



a 5<sup>th</sup> Edition D&D campaign

**SESSION #11**  
**Rivergard Keep**

## Last Session...

The heroes wiped out seven or eight cultists of the Howling Hatred who had taken up temporary residence in Feathergale Spire. The bodies of the previously dead Knights, Thurl and Savra and all the others left on the rooftop have been tossed from the parapets in a ceremonial post-mortem dive to the bottom of the chasm where they splattered.

But the PCs are in somewhat of a quandary. What do they do next? Retreat or hide or press the attack while their enemies are confused? Do they have the strength to take on the Temple itself, as Crowkatak suggests, or should they try and lure more of the enemy out into the open and pick them off as they have been doing? Maybe some stronger forces will be sent forth and this will leave the inner recesses exposed? They don't know.

The heroes and birdmen discuss their options for a while and it is ultimately decided that they want to frame the Black Earth cult against the Air cult as they already know they are diametrically opposed and hate each other. To do this, they arrange the remaining corpses around the feast table, piling rocks on the bodies and plates and drawing the Earth symbol in ash upon their foreheads. They make deliberate tracks out into the hills toward Knifepoint Gulley to create a fake "campsite" where cultists might be hiding, then they return to the Tower and close the portcullis.



Once on the roof, the horn is destroyed so the Spire cannot alert the Temple again and one of the heavy brass telescopes is pried from its moorings and flown to the hiding hole, and

then all the birdmen fly them back once again to the safety of the hidden bluff that they have returned to so many times before.

But they realize this shallow little cave can't be used forever, and is completely not defensible. If discovered they'll be trapped with their backs to a wall and no escape....



So they wait, keeping watch in turns throughout the night, getting a long rest in, and just before dawn Brey the elf sees a flicker of white light at the entrance to the Temple.

*WOMP WOMP WOMP WOMP WOMP WOMP WOMP*

A ball of scintillating light appears to be a free-floating orb unattached to anything or anyone else. It floats quickly across the landscape like a bobbing lantern while emitting a peculiar hum. The heroes watch it carefully, unsure of what it is or its purpose.



The orb approaches the tower, circles it from bottom to top and then disappears momentarily on the backside, only to soon be seen flickering through the wooden slats inside the structure, inspecting it from within.



After ten minutes or so it leaves and returns Knifepoint Gulley and vanishes into the cleft.

“What devilry was that?” asks Crow.

“I suspect some sort of remote scrying,” suggests Brey. “Perhaps they were...watching. We cannot stay here much longer.”

But they still decide to wait a little longer until the sun has fully risen and see if anymore reinforcements are sent out. They're using the brass telescope pried from the tower so they can easily see what comes in or out.

And just as the sun is rising, dark clouds suddenly form over the plateau at Knifepoint Gulley and three streaks of lightning rumble through the clouds in three evenly spaced bursts.



Now they DEFINITELY are not sticking around. They suspect some kind of ritual has been cast, but for what purpose they cannot fathom. The wind picks up in the canyon and briskly moans across the Howling Plateau, and two armored men are seen standing watch at the Gulley entrance, but other than that nothing else happens.

“What now then?” says Crowkatak. “We have lost the element of surprise. But I promise you, if the Temple proper is not destroyed they will only recruit more forces within the month and repopulate the Spire.”

Brey, Hadrian and Serena agree that this is probably true, but the prospect of entering the Temple is just too risky. They

only way they defeated the Feathergale Knights was by separating them into manageable chunks, and even then it was brutally difficult. Encountering Queen Aerisi on her own terms in her own kingdom sounds practically suicidal. The PCs have no clue what is waiting for them down there.

Thus begins deliberations on their next course of action, and it does not involve infiltrating the Temple. Crowkatak is somewhat disappointed in this as he suspects that the region will soon be inundated with even worse things than strange storms, but he consents to their decision.

They have several options, and the goal of finding the lost delegation from Mirabar, missions dictated by their respective factions - **The Emerald Enclave** and **Order of the Gauntlet** - are at the forefront.

