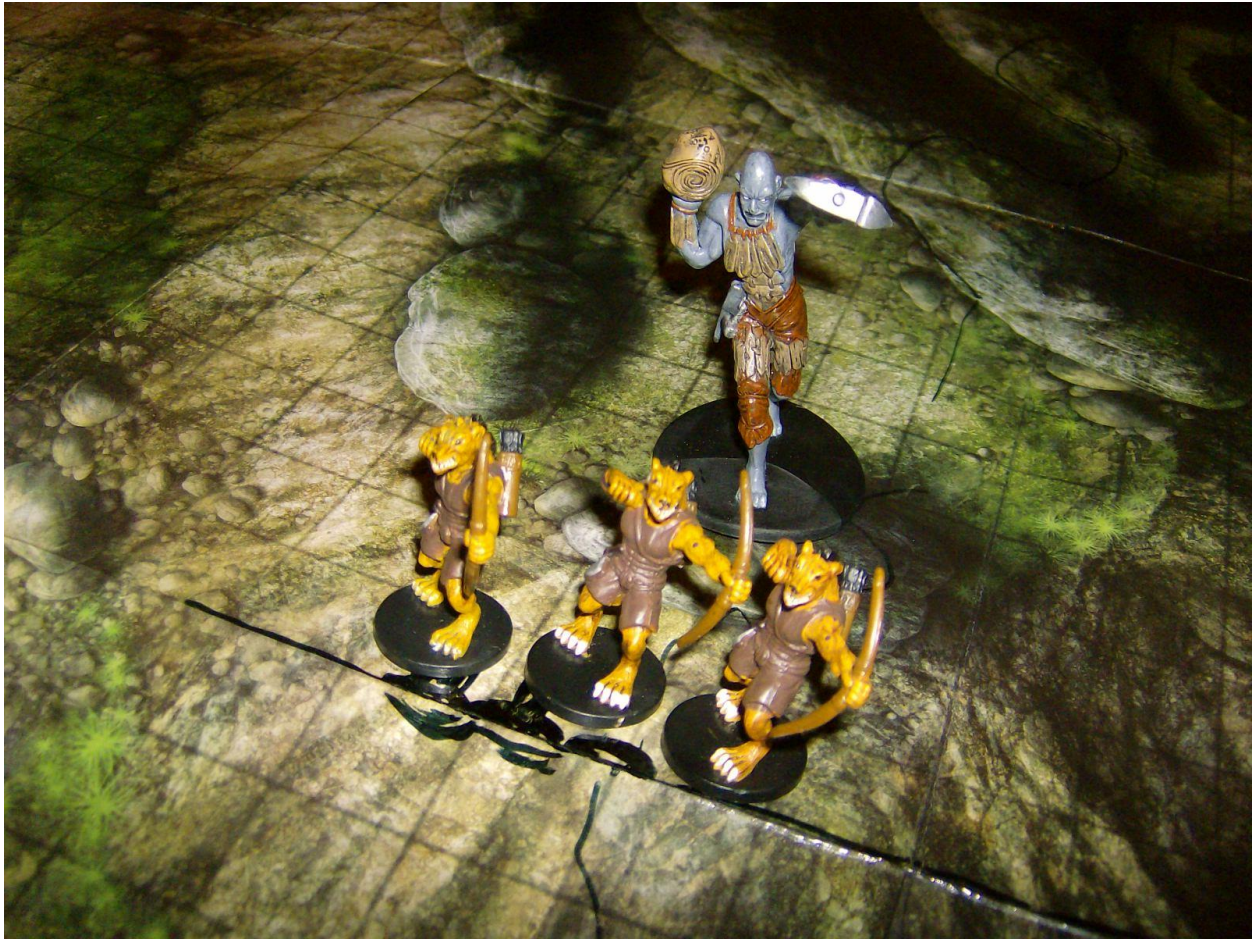




a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #6
Feathergale Spire

Last Session...



