



a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #10

Deathtrap at Feathergale Spire

Last Session...

The heroes ended in a strange predicament. They had just killed seven Feathergale Knights in the Spire after Thurl Merosska and two others had flown to the Temple entrance at Knifepoint Gulley. The three birdmen, Crowkakatak, Whistlewing and Dirtbeak flew the PCs to the roof under the presumption that they were “prisoners”, and the group managed to surprise and ultimately slaughter all their foes, including the fanatical yet disillusioned Savra from Waterdeep. The PCs then proceeded to clog the lower stairwells with as much debris and beds and furniture as possible, and closed the drawbridge and arranged the bodies on the roof to piss off Thurl. Then the birdmen flew them back to the hidden bluff by the river where the other three aarokroca wait with the three Wyndweirds who are REALLY ready to get the hell out of this place.

Three hours later they see three griffons heading toward the tower at high speed. *Thurl*. There appears to be only one rider per mount.



Well, in the three hours of waiting the group has come up with a plan. They'll sneak forward under cover of heavy brush as close as they can, hoping that the Knights will be consumed by searching the tower or bodies or removing debris in the stairwells. The birdmen will fly them up, and once they're within 500 feet, Serena the genasi sorcerer will use her new **Cape of the Mountebank** to *dimension door* herself and Hadrian the paladin straight to the rooftop for a surprise attack. Brey will be carried by the others, but they're slow going with the added weight, so it will take them extra time to get there.





They enact their plan and don't see any particular commotion at the top of the Tower, but their vantage point is inadequate. No one seems to be keeping watch so the birdmen grab the heroes and they're off!

Wings pumping hard, the group clumsily lifts toward the Spire, the magic Cape around Serena as she stays close to Hadrian so she can touch and teleport them both. They finally are close enough for her to envision the top of the roof and she invokes the power of the cloak. With a puff of stinking brimstone both she and the paladin vanish from the grip of the birdmen and appear in a flash and pop of smoke on the rooftop gardens.

Their arrival surprises and terrifies the three griffons stationed here and they all immediately launch from their perches, cawing and flapping and shrieking a cacophony of noise. But the three Knights are not up here and the door the lower level is open. The seven arranged dead bodies are still here.



Hadrian and Serena hear commotion down the stairwell as if someone is thrashing through the debris. But the birds are making a ruckus and they hear Thurl shout: “Go see what’s up there! Now!” Hadrian readies his blade by the door and Serena stands well back with a crossbow in hand, and seconds later a Feathergale Knight bursts to the roof – and Hadrian’s blade catches him in the chest. The Knight staggers back down one step, wounded but not dead, and screams, “THURL! THEY’RE HERE! THEY’RE HERE!”

He and Hadrian exchange blows even as Serena sends a crossbow bolt into his leg. Feet are stomping up and Thurl and the other Knight will arrive in seconds, and it will take several rounds for Brey and Whistlewing and Crowkakatak and Dirtbeak to reach the pinnacle...



...but while being held aloft in the birdmen's arms, Brey the elf spots something far to west...

...a number of figures have emerged from Knifepoint Gulley and are hightailing it to the Spire on foot, but one of their number is actually FLYING above the others with robes rippling behind him like tattered flags. *They'll be at the Spire in no more than 10 minutes.* Gulping, Brey urges the birdmen to move as fast as they can.



It doesn't take Thurl long to reach the top of stairwell, but this time he's carrying a new weapon, a longsword of jet-black enchanted steel.

"You'll die by *Deathdealer*, Hadrian, this I swear! A gift from my Queen to YOU!"

Thurl also seems to be moving unnaturally fast, and he starts hacking away at Hadrian but unfortunately (or rather fortunately for the paladin) he misses and his blows from **Deathdealer** are deflected (and squanders the blades short rest power, advantage for a crit attack, full damage on a natural 20 plus HP conveyance to the wielder)

Hadrian and Serena hold their own pretty well, and the paladin strikes back with a holy smite, SEVERELY

injuring Thurl, and Serena casts spell as well, but the third knight has a new tactic and he whistles at the griffons and shouts orders and THIS time the birds enter the brawl! And here's where things start going downhill fast.

