

Session 54: What Awaits at the Tower

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Summary

The dust had barely settled in the sludge room when the party began pulling themselves together after their brutal confrontation with the Pale Man and Osiric. Ned secured the heads of their fallen enemies along with a recovered spellbook, tucking them carefully into the bag of holding alongside the other grim trophies they had accumulated. Oiroa did her best to mend the group's wounds, though the healing came in frustratingly small doses, leaving most of the party battered and barely standing. The group noted that the toxic sludge surrounding them carried the same corrupting properties as delirium itself, a grim reminder of just how dangerous the Pale Man's domain had been.

Before leaving, the party made sure to pillage the Pale Man's research — a decision that Ned cheerfully reminded everyone should always come before burning anything down. They ascended from the basement through the backyard well and made their way to the upper floors of the house, finding the area cleared of the dregs they had previously scattered. The homunculus was tucked away in the bag of holding before they entered the research room, where a sprawling conspiracy board dedicated to the Inscrutable Tower covered the walls alongside stacks of experimental notes. The party swept everything into the bag without ceremony, pulling the homunculus back out once the looting was complete, the little creature gasping for air and muttering about its master.

They had barely made it to the foyer when Eldrick Runeweaver came through the front door. The normally composed and bureaucratic archmage was a shadow of his usual self — his robes singed well beyond repair, his voice tight with urgency, his fingers nervously working the academy ring on his hand. He described in haunted tones how a crystalline dragon had exhaled a colossal cone of prismatic energy and torn his entire elite strike team apart in a single, terrible heartbeat. He asked the party to come with him — not to fight, but simply to see what they were up against.

Eldrick teleported the group into the deep, suffocating violet fog of Drakkenheim, depositing them on a raised abutment overlooking the plaza of the Inscrutable Tower. The tower itself was staggering up close — a 1,200-foot pillar of perfectly smooth shimmering obsidian with no windows, no doors, and no seams along its surface. Roughly two-thirds of the way up, the

structure had been smashed apart by a meteor, yet the upper section still floated impossibly above the breach, defying gravity while crackling eldritch lightning danced within the gap and fragments of bookshelves and scattered books bobbed slowly through the wreckage. Drifting delirium shards caught the light of the lightning and scattered it in prismatic bursts across the haze.

Eldrick directed their attention downward to the plaza, where the remains of his strike team lay scattered — crushed iron golems, scorched purple robes, and the bodies of fallen Academy mages strewn across the ruined ground. Grotesque tree-stump creatures anchored on four root-like legs moved through the carnage, their knobbly branch-like arms ending in sharp claws that shoveled chunks of flesh into enormous tooth-filled mouths set directly atop their bodies, yellow eyes gleaming from the palms of their hands. Nearby, eight-legged lupine aberrations with no heads or visible eyes prowled through the wreckage, surrounded by shimmering prismatic auras. When one of them seized a fallen archmage and raised him overhead, the fur and flesh along its spine split open to reveal a gaping mouth of bone and razor teeth — not leading into the creature's body, but into a dark rift in space and time itself. The body was simply dropped into the void and vanished. The party watched in horrified silence until the creatures froze, slowly turned toward the abutment, and then — mercifully — retreated toward the tower. Eldrick wasted no time teleporting the group back to the outskirts of Kleinberg, warning them gravely that the Delirium Dragon had grown from a mere wyrmling to a full adult by feeding on the chaos of the tower's rift, and that they could not afford to wait much longer.

Back in Emberwood Village, the party scattered to tend to their various needs. Yazzy made her way to the Gilded Lily, where the crowd recognized her immediately and buzzed with excitement. She launched into a sharp, tongue-in-cheek satire of the Silver Order and their so-called contributions to the people of Drakenheim, and the performance was so devastatingly effective that even those in the crowd who had been Silver Order sympathizers were rethinking their loyalties by the final verse. The tavern owner begged her to stay for a third song and offered her a cut of the house, which she accepted, earning a generous sum of gold and even a geode of delirium pressed into her hand by an admiring fan.

Meanwhile, Syndle made his return to the farm where the Falling Fire pilgrims had gathered, riding in on his goat to thunderous fanfare. The stories of the party's exploits had grown considerably in the retelling, and by the time they reached the crowd, Syndle was being credited with single-handedly saving everyone involved. Nathaniel Flint found him amid the celebration and passed along a message — Lucretia Mathias wished to meet with Syndle to discuss recent developments, and she was particularly curious about the party's association with Eldrick Runeweaver.

Ned, for his part, holed up in the hotel and buried himself in the recovered spellbooks of the Pale Man, Dr. Freed, and Osiric. The Pale Man's collection contained several spells the party had never encountered before, including methods for siphoning contamination from one host to another and conjuring the deep haze itself. More unsettling were the Pale Man's research notes, which read like the writings of a man consumed by obsession — filled with references to thin spots between worlds, the nature of the Inscrutable Tower, and several entries where he questioned whether the Delirium Dragon might actually be a historical figure named Amaranthus, described in Academy records as an Archmage of the Moon and one of the earliest founders of the Amethyst Academy.

itself. Ned also discovered that the Pale Man had been furious to find his Academy rings no longer opened the tower's entrance, and had been scheming to use Ned and Xakarium's rings to gain access instead.

After a long and desperately needed rest, the party sought out River to deliver the fruits of their mission. The heads of Dr. Freed, Osiric, and the Pale Man were handed over for processing at the Ziggurat's mental extraction lab, and River confirmed that the Academy would help the party develop the contamination-siphoning technique as their official reward for recovering the Pale Man's research. When Ned mentioned the discrepancy in Eldrick's appearance and gear during their encounter at the estate, River met his eyes with a knowing look and told him what she suspected he had already begun to figure out — Eldrick Runeweaver did not have one simulacrum. He had four. The revelation explained every inconsistency the party had noticed across their various encounters with the archmage, and raised more than a few uncomfortable questions about which version of Eldrick they had actually been dealing with at any given time.

With their rewards negotiated and their wounds healed, the party prepared themselves for what was coming. Tark traded in his belt of lazy hill giant strength for something considerably more powerful, and the group leveled up in experience and capability, steeling themselves for the assault on the Inscrutable Tower. Eldrick's homunculus, Homie, remained with the party as a communication link, settled into a quiet corner of the hotel lobby and waiting patiently for the word to be sent. The Silver Order continued burning the outer districts of Kleinberg block by block, and the Hooded Lanterns fought back with bureaucratic insurgency rather than open combat, slowing the destruction without triggering all-out war. The city was fraying at the edges, the tower loomed on the horizon, and somewhere inside it, a dragon that might once have been one of the Academy's own founders was growing stronger by the hour.

Memorable Moments

Eldrick Runeweaver arrives at the foyer singed and shaken, describing how a crystalline dragon's prismatic breath tore his entire elite strike team apart in a heartbeat.

The normally composed and bureaucratic archmage is visibly rattled, his robes scorched, nervously adjusting his academy ring as he recounts the disaster.

The party witnesses the Inscrutable Tower for the first time up close — a 1,200-foot obsidian spire with its upper section floating in defiance of gravity above a breach crackling with eldritch lightning and drifting delirium shards.

Teleported into the deep violet haze of Drakkenheim, the sheer scale of the tower and its impossible physics leave the party in awe.

River reveals that Eldrick Runeweaver doesn't have one simulacrum — he has four, explaining his different appearances and gear throughout the campaign.

After Ned activates his amulet to read Eldrick and notices something is off, River confirms the party's suspicions with a knowing look.

The Pale Man's research notes suggest the Delirium Dragon may be Amaranthus — an Archmage of the Moon and one of the founding members of the Amethyst Academy.

Ned uncovers this disturbing theory while studying the Pale Man's conspiracy-style research notes back at the hotel in Emberwood Village.

Eight-legged lupine aberrations with no heads or eyes open temporal rifts along their spines to swallow the bodies of fallen Academy mages and iron golems whole, disposing of the wreckage into a void.

The party watches in horrified silence from the abutment as the creatures scavenge the plaza below the Inscrutable Tower.

"You pillage before you burn. I always forget that."
— Ned

Realizing mid-discussion that the party was about to leave the Pale Man's house without looting it first, before setting it on fire.

Yazzy's satirical performance mocking the Silver Order is so effective that even Silver Order supporters in the crowd begin rethinking their politics and religion by the end of the song.

Yazzy rolls exceptionally well on her performance checks, turning a bar set into an impromptu political revolution at the Gilded Lily.

Scenes

Aftermath in the Sludge Room

The party recovers in the aftermath of their battle against the Pale Man and Osiric, tending to their wounds before looting the laboratory.

- The party gathers themselves after defeating the Pale Man and Osiric, noting the remains of animated sludge and jellyfish-like creatures.
- Ned secures the heads of their fallen foes and a spellbook into the bag of holding.

- Oiroa uses healing words at various upcast levels to mend the party's severe injuries, though the healing proves less potent than hoped due to poor rolls.
- The group discusses the toxicity of the sludge room, noting its similarity to delirium contamination and that barbarians are immune.
- The party decides to pillage the Pale Man's research and paperwork before leaving the premises.

Looting the Pale Man's Research

The party ascends from the basement to the upper floors of the Pale Man's house to collect his experimental notes and conspiracy boards.

- The party travels through the backyard well and up the stairs, finding the area cleared of the dregs they previously scared off.
- The homunculus is placed in the bag of holding before entering the research room.
- The group enters the research room, finding a conspiracy board dedicated to the Inscrutable Tower.
- Ned stuffs the Pale Man's research papers and books into the bag of holding for later study.
- The homunculus is pulled back out of the bag of holding once the looting is complete.

Encounter with Eldrick Runeweaver

The party encounters Eldrick Runeweaver in the foyer of the Pale Man's estate, appearing singed and shaken after a catastrophic defeat.

- Eldrick Runeweaver arrives at the foyer, appearing disheveled with singed robes and a tight, urgent voice, nervously adjusting his academy ring.
- Eldrick describes the total destruction of his Academy strike team by a crystalline dragon exhaling a colossal cone of prismatic rays.
- Eldrick requests the party stand with him to witness the wreckage at the Inscrutable Tower, promising to teleport them right back to town afterward.
- The party notices Eldrick is carrying a rod of absorption instead of his usual staff, and his overall appearance is subtly different from previous encounters.

Vision of the Inscrutable Tower

Eldrick teleports the party to a vantage point overlooking the Inscrutable Tower, revealing a scene of eldritch horror and devastation.

- Eldrick teleports the party to a raised abutment overlooking the Inscrutable Tower plaza, surrounded by deep suffocating violet fog.
- The party observes the massive 1,200-foot shimmering obsidian tower, with its upper section hovering above a gaping breach in defiance of gravity, crackling eldritch lightning visible within.
- Eldrick points out the remains of his strike team scattered across the plaza, including crushed iron golems and fallen Academy mages in scorched purple robes.
- Grotesque tree-stump creatures with eyes in the palms of their hands are seen shoveling chunks of flesh into tooth-filled mouths atop their bodies.
- Eight-legged lupine marauders with shimmering prismatic auras use temporal rifts that split open along their spines to dispose of wreckage and bodies into a void.
- The creatures momentarily notice the party before retreating toward the tower.
- Eldrick explains that the Delirium Dragon has rapidly grown from a wyrmling to a full adult by feeding on the chaos of the tower's rift, and urges the party not to delay.

Return to Emberwood Village

Eldrick teleports the party back to the outskirts of Kleinberg, and the group makes their way back to Emberwood Village to recover and plan.

- Eldrick teleports the party from within the Haze to the outskirts of Kleinberg near the city walls, bypassing the need to pass through checkpoints.
- Eldrick warns the party they must act quickly before the dragon grows into an ancient threat, then departs.
- The party insists on returning to town for healing and a long rest before attempting to take the tower.
- Ned activates his amulet to get a read on Eldrick before he departs, noting the discrepancy in his appearance and gear.
- The party takes a long rest to recover from exhaustion and injuries.

A Night at the Gilded Lily

Yazzy performs at the Gilded Lily, using her music to influence the political views of the crowd regarding the

Silver Order.

- Yazzy performs a satirical set mocking the Silver Order's supposed help for the people of Drakenheim.
- The performance is so effective that even some Silver Order supporters in the crowd begin to rethink their politics.
- Yazzy earns a significant amount of gold and a geode of delirium from the appreciative crowd.
- The tavern owner offers Yazzy a cut of the house to perform a third song, which she accepts.
- Yazzy plays a slow dance song, further captivating the audience and earning even more gold.

Syndle's Triumphant Return to the Farm

Syndle makes a grand entrance back into town, celebrated as a legendary hero by the Falling Fire pilgrims.

- Syndle rides into town on his goat with great fanfare, greeted like a legendary figure by the locals.
- Followers announce the return of the 'Champion of Drakenheim' to the rest of the crowd.
- Stories of Syndle's exploits have been greatly exaggerated by the public, crediting him with solo victories.
- Nathaniel Flint informs Syndle that Lucretia Mathias wishes to meet with him to discuss recent developments, particularly the party's association with Eldrick Runeweaver.

Research and Revelations

Ned begins studying the captured research of the Pale Man, uncovering secrets about the Inscrutable Tower and the nature of contamination.

- Ned holes up in a hotel to begin copying spells from the captured spellbooks of the Pale Man, Dr. Freed, and Osiric.
- The Pale Man's spellbook contains several new spells never before encountered: Siphon Contamination, Octarine Spray, Forced Evolution, Delirium Blast, Conjure the Deep Haze, and Delirium Orb.
- The Pale Man's research notes contain conspiracy-theory-style writings about 'thin spots' between worlds and the nature of the Inscrutable Tower.

- The research includes several entries questioning whether the Delirium Dragon might be a figure named Amaranthus, described as an Archmage of the Moon and one of the early founders of the Academy.
- Ned discovers that the Pale Man was unable to open the Inscrutable Tower because his rings no longer functioned, and he intended to use Ned and Xakarium's rings to gain access.
- Eldrick Runeweaver's homunculus, Homie, remains with the party to act as a messenger for when they are ready to return to the tower.

A Meeting with River

The party meets with River to deliver the heads of their fallen enemies and negotiate rewards for their successful mission.

- The party delivers the heads of Dr. Freed, Osiric, and the Pale Man to River for mental extraction at the Ziggurat.
- River reveals that Eldrick Runeweaver does not have one simulacrum but four, explaining his varying appearances throughout the campaign.
- The party discusses the threat of the Delirium Dragon and the exotic creatures guarding the Inscrutable Tower.
- River confirms that turning over the Pale Man's research will allow the Academy to help the party develop the Siphon Contamination spell.
- The party negotiates for magical rewards, with Syndle trading in his belt of hill giant strength for a belt of stone giant strength.
- The party levels up to 11th level in preparation for the assault on the Inscrutable Tower.

NPCs

Osiric

A powerful wizard whose head was taken by the party as a trophy and stored in the bag of holding after his defeat. His spellbook was also recovered.

The Pale Man

A researcher into delirium and mutations whose laboratory was pillaged by the party. His head, spellbook, and research notes were claimed as spoils. His research contained conspiracy-style

writings about the Inscrutable Tower, notes on siphoning contamination, and entries questioning whether the Delirium Dragon might be the historical figure Amaranthus.

Homie

The Pale Man's homunculus, captured by the party and temporarily stored in the bag of holding. Later given to Eldrick Runeweaver's care, then left with the party as a communication link for when they are ready to return to the Inscrutable Tower.

Eldrick Runeweaver

A high-ranking mage of the Amethyst Academy who appears singed and shaken, his bureaucratic composure stripped away. He reveals his entire strike team was annihilated by a crystalline dragon's prismatic breath. He uses teleportation to show the party the devastation at the tower and urges them to act quickly. He carries a rod of absorption instead of his usual staff. River later reveals he employs four simulacrams to manage his affairs, explaining his varying appearances.

River

A tiefling mage and contact for the Amethyst Academy who accepts the heads of the party's enemies for mental extraction at the Ziggurat. She reveals that Eldrick Runeweaver uses four simulacrams, confirms the Academy's interest in the Pale Man's research, and helps the party negotiate magical rewards.

Nathaniel Flint

A leader of the Falling Fire who informs Syndle that Lucretia Mathias is curious about the party's recent activities and their association with Eldrick Runeweaver.

Lucretia Mathias

The unseen leader of the Falling Fire faith who requests a meeting with Syndle to understand the current state of affairs, particularly the party's association with Eldrick Runeweaver.

Locations

The Sludge Room

A toxic basement chamber filled with animated sludge and geodes, where the party recently concluded a desperate battle against the Pale Man. The sludge is toxic in the same way as delirium contamination.

The Pale Man's House

A residence containing a research room filled with conspiracy boards about the Inscrutable Tower and notes on siphoning mutations, as well as a backyard well leading to the basement.

Inscrutable Tower

A massive 1,200-foot tall shimmering obsidian structure with no windows, smashed apart roughly two-thirds up its height by a meteor. The upper section floats above a gaping breach filled with crackling eldritch lightning and floating delirium shards. The plaza at its base was the site of Eldrick's annihilated strike team and is now prowled by grotesque aberrations.

Gilded Lily

A popular establishment in Emberwood Village where Yazzy performs satirical songs that sway the political opinions of the patrons, earning gold and a geode of delirium.

Red Lion Hotel

The place where River stays and where the party seeks her out to conduct business, delivering enemy heads and negotiating rewards.

Hendrick's Farm

The gathering site for the Falling Fire pilgrims where Syndle is celebrated as the Champion of Drakenheim upon his return.

Emberwood Village

The party's base of operations where they rest, conduct research, perform, and meet with faction representatives including River and Nathaniel Flint.

Ziggurat

The location of River's mental extraction lab, where the heads of the party's enemies are processed for information.

Items

Bag of Holding

A magical extradimensional satchel used by the party to store various trophies including the heads of Osiric and the Pale Man, stolen research papers, and the reluctant homunculus Homie.

Pale Man's Research

A collection of paperwork and conspiracy-style boards detailing the Inscrutable Tower, methods for siphoning mutations from one host to another, theories about thin spots between worlds, and entries questioning whether the Delirium Dragon is the historical figure Amaranthus.

Pale Man's Spellbook

A tome of arcane knowledge recovered from the Pale Man's remains, containing several previously unknown spells including Siphon Contamination, Octarine Spray, Forced Evolution, Delirium Blast, Conjure the Deep Haze, and Delirium Orb.

Dr. Freed's Spellbook

A spellbook captured from Dr. Freed, noted for its unusual lack of cantrips, recovered and studied by Ned.

Osiric's Spellbook

The spellbook of the mage Osiric, recovered from his remains and studied by Ned for new combat magic.

Academy Ring

A signet ring worn by Eldrick Runeweaver, which he nervously adjusts while recounting the destruction of his strike team in the foyer of the Pale Man's estate.

Rod of Absorption

A magical rod carried by Eldrick Runeweaver during his visit to the Pale Man's estate, replacing his usual staff and noted by Ned and Xakarium as unusual.

Belt of Stone Giant Strength

A powerful magical belt acquired by Syndle as a reward, traded in exchange for his belt of hill giant strength to significantly increase his physical power in preparation for the assault on the Inscrutable Tower.

Geode of Delirium

A crystalline meteorite fragment given to Yazzy by a fan in the crowd after her performance at the Gilded Lily.

Spells

Healing Word

Cast multiple times by Oiroa at various upcast levels to keep the battered party alive after their grueling fight, though the healing proved frustratingly weak due to a string of poor rolls, including multiple ones.

Teleportation

Used by Eldrick Runeweaver to transport the party from the Pale Man's estate to a raised abutment overlooking the Inscrutable Tower plaza, and then back to the outskirts of Kleinberg near the city walls. He notes that teleportation within the Haze is possible, but one cannot teleport in or out of it.

Purge Contamination

Discussed and cast by party members to remove magical corruption from those afflicted, though it leaves the caster or target with levels of exhaustion as a consequence.

Greater Restoration

Discussed as a means to reduce exhaustion levels, though noted to only reduce a single level of exhaustion per casting despite being a fifth-level spell.

Siphon Contamination

A specialized spell found in the Pale Man's spellbook, identified as the spell used to pull the mutation out of Osiric during the battle. The Amethyst Academy's official reward for turning over the Pale Man's research is assistance in developing this spell.

Octarine Spray

A powerful seventh-level spell found in the Pale Man's spellbook, noted by the party as something that previously devastated them in combat. Ned intends to learn it once he reaches the required spell slot level.

Conjure the Deep Haze

A spell found in the Pale Man's spellbook that allows the caster to conjure a fog cloud of the deep haze, the toxic violet fog found within the ruins of Drakkenheim.

Delirium Orb

A spell found in the Pale Man's spellbook, described as similar to a chromatic orb but utilizing the chaotic energy of delirium.

Simulacrum

A powerful spell used by Eldrick Runeweaver to create not one but four copies of himself, allowing him to manage Academy affairs across multiple locations simultaneously and explaining his varying appearances to the party.