So they consider the geography of the region, pulling out Thurl's crude leather map that shows the position and names and locations of places they have not been yet, including The Sacred Stone Monastery, Rivergard Keep and Beliard and even Goldenfields, the final destination for the delegation before they vanished.

And speaking of the vanished delegation, they have reason to suspect that Queen Aerisi might have ONE prisoner in her clutches, if her letter to Thurl Merosska is any indication...

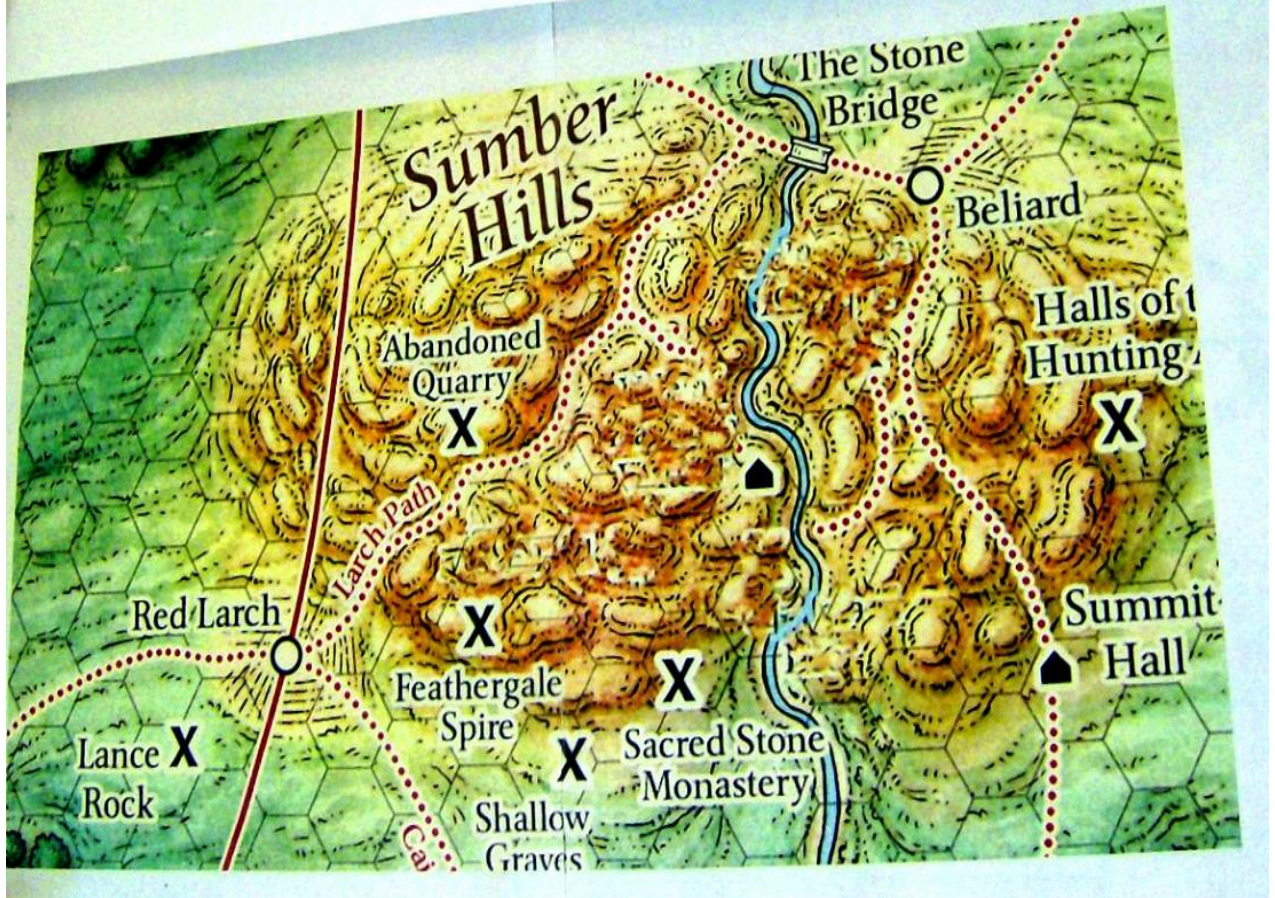
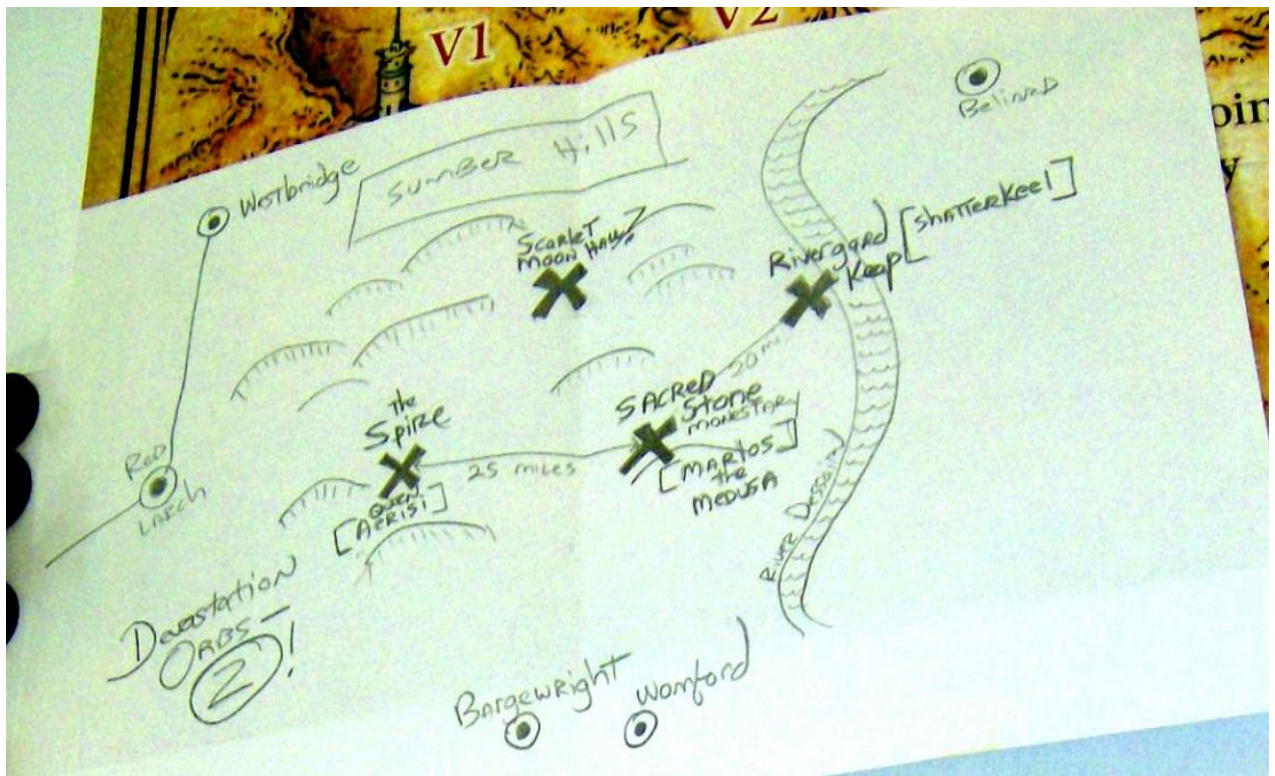


Merosska,

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





Crowkakatak and Dirtbeak and Whistlewing initially decide to retreat further into the canyon to distant caves, but when it sounds like the PCs could be gone for weeks – or indefinitely – they decide that the risk is just too great and they will need to leave the canyon as well and return home to their tree citadel beyond Goldenfields. Their clan is probably worried about them. Still, they will need to wait until the other three return from Red Larch where they hopefully arrived safe and sound with the Wyndweirds trio.



