

# Rendezvous with Gaia

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Daniel Dixon

01/10/91 - 09/12/91

## Player Characters

Robinton	Illusionist	Male	Human	
Thistlefoote	Air	Female	Human	Leader
Saydar	Necromancer	Male	Orc	
Antonio	Air	Male	Human	
Silver	Mind	Male	Human	
Pentelthorm Quence	Air	Male	Hobbit	
Phaeton	Solar	Male	Human	Scribe

## Plane - Gaia

### Places visited

Zones within Gaia:

Hyperion (Light)	Rhea (Dark)
Crius (Light)	Phoebe (Dark)
Tethys (Light)	Thea (Dark)
Metis (Light)	Dione (Dark)
Iapetus (Light)	Cronos (Dark)
Mnesme (Light)	Oceanus (Dark)

Titantown - Titanite village in Hyperion

Brazletown - Titanite village in Crius

Stopase Swamp - Location of Gaian half-orcs in Metis

Several other unnamed places

### Employer - Axalon - Guild rune mage

### Major NPCs encountered

Hyperion - Godling centauroid

Gaia - Supreme goddess

Viola - Titanite female

Harp - Male Titanide explorer

Digeridoo - Male Titanide

Timphany - Titanide

Guitar - Titanide mayor

Sitar - a Titanide Healer

Leviathan, Dreadnaught, Titanic, Bombastic - Blimps

Bug - Gaian half orc/hobbit

### Mission

Exploration of an unknown plane

# RENDEZVOUS WITH GAIA

Adventure Summary

Phaeton

30/09/91

Met up with rest of party and employer, the Guild Rune Mage Axalon who had accidentally created a link to another plane. Discovered name of destination plane was Gaia. Prepared ourselves for mission.

01/10/91

Received shadowwings and entered portal. Arrived in plane 20km above ground. Flew down and landed. Looks like we're inside object that resembles giant 'doughnut'. Went to examine pillar stretching from ground to ceiling. Looked like strands of giant rope.

02/10/91

Raining. Explored maze between pyramid strands. Nothing unusual found. Stopped raining so we walked to a nearby river. Fished for a bit then discovered that the local herd animals, called Smilers, had flesh that just peeled off. Very convenient. Air mages spoke to wind and discovered that there are other flying creatures called Angels that are humanoid with feathery wings. Built a raft to go down this river in an attempt to meet up with larger one.

03/01/91

Constructed the raft.

05/01/91

Gave up constructing the raft owing to lack of tools. Walked towards forest following the river. Noticed floating 'zucchinis' in the sky. Reached forest. Managed to construct a raft using lightning bolts to fell the trees.

06/10/91

Completed raft and floated down river. Reached large river. Discovered large half-walnut shell, 9' wide floating in river. Towed it behind us. Found a cove and beached the raft. Headed towards a very tall tree with dwarfed the rest of the forest. It's GTN was Giant Walnut Tree. Heard explosion in distance. A large walnut was balanced on top of the tree. Pent climbed the tree in an attempt to dislodge the nut but failed. He believed there was something in there waiting to hatch. In the distance he could see other walnut trees, many of which did not have walnuts on. Went to nearest tree without nut. Top of tree wasn't hollow but had been frayed. Returned to raft. A Limited Precog showed us that within twelve hours, the nearby tree was going to lose it's nut.

An hour later the top of the tree exploded and the walnut shot into the air. As it reached the top of it's arc, it split into two halves releasing a fine black cloud. We found one of the fallen halves and discovered a tiny black seed still stuck inside.

07/10/91

Continued floating downstream. Still sailing through jungle. Stopped so that curse removals could be performed on two amnesiaced party members.

08/01/91

Continued on. Jungle thinning out. Passed by another pillar that had a pyramid block structure next to it so decided to stop and investigate. Five tiers, 45ft high and 45ft wide at the base. No minds detected. Structure is hollow. Managed to penetrate into the topmost chamber which was empty apart from two glyphs in the middle of the floor and ceiling. No reaction when we did things to them. Same on next two levels. Unable to get any further.

Saydar and Silver discover a door in the centre of the pillar. We went in and descended down long flight of spiral steps. Encountered lizard creature that emitted light. GTN - Flitter.

09/10/91

Descended into large room. Met centauroid godling called Hyperion who looks after this section of the land above. He told us that the central Godhead is called Gaia and she lives in the centre of the 'doughnut'. He offered to transport us to Gaia's residence in the Hub. Suddenly we all felt sleepy.

10/10/91

Found ourselves in place lit by a dull red light. There were buildings as far as the eye could see. Part of the wall nearby opened to reveal a darkened stairway with jets of flame spurting out on both sides. So we went up. Each time we stepped on a stair, it would light up and a note would sound.

Finally reached a wide door which swung open revealing a large temple beyond. In the dim light we could just see the figure of a 12ft tall well built female.

Gaia told us that we couldn't return via the portal as it was travelling around her world at around 2000 miles an hour. She would return us to Alusia but we would have to pay by doing something heroic. We'd have to go exploring to see what we could find. Also if we did really well, we could get gifts.

We discovered that this plane is 2000 miles in circumference and divided into twelve zones, alternating light and dark. A godling looks after each one

We left by falling down a long tube then into the air beyond. Angels flew up and caught us before carrying us safely to the ground. However Cuddles, Robinton's 'sheepdog' had objected and mauled one of the angels. When last seen he had soft landed on top of one of those 'zucchini' things (Gaia referred to them as blimps). Landed somewhere near a Titanide settlement.

11/10/91

Centauroid female, named Viola, arrived in camp followed by Harp. The guided us to their city, Titantown which turned out to be built around a very large spreading tree. Met their leader, Digeridoo.

12/10/91

Learned about the Titanides and their culture.

14/10/91

Blimp sighted. As it got close we could see it was nearly a mile long. As it descended a cord was lowered from one end and the entire party, plus Harp, ascended. We made our way to a bubble

at the bottom of the blimp the floor of which was transparent so we could see out. The name of the blimp was Leviathan.

17/10/91

Passed over the dark zone called Rhea which was mainly ocean.

21/10/91

Reached the Nemesis mountain range which marked the boundary of Rhea and Crius. Rumour had it there was a dragon here so we decided to stop and kill it heroically. So we parachuted down. Found a 60' long grey/green dragon sleeping in a tunnel. Managed to vanquish it with the aid of mighty magics. Ascended back to the blimp.

23/10/91

Reached a Titanide settlement called Brazeltown. Many Titanides more humanoid than centauroid. Spoke to Guitar, the town mayor. Headed to graveyard to destroy several zombies and a 'priest' called Mad Jack. Managed to do so but Pent was killed.

25/10/91

A days trip brought us to a Titanide Healer called Sitar who resurrected Pent.

27/10/91

Returned to Brazeltown after Pent was recovered. Leviathan had left.

28/10/91

Harp and us took a boat to the Phoebe Sea in the next Dark zone. to reach the Ironsmith Enclave located on the shore. The Ironsmiths are creatures made out of Cold Iron and don't have auras. They're called the Iron Masters. Visitors are not allowed on their main fort on an island in the middle of the sea.

Watched metal boat come in before constructing three large canoes.

30/10/91

Sailed across the Phoebe Sea and entered Phoebe proper which was mostly swamp. Had a close encounter with a Buzzbomb, an 18' oval creature propelled by fire. Blimps fear them as they make them explode. A Mage Wind caused it to crash and burn.

Eastern portion of Phoebe not swampy but rocky. We were sailing through a canyon.

01/11/91

Spent most of the day on the river but had to stop because it was risky to go through a river 'pump'. Instead we disassembled the canoes and ascended the canyon sides and reached the shores of a lake on the other side. The lake shore was littered with bones. A desert was beyond the lake so we decided to wait for the next blimp to show up. Many of the party were starting to show various backfire effects.

03/11/91

The blimp, Dreadnaught, arrived that morning. Everyone getting edgy. We passed over Tethys while Curse Removals were performed. Down below was desert and we could see large sandwraiths tunnelling down there.

07/11/91

Passed over Thea, an area full of ice and snow. Many of the curses now lifted. Yetis exist down there.

09/11/91

Traversed the east side of Thea which was a glacial mass. The northern half of the next zone, Metis, was sea while the southern half was swamp with lots of rivers. A column of smoke could be seen from the swamp even though we were told that the swamp was uninhabited. We decided to investigate while Dreadnaught defrosted.

We parachuted down and landed near the village. It consisted of a small collection of poorly constructed circular mud huts. The inhabitants turned out to be half orc/hobbit - a recent creation of Gaia. So we tried to teach them how to improve their rather primitive lifestyle, especially as they just didn't have a clue.

There was a possibility that Cuddles had landed on Dreadnaught so the top was searched. No sign of an impact site.

10/11/91

Halfway across Metis, the swamp turned into a red zone with upside-down trees and large grey animals. We rendezvoused with another blimp, Titanic, and looked for signs of Cuddles - nothing. Not on top or inside.

We changed course to intercept with Bombasto, but checked out Dreadnaught's innards first. Success!

Passing over Dione - a forested zone.

11/11/91

A human city is located on the shore of Mt Iris on the border of Dione and Iapetus. While Dreadnaught refuelled with trees, we visited it. Discovered slave market and that the town is ruled by crime bosses. Had to slip out of town that night. There was a fall of 'manna' during the night, manna being coconut pods containing several different flavours of milk.

12/11/91

Picked up by Dreadnaught. Sailed over Iapetus which consisted of mountains in the north and a sea in the south. Visited a rustic rural village and tried the food in the hostelry.

13/11/91

Visited a fortified village. Some of the party took part in an eating and drinking challenge.

14/11/91

Passed over Cronus. Apparently it's inhabited by barbarians.

16/11/91

Mnensone. A desert and very flat. Full of sandworms.

18/11/91

Oceanus. A large expanse of ice, probably a frozen ocean.

21/11/91

Arrived back in Hyperion and landed at Titantown. Big celebration for Harp, the first Titanide to circumnavigate Gaia. Took off with Wings towards the Hub. Halfway up, as the Wings were about to expire we managed to land at an Angel's hive. After a rest, they carried us up to the Hub. Rested on arrival.

22/11/91

Gaia gave us gifts then sent us home to Alusia. Actual date at the Guild was 09/12/91.

# RENDEZVOUS WITH GAIA

- Phaeton

It had been quite some considerable time, but finally I was prepared for another adventure. I had removed all the curses I had acquired during the previous quest, excepting that of random teleportation. So far it hadn't proved to be too much of a nuisance, although being transported unexpectedly one day into the middle of the Sweetwater river had me tempted. I wanted to study it further.

In addition to magic philosophy, I had studied the Healing Arts, and a little astrology, but all this bookwork was getting rather dull. It was definitely time to get out again.

30/09/91

Another Guild meeting. Maybe this time a suitably interesting mission would be available. And so it proved. A balding, tall, thin gentleman dressed in long flowing robes decorated with runes and sigils (an obvious rune mage) presented his problem. He told the assembly that he had been establishing a rune portal. He had thereby made contact with another plane and was requiring a party of adventurers to enter and explore it. The portal was one way but it was hoped that he might be able to activate it from the other side. Astrology readings had indicated that it might well be safe. Unfortunately there wasn't much more that the mage could tell us about the other plane at this stage. Investigations were still in progress.

Since I was in the process of studying other planes of existence, as part of my Philosophy studies, I volunteered for this one. There was also the odd chance that magic could be affected which meant I'd have fun working out the altered symbology. Maybe I could finally figure out how to get the coloured light spell to work.

So I went to see Axalon (the runemage). Other Guild members had decided to join me on this mission. They were:

Robinton: He is a rather tall guy (6'2") and told us he was a troubadour, illusionist, rank 5 Healer, rank 10 courtesan, beastmaster, knows counterspells, and has curse removal (useful). He took one look at my outfit and muttered something like 'Oh my god - no taste'. Doesn't he like bright colours? Also he would introduce us to his friend - an Old English Sheepdog named Cuddles. Robinton looks about 30ish and is fairly well built, wearing leather armour. I observed a flute in his pocket and a lute on his back. He carried a quarterstaff.

Thistlefoote: A female human air mage who is also a Ranger and a rank 6 Healer. (I'm only rank 3. I hope to learn a lot from those two). She is 5'10" tall has brownish, shoulder length hair, average looking. She looks about 19. She was wearing green at this stage but changed to brown, hard leather, later.

Saydar: A beginning necromancer orc. He's 5'6", unshaven, dark hair in dreadlocks. Covered in furs and rags as well as bits of half-eaten animals and wearing various amulets and bones. There is a knife in his belt.

Antonio: Another human, male, and a beginning air mage. He's tall, blond, and fairly thin. He is wearing normal brownish clothes with daggers protruding from various pockets. He reckoned he

was more at home in a store.

Silver: A human male, low ranked mind mage. He's also a fighter and an astrologer. He looked like a hard worker and also had swordsman calluses. He was wearing light, leather armour and carried a falchion and daggers. Looked like a well presented tidy chap. He told us he was a poor, struggling, artist. Good. Now I can get illustrations in the scribe notes.

Pentelthorm Quence: (Pent). He's a 3'2" hobbit, reasonably cute (most hobbits are) and carrying a grappling hook and shouldering a coil of rope. He was wearing a brown shirt and brown pants, both reasonably worn. He was in bare feet but a pair of boots are dangling from his belt. He is also carrying a javelin. He said he was a good climber. He is a bad, but keen, air mage.

Me? I'm Phaeton, human male, Solar Celestial mage, rank 3 Healer, rank 1 Astrologer and rank 4 Philosopher specialising in magic. I'm 5'3" tall, short blond hair, tanned complexion, wearing a yellow shirt, blue trousers and a rainbow robe. I changed to brown leather armour later. The only weapon visible is a dagger in my belt.

Axalon conducted the seven of us to a shack, just off the main area. Guild Security was much in evident in the area. They were there in case something came through the portal that was extremely nasty. There were a couple of guards in front of the shack. Axalon spoke to them and they let us in.

Inside were two other guys, one of them being an astrologer and I believe that the other was a Namer. The inky black portal was sitting in the middle of the room with the runesticks around it. Nothing could be seen through it. Axalon conversed in a low voice with the other two while we waited. He then told us that it now appeared that the portal is two way so there was no need for him to come with us. He had been attempting to create a portal to the far end of Alusia when something odd had happened. I suspected it was some sort of backfire effect although he vehemently disagreed with the possibility. The portal was now permanent owing to a runestick that had slipped through partially. Tests had showed that the mana level was okay on the other side.

