a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #9
Assault on Feathergale Spire
Last Session...

The PCs barely made it out of the Spire alive, not that they were hurt badly, they were relatively uninjured, but they were heading out into the Sumber Hills on foot, DURING a fury storm, AND about to be hunted by the entire regiment of Feathergale Knights. They never could have escaped. However, they had one savior... Crowkakatak the Aaracroka.
Six birdmen swooped down and hauled them into the Sighing Valley, dipping into the darkness and rain that obscured them from pursuers and hiding in a predetermined cave beneath a tree-shrouded bluff. There they breathlessly waited as the storm rumbled and crashed overhead, the Lost River rising higher and higher and higher and higher, but they were not discovered.

So Brey, Hadrian, Serena, the six Wings of Battle and the three Wyndweirds are all beneath the bluff until dawn when they spot three griffons take off from the Spire, including Thurl’s snow white mount. Crowkakatak has already informed them that the Feathergale Knights are NOT the benevolent men and women (woman) they appear to be, but rather fanatical followers of Queen Aerisi in the Temple of Howling Hatred, a cult dedicated to the Elemental Evil Deity of Air: **Yan-C-Bin**. Crowkakatak and his comrades are sorely opposed to their presence but lack the power to directly confront them. This is where the PCs come in – with their combined strength perhaps they can root out this vile presence and bring at least some small amount of peace to the land.
So, their plan this misty dawn is to assault the tower while Thurl and two other Knights are away. Hopefully they can do this quickly before they return. Crowkakatak, Dirtbeak and Whistlewing agree to haul the PCs to the top of the Spire while they pretend to be captured and unconscious. Perhaps this will give them just enough element of surprise. After all, the birdmen have been very careful to hide from the Knights. They even come up with a brilliant lie: “Feathergale Knights- we were brought here by the FURY STORM! Heed our words!” Given their love and reverence for flying things, perhaps it will persuade them not to attack...

So that’s the plan, and along with Serena’s newly acquired Cape of the Mountebank, they birdmen clumsily haul their heavy cargo toward the tower. They’re spotted immediately by vultures and telescope, and with a screech, the nearest mounted bird angles toward them, the Knight’s sword drawn. He swoops around the group, the PCs limp and unconscious in the birdmen’s arms, and the vulture returns to the top of the Spire, the Knight blasting a
horn to alert the others. Soon three more armed Knights are on top of the parapets armed with crossbows.

The birdmen hover just outside, barely able to keep the heavy PCs in their grasp and Crowkakatak croaks: “Put down your weapons! We come from the Fury Storm, and we bring your foes as prisoners. Let us land in peace!”

The Knights gasp. Flying things from the freaking fury storm! YES! They step back, weapons lowered, but one of the Knights heads downstairs. That leaves three, and the birdmen gently drop the heroes to the floor of the garden rooftop. Eyes still closed, they listen carefully to what happens next.

“Who are you?” growls one of the Knights. “How did you come by these men?”

But before Crowkakatak can explain with another contrived lie, Hadrian the paladin opens his eyes, yanks out his blade and swings at the guard! Unfortunately the guard jumps back from the prone aasimar and two Knights immediately stab him, one of them critically. It’s a VERY good thing the PCs were amped up with Aid and Inspiring Word. Serena and Brey are up in a jiffy too and the top of the tower turns into a brief but hectic brawl.

Serena doesn’t waste any time, she feels the rage of the winds enter her and energy crackles in her eyes and down the length of her arms. She changes in stature, growing in a frightening manner like a storm surge, and she positions herself such that she can unleash a lightning bolt upon all three Knights in a row.

Two of them are electrocuted to death, their screams echoing into the morning air, and the last is so sorely wounded that he falls to his knees and accepts Hadrian’s offer to surrender.
“Who else is here?” demands Hadrian, his sword at the Knight’s throat. The Knight sneers. “There are eight. Five of us Brothers, three of the Hooded Ones. You should not have come back here. Thurl is sure to find and kill you!”

Well, Hadrian and the others can’t disagree with that statement, but the paladin knocks him out anyway with the butt of his sword and they tie him up.

While all of this has been going on, the vulture and hippogriff on the parapets have been going CRAZY, cawing and flapping and getting very agitated as the heroes slay their masters. The bolt of lightning from Serena scares them off and they circle the Spire but don’t attack, but the PCs are afraid all of the commotion is going to attract attention from Knifepoint Gulley. Besides, the Knight they first encountered blared a horn, but the entrance to the Temple was still pretty far away, they might not have heard.

Well, the birdmen have a few magical abilities at their disposal, one of which is Speak with Animals, the other is Avian Friendship. They decide to befriend one of the vultures if possible- and it works! The bird returns to the tower and nuzzles against Crowkakatak like a feathery kitten.
The other bird, the hippogriff, they just ask to leave, and it does, but where it ultimately goes they don’t know, just so long as it isn’t hanging around the tower in a frenzy.

While all of this is going on and they’re searching the bodies, one of the birdmen and Brey suddenly glimpse an eyeball peeking at them through a crack in the door that leads downstairs.

“Hey!” shouts Brey.

The eyeball vanishes.
Growling, Hadrian rushes around to the door from where he was and KICKS it open, hoping to bash anyone behind it down the stairs, but whoever there has fled. He gives chase immediately. Brey and Serena follow, along with Dirtbeak and Whistlewing, but Crowkakatak stays up top in mental/magical contact with Serena via message cantrips so that he can watch if Thurl returns.

