

Gaia's Blessing

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Alan Grant

1st Frost 804 - 10th Snow 804 (Duration 40 days)

Party Members

Flamis	Fire	Human	Female	
Vanderhand	Non-mage	Human	Male	
Talon	Illusionist	Human	Male	
Neroli	Air	Dwarf	Male	
Aqualina	Water	Human	Female	Scribe

Plane

Gaia

Damascus

Employer

Quidie - were platypus ambassador to the Emperor

Places Visited

Fastness of Gydion

Principle NPCs encountered

The Emperor - weredragon

Chamberlain - wereraven

Commander of the Armies - werewolf

Grand Vizier - wereanaconda

Mission

To go somewhere where they can't and retrieve vital artifacts, including the Sceptre of Amon-Her

Gaia's Blessing

It's cold today. Mind you, it's always cold in Seagate during winter and this winter was no exception. And it's usually winter I decide to go out adventuring into warmer climates. Trouble is, wasn't really much going that seemed suitable. So I decided to go on this one offered by this seven-foot tall apparition. Not sure why but it seemed.. interesting.

The job had something to do with some sort of dishonourable impending doom threatening the inhabitants.. or something like that. At least it has to be warmer than here.. I hope.

In the meeting room were the following:

Flamis - a well known firemage, hair the colour of candle flame,

Vanderhand - 7'tall human, grey skin and four arms

Talon - 5'6" human male, muddy brown hair and eyes, dark grey leather, bracelet on the left arm. He told us basically that he is an illusionist, thief, and mechanician.

Neroli - A dwarf. Airmage and troubadour.

The librarians had examined the writing on the 'coinage' and had established that the language was formal draconic.. a precursor of draconic. Also, studying the maps led us to the conclusion that the portal to the place we were going was located in the Fastness of Gydion, an area known to be populated by harpies.

Aqualina - "I'm a watermage. I'm not allowed to drown people"

While Flamis did her 'Converse with Other Selves ritual' at her place, I went back to the 'Sea Goddess Haven' and made six Waters of Healing for the trip, using seven sets of ingredients. When I got back, I headed off to their farm where, after getting our Lessers, an impromptu party started. Neroli and I played duet on our harps for a while and entertaining the children.. I just hope Basalic didn't really mind about all of his beer that was drunk.

2nd Frost

Next morning we sort of picked ourselves up from where we had collapsed and I 'borrowed' the local pond to bathe in as Neroli was hoarding the bathroom. While I was doing that, it was discovered that Basalic's prize white stallion was more intelligent than anyone had first thought. From what I heard later, it actually spoke Common.

Anyway, after breakfast, we rode back to the Guild while Flamis went to the library. I was helping to do swimming lessons when we felt the earth move twice accompanied by two explosions from the direction of the library. By the time I got there however, Guild Security were doing the 'Move along, nothing to see here' act so I was unable to ascertain if Flamis's investigations had been responsible.

Comparing notes over lunch later she told me that the researchers had determined that we were going to the Plane of Gaea, the local Emperor is a dragon, and there were no humans, dwarves, elves etc ... this was getting more intriguing by the minute.

After lunch we rode off. This was actually the first time that I had been able to take my horse, Waverunner, on an adventure with me. The others were looking rather odd at me for a while since I was riding bareback until I explained Waverunner was trained for it. That afternoon's ride was very uneventful and we spent the night at the inn in Viscount.

3rd Frost

Rode on. As we neared the Fastness, a storm blew up from the south and we had to ride as fast as we could to shelter. As we reached the high mana zone, the scroll I was carrying glowed silver and a golden path appeared. We followed the path.

Finally, at sunset, as instructed, I placed the scroll on the path. Just after I did the scroll flared up into a blinding light and the portal appeared. The edges seemed alive somehow while the path continued onwards, rimmed by ice and surrounded by 'nothing'. We went through ... I could feel the cold even through my spell protections. Just when I thought I was going to turn into a corpsicle, we found ourselves in the centre of a grassy field.. and something odd was happening to us.

Flamis was covered in tiny flames, Neroli looked like he was standing in a storm with his hair and beard whipping about, Vanderhand seemed to covered in spiderwebs while Talon was sort of.. not there. As for me, even though I knew I was on dry land what I could see looked like I was in forty feet of water so my vision was limited.. My hair was waving around me as if I was in a gentle ocean current, my hands were more webbed, and my legs were scaled as if my Belt of Merform was trying to assert itself. So I hopped on my horse and within seconds I was a mermaid on a horse.

Just then the 7ft cloak drifted across the field. We were wary as it approached but, as it got close, the cloak collapsed revealing a humanoid duckbilled platypus with a squeaky voice. Everyone else but me burst out laughing, which I thought was rather rude of them.

Once everything calmed down introductions were made and we head off to see the Emperor.

.2.

4th Frost

As we were led to the city, the were-platypus introduced himself as Qunidie. He told us that the warrior caste are the werewolves, the diplomats are the platypuses. The vizier is a weresnake, healers are usually werebears and werebirds are very fast messengers.

