

DAR SILVERCLOAK

AMONG THE ASTRAL SPIRES





NALLEVER UPON
THE UNIVERSITY

Brunswick
Palace Sea

University of
the Protectors

Surrendered
West Docks &
the Slaves

Surrendered
Docks &
Market

NATHIS' TOWER
UPON NATHIS

PESKIS UPON
LOST MEMORIES

Any who Enter or Exit
will be Killed

THE SOUTH-EASTERN
SEGMENT OF VERALIA

So here we are," came the growl from above my head. Being a halfling, anything from the ship's draconic captain, Lavin, came from above my head. "If this one isn't a world, we'll have to rethink this enterprise of yours."

"I have a feeling about this one," I replied.

He mumbled something about headaches, the standard complaint when I stayed deep for too long, then bellowed, "Clō!"

The sound of motion below, then of the cabin door opening. Clō, blue frock coat over patternless brown-black scales, slowly climbed the steps to join us aft. She was clearly unhappy to be out of the warmth. Looking over my head at Lavin, she said, "What?"

"Sar's closing on something again. Let's see if this theoretical profit materializes."

I was at the wheel of the Kelln, dragged by sails woven of impossible crystal threads through the aether between the stars. As I steered, they walked to the rail and watched the approaching world grow before us. Unprompted, Lavin ordered adjustments to sails, half-reefing all three headsails to keep our pace down.

As we neared, reality grew faster and faster, until we seemed stationary as the star-like speck stretched into the dense shell of dust that surrounds a world.

I smirked at them. "Told you I had a feeling about this one."

"That's three feelings of seven approaches," Lavin said.

Looking at the expanse of silvery mist before us, I said, "It's a bit flat."

"What?" Clō said.

I gestured up to where the haze curved sharply back. "It's oblate, not spherical. Very oblate, so probably no regular system in there, although there's no shadows to read from. Also, I don't think it's very large, although it's hard to say for certain."

Lavin looked along the silvery, glowing wall. "It seems

endless."

I've seen hundreds of worlds, but hadn't been systematic enough to explain how I knew what I was looking at, so I didn't try.

He didn't ask for more, instead just setting the crew to double-checking every knot on the ship in the thirty minutes left before we reached the boundary. His Scalies were finishing their checks just minutes before the Kelln's prow pierced the barrier. Layers of silvery curtains, rippled and pulled aside, granted the Kelln passage into an unmapped world.

Many worlds are a black void, the sea of stars visible about it, a glaring sun and some planets dominating the space. This was not such a world. A fog filled the air before us, thicker below and thin up where we were. It almost looked like a nebula, dense clouds of aether ready to adopt false-realities. Looking back, it seemed to continue outwards forever as well, although I was confident that the boundary was still close behind us.

As we sailed in, vague shadows appeared. They began slightly below the Kelln's draft, growing hazier as they descended out of sight below.

I studied the aether below, not seeing the lively energy I expect from aether in the astral sea. Still, it had something of the aethereal about it, an echo of chaos wanting to coalesce into reality.

The ship twitched, forcing my focus back to the wheel. Again, then a buck as something tugged at us, even though the haze about was unmoving.

"Sar, what are you doing to my ship?" Lavin snapped.

"Nothing, there's something pushing us, but— Wind."

I adjusted, called out orders to angle the sails. Lavin quickly echoed my orders, adding who was to do what. The Scalies, the title his band had earned as revolutionaries and kept as pirates, leapt into action.

Soon we had steadied, then begun to descend.

"Wind?" Lavin asked in the regained stillness.

"I didn't notice because the mist isn't moving, as if it's genuinely just raw aether," I explained. "But there is wind, a fierce one, as though we were in the upper atmosphere of a planet."

"I should start studying the world," I said, not sure what order to give. This was our first effort at exploration, six weeks out from Navidem, and I still had trouble remembering names of the crew. This was also the first time I'd managed to land my half of the deal, getting the Kelln to an undiscovered world.

It was a simple deal, really. I got a crew of skilled warriors to accompany me as I explored, they got the first crack at opening up new trade routes, and we both might earn a weight of coin.

As a crewmember—Leane—took the wheel, I walked over to the gunwale where Nish waited by the halyards.

Lavin joined me. I could read him better than his crew, either because I'd dealt with him more, or because he was better at faking expressions for soft-skins like myself. Right then, he was smiling.

Clō joined us as well, grumbling about the chill. She only made a point of being readable while negotiating, and right then she wasn't negotiating. "I guess we've gotten to wherever here is."