[DM Note: each PC is controlling 1 birdman. The three of them together have a pool of around 60 hit points]

They reach the level of the Feast Hall – but see no one. All of the doors are closed and anyone could be in the rooms. They decide they need to clear this out before they descend any further. Everyone stations themselves outside a room and then they simultaneously kick the doors in! Nothing. And no time to search. They run back to the stairwell and descend the spiraling staircase to the next level of Thurl’s personal chambers.
They decide to split up here to prevent the enemies from bunching up or setting a trap if they get too far ahead. Hadrian and Dirtbeak go down to the portcullis main level while Serena, Brey and Whistlewing inspect Thurl’s chamber.

Hadrian sees that the doors are all closed, one of them locked, and the portcullis is still raised and closed. He opens the door to a room he has never seen and it is solarium of some sort…and Savra and a Knight are waiting, weapons drawn.

“Hadrian, Hadrian…” she says almost sadly. “Why did you not join us? WHY? It would have been perfect. You and Serena, you were born to help our Queen. But know that I cannot let you leave here alive.”

“Same here,” says the paladin, and he immediately launches at her.

Dirtbeak enters too and attacks the Knight with a javelin.
The battle is not a particularly long one; Hadrian outstrips Savra by far in terms of strength and expertise, and he soon sends his blade all the way through her gut. Her expression is one of agony and disbelief and she slides off the blade, holding the gushing wound, and as she sinks to the floor and her eyes flutter closed, she whispers, “Oh, Thurl, save us...” She dies, and Hadrian genuinely does feel sorry for her. Dirtbeak and Hadrian dispatch the last Knight, and then we jump back to Serena in and the others.

The genasi sends a telepathic message to Crowkakatak – “You see anything yet.”

“Not yet. But hurry!”

Brey listens at the door where Serena originally heard the chant, “BECOME THE STEAM. BECOME THE STEAM.” They hear whispering again, but the
words are indiscernible. Serena flips over a table for cover and Brey opens the door to a room filled with thick steam and two hooded cultists of elemental Air.
The Hurricane is behind a flipped over table, his arms raised and the words of a spell on his lips. The other is behind a tub of hot running water from which steam has filled the chamber. But before the cult leader can get his spell off, Serena COMPLETELY immolates him with a twinned Chromatic Orb that hits with a critical. Screaming, he is instantly turned into a pillar of flame and dies.

The other cultist is killed too, but the PCs notice a curious anomaly – part of the steam seems to roil and coil and detach from the rest of the stuff and quickly jet out the slats in the window, as if it were a separate entity.

They search the bodies quickly and find two solid gold pendants with the elemental Air symbol engraved upon them.
They reunite, missing only one enemy now after having dispatched seven, assuming the Knight was telling the truth about their being eight. Brey tries to pick the lock to a room but fails and breaks the pick off. He does open the door to the weapon's room and finds it the same as last time, fully stocked but non-magical. The kitchen is empty, and that just leaves one more level – the stables.
Two griffons are here, flapping and shrieking as Hadrian and Brey enter, but they don’t see anyone hiding in here. There are eight stalls. They head back up and Hadrian bashes open the door that Brey broke the lockpick and finds a room with four bunkbeds and four locked chests. They quickly loot them for goods and then return to Thurl’s chamber for a more extensive search.

And here, on the same cluttered table of papers and quills and inkwells, Serena finds again a most interesting clue – a hand drawn leather map.
[DM Note – one reason I'm posting so many pictures of these maps even though nothing specifically happens is because they're so damn detailed and interesting!]
It's a map of the region, depicting what looks like the name of 4 keeps, including the one they're in now, and the respective rulers nearby. They do NOT like the sound of a medusa at the Monastery. The Devastation Orbs are a mystery as well. They take the map and keep searching the room, ultimately finding a *magic rope* and a *magic shield*.

Back to the roof now where Crowkakatak and his vulture buddy keep watch, but there’s still no sign of Lord Commander Thurl.

And this point there is a LOT of discussion about what to do next. Wait for Thurl to return, or head out and find the Temple? Crowkaktak insists that the fight must be taken to the temple and the Queen herself, otherwise they will simply repopulate Feathergale Spire again. He and his brothers will help the PCs accomplish this, but it won’t be easy.
Several plans unfold, including filling the stairwells with junk and bed frames and chairs to make navigation to impossible. Or opening the portcullis. Or jamming the door to the roof and waiting inside. Ultimately they decide that waiting is not the best idea. Whoever might have escaped the Tower, such as that sneaky steam thing, it might alert Thurl. He could come with reinforcements, and then the PCs would be trapped inside. So they leave a little present for the Lord Commander instead – 7 bodies spread equilaterally around the roof.

Why you ask? To PISS him off, that’s why. To get his rage out of control, and when Thurl is mad, such as attacking the Purple Wyrm, he makes tactical mistakes. Now, Hadrian still feels bad about Savra, so he says a prayer over her and covers her with a sheet. (Did you all kill that last guy? I forget.)
And then they get the hell out of there. The birdmen fly them back to their hidden cove where the Wyndweirds and the three other birdmen wait, and then they watch for anyone to return to the tower.

And three hours later, sure enough, Thurl's white griffon is seen heading straight toward it. Now, they can either wait and see what happens, or sneak somehow into Knifepoint Gulley and see what this Temple thing is all about. Queen Aerisi might not know what hit her.

And we stopped right there.