a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #13
The Vale of Dancing Waters
Last Session...

Our heroes were in BELIARD and managed to meet the Emerald Enclave contact Markus Damaskus, who had a mountain of information to unload.

In summary:

1 – The Hand of Yartar has an elemental weapon of power, probably in Yartar, and is trying to auction it to the highest bidder.

2- An ex-Zhentarim assassin named Windharrow, a bald man with tattoos, has mostly likely led the delegation from Mirabar into an ambush, or at the very least, was leading them astray and they were ambushed by another cult, mostly like the Black Earth. The allegiances of these cults are iffy at best, and Air and Earth are known to be bitter enemies.

3 – The 4 main delegation members, the dwarves Brudlenor and Rhundarth, the moon elf Teresial, and the male elf Talbok, had a special mission in the Sumber Hills to address this elemental problem, either to stop it or unearth it. The cults caught wind of this and snipped their mission in the bud.

4 - Somewhere west of the Dessairn River and north of Rivergard Keep is a place called the Vale of Dancing Waters, a secret and sacred Temple of Dwarves that used to be the summer palace of King Torild Flametongue, and these dwarves, at least some, are affiliated with the Order of the Gauntlet, just like Hadrian.

There was more, but those were the highlights. The PCs decided they needed more help, so they recruited a veteran fighter living in Beliard named Vinny, and a priest of Tyr named Ghrol. They agree to meet in the town square come dawn and figure out their exact plan of action and destination, which is most like the Temple of the Howling Hatred.

The next day doesn’t go so well.
Some weird orb and the ensuing Storm Elemental completely obliterates Beliard within fifteen minutes. It finally dissipates, but in its wake is only death and destruction. The PCs managed to get out of town with a bunch of people and watch the devastation. The new NPCs made it out too (and their personalities are not fleshed out yet at all, and not this session either).

There are a hundred of them altogether, men, women and children, but only half are in any kind of fighting condition. They don't know where to go, or what to eat or drink other than the meager items could scrounge from their ruined home. Most of Beliard and the cattle and animals died in the attack.
The PCs ultimately decide to find this Vale of the Dancing Waters. The NPC Vinny the Veteran was there once 20 years ago with his party, which included a dwarf, and they were invited to some of the sacred shrines. But it is by dwarf invite ONLY. So he’s not sure how they’ll react to them tromping in there.

Plus, he’s not sure where it is. It was a hidden place after all. He remembers having to scale up a cliff by a waterfall in order to reach it.

So they head off with the ultimate goal of getting the refugees to Red Larch, but this is a long, long journey across the Larch Path through hostile territory, and the caravan is slow.

After crossing the Stone Bridge west of Beliard (Old Beliard, Dead Beliard?) the path diverges toward Westbridge and Red Larch and they head south.
Another day in and they see that the path diverges a second time.

“Southeast lies the Vale,” says Vinny. “The path won’t take us all the way, it ends soon and we’ll have to search from there.”

According to Thurl’s map they got from Feathergale Spire (and from a hint from the DM) they think they might be close to whatever Scarlet Moon Hall is here at the crossroads. Well, they’re not SURE it’s the fire temple, but they know the other three are respective Air, Earth and Water outposts. It’s impossible to tell, Scarlet Moon could be 1 mile or 100 miles away, but they elect to take the refugees along the split trail a little farther and have the camp in the hills and woods before the PCs go looking for the Vale.

The ranger Brey shows them how to forage, those that don’t know how, and how to shield their fires. Stick close together and set up changing guards all night long and be always vigilant. They have orders to camp here for two days and wait for their return. After that, head for Red Larch as FAST as they can.
along the Larch Path. It will probably take them a week to get there though.

So, Brey and Hadrian and Serena and Ghrol and Vinny leave to find the Vale of the Dancing Waters where hopefully Hadrian the paladin can use his clout with the Order of the Gauntlet to maybe recruit the aid of some stalwart dwarves to assist them in this daunting task of confronting the cults of the Sumber Hills and whatever nefarious plans they have.

Which, at this point, seems to involve **Devastation Orbs**, at least one of which has probably already annihilated Beliard, and the location of the other is unknown.

So, with Vinny’s help they have a base 30% chance of finding the Vale. With a day of searching, and a DC 15 Survival check from the ranger, this is bumped up 10% to 40%. They fail the first day and roll no random encounter. The second day of searching they manage to find the waterfall and the cliff midmorning. Yay! That wasn’t too difficult, but that’s mostly because Vinny gave them a good head start. It also means they have time to get back to the refugees before they break camp.
They wind through dense brush and foliage atop the plateau and eventually find a real path that descends along a cliffside above the Dessairn River. The Ranger deduces that they are headed south, directly toward Rivergard Keep, but its exact distance is unknown.

“Somebody here better help us,” mutters Serena, peeking over the steep cliff and the long drop. Fortunately, her new 3rd level spell is FLY! [Oh yeah, PCs are 6th level this adventure]

A mile later after traversing the narrow granite walkway, it splits, one branching continuing south, but the other winds upward, zigging and zagging up to what looks like a structure built into the cliffside, its wide entrance flanked by two dwarf statues. A waterfall falls beside the left statue.
“You recognize this?” Hadrian asks Vinny.

The Veteran wrinkles his nose. “Yeah, think so. Temple of some kind. Been a long while.”

They start heading up one at a time, the switchback trail narrow and the slide down to the trail below steep and sharp.

Brey the elf ranger takes point, keeping an eye out for traps as they inch toward the guardian statues flanking the entrance, and well over halfway as he near the last bend he easily spots a hidden tripwire crossing the path. His gaze follows its course up the wall to a clump of boulders positioned to collapse. The wire is shiny and new. It hasn’t been here very long.
Brey leaves the trap in place and they all gingerly step over it. He scouts ahead to the entrance to the shrine, and that’s when they heard the DRUMS.

**BOOM – Dooooom. BOOM – Dooooom. BOOM – Dooooom.** A slow, deliberate beat that they remember hearing when they were watching Rivergard Keep that one night not long ago. The sound is ominous and creeps into their bones.

The stone dwarfs are twelve feet tall and there doesn’t seem to be anyone else present. Silently, the group breaks up and hides behind the statues while Brey sneaks forward into the large, sunlight dappled room beyond that features a huge female dwarven statue, her arms raised to the sky and a partially open roof that allows shafts of light in. Burning braziers flank all four corners.

That’s when Brey hears footsteps. They’re coming from the west passage and seconds later two humans in blue robes emerge and walk toward the shrine entrance. Brey motions to Hadrian who has line of sight to the elf.

*Company coming! Two!*

The paladin doesn’t wait to be discovered. He boldly marches out, surprising
both men, and loudly demands, “Surrender!”

Unsurprisingly, they don’t.

They pull forth strange *sharktooth swords* and come at him swinging, but Hadrian deflects his blows and SNICK takes his head off clean.

The other one makes a quick stab at Hadrian with his own blade and then retreats, suffering a brutal OA, and heads toward a dual stairwell in the north chamber, but Brey catches him in the back with a well-placed FLAME ARROW and a sneak attack on top as he was still hidden behind the female statue.

The cultist is dropped, his robes burning, and he collapses against a pillar.
They remain quiet for a moment and only hear the unbroken tempo of the drums, *BOOM-DOOOM, BOOM – DOOOM* somewhere else in the complex. Maybe from the stairwell the man was running toward.

They decide to scout out the rest of this level first.

Brey doesn’t go inside the eastern passage, but he sees a square basin of water with puddles all around it. The other passage to the west is where the cultists emerged. Brey sneaks down there first, listening at the four doors along the hallway, each are closed and he hears nothing behind them.

But the last door on the left he smells something unpleasant. The sour stink of rot. This calls for the aid of a paladin and his divine senses!
Hadrian attempts to detect undead or desecration, and finding none, he opens the door. The sight within is appalling.

TEN DEAD DWARVES are piled in the room, all dressed in robes. They are rotting and have no obvious wounds, but their clothing is damp. He estimates they’ve been here for days. Drowned most likely. Either by magic filling their lungs or the good ol’ fashioned way.

**BOOM-DOOOM, BOOM-DOOOM. BOOOOOM- DA DA -BOOOOM.**

The tempo changes slightly. Forget it, the PCs aren’t staying here. Gods knows what is upstairs, and they aren’t ready to find out yet. This isn’t their problem, and they elect to descend back onto the trail and see if they can find
what they were looking for in another valley outpost, of which Vinny says there are several.

Before they leave Brey scouts out the **pool room** and sees that it is not quite as empty as he thought. In fact, there is something downright odd about it.

Part of the eastern wall has been knocked out, but it’s hard to tell from which direction, there is rubble everywhere. A black tunnel descends downward. He doesn’t go in and tells the others. Very strange. They know that Rivergard Keep lies not too far away along the river. There might be a connection.

They dump the two dead guards over the waterfall into the river and then hightail down the switchback trail and reach the junction and trudge parallel along the river below, hoping to find another dwarven outpost.
Pretty soon the dwarves find them first.
“HO!” shouts the foremost dwarf. The groups are about 100 feet apart. “NO NON-DWARVES ALLOWED IN THE VALE! NONE!”

All four dwarves draw hammers and pickaxes, the start of a fight twitching in their fingers.

Hadrian holds up his hand in a gesture of peace, as well as a symbol of the Order of the Gauntlet given to him by Sir Rel in Red Larch.

“We mean you no harm! We are on a mission of peace and desperation, seeking help from the Gauntlet! We would not be here at all unless the situation was dire! Please, we only want to talk.”

Frowning, the foremost dwarf lowers his hammer and turns to speak to the others. They all glare menacingly at the PCs, and finally the front dwarf says, “You there, only you, meet me in the middle. We will speak.”

Sighing in relief, Hadrian advances and calmly as possible tells the dwarf what is going on, starting however with the destruction of Beliard, the refugees camped outside of the Vale, and ending with how they JUST entered the shrine behind them, found all of the dwarven priests dead and stacked like cordwood in a room, and the ones who committed this massacre are still there and the PCs have a clue as to who they are. And they’re probably very dangerous.

Needless to say the dwarf is shocked, so shocked that he can barely speak for a moment, his mouth hanging, and then he explodes into a torrent of questions and demands and seething rage.

“WHO DID THIS? WHO? SHOW ME NOW!”
“Will do,” says Hadrian.

The group of 9 returns to the split in the trail and ascends again. The dwarf leader introduces himself as **MALBECK**, and yes, he was once a proud member of the Order of the Gauntlet long ago and is sympathetic to their cause, but he has long since lived in the Vale as a protector. There are several other dwarves living here who are Gauntlet members as well.

This small group here was simply doing a periodic patrol throughout the vale as it had been many days since anyone went to the Shrine of the Tender Oath, dedicated to Sharindlar the Goddess.

They cross over the tripwire again (it was never deactivated), and enter the shrine and hear the **DRUMS** still beating, but no one else is downstairs. They point Malbeck toward the room with the dead dwarves and he enters, but soon exists, sickened to his core. His lips are twisted in disgust and rage.
“We kill them,” he says hoarsely. “We kill them all!”

“Not so hasty,” warns Hadrian. “We need some kind of plan.”

One of the dwarves checks out the pool room and the breached wall and corridor, and reports back to Malbeck, whispering.

In the back chamber two stairwells lead upward, so they agree to split up, dwarves and PCs, and take each side as Malbeck says they both lead the same place, the main worship hall for Sharindlar.

So up they go, Prong A and Prong B, stealthily as possible, which isn’t too hard because the DRUMMING is quite loud and reverberating, and at the top of each respective stairwell they see a green curtain obscuring the room beyond, but then the drumming quiets to a slower beat and they hear a man speaking, followed by the droning repeat of what he just said by multiple voices:

**OH, OLHYDRA!**

**BATHE US IN YOUR GLORY!**

**RAIN YOUR BLESSINGS UPON US!**

**WASH AWAY OUR FEARS!**

**DROWN OUR ENEMIES AND SUBMERGE OUR FOES!**

They keep repeated the mantra in a singsong voice.

This sounds kinda bad. They’re not sure HOW bad yet, but bad. No one peeks into a curtain yet and Serena sends a message to Malbeck – _WAIT_.

Hadrian backtracks and joins the four dwarves, leaving Brey, Serena and Ghrol the Priest and Vinny the Veteran on the other side. But in the meantime Malbeck does peek in, his curiosity and anger and thirst for revenge having got the better of him.

“Not good,” grunts the dwarf. “They have an ogre mage in there. It’s the drummer.”

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“How many more?”

“I counted maybe seven. I didn’t get but a glimpse. I didn’t want to be spotted.”

Serena messages them to know what’s going on, what the plan is, and Hadrian replies that they need to focus fire on the BIG GUY at the drums. On the count of three they’ll rush the room. ONE - TWO - THREE!!!
The heroes gain COMPLETE surprise.

Serena unleashes with a twinned Chromatic Orb, crits with the first one, misses the second, rerolls with a luck die and crits with the SECOND orb. That’s over 70 points of damage in the surprise round on the ogre, then Vinny the Veteran runs in along with the paladin and Vinny crits TOO, and well, the ogre is dead before it can even move. This changed the entire battle.

Meanwhile, Serena pops back out and casts SLOW on the mass of cultists in blue robes, and this incapacitates 3 or 4 of them, and the dwarves rush in screaming from the right flank and the others come from the left, and chaos ensues in a fight that was considerably harder to run than I had expected with 16 combatants, and I hadn’t planned it as well as I should. I ALSO didn’t think the ogre would die!!! He was a game changer.
The priest tries to cast a 3rd level spell but he’s slowed and doesn’t get it off for 2 rounds, but then to my chagrin the Sleet Storm spell is a TERRIBLE choice for a room this small, and I didn’t read the effects until too late. (I ended up not casting it). But the water elemental they were worshiping on the altar is not just a static set piece – it leaps down and BATTERS a dwarf into the floor!

Serena steps in and obliterates four cultists in a row with a lightning bolt, sizzling them to death, and this just leaves the cult leader and elemental and maybe one other guy, and only one dwarf is dead.
Finally freed of the slow spell, the cult leader breaks free but can’t make it out of the room alive, an arrow catching him in the back. The water elemental tries to surge over Vinny but he escapes, and then another lightning bolt sizzles a good chunk of the creature away, and then Brey the elf follows up with a **Bead of Dust and Dryness**!

The damage completely destroys what was left of the elemental and its form dissolves into a bubbling puddle.

The fight took an hour, not too bad for that many combatants but it was slower than usual.

Breathing hard, they decide to search the bodies, but that will have to wait until next time. From there, they’ll decide what to do about this new turn of events.