"Wherever it is, it's a world," Lavin pointed out.

As a halfling, I'm used to people talking over my head. I pulled in some aether—it came easier here than in most worlds—and filled my cloak. The crystalline weave glowed, lifting me until I floated nearer Lavin's eye-line, the cloak rippling about me.

Lightning-bright eyes turned my way, the flickers casting his scales in brilliant blue. "Well, Sar, there had best be something of value here. We won't be selling enough guidestones to turn a profit if this is a wasteland."

"Let's just try to find a city," Clō said.

"This is excellent," I declared. "If you keep exploring, you'll learn that the places that are strange have the strangest things."

A place like this, it can have things that exist nowhere else."

Lavin's eyes sparked with amusement. "So, we go in, and you will both be happy?"

"The issue is learning how the world works," I explained. "A place like this, where we already see that gravity isn't around planets and bodies like normal, we need to find somewhere to figure out what else works differently."

"That somewhere being where?" Lavin asked.

I shrugged. "Honestly, wherever's closest."

Clō groaned. "All that talk about exploration, and we go to the nearest."

"Well—"

"No, no, you do that. I'll go back to the cabin where it's warm. Tell me when we're docking somewhere that isn't completely random."

Lavin watched her go, then tilted his head my way. "Don't worry, that's her being friendly." He walked towards the wheel. "Besides, closest makes as much sense to me. Don't overthink these things."

At least someone understood. I, meanwhile, was overthinking other things. It pays to decipher what you can, to not be surprised by everything when you actually meet people.

I let out the aether that trickled through my core, feeling it slip back into the silvery mists about us. The fog did feel like aether, yet everyone could see it as well as I. In the astral sea, aether was only visible to others when it got real thick.

Then there was the wind, which had been so strong in part because we were high, and Lavin had needed to go lower to get the Kelln under control. Yet, the fog did not move. Wind wasn't touching the aether, which was normal, but the aether was visible to all, which was deeply abnormal.

I walked to the wheel. "I want you to try flying lower."

"Why?"

"An experiment."

"Remember last month when you wanted to install an

aethereal rudder into the Kelln? Remember how I told you nobody did weird experiments on my ship without explaining them to me?"

"The mists below are thicker, and I'm wondering if they're different. If the wind up above is actually the aether mimicking a sky, then the aether below may be mimicking a sea."

"That's quite a theory to have based on nothing."

I like Lavin. He's not too worried to question me, but he also isn't just stubborn in his opposition. He made his comments, but then he started giving orders. No sails were adjusted; he was just making sure the crew was ready. After everyone was ready, he tilted the wheel forward, angling us slightly down.

"You know," he said casually as we descended, "if this goes wrong and rips my ship out of the sky, I'm gonna grab onto that cloak of yours and drag you down with us, no matter how you try to fly away."

See, a reasonable man.

As we got deeper, the shadows in the mist began to resolve, looking like spires piercing clear of the thick mists below. As our descent brought us level with the nearest spire, our keel dipping into the denser mists, his grip on the wheel tightened, wood creaking beneath dragon-scale. His eyes were flickering with internal storms, lightning trying to leap free.

Nothing happened.

His grip relaxed. We leveled off.

"Huh." I looked around, wishing I could see even the faintest pattern in the aether. "Nothing. Perhaps we—"

The Kelln lurched to port, deck tilting sharply.

"Up!" I yelled.

Lavin growled at me. He already had the wheel back, turning to the right as well. The Kelln kept twisting aside, but the sharp cant faded. The bow rose, dipped in a lurch, steadied. We drifted slowly towards one of the spires, whatever physics the world had deciding our destination for us.

"Furl all!" he called.

As the Scalies worked, Lavin and I studied what we approached. At last, the haze was thinning, allowing me to see the spire properly. It was a patch of regular land, as though we were already planetside. "It's almost like this shallow isn't very shallow, but the patches within are still holding together, despite that. Normal worlds, the planets are shallower than the void, but here it's like they're somehow holding a full reality without being shallow enough."

"What does that mean?" Lavin asked.

I paused. I'd learned to adjust what I'd learned on my own to the parlance of Navidemi aethernauts and arcanists, people who already knew the sciences to some degree. "Um, well, normally we would be entirely on a planet or entirely in the void or entirely in the aether, but this is feeling like some strange middle-ground between the three."

