



a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #5
Shallow Graves

Last Session...



Sir Rel the priest of Tempus (NPC of the Allfaiths Shrine), **Hadrian** the aasimar paladin and **Serena** the genasi sorcerer all investigated the small cave system beneath Lance Rock and uncovered several unpleasant things -

1) the remains of a Black Earth cultist who escaped from the Tomb of the Delvers



2) A little blond zombie girl feasting on his corpse...

3) Another little LIVING girl in a cage who was the dead girl's sister, one of two kidnapped children

4) a maniacal necromancer who shrilly evokes "DO YOU SEE THE EVIL EYE? DO YOU SEE IT???"

5) A shrine to some kind of bizarre elemental node that vanishes upon the necromancer's death.....



6) And the same stone mask that **Larrakh the Black Earth priest** had been wearing, but Larrakh is nowhere around and they suspect that he might have been chopped into pieces, according to testimony anyway from the little girl who said that the man in the mask had a verbal confrontation with her kidnapper.

7) LASTLY, as they are leaving the cave, two griffons or hippogriffs or some such strange flying, mounted creatures fly overhead, bound straight for Red Larch about 5 miles away. Sir Rel claims that they are **Feathergale Knights**, a “club” or sorts who reside in Waterdeep but have a tower out in the Sember Hills. He sees them fly over from time to time but they never stop in Red Larch.

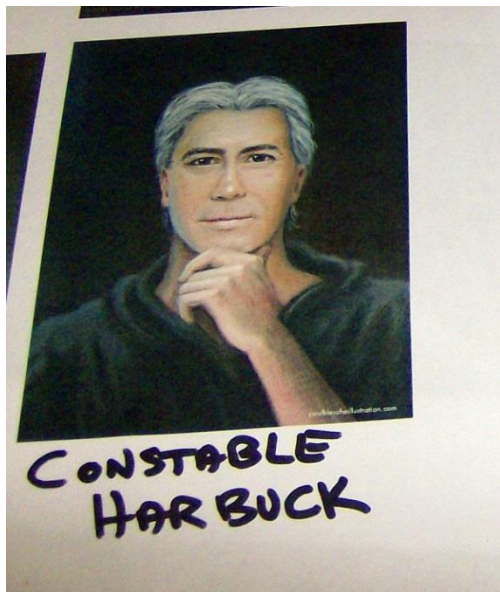


This definitely perks Serena’s interest and she remembers **Lasko’s** offer-- a flautist of the Wyndwierds-- who asked her to come perform with them at a place called Feathergale Spire at the invitation of the society who only liked to hear wind instruments. She thinks it might be worth checking out, if the others are agreeable to the idea anyway.

Now, **Brey** the elf, the regular PC, he wasn't with the group last session because he was still recovering from *Raise Dead* from his unfortunate confrontation with the Bringers of Woe in the Tomb of the Delvers.

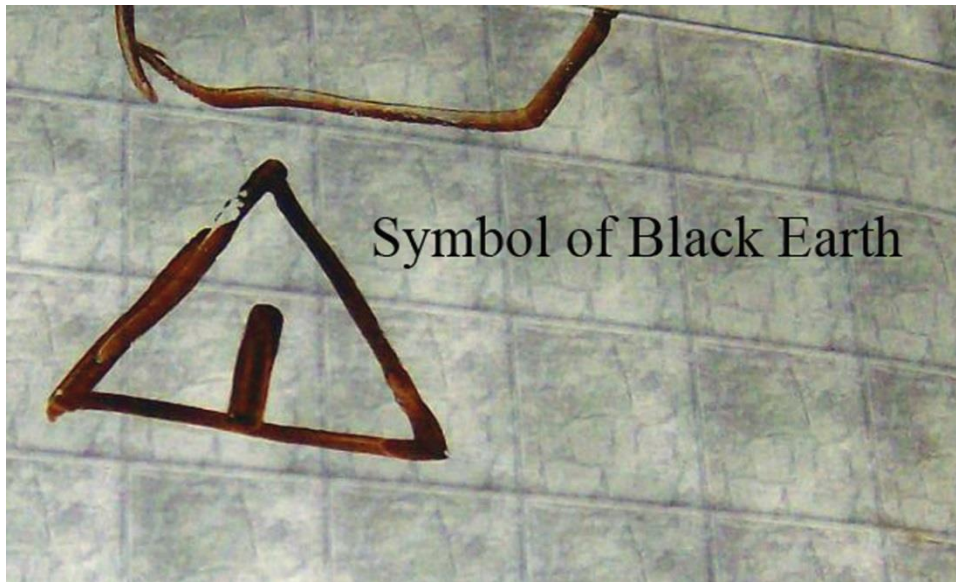
So Brey is recuperating from his ordeal at Leeya's Bathhouse, who doubles as an Emerald Enclave contact, which is the faction that both Brey and Serena share. After Sir Rel used the scroll of *Raise Dead* on Brey, Hadrian the Paladin is now an official member of the Order of the Gauntlet, and Sir Rel has mentioned to him that if they ever make it out to Beliard maybe they can find out what happened to the knight from Icewind Dale who was to be buried in Goldenfields (**Gauntlet faction mission!**).

But first things first, the PCs (plus Sir Rel the priest) return to Red Larch bearing both good news and bad for Jax's family; one of his sisters is deceased, but the other is alive (although surely traumatized). The paladin tries to ease their grief and even gives them some gold, for which they are immensely, tearfully thankful.



Next, they swing by and talk to **Constable Harbuck** again and find out what is going on with his investigation with the Believers and the Tomb of the Delvers. Well, says Harbuck, turns out that several of the "inner circle" have already fled town, which seems VERY suspicious. Wally Waelvur of the Wagonworks is gone, as well as Berthunder of the Warehouse along with his son Mickey, the one who had been trapped under the rubble as punishment. The old man named **Barnabas** who they found down in the Tomb says he thinks they're guilty of killing some of those victims the PCs stumbled across, the ones who had been sacrificially bludgeoned to

death and engraved with the rune of the Black Earth.



As far as the others of the inner circle who were implicated, such as smoky **Mellhiko** and **Ulruth** of the Tannery, they viciously deny any involvement with anything so screw off.



Constable Harbuck tells the PCs not to worry, he'll take care of this, and he deeply thanks them for uprooting the problem. Something definitely strange is going on, he's not sure what, and he wants to get to the bottom of it.

So, the PCs all reunite at the Bathhouse to check on Brey and get him up to speed on what has happened, but their elf friend is not alone. Leeya of the Enclave is there along with three dusty travelers they have never seen before,

and Leeya introduces them as **GUB**, **THEA** and **SHADAI** from Waterdeep, members of an order known as the Harpers.



[DM NOTE – we had 3 guest players from out of town for a one-shot scenario, so this session is going to play out a little different than normal]

Gub is a half-orc barbarian, Thea a female wood elf ranger, and Shadai a Halfling barbarian from Maztica who likes to eat the flesh of her defeated enemies and carries a vivisection knife in her gear for this very purpose. They are NOT your typical Harpers, in fact they are fringe Harpers and maybe outcasts, but they have a mission here anyway:

Go investigate The Hall of the Hunting Axe south of Beliard and see if they can find the missing delegation from Mirabar, or at least, some hint of them.



Now, Leeya of the Emerald Enclave is not privy to the Harper details, and vice-versa, but it seems like both groups are interested superficially in the same things – the missing delegation from Mirabar, and the PCs are now really, really pissed off at the Black Earth cult for assaulting them. This shit has become personal. In fact, while idly discussing their upcoming plans. Thea the ranger overhears the word Feathergale several times.

“Feathergale?” she asks quizzically. “So you know of **Thurl Merrosska** then? Correct? Leader of their little elite club?”

Serena shakes her. She does not.

“We are from Waterdeep, and **Thurl Merrosska** is a noble there, and one of the

Feathergale Knights at the Spire. He is under great suspicion recently for a **DEATH** that occurred at his home in the city; someone was pushed from the rooftop with his hands bound, execution style. Of course nothing came of it and was quietly wiped away, but I have sincere doubts about that man's sincerity."

"And there is more," says Leeya carefully. "A local goat herder named Larmon came into town today and has been talking about **shallow graves** he found in the hills. A week ago, he claims, these graves were not there. It some distance away, but he will lead you there if desired, and he might can show you the location of Feathergale Spire as well."

Well, this sounds like as good as time as any to find out what is happening in the region. As several others have reported, strange weather patterns have been seen the past few months, such as roiling black clouds in the distance punctuated by streaks of purple lightning, or even hailstones the size of fists falling within Red Larch, or a rain of splattering, squishing frogs that cover the streets with wet entrails. Leeya suspects that things will only get worse before they get better. There is an unbalance within Nature, she can feel it.

But Brey the elf needs one more day to rest (he's currently at -3 to all rolls), so the PCs gear up with some purchased healing potions and spend time that evening at The Swinging Sword and The Helm Held High.

While lounging in the latter, Serena the genasi is beckoned by **Lady Ghaele** of Phandelver, the priestess of the Lady of Luck who they escorted here to serve as a temporary servant in the Allfaiths Shrine along with Sir Rel.



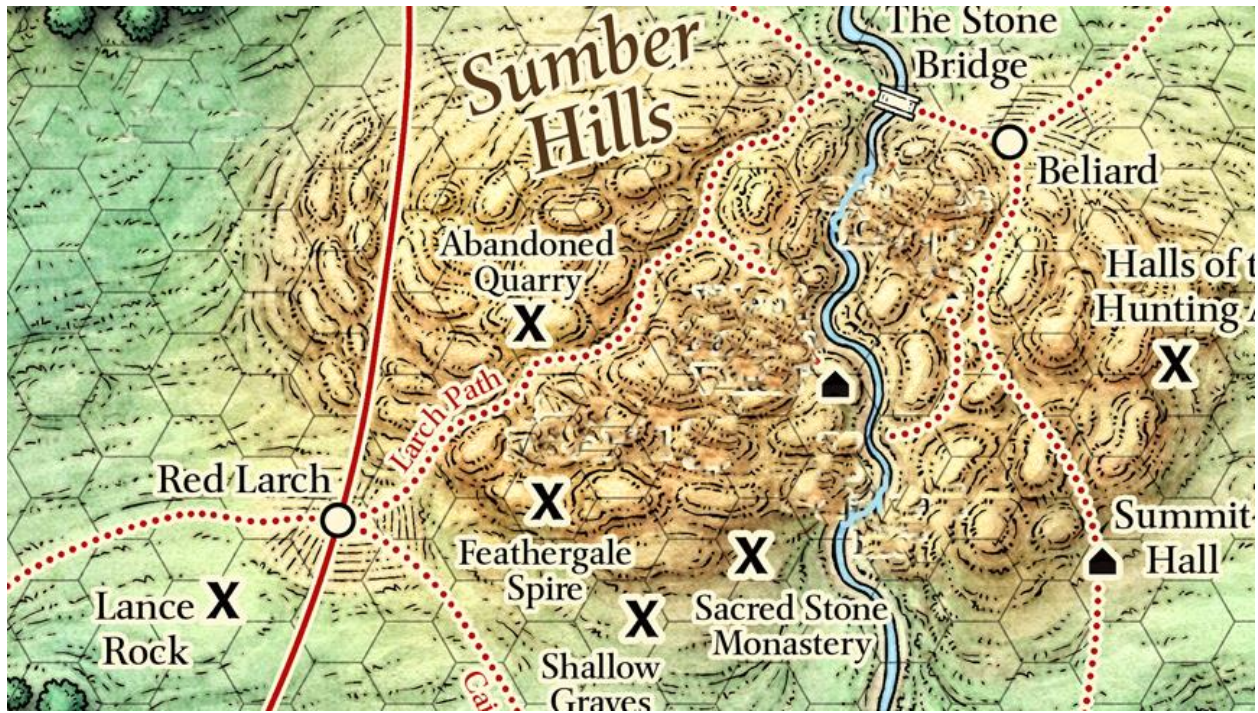
“Serena, I have had a vision today, and you were in it! I must share it with you immediately. You were flying upon a snow white griffon through the clouds, but suddenly you both were falling, twirling down, down together until the black earth yawned open and swallowed you both. I know not what it means, but be cautious. And beware the HAUNTED KEEPS. Beware...”

Mysteriously, Lady Ghaele quickly departs, leaving Serena somewhat perplexed.



The next day they set off with Larmon the goatherder leading the way to where he found the shallow graves in the hills. He's not a very talkative fellow, more inclined to spend time alone with his herd, but he's pleasant enough. It is a good 40 miles to the location so it takes them two days to get there, enough for Brey to reduce his penalties to a manageable -1.

There are no other encounters along the way, and when they finally arrive about midday, Larmon points and says, "I ain't goin' no closer. Don't feel right, no it don't."



Hadrian sends out a pulse of holy energy to detect any undead or desecration but finds none. The area is littered with broken arrow heads and javelins and footprints. The cairns looked hastily built, with furrows dug out and nearby stones tossed on top. They can't discern much else besides some clawed footprints heading north, so they elect to exhume the bodies and find out what happened.

They discover one corpse under each pile of rocks:

A dwarf in fine artisan's robes

A human female wearing the surcoat and emblem of Mirabar

A human male with a white robe and black feathers at the shoulders

A human male wearing bizarre stony armor like **rock platemail**



They have all been bludgeoned to death, save for the man in stone armor who died from arrow wounds. The female with Mirabar insignias may have been a delegation guard. The dwarf they're not sure, but the other two seem to represent Air and Earth to some degree. The group of six PCs isn't sure exactly what happened here, it seemed like some kind of ambush and a hastily burial, but by who and what they don't know.

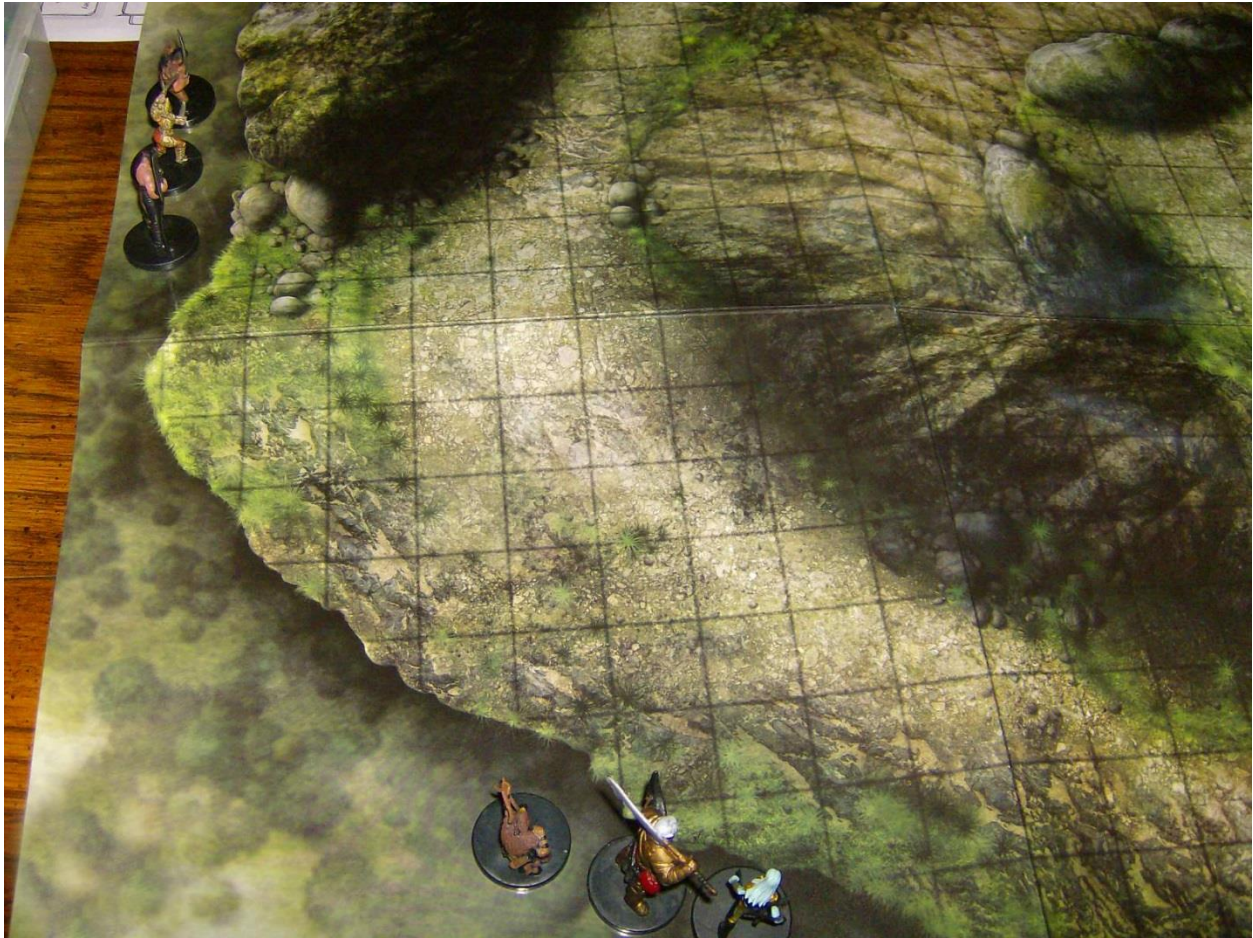
Meanwhile, Serena has climbed to the highest point and scanned the horizon and sees a distant pinnacle of rock thrust into the air with tiny gnats circling the top. It is much larger than that, but so many miles away that the details are indiscernible.

Larmon the goatherder says that the place is called **Feathergale Spire**.

Well, that destination is out of the way for the Harper group, but then again, there are some clues to the missing delegation in these shallow graves, so maybe whoever or whatever trudged northward can offer more information. They decide to investigate as a group first rather than part ways here.

Half an hour later, with the bright sun in their eyes, they suddenly see a humanoid figure crest the top of a hill about two hundred feet away. It's just a blurry shape and seconds later it is gone.

Well, that might not be good, so after a quick discussion they decide to break into two prongs and flank the ridge and try to pinch whoever or whatever that thing was in-between.



They all clamber up and find themselves looking down into more rolling ridges and hills, and on the far side of the gully are three furry faces peering at them from prone positions. Brey recognizes them immediately – **gnolls** – hyena-faced scavengers and killers.

Hadrian shouts a warning but the gnolls quickly scamper out of view, but this is followed moments later by the shrill sound of a war trumpet!

The gnolls remerge armed with longbows, followed by the largish, grayish head of a **GIANT** lumbering up the hill behind them! The now familiar *symbol of the Black Earth* cult is engraved into the stone giant's forehead, and it's already weighing a rock in its hands and picking a target. Hadrian had already advanced out into the open, shield ready, and the giant figures that makes as good a target as any of HURLS the rock.

It narrowly whistles past the paladin's head and could have decapitated him.





Laughing maniacally, the gnolls unleash arrows at him, managing to hit, and then the half-orc barbarian charges into the gulley along with the Halfling barbarian Shadai and they hunker down as more arrows streak down. Thea the ranger finds cover and starts rattling off her own arrows as the two sides try to converge at the top of the ridge where the enemies are stationed, but it is slow crawling up the hill to reach them.

As if that weren't bad enough, MORE gnolls suddenly rush from cover in other ravines, and two of are even leading a fat, blubbery dead thing that slavers and roars behind a metallic face grill. A gnoll unscrews the thing's mask and it trundles forward, blubbery limbs outstretched to slay anything it can catch!





A brutal fight ensues, but the gnolls are not the true threat, it is the giant and its club which inflicts horrible damage. Hadrian challenges it to combat and enters striking range, and within a round or two most of the group has entered battle at the top of the hill. Gub and Shadai start raging and hacking away at their foes while Serena casts magic from afar, eventually turning invisible from an unexpected blast of WILD MAGIC.



Soon many of the gnolls are decimated and their bodies tumble down the hill into a growing pile of the dead. Brey the elf ranger/druid/fighter transforms into a grizzly bear (and despite my owning many-a-bear I did not have one handy so we used an owlbear) and it stomps toward the insane stone giant.

The blubbery dead thing begins attacking Gub the barbarian, and the half-orc takes many, many dire hits that would have slain a lesser man, but in his fit of rage he shrugs off the pain like an emotionless machine. The stone giant is finally laid low and tumbles down the slope to join its dead kin, but there are still gnolls left and the dead thing that has been affectionately named [Blueberry the Blubbery](#).

Serena finally blasts a devastating line of fire with Aganazzar's Scorcher, but it unfortunately does more damage to Brey the grizzly owlbear than anyone else! Feathers and fur singed, the bear transforms into a DIRE WOLF, and despite

my also having many-a-dire wolf, I did not have any handy, so we settled for a substitute Dire Toad miniature that someone bizarrely worked well anyway.



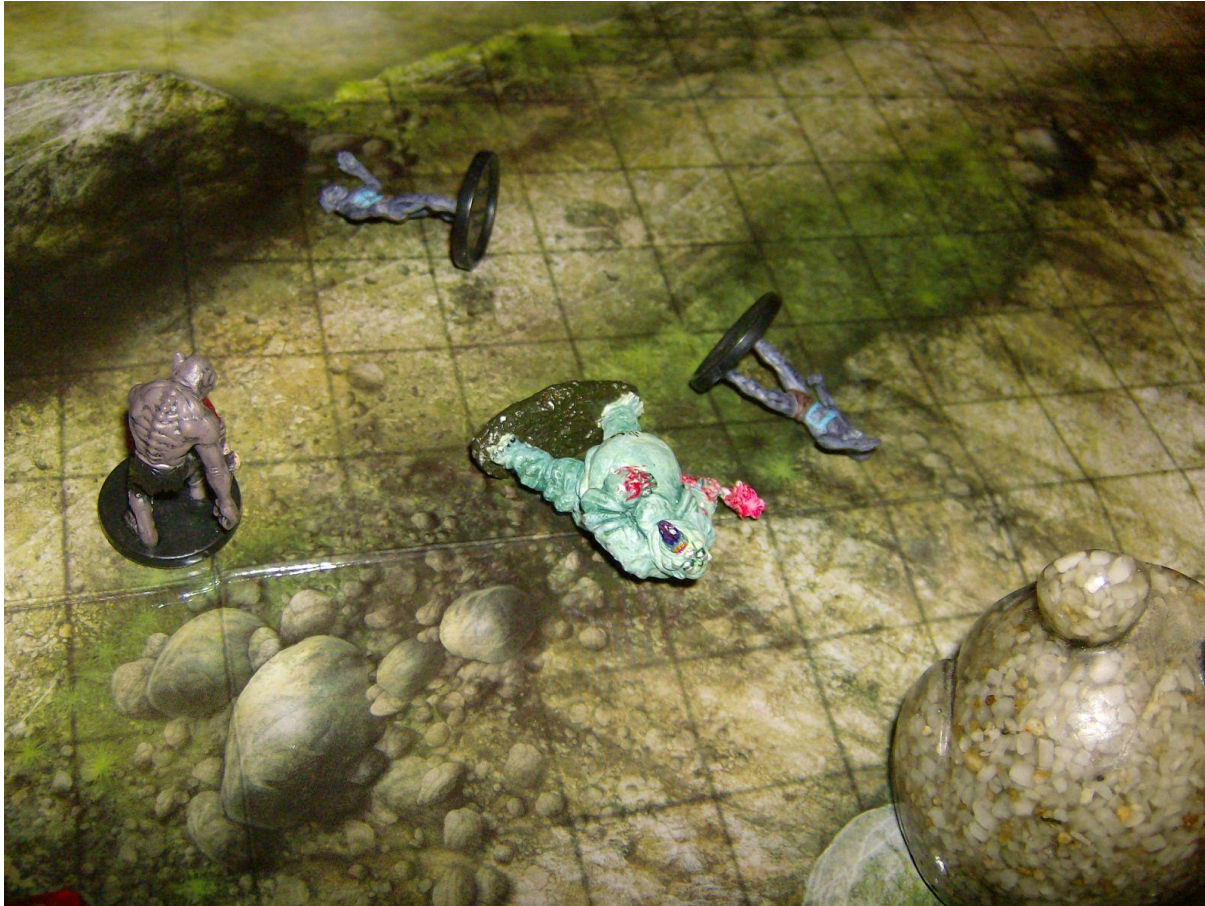
But Blueberry is not done with its surprises. Raising hands to the sky and trembling like a bowl of jello, it somehow summons more undead that rise from the ground and begin to viciously attack anyone nearby!



The raging barbarian Gub has been brought to 14 hit points, with only his DR keeping him on his feet throughout the battle. Still surrounded by dead things he starts getting squeamish, so finally Hadrian calls upon his ability to turn undead and the brilliant light of Bahamut repels all but one of the monsters.

Blueberry and the others flee, with several opportunity attacks beheading zombie things as they retreat, and a final ranged attack smacks Blueberry in the back of the head and to everyone's shock the fat thing EXPLODES, rotting bone and viscera destroying the zombies that were fleeing with it.

There is only one gnoll left alive by this point and it tries to flee, but Brey the dire wolf/toad is faster and gives chase, and the PCs try to shout down the gnoll and demand its surrender but it ignores them -- until two javelin's pierce its calves and it finally succumbs, bending down and howling in submission.



Cowering and begging amid snarls and yips, the PCs demand what it can offer in exchange for its life. The gnoll promises the treasure stash of the giant, in a cave not far away and there are no more foes there. The gnoll is prodded to lead them and soon after they find the cave, along with some gold and two small bags of dust, one of which completely desiccates Thea's tongue like a dried up sponge, and the other sends her into a fit of choking and sneezing.

They question the gnoll some more and find out why the stone giant had the emblem of the Black Earth engraved in its head...the giant was a friend of the people at the **Sacred Stone Monastery** to the east, and the gnolls just followed along because it was a powerful ally, and they wanted to rob and devour the PCs. Simple enough motivations! The gnoll also denies that they had anything to do with the shallow graves but does admit they had poked around the area for leftovers.

Well, the party DID promise the monster they would let it leave if it told them the truth, so they let it go, and it leaps from the cave howling and cackling and skids down the slope...

...only seconds later to be picked up off the ground by a massive griffon that swoops out of nowhere.

The last they see of the gnoll are its legs weakly kicking the air as the flying creature hauls it away for dinner.

Well, here is where The Harper group and the PCs decide to part ways. Serena and Brey and Hadrian have reasons to investigate Feathergale, namely that Serena was invited by the Wyndweirds, but now Thea has told them about **THURL MEROSSKA** of Waterdeep and how someone was pushed from his rooftop with their hands bound, and this Thurl is the leader of the Feathergale Society. What that means exactly they're not sure.

So they shake hands and congratulate one another on a battle well done, and the Harpers continue eastward to find the Halls of the Hunting Axe south of Beliard.

The PCs continue toward the spire and it gets larger and larger and larger until they can finally discern a couple of mounted giant vultures circling the area, and there is no way the heroes have not been spotted, and one of the vultures might even be coming straight toward you....