Serena is cut off and flanked by the griffons, both ripping and pecking at her with claws and beaks. Within seconds she is dropped to 15 hit points and probably won't survive another round unless she can escape.

Thurl manages to hit Hadrian multiple times, as well as the other knights, and finally the paladin is dropped by a lucky blow, his gaze blurring and pain filling

his body as he falls unconscious to the flagstone floor. And just THEN, Brey and the birdmen alight on the roof and offer a much needed distraction!



Crowkakatak launches at a griffon. Dirtbeak throws a javelin at Snowy, Thurl's mount, and Brey rushes to Hadrian and forces a healing potion down his throat, as Whistlewing takes to the air and prepares for a divebomb attack and Serena uses the chance to *misty step* out of danger and appear on the far side of the tower, AWAY from the griffons. There was a third griffon but it did not enter the fight and has coasted away from the Tower.

But brave Thurl Merosska has been sorely wounded up to this point, staggering and bleeding and grimacing, **Deathdealer** still clutched in both hands, but he doesn't see Whistlebeak dive until it's too late. The birdman's javelin pierces his chest, pushing all the way through, and with blood frothing from his mouth, Thurl Merkossa loses the grip on his blade and sinks dead to the ground, finally defeated.

A brown griffon is injured enough that it abandons the fight as well, but Snowy is a terror, ripping into any non-Knight it can reach. Still, the bird is wounded by multiple attacks but has incredible stamina, continuing to resist as best as it can, and when another Knight is dropped and only a final Feathergale Knight remains, he abandons the battle, scoops up Thurl's dropped magic blade and hauls himself into Snowy's saddle! *I'm gonna be the new Lord Commander!* he thinks.



The mounted griffon takes three opportunity attacks from nearby foes they are insufficient to slay it, and both rider and bird plunge off the roof and soar down into the canyon.

“GET THEM!” yells Hadrian, who has staggered up with 7 hit points and attempts to heal himself further with holy magic.

The aaracroka are ON it. They plunge off the roof too, and although they're fast they're not as fast as the griffon. Brey and Serena fire ranged weapons and one manages to pierce the knight, but he's still alive and strapping into the saddle. He'll be out of range within seconds, but the birdmen manage to barely get within javelin range and Dirtbeack hurls his last attack...and HITS.

The pointy end kills Snowy, and with a gurgling shriek the griffons loses momentum, its white feathers stained grotesquely pink, convulsing, and then both mount and rider start spinning dizzily toward the canyon floor.



But the last Knight isn't out of ideas quite yet.

With the words of a featherfall spell upon his lips, he manages to release the straps and leap from the saddle before hitting ground, where the griffon erupts into an explosion of blood, feathers and viscera, but the Knight lands easily moments later and starts sprinting, throwing glances over his shoulder at the approaching birdmen, waving Deathdealer as if that will somehow thwart their pursuit.

It doesn't. Whistlewing divebombs and kills him, running him all the way through with a javelin and then they retrieve the magic sword and return to the roof.

[DM Note – This session might not have been survived without the presence and aid of three aaracroka. They were awesome, and rolled really, really well].

“We got company coming,” says Brey. “A regiment from the east, at least ten of them. They'll be here in probably five minutes.”

“But the portcullis is closed, how will they get in?”

“I don't think that will be a problem,” says Brey. “One is flying, and the others can probably levitate right up. We can't stay here. We've been hurt too badly.”

So that's that. The cultists from Knifepoint Gulley might have seen the birdmen chasing Snowy, but they DON'T see the aaracroka haul Hadrian, Brey and Serena off the roof and they fly westward in the opposite direction, dipping down over the hills and winding back and forth for at least a mile or two until they are sure they are out of sight and can't be easily tracked. Their enemies will have no idea which direction they went.

