

BIRTHRIGHT

ADVENTURE

Legends of the Hero-Kings



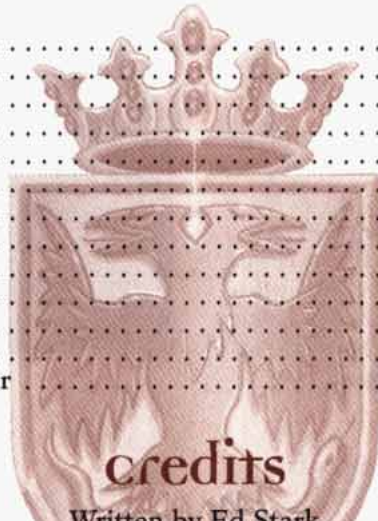
by Ed Stark





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introduction

"The fifteen centuries following the Mount Deismaar cataclysm were an age marked by strife and dissension. Elves waged genocidal wars against humans; dwarves battled ceaselessly to contain the orogs underground; the awnsheghlien preyed on everyone. Many feared Cerilia's factious rulers would tear apart the continent itself in their quest for dominance.

"Then the time of the Hero-Kings came upon the land. Not since Michael Roele died at the hands of the Gorgon had any leader so great stood among the peoples of Cerilia. And then there were many.

"Call me Karlbrech the Wanderer. Some honor me with the title 'loremaster'; others consider me merely a bard. Wandering the world, my home is Cerilia and my songs are waves upon its shores.

"The stories I tell today are of the Hero-Kings: the men and women who forged empires out of Cerilia's turbulent middle years. They lived, they fought, they won, they lost, and they died—all long ago. And thus their legends formed."

Karlbrech the Wanderer comes from a time far in the future of Cerilia. His tales speak of Hero-Kings and conquerors from his past . . . but from your present. His Heroes are your kings—your player characters (PCs) in your campaign.

Every adventure in this book details a legend told in Karlbrech's time about deeds done by your PCs. Events that may seem relatively insignificant right now play critical roles in forging Cerilia's future—but the Hero-Kings of your campaign must fight their wars and achieve their victories while they may, not knowing how the outcome affects the future of their world.



how to use this book

More than simply an adventure collection, *Legends of the Hero-Kings* enables a BIRTHRIGHT® game Dungeon Master to turn an ordinary domain action into an opportunity for adventure. Every challenge, every "legend," contained in this book corresponds to a particular entry on Table 15: Random Events in the "Adjudicating Random Events" section of the BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook. When you, the DM, roll for domain events as part of a character's domain turn, you do not have to let the dice decide the outcome of each event—you can have the PCs, the "Heroes," forge their own destinies by role-playing the scenarios outlined here.

Legends of the Hero-Kings requires only the AD&D® game *Player's Handbook*, *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, and BIRTHRIGHT boxed set to play. Other BIRTHRIGHT accessories, such as *Blood Enemies* and *Cities of the Sun*, can prove helpful for some of the adventures but aren't essential.

the legends

Each adventure in this collection is a *legend*. The PCs who participate in the adventures are *Heroes*—whether they be regents, scions, or commoners, they all take a place in Cerilia's history as Heroes: Karlbrech would have it no other way. Each legend must be resolved through role-playing, ingenuity, and battle—none can be simply “dealt with” as a domain event and resolved with a mere die roll.

The key to making each legend an exciting, challenging adventure lies in getting the Heroes interested in solving it themselves rather than sending out lieutenants or armies to take care of the problem for them. Entice the players with rumors of gold and glory. Threaten the PCs with dire consequences if they do not quest for adventure themselves. Make them want to come down out of their ivory towers and get their own hands dirty in the running of their domains.

the building of a legend

Each adventure divides into several parts: the *legend seed*, the *event type*, the *Heroes*, and the *challenge*, followed by the adventure itself and the resolution. A few of the adventures also require preparation during previous domain turns to “set the stage”; these special requirements have been noted in their respective legend descriptions. Each component serves a different purpose in forming the overall legend.

Karlbrech the Wanderer wrote (or will write) each of the italicized **legend seeds** that appear at the start of the adventures. These short introductions begin the stories that the player characters—through their actions—will finish. Each seed sets the mood and reveals information pertaining to the adventure about to unfold. You can use the legend seed as a backdrop against which to set the rest of the drama.

Every legend fits into at least one **event type**, as defined in the “Adjudicating Random Events” section of the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*. Each domain turn, the DM can roll on the *Rulebook's* Table 15: Random Events to determine which complications (such as a diplomatic matter or brigandage) to introduce into the PCs' lives. An annotated Table 15, indicating which legends correspond to which event types, has been reprinted on page 4 of this book for your convenience.

Many of the legends fit into more than one event type. Each adventure lists a primary event type; most also include recommended alterna-

tives. If you run a particular adventure and then roll the same event type again, you can choose one of the alternatives (or simply reroll).

Each legend also includes recommendations regarding the types of **Heroes** best suited for the adventure—some require that at least one PC be a regent or of a particular character class, others offer guidelines for minimum PC experience levels. Always run adventures appropriate to the party's make-up. If your group of PCs doesn't fit the guidelines of a certain legend, don't worry—most of the adventures can be adjusted to compensate. For example, a legend ideal for a party of low-level PCs could be modified to accommodate a higher-level party by increasing the level or number of opponents, or by including a dangerous monster, awnshegh, or NPC as a “ringleader.”

The **challenge** of every legend summarizes the action of the adventure and recommended plot thread of the tale. Although the challenge reads like a story already complete, the PCs are expected to vary from the plot, creating their own legends.

After the summary, the adventure follows. Consider each adventure only an outline for all the things that *could* take place during the event—since each legend is described only briefly in this book, there should be plenty of room for expansion and individual improvement.

Each legend concludes with some sort of resolution, though not every legend has an easily quantified one. Usually, this section summarizes the most likely endings and details the different rewards the Heroes can obtain for participating in the adventure. Most often, you as the DM are left a lot of room for granting your own experience points, Regency Points, or other awards to the PCs, but some guidelines are offered.

The resolution also suggests ways of continuing or expanding the adventure. Often, villains remain alive, situations remain unresolved, or new problems sprout up as a result of the Heroes' actions during the adventure. Creative DMs will try to make one legend flow into another—whether the new legend is one from this book or one you create.

the settings

To allow you maximum flexibility in introducing these adventures into your own *BIRTHRIGHT* campaign, most of the legends in this book can take place virtually anywhere on Cerilia. Certainly, some adventures proceed more

BIRTHRIGHT table 15: random events

2d10	Event	Legend(s)
2	Blood Challenge	Blood Hungry, The Horns of Droene
3	Assassination	Double Dealing, Blood Hungry
4	Festival	Gathering of Heroes, Double Dealing
5	Feud	Heroes' Pride
6	Natural Event	Terrible Awakening, The Gift of Azrai
7	Diplomatic Matter	Gathering of Heroes, Dwarven Steel
8	Corruption/Crime	Heroes' Pride
9–12	No Event	
13–14	Monsters or Brigandage	The Horns of Droene, A Time of Troubles, Terrible Awakening
15	Trade Matter	Dwarven Steel
16	Intrigue	Double Dealing, Gathering of Heroes, Heroes' Pride
17	Unrest or Rebellion	A Time of Troubles, Fang of Kriesha
18	Matter of Justice	Poor Relations, Heroes' Pride
19	Great Captain/Heresy	Fang of Kriesha, A Time of Troubles
20	Magical Event	The Gift of Azrai, Terrible Awakening

smoothly in particular types of settings—for example, “The Gift of Azrai” works best if set along the southern coast of Cerilia; “Fang of Kriesha” requires the least adjustment if run in the center or east of the continent. However, with only minor modifications, name changes of NPCs, and a few tweaks here and there, most legends can take occur just about anywhere.

timing

As mentioned in *Karlbrech the Wanderer's* prologue, these legends take place about 1,500 years after the Battle of Mount Deismaar. However, that period is not the “timing” that most concerns you as the DM.

Each random event occurs during the domain turn phase of play. A domain turn covers a period of three months (three action rounds); one random event per regent can occur during each domain turn. When the PCs start each adventure, the rest of the domain turn is suspended until they return (unless they have left lieutenants behind to administer the domains' affairs in their absence). Most of these adventures will take less than three months of game

time to resolve; some take only a few days or weeks. Regardless of the adventure's length,

the PC regents involved will use the “adventure” character action as one of the three actions they are allowed during the domain turn.

These adventures seek to pull kings, guildmasters, wizards, and priests out from behind their walled keeps and armies of retainers to create their own legends. That's what role-playing is all about.

While running a domain is fun and exciting, role-playing should also involve one-on-one action. The Heroes must act heroically—they cannot solve the problems posed in these adventures by delegating authority. They must do the dirty work themselves.

a note about abbreviations

Throughout these adventures, essential statistics of NPCs are given in a condensed format. Abbreviations for each character's gender, race, class, and level are the same as those used in *Ruins of Empire* in the BIRTHRIGHT boxed set. Note, however, that one NPC (Abram, in “The Gift of Azrai”) has the race abbreviation *Ms*, one never before used in a BIRTHRIGHT product. Abram is one of the last living members of the ancient Masetian race.

Note also that many NPCs have been designated Anuireans as a default race. If your campaign takes place in another part of Cerilia, feel free to make these characters local by substituting a more suitable race.

In spell lists, the abbreviation *ToM* indicates that the spell appears in the *Tome of Magic*.

without further preamble

And so the time has come to harken to *Karlbrech the Wanderer*—loremaster, minstrel, and storyteller. Hear the words that make the legends of the Hero-Kings come to life. High adventure and good luck be yours!

blood hungry

"Tragedy and triumph, villains and heroes, death and life—all play their parts in Cerilia. A victory means nothing without fear of defeat; healing nothing without disease. And disease, one finds, can ail not only the body, but also the soul.

"Such a sickness found its way into the heart and soul of a child when a tragic turn of fortune denied him something none would argue was his by right of birth . . . by right of blood. And this child grew into a man, with a man's strength, a man's ambition, a man's desires. But he was a warped man on the inside, and he saw the world as warped around him.

"And he worked, with all his twisted heart and poisoned soul, to wrench Cerilia back the way he thought it should be. . . ."

Event Type: Blood Challenge (result of 2 on Table 15). "Blood Hungry" may also be used as an Assassination (result of 3) event.

The Heroes: The primary Hero of this adventure should be a regent—preferably one with law holdings. The premise works best if the object of the blood challenge is a regent of some prominence.

PCs of any level can participate in this adventure. (However, you as the DM might find higher-level Heroes a little hard to manipulate in this scenario.) If necessary, adjust the levels of the villains in the adventure to suit the PCs' levels.

The Challenge: One of the PCs' seemingly loyal retainers (a lieutenant or trusted steward) appears to be the target of an assassination plot. Someone attempts to murder the retainer but the Heroes prevent his success. The Heroes' investigations into the incident reveal no suspects.

Just when the Heroes speculate that the attempt might indeed have been an isolated incident, the retainer vanishes—apparently kidnapped. The PCs investigate his disappearance and find clues that point blame at the regent he served.

Suspicion mounts; questions arise in the domain and around the court. Was the retainer becoming "too popular"? Did he do something that threw him out of favor with the regent he had so loyally served? Has the regent chosen to make one of his most loyal servants "disappear"?

Of course, the PC regent is not responsible. The other Heroes presumably trust their associate (though really good role-players might act as if their characters have doubts). The PCs must find the retainer and the true culprits before word of this incident spreads to the provinces—and they must keep news of the retainer's disappearance as quiet as they can.

The Heroes discover clues that lead them to one of the least-settled provinces in the regent's domain. They track the kidnappers and encounter a band of brigands led, apparently, by a scion of some power.

A fight breaks out. Ideally, the PCs are victorious, driving the brigands and their leader away (or killing them outright). The Heroes might, however, wind up defeated and captured. Either way, they come face-to-face with the "kidnapped" retainer.

At this point, the retainer reveals that he was not kidnapped, but actually the instigator of the plot. He then attempts to commit bloodtheft against the PC regent. If he succeeds, the brigands could also succeed in killing the rest of the PCs. If he fails, the other PCs might be able to engineer an escape and turn the tables on the brigands.

necessary preparation

Unlike most of the other legends in this book, "Blood Hungry" requires quite a bit of pre-adventure preparation. The setup can be accomplished in three parts.

First, introduce a retainer. In a prior adventure or earlier domain turn, the PC regent must take on a henchman, lieutenant, or NPC traveling companion who appears completely trustworthy (and, at the beginning, may well be). This NPC can be of any class.

though his level should at least match that of the PC regent (to make it a fair fight), his bloodline should be of the same derivation as the PC's, and he should be of the same race (at least partially) as the PC.

Second, the NPC should do something to win the PC's trust. Either the NPC stays with the Heroes through a few adventures, fighting alongside them heroically, or he runs a province or the domain in the PC's absence and does a good job. *The PC and NPC must have some occasion for interaction so that this trust can develop.* Again, the NPC may actually be operating in good faith at this point.

When you deem the time right, the NPC either decides to implement a long-developing plot to assassinate the PC regent and take over his domain, or comes to a revelation about his true ancestry (as explained under "Your 'Loyal' Servant," below) and snaps—throwing away his loyalty and devotion in favor of a twisted form of revenge. At this point, the adventure truly begins.

If you, the DM, have just rolled a blood challenge on Table 15 and are not prepared for such an involved scenario, declare "No Event" and begin the setup *now*. The next lieutenant or NPC the regent takes on is the one who will betray him. Allow the plot to percolate for a few months (and go through the steps listed above) and spring it the next time the campaign experiences a lull (or another "No Event" result occurs).

your 'loyal' servant

While the adventure generates more excitement (and genuine feelings of betrayal) if it involves one of the PC's established retainers as the traitor, you can introduce the following NPC as a substitute. Feel free to adjust his levels and abilities to keep him about as powerful as (or a little *more* powerful than) the PC he is destined to betray, as long as his level complies with the lieutenant guidelines outlined in the *Rulebook*.

Also, make sure you change his race and bloodline if necessary to match those of the PC.

Orlis, MA, T5/F7:

AC 6 (leather armor, ring of protection +1, Dex bonus); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 35; THAC0 14 (13 with Str bonus, 10 with *Blood Hunger*); #AT 3/2 (2/1 with dagger); Dmg 1d6+4 (*Blood Hunger*, Str bonus); SA backstab (×3), bloodthief; SZ M (5' 11" tall); ML fearless (20); AL CE; XP 3,000.

S 17, D 15, C 12, I 15, W 16, Ch 14.

Bloodline: Anduiras, tainted, 12; blood ability: unreadable thoughts.

Personality: Fractured—veers from kind and conscientious to sociopathic.

Equipment: Ring of protection +1; *Blood Hunger* (*tighmaevril* dagger +3), described below.

Thief Abilities: PP 50, OL 42, F/RT 40, MS 40, HS 31, DN 20, CW 90, RL 25.

the traitor's background

Regardless of whether the traitor is Orlis or an existing retainer, this adventure requires him to have a particular family history. The traitor's "true" background, therefore, is described below; if necessary, replace details of an existing NPC's background with details essential to this adventure.

Orlis grew up in the domain he now seeks to rule. Born to a single, slightly insane, mother, he grew up poor and hungry. He became a thief at an early age, using his skills to support himself and his family. His mother, meanwhile, gradually grew more mad.

Despite his shady way of earning a living, Orlis was never evil. Eventually, he hit a big enough "score" that he could buy his mother a small cottage outside of town and pay for her keep. He then gave up his thieving lifestyle and became a warrior.

Serving in several armies across Cerilia, Orlis always returned home after his adventures to see his mother. To his heart's pain, she never got any better, but grew more and more unhinged. She called her cottage a "palace" and referred to her servants as "courtiers." Sometimes in her sleep she cried out to someone Orlis could only believe to be his father.

But Orlis continued to support her, working off his anger and frustration at her condition in adventures and wars. Eventually, he enlisted in the service of the regent of the land so he could remain close to his mother (That's when he started serving the PC.) Still a basically good man, Orlis continued to struggle silently with his feelings.

One day, however, something happened that pushed him over the edge. Returning home for a visit, Orlis found the cottage broken into, the servants dead or fled, and his mother dying in her bed. She gasped out, "The palace has been invaded, and the crowned jewels taken." She made Orlis vow, in her delirium, to take "her secret treasure" to his father and make himself known. She gave directions to where Orlis could find this "treasure." Then she died.

Overcome with grief, Orlis could not bear to report his mother's death to the authorities (of which he was one), feeling that it was his fault she had been left vulnerable to attack. He served his master with growing uneasiness and returned to the cottage frequently in memory of his dead mother, whom he buried nearby.

One day, Orlis decided to search for his mother's "treasure." Undoubtedly, he thought, it was a glass gem or a piece of cloth or something that she had, in her insanity, thought valuable.

He could not have been more wrong.

Orlis followed her instructions to the hiding place. Inside a small box, he found three things.

The first was a collection of letters, unsigned but obviously from someone rich enough to afford the finest parchment and inks. He found the handwriting disturbingly familiar.



The second item was a scrap of cloth, well worn from use—a swaddling cloth once used to wrap a baby. It bore a royal seal Orlis knew all too well.

Now agitated and desperate, Orlis drew out the third item: a small, leather-wrapped package. He felt power surge into his body.

And though he didn't know it then, his mind snapped.

Orlis had come upon an evil heirloom: *Borablsbegh*, or "Blood Hunger," an ancient dagger laced with the magical metal *tigh-maevril*. How his mother had come into possession of it, no man can say, but it twisted Orlis as it had broken his mother's mind, and his thoughts turned to revenge and hatred. Orlis, in that moment, recognized the hand who'd written the letters to his mother, and again experienced being carried from the very palace he served today.

Orlis was the bastard son of the domain's former ruler. He had sworn service to one who was—in his now twisted eyes—a usurper who'd stolen his blood rights.

Orlis gripped the dagger *Blood Hunger* in his hand. *He would get his birthright back.*

blood hunger

An ancient dagger forged, no doubt, by the same elf smith who made all the known *tigh-maevril* weapons, *Blood Hunger* has survived more wars and more assassination plots than any person currently living on Cerilia. A cursed, sapient dagger, it hungers for the lives it takes . . . and the sanity of the one who wields it.

Blood Hunger is a dagger +3 with an Intelligence of 13, empathic capabilities, an ego of 10, and a Chaotic Evil alignment. It has two primary abilities: the ability to locate scions in a 120-foot radius (similar to the locate object ability), and the ability to detect secret doors in a 5-foot radius.

Its special purpose is to kill blooded characters.

Blood Hunger also has a special purpose power it uses to increase its wielder's ability to kill scions. Whenever *Blood Hunger* senses a victim is within a few hit points of dying (that is, within the damage range for a killing strike), it will guide its wielder's hand to his target's heart. The wielder need not make a called shot to strike his victim's heart, or guess at his timing. As long as the wielder hits, the killing thrust will go into the victim's heart.



the adventure begins

The critical preparatory elements in place, start the adventure while one of the Heroes—the target PC regent—holds court. The other Heroes in the party either sit by, offering assistance or advice when necessary, or hold court in their own domains.

Having attended to most of the daily matters of court, the PC regent calls forth his advisers, lieutenants, and courtiers and asks them if they are aware of anything interesting or untoward happening in the domain that requires the regent's attention. Unless you, the DM, have some other plot lines developing, no one offers a report of this type . . . except one trusted retainer known as Orlis (or the substitute NPC retainer the DM has chosen).

Read or paraphrase Orlis's report aloud:

And then *Blood Hunger* does what it was designed to do: It drains the victim's bloodline, passing half of it to its wielder and consuming half itself. For a number of days equal to the amount of bloodline strength points it absorbs, *Blood Hunger* becomes a *dagger +6* with an Intelligence of 17—meaning it can use speech and telepathy. It gains no other powers, but its ego increases to 15 during this time. While thus empowered it will try to dominate its wielder, driving him to more evil acts and more killing of blooded characters—something a chaotic evil wielder will have a hard time resisting.

The DM should refer to Appendix 3 of the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* for more information about intelligent weapons. Details regarding tighmaevril weapons and bloodtheft appear in the "Blood and Regency" section of the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

"My lord," your loyal retainer begins. He stammers a moment, looking around. "My lord," he begins again, "I hesitate to report this, but there has been an attempt on my life."

The other courtiers erupt with questions and exclamations. The whole room fills with chatter. Orlis pauses until the noise level drops, then continues.

"My lord, I was walking through the streets of the capital last night when I heard a noise from a nearby alley. I walked alone, attending to personal business, but I did not hesitate to investigate. Your Majesty's city streets are, of course, very safe normally.

"But, alas, no sooner did I enter the alley than I was beset by a group of brigands. Coming at me with all manner of weapons, they assaulted me and would have done me in if not for the intervention of the city guard. The guard managed to drive the brigands off, killing two of them.

"I would have thought it a simple robbery attempt, my lord, except for the fact that, as I entered the alleyway, one of the brigands shouted to his comrades, 'That's him! Kill him!' before they attacked."

This report shocks the court into silence, broken quickly by murmurings and gossip. Unless the regent orders everyone to be silent on the matter, rumors soon run rampant through the palace: An attempt made on a courtier's life—is no one safe?

Interviews with Orlis and the watch patrol that saved him provide little information. The most generic terms describe the brigands, and those involved speculate that the bandits probably didn't know who hired them to kill Orlis (true), or why (also true). Any investigations the PCs make prove fruitless. Even if a few of the brigands turn up, they know nothing of import.

The other retainers urge the regent to summon some of his allies for assistance (the other PCs) and call for an increase in guards around the castle. Orlis, on the other hand, argues that the attempt was undoubtedly the work of some jealous courtier or foreign manipulator who thought killing one of the king's retainers—any retainer—would stir up trouble. He believes that there will be no more attempts on his, or any other retainer's, life, since the regent's officials have seen through the plot so easily.

a reminder

Don't forget: Orlis orchestrated the assassination attempt and runs the show from here. He made certain to walk where the city guard could not help but spot the assault, and hired—through many intermediaries and guises—men he could defeat on his own if necessary.

The gossip currently running through the court comes, indirectly, from Orlis as well. For weeks he has planted seeds of rumors in the ears of maids, minor courtiers, and other advisers about the regent's apparent dissatisfaction with him. A comment here, a comment there, and many of the courtiers believe Orlis is "out of favor" with the regent but they don't know why. Now this assassination plot makes Orlis both a sympathetic figure and one to stay away from.

The regent, of course, knows none of this, unless you think the PC has done an exceptional job of spying on his own court.

further developments

Encourage the Heroes, or at least the PC regent, to investigate the matter thoroughly. If the PC regent has any enemies, Orlis has tried to leave subtle clues to their involvement. (For example, if this adventure takes place in the domain of Roesone, and Ghoere is an unfriendly neighbor, Orlis might arrange to equip the brigands he hired with weapons or clothes made in that domain.) No one discovers any hard evidence, however, so after a few days the excitement around the court dies down.

a dagger in the night

No matter what precautions the Heroes take, eventually Orlis arranges for another attempt on his life. This one occurs in the PC regent's home or headquarters itself, while Orlis is present on business. Preferably, it happens at night, when Orlis and the Heroes are asleep.

Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

You are awakened out of a sound sleep by a shout and a crash. The sounds seem to be coming from the direction of Orlis's room.

If the Heroes rush to the rescue, they find guards outside Orlis's room trying to get in. Someone has locked the door from the other side, and sounds of a struggle come from within. Breaking down the door or otherwise getting into the room reveals the following scene:

A man dressed in gray and black holds a dagger in his hand as he steps away from Orlis, who wears only his nightclothes. Both have blood on them, but Orlis looks the worse for wear. He drops, in a swoon, onto the bed. The man in gray moves forward.

Assassin, MA, T8: AC 4 (*leather armor +1, Dex bonus*); MV 12 (*unencumbered*); hp 38; THAC0 17 (15 with *dagger +2*); #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+2 (*dagger +2*); SA backstab (×3 dmg), poison; SZ M (6' 1" tall); ML elite (13); AL NE; XP 975.

S 14, D 17, C 13, I 13, W 8, Ch 9.

Notes: Sleep poison on dagger (save vs. poison or sleep)—the assassin *thinks* it is lethal.

Personality: Rash, greedy.

Equipment: *Unencumbering leather armor +1, dagger +2, climbing tools, dark clothing, black mask, sleeping poison (three doses in pouch, one on dagger), smoke bombs, caltrops.*

Thief Abilities: PP 70, OL 67, F/RT 55, MS 67, HS 54, DN 25, CW 95, RL 40.

Hired by Orlis through many intermediaries, the assassin seems to have finished his job—at least, he thinks so. Even though Orlis got a good hit on him (better than the assassin knows—see below), Orlis has finally collapsed, overcome by the poison on the assassin's dagger. Now the rogue can escape. He uses his smoke bombs and caltrops to confuse and obstruct pursuit and makes every effort to flee the dwelling.

Unfortunately for the assassin, the Heroes can fight as well. They can try to engage him in combat, check on Orlis, or perform both actions. The assassin attempts to kill or cripple anyone who tries to stop him from leaving. If the Heroes inspect Orlis, they see him unconscious and bleeding from a small wound; a successful Healing proficiency check will reveal poison in his system.

The assassin doesn't know it, but poison permeates his system as well. Orlis's dagger, identical in appearance to the assassin's (he planned it that way), is coated with a lethal variant of the sleep poison the assassin unknowingly employs. The assassin failed his saving throw moments ago and dies 2d4 rounds after the Heroes break into the room. This event surprises no one so much as the assassin himself.

On the other hand, Orlis recovers in two turns. If someone casts a *neutralize poison* spell on him, he recovers within one round.

A *slow poison* spell wakes him in one turn.

Orlis's tale

When Orlis awakens, he tells the Heroes he was working late and had just dozed off when he heard a noise. The next thing he knew, an assassin, daggers in his hands, hovered over him. Orlis wrestled one of the knives from the man and stabbed him but took a knife wound himself in the bargain. He doesn't remember the Heroes coming through the door or anything else. He did not recognize the assassin.

the assassin's tale

In the unlikely event the Heroes question the assassin before he dies, he reveals nothing willingly. However, since magical means of interrogating dead subjects do exist, you need to know the assassin's story.

The assassin has no idea who paid money to eliminate Orlis. An agent contacted him and told him he had a job. The assassin checked out the particulars and agreed to do the work; his agent provided him with the poison he believed to be lethal. He broke into the bedchamber and tried to do the job with the dagger he'd been given.

At this point, the assassin's tale differs from Orlis's story. According to the assassin, Orlis lay in his bed, apparently asleep. However, when the man crept alongside the bed, Orlis leapt up, dagger flashing, and cut him across the side. The assassin, despite his training, shouted and fell against a chair. He recovered quickly, however, and dealt Orlis what should have been a lethal blow.

finding the truth

The Heroes can use clues at the scene to determine what happened without having to interrogate the assassin (before or after he dies). First, the hired killer carried his only dagger in a sheath; he does not have a second sheath. Second, the poison in the assassin's pouch is a much-diluted form of the residue on Orlis' dagger, as someone experienced with poisons could learn from analysis. Third (and this is the most subtle clue), if Orlis was indeed working late, he worked without light—the guards can verify that no light had streamed from under Orlis's door for at least an hour before the incident. (The retainer waited in the dark for his assassin.)

However, do not under any circumstances “give” these clues away. The players must investigate thoroughly and ask very specific questions about the assassin, the poison, and the attack to get even a suspicion about what really transpired. Orlis, of course, attempts to throw them off the track if he senses them closing in, and may have even arranged for a few distractions around the palace in case the Heroes got suspicious. Orlis wants to play the victim here, and he wants everyone to believe he has miraculously survived a second attempt on his life.

the retainer's next move

Depending on how much the Heroes know (or suspect), Orlis proceeds either quickly or slowly. If the Heroes suspect nothing, or if Orlis believes they suspect nothing, he begins sowing a few more seeds of suspicion. For the past several weeks, before the first attempt on his life, Orlis dropped hints that he felt the PC regent was “dissatisfied” with his work and “somehow displeased” with him. This has been going on very subtly (as mentioned above). Now, the whispers start getting louder, and there is a chance that someone in the party will hear them.

In addition to the whispers and general suspicion, a few courtiers and visitors to the PC regent's domain have started speculating about the identity of the assassin's employer. Most of the rumors indicate that one of the PC regent's allies (the other player characters) sent or brought the assassin to court. Perhaps the assassin carried or wore something on his body that indicates this (much like the brigands from the previous encounter). If Orlis can accomplish it he will try to obtain very personal objects, such as the official seal of another PC regent or part of a letter signed by one of the Heroes, to plant on the assassin's corpse or “discover” in his room after the fact.

and as a result . . .

This development should encourage a feeling of uneasiness among the PCs. Ideally, even they should begin to doubt each other, wondering if the PC regent (or one of the other Heroes) really is executing some bizarre plot. More likely than that, however, they probably

conclude that someone is trying to kill Orlis and frame the PC regent. They need to keep the mutterings and the gossip to a minimum (you, the DM, can actually have trusted advisers say this to them) while using their own abilities to track down the true perpetrator.

Send the PCs on a few wild goose chases. Orlis planned his treason for months and manipulates circumstance to lay false trails all over the kingdom. The Heroes, in desperation, can rely on only each other for support, while the rest of the retainers and courtiers try to find “something else to do” (such as paying that long-put-off visit to Aunt Edwinna) until the situation is resolved—they don't want to get caught in whatever is really going on, either.

At the height of the investigations and the paranoia, Orlis disappears.

kidnapped!

You can handle the kidnapping in one of two ways. The first is easy: Have Orlis disappear one night, leaving his bedchamber wrecked, and perhaps the body of an assailant on the floor. The Heroes can do nothing to prevent this, since it has already happened, and the plot proceeds from there.

However, if you feel that method does not involve the Heroes enough and you believe that you can control a more direct approach, use the following scenario to engineer Orlis's disappearance.

going, going, gone

Orlis awaits the kidnappers in his bedchamber. Guards remain outside—or perhaps inside if the PCs are paranoid enough—and the Heroes stay on alert. The possibility also exists that one or more of the PCs are in Orlis's room, since they might personally try to protect him from being attacked again.

Note: If the PCs try to “set up” the assassins by lying in wait, Orlis simply waits until they let down their guard to execute this stage of his plot. If they refuse to play along, have him stage a diversion (perhaps an attack on another lieutenant or retainer) using this scenario as a backup.

Like a recurring nightmare, a shout rings from Orlis's room. As you burst inside, you see your retainer, bloodied and hurt, being dragged off by a pair of black-garbed men. Other darkly clothed warriors turn to face you, drawing their swords and daggers.

The kidnapers, though employed by Orlis, do not realize he is their benefactor and have tried to beat him unconscious. They have partially succeeded; Orlis, not wishing to be killed, plays along. He lies apparently unconscious in their arms.

Meanwhile, a number of kidnapers turn on the PCs. They have identical statistics to the assassin listed previously, though they also carry long swords and other weapons (use your discretion). Just enough kidnapers should be present to keep the PCs busy while two others escape with Orlis. *Their success is imperative; Orlis must be kidnapped for the plot to progress.*

if something goes wrong

If the Heroes—through ingenuity or pure brute strength—manage to stop the kidnapers from escaping with Orlis, the retainer has a back-up plan. He does not want to use it, as it lacks the elegance of his primary plot, but he will if necessary.

Orlis resigns.

The following day, the once-loyal retainer publicly (before the whole court) resigns from the PC regent's service, proclaiming that someone in the regent's employ plots to remove him from his position. He makes accusations just short of maligning the regent himself and produces evidence he obtained from one of the would-be kidnapers: a treasury draft for 1,000 gp . . . signed by the PC regent himself.

While rumors and accusations fly around the court, Orlis stalks off and—despite the PCs' precautions—his kidnapping finally takes place.

He leaves clues to his whereabouts and prepares for the final stage of his plot.

damning evidence . . . and a clue

When Orlis's kidnapers escape (minus any that might have been killed by Orlis or the Heroes), they leave behind some devastating clues. One points to their hideout, while the other points to the PC regent as the kidnapper.

And both clues were planted by Orlis himself.

The damning evidence is a note, drawn on the treasury of the domain, for 1,000 gp. It apparently fell from one of the kidnapers during the initial struggle with Orlis; careful examination reveals it was signed by the PC regent. In reality, Orlis either stole the note after the PC regent signed it for another purpose entirely (perhaps Orlis planted it among other papers when the PC was signing them), or forged it himself. Either way, it certainly looks convincing and rumors of its existence spread through the court like wildfire.

The other clue indicates where the kidnapers might have taken Orlis. The clue might be a leaf from a tree found only in one particular part of the domain, or a receipt from a particular inn—whatever you, the DM, think appropriate. It doesn't matter if the evidence seems contrived, because it is—contrived by Orlis himself. He dropped both the note and the evidence, hoping the PCs would find them.

where now?

If the Heroes concern themselves with the rumors flying around the court and the nearby populace, they had better get Orlis back . . . fast. Loyalty among the courtiers and the provinces threatens to drop, and already other advisers and courtiers are making excuses to leave the court (only temporarily, of course). The PC regent should feel very persecuted and under suspicion at this point.

Of course, the Heroes may actually *know* what's going on by this time—it is not impossible, or even terribly unlikely, that they could make an educated guess based on the information they have. However, they possess no *proof*, and accusing Orlis, who has disappeared and cannot speak in his own defense, will only make matters worse. If one of the Heroes voices such suspicions the court boos and shuns him, thinking that the PCs are just clumsily trying to cover up their duplicity.

The PCs should soon realize that their best option lies in following the only clue they have to Orlis's whereabouts. Once they bring him back safe and sound, *then* they can hang him.

the hideout

It doesn't matter where in the domain Orlis hides—he wants to be found, and now he has men around him. The Heroes dare not take an army with them (since the army would give away their movements and presumably they want to sneak up on the culprits). The place should be secluded and defensible—Orlis has had plenty of time to select it. Most likely, he chooses the old cottage he kept his mother in for all those years.

It seems appropriate.

the final confrontation

When the Heroes approach the hideout they see what they expect to see: a small building, out of the way and guarded by several individuals trying very hard not to look like guards. Each guard attends his post alone. Orlis expects them to be killed or

removed during the approaching, inevitable, confrontation. They, meanwhile, still believe that Orlis is their victim, not their employer.

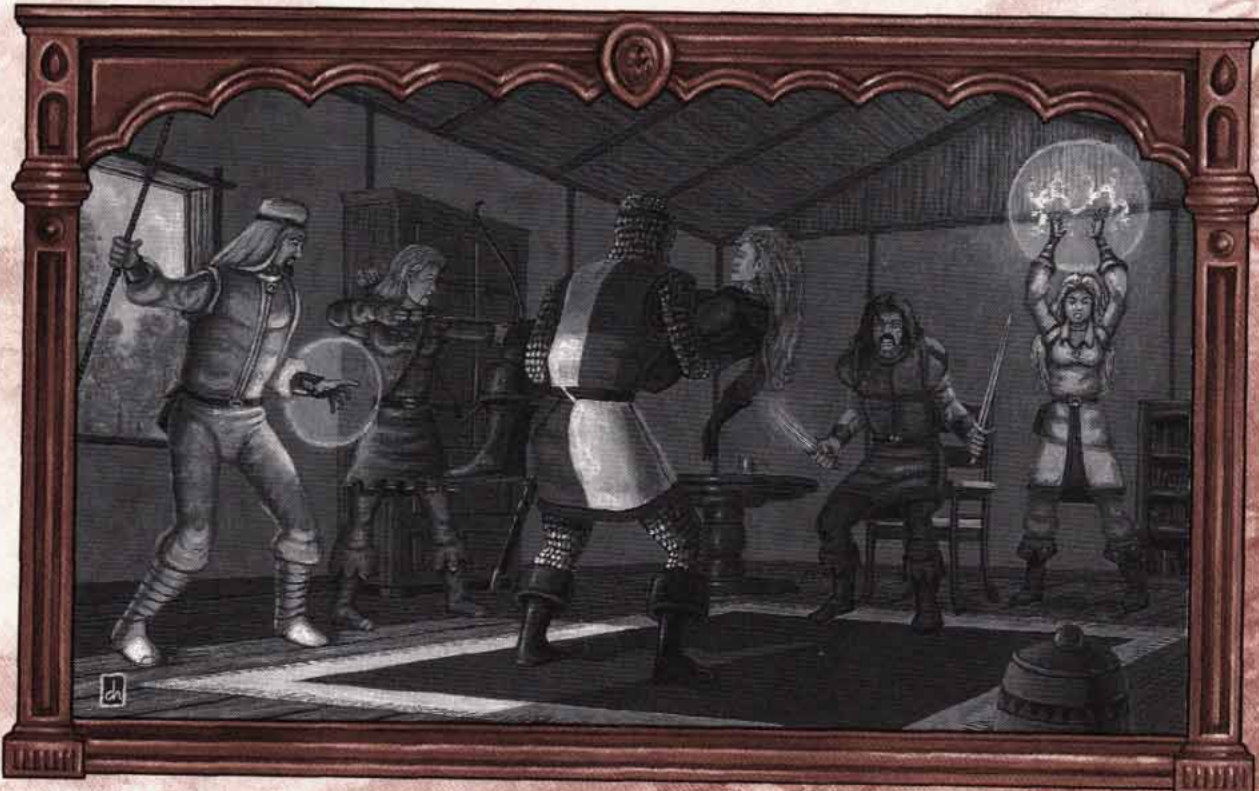
The guards have the same statistics as the assassin described earlier and were probably involved with the kidnapping themselves. There should be no more than four of them, one on each corner of the house, and the PCs should have little trouble removing one of them without alarming the others.

However, inside the cottage the situation changes. Orlis leads elite conspirators who know they work for him. As a precaution, they have the retainer tied up (though he can break the specially prepared ropes in an instant). Orlis hopes this deception will allay any doubts the PCs might harbor about whether he has in fact been kidnapped.

Orlis's Henchmen, MA & FA, F8 (4–6):
AC 3 (chain mail and shield, Dex bonus);
MV 6 (encumbered); hp 74, 72, 70, 68, 66,
59; THAC0 13 (12 with Str); #AT 3/2; Dmg
1d8+1 (long sword plus Str bonus); SZ M;
ML champion (15); AL LE; XP 650 each.

Equipment: DM's discretion; see below.
Personalities: Ruthless, careful, cruel.

If the Heroes have many magical items, feel free to equip some or all of the henchmen with magical weapons, armor, or potions. They should not have anything better than the party



already has, but they should present a challenge to the Heroes. If they do have magical items, increase the XP award by 325 points each.

Orlis also has a partner in conspiracy—a female wizard of mixed Khinasi and Anuirean descent with her own grudge against the Heroes (or just a severe case of greed—you can decide which). She has a bloodline, and so is able to cast true magic—which she does to good effect.

Ketifa Yellowhair, FA/Kh, W9: AC 6 (*bracers of defense* AC 6); MV 12 (uncumbered); hp 29; THAC0 18 (16 with *dagger +2*); #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+2 (*dagger +2*); SZ M (5' 5" tall); ML champion (16); AL LE; XP 5,000.

S 8, D 11, C 16, I 18, W 11, Ch 15.

Bloodline: Azrai, tainted, 8; blood abilities: none.

Personality: Calculating, passionate, vengeful.

Equipment: Spellbook, *dagger +2*, *bracers of defense* AC 6, *wand of magic missiles* (22 charges), *ring of spell turning*.

Spellbook (4/3/3/2/1): 1st—*burning hands*, *change self*, *charm person**, *detect magic*, *light*, *magic missile*, *phantasmal force**, *read magic*, *sleep**, *wall of fog**; 2nd—*darkness* 15' radius, *forget*, *invisibility**, *levitate*, *mirror image*, *stinking cloud*, *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter**, *web**; 3rd—*dispel magic**, *fireball*, *hold person**, *invisibility* 10' radius, *lightning bolt*, *protection from normal missiles**, *vampiric touch*; 4th—*dimension door*, *fear*, *fumble**, *minor globe of invulnerability**, *stoneskin*, *wall of fire*; 5th—*cloudkill*, *teleport**, *wall of iron*. *Indicates favored spell.

If the guards outside do manage to warn the people inside, Ketifa casts as many of her "preparation" spells as she can (*minor globe of invulnerability*, *protection from normal missiles*, etc.) and readies a few nasty surprises for the Heroes. She might turn *invisible* or even make one of the henchmen—or Orlis himself—unseen.

When the battle ensues in the cottage, the Heroes should encounter a few surprises.

orlis's final betrayal

Orlis planned for two contingencies. If the Heroes at any time appear to be winning, Orlis waits until he can get a back-shot on the PC regent. He then snaps his bonds and strikes with his special dagger.