We had six PCs trekking across the Sumber Hills led by a goatherder who had found some shallow graves. The characters unearthed them, finding four bodies with the following details:

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 armor***



They have all been bludgeoned to death, save for the man in stone armor who died from arrow wounds. The female with Mirabaran emblems 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 wasn'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.

The broken arrows seemed to be of high quality, not cheap or flimsy.

Soon afterward they engaged in a fight with a clan of gnolls and their hill giant leader, a hill giant whose forehead was emblazoned with the Black Earth cult symbol, the same cult that nearly killed **Hadrian**, **Brey** and **Serena** in the Tomb of the Delves. The heroes have a real beef with these guys already!





The gnolls and hill giant were ultimately slain and their lair looted, then 3 of the PCs (one-shot players here for only one session, all somewhat barbaric Harpers from Waterdeep) continue on their mission to the Halls of the Hunting Axe to search for the lost delegation from Mirabar.

Now, one of these characters from Waterdeep has already dropped a clear hint about Feathergale Spire, namely that its Lord Commander **THURL MERGOSSA**, a nobleman, has been under recent suspicion when someone was thrown from the roof of his home in Waterdeep with their hands tied, execution style. Furthermore, Serena the genasi grew up years ago in Waterdeep and has heard the name Thurl Merosska, but she can't recall if she ever met the man.

So the group has a few reasons to be out here:

- A)** Check out the graves and see if there is some connection to the lost delegation, and it does seem to have some connections. Confusing though.
- B)** Discover if the Black Earth cultists have anything to do with the strange weather patterns over the Sember Hills and surrounding towns.
- C)** Hadrian's new association with Sir Rel and the Order of the Gauntlet has him looking toward Beliard and picking up clues regarding the dead knight from Icewind Dale who was to be buried in Goldenfields, but his corpse was lost along with all the others.
- D)** See if these Feathergale fellows know anything else; after all, they command an excellent view of the countryside and they might be able to answer questions about the shallow graves. The rumor that someone was thrown to their death from Merosska's home is suspicious, but maybe not even true, or explained somehow else.

So here the two groups part ways, but off in the distance our three core heroes spot what they have been told is Feathergale Spire, a place where the so-called club of Feathergale Knights reside in a needle-like tower. It is here that **Selko** of the Windweirds traveling musical troupe have come, and Selko invited

Serena the genasi as well after seeing her masterfully play the flute in Red Larch.



Tiny creatures soar around the spire, but then one breaks off and heads toward them. The PCs are approaching maybe a mile away and with no cover, and as the beast soars closer and closer they see that it is a huge vulture carrying a rider!



Hadrian raises a hand in greeting as the vulture soars over their heads, its rider returning the greeting, and then it heads back toward the spire. The companions continue over the dusty terrain and finally find themselves standing at the lip of an extremely deep chasm, a bridge crossing to a closed portcullis on the far side. A bell hangs on their side of the bridge and they ring it.



A slot opens in the wall and a woman's face peers out.

“Who are you, travelers?” she asks curtly.



“I am Serena,” the genasi answers, “and these are my companions Hadrian and Brey. We were invited here by Lasko of the Windweirds, who I hope made it here safely. I am a flute musician myself, and he said the brave Feathergale Knights appreciate such talent. We also slew a giant just recently, a giant with a strange symbol on its head and a band of gnollish friends.”

The woman’s features soften. “You slew that hill giant! Bravo! And yes, that’s true. Lasko and the others are here, and have been entertaining us for two days now. Excellent! Yes, do come in, we welcome you as brace guests of the Spire. I am Savra.”

Gears and chains move and the portcullis grinds up, allowing the PCs to cross the windswept bridge which

is dizzyingly high above the bottom of the chasm. Two more Feathergale Knights are waiting with Savra, and the heroes see that there is a bottom level of the Spire that has partially open gates holding more flying creatures inside. Far overhead at the pinnacle one vulture rider circles while another is perched on the parapets watching them.