They rest for an hour, discussing their options and wondering what the best course of action is. There are many options, not any particular one standing out as “best.”

- A) Head back to Red Larch and recuperate there and touch base with their faction allies of the Emerald Enclave and Gauntlet.

- B) Continue on to Beliard far to the NE and continue searching for clues regarding the lost delegation from Mirabar. That will take 5 days.
- C) Return to the Spire after they're recovered their strength and reassess the danger.
- D) Try to enter Knifepoint Gulley and the Temple proper, as Crowkatak suggests, so that the deeper, true evil can be rooted out. If not, they'll just keep repopulating the Spire.

But the group needs a safe place to rest for a long evening, and out here in the wilds of the Sumer Hills there are FEW safe places. Ultimately they decide to head to the cave where the gnoll led them about four session back. It's not much, and it stinks of gnoll, but it is a concealed shelter and probably not overtaken by another creature yet.

Dirtbeak stays with them while Crow and Whistle return to the hidden bluff to check on the Wyndweirds and others and to do some reconnaissance and watch the Spire for new developments. They'll wait for the cover of darkness to maximize their chances.

So the group of four starts trudging across the barren hills, trying to remember roughly where that cave area was.



It all looks about the same, but they have a fairly good idea, it's only maybe been two days since they first arrived at the Spire [and the 5th session we've spent there!]

But one random encounter roll later and they're not alone in the wild.

A shadow passes over them, a HUMAN shadow with arms spread wide, and then they hear a horrifying shriek and flap of wings and some grotesque flying beast is diving toward them!



“A peryton!” shouts Dirtbeak. “Defend yourselves!”

Brey’s nature check reveals this is an unnatural monster, and from what he remembers from lore, they are a species created from cursed humans who are now chaotic and evil and exist only to eat the hearts of living, intelligent beings.

The monster lands in their midst, clawing and biting Hadrian, and then launches away again, avoiding all opportunity attacks, readying itself for a second violent divebomb – until Serena hits it with acid orbs. The monster is plucked from the sky, a sizzling, ruined hunk of burned meat and wetly falls to the ground, dead.

So they ultimately make it to the gnoll cave, find it empty, rest for the night and wake up refreshed in the morning and full up on everything. Hadrian has taken the sword Deathdealer but is not comfortable wielding it; the thing has a MEAN look to it, and is possibly cursed or evilly aligned, so he just tucks it away.



They send Dirtback back to the hidden bluff to get an update (it’s only about 5 miles away) and they find that when he returns that Crowkakatak witnessed half of the team from the Temple left the Tower this very morning, leaving roughly the other half stationed there.

After some more discussion they all decide that there’s nothing immediately in Red Larch that they need, they’re already here so they might as well take advantage of the situation as best they can and take the fight to the enemy in carefully weighed hit and run attacks. It’s worked well so far!

So back to the Sighing Valley they go, taking the longer roundabout way to avoid detection from the Spire which still has mounted telescopes. And just to make things more interesting, for the first time Hadrian the paladin summons his mystical warhorse mount! The creature is Intelligent (6), can do math (in-game joke I can't even explain), has a telepathic rapport with his master within 1 mile and can only be killed temporarily, in which case another ritual will just return it.



So a whole lot of options are tossed around, between assaulting the Spire or the Temple. They don't know how many enemies are in the Temple, but they're pretty sure the ones in the Spire are sparse, so that's where they decide to hit first. Again they wait for cover of darkness within the hidden bluff (and in the meantime the Wyndweirds and the other three birdmen head to Red Larch) and as nighttime falls they see the top of the Spire is lit by bright lights so any approach will be seen by air. And then the PCs begin Phase One – the paladin's warhorse is given a magically lit stone to hold in its teeth and

instructed to gallop through the open areas between the Spire and Temple, drawing as much attention as possible and sending telepathic reports back to Hadrian.

