a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #12
Beliard
Last Session...

Our heroes, still deep within the Sumber Hills, are searching for evidence of the lost delegation from Mirabar at the request of their respective factions, the Order of the Gauntlet and the Emerald Enclave. Brey the elf and Serena the genasi are far more familiar with the Enclave, whereas Hadrian the paladin is a new recruit to the Order upon the behest of Sir Rel in Red Larch. Still, Hadrian feels a deep sense of commitment and devotion to the faction and his doing his best to uphold his end of the bargain and serve them with honor.

Their quest has brought them through Feathergale Spire, flirting dangerously close to Queen Aerisi in the Temple of the Howling Hatred, and most recently to crumbling Rivergard Keep, which to their disappoint they learned is yet another bastion of evil devoted to the elemental cults, this one led by a portly man named Grimjaw.
Somehow, they were able to escape without getting into a brawl, although they chalk that up to luck more than anything else. If word of their “deeds” at Feathergale had gotten this far then they surely would have been detained and/or killed.

But no, they find themselves dumped on the east side of the Dessairn river and they make camp not far inside the wooded area to keep watch on Rivergard overnight to make sure nothing suspicious is going on there, at least what they can discern from that distance at night, which won’t be much.

Night comes and they build a small fire and huddle under thin blankets for warmth and take turns for watch, listening to the peculiar chirps and howls and rustlings of the night creatures, but none attack and nothing particularly odd happens at the Keep during the wee hours.

The only thing they see are two men patrolling the battlements with lanterns in regular intervals, and sometime around midnight DRUMMING begins, slow rhythmic beats somewhere inside the walls that lasts about an hour and finally stops.
They wake fairly refreshed on a dim, drizzly morning, the Spring air crisp and cold, pack their things and head northward on a faint trail toward Beliard where they hope to find some more clues.

They don’t encounter anything else along the way, but midmorning, with the drizzly rain still falling, they see some indistinct black shapes littering a clearing the distance. Brey sneak[s forward and the others wait, and the elf soon spots a number of crumpled dead bodies, some dead horses, a burned wagon and a shattered coffin, its occupant pulled forth and savaged by predators. In fact, all of the bodies are mutilated, and by his best guess they’ve been here a couple of weeks and are very decomposed and torn apart by wild animals to the point that it is difficult to tell what killed them in the first place.

But a few bodies with **rocks piled on them** offers a clue. Black Earth.
This is undoubtedly the remains of the delegation from Mirabar, and the insignias on the soldiers clarify that. They are all human, even the dead knight from Icewind Dale, except for ONE man in robes who was an elf. Other than that it seems like the delegation might be missing a few members, such as whoever was taking the magical seeds to Goldenfields. This would have been a GREAT time for *Speak with Dead*, but no one has it.

They scan the area for a potential ambush, and finding none, they bury the bodies in a shallow mass grave, except for the Icewind Dale knight who they bury separately as he still needs to be returned to Goldenfields to fulfill his dying request and the goal of the Gauntlet’s mission.

The group continues to Beliard, having many more questions now, and hoping that someone in Beliard who last saw the delegation can shed some light on the matter. The trail soon converges with another more traveled path that ranges north-south from Beliard to Summit Hall, and the three heroes wearily trudge up the muddy road until they finally crest a hill and see the settlement of Beliard below.
The town is larger than Red Larch and seems to have an awful lot of cattle in the streets. No one pays them much attention and they wander eventually to the central commerce area, as they have quite a few items to pawn off that they’ve been collecting during their travels.

But Brey spots something interesting across the street, a place called “Eidon’s Eatery,” in the same stylized lettering that was coded upon Hyleelya’s Bathhouse (“Enter and Enjoy!”) in Red Larch – it is an Emerald Enclave contact point.

So first they trade a whole bunch of stuff and are even able to convince the proprietor to identify some of the magic items they’ve found and have no idea what they really do, including Thurl’s Deathdealer sword.

The shop owner says OK, but that’s going to cost them some money and take some time, so you can wait for a while or come back in a few hours. Although he seems trustworthy enough and honest in his appraisal of various gems they’ve traded, it is too risky to just leave a pile of 5 or 6 magic items in a stranger’s hands and wander off, so Hadrian agrees to stay in the shop (glaring firmly at the shopkeeper the whole time, his hands clasped before him) while Brey and Serena check out this Eidon’s Eatery and the potential Enclave contact within.

The doorbell chimes as they enter the small café. There’s an elderly man behind a counter and the place smells of savory meats and mead and smoke. A few people are seated around and a bar wench is serving them drinks.

“Greetings!” says the man. “I am Markus, son of Eidon! Have ye come to the Eatery to fill your bellies? I’m I have just what you need!”

At this point Brey and Serena give the discreet **SECRET GANG SIGN OF THE ENCLAVE** – (“Yo, we are Enclave mother******!”)
He leads them through a door in the back, closes it and instantly says, “My name is Markus Damaskus. BUT, who are you and what are you doing here? Just because you claim yourself Enclave, I don’t trust anyone right now. Who sent you here and why?”

Brey and Serena have no reason not to trust this man, so they tell him their names and about their contact in Red Larch, Leelya of the Bathhouse, as well as Constable Harbuck, and they mention the Black Earth cult in the Tomb of the Delvers, and the Feathergale Knights in the Spire and Queen Aerisi in the Temple of the Howling Hatred and a possible prisoner, a noblewoman from Waterdeep, and LASTLY and probably most importantly they mention that they found the missing delegation, what was left of them anyway, not far to the south along a side road heading toward Rivergard Keep. Which, also, seems to be a bastion for the Crushing Wave.

Markus listens attentively, and then says, “Alright, follow,” and leads them to another private room and closes and bolts the door.

Markus has a LOT of information to share, which I will bullet point summarize here:

- Yes, the delegation from Mirabar passed through Beliard about two weeks ago. Comprised mostly of guards, it did have several important members, including two shield dwarves, a female elf from Waterdeep and another male elf. It also had a human with a shaved, bald head, but
Markus will get to him later.

- The delegation actually had a SECRET mission known to very, very people, not even Leelya. The four members, the dwarves *Brudlenor* and *Rhundarth*, the moon elf *Teresial*, and the male elf *Talbok*, were special scholar/sage/druids on a specific mission to unearth the mystery of the elemental chaos in the Sumber Hills, under the suspicion (and perhaps divinely guided?) that it was much, much more dangerous than anyone expected. These four individuals has a special plan to deal with whatever they found in the hills, but they never made it there.

- Another man, the bald man with tattoos, seemed to be another guide or scholar of some sort, and Markus could have SWORN he recognized him but could not place his face. A few days later, with startling clarity, he remembered. It had been years since he saw him, and then he had hair and no tattoos on his face, but it is a man who used to go by the name *WINDHARROW*, a Zhentarim assassin from Yartar and someone on the Enclave’s Most Wanted List for crimes against man and nature.

  Too late Markus realized this and the delegation had already left, and was probably already ambushed and kidnapped. Did Windharrow lead them into an ambush? Possibly, or maybe the Black Earth cult intervened.

- Disturbed by this revelation, Markus tried to decipher the letters and script upon Windharrow by scribbling the icons on to a rough sheet of paper, finding out later that it was an old dead language, but the letters said over and over, “*Be with the wind, become the sky, meld with the clouds, sink with the steam, fly like a zephyr, light as a feather...*” and so on. Oh yeah, the PCs know exactly who this bastard is allied with now.

  The man is unmistakably easy to identify, and once the PCs explain to him about Queen Aerisi, Prophet of Air (a name Markus has not heard yet), Markus suspects that Windharrow might be her right hand man.

  If they see this guy, be careful, he is very dangerous, deceptive and manipulative, and is probably no longer associated with the Zhentarim, having moved his allegiances to the Elemental cult of Air.
Well, this is quite an info dump, and Brey and Serena are nearly overwhelmed and don’t know what to do. The situation is worse than they thought, and it seems like Talbok the elf is dead, and the two dwarves and the elf woman from Waterdeep are missing, as well as Windharrow. Teresial is most like the prisoner in the Temple of the Howling Hatred as discussed in Aeresi’s letter to Thurl.

The dwarves, who knows, they might be dead or somehow prisoners in the Earth Temple or Water Temple.

It seems like the Black Earth cult ambushed Windharrow and the delegation, killing and kidnapping almost everyone, then the AIR CULT in turn ambushed the EARTH CULT at the shallow graves, and from there the last prisoners were scattered to the wind (no pun intended). This is all getting rather complicated.

But why was Windharrow with them, other than a deliberate ruse to lead them off course? Unless he is some kind of super traitor spy, or maybe he escaped, or...well, they don’t know, there’s not enough information.

- Somehow, says Markus, the cults heard about the secret mission of the delegation to unearth the presence of the cults in the region, so they nipped it in the bud to maintain their secrecy. This is the last that Markus heard about the situation and it was very little he knew, only that some cults were active and secretly operating in the hills.

- BUT WAIT! There’s more! Myriad other problems plague the region!

  a) Rumors of an elemental weapon stolen by the Hand of Yartar in Yartar, unaffiliated with the cults and they’re trying to pawn it off to the highest bidder.
  b) The Zhentarim faction is highly active in Bargeright Inn to the south.
  c) Iceshield orcs have already swarmed to the east and burned down some farms.
The PCs learn a few more things by questioning Markus:

- **The Halls of the Hunting Axe** are not far from Beliard, and they are the crumbling surface and subterranean remains of the ancient dwarven city of Belsimer, and home to the tomb of King Torild Flametongue. Vast riches and monsters are said to be there, but the HARPERS faction doesn’t want anyone looting the place, so they regularly send patrols out to make sure intruders stay clear.

This is particularly interesting to the party because in **Session #5 – Shallow Graves**, they had 3 NPCs with them who were Harper allies, and their mission was to investigate the Halls of the Hunting Axe and see if it had anything to do with the missing delegation.
• Somewhere west of the Dessairn River and north of Rivergard Keep is a place called the **Vale of the Dancing Waters**, a secret and sacred Temple of Dwarves that used to be the summer palace of King Torild Flametongue, and these dwarves are now affiliated with the Order of the Gauntlet, just like Hadrian.

This is so much to take in, and the players spend a long time deliberating what to do next. It sounds like they’re going to have to take on one of the outposts, whether Rivergard Keep or the Stone Monastery (but frankly the name Marlos the Medusa scares the crap out of them), or head back to The Temple of the Howling Hatred and rescue at least one prisoner they know is there –**Teresial** the moon elf noblewoman of Waterdeep.

Whew.

Well, to do ANY of this, they’re going to need some help. And with some metagaming knowledge, they ask Markus if he has suggestions. Well, it turns out that quiet, peaceful and attractive Beliard is a popular retirement home for old adventurers, and he might know of some hired muscle who could help them. Furthermore, a priest in the Temple of Tyr might be able to lend a hand and spell as well.

Sounds good, and the PCs round up an older priest and grizzled warrior to help them root out some of the stickier problems in the region, whichever one they decide to do next, they’re not even sure. The options are…..myriad.
(Don’t know their names, we’ll figure that out later; they’re using the priest and Veteran templates from the Monster Manual)

Then it is back to the trader who was identifying their magic items:

1) Deathdealer is an evil blade, and although it has some nifty magic powers, eventually it will compel its wielder to slay one innocent a month to keep using it without penalty. They decide to pawn this item off to the Temple of Tyr in trade for healing potions and have them destroy it.

2) Rope of Climbing
3) Sentinel Shield
4) Flame/Ice/Lightning arrows
5) Dust of Dryness

Now, it’s off to **the Watchful Knight Inn**, which they learn is named after a Helmed Horror that used to stand guard in the main hall, but one day it left and is said to have been wandering the Sumber Hills ever since, a strange animated suit of armor...
They agree to meet their new recruits, the priest and veteran, at daybreak at the center of town and from there they will probably head either to Rivergard or the Temple of the Howling Hatred (and the PCs will be 6th level too next session)

DAWN comes with no incident and the PCs gear up and head to the middle of town, but a crowd of muttering citizens is already gathered there by the well, 20 or 30 of them in a circle, and their chattering voices is filled with: “What is that?” “Why is that here?” “What in the hells is that SOUND?”

They the heroes hear it too – a strange warbling, ebbing and rising hum that fills the morning air with apprehension. They push through the crowd and see a large IRON BOX is beside the well, but more drastically, it is covered with cult elemental symbols, three of which they now recognize.

THEN the box starts vibrating and the humming gets louder and they feel heat waft from it.

“When did this get here” asks Hadrian.

A young little girl speaks up. “Just ten minutes! Men in orange robes drove a wagon. They dumped it then sped from town as fast they could, toward the Stone Bridge!”

Crap. Long gone by now and out of reach.

“Get back!” shouts Hadrian. “Get away from that thing! GO! GO! GO! GO!”

Chaos ensues. Citizens start screaming and running, unsure of what is happening but a feeling of dread has overcome everyone present, PCs included.
They all back away, still watching, but then the box gets reddish and begins to melt into slag and from its depths rising a colored, scintillating orb of light that pulses with dire energy.

The orb rises higher and higher into the sky, and black clouds are forming above it along with the boom of thunder, then it starts to pelt HOT rain and hail, and lightning strikes the highest building and showers sparks.

The orb disappears into the clouds but colored light continues to swirl among them, then the light moves slightly away from town and begins to coalesce into a massive humanoid shape.

The PCs had originally been urging the townsfolk to head to the Temple for protection, but seeing this new, absolutely horrible, terrifying, gut wrenching and soul squashing development, they urge them to all GET THE HELL OUT OF BELIARD NOW!
It doesn’t take long for things to go from bad to worse as hurricane force winds rip through the town, tearing roofs and walls away, shingles flying like daggers, carts and horses and home blowing away under an unstoppable wind and lightning from the thing’s hands sets the town on fire.
The PCs and a hundred others have fled barely out of town and turn to watch Beliard be destroyed, and more people than those that escaped are trapped inside, and they are sucked up into the vortex along with spinning cattle and steer and homes, crushed and burned and drowned and blown away.

Fifteen minutes later the clouds disperse, the wind cease and the elemental death storm vanishes but in its wake is an utterly destroyed Beliard.

There is practically nothing left.

[DM Note – the player’s shock at this development was nothing short of terrified]
Something else occurs to them that was written on Thurl’s map –
DEVASTATION ORBS – 2!

If this thing was an orb, and if what Markus Demaskus said is true (is that dude even ALIVE now? Maybe not…) then the Hand of Yartar (some criminal gang) might have another orb of devastation and are trying to pawn it off, and that means that no city in all of the lands is safe.

Beliard got nuked and it could happen anywhere else.

We were nearing the end of the session. The PCs (and players) are shell shocked, this has but a huge monkey wrench thrown into the plans. There are over 100 refugees with them, men, women and children, all utterly terrified. Hadrian the paladin feels a deep commitment to get them to safety, but where is safety now?


Then they consider the dwarven Gauntlet faction in the hidden Vale of the Dancing Waters, somewhere near the Dessarin River north of Rivergard Keep.
All of this deliberation took a long time. I'll skip the nitty gritty. They decide on this:

Lead the refugees, all 100 of them, west across the Stone Bridge have them camp. If all looks safe, send them on their way to Westbridge while the PCs take the fork south (along with the new NPCs Priest and Veteran) and they’ll look for the dwarven Vale of the Dancing Waters, hoping to use some of Hadrian’s clout with the Order of the Gauntlet to recruit some more muscle so they can take on either Rivergard Keep or the Temple of the Howling Hatred.

Problem is, Hadrian REALLY wants to escort the refugees all the way to Westbridge, and Serena and Brey don’t really want to do that.