On the way, I felt something coming at us, as if I was feeling the pressure wave. The others reported a flock of birds coming. Then, all bar one of them split off in various directions. That one dived towards us and I was getting very worried that we were under attack, as I couldn't actually see what it was. It turned out to be a were-falcon messenger who transformed to humanoid form, just before landing. The Emperor was expecting us.

When we finally arrived at the city, we could see that it was primitive, but well crafted, as if they had several thousand years to perfect their techniques. All the buildings, except one, were wood and it looked like they had been grown. There were no walls around the city and there was very little traffic as well. It looked decidedly odd.

The exception was the Imperial Palace in the center. That was made out of stone and looked as if it had been carved out of one complete block. There was even a perfect spire on top.

Even though there was no city gate, there were a couple of guards, two 9' tall wolf-types with wooden weaponry. We passed them without problems then I noticed two urchins, a crow and a rat were following us. We also spotted two other lupine kids having a fight.

There were gates in front of the palace, which, surprisingly opened inwards into the courtyard. There, we left our horses, met by a weresnake and werebear and led to the wereraven chamberlain, who showed us to our quarters and asked us what requirements we had for baths etc. There was a room for the each of us with a bed covered in heather and a large bath. Mine was even large enough to completely immerse myself and I could completely stretch out without touching the sides or even breaking the surface. While I was relaxing in the water, in mermaid form, I discovered I could hear everything that was going on in the other rooms. Even though my vision had been reduced, I had some sort of pressure sense, very much like what a shark has through its lateral line. Maybe, here, I'm a werewolf.

“I'll polish your weapons – it's my job” – Flamis

“That's one hot woman” – Talon.

“Flamis is a complete innocent” – Vanderhand

“I can't do anything and I'm not” – Neroli

I had changed into my best two-piece swimsuit, the one with the matching short, pleated, skirt, as my Belt of Merform was still attempting to assert itself. I figured I might as well let it while we were at dinner. Once we were ready, we were led into a waiting room, which was lined with tapestries. One was of a mountain scene and, when Flamis was examining it, she saw a pair of red eyes in it, and they were actively watching her. It scared her so much that she passed out. I instinctively went to help her and discovered that, when I touched her, I burnt myself. Flamis said that my touch was a momentary relief from the dryness she was enduring.

It was about then that the chamberlain arrived and led us into the throne room. There was a very strong looking man and woman on a pair of thrones. We first thought they were sold silver but Talon later identified them as platinum.

After greetings and formalities – note: address them as Your Imperial Majesties. The Emperor and Empress might not mind if you get it wrong but some of the other court members are sticklers for protocol. Anyway, after getting through that, we were led into dinner, and.. what a feast that was. Just about every sort of food imaginable was there, and quite a few were my favourites, as well as favourites of the others. Hmmm ... As I let my tail assert itself, some little werewolves, who were the serving staff, scampered under the table and placed my tail in a large bowl of water. Most appreciated. Entertainment was provided by a couple of wereotter acrobat/dancers.

After dinner, the Emperor told us why we were here. We had to quest for an item in a place that was forbidden for their kind. There were elements there that could kill them and those that could survive did not have the skills to complete the mission. However the werewolf army commander had a different idea. He wanted to test us to ensure our honour and integrity. I was prepared to take his test right there and then however we had until the morning to decide, and it was Flamis's task, as party leader, to decide.

I spent the night, in the bath, in merform. Unfortunately I found I could hear everything – including my companion's snores. Looks like what I lost in vision, I gained in hearing.

While still underwater, I purified then clambered out of the bath and out of my room in search of breakfast. As I reached the corridor I encountered a werebird with a breakfast trolley. I got my usual hot chocolate and suggested that the others would like a 'pick-me-up' beverage. I then went back in my room with my breakfast, sniggering after I was told what they would be getting. It was a blue drink. One sip was enough to perk someone up, but both Talon and Neroli downed a large amount of it. Boy did they get a buzz, and had permanent silly grins on their faces. Dunno what the Emperor's Court was going to say when they saw that.

We were led there by what we first thought was a lady in a toga but I soon came to the conclusion she was a werecat. When we reached the waiting area we heard a raging argument between the army commander, the vizier, the healer and two other individuals. We couldn't understand them but I suspected it was about us. It quickly stopped when their Imperial Majesties came in the room, flanked by two weresnakes. Flamis told them we were accepting the quest so we were told that the quest will take us to another plane and how we do is not how we complete the quest but it is how we behave. We would find our instructions when we got there.

We headed back to our rooms to get ready. As we did, Talon commented that he thought that the emperor and empress were under some sort of magical shield. We then checked our equipment and Talon discovered he was missing a silver dagger. At the same time, I was discovering an extra dagger in the bottom of my bath. When I heard Talon complaining I went to find out what the matter was and was able to return it. But ... how did it get there?

I was getting very nervous as the pressure waves were telling me something big and dangerous was coming. It turned out to be our guide, a female wereanaconda who was also a vizier. She did guarantee that we would get out alive but may be affected in some way. We were taken down to the ground level in the palace and went through some plain stone doors. Flamis put Fire Armours on everyone else but I refused as I suspected that something bad would happen. Talon poked an illusionary fire, one of which was lighting the area, and got burned. Finally we reached another stone door. Our guide would go no further.