And what do you know, it works.

Three trumpet horns blast from the top of the Spire, MUCH louder than before, they must have gotten a new horn, and three similar blasts echo across the valley from Knifepoint Gulley. The portcullis is dropped and a squad departs to chase down the bobbing light in the darkness, and several guards detach from the entrance to the Gulley and they all converge in pursuit of the horse that they're not sure is a horse but they're following anyway because it looks freaking suspicious.

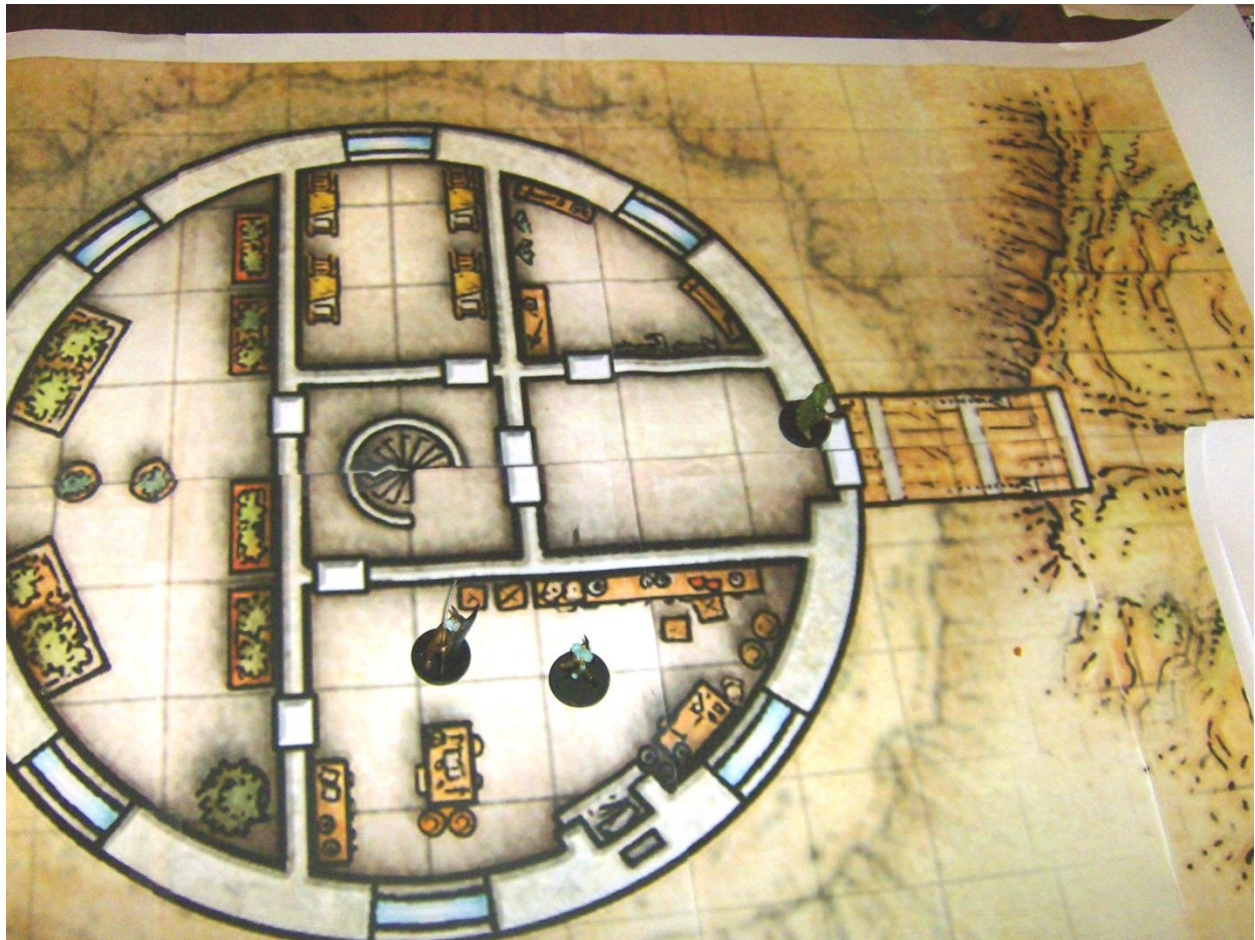
As Brey is sneaking up to the entrance the birdmen station themselves down below out of sight and once AGAIN Serena and Hadrian get close enough to use the Cape of the Mountebank and this time they pop into the kitchen on the lower level that has the mechanism to open and close the portcullis.