He blinked, staring at me blankly. Voice flat, he said, "Fine. Wherever we are, it's not the city Clō wants." Lavin was right. Ahead was a valley, overgrown with pine. The spire was perhaps two miles wide, the vee up steep mountains ending in a sharp drop into the endless haze below, as though the land had been sliced away by some divine blade, leaving sheer cliffs all about.

He pulled back the wheel, the Kelln shuddering as it rose. The prow heeled higher as it left the current and the stern stayed deep, and then we were out of the river, slowing as much as we could while staying aloft. "Invisible rivers. You're right about every world being unique."

"Actually, I've seen two invisible seas and one invisible river before. This, however, is a fake river. There's no water down there, just the pressure a river would provide." I channeled some aether and whipped a bucket over the edge, down into the current and back up. "See, empty."

"Excellent, you can fling my buckets overboard." He leaned on the wheel. "We're flying in circles until we have a plan."

"You really were in a formal navy before the rebellion,

weren't you?"

He ignored my question. "You have some grand theory about fake rivers and aetheral nonsense. What does that mean for the spire ahead?"

I shrugged. "Not a lot. The aether is imitating gaps between tiny worlds, but those worlds still exist. That ahead isn't fake stone, and if you look you can even see where water suddenly starts, just past that knot of fog. A real river out of a fake one. So, real world, but tiny, interacting with the aether. The other shadowy spires we can see are likely the same. That's all we know. To learn more, we talk to locals."

Lavin nodded. "Fine. We know nothing, so you learn it. We sail in. If there's no town on the river, we pass through and do not stop. If there is, we stop and you go ashore."

I shook my head. "Not just me."

"Oh?"

"You showed honor in the past, but that was before several years of piracy. I didn't sign that contract because you were trustworthy. I signed it because you were more trustworthy than the others."

"And more affordable."

I laughed. "Yes, you did make a much fairer offer than anyone else I spoke to. But the tales of your piracy are not subtle."

"That was aboard other ships, working as part of other crews, under other captains. This is different."

"All the same, I'll have some surety you won't fly off with my half of the ship. The sails and rudder weren't easy to make."

Lavin's lightning flickered, leaping from his eyes to trace his brow-ridges, then settling back into his irises. "Business is business, I suppose."

Turning away, he called out to Leane, Martam, and Drafe, telling them to arm, then dipped the Kelln back into the current.

No sails needed, we flowed with the river in towards the

spire. The fog thinned until we had a clear view of the spire's outside edge: a stony expanse, knife-slice clean, not a ridge protruding. The haze hadn't thinned before the water, hiding that bit still.

In we went, no change in the feel, but the sound was clear. Aethereal haze had been a faint scraping to my ears, while the water was that familiar planet-side shush and splash. The air gained a chill, as if the world hadn't bothered to have weather until we were above a spire.

Stranger than the sudden weather was the glow from above. From a distance, I'd thought nothing of the trees being sunlit, but now I realized that there was no sun. Instead, the mist was an even golden glow, aether pretending to be a sun, high in the sky.

As I stared at this phenomenon, the scalebacks grabbed coats, more worried about cold than a mammal like myself.

None of that altered our slow drift with the current. Straight a bit, then around a slow curve, a sharper bend, and there was a town, right at the center of the island, along the slowest stretch of water.

Small fields of wheat flanked perhaps a dozen buildings. Smoke rose from chimneys, unsurprising given the crisp, chill air. In amongst the buildings, the townsfolk were still. Staring.

They exchanged quick words. One ran through an open common square towards the only truly large building in the place. Before large double-doors, he pulled a blindfold over his eyes, opened the doors a crack, and slipped in.

Looking across the townsfolk, I saw that they all had black bands tied about their heads, the same as he had used for a blindfold. To nobody, I murmured, "That's not a promising sign."

My doubts did not prevent me from heading ashore when we tied off at their stubby wooden dock. I led the way down the gangplank, somewhat surprised that Lavin came himself, leaving the ship under Clō's command.

Eight feet tall with blue-black scales, Lavin caught every eye in the village. I drew in power again, flaring my cloak and drifting upwards. "Greetings. I am Sar, called the Silvercloak. We are travelers, uncertain of where we have arrived."

Internally, I winced. Travelers, uncertain. What a stilted effort at introducing myself.

The delegation awaiting us glanced between my glowing cloak and Lavin's imposing figure, apparently still unsure who to address. An elf old enough to have lines on his face stepped forth and met my eyes. "Please, be welcome to Calinvale Upon Arbehah. We did not expect a ship anytime soon."

"We apologize for any inconvenience."

"Oh, please, be welcome, be welcome. No inconvenience. Come, join us."

"Yes, come," another said, and they were leading us ashore.

Lavin had the general readiness of a soldier, but didn't seem to notice anything amiss. I was less confident, but it's difficult to read a new people. The idiosyncrasies of cultures a country over can be confusing, and here was a whole world we had never seen before. I could be misreading their every mannerism.

I drifted close enough to not be heard except by Lavin. "A small town like this is easily won over by small gifts. Can Clō pull a box of spices from the stores?"

He snorted in amusement. "If you don't mind the grumbles about cost when we get back to the ship."

Apparently he didn't mind Clō's grumbles, not waiting to send Martam for a box of Ring-Pepper mix. That's the cheapest mix available, but every spice is welcome in a small town.

The locals' nervous glances continued, and I still had worries about those blindfolds, but they were welcoming. Soon, wood was being piled for a bonfire to center the celebration. Benches and tables were pulled from homes, covered with mostly-white cloth to make the commons a rich feasting space.

With the spices offered, they invited us to share drinks and

help prepare. Nothing properly welcomes a halfling like getting to prepare food, but I refused to relinquish my worries.

Small towns know what's ingratiating; nobody fakes it better. There's no lie in letting someone get up to their elbows in the last knead of trenchers, no trickery in the scent of yeast and a dusting of flour, but that doesn't mean there's no trick behind it.

Lavin and his soldiers, a bit more insular, were glad to enjoy some early food and to share drinks with those not cooking. Apparently, the local lager was quite good.

Done kneading a last loaf, as I dusted flour from my hands and watched the last tray slide into the town's oven, one of the cooks bumped into me.

"We need to talk," she whispered as she passed.

My worries leapt to the forefront. Hopefully I masked my doubt as I mentally raced through everyone I'd been introduced to. Lyah? No, Reyah, that was her name. She had been one of the three chopping through stacks of root vegetables to make the world's quickest stew.

So, trouble. I'm good at running from trouble.

I aligned the runes in my soul, focusing power through a facet of illusion. Lips barely moving, my words sounded, a whisper, in Lavin's ears. "This is Sar speaking. There may be trouble. If they do anything, get to the ship."

His head perked up, but nobody else responded. Scanning the town with a soldier's harsh eyes, he began drawing looks, words of soothing as people tried to calm him.

I melded into shadow with a mixture of illusion, misdirection, and simply being small and used to hiding. When I circled about the baker's and between two narrow buildings, I found Reyah pretending to be busy at a pile of split logs, although her sling was already full.

"Well, let's hear it."

"You have to promise to get my daughter and I out of here."

Anyone who's fled and left others behind feels that plea to their core. I kept my face steady. "We can just leave."

"Arbehah is watching. If you run, she'll pursue." Reyah flicked nervous eyes toward the mansion that dominated the town. "I can make sure you're safe."

"I don't take to extortion. Tell me why."

Her eyes were darting faster, the nervous terror of someone trying subterfuge for the first time. "Arbehah, she likes oddities and beauties. She keeps them as statues. My daughter, Triess, will be selected next choosing day, unless someone like that big blue guy comes here first."

"So us being here buys you time."

"Time? At most a few scant years before Triess—" Reyah straightened. "Dellah, isn't one more sling enough?"

"Oh," said the approaching woman, "I was just bringing some back. What do we need more for?"

Reyah tried to cover her mistake, I don't know how. My focus was on the manor. It was an odd building. Its tiny windows were diamond-shaped, covered with layered lattices, the sort you could see through if you got close enough, but that otherwise hid everything.

I walked towards the commons, not slowing for whatever Dellah said. As I reached the square, the tone was changing. Overhead, the steady glow of daylight was fading. The bonfire to push back night was being lit, but the spectacle of cross-stacked timber kindling drew no attention.

Lavin's lightning-strike eyes were the fiercer glow. For an instant, the town froze, as clean a tableau as any painting in a gallery. Lavin loomed larger than his eight feet could explain. An elf was on the ground before him, panicked. The Scalies put hands to hilts, but confusion held their draw, wits struggling through too many beers.

I don't know what started the fight. It didn't really matter. Right then, there were three points of light in the square. The kindling beneath the bonfire, Lavin's brilliant eyes, and a glow from the manor's latticed windows. That manor had been dubious from the first, but with Reyah's words it was an

outright threat.

A great whoosh as the bonfire took, flames reaching skyward, sparks darting higher.

The elves were yelling at each other, Lavin was yelling at his warriors, chaos was spreading as it ever does. Only one thing mattered to me right then: the elves nearest the manor, the ones yelling the loudest, were pulling down their blindfolds.

Whoever this Arbehah was, the townsfolk were afraid to look on her and she kept people as statues, which really narrowed the list of possibilities. Fortunately, there are more ways to avoid looking at someone than just covering your eyes.

Realigning the runes within my soul, I warped aethereal force into umbral essence, pouring it through a runic facet as a wash of darkness towards the manor, guided by the quick, broken words of a spell. The facade of the building vanished behind a mass of blackness so dark that the contours of its surface were lost, leaving only the black edges to see. It spilled from the manor into the commons, a sea of black coming to a halt half-into the bonfire, flames flickering in and out of existence as they slid through that unnatural dark.

"Get to the ship!" I yelled, taking a step that way myself.

Only one step, though. Lavin was holding up Leane and Martam was leaning on the hardier Drafe. A simple trap. Drugged beer for soldiers rarely fails.

They wouldn't be reaching the Kelln quickly. "I'll delay her!"

Someone behind me grabbed on, trying to do I know-not-what. Their grip didn't matter. I was already pouring myself through a channel of raw aether, into the darkness, skipping the space in between.

I came out at a run, arms crossed before me, crystal cloak wrapped tight as my armor. I made it six steps before I hit someone coming the other way at a steady walk.

She cursed by some local deity or demon as we both fell together.

About us, hissing rose as from a pit of serpents. Little thuds

like thrown pebbles pelted my cloak, harmlessly bouncing from the crystal weave.

I couldn't see a thing, but I knew that someone's legs were tangled with my own. Pulling on aether, I shaped a lance of warping force and hurled it, drawing a cry of pain and a storm of irate hissing.

Much as I would like to portray the rest of the struggle as some skillful duel in which I acquitted myself well, it was mostly aimless flailing. My next two lances of power elicited no cries, and then Arbehah had me pinned down.

The only good thing that can be said of my skill in a fight is that I kept the cloak wrapped tight and it turned all serious blows aside, although I was collecting bruises.

Lying there, huddled under my cloak, I prepared my escape. Ideally, I would teleport from the darkness, then again to the ship, and be gone. Except that Lavin was surely at the ship and making his swift escape, and quick as I can slide through reality, the Kelln flies faster within a world's shallow reality.

The alternative was more chaotic, ripping my way from that world directly. There was no telling where I'd end up, but it would be nowhere near here. Or, I could teleport another direction, out into the trees, fly for the edge with my back to the village and Arbehah.

That would have to be it, unless I were abandoning the Kelln, and I'd only finished spinning those sails three months ago. I pulled more and more aether into the well at my core, drinking it in until I was filled to bursting, holding enough power to chain such teleportation together.

As I prepared myself, a thunking sound cut past the scrape of feet and hissing of snakes, followed by a thunderous crash. That was a ballista. One of the Kelln's four, I assumed. I hadn't thought Lavin would come for me, which I suppose was unfair. This was an excellent situation for a pirate to finagle out of a contract, but they had been rebels before they were pirates. And now they were explorers.

And there was the clicking and creaking of the gears as the ballista wound again, barely audible past a few panicked cries from the villagers. I let excess aether bleed out and cast a simpler spell, the one I'd used earlier that night. "I'll make the darkness vanish on the count of five," I told Lavin. "Shoot her, but don't look directly at her."

For Arbehah's part, she seemed to have decided against staying in the darkness, and had gone from trying to drag my cloak aside to kicking me away. I hunched down, letting her go, and silently counted. On five, I released the darkness.

With my eyes tightly closed, I couldn't see the spell melt from midnight black to shimmering dust, but I heard the whunk of a ballista firing, then twice more in a near-echo. Thud-thud-thump bolts hit flesh twice and dirt once. The screech of a wounded woman was accompanied by the hiss of a hundred serpents.

As that scream trailed off, it sank into the earth as a pulse. Hard-packed dirt vibrated against my splayed hand, kicking up dust.

My stomach sank. I glanced aside, seeing Arbehah's limp form, pinned upright by criss-crossed oaken shafts. Not looking directly at her, I snatched the cloth from the nearest table and threw it over her head.

Finally looking around freely, I saw that the elves—hunched down, blindfolded, huddling behind their arms—were starting to rouse. Some removed their blindfolds. The true panic set in. Desperate sobs went from worry to despair.