The door opened into a natural cavern. When we stepped through, all our odd effects dropped off. I could see clearly again. The plane we were on was Damascus and it looked like we had stepped out of solid rock. The cave looked odd, with layers of limestone and granite, definitely not natural. Outside the cave, we could see plains, forests, and a lake. What seemed to be a dry streambed led from the cave towards the lake. There were also two burial cairns and a third that had been torn apart. Bones were scattered all over the place. They were determined to be human and had died fifty years ago. As I looked at the pattern of the bones, I realised they represented a map. The exit portal was about a weeks travel away. The bones also indicated that we had to go down to the lake.

So, that's what we did. The water was very clear with a white-pebbled bottom changing to white sand, as it got deeper. A spring bubbled at the bottom. I was really keen to try the water but Vanderhand wouldn't let me. Neroli found a black marble slab with writing on it. It said 'Travel west to the mountain on the other side of this one. Seek to aid those who ask honourably. Those who demand that can be chosen to be ignored. Through this you will find what we seek.' The other thing that was found was four uncut diamonds among the pebbles.

So we headed back up the mountain and went around the north side. When we stopped for lunch, we could see hawks approaching. I left some food scraps for them before we headed off again. That evening, we descended down into the tree line and made camp. During the first watch, we were attacked.

“These guys are intelligent” – Vanderhand

“They’re clearly not guild members” – Neroli

There were four of them, two of which were mages, Namer and Greater Summoner. The summoner summoned a very large demon, which charged towards Flamis. I managed to hit it with some water bolts but it took a lot of damage from Flamis’s self immolate, then fumbled its attack and hit itself with its own sword, destroying itself. The Namer had put up an anti-magic wall but one of my waterbolts got through and blasted the Summoner to bits. One of the archers had lacerated himself with his own bowstring while Vanderhand and the other archer were exchanging critical hits.

Both archers then fired at Flamis, one hit her but the other one lacerated himself again. The Namer backfired as well and called a retreat. He and one archer vanished, literally, but the one that had hit himself went berserk and charged me with a sword, knocking me unconscious and badly scratching my face. The others soon finished him off.

There was a symbol on his tabard, a bone dragon sinister i.e. facing left. A grey clay amulet was found with the nature of magic being balance. It was engraved with the head of a skeletal dragon facing one way and a flesh dragon the other way. The skeletal dragon matched the one on the tabard. The effect on anyone wearing it was understanding. A necklace contained necromantic magic. Once I was awake, I created a Waters of healing for Vanderhand and me before we broke camp and quickly left, just in case reinforcements were on the way. Plus the summoner had been pacted to Beelzebub. On our way out there was a buzzing of many flies and we heard the message ‘Since that servant of mine botched the job, I’ll leave you alone – this time.’

.4.

6th Frost

We woke up the next morning and, after last night, I decided to armour up. Last night’s run had brought us around the other side of the mountain and we could see the other peak in the distance, separated by a wide forest. Talon was still aching and stiff after last night so Flamis made a wheelbarrow for him to sit in.

This morning had dawned very quiet, not even the sounds of birds, and it was still that way as we progressed on. Talon was entertaining himself by rummaging in my haversack. He discovered my cold ham, my spare swimsuit, then managed to get his finger sliced off by the very sharp mousetrap that I have no recollection of putting in there. Still that’ll teach him for rummaging around in a lady’s underthings. As Flamis bandaged that up and attempted to reattach the finger, we heard some singing in the distance, in the direction we were going and coming our way.

As it got louder, it soon became clear that, however was doing it was either totally tone deaf, or as a very good singer as the male songster was sliding quickly from one key to another and also hitting notes that I was sure did not exist. To make matters worse, the song was about

someone who was tone deaf and whoever was accompanying the person on the harp was fighting to keep up ... and succeeding. I was trying to follow it on my harp but soon gave up.

The singer was male, dressed as a French aristocrat fop, the harper, female, dressed in Ellenic style, while the third person, also female, was in some sort of religious garb which Flamis said was Catholic. She had wax plugs in her ears. The fop stopped singing, much to our relief, and introductions were made. The Catholic woman was a healer, named Sister Cathreen, the Ellenic female, was Demeter, who was an Amazonian fighter and the fop introduced himself as Felionius. I complimented Demeter on her playing and it was then we discovered she was mute. There was a scar on her neck. However Flamis noted that their clothing seemed more advanced in manufacture as if it was done in Britannia. She also discovered that Cathreen's aura was actually sentient animate. Also Felionius's rapier and dagger were highly magical. The rapier's aura was sentient with the GTN of dragon and it came from Mystra.

We stopped so Caithreen could heal Talon. By late evening, Neroli wanted a bath. So Flamis made a hipbath. She wanted me to fill it but was extremely annoyed with me when I admitted I could only make a small amount of water at a time. Just then, the rapier decided to help out and the bath filled with ice, which Flamis was able to melt. I could feel the cold, even with my protections. Later on, after dinner, I was playing harp duets with Demeter while Talon's healing progressed. It was going to take several hours.