Smiling, Savra extends a hand for them to shake it. “Well met, then, travelers,” she says. “Welcome to Feathergale. We are the Feathergale Knights, keepers and custodians of the Spire and region.”

Immediately behind her is a large, ominous looking battering ram in the shape of an eagle that looks like it could sweep down from the ceiling and obliterate anyone or anything trying to force its way through the doors.





The other two knights cautiously eye the newcomers but do not otherwise speak.

“You must want to meet Lasko and the others again,” she says. “Their accommodations are on the next level. I will show you. Come, follow me.”

As they ascend the central stairwell they ask what exactly the Knights do out here, and if Savra lives here.

“I do live here! The majestic freedom of the open sky and land, it is too magnificent to waste one’s life in the confined squalor of a city. I grew up in Waterdeep, I should know.”

As they climb they pass several doors, one of which is partially open and a man is peeking out, his long black hair braided with FEATHERS. He quickly closes the door. BUT...something about him sparks an image in everyone...a dead man in a shallow grave *had similar feathers braided into his hair...*



Savra leads them through a door on another level and find themselves in a richly decorated lounging chambers, replete with a roaring fire and plush chairs and rich, thick carpets and vibrant tapestries depicting mounted knights battling all sorts of horrible beasts. A long dining table is surrounded by chairs and two more armored Feathergale Knights are seated there drinking mead. They slowly lower the cups as Savra enters, nodding at them, and they watch the newcomers carefully.





She raps on the door of a room and it is promptly answered by the Wyndweird Lasko who is overjoyed to see that Serena actually came! He hugs her and then introduces everyone to the rest of the troupe, a stout halfling named **Tavist** and a slender gnome named **Bardo**.

“I am sure you would like some time to rest and converse with your friends,” says Savra. “I need to tell our Lord Commander that new guests have arrived. Please, wait here.”

So the heroes and the Wyndweirds briefly converse in the confines of a small but cozy room. Hadrian looks out the window and has an excellent view of the canyon that winds through the countryside like a deep scar.

“How have the Knights treated you so far?” Selko is asked.

[DM Note: I think at this point in the adventure the players weren't exactly sure what is going on. There's nothing BAD happening, or any reason to think there would be. So there was some roleplaying to just see what they may or may not have missed, if anything.]

“Oh, marvelously!” says Lasko. “They have a great fondness for music, and the drunker they get in the evenings the more they tip! We have made some good coin these past few nights, haven't we Tavist?”

The halfling is chewing the leg of something, they're not sure what, and wipes the grease away with the back of a sleeve.

“Eh, they're kind enough, sure. But those damn drafts! Don't tell me the drafts that get into this room at night don't bother you.”

“And the whispers,” adds Bardo the gnome. “I don't like the whispers. *Something has been whispering in my ear...*”

Lasko rolls his eyes as if they are both idiots to be complaining about nonsense.

“Oh, you two whiners. The only thing that is maybe somewhat odd are a few fellows around here that don't seem like Knights. I think they're servants. Don't see them much, they tend to keep to themselves and don't talk.”

Savra soon returns and says that the Lord Commander would love to meet these brave giantslayers! But not now, later they will all reconvene for dinner on this floor and perhaps the Wyndweirds and Serena can play for them. Serena is certainly open to this and had looked forward to it. She even brought her saucy genii outfit!

Hadrian asks if they can see the rooftop pinnacle, and Savra glances at the seated knights at the dining table. He slowly nods.

“Very well! Follow me. Up and up we go.” They ask her more about what the Knights do and how she became a knight, and she goes on to explain how she rode a pet Pegasus as a little girl in the city and she has been in love with flying ever since. There is such sense of freedom and weightlessness and power that nothing else can compare. The Knights themselves are all aerial enthusiasts and self-proclaimed custodians of the Spire, which is actually an ancient place of dwarven origin and nothing they built themselves, they have merely taken over it.

They exit onto the rooftop and to their surprise see that it conceals a hidden garden! Rare trees and plants and flowers grow in the sunlight and bubbling water circulates from somewhere in small streams and tiny waterfalls. A gravel pathway of white rocks stretches each of the cardinal direction and ends at the spiked parapets where four large, mounted brass telescopes gaze out over the terrain. There is one large vulture perched on the ledge and it becomes agitated upon their arrival, its rider trying to soothe the beast by stroking its hideous feathers.

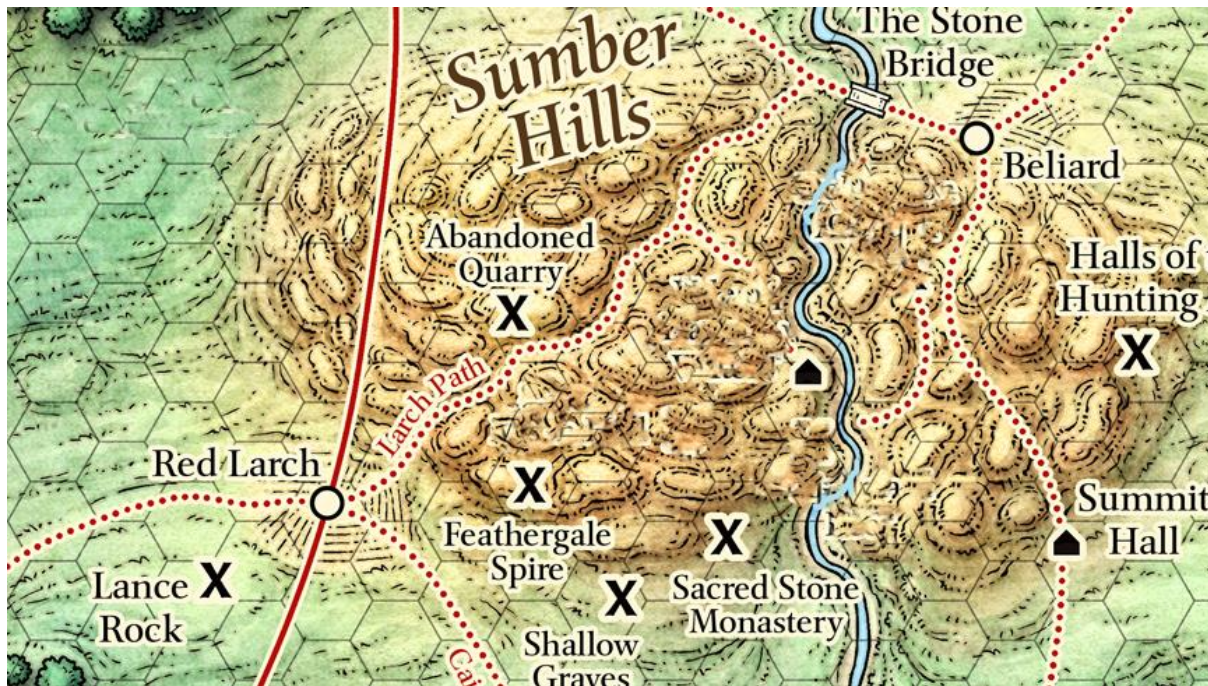


“Do not mind the vulture,” says Savra. “They’re always...nervous around strangers.”

Hadrian asks if he can look to the east, toward where strange weather patterns have been seen recently. Savra complies and the aasimar paladin tips the lens and squints into it.



Far, far away he sees what looks like a small town on the edge of a river, which Savra says is Rivergard Keep. Tiny boats are at the docks, but other than that he can't see much else. Far away however there are black clouds gathering on the horizon to the north.