Pots are simmering on the stoves as if about to prepare a meal for a small number of people. No one is here though, and Serena messages Brey to ask if he sees anything.

One guard. Front entrance.

And then Brey sends an arrow through that guard's throat, instantly killing him.



Everyone quickly converges at the entrance by the hawk battering ram, which they STILL want to use again to obliterate anyone coming in the door. They can't believe how well this is all working out, and as far as they know, no one knows they're in the Tower. Hell, the enemies haven't even really seen them, they've killed almost everyone that knew about them, leaving behind only a trail of destruction and corpses.

And if they can have it their way, the Spire is about to become another deathtrap.



Hadrian and Serena descend the central shaft to listen at the stable level, but they don't think any mounts are left here, either slain or driven off. They hear nothing. Sneaking up the same stairwell, Brey hides in shadows and stealthily maneuvers toward the next level – but then hears footsteps coming down.

Seconds later a hooded madman careens around the corner, utterly surprised by the elf, who just smiles, and then stabs him the guts. Brey immediately retreats, rushing past Hadrian and Serena who are coming UP the spiral steps, even as the wizard rushes DOWN, his hands crackle with energy, and he unleashes a *lightning bolt* at the paladin and sorcerer. Damage is low, but they can't let him do that again, so Serena hits him hard with a chromatic acid orb and half his face melts off and then Hadrian takes his head clean from his shoulders, his noggin rolling down the steps to the bottom.

Next level, Hadrian keeps charging up and finds another guy at the top of the

Feast Hall, and Hadrian instantly beheads him as well. One more level to the rooftop and Brey sees a FINAL cultists obserbing the chase after the warhorse in the valley, and he sneaks up and dispatches him as well. And sure enough, there IS a new huge horn up here, loud enough to alert the entire valley and too large to be easily carried.



So once again, the Spire is cleared out and the enemy is none the wiser.





Here is probably the funniest part of the whole session, and it won't translate well here, but the PCs decide to make the tower look as NORMAL as possible. They stir the pots so they don't burn. They set the tables and make it look all nice. The beds are made and everything is tidy except there are CORPSES EVERYWHERE. Hell, I think they might even have stationed the dead cultists at the dinner table with utensils in hand. Anyone that finds them is going to think this is some demonically haunted hell house.

Meanwhile, outside, the dudes chasing the warhorse eventually catch up and manage to kill it, which isn't a huge deal because Hadrian can just summon it again. The horse vanishes in a puff, which is certainly odd, and the cultists slowly return to their respective sides.

When the three enter the Spire they're slain instantly and added to the growing pile of dead and dismembered. For the bad guys, Feathergale Spire certainly HAS become a deathtrap!!!

The session was near a close so the last bits involved just strategy. What next? Where? How? When?