Night fell. The dagger gave out a soft blue glow, which illuminated the campsite. Felionius showed us the rapier, which had a black blade with silver draconic runes on it. My watch went uneventfully and I settled down to sleep. At midnight, the crickets started up.

Felionius had wandered off to practise swordplay earlier in the evening. Two AM there was the sounds of explosions, and he wasn't back. They were only five hundred feet away but were not in the same direction he had left in. So Flamis and Demeter went to have a look. What they found really surprised Flamis. Fire explosions had occurred while they had been getting mobilised, and they found a clearing with the remains of five trees that had been crushed. An orc was impaled upon each one. In the centre of the clearing was Felionius, very badly wounded. Flamis used a Waters of Healing on him and, with Demeter's help, brought him back to camp.

Meanwhile, Talon had been waking the rest of us up. He had tried to approach my tent with the intent of surprising me and attempting to catch me 'au natural' as it were. However, as he approached a large claw rose out of my haversack and took a swipe at him. When I found out about that, I told him it was my guardian taniwha. Not sure if he believed that I knew it was there.

7th Frost

The rest of the night passed uneventfully and, early the next morning, Sister Caithreen commenced the last phase of Talon's healing. This required him to be strapped down, immobile, to some planks of wood wearing only a loincloth. He wasn't too happy about this, especially when the rest of us were having a very nice breakfast and wouldn't give him any. All Sister Caithreen would allow him to have was healing broth. He also wasn't happy when I told him to stop complaining, as I knew people who would pay money to be in the sort of situation he was currently in.

We discovered, much to our horror that her daughter had muted Demeter and iron bands surrounded her tongue. She also had a tattoo of a trident pointing down on her shoulder.

Once Talon was healed, we parted company. As they were leaving, Felionius was singing some rather ribald songs. He had started on a very naughty one that both Neroli and Talon were trying to get the words to but by then, we were getting way out of hearing range, much to their annoyance.

We continued westwards....

.5.

By afternoon, we were heading through the forest. We could see webbing in the trees, which looked like colony spiders did them, large ones. The webbing above was even thicker by the time it got dark. Flamis had her fire armour on so she was attracting every suicidal flying insect in the area. We could also see some spiders running around up there. I hoped they stayed up there. I could also detect water five feet underground. We decided to keep going. Finally we found a spring of glacial water. There, we made camp and food was gathered. The spiders moved well away from the spot above the fire. Fortunately the night was completely uneventful.

8th Frost

We were heading into the hills and the spider webs just kept on going. It was a solid canopy of white above then it started to fade. However another canopy took over a short while later, probably a territorial boundary. This group of spiders was a different species. I was so sure they were very similar to a very dangerous species on my home islands. It didn't help that I saw one that was as long as my arm that was dealing to a hawk that was stuck in the web. So we stayed away from the trees, in case there were hanging tendrils.

That afternoon the webs thinned out as we climbed higher. Behind us we could see twelve separate web territories. I could sense water to the right so we went that way. It was getting close to evening by the time we reached the mountain river.

There was trout in there as well as barracuda and barbfish. I gaffed a trout with my trident and flipped it out. Meanwhile Talon was nearly dragged in by a sturgeon. While that was being sorted out, I waded into the water and flipped out three lobsters. Eagles were circling above hoping for free eats while Flamis smoked the fish. I managed to pull out salt, olive oil and a loaf of bread that was growing a beard out of my backpack. The last was in response to Neroli's request for dwarven bread. Hmm.. my magical backpack has a sense of humour.

I was relaxing underwater in the river while Talon climbed a tree. He came face to face with a hunting spider. Vanderhand shot it and Talon nearly fell out of the tree. Flamis went up another tree and encountered something she called a yelsemari. It looked like a furry lizard and radiated a dead magic zone around it.

“You're not female and therefore not acquainted with female anatomy” – Flamis

“Only with certain aspects of it” – Talon

Talon was irritating me as well so, in sheer annoyance, I dropped a Rainstorm on him. However I countered it a short while later.

Flamis had extracted the sturgeon eggs so we had some caviar. It was delicious. There was even enough for the Emperor's kitchens.

We also shut down any active magics in case the spider Talon had encountered was a manavore.

That night, the sky clouded over and the temperature dropped. Big wings were heard in the sky in the early morning. Vanderhand made sure all the leftovers were taken well away from the camp and, whatever it was, was feasting on it.

9th Frost

The crunching sounds faded by dawn, then there was some splashing and the river ran red for a bit. However, the fish that had been smoked was ready. The water was flowing out of a cave so I swapped back to swimsuit, in case we had to go for a swim. Some large feathers were lying around so we took them. Finally we headed up to the cave mouth.

This cave was pure limestone and wound into the mountain. We could walk alongside the river. We then noticed that part of the wall and Flamis's pack was glowing. The source was the amulet she had found so it was removed and touched to that section. When that happened, that section vanished revealing a starfield and a path. We stepped through

... and found ourselves in a corridor. All the effects were back.

.6.

We were led back to our rooms with instructions to relax. I had left all my dirty clothes out to clean them later and, when I finally got out of my bath I found that they were all clean and folded. So, I got changed into something more suitable and joined the others as we made our way to the waiting room. All the court were present and the Imperial Majesties were behind a screen. We told our story to the Emperor who told us we had passed the test and had earned their trust. They had managed to observe us for part of our trip but had lost contact with us for a while. We suspected it was something to do with the demon.

They told us that we were looking for the Sceptre of Amon-Her. It had been lost in the mountains, ten days south of here. The journey should be uneventful. The sceptre is two feet long made of a mixture of gold and platinum, surrounded by rings of adamantinum and topped with a black fire diamond held in a jade dragon's claw. The base is a teardrop of pure mithril. When possible, it hovers two foot above the ground and is surrounded by a golden glow. Any being that is not inherently evil can wield it. It inspires courage and is sentient. There are beings ensuring that none of the Emperor's warriors can reach it and it seems to be located in a null magic area.

Five days journey into the mountains is a volcano. Somewhere there is the sceptre. Somewhere there were forces that came from the ground, hooded cloaked creatures. They want information on them. Also hidden in the volcano is a stone, which aids in healing. It only works if held by a healer.

They also told us that there were different magic zones. If the grass is green, then we were in Gaia's realm where magic is normal. Golden is Helios, where magic is burned away or twisted and wild grass is Luna.

On the way back from the audience chamber I could hear a rumbling sound, like a rumbling tummy. It came from my room and when I got there, I discovered all the refreshments that had been left out for me were gone. However, my backpack was still in the exact same place I had left it. So I requested a new set

For the journey we were given gifts, Vanderhand and Neroli received exquisite flasks of 'blue' while Talon's container was a common pottery flask. I wonder who he offended. Flamis received a cold water bottle with a diamond stopper. My gift was a box with an intricate lock that opened at my touch, and contained exquisite chocolate. We were also given the option of purchasing ironwood weapons. They had the effects of iron (-1 to hit) but didn't affect our magics. So I purchased a trident, dagger, maingauche, and a brace of crossbow bolts. The weapons arrived that evening.

Dinner was tailored to our tastes. I was enjoying hot chocolate and food that tasted as if it had come out of an umu. I also tried feeding my backpack but nothing happened.

10th Frost

For a change, I had spent the night in the moist mossy bed, and was having a very comfortable night until Neroli woke up really early in the morning, screaming. Vanderhand and Talon had to apply an improvised hangover cure. I believed he should suffer but why should we have to as well. So it was a grumpy watermage who joined the group as we set out just before dawn, heading out of town towards the hills. My lack of vision also put paid to the usual game of 'I Spy'.

That night we camped by a river with white sand and pebbles. As predicted, the night was uneventful,

16th Frost

We were making our way along the plain close to the mountains, when at lunchtime; Vanderhand's 'laser rifle' started speaking as it reactivated. Usually it doesn't work in a magic zone – and it had never spoken before. A bit later on Talon made an illusionary stream and I jumped in it in merform. I even put a waterbreathing on Talon, as it was obvious he completely believed in the illusion.

Wards were set around the camp that night which was uneventful. However, I suspected that was about to change.

.7.

17th Frost

It was approaching evening when we approached a large wild magic zone. I could feel it as if it was turbulent and wild water. As far as we could tell it was 80 miles diameter. So we decided to camp first before attempting to cross it. There was a very sharp delineation of grass types at the boundary.

That night, I detected three entities heading towards us in the wild zone. They felt like sharks on a hunt, however, I was still not well versed with my lateral line sense to use it exclusively. Incidentally, I must have been getting more fish like as I was getting scaly patterns on my skin.

Anyway, while Talon was getting everyone else up I was tracking these entities, as they got closer. I fired a bolt at each of them then set back and set my ironwood trident for a charge. Meanwhile a tainted werewolf leapt out of the wild grass and onto Flamis. Another headed for Neroli while the third tried going around then headed for me. The one attacking Neroli had a poisoned weapon while the other two were quickened.

It missed me and I hit it. I then noticed that its wounds were healing so I decided to switch to my magical trident. Neroli managed to lose most of his beard in a near miss. Meanwhile Flamis succeeded in tripping hers and ripped its throat out. As it fell, I felt energy pulsing out from it that was increasing. Neroli was poisoned and collapsed while the next shot from my opponent took out a lot of my hair. While I was reeling from the shock of that, Vanderhand finished off my opponent. Again I felt pulses of energy. The last one retreated back into the wild zone.

As the energy levels from the two dead entities increased, we backed off. When the first one went off, the energy only covered a small area, including both Talon and Neroli. To all our surprises, especially theirs, it was healing energy. They both found themselves fully healed up. Neroli even got his beard back. The second blast was bigger and, again it was healing energy. Also the body vanished with each blast. The energy was actually coming from the blades they were wielding. Vanderhand was also healed up and Neroli suddenly discovered that some missing parts had regenerated. Unfortunately neither Flamis nor I resisted that. I had to use a Waters of Healing to heal my injuries then get Flamis to fix my hair. I ended up with a rather short haircut. Considering it had taken me months to get my hair the way I liked it, I was NOT impressed.