They question Savra more about what the Knights do, and she seems happy to answer their questions; her deep love of the open skies and griffons and hippogriffs is quite evident and nearly infectious. Serena the air genasi can certainly sympathize; this airy realms of clouds and wind and breezes appeals to her nature as well, but she can't help but think back to Lady Ghael's mysterious vision a few days ago when they were still in Red Larch, where she pulled Serena aside and told her that she'd seen Serena riding a snow white griffon, but suddenly both were plunging down, down, down, and the black earth opened to swallow them both. She has been uneasy ever since that premonition...

"And these Black Earth priests, the one the hill giant worked for...you know of them? And where they reside?" Savra nods. "Indeed I do, but perhaps it is best if the Lord Commander speaks to you of such things."

They ask if anything else strange has happened recently, and aside from one death by the hill giant, she says that another mounted rider was slain by a beast that has become known only as *The Purple Wurm*. It comes out only at dusk or night and breathes a cloud of sticky black flame that cannot be extinguished. Upon hearing this, Hadrian feels his chest tighten and his pulse accelerates. Such a beast has embedded itself in his own life as well! Long ago forcing him along the holy path as a paladin servant of Bahamut....

The rooftop pinnacle is a pleasant enough place, but soon they descend and find that they have a room prepared for them, so they bide their time quietly with the Wyndweirds for a few hours until they are summoned for dinner with all of the Knights in the Great Hall.



Platters of steaming hot bird meat are brought out with heaps of mashed potatoes and gravy and mead and honeyed bread. It is a sumptuous feast, and as the heroes are seated they see none other than who must be the leader, **Thurl Merosska**, rise from his chair and greet all with a firm handshake.

“Brave giant slayers!” he roars, and the Knights applaud and cheer. “You have done us a great service heroes, slaying the monster that killed one of our kin. We have had to steer clear of the beast and the brutish gnolls, their arrows have wounded us too much, and we are too few to risk more casualties. But we salute you, and offer you every hospitality at our disposal.”

WELL, now that the PCs have got Thurl into a very agreeable mood, they decide to roll out some detailed questions, including WHY was the Black Earth symbol on the forehead of the giant, and what is the Sacred Stone Monastery where the gnoll claims the giant had friends. And also, is Thurl and his knights aware of the shallow graves to the south, and of a missing delegation from Mirabar. What exactly have they seen on their wide scouting expeditions?

Upon hearing the words “Black Earth cultists” the lord commander’s features darken. “There is a great evil in these hills, my friends. I spit upon their very name! Vile pretenders and haughty kills. If they love the deep black earth so much, then I and my Knights should just bury them all there! HO!” The Feathergale Knights cheer and clank cups and laugh at their lord’s joke.

As for any shallow graves, Thurl says he does not know of that. The gnoll claimed that their war party did not kill the four people in the graves, but Thurl says he cannot say otherwise who did what, or when, or how. Thurl has heard of the missing delegation, but that is only because Lasko and the Wyndweirds brought such news and gossip from Red Larch. Regardless, Thurl cannot praise their bravery enough, and he does confirm that the vile Black Earth followers have a citadel far to the east where they plot and connive, and he'd just as soon see them all wiped off the face of Faerun. His anger and disdain toward these people is clearly in the realm of blatant hatred and unconcealed violence.

Hadrian tries to see if any of the Knights are armed with arrows similar to those found at the gravesite, but he doesn't spot any. They aren't dressed the same either, these guys are clad in leather and steel and have the look of grizzled warriors. The only connection they've seen so far is the brief glimpse of a man downstairs with feathers braided in his hair.

Dinner and discussion continues for an hour or two and the Wyndwierds calmly play in the background, and Serena changes into her genii outfit, ready to dance and sway and mesmerize the men (and woman!) with her ephemeral beauty, but she doesn't get the chance. They all hear shouting from the stairwell to the roof and then thundering footsteps and suddenly the door is flung open and a panting knight screams:

"LORD COMMANDER! It's here! It's here! The purple wyrm FLIES!"

Thurl rises from his chair, a growl in his throat, his fingers clenching into gnarled fists. "That BASTARD," he croaks hoarsely. "Monster! Demon! FIEND! We slay it tonight! Tonight we slay the BEAST! Go bring my mount!"

Confusion and chaos suddenly overwhelm the Great Hall. Chairs are flung back and steel rattles and there is a glut of knights all trying to press into the doorway at once. Lasko and Tavist and Bardo lower their instruments, bewildered."

Thurl Merosska whirls around to face the PCs. "Do you join me, brave giantslayers? Join us to hunt the BEAST once and for all!"

This is all happening so fast, but Hadrian and Brey both nod their agreement, and for Hadrian this is a personal matter, for this sounds like the very monster that killed his beloved dragon Haux over five years ago...

[DM Note: The gods of synergy and backstory were at work here. I had changed the default monster of the written encounter into something stranger and more dangerous, forgetting 100% that Hadrian's backstory also involved a trio of dragons, one of which was slain, but the other two escaped. The culprit has finally made a reappearance, and Hadrian's thirst for revenge knows no bounds. Or fear of heights]

Knights plug the doorway but they are all able to eventually shuffle to the top, save for Serena the genasi who is definitely not dressed for any kind of excursion, and it doesn't seem like these guys are going to wait for her. Hadrian and Brey burst onto the rooftop gardens and see black clouds encroaching from all sides. A strong wind gusts across the parapets and in the distance they can see a long serpentine creature flitting through cloud banks, the purplish hue of its skin in sharp contrast to leathery orange wings.

Multiple griffons and hippogriffs are already being mounted, and suddenly they see a Knight bring from the stables below what must be none other than Thurl's personal steed – a snow white griffon larger than the others.

“Attack formations!” roars Thurl as he climbs atop the white griffon. He points directly at Hadrian and Brey. “Ride now for the glory of battle or death!”

Blood pumping in their veins, the two heroes see a massive owl has been fitted with dual seats and riding straps. They clamber on, buckling in as well as they can and fitting their feet into stirrups. The other knights have already launched off the roof, soaring into the cloud bank and diving down after the fleeing purple wyrm.

Hadrian sends a message spell to Serina – *You might want to get up here, girl. White griffon.*

Shit! Serena flies into their quarters and strips as fast as she can, clumsily trying to pull on her normal clothes and padding and boots, but even as she is hopping from the room on one foot and banging off the stone walls that lead to the rooftop, she knows she has probably taken too long (failed a Dex check).

She gets to the top and sees that all five mounts have swooped off in pursuit,

leaving just two Knights on the roof watching from the telescopes. She asks if she can see and pushes an eye to the lens.



The serpentine purple wyrm is trying to evade the Knights and has a good head start, diving down through the clouds and into the twisting pathways of the canyon. It is getting dark out and thunder rumbles in the distance and the occasional flash of lightning sparks in the sky.

The wind is rushing in Hadrian's and Brey's ears so loudly they can barely hear a thing, but ahead they see Thurl twist in his saddle and motion everyone to follow, and one by one the Knights divebomb into the canyon in roaring pursuit, then their owl follows suit whether they want it to or not and their screams are ripped from their throats and stomachs lurch into the throats and the chase is ON in a flurry of brisk wind and terror.

[DM Note: Thank you, thank you, thank you Mr. Baker for writing a scenario with a hectic griffon-riding hunt through a canyon. Too awesome.]

The group loses sight of the beast so they split up, but the PCs owl stays close to Thurl and his snow griffon. Each party had a 15% chance to spot the monster and then alert the others with a horn, giving them 1d6 rounds to catch up and engage the fight. Any round a PC was not involved with the fight then both the dragon and the rider and mount take damage and disengage.