So the PCs options at this point include heading back west to Red Larch and recuperating and resupplying; head north to the Larch Trail and meander to the Stone Bridge and Beliard; or trek east toward the little town (?) called Rivergard and see if they get passage across the Dessairn River and then angle up to Beliard.

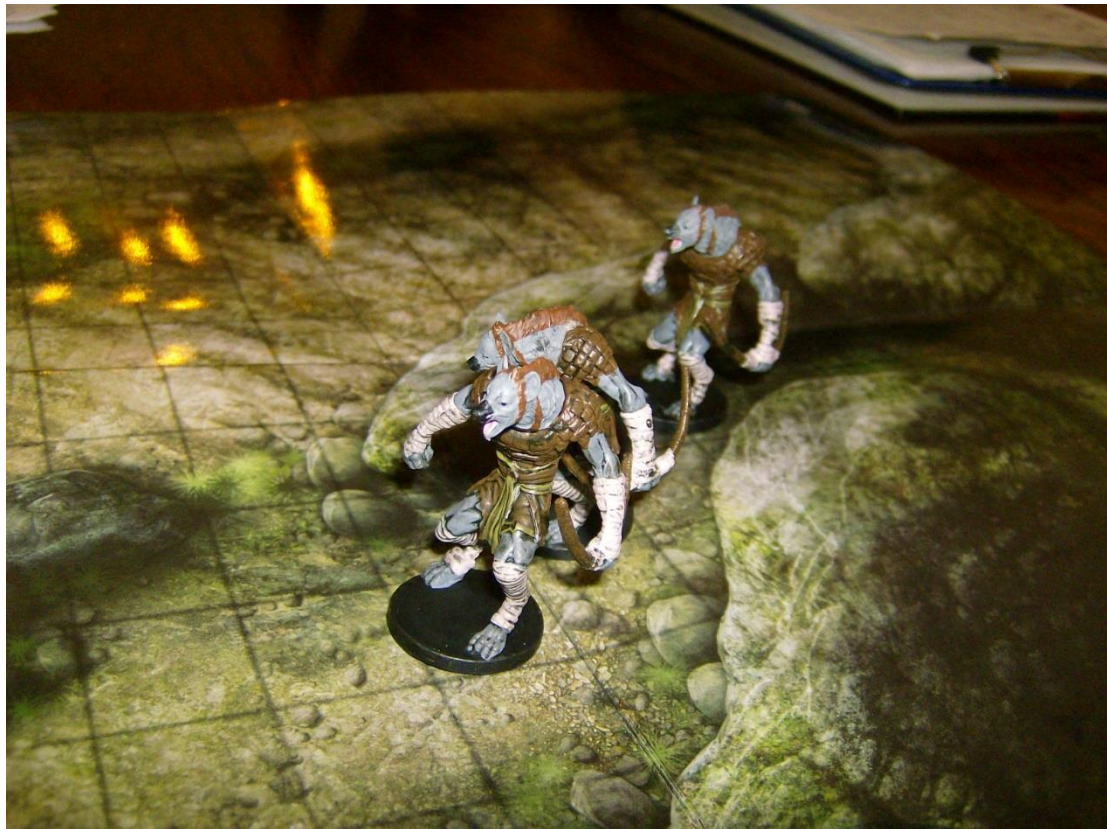
This last route will take them close to the Black Earth Temple and perhaps they can further confuse the Air cult by making their tracks deliberately easy to find, in case they are followed. They DO suspect some kind of retaliation from Queen Aerisi, they think they framed the Black Earth well enough, but how long and in what manner that retaliation will take shape is unknown. And they can't wait around to find out. Maybe they'll return here another time and find everyone dead!

[DM Note – Despite my preparations, I had little idea of what would happen this session and played it by ear, even with the scintillating orb that was just a possibility that I decided on as a logical extension of the enemy's tactics]

They finally decide to head east to Rivergard and try to reach Beliard via that route and continue the search for the delegation. The birdmen fly them out of the canyon and they genially part ways, perhaps to never see each other again, but hopefully so as they all proved excellent allies in their fight against the Howling Hatred.