Flamis suggested that we move the camp back. I was even more upset when I discovered my tent was missing and I couldn't find it in the dark, even with my 'pressure vision'. I was exhausted and it didn't help it was 'that time of the month' as well. So it was a very upset water mage who stalked off to the new campsite. It was also noticed that Flamis's star sapphire was glowing.

"I have difficulty concealing stuff cause I'm so HOT" – Flamis.

The rest of the night was uneventful.

18th Frost

Once it was daylight, I found my tent, several hundred yards away. No idea how it got there. Neroli discovered that he was a counter-tenor and Vanderhand was 'educating' him on things he should know; now he was ... intact. Flamis used her crystal ball to look inside the wildmagic zone and saw two eyes looking straight back at her. We decided to go all the way around the circle.

21st Frost

It took two and a half days to go all the way around before we carried on. By the afternoon, we had reached the vicinity of the first mountain. The volcano was still four days away. Flamis used her crystal ball to map out a path and the most optimal one still took us through a couple of wild zones and three Helios zones, in the order W-H-H-W-H. We set off.

22nd Frost

Uneventful but there was no sound. The campsite Flamis picked had no water but was very defensible being a raised area with boulders around it. By now my hair was getting shoulder length but it had turned a deep blue colour. I was hoping it would stay that colour as it grew back.

Suddenly Talon reacted adversely to Neroli, claiming that he saw Neroli's eyes flash green. However Flamis could not detect any unknown influences on Neroli's mind or spirit.

That night Neroli was practising scales so I was using my harp as accompaniment. It also softened Neroli's harsh tones. He then gulped down a rather large slug of Talon's 'blue' – about two weeks worth. That caused Neroli to become hyperactive for the next few hours before lying down and twitching. Flamis woke me up to make a Waters of Healing for him. I then had to put up with hearing Vanderhand and Neroli snoring ... as well as sensing the vibrations through the ground. Finally, I got up and turned them over at trident point.

23rd Frost

There was a 'Do Not Disturb' note on my tent, and it wasn't in my handwriting, but none of the others had put it there. The others had to wake me up for breakfast, right out of a very enjoyable dream. As a consequence, I wasn't very happy. I also discovered that my hair colour had faded to a light blue. I hoped I wasn't turning into a blonde.

Finally we reached the first wild zone. The stone in the zone was white marble veined with gold. Flamis tried to DA the area and got blinded – nature of magic: everything. Nothing happened to objects that were tossed in so Vanderhand pushed in the pack pony. Still nothing happened. So we went through. When I tried to go though, I was completely disoriented. Vanderhand had to pull me through. To make things worse, once we were out, Talon managed to enlarge the zone by picking a pebble ahead, putting us back in it.

Two hours later, we reached the first zone of Helios. It felt like dead water, unbreathable. However it wasn't too wide so I took a deep breath and dashed through, holding my breath. All the magics I was wearing dropped right off. By the time I reached the other side, I was gasping for breath. And then Waverider trotted through after me without any problems. Talon went through on his horse, and came out unconscious with a circle branded on his forehead. I treated him with a Waters of Healing. As I did, the brand faded and disappeared. He was also covered in scintillating colours as he went through. We also discovered he had received a blessing. Some of the others saw a four handed person as they went through.

.8.

We arrived at the next Helios zone that evening so we decided to camp the night before attempting to cross. It looked like twilight around it so we retreated a bit until there was night, a night which passed without incident.

24th Frost

I woke up with white hair the next morning, which made Flamis remark that I looked like someone called 'Storm' in a moving picture we had seen a while ago. There was no life in the area, except for us and, examination of the Helios zone showed it to be only 350ft wide. So Talon and I barrelled through on horseback. Talon remarked later that it looked like I was covered in blue fire while I noticed he was enveloped in red. His brand was back too and I discovered I had a half circle one. The magics on us felt different and, oh my, it was so HOT in there.

We reached a small waterfall a bit later on so we stopped and watered the horses. I sat in the splash zone for a while to cool off. An hour later, we encountered a 50ft wide wild zone, which was full of very tall grass. Of course the horses went for it. We only let them nibble at the edges.

We were preparing to rope up when something grabbed one of the packhorses and dragged it rapidly into the zone. Using two very diseased muscular arms. So Flamis fired off dragonflames. As soon as the flames reached the zone, they turned into a swarm of grass cutting insects, which levelled the grass in the area revealing a hideous monstrosity. My waterbolt failed and, as I saw it I became a quivering mermaid ball, trying to wrap myself up in my tail as well as falling off the horse. I was basically a tight little ball. Flamis fired off another volley of fire that became pure white radiance. This had the effect of destroying the monster, releasing what was left of the packhorse from its misery, and turning the entire wildzone into an ashfilled wasteland. Meanwhile Talon had snapped me out of it by threatening to steal my chocolate. Somehow my hair was back to black, I had red eyes, was covered in aquamarine scales, and had a grey shark's tail.

Just then, there was a rumble and lava erupted in the wildzone, filling the area. Only one lone walnut tree survived the onslaught of fire. Talon attempted to leap over it and ended up bobbing up and down in a thermal at the other end. Flamis got on her horse, Flamefoot, then leapt over. She then used a rope to haul Talon down. However her and Flamefoot were covered in fire as they leapt. The rest of us weren't keen in trying this, especially not Waverunner. So I cast a Saturated Earth into the area in an attempt to cool the lava down.

The results were ... explosive, with lava bombs flying everywhere. When the steam and eruptions died down it turned out I had turned the entire wild magic zone into an ocean, stretching high in the sky. So I cast waterbreathing on everyone and we went through. As Waverunner and I went through, I reverted to my mermaid form and Waverunner turned into a seahorse. Also he began speaking to me.. in the common tongue. With the amount of praise I was lavishing on him, I think he was smirking at the other horses, especially Flamefoot.

Our next camp was near the base of a large waterfall and, as we approached, there was the call of a hunting bird. There were, what we called, ugly fish, swimming in the river so I waterbolted one, stunning it, intending it to be dinner. Turned out to be toxic. Flamis blasted it with a bolt of Radiance and it exploded into a noxious and sickening green gas. A DA showed them to be demonfish.

25th Frost

The night was uneventful and the morning was slightly overcast. We arrived at the Helios zone and, again, I went through with Talon. This time I felt like I was being infused with knowledge, skills, and power and it was so tempting to just stop and assimilate it all. However, as we reached the end we found ourselves on a golden path in front of a door. Mindful of our mission, we went through.

“So's playing with fire but I don't make a habit of it' – Flamis

For some reason Vanderhand was very annoyed when he came out. Plus his eyes were pure black with stars in them.

Continued on to the volcano, and we were getting rained on by ash. It didn't help that it was turning to a paste as it landed on me. Fortunately, as we reached the base of the volcano, the rain stopped. We headed up the path and stopped at the mouth of a cave. It felt really bad. Hot air was wafting out of the cave and it smelt of volcano.

After leaving the horses outside, which they weren't happy about, we entered and found a dead zone. All our special effects dropped off. So I clambered into my eog plate armour. Flamis was still covered in that blue glow from her sapphire though. The dead zone seemed to be some sort of anti-magic, presumably to nullify the inherent magic of this plane.

A bit later on we reached a fork. The left side went downish, while the right one curved up. We went down. A short while later we heard the tromp tromp tromp of marching feet, presumably a guard patrol of about six or seven heading our way. So we turned and went up.

We ascended and finally reached the top where we found a room with an altar in it overlooking a large cavern. It felt really bad in here. There were ornate candlesticks with black candles. Sitting on the altar was a fist-sized stone that matched the description of the healing stone. Knives lined the walls; all of the same shape but made of different materials. Each one had a small unique rune on it, eighteen in all. The nineteenth, which was in pride of place, was emitting a moaning sound. The stone was sitting in the exact centre of the altar and there was an upside skeleton in a pentagram hanging above it. The stone was magically trapped and analysis showed it to be a soul eater. If it had been a healing stone, it was completely warped.

We worked our way back down. On the next level was a curtain that seemed to be made of darkness. Talon carefully lifted a bit with a dagger and had a peek. He saw a large scaly foot, about orc sized. If those are guards, we might actually be inside the complex. The next curtain down had steps leading downwards on the other side. Finally, after we passed the point where we had come in, we struck paydirt. However, we were going to have a tough fight to get it.

.9.

Basically though the curtain we were now at, there was a 20ft wide, 100ft corridor. At the end of that, stairs led up 10ft to a 30ft by 50ft room that was lit by four torches of green flame on pillars. Beyond that was another set of ten steps going up to a 50ft by 50ft chamber. At the end of that was an altar with the sceptre hovering above it. The sceptre was encased in flickering blue lightning. Four individuals were in here, two with four arms, and the other two with two. The two-armed individuals were armed with glaives while the four-armed ones had two maingauches and two broadswords.

Through a Waters of Vision, I could see that the walls looked like tortured souls and the green flames were coming from mutated skulls. It was so awful I was sick. A slug of vodka later, I felt a bit better. I then cast Waterbreathings all around. However I found I could not scry beyond the second set of steps.

Flamis did a ritual to create a Superfred (her term for her fire elementals) and we charged in. The nature of the torches were non-sentient undead and the nature of destruction was sunsteel. The flame was formally living under necromantic magic and, as we watched, we could see a figure in the flame writhing in agony. We could also hear faint screaming. Flamis

put a Weapon of Radiance on Vanderhand's sword and he poked the flame. It went out, but a fresh one started.

The second set of steps was covered in an antimagic aura and it was quickly discovered that the Superfred could not pass through without Flamis's help. Also Talon found standard traps on the third and seventh stairs. We tried charging up the stairs and discovered that the air was too thick to breathe and as we did so, the figures moved to intercept. If I had kept going I would have had to plow right into one so I retreated. We could also hear a loud clanging sound as the alarm was raised.