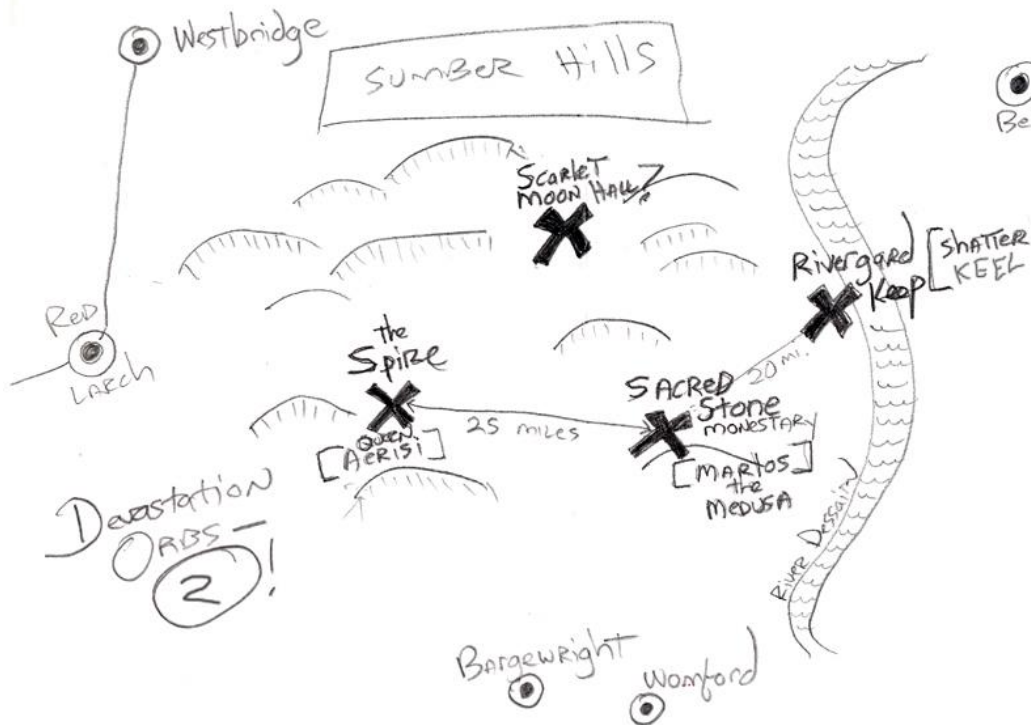
If the Temple keeps sending out reinforcements the PCs are going to keep cutting them down until they level up a few times ☺

But will the Temple of the Howling Hatred do that? Will then send some BIG GUNS after them, maybe Queen Aerisi herself? Or will they hunker down and not leave the Temple and put as many guards as they can spare at Knifepoint Gulley. Crowkakatak is adamant that if the evil is not removed from the core then it will only return ever stronger. They'll keep recruiting.

That's certainly plausible, but the PCs don't know if they have the strength and ability to take on the Temple. Hell, they nearly died on the rooftop fighting Thurl and the griffons, which was extremely difficult.

LASTLY, they seriously consider framing the Black Earth cult for these last murders at the tower. A pile of rocks there, a rune-inscribed Earth symbol there, some muddy footprints, etc. etc.; maybe they can pit the Air cult against the Earth cult in a bloody reprisal.

Granted, that is a long shot. The Sacred Stone Monastery is 25 miles away, according to Thurl's map anyway, and it has Marlos the medusa somewhere in the vicinity, and that ain't cool. Even then, there is no guarantee of a full on war with the other, or even if the Air cultists will fall for the ruse.



The PCs even consider taking some of the bodies and burying them in NEW shallow graves and leaving an obvious trail to follow, yet another ruse. It is still the middle of the night and many hours until dawn so they have time to plan, but not much.

Queen Aerisi is either going to retaliate or insulate, but it is unlikely they will continue sending smallish squads to Feathergale. From here on out it's going to be all or nothing. And despite telling Crowkatakatak they'd help him, getting the hell out the Sighing Valley and heading to Beliard while they still can might be the best option after all.

And that's where we stopped.

[DM Note – This was the fifth consecutive session in and around Feathergale. That's probably around 12 hours of gameplay, much more than I expected, and they're likely to start there again next time. I think the players secretly want to claim the Spire as their own and deviate from the main adventure and just be wealthy, sadistic squatters ☺]