I had been thinking they were like any other cluster of serfs, beholden to a local lord. It wasn't like that, though. Not at all. The earth shuddered again. From the edges of the valley, the sound of crumbling rock echoed through the air.

I pulled mists about me, flowed through them to the Kelln. Lavin started as I appeared on the Gunwale before him. "We need to be quick."

"Already going," he said.

"No, we need to help them." I looked around, then pointed to the side of the valley, where a fracture had appeared. Some great mass of earth slid away, plummeting into the depths.

Lavin stared, uncomprehending.

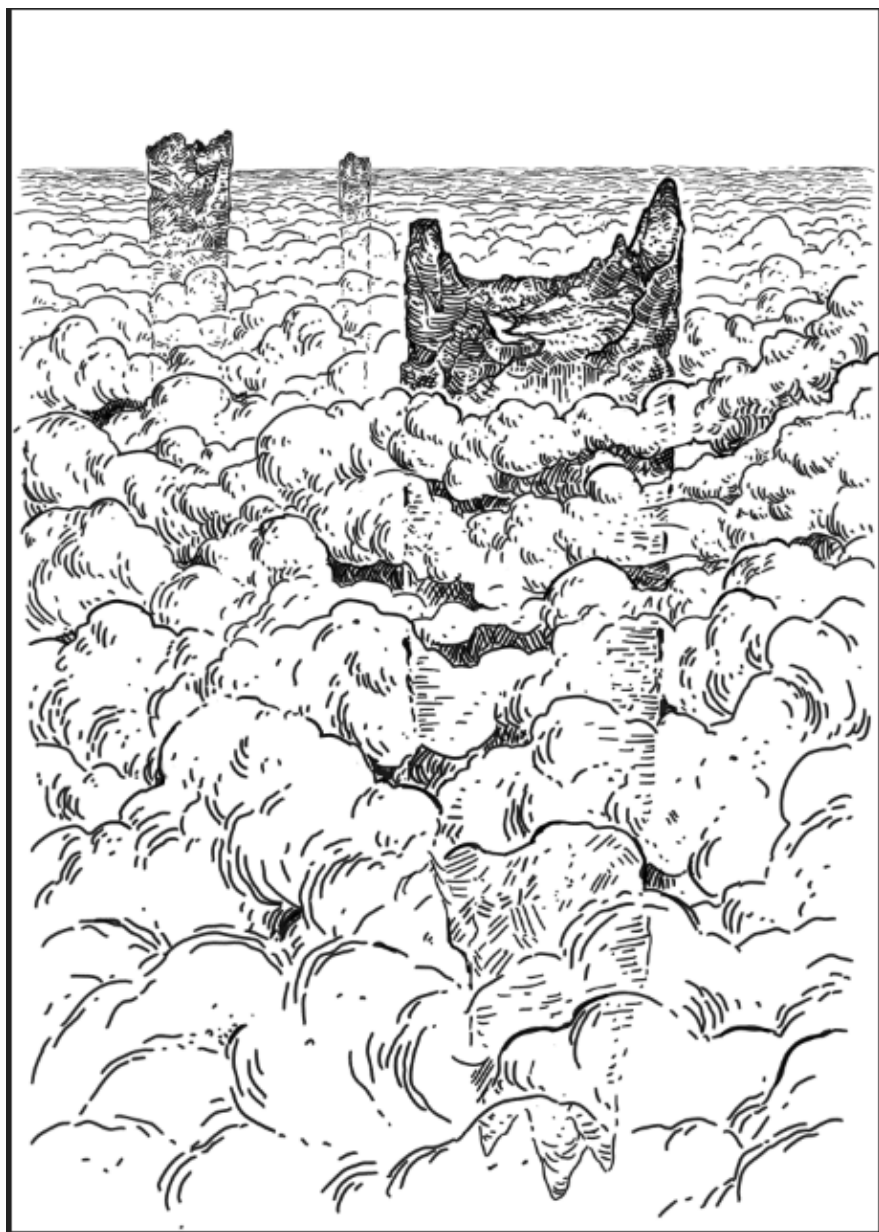
"This is why you want to learn about a place before you start trading with them. They called it Calimvale Upon Arbehah because the land itself rested on her. The world here exists, but just barely. It's not shallow enough for reality like we're used to. I don't know if it was some spell, force of will, perhaps her nature, but the only thing keeping this spire stable was Arbehah herself. With her gone, the spire collapses, taking all of them with it."