Someone had the idea of getting one of the airmages to summon a bird, send it through the portal, and have it report back. An intense discussion resulted on what sort of bird to send through. In the middle of it, Thistlefoote stepped outside.

Meanwhile I DAed the portal and managed to determine that the name of the plane on the other side was Gaia. I was going to inquire further when a sparrow flew through the door and circled the room. Thistlefoote came back in and chirped at it. The bird flew into the portal.

We waited for a while but the bird didn't return. Thistlefoote stepped outside again. We watched as she summoned a mynah bird, and asked it to fly in the portal. It did so. However, again, the bird did not return.

Axalon, and the other two, had been gathering further information. Gaia was habitable and we could live off the land. There was a bufferzone between the two planar portals and that the entrance on the other side was high in the air. Axalon would arrange for some invested shadowwings for us so we could fly back.

We speculated what could have happened to the birds. Could something nasty had got them on the other side? Or could the portal on the other side be invisible and they couldn't find it.

Axalon told us that Guild Security wanted us to depart as soon as possible as they were getting edgy and wanted to know, as soon as possible, just what sort of threat that this portal would be. He would pay us 5000sp and the Guild would throw in another 2000sp. (Finally I'd have the cash to learn StarWings and StarFire.) Axalon also requested 5% of salvage.

There wasn't much more we could do here so we set off to make our preparations. Thistlefoote and Robinton decided to wait a bit longer for the birds. I headed off to the Guild Library while the others went shopping. We were to meet back at the shack at 8am the next morning.

After an intensive library search, and quite a lot of help from the Guild Librarians, as well as from Antonio who came in later, we couldn't find any references to a plane called Gaia. It was close to sunset by now so I had a quick dinner at the Guild, then went up to the roof on the Solar College and began a Reading the Night Sky ritual (after casting a Light to lie in). An hour later I had got the following reading.

The Great Wheel spins  
And for those who ride upon her,  
A plethora of new experience beckons  
Meetings with those who are half man and half beast  
And those who are more beast than man  
And those who are more man than beast  
And a great wealth resides within.

Cryptic but it seemed to make an odd bit of sense.

01/10/91

I met up with the others at the agreed time. Vance (Lord of the Bats) arrived to cast some shadowwings on us. He also handed us an invested item with 7 charges of rank 11 wings in it. Meanwhile I cast Witchsights on myself, Antonio, Thistlefoote, and Silver. (Another spell to practice. They failed to go off first time.)

Robinton introduced us to Cuddles. He looked like an Old English Sheepdog but Robinton explained that he is actually a Sabertooth Tiger. The illusion is there so as not to alarm people. Fair enough. I managed to disbelieve the illusion to see Cuddles' true form.

We had a quick vote on party leader and scribe. I became the scribe (seemed appropriate for the party philosopher to scribe) and there was an election for party leader between Thistlefoote and Robinton. Thistlefoote won. We also signed the Guild Contract.

Lord Vance cast the Shadowwings, which had a duration of 5 hours, and we entered the portal, one at a time.

As I jumped, I was conscious of a brief sensation of darkness and cold. Then I felt a wrenching sensation and a strong wind around me. I felt as if I was falling. The wings were trying to engage but the wind was just too strong. I couldn't even open my eyes.

A few minutes later the wings managed to engage as the wind had died down a bit. My eyes were very watery but I could just make out the ground, about 20km below. All I could do was to hope that the wings would stop me from a very nasty impact. Fighting the wind gusts was exhausting.

A short time later, although it felt like eternity, the wings had control. The wind had died down to nothing. I was still about 20km above the ground and was viewing a strange landscape. It curved upwards to two sides. I could perceive a wall on the other two. The ceiling, (yes there was one), was very high up. There was no sun but the whole ceiling glowed with a dull light - like a cloudy day.

I couldn't see the portal at all so I attempted to gain altitude and find it. However I had no luck. I saw the others land in an exposed area so I followed them down.

When I got there Thistlefoote had established that North was in the direction of the furthest wall. She reckoned the one to the south is only 30 km away. We could reach it in a day. Over to the west was an area of polar ice, an area of darkness, then an area of desert. The other direction was darkness.

I decided to check for altered spell effects so I cast a Light. It worked normally so I counterspelled it as there was no sense in attracting attention to ourselves.

From what I could figure out, we were inside a torus. I tried to explain it to the others until someone mentioned doughnuts. That did it. Gaia must be the Great Wheel mentioned in the astrology reading. Since it was spinning that would explain why we lost the portal as it was holding a fixed location relative to Alusia. The wind was the air rushing past us until we finally matched the spin. No wonder those birds couldn't return. Since the portal was now moving at about 200km/hr relative to us, it would be nearly impossible to get back that way. I reckoned we would have to find a Namer who could cast a Banishment on us.

There was a copse of trees nearby with a river. We flew over there. On the way Robinton spotted some grazing animals on the grass plain and flew ahead to look. When he got back he said that he didn't think they were sentient but could I please check. I did so and he was right. Non-sentient, generic true name: Smiler. They were 2m tall and had frog-like heads with herbivorous teeth. Their mouths looked fixed in a permanent grin.

Once we landed I did several DA's on various objects to determine the mana level. Normal. No undercurrent aura. This plane wasn't magical. Robinton had prepared a hot meal so we had a meal then slept for a short while.

Someone had spotted a pillar thing to the WNW, reaching from ground to ceiling. We couldn't tell exactly how far away it was but maybe a day or so. We decided to investigate.

Several hours, and a few breaks later, we finally arrived. By my reckoning it should be nightfall but it's still light. Days must be a lot longer here. Bet the nights are too - if there are any.

The pillar is 5 km across and is made up of several strands, each 200m wide. There is about 30m between each strand. About 500m up the strands start to wind around each other like rope. There is a broken one lying nearby. Up above is the other end. It appears that this strand broke.

The strands look like they're made out of some sort of rope. I DAed one and got a faint reading of Long Lived Sentient. So I went for Generic True Name. The answer I got was Gaia. Uh oh! This plane is alive. However it seemed like the centre of consciousness was not here. I then noticed that the ground had a similar, but slightly different aura. However I failed to analyse it.

Saydar announced that he spotted something odd, about 200m up one of the strands. The strands aren't climbable but vines and other greenery are growing on it. Robinton tried to climb up and, after a few tense moments, managed to do so.

When he got back he told us they were some box like structures attached to the strand. They seemed hollow but he could find no way in. According to him, they seemed artificial and not part of the strand at all.

At that moment we noticed that clouds were coming in from the east and the wind was picking up. We decided to take shelter among the strands. It was dark in there, like a maze, so we marked our way. Watches were allocated. I went first with Antonio, Cuddles and Robinton second, Saydar and Pent third, leaving Thistlefoote and Silver last. I also asked that if it got dark I was to be woken immediately.

.2.

02/10/91 (I think)

Nothing unusual happened during the watches. The light level had dropped but that had been due to the clouds moving in. It was now raining quite heavily. Thistlefoote reckoned it would be raining for a while. We took shelter deeper into the maze.

I extracted a pack of cards from my pocket so Robinton asked Pent whether he had played 52 pickup before. Pent said he hadn't so Robinton scattered the cards and told Pent to pick them up. Silver helped. Meanwhile Robinton started juggling coloured light balls. I decided to create a set of my own, and tossed them in his direction, then sent them spinning rapidly around his head. A sudden explosion of light caused me to lose my concentration.

For some reason Antonio looked rather stiff. I did a quick empathy on him and discovered he was suffering from arthritis. When I asked him just what he was attempting to cast, he said he was trying to detect odours. I soon had him cured.

Thistlefoote decided we should have a look further into the maze so I cast a Light, put witchsights on myself, Saydar, and Thistlefoote then dispelled the light (after a couple of attempts).

While we wandered through the dark maze, someone brought up the subject of ghosts which made everyone jumpy for a while. Some of the party were looking for secret doors in the pillars but they didn't find anything. An hour or so later we had wandered through and emerged on the other side. Nothing special had been observed the whole time. It was only raining lightly by now. Robinton sampled the vine leaves and concluded that they're okay. I detected no ill effects on him.

Finally the rain stopped and we could see to the next dark patch to the west. There could be a large amount of water there. The boundary between darkness and light was rather fuzzy but, as far as I could tell, it hadn't moved.

We walked off towards a river up ahead. On the way we passed by a herd of smilers. We could

see their tracks, long thin ones.

A couple of hours later we came to the north flowing river. Antonio wanted to call it 'Antonio Flow'. The river itself is 10m wide, stony and flowing reasonably fast. Another river is flowing into it.

We saw fish in the river so Saydar set out to catch some. Pent excavated in the ground, searching for worms. He observed that the black soil was warm. Meanwhile Thistlefoote had investigated a clump of bushes and wanted me to find out if they were all the same age. I was only successful in getting the age of one - three years.

By the time I returned, Saydar hadn't managed to catch a fish. We filled up our water bottles. The water seemed fresh but I reckoned we'd better boil it first. Then we walked on towards a copse of trees downstream. On the way Antonio threw some leaves into the river. Immediately a fish leapt up and grabbed them. Vegetarian fish? Saydar had been using the wrong bait.

There was a small waterfall with a pool at the bottom near the copse. Quite a few fish were swimming in the pool. Pent tried to stab one with the javelin and not having much luck. Saydar resumed fishing at the top of the waterfall. A little while later all the airmages were throwing rocks. And some people reckon us Celestials are crazy? Robinton and Silver, wandered on further to check out the copse.

Finally Thistlefoote managed to trap a fish in a Wall of Ice. I DAed it. Generic True Name: Generic Fish - Herring. Pent stabbed at it several times and finally managed to hit it. Antonio jumped in to get it and threw it on to the bank where Thistlefoote finished it off. We wandered over to the copse.

When we got there we discovered that there were Smilers in the copse. They showed no fear as we approached. Robinton reckoned that there can't be any carnivores around. Saydar killed one and the others didn't even react.

Saydar dissected it while I observed. The smilers are definitely mammalian and marsupial. Meanwhile Robinton and Silver made smiler steaks. Silver reckoned the meat just fell apart into slices. Curious.

While that was happening Pent and Thistlefoote attempted to summon seagulls. Pent waved part of the fish in the air. He might just have something there. Antonio picked up some seeds and other material to take back. Good idea. The Guild diviners may be able to obtain quite a lot more information out of them. The other smilers wandered off.

Thistlefoote and Pent then decided to try WindSpeak. After a while Thistlefoote started talking to herself. I suspected it had worked. When she came out of it she told us that she had spoken to a wind blowing from the west. It had been through several light and dark regions. There were no birds but there were other flying creatures. She described creatures it called angels. They were humanoids with multicoloured feathery wings. They lived in houses. The closest group it knew about were two other light regions away. The dark and light regions don't change.

We had dinner. While the others sampled the smiler, I decided to stick to the rations and salad for the time being. The fact that this plane has a consciousness is disturbing. Maybe all the animals

are connected to it.

After dinner, Robinton created an illusion of a large doughnut, with chocolate stripes, all around Pent. I tried to explain to the others just what the situation was. Robinton came up with a more detailed, larger, cutaway image.

Silver reckoned that a larger river is running E/W down the middle of the plane and this river is flowing into it. It was therefore decided to try and construct a raft. Suddenly some force hurled Antonio towards the river. I hurried after him and discovered he was bruised and exhausted so I transferred some fatigue over so he could walk. By the time we got back, Saydar had made himself deaf by backfiring a Ram of Force. It seemed logical that another one had got Antonio. We finally managed to inform Saydar of his condition and Robinton initiated a curse removal ritual. Otherwise he was going to be stuck with it for several weeks. Since this was going to take six hours the rest of us settled down to sleep with only one person watches.

03/10/91 (Getting dates on these scribe notes is going to get difficult)

Most of this day was spent with Robinton attempting curse removal on Saydar and the rest of us attempting to cut down a tree without a single axe among us. Thistlefoote blasted it with a lightning bolt which scorched it but did little else. Silver managed to come up with a rather crude stone axe and started hacking away at it. I had attempted to DA all the trees and had got the ages of three of them (out of seven - that's not good). They were all different. So much for Thistlefoote's theory of everything being created at once. Also, in one of the trees I failed to DA, Antonio spotted a face.

Saydar attempted his Ram of Force again and backfired - again. This time he went amnesiac. That lasts for days. Robinton was not pleased. Saydar charged off after Thistlefoote who hit him with her quarterstaff. When he came around Silver had Saydar go down to the river and clean himself up. All the decaying animal bits on him were removed and buried.

05/10/91

After a long while Robinton managed to remove the deafness. By now we had spent about three days in this spot. The next attempt lifted the amnesia.

We all had been hacking at the tree with our daggers and finally it toppled over. The face on the other tree wasn't very distinguishable owing to Antonio hacking at that with a dagger. As far as we could tell that tree was not sentient.

Later on Antonio reckoned that the smiler meat can be peeled off them while they're still alive and it doesn't hurt them. This I've got to see. I asked him to tell me when he was going to do that again so I could observe.

Finally we decided to abandon the attempt to turn the fallen tree into a raft and move on down river on foot. Robinton reckoned the smilers aren't constructed for riding.

.3.

Northward we could see another pillar, and another one could be seen beyond it. The air was very clear and we managed to determine that the roof is well over 100km above us. East & west we saw other pillars slanting towards the roof. Where they met the roof we observed L-shaped

flaring. There were holes in the roof corresponding to each dark patch. To the south was a huge cliff that rose three or four kilometres. At the top of that was the wall. There was a forest ahead of us near the river. Maybe we'd have better luck building the raft down there.

Three hours later we were still proceeding towards the forest. I decided to spot DA smilers in an attempt to determine if there was any trace of the Gaia consciousness in the smilers i.e. if we killed one would Gaia know about it. So far the others didn't seem to be suffering any retribution from eating them. I couldn't find any traces so I considered dropping my vegetarianism. Antonio reckoned that the smiler steaks peeled off the smilers like the layers of an onion. There were layers of fur between each layer of meat. Most odd.

We saw no insects and all the flowers we had seen so far were small and green. Self pollinators we presumed. Far in the distance Pent spotted something in the air, drifting near one of the northern pillars. He described it as being a black, floating, zucchini, about 2 kilometres long.

Someone wanted to know if smilers had sex traits so I continued my spot DAing. I determined that two of them were male but was unable to detect any females. That provided speculation whether or not the zucchinis were the females. Saydar decided to kill and dissect a couple of smilers.

Three more hours went by and we neared the edge of the forest. Another smiler revealed the information that it was six years old, male, and its purpose was to be food. Another smiler was female. Saydar killed and dissected it as well. We decided to have a lunch break.