The others made it up and Flamis released the Superfred, which headed for one of the glaive wielders, while putting a ring of fire around the other. This room had a 200ft high ceiling and, now they were up, they could see a stone on the altar. There was a strong amount of life energy and it was evident that the stone was protecting the sceptre. All the light in this room was coming off the sceptre. The broadswords were one of fire, one of ice, so were the maingauches. Black lightning surrounded one glaive, the other was normal.

Battle was joined. I stayed down the bottom to deal with the reinforcements while the others fought the best they could. Finally Flamis regrouped everyone by casting firearcs on everyone and put them alongside the altar behind a second wall of fire. All of the opposition were in some sort of plate mail and we could hear screaming as they took damage. Presumably there were bound souls in there. Neroli's bolts and mine were pinging off the armour but the others were being more effective. However they had been getting as good as they gave.

I tried to trigger a Witchsight, just in case, and got a thumping headache, in time with the alarm clangs. Meanwhile Flamis fired a fireball, and one of the glaive wielders went down. Maybe we had a chance after all.

Talon tried to swipe the stone off the altar and was knocked clean across the room, sliding down in an unconscious heap. The superfred was walloped back to the Elemental Plane of Radiance, while Vanderhand was using his laser rifle on them. Flamis then moved into the Wall of Fire to attack one, which looked to be the leader.

I triggered a Walking Unseen, just as I heard the sounds of running feet heading our way. It sounded like there was fifty of them so I retrieved the Plaque of the Great Sea and used it to create a giant wave, washing them all back down the corridor. It was then I remembered we were in a volcano and there was a good chance all that water was going to hit the magma chamber and possibly blow the entire mountain up. So I rushed in to help the others.

Flamis was being pummelled but managed to get a good shot. White cracks had been appearing in the armour and, as the shot went in, the armour exploded, knocking her unconscious. Vanderhand blew up the third one, which left only one of the four armed ones left. That one came around the back of the altar and attempted to close on Neroli as he shot it. Neroli was tossed though the Wall of Fire then it stepped to take on Vanderhand. I just raced through the Wall of Fire to help. Vanderhand was basically holding it off, as he had a crippled arm, while Neroli and I were trying to take it down from behind. Finally I got so fed up that I stood back and fired a Waterbolt. Fortunately it was only a small explosion when the creature was destroyed.

As the last one went down, the sceptre gently floated down while the stone stopped protecting it. I was able to grab both. Touching the stone to the others brought them around then it was a case of using quite a few Waters of Healing to heal them up. After some quick looting, we quickly departed. On the way out, Vanderhand grabbed the sceptre and used it to permanently put out the necromantic flames. He then insisted on carrying it. I sort of sulked all the way back to the horses. Part of the loot we had got were two suits of armour, both of which drained the life force of the person wearing it., It was lined on the inside with several sharp spikes and sealed completely when worn so it was impossible to remove.

When our special effects came back, it was back out of the armour and on with the sash. To my delight, the sceptre then flew out of Vanderhand's grip and glided back to me. I could not resist then sticking my tongue out at Vanderhand before we left the area quickly. Behind us the volcano emitted a burp.

The trip out of the mountains was uneventful. The presence of the sceptre provided us with safe passage through all the zones, even as far as putting a tunnel through the ocean. We even went through that fifty-mile diameter wild zone without any problems.

.10.

I had both the stone and sceptre in my possession so I was covered in a lightning field. Vanderhand tried to accost me and got zapped. So I tossed the stone to Flamis so she could heal him. As I did so, the lightning field vanished. It had been coming from the stone to protect the sceptre. When I got the stone back, the lightning field returned.

9th Snow

Finally, got close enough so that we would be at the city the next day. That night, something large flew overhead. It was identified as a a giant moth. It was heading north, the same direction we were going. It was then we noticed the glow on the northern horizon. It seemed as if the city was on fire. We quickened our pace.

Finally we topped the last rise and saw the city encased in a glow. It wasn't a fire though, especially since there was no smoke. It looked more like some sort of radiant energy, like an aurora, and most likely magical in origin. Several large moths circled overhead.

As we entered, we started collecting an honour guard. I thought I was raising morale by waving the sceptre in the air. It certainly started the cheering but, afterwards, I was chastised by Vanderhand as it could have looked like I was rallying for a hostile takeover.

The fireworks started as we reached the palace. We dismounted and were put on a were-smileadon and escorted into the audience chamber. There, I handed over the stone, the sceptre, and all the information we had gathered, including one of those life-draining suits of armour. The Emperor thanked us and said that, if we ever came back, we would be recognised as citizens.

The rest of the night was spent partying. I ended up in the ocean with a collection of were-aquatics swapping dance moves. Not sure which ones I ended up cuddling up to afterwards.

10th Snow

A portal was created and we went through, emerging in a building. The question of where we were was quickly answered when a member of Guild Security wandered in. Again we turned in what information we had, including the other suit of armour

Aqualina (when turning over the armour) – Divinate THIS!

We were also divinated and found that some of our abilities had stuck as rankable talents. As well as the standard Guild rate, we were given extra payment, a total of 4550 each as bonus. The diamonds, of which we had one each, were assessed at 500 each when cut.

All in all, it was an interesting trip and, if I ever get the opportunity, I'm going back.