The first knight finds the monster and the hippogriff and wyrm engage in a flurry of exchanged claws and bites. Claws rake down the hippogriff's chest, ripping out feathers and flesh and it squawks in agony and peels away, but the knight has a bow out and from her perch safe on the tower, peering through the telescope, Serena sees bolts of silvery magic arrows streak toward the dragon, exploding into bright white sparks. But the hippogriff is trained not to endanger its rider so it breaks away, barely giving the next closest knight time to spot their quarry and he too blows the trumpet and soars down to sideswipe the dragon with a blade.

Hadrian and Brey and Thurl hear the distant trumpeting and do their best to angle toward them, but the PCs feel like they have little control of their warmount, this thing is on autopilot almost and following the snow griffon and lord commander. Brey readies a magic spell in his hands and Hadrian unslings a bow, glad that his legs are firmly secured in the saddle.

Another knight is severely wounded and also drops from the fight and the purple wyrm flits away deeper into the canyon with the last three riders in hot pursuit, but their course finally removes them from Serena's line of sight and she sighs deeply, raising her eye from the telescope. A wounded knight and rider are slowly limping toward the pinnacle, so Serena runs downstairs and shouts to the last knight present: "They're getting killed out there! HELP THEM!"

"I can't leave my station, woman!" grunts the Knight, but she sees the desperation in his face, and he immediately pushes past her and runs up the steps. Lasko and Bardo and Tavist are still nervously standing in the Great Hall, fidgeting, then they too run up the stairs to see what all this horrible commotion is about.

Breathing hard and remembering the vision from Lady Ghael, with Serena upon the back of a snow white griffon, a griffon EXACTLY like Lord Thurl's, and their horrible dive into the earth, she's now glad that she did not reach the roof in time. If Thurl had asked her to join him atop his steed...would she have done it? And would it have led to her DEATH?

But then the next thought that strikes Serena is....*I'm all alone.*

This opportunity will not come again, so without hesitation she runs to the central stairwell and reaches the level below that they skipped. A door is there,

unlocked, and she carefully pushes it open to see a largish room that is lit only by a single lantern on a writing table.



Cool marble flagstones are beneath her feet, and she hears nothing aside from her own rapid breathing. She wants to investigate the rest of the room so she quickly trots forward to snag the lamp...but then her eyes are drawn to a folded paper on the table.



The top of the paper is exposed, and she sees a symbol drawn there. Not the Black Earth symbol, but something else. Something similar. She slowly unfolds the parchment and reads the words upon it.



Mgrosska,

We are pleased to hear of your outcome with the Black Earth cult last week! It was a glorious ambush you unleashed upon them near the Spire. We praise you as well for the prisoner you liberated. This noblewoman from Waterdeep has an interesting tale to tell, and we shall continue to -ha ha- question her further. In the meantime continue surveillance upon the Sacred Stone monastery. I want to know exactly what our enemy is doing at all times.

Your Beloved Queen, **AERISI KALINOTH**

Serena silent mouths the words, trying to understand them. What does this mean, and who is this Aerisi Kalinoth writing a letter to Thurl, in what sounds like an implication of an ambush, which sounds like it might explain the shallow graves? There are more questions than answers now, so she quietly folds the letter back into the same position and leaves it, tip toeing across the vacuous room to another door where she hear faint voices. She presses and ear to the door and listens.

*“Become the steam. Become the steam. Become the steam oh my brothers!
Become the steam, become the steam, become the steam...”*

Several voices are eerily chanting behind the door, and it doesn't make a lick of sense to her what they're talking about. Afraid that she's pushed her luck far enough, she returns the lantern to the table and races back upstairs before she's caught.

Meanwhile, the chaotic pursuit of the purple wyrm is still underway! The parties have ventured deep into the Sighing Valley now, swooping past rocky cliffs and round protruding pillars of ancient rock. A river winds through the bottom of canyon and carves a path through a natural formation, and it is into THIS that the wyrm flies, now with Thurl, the PCs, and one last griffon rider in hot pursuit. Thurl signals for them to flank the rock formation while he takes Snowy and blitzes through the dark tunnel after the wyrm.



Through luck and perseverance they've somehow managed to keep pace with the monster and not lose it. Brey tosses magic and Hadrian pegs the monster with arrows, but then the wyrm abruptly pulls up and hangs there like a vile emblem of evil, its wings beating a wind of terror that sweeps over everyone nearby and fills them with dragonfear. Screaming, the last knight on a hippogriff peels away, both mount and rider overcome. Hadrian is filled with dragonfear too, but the war owl is on a mission that no stranger on his back will deny! It barrels forward, Hadrian screaming as the dragonfear clutches his chest like a vice. He desperately tries to rattle more bow shots, but his fingers are shaking so badly his aim is wretched.

Thurl and Snowy burst forth from the tunnel, the former wielding a huge sword and the commander and wyrm meet midair, slashing and clawing and biting, until the wyrm inhales and releases a **GOUT OF BLACK FLAME**.

Thurl and his griffon are enveloped, both screaming in agony, and then seconds later the griffon drops from the sky, spiraling down, down, down to the

canyon floor, a greasy plume of smoke rising behind it. The purple wyrm flies off again, seeming like it has some kind of destination, and they know it has been hurt and hit multiple times but it still seems very much alive and VERY pissed off. There is no left in the battle now but Hadrian and Brey upon the owl, everyone else has fallen away. This time they keep their distance and finally see the wyrm swoop down to river level, barely skimming the surface like a bird of prey hunting fish, and then it hits the sandy banks in an explosion of debris and clambers up a slope and squeezes into a small black cave entrance that looks too small for its bulk, and is lost from sight.

The PCs pull the owl's reins and have it circle down to where Thurl Merosska landed. The lord commander has climbed off the mount and thrown himself into the river, screaming "IT BUUUUUURNS!" as the sticky black flames continue to ripple across his body, the water doing little to extinguish them.

The white griffon is burning too, motionless and possibly dead, but Hadrian hops off and quickly lays on hands to see if he can save the animal's life.

In the river, Thurl holds out two trembling hands, and to everyone's surprise, he CASTS a spell. Frost forms on his hands he touches his chest, arms crossed, ice creeping over his armored breast plate and freezing the whiskers on his face. Slowly, the black flames retreat and then die out.

He falls to his knees in the water and the others have to help drag him out.

"Where did it go?" he snarls. "The wyrm! Where did it go?"

"A cave," says Brey. "Across the river. Not far."

"We kill it then," grunts the lord commander, leveling a gaze at where Brey has pointed, but Thurl is close to death himself, he is not in a position to root this monster out of cave.

"Caution is the better part of valor," warns Hadrian with a hand on Thurl's shoulder. "Let Brey get closer, maybe he can scout it out."

Realizing that perhaps he was being too rambunctious, Thurl nods and then tends to his wounded griffon whose wings are horribly singed and the stink of cooked meat fills the air.

So Brey has the owl land him on the far side and he sneaks through the sand and crouches outside the cave entrance. It IS too small for the dragon, but then he sees a rotting wing not far away. He inspects it closely. He's seen this before, it is a manticore's wing, ripped right off the body from where it attaches at the shoulder, the stump riddled with maggots. He wonders now if this is not so much the wyrm's lair but just stopover it took from the former resident.

He returns and tells the others. They debate what to do, rather stay here in the canyon and camp and recuperate or try to return to the Spire, which is quite far away, they have reached the other end of the canyon by now many miles distant. The white griffon cannot fly, it is far too injured, but ultimately they decide to send Brey back and get reinforcements. This time 3 more Feathergale Knights return, along with Serena and Brey on the owl's back while Hadrian waits with Thurl and the severely wounded white griffon.

Along the way, Serena hastily tries to tell Brey what she found, the strange letter and people chanting about becoming steam. It doesn't make any sense, but now they're wondering exactly who this Lord Commander Thurl Meroksska really is, and if he can truly be trusted at all...

Next time we might find out.