The forest looked more like a jungle and it felt hot. The river was now 20 metres wide. We heard small animal calls from inside the jungle. Pent scrambled up a tree and reported that the river joined a very large one coming in from the east then bending north. We would need to cross it to continue north.

Antonio suggested that I DA a tree to determine its purpose. I told him that I didn't believe I'd get an answer but I did it anyway. I was right. No answer.

Thistlefoote started blasting down trees with lightning bolts. Soon there were six lying on the ground. We got to work assembling a raft. Thistlefoote provided a tarpaulin for a sail. Pent could still see the zucchini drifting away to the east.

The rest of the afternoon was spent manufacturing the raft. We had dinner then test floated it finally concluding it required another three trees to bear our weight. So Thistlefoote started with the lightning bolts while I decided to maintain an empathy check on her just in case.

She backfired and went blind. However, with the aid of Silver, tying a rope to the target tree, and giving the other end to Thistlefoote, she was able to knock down two more. Some little animals were caught and killed under the trees. She clipped the third one then got twitches. Another backfire. She was able to fix the twitches but was feeling rather fatigued by now so she sat down while Robinton started another curse removal. Silver tied some more ropes to the damaged tree in an attempt to pull it over.

A short while later Silver had the last tree down and we attached it to the others. By the time we had finished Robinton had completed the ritual but it failed to work. We decided to have supper

then sleep. So far the backfire score is Saydar:3, Thistlefoote:2.

06/10/91

After breakfast we completed the raft while Robinton repeated the curse removal ritual. After six hours, Thistlefoote could see again. Once the raft is completed Robinton generated an illusion showing us the best way of fixing the tarp as a sail. An hour later we were underway.

Well this was much better than walking as we drifted down the river. The jungle came right to the riverbank on both sides. We kept a lookout for anything unusual but, well, it looked rather ordinary really. I just let myself relax for a while.

After a short while Pent conjured up a Mage Wind to help propel the raft. Robinton then grabbed Pent's ears and used him to direct the wind and steer us.

Half an hour later we reached the large river and continued heading north. So far it had been all jungle. The ground was still the same aura as before. That had been provoked by Saydar asking about high mana areas. I told him we probably wouldn't find one unless we stumbled into it but I'd do some spot checks.

Saydar had been trailing a hook and line behind us and another half an hour later he caught a really weird fish. It was blind, scaleless, and finless. It's tail was the same orientation as a whale. I failed to DA it so I asked Saydar to catch another one.

As the time passed Robinton played on his flute and Silver began sketching. Meanwhile I was doodling with magical symbols. First chance I got I was going to try to mix the light spell and a colour cantrip and see what happens.

Just then Saydar caught something else. What ever it was, it was so strong that Saydar was nearly pulled off the raft. We turned the boat around and chased it. Silver was picking up some sort of animal thoughts. He reckoned it wasn't even aware it had been hooked. Robinton tried to attract it to the surface with an illusion of a large pile of the local salad leaves but there was no response. An image of a pile of floating smiler meat also produced no response. Robinton then stripped down to his underclothes, tied a rope to himself, the other end to the raft, and jumped in the water. He attempted to follow the line down and to see what it was, even though the water was rather murky, but, shortly after he jumped in, the line broke. He crawled out and we turned downstream. Saydar gutted the odd fish.

The Mage Wind ran out half an hour later so Thistlefoote summoned up another one. However she objected when Robinton wanted to grab her ears and use her head as a steering wheel. Saydar caught another one of those fish and I DAed it as being a relative of the eel family.

Thistlefoote's Mage Wind blew out an hour and a half later. The river is still heading mostly north but there is a slight northeastern vector. Just then we saw something floating in the water. Silver wanted me to DA it but I told him it was too far away. So we moved in for a closer look.

It turned out to be a half walnut shell, about 3 metres in diameter. Silver could detect no mind associated with it. It DAed as formally living, GTN - Giant Walnut. It was hollow inside so Antonio stepped in and sat down in the centre. It's so high he couldn't see over the edge. Silver joined him and soon we discovered that it would take half of us before being swamped so decided

to tow it along behind us. A few more of these and we'd have a really decent raft.

A short while later we found a cove and beached the raft. We could see a very tall tree about 100 metres away which towered over the rest of the canopy. Robinton, Pent, and myself went to investigate. As we did we heard a bang in the distance, sounding like some sort of explosion.

We soon reached the base of the 50 metre high tree which DAed as a non-sentient Giant Walnut Tree. A giant walnut could be seen perched on top of it. As the other two ascended the tree I heard another explosion, further away this time.

Pent scrambled up the tree very easily and started hitting the walnut in an attempt to dislodge it. I could feel the tree shaking as he did so. The walnut quivered. Pent reckoned there was something inside it wanting to hatch. He could see other walnut trees in the distance. Some of them looked slightly shorter and didn't have walnuts on.

They climbed down and we wandered over to the nearest one that had the top blown off. We couldn't find any shells at the base of the tree so we started a spiral search and found one about 20 metres away but were unable to determine what had been in it. Pent climbed up the tree and found that the top had been frayed and that it wasn't hollow. The tree had the same aura as the walnut - formally living.

We returned to the rest of the party who had been preparing camp and dinner. Silver cast a Limited Precognition and determined that, in less than twelve hours, the nearby tree with the walnut on was going to lose it. We set up the first walnut shell as a shelter then, while Pent went up a tree and watched the walnut tree, while I stayed at camp and did the same, the others went and fetched the second walnut shell half.

An hour later, the top of the walnut tree exploded and the walnut shot in the air. When it ascended to the top of it's arc, it split into two halves and a fine, dark, cloud of stuff was released which quickly dissipated. Antonio went out seed hunting but couldn't find any. However we were able to retrieve the two fallen halves and I noticed a tiny, black seed stuck to the inside of one of the shells. Antonio added it to his collection.

We consumed the fish stew for dinner then slept.

07/10/91

Robinton had made breakfast and it was rather good, consisting of maple syrup and rolled oats. Somehow I suspected it was an illusion covering something else but since he had added taste and smell I didn't really care. We tied the shells together, lashed the raft on top of them and soon we're away again. Thistlefoote provided the first Mage Wind.

Saydar fished as we continued on downstream. The river started angling to the west. We determined that the nearest pillar is now 30 kilometres to the north. A while later the Mage Wind died and it was Antonio's turn. Suddenly Cuddles got a Mage Wind in the face. He growled menacingly so Antonio quickly dispelled it. He asked Pent to take over but then changed his mind and tried again. The spell worked but died five minutes later. So Pent did one which also died five minutes later.

Thistlefoote struck a dramatic pose and cast. A blank look crossed her face. She had given herself

amnesia. When Robinton told her that her name was Thistlefoote she reckoned that the name was silly. She'd rather be called Mary. She also thought that Saydar was horrid but Cuddles was cute. Robinton said we'd have to wait until we went ashore before he could start the curse removal.

I was using an empty shell as a casting chamber. To start with I cast a Light then cast a colour cantrip at it. To my delight the light turned red. I spent the next few minutes experimenting with various hues and making notes. Now all I've got to do is figure out how to do the same effect with one cast.

We sailed around the bend and started heading east. There was no change in the scenery - still jungle. Antonio attempted to set up a Mage Wind but, he too, got amnesia. So, at the first opportunity, we went to the shore and set up a camp. Robinton started on Thistlefoote and asked her to sit still for a while. Thistlefoote wanted to know why and started protesting so Robinton commented that Mary was being contrary.

Thistlefoote finally settled down and Robinton set to work. Silver used the opportunity to get Thistlefoote to pose so he could draw her. Meanwhile we had to keep an eye on Antonio who was playing with his daggers. To distract him, I decided to tell some adventuring stories.

Once Robinton had succeeded with Thistlefoote, he started on Antonio. Six hours later that too was successful so he settled down to sleep. The rest of us soon followed his example.

08/10/91

Next morning we're off again. Thistlefoote backfired another Mage Wind. This time she got the worst one of all - Creeping Senility. She recast successfully but I advised her that it would not be wise to continue until the curse is lifted. I reckoned she strained the part of her that manipulates mana. There was no immediate hurry to lift the curse so we continued on. Now the backfire score is Saydar:3, Thistlefoote:3, Antonio:2. I remarked that this trip is proving useful for studying backfire effects.

The jungle had been steadily thinning off and four hours later we're cruising by another one of those cables. This time we could see another of those block structures on the ground so we decided to land and investigate.

This one is shaped like a pyramid with one side flush with the column. There were five tiers, each three metres tall and is fifteen metres across at the bottom. Silver failed to detect any minds.

When we got there Robinton threw Pent up to the top. Antonio also scrambled up. Meanwhile I tried to DA the pillar to determine if the Gaia consciousness had a magical college but discovered that it was the same aura as the other one. I can only DA the same aura once.

The others had discovered that the structure is hollow and Saydar used a Ram of Force to knock a hole in the topmost tier. It was pitch dark inside so Antonio lowered a rope so I could get up and cast a Light in it.

The light revealed a dusty chamber with some rubble. Antonio crawled in and found a square indentation in the middle of the floor with some writing. Thistlefoote came to the conclusion that it looked like a doormat with a Welcome sign. I could detect no aura on the indentation so at least it wasn't magically Warded, Trapped or Cursed. Another indentation was discovered in the

ceiling above the first one. We tried fiddling with both of them, in various ways, but nothing we did seemed to have any effect. I transcribed the writing for later analysis while Antonio went and got his stone axe from the raft. Meanwhile Saydar blasted a hole in the next chamber down.

I cast a Light in this chamber. Another two indentations were found top and bottom with different writing on the bottom one. Thistlefoote studied it and reckoned it had a travelling theme. This set also got transcribed. Antonio tried sitting on the indentation and wishing himself to other locations, like the room above but nothing happened.

The next level down proved harder to get into. The first Ram of Force only cracked the wall so Saydar had to use another one. The walls are getting thicker the further we go down. He then had to use a third one as he managed to make himself deaf. Chalk up another backfire for him.

We crawled in after I cast another boring, standard, Light. Again there were indentations top and bottom. The writing here was very similar to the one above but was slightly different. Antonio reckoned it was some sort of level identification. He banged on the floor in an attempt to break through to the level below but it was too hard.

Level Four proved impossible to enter with a Ram of Force as the wall was too thick. So Robinton took Saydar up to Level Three to try and bust through the floor. However that didn't have much effect either.

.4.

According to what we could tell, we were now equidistant from the two walls. Our stomachs were telling us it was lunch time so Robinton came up with something that resembled pasta. He reckoned he found a pasta bush. I'm taking that one with the proverbial grain of salt. While Thistlefoote gathered up some wood Silver tried to do an astrology reading with a pack of cards. What he got was:

From turmoil we will gain happiness as long as we are wise  
enough not to be deceived into the gain of wealth as this  
will also gain us an enemy.

It sort of makes sense but I think I'd stick to the stars anyway.

The river curved around this cable and went east. Silver and Saydar walked towards the pillar with the intention of exploring it. The rest of us would take the raft and wait around the other side for them. Since Saydar was still deaf, Robinton created an animated illusion to explain what was about to happen. Also I cast a double duration witchsight on Silver.

Once they'd disappeared into the pillar we sailed around the side. The jungle had faded out completely by now. Ahead of us were marshlands. Pent managed to get a WindSpeak ritual to work and asked about the zucchinis. He found out there were lots of them about and they don't usually come closer than 2km from the ground. They aren't scared of the angels but are scared of fire. There are some upwind, not very far away. Upwind was from the west. The zucchinis also talk to each other. Robinton reckoned they're great big floating grenados.

Pent also found out that there were lots of small other things that fly and there were humans in a city between a dark and light area about 2 darks away to the west. There were no humans in this

zone. The closest are in the next light zone.

After a few hours Silver and Saydar returned. They had found a strand, right in the centre of the pillar, that had a doorway with stairs going down. Silver had drawn a picture. The bottom of the strand had been carved to resemble a building. While he was telling us all that Saydar decided to have a nap. Soon the orc was snoring very loudly in a corner.

We decided to check out the building. Thistlefoote, Antonio, and myself needed witchsights so I set to work. 14 casts later it was done. As we proceeded Robinton began telling tall tales about dwarves. Apparently he had been on an adventure before where he had obtained a nice broadsword from a giant called Tiny. He pulled it out to show us. It's a real BIG sword. However Robinton admitted he wasn't skilled in using it. Every time he tried, he got hurt.

We finally reached the centre pillar which had the same aura as the ground, much to my annoyance. The doorway and staircase are five person wide. I couldn't detect any magical traps on the stairs so Saydar stepped boldly forward. Oh well. Let him trigger anything. We followed and discovered that the steps wound around the central core. Pent was counting steps and marking every one hundred. Occasionally he lost count and had to go back to the last mark.

About 2400 steps later, we could see a dull orange glow ahead. Saydar was still leading, I was just behind. As we got closer we discovered that the light was coming from some sort of lizard thing, with small wings, on the roof. It's stomach was glowing. We could see more of them ahead. I DAed it and got the results Living, Generic True Name - Flitters. Saydar grabbed one and shook it. After a short while it's glow went out. Also it wasn't alive any more.

We progressed onward. The walls were roughly carved. Several DA's later I had found out the following. The Flitters were non-sentient, asleep, age varying, sex all female, purpose - lighting (Saydar's theory was correct), name of creator - Gaia. Figures.

Pent woke up a flitter and it fluttered away. Thistlefoote tried feeding a flitter with various items but it ignored her. These things had big black eyes and, as far as I could tell, the glow was of natural origin. Also the time since they last ate was between 2 days to three weeks.

A bit later on, Pent caught a flitter and kept it on his shoulder as a pet. He called it Lumen. It ended up sitting on his head. We were about 3 km straight down by now so we stopped and camped with standard watches.

09/10/91

We carried on, estimating we were about 5km down by now. An hour or so later, the stairs stopped and a corridor extended onwards. After 100 metres it opened up into a large room. It was so large that we couldn't see the ceiling or any of the other walls. The Air Mages all reckoned they weren't enclosed any more. What we could see was several large pillars, looking like doric columns. The floor and walls were constructed out of marble or slate, and were tiled. The aura here was the same as the one on the surface.

Just then we observed a slow moving bright white light, coming closer. Pent ducked back in the corridor and got rid of Lumen, in case whatever this was, took offense. Maybe it was mother. Meanwhile I cast Walking Unseen, followed by a Witchsight, on myself and waited.