So eastward it is, and that's going to be six encounter rolls, and they roll a HIT on the very first day, a pack of three chattering gnolls that emerge from a trail among the rocks...

The PCs tried to hide as quickly as they can but they're spotted anyway. Howling, the gnolls instantly find excellent cover and draw their bows, setting the stage for a surprisingly interesting and difficult fight.





**JINDRINN**  
Assassin Paladin

**MONSTER**  
ENEMY

**IPSOINI ATTACK**  
LAW/DOCTOR  
L1

**L1**  
L1



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Brey, the stealthiest of the group, somehow manages to roll THREE 1's in a row, and in a more dangerous situation this really could have jeopardized his life. He is pinged a few times by arrows, but the hard part was getting within range of the gnolls who are ducking and firing behind the boulders.

[DM Note: in retrospect I should have had them dropping prone to further decrease your chances of hitting them]

The heroes break apart, trying to find cover in their own ways, and Brey manages to get an *entanglement* spell dropped on the hyena-men.



Hadrian closes the distance, sweeping into cover behind a clump of rocks, his shield raised. Serena tries to fire crossbow bolts at the gnolls and Brey clambers over some rocks and casts a spell, but this only draws an enraged gnoll to him in close quarters, digging a spear into the elf.



All the gnolls escape the grasping vines but this doesn't stop Hadrian from finally entering sword range, and his blade cuts them down quickly, and even as he rushes to help Brey, the rogue/druid/ranger transforms into a bear and BITES the gnoll's head clean off.



The gnolls yield nothing of value and they continue on their way to Rivergard, and fortunately they encounter nothing else the next few days and finally come within sight of the gigantic, impassable Dessarin River and skirt it northward until they see a small fortified keep abutting the water.





They spot a guard on the sentry wall and make no attempt to hide, loudly announcing themselves and politely requesting passage across the river. They don't know what this place is exactly, but it WAS on Thurl's map for a reason, and it appears far too small to be a town.

He directs them to the west wall where the entrance lies, and another guard opens a slot and demands to know why they're here. Again, they claim they just need passage across. The slot closes and a minute or so later the door is opened and now four human guards are here to escort them inside. They're armed but weapons are sheathed.

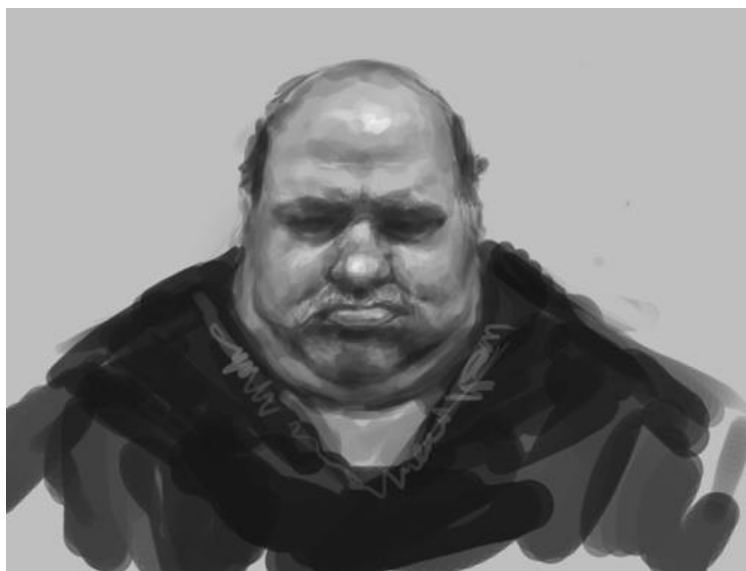


"We're travelers from Red Larch," Hadrian explains. "We have traveled a long ways and only ask for a way across as we head to Beliard."

"You'll have to ask the boss about that. Grimjaw. Follow me."