Lavin stared down at the crowd of elves, parents huddled with children, yelling pleas to us. His words were heavy. "We destroyed their world."

Thirty minutes later, we were drifting over a hazy expanse, the last shards of the spire disappearing into the mists below. Every inch of the deck was packed with elves.

It wasn't a good day. Where there had been a small feast and a greeting with locals, now there was the memory of a town that used to exist. The elves glared at us, where they weren't too busy holding one-another close. Their homes, belongings, everything but their lives, gone in an instant.

But they were alive, and Lavin insisted that our next flight be to wherever they wished to go. He got no argument on that point.



Fracture lines slowly appear as a spire starts to crumble

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Notes on Veralia

Veralia appears to be in decay, but is actually stable, so long as nobody kills the rulers. That is the key to it all: So long as the leaders are left in power, life continues.

On most worlds, people can at least try to rise up and rebel. Not so on the spires. If the ruler of a place stops holding that bit of reality together, it collapses and everyone dies.

This doesn't simply mean that the people won't harm the ruler, it also usually means the people will harm you to please the ruler. They have lived their lives in this impossible situation so long that it has become their defining reality.

What to know about Spires, Weather and The Mist

1. If the ruling power of a spire dies, it will take the spire with it.
2. Spires drift about, so your maps will never be perfectly accurate.
3. A hundred feet above the mist-line, the winds are powerful and can be deadly.
4. Each spire defines its style of weather, but not the weather itself. A blizzard may blow through one spire and become a sandstorm in the next.
5. Day and night aren't from any sun, they are just light. The light all day is as high noon, then as darkest midnight all night, with less than thirty minutes between those extremes.
6. The "water routes" between spires are invisible, but they are real, and if you sail off them without a flying ship, you will fall to your death.
7. You can fish in the aether off the spires, but the fish you get are not natural and probably should not be eaten.

Types of Spires

Spires are named as a region "upon" the ruler that keeps it from crumbling into the mists.

Arcane. Ruled by people who maintain powerful spells, these are generally the safest places to live. The ruler is often a group, not an individual.

Cruel. Intelligent individuals like vampires and nagas like to keep people alive but suffering.

Patronizing. Generally benevolent beings like sphinxes tend to make stable and safe spires, but force their specific worldview onto all residents.

Undead. Some are filled with mindless, shambling undead. No one knows if there is some central undead being that rules, or if it is the mass of undeath that sustains the spire.

Wild. Beasts such as hydras can instinctively sustain a spire. Here, the ruler will attack anyone it sees, but if anyone kills it the world will collapse beneath them. These are avoided, except by the desperate.

Spires of Note

Nallever Upon the University. A group of wizards managed to ward the island. They promptly deposed the king and now rule as a benevolent oligarchy. This is the only city truly ruled by law that I was able to find.

Greater Bolerea Upon Nerglyen the Ancient.

A massive dragon maintains a spire 200 miles across, more land than any hundred other spires. Nerglyen is cruel and greedy, but so long as people feed their horde, those people can stay.

Be wary nearby. The residents constantly send forth raiders to appease Nerglyen.

As to the layout, there's an entire mountain range down the center where Nerglyen lives. South, a full kingdom remains, as well as a notable independent port.

North, the elven kingdom is just lost ruins, but there's still a smaller port in residence.

Fort Chisik Upon the Wielder of the Sapphire

Rod. Sustained by an artifact that only those with a particular bloodline can wield, Fort Chisik is balanced between the whims of its ruler and a strong guild structure.

Its skilled mercenaries take jobs abroad to keep this small spire wealthy.

Spires of Note

Terylia Upon Waves Glistening With

Moonlight. The unicorn Waves Glistening With Moonlight is loving and kind, so long as her home looks like a natural paradise. Homes are built to look like trees, or incorporated into convenient caves and boulders.

Harming a tree or an animal is forbidden, so food is scarce, but everything is also safe.

Nathis's Tower Upon Nathis. A mad, immortal man, Nathis managed to preserve his tower when the dissolution came. However, unlike every other spire in existence, his spire has grown. He's expanded his tower from nineteen feet wide to twenty-six, earning an endless supply of supplicants for him to ramblingly chat with.

Peskis Upon Lost Memories. This island is blockaded, and be warned that anyone found leaving it will be swiftly killed. Sometime in the past, Peskis was overrun by some sort of shapeshifter, similar to the dust-talkers of the astral sea. These creatures replaced everyone, and now the rest of the world is worried they'll get loose.

On a Theory of Veralia's Dissolution

Many I have discussed Veralia with have proposed it as an example of world-collapse being halted mid-process, but I have doubts.

There is no evidence that this is not a natural process of the world, perhaps even a cycle. Most telling is that, despite all appearances, the mist is not in fact aether. It functions similarly, but since the initial publication of this text I passed through Veralia a second time and performed some intentional testing.

When aether is drawn on by a spell, the mists do respond, but not in the manner you would expect of aether. Rather, they seem to trail behind the aether, as though they are also influenced by it.

If the mists are not aethereal intrusion, the assumption that this was a case of boundary-decay seems unlikely.

People of Nallever Upon the University

Nallever is a surprisingly typical place, as though the locals are still clinging to the idea of being part of a world. There are customs around seasons according to a calendar, even though that seasonal cycle has changed. They call their fishermen "farmers" because they were surrounded by fields before the dissolution happened.

The primary uniqueness of their culture is the same as in every Veralian culture: those in power are untouchable, although only slightly more so than with typical monarchs.



Veralian ogre, dwarf, elf, and gnome in typical University attire

Clō's Notes on Trade

The Astral Spires have limited trading value, but you can earn a lot just making trips in and out. Many locals are desperate for a better world and will pay well for a berth. Be discreet, though. The rulers are stuck, and even the vilest of them prefer a spire with subjects to one without.

Other than transit, the best money is going spire-to-spire and trading for whatever the local craft is. Sheer uniqueness has a value all its own, and there are thousands of spires to go through.

Any trip will likely also involve Nallever, and while they are a trade hub, they mostly trade in the sort of goods you can get elsewhere. The one standout is their tradition of illuminated manuscripts, although you'll need to do multiple trips with commissions if you want books from civilization instead of the local fare.

On the next page, I have included a brief summary of some key factions you are likely to encounter while making trade deals in Nallever.

College of Wards: This is, officially, the branch of Nallever that holds back the mists. They have the job of refreshing various wards throughout the city. There are seventy-three members at a time, two for each of twenty minor wards and three for each of eleven major wards. Although they are people like any other, they are also exempt from most laws and some abuse that privilege.

College of Studies: In charge of training new wizards, this is the city's bureaucracy. To ensure everyone is tested, they register and track all residents. As they are already doing this, they also enforce all the non-violent ordinances, and often invent new ordinances if they decide that they want something.

College of Evocation: Although most of the wizard-colleges are of no particular note, the College of Evocation made a come-back when raiding became common a hundred years after the dissolution. In addition to war-wizards, they also maintain the navy.

Brusum's Circus: This is a mixture of an employment agency and a criminal organization. Officially, Brusum provides affordable labor to entrepreneurs in need. Unofficially, Brusum has enough thugs to get what he needs.

Braimwick Palace Inn: Technically just an inn, this is a prime location for aristocratic soirees. You likely won't be able to get a room, but if you need to meet an influential merchant, buying an invitation to a get-together here is a your best bet.

Evrick-Kestrovell-Yarnish Consortium: A trio of merchant houses that unified, Evrick-Kestrovell-Yarnish try to monopolize shipping lines. As any transit between spires requires careful mapping to not have the ships fall into the void, maps can be incredibly valuable. In addition to fighting to keep their maps secret, these are trying to be the main buyers of off-world goods, and may interfere in deals you make with other merchants.

While visiting the Astral Spires of Veralia,
always remember:

1. If the ruling power of a spire dies, it will take the spire with it.
2. Stay within a hundred feet of the mist-line. If you fly higher, the winds can be deadly.
3. Spires move about, so your maps will never be perfectly accurate.
4. The water routes between spires are invisible, but they are real, and if you sail off them without a flying ship, you will fall to your death.
5. You can fish in the aether off the spires, but the fish you get are not natural and probably should not be eaten.

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*Remnant of
Rheval*

*Barot
Plains*

Nother Woods

*Rains of
Nother*

GREATER BOLEREI UPON

NERGLTEN THE ANCIENS

*Kerygen's
Lair*

*Dundee's
Pass*

The Kerygs

Summer Hills

*Brashware
Port*

*Seat of the
Summer King*

FORT CHISIA

UPON THE WIELDER

OF THE SAPPHIRE ROD

*A map of Veralia by the University
Cartographic Society of Nallever by the
hand of Cartographer Ifrir depicting
the state of the spires as of the year 457*