The light arrived. We could make out a centauroid shape, 3 metres tall. It had the same aura as everything else around it and was definitely sentient. It asked us what we were doing by bothering it in Gaia's work. We explained that we were explorers who had arrived on this plane by accident and were now seeking a way home. He told us that its name was Hyperion and he looks after the land above. Gaia is the supreme Godhead and is female. We asked if we could have an audience with her. He replied that he can transport us to her place 600 km straight up. That put it somewhere in the Hub. He also told us that the zucchinis are actually called blimps, that there are no humans in this light band which he looks after, and that the land works okay to Gaia's will. The pyramids were the remnants of a long-dead race that Gaia made extinct. There aren't any angels in this block either.

After a few moments he suggested that we'd better be on our way. Suddenly we were all feeling drowsy. Some of the party dropped to the floor. As I finally lost consciousness I could have sworn that the ground was wobbling and rising to engulf the fallen members.

10/01/91

We regained consciousness to discover that quite a bit of time had passed. Both my Witchsight, and Walking Unseen spells had worn off and Saydar was no longer deaf. We later discovered that Thistlefoote was no longer suffering the effects of the Creeping Senility. Gaia must have removed it. However my random teleportation curse was still in place. We all felt very refreshed.

We looked around. The place was illuminated in a low, red, light and there were buildings as far as the eye could perceive. They all looked like churches and temples. There was a wall 100 metres behind us.

Just then there was a low rumble and we turned to discover that part of the wall had lifted away to reveal a fifty foot square opening and a darkened stairway. Jets of flame spurted out on each side of the stairs.

We advanced up the stairs. Every time we stepped on one, the stair would light up and a note would sound. The sound stopped when we got off although the step remained lit. The tone started at a low C but, after eight steps, it went up a semitone. Every eight steps was another semitone. Finally, after a full octave, we began hearing harmonics. Further on it was chords. The stairway DAed as Gaia and narrowed as we ascended up its 45 degree slope.

Finally we reached a wide door. I noticed I felt lighter up here and objects fell slower. As we approached the doors they swung open, revealing a large temple beyond. In the dim light we could just see the figure of a 4 metre tall, well built (plumpish) female.

Robinton called out and asked if we could approach. Lightning flashed, thunder roared and a voice spoke saying "YOU MAY APPROACH". We advanced. Robinton decided that he should do all the talking. We approached a raised dais and noticed that the woman's feet were planted in it and there was greenery all around.

Gaia told us that she was aware of the portal but it would be dangerous to return that way as it is travelling at 2000 miles an hour. Robinton explained about how the portal happened then explained that where we came from there was a thing called magic, divided up into various colleges. Gaia wanted demonstrations so Robinton created a flame illusion while I conjured a standard light, added colour, then dispelled it. It was much easier to cast here and there was no

fatigue drain. Like a High Mana Area combined with a Place of Power. Soon we had explained the basics of each of the colleges we represented. Gaia wanted to see more powerful magics and mages. We answered that we would pass on her invitation to the Guild.

She also told us we would have to pay for the favour of returning us to Alusia. Say if we did something heroic like killing a dragon (she said there were 1001 of them), or retrieve a guarded diamond from on top of a mountain that was guarded by all sorts of things. The diamond was as big as a house. We would have to go exploring and see if we could find something. If we do really well some gifts may be given.

She said that she could teach us how to talk to the sentient beings below, such as the angels and the blimps. That would also require some sort of pay back. If we wanted to return here the angels could carry us up.

The plane itself is 2000 miles in circumference and divided into twelve zones, six dark and six light alternating. There is a godling (like Hyperion) in each zone. Her abilities are something like magic but not the same. Her consciousness is in the Hub but she is all-seeing. For recreation she plays with sentient races.

Silver pulled out his sketch pad and started drawing a picture of Gaia while Robinton played his flute to demonstrate our arts. Meanwhile Saydar went over to the side of the room and a door opened revealing a bright light. He had gone to play cards with Gaia.

Gaia wanted to know what gifts we would like. Now that was a tough one. The device to add colour to spells was not in her realm of power, since she didn't use our sort of magic so that question left me at a loss. I'd have to get Robinton's advice later.

A short while later Saydar staggered out. He was drunk. Trying to drink Gaia under the table had not been a good idea. I made a mental note to check up on him later.

Gaia told us it was time for us to leave and eight little doors opened revealing a small room behind each one. We stepped in one each and the door closed. A few minutes passed then the floor suddenly dropped out from under me. I was falling slowly down a large green tube. I could just see Thistlefoote above me but can't see anyone below. I could also see a dark area below mostly taken up by sea. Falling downward was making me uncomfortable so I twisted around so I was falling up. That felt much better. I could see, far in the distance, an iris valve at the end of the tube.

An hour later, we reached the iris. It opened and I fell through it. It didn't take me long to realise that I had just fallen out of the hub and was now plummeting towards the ground. Just then I saw a couple of winged shapes heading towards me. Thank goodness. Rescue. (I had been getting rather worried). They're winged humanoids, slightly shorter than humans with large colourful wings. I'd like to obtain a few loose feathers. They DAed as Short-lived sentient, Generic True Name = Angels. They spoke in a sort of squarking language but I couldn't understand them however I later found out that Thistlefoote did.

They grabbed me and I was carried down and towards Hyperion. On the way down I saw an angel spiralling down, out of control, leaving a trail of red. I suspected it was blood. The landing consisted of being dropped in the river and I had to flounder ashore. As I clambered out,

Thistlefoote splashed down. I watched the others land while I cast several dry cantrips on myself and equipment. However there were only seven splashes. Where was Cuddles?

Thistlefoote conversed with one of the angels and he told her that Cuddles had attacked him and the other with him. The other one was killed (that was him falling out of the sky) and he was able to manoeuvre Cuddles' fall so he soft landed on a blimp. Robinton was rather upset by that and blamed himself for not controlling Cuddles properly. The angel also informed Thistlefoote we had been dropped near some Titanides.

We had been dropped 100 kilometres west of where we had been and could see a slanting cable 15km west. Saydar was in pain as the effects of his drinking had caught up with him. So I did a Soothe Pain on him and called over Thistlefoote and Robinton to see if they could do a Neutralise Poison (I wasn't skilled enough yet). Thistlefoote reckoned she didn't want to touch him so Robinton did the job.

Robinton was still feeling rather despondent over Cuddles so Silver did the cooking - or tried to. He was attempting to cook cabbage and ended up with a soup. Meanwhile Pent was whistling loudly. When he finished he reckoned that there wasn't any blimps within range - at least not upwind.

We walked towards the sloping pillar which looked like a hand, with fingers, stuck in the ground. The arm went up in a twenty degree slope but soon bent to near vertical. Three hours later we got close to the cable and we could hear a loud moaning noise. We discovered it was the wind blowing into a hole on one of the 'fingers'.

Came dinnertime and Silver was cooking again. He was trying to be really artistic with the food but he was taking so long about it that we ate some of our trail rations instead. Meanwhile Pent was whistling again.

We decided to camp here and get some sleep. Standard watches were set.

11/10/91

We were woken by Robinton as he had spotted a centauroid creature ten metres away. The rear half was horse-like but the front half was humanoid female. It's Generic True Name was Titanide. It's language consisted of a series of toots and both Silver and Robinton can understand it. Antonio could understand bits of it. Robinton used his flute to communicate. The Titanide is covered in an orange colouring. She's wearing a pouch and some jewellery and that was all. The Titanide was three metres tall. The horse section was a metre and a half off the ground.

Her name was Viola and Robinton introduced us all. Thistlefoote told him to tell Viola that her name was Mary Jane. Robinton made a breakfast of smiler steaks while Silver made the side salad. Robinton supervised closely.

Viola told us that the colours showed what Chord they belonged to. They're named after the instrument they play. She wanted to know if a friend could join them. When Robinton said yes she tooted into a shell she produced from her pouch. It must have been some sort of communication device for, shortly, another Titanide arrived. This one was definitely male although the upper body had the same female features. His name was Harp.

Harp told us that their Chord was about 5-10 kilometres away. It's one hours ride for them but a couple of hours walk for us. They agreed to let all of us ride on them 'except the green one'. Finally Thistlefoote and Pent rode. On the way Silver came up with another prediction 'Our futures are no longer set'. Soon Robinton, Viola and Harp had formed a musical trio.

It turned out that they were taking us to their major city, called Titantown. Several Chords made their homes there. After a while, we came over a hill and saw a very large tree with a one kilometre wide trunk. Other, smaller, trunks came down from the limbs to help support them. We could see the Titanide city, all around it, and even in the Tree itself. Harp had told Robinton that the Tree carried orange coloured fruit, rather like apples. Robinton replied that it was the biggest apple tree he had ever seen. I later found out that the tree was non-sentient with a Generic True Name of Town Tree.

The population numbered in the thousands. Unfortunately for me they don't possess a library. Instead all their history and folklore is passed on by song through the generations. Makes sense. This race are all natural bards.

Soon we entered the city. There were lots of Titanides watching us with obvious curiosity. We gave them a cheery wave while Saydar gave them an orcish salute. We are conducted to a big house near the Tree, there to see Digeridoo. The houses had no doors, just entrances. Digeridoo turned out to be a purple and blue Titanide. I DAed him for Aspect and got Light. His house was full of different types of instruments and there were also a lot of carvings and sculptures to look at.

Robinton did the talking while Silver translated for us. It was suggested that our story could be transmitted to the rest of the Titanides by use of the radio seeds. What would happen is that the radio tree would receive the signal and speak it to the crowd. Somehow it manages to keep multiple messages straight. Also, apparently, transmissions are judged on beauty and eloquence. Those that pass are relayed. I wanted to know if it was possible if the tree was a switching centre between two radio seeds but that was not the case. Seeds only transmitted to the tree they came from. So Robinton ended up telling our story to music.

Afterwards Digeridoo told us that, even though a Titanide was named for a particular instrument, it did not mean that they were unable to play any others. It merely indicated the instrument they were most proficient at. Also Titanides were named before birth. It turned out that the mother had some sort of telepathic communication with the developing child. He also told us he wasn't the only Digeridoo in the place.

After a while we were offered refreshments. Wine, beer, fruit juice and something called Tequila. Saydar went for the Tequila so Robinton demonstrated the Tequila Slam. That took care of Saydar for quite some time.

Over refreshments, we discovered that the humans in the next light zone did look quite a bit like us. Also that blimps do pass by, but rather infrequently. Some Titanides use the blimps as transport to trade with other Titanide locations in other areas. The blimps usually cruise with the wind but can manoeuvre independently. They can also communicate over long distances.

The dark zone to the east is called Rhea and is the one with the large sea. Beyond it is Crius, where other Titanides live, mutated ones that speak a slightly different language. I reckoned that Antonio would be able to understand them better. To the west is Oceanus, a dark zone which is basically one huge ice cap. On the other side is Nmeysome, a desert light zone. The name of the big river in this zone is Ophion.

Antonio expressed an interest in Titanide agriculture so Viola took him to see Maraceras out in the fields. Meanwhile Thistlefoote went for a walk and found herself amusing the children by letting them give her rides. She then went on a food hunt and discovered that it was just a case of asking for it. I was studying a radio seed. It looked like an acorn with some sort of metallic mesh like thing inside it. I later DAEd the tree itself and confirmed that its Generic True Name was Radio Tree.

When Antonio returned he was carrying a pair of maraceras that had been constructed for him. They contained seeds but he wasn't sure how to get them open. I was able to determine that they were made in two halves and suspected they twisted apart. Antonio didn't want to try in case they broke.

Digeridoo cooked some prawns for us and Robinton, with the aid of taste/smell illusions, showed him what our wines were like. He liked them. After dinner we slept.

12/10/91

We spent much of the day finding about our hosts and their culture. Silver has found a trombone and was trying to play it. A Titanide started giving him lessons. Thistlefoote had found a recorder and was playing that. Robinton was spending much of his time going around the various Chords. I basically spent my time catching up on my studies.

14/10/91

A blimp had been sighted. We could see that it was about a kilometre long. The first thing on the agenda was to arrange for some food to replenish our supplies then we prepared to board it. Harp came with us. As he called the blimp down we found out that Pent could indeed understand blimp. There were 10 to 20 baby blimps clustering around this one. We could see a lump underneath the blimp and it had flukes along each side and at the rear, somewhat like a whale.

As the blimp descended a cord was lowered from the front. We grabbed it and were hauled up. Also the blimp began to rise. Water was being jettisoned from open sphincters underneath it.

Shortly, much to my relief, we were hauled in to a slit. It looked very suspiciously like a mouth. We then moved down a passage and soon found ourselves in the lump. The bottom of it is transparent so we could see the ground far below as we slowly moved on. There were also some smilers in here as well as some rat like creatures and some mulched up wood. It turned out that the blimp hauls up some trees, the rat creatures eat them and the blimp lives off the rats byproducts. Some sort of symbiotic relationship. The smilers were hear by accident but will make good food. At least I don't have to worry about being vegetarian any more.

Pent asked about Cuddles but Leviathan, the blimp, did not know anything, however he would pass on the message. Meanwhile Robinton had discovered that the blimp had a second stomach which was much messier. The bottom was covered in some sort of liquid which turned out to be a very weak acid. Pent passed on the message that the blimp would like us to pass the wood to

the other stomach for further processing. Apparently that was the price of passage. So that was what we did. Soon the reply to the earlier message was received. None of the blimps were aware of anything on their backs. It was possible that Cuddles had worked his way inside one.

15/10/91

We passed the time as best we could, playing cards, telling stories (Robinton has lots - much to Thistlefoote's annoyance) and various other activities.

We travelled over mountains. We also discovered that the blimps are scared of things called buzzbombs. They're are things they move very fast and could be another type of living entity. They hang around the cables as well as the northern and southern highlands.

Later on we crossed the twilight area between Hyperion and Rhea. There was a forest down there and I could see mountains then ocean beyond.

17/10/91

We passed the central pillar of Rhea. All around was ocean. The pillar extended out of what looked like a coral island. The water was very dark blue. I saw a dark hole on the hub above.

19/10/91

Finally reached the other coast of the Rhea Ocean. A fiord became a long canyon where the river continued on. It was eventually confirmed by Leviathan that the river does run all the way around Gaia. We saw seven giant amoeboids straddling the river. They were acting as pumps. Leviathan told us they were river pumps. It reminded me a lot of the human circulatory system with the river being the Blood of Gaia and these things being hearts. There was also a road alongside the river.

A few hours later and we're over mountains again. This was the Nemesis Range and was a couple of hundred kilometres wide. On the other side was Crius which, we were told, consisted of rolling plains.

21/10/91

Reached the twilight zone between Rhea and Crius although were still over the Nemesis range, but on the other side. The wind has shifted bringing us more to the south.

Down below we could see a mountain pass leading into a vale. The vale itself is bare and runs 15-20 kilometres east-west and 10 kilometres north-south. Leviathan told us that this was the place where a dragon had been seen. Now everyone wanted to stop here, find it, and kill it heroically. Leviathan agreed to hang around for a short while we did that.

I wasn't really looking forward to sliding down the cable but Pent said there was a better way down. Up on the ceiling were several bundles of what looked like packs so he grabbed one, pulled it and pulled it down. A strand still connected it to the roof. He then strapped it to himself. Just then a hole irised open in the floor. Pent walked over to it and jumped out. The strand elongated and pulled out a mass of blue cloth from the pack which rapidly filled out into a large round canopy, under which Pent was floating. Meanwhile the strand retreated back into the blimp. Harp said that it was a parachute and it was perfectly safe. Uh huh! I'd believe that after I've landed.

Harp helped the rest of us prepare. We were to steer our descent by pulling the cords connecting us to the canopy. One by one we dropped through the iris. It looked a very long way down and

I can't remember whether I jumped or I was pushed. I was very relieved when the canopy finally opened above me. It was a slow trip down. Landing was a bit of a problem though. I ended up being rolled up in my own parachute and had to be helped out. Harp helped me refold it back into the pack. I intend keeping it for future use.

Thistlefoote had WindWalked and had discovered a cave in the west which had bones littered around it and it smelt. Some of the bones looked like they had been melted. We went over to investigate. Robinton reckoned it didn't smell like any dragon cave he was familiar with. The bones looked more like they had been burnt by acid rather than flames.

I cast some more Witchsights and Walking Unseens then we entered. The tunnel went straight ahead 100 metres then turned a corner before opening up into a big cavern. Stalactites and stalagmites are everywhere except in the centre. Instead the centre was occupied by a pile of stuff, what of we couldn't determine. On top of that was a 60 foot long, grey/green, winged dragonish shape which was asleep. It was illuminated by a shaft of light coming through a small hole in the ceiling.

We sneaked out to decide what to do next. It didn't take us long to find the top of the hole, though which we could see part of the dragon below. Several schemes were discussed to kill it off, the least craziest being to make the hole bigger with an Invested Tunnelling and drop rocks on it, or maybe make it the target of a meteor shower. Thistlefoote objected to the idea of being used for bait.

.6.

We needed to find out a few more things about this entity, such how tough it was and how well it would stand up against magic. Also I wanted to determine it's GTN, whether it was sentient, and if it was Dark or Light Aspected. So I got 'volunteered' to sneak back in and DA it. Thistlefoote and Robinton offered to come along as support. Thistlefoote would have a WindWalk handy while Robinton would use a Flash of Light if the dragon woke up while I was examining it. So I ended up casting Walking Unseens on Thistlefoote, Robinton, Silver, Antonio and myself and we all crept back in. I went around the back, got as close as I dared, and activated the talent. Nothing! We also discovered that the stuff it was sleeping on was fused metal. I could see glints of gold and silver in it.

Once outside again we continued to debate what to do. We weren't even sure whether this thing was a living entity. Then I remembered about my Healer Empathy. Maybe that might yield some useful information. So I announced that I was going back in again. I think Pent was the only one who heard me, as the others continued the debate.

Once inside, the Empathy told me it was definitely alive, and was sound asleep. Pent was walking around it, studying it from all angles. Meanwhile I found a small lump of the fused metal lying on the ground so I picked it up for later analysis. It's a dull grey cover and felt heavy.

Finally we decided to go with the dropping the rock on it idea, (using Invested Tunnelling to enlarge the hole), followed by Robinton's Invested Meteor and Thistlefoote with Lightning. Saydar used two Rams of Force to place the rock in position. Meanwhile the rest of us would go down and do what we could. So Silver, Robinton, and Thistlefoote stayed up top to trigger the investments while the rest of us took position around it. I went behind it and cast a Light to wait

in.

All of a sudden the hole opened up and the rock plummeted down on the dragon. The dragon definitely took damage, as it's legs splayed out with the impact and looked stunned. A split second later the meteor thundered in, also having the same effect.

We leapt to the attack. I put a Wall of Starlight in front of it then, realizing I was in the wrong position to put a Wall of Darkness up there too, moved as quickly as possible to the front. Meanwhile Saydar and Pent rushed in. They quickly discovered that the dragon's fluids are acidic and, pretty soon, Pent's javelin head was no more. The same thing happened to Saydar's hand axe head. A spurt of blood hit Pent and ate through his armour.

There was still no sign of the lightning bolts as I got closer to the entrance, cast the Light, then put up the Wall of Darkness, parallel to the Wall of Starlight. One of them should have an effect if the dragon tries to flee. Just then six, enraged, Saydars burst through and began hacking at the dragon. Robinton strikes again. Saydar was still attempting to chop at it with his axe but only succeeded in throwing it over the dragon so he decided to resort to usual orcish tactics and began savagely head-butting it, impervious to the acid. I later commented he should get a helm with a spike on it for next time. Meanwhile Antonio was busy poking it in the eye. This isn't a battle, it's a massacre.

Silver dropped rocks down the hole, now back to it's old size. Suddenly he changed tactics and dropped some water down. I think it had something to do with one of his astrology readings. There was still no sign of Thistlefoote's lightning.

Just then I spotted Pent being hurled away from the dragon. He looked stunned but recovered before I could get there. The Saydar clones disappeared. Something was bothering me for a while then I realised what it was. The dragon hadn't fought back.

A quick empathy check revealed that it was dead and had been so for a bit of time. I called out to the others that it was dead and to stop. However Saydar didn't as he had gone into some sort of berserker rage. I had to sap him to stop him hitting the dragon. I thought it was usual orcish behaviour but he later told me he had backfired a Fire and Brimstone spell. A non-standard effect but I had heard that backfires can have different effects on other planes.

We dragged Saydar out and Robinton got to work on the healing as I was rather tired from working on Pent. We went looking for Thistlefoote. Pent couldn't see her but I soon found her, still under the effect of a Walking Unseen and just getting up from the ground. She had grass and dirt all over her face and the front of her armour. Turned out she had gone catatonic from a backfire.

By the time we got back Saydar had woken up and had attacked Robinton. Robinton commanded him to stop, using an odd tone of voice. I later found out it was a Bardic Voice. We all stopped. For some reason I felt that Robinton was a good friend and I'd do whatever he wanted.

Robinton got Thistlefoote and I to examine the rest of the dragon, while Antonio and Silver examined the cave and the metallic mess. We ended up removing some teeth (my bonesaw is not looking too good after that) and a claw. Also Silver had collected as much coloured dust (it was gemdust) as he could and wrapped it up in the remains of one of the parachutes.

This took quite a while, during which Saydar finally came out of his berserker rage. He petrified some dragonfeet to extract the claws. We then decided to burn the dragon's body.

Once that was all done Thistlefoote cast WindWalks on us all and we headed up to the blimp. Harp was in the process of heading up the cable. When we got there we discovered there was still no word on Cuddles but the possibilities had been narrowed down to a group of three blimps currently ahead of us. Robinton said that we weren't going dragon hunting any more as we were running short on Investeds and that acid had taken too heavy a toll on our equipment.

Harp told us it would take us another day at least to get to Brazelton, the other Titanide village. Pent cast a Mage Wind to push us along faster but it fizzled out after ten minutes. We decided to spend the time resting. Robinton, Thistlefoote, and I gradually cured all the parties wounds then I watched the other two do the skin grafts to remove scarring. Saydar decided to wear his scars with pride.

Silver did some readings with a deck of cards and reckoned that Cuddles is near a settlement. Either he's landed or the blimp he's on is near one. He also reckoned that Gaia had noticed us and was inspired.

Several hours later we passed close by the central cable of Crius. I could see a sea in the twilight zone ahead.

23/10/91

Finally we reached Brazeltown. It's on an island in the middle of a large lake. The city looked like it grew up randomly. Also we could see another blimp over the Phoebe Sea.

We used the parachutes to get down. Thistlefoote must have got the hang of it as she was doing intricate twists and turns while descending. I just concentrated on getting down. This time I didn't get tangled in the canopy.

While I repacked the parachute, Robinton attempted to summon Cuddles. No response.

Harp led us over a bridge, crossing a stream, separating the landing area from the town. All the land around here has been cultivated. Also the Titanides here were definitely odd. There were lots of Titanide/human crosses. Some Titanides had even lost the horse part. However they still had a GTN of Titanide. There wasn't as much jewellery or paint on these ones either. Antonio found he could understand their dialect a lot easier than Robinton or Silver.

These Titanides made weapons as apparently, they get attacked by zombies. Robinton perked up. Something else heroic to do.

We reached the town. The houses here were made of wood and their were paving stones down. Harp led us to a metalworkers shop, run by a Titanide called Timphany, whom Harp usually trades with. Once inside Harp started trading the leaves and carved items in his bags for axeheads and other similar objects.

Once Harp had finished his trading we showed Timphany the metal lump. He examined it and said it was mostly made out of pewter, a mixture of lead and tin, with traces of gold and silver. He wanted to know where it was. We finally traded that information for new weapons and armour

as well as food and board.

Timphany suggested we see Guitar, the town mayor. Robinton was very interested as that instrument was unknown in Alusia. Robinton had one, but had not met anyone else who could play it. Timphany also told us that the zombies were in the graveyard and that they were controlled by someone they called Mad Jack. There were a dozen or so of them.

So that was what we did. Guitar's place turned out to be a smallish building surrounded by trees. Robinton asked Harp about suitable protocol and Harp replied that knocking on the door and saying "Hello" would do. So Robinton did. The door was opened by a mostly human Titanide who invited us in. Robinton introduced us and asked if he could try out Guitar's guitar. Guitar agreed and Robinton went for it. Guitar was impressed by Robinton's playing, while Robinton was impressed by the instrument.

Guitar gave us refreshments which included cream doughnuts. Between Thistlefoote and Pent the doughnuts went very rapidly. I only managed to snare one. Guitar told us that the zombies were in a graveyard to the north and they were really only regarded as a nuisance. They can be killed by hacking them up into tiny little pieces. Their leader, Mad Jack, can also 'howl'. Occasionally that seems to charm a Titanide into going towards them and being killed. Not many people are worried about them though.

I was all for going and checking the place over with several DAs but the others wouldn't let me. Instead we waited until the new armour and weapons were ready which took two hours.

Finally we headed off to the graveyard. There were no tombstones, just markers and crosses. The ground itself still had the same aura as the rest of Cruis. Just then there was a rustling in the woods and several zombie shapes stepped out. They were all humanoid. The lead one looked like it's entire face had been peeled off leaving the skull. I figured that was Mad Jack.

I failed to DA Mad Jack but I managed to get information from the others. Lesser Undead, Deathsnake, Dark Aspected. So I tried to cast a Wall of Starlight which failed to go off.

Mad Jack started wailing so Thistlefoote hit him with a Lightning Bolt, knocking him over. Saydar used Fire and Brimstone on the other ones. Pent leapt to the attack. Mad Jack got up again and resumed wailing so Robinton countered with the sound of a siren. I finally managed to get a Wall of Starlight up separating myself, Saydar and Robinton from the zombies. The others had already moved up and were in combat.

Just then I got a close look at a deathsnake. It's mass was full of snake like creatures all writhing around inside. Some were crawling out of the eye sockets. They smelt really bad. For some reason I felt really scared and ran. After a short while I was able to control myself enough to cast a Walking Unseen on myself before continuing. A while later I managed to control my composure enough to stop especially since I was exhausted.

I made my way back as quickly as I could. When I got close enough to see what was going on I could see Robinton being throttled by Mad Jack while Saydar and Silver were trying to get him off. Thistlefoote was lying on the ground twitching. It turned out to be another backfire. Meanwhile Antonio was using the Wall of Starlight to damage the deathsnakes. He had already dispatched a few. So had Pent who was valiantly hacking into another bunch.

At that stage Saydar had managed to get Mad Jack off Robinton. As he did so, Silver swung his sword, neatly decapitating Mad Jack. Thistlefoote was now recovering from her epileptic fit.

Saydar turned to face another set of deathsnakes and cast a spell. Suddenly he stopped and his face took on a very peaceful and calm expression. Great. Another backfire. He walked up to a deathsnake with the intended purpose of shaking hands. Meanwhile Antonio had collapsed with a couple of deathsnakes attacking him. They turned towards Silver and Robinton. A few seconds later Antonio turned into wind, courtesy of Thistlefoote.

The deathsnake, that Saydar was trying to befriend, tried to attack him and missed. The group near Silver and Robinton were closest to me and just within range of a Wall of Starlight so I cast the spell. It didn't work but the two deathsnakes there dropped.

Pent was down and bleeding as a deathsnake struck him. I started running in that direction. Robinton moved to attack that one while Silver dealt with the one attacking Saydar. Before long the last of the deathsnakes were dead.

By the time I reached Pent it was all over. My empathy told me he was dead. All I could do was tend to the living while Thistlefoote put a Preserve Dead on Pent's body. I hoped that Gaia would be able to resurrect him.

.7.

Some of those worm things were still crawling around. Their aura told me they were as Animal with a purpose of Zombies. I surmised these snakes could animate dead things. We also noticed they had little sharp teeth.

We hung Pent's corpse from a tree while we healed each other, burnt all the bodies, destroyed all the snakes and had a look around. The only thing we found was a silver crucifix on Mad Jack. It had no aura. The curious thing was that Mad Jack was not infected with deathsnakes. I cursed myself for failing to perceive his aura.

Meanwhile Saydar picked a flower and put it behind his ear. Odd behaviour we thought.

We headed back to Guitar's house, with Pent, where we were fed more cream doughnuts. This time I managed to get some more. Guitar didn't recognise the crucifix as being significant to Titanide culture. He also told us that Mad Jack had always been that way and had come from the East.

We decided to sleep here as most of us were down on fatigue.

24/10/91

I had been trying to purify for three hours but only succeeded in one as I had been distracted by the sight of Saydar covered in flowers and attempting to play a lute. Meanwhile Robinton had been learning new tunes and styles of music. Harp wanted to know if Pent had seen a Healer. He knew of some in TitanTown that may be able to resurrect him. There might be one on Cruis. Guitar went to find out.

I finally couldn't resist reading Saydar's aura to see what was wrong. It turned out he was suffering a backfire effect called Pacification and it would last for another couple of days. I

informed the others who were highly amused.

Soon Guitar came back and told us there was a Healer to the northwest about a day or so away. Saydar expressed an interest in the lute and Robinton reckoned it wasn't the sort of 'lute' that adventurers usually carry. Ouch!

As we travelled, Robinton was teaching Saydar how to play the lute. I noticed that Harp was carrying a clock and asked him what they used for a time standard since there was no night or day. He said the standard was one revolution of Gaia. But then how did they know how fast Gaia was revolving because there wasn't any fixed point of reference. He said that they had timed it with their clock. A circular argument if I ever heard one - in more ways than one. I finally was able to ascertain that one revolution was slightly longer than one of our hours - according to the clock. The clocks were made by the iron masters in the middle of the Phoebe Sea.

25/10/91

A days travel had brought us to a Titanide house under a tree. This was where the Healer, Sitar, lived. Sitar turned out to be a tartan coloured Titanide with lots of jewellery. Robinton handed Pent over and she examined him. She said that his soul was still singing faintly and it will take something between 10 to 20 revolutions to fix him. Robinton asked what a sitar was as it wasn't an instrument he had seen. It turned out to be an oddly shaped guitar with more strings.

Sitar started to sing over the body of Pent. Robinton was intently studying the sitar, and the music Sitar was using, for the resurrection. He was surmising of attempting to duplicate it but he would need a full piece orchestra to produce the same effect of chords and harmonies. That led me to postulate on the possibility of using musical tones to manipulate mana as well as spirit, which was what Sitar was doing.

26/10/91

Seventeen hours later Pent was alive, but weak, and wanting food. My empathy revealed he was on minimal Fatigue and Endurance. All three healers pounced on him to cure him. When we had finished Pent was still wanting to catch up on the meals he missed so Robinton and Sitar produced a large amount of cream doughnuts. Real ones.

We were soon able to ascertain that Pent could still talk to blimps. Meanwhile Saydar had dressed up in new clothing with ruffles and lace, as well as being covered in flower necklaces etc.

27/10/91

When we arrived in the vicinity of Brazelton, we noticed that Leviathan was no longer hanging above it. Just then Saydar's backfire wore off and he ripped off all the flowers and the new clothing and kicked them about. He also attempted to break the lute but Robinton managed to save it. Saydar finally calmed down with the help of a full bottle of Tequila.

28/10/91

We took a boat to the Ironsmith Trading Enclave on the shore of the Phoebe Sea, taking two hours to make the trip. We found the bazaar around a large cubic fort. There are shop fronts in the walls such as weapon shops, jewellery shops, utility shops etc.

We entered one. The creature behind the counter was made out of metal. It had a conical body on top of a round head. Arms were etched on it's side. I attempted to DA it but couldn't pick up

a thing even though I was sure I did it right. It spoke asking us if we knew the Trade Tongue. It turned out to be a derivation of Common. This metal guy told us he was one of the inhabitants of the fort and that they were the Iron Masters, that lived on an island in the middle of the Phoebe Sea. They are in contact with it and visitors are not allowed. They hadn't seen Cuddles.

Robinton asked it to analyse the coloured dust. One of the etched arms reached out, took the offered sample and a metal grill over the counter closed. Silver cast an ESP and reckoned he could pick up living entities in the castle but they had no emotions. Harp came through clear but the rest of the party were fuzzy. I could think of no logical explanation.

Soon the grill opened again and we were told that the dust was powdered glass and not valuable. Robinton wanted to throw it away but I decided to keep it. Robinton handed over a couple of silver pennies for the analysis.

We moved outside away from the fort and I asked Silver to try his ESP again, in case it was something to do with the metal around, but we still came out fuzzy. So much for that theory.

Silver started an astrology reading while the rest of us went for a wander. He had been trying to locate Cuddles and got the reply that Cuddles was in the East and the West. Since we were on the inside of an East/West ring it did make sense.

It was decided that someone should fly around the fort and see if there were any openings. Pent volunteered. I cast a Walking Unseen on him. I then had to cast a Witchsight on Thistlefoote so she could target the WindWalk. The fort had a flat roof with a large steel door on the seaward side (the fort jutted out into the sea) and a silver trapdoor on top. Both were closed and sealed tight. So much for that.

Robinton suggested going over the counter top. So I put a Walking Unseen on him and he went in. However, as he went to climb over the counter, the grill slid down. So much for the Unseens.

Next idea was Robinton going for a swim. He told us that he had a device, something like an Invested Waterbreathing, that allowed him to stay under. He discovered that the wall goes all the way down to the bottom.

The curve of the land meant that we could just see the island in the distance. There was smoke coming from the vicinity of it. Something was glinting underneath the smoke and it is moving slowly in this direction. When we pointed it out to Harp he told us it was the Iron Master's boat. I asked him what the next dark area was called. He replied that it was Phoebe which was mostly swamp.

Robinton went to speak to the Iron Master again and discovered they could make weapons as good as Tiny's sword (a Rank 10 weaponsmith) with better materials. It would cost 5 kg of silver (over 2000sp) or 16 smiler young to make something that good. Robinton wanted to trade them the secrets of manipulating magic.

Meanwhile I had been watching the steadily approaching ship. It was about three to four hours away by the time Pent called me into the shop. There are two of those metal creatures there. I cast a Light and attempted to detect their auras for magical ability level, which Robinton asked for. However it didn't work. I told Robinton that all that metal, which they told us was iron, was

disturbing the mana flow. No way would they be able to manipulate mana. I counterspelled the light and left.

Harp reckoned it wouldn't take us too long to make some canoes. He produced some dull silver cloth which is used for making ships. It was tree bark.

While the others went to find a certain type of tree, Thistlefoote, Pent, and I watched the boat come in. It was a metal boat (we wondered how it floated) and consisted of a hull with a box like cabin on top. Behind that was a cylinder where the smoke was coming out. It was making a chug-chug noise. Pent commented that they must be making a lot of food in the kitchen.

Thistlefoote flew off as the boat approached the fort. She saw the big door open, revealing a docking area, and the boat drifted in. The sound had stopped. The door closed.

Meanwhile the others had found the appropriate trees. Harp hit one with the back of the axe and it immediately split into planks. It was a plank tree, the plant equivalent of a smiler.

The rest of the day was spent making three large canoes with outriggers and sails.

29/10/91

We got in the boats and sailed off. The current and the winds were propelling us east. Saydar and Antonio went fishing.

30/10/91

The end of the month. I was beginning to believe that my teleporting curse was no longer current. Maybe it didn't work here.

We had crossed the Phoebe Sea and was now entering Phoebe proper. It was getting darker. We entered the river and continued on. The river sped up and soon we're shooting three to five kilometres of rapids. It felt like thirty to fifty. We had to bail like crazy.

Soon we could see that the river was heading for the central pillar. North of us is a mountain range that looked like the jagged edge of a broken bottle. There were six or seven things with bat-like wings around there.

Harp had just told us that Tethys was the next Light zone when there was a buzz-pop. I found myself standing in the middle of the swamp. The others were nowhere in sight. That does it! That curse goes! There hadn't been enough time to get rid of it before leaving. My next move was instinctive. A Walking Unseen. On reflection later a Blending would have been more logical. I then put up a Light in order to direct any rescuers. I knew they couldn't be too far away.

Meanwhile the others had beached the rafts and Robinton had put up a large glowing green arrow pointing at them. Thistlefoote was doing an aerial survey.

I realised I had done something very stupid. Thank goodness no one was around to see it. How could they find me if I was Unseen. So I attempted to Counterspell the Unseen and immediately backfired, draining much of my fatigue. Two Counterspells later and it was gone. Then I remembered the technique Darian and I had used on the previous adventure to signal Shinji when he was using ShadowWings. I got lucky and the spell worked first time. Soon I'm sitting next to

a large expanse of Darkness.

A few minutes later Thistlefoote landed and we headed off to where the others were. Just as we reached them there was a large bang overhead and Robinton was knocked over. We hit the swamp. It was a six metre long oval object with flame shooting out one end. It was moving faster than a speeding fire mage. As I dived for the swampy ground my thought was whoever was controlling that FireFlight was a maniac.

The object, which I theorised was a buzzbomb, turned around and made another pass. I attempted to read its aura and missed. It was moving far too fast. Thistlefoote started another epileptic fit. That makes the backfire count Saydar:6, Thistlefoote:6, Antonio:2, Phaeton:1.

We waited for the next pass. It was flying 20 feet up, just higher than my Wall spells. As it passed over, we were flattened into the swamp by a powerful wind. Then there was a crash and an explosion. I turned around to see the buzzbomb on the ground and burning. Pent had brought it down with a Mage Wind.

By now we were completely covered in swamp water and muck. Thistlefoote was still twitching so Silver picked her up. He then dropped her. Somehow that relieved the twitch.

We clambered into the boats. As I got in I felt very weak and sick and could only manage to lie on the bottom. However I couldn't detect anything wrong with my empathy. No swamp diseases. Robinton couldn't find anything either.

The next thing we checked for were parasites. Nothing. I finally read my own aura looking for another curse. Still nothing. Saydar offered me a drink of Tequila. However the smell of it made me lose my lunch. Fortunately it went over the side.

Silver reckoned it was all in my mind so he offered to hypnotise me. Risky but I finally agreed.

.8.

By now we had drifted east of the central pillar. I don't know exactly what Silver had done, but I felt great, even better than I had ever felt before. Everything around me looked beautiful, the sky, the surroundings, the rest of the party. I was feeling so happy and confident that I reckoned I could have taken on anything.

The eastern portion of Phoebe wasn't swampy. Instead we were approaching a big canyon, in the twilight zone. The walls must have been at least a kilometre high. Pent spotted a blimp behind us. If we stayed around long enough it could pass overhead. We could see that the river stopped somewhere in the canyon but we were determined to follow it to the end.

Saydar went fishing and eventually he caught a little fish which he decided to use for bait. The next fish he caught had a mouth full of very large, sharp teeth. The Generic True Name was Tooth Fish. He used that for bait. The next tug only resulted in a frayed line.

In another hour we entered the canyon, which was about one hundred metres wide. It looked rather beautiful with the many coloured layers of sandstone formations, augmented by the reflected light of the sea behind us. The wind velocity picked up as it was funnelled down the

canyon. Thistlefoote cast a WindWalk on Antonio so he could fly up and have a look about. All he saw was bare hills.

A short while later we pulled into a sheltered bay. While Pent had a look around, Silver did another astrology reading. He actually did two as he didn't like the first one. Finally he came to the conclusion that we were about to meet someone who was very powerful with fixed morals. Something like a warlord he reckoned.

By this stage, whatever Silver had done had worn off and I was feeling worse than I was before I tried to rest while the others set up camp and dinner. I skipped dinner, I just didn't feel like it. I did ask Robinton how long it would take to shift the teleportation curse and he reckoned around eighteen hours since it was a major one.

01/11/91

I still wasn't feeling well the next morning so I turned down breakfast. The rest of the party reckoned that I was missing delicious food such as greasy eggs and ham etc. Sadistic sods.

Most of the day was spent on the river. It was mid afternoon before we reached the other end of the canyon. We could see one of those river pumps ahead. More are located further up. Robinton was speculating on the possibility of riding the raft through but, after watching the force of the water spurting out of the other side, decided against it. So we beached the raft and collapsed it to its component parts.

Pent used one of Thistlefoote's Windwalks to fly up and reconnoitre. He saw the river flowing into a large lake surrounded by a white substance. There was no sign of any exit from the lake. Robinton used one of his invested ShadowWings to have a closer look. The white stuff turned out to be all sorts of bones, piled up like dunes, about three kilometres wide. There was no sign of life and no sign where the water was going.

Beyond the range of mountains that we have reached, is a large desert, the light zone called Tethys. There is another range of mountains on the other side of that, beyond which is an orange coloured lake. The river was flowing out of that. We speculated on some sort of underground passage connecting the two.

Since we had nothing better to do we decided to investigate the lake. A WindWalk would get us there. Robinton could use his ShadowWings to carry the lighter members up. Harp got us to stack most of the boat materials on his back and Thistlefoote cast a WindWalk on him. She promptly toppled over. Catatonia - another backfire. Fortunately she recovered after five minutes. Meanwhile Robinton carried Pent up.

Her next attempt sent Harp away while Robinton carried me up. Thistlefoote was the last to arrive. When she touched down she was very happy and was bouncing all around the place. I was rather concerned but my empathy confirmed that she was okay.

It was decided to set up camp here as it would be another forty or fifty hours before the next blimp arrived. No one was keen on attempting to traverse the desert on foot. Once that was done we went down to check out the lake. I managed to muster enough energy to join them. Guess curiosity can overcome nearly anything.

The bones belonged to all sorts of different species and all of them were picked clean. The ages that they had been lying there ranged from two months to nine hundred years. Saydar was collecting samples. He had been attempting to talk to the dead but he discovered that this didn't seem to be the place that they died.

When we reached the lake, we discovered that there was a two metre gap between the bones and the lake. The water looked clear. Some dead animals were lying nearby. According to what I could detect they all died of acute haemorrhaging. Antonio started throwing bones in the lake but there was no visible reaction.

The walk down and all the DAing must have taken more out of me than I thought as I felt completely weak, started seeing spots, and picked up a headache. Silver offered to hypnotise me again and I reluctantly agreed. Once he had finished I felt refreshed again. When I got back to camp I went instantly into a deep sleep.

Another blimp had been spotted over the mountains at the other side of the desert. Pent had been watching it and he reckoned it hadn't moved. Maybe it was waiting for us? The one behind us seemed to be coming in this direction.

Pent attempted to summon a blimp but failed. A few minutes later he started setting small bushes on fire and attempted to burn the pile of raft wood. Was he under a delusion that he was a fire mage? Robinton managed to stop him by putting a burning palm illusion on him, which caused Pent to start leaping up and down in the water in an effort to put it out. Thistlefoote sapped him and tied him up while Antonio extinguished the flames. Pent spent the next few hours just staring into the fire with a strange gleam in his eye.

A few hours later Thistlefoote heard maniacal laughter and a lighted torch running off. Pent had escaped. Before anyone could do anything about it, he had fired the pile of raft planks. Silver hit him with a Control Person and Pent was more securely tied up.

02/11/91

When I awoke my first thought was we had been hit by a runaway buzzbomb. Thistlefoote explained what had happened. I attempted to DA Pent to determine the remaining duration of the pyromania but got no answer. It was either permanent, I had phrased the question wrong, or I couldn't read the aura properly. I think it was all those red components in it that was putting me off. Also I still wasn't well. In fact I was feeling worse than before.

Antonio succeeded in summoning a blimp with the incantation 'Oy You Jimmy'. Whatever works I suppose. The one he got was the one to the east and we watched as it turned around. Antonio reckoned it would take a day to get here. I noticed that Silver was spending a lot of his time sharpening his sword and daggers.

Robinton was also looking at the rest of the party strangely and keeping much to himself. However he attempted a curse removal on Pent. After twelve hours, and two attempts later, it had seemed to work. He didn't even flicker when I tested his reaction to a lit candle. So Thistlefoote permitted him to be untied. Silver slit through the ropes with his knife, nicking Pent and drawing some blood. Silver also had a peculiar grin as well.

Robinton disappeared to be alone and rest while Silver started drawing. However he wouldn't let any of us see it. What ever it was he was drawing it used an excessive amount of red pigment.

Robinton called for a fire and Pent leapt forward until he realised what he had done. Oh well. Maybe he's got it under control.

I was feeling really bad and told Thistlefoote that I must have caught some undetectable disease that I was sure was fatal. What ever it was, I couldn't cure it. Thistlefoote had an attempt at curing but she reckoned she couldn't do it either. We would have to wait for Robinton to finish resting as he was higher ranked than either of us. She also commented that I should study this ailment. Maybe we could call it Phaeton's Disease.

Saydar had gone back to the lake and had rushed up in a mad panic. He reckoned something had followed him back up. Something small and furry with big teeth. Silver collected up all his weapons and went hunting, followed by Thistlefoote. Antonio followed. However they didn't find a thing.

03/11/91

The blimp arrived early that morning. Just as well too as everyone was getting jumpy. Thistlefoote looked like she was close to a nervous breakdown. Harp took her and Robinton aside. I found out later that he believed that there was something wrong with everyone except Antonio and Thistlefoote.

We collected what was left of the bushes and boarded the blimp, who Pent identified as Dreadnaught. After a short while Silver turned really nasty and started doing strange things to the rats. He even threw some of them out. Thistlefoote had to forcibly stop him. Finally Robinton resorted to his Bardic Voice to calm everyone down. He then ordered Antonio to tie us all up except for himself, Antonio and Thistlefoote. He had a lot of curse removals to do. By now I couldn't care less what they did. Twelve hours later Silver is relieved of his affliction. Another six hours had Pent cured of his pyromania.

As we passed over Tethys I was glad we weren't down there. We could see some creatures, which Dreadnaught identified as sandwraiths, tunnelling faster than the blimp.

04/11/91

Not much to do, just lie there. I was feeling very weak. Lack of food wasn't helping. Robinton wasn't having any luck with the curse removals at all. By the end of the day we crossed over the orange lake which had a slanting cable was coming out of it.

I asked Silver what could have caused his maniac effect and he reckoned he must have backfired. Pent remembered about the group of three blimps that had been in the area when Cuddles fell. Dreadnaught had been one of them, Titanic and Bombasto were the other two. I asked Pent to inquire of Dreadnaught about what was coming up and received the answer that Thea was the next zone, a dark area full of snow. Metis followed that, which was then followed by Dione.

05/11/91

Robinton was trying to fix Saydar's paranoia but was not having any luck at all. It wasn't until the 7th that he was able to shift it. Silver and Pent had been untied by now as they had been cured. Antonio also untied me. I wasn't about to go anywhere anyway.

I had found out by now that there are humans living on Dione, a dark zone.

07/11/91

Once Robinton had finished with Saydar, it was my turn. He asked me to sit still for six hours. I reminded him that if this was a curse removal, he was wasting his time as I had already determined there was no curse involved. He reassured me this was a new form of Healing ritual. So I lay back.

It was getting colder as we proceeded over Thea. I had caught a cold and I was sure that pneumonia and pleurisy was next on the list. Thistlefoote gave me a herbal brew that she reckoned would at least, stop things from getting worse. I drank it. It tasted horrible. She seemed rather surprised at that. Saydar reckoned that my diet had caused the problem since I hadn't eaten everything he had and he was okay. The thought of consuming some of the things he had made me feel very nauseous.

Pent reckoned there were yetis living in the snowy wastes below. He must have been talking to Dreadnaught again. Also some snow had got in and soon, a snowfight started, Pent versus everyone else.

Whatever ritual Robinton was using it hadn't worked after the six hours. Robinton was convinced it should have. However he was able to determine that I was suffering from hypochondria. Since that was a disease of the mind Silver offered to hypnotise me in order to convince me that I didn't have it. I agreed and he did so, just in time to throw a few snowballs about.

08/11/91

Finally all the curse removals were done. I managed to determine, by questioning them, that Robinton and Saydar had also suffered backfire effects. Also Silver's hypnotism must have been the actual cure as I was still feeling okay, even after his spell wore off and very ravenous. I hadn't eaten properly for days. This made the backfire count: Saydar:7, Thistlefoote:7, Antonio:2, Phaeton:1, Robinton:1, Silver:1, Pent:1.

By late afternoon we emerged from the snowstorm and crossed into the zone between Thea and Metis. Silver attempted to use his cards to determine just which blimp, between Bombasto and Titanic, that Cuddles was on. He got the answer 'It would be dreadful if he was on either'. We took that to mean that Cuddles could be somewhere in the innards of this one since the syllable dread also occurred in Dreadnaught. However we would have to wait for the ice and snow to clear off the top of the blimp before we could look for any holes.

09/11/91

The east bit of Thea turned out to be the edge of a glacial mass. We could see that the northern half of Metis was sea while the southern half was swamp with lots of rivers. A column of smoke was rising from the swamp which Dreadnaught thought was odd as he thought that this area was uninhabited.

Dreadnaught slowed down. We noticed he was fairly low, in order to assist getting the ice off. There was a small village in the swamp where the smoke was rising so, while we waited for Dreadnaught to defrost, we decided to investigate. That meant parachuting down. Harp decided to stay on board while the rest of us checked it out.

The landing was okay. Maybe I'm getting the hang of it. We touched down two kilometres away

from the village and walked in. We could hear lots of small animal noise coming from the swamp. Soon we could see the village on a small hill ahead.

.9.

A reading Silver had done previously, seemed to indicate that Gaia was setting us up. For what we weren't sure but we were certain it was going to be something heroic.

The village consisted of a small collection of circular mud huts, dhobi huts somebody called them. Some of them looked to be very poorly constructed.

Just as we passed a 3 foot high bush, something fell out of it. We could see spears sticking out of the bush as well. From the number we quickly determined that there were six more in there. The creature was small and green and spoke Common. He told us that this was the Stropase Swamp and his name was Bug. He said he was a half orc. He pinched Pent, who hurriedly pinched him back. Turned out they were testing each other to see how scrawny each one was. His clothing consisted of a hessian loin cloth. The ones in the bush he said that 'dey were da Boys'. They wouldn't hurt us if we didn't hurt them.

When 'da boys' finally emerged I DAed a few of them. Short lived sentient. GTN = Gaian Half-Orc. Half that wasn't orc = Hobbit. Purpose = Entertainment, Age = 2 weeks. Gaia is definitely having fun. She must have crossed Saydar and Pent to get this lot.

We were conducted to the village and we could see naked half-orcs wandering around. Six hunters had brought back a collection of red berries and they ate them. Suddenly they fell over and died. Poisoned. Saydar started showing the other half-orcs how to do split roasts with the corpses.

Somehow the subject of baby half-orcs came up. There were no children around but I soon discovered, using empathy, that many of the females were pregnant. The gestation period was five months. We then had to explain to them just exactly what babies were. Also that it was not a good idea to use them as articles of trade. Bug told us, since he was smaller than the others, he was used as bait. He's also faster than the others, that's why he's still here.

Robinton reckoned that we'd better teach these people a bit about surviving as it was rapidly determined that these guys just don't have a clue. So Antonio taught them to fish while I worked on basic first aid and hygiene. A little while later Pent found some boxes lying around that were used to make mud bricks. The half-orcs had been trying to use them as weapons then discarded them. So we showed them what they were supposed to be used for. Thistlefoote also showed them what plants were edible while Silver was showing them how to make traps.

Saydar suggested that I DA the red berries to determine their purpose. I did so and discovered that their purpose was agriculture. Saydar crushed one and reckoned that it smelt like alcohol. He ate one and was poisoned. Thistlefoote had to do a quick cure. After some experimentation he discovered that diluted red berry juice, mixed with some yellow juice, made a rather potent drink. Within minutes of his announcement, the village was deserted as everyone was out collecting berries.

Once everyone had gathered back in, the next lesson was how to catch a crocodile. Apparently

the half-orcs were having a few problems with them. They had only just realised that it was more effective to use the sharp ends of their pointy sticks instead of the other end. So Robinton created a rather realistic illusion of a crocodile and Thistlefoote and Pent demonstrated the best method of dispatching it. Soon they're all in, bashing up the illusion in a berserk frenzy.

Robinton also suggested to Thistlefoote that it may be an idea to show the women how to control the men. It could be the birth of a matriarchal society. However Saydar showed them the orcish method of electing a chief which as find the tallest half-orcs, put them all together, and let them fight it out. The survivor was the chief and won the right to bear the Sacred Dagger (donated by Silver). He soon got the hang of ordering the others about and quickly took advantage of Saydar's comment that he was now entitled to the biggest hut and three wives.

It was time to leave by then and we decided that an ascent into the sky by blimp rope would be a rather spectacular exit. They were already drawing our pictures on a large rock and saying that we were deities. So Pent called Dreadnaught and we were hauled up.

When we got up there, Robinton and Pent leapt on to the back of a baby blimp and did an inspection of Dreadnaught's back. However they couldn't find any evidence of an impact by a carnivorous sheepdog.

10/11/91

The swamp ended halfway across Metis and became a red zone with upside down trees and grey animals. I was wishing there was a way to store images into a permanent record. The grey animals were big hairy quadrupeds.

I asked Pent to ask Dreadnaught about Dione, the next dark zone. Dione was darker than the usual dark area, as dark as a moonless night and consisted mostly of forests. That was good as Dreadnaught needed to refuel with trees. We also needed to take on fresh supplies as we were running out of food. Hopefully we'd be able to find some smilers.

Silver did a reading and reckoned that we were about to gain some material wealth.

A few hours later, Dreadnaught moved over the top of Titanic and we used some parachutes to land on top. We couldn't find any signs of an impact, but Dreadnaught had previously told us that their wounds healed very quickly. So we decided to search Titanic's innards in case Cuddles had fallen inside. We were told not to cut through any lift bubbles which could be detected as being tight bits on the skin when we pushed against it. If one was punctured, the pressure inside would blow us off.

Saydar made a hole and we could see 10 metre bubbles inside. It looked rather crowded so I put a Light inside to mark the hole while Thistlefoote cast a WindWalk on Robinton so he could fly around, as an air current, and do a quick survey.

After a few minutes he was back. There was no sign of Cuddles but there was a functioning eco-system inside. Robinton then climbed down to check Titanic's stomachs. He didn't find Cuddles but he did bring back a couple of smilers.

We reboarded Dreadnaught and asked Pent to thank Titanic on our behalf. We cruised away and Dreadnaught set a course to intercept with Bombasto.

Since blimps healed quickly, and bearing Silver's prediction in mind, we thought we'd better check out Dreadnaught's innards while we had nothing better to do. A small incision was made in the stomach lining and Thistlefoote cast another WindWalk. Robinton breezed in.

After several minutes he still hadn't returned. We were getting rather worried. Had one of the creatures inside had done him in? Finally Thistlefoote decided that we should form a search party so the hole was enlarged and we climbed in. I decided to leave a marker so we could easily find our way back. So I cast a Light. I then wanted to make it a pure yellow light so it would easily stand out. It took three attempts before the colour took hold. Also after the second attempt I felt a bit dizzy. Overdoing it I supposed.

Pent, Thistlefoote and I went sternwards while the others went forward. Thistlefoote led us over a lift bubble. When I attempted to climb it, I suddenly felt very dizzy. The entire blimp was swaying and the floor looked a very long way down. When Thistlefoote asked what the matter was, I told her I was feeling queer and to go on without me. I'd wait by the entrance.

When they left I repeated the last DA question I had used on myself i.e. 'Apart from the teleportation curse what curse have I currently got'. The answer was Fear of Heights. Robinton wasn't going to be pleased.

By the time the others, including Robinton and Cuddles, had returned we were passing into Dione. We clambered back into the stomach. Too late I remembered about the transparent floor. According to Thistlefoote I had an attack of the 'screaming meemies' and had to be physically restrained while Silver did a hypnotism, to neutralise the effects of the fear.

I felt rather embarrassed as Robinton did the curse removal. Fancy backfiring a simple cantrip. Some of the comments the others were making weren't very helpful either. In six hours the curse was lifted.

Up ahead of us, in the twilight area between Dione and Iapetus, was a large area of mountains with an iris shaped lake. Naturally it is called Lake Iris. A human village was located on its eastern shore.

11/11/91

Silver had done another astrology reading with the cards and he and Saydar were trying to make some sense of it as we approached the city. They finally came to the conclusion that there was going to be a large fire. The city was the size of Seagate and the central area looked different than the outskirts. More richer. The city also extended into the lake and we could see an extensive set of wharves. There wasn't much farmland about so we came to the conclusion that most of the food supply was fish.

The plan was we would spend a couple of days here while Dreadnaught floated off to refuel. Pent would whistle for him if we needed help.

Thistlefoote jumped out and we followed her. Robinton had explained the situation to Cuddles so he would be okay. We landed on a field outside the city and followed a path that took us to the edge.

Inside we found fairly normal but rather dirty people. They all seemed slightly hostile. They were

human and, according to my empathy, healthy. For some reason Thistlefoote reckoned it would be my lucky day. The whole place had a rather fishy smell hanging around it.

We headed towards the central area and discovered there were lots more craft shops here than in the outskirts. Suddenly we saw a bunch of guards coming, clearing the crowd before them. Following the cart is a rich looking guy in a wagon. Following that and chained to the cart, and each other, is a group of humans. Slaves! At the tail of the precession was another group of guards. I was not impressed and thought it was a shame I hadn't learnt Solar Flare yet. Pent reminded me I needed a sun to work with.

We followed them and discovered a slave market. They were using crates, containing bottles of alcoholic beverages, as currency. We then decided to find a nice looking tavern to see if we could find out just what was going on.

We found one and Robinton paid 2 silver pennies for six ales and six wines, then asked the bartender to join us. His name was Carl. We found out that there were barbarians in Iapetus, that we needed permission to buy armour from one of the Twelve, and that the Twelve are Crime Bosses. Anyone who broke any of their laws were turned into slaves - if they were lucky. Crimes depended on the whims of the bosses. Citizens either ended up working for one of them or dead. He also mentioned the Free Females. They're a bunch of crazy women down by the wharves. The food around here was fish, lakeweed and manna. Manna was stuff that fell from the sky every 30 to 40 revolutions and look like coconuts with parachutes. Carl went back and brought out one of these 'coconuts'. When we opened it we discovered the milk tasted like chocolate. So did the flesh. Other 'coconuts' had different flavours.

Just then there was a wolf whistle and the crowd headed out the back door, just as a bunch of armour clad guards with clubs burst in the front. From the way they were looking at us we suspected that we were wanted. Robinton started casting flashes of lights for a diversion while the rest of us dived out the window. Thank goodness it was open.

We ran towards the wharf area with the guards in hot pursuit. Guess it was a crime to be seen wearing armour, or carrying weapons, here. Antonio started scattering some silver pennies behind us as Saydar yelled 'Free money'. In an instant the streets were full of people attempting to take advantage of the windfall. It certainly slowed the guards down.

Robinton reckoned our only chance was to make for the Free Females. However Carl had mentioned they were Amazons and didn't like men. So Robinton put an illusion of being female on us. All the illusions looked the same and Robinton had to concentrate very hard on them.

Thistlefoote spoke to the Amazon at the door and we were let in. After a few minutes there was a battle outside as the guards fought to get in but soon the noise subsided. The woman told us that they didn't like men, and communal showers and bedrooms were available. However Thistlefoote managed to arrange for us to get a room to ourselves. There we decided it wasn't safe to hang around here so we would slip out that 'night'. The head woman sounded rather surprised when Thistlefoote told her we were going to avoid the guards by flying out.

During the 'night' there was a manna fall. I managed to DA several different flavours and also discovered they were formally living, GTN = Manna Tree. We collected up as many pods as we could carry then Thistlefoote cast WindWalk on us all. We flew off to the point where we landed

and Pent called Dreadnaught to come and pick us up.

12/11/91

Dreadnaught picked us up early that morning. Was I glad to get away from that place. I was seriously contemplating this town as the site for the next Fire College convention.

.10.

Iapetus turned out to consist of mountains in the north and a sea in the south. A plain separated the two. We could see villages scattered over the plains with smoke rising from some of the buildings. Pent asked Dreadnaught what sort of beings lived here and was told that they were human. That prompted us to ask Dreadnaught to fly in low over the nearest one.

I guess that the inhabitants weren't used to blimps flying this low as quite a crowd was gathering in the village we approached. We could definitely see that they were humans. The whole area was cultivated land and the whole village had a rural atmosphere about it. It was decided to drop in for lunch.

As we prepared our parachutes, Antonio commented that he wanted a red parachute. Since they were blue this was going to be a bit difficult. Also it would take me several colour cantrip casts in order to recolour all that fabric. The best I could come up with was a deep purple colour but Antonio seemed satisfied.

Of course Thistlefoote was the first one out the hatch but we weren't too far behind. From the crowds reactions, it was obvious they didn't get many casual drop in visitors. I hoped that our reception was going to be benign. They did seem rather impressed with Thistlefoote's aerial display.

Since we were only about a kilometre up, it didn't take too long to touch down. Silver nearly managed to twist his ankle. As we picked ourselves up a farmer approached. For some odd reason Robinton greeted him with 'Ooooh arrrr ooooh arrrr, how ye be'. To our surprise the farmer replied in a similar manner. When questioned about that later Robinton reckoned he didn't really know why he had done it but it just seemed appropriate.

The farmer introduced himself as 'Arry and, when Robinton told him we had dropped in for lunch, offered us some brown ale along with food, including cream on crumpets. Pent looked very interested.

We were conducted to the local hostelry. Several other farmers were in there drinking some sort of brown ale which we were informed was Guinness. I tried a little bit but I didn't really like it so I decided to stick to the local milk. Scones and jam were later brought out.

'Arry told us that the next dark zone was called Cronus and it was one large jungle containing lots of horrible monsters. Barbarians also lived in the mountains to the north. Up there, even the men wore dresses. A fortified village was located near the twilight zone and was there to guard against the monsters which sometimes came out to ravage the area.

For some strange reason Thistlefoote thought I was rather depressed. I told her I was actually pondering some deep philosophical questions such as what is on the other side of the north and

south walls and what lies below us. She seemed satisfied by that explanation. Actually she was a bit right. So far I hadn't found a decent repository of knowledge and the lack of a sun and stars was starting to get to me. Also bars aren't really my type of place. Robinton reckoned I had spent too much time in the library stacks.

We stayed a bit longer and were entertained by their band's music. Robinton joined in. Thistlefoote started feeling hungry again so more food was provided. Where she puts it all and how she remains slim is probably one of those questions that would never get a satisfactory answer. We did ask but all she said that it was something to do with an encounter on another plane that also was keeping her young. We finally came to the conclusion there was a worm inside her that she had to keep feeding. She wouldn't tell us her real age (and it was none of our business either) but she did say that she had been married once. She had to finally leave her husband behind on the other plane.

Finally we ended up telling the assembled crowd some horror stories, especially the story of Mad Jack, suitably embellished with effects. I used a Darkness to drop the lighting level. After the stories we returned to the blimp.

13/11/91

Next day we were approaching the fortified village. Originally we intended to go north and visit the barbarians but Pent had been so drunk, he had forgotten to tell the blimp. The village was on the junction of the main central river and a smaller one. It was ringed with palisades. Off to the east we could see the jungles of Cronus.

We jumped out to visit the village, Harp included. We met a greeting party and, after introductions we were conducted inside. They had been rather suspicious of Saydar but we soon reassured them he was our bodyguard.

The economy of this place was based on trade, such as meat from the barbarians in return for the local produce. So we traded them the parachute fabric for food and board. Robinton reckoned we should get all the food and drink we wanted if we could beat their champion in an eating and drinking competitions.

The eating competition was first, being Thistlefoote versus a rather large guy. A whole lot of pies were provided and the winner was the one who could eat the most. This wasn't a speed race so they could take their time. The locals were reckoning Thistlefoote didn't stand a chance. She just smiled and daintily started on the first one.

It took quite a while but, much to the local's amazement, she won by two pies. Her opponent just couldn't eat any more as he was completely stuffed. So was she. We could just see her stomach bulging.

Meanwhile Saydar and a tough looking guy called Animal, had started on the drinking competition. It was going to be beer but Saydar suggested that they use a rather more potent drink called schnapps. So it was a case of who had the most empty shot glasses next to them at the finish. Saydar looked at the size of a shot glass and asked for something larger. However shot glasses it was.

We watched as they downed shot glass after shot glass. Animal was ahead for a while but after

a while he collapsed. Saydar just managed to consume one shot glass more before deciding the floor was a good place to be. He then attempted to crawl to the bar for another drink. We counted up. Thirty shot glasses. The locals were impressed.

Silver did a quick reading and reckoned we should drink lots and watch out for stern women. The barmaids here did look rather big and tough. I certainly didn't want to tangle with one of them.

We eventually ended up staying the 'night'.

14/11/91

Antonio went shopping for some leather armour and traded two knives for it before we left for the blimp. As we passed over Cronus we decided we weren't even going to risk a landing, especially when Pent told us that Dreadnaught, and the other blimps, never pick up any trees here as they didn't want to chance picking up anything dangerous.

I asked about other intelligent lifeforms around the place and was told that the sandwraiths back on Tethys were intelligent. Also there were creatures in the Rhea ocean called submarines and were the female of the blimp species. What happens that a blimp would come in low over the ocean while a submarine would rise to the surface and the two would mate. The babies were born underwater and they could 'choose' whether they wanted to be blimps or submarines. Those that chose blimp would rise to the surface then wait for a blimp to come alongside and 'pump them up'. They would then become part of the flotilla until they grew big enough to fend for themselves.

16/11/91

We had passed over Cronus and were now into Mnensone, which was desert and very flat. The only feature we saw was a large range of hills, 200km long and 1km high. It was like a bump in the desert or, as someone put it, like a large snake.

According to Dreadnaught, Mnensone was a green and beautiful place about 2000 years ago until Gaea put some sandworms there. They turned the whole place to sand then ate each other until only one was left. As we descended we could see that the 'range' was made up of segments and it was slowly moving. We reckoned it was either eating the sand or filtering it.

18/11/91

Oceanus was now below us. With a name like that, we had expected a large ocean but instead it was a large expanse of ice. There had been a small sea between Mnensone and Oceanus but that was it. Dreadnaught said there had been a large ocean here, the biggest on Gaia, but it had been frozen over. Could it had been a punishment for the godling there? Pent decided to spend the time creating ice sculptures of the landscape below.

21/11/91

Hyperion again and back to TitanTown. Dreadnaught was asked to hang around for a day or two while we decided what to do next. There was a big reunion, especially for Harp, as he was the first Titanide to circumnavigate Gaia in living memory. We were taken to the Titanide pub in the centre of the tree called El Gato Incantata. Roughly translated, it meant the Enchanted Cat.

During the ensuing party we decided that we should go and see Gaia again. Maybe she would send us back. There were two ways we could do that. Either use a blimp to get as high as we could then hitch a ride with some angels up to the spokes, or get blown up the sloping pillar we

had discovered. Silver did a reading on it and reckoned it would be safe. Either way I did want to see Gaia again as I had some questions for her. What languages had she given Saydar and myself? Also what lay outside the confines of the Great Wheel?

.11.

We finally decided to take a blimp up as far as we could then use the invested Shadowwings to go the rest of the way. So Dreadnaught flew us up as high as we could under the Rhea spoke. Thistlefoote triggered all the invested Wings. Robinton ended up with a double while Antonio and Silver had triples. I decided to take another pre-packed parachute. Just in case.

We took off. Pent whistled at Dreadnaught as we ascended. Guess he was saying thanks and farewell. As we ascended up the spoke we could see trees growing out from the sides. That explained the green we saw when we were falling. After a few hours we could see what looked like a large hornet's nest on the side of the spoke. I could see specks of colour flying around. As we got closer some of those 'specks' flew out to meet us. They were Angels and they escorted us towards their nest. Just as well that was there as the single duration Wings were about to fail. We landed okay except for Antonio. He crashed into the side of the hive and fell in it.

Since Silver, Robinton and Antonio still had duration left on their wings they decided they were going to continue the rest of the way up as this hive was roughly halfway between the ground and the Hub. Thistlefoote cast the last remaining Wing on Cuddles. Meanwhile the rest of us were going to be carried up an hour later, once the angels got themselves organised. They had instructions from Gaia that they had to carry us up or suffer the consequences.

After they took off, the rest of us were offered food and drink. I managed to find some discarded Angel wing feathers. All of them had a bright sheen to them and they had different colours. The Milk of Gaia, they offered us, was ... interesting. Nutritional but rather bland. I attempted mixing in various fruit juices and only succeeded in curdling the stuff. Pent was shaking up some of the milk in one of those manna coconuts. He came up with something ... intriguing. Gaia shakes he called them.

The idea was that they would carry us up the rest of the way but Saydar objected. He wanted to be borne up in a chair. The best that they were able to offer was a perch. Finally he lay in the middle of a parachute while four angels took a corner each. The rest of us were borne by two angels each.

It took another eight to nine hours to make the ascent to the iris and I was able to snooze on the way. When we finally got through the iris, into the area with the cathedrals, we followed some sounds to a large lounge. There we found the others and Gaia watching some moving images on a large screen. I was so exhausted I collapsed into the nearest couch.

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Saydar's voice was sounding rather strange as he had found something called 'firewater' to drink. Apparently it's nearly pure alcohol. Breakfast consisted of several samples of what Gaia called 'finger food'.

I managed to ask her the questions that had been on my mind for some time. She told me there was absolutely nothing outside Gaia. Also I had been given the ability to speak to the Ironmasters. However their speech had been too high pitched for me to hear. Saydar was able to speak to

priests - such as Mad Jack.

She asked us whether we wanted to be sent home now. Robinton reminded her about what she said before about 'gifts'. She did agree that we had been heroic. (I knew it. She had been watching.) Gaia looked at us and clicked her fingers. Silver ended up with a second brain, Robinton gained a voice box with an eight octave range, Thistlefoote can shrug off physical curses ten times faster, Antonio could grow plants on his skin (he commented that maybe he should have been an Earth Mage), Pent has a certain amount of protection from normal fire, Saydar had bony plates on his head, and I discovered I could affect my skin colours. She said that we could enhance them if we wanted.

Many of us did, including me. However Silver decided that he didn't want a second brain so he asked Gaia to remove it. So she did.

Now we were ready to be sent home. Gaia told us to lie on the couches and go to sleep which we did.

When we woke up we found ourselves in a small shack containing a dark portal. However Gaia had sneaked in a few other 'alterations' as well. Robinton had acquired a pair of Titanide breasts, Antonio had grass growing all over him, Pent was looking for something to burn, Silver could feel something scratching inside his head, Saydar was dressed in a pink tutu, Thistlefoote was dressed in a slinky leather outfit that looked like it had been sprayed on, and I found I was stark naked with pictures of naked women tattooed all over me. It wasn't just the chameleon effect that caused my skin to go bright red as I grabbed for the nearest discarded parachute. Saydar ripped off his tutu in disgust so Pent immediately leaped on it and set it on fire.

We soon discovered that the rest of our equipment had been wrapped up in brown paper parcels with our names on them. I must have beaten the Alusian speed record for getting dressed. I then used a parachute to cover myself in and cut out two little eyeholes. Meanwhile Pent was having fun burning the paper wrappings while Silver was making some quick sketches of Thistlefoote.

Just then a peephole on the door opened up and one of Guild Security looked in and, after asking us various questions to verify our identity, he let us out. He then told us that Axalon, and a few others had entered the portal as we hadn't returned. The actual date was the 9th of December, exactly three weeks before the Guild meeting.

We were hurriedly taken to be debriefed then the Guild diviners got to work. They discovered that Gaia had implanted some sort of recording/transmitting devices which were currently deactivated but they still gave protection from ESP spells of less than Rank 6. That explained the fuzziness Silver had picked up earlier.

They also found that Silver had another entity inside his brain that could be surgically removed. That was arranged to be done in the next few days. Nearly every Healer in the Guild turned up to watch - me included. The creature turned out to be some sort of snake and was sentient. Currently it had the same aura as Silver.

Robinton had his breasts removed while Antonio was busy plucking grass seeds out of his skin. I arranged to have the tattoos removed as well as going into curse removal to get rid of that teleportation curse before it got me into any further trouble.

Finally that was all done and it was back into the studies. More spells to practise and perfect before the next adventure. We also got 7000sp in payment so I decided to learn StarFire - just in case.