The guards escort them through the gate and it closes behind them and they

find themselves in a small fortress smelling of smoke and fish and unwashed soldiers.



**Grimjaw** is seated in a large two story meeting hall, mugs of empty ale spread around him. He's gruff looking, overweight and hairy and scowling as they approach.

“What’s your business here?” he growls.

They repeat their intentions as before, safe passage across the river.

Grimjaw glares at them and starts asking questions – where are you from? What have you seen? Is there news from Red Larch? On and on he keeps asking questions as if to glean some hidden truth from the PCs. They finally do mention a missing delegation and how they're tasked with looking for them, and Brey asks if HE knows anything about the delegation from Mirabar.

“No. And I'm doing the asking here. You just answer.”

They do manage to find out that Rivergard Keep is here to protect against **river pirates** that sometimes plague travelers along the Dessairn, which is their main duty.

Ultimately, seemingly satisfied - for now anyway – Grimjaw says he'll take them across but for FIFTY gold coins apiece, that's the price, and it is a steep one. But they pay it anyway. But it will have to wait for a long while, the river is too high from the recent storms. It probably won't take until dawn, but possibly. Until then the PCs can wait in the barracks or wait around outside.

[DM Note – I had unfortunately not read this section of the book very closely so I had to do some quick skimming to get a better gist of the situation].

Not feeling particularly threatened by the inhabitants of the Keep, the heroes split up after seeing the barracks. Serena hears some music playing in the common grounds around a campfire and she asks to join them with her flute. Hadrian sees a chapel so he checks it out, and Brey wanders down to the docks and does some fishing.

Twelve pews are arranged in the chapel and Hadrian sees three people around a pulpit at the back of the room where a strange symbol is scrawled on the wall, like an X connected at the bottom by a straight line.

The woman, who is rather eccentric looking, instantly spots him and says, “You there. Come in and sit.”

Hadrian compiles, not saying a word, and walks to the front of the room and sits. The bored looking acolytes stand at either side while the woman begins a long, meandering sermon that sounds like she's either trying to CONVERT Hadrian to some water-related religion and worship of something called **OLHYDRA**, or she's assuming he's already a fervent follower and just come here for a refresher course on subservience and fanatical devotion.



She drones on for an hour until Hadrian is nearly bored to tears, but he remains attentive and finally he is dismissed with a curt, "Leave now," by the priestess. He closes the door behind him. OK THEN, so this is definitely another elemental place, this region is rife with them.

Meanwhile at the campfire, the drummers and whatnot finally break up but an older dirt caked woman approaches Serena timidly.

"You are not like the others," she whispers. "What are you doing here, in this place?"

"Seeking passage to Beliard, that is all."

The old woman shakes her head. "The **Crushing Wave** is nothing to be toyed with. You must leave. You must leave now!"

Puzzled, Serena asks her who SHE is and why doesn't SHE leave, but the old woman says she is just a simple commoner like some of the others who live here and they are used as cooks and cleaners and laborers, and she has nowhere else to go. At least she feels somewhat safe in her meager duties.

Liking this less and less, and suspecting that they have unwittingly wandered into a very dangerous place, the genasi quickly finds the others and they reconvene on the docks.

But while fishing Brey has spotted something unusual of his own – what appears to be a hidden alcove beneath the banks guarded by a locked gate through which water swishes and churns, as if it is some secret dock.



“We need to leave,” says Serena.

Hadrian agrees, telling him about the verbose priestess in the chapel.

And at THIS point I determined a completely random roll because I just wasn't sure how Grimjaw and the soldiers would react to their presence and questions or if they would flat out betray them and attack. I had to idea and I left it to chance - a 30% chance that the PCs would get passage across the river with no trouble.

And a 70% chance of really, really bad trouble.

They rolled low.

Evening comes and the water is calmer and they are taken across the river by a sullen ferryman who doesn't speak and they are dumped on the far side and make camp not far from the Keep, wondering if they indeed have just escaped from Rivergard by the skin of their teeth....