagate. It had been so quick, we hadn't had a chance to retrieve the head.

It didn't take us long to reach the Guild. Once there we met up with a trainee Namer called Jerimia who took us over to the Namer College. Once there both Grendel and I lost the shapechange. The rest decided to keep it. Also the extra treasure and gold dust we had managed to purloin was just enough to pay for the regeneration and resurrection of the hobbit princess.

So that was that. Hopefully now I could arrange for more Healer training for the Ninth level of mastery.