Should the PCs be losing the battle, Orlis contents himself to wait. His instructions to the henchmen included killing the Heroes (with the exception of the PC regent) or rendering them unconscious. If you are using the "death's door" option, then it should be possible for all the Heroes to lose consciousness without being killed.

orlis's best-case scenario

Orlis wants to enjoy his victory. If his henchmen, with the help of Ketifa, can render the Heroes unconscious, his dreams are fulfilled. The Heroes awake to Orlis gloating over them, fingering his tighmaevril dagger. He tells them the story of his history, raves like a madman and—unless the Heroes think of something quickly—kills the PC regent first (with a strike through the heart, naturally), followed by the rest of the Heroes.

not quite what he hoped, but all right

If the Heroes manage to defeat Orlis's henchmen but still believe (or seem to believe) Orlis loyal to the PC regent, he thanks them and tells them he has uncovered the plot against the regent. If at all possible, he tries to get the regent alone (and facing in another direction), then strikes with his dagger—straight for the regent's heart. With his backstabbing ability, he might succeed. Regardless, he raves like a madman while trying to kill the PC regent, then attempts to escape.

years of planning, all in ruins

If everything goes wrong for Orlis, he tries to kill the PC regent but, failing, goes insane and becomes catatonic. Somehow, the Heroes should uncover his history, and you should make

him sound as pitiful as possible. Why? Because at any time Orlis could “snap out” of his catatonia and come back to trouble the PCs again. If the Heroes are good-aligned, encourage them toward mercy. Remind them of any good deeds Orlis did while in the PC regent’s service, and that he is (probably) not truly evil, just insane.

the end of it all

Two endings to this adventure present themselves. The first, and most likely, is that the Heroes defeat Orlis. Should that happen, the PCs find enough evidence among his papers and possessions to piece together his history, his plot, and all the evidence they need to clear the PC regent of treachery. The wizard, Ketifa Yellowhair, offers to testify and tell all she knows—if she survives the battle. She tries to portray herself as a dupe of Orlis, perhaps a tragic love interest gone sour.

The other possible ending can darken the campaign. If Orlis manages to strike down the PC regent, the truth of blood shows through: Orlis becomes heir to the regency of the domain and gains bloodline strength, ability, and regency that once belonged to the PC regent. Whether the Heroes kill him or not, he becomes the rightful ruler of the domain . . . no matter how short his rule is.

And he is insane.

aftermath

Obviously, the two diverse potential endings of the adventure pose something of a problem for the DM. Either the PCs are victorious and cleared of all wrongdoing, or the PC regent dies and Orlis takes over the domain or dies with him. In the former case, everything returns to normal; in the latter, the Heroes had best get out of the realm as soon as possible because whoever is in charge is not likely to believe they were innocent in the destruction of *two* heirs to the domain’s regency. If one or more of the PCs rules a landless domain (a temple, guild, or source network) located within the realm, then tough times lie ahead.

experience awards

In addition to the XP obtained for killing the enemies in this adventure, award some XP to

Heroes who distinguish themselves in figuring out this intrigue.

If the Heroes actually piece together enough clues to strongly suspect Orlis before they go to the cottage, they receive a bonus of 1,000 XP each.

Keeping Orlis or Ketifa alive (so they can testify or be presented for punishment to the court) is worth 500 XP (per NPC), as accomplishing this is tricky and allows you to use these villains again sometime.

Losing the realm to Orlis (whether he is killed later or not) is a *bad* thing; penalized the surviving Heroes up to 1,000 XP each for allowing it to happen.

Particularly inspiring role-playing, especially on the part of the PC regent (who must interact with Orlis as a trusted adviser gone bad), can be worth up to 1,000 XP depending on how convincing it is. For example, if the PC regent does not allow anyone to kill Orlis, even after the man has tried to kill him and take his domain (citing faithful service and madness caused by the evil dagger), that character should receive the full award.

continuing the adventure

If Orlis achieved his dream, then eliminating him and recovering the domain for a more suitable regent could be an epic quest. If Orlis killed the PC regent but died afterward, finding the “true” new regent before the domain is thrown into turmoil and civil war becomes a quest as well.

On the other hand, if Orlis goes down in defeat and the PCs emerge victorious, you can explore several options. First, was Orlis *truly* the real heir? In the “Orlis wins” scenario, he is, but if he loses is there evidence that he was set up—perhaps by an enemy of the PC regent? Did *Blood Hunger*, the evil dagger, drive him insane and delude him, spurred on by false evidence planted by someone else? Could this all have been some scheme developed in the crazed mind of some *other* manipulator behind the scenes? If you decide to answer to any of these questions “yes,” then you have the makings of another adventure.

double dealing

“Regency does not confer honesty, nobility, or a sense of responsibility upon a ruler. Kings and lords are not simply born—they make themselves. True, some find themselves created by manipulative advisers and would-be friends—often in images not to their liking—but most regents shape themselves into the people they become.

“Throughout history, many nobles have epitomized the ideal. They gained renown for their kindness, gentility, bravery, heroism, goodness, lordship, and compassion. Ruling their domains like loving parents governing precious children, they safeguarded their charges from enemies and tried to keep peace with their neighbors, who also had ‘children’ they wanted to see grow and flourish.

“But nobility and compassion, like regency, do not come to a person with the passing of a crown. Sometimes—more often than many historians like to admit—kings and lords create themselves in images of their own choosing, but hardly to their neighbors’ liking. They prove to be cruel and harsh parents who, when they do not get satisfaction from their own families, look to supplant others and take what is not rightfully theirs.

“One such story can be told here today. Every regent should learn from the example set by one cruel ruler, so that they can avoid his pitfalls and avarice. Of course, some might learn the wrong lesson and try to emulate his greed. . . .”

Event Type: Assassination (result of 3 on Table 15). “Double Dealing” may also be used as an Intrigue (result of 16) or Festival (result of 4) event.

The Heroes: Heroes of any character class fit into this adventure, but at least one must consider himself friends or allies with an NPC guildmaster; this NPC regent is the target of the assassination attempt. (While a player character can be the target, that situation makes

this adventure more difficult to run.

However, experienced DMs can feel free to try that tack—it will encourage some challenging role-playing.)

Newly invested regents or nonregent PCs make good Heroes for “Double Dealing.” They should be mid- to high-level adventurers (4th level or higher), as this is a dangerous, fast-paced adventure—and the PCs won’t be able to summon help when major events start happening.

The Challenge: A new ruler, Miklos Volstead, seizes power in a nearby realm and causes quite a stir. In order to familiarize himself with his new neighbors and possible allies, he calls for a party to celebrate his birthday and coronation. He invites many of the surrounding regents and notables of the area (including the PCs)—even those who were enemies of the realm’s former ruler.

While some of the Heroes (and their NPC allies) might feel reluctant about accepting this invitation, rumor has it that Volstead spent vast amounts of money to prepare the palace and the entertainments, so it won’t be a party to miss. The PCs might consider the celebration a good chance to meet the new ruler and perhaps other new regents in the area. Virtually all of the PCs’ advisers and allies recommend that they attend—though many advise caution.

None of the invited guests suspects Volstead’s true motive for the party: a bloodthirsty attempt on a wealthy guildmaster, an ally of the PCs. The Heroes become embroiled in the plot when the trap springs. Chaos erupts in the great hall and the guildmaster disappears from the room. The PCs must thwart the assassination attempt, rescue the guildmaster, and (if possible) reveal the regent’s duplicity to the other guests—or deal with the consequences of a changed political landscape that grows stranger each day.

necessary preparation

This adventure requires “setting the stage” during the previous domain turn (or earlier), so you as the DM need to plan ahead. A new ruler must be introduced to the campaign.

the new ruler

Assuming you use Miklos Volstead as the villain of this adventure, choose a realm you haven't used much in the campaign and substitute Volstead for the previous NPC regent. If possible, do this a couple of action rounds before beginning "Double Dealing" to allow the PCs to adjust to the idea of a new regent in the area.

If, however, you prefer to use an NPC ruler of your own (or one listed in another BIRTHRIGHT product), you can substitute that NPC for Volstead. Just make sure that his level and alignment are suitable to this scenario.

miklos volstead

10th-level Vos fighter

S:	19
D:	17
C:	15
I:	14
W:	9
Ch:	12
AL:	LE
AC:	-1
MV:	12
hp:	79
THACO:	11
#AT:	2
Dmg:	1d10+8
XP:	7,000



Bloodline: Vorynn, major, 40.

Blood Abilities: Resistance (major), divine wrath.

Equipment: *Two-handed sword of speed +1* (has a speed factor of 1), *bracers of defense AC 2* (engraved with wolf-headed icons), darts hidden in sleeves (poisoned with powerful sleep drug—save vs. poison at -4 or lose consciousness for 1d3 turns).

Description: 5 feet 11 inches tall; overconfident, wily.

Background: Vos by birth, Miklos Volstead never hoped to rule a realm in his native Vosgaard—while a strong bloodline flowed through his veins, his family history boasted no *tsarevos* (war-chieftains). So he fought to distinguish himself in battle and in leadership, gaining the support of many chieftains and

warriors, and always casting his gaze toward other lands. This "wandering eye" pleased the *tsarevos* because it indicated that Miklos would pursue his ambitions elsewhere instead of attempting to displace one of them.

Miklos proved himself wise. The other Vos leaders financed his expeditions among the southern and western lands. Miklos made the foreign leaders underestimate him, and he strove to keep himself popular among his men. When the war leader saw a chance to take over a non-Vos kingdom, he was able to drum up both financial and armed support and catch his opponent unawares. Secretly aided also by a wizard, Volstead moved in, struck quickly, and settled the matter decisively. He now rules the law holdings in a realm near the PC regents' domains.

The takeover was quick and bloody, but the new regent has since made himself acceptable to his subjects by keeping peasant casualties as low as possible and by agitating for himself several times—spreading lots of gold around.

volstead's plot

Though Volstead's plan comes from an evil mind, it is a clever ruse. Employing the assistance of a high-level wizard and a few other aides, Volstead made contact with a doppelganger. Rare creatures on Cerilia, doppelgangers nonetheless exist. They generally move from province to province, posing as wanderers and then doing what they do best—killing and replacing prominent citizens and living their lives as long as possible. To a doppelganger, this act is neutral (hence their usual alignment), but it wreaks havoc on the domains the creatures visit.

Volstead decided to harness the doppelgangers' legendary power, if he could. After weeks of spellcasting, Volstead's wizard ally, Kesta Zikara, finally summoned one of the creatures. She ordered it to listen to Volstead's proposal; if interested in the plan, the doppelganger was to return to the Vos ruler on its own after the summoning spell expired.

What the doppelganger heard was this: Volstead planned to host a party—a grand affair—to which he would invite all the dignitaries and nobles in the area. One such noble, a guildmaster of some renown, would be the unknowing reason for the celebration. Volstead planned to drug the regent, then spirit him off to a dungeon cell where

he would force an investiture ceremony to transfer the victim's bloodline and regency to the doppelganger. The doppelganger would then take over the rulership of the guild network, acting as a puppet and channeling guild profits to Volstead.

In return, Volstead would give the doppelganger enough support (in the form of Regency Points) to carry out the ruse until the creature grew bored. They would then engage in another investiture ceremony, transferring the doppelganger's regency to another puppet chosen by Volstead. Afterward, the creature would be amply rewarded and sent on its way.

Volstead assured the doppelganger that both parties could trust each other. If the doppelganger ever felt ill-used or manipulated, it could disappear. If Volstead believed the doppelganger guilty of betraying him, he could order his wizard to act on his behalf—killing or exposing the creature.

The doppelganger, an unusually intelligent and ambitious member of its species, agreed. The creature now awaits Volstead's party with as much excitement as it can summon.

Doppelganger: AC 5; MV 9; HD 6; hp 40; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d12 (claws); SA ESP ability, shapechanging; SD immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells, rolls all saves as a 10th-level fighter; SZ M (varies); ML elite (13); Int high (14); AL N (evil tendencies); XP 975.

Notes: Has *ESP* as a natural ability and can shapechange with 90% efficiency.

Personality: Cold, appears bored most of the time.

Equipment: Gear and weapons identical (in appearance) to intended victim's.

If the doppelganger ever had a name of its own, it has long forgotten it—Kesta and Volstead refer to it as *the Doppelganger*. It has agreed to participate in the plot against the guildmaster's life, but refuses to actively help the scenario along. Most likely, until the time comes for the forced investiture, even Volstead and Kesta will not know which guest is the Doppelganger. It has not lived as long as it has (and improved itself above the average of its species) by taking foolish chances.

invitations and circumstance

The PCs, as notable personages in the region, all receive invitations to the gathering. The invitations are grand to look at—they have been engraved on fine, gold foil and phrased in the most polite and inviting of terms.

Depending on how you run this adventure, the PCs may, initially, know nothing of Miklos Volstead except that he has recently become a law regent in the area—by forcibly deposing the previous ruler. Tell the players as much as you think they should know and allow their advisers and friends to encourage them to attend. Not only does it look like a great chance to meet and size up the new regent, but rumor has it that Volstead's party will be the most lavish social event of the season. Virtually every NPC invited has already decided to appear.

If the PCs have rivals or enemies who also happen to be regents, be sure that they know their opponents also have been invited. Not only does this bit of information throw some of the players' suspicion off Volstead as a villain for this adventure, but it should make them want to attend all the more. After all, they don't want the new ruler in the area hearing only one side of any stories about them, do they?

Should the PCs stubbornly resist attending the party despite the above enticements, involve the NPC guildmaster who is the target of Volstead's plans. He can ask the PCs to attend because he feels "concerned" about this new regent and how the change in rulership will affect his profits. (Reserve this means of persuasion as a last resort, to avoid making the guildmaster stand out from the other NPC guests.)

The PCs can respond without taking a domain action (a simple "yes" or "no" doesn't cost them anything) and can spend a month or so getting ready to travel. They do have to obey a few strictures, however:

First, since the party is to be grand in scale (perhaps grander than the host's ability to contain it), the Heroes should attend with as few retainers and courtiers as possible. Naturally, no one expects them to travel without an escort, but Volstead has generously provided for entertainments and feasting for all the regents' and notables' guards and retainers—outside the castle walls. If everyone restricts himself to one or two retainers, then no one will be slighted.

Second, the party is technically a birthday party.

While the invitation observes proper etiquette in avoiding any mention of gifts, most regents appreciate (if not expect) presents on their birthdays—and Volstead is not only celebrating his birthday, but his ascension to the throne. The Heroes would look bad (especially when compared to their rivals) if they show up without a present of reasonable value. A minor magical item or expensive art piece (such as a 1 GB painting or sculpture) should be sufficiently impressive. Of course, the final decision is up to each individual Hero.

Finally, some Heroes may have to travel farther than others to arrive at the party. In general, it costs 1 GB for a regent to relocate within his own domain (in royal style) during a domain turn. PCs who travel alone or as part of an adventuring party do not have to spend this money, but they lose contact with their capitals and must trust their advisers to run things in their stead. They also forfeit most of their bodyguards by traveling in this manner—and Cerilia can be a dangerous place.

If a PC wants to arrive in style, with retainers, bodyguards, and regal trappings, he spends 1 GB for moving through his domain (any provinces in which he has holdings), plus one additional Gold Bar per realm crossed (assuming that realm is a neutral or friendly one—if the regent goes into an enemy domain, he may have other problems). This expense covers transportation, tariffs, food, lodging, and other considerations. It does not buy immunity from any random encounters the DM wants to throw in to liven up the adventure. The PCs can, of course, choose to meet and travel together, or they can all arrive at Volstead's capital separately.

arriving at the party

When the Heroes reach Volstead's realm, they cannot help but notice the prosperity and gaiety that pervade the kingdom. To keep his people happy and content, Volstead has instituted several work programs that seem to be effective. New houses are being built, roads are being repaired, and everyone who wants a job has one.

Even the commoners look forward to Miklos Volstead's birthday party as the highlight of the season. In planning the celebration, the

new regent has reversed a trend among the peasants—rather than tax the citizens of his domain to pay for his party, he simply asks that everyone do their best to make his guests feel welcome in the realm while he uses his own treasury to fund the celebration. This decree pleases the peasants, and they shower the Heroes (and everyone else on the road) with songs, drinks, and merriment. By the time the PCs have reached the palace, they should be in a festive mood—unless, of course, they have run into some old foes on the road.

When the Heroes arrive at the palace, Miklos's brother, Cronal, greets them. Cronal shows the Heroes and their personal retainers into the palace and calls for a page to escort their men (if they brought any) to the outdoor tents and feasting. While glancing at their surroundings, the Heroes might also notice Kesta in attendance.

cronal volstead

10th-level Vos fighter

S:	19
D:	17
C:	15
I:	14
W:	9
Ch:	9
AL:	LE
AC:	-1
MV:	12
hp:	79
THAC0:	11
#AT:	2
Dmg:	1d6+10
XP:	6,900



Bloodline: Vorynn, major, 36.

Blood Abilities: Resistance (major), divine wrath.

Equipment: Sabre +2, +3 vs. shapechangers.

Description: 5 feet 11 inches tall; serious, quiet, hard to read.

Background: Cronal serves as Miklos's part-time steward and full-time military adviser.

He and his brother are very much alike in appearance and ability. Cronal, however, wears plate armor almost all the time

(though today it is very finely polished and decorated, and does not look out of place at the party) and has a much more serious and quiet

demeanor than his sibling.



kesta zikara

15th-level Khinasi wizard

S: 8
D: 16
C: 11
I: 18
W: 12
Ch: 14
AL: LE
AC: 4
MV: 12
hp: 43
THAC0: 16
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d4+1
XP: 10,000



Bloodline: Basaia, minor, 22.

Blood Ability: Alertness.

Equipment: *Dagger +1*, spell components, *cloak of protection +4*, wizard staff (nonmagical), spellbook, scrolls of several spells in spellbook (DM's choice).

Spellbook (5/5/5/5/2/1): 1st—*alarm**, *burning hands*, *cantrip*, *charm person**, *color spray*, *comprehend languages*, *detect magic*, *feather fall*, *grease*, *hold portal**, *identify*, *magic missile**, *phantasmal force**, *read magic*, *wall of fog*; 2nd—*bind*, *darkness 15' radius*, *detect invisibility*, *ESP*, *forget**, *invisibility**, *Leomund's trap**, *spectral hand*, *stinking cloud*, *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter**, *web**, *wizard lock*; 3rd—*dispel magic**, *fireball*, *fly**, *hold person**, *monster summoning I*, *protection from normal missiles**, *spectral force**, *vampiric touch*; 4th—*enchanted weapon*, *fear**, *fire shield*, *fire trap**, *minor globe of invulnerability**, *monster summoning II**, *stoneskin**; 5th—*advanced illusion**, *cloudkill**, *domination*, *monster summoning III**, *passwall**, *telekinesis**; 6th—*globe of invulnerability*, *monster summoning IV**, *programmed illusion**; 7th—*monster summoning V*, *spell turning**. *Indicates favored spell.

Description: 5 feet 3 inches tall; energetic, playful, drunk on her own power.

Background: Kesta eagerly waits, ready to perform her tasks, for Volstead's party to get into full swing.

She may be caught by surprise if determined resistance to the plan arises (she likes to have every detail planned out;

surprises affect her badly), but as a 15th-level

wizard she should recover quickly. If pressed, Kesta likes to summon monsters, use illusions, and try to remove herself from sites of danger as quickly as possible.

distraction and deception

As the DM, you must keep Volstead's plot undercover for as long as you can. Miklos hopes that old enemies and old friends get together at his party, allowing him to stay in the background as much as possible. If you stage confrontations between the Heroes and some old foes (or some new ones from nearby domains) you will encourage the players to think that the party is just a setting for adventure—not part of a plot.

a palace fit for a king

Rumor has it that when Miklos Volstead took over the regency from his predecessor, he looked around at the old ruler's palace and proclaimed, "No wonder he lost! He lives like a peasant!" Volstead immediately ordered a complete renovation of the castle before he took up residence. By paying the finest carpenters, masons, and sculptors more than double their usual fees, he bought a home that looked more like a work of art than it did a palace.

The great hall, where most of the party is being held, looks like a marble mountain range (to remind Volstead of his homeland). Hidden stairs and smooth platforms run up and down the structures, making the dance floor and feasting areas three-dimensional. No hazards lie hidden in this masterpiece, however—every transition from flatness to incline is smooth and seamless. The steps are shallow—hence elegant—and the floors are polished smooth.

Because of its unique architectural design, the great hall never looks quite full and never looks very empty. In some places, people can take a few steps around an onyx "mountain" topped with white marble "snow" and find themselves in a private anteroom, or behind an indoor waterfall, or even on the other side of the room. No magic has been employed here, however—just skillful construction.

entertainments, effervescence, and evil

Always a wise planner, Volstead bides his time. He has made a habit of keeping his opponents offguard and, in this scenario, anyone could be his opponent. He spends time with every guest, chatting, discussing politics (all in a noncommittal, friendly way), and playing the gracious host. Meanwhile, his jugglers, acrobats, and fools keep the guests entertained and happy.

This reticence may prove his undoing, however. While Volstead is a perfect play-actor, three other individuals may cause problems.

cronal volstead, brooding lieutenant

Cronal knows his brother's subtle scheme and does not approve, finding the direct approach much more satisfying. To his way of thinking, if Miklos wants to seize control of a guild, fine—kill the fool guildmaster and take over the guild; don't play around with magical creatures and wizards. They, Cronal believes, will be his brother's undoing.

As a result, Cronal proves to be a cranky, unpleasant, and somewhat nervous host. If anyone asks him (or his brother, for that matter), about his poor mood, Cronal offers the excuse that he is more used to a battlefield than a dance floor. Scarcely anyone conversing with him will grow to like Cronal—he always looks like he's trying to restrain himself from ripping someone's throat out (and barely succeeding).

kesta zikara, eager intriguer

If Cronal is brooding, Kesta is celebrating. Perhaps the wizard has spent too much time alone with her books or off killing oogs, but she just can't seem to master subtle interaction. Miklos constantly has to warn her not to drink too much or to just "settle down." On more than one occasion he actually approaches her, interrupts the conversation in which she is engaged (usually

one that could prove the ruination of the plot), takes her by the arm, and—smiling at the other guests all the while—drags her behind a sculpture, where he tells her to shut up.

But these incidences don't darken Kesta's mood. She's young, she's powerful, and she feels certain the plot will succeed brilliantly. She might even taunt the NPC guildmaster with innuendo or jibes before the switch has been made—partly because she knows no one can possibly suspect her, and partly because she knows it will annoy Miklos.

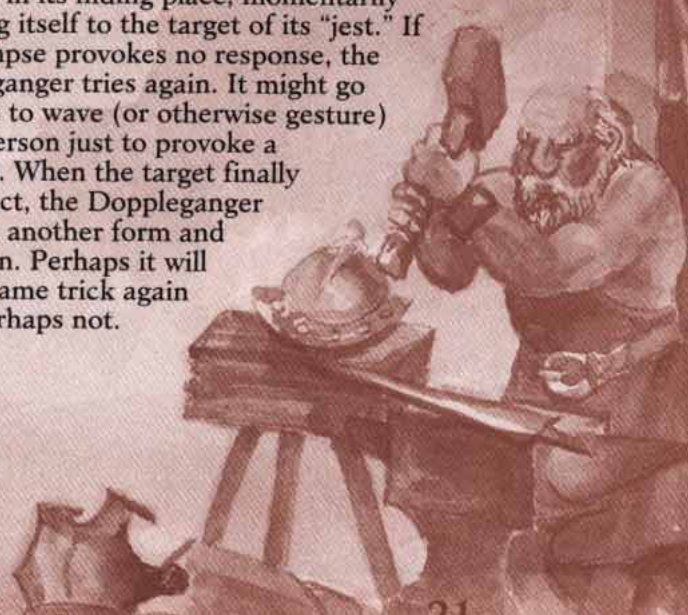
the doppelganger, thrill seeker

Have you ever, honestly, been trying to help someone who seems bound and determined to drive you insane at every turn? That's how Volstead feels about the Doppelganger.

Even though Miklos will obtain a puppet guildmaster at the end of the scheme, he feels he is also giving the creature a great gift—regency over a guild and a bloodline to boot. And what does the Doppelganger do to advance the plot? Less than nothing—it seems completely oblivious to the situation and wants to spend its time playing mind games with the guests.

The Doppelganger circulates through the room, catching snippets of conversations and using its ESP ability to read the minds of the guests. It then steps out of view—into an alcove or behind a sculpture or staircase—and becomes either one of the guests or someone for whom the Doppelganger knows a guest has strong feelings. The Doppelganger might become a hated enemy, a true friend, or a dead associate—whoever it thinks will elicit the best reaction.

When ready, the creature walks past an opening in its hiding place, momentarily revealing itself to the target of its "jest." If this glimpse provokes no response, the Doppelganger tries again. It might go so far as to wave (or otherwise gesture) at the person just to provoke a reaction. When the target finally does react, the Doppelganger assumes another form and moves on. Perhaps it will try the same trick again later, perhaps not.





the guildmaster in a manner that suggests no pretense or guile. When he reaches his target, the trap is sprung.

abducting the npc

Unless the DM has chosen to substitute a PC regent (who could offer unpredictable resistance) as the target of Volstead's plan, the abduction should be accomplished easily. Volstead tries to keep his movements and those of his allies subtle enough to avoid creating suspicion among the guests; even the Heroes might not notice them.

If Volstead's preparatory trip around the room made no impression on the Heroes, they should be close enough to the NPC target to observe Miklos approach the guildmaster, engage him in brief conversation, then make the following request:

"My lord, it has come to my attention that we share a mutual problem involving a trade matter of some importance. A messenger has just arrived with the latest news and I would like to address the situation quickly so we can get back to enjoying my humble party. Please, if you would come with me, we can resolve the matter in private and return shortly."

By this time, the NPC regent has been "softened up" by the celebration and agrees readily. With no guard but a scribe, he goes off with Miklos toward one of the mountain sculptures at the back of the great hall.

If one of the PCs "tracked" Miklos through the crowd or takes particular notice of his exchange with the NPC, he can observe Volstead and the guildmaster (as well as the scribe) disappearing into the mountain. He might also notice (if he is really paying attention) Miklos drawing something small from his belt as they pass through a secret door.

That is the last anyone sees of them for quite a while. . . .

Note: This

diversion can affect the

PCs in two ways. First, the

Doppelganger may read the minds of

one or more PCs and choose to reveal itself as an old enemy or friend killed in battle long ago. (To inspire a truly horrific reaction, it might go so far as to assume the form of an obviously deceased creature—a walking corpse.) In this situation, the Doppelganger takes extra care not to be seen by anyone else so as not to cause a panic.

Second, the Doppelganger may pull its trick on a friend or enemy of one of the PCs—perhaps impersonating the Hero himself. Its mischief could then extend to implicating the Hero in petty crimes, love trysts, or other dubious activities. In this variation of its game, the Doppelganger wants to start a misunderstanding and—if it gets lucky—a fight.

the plot takes shape

After the PCs have had a chance to get flustered by the Doppelganger, annoyed by Cronal, confused by Kesta, or in trouble with some of their old foes, Miklos judges the time right to spring his trap. The PCs—if they keep a surreptitious eye on their host or his retainers—might notice the clues.

Miklos excuses himself (somewhat abruptly) from a conversation in which he had been taking part and heads around one of his decorative sculptures. On the other side, he meets his brother Cronal and whispers something in his ear ("It's time; get your guards"). Cronal, brightening almost immediately, smiles grimly and strides out the nearest exit.

Next, Miklos takes a circuitous route through the hall and around its marble mountains to Kesta. Engaged in a somewhat drunken conversation with several courtiers, she hardly notices him until he grabs her by the elbow and pulls her back—hastily excusing himself. He whispers in her ear twice ("Sober up and get to your position! It's time!"), after which she immediately sets her goblet down and heads off to a side door in the great hall.

Finally, Miklos slowly and gracefully approaches the NPC guildmaster. He chats briefly with other courtiers again (as if nothing special were happening) and makes his way to

putting the bag on a hero

If the DM has chosen one of the PCs as the intended assassination victim, Volstead might have to work a little harder to accomplish the abduction—Heroes are more difficult to predict than NPCs. However, it can be done.

Miklos goes through the same motions and the same speech as above, resulting in his expression of a desperate wish to discuss trade matters with the target PC. Volstead will remain as vague as possible about the exact nature of the trade matters, citing a reluctance to talk about sensitive diplomatic issues “out in the open.” If pressed, he indicates only that a lost treasure has been found and he needs the guildmaster’s help to uncover and exploit it.

Volstead tries to discourage more than one other character (PC or NPC) from accompanying the Hero to their “negotiations.” He insists that this is a private matter; if the guildmaster doesn’t want to discuss it in private, other guildmasters present might be more than willing to do so. He wanted to deal with the Hero, but. . . .

If you must, create a few more details of the “lost treasure” story to pique the guildmaster’s interest. Perhaps imply that the treasure could lead to an adventure, but that Miklos isn’t comfortable involving lots of people right now—if the PC wants to tell his friends later, that’s fine.

Volstead, if faced with a PC so resolute in his desire to bring multiple companions that his stubbornness threatens the success of the plot, will yield on the issue. If necessary, the whole adventuring party may go along—

Volstead has planned for that contingency, but he doesn’t like it.

and the trap is sprung

The secret passage leads to some steps—a poorly lit, damp stone staircase spiraling downward. Once Miklos gets the guildmaster inside the mountain, he either strikes immediately (if they are alone) or waits for backup (if they are accompanied).

If only one character attends the guildmaster, Miklos first strikes the companion. He prefers to use his poisoned darts but will draw his dagger if necessary. When Volstead has dispatched the companion, he attempts to render the guildmaster unconscious. The attacks proceed smoothly unless one of the characters is a PC, in which case a fight ensues. Any screams or cries for help cannot be heard outside the mountain above.

If the guildmaster is a PC or is accompanied by two or more characters, Volstead waits for reinforcements before attacking. He leads the party down the staircase, explaining to the curious that the palace contains a secret negotiation room where they need not fear eavesdroppers seeking information about the lost treasure. When they reach the bottom of the stairs (or if Volstead has cause to cry out sooner), the guards waiting in the dungeon besiege the party. (See “While Down Below. . . .”)

meanwhile, back in the great hall

Cronal and Kesta have been busy. Kesta makes her way past courtiers and guards and up a staircase to a balcony overlooking the great hall. She stands there, waiting for Miklos to disappear into the mountain (which she can see clearly from her position), then casts a spell. Anyone who follows her to the balcony (not a difficult feat—Kesta isn’t paying attention to the courtiers) can see her actions clearly.

Kesta begins by throwing several illusion spells in quick succession. The sophistication level of the illusions depends upon how much she thinks the guests are likely to threaten Volstead’s plan. If possible, she sticks to lower-level spells, saving the rest for more critical situations.

Her illusions take the form of monsters common to the area. If the adventure takes place near the Spiderfell, giant spiders come in through the windows and doors of the palace, supported by "paratrooping spiders" entering through the upper windows. She keeps all airborne creatures (whatever they are) away from her perch and doesn't place any walking monsters near the front door.

Once the illusions begin, Cronal appears near the front door with several men-at-arms. He shouts for everyone to clear the hall and proceed to the jousting field (just outside). He and his men will "hold off the creatures until everyone gets clear!" His men attempt to remove anyone who wants to stay and fight the illusory monsters (few of the guests feel so inclined, but you know those PCs . . .).

Miklos's orders instruct Kesta and Cronal to distract everyone while he "takes care of business" downstairs. Ideally, the plan will keep busy everyone who might interfere; no one involved wants to harm the guests for fear of jeopardizing future diplomatic relations.

Only those who try to follow Miklos under the mountain will be attacked or hurt. Both Cronal and Kesta keep an eye on the secret passageway, ready to jump anyone who does go there. Kesta will throw a *hold person* spell at anyone who gets too near the door, while Cronal will try to grab the character and send him outside. Any individual who actually enters the secret passageway, however, becomes fair game.

When everyone has cleared out of the great hall, Kesta stops casting spells and heads down to the dungeon. Cronal then goes to the jousting field, where he explains that this whole scene was an entertainment provided by the court wizard and that the party is moving outside (for the joust and other activities). He then slips off and goes to the dungeon as well.

while down below. . .

Miklos takes the guildmaster and any tagalongs to a small dungeon underneath the palace where several guards and a priest await. (If the PCs have encountered a neutral or evil regent priest during the campaign, use that individual; otherwise use Natasha Garenkov, detailed below.)

If the guildmaster is an NPC, then the man is unconscious and his scribe lies unconscious at the top of the stairs. If two or more PCs accompanied the guildmaster, or if the guildmaster is himself a PC, the dungeon becomes a stage for a fight between Miklos, his guards, and the Heroes in attendance.

Elite Guards, MV, F5 (1 per PC): AC 3 (plate mail); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 32 each; THAC0 15; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+3 (sabre); SZ M (6' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int average (11); AL LN; XP 175 each.

Natasha Garenkov, FV, Pr6 (Kriesha): AC 5 (studded leather armor, *ring of protection* +2); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 37; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (mace); SW see below; SZ M (5' 7" tall); ML average (9); AL NE; XP 420.

Notes: AC drops to 8 if attacked while performing investiture ceremony.

S 14, D 11, C 13, I 12, W 16, Ch 10.

Bloodline: Azrai, tainted, 8; blood ability: enhanced sense (minor).

Personality: Selfish, mercenary.

Equipment: Items required for the investiture ceremony.

Spells (3/3/2): 1st—*cure light wounds, detect evil, remove fear*; 2nd—*charm person or mammal, flame blade, resist fire/resist cold*; 3rd—*animate dead, remove curse*.

The priest will engage in combat only in self-defense; she has been paid to perform an investiture ceremony on the guildmaster, not get injured or killed in someone else's fight.

If the battle goes on for five rounds, Kesta arrives and joins. The Doppelganger also shows up, but avoids participating in the battle unless it can get a free shot at someone's back. Cronal shows up a few rounds later with a few additional men-at-arms. Other Heroes originally left in the hall could arrive at any time if they observed or followed Kesta or Cronal.

so how does it all end?

Oddly enough, this adventure runs the risk of the PCs never realizing an adventure is taking place right under their noses. From Volstead's perspective all is clear, while the PCs might never figure out the whole scheme. The hope is that they get suspicious and involve themselves before the priest can complete the ceremony of investiture, so that they can save the guildmaster from Volstead's clutches and get him out of the dungeon.

If the PCs succeed in rescuing the guildmaster, Volstead is defeated. He fights desperately to keep his plan from going to ruin, but once the Heroes get out of the dungeon with the guildmaster his only recourse is damage control. He hopes that the rest of the guests won't believe any of the tales the Heroes might tell of him ("they were confused by the entertainments"), but he won't try anything overt unless the tide turns against him (in which case he might just call out his army—the PCs should consider that possibility).

Of course, Volstead might succeed. If the investiture takes place, the PCs should *not* kill the Doppelganger, but rescue the guildmaster. Killing the Doppelganger means losing the bloodline and the regency forever (or, if the killer is a scion, losing all but 1 or 2 points of the bloodline). Ideally, the PCs will try to restore the lost birthright to the original owner (through another investiture ceremony), if possible.

If the target was an NPC guildmaster, that character dies. Miklos kills him off so that the former regent can never expose him. If

the target was a PC, Volstead keeps the guildmaster alive in his dungeon—there may be a need for him later, or at least a need for his powerful friends. The player may choose to continue playing a character in a dungeon, or he can play another character (perhaps one of the guildmaster's lieutenants) who helps investigate why the "guildmaster" is behaving so differently and then leads an expedition to rescue the real guildmaster.

experience

This adventure keeps the Heroes and the DM thinking. Depending on the PCs' ability to observe and synthesize circumstances around them to figure out the true motive behind the party (and depending, by extension, on how much of his plan Volstead has time to execute), players could complete this adventure with little or no fighting. Therefore, be sure to reward players for good role-playing and puzzle-solving.

Determining Volstead's plans before the investiture takes place should be worth up to 1,000 XP for each character who makes the cognitive leap. Actively following around Miklos or his lieutenants and preventing the kidnapping altogether can net a character up to 1,000 XP more.

taking it from here

Miklos, Cronal, and Kesta make excellent foes for later adventures, and the Doppelganger doesn't have to die even if the plan fails. Each member of this sinister ensemble looks out for his own skin above all else—there's no profit in dying. They will let the Heroes go rather than put themselves at too much risk—but they will be back.

On the other hand, if Miklos succeeds and the Doppelganger takes over the guild, the local political landscape gets strange quickly. Miklos finds he can't quite control the Doppelganger, though it usually does what he asks. On its own time, the Doppelganger continues to impersonate people and to play cruel and bizarre tricks. Former allies of the late guildmaster become confused and the holding becomes unstable. The Heroes' next adventure could involve discovering what has happened to their friend or ally.

special note

If a PC loses his regency to the Doppelganger, make certain that the next adventure concerns trying to get it back. The premise of this adventure may be an assassination, but if the PC survives, the Heroes should have a shot at restoring him to his rightful place. Of course, one shot may be all they get. . . .

gathering of heroes

"Festival! Festival! Even in the age of conflict from which our Hero-Kings sprang, time came for celebration, competition, and jubilation. Courtiers, kings, knights, and fools all gathered together for games and gladness.

"But not all rivalries were friendly, and not all truces were upheld. The full cloak and poisoned dagger often turned diplomacy to intrigue and peace to war. Much was made of the celebrations that did not end with a bloodied blade or a declaration of enmity, and they became tales in and of themselves.

"But this tale of festival that I tell you now, how will it end? Will laughter and revelry ring out? At the beginning, certainly. Will arms clash and tempers flare? More than its hosts expect, I wager. Will the festival end in tired farewells and promises of peace? Not impossible, of course. . . .

"But look for blood and death as well."

Event Type: Festival (result of 4 on Table 15). "Gathering of Heroes" can also be used as a Diplomatic Matter (result of 7) or an Intrigue (result of 16) event.

The Heroes: Since much of the festival revolves around physical competition and knowledge of courtly ways, regents and courtiers compete on even ground. And because many nonsporting events occur in this scenario, those PCs unfamiliar with courtliness and lacking ability to compete at physical games can still have some fun.

The PCs' levels do not matter, though low-to mid-level Heroes who need to accumulate experience and meet their neighbors can do so in this adventure without some of the usual risks.

The Challenge: Three challenges dominate this scenario: *the games*, *the plot*, and *the intrigue*. The Heroes resolve the adventure threads the DM and the players decide to pursue, and leave the others alone.

The Games: The Heroes use their knowledge and their abilities to win prizes and show off their talents to the local gentry. Using a combination of weapon skills, proficiency checks, and role-playing strategy, the PCs strive to prove themselves better than their competitors.

The Plot: A rival regent sends agents to dis-

rupt the festival and cause trouble for all concerned. If one of the Heroes hosts the festival, he obviously wants to stop the plot from succeeding. Of course, he requires the assistance of his friends and lieutenants—the regent still plays the gracious host while rooting out any trouble.

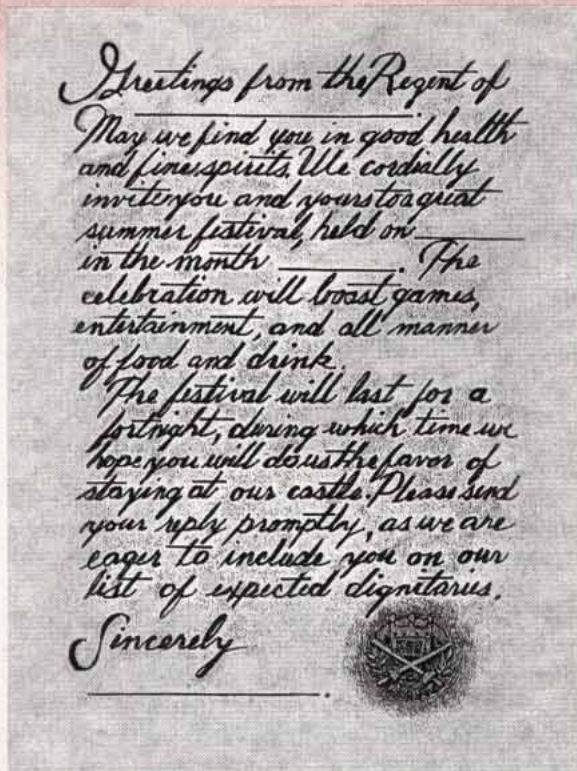
If an NPC regent hosts the festival, the PCs get drawn into the plot by either the schemer or the regent. The PCs wish to stop or facilitate the plot for their own ends.

The Intrigue: Someone is using the festival as a place to conduct an intrigue against a third party. One of the PCs might be involved, or could be the target of the intrigue, or may just overhear the workings of the intrigue and have to be "removed." Whatever happens, the intrigue spreads past its initial boundaries and involves many more people than its designers anticipated.

Each challenge has its own reward. Heroes who participate in the games earn prizes, accolades, and experience points for winning events (or making a good showing). If the PCs get involved in the plot, they either gain experience for preventing its successful execution, or political advantage for helping it along. Participating in the intrigue yields similar results.

introduction

The Heroes can become involved in the events of this adventure in one of two ways. First, a PC regent (or a Hero who works directly for a regent) can host the festival during an action round of his domain turn. This option ensures that the PC will have an interest in at least two of the three challenges (the plot and the intrigue), and will probably enjoy watching the third.



If none of the Heroes hosts the festival, they receive invitations to one. A neighboring, fairly friendly regent sends a welcome and an invitation to the festival. This step could be considered part of a domain turn—a Diplomatic Matter, for example. By attending the event, the PC takes advantage of an opportunity to learn about his neighbors.

Nonregents and even commoners can participate in the festival, either as courtiers competing in the games or as peasants “helping out” with the organization and running of the show. Different PCs might attend for completely different reasons but still find plenty of excuses to interact with each other.

Every courtier, noble, and regent receives an invitation to the festival. Prominent PCs (and NPCs) in the area also receive invitations, and not-so-prominent Heroes can “tag along” or look for work at the celebration. This page features a good sample invitation. The DM can fill in the appropriate names of the host, his domain, and the guests. If a PC regent hosts the event, he can send the invitations to those people his courtiers recommend.

arrival

The weather on the first day of the festival is clear, warm, and dry. A cool, refreshing breeze wafts over the festive, happy crowd, and it seems that nothing could disrupt such a joyous event.

The host of the festival, whether a Hero or NPC, spends most of the first day greeting arrivals and attending to minor matters around the castle. His steward and courtiers will do most of the actual work, but his etiquette duties leave him little time to do more than smile, shake hands, and exchange pleasantries with each new arrival. The Heroes not involved in running the festival arrive in their own time and in their own ways. Attendees at the festival fit into three categories:

Nobles: The visiting nobles and their retainers occupy apartments in the castle proper. Minor nobles stay in single private rooms; their servants stay with the castle staff. Excessive retainers (like armed guards) bunk with the regent's own troops in the barracks. Everyone must take a little time to clean the trail dust off and dress for the welcoming feast.

Courtiers: Lieutenants, court officers (wizards, advisers, etc.), and regents of small landless domains receive quarters appropriate to their stations—from small, comfortable apartments to single rooms. A few might share rooms with each other or with their traveling companions and servants, but the host makes an effort to satisfy everyone.

Commoners: PC commoners or unrecognized nobles (scions who have no holdings and are not affiliated with a court) obtain quarters as suits their individual notoriety and situation. Most commoners sleep outside in tents or under the stars, though noted adventurers (and Heroes) can expect quarters at the castle or in one of the support buildings. The host expects that most of the nameless commoners (or those with only a few adventures behind them) will assist with the welcoming feast—as entertainers, servants, or general “gofers.”

the welcoming feast

Anticipation builds the night after the arrival, as the ladies dress in their finest evening wear and the men practice their manners in their best suits of clothes. An enjoyable time waits for all, and good food steams on the trays.

If a PC hosts the festival, tell him to address the other PCs (and NPCs) as the feast begins; if not, the NPC host stands up (holding a wine glass or flagon) and makes a short speech:

“Welcome! Welcome, one and all to my home and my domain. I hope that you will all enjoy yourselves and want for nothing. Let this festival, this time of celebration and mirth, be a reminder to all good friends that cheer and brave deeds are a pleasant alternative to fighting and woe! Welcome to the festival, and may everyone join me in raising a glass to good fellowship, competition, and joy!”

The dinner proceeds uneventfully; the Heroes can use this opportunity to meet some of the attendees (listed below). Feel free to arrange events and incidents during the dinner if you wish, or to include new NPCs to replace those listed here if you have already developed characters that could fit into this scenario.

As a rule, nobles tend to interact only with other nobles and courtiers—at least in public. Therefore, if only one or two of the PCs are nobles they are probably going to avoid “getting together” with the other members of the party until they can do it more discreetly. A few commoners, however, have risen to “interesting status” in recent days and as a result are able to rub shoulders with their betters.

the nobles

Among the noble guests, the PCs will likely encounter Arlen Treyneir, Boden Stormwatcher, Keyrie Felfader, and Marya Nikosdottar.

arlen treyneir, baronet

5th-level Anuirean fighter

S:	17
D:	14
C:	15
I:	12
W:	10
Ch:	11
AL:	LG
AC:	1
MV:	6
hp:	43
THAC0:	16
#AT:	3/2
Dmg:	1d8+2
XP:	420



Bloodline: Anduiras, minor, 22.

Blood Ability: Unreadable thoughts.

Equipment: Long sword +2, splint mail +2, shield, exceptional war horse (adds +1 to Treyneir's Riding nonweapon proficiency).

Description: 5 feet 9 inches tall; self-motivated, confident, at times stubborn.

Background: The baronet, a vassal of a nearby regent, is in charge of a small province. He rules his area fairly, despite any conflict in alignment or attitude he may have with his lord. Treyneir came to the festival accompanied by twelve 0-level men-at-arms led by a 5th-level sergeant. He also has a 4th-level illusionist and a 5th-level priest of Haelyn in his company.

The baronet attends the festival mainly to participate in the games and court events. He is a specialist with the long sword, gaining three attacks every two rounds, and bonuses of +1 to THAC0 rolls and +2 to damage.

boden stormwatcher, grand vizier

9th-level Anuirean wizard

S: 7
D: 13
C: 11
I: 18
W: 14
Ch: 11

AL: LN
AC: 0
MV: 12
hp: 36
THAC0: 18
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d6
MR: 50% against

XP: 8,000



Bloodline: Brenna, major, 32.

Blood Abilities: Resistance (major), shadow form, unreadable thoughts.

Equipment: Bracers of protection AC 5, cloak of protection +3, ring of protection +2, wand of lightning (13 charges), spellbook, various scrolls (DM's discretion).

Spellbook (4/3/3/2/1): 1st—*alarm**, *burning hands*, *cantrip*, *change self*, *comprehend languages*, *detect magic**, *hold portal*, *magic missile**, *read magic*, *sleep**, *unseen servant*; 2nd—*detect invisibility*, *ESP**, *forget*, *improved phantasmal force**, *know alignment*, *Leomund's trap**, *mirror image*, *web*; 3rd—*dispel magic**, *fireball*, *fly*, *hold person**, *invisibility 10' radius*, *protection from normal missiles**, *suggestion*; 4th—*charm monster*, *dimension door**, *fire trap**, *polymorph other**; 5th—*domination**, *teleport*.

Also able to cast realm spells.

*Indicates favored spell.

Description: 5 feet 11 inches tall; judgmental, cross, secretive.

Background: Though he styles himself a "vizier," Stormwatcher advises only those he considers worthy of his knowledge. No one expected him to show up at the festival, but it would have been discourteous not to invite this regent wizard to the event.

Stormwatcher

holds sources and ley lines in many of the nearby domains; however, he (usually) chooses to keep a low profile in politics.

The grand vizier arrived with twelve 5th-level fighters as bodyguards, three scribes, and two 2nd-level wizard apprentices.

keyrie felfader, baroness

3rd-level Anuirean fighter

S: 17
D: 14
C: 16
I: 13
W: 14
Ch: 15

AL: NG
AC: 0
MV: 6
hp: 28
THAC0: 18
#AT: 1
Dmg: 2d4+2
XP: 270



Bloodline: Anduiras, minor, 24.

Blood Abilities: Iron will, courage.

Equipment: *Morning star* +2, *potion of extra-healing*, normal war horse, full plate mail and shield.

Description: 5 feet 7 inches tall; aloof, cool, quiet.

Background: Her father ill and likely to die before the year is out, Keyrie is the most promising heir of a nearby domain. She is unknown to most of the court, though many of the locals would like to get to know her better—she is beautiful and wise, and rumors say that she actually has been ruling her home domain behind the scenes for more than two years now.

The baroness arrived with a retinue of eight 1st-level warriors as bodyguards, a 4th-level ranger as captain of the guard, two pages, and a maid.

lady marya nikosdottar

5th-level Vos fighter

S: 18/17
D: 14
C: 17
I: 10
W: 9
Ch: 12

AL: NE
AC: -2
MV: 6
hp: 66
THAC0: 16
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d8+2
XP: 975



Bloodline: Vorynn, major, 32.

Blood Abilities: Animal affinity (minor), blood history, enhanced sense (major).

Equipment: Battle axe of wounding +2, plate armor +2, shield, varsk mount, heavy clothing.

Description: 5 feet 5 inches tall; malicious, haughty, secretly open-minded.

Background: Arriving with a large group of bodyguards and servants, the Lady Marya has already caused quite a stir among the courtiers. She was invited only because the regent (if the host is a PC, inform him of this beforehand) received a request from one of his neighboring regents saying that Nikosdottar, the heir to a major Vos domain in the north, wishes to meet some of her southern neighbors. The regent expressed the hope that the Lady Marya could be swayed toward the side of good on the land of Cerilia, if only the fine, young woman could get away from her family in the north for a while.

Nikosdottar has twenty-four 2nd-level fighters with her, as well as four 6th-level sergeants and a 7th-level captain. She also has four maids (one of whom is a 5th-level thief) and two scribe/pages.

courtiers

Among the courtiers, PCs will probably encounter the enigmatic Kalilah Shadam and the equally mysterious Knight of the Blemished Shield.

princess kalilah shadam

1st-/3rd-level Khinasi wizard/thief

S: 9
D: 16
C: 13
I: 16
W: 8
Ch: 15

AL: N
AC: 4
MV: 12
hp: 14
THAC0: 19
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d4+2
XP: 650



Bloodline: Brenna, tainted, 14.

Blood Ability: Persuasion.

Equipment: Bracers of defense AC 6, eyes of charming, expensive clothing, jewelry (worth 500 gp), exotic perfumes, dagger of backbiting +2 (increases its wielder's backstab multiplier by one level—in this case, ×2 to ×3—to a maximum of ×5).

Spell (1): Sleep.

Thief Abilities: PP 40, OL 38, F/RT 30, MS 27, HS 20, DN 15, CW 87, RL 0.

Description: 5 feet 1 inch tall; pleasant, charming, manipulative.

Background: No one knows exactly what Princess Kalilah is princess of, but then no one has ever been tactless enough to press for an answer. A young woman, the princess has lived at different courts ever since she was a child and her mother was an "ambassador." She has learned much of court etiquette, intrigue, and subtlety. Initially schooled as a wizard, she found her temperament ill-suited to the discipline of a spellcaster.

There are very few in any court who suspect Kalilah of financing her lifestyle by stealing from other courtiers and nobles . . . and if discovered, her charm and beauty could persuade nearly anyone to take no action.

the knight of the blemished shield

6th-level Anuirean paladin of Haelyn

S: 18/76
D: 16
C: 18
I: 14
W: 15
Ch: 18
AL: LG
AC: -1
MV: 6
hp: 62
THAC0: 15
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d8
XP: 2,000



Bloodline: Anduiras, great, 33.

Blood Abilities: Battlewise, courage, detect lie, healing.

Equipment: Trained war horse (+2 on all Riding proficiency checks).

Description: 6 feet 3 inches tall; humble, brave, self-denying.

Background: This knight arrived alone on horseback to the festival. He claims he heard of the gathering of great heads of state and respected nobles while on his travels through the land. He has been admitted to the court mainly due to his rugged good looks (a Charisma of 18) and his obvious skill at arms. He is modest and somewhat unrefined—certain of the more “courtly” nobles and courtiers (such as the Princess Kalilah) have begun to make indiscreet jokes about his stiff and rural manners. For his part, the Knight of the Blemished Shield has kept to himself and not allowed anyone to provoke him.

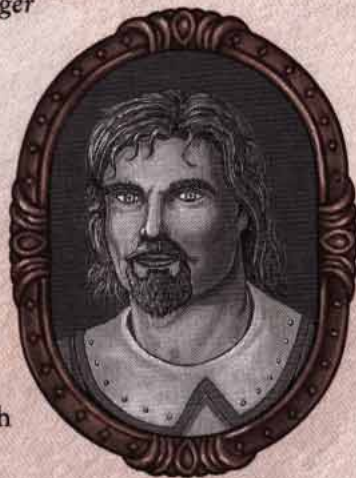
commoners

The festival has attracted some commoners as well. PCs might find themselves encountering Bram Holdenheyrd or Jerrick Skalden, a curious pair of comrades.

bram holdenheyrd

4th-level Anuirean ranger

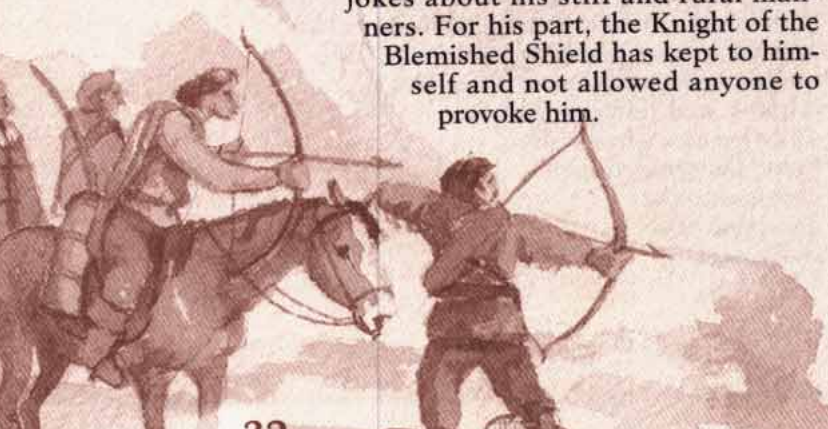
S: 17
D: 18
C: 17
I: 12
W: 14
Ch: 11
AL: CG
AC: 1
MV: 12
hp: 41
THAC0: 17
#AT: 1 (2 with bow)
Dmg: 1d6+2
AL: CG
XP: 650



Equipment: *Leather armor +3, composite bow +2, rapier +1, main-gauche.*

Description: 6 feet 1 inch tall; quiet, grim, watchful.

Background: One of the few commoners invited to sit among the nobility, Holdenheyrd is a young ranger of renown. He has traveled much of Cerilia by land and sea, and has many rough tales to tell. His sometime companion (Jerrick Skalden, below) improves upon his stories and is usually able to get applause or a laugh, whereas the dour Bram can command only respect.



jerrick skalden

7th-level Amuirean bard

S: 9
D: 16
C: 9
I: 16
W: 9
Ch: 15

AL: N
AC: 6
MV: 9
hp: 32
THAC0: 17
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d6+3
XP: 2,000



Equipment: Rapier +2, lute, flute, cloak of invisibility, deck of cards (marked).

Spells (3/2/1): 1st—*affect normal fires*, *Nystul's magic aura*, *phantasmal force*; 2nd—*alter self*, *pyrotechnics*; 3rd—*Leomund's tiny hut*.

Bard Abilities: PP 45, DN 50, CW 65, RL 35.

Description: 5 feet 10 inches tall; outgoing, boisterous, sarcastic.

Background: Jerrick has managed to make himself both popular and unpopular around the court in the last few days. Arriving early with his friend Bram, he has already singled out those ladies and gentlemen he would seek to entertain (like the local regent and perhaps one or two of the PCs), and those he would ridicule and satirize for the sake of entertainment (like the Lady Marya Nikosdottar and, again, perhaps a few of the PCs). Jerrick's biting wit and clever songs make him the center of attention wherever he goes.

other attendees

If this festival is being held in a domain where the PCs have adventured, or if the DM or a player has a domain sourcebook for the host domain or ones nearby, the Heroes should recognize plenty of other nobles and important personages in attendance. If possible, try to include any important people—friends, rivals, and contacts of the Heroes—that the PCs have met or heard about during their travels.

let the games begin!

From the first day to the last, the festival offers games and entertainments for all. Listed here are several recommended games, along with rules for participants and guidelines for competition. Feel free to use as many or as few as you and your players are interested in, modifying them to suit your game session.

Run the games in heats, with plenty of breaks for the other parts of this adventure (the plot and the intrigue, described below). Do not resolve all the events at once, or deprive characters who want to participate in the games of at least a chance to witness the other two challenges.

the joust


The highlight of the festival, the joust is usually held on the last day of a celebration. However, if the lord of the festival wants to stage an opening day joust, there are no social strictures against doing so.

The Rules: The rules are simple. Anyone who wants to compete must supply his own war horse, lances, and armor. All lances are tournament-style, meaning they are made to break and not cause much injury to an opponent. But accidents happen, so PCs should exercise caution nonetheless.

Every Hero who wants to participate can, even if he is not a noble or courtier. Often, warriors who are trying to attract the notice of possible employers compete in the lists at these open festivals to win renown and subsequent positions at court.

On rare occasions, people who wish to compete but who do not have the capital to supply their own gear find sponsors among the courtiers or nobles in attendance. In that case, any honors won go to the sponsor, but everyone knows who performed the actual joust (this is a good way to get some of your poorer characters involved in the event).

The two combatants line up at opposite ends of the lists and spur their



horses toward each other at full speed. Each character makes a Riding proficiency check to see if he gets "up to speed" fast enough. If the character succeeds, he receives a +1 to his subsequent attack roll.

The players make attack rolls when the two riders meet at the center of the lists. Strength modifiers apply for both attack and damage, but if one attacker hits another with a practice lance, the lance shatters; the damage is only 1d3+1 (plus the attacker's Strength bonus, if he has one). Both attacks are made simultaneously, so competitors can be hit at the same time.

Each character hit by a lance must make another Riding roll to stay on his horse. The chance of success is lowered by 2 points for every point of damage the character took during the pass. If a character falls off his horse, he loses the joust and suffers 1d3 points of damage. If both characters fall at the same time, they both forfeit.

If no one hits his opponent or falls off his horse during the first pass, the process is repeated to a maximum of three passes for each competing pair—if no one has fallen off a horse by that time, the competition is declared a double loss.

No magical weapons or armor may be used in the joust, and no spells may be cast on participants during or before the joust. Contestants will not be checked for possible cheating, however, unless someone lodges a formal protest.

The Participants: There should be at least one NPC participant for every Hero participating in the joust. The statistics for each possible opponent are listed with the NPC descriptions; below is some additional pertinent information about likely participants.

◆ **Knight of the Blemished Shield:** Riding proficiency 17 (+2 for his war horse), gains +1 to attack rolls because of jousting specialization. If the knight hits an opponent, the victim receives a -1 to his chance of staying on his horse, since the knight is so skilled at jousting. The knight fights honorably.

Lady Marya Nikosdottar: Since Lady Marya is not allowed to enter her varsk in the lists, she has a Riding proficiency of only 10. However, she fights dirty. She wields a *lance of jousting* +2 that will automatically unseat an opponent if she rolls a maximum result on her die of damage. She also wears her magical armor in the lists and will be greatly offended if anyone calls her a cheater. She is likely to challenge her accuser to a duel right there on the spot.

◆ **Keyrie Felfader:**

Riding proficiency 14. The baroness has a knack for making her opponents underestimate her (and therefore "go easy" on her). During the first pass of any encounter, subtract 1 point from the attack and damage rolls of her opponent (unless they have watched her use this "trick" in the lists before). She fights honorably and will not use magical items or armor in the lists.

◆ **Arlen Treyneir:** Riding proficiency 15, +1 to jousting attacks. The baron fights honorably.

Other nobles, courtiers, and even noted commoners may participate in the joust. Assume that any additional nobles will be fighters of 3rd to 5th level, courtiers will be of 2nd to 4th level, and commoners 1st to 4th level. If the PCs are of higher (6th+) or lower (1st to 3rd) levels, you might wish to adjust the levels of the participants to make this a more evenly matched event.

Note: Heroes who try to use their wits and their natural abilities should be rewarded for their efforts. For example, a PC who says he is watching the Knight of the Blemished Shield carefully to determine any weaknesses in the paladin's style should be allowed to make a Riding, Wisdom, or Intelligence check (your choice). If he succeeds, give him a +1 or +2 on his attack. (PCs who just wait for their turns in the lists might end up being "scouted" by their opponents as well.) Additional experience points should be awarded to PCs who come up with particularly inventive ways of winning the joust (fair or foul, as their alignments permit).

The Prize: The host regent judges the jousting event. The ultimate winner of the joust (characters will have to participate in several different heats to win—you can work out a schedule for PCs and NPCs) receives a gold and silver crown that can be attached to a helmet. The crown bears the symbol of the domain as well as an attached flourish most knights and nobles will recognize as meaning "Master of the Joust." The crown itself is worth 500 gp, assuming anyone would try to sell it.

The Experience: For every opponent a PC faces in the joust, he receives 50 XP just for the experience. If the PC wins the heat, he also receives bonus experience based on his opponent's ability and tactics: 10% of the NPC's XP value. Should a PC win the overall joust, he gains an additional reward of 200 XP for winning the field.

the fencing match

Performed like a normal combat, the fencing match helps warriors show off their command of the martial arts.

The Rules: First, all weapons must be some sort of blunted, one-handed sword (bastard swords are considered two-handed). Shields are not allowed, but second weapons are permitted. The weapons must be blunted to the extent that they will inflict only half damage; in addition, only 1 point of damage per die rolled is "real" damage. The rest is a form of stunning damage—each point will regenerate with one turn of rest. If a character sustains a number of points of stunning damage equal to his total hit points (taking into account any real points of damage), he goes unconscious until his stunning damage heals.

Second, combatants may use their normal abilities but no spells. Blood abilities can be used, as long as they are not too obvious (DM's call—it *feels* like cheating to honest characters).

No armor is worn. Characters use their Dexterity alone (they may use the optional parry rules if the DM permits). When a combatant is struck, he can either announce he has been hit or wait to see if a judge notices. The chance a judge will notice a hit is equal to 20% per point of stunning damage inflicted upon the target.

Participants must win two of three fights with a single opponent to advance to subsequent rounds. Strength bonuses apply to attack rolls, and to damage rolls *after* damage for the weapon is halved (and damage bonuses inflict *real* damage).

The host regent's fencing master, chief arms trainer, or other appropriate NPC judges the event.

The Participants: The following NPCs will provide challenges for the player characters during the fencing match.

- ◆ **Arlen Treyneir:** A specialist in the long sword, the baronet hopes to sweep this event. He has 3/2 attacks, a +1 bonus to attack rolls, and a +2 bonus to damage rolls. Arlen will not announce a hit of fewer than 4 points of stunning damage—he might not even notice it. The baronet is a fierce competitor and, if beaten and mocked, will probably hold a grudge. Treyneir will, however, be a good loser if his opponent is honorable and polite.
- ◆ **Keyrie Felfader:** While not a fencer, the

baroness is a fairly skilled warrior and will participate in the duels. She is proficient with a rapier as well as her favored weapon, the morning star. She fights fairly and will announce all hits.

- ◆ **Lady Marya Nikosdottar:** Convinced that the nobles of the south are "soft," the Lady Nikosdottar has surreptitiously sharpened her blunted blade. While it still inflicts only half damage, all damage points inflicted by the northern warrior are *real* hit points of damage. The lady will be impressed by anyone who defeats her and haughty toward those who fall to her blade. She will not announce any hits upon her person unless they are near maximum damage.
- ◆ **The Knight of the Blemished Shield:** The unknown knight will participate in this event, though somewhat unwillingly. He is using the fencing match almost as an "audition" for future lords, so he will do his best—however, he will "pull" his strikes so as not to hurt anyone. After figuring out whether a judge calls a hit for the knight, subtract 2 points from whatever real damage he does (half his Strength bonus).

Note: The Knight is quite likely to be over-chivalrous to his female opponents, especially if they are gracious or skillful. He might suffer a handicap (a -1 or -2 to his attacks), or he could even "throw" the fight if he is impressed enough with a female PC or NPC. This could set up an interesting situation if a female PC were involved—the knight could seek to become a suitor (though he would never be so bold as to admit it).

- ◆ **Bram Holdenheyrd:** While Bram favors the bow in combat, he nevertheless participates in the fencing. He is proficient with two weapons: long sword and dagger. Grim and quiet, Bram will fence with a determination and precision that unnerves many of his opponents. He will announce all hits that inflict more than 2 points of stunning damage.
- ◆ **Jerrick Skalden:** Jerrick fights with his rapier and main-gauche, using the second weapon to parry. He enjoys mocking those who take this game "too seriously" (especially Lady Marya and Lord Arlen, and any haughty



PCs), provoking them to make incautious attacks (DM's option on modifiers). He will not be dismayed if he is taken out of action early. He will root for the Knight of the Blemished Shield (secretly) and his friend Bram Holdenheyrd (loudly).

Again, the fencing is open to all. If the DM wishes to include other courtiers, commoners, or nobles from his campaign, the match can help escalate rivalries or make friendships.

Note: As in the joust, the DM should allow players to suggest strategies and modes of attack and defense for their characters, giving them positive modifiers for particularly inventive ideas. Role-playing is as important here as die-rolling.

The Prize: While mastering the fencing grounds is not as prestigious as being named Master of the Joust, the winner still gains a ribbon he can wear on ceremonial occasions proclaiming him "Master of the Blade," as well as a jeweled-hilt rapier and matching dagger with a total value of 400 gp.

The Experience: As in the joust, combatants win experience for participating. Every character receives 50 XP just for fighting an opponent. The character also receives an XP award for defeating an opponent: 10% of the character's XP value.

storytelling

An evening activity, the storytelling competition is a perfect opportunity for the less physical, but more eloquent, characters to show what they can do. Each participant steps forward in front of the festival's most noble attendees and tells a tale of adventure, romance, or whatever comes to mind. The judges are Jerrick Skalden (as a professional bard, he should not compete), the host of the festival (who could be a PC), and Boden Stormwatcher.

The Rules: Each player who wishes his character to participate can either tell a story and make an appropriate proficiency or ability check (see below), or simply make the check and outline his story. The DM should reward players who actually compose or relate stories at the game session—it is all part of role-playing, after all—with positive modifiers to their proficiency checks (just telling a

story should increase the character's chances, while a good story can do an even better job).

The following proficiencies are appropriate for storytelling if the player can think of a way to work the skill into the telling of the story: Artistic Ability (composition), Ancient History, Local History, Musical Instrument, Singing, and Religion. Even secondary checks should be allowed (like Juggling or Tumbling) if the player suggests using them to enhance his tale. If the optional proficiency rules are not used in your campaign, check relevant ability scores such as Intelligence and/or Charisma.

A single character might make several checks in the course of telling his story. Take each success into account when keeping score. The more proficiency successes, the better the story is likely to be. Add this to the player's inventiveness and willingness to role-play the event, and you have the winner.

The Participants: The storytelling competition will attract an assortment of competitors. The following NPCs are among them.

- ◆ **The Knight of the Blemished Shield:** A hero, but not a good storyteller. He thinks of the practice as bragging and tends to downplay his accomplishments (which are the only tales he knows).
- ◆ **Arlen Treyneir:** He *does* sound like a braggart, though not too much. He tells stories of his family's heroics in the Battle of Mount Deismaar and in other, notable wars throughout the ages. He is an average storyteller.
- ◆ **Marya Nikosdottar:** Her tale is a song and, though she has a strong, good voice, it is a tale of brutality and bloodshed that causes many of the more sensitive courtiers to swoon and gasp. Strangely, the tale will appeal to the Knight of the Blemished Shield who, while he sees its "heroes" as cruel and evil, also sees a certain sad tragedy in Lady Marya herself.
- ◆ **Keyrie Felfader:** Hers is perhaps the most accomplished of the tales. Obviously used to court life and storytelling, she is practiced in courtliness and diplomacy. Her tale will connect with everyone in the court, without offending anyone. It is a good, solid tale about the creation of the Anuirean Empire and the fall of Michael Roele. If none of the PCs do a better than average job, she will win.

If any other participants show up, they can, perhaps, tell tales that will concern the Heroes—either as heroic participants or objects of ridicule (depending on the NPC telling the tale). This is yet another chance for you as the DM to involve active NPCs from your own campaign.

Note: The storytelling event is all about role-playing. Coming up with decent story, or even an idea for a story, will win the day. You may wish to reward players who try to guess what the judges want to hear. (For example, Jerrick would probably like tales of wandering, humor, and cleverness, while the grand vizier will find himself drawn to scholarly, well-composed epics.) The DM can even bypass the proficiency check stage for really good storytelling attempts. Remember, it is the *attempt* that counts for the players—not the actual tale. A role-player who makes a good effort should be rewarded.

The Prize: The best storyteller at the festival receives a book of tales, compiled by the best bards in the domain and inscribed with gold lettering. The book includes many tales of legend, as well as stories about current events (as in, “more legends from this book”). Referencing the book will give the character a chance to make Ancient History or Local History proficiency checks at a 15. The tome itself is worth about 250 gp, mainly because of the binding, lettering, and artistic ability that went into its creation.

This event also has “honorable mention” awards for anyone who does a good job. This reward is designed mainly for PCs who really make an effort but are bested by their compatriots. Gilded pens, fine parchments, and musical instruments can be given out—the value of each “consolation prize” should not be more than 50 gp.

The Experience: While this event does not hold much danger for the competitors (unless they choose to insult their host or other guests), role-playing the sequence should be rewarded. Players who actually role-play the storytelling (even if they just make up a very short story or come up with a clever poem or something) should see their characters awarded between 50 and 100 XP. The winner of the event should receive no fewer than 100 XP and no more than 250.

other games

Introducing other games to the festival is an excellent idea for extending the event. Promenades (beauty and courtliness pageants), dancing, riddle-telling, and other competitions should bring out the best in many role-players.

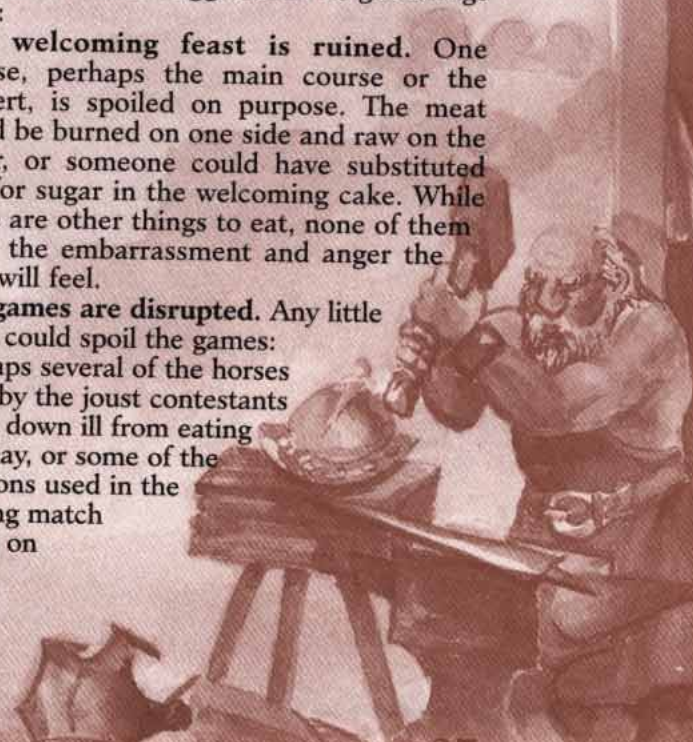
When introducing new games, try to keep the rules simple and fun—and always try to work in rewards for good role-playing, as well as character experience and die-rolling. You may wish to cut some of the XP awards listed in the above events if you introduce more competitions, however—this adventure is meant to give low- to mid-level characters a little experience, not more than a level's worth.

the plot

A neighboring regent, preferably a long-time foe of the Heroes (particularly a PC regent attending or hosting the festival), has decided to disrupt the celebration. The plot involves pitting several of the attending nobles and courtiers against each other, resulting in embarrassing—if not downright dangerous—consequences for the host.

The plot is fairly simple. Several commoners (not detailed in this scenario) have been paid to disrupt key proceedings throughout the festival. There are many ways the “faceless masses” can complicate the delicate running of the festival. Some suggestions to get things started:

- ◆ **The welcoming feast is ruined.** One course, perhaps the main course or the dessert, is spoiled on purpose. The meat could be burned on one side and raw on the other, or someone could have substituted salt for sugar in the welcoming cake. While there are other things to eat, none of them salve the embarrassment and anger the host will feel.
- ◆ **The games are disrupted.** Any little thing could spoil the games: Perhaps several of the horses used by the joust contestants come down ill from eating bad hay, or some of the weapons used in the fencing match break on





dn

impact. Player characters should definitely become annoyed, as these conditions could cause them to lose a valuable victory.

- ◆ **Petty theft is rampant.** The Heroes and other attendees start noticing that many of their small but valuable items are disappearing. A silver mirror here, a favorite dagger there, and soon everyone is accusing everyone else of snatching their things. Items could also begin to turn up in unlikely places—perhaps in the possession of the regent's castle steward or captain of the guard.
- ◆ **Certain nobles and courtiers are singled out for minor abuse.** Any PC who is normally haughty or proud is a good target for this attention, as are Lady Marya, the grand vizier, and Arlen Treyneir. Buckets of slop are “accidentally” emptied on their heads, their bedding is made up with soiled sheets, or whatever will anger or embarrass them the most.
- ◆ **Vicious gossip is spread.** This is particularly possible if Jerrick the bard has made any enemies. He is quick with his tongue and will often make fun of incidents he only *hears* have happened. For example, nearly everyone knows that the baroness's father is deathly ill—Jerrick might be informed that the illness is actually not serious and is in fact caused by some embarrassing situation (falling off a horse, eating too much, drinking excessively). A bawdy poem or song mocking the ailing baron will embarrass or enrage most of the courtiers and nobles, and truly astound Keyrie Felfader. Jerrick could also relate slanted tales about the Heroes (perhaps ridiculing them for their involvement in an incident that he hears was a humorous fiasco but was really a terrible tragedy).

the reaction

Any one of these incidents would not be enough to ruin the festival. Indeed, a few untoward things *must* happen at these occasions to make them memorable. However, the combined impact of *all* of these incidents (plus any the DM can contrive) will ruin the event and mortally embarrass the regent in charge—as well as anyone else who gets in the way (probably the PCs).

The Heroes can prevent this through being alert and watching out for sabotage. Checking tent ropes, saddle hitches, open windows, and

just being extremely careful will help. Actually investigating the incidents and finding out who is behind them (a band of commoners led by a 0-level spy or disgruntled peasant) will make things a lot easier, but there are so many faceless individuals involved that catching the ringleader won't completely end the incidents.

If the PCs can stop the embarrassing occurrences and investigate, they will probably be able to question enough knowledgeable peasants to find the originator of the plot. At that time, what happens next is up to them.

rewards and penalties

If the incidents go unchecked, the host regent will lose 1d6+1 Regency Points at the end of the festival and may incur the enmity of several nobles and courtiers. Certainly, those invited to the festival will be completely overwhelmed by the host's inability to deal with the situation.

Of course, if the PCs have no strong ties to the regent, this loss of face causes them no real harm. The DM, therefore, should make certain that the Heroes are somehow splattered with the mud that hits the regent. Maybe the commoners set them up as possible manipulators behind the plot (planting stolen items on them or their retainers and passing slander about them). In this case, PC regents lose 1d3 RP after the festival, and scions and commoners get “bad reputations.” The courtiers and nobles will spread the word about the “disruptive” effect the PCs had on the festival and they will be viewed as suspects by anyone considering hiring them or inviting them to their kingdoms in the future.

If the PCs succeed in stopping a majority of the incidents from happening and tracking down the perpetrators, each PC regent involved gains 1d3 RP. If a PC is the host, he gains 1d6 RP and a reputation as an efficient, careful host—as well as the direct role-playing benefits of a grateful noble, courtier, or commoner who was saved much embarrassment by the PC's management.

Commoners who help stop the plot from succeeding should gain between 100 and 500 XP for their assistance, as well as rewards from the hosting regent (though a PC host will have to decide for himself what form the rewards might take).

the intrigue

In the intrigue, the true purpose of Lady Marya Nikosdottar's visit is revealed. Lady Marya was invited because she seems to have sympathetic leanings toward her southern neighbors, and the regent in charge of the festival hoped to give her a chance to see how pleasant peaceful interaction could be. However, the regent (or his advisers, if the regent is a PC) was maneuvered into inviting Lady Marya so that she could be used to disrupt the festivities and discredit the host regent.

The intrigue is the work of none other than Boden Stormwatcher (or, if the DM has substituted another NPC wizard in his place, that character). He feels that the southern lands have been too passive toward the Vos, and that the law regents should unite to wipe out the former followers of Azrai. Such an alliance could benefit him as well—as a major wizard regent in the region, he would undoubtedly be asked to help with any war that occurred.

The grand vizier has enlisted the aid of Princess Kalilah Shadam. She has no particular feelings about the subject, but Stormwatcher has promised her rich reward for her help—and the princess has always had a fondness for wealth.

the plan

Stormwatcher's plan has two parts. First, Princess Kalilah will flirt with another noble, courtier, or commoner (preferably a PC) attending the festival, supporting his actions in the games and generally hanging all over him like a dove cooing flattery and appreciation at every opportunity. At the same time, she is also supposed to surreptitiously antagonize Lady Marya, issuing thinly veiled insults and spreading vicious gossip through the court.

If possible, the princess will pick a Hero who seems to dislike Lady Marya, or one who has incurred the Vos woman's anger (perhaps by defeating her in the joust or fencing competitions). She will encourage the enmity, fanning the flames at every chance she gets.

Should the timing be correct, this antagonism will prompt Lady Marya to do something stupid—like using a real lance in the joust or a real sword (disguised by magic to look dull) in the fencing match. She will, of course, be caught; her actions will provoke reprisals and at least some amount of censure from the other guests, putting Lady Marya in an even worse position.

When everyone is truly sick of the Vos woman and sure the regent was crazy to invite her to the festival (among “civilized” people), the princess will play her last card. She will plant some of her expensive jewelry either on Lady Marya or in her quarters (using her thieving skills and, if necessary, some magical assistance by the vizier), then announce publicly that someone has stolen them. A search will be instituted and, aided by Stormwatcher's magic (he can have memorized some divination spells, or at least claim to have some memorized), the jewelry will be found. Lady Marya will be disgraced and probably expelled, undoubtedly prompting her to go home and encourage her father to launch a retributive strike against the southern kingdoms for this insult.

the heroes' role

What can the PCs do? Whatever they want. They may wish, for their own reasons, to encourage the execution of the intrigue (if they aren't good-aligned characters), in which case they will have to discourage others from finding the truth. Most likely, they will be pitted against the princess and the grand vizier, trying to uncover the perpetrators.

Discovery proves difficult. The PC chosen by the flirtatious princess should regard her as a “damsel in distress.” Lady Marya is unpleasant and a cheat, and should have a hard time garnering sympathy. However, there are a few clues the Heroes can pick up:

- ◆ **Heroes other than the one to whom the princess has “attached” herself should hear some of the vicious gossip** either directly from the princess herself or from courtiers known to be her friends. The gossip will be so outrageous that they will wonder, if it is true, how Lady Marya ever got here without everyone else going home or attacking her.
- ◆ **The Hero the princess has “claimed” will probably see through at least part of her act**, as she is overdoing it a little. He will also probably wonder why the princess is so attracted to him—unless he has a tremendous ego.

- ◆ **The princess should be seen at least once with the grand vizier** in an obviously private conference. When the two spot their observer, they will immediately shut up and head in different directions.
- ◆ **Lady Marya, while ruthless, does appear to have a few scruples.** While she does not respect the “play-fighting” the southerners do (she is used to practicing with real weapons), she does not seem like the type to steal or lie outside of such games. This is just a feeling perceptive players should get.
- ◆ **Wizards who have their own divination spells will be able to find out the truth** (if the grand vizier doesn't arrange for some “accident” to befall them). In fact, if anyone starts probing into the theft too deeply, his retainers, poorly disguised, will try to “discourage” the investigators.

success or failure

If the intrigue succeeds (with the Heroes none the wiser), everything will probably go as the grand vizier planned—war with the Vos and the enmity of Lady Marya will pepper the campaign's near future. In this case, the Heroes should definitely learn about the intrigue later (either perpetrator might actually tell them) and the revelation could lead to an adventure in which the PCs try to straighten out the mess.

Should the intrigue fail, Lady Marya will likely be impressed by those who cleared her name—so much so that she could change alignment (she had been wavering anyway) to neutral, or perhaps neutral good. The grand vizier, however, will be enraged and try to place the blame completely on whoever is handy—the princess, most likely. He will also hold a grudge against the Heroes.

The princess is a better sport. If caught, she will confess—feeling that what she did was not a particularly serious crime, but “just a prank.” She will attempt to use her *eyes of charming* to persuade at least one of the Heroes to see things her way, but she will be smart enough to get out while the getting is good—and the host regent should let her leave.

If cleared of conceiving the intrigue, the princess will express gratitude to the Heroes and may even develop an infatuation with one of them that can be explored later in the campaign. She is an interesting character who can pop up anywhere, anytime. The only grudge she will hold stems from anyone embarrassing or truly humiliating her.

rewards

Defeating the intrigue will net a PC host regent 1d6+1 RP, as well as the gratitude of Lady Marya. Other PC regents will also gain Lady Marya's favor, as well as 1d3 RP. Commoners are a little below the lady's notice, but her retainers will see that they are rewarded (surreptitious gifts of prize furs or gemstones—not to exceed 500 gp each).

Rewards for making certain the intrigue succeeds should be no more than half the benefits for stopping it—the Heroes, in this case, hope to gain some sort of tactical advantage in Cerilia's wars by helping the intrigue succeed. Gaining such an advantage is itself a reward.

continuing the adventure

As mentioned at the beginning of the legend, this adventure offers the Heroes an excellent opportunity to meet and interact with nobles and courtiers from many lands. They can segue from the festival to almost any adventure included in this book, or another challenge of your design.

Try to use NPCs introduced in this adventure as recurring characters in the campaign. The Knight of the Blemished Shield, for example, might choose to ally with the Heroes if they are good and strong (more the former than the latter) and could make an excellent lieutenant for someone. Learning why his shield is “blemished” (and perhaps restoring his status) could be an adventure in itself. Lady Marya could be a good villain or an interesting ally, depending on how the Heroes interacted with her, and the chances of running across Bram or Jerrick anywhere in Cerilia are very good.

If possible, plan a transition between the festival and another adventure. You could even interrupt the festival (after you have done everything you want with it) with an urgent mission for the PCs. Or one of the nobles, courtiers, or commoners could “tip off” the Heroes to a new adventure as the celebration is breaking up. Through the festival, you have the opportunity to throw the Heroes together with any NPCs you want—use it well.

heroes' pride

"The activities of the highest nobles all too often resemble those of the youngest children.

"As any parent knows, keeping children busy keeps them out of trouble. Similarly, savvy regents soon learn to keep their courtiers, lieutenants, and vassals involved in projects and activities that benefit the domain—else these supposedly responsible adults find their own self-serving interests and activities.

"This legend concerns a ruler who paid too little attention to his own court and did not keep his loyal subjects busy when they desperately wanted to be noticed and attended. As a result, two factions arose within the regent's own court—both still loyal to him, but both also bitterly opposed to each other. Instead of simply assigning tasks to his courtiers, this ruler found himself having to pry them apart to keep his domain whole."

Event Type: Feud (result of 5 on Table 15). This adventure can also be used as an Intrigue (result of 16), a Matter of Justice (result of 18), or a Corruption/Crime (result of 8) event.

The Heroes: A regent with law, temple, or guild holdings should serve as the "lead" PC in this adventure. (Regents of domains comprising only sources seldom have large courts, so they tend to avoid the type of situation "Heroes' Pride" presents.) As written, the adventure assumes a province ruler as the focal character; it will work for regents of temple or guild domains with only minor adjustments—the DM merely needs to change the character classes of NPCs to clerics or rogues. After all, individuals of any class are capable of petty differences that escalate into a full-blown conflict.

The PCs can be of any level. Most of the NPCs are 0-level, and PC experience levels will not factor as importantly in resolving this adventure as will tact and guile.

The Challenge:

Unbeknownst to the lead PC, two factions have arisen in his court. One faction, composed mostly of his military leaders and warrior lieutenants, takes bitter exception to the regent's apparent preference for his civic (and perhaps magical) advisers and courtiers. For their part, the civilian advisers feel the same way about the military faction.

Neither group blames the PC regent for his perceived favoritism. Each group blames the other for coloring past events and toadying up to the regent for favors.

The initial indications of the growing problem won't actually distress the regent—at least not if he is typical of most regents. Both factions first try to perform their assigned tasks to the best of their ability, and they make certain the regent (or his friends and lieutenants) knows of their success.

Next, however, a "war of favor" commences. Each faction tries to discredit the other, dragging the PC regent (and/or his allies) into the middle. The war escalates when the civilian faction tries to outmaneuver the military faction on the accounting board, and the military faction tries to kill off the civilian leaders by provoking duels and staging ambushes. This situation leads to more problems—most of which involve the other members of the court as involuntary participants or innocent bystanders—until the PC regent finally takes action to settle the matter.

A Word of Advice: This "adventure" may seem very unusual to most DMs and players. It is.

Few chances for armed conflict arise. The PCs instead spend most of their time observing the actions of NPCs and becoming increasingly cognizant of the drama unfolding in the court—in other words, they are in a position in which they react to rather than initiate the course of events. And the conclusion—unlike that of many adventures in which the party is given a concrete goal ("defeat the evil monster")—forces the PCs to formulate a solution of their own.

As a result, "Heroes' Pride" is an adventure that should be completed with a lot of role-playing (read: "hamming it up") and a fair amount of relaxation. It serves as a perfect transitional piece to occur between a series of domain turns and an adventure, or between two difficult, world-shaking adventures (such as "The Gift of Azrai" or "Terrible Awakening"). It emphasizes a good story—with a lot of fun involved—not a classic sword-and-sorcery brawl.

and it begins

Having just completed a particularly arduous adventure or challenging domain turn, the PC regent and his allies lounge in his castle (temple, guildhall), enjoying the peace and quiet. Perhaps they plan their future adventures, or maybe they just look forward to a good lunch and a nap. Whatever their plans, an interruption comes in the form of Captain Ingrid Brodin, the leader of one of the PC regent's military units.

"My lord! I have just finished drilling a special unit I've been training for the past few months. Would you accompany me to the practice field at your convenience to inspect them? I would be honored to hear your opinion of their abilities."

A wise regent knows the translation of this simple statement: "Hey, boss, I've been working overtime to make one of your military units a heckuvalot better than it was a few months ago. After I've spent all this time and effort getting the troops ready, I'd really like you to see them and tell me how great they are, okay?"

If the regent goes along with Captain Brodin, continue. Otherwise, the armored and sweaty warrior stands in attendance until ordered to leave or until the regent changes his mind.

lieutenants, advisers, and courtiers

The lead PC regent probably has several lieutenants and/or advisers he knows by name, acquired in previous adventures and domain turns of your campaign. Whenever possible, substitute these specific characters for the NPCs in this adventure.

Of course, the PC might not have enough established lieutenants or advisers to replace all the NPCs. No problem. If the PC maintains a court, he has prominent courtiers—usually at least one or two for every Gold Bar he spends on his court. Likewise, military leaders come with the troops they command. Each unit of infantry, cavalry, or other armed unit represented by a War Card follows a leader of some kind. These leaders might be only first- or second-level fighters, but that experience puts them head-and-shoulders above the troops they command.

So, when "introducing" new advisers or courtiers, be sure to remind the player that his character has known these NPCs for as long as he has maintained a court or an army. They all hold trusted positions. If possible, inform him of some of their points of character. He probably wouldn't have hired or appointed them if they hadn't impressed him in some way.

military advantage

Captain Brodin leads the Heroes to the practice field, where a unit of soldiers stands at attention. **Note:** This unit's type (preferably infantry, cavalry, or irregulars) depends on what sort of units the PC regent employs.

Captain Brodin bows as you take the observation stand. She strides onto the field, mounting her war horse and donning her helm. Riding to the head of her unit, she draws her sword. With only a moment's hesitation she waves it around her head, beginning the exercise.

Under the captain's direction (and that of her sergeants) the unit performs admirably. The troops execute complicated maneuvers with practiced precision and obey every order with immediate results.

The demonstration lasts half an hour, after which many of your courtiers (who followed you out to the field) applaud with great enthusiasm. Ignoring them, Captain Brodin rides up to you, dismounts, takes her helm off her perspiration-dampened head, and bows. She looks up at you expectantly.

At this point, inform the regent that the military unit standing on the field has improved from one classification to the next. For example, if Captain Brodin commanded cavalry before, she now has a unit of well-trained knights. Irregulars become infantry; regular infantry become elite infantry. If the PC has only other types of units (archers, pikemen, scouts, etc.), inform him that the unit now receives +1 bonuses to attack and defense.

If appropriate, you can require the regent or his allies to make Leadership or Strategy proficiency checks to determine the improvement for themselves, but it should be clear that Captain Brodin has surpassed herself in serving the regent she swears to obey.

and the civil response

As if this news wasn't good enough, a few hours (or perhaps days) later, one of the PC regent's best civil advisers, Master Nemir Wellsown, seeks an audience with his lord.

"My lord, it is my pleasure to inform you that you are richer than you know. Over the past several months, I have worked with my assistants to discover how the variance in your taxes occurs. Some nobles and peasants pay certain, predictable amounts every month; others vary in how much they insist they can pay, and I have wondered about this curiosity for some time. If you would allow me, I can show you what I mean."

The wise translation: "I think someone has been cheating you out of your rightful taxes (tithes, profits) and I think, after many weeks of searching, I have found out who and how. I'd really love to show you how I can save you lots of money; do you have a few minutes?"

If the PC regent takes a look at "the books," he can make an Administration or Law proficiency check, or Nemir can explain the numbers to him. The man has found some of the ways certain nobles and groups of wealthy commoners dodge particular taxes—legally, but unscrupulously. With a few simple corrections to the tax laws (tithe laws, collection methods), Nemir can make the regent's domain much more prosperous—without costing the regent his subjects' loyalty or anything else.

In effect, Nemir has closed off several loopholes in the law and it will take those who seek such loopholes at least one season to recover. Inform the player that he can feel

free to tax, for the next domain turn only, all his provinces at the severe taxation level—however, for purposes of

loyalty adjustments and other considerations the rate counts as moderate taxation. (Guildmasters and priest regents gain a

+1 to all their GB rolls, though they can't exceed the normal maximum income from any holding.)

escalation of interest

Inform the PC regent that similar events, but on a much smaller scale, occur around the palace during the next few days. The regent's personal guards have been refitted with better armor and snap to attention more quickly; the court has never looked more prestigious and inviting; the troops drill constantly; reports of new diplomatic and trading possibilities flow in hourly.

At this point, involve the other Heroes. Certain parties from each faction approach the PCs, attempting to curry favor with the regent's friends and allies. Every PC with any obvious connections (such as another regent, scion, or trusted personal ally) is approached, and everyone gets a chance to interact personally with someone who wants something.

the flanking maneuver

During the course of the next few days, about half the PCs engage in conversation with someone from the military faction. The military "representatives" approach only those PCs who seem most interested in military matters—warriors, war priests, or wizards with combat spells. While each encounter runs a little differently, the following example should give you some ideas about how the military faction courts its hoped-for friends.

As you take your morning exercise, a lightly armored man carrying a shield approaches. The shield bears the insignia of your friend, the regent of this domain; you quickly recognize the man carrying it as Sir Caldor Daffyd, a sergeant in the palace guard. He comes within a few paces of your position, bows, and speaks.

"Good sir, I have heard of your adventures and listened with great interest when you spoke to my lord about plans and opportunities for new enterprises. Your heroic exploits and honorable demeanor greatly impress both me and my troops. It would please me very much if you could give us some guidance in arms and carriage, so that we may better serve our lord."

Assuming the PC does not put Sir Caldor down or refuse to talk to him, what follows is an interesting, if somewhat shallow, conversation about the PC's adventures, heroics, and tactics. Sir Caldor acts appropriately interested and impressed, but does not offer much comment in return. When the conversation winds down, Sir Caldor produces a sword.

"I realize, good sir, that you have much finer weapons than this at your disposal. However, if you find yourself at a ceremonial occasion, or one that does not require any real fighting, you would honor me by using this gift."

Sir Caldor presents the PC with the sword, bows, and leaves. The weapon is extremely well-made and bears many ornamental features that do not make it any less useful. If the PC were to sell it, he could probably get nearly 1,000 gp from a collector, or 500 gp in a quick sale. Sir Caldor, if asked, provides no explanation for this grandiose gift, except to say that he and others of the military honor and respect the PC and his companions.

Each PC approached by the military faction receives a similar gift. Not all get swords—since not all could use them—but the gifts include expensive armor, a war horse, and/or other goods. Each presenter makes certain the PC knows the military "greatly respects him" and "hopes he will grant the honor of using this gift."

being most civil

And what of the remaining PCs? Are they slighted? Not at all—while the military-oriented PCs gain gifts of war, the other PCs receive tributes appropriate to their positions.

The gift-bearer in the following example is the Honorable Selma Efferson, who works as a supervisory accountant and scribe for the lead PC. She approaches one of the PCs during a moment of relaxation.

The woman who catches your eye nods and approaches, as if your glance gave her the permission she sought to gain your audience. She wears simple, if well-made, clothing and carries a book beneath one arm. At her belt hang scribes' tools; in only a few seconds you recognize her as one of your friend's most accomplished bookkeepers and secretaries.

"Dear sir, may I have but a moment of your time? I have heard it said around the palace that you are one of the wisest of my lord's companions. All who speak of you say you bring wise counsel and quick wit to any situation. Could I have a brief word with you?"

Selma asks the PC to describe some of his cleverest moments as an adventurer (of which she has heard tales around the court), and some of the strategies he used to defeat evil foes. She also asks him his opinion regarding several minor financial and diplomatic matters, nodding and agreeing with anything he says (providing his comments aren't absurd or utterly inappropriate). If he jests with her, she laughs; if he confides in her, she listens intently. When the conversation runs down, she brings out her book.

"I was wondering, sir, if you would do me the honor of perusing this text at your leisure. I have worked hard, with many of my colleagues, to compile a list of strategies and economic trends throughout this region, and I wonder if your expert opinion could improve upon it. Please feel free to keep this copy as a tribute from my lord's financial advisers and friends."

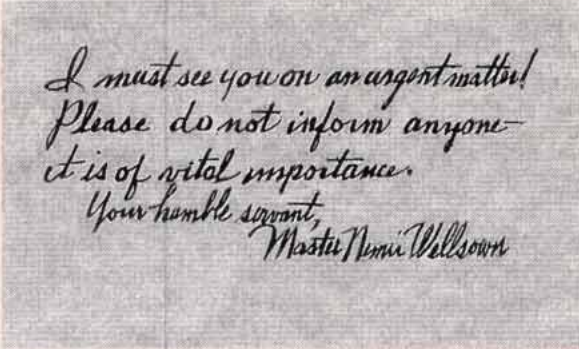
The leather-bound book exhibits fine workmanship and contains much useful information. Anyone who can appreciate a text with this content (anyone with the Administration or Law proficiency, for example) would immediately recognize its value. Any character who consults this text before making a proficiency check on a related skill receives a +2 bonus to his roll. The book cannot benefit characters whose interests lie outside of the region (Anuire, Brechtür, etc.) and will be outdated after a year or so, but it is very useful in the immediate time and place.

As with Caldor above, Selma offers no explanation of why she chose to present this valuable gift to the PC—except to say that she admires him and respects his opinion, and that the rest of the court's financial ministers feel the same way.

and now . . . the backstabbing

The flattery has reached a crescendo; now the insinuations begin. The court turns from a pleasant place where the Heroes hold everyone's attention to a site of vicious rumor mongering and backbiting.

The first official occurrence of backstabbing happens while the PC regent watches his troops (or personal guard) practicing. A page approaches and presents him with a note. It bears his name and titles, and contains the following message:



*I must see you on an urgent matter!
Please do not inform anyone—
it is of vital importance.
Your humble servant,
Master Nemir Wellstown*

If asked, the page indicates that Nemir awaits his lord in one of the regent's receiving rooms.

a civil disturbance

The PC regent (accompanied, perhaps, by the rest of the party), should go to the meeting-place as soon as possible. The civilian faction in the court timed the summons with great care—all the military personnel are out practicing, except for a couple members of the regent's personal guard who will wait outside the chamber.

Inside stand Nemir Wellstown, Selma Efferson, and a few other courtiers (perhaps ones with whom the PCs have already met and interacted).

Their faces bear concerned expressions. When the PC regent asks why he has been summoned, Nemir speaks:

"My lord, I regret to inform you that I—no, we, my assistants and I—have uncovered a plot against your highness. It is not a plot against your life or your rule, but something vital to your regency: It is a plot against the treasury.

"Through several unnamed sources, we learned that certain parties in the court have been siphoning off funds for . . . private ventures. At first we thought these expenses legitimate, as they produced some positive results. However, when we balance expenditures with gains, we find a vast discrepancy. As a result, your highness's treasury is over five Gold Bars short this month.

"We believe we have traced the expenditures and the . . . I hate to say it, my lord, but the proper word is embezzlement—to its source. The recipient of these funds is none other than Captain Ingrid Brodin!"

Nemir goes on to explain how he believes Captain Brodin's "special training" for her unit was nothing but a clever ruse for funneling gold and goods away from other sources (primarily civilian projects) and into her own—and her officers'—pouches. Nemir shows the PC regent, on a complicated chart, how he believes this was done, all the while apologizing for not having caught this discrepancy sooner. He also makes a great deal of assuring his highness of Captain Brodin's loyalty in battle, "but these military people . . . tsk, tsk. They have no sense of *real* responsibility."

If the PC regent or one of the other PCs inspects the chart and the evidence, have the player make an Administration proficiency check (or an Intelligence check) at a -5 penalty. If successful, he notices that something about these numbers doesn't seem to balance. Nemir and his assistants have had weeks to construct this evidence (that's right—it's false), and just checking it over quickly won't uncover everything. Still, the PCs might obtain some clue as to what is transpiring.

If Nemir gets the chance, he suggests that the regent do nothing about this situation . . . for now. Rather, he states his hope that perhaps Captain Brodin simply made a horrific bookkeeping error and will try to correct it. In the meantime, the regent should watch and wait for further developments.

After the meeting, the PCs who were approached by members of Nemir's staff (the other courtiers, such as Selma) are approached again. All the courtiers express the same fear: that Nemir trusts the military too much. They say that the corruption in the military has gone on for quite some time and the PCs need to do something about it—"But don't tell his highness I told you, I beg."

that's it— this means war!

Of course, the PC regent's guards will inform Captain Brodin and the other military counselors of the meeting; they, in turn—with a few bribes and muscles planted in the right places—will find out what the meeting was about. Captain Brodin doesn't take the news well. At first, she wants to see the regent immediately and deny everything. If the PC regent grants her an audience (or commands her appearance), that's what happens. She cannot explain "those petty numbers" but she is certain "that snake" Nemir is behind them.

However, once she has a chance to cool down she sees the game the civilian courtiers play—and she herself has developed some strategy at court as well as on the battlefield. She arranges for her own plans to take shape.

Consulting with her advisers, Captain Brodin decides to stage a little demonstration of her loyalty. She plants two rumors among her men. The first is for the PC regent's ears; she'll use people like Sir Caldor to deliver it, through the Heroes:

"Sir! I have heard a startling tale! Spies lurk outside the castle, trying to gain entrance through use of bribes and coercion. One of my men overheard such a spy speaking with someone from this court. My man approached, thinking to seize them both, but when he got to their lair they were gone. He did hear that they intended to meet back there again at midnight, when the spy would bring gold to pay for his passage."

Sir Caldor recommends that the Hero with whom he makes contact, along with a small number of guards (or the other Heroes) surprise the spy and his inside contact—thereby exposing a traitor to the regency. He also recommends that no one outside of the Heroes be told of this, since anyone could be the spy's associate.

The second rumor Captain Brodin sends around the castle with her men. They speak in hushed tones of a deserter, unhappy with Captain Brodin and her officers, who wants to sell information about illegal dealings by the military to anyone who will pay. The rumor says that the deserter has been seen outside the castle walls in a certain place every midnight, waiting for someone to come with gold to pay him off. Captain Brodin would set a trap for him but she fears the regent will hear of it and capture the deserter himself—and then he'd find out about her "special trade deals." She wishes to keep the deserter's existence quiet until he gets discouraged and leaves.

Captain Brodin hopes to tempt the civilian courtiers with their own lie—one they cannot pass up. The courtiers, of course, bite on this hook. They love the idea of getting real proof, so they send Selma outside near midnight with a bag of 500 gp—more than enough for a bribe. She spends her time looking for the nonexistent informant, while the military officers hope she will be caught by the regent's friends.

the next step up

If the Heroes hear the first rumor and go along with Sir Caldor, catching Selma with her bag of gold proves easy. Perhaps she leads them on a brief chase, but she isn't up to a fight so she surrenders immediately. She tries to explain her purpose for being there, but Sir Caldor and the rest of the military men present sneer at her story. No one who originally repeated the second rumor remembers hearing it at all.

This turn of events inflames the civilian courtiers. Nemir publicly accuses Captain Brodin of using a lie to trap his servant. In response, Captain Brodin accuses Nemir of slander. Everyone jumps in, and the water truly starts to get hot.

This leaves the PCs with a dilemma: They have to devise some way to unify the court—or chaos will reign supreme.



unworthy opponents

In the meantime, the courtiers and the military start striking at each other in more direct ways. The following encounters exemplify what each group does to the other and include possible ways the PCs can intervene.

ambush

The military often thinks with its steel, and this case is no exception.

Late at night, when just about everyone sleeps, some of the courtiers perform their duties by candlelight—balancing the books, preparing the court for the next day's activities, and generally easing the life of the regent.

One night, a group of soldiers—ostensibly palace guards on patrol—"mistake" the courtiers for intruders, beat them soundly, and throw them into the dungeon. When the courtiers' superiors report them missing the next day, no one says anything. Master Nemir grows more and more agitated.

The Heroes must find the courtiers before something worse happens.

slashed funding

Since the military receives its pay in gold, and the courtiers control the flow of gold, the accountants can juggle their numbers to make anything appear correct.

When a group of bandits ambush the pay-wagon, stealing the money intended for the troops this season (about half the Gold Bars owed the troops for normal maintenance), everyone but the courtiers expresses surprise. The courtiers produce signed receipts stating that all the units received their pay for the season (the bandits, therefore, could not have stolen the gold from the crown, so no more money will be forthcoming). A general mutiny nearly results.

Either the Heroes have to find the lost money (a task involving a short jaunt into the wilderness and a fight or two against some low-level bandits), or the PC regent has to pay half his maintenance cost all over again—

unless he chooses to side with the courtiers and refuse a "second" payment or go so far as to disband the military units altogether.

duels—mark one

The military faction starts to provoke the civilian courtiers unmercifully, resulting in a little spilled blood and a lot of duels. The PCs get involved when military men start challenging them (at least those PCs who appear to be siding with the courtiers) or when their friends (the NPCs who interacted with them) start getting hurt or killed.

duels—mark two

The courtiers, obviously overmatched in the dueling department, resort to hiring professional killers to act on their behalf. These duelists fight for pay and most hold levels well above even the best military officers the PC regent has—but not, most likely, above the levels of the PCs themselves. If the PC regent wants to avoid having his best military leaders killed (which would detrimentally affect the status of his units) he or his friends had better take action.

resolving this mess

The best way to resolve this whole bad-and-only-growing-worse situation isn't to cut everyone's head off and start over—though the PCs might find that solution somewhat tempting. Instead, the PC regent must formulate a proactive plan to resolve the conflicts *and* to occupy everyone with other interests (ideally, getting back to work). For the military faction, the solution could involve leading an expedition against a known enemy. Starting a war is a little extreme, but rooting out a tenacious group of brigands that has long plagued the domain could give the military a constructive focus for its attention. The courtiers, meanwhile, can be sent off to negotiate treaties and trade routes, or to conduct espionage in a manner more beneficial to the domain.

The leaders of each faction, represented in this adventure by Master Nemir Wellsown and Captain Ingrid Brodin, have to be threatened, then encouraged. They need to see that the PC regent doesn't favor either faction and be told that he appreciates the both of them—and that if they don't settle down and stop all this infighting, he *will* consider a little neck-cleaving.

In a perfect world, an ingenious regent could resolve this situation and then relax as everything continues along smoothly. Campaigns, however, shouldn't be set in a perfect world. Use the events of this adventure as a means to construct interesting dilemmas for the PC regent and his allies later in the campaign.

experience

Because very little actual fighting should occur during this adventure (perhaps a battle against some bandits or a duel with a sword-for-hire), the XP awards should be based on role-playing and cleverness. Award the PC regent up to 1,000 points for taking a firm, active stance in his domain's development, and up to 500 XP each for PC allies who help out. Killing off chief advisers or misinterpreting court infighting as outright treason is a mistake that should be penalized.

Turning this sort of situation loose on an enemy would be a clever political maneuver. Regents who learn how to sow such dissension (say, by sending Selma and Sir Caldor off to a neighboring domain with very explicit instructions) should be rewarded.



terrible awakening

"The past can be dangerous. The past can haunt the present, lying like a shadow waiting to overtake the future. Empires rise and fall as history repeats itself; this is true everywhere.

"But in Cerilia we have learned that the past can do more than haunt and repeat: The past can supplant the present and threaten to allow no future. The old gods, long dead, can yet influence the world as their sleeping minions awaken and continue to faithfully serve their masters.

"When such an event happens, the future of the world lies in the hands of its Heroes. They can fight to keep the present alive and pray for a future—while they at the same time work to rebury the past.

"This legend tells of a time when Cerilia's past threatened to destroy its present. The Heroes who fought against the reawakening of evil became champions of the future, still remembered and celebrated by minstrels and storytellers."

Event Type: Natural Event (result of 6 on Table 15). "Terrible Awakening" may also be used as a Magical Event (result of 20) or a Monsters/Brigandage (result of 13 or 14) event.

The Heroes: Due to the very powerful main villain of this adventure, the Heroes should be of at least 9th to 12th level and would benefit from having a priest among the party. The PCs need not be regents or even scions—any PC in the area of the event should react to what happens.

The Challenge: A natural event reawakens magical forces long thought put to rest. Though the nature of the adventure lies deep in Cerilia's past, the immediacy of the crisis threatens the future of the world.

A powerful earthquake shakes the continent.

In its aftermath, the Heroes

help peasants and nobles alike recover from the disaster. But as they work to put people's lives back together, the Heroes learn that this natural event has led to some unnatural consequences. The tumult has freed an ancient, evil creature that now once again threatens to destroy the land. The Heroes must find a way to defeat or imprison the creature.

The quest leads to battles against the creature's servants and then against the creature itself. Because of its magical nature, it cannot be defeated by normal means—unless the PCs prove mighty indeed.

The Heroes must formulate and implement a plan to defeat the creature or imprison it anew.

The adventure culminates in a great battle, possibly involving armies, perhaps involving only the Heroes and a few NPC allies. Whichever the case, the carnage is great, the struggle brutal, and the outcome always in doubt.

fateful rumblings

The Heroes can be anywhere when the adventure begins—traveling through an unfamiliar area, administering domain affairs, relaxing at home.

Suddenly, a great thundering and shaking interrupts them. The earth, the buildings, and the trees begin to move. It feels as if the gods themselves shake the continent. Trees split in half, the earth opens up, fires blaze uncontrolled. Everyone in the area panics. People run this way and that, heedless of orders or cries for help; they think only of futilely trying to get away from the horrible scene that surrounds them.

The Heroes, while affected by the panic, ideally act in more constructive ways. If they wish, they may attempt to aid people threatened by the earthquake. Several opportunities for individual and group heroism present themselves; each does, however, put the PCs at some risk. And, of course, no reason exists for the Heroes not to succumb to panic themselves, except—well, they *are* Heroes.

sample events

Any number of quake-induced crises could happen simultaneously. The following are some examples of calamities occurring right before the PCs' eyes (and some possible solutions):

helping out

- ◆ A child falls into a fissure. (A character who makes a successful climb walls, Mountaineering, Rope Use, or Dexterity check could save the child.)
- ◆ A woman stands trapped in a collapsing building. (Successful Jumping, Tumbling, or Dexterity checks could get her out safely.)
- ◆ A man tries to keep his cattle herd from stampeding and ruining his farm. (Riding, Rope Use, and Animal Handling proficiencies, or a successful Wisdom check, can help.)

The DM should feel free to make up other situations that put peasants, nobles, or even Heroes at risk. When making rescues, PCs not only need to succeed in ability or nonweapon proficiency checks (or figure out other ways to save people or themselves from danger), but also need to roll saving throws vs. paralysis, rocks, or other debris. Characters may add any reaction adjustments (such as Dexterity bonuses) to their saving throws.

Heroes who succeed in their saving throws sustain no damage—though they may have to make additional saving throws—while PCs who fail suffer either 1d6, 2d6, 2d8, or 3d6 points of damage (depending on how dangerous an activity they attempt). For example, a character leaping through collapsing brush to save a child caught in a snare might suffer 1d6 points of damage from falling branches, while another character lowering himself into a fissure to save a peasant clinging to a rock could suffer up to 3d6 points of damage from falling boulders, shifting earth, and flame.

after the quake

As suddenly as the earthquake began, it ends. The Heroes who saved people from danger (or at least tried to do so) earn thanks; the others can recover in peace. Everyone who helped an NPC gains 100 to 400 XP per attempt (based on the risk of damage—risking 1d6 points of damage gets a Hero 100 XP, while 3d6 points nets the Hero 400 XP). The Heroes can now help those around them rebuild and clean up, or they can try to determine the cause of this cataclysm.

Allow the Heroes to spend a few hours (or even a few days) searching for lost people or cattle, rebuilding houses, and making funeral arrangements. If the PCs happen to be at home, they can total their own losses and spend a little time correcting problems. As the DM, you should be creative when deciding what sort of damage a PC's domain has taken. If in doubt, roll 2d6; results of 2 to 6 reflect minor, easily correctable damage, while results of 9 to 12 mean tragedy (an entire tower in the PC's castle collapses, a loyal retainer dies, or some other horrible event occurs). Median results (6 to 8) reflect "average" damage—no important NPCs die or sustain serious injuries, but extensive property damage occurs. In all cases, each domain suffers 2d6 Gold Bars' worth of damage (use the same die roll to determine the cost of repairs).

searching for a cause

In Cerilia, earthquakes occur in different places with random frequency—no science exists to predict them, and priests generally don't spend their days casting *divination* or *augury* spells with earthquakes in mind. However, magical means do exist for tracking down the causes of such cataclysms, because a powerful awnsheg or evil sorcerer could be responsible.

Great superstition and fear surround earthquakes. If the Heroes try to determine the cause of this one, they encounter quite a bit of hypothesizing. Priests, wizards, loremasters, and peasants all have an explanation for the earthquake, and each of them wants to tell anyone important (like the Heroes) his pet theory.

Some explanations sound plausible: "The dragon of the Tarvanian Hills has finally woken, and she beats her wings at this very moment!" Others exhibit some merit: "The troll under the mountain is stretching. When his muscles hit the great stalactites the earth shifts." Still other theories can be regarded only as the mad fancies of demented minds: "The ground under Cerilia's surface is made up of constantly shifting plates. When these plates pull apart or rub together, they cause violent shaking and shifting on the surface."





The explanations espoused by the realm's populace range from the plausible to the ridiculous. All this conjecture does, however, lead to something—a tale of a terrible awakening.

the awakening of evil

Soon, rumors from the epicenter of the earthquake find their way to the Heroes. At first, the tales sound a lot like the proposed explanations for the earthquake—a dragon has woken, an evil sorcerer is trying to destroy the land, etc. The Heroes might express interest in investigating, but they should be cautioned that most of these accounts come from frightened peasants who repeatedly change their stories.

One tale, however, filters through the rest rather quickly—a legend from the time of the Battle of Mount Deismaar. Its origin lends the story some credibility because no other story offers as many specifics or refers to any other cataclysm—and this one is firmly rooted in the

legends surrounding the great battle.

You as the DM may choose how the Heroes come to hear the story of the Dread Prisoner (below). They could hear the ballad of a wandering bard; if the party includes a loremaster, bard, or student of Ancient History, that individual could have heard the legend long ago and have been reminded of it by recent events; if one or more of the Heroes hold domains, courtiers might circulate the story within their earshot.

the dread prisoner

The story begins nearly 500 years before the Battle of Mount Deismaar, during the Wars of the Deretha and the *gheallie Sidhe*. Azrai had just begun to cast his shadow across Cerilia, working to corrupt humans and elves and using his influence to enslave lesser beings.

One such being became one of Azrai's primary servants. None know the creature's original shape, but he (?) soon became known only as the Dread. His form constantly shifted, but it was always black and shadowy. Some say he was a creature of the Shadow World, too terrible for it to contain; others believe the Dread was originally a man of the fifth tribe of Andu (the Deretha) who betrayed his people and accepted the shadow of Azrai into his heart. Some speculate that the Dread was a "prototype" awnshegh—a being invested with some

of Azrai's power before that terrible god died at Deismaar.

The Dread's tasks included the extermination of the Deretha and the corruption of the Vos. While Azrai led in all things, the Dread followed as a shadow of his master's evil. The Dread did not always succeed in his tasks, but he never completely failed either. He rose in power and evil until he rivaled his master.

And that was his undoing.

The Dread, whatever he was, began as a mortal creature. Mortals cannot oppose gods (without godly help) and hope to survive. And so, years before the cataclysm at Deismaar, Azrai fought another battle against his own chief servant. The long, terrible struggle cost many lives, but none could ever truly doubt the outcome.

Defeated and powerless, the Dread lay at Azrai's feet like a black, tattered robe spread out over too large a surface. At first Azrai intended to finish his work and blast the Dread into nothingness, but he stayed his hand. Mercy never entered Azrai's mind—but revenge did. Azrai cursed the Dread and his most loyal lieutenants to a living death, imprisoned and immobile beneath Cerilia in a cavern of Azrai's own creation. The Dread would see and hear all that went on above the ground that covered him, but he would be unable to act or move until Azrai freed him.

If Azrai intended to keep the Dread as a final reserve during his terrible battle with the other gods, he failed to summon him in time. The spells that held the Dread held him fast while his former master died at Deismaar, and the terrible reality of that death overshadowed any feeling of triumph the creature might have experienced: With Azrai gone, no one could ever release the Dread or end his torment.

Or so he thought.

Now, reports of shadow creatures emerging from the earthquake's central fissure match the bards' tales of the Dread's servants. The frightening beings terrorize the local people and carry off sacrifices for their lord. Soon the Dread may fully awaken, and then his servants' depredations will seem negligible.

first indications

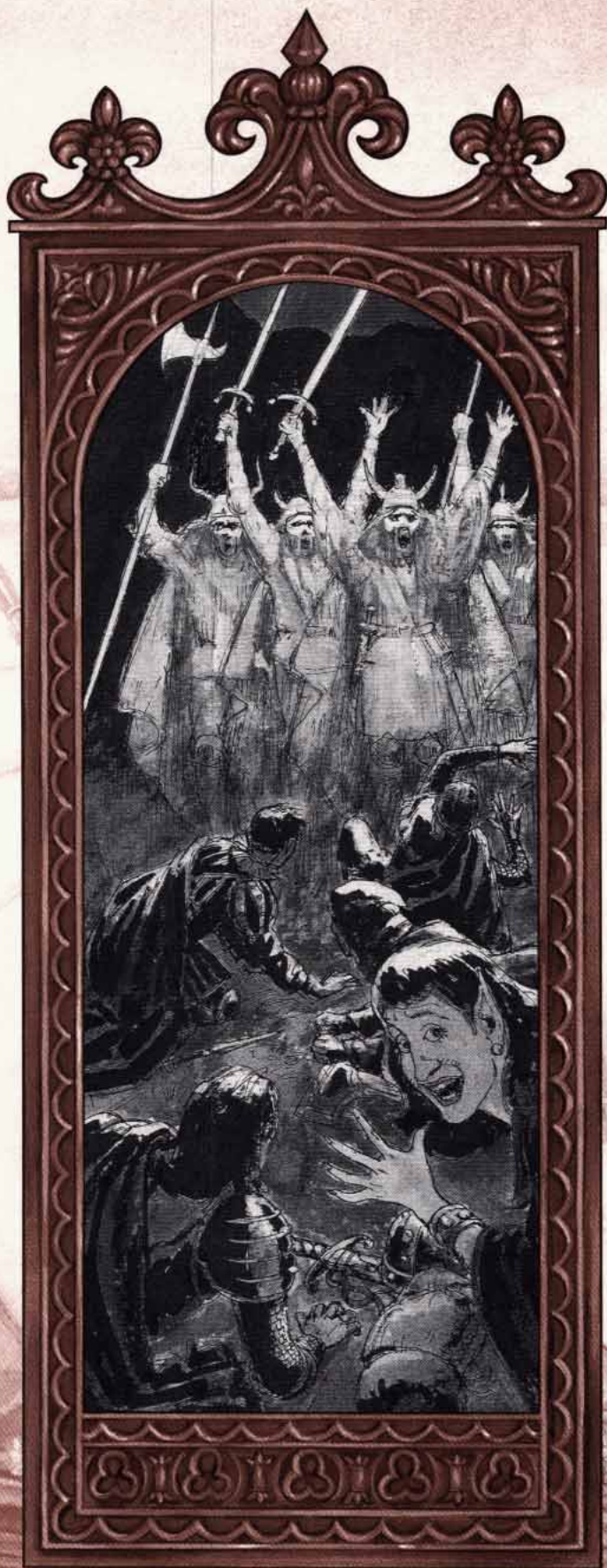
Perhaps the strongest indicator that the Dread has returned from its long imprisonment is the havoc caused by its servants. To the people of the area, it seems as if the creatures come from the Shadow World itself to torment them and trouble the land. Many people, believing this possibility to indeed be the case, have fled the region. Those who think otherwise do not fare much better—wherever the creatures come from, they fight like the essence of evil itself.

The PCs hear tales of shadowy creatures swallowing cattle whole, rending farmers and soldiers who stand against them, and terrorizing small villages until they abandon the area around the fissure. People flee toward the cities or disappear. If one or more of the Heroes hold domains in the area, their sheriffs, reeves, and spies all tell tales of undead, shadows, and terrible death.

the heroic thing to do

When the Heroes decide to ride forth, they can do so as a small party or at the head of an army. Dealing with the threat as a small strike force does not seem unreasonable for high-level PCs. After all, leading an army into the fissure would attract attention, take more time, and possibly result in the deaths of hundreds of men and women. Additionally, the reports of "wandering undead" might be greatly exaggerated—a frightened man fleeing a cataclysm tends to multiply his troubles and his foes as he runs. If the Heroes can deal with the problem quickly using their substantial abilities, they can save the locals from needless panic.

On the other hand, if the Dread and his servants have indeed returned to terrorize Cerilia, the Heroes have every reason to want as much support as possible in eradicating this threat. The whole tone of the adventure changes if the PCs bring an army along, but the



Heroes are justified in wanting to do so: Why not use every resource available?

The rest of this adventure has been written to take into account both possibilities. The individual approach is detailed first, followed by instructions for adapting each encounter to accommodate PCs who bring along an army. If the Heroes go toward the fissure alone, they encounter several small groups of undead creatures until they arrive at their destination. If they lead an army, these creatures learn of their coming and soon band together in a terrible army of their own.

initial challenges

The Heroes have no difficulty finding the fissure, the end of which lies about a day's journey away. Eyewitnesses report it to be several miles in length, beginning as a small upheaval in the earth and ending as a deep wound torn into the flesh of Cerilia. The PCs simply need to follow the fissure as it grows in width and depth to come to the epicenter.

encounters on the road

The Heroes first encounter people fleeing the wreckage caused by the earthquake. Many of them have heard rumors of undead and shadow creatures preying on refugees, but all the tales come from second- or thirdhand sources ("Someone told me that . . .").

The PCs next run into the inevitable looters and bandits preying on the weak and disenfranchised. Most of the bandits come in groups of 10 or fewer, and only one or two thieves in any band hold levels higher than zero. The PCs should have no trouble discouraging their looting or driving off attackers. A few such encounters might make the Heroes think the tales of "shadow creatures" originate from peasants who saw hooded and cloaked bandits descending out of the night.

But events dispel that belief fairly quickly.

If the Heroes lead an army: While the army travels along the land, the shadow creatures gather with their undead legions (shadows, skeletons, and zombies, mainly), attacking the army in one- and two-unit groups several times. Use War Card #86 for the undead legions.

the first test

If the Heroes make camp on the first night, they just ready themselves for sleep when a wild-eyed woman with long, gray hair bursts into the camp. She wears fine clothes—now torn and soiled—and her hair bears the remnants of braids and ribbons. She has a look of madness about her.

"My boy, my boy!" she screams. "He was with me, and now he's been taken! The shadow has him—the shadow!" Her eyes roll up in her head and she collapses.

If the PCs examine the woman, they see she is either of noble birth or the trusted servant of a noble family. The ribbons (what's left of them) in her hair are silk, and her fingers, covered in grime, still wear gold and jeweled rings. She wears on her back a makeshift pack, constructed of an old war pennant. Inside the pack, a piece of bread and a small wineskin filled with water await their owner's need.

The woman requires first aid, food, and rest, but the PCs might want to awaken her immediately to determine the cause of her raving. If they do, she screams incoherently and passes out again. Only a *heal*, *limited wish* or *wish* spell can restore her to sense before morning. Of course, the PCs might instead try to follow her tracks whence she came—she seemed to be running from something.

following the trail

If the Heroes choose this course of action they can follow her trail easily. Successful Tracking proficiency checks make the trip quicker, but even the most obtuse fighter can see the trail she left. Bits of clothing have been left on bushes and trees; a staff, some small supplies, and other things line her steps.

The trail continues for about a mile, then the woods open into a clearing. A few days ago this clearing did not exist—the Heroes can determine this fact easily. A portion of the fissure struck off in this direction, uprooting and splitting trees around a small hillock.

And in the hillock is a large sinkhole from which the Heroes hear crying.

The sinkhole is narrow and deep—one man in armor might be able to squeeze through, though he could get stuck as well (the character should make a Dexterity roll to determine whether he can slip through). Characters in leather or lighter armor should have no problems unless they are of exceptional girth.

About 25 feet down in the darkness, a boy sits crying in a small, open cave. Miraculously, he has suffered no serious injury, but he cannot grab a rope to wrap it around himself. He shies away from the opening after the PCs get a glimpse of him (assuming they project light into the hole) and he appears afraid of the Heroes. He constantly calls for "Nana" and won't cooperate with the PCs.

In reality, the child did not fall into the hole—a shadow creature (outlined below) seized him and brought him down, in the process driving mad the woman who accompanied him. The shadow creature then inhabited the boy, hoping the woman would bring help—help that it could then kill and consume.

Shadow Creature: AC 5; MV 12; HD 3+3; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+2 plus Str drain (hands); SA Str drain, possession; SD immune to *sleep*, *charm*, and *hold* spells, +1 or better weapon to hit; SW turned as wraith; SZ M (6' tall); ML special; Int low (7); AL CE; XP 650.

Notes: Drains 1 point of Strength per hit. Strength returns only if the creature is destroyed or successfully turned. Characters reduced to 0 Strength become shadows (see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome). If the creature can render a victim unconscious (0 hit points) it can possess the victim until it is turned or its host is killed (by inflicting on the host damage equal to the victim's full hit points). While possessing a victim, the shadow creature can use all its host's abilities.

The fissure of shadow



The shadow creature appears to be a normal shadow and exhibits many shadow characteristics. However, it has greater strength and intelligence than the average shadow, and a unique possession ability that Cerilia's Heroes have never before encountered in shadows. The Dread's favor bestowed these additional powers on the creature.

Its tactics are simple: When a single PC ventures into the sinkhole (or the PCs somehow manage to retrieve the boy without going down into the hole), the shadow creature attacks. It springs from the boy, appearing to be the child's own shadow—only horribly twisted. During the battle, the boy's incognizant body moves as if he, too, fights.

Only turning and +1 or better weapons can defeat the shadow creature. If the boy is killed, the shadow merely loses its host. While the shadow fights within the boy it gains a -2 bonus to its AC (for a modified AC of 3) if its opponents intentionally try not to hit the boy. If the shadow creature takes possession of one of the Heroes, then it completely melds with the character and fights with the PC's weapons and abilities until its host is destroyed.

staying put

If the Heroes do not go into the woods immediately but wait until morning, Nana (her real name is Belthred, and she is the boy's nurse) wakes up panicked but sane. She leads the PCs to the sinkhole, which she says wasn't there when they camped on the hillock. She then describes how a shadow came out of the ground and snatched the boy. She couldn't grab him in time.

Unfortunately, the Heroes' delay in waiting until morning dooms the boy. When the PCs look into the sinkhole, they see an emaciated body that could only be the child's remains. If they venture down into the hole, the shadow creature and a small, newly created shadow attack them.

If the Heroes lead an army: The guards find the nanny and report her words and actions to the Heroes. They can act on the news (and enter the sinkhole) themselves or delegate the responsibility to someone else.

into the breach

Regardless of the success or failure of "The First Test," the Heroes' steps lead them closer to the center of the fissure while undead plague their nighttime hours. Bands of shadows (2d6 shadows per band) led by an individual shadow creature (possibly inside a host form) attack the PCs or prey on individuals the Heroes meet. The Heroes encounter at least one such band a night for the next two nights.

During the day, the PCs encounter only frightened people or emaciated, dead bodies. Occasionally, skeletons or zombies appear as well, but these should pose no great threat to the Heroes.

a step down

Eventually, the Heroes come to a place where the fissure breaks wide and deepens (see map). They must either travel along the top of the cliff or go into the depths—but they should sense that the latter choice holds the true path. If the Dread exists, it certainly lairs in the deepest part of the chasm.

The PCs should find the process of climbing down the fissure treacherous. If no one has the Mountaineering proficiency or the rogue's climbing ability, the descent takes more than a day. And, of course, at night the PCs end up fighting more undead—while balancing in precarious positions. If hit during a battle along the descent, the Heroes need to succeed in Dexterity checks or plunge to the chasm's floor, suffering anywhere from 5d6 to 10d6 points (DM's choice) of damage.

Reaching the base of the fissure by no means extricates the Heroes from their troubles with the undead—they merely move on to the second stage of the adventure.

If the Heroes lead an army: Leading troops down into the fissure can be tricky, and the Hero in charge of the army must make a Leadership proficiency or Charisma check for each unit he attempts to lead down—adding a +6 penalty to his die roll for Cavalry units. If the Hero fails a roll, that unit suffers one hit (from injuries sustained by its members).

winding in shadow

The fissure remains in darkness throughout most of the day. Only around noon does any true daylight reach the area, and then only along the center of the fissure. Otherwise, earthen cliffs overhang the walls throughout the long chasm and the Heroes need torches or other light sources if they want to see clearly. (Infravision still works normally.)

No trees or vegetation line the floor of the fissure—at least not living. Until recently, most of the base of the fissure rested hundreds of feet underground. Now the dark earth reveals itself to what little daylight exists.

The terrain should give the Heroes an eerie, unnatural feeling as they pass along the chasm's floor. Occasionally a bird or other animal ventures down into the crack, but rarely. Broken bodies of men and animals appear, half-buried in the earth at disturbingly regular intervals. Add that to the unnerving encounters the PCs confront, and the Heroes should experience a strange passage through the shadows.

the disturbed worm

Beneath hundreds of feet of earth and stone, creatures exist that no native of Cerilia has ever seen. Now a great gash in the earth brings forth one such creature: the purple worm.

Purple Worm: AC 6; MV 9, Br 9; HD 15; hp 95; THAC0 5; #AT 2; Dmg 2d12/2d4 (bite/stinger); SA swallow, poison; SZ G (150' long); ML steady (12); Int non (0); AL N; XP 13,000.

Notes: If the worm succeeds its attack roll by 4 or more, it swallows its victim whole. The swallowed creature dies in six rounds but may attempt to cut his way out; the worm has an internal AC 9. The victim suffers a cumulative -1 damage penalty due to digestive juices.

The tail's stinger injects lethal poison; victims must save vs. poison or die instantly.

The worm awoke when the earthquake broke open its home. It feels as angry as a nonintelligent creature can, and pangs of hunger course through its body. If it eats (and digests) four human-sized characters or two horse-sized

creatures, it attempts to burrow away. Otherwise, it fights until slain or wounded badly enough to flee.

Inside, the worm's body holds the treasure of many centuries of undirected pillaging. Its undigested loot includes 3,000 cp, 1,000 sp, 4 gems worth 20, 50, 200, and 250 gp each, and one human or elf-sized suit of *full plate armor* +2. The leather straps on the armor must be replaced for it to be worn, but the enchantment still holds true.

If the Heroes lead an army: The purple worm attacks the party by first springing up underneath a group of soldiers. The Heroes probably have to fight the worm themselves (their soldiers just aren't equipped for that sort of battle), though their soldiers and lieutenants can help.

the ghost camp

After the first day's travel in the depths of the fissure, the Heroes make camp in an area of soft ground where wooden debris and rubble provide a defensible surrounding to their fire. Unfortunately, the location really grants the camp no more security than it would have anywhere else in the chasm.

The rubble and debris once composed a village on the surface of Cerilia that has now fallen into the chasm. A small village, it probably didn't appear on anyone's maps—though a bard or ranger familiar with the area could know of it and might warn against camping in this particular area. The reason for the warning becomes clear at nightfall—the spectral images of the villagefolk appear, as well as the ghostly outlines of their homes.

Most of the images are phantoms, both unaware of the Heroes' presence and unable to do them any real harm. Characters witnessing the phantom village must roll a successful saving throw vs. death magic, at a -2 penalty, or immediately panic and run away per the effects of a *fear* spell. Those who fail their saving throws must then make a system shock roll, at a +10 bonus to the roll, or die from terror. (See the MONSTROUS

MANUAL tome for further details about phantoms.)

But worse creatures than phantoms inhabit the village.

Two ghosts now reside in the haunted village.

They appear just like the phantoms, but these

spirits

know of the party's

presence and attempt to

cause the PCs grievous harm.

Ghosts (2): AC 0; MV 9; HD 10; hp 60, 65; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg age 10–40 years; SA age, *magic jar*, panic; SD silver or magical weapons to hit; SZ M (6' tall); ML special; Int high (13); AL LE; XP 7,000.

Notes: Unless he succeeds at a saving throw vs. spell, any character who sees the ghost ages 10 years and flees in panic for 2d6 turns. (Priests above 6th level are immune; all other 8th-level or higher humanoids gain a +2 bonus to the roll.)

Any creature within 60 yards of a ghost is vulnerable to its *magic jar* attack (per the spell). If the attack fails, the ghost will semi-materialize to strike characters; those struck age 1d4×10 years.

Ghosts suffer half damage from silver weapons, full damage from magical weapons. Only spells cast from the Ethereal Plane effect them.

The ghosts hide themselves among the phantoms until the PCs assure themselves it is safe to proceed. Then they attack. Though they wish to destroy the living, the ghosts will not leave the village to pursue fleeing characters. The ghosts dissipate and return to death if the Dread becomes imprisoned again or is destroyed.

If the Heroes lead an army: When the PCs and their army make camp after the first day's march in the fissure, they make camp near the wrecked village. At night, the phantoms come out, wreaking havoc among the nearby troops. If the PCs don't do something immediately, they lose a random unit to fear of the phantoms and the aging effects of the ghosts. After that, the army automatically moves away from the village.

the army of dread

As the Heroes make their way toward the fissure's center, shadow creatures and other undead gather around the Shadowed Lake (see map) to await the wakening of the Dread. The creature draws them and saps them of the life energy they have stolen, fueling himself through their prey. Soon the Dread will be strong enough to command them.

But when the PCs arrive at the Shadowed Lake, they either see scattered, decomposing bodies (between the hour before and the hour



after noon, when the lake is not in shadow) or the wandering spirits of the dead—including hundreds of zombies and skeletons, and dozens of shadow creatures.

Skeletons: AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 7 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); SD immune to *fear*, *sleep charm*, *hold* and cold-based attacks, edged or piercing weapons do half damage; SW holy water inflicts 2d4 points of damage; SZ M (6' tall); ML will fight until destroyed; Int non (0); AL N; XP 65 each.

Zombies: AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 12 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (claw or pummel); SD immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, death magic, poisons, and cold-based spells; SW holy water inflicts 2d4 points of damage; SZ M (6' tall); ML will fight until destroyed; Int non (0); AL N; XP 65 each.

Shadow Creatures: See statistics under "The First Test," above.

The undead beings do not notice the party unless the Heroes do something to attract attention. The undead legions feed the Dread with their unlife energy, a task that requires their full concentration. The Dread, meanwhile, rests on a ledge nearly 100 feet above the lake, in the remnants of the *binding* spell's *hedged prison* that once imprisoned him.

The Heroes might find it necessary to first annihilate the ghostly army just to get to the Dread, but this course of action isn't cost-efficient.

the battle

When the PCs arrive near the Shadowed Lake, roll 2d8. That number determines the current Hit Dice of the Dread. Each hour the creature rests (except during the two hours it is exposed to sunlight) it gains another Hit Die until it reaches 16 HD.

When the Dread obtains its 16th Hit Die, it will lead its undead army out the next night to ravage and destroy the land—unless the Heroes can stop it first.

The Dread:

AC -2; MV 12, Fl 9;
HD 16 (at full strength);
hp 110 (at full strength); THAC0 5;
#AT 2; Dmg 2d10/2d10 plus level drain;
SA level drain, envelop; SD +2 or better weapons to hit; SW direct sunlight, *ensnarement* spell; MR 50%; SZ L (9' tall); ML fanatic (18) at night, unsteady (6) in full daylight; Int genius (18); AL CE; XP 18,000.

Notes: If the Dread hits a character, the victim must succeed at a saving throw vs. death magic or lose one level. The Dread then gains that level (decreasing its THAC0 and increasing hit points). If the Dread is killed or imprisoned, lost levels return to its victims unless they have been killed. Characters killed by the Dread cannot be raised unless the Dread has been killed.

The Dread can choose to envelop one foe by surrounding him in shadow. Its THAC0 improves to 3, but its AC worsens to 2. The Dread can hold a victim, automatically hitting the character twice per round, until the victim dies, the Dread is killed, or the victim succeeds in a bend bars/lift gates roll to break free.

If exposed to direct sunlight, the Dread loses its spell abilities and level-drain powers, and becomes AC 10. Also, Azrai put a special curse on the Dread so that he could control the creature if necessary. The *binding* wizard spell automatically succeeds when cast upon the Dread, but the creature becomes dormant while under its effects and cannot be asked to perform tasks.

Because the Dread is not a true undead creature, it cannot be turned.

Equipment: Eversmoking bottle.

Spells (3 times/day each): *Animate dead*, *cone of cold*, *Otiluke's freezing sphere*, *shades*, *summon shadow*.

The ledge the Dread currently inhabits catches direct sunlight between during the hours immediately before and after noon. The Dread, if involved in combat near this time, tries to get off the ledge and to the dark shores of the Shadowed Lake, against the wall of the chasm where it feels much safer. The Dread will also use its *eversmoking bottle* to block out the sun if it gets the chance. The command word is, appropriately, "Azrai."

If the Heroes do not have a *binding* spell, they must destroy the Dread or devise some way of entrapping the creature again. The Dread can fly, but it cannot turn noncorporeal. It can summon undead or create them, but that power could be useless if the PCs time their attack well.

If questioned, the Dread might know of other powerful creatures like himself (DM's discretion, based on future campaign plans). However, it will tell the Heroes nothing useful

unless motivated by spite or fear.

Should the Dread die or be imprisoned, the shadow creatures and other undead depart this plane.

If the Heroes lead an army: When the Heroes and their army arrive near the Shadowed Lake, they participate in a mass battle against undead legions. One Undead Legion (War Card #86 from the BIRTHRIGHT boxed set) takes the field for every unit the PCs command. In addition, the Dread's army gains one reinforcement unit every time the Heroes' army loses a unit.

Each time the Undead Legions inflict a hit upon any of the PCs' forces (killing some of the unit, if not all), the Dread gains one Hit Die. When the Dread reaches 16 HD, it and an Undead Flying Cavalry unit join the fray (use any Cavalry unit but ignore negative terrain modifiers and F and R results, except those resulting from magical attacks). If the PCs do not do something about the Dread, it could decimate the army with some of its powers.

resolution and recompense

The PCs earn full experience points for defeating the Dread, whether they do it by destroying or merely entrapping the creature with a *binding* spell. If the Heroes search its lair, they do find some treasure.

The Dread once used weapons and armor before its long undeath began. In addition, the Dread still values gold and other riches, if only because it hasn't gotten out of the habit. Unfortunately for the Heroes, the Dread's valuables lie on a ledge nearly 100 feet above the base of the fissure. The Heroes should have little difficulty getting to it—if the thought even occurs to them to look there. Investigation yields the following bounty:

- ◆ *Shadowcloak*: Allows the wearer to duplicate the shadow form blood ability three times per day. It also acts as a *cloak of elvenkind* at night.
- ◆ *Plate Mail of Etherealness +5*: The armor has only four charges remaining. The Dread has not worn it since Azrai altered him from his living form.

- ◆ One wizard's spellbook: This item rests on the ledge, placed just outside the *binding* spell's *hedged prison* to taunt the Dread. Each page has a random wizard spell of any level engraved upon it, though some pages have been ripped out; 6d10 spells remain.

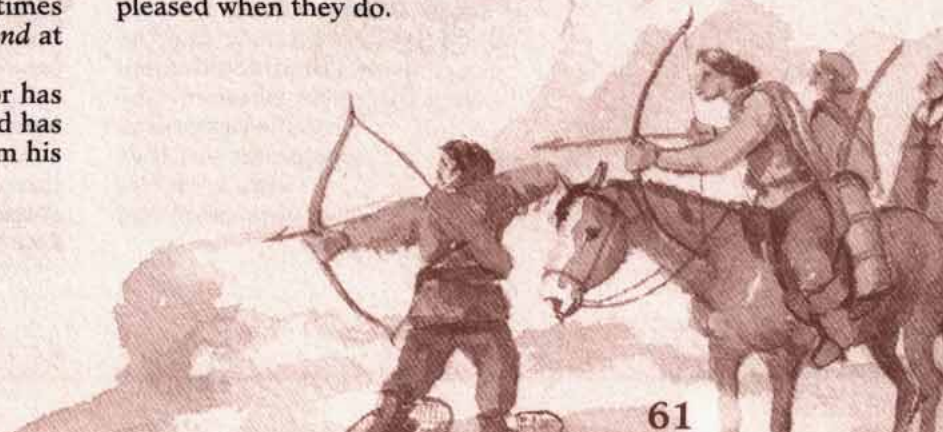
Two chests sit on the ledge as well. A third once sat beside them, but it now rests at the bottom of the Shadowed Lake, in pieces. The first chest contains 4,000 silver pieces of ancient mintage (worth perhaps 10 times that much from collectors, though individual collectors will buy only a few each). The second chest holds nearly 100 gems of variable worth (26 × 10 gp, 18 × 50 gp, 13 × 100 gp, 32 × 500 gp, and 9 × 1,000 gp).

continuing the adventure

If the Dread manages to escape (a possibility), it will eventually return for revenge—probably at the head of an army. While other horrors from Cerilia's past may lie imprisoned in the earth, the Heroes might do best to leave them there . . . for now.

One possibility for continuing the adventure lies at the bottom of the Shadowed Lake. What was in the third chest of the Dread? Might the creature tell the Heroes about a great treasure in the third chest in exchange for its freedom? Is there anything useful there?

Some suggestions include a talisman that could be used to imprison the Dread or command undead armies, a powerful weapon from the days before the Deismaar cataclysm, or a tome of ancient lore containing secrets to defeating Azrai's servants and their works. And what guards the Shadowed Lake? More undead, no doubt—perhaps some undead aquatic creatures as well. There might be monsters in that lake that have never seen the light of day—and aren't too pleased when they do.



"The Gorgon. The White Witch. The Serpent. The Magian. All awnsbeghlien, all terrible, and all rulers of their own domains. Their numbers were few, but their foul legends course through the history of Cerilia like black blood through an orog's veins. They, however, held no monopoly on evil or power; their lesser cousins strove to make their names as feared and hated throughout the land as their 'great' brethren already had. They answered the calling of their blood—the blood of Azrai—and became as evil and as terrible in their time as any on the face of Cerilia.

"This legend tells of one such awnsbegh—the Ogre. A brute of terrific power and awesome strength, he longed to be listed among the immortals of Azrai's host but he did not possess the immortality of his greater cousins. He knew, though, how to quench his fear of death—the blood of kings could give him the power to achieve immortality. And the Ogre knew where to get the blood he desired. . . ."

Event Type: Monsters or Brigandage (result of 13 or 14 on Table 15). "The Horns of Droene" may also be used as a Blood Challenge (result of 2) event.

The Heroes: At least one Hero needs to be a blooded character, preferably (but not necessarily) a regent. This adventure is best suited to Heroes of mid-level (5th to 8th); lower or higher level PCs can complete the adventure if the DM adjusts the levels of the Ogre and his minions accordingly.

The Challenge: At first, the challenge appears straightforward. Bands of brigands and, reportedly, demihumans raid some outlying provinces where one or more of the PCs have an interest. If one of the Heroes rules a province, the raiding is going on within his realm; if not, the brigands pillage guild holdings, disrupt source manifestations, and ransack temples—whatever it takes to disturb the PC regent(s). Unfortunately, local law enforcement officers cannot find the offenders. Reports state that the brigands and their demihuman allies disappear whenever any sizeable opposition approaches—or they attack smaller opposition and

the horns of droene

destroy it. The regent (or his allies) needs to personally take action.

In actuality, this series of events composes the Ogre's feint. He has managed to fake some of the reports of pillaging and looting, and conducts actual raids only when he thinks bribes or threats won't work. He plots to draw the regent(s) of the area into the open so he can commit bloodthief.

The Ogre expects the Heroes to investigate the situation personally; he stages raids or fakes attacks on local villages, guilds, temples, and/or source manifestations until they do. No matter how many armies or lieutenants the PCs send after him, they have only minimal effect—and none bring back any rumor of his existence at all.

When the Heroes investigate, the Ogre sends out raiders to lead the party into a trap. (If the PCs brought an army themselves or if they summon one, he engineers their separation from the army.) He then attacks the blooded characters while his elite minions keep everyone else busy. If the Ogre gets lucky and several blooded characters show up, he tries to first attack the leader and work his way down.

the cast of characters

Droene Blackshield spent most of his life as a mercenary captain. He led a group of Anuirean cavalry and infantry throughout Cerilia, fighting for whichever banner paid the most. His bloodline, tainted and thin though it was, still gave him enough power to achieve victory where others would fall in defeat—a circumstance which soon elevated Droene as a captain of some renown. His men respected and feared him; his enemies feared him more. The few employers who tried to cross him had no reason to fear—the dead, after all, fear no one.

droene the ogre

9th-level awnshegh fighter

S:	20
D:	16
C:	17
I:	12
W:	13
Ch:	15
AL:	LE
AC:	2
hp:	85
MV:	12
THAC0:	9
#AT:	3/2
Dmg:	1d8+8/1d8+8 or 1d10+10 (fists or sword)
ML:	17
XP:	7,000



But Droene grew dissatisfied with his wandering lifestyle. While each battle made him richer and more renowned, he spent all his fortune recruiting, equipping, and leading new companies to their next engagement. The sense that he was getting nowhere increased his ruthlessness and filled him with frustrated ambition.

Then Droene saw his chance. Employed by a certain Khinasi lord to start a war with a neighboring realm (and direct the apparent cause at a third party), Droene decided to double-cross his already double-dealing employer. Realizing that he and his men would doubtlessly be eliminated once their job was finished (only they knew the true origin of the war they started), he felt no compunction against assaulting the capital city of the Khinasi lord and trying to take the land for his own.

But the lord anticipated him. While Droene readied his siege engine for an assault on the city, an invisible assassin slipped through his lines and into his tent. Bent over his plans of attack and anticipating no surprises, Droene was caught almost completely offguard. Luck saved him from being killed immediately, but not before he took more than a few wounds. Reaching up, he tore away the mask that hid the assassin's face.

What he saw made Droene Blackshield, mercenary captain and valiant warrior, scream in terror.

To this day, Droene refuses to tell even his most trusted lieutenants what horror the face of the assassin held. He does admit that it was fear and desperation, not skill, that gave him the strength to wrest the assassin's weapon from him and stab upward, into the foul creature's black heart. Unknowingly, Droene committed bloodthrift on a scion of Azrai. His screams as he took the assassin's life and power could be heard throughout the camp.

The next day, the mercenary captain and his elite cadre were gone. His army, bewildered and leaderless, routed at the first sortie from the city and many surrendered or were slaughtered.

Meanwhile, Droene felt the surges of Azrai's bloodline through his veins. He felt his body grow and change, and he knew his life of wandering was long from over.

Bloodline: Azrai, great, 48.

Blood Abilities: Alertness, battlewise, enhanced sense (minor), heightened ability.

Equipment: *Two-handed sword +2, amulet of blood-scrying, tattered armor.* The *amulet of blood-scrying* can be used three times per day. It has a range of 100 yards and tells its wielder the whereabouts, bloodline derivation, and bloodline strength of any blooded character.

Description: 10 feet tall, muscular build. Calculating, not unnecessarily cruel, efficient.

Background: Droene suffers under the curse of Azrai's blood. His form mutated until it became that of a giant, horned ogre—and "Ogre" became his awnshegh name. The transformation granted Droene great strength and other abilities, but the curse mocks him every time he looks in a still pool of water or the shiny reflection of a shield.

Droene remains practical, however. Doomed to be an awnshegh, the Ogre makes the most of his power. He fights now to become one of the immortal, legendary awnsheghlien and to rule a realm of his own. His situation increased his ruthlessness tenfold, and now his pursuit of a realm and of immortality consumes him.

One weakness grips the

Ogre: blood madness.

Droene's personality still rules the

Ogre's strength, but in

certain situations he gives in to the madness of Azrai's bloodline and goes berserk—attacking his foes, and sometimes his friends, with hideous consequences. When Droene suffers wounds equal to half his hit points or more, he must make a Wisdom ability check. If he fails, he goes berserk. Otherwise he controls himself until he is wounded again, after which he must make another roll.

The ogre side of Droene can also take over under other circumstances. If Droene is taunted about his appearance or grows overly frustrated, you as the DM may choose for him to go berserk. Only the counsel of his friends or the deaths of his enemies (or the removal of his frustration) can reawaken Droene's consciousness in the Ogre.

When Droene goes berserk, he becomes truly hideous. He seems to swell almost 50% in size and his Strength bonuses (+3 to THAC0, +8 to damage—both already incorporated into above statistics) are doubled. He gains 20 "berserker" hit points—meaning he will continue to fight until after he should be dead, surrendering to the inevitable only after he has taken damage enough to put him at -20 hp or when all his foes have been removed. The Ogre does not fight with guile or tactical planning at this point—he just drops his sword and pummels opponents with his fists. If Droene has fewer than 0 hit points when the berserker rage wears off, he loses consciousness until enough damage is healed to bring him up to one hit point.

followers of the ogre

Droene's faithful lieutenants still stand by him. The following NPCs serve Droene and are loyal to him alone. **Note:** Depending on the levels of your PCs, you may wish to exclude or modify some of Droene's lieutenants.

Duana Llewellyn, FE, W7: AC 5 (Dex bonus and *ring of protection* +3); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 20; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (quarterstaff); SD *ring of fire resistance*; SZ M (5' 8" tall); ML champion (15); AL LN; XP 3,000.
S 8, D 16, C 14, I 16, W 11, Ch 16.

Personality: Loyal, methodical, contemplative.

Equipment:

Ring of protection +3, *dust of disappearance* (2 doses), *ring of fire resistance*, spell components, spellbook.

Spellbook (4/3/2/1): 1st—*alarm**, *cantrip**, *grease*, *magic missile**, *mount*, *read magic*, *sleep*, *wall of fog**; 2nd—*bind*, *blindness**, *continual light*, *hypnotic pattern*, *ray of enfeeblement**, *strength**, *web*; 3rd—*dispel magic**, *fireball*, *invisibility 10' radius**, *spectral force*; 4th—*fear*, *minor creation*, *stoneskin**. *Indicates favored spell.

Duana is a combat wizard. She uses her spells to support Droene, his mercenaries, and the other lieutenants. She often casts a *strength* spell on an individual warrior before the beginning of a battle or around noon of each day—because the spell's effects last for seven hours, she always gets good use out of it.

Siegfried Karlsget, MBr, Pr6 (Kirche): AC 4 (chain mail and shield); MV 6 (moderately encumbered); hp 32; THAC0 15 (13 with *light crossbow* +2); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+3 (*light crossbow* +2); SZ M (5' 11" tall); ML fanatic (17); AL CN; XP 2,000.

S 14, D 13, C 17, I 13, W 17, Ch 11.

Personality: Warlike, loud, impulsive.

Equipment: Chain mail, shield (painted mercenary black with a pair of horns in the corner), *light crossbow* +2, herbs, pike.

Spells (5/5/3): 1st—*courage (ToM)*, *cure light wounds* (x2), *morale (ToM)*, *magical stone*; 2nd—*chant*, *flame blade*, *rally (ToM)*, *silence 15' radius*, *spiritual hammer*; 3rd—*dispel magic*, *prayer*, *unearthly choir (ToM)*.

Siegfried uses his spells to back up his warriors and allies. Sometimes, however, Siegfried forgets that his job is to keep the Ogre's troops in action—rather than to jump in and lead from the front. Fortunately, when Siegfried drops his crossbow and holy symbol and leaps into the fray, he does considerable damage to the enemy and usually escapes relatively unharmed.

Meshak Rodelovich, MV, F6: AC 0 (Dex bonus, plate mail and shield); MV 6 (moderately encumbered); hp 50; THAC0 15 (12 with *battle axe* +1); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+5 (*battle axe* +1); SZ M (6' 6" tall); ML champion (16); AL LN; XP 1,400.



S 18/80, D 16, C 15, I 12, W 14, Ch 9.

Personality: Brooding, grim, careful.

Equipment: Battle axe +1, boots of the north, long bow, 20 flight arrows, heavy war horse, maps of surrounding area.

Meshak is a war leader and Droene's chief military adviser. He is crafty and wary of situations that are too good to be true. Even Droene, when blood-mad, respects Meshak's judgment.

Meshak has been with Droene almost since the two began their careers. He grieved when Droene became the Ogre, for he saw the berserker fury of his Vos cousins in his war-chief, and Meshak has always fought against this madness. Since Meshak has experience with berserkers (both Vos and others), he adds +2 to Droene's chance of resisting or breaking out of his berserker fury—if the lieutenant has the opportunity to talk to him and calm him down.

introduction

The Heroes receive word of brigands looting and pillaging in the area. Operatives of the PC regent(s) being attacked report that the brigands appear to be of one band, are well organized, and have

some sort of “early warning” network: Every time the sheriffs, reeves, and other agents attempt to capture them, they vanish into the less-populated areas of the domain.

Identify to the PCs specific areas of their domains that the brigands have attacked or moved through. If possible, they should raid all over the domain(s) in question, but suggest a point of origin for their attacks.

Try to lead the Heroes into making one of two decisions: They could go out at the head of an army (if so, preferably a small one for reasons detailed below), or they could go out alone (or with a few retainers) to deal with the situation themselves.

out with an army

If the Heroes lead an armed contingent against the brigands, the PCs' advisers urge caution. Such a reaction might indicate to peasants, nobles, and rival regents that the Heroes cannot deal with “simple brigands” in a discreet and inexpensive manner.

A unit (perhaps two) of infantry, cavalry, or



archers should be sufficient—at no time do the reports indicate more than a hundred or so brigands participating in any particular raid. The band likely comprises no more than 200 men and women (about the size of one levy or irregular unit). If the regent(s) rallies more than three units of trained soldiers against them, the response will look excessive. Also, such a large force will destroy any possibility of surprising the brigands.

alone against the brigands

Information and experience indicates that the bandits are probably 0-level criminals, outlaws, and rogues from the area, gathered together under a few higher-level troublemakers with ambitious plans and no discretion. If the Heroes can remove the bandit leader (or leaders) without extraordinary bloodshed and expense, the loyalty of the populace increases and the brigands break up and go away. At least, that's the plan. The regents' advisers do caution against rash action, but do not think the army is necessary. A few bodyguards, however, wouldn't hurt.

sally forth

The PCs ride out, either alone or with a small army. Meanwhile, Droene institutes the next phase of his plan: Divide and conquer.

against an army

Droene has a simple two-stage plan to deal with any serious armed force. First, he deploys his lieutenants, along with a unit of "brigands" (really a unit of elite infantry), on a raiding party. The PCs and their army come upon the unit as it burns a small village, temple, or other appropriate holding. However, almost as soon as the PCs ride into view with their army, the brigands regroup into a suspiciously well-ordered unit under the command of Siegfried and Meshak and supported by spells cast by Duana. When the action goes to the battle mat, place the woods terrain card (or another card more appropriate to

the region) on the mat and put the brigands next to it. Also place other terrain cards as you can—to the brigands' favor (Droene planned this battle out well).

Inside the woods lurk a unit of archers with orders to rain death upon any unit coming within range. They, plus Meshak and Siegfried's troops, comprise the sum of Droene's military forces. **Note:** Even if the PC regents involved bring many more units than recommended by their advisers, Droene has no more units to send against them. Ideally, that should not matter to the story.

At some point in the battle (perhaps right from the beginning), the situation should look bad for the Ogre's forces. This deception is part of the plan. The NPC lieutenants, along with their personal guards, flee from the battle; the archers and elite infantry break up and rout. These units have been told to hold for one or two actions after the NPC lieutenants have fled, then disperse and regroup at a prearranged destination.

Droene plans for the PCs' army to chase his "brigands" (so they don't regroup or cause trouble on their own, presumably) and for the Heroes themselves to pursue his lieutenants. That way, he gets a crack at the blooded characters himself.

As the DM, you should run the battle as the climax of the scenario. Make the players feel that letting the NPCs get away would be the height of failure (if possible, make one of the NPCs especially infamous), and that allowing the brigands to regroup would be idiocy. Try to manipulate the PCs into falling for Droene's plan.

If the Heroes just refuse to bite and begin pursuing the NPCs with their army, the archers and elite infantry renew their attacks (if feasible) or flee, leaving the Ogre to try another plan (see "Contingencies," near the end of this adventure).

Of course, the Heroes might order their army to concentrate on the brigands and allow the NPCs to get away. In this case, Droene's lieutenants have their orders: Meshak returns to report to the Ogre; the two spellcasters stay to help the army as best they can. When they can no longer assist (in other words, when they run out of spells), the spellcasters flee. The army regroups and does not break until forced to do so by a battle card situation or until everything seems hopeless. Again, the Ogre is left with the problem of coming up with a new plan to enact against the Heroes.

the heroes alone

If the Heroes decide to go up against the brigands alone (after all, they're *only* brigands), then they present the Ogre with his best-case scenario. Droene stages a few little raids and a few small battles with the PCs (which they win easily) to lure them into his lair. He then springs his trap.

The Ogre's forces comprise his lieutenants and two types of warriors: archers and infantrymen. Zero-level fighters make up the bulk of his army, but 1 in 10 troops are 2nd- to 4th-level fighters (a very high proportion). Droene encourages his squads (units of 10, led by these higher-level fighters) to fight the PCs and then flee, dispersing into the woods. He offers a bonus to any of the squad leaders who allow themselves to be captured: They can deliver misinformation Droene has generated beforehand to lead the PCs into a trap, and the Heroes will have to assign retainers to watch over the prisoners, rendering the guards noncombatants during the confrontation.

Note: If the Heroes are the kind who kill their prisoners (or have a reputation for not taking prisoners), Droene does not make deliberate capture part of his plan. Even though he is of lawful evil alignment, he values his subordinates and does not spend them needlessly. After all, he will require help in taking over the PCs' domain(s).

Run the skirmish long enough to give the Heroes a good idea of where the "bandit leader" is hiding out. If the PCs take a prisoner, give them some time to confirm that, no, Droene has no significantly powerful allies (a lie), and that no, he did not expect the PCs to come out themselves to deal with him (another lie).

If the Heroes then head into the Ogre's lair, he is prepared for their arrival.

the confrontation

The Ogre awaits the Heroes in a glen or hollow he has designated as his command center. In it, he has set up a few traps and hidden his men. His plan remains the same as ever: to commit bloodthrift on as many of the PCs as he can, using his amulet to detect who has a bloodline and who is merely a meaningless retainer.

If possible, all of the Ogre's lieutenants run or ride back to this area, leading the PCs. If the PCs manage to capture or kill Droene's lieutenants, he grieves later—for now, he fights to kill.

In addition to the Ogre's lieutenants, several elite warriors also stand ready to defend Droene. There should be only enough of them to slow down the bulk of the party while the Ogre picks and engages his targets. Include one elite warrior per PC, plus one or two for every retainer (depending on what you think Droene, with his advanced preparation, would know of the Heroes' henchmen and lieutenants).

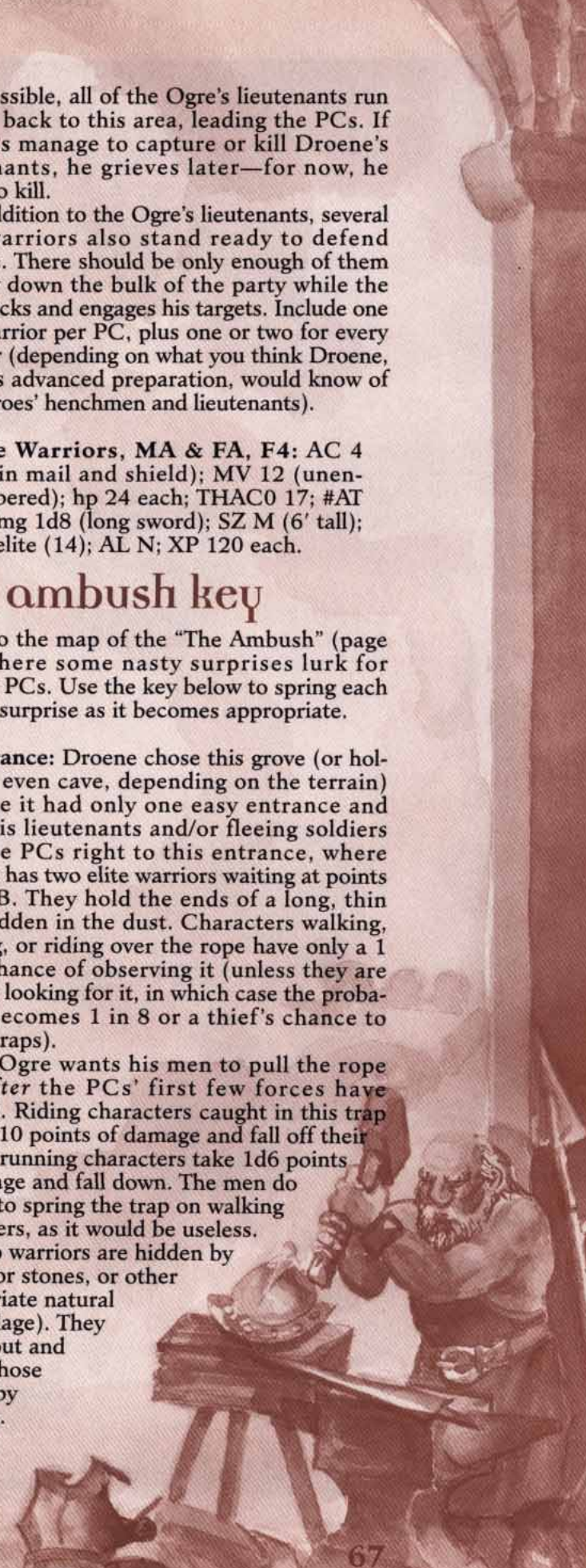
Elite Warriors, MA & FA, F4: AC 4 (chain mail and shield); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 24 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword); SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14); AL N; XP 120 each.

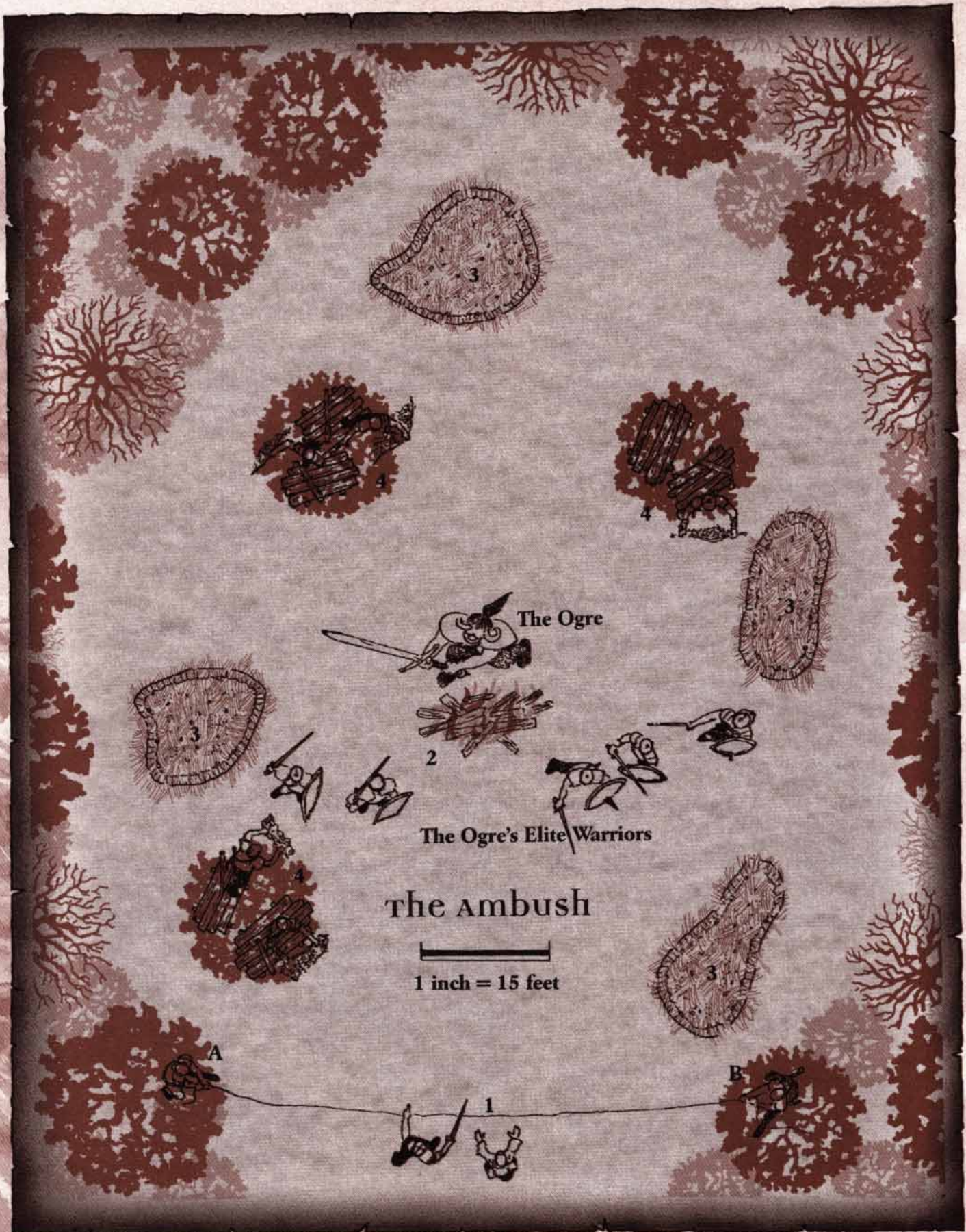
the ambush key

Refer to the map of the "The Ambush" (page 68), where some nasty surprises lurk for unwary PCs. Use the key below to spring each trap or surprise as it becomes appropriate.

1. Entrance: Droene chose this grove (or hollow, or even cave, depending on the terrain) because it had only one easy entrance and exit. His lieutenants and/or fleeing soldiers lead the PCs right to this entrance, where Droene has two elite warriors waiting at points A and B. They hold the ends of a long, thin rope hidden in the dust. Characters walking, running, or riding over the rope have only a 1 in 12 chance of observing it (unless they are actively looking for it, in which case the probability becomes 1 in 8 or a thief's chance to detect traps).

The Ogre wants his men to pull the rope taut *after* the PCs' first few forces have entered. Riding characters caught in this trap take 2d10 points of damage and fall off their horses; running characters take 1d6 points of damage and fall down. The men do not try to spring the trap on walking characters, as it would be useless. The two warriors are hidden by brush (or stones, or other appropriate natural camouflage). They spring out and attack those caught by the trap.





The Ogre

The Ogre's Elite Warriors

The Ambush



1 inch = 15 feet

2. Cooking Fire:

A small wooden table covered with maps sits next to a large cooking fire. A spit sticks through the fire, which blazes up almost 10 feet in height. Two or three elite warriors (or Droene's lieutenants, if they've had time to get back and get settled) sit on chairs near the cooking fire, and they act surprised as the PCs break into the camp. Two of them draw swords while one backs off to the side of the fire.

The Ogre stands behind the fire, clutching his two-handed sword. When the Heroes engage the elite warriors, he spends a round using his amulet to single out the blooded characters. He then leaps through the fire with a scream and attacks the nearest scion.

A pile of belongings and extra weapons lies near the fire. Underneath this pile sits a war chest, used by Droene to pay and equip his men. Unfortunately, he currently operates on a strict budget, so the chest holds only about 100 platinum pieces and 500 gp. Two potions rest inside the chest as well—a *potion of extra-healing* (six doses) and one “dose” of *oil of slipperiness*.

3. Pit Traps: Each of these areas is a cleverly concealed pit trap almost 20 feet deep. The Heroes have only a 1 in 6 chance of detecting these pits accidentally (only 1 in 10 if they are currently engaged in a fight). The Ogre's men have instructions to herd as many of the PCs and their allies into these pits as they can, then throw nets over them (obtained from area 4) to keep them from escaping.

4. Trees/Elevated Platforms: These trees (or elevated platforms if the DM is using different terrain) have spears, arrows, and other weapons stacked against them, but they serve a different purpose during the battle. In each “loft,” one or two warriors hide with nets. (Each warrior has three nets, one ready for action immediately.) The warriors have instructions to hurl the nets at any Heroes who pass by, entangling them. The warriors then have the option of preparing another net, which takes one combat round, or leaping down and bludgeoning their trapped quarry into unconsciousness.

The Ogre feels the curse of Azrai growing in him and wants to make this plan work. If he lures the PCs into his trap, he refuses to flee or surrender, even when all his followers are defeated or gone. Only the interference

of one of his lieutenants somehow dragging him off to fight another day would cause Droene to give up this plan. If the Ogre fails a morale check, he does not flee but instead goes berserk.

contingencies

By making his plan simple and straightforward, the Ogre has eliminated many of the things that could go wrong with a more intricate strategy—but he still leaves himself open for failure at several points.

If the Heroes at any time during the adventure decide that they have “done enough” and go home, they could defeat the Ogre by inaction. For example, if the Heroes ride out with their army and engage the Ogre's men, they could win a stunning victory or even just break up the brigands but choose not to pursue Droene's lieutenants back to the command center. “They've learned their lesson,” the Heroes say, “let's go home and have an ale.”

What do you, the DM, do then?

Several possible plots come to mind. First, the Ogre grows angry and frustrated—he thinks his plan is a good one and *should* work . . . but it hasn't. Instead, he is left with a dispirited (or, possibly, decimated) group of brigands and lieutenants.

In this case, he can instruct his lieutenants to go out and start taking hostages. Perhaps the “brigand chieftain” grows angry at the Heroes and wants revenge, so he slips in front of the PCs' army and returns to their castle ahead of them—kidnapping a loyal retainer or love interest. The “bandit chieftain” then demands a meeting with the PCs to discuss the release of any hostages. This gets the Heroes into the ambush site, if the Ogre is careful.

Another possibility exists if the Ogre still has his armed units. Instead of engaging in brigandage, Droene and his troops make a surgical strike at some critical but ill-defended holding in the area. Droene uses all of his military strategy and his forces' abilities to take and hold this place, challenging the Heroes to come and fight for it one-on-one. If the PCs refuse, Droene destroys the holding completely.

Both of these approaches can work and do fit within the Ogre's personality profile. He is aggressive, active, and determined to succeed.

The final contingency is surrender. Droene does not give himself up, but if the PCs are just too tough or too careful for his plots (the Ogre's plans do hinge on the PCs being somewhat reckless), he retreats. Perhaps he finds a patron in a local lord or maybe he takes over another, less well-defended domain. He'll be back: Droene isn't prone to revenge . . .

But the Ogre is.

awards

Aside from the experience the PCs earn by defeating the Ogre, his lieutenants, and/or their "brigand" followers in combat, they gain some adventure awards for leadership and intelligent choices:

- ◆ Award the commander of the PCs' army (if it comes into play) 200 XP for truly defeating the Ogre's forces in a pitched battle. Any PC who directly participates in the battle gains 100 XP.
- ◆ Any PC who refuses to "make things easy" for Droene should gain between 100 and 500 XP. (Basically, if any player gives you a headache by coming up with ingenious ways to subvert or bypass Droene's schemes, give the character some bonus points.) Do *not* give this award to PCs who are just cowardly or belligerent—players who refuse to let their Hero characters walk into a trap gain this bonus.

A PC who actually commits bloodtheft on the Ogre gets the additional reward of an improved bloodline—with a chance of mishap.

Divide that character's bloodline strength score by 6, rounding down. Have the player roll that number of six-sided dice; meanwhile, you roll 6d8.

If the PC's total roll exceeds yours, his bloodline derivation is strong enough to withstand Droene's and bloodtheft occurs normally. If your roll is equal to or higher than the PC's, then the curse of Azrai's blood takes over.

The PC's bloodline derivation changes to that of Azrai, and the PC gains a new minor blood ability. He loses all blood abilities prohibited to

those of Azrai's bloodline, but for each ability lost gains one new roll on Table 12: Blood Ability Acquisition in the "Bloodlines" section of the *Rulebook*.

The repeated use of each new blood ability changes the PC physically. Minor blood abilities change skin color (usually darkening it toward coal-black or lightening it toward ash-gray or albino-white), hair, or other cosmetic features. Major blood abilities might cause growth or shrinking, or the early growth of new appendages (horns, a tail, etc.). A character who repeatedly uses a new great ability changes dramatically—his form, his color, and even his statistics may change (DM's option). The character slowly becomes an awnshigh!

This transformation does *not* mean the PC becomes evil. If the character already has an evil alignment, he becomes worse; if he is not evil, he must fight evil thoughts and tendencies at every choice and opportunity. Any time the PC acts in a manner that could be construed as selfish, cruel, or evil, the character's appearance changes a little more, and the player should be warned that his character is growing increasingly dominated by the blood of Azrai.

continuing the adventure

If Droene the Ogre is defeated but not killed, the adventure continues sporadically. Droene reappears from time to time, trying new plots and new intrigues to gain access to the PCs. He may disappear for periods, reemerging with greater powers (after having committed bloodtheft on someone else) and more savage tendencies.

Killing Droene does not necessarily end the adventure—at least not permanently. Droene's lieutenants may want revenge, or some of his men may become true brigands or engage in mercenary activities in nearby domains. The Ogre's shadow does linger.

"Kings' crowns are made of gold and jewels, but their army's weapons are forged of fire and steel. A king needs both gold and steel to hold his throne; a wise ruler uses gold when he can, steel when he must.

"In the dwarven kingdom of Baruk-Azhik, riches more precious than steel or gold run through the veins of the mountains. Grimm Graybeard, rumored to be the last of Baruk-Azhik's great overthanes, regards outsiders with suspicion. In a canny move, the old ruler uses the temptation of dwarven steel and gold to motivate the Hero-Kings to action. Can he bend them to his will, and maneuver them into war against the oogs that plague his borders? Or will he find that even Heroes have their limits?"

Event Type: Trade Matter (result of 15 on Table 15). "Dwarven Steel" may also be used as a Diplomatic Matter (result of 7).

The Heroes: Regents who wish to set up diplomatic or trade relations with the dwarf-kingdom of Baruk-Azhik are most easily drawn into this adventure, though sufficient motives can be found for any PC to participate. Low- to mid-level adventurers (2nd to 6th level) work best, but a small group of higher-level PCs should still be challenged. Warriors, mages, and clerics are especially appropriate.

If one of the PCs rules or lives in Baruk-Azhik, the DM can still run this adventure. Suggestions for modification appear below.

The Challenge: Oogs from the Iron Peaks threaten the dwarf kingdom of Baruk-Azhik. This situation is nothing new; the dwarves have been at war with the oogs for as long as anyone can remember.

However, desperation clutches at Grimm Graybeard's heart. He knows that the dwarves cannot hold out forever—they breed slowly, while the oogs are constantly reinforced by their own young and by eager warriors from the Gorgon's Crown. Add to this his recurring premonition of doom (he believes he will be the last ruler of Baruk-Azhik), and Overthane Graybeard earns his name "Grimm" many times over.

But the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik have recently begun to consider the possibility that

they need not battle the oogs and other foes alone. Rumors abound in the dwarf-tunnels, of Hero-Kings who fight evil and work against its minions directly. Grimm Graybeard has not seen such heroism among the humans (and even, he must admit, the elves) in many a year. Perhaps it is time for the leader of Baruk-Azhik to admit a few allies.

dwarven steel

The adventure begins when the PCs make contact with Diirk Watershold, the head of Baruk-Azhik's trading guild. It doesn't matter who initiates the first contact—the PCs or Diirk—the dwarf wants to talk trade. Diirk longs to bargain with outsiders to ship Baruk-Azhik's famous weapons and metalworkings all over Cerilia.

Until now, Overthane Graybeard has restricted Baruk-Azhik's trade to those Anuireans who brave the mountains and bring their trade goods with them. Diirk, however, wants to set up more regular, permanent trade routes. Because he will act only with Graybeard's approval, any such trade negotiations require the PCs to travel to Baruk-Azhik for appraisal by the overthane. Diirk offers to present the Heroes to the dwarf overthane as soon as they wish.

The PCs meet Grimm Graybeard. The overthane is gruff and skeptical of their intentions, but if they are polite and seem content to deal on his terms, he assents to a formal trade agreement—on one condition: The Heroes must pass a test to prove they are allies of the dwarves and enemies of the Iron Peaks oogs.

The test is a simple one (according to Graybeard). The PCs must follow one of the dwarven tunnels to a known orog stronghold and bring back the head of an orog chieftain. Additional orog heads would curry extra favor—the more the better. Once the Heroes have completed this mission, Diirk may freely trade with them.

The dwarves lead them to the tunnel and send them on their way. The challenge proves difficult when the PCs encounter not only oogs, but traps

and other monsters as well. Finally, they confront a war band of orogs and dwarf envoys (from the dark realm of Mur-Kilad) in a great battle. Should the Heroes escape, they make their way back to Baruk-Azhik to impress Grimm Graybeard with their tales and their trophies.

introduction

Introduce this adventure in one of two ways. If the PCs seem interested in forging trade routes and building alliances in northeastern Anuire, have one of their advisers suggest a personal visit to the court of Baruk-Azhik. If the Heroes instead concern themselves with other matters, then have the dwarves, led by Diirk Watershold (*MD; T10; An, minor, 29; NG*) contact them. (For a fuller description of Diirk and other NPCs of Baruk-Azhik, and of the domain itself, see *Ruins of Empire* or the *Baruk-Azhik* domain sourcebook.)

The possibility of opening up trade with Baruk-Azhik should interest the Heroes regardless of who initiates negotiations. The dwarves hold reputations as marvelous warriors and spectacular smiths. Armies equipped with their weapons or supported by their troops would find their effectiveness doubled. Besides, no one in living memory has ever had the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik seek them out for purposes of trade—usually, the dwarves are on the receiving end of such overtures.

If Diirk Watershold comes to visit one (or more) of the PCs, he seems cheerful, friendly, and jovial. Alert Heroes note, however, that Diirk seems to be appraising their holdings—as well as themselves—with a keen, if subtle eye. No one should underestimate Diirk's ability to rate potential allies or enemies at a glance.

On the other hand, if the PCs go to Baruk-Azhik, Diirk meets them at one of the upper gates. While the other dwarves are somber and watchful, Diirk is friendly and outgoing. He may surprise the Heroes by knowing some of their names and accomplishments (and flattering anyone with notable adventures under his belt), demonstrating that while the dwarves may be insular they do have contacts outside their kingdom:

“Yes, my friends, I've heard of you. You've caused quite a stir among the nobles of Cerilia, I must say—no one has caused this much excitement since . . . Ha, ha! Since I can't remember when! Here, have a drink.”

The ale of the dwarves is full bodied and strong—and plentiful. Diirk does not want his guests drunk and unable to negotiate intelligibly (he doesn't need such tricks), but he wants to prepare them for their meeting with Graybeard.

adjusting for a pc as overthane

If a PC rules Baruk-Azhik, you can run this adventure with a few minor alterations.

Have a single NPC adviser—Diirk Watershold, or whoever controls the guild holdings in Baruk-Azhik—persuade the regent that isolationism does not help the dwarves nearly so much as it hinders them. The adviser should also present all the facts about the Mur-Kilad/orog alliance (described below) and recommend dealing with both situations at once.

Unfortunately, the rest of the PC's advisers adamantly oppose action that involves nondwarves in the business of Baruk-Azhik. They think setting up permanent trade routes is a terrible idea, and most of the domain's dwarves agree with them. Almost everyone believes that outsiders breed fear, dissention, and chaos—in a kingdom devoted to order.

The PC overthane must prove to these advisers and his people that nondwarves can contribute to the welfare of Baruk-Azhik without causing disruption or disharmony. While he could just issue a decree allowing nondwarves into Baruk-Azhik, or set up a trade route without his advisers' endorsement, that course would not be a wise one to take. It would certainly reduce the loyalty rating of every province in the kingdom by at least one degree (perhaps two), regardless of the benefits it reaps.

"Ah, yes, Graybeard is a good overthane—best in generations. But he's so *grim*, and so untrusting. Still, I guess that's his job. I go out to solicit business for our smiths and our warriors, and he keeps the kingdom from splitting apart. I watch the profits and he the ologs!"

When Diirk mentions the ologs, he seems to flinch but recovers quickly.

"Yessir, ol' Grimm has Baruk-Azhik's best interests at heart, I'll tell you. He wants his people to be safe and sound. I want 'em fed and clothed. Dwarves ain't never been much for tillin' the earth—just digging in it! Ha, ha!"

This is a sample of Diirk's patter. Often the guildmaster drops hints and makes innuendos about what might be expected of the Heroes ("proof of valor," "demonstration of bravery") should they wish to set up a trade route or diplomatic negotiations with Baruk-Azhik, but he always stops just short of telling them directly. Diirk isn't stupid or careless; he wants to test the Heroes himself. If they don't seem to get any of his little "hints," he might think them too dense to bother with as trade partners.

the kingdom of the dwarves

Entrance to the domain of Baruk-Azhik is by invitation only. A human, elf, or even dwarf from another realm might wander the hills and mountains of Baruk-Azhik for years without finding an entrance. Fortunately for the PCs, they are either guided by Diirk Watershold or expected by the dwarf watchers at the borders.

The Heroes follow Diirk through a hidden mountain entrance and into the upper halls of an underground fortress.

The entrance to the dwarf kingdom lies hidden among the mountains. Upon first walking through the hidden gate, you find yourselves in darkness. A small door, guarded by two dwarves with crossbows and battle axes, is the only feature you can make out in the stone room. Bleak and foreboding, the entrance to the kingdom of the dwarves stands before you.

And then, as the outer gate shuts, the small door opens.

Inside, light and music fill the air. The walls of the halls look, at first, like fine marble—until you realize that they are simply made of ordinary, but perfectly polished, stone. Dwarves work everywhere, keeping the halls, the tunnels, and even the smallest rooms bright and perfect.

Dwarves dressed in fine clothes mingle with dirty miners. Music blends with the sound of endless hammering, chiseling, smithing, and smoothing stone, steel, and gold. Everyone works at something, and, from the lowest floor-polisher to the highest smith, they all take inordinate care to make certain their work is done right.

The dwarves escort the PCs through many passages and halls to see Overthane Graybeard. Diirk Watershold regales them with stories about all that they see, and even the most jaded PC should find the works of the dwarves impressive, if not downright fascinating. The magnificent ceilings of the most common room rival those of palaces, and no one misses the daylight, though it is hard to see, sometimes, where the light of the dwarven halls comes from.

The end of the Heroes' journey does grow darker, however. Diirk leads the Heroes by "access tunnels" to a "private audience chamber" where they can speak to the king. He explains that Overthane Graybeard wants to see them in private, so that the other affairs of state do not interfere with their dialogue. In reality (and perceptive PCs could pick up on this), Grimm does not want it generally known that he may be appealing to outsiders for help against the ologs.

Finally, the Heroes are escorted into a small anteroom next to one of the larger court areas. Their retainers (if they brought any) are offered food and drink in another room (or if there aren't too many of them, they can stay off to the side while the negotiations progress). After the PCs have had a chance to relax, a door to the anteroom opens and an old dwarf walks in, escorted by a small retinue of guards and courtiers.

Grimm Graybeard has arrived.



a grimm proposal

Grimm Graybeard is old but still strong. He, like many dwarves, acts in a direct, blunt manner. He dresses simply—more simply than most of the “important” dwarves the PCs have seen on their visit (especially Diirk Watershold), and he carries an axe that is not at all ornamental. He looks over the PCs critically, exchanges a few brusque pleasantries, and then gets down to business.

The Overthane of Baruk-Azhik speaks: “If you wish to bargain with the dwarves, you must prove to us that you would not deal with our enemies. Dwarves do not make friends easily, but we can trust those who share our foes.

“The mines of Baruk-Azhik extend deep underneath the Iron Peaks. This means the orogs—curse their black blood!—can tunnel in occasionally to harass our miners and steal our gold. We send tunnel fighters and war parties against the orogs and drive them back, but still they come. Their lives do not mean as much to them as our gold.

“To prove you hate the orogs and have the valiant hearts we require of our allies, you must go into the mines to the south, find an orog raiding party, destroy it, and bring back the tattooed head of the chieftain as proof of your bravery. If you do this, then we know we can trust you. You may then trade with us and be known as our friends.”

The words of Grimm Graybeard are hard, but honorable PCs recognize the truth in them. “My friends are the enemies of my enemies” has always been a dwarven axiom, and Overthane Graybeard uses it to make his kingdom safer for his people.

a minor deception

As much as it pains Grimm Graybeard, he cannot tell the Heroes the *entire* truth about the dwarf-orog situation. The orogs far outnumber the dwarves and, were it not for the dwarves’ superior fighting, smithing, and mining skills, they would be overrun by the orogs under the mountain. The dwarves of Baruk-Azhik need

allies—strong
allies—who aren't afraid to
fight in the depths of the earth.

Through Diirk Watershold's spy network, the overthane has learned of a hideous alliance between the dwarves of Mur-Kilad (hated enemies of the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik) and the orogs of the Iron Peaks. The two groups do not trust or like each other, but they realize they could pinch Baruk-Azhik in a deadly grip—if they can ever agree to fight together. The cunning of the evil Mur-Kilad dwarves, combined with the numbers of the orogs, would wipe out Baruk-Azhik in a matter of weeks.

So Grimm Graybeard must do his best to prevent this alliance. He wants the Heroes to attack the war party as it negotiates with the evil dwarves of Mur-Kilad (though he won't tell them this). He hopes that in the confusion some of the evil dwarves will die and some will escape to carry the tale home; the dwarves will either think the orogs betrayed them, or that the orogs aren't smart enough to keep even their own lairs secure; the orogs will believe the dwarves led a party of adventurers into their lair and will not attempt to re-establish negotiations.

The reason Grimm doesn't simply send in a group of his own warriors should be obvious: Both the dwarves of Mur-Kilad and the orogs of the Iron Peaks hate the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik even more than they dislike each other. If they thought Grimm actively tried to keep them apart, they would immediately settle their differences and join together. They would consecrate their alliance in dwarven blood.

barter and the overthane

If the PCs try to barter with Graybeard—about the terms of the “test” or anything else, he looks at them with displeased curiosity. Diirk steps in, embarrassed.

“My friends, few humans [or other people of nondwarven races, if applicable to the PC party] have ever come this far inside the kingdom of Baruk-Azhik. Indeed, besides myself, I daresay few dwarves who live here have ever seen those of other races.

“We do not hate, fear, or disdain humans. We just do not, as a race, trust them. Overthane Graybeard is offering you, heroes of great renown, the opportunity to break our long custom of isolation. I recommend that you take this chance.”

Diirk looks at the Heroes as imploringly as a dwarf can. He acts as if he has stuck his neck out to get the PCs this far, and to persuade Overthane Graybeard to make the concessions he has.

This description is *extremely* accurate. Aside from Diirk, all the king's advisers oppose bringing “outsiders” into the dwarf kingdom, and none of them support regular trade with the outside world. They want things to remain as they have for centuries. Only Diirk and the overthane himself see that circumstances *must* change if Baruk-Azhik is to survive, let alone thrive.

accepting the proposal

If the Heroes accept Grimm Graybeard's proposal outright, he doesn't look noticeably pleased. Overthane Graybeard *really* dislikes deceiving the PCs about the true nature of their mission and respects the fact that they choose to abide by his conditions without putting up much of an argument. The overthane leaves them with Diirk to finish the arrangements.

organization and planning

The dwarves of Baruk-Azhik regard planning and organization as two of their best talents. Diirk, on the other hand, having dealt with outsiders on a regular basis, understands that other races react more impulsively. As a result, Diirk cuts off the overthane's advisers as they "brief" the PCs for the mission ahead.

Why does Diirk do so? Because the details of this mission involve something like, "Go down the tunnel several miles. When the tunnel becomes rough and irregular, you have entered the Iron Peaks. Soon you will see a side passage marked with a white stone carving left by a dwarven spy. Go down the side passage to enter the war party's den. Kill as many as you can and bring back the head of the chieftain."

Simple, yes?

Not the way the advisers put it. They insist on describing every step of the tunnel in detail. They recount how hard it was to cut the passage out of solid stone and how hard their miners worked to smooth and level the passage; they bemoan the fact that the orogs were able to get into the passage and corrupt it with their influence.

They then go on and on about how they can't shut the passage down because it wouldn't do any good (many other tunnels lead into the Iron Peaks, and the dwarves need access to the orogs so they can spy on them and stage occasional attacks) and about how the limestone in the area is nearly pure and how they think this means rock oil lies underneath the

passage but they can't take the time to dig deep to find out and—

You get the point. If this were a purely dwarven expedition, it would take days, perhaps weeks, to organize. The overthane wants it done sooner than that, and presumably the PCs also feel anxious to complete the task.

Diirk understands this urgency and tries to hurry the advisers along. Still, as the DM you should play each adviser as a self-important (if knowledgeable) blowhard

who has one tidbit of the above information (as well as a few of the useful tips listed below) buried in the sea of details he tries to impart.

the useful tips

Share with the players as much of the following advice as you feel is necessary (or interesting). To obtain these tips, however, the PCs must patiently listen to the long-winded advisers or ask the right questions.

- ◆ **The orogs construct traps regularly throughout their section of the passage.** Fortunately, they are more concerned with pain and suffering than subtlety. Anyone looking for an orog-constructed trap gains bonuses to find them, since they are usually constructed of large weights, pointy spikes, and pulleys that cannot be hidden well. Rogues receive 1d3×10 bonus percentage points to their chances of detecting traps; they receive the same bonus for disarming the traps. Other classes receive bonuses based on the DM's opinion of how well they pay attention.
- ◆ **Orog guards tend to react noisily to intruders but do not immediately think of summoning help or calling out an alarm.** Orog generally don't care (in the dwarves' opinion) whether others of their race are in trouble and so do not expect help when they are in trouble themselves. However, if guards are given the opportunity to cry an alert, the Heroes could end up fighting a dozen or so of the creatures in a very short period of time. (Orog love a fight, especially when they outnumber their opponents.)
- ◆ **The orog chieftain can be recognized not only by his large bulk and cruel demeanor (cruel even for an orog), but by the blue and yellow tattoos worn by all of the orog chieftains in the northern Iron Peaks.** According to the dwarves, the chieftain of this band is truly hideous and an accomplished fighter.
- ◆ **If the orogs have anyone with them at their war camp, then that person (unless obviously a prisoner) is an enemy of Baruk-Azhik and should be killed if possible.** If asked, the advisers make up a story (one that does not involve the dwarves of Mur-Kilad in the remotest way) to explain why the orogs might have such an individual in their war camp—but they're hoping this point slides through unnoticed. Grimm Graybeard insisted they mention the possibility, though they aren't happy about it.

of any fighting that ensues (so nobody sees a Baruk-Azhik dwarf involved), but he helps the PCs get where they're going. If the Heroes impress him as friendly and noble, he'll probably help out in the final battle anyway.

Potions and Scrolls: Though the dwarves have little access to true magic, they do have priests who have learned to make potions and scrolls. They might share one or two *potions of healing*, and Grimm Graybeard could order the priests to prepare a few *potions of protection* (various minor types). **Note:** This type of help from dwarves is extraordinary and should be offered only if the Heroes—through interaction with the overthane and his advisers—have proven themselves noble, lawful, and dedicated to performing the mission entrusted to them. If the PCs are haughty, obnoxious, or cowardly, the dwarves offer no help of this type.

Miscellaneous Gear and Supplies: Of course, the dwarves offer the PCs any miscellaneous gear they think would be helpful. Mining tools (to clear cave-ins), rope (for pits), torches, lanterns, mapping tools, or any other standard supplies can be had upon request. The dwarves also give the PCs enough food for the journey (a day's worth or so) and just about anything else they require.

After the dwarves tender their assistance, they bow (how deeply depends on the impression the PCs have made on them) and depart, leaving the party with Diirk and a few retainers. Diirk leads them to the tunnel and bids them good luck.

At this point, if the PCs ask questions about the true nature of the mission (proving they are pretty perceptive), Diirk may let something slip. While he is more accustomed to "necessary deception" than is the overthane, he may have grown to like the

Heroes. Of course, if they made a bad impression on him, he could supply them with completely false information. ("Oh, those advisers! They still think there are traps in the mines. Why, we cleared them out *years* ago!")

into the darkness

Darkness shrouds the tunnel. Still, the light from the Heroes' torches or lanterns reflects off the walls and reveals that the dwarves did not skimp on their work when they made this gently sloping, even passageway.

Every half-mile or so, the PCs come upon dwarf guards. Some accompany surveyors who check the walls for cracks or the floors for wear, but most are alertly alone in the darkness. They know of the PCs' mission and grimly bid them to proceed. Some wish the Heroes luck; others remain silent. These stony figures, standing still in the darkness, seem more eerie than the darkness itself.

After several miles, the passage grows a little rougher. The floor is unfinished; the support beams for the walls and ceilings are still visible. Signs of old battles scorch the floor and pock the walls. When the PCs reach a point in the passage where a red stain darkens the hard-packed ground, Graus (if he accompanies them) remarks that they have reached the border of orog territory. Even if the PCs are alone, they realize this fact soon enough. Within a few yards the passage walls grow increasingly irregular, the ceiling ranges in height from 3 to 7 feet, and dirt and cobwebs hang. The walls grow closer together and farther apart at irregular intervals. In most cases, the PCs must proceed single-file, though sometimes they can walk three abreast.

encounters in the orog tunnel

The PCs can encounter any number of difficulties in the orog tunnel, including and exceeding those mentioned above by Grimm Graybeard's advisers.



Other than these points, the advisers provide little helpful information. Diirk, however, gives the PCs some advice regarding their expedition. He recommends they bring as few retainers with them as possible, since the orog tunnels are narrow and treacherous, and the more people they bring along, the more noise they make and the more difficulty they will have moving around. He also recommends that any nondwarf character wielding a two-handed weapon bring a good alternate for tunnel fighting—the PCs may have to crawl through parts of the badly constructed orog tunnels, and that's just when the orogs might spring some particularly nasty surprises.

other assistance

If the Heroes are not of high experience levels (or if you believe them under-equipped for this mission), the dwarves may offer them aid. The assistance can take any of the forms listed below, or another form of your choice.

Dwarven Armor and Weapons: While the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik have little access to true magic, they remain smiths without peer. Their weapons and armor carry nonmagical bonuses. For example, they might fit a dwarf or bulky halfling character with field plate that the character can move freely in (treating it,

for purposes of movement, as if it were leather armor), or they could give any character an axe or sword that gains a nonmagical +1 bonus due to its extreme sharpness and fine balance. The bonus goes away after 10 or 20 engagements (the blade eventually grows dull) unless a dwarf smith sharpens it regularly.

A Dwarven Guide: If the Heroes have no rogues with them or they are an underpowered group to begin with, one of Diirk Watershold's lieutenants volunteers to accompany the party. He is a 5th-level fighter/thief named Graus Pineburner (a name given to him after his unsuccessful apprenticeship as a smith), and he is as cheery and outgoing as all the other dwarves the PCs have met (with the exception of Diirk) are serious and dour. He wears light armor (*leather +1*) and carries a collection of weapons, including poisoned darts (only poisonous to orogs, of course—and just for extra damage), a magical short sword (bonus value DM's option), and a few other surprises. Graus has been told that he should stay out

rats and spiders

Orogs eat rats and spiders (among more unpleasant things), so the survivors that populate the orog tunnel remain especially nasty and tough. At any time, especially during periods when the party must crawl or walk single file, a 1 in 6 chance exists that rats, spiders, or both attack.

Rat, giant (6–12): AC 7; MV 15; HD 1; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (teeth); SZ T (2' long); ML average (8); Int semi (4); AL NE; XP 20 each.

Notes: These rats are even larger and more independent than their giant rat kin. They can still swarm opponents (see the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome), but they prefer to leap out of hiding places, surprising opponents and hitting unarmored areas.

Spider, large (2–8): AC 8; MV 6, Web 15; HD 1+1; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1; SA poison, web; SZ S (2' diameter); ML average (8); Int non (0); AL N; XP 175 each.

Notes: Poison is Type A, onset time 15 minutes. Victims suffer 15 points of damage, or no damage with a successful saving throw vs. poison (with a +2 bonus). The spiders spin webs that do not affect characters of Str 19 or better, but for every point below Str 19 a character is, it takes one round for him to break free. Trapped victims can be attacked at a +4 bonus and lose all AC adjustments due to Dex.

Though nonintelligent, the spiders have gotten into the practice of attacking intruders just after the rats have attacked (sometimes at the same time). The spiders use the rats as a distraction, then drop their webs (pre-spun on the ceiling) onto the rats' victims and drop or scurry onto their imprisoned victims to bite them until they die. They then share their victims with the rats—the spiders drink the blood and the rats eat the bodies. This uncanny cooperation breaks down only when a ravenous rat takes a bite out of a nearby spider, or a rat is accidentally caught in a spider web and poisoned.

an orog spike-trap

The orogs love to construct nightmarish contraptions near guard areas. They put their traps in narrow passages where the tunnel constricts to catch unwary trespassers as they adjust to the space constraints.

An orog spike-trap is constructed of four

basic parts: the trigger, the pulley mechanism, the counterweight, and the spike wall. The trigger is usually a pressure plate built into an uneven floor. The victim steps on the plate (each character passing through the area has a 4 in 6 chance of doing so, if he has not noticed the trap), which sets the underground and wall-hidden pulley system in motion. The counterweight—usually a boulder or stalactite off to the side or above the victim—falls, pulling the spike wall forward out of a camouflaged fake wall or ceiling section, and across the victim's chest (if a dwarf or halfling) or waist (if a human or elf).

Constructed of two parallel rows of spikes, the spike wall strikes its victim (or victims) in a horizontal swinging motion. The equivalent strength of the pulley system is 19 or 20, and the barbed, hooked—and sometimes (25% chance) poisoned—spikes are cruel and deadly.

Any character springing a spike-trap must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation at -4. The character does get to add his reaction adjustment, however, since the sound of the pulley and the swing of the spike wall gives him a chance to dive or jump out of the way. Therefore, a 5th-level warrior with a Dexterity score of 17 who normally needs a 15 (11+4) to save against this trap would need only a 13 (+2 reaction adjustment).

Failing the saving throw leads to dire consequences, however. Either one or two victims (depending on marching order and room for movement) can become literally stuck on the spiked wall. The wall inflicts 2d8+8 points of damage on anyone it hits and, if the trap is poisoned, injects spider poison (described above).

In addition, anyone who suffers even a single point of damage has been "impaled." The barbs on the spike trap have entered the character's body and he must pull or work himself free. The base time to work free (without incurring more damage) is four rounds. If a character rips himself free before this, he suffers 2d4 points of damage per round he is premature. So, a character hit with a spike wall who pulls himself free in the very next round sustains 6d4 points of damage. A player must announce upon impalement how many rounds he'll devote to freeing himself; as the DM, you may advise him of

the action's difficulty.

Disarming the trap isn't very hard if the Heroes discover the mechanism before it springs. The trap is most easily disarmed by springing it with a long pole or well-thrown weight (at least 25 pounds, AC 8). The trap does not automatically reset. Of course, this action might summon guards (see below). A thief can disarm it using his skills at a bonus of +10 to +30 percentage points.

Orog guards station themselves near spike-traps so they can hear the screams of the unwary. The guards are detailed below. A 60% chance exists that a pair of guards waits near any spike-trap encountered by the PCs.

orog guard posts

The Heroes should have to cope with at least two, perhaps as many as four, guard posts along the tunnel. Fortunately, the orogs do not fear a dwarven attack nearly as much as the dwarves concern themselves with the orogs' activities. Knowing the guards could be killed in any initial rush, the orogs assign warriors that they consider "dispensable" to these positions.

Orog Guards (3): AC 3 (combined chain and plate armor); MV 9; HD 3; hp 20, 19, 17; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M (6' 6" tall); ML elite (10); Int average (10); AL NE (chaotic tendencies); XP 120 each.

Personalities: Cruel, quarrelsome.

Equipment: Each orog is equipped with a missile weapon (either a crossbow or a pair of hand axes) and a melee weapon (battle axe or long sword). Each also possesses an alarm horn.

The orog guards have orders to blow their horns if anyone attacks. They are unlikely to do so immediately, since they know they'll be punished for disturbing the other orogs over an insignificant threat. Also, they want first pick of any booty intruders might have, so they try to deal with minor trespassers themselves.

Any orog guards stationed near spike-traps have a +2 chance of being surprised (unless, of course, the trap is sprung—in which case they are immediately alerted).

These guards depend on

the trap to do their watch-work for them, allowing them to spend their time waiting to hear the screams of the maimed and bickering among each other.

The orog guards earned their posts because of their trouble-making nature. Three guards stay at each station because if there were two, soon there would be only one—they'd fall to quarreling and kill each other. A third guard ensures that if two of them start acting up, the third can call or run for help. If the PCs sneak up on any of the guard stations, they may be able to exploit the divisive nature of the guards (if they notice it) and make their encounters that much easier.

the white stone carving

The Heroes must actively look for the marker left by the dwarf scout in order to spot it. It is small and unobtrusive (intentionally), but the Heroes should be able to guess when they're approaching it based on the distances Graybeard's advisers approximated for them. If any of the players, after the PCs have had a few encounters in the tunnels, asks about the distance or about the marker, be sure to let his character see the carving when the party reaches that point of the tunnel. Of course, since no definitive distance was stated and the PCs have no map of the orog tunnel system, you can make them wander around until they feel good and nervous.

The white stone carving resembles a small dwarf (about 6 inches high) cut out of the limestone of the wall. No orog has noticed this, however, as the statuette looks like an irregular bump in the wall to anyone who doesn't know what it is. The carving can be removed easily if the Heroes wish to do so. Otherwise, it remains as a marker for those who know to look for it.

the war den

The war den of the orogs lies only a half-mile or so down the passageway. Halfway down the corridor, two large guards stand alert and ready (as opposed to bickering and lazing about). These orogs have the same statistics as those listed above, but a whole different attitude: If attacked, they immediately try to shout or blow a warning to those

below them in the war den, then fight a defensive battle until help arrives. The "Guard Post" map (on this page) might suggest some possible ways the PCs can get around these two, but the guards should be difficult to avoid.

1. Stalagmite Passage: Huge stalagmites, some nearly 3 feet in diameter, stick up from the floor of the passageway. Gravel and loose stones litter the ground. Anyone who attempts to move silently through this area suffers a penalty of 15 percentage points to the attempt; all other characters must make Dexterity ability checks at a -5 penalty or inadvertently create a lot of noise while traveling along this corridor. Characters who succeed have only a 30% chance of alerting the oogs to their presence at this point; those who fail automatically alert them.

Fighting among the stalagmites is difficult. All characters receive a +2 penalty to their Armor Class ratings (since it is hard to dodge on loose stone and around the stalagmites)—except the oogs and any dwarves of Baruk-Azhik or Mur-Kilad (who are all familiar with the terrain and do not suffer any undue difficulty).

2. Rockfall: Any character familiar with caving or spelunking (including all dwarf characters) notices that this area is extremely treacherous. Moving around the rockfall proves difficult, but if done quietly, the rocks can provide cover to hide from the oogs. Every character must either make a move silently or Dexterity check (at -15 percentage points or a -5 penalty to the roll, respectively) or dislodge a large clatter of rocks and loose gravel. The oogs will be alerted by any noise of this kind, since they engineered the rockfall for this very reason. Characters who fail the check also suffer 1d6 points of damage from falling rocks (along with anyone else standing within 5 feet).

3. Watch Post: While these two oogs can hardly be considered elite guardsmen, they do know enough to behave and do their jobs. One oog walks back and forth along the corridor (half the time facing the rockfall area and the other half facing away) while the second sits at a table, occasionally eating or drinking weak ale. They converse with each other, but both are smart enough to settle any differences later, after their shifts. They stand only a few hundred feet from the war den chamber (see below) and they don't want to cause enough trouble to be heard and disciplined.



If the two orog guards hear any disruption in the passageway, the standing guard goes to investigate while the other rises from his seat and readies his horn. At a shout (or even a really loud noise) from the investigating guard, his partner blows his horn, summoning 3d4 orog warriors (all with 3 HD) from the war den within 2d4 rounds. The investigating orog then moves toward the war den slowly, holding off any attackers as best he can.

If the PCs move through the passage beyond the watch post, they will enter the war den chamber via the entry ledge (area 4, below).

the war den chamber

The passageway from the guard post winds a few hundred feet and then arrives at the war den chamber (see map on facing page). The Heroes should realize they are nearing the war den chamber when they see firelight and hear orog voices yelling amid the clash of steel-on-steel and steel-on-stone. No, the orogs aren't fighting—that's the way they hold a council.

Note: If the PCs failed to make it through the guard post silently, the orogs and Mur-Kilad dwarves inside are alert and ready for trouble.

4. Entry Ledge: The entry ledge is not the main entryway to the chamber (see area 7, below), but two orog "honor guards" stand here with spears and shields watching the council intently. If the PCs approach quietly, the guards won't hear a thing. The honor guards have the same statistics as the other orog guards listed above, except their armaments include a spear, a shield (making them AC 2), and a hand axe. The entry ledge is carved out of rough stone and rests 20 feet above the main chamber (area 5). Rough stairs lead down from either side.

5. Main Chamber: The huge cavern that makes up most of the war den is nearly 200 feet wide. It is a natural cavern, shaped by the orogs (meaning it has rough floors and walls, and even a few stalagmites sticking out of the ground). At the room's midpoint,

the stalactite-covered ceiling is nearly 100 feet high.

Fifty orogs stand or sit in various parts of the chamber.

Thirty of them, however, are noncombatants. They are

slaves, servants, and hangers-on among the "important"

orogs. If any kind of fight breaks out, they first retreat to the walls and then try to flee out the main entrance (area 7).

The other 20 orogs in the main area are primarily typical warriors with statistics identical to the other orog guards. However, two sergeants (subleaders) order the troops. They have an Armor Class of 2 and 4 Hit Dice each. In the event of an attack, they try to get their squads organized and fighting quickly. Many of the orogs are unarmed except for eating utensils; if surprised, they spend 1 to 4 rounds equipping themselves for battle (25% become battle-ready on the first round after any attack, and then 25% in each subsequent round).

Two bonfires light and heat the room. Slaves turn giant spits and cut chunks of lizard meat off the carcasses to serve the warriors and chieftain.

6. Lizard Pits: Each pit is more than 20 feet deep and spiked around the top. Inside the pits rest the orogs' trained lizards; three lizards inhabit each pit. They haven't been fed today and sit alert and ready to attack anything that falls inside (including an orog). The chieftain intends to feed the creatures either a group of slaves (for sport) or the dwarves of Mur-Kilad (if he can't reach an agreement with them) when the negotiations end. Beside each pit lie long planks, used to enable the lizards to climb out. Even if a battle breaks out in the war den chamber, the orogs do not try to get the lizards involved—in these close quarters, the lizards are as likely to attack the orogs as attack their keepers' enemies.

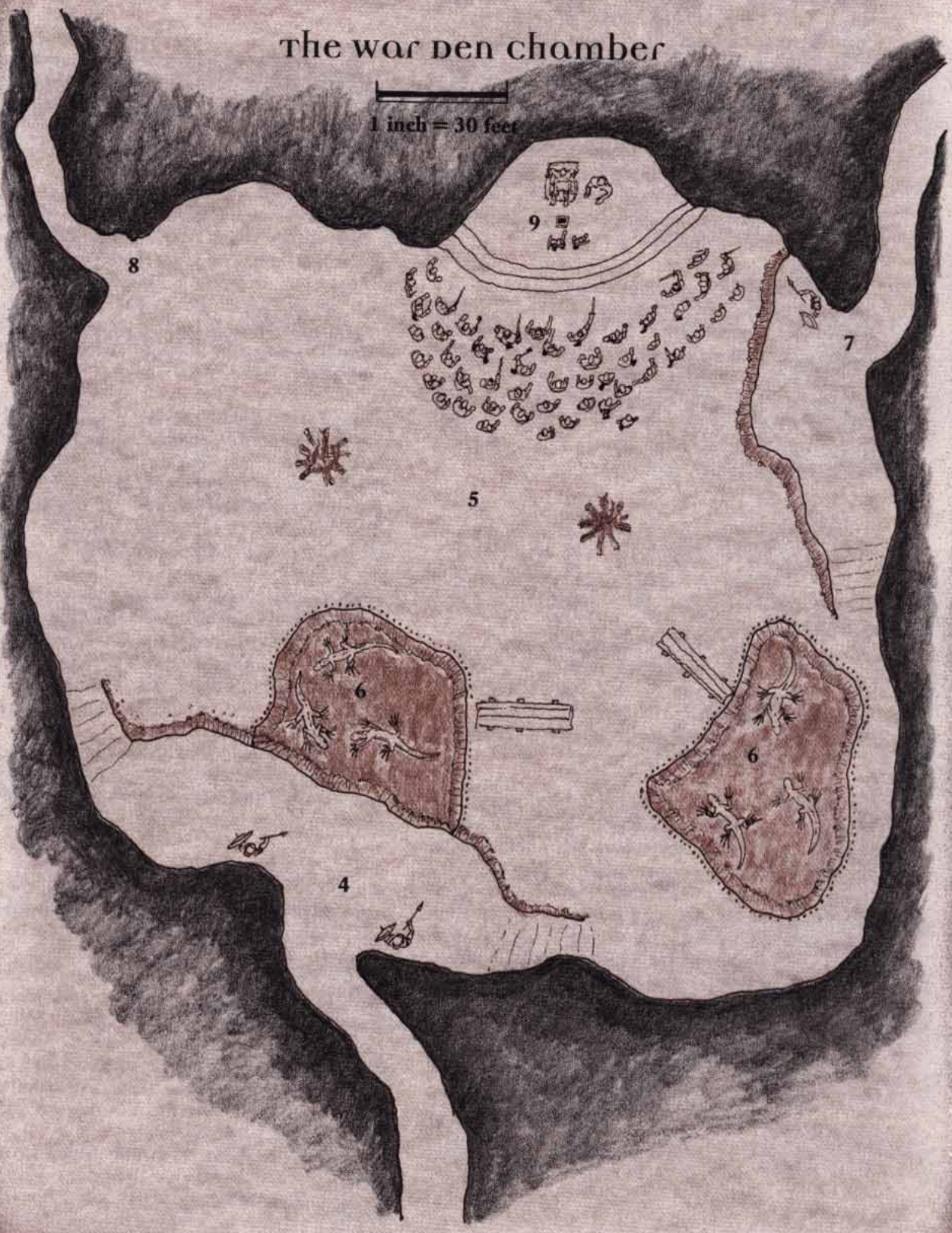
Subterranean Lizards (6): AC 5; MV 12; HD 6; hp 40 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA jaw clamp; SZ H (20' long); ML average (9); Int non (0); AL N; XP 650 each.

Notes: On a natural roll of 20, the lizard clamps its jaws on its victim, causing double damage that round and 2d6 points of damage each round thereafter until the victim is freed.

7. Main Entrance: A passageway leads off into the Iron Peaks' orog city, but little help comes from there if these orogs get into trouble—it is a long journey, and other orogs don't want to get involved in any trouble erupting here that the chieftain can't handle. If a battle breaks out in the war den chamber, 2d4 orogs may come from this passageway a turn or two into the fight (or after the fight).

The warden chamber

1 inch = 30 feet



8. Sub-Passage: This passageway was carved secretly by the orogs; it goes under and around the mines of Baruk-Azhik. Eventually, it comes up somewhere near the Khurinlach, under the shadow of the northern Iron Peaks. By way of this passage (and Kiergard), the dwarves of Mur-Kilad made their way to the Iron Peaks. The tunnel is small and narrow (4 feet high by 3 feet wide) in most places, and only the smallest orog slave would attempt to flee into it—except, of course, for the dwarves of Mur-Kilad, who attempt to exit this way should a battle go badly for them.

9. Chieftain's Dais: On the dais rests the orog chieftain's prized possession—a throne fashioned entirely from the bones of Baruk-Azhik dwarves defeated in battle or tortured to death in the mines and tunnels. On the throne sits the chieftain, listening to his adviser (Tulka Nine Hands) and the dwarves of Mur-Kilad (Reft and Mikla Falconslayer) bickering with each other.

Bahkal the War Chieftain, MM, F8: AC 0 (full plate +1); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 65; THAC0 13 (12 with battle axe +1); #AT 2; Dmg 1d8+1 (battle axe +1); SZ M (6' 8"); ML champion (15); Int high (14); AL LE; XP 1,400.

Personality: Angry, calculating, cruel.

Equipment: Full plate mail +1 (would fit a large human or elf), battle axe +1 named *Akalbakzar* ("dwarf maimer"), gem-encrusted scepter made of a dwarf's femur (500 gp value).

Bahkal does not reign over the orogs of the Iron Peaks, but he thinks he should. His little alliance with the dwarves of Mur-Kilad (if he can ever get it going) could be his crowning achievement—literally. He wants to decimate the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik and then show that the current ruler of the orogs is old and unfit to rule. Bahkal has disciplined the forces under his control so that they seldom fight with each other (those that do get remote guard duty, where the dwarves take care of the problem), and he looks toward a future without the Baruk-Azhik dwarves under "his" mountains.

Tulka Nine Hands, FM, P3 (orog pantheon): AC 3 (chain mail and shield); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 20; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+2 (scimitar); SZ M (6' 3"); ML champion (14); Int high (14); AL NE; XP 270.

Personality: Cunning, wary, attentive.

Equipment: Chain mail, shield (with Iron Peaks symbol on it), unholy symbol, *potion of poison* (contact poison: save vs. poison or suffer 3d10 points of damage).

Spells (4/3): 1st—*cause light wounds, cure light wounds, curse, sanctuary*; 2nd—*charm person or mammal, enthrall, hold person*.

Tulka Nine Hands advises Bahkal on all matters and currently holds a heated debate with the dwarves of Mur-Kilad regarding the alliance. She actually proposed the idea to Bahkal and remains steadfastly in favor of "making those little dirt-eaters understand" what the orogs of the Iron Peaks want to accomplish.

Reft and Mikla Falconslayer, MD & FD, F5: AC 0 (full plate and shield); MV 9 (unencumbered); hp 32, 40; THAC0 16 (two-handed battle axe +1); #AT 1; Dmg 1d10+1 (two-handed battle axe +1); SZ M (4' 5"); ML elite (13); Int high (14); AL LE; XP 975 each.

Personalities: Power-hungry, grasping.

Equipment: Two-handed battle axe +1, specially lightened plate armor and shield (no movement penalties), 200 gp (each).

Hardened veterans of Mur-Kilad's many wars, Reft and Mikla also operate without the full knowledge of the regent of Mur-Kilad (or the Gorgon, for that matter). They hope an alliance with the orogs will not only destroy Baruk-Azhik, but give them enough leverage to lead the dwarves back home in an uprising and become independent once again. Mikla and Reft remain and fight for as long as seems feasible (should a battle break out) for this very reason—but if the chieftain falls, or the battle goes badly, they flee down the sub-passage (area 8) and disappear into the mines.

Treasure Chest: Reft and Mikla brought a chest of valuables with them as a gift to the orogs. The chest is unlocked, but can be locked with a key now carried by the orog chieftain. It contains the following treasure:

- ◆ 500 gold pieces.
- ◆ 200 platinum pieces.
- ◆ A wicked-looking curved dagger (+1, +3 vs. goblins) encrusted with gems and inlaid with red-stained silver (worth over 1,000 gp even without the magic).
- ◆ A bag of fine diamond dust (worth 500 gp).
- ◆ A map case containing the (as-yet-unsigned) orog-dwarf treaty. It promises the orogs joint rulership of Baruk-Azhik with the dwarves of Mur-Kilad once the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik have been killed, driven out, or enslaved.

a head on a platter (or in a sack)

Getting Bahkal's tattooed head as a prize won't be easy—especially for low- to mid-level characters. The job requires cleverness, stealth, and daring. Fortunately, until they are alerted to the Heroes' presence, everyone in the chamber stands (or sits) watching the dais—regardless of what they are supposed to be doing. Also, many of the orogs call out their own opinions of the negotiations (only to be cuffed or shouted down by the two subleaders) and some clang weapons together or against rocks when they think the priestess has made a particularly valid argument (or when they feel like it).

Theoretically, it should be possible for the PCs to kill or disable the two guards on the entry ledge (area 4) without anyone noticing—if they are careful and quick. Even getting down to the main floor shouldn't be a problem. After that, however, the situation escalates. Only inventive Heroes can accomplish this mission.

escape!

If the Heroes succeed (or fail) in their mission and at least half the orog warriors still live, the PCs may make it to the exit (area 7)—but then they have to get out of the war den. The orogs need no lights in the tunnels and they know the layout like the backs of their dirty, gnarled hands. They have no problem getting reinforcements to chase the Heroes back to the border—and possibly beyond.

Of course, the PCs have to deal with any traps or guards they left behind on the way in. If they do not have a guide and are in a

hurry, you may wish to have them make Wisdom checks to remember which way to go when passages split off in different directions. Wrong turns lead to dead ends, pitfalls, traps, and more orogs. If at all possible, make this an exciting, hit-and-run chase. Indicate that if the Heroes stop and try for a pitched battle, orogs will get ahead of them and overwhelm them from all directions (a distinct possibility). However, if they do make it out of the war den chamber and race out into the main passageway, they stand a good chance of getting out alive—mission accomplished or not.

Otherwise, they get dragged back, tortured, and fed to the lizards.

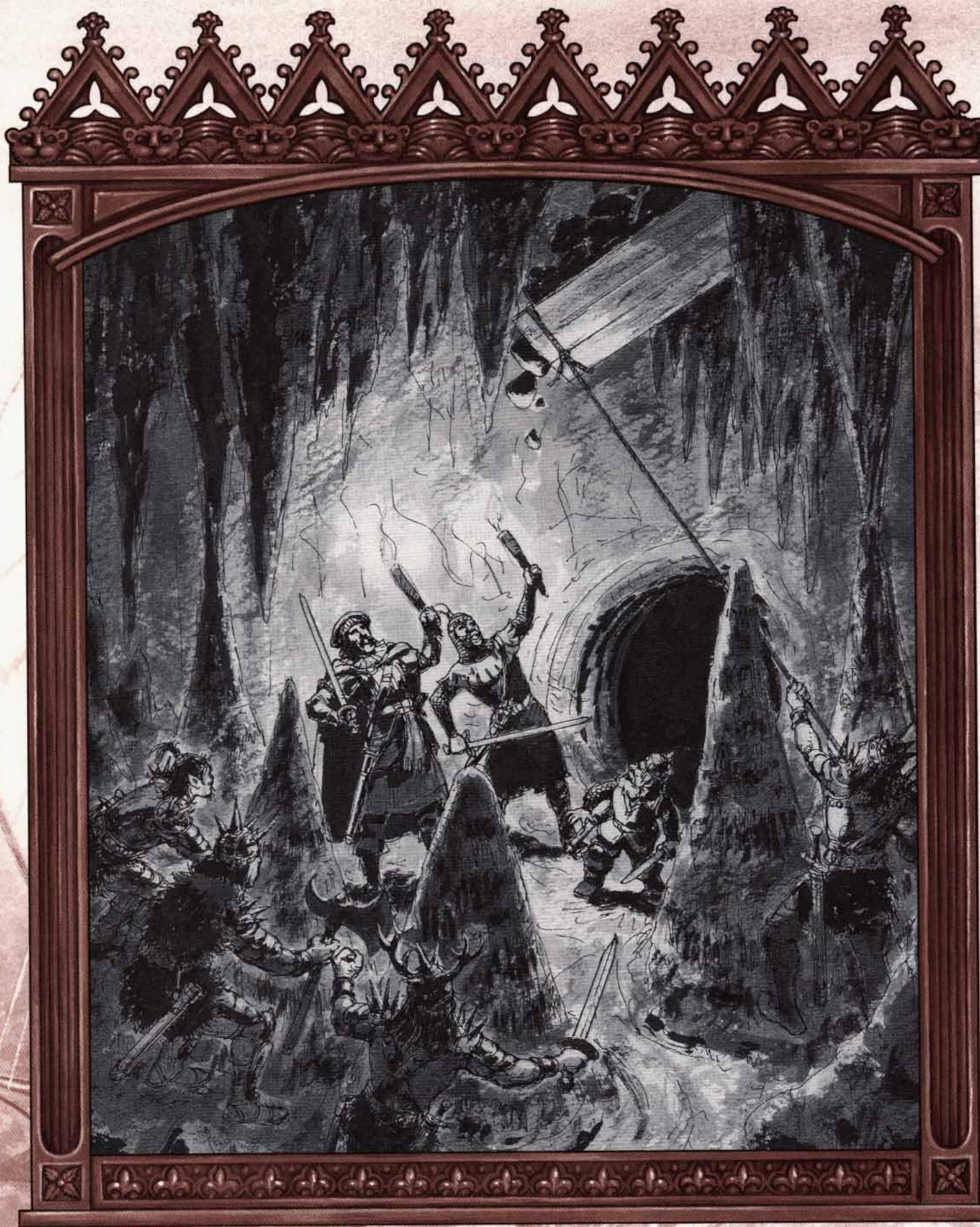
conclusion

The adventure, however, does not end with the Heroes' escape from the Iron Peaks. Whether or not the orog chieftain's head is in their possession, the Heroes still have the trade matter (remember that?) to deal with. That goal remains as yet unresolved.

coming back headless

Even if the PCs do not accomplish their mission for the dwarves, they might turn out winners after all. If Graus went along with them as a guide (and survives), he can report on the PCs' heroism (or lack thereof) and on the likelihood of an alliance between the orogs and the Mur-Kilad dwarves. If the Falconslayers fled down their escape route during the battle, the alliance has been at least postponed. If they were killed, then negotiations are probably dead in the water.

Likewise, if the PCs come back with believable tales of heroism, or even just evidence that they fought a tough battle, Grimm Graybeard relents and tells them the entire story, possibly even offering an apology (quite a concession from a dwarf overthane). If the Heroes prove themselves noble and gracious, the overthane offers them any assistance they might need to heal or recover party members, and rewards them substantially (see "Trade Matters," below).



On the other hand, if the PCs did not show heroism—perhaps they got to the war den chamber, saw the situation, and fled—or if they accuse the overthane and Diirk of misleading them, they are answered with stony displeasure. The overthane realizes he used them unfairly, but he also knows they failed—possibly without even trying—a test that would have proven them to be true heroes worthy of dealing with the dwarves. He tells his advisers to make certain that any wounded characters are healed, then to escort the PCs out of the kingdom in any direction they wish. Overthane Graybeard is a dwarf of little compromise and great pride.

getting a head

Only the most pompous and arrogant of Heroes can manage to spoil the trade deal if they come back with Bahkal's head in a sack. With luck, Grimm Graybeard's obvious relief, his advisers' amazement, and Diirk Watershould's overflowing praise cut off any possible lectures the PCs might decide to give the overthane of Baruk-Azhik about "full disclosure." Of course, player characters being player characters. . . .

Grimm eagerly listens to the Heroes' tales. He isn't a fool and won't believe utterly outlandish stories of heroism, but like a true dwarf, he sees the evidence of their abilities and is more than willing to let them embellish their stories and enjoy their victory. ("No, no, it was *fifty* ologs, all armed with great-axes and crossbows! And we killed 'em all!") In fact, if Graus went along with them, he, too, does a little embellishing in the PCs' favor (assuming they haven't treated him badly). In general, everyone in the kingdom expresses relief that the unholy alliance is dead.

Grimm Graybeard hearkens to any word of the deaths of either Falconslayer. He recognizes the two dwarves by their descriptions, and if the PCs killed them as well, the overthane actually smiles (briefly—if the PCs blink they will miss it). If the Mur-Kilad dwarves were forced to flee, he still looks pleased and comments that they might find their welcome back in Mur-Kilad a little cooler than what they had hoped.

trade matters

As long as the Heroes impressed Grimm Graybeard, he intercedes with his advisers and proclaims the PCs "friends of the dwarves" and worthy to deal with Baruk-Azhik. Any regents able to set up trade routes with any of the provinces in Baruk-Azhik may do so immediately. In addition, if Grimm finds himself suitably impressed with the regents, he offers to pay the Regency Points (in other words, have his people make the arrangements) for the first trade route to each realm as a gift to the Heroes. (The PCs still have to pick up the GB costs.) These trade routes automatically pass their success rolls.

In addition, any regent who sets up a trade route with Baruk-Azhik as a result of this adventure gains a few bonuses. First, most of the goods the dwarves send to the regent's domain are weapons and armor. Any army outfitted with this equipment gains a +1 in War Card combat to both its melee attack and defense ratings. For every month the trade route is in existence, it supplies one unit with this special equipment.

The second trade bonus concerns alliances. Grimm offers any regent who impressed him with his deeds and attitudes an opportunity to perform a "military exchange." If the regent wishes, he can send one unit of regular infantry to serve the dwarf overthane and Grimm will send a unit of dwarf guards or a unit of dwarf crossbows to serve under the PC regent. The term of service should be no longer than a year or so (though the parties can later renegotiate the agreement); when the infantry unit returns, it has been equipped with dwarf-made armor and weapons and has improved to elite infantry (due to its extra training and tunnel-fighting with the ologs).

individual recognition

The overthane may, in unusual circumstances, show his appreciation to the PCs in other ways as well. If they *really* impress Grimm, he may outfit the entire party in

dwarf-made armor and weapons, or he could give them miscellaneous nonmagical (but extremely well made and useful) items, or any combination of the two. In addition, Diirk Watershold has many contacts among guilds in Anuire, Brechtür, and Khinasi; he could offer individual Heroes further considerations, such as aid in setting up additional trade routes, free espionage actions, or other useful things.

quite an experience

If the Heroes succeed in this adventure, they should get substantial combat experience from killing orogs and dealing with traps, rats, and spiders under the Iron Peaks. However, they gain several bonuses (and can incur a few penalties) for certain results:

- ◆ Bringing back Bahkal's head is worth a bonus of 500 XP for each PC or NPC in the party.
- ◆ Figuring out or discovering (without being told by Grimm or Diirk) the negotiations between the dwarves of Mur-Kilad and the orogs nets the Heroes 200 XP each.
- ◆ Employing a clever strategy to accomplish the mission without a dangerous, pitched battle in the war den chamber gains the PCs 100 to 500 XP each, depending on how well it worked.
- ◆ Being really obnoxious to Grimm Graybeard and spoiling the trade matter *loses* the PCs up to 500 XP each (with a special penalty of 250 additional XP lost to the "Hero" who led the ego attack).
- ◆ Being gracious and noble toward Grimm Graybeard, even after finding out that he deceived the PCs, gains each Hero 100 XP.

Of course you, the DM, may distribute other awards or penalties as you see fit. No PC should receive more than 1,000 total XP for role-playing and strategy, however, unless that Hero *really* distinguished himself.

continuing the adventure

If the Heroes failed to kill Bahkal but the mission did result in good terms between them and Grimm Graybeard, the overthane puts a price on Bahkal's head—in Gold Bars or perhaps in some other negotiable currency (like one of the rewards listed above). The same contingency occurs if the Falconslayers survived and are thought to be making their way back to Mur-Kilad. If the Heroes can intercept and capture or kill them somewhere along the Khurinlach or in Kiergard, Overthane Graybeard will be very grateful. Of course, they probably have a retinue of guards waiting for them, so it won't be easy. And if the Falconslayers make it back to Mur-Kilad, they have a story to tell their people about the Heroes who spoiled their chance at greatness. . . .

If everything went as planned, Bahkal and the Falconslayers lie dead but the overthane still has problems with the orogs (who are probably pretty stirred up right now). Grimm wouldn't mind if the PCs want to hang around and lead a few expeditions (possibly at the head of a dwarf army) into the Iron Peaks. A dwarf-orog war is not a thing to miss.

Lastly, if the PCs so badly handle the situation with Grimm Graybeard that they get politely but firmly expelled from the realm, they may need to think of another way to deal with the dwarves. It is possible (though unlikely) that Diirk may act behind the overthane's back and come up with a scheme to bring them back into Baruk-Azhik's favor. Of course, such a plan has to be *much* more dangerous than the Heroes' first stroll through the Iron Peaks!

“No matter how subtle and wise the regent, every domain endures a time of troubles. Peasants grow unhappy, nobles grumble, courtiers worry and wonder. A true regent shows his worth during such times. Anyone can rule a settled, orderly kingdom—but how many can take command when all seem turned against them?”

“Hearken to this tale of such a time of troubles. Even a Hero-King must sometimes bend to the whims of his people. And always he must try to root out the troubles that plague his kingdom. . . .”

Event Type: Unrest or Rebellion (result of 17 on Table 15). “A Time of Troubles” may also be used as a Monsters/Brigandage (result of 13 or 14) or Great Captain/Heresy (result of 19) event.

The Heroes: At least one of the Heroes in this adventure must rule a law holding in the province where the adventure takes place. If that is impossible, the Heroes find employment as agents of the province ruler, who must direct his attention toward other matters. Low- to mid-level PCs are best suited to this adventure, though one or two high-level adventurers could find challenge in the events.

The Challenge: Everything in the domain appears to be going smoothly. The regent deals with troubles as they appear but does not go looking for problems where none exist. However, apparently out of nowhere, trouble appears—and the regent must attend to it quickly.

One of his provinces goes from whatever loyalty level it currently holds straight into rebellion. The PC’s advisers cannot explain the situation; they can only watch helplessly and hope their regent deals with the situation before it grows worse.

Reports filter in concerning bands of brigands and armed peasants looting and burning the regent’s holdings. These bands organize and attack almost without warning, then disappear into the woods (or terrain appropriate to the region).

The province ruler and the other Heroes need to deal with this situation quickly, before the rest of the regent’s provinces (or those nearby, if this is his only one) go into rebellion as well. The regent must suppress the armed revolt as the first step, then find the cause of

a time of troubles

this rebellion and stamp it out as well. Finally, he needs to regain his popularity among the commoners and nobles in the area.

introduction

This adventure interrupts whatever else concerns the regent at present. Reports of rebellion in the province flood into the castle, as well as tales of burning, looting, and other heinous crimes against his authority. **Note:** If the law regent has only one province, he can look out his window and see the destruction occur right outside.

The first step should be obvious: Suppress the armed bands militarily. The regent’s advisers expect him to solicit help from his friends (the other Heroes), but they also think he should summon troops to the province and command them to fight the brigands. Of course, the regent may decide to handle the situation personally, without his troops—and against his advisers’ best counsel. If he chooses the latter course, skip to “A Personal Interest,” below.

war moves

If the regent takes his troops into the province, he must command them himself—his lieutenants cannot handle the situation for him, as it constitutes a direct attack on the regent’s authority. He can, and probably should, take his friends (the other Heroes) along with him. His advisers *really* stress the importance of not using foreign troops or mercenaries if at all possible (such action might further inflame the rebellion).

You, the DM, should determine the resisting forces based on how many troops the regent can muster, along with a few modifiers for what kind of troops he uses. The rebels do not have much chance of

defeating him—they comprise mostly levy, irregular, and/or archer units. (Use the War Cards from the BIRTHRIGHT boxed set or appropriate campaign expansion.) In general, there should be no fewer than three rebellious units, but no more troops than the regent himself can muster. The battle should not present too great a challenge for the regent, though it could turn bloody.

On the other hand, for every mercenary unit—or unit obtained from a foreign domain (brought, perhaps, by one of the other Heroes)—the regent employs to address the situation, the rebels should have a little something “extra” thrown into the mix. Be creative. The rebels might come up with enough cash to hire their own mercenary units, or you can include a party of adventurers with spellcasting ability among the rebellious troops. While supplying more and more troops to the rebels borders on the unrealistic, coming up with inventive little difficulties the regent has to overcome makes the battle memorable.

If the PC regent wins: If the rebel army retreats or collapses, the regent wins the day. However, the true war remains unfought—how did the rebel army form, and what caused rebellion in the first place? The regent must investigate.

If the PC regent loses: Should the rebels actually defeat the PC’s troops in battle, the situation goes from bad to worse. Another province (if the PC regent has another one) erupts in rebellion, and the Hero can’t raise enough troops in time to deal with the problem. He can only send his remaining forces back to his castle while he and his allies (the other PCs) consider alternative solutions.

Creative solutions: The players might come up with a third alternative, or another way of dealing with this situation after the battle. Let them. Work the adventure material in as you see fit, and allow them to deal with the unrest in their own way—if they can.

a personal interest

If for some reason the PC regent does not want to take troops into the province, substitute this encounter for “War Moves,” above. Maybe he does not have enough forces at his command, or perhaps he fears

military interference would exacerbate the situation.

Regardless, he takes only his allies and some retainers into the rebellious region.

The Heroes, when they cross into the insubordinate province, note the devastation. It looks like a battle zone; the smell of fire and death hovers everywhere. Investigating the province should be a heart-wrenching experience for any good-aligned character (especially the regent), since most of the bodies lying in the burning ruins of towns and houses are those of peasants too slow, too young, or too old to escape to a safe place of hiding.

In the course of their investigations, the Heroes come upon a band of cutthroats surrounding a small farmhouse. The farmhouse shows scorch-marks on the roof; the barn burns unchecked. Occasionally, arrows arc from the windows of the house but fall short of the cutthroats, who jeer at the inhabitants unmercifully.

Cutthroats, MA & FA, F4 (2 per PC): AC 6 (studded leather and shield); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 22, 21, 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15; THAC0 17; #AT 1 (2 with short bow); Dmg 1d6 (short bow or short sword); SZ M; ML 11 (steady); Int 9 (average); AL NE; XP 175 each.

Left to sack the village, these cutthroats act as scouts for a larger force of brigands. They currently amuse themselves by taunting those in the farmhouse who still resist them. Before long, they plan to attack the farmhouse *en masse* and wipe out the last of the peasants.

Inside the farmhouse, a number of peasants still hold out against the rebels. Primarily made up of refugees from the nearby burning buildings, they follow a retired warrior who is the only effective fighter in the bunch. He continues to plink arrows at the cutthroats and remains the only reason they haven’t rushed the house yet.

Shaemas of Abbatuor, MA, F6: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 6 (encumbered); hp 43; THAC0 15; #AT 2 (bow); Dmg 1d8 (sheaf arrow); SZ M (5’ 8”); ML 14 (elite); Int 10 (average); AL LG; XP 420.

Personality: Gruff, desperate, grateful to those who help him.

Equipment: Long bow, sheaf arrows (20), chain mail, battle axe.

Shaemas comes from southern Anuire (which may or may not be far away). He has lived in this region for years, regaling his extended family and friends with tales of his exploits as an archer in the service of Aerenwe, Roesone, and Medoere. Until today, no one really believed all his tales, but those who survive under the protection of his bow now believe anything he tells them.

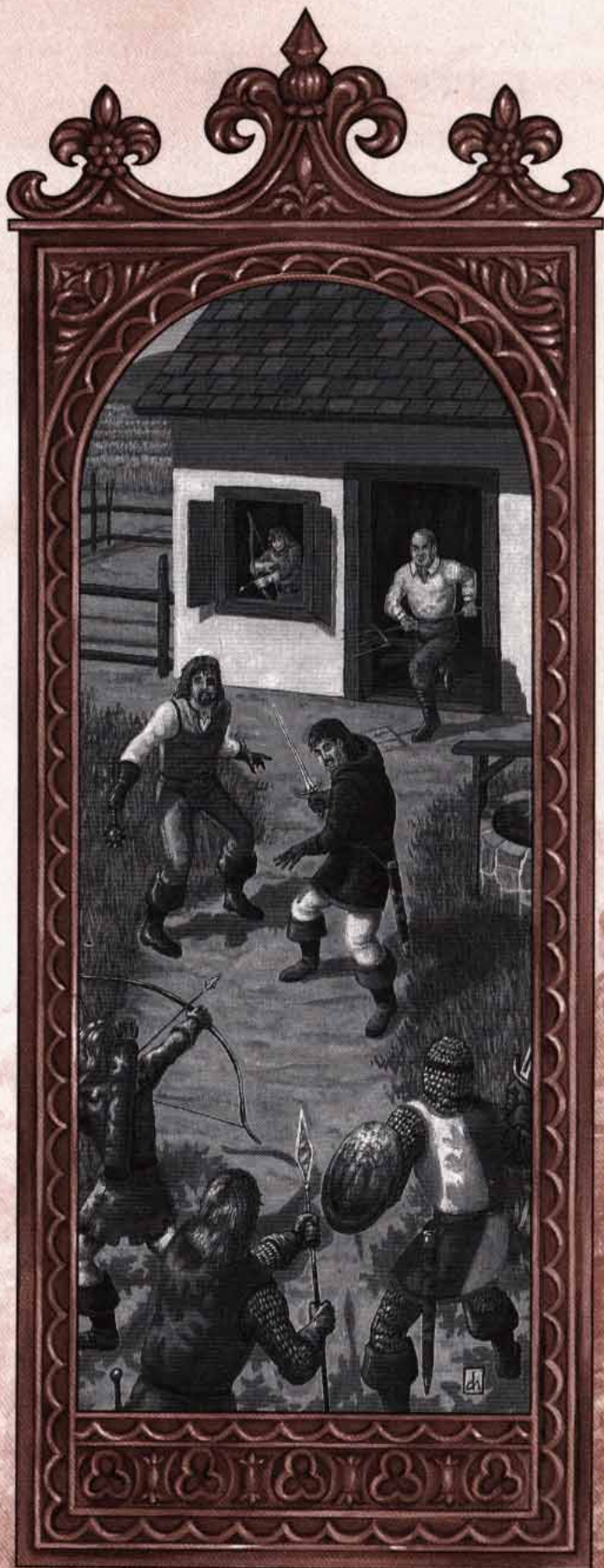
Among the survivors, a few able-bodied but untrained men and women desperately prepare to fight the cutthroats if and when they attack. Shaemas tells them to hold back and wait, since running out into the open only killed the other young people of the village.

Children and old men and women also huddle in the farmhouse praying for rescue. If the PCs don't do something soon, they become the latest victims of the rebellion.

Frontal Assault: If the PCs charge in and attack the cutthroats, they start the fight obviously outnumbered (after all, two cutthroats surround the farmhouse for every one PC or retainer), but the cutthroats have spread out and cannot respond as a group. At best, they can muster a defense with one-third their number, and that does not include the possibility of PC surprise (very likely, since the cutthroats think they have killed everyone around). It takes three rounds, after surprise rounds, for the cutthroats to get together in a group—by then, some of them may have died or fled.

Surprise Sniping: Should the PCs act more cautiously and try to eliminate the cutthroats in a stealthy manner one or two at a time, the cutthroats who do not notice their maneuver begin an attack on the farmhouse within a few rounds. Their charge must draw the PCs' attention; the Heroes may need to mount a frontal assault just to keep the cutthroats from setting fire to the building. However, that choice must be made by the players.

The Farmhouse: If Shaemas sees help arrive, he stages a sortie from the farmhouse. Armed with a few short bows, clubs, and farm tools, the young men and women rush at the backs of the cutthroats engaged with the PCs and do their best to fight. Many of them get cut down or knocked unconscious (if you use the "death's door" optional rule) for their trouble, but they might keep a PC from getting hurt too badly. Shaemas himself continues to shoot arrows with increasing accuracy at the cutthroats; this two-front attack should cause the villains to flee at their first opportunity.



aftermath

After the battle ends (either the war move battle or the battle at the farmhouse), the Heroes find someone to question. Whether these interrogations take place with friendly or hostile participants doesn't matter; the information the PCs obtain is essentially the same.

The peasants revolted because of what someone told and showed them. This "someone" came to several settlements in the province and revealed that the PC regent (or the regent the Heroes work for) has ignoble plans for the province. These plans include such diverse elements as taxing the peasants out of existence, conscripting all able-bodied men and women into the army, razing the farmland to build castles and villas for nobles, and "ruling down" the law level of the province to make room for an evil wizard ally.

When asked by the PC regent how anyone could possibly believe this drivel (assuming it is drivel—after all, the PC *could* have actually been doing some of those things), the questioned party produces part of a document that appears (even to the PC regent) to be signed by his own hand. The regent's seal graces the paper, making this a convincing forgery (again, if the PC regent has actually done some of these things, the document could in fact be genuine).

The regent may want to know where the NPC obtained such a document. If he asks, stony silence or uncomfortable ignorance greets him (depending on the questioned party). Further questioning (involving threats or helpful advice about remembering such things) reveals that the "original" bearer of the document passed through the area a week or so ago with a band of well-dressed, well-kempt men who made it their business to show off the document (and others like it) and express their anger at the

regent's new policies. No one knows where the men came from or went to, but the questioned party does have some idea where the center of the rebellion might be.

the next step

Whoever the PCs question provides them with vague directions to the "lair" of the people (or person) agitating against the PC regent. The lair lies a few days' travel away.

Try to locate the lair in a fairly remote part of the province, in some sort of defensible terrain. If forests blanket the province, then put the lair in the deepest part. If hills and mountains cover the province, then a cave or mountain structure encloses the lair. Deserts contain oases, and plains hold hidden entrances to underground dwellings—place the lair wherever you think most appropriate.

Again, the PCs must decide how to proceed. Bringing an army to the agitator's lair might solve the problem, but since the villain has blanketed the province with his own agents, the PCs have no chance of surprise if they use this plan. A strong army just causes the villain to break up his forces and flee, rendezvousing at some predetermined spot. A weak army means the enemy can prepare more than a few surprises for the Heroes—and surprises are never good on a battlefield.

On the other hand, if the PC regent and his allies (along with a small retinue) decide to sneak into the lair themselves to overcome the villain and his forces, other difficulties exist. The PCs should be able to bypass most of the troops (they think) but they don't know what lies in wait for them inside the lair itself. The situation might be too difficult for them to handle on their own.

Whichever choice they make, you should be prepared for a wild time.

an army at their backs

Riding off to the lair with an army, the PCs encounter little resistance—or welcome—initially. The towns and villages through which they pass show signs of war and death (though nothing as bad as that observed in Shaemas's village), and the peasants either flee at the sight of the troops or cower in fear. No one offers to guide them or enlist with the army—everyone remains convinced that the rumors

about the regent
are true and that he rides
through the province to put down
those who dare to speak the truth.

If the army the PCs have mustered appears formidable, the villain (Sadira Jami hap Effeir, described below) sends out her few cavalry troops and some archers to perform hit-and-run attacks on the Heroes' flanks. Day or night (whenever looks most propitious) the villain's forces attack and retreat, causing as much trouble as they can.

To handle this encounter, select a few mercenary cavalry and archer unit War Cards and have them assault parts of the traveling army at any given time. The players cannot, initially, put all their forces on the battle mat because only part of their entire army is being attacked, but since the attacking units are just skirmishers, the PCs should have more forces on the mat than the enemy.

Run the battle quickly and have the enemy forces retreat (if they can) after a few passes. The skirmishers try to damage a few units (possibly eliminating one or two) and then escape before the rest of the army can respond.

After the PCs have weathered a few of these attacks, they should generate some defensive strategies. Once you decide they have a handle on the situation (or when you think the skirmishers become *too* effective), end the ambushes.

Note: If you do not want to use the War Cards, use the "Skirmishes" rules detailed in Part III of the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook* instead—or invoke the "DM Fiat" option and inform the Heroes of any resultant losses to their forces.

alone against the enemy

Should the PCs attempt to "go it alone" against the villain, they meet with a much different reaction from the populace—and from their enemy.

When the Heroes ride or walk through towns, silent, war-frightened people come out to look at them; if they approach the people, the peasants tell of the terrible orders they've heard "the regent" has given for the devastation of the province. They show the Heroes their buried dead and their burned lodgings, and they tell how units of brigands moved through their towns, taking and killing what they wished.

However, seeing the regent with just a few retainers riding through the province has made them doubt the words they've heard. Why would the regent take such a personal interest in their suffering if it were he who caused it? Why would he endanger himself—since the brigands still lurk in hidden woods or behind rocks and in shadows—when he need merely send in his army to kill everyone who resists? Certainly, no one can be swayed to the Heroes' side easily, but if the PCs make an effort, the peasants come around.

winning friends and influencing people

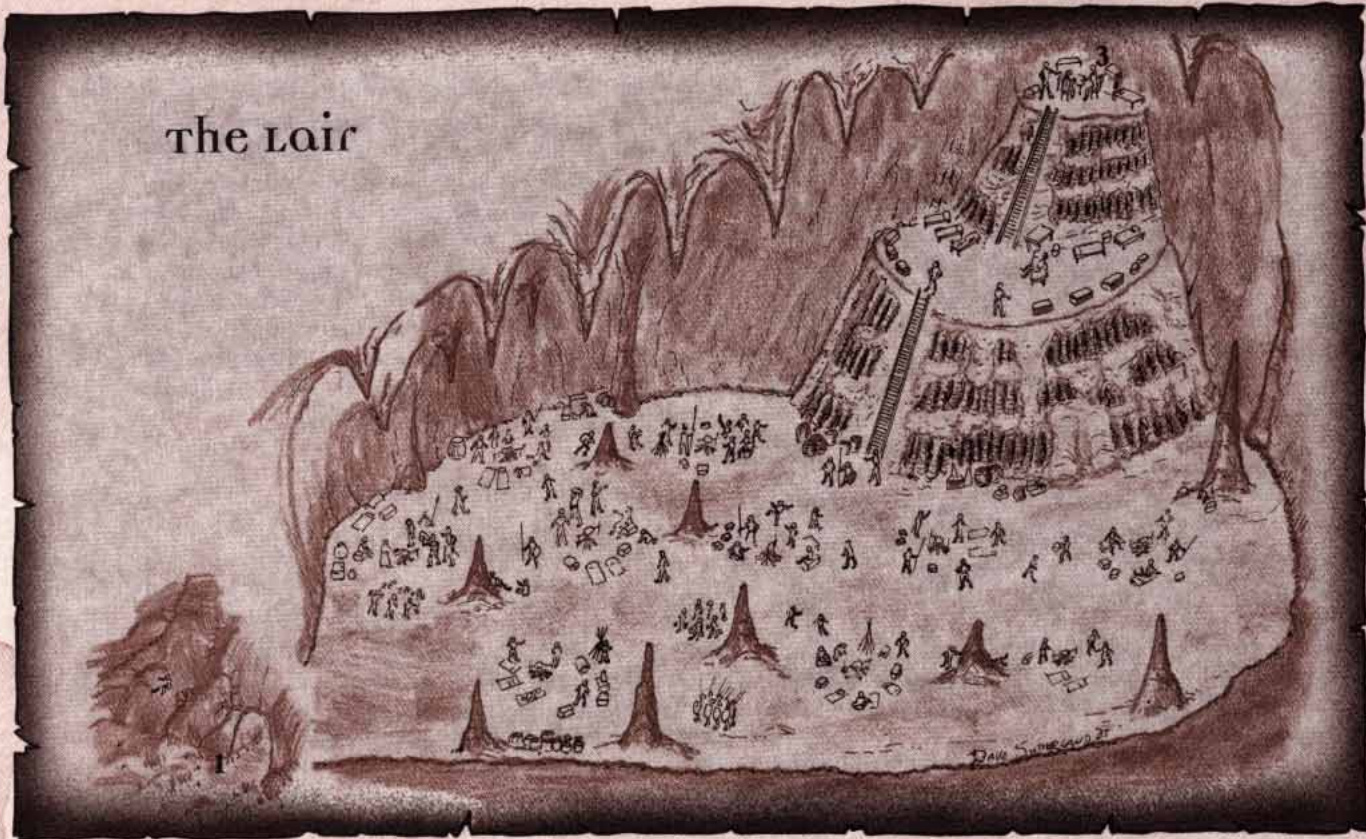
Stage a few "incidents" to test the PCs' response. A youth, for example, might throw a rock or a piece of rotten fruit at the regent and try to prompt some sort of attack. If the Heroes strike back, they might rouse the populace against them. However, if they just try to keep from being hurt and attempt to answer the peasants' volley with words instead of blows, the common people listen. If the PCs have the right temperaments and abilities, they could ingratiate themselves with the peasants by performing a few healing spells (or nonweapon proficiencies), helping to put out fires, or assisting with the search for a lost child.

The peasants' response corresponds directly with the Heroes' actions. Hostile or imperious behavior gains the PCs nothing, but kindly and noble gestures win support from the people. This "support" could mean anything from cheers and waves to raising a small group of 0- or 1st-level troops under the command of a 4th-level fighter (equivalent to one War Card levy unit, unless you are using the "Skirmish" rules here instead). Adapt the type of assistance to the PCs' plans and make them feel good about aiding the helpless.

skirmishing with foragers

Of course, being a good guy doesn't mean one escapes without a scratch. The villain still sends out patrols and skirmishers in case an army *does* arrive, and the Heroes undoubtedly encounter at least one of them. Of

The Lair



course, the PCs may manage to surprise or even bypass them, depending on their skills and abilities.

When the Heroes depart the village or the battle scene, they begin discovering evidence of outriders and foragers along the way to the villain's lair. Eventually, they come upon (or are set upon by) a group of foragers led by one of the villain's lieutenants.

Use the statistics for the cutthroats (above) for the foragers, and the statistics for the cadre officers (below) for the lieutenant. Include at least one cutthroat (possibly two) for every member of the party. In addition to his weapons and armor, each forager carries something additional. Most fill their packs with food, but some have gold (5d20 gp among the lot), and a few (10% chance per forager) have come upon some minor (randomly determined) magical item—nothing more powerful than a *sword +1* or a *potion of extra-healing*.

When the foragers and the lieutenant engage the Heroes, they initially intend to wipe out the PCs—no matter who surprised whom or what the circumstances are.

However, if the tide turns (and it

should) against the foragers, the lieutenant tries to escape; if he cannot, he encourages one of his men to flee for the camp to warn the other rebels.

The PCs have to keep this contingency from happening. Presumably, they wish to keep surprise on their side while dealing with the brigands. If anyone escapes the encounter, the villain will learn of their presence and probably send out troops, post guards, and generally make the situation extremely difficult for the Heroes. A running chase through the woods (hills, plains) ensues, ending only when the NPC escapes or the PCs bring him down.

Anyone captured sings like a bird about the layout of the lair and the troops stationed there—anyone, that is, except the lieutenant. He maintains stony, loyal, silence until the PCs get inventive. As the DM, you'll have to decide when (or if) he talks.

the lair

As mentioned above, the rebel base can be of any construction, depending on the terrain type of the province. "The Lair" map (see this page) favors a cave construct (which could be in a hill, mountainside or even underground), but you can transform the cave walls into thick trees or building walls if necessary.

sadira jami hap effer

7th-level Khinasi fighter/wizard

S:	17
D:	16
C:	17
I:	18
W:	9
Ch:	11
AL:	LE
AC:	1
MV:	12
hp:	32
THAC0:	14
#AT:	2
Dmg:	1d8+3
XP:	5,000



Divided into three sections, the lair houses one unit of infantry, the command cadre, and the commander herself. Each area of the lair is described briefly below; details follow for running the types of encounters that might occur in each area. *Be sure to read this entire section (through "Defeating Sadira") before running encounters in the lair.*

1. Entrance: The large open area just inside the entryway to the rebel base is large enough to hold one unit of infantry (about two hundred men and women), as well as their gear and foodstuffs.

2. First Platform: At the far end of the entry area, a stair (or ladder, as appropriate) leads up to a large platform or step where the cadre sleeps and plans. While only about one-tenth the size of the lower area, it provides plenty of room for the six lieutenants and their gear.

Cadre Officers, MA & FA, F6 (6): AC 4 (chain mail and shield); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 50, 48, 60, 55, 49, 44; THAC0 15; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8 (scimitar or long sword); SZ M; ML elite (13); Int 12 (very intelligent); AL LE; XP 270 each.

At any one time, 2d3 officers occupy the first platform. If all of them are not there, one is on the second platform and the rest (if any) are with the troops.

All of the cadre officers have access to short bows and arrows, but they use them only if their enemies are around the entry area. Among their things, each officer also has 2d100 gp, 4d10 pp, and one potion (roll randomly on Table 89 in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*). Part of the money is each officer's share of the loot; the rest has been supplied by their commander for bribes and agitation purposes.

3. Second Platform: Here resides the villain of the adventure: Sadira Jami Hap Effer. She hails from Khinasi lands and seeks to carve out her own domain—by depriving the PC regent of one province at a time.

Bloodline: Basaia, major, 31.

Blood Abilities: Alertness, divine aura (major).

Equipment: Bracers of defense AC 3, scimitar of speed +2, spellbook, 2 GB worth of negotiable currency (50% coinage, 50% gems, jewelry, furs, or other valuables), 2 potions of extra-healing, a mass of papers outlining her plans to agitate against and contest the PC regent.

Spellbook (4/3/2/1): 1st—change self*, charm person*, magic missile*, phantasmal force*, read magic, sleep, wall of fog; 2nd—blur, invisibility*, misdirection*, stinking cloud*, web, wizard lock; 3rd—dispel magic, invisibility 10' radius*, fireball*, protection from normal missiles; 4th—dimension door*, massmorph. *Indicates favored spell.

Description: 5 feet 5 inches tall; efficient, curt, vengeful.

Background: Sadira's history certainly fills a few scrolls in her homeland, but only a few details are important here. Having first served as an apprentice before becoming a full-fledged wizard, Sadira already had quite a bit of power when she decided to join a mercenary army. Because the mercenaries only respected brute force, not subtle intelligence, she trained as a warrior until she won her place as the band's leader. Evidence of her origins can be found among her personal papers; the DM may

also wish to plant evidence of current alliances.

Now Sadira leads a small group of elite mercenaries in agitation against the PC regent. Bolstered by her spells (including, on occasion, realm spells fueled by a source (4) in a distant province connected by a ley line), her forces wreak havoc while she directs them from the safety of her lair.

reaching sadira

To reach the commander, the Heroes need to somehow bypass the brigand army and the cadre officers. They can manage this feat either by sneaking up to the lair (which they can do if they did not bring an army) or by engaging the villain's troops with their own and slinking inside while the battle rages.

sneaking in

If the Heroes enter the cavern by themselves, they need to do it stealthily. At almost all times, 100 to 200 infantry troops (made up of 65% 0-level, 20% 1st-level, 10% 2nd-level, and 5% 3rd-level troops) rest, walk about, or otherwise congest the main area. The brigands don't wear uniforms, so the PCs needn't fear "sticking out" because they lack them; however, the Heroes might attract notice because of their equipment, quality of clothing, deportment, or racial features. Disguises help (perhaps taken from the foragers above).

Of course, getting to the first platform requires some inventiveness. Sadira has left orders for her scouts (the 4th-level cutthroats and foragers) to come directly to her lieutenants with any important news, but since they make up only about 5% of her army, most of her lieutenants know them by sight. Other members of the force usually get turned away at the ladders.

Once the PCs make it to the first platform, they must *really* get inventive if they don't want to fight their way to the second platform. (Of course, they already may have had to fight their way to the first.) The cadre requires more than a few creative lies before it lets anyone ascend to Sadira's quarters.

On the second platform, Sadira and one (or more) of her lieutenants discuss plans. Sadira carefully inspects anyone who makes it to the

second

platform, and

attacks anyone who

doesn't pass inspection. She

knows that the province ruler would love

nothing more than to eliminate her and her

army. Sadira has seen the regent only from a

distance; she has a 55% chance of recognizing

him on sight.

drawing her out

If the Heroes use their army (or some other means) to engage Sadira's troops, they face a larger force. In addition to the infantry unit Sadira has quartered in the lair, several units pitch camp outside the base.

The DM determines how many units Sadira leads. There should be at least as many units—though maybe not as powerful—in her army as there are in the PCs' army. This ensures that the Heroes—not their army—must win the day.

At the first sounds of battle, the troops stationed inside the entrance try to get outside and into the action as quickly as possible. (If the attack somehow begins *inside* the lair, they arm themselves and start fighting.) Most of the lieutenants hurry down to lead their troops, encouraging the brigands to action with shouts and horn blasts.

At least one lieutenant (but no more than three) stays to guard Sadira. She heads into the battle a few minutes after the rest of the troops engage. She tries to stay out of the line of fire—perhaps by entrenching herself in the lair (use the "Fortification" War Card)—while casting spells to support her troops.

a combined effort

Perhaps the Heroes plan to flush out Sadira's troops and then slip inside to eliminate or capture her. This solution is potentially the most interesting ending to the adventure, since it involves a large battle and a small one running at the same time. Even if the PCs divide their forces, the players can have a good time running each side of the situation.

In a War Card or skirmish situation, the Heroes must somehow get from one side of the battlefield to the other before the engagement ends or Sadira's troops retreat into the lair (which should be placed on the battlefield as a fortification). If they enter the fortification (because of the nature of the battle, they can do so unobserved though their army cannot), the War Card battle continues outside while the Heroes fight inside.



defeating sadira

If the Heroes capture or kill Sadira, most of her troops flee or surrender. Some fight, but the PCs should handle them easily. Since the Heroes must first overcome at least some of the lieutenants to defeat Sadira, the officers surrender or flee as well.

resolution

Defeating Sadira, either with an armed force or by personal action, is the goal of this adventure. If the Heroes defeat her—no matter how they do it—they have succeeded. The mercenaries and brigands scatter (possibly to return another day under the command of a lieutenant or new NPC), and the province returns to a nonrebellious loyalty level.

ultimate victory

If the Heroes do everything right—they defeat Sadira in a heroic and exciting manner, they overcome great odds—the PC regent earns 2d4 RP and the loyalty level of the province returns to its original level. If the PC regent distinguished himself particularly, loyalty may even go up one level (DM's call).

Sadira herself may or may not be killed at the end of this adventure. Certainly, she fights and tries to escape if the tide of battle turns against her, but the PCs could manage to capture her. If she escapes, she has no real army or power anymore and retreats either to parts unknown or to an enemy domain. Should the PCs capture Sadira (she surrenders if both escape and victory are hopeless), they find her disagreeable and manipulative. Options for dealing with her include imprisonment, execution (depending on the PCs' alignments, attitudes, and dispositions), or contacting someone from the Khinasi lands about sending her back in chains (you, the DM, can invent a reason for her original flight from her homeland). Her lieutenants may or may not share her fate.



partial victory

The Heroes enjoy a partial triumph if they break Sadira's hold on the province but do not achieve a particularly satisfying or distinguished victory.

Reasons for a partial victory include Sadira's escape, the Heroes' inability to distinguish themselves (perhaps they always made the "safe" choices), or a number of unfortunate incidents with the peasants. The PC regent gains no RP for this result and the province, while subdued, returns to only a poor loyalty level.

If the PCs allow Sadira and a portion of her army (or her elite lieutenants) to escape, the Heroes had better continue watching their backs—someday she'll be there again.

defeat

Sadira *can* win these battles, and the Heroes *can* be defeated. If so, the PC regent loses control of the province (no matter what holdings he had in it, they're gone now!) and the peasants shift their loyalty to Sadira, who has begun creating her own domain. All of the PC's remaining holdings (if any) drop one grade in loyalty; any that rebel in the future do so at Sadira's instigation—and she has troops to support them.

Sadira consolidates power quickly. She gains a total of 2d6 RP and 2d4 GB when she takes over the province. The loyalty level of the province starts at average.

Immediately, Sadira calls for help among the PC regent's neighboring enemies (if any exist) and obtains some allies. This support might take the form of extra RP or GB, troops, or anything that makes the PC regent and his Hero allies sweat.

experience awards

Debeating the NPCs in this adventure makes up most of the experience award. Smart role-playing (like helping the peasants, employing excellent strategies during War Moves, etc.) should net a PC between 100 and 1,000 XP per incident (no more than 2,000 total XP for any one character). Obviously erroneous actions decrease the total experience award by the same amount. Trying to enlist troops from a burned-out village or blatantly ignoring cries for help among the populace should decrease the experience award significantly.

continuing the adventure

If Sadira wins or survives, she becomes a thorn in the Heroes' sides. She might try agitating or contesting in other domains (those run by other PCs) or, if she has no ability to do that, she might attempt a more direct approach—assassination or brigandage.

Feel free to substitute Sadira for villains in other adventures in this book if applicable. Ally her with continuing villains in your campaign (for example, Aftane or Ghoere make good supporters for her).

On the other hand, if the PCs prove victorious, Sadira's notes may point to other villains looking to strike at one or more of the Heroes' domains. Perhaps Sadira's failed attempt at a takeover fits into a larger plot—even now, other domains could be under siege, from inside or out.

Run with it and have fun.

“All regents have enemies. Some face their foes on the field of battle, some in court. Still other regents prefer to lure their rivals out of their castles and into adventures, courting them with intrigue and danger, hoping to destroy them through their own ambitions.

“But another kind of enemy exists: the base enemy who strikes at a man’s friends, allies, or servants rather than face him directly. This enemy holds his honor cheap and brings shame upon his kingdom. Let this tale, then, be a lesson of honor for the true Hero-King. . . .”

Event Type: Matter of Justice (result of 18 on Table 15). “Poor Relations” may also be used as a Feud (result of 5).

The Heroes: At least one of the PCs should be a regent of law holdings (preferably a province ruler), or the lieutenant of such a regent; the rest can be regents, scions, or commoners. This adventure assumes the PCs are of low- to mid-level; the DM can easily accommodate higher-level parties by increasing the levels of a few NPCs.

The Challenge: Raen Olsonson, a friend or relative of one of the Heroes, is in trouble—*deep* trouble—with the NPC ruler of a neighboring domain. This young man has been accused of a heinous crime: the brutal murder of two girls. Though Raen has pled innocent, no one believes him. Even when he passes a local priest’s *detect lie* spell, people assume he has some way of hiding his evil deed from the gods.

Everyone believes the young man guilty because he has been personally accused by the NPC regent, who now holds him for sentencing. The regent has witnesses who swear the boy murdered and butchered the girls. The boy’s only favorable witnesses have disappeared.

The NPC regent, however, offers to free the boy—to banish rather than execute him—if the PC regent agrees to several outrageous demands. The NPC regent indicates that several of the PC’s other friends may also be “under investigation” and hints that the PC would be wise to comply. The Heroes should recognize the NPC regent’s words for what they are: extortion. He all but admits that he has framed the boy, and that he’ll frame others if the PC regent does not agree to his terms.

poor relations

However, the common people do not know about the NPC regent’s shady scheme and, thanks to his popularity, no one questions his word. If the Heroes do something rash—like breaking the boy out of prison—they could very well offend their own populace by showing their unwillingness to comply with other regents’ laws. They must instead investigate the crime and piece together clues to prove Raen’s innocence.

choosing the cast members

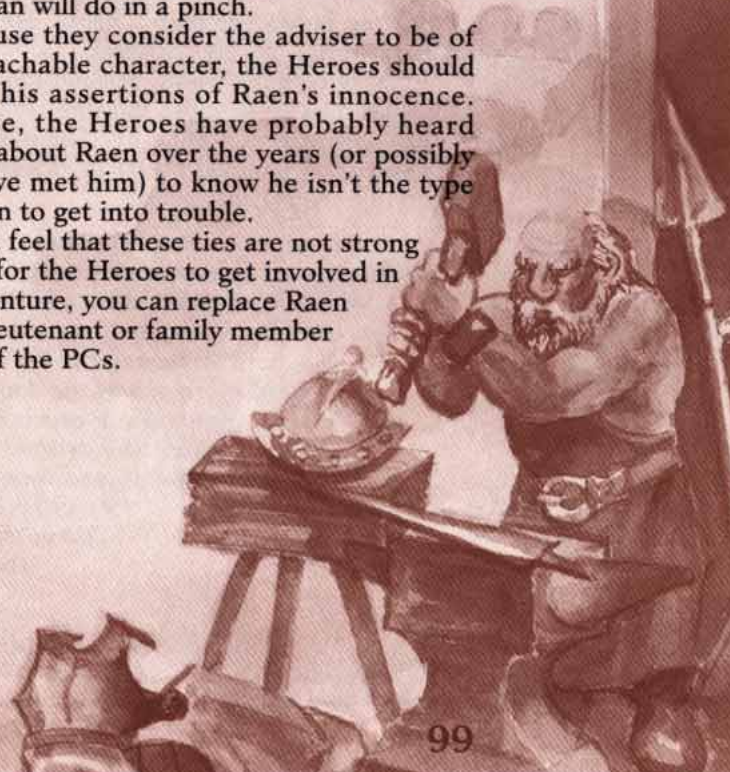
Before the adventure begins, you as the DM must determine how Raen is related to the PC regent and which of the PC’s rivals framed him.

the accused

As written, this adventure assumes Raen’s uncle is one of the PC regent’s most important advisers. The adviser should be someone the Heroes (or at least the PC regent) have come to trust over the course of several adventures or domain turns. A lieutenant or even a valued henchman will do in a pinch.

Because they consider the adviser to be of unimpeachable character, the Heroes should believe his assertions of Raen’s innocence. Likewise, the Heroes have probably heard enough about Raen over the years (or possibly even have met him) to know he isn’t the type of person to get into trouble.

If you feel that these ties are not strong enough for the Heroes to get involved in the adventure, you can replace Raen with a lieutenant or family member of one of the PCs.



the accuser

Choose a domain near that of the PC regent, one that has been in conflict with that of the PCs. Preferably, the Heroes and the domain in question currently enjoy peaceful but strained relations. The regent of the rival domain must also have evil tendencies (or have evil lieutenants who have engineered this situation on their own).

In an Anuirean campaign, Ghoere would be a likely candidate for the villainous domain; in a Khinasi campaign, Aftane would make a good choice. For simplicity's sake, this adventure will refer to the rival domain as Ghoere; feel free, however, to substitute an enemy domain more appropriate to your campaign.

introduction

The adventure begins while the PC regent holds court, administering the affairs of his domain. The other PCs may or may not be present, depending on whether they have domains of their own to rule.

Over the course of the day, the Hero notices the absence of one of his chief advisers. No one knows the adviser's whereabouts.

Eventually, the adviser appears. He seems haggard and worried, and his clothing looks like it hasn't been changed in days. The adviser dispenses with most of the formalities of court and approaches the regent directly.

"My lord," he says, gasping for breath. Someone hands the man a drink. He downs it in one gulp, nearly choking.

"I have terrible news. My nephew, Raen Olsenson, is in terrible trouble. If I might speak to you a moment. . . ?" The man looks around the crowded court as if he wished everyone would disappear.

This adviser is important enough that if he wishes a private audience he should get one. The PC regent (or, if the PC is a lieutenant, he and the NPC regent) head off to one of the court's anterooms. Everyone in the court stares silently until the door shuts—and then an eruption of murmuring and gossip breaks the silence.

the situation

The adviser paces around the small room like a caged animal. After a few moments, he speaks—at first haltingly, then all in a rush.

"I don't know what to do, my lord. Raen . . . he's a good boy. He'd never do anything like this! Never! I'd stake my life—the lives of my entire family—on it. But, but there's nothing I can do!" He looks at the regent, desperate appeal in his eyes. "Please, my lord—I need your help!"

At this point, give the regent a minute to interact with his adviser. He likely asks what's wrong and what kind of trouble plagues Raen. The adviser rubs his forehead and responds tiredly:

"I'm sorry, my liege, I haven't slept in . . . no, that's not important." He takes a deep breath and exhales, his ribcage shuddering. "My nephew has been accused of, and apprehended for, the brutal murder of two young girls." He clenches his teeth and steps forward. "I know he didn't do it, my lord! I know it!"

If the PC tries to calm him (perhaps by asking him to sit down or offering some wine) the adviser complies with any such request and soon gathers his faculties. He then answers some of the regent's questions in a more useful and orderly manner.

the adviser's tale

The adviser sent Raen to Ghoere on a simple errand—perhaps related to a prior domain action (trade route, diplomacy mission, etc.) the regent himself ordered. (If not, the adviser was looking into a possibly profitable situation on the regent's behalf.) Raen ventured forth on his mission with a companion, his best friend Hugo Landwalker—a skilled (if headstrong) negotiator and trusted ally.

At first, events went as planned—or even better than planned. The nephew returned

encouraging reports to his uncle.

Then suddenly the messages stopped. After a week of silence, the adviser received an official letter from the sheriff (or other constabulary) of the province where Raen was.

The letter stated that Raen had been arrested and imprisoned for two grisly murders—the killing of two tavern girls on the same night. Witnesses placed him at the scene; the evidence convicted him quickly. The Baron of Ghoere would soon decide Raen's sentence.

Without pause, the adviser took to his horse and rode to the town where Raen lay imprisoned. Despite his influence and some substantial bribes, he was able to see his nephew only at a distance. The young man looked physically all right, if emotionally drained.

While in Ghoere, the adviser learned what he could about the circumstances of the crime. Apparently, Raen went to a tavern to meet with some of his local business contacts. The men never showed and, according to witnesses, Raen grew increasingly belligerent and drank more and more heavily. The tavernkeeper considered calling the watch to have him removed, but knowing Raen to be a man with important connections, he held off. At closing time Raen refused to leave.

At that point the tavernkeeper went for the watch. While he was gone, Raen allegedly made contact with two young women who often frequented the tavern and took them into one of the bar's back rooms. When the tavernkeeper returned with the watch, the two girls lay dead, their bodies horribly mutilated, and Raen lay unconscious covered in their blood.

The adviser visited the tavernkeeper, who parroted this story back to him almost word for word; the adviser suspects he was coached. Raen's uncle also managed to contact a few of the tavern's late-night patrons but none of them provided any new evidence.

Out of leads and hoping for aid from the PC regent, the adviser returned home.

weak links

In addition to the adviser's mistrust of the tavernkeeper, clever PCs might perceive several other weaknesses in the case against Raen.

First of all, it appears no one even tried to locate the men Raen was supposed to meet at the tavern. No one seems to know, or care, who they were. The adviser, if asked, reports that when they didn't show up at the trial, the

sheriff declared them immaterial to the case.

Second, what happened to Hugo Landwalker? No one has heard from him since before the murders. The adviser thinks Hugo would have accompanied Raen to any meeting, since the Brechtür-born man lived for negotiations and deals.

Third, no one from the young man's family learned of his situation until after the trial and conviction. In fact, the adviser feels certain that if Raen hadn't been on an official mission, he wouldn't have learned of the boy's fate until after the sentencing.

Finally, Ghoere has never been a strong ally of the PC regent. As an emissary of the PC's domain, Raen is now at the center of an international incident—yet the PC regent has received no official dispatch from the Baron of Ghoere regarding the situation.

what really happened

As the DM, you need to know what happened so that you can drop clues as the PCs investigate.

The Baron of Ghoere concocted this plot with his counselors as a way to publically embarrass the PC regent and his most trusted adviser. The baron intends to cause the PC regent as much grief as possible, while insisting that he "cannot ignore the will of the people in matters of justice." Of course, Ghoere's prior actions (throughout the campaign or as described by helpful NPCs) belie this alleged concern for his subjects.

The frame-up is simple. The young Raen, who shows promise as a future diplomat, was sent to Ghoere on a simple errand. Raen had handled similar assignments before, but because Ghoere is such a powerful domain, his uncle sent Hugo with him as a counselor.

Once in Ghoere, Raen was contacted by some local businessmen to negotiate some sort of deal. When he suggested they talk directly to his uncle, these contacts attacked his pride by implying that if the boy was too young and inexperienced to deal with them, maybe they should take their

business elsewhere. Thinking this could be an opportunity to advance not only the cause of his domain but also his own diplomatic career, Raen found their offer more tempting each day. He did, however, have the presence of mind to consult Hugo for advice.

Hugo possessed not only the friendship and trust of young Raen, but some canny negotiation skills and a healthy dose of paranoia. Hugo managed to keep the impetuous Raen from doing anything rash (and, thereby, avoided many preliminary traps set by the baron and his cronies). His savvy, however, made him a target.

Indeed, Hugo began to suspect something rotten in the domain of Ghoere. He sent messages back to Raen's uncle informing him of these suspicions, but they were all intercepted. Cut off from support, Hugo tried to convince Raen to give up the negotiations and go home.

Rash as he was, Raen proved to be no fool. He listened to Hugo and began to suspect his fellow negotiators of stalling and dragging out the talks incessantly. He demanded one final meeting with his contacts in which he would either make his deal or end the negotiations.

Ghoere told the conspirators to move quickly. To avoid interference from Hugo, they decided to abduct him before the final meeting and catch the young noble alone. They lured Hugo away from Raen a mere hour before the meeting and sprang their trap.

The trap worked, but not in the way the conspirators intended. They succeeded in delaying and injuring Hugo, but he managed to escape. He headed for the meeting at the inn, but arrived too late.

Hugo approached the inn as the watch dragged Raen, chained, covered in blood, and half-conscious, out of the inn under heavy guard. Even late at night, this commotion drew quite a crowd. Hugo hid in the shadows, hoping to learn something.

When the soldiers and bystanders left, Hugo remained behind—hidden—while the innkeeper closed up the tavern. He

became increasingly suspicious when the innkeeper snuffed the lanterns but remained behind in the darkened main room. Hugo figured any commoner would feel too nervous to do anything of the

kind—the two butchered bodies still lay in the back room. No, any commoner would get away

from the scene as quickly as possible—unless he was afraid of something else.

A man arrived well after all other witnesses were gone. He wore a cloak and hat, but Hugo perceived chain mail under his outer garments—of the type worn only by the regent's private guard. The cloaked man spoke to the innkeeper in whispers that Hugo couldn't hear. The innkeeper only nodded in response. In the end, the innkeeper received a large, heavy bag that jingled; the shadowy figure left quietly.

Hugo followed the cloaked man. He walked around two corners, then shrugged off his heavy cloak and stood revealed as a palace guard. He made his way to the baron's castle and entered. There, Hugo could not follow.

Hugo then made a decision that showed his true valor. Rather than return to Raen's home domain, he decided to send a message by his only remaining reliable means (a carrier pigeon) and to continue hiding and spying within the city until help could arrive. If possible, he would break Raen out or uncover the truth of the situation, and return them both to their homes. If not, he would remain, gathering information and hoping for a lucky break.

important communications

Soon after the PC's adviser finishes his tale, a message arrives—bearing the official seal of Ghoere.

It has recently come to my attention that a murderer awaiting sentencing in my dungeon claims kinship with one of your chief advisers. Do you take an interest in this matter? Else I shall let our legal process run its course. —Gavin Tael

While the PC regent (probably in consultation with the other Heroes) debates how to respond to this message in light of the adviser's story, Hugo's pigeon arrives at the palace. It bears the following message:

In hiding. Raen imprisoned—evidence of a plot. Send help soon. Wear uncle's colors. Black Lion Inn. —Hugo

The fact that Hugo remains free and has managed to collect evidence of a plot should prompt the PCs to immediate action. If they try to meet with Hugo, he plans to recognize the Heroes by their clothing—Raen's uncle, like many nobles, has a set of colors (sky-blue and silver) attached to his house.

the proper approach

The PCs can choose from any number of methods to begin their investigation. The two most likely adventure scenarios are outlined here.

official visit

The PCs might elect to take the direct approach and pay Ghoere an official state visit. Indeed, the baron expects the regent (or his lieutenants) to come to him and negotiate for the boy's release.

This method holds obvious advantages: As official emissaries, the PCs do not have to sneak into the domain and they avoid (one hopes) the risk of direct attack. They can speak with the baron himself and perhaps discover some clues in the castle. Also, if they are at all stealthy they can probably break away from the castle at some point to rendezvous with Hugo at the Black Lion Inn.

The disadvantages prove obvious as well: If the Heroes enter the domain as emissaries, they cannot act as private individuals—everything they do officially represents their realm. Attacks and subterfuge may start wars or spur interdomain incidents. Their presence and movements will be monitored; they will have to deal with the regent when he wants to see them, not on their own schedule. And if Ghoere does harbor dishonorable intentions toward the PCs, the Heroes will have to defend themselves in the baron's own stronghold.

sneaking around

If the Heroes choose to venture into the enemy's lair quietly as adventurers and not as representatives of their domain, they gain some benefits at the expense of others.

They do not have to worry about the baron knowing where they are at the start of the mission. Presumably, they can enter Ghoere under cover and bypass any border guard (they're adventurers, after all). They can wander around the capital city with as much freedom as any other citizen (which might not be all that much) without attracting undue attention. They can meet Hugo at the Black Lion when they want to, with less risk of being discovered.

Of course, if an emissary does not arrive at the enemy kingdom soon, the baron might decide the PC regent does not take his threat seriously and execute Raen out of impatience. Another disadvantage: The PCs will have little or no access to official records or proceedings and, if discovered by the conspirators, can be killed with relative impunity as spies and invaders.

continuing the action

The PCs may choose the official or unofficial approach, or a combination of both (sending an envoy to meet with the baron and a strike team to meet with Hugo). Regardless of their method, the Heroes begin their investigation upon entering Ghoere—conscious that each moment brings the executioner's axe closer to Raen's neck.

Right now, they have only a few leads: the baron, Raen, Hugo, and the innkeeper.

the baron, smug manipulator

If the PCs pay an official call to the baron, he receives them with all the pomp and circumstance he would accord any other visiting diplomat. When the discussion turns from introductory pleasantries to the situation at hand, however, the baron shakes his head.



"I notified you as a matter of diplomatic courtesy. But ultimately there is little I can do for the boy. My subjects are up in arms about these murders—it was all I could do to ensure that Raen had a fair trial. Justice must be served—a true regent must respond to the will of the people."

The baron then proceeds to detail the happenings of the last few weeks—in his own, slanted (and smug) perspective.

If pressed by the Heroes to use his influence on Raen's behalf, the baron—with a great show of reluctance—makes the following offer:

"Perhaps I can help you after all. I could extradite the boy—release him into your custody—instead of having him executed. But if I am to risk the rebellion of my people, our bargain must be worth my while."

The baron then issues a list of demands the PC regent must meet. The nature of these demands is up to you as the DM, but they should be outrageous. Perhaps the baron requires vassalage from the PC regent, or a "show of good faith" in the form of half the Gold Bars in the PC's treasury—whatever will push the PC's buttons.

When the PC balks, the baron issues a thinly veiled threat:

"You know, my realm has experienced several other brutal crimes—currently unsolved—in recent months. Perhaps, as you seem to rule a domain in which justice matters little, we should investigate some of the other emissaries you have sent here this year."

Soon after, the baron excuses himself to "attend to other matters of state" while the PCs consider his proposal.

New Leads: Doubtless, the Heroes recognize extortion when they hear it. The baron's message is clear: Meet my demands, or expect more incidents of this nature. If they didn't suspect a setup—or the baron's direct involvement in it—before, they should now.

raen olsonson, captive

Obtaining an audience with Raen should not prove too difficult (the Heroes are more resourceful than the uncle). If the PCs pay an official visit to Ghoere, the baron allows the Heroes to visit Raen. If they are acting as independent adventurers, they can probably bribe or browbeat a guard into letting them see him briefly.

Since Raen is of noble blood, his cell hardly warrants the name “dungeon.” True, it is a small room high in the tower with only one tiny, barred window, but it has a real bed and doesn’t reek of human and animal waste.

Still, Raen looks dejected and broken. He hasn’t been tortured, but his apprehension did not occur without incident—he woke up in chains on the way to the tower and fought his abductors, who beat him cruelly. He receives one plain meal a day, and hasn’t changed his bloodied clothing since arriving here.

If Raen can talk to the PCs freely (he won’t talk in front of any soldiers, guards, or the baron), he’ll proclaim his innocence and give them all the information he knows:

- ◆ He and Hugo were supposed to meet two of their contacts at the Jug and Loaf Inn, but Hugo disappeared shortly before the meeting. Raen decided to go on his own. His contacts never showed up, so he ate a meal—and passed out. (He believes he was drugged.) The next thing he remembers is waking up in chains.
- ◆ The only witnesses at the trial were the innkeeper, the guard sergeant, and the other soldiers. The innkeeper cried on the stand that Raen had murdered his only daughter, and the soldiers spoke shakily of the horrible murder scene. Raen claims he remembers none of the events—a statement that passed a *detect lie* spell. The Baron’s Prosecutor declared Raen must have either blocked the crimes from his memory or been insane—which explains how he fooled the spell.
- ◆ The baron has been to visit Raen twice: once to say that his uncle had been making inquiries about him, and once to inform him that his judgment would be delayed until an emissary from the PCs’ realm came to speak on his behalf. Both times, the baron seemed to be gloating.

Raen can provide few other details. He hasn’t heard from Hugo since before the aborted meeting, but he forcefully rejects any suggestion of Hugo’s involvement in the plot. If he hears that Hugo has tried to contact the PCs, he insists they find him immediately.

If asked, Raen can describe the innkeeper’s daughter—one of the murder victims. She had light blond hair, a flat nose that may have been broken once, and a nice enough figure. She also bears a birthmark on her left shoulder, dark and about the size of a walnut. He saw it because she wore a plain, off-the-shoulder peasant dress when she served him his food.

New Leads: The Heroes may identify a few new leads in Raen’s story. First, if any of the PCs are priests capable of casting *detect lie* (even if they haven’t prayed for it recently), they’ll know mere memory loss or insanity won’t fool the power of the gods. True, other magic could defeat it, and the questioner may be fooled, but both are highly unlikely—especially when a Baron’s Prosecutor is involved.

Second, Raen says he passed out right after dinner—but according to his uncle’s investigation, the innkeeper testified that Raen spent the entire evening at the tavern getting drunk and boisterous. Perhaps the PCs can locate and question some witnesses.

hugo landswalker, fugitive

If the PCs seek Hugo, they need only go to the Black Lion and wait. Of course, they should wear some silver and sky-blue clothing if they want to be contacted.

Alternatively, they can try to locate Hugo themselves (perhaps they question his loyalty and wish to observe him covertly). They can obtain a detailed description of Hugo from Raen’s uncle or Raen himself. Either man tells the Heroes that Hugo stands about 5 feet 7 inches tall, has dark hair and eyes, and pale skin. He seldom shaves and has a drooping, black moustache. He tends to wear dark clothing, especially browns and greens, and doesn’t wear armor.

Hugo Landswalker, MBr, T7: AC 4; MV 12; hp 33; THAC0 17 (15 with rapier +2); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (rapier); SA backstab (×3 damage); SD parry; ML fanatic (17); AL NG.

Notes: Using the special two-weapon combat style of the Brechts, he receives a -3 bonus to his AC vs. one melee attack (that he can see coming) every round.

S 14, D 18, C 15, I 12, W 14, Ch 9.

Personality: Suspicious, taciturn.

Equipment: Rapier +2, main gauche +1, cloak of the bat.

Thief Abilities: PP 70, OL 62, F/RT 45, MS 75, HS 68, DN 25, CW 99, RL 40.

Hugo lurks around the Black Lion Inn (located in one of the unhealthier parts of town). Disguised, he's shaved his chin and cut off his moustache, and has given up wearing his cloak in favor of a large, gray robe (to hide his weapons) and a weather-beaten hat. He spends his evenings at the inn and his days skulking around the city, hoping to uncover something to help his friend.

If the PCs go to the Black Lion wearing silver and sky-blue, Hugo approaches them after assuring himself that there's no trap. (Hugo's paranoid, so this takes nearly an hour.) The Heroes might recognize him even in disguise (make an Intelligence check at a -6 penalty), but he will avoid contact until he's sure it's safe. Incautious Heroes may scare him away.

Should the Heroes arrive without the signature clothing, Hugo recognizes them anyway—if the PCs aren't regents of the domain Hugo serves, they are probably important enough that he's seen them around court. He becomes suspicious over the absence of the clothing he suggested, but if they give him a chance to detect a trap, Hugo eventually approaches them.

When questioned, Hugo explains that he didn't see the murders because he was abducted. (He relates the details described in "What Really Happened," above.) He did, however, notice some suspicious events going on (the payoff to the innkeeper, and the palace guard in disguise). Unfortunately, the Brecht hasn't gathered much additional information. He feels he can't go back to the Jug and Loaf—he's noticed suspicious characters spying out the

area—and he thinks the PCs may have to either give in to the enemy regent's demands or break Raen out of prison.

New Leads: Hugo has one other tidbit of information: One of the guards at the prison, Everard Gipsen, was a Brecht mercenary Hugo served with years ago. Everard was always a decent fellow (if somewhat slow) and might be counted on to aid a break-out or arrange a meeting between the PCs and Raen if they've been having trouble seeing him.

Hugo also saw the murder victims before they were carted away by the guard. He says they both appeared to be middle-aged women wearing poor dress, and both were mutilated badly. He doesn't know what became of the bodies.

the fighter's option

If the players are itching for combat by this point, throw in an encounter with some hired brigands. The conspirators have not given up searching for Hugo, and they've managed to track him to the area around the Black Lion Inn. When the disguised Hugo made contact with the strangers (the PCs), the conspirators recognized him. They quickly hired a group of brigands to attack him and anyone he talked with.

Brigands, MA & FA, F3 (2, +2 per PC): AC 5 (chain mail); MV 12; hp 17 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (club or short sword); SZ M (6' tall); ML 9 (average); Int average (8); AL N; XP 65 each.

the innkeeper, nervous conspirator

The Jug and Loaf Inn sits in a much more affluent section of town than does the Black Lion. Many of its upper windows feature views of the castle; the place is always clean and its patrons well-heeled. Its appearance notwithstanding, the inn has suffered a setback in business since the murders.

The PCs will find the place nearly deserted at almost any time of day. The innkeeper, depressed, spends his time cleaning tankards,

sweeping up, and muttering about his ill-fortune. He'll be happy—relieved, in fact—to see any customers at all . . . unless they hearken from Raen's homeland and start asking questions.

As you know, the innkeeper, Rufus Oldkemp, was involved in the plot to frame Raen. He is one of the few living people who knows Raen is innocent, and he's been paid well to keep silent. He has also been assured that his perjury will never be discovered.

And then the Heroes come along.

You, the DM, should handle Rufus as affable and solicitous, as long as no one talks in depth about the murders. If the murders are brought up in passing, Rufus acts relatively calm about the whole matter, referring to it as "a shameful waste of human life," and saying that he's "just glad they got the scum what did it."

This response should seem incongruous to PCs who have talked to Raen. One of the murder victims, Raen said, was the innkeeper's daughter, and he was very distraught over her death. In truth, the innkeeper's daughter was not involved—the conspirators thought of that little twist later—and still lives. She may even make an appearance if the PCs do nothing to betray their interest in the murders; however, she has cut her hair short and dyed it black to hide her identity. If the PCs have heard (or later hear) a description of the innkeeper's daughter, they can make Intelligence checks to recognize her.

The innkeeper answers any sort of direct questioning with parroted lies and nervousness. If the PCs have amassed enough knowledge to catch him in lies or deceptions, he'll crack.

Rufus's story is simple. He started having financial trouble some months back. The tavern tax for the district tripled and he couldn't make all the payments. After being threatened with debtor's prison, a cloaked man offered him a way out. He told Rufus as little as necessary about the plan, but the innkeeper has pieced much of it together by now. Somebody powerful wanted Raen framed for murder, so Rufus supplied the location and himself as a witness. When Rufus balked at testifying, they threatened to kill his daughter. He's under instructions to hide her and keep his mouth shut.

How the PCs get any, or all, of this information out of Rufus is up to them. He won't talk willingly but could be interrogated or tricked. He knows his life and that of his daughter won't be spared if he gives up the conspirators.

New Leads: Rufus doesn't know the name of the man who gave him the instructions, but has a good idea where to find him. Rufus has seen him marching with the local regent's honor guard and can give the PCs a description. The man is, in actuality, chief of the regent's personal guard.

If Rufus starts to spill the story, a spy flees the Jug and Loaf at first opportunity. The Heroes see him—he won't even try to be subtle—and he runs straight to the nearest guardhouse. The PCs have only a little time before guards come to attack and arrest the Heroes on a trumped-up charge.

A few moments later, brigands burst into the inn and do their best to kill the innkeeper. He is only 0-level, so that won't be hard—unless the PCs protect him. If the innkeeper survives the attack, he confesses everything in exchange for getting his daughter and himself out of the domain.

Rufus actually possesses minor proof of the conspiracy. The money he received came in a purse with the royal seal on the side—either accidentally or (more likely) to scare Rufus by showing him how high the conspiracy reached. He still has the purse (and the money) and will show it to the PCs if they save his life. Otherwise, they have to find out about it another way.

more mystery

If the Heroes uncover the purse, they may be able to find more evidence of royal involvement in the crime (for instance, the captain of the guard, or one of the spies tracking Hugo or watching the innkeeper). They may even manage to amass enough evidence to force the baron into giving up Raen and letting them go in peace.

That option lies completely with you as the DM. If the PCs role-play well and do their best, they should be rewarded with more evidence, more clues, and more informants. Some additional evidence they could find includes:

- ◆ **The Bodies:** The bodies of the two women were dragged off for inspection and kept at the guardhouse. There they remain, awaiting burial, and anyone with half an eye can tell they

were both middle-aged and poor—not the young waifs Raen is alleged to have killed. Also, though they were covered in blood from many wounds, a character with knowledge of healing can tell that they died of slashed throats. The other wounds came much later.

- ◆ **The Spies:** While the brigands know nothing of the plot, the spies who watch for Hugo and the innkeeper (and perhaps keep an eye on the PCs) know some information. If the Heroes lay a trap, they could catch a conspirator.
- ◆ **The Secret Witness:** The innkeeper had instructions to get everyone out of the tavern by midnight, when the plan took effect. He did so, with one exception: One of the overnight guests, a friend of Rufus, woke with a case of the midnight munchies. Creeping downstairs with the intention of raiding the larder, this customer inadvertently witnessed the murders. He has since been hiding out, pretending he saw nothing. If Rufus is killed or disappears, he may come forward hoping to avenge or save the innkeeper's life.

more action

If the Heroes have bad luck amassing evidence, they might consider a jailbreak. Hugo helps them, as does his guard contact, and the innkeeper (if he is still alive) might even become an asset. If the PCs choose this course, they have to infiltrate or scale a guard tower, open some strong locks, break out again and run for the border. They fight guards and maybe even magical wards, and the adventure could end on a very exciting—if messy—note.

conclusion

This adventure can end in many different ways. The PCs could negotiate for Raen's release, using their knowledge (if any) of the enemy regent's complicity in the murder. If they can convince conspirators or witnesses to come forth and accuse each other, so much the better. The more concrete evidence they have, the more likely Raen's release at no cost to themselves.

Of course, breaking Raen out is perfectly acceptable as well. If this causes a war or an incident, the PCs will then have to deal with it.

Leaving Raen to his fate should not be an acceptable option. Should the situation come to that, some third party—perhaps an NPC group hired by Raen's uncle—takes action, prompting the PCs to explore one of the former options.

rewards

For every piece of evidence or significant clue the Heroes uncover that points to Raen's innocence, they should each receive between 100 and 500 XP. Even if they aren't able to clear Raen, they should get experience for proving, to themselves, that he is innocent. Breaking him out of prison, or saving him in some other way, is not nearly as noble or difficult as proving his innocence and effecting his release.

Turning the plot back on the enemy regent and forcing him to fall back from his aggressive stance gains each Hero 1,000 XP. This accomplishment should be extraordinarily difficult, probably requiring the Heroes to track down the captain of the guard (the chief conspirator) and force him to confess. Still, enough evidence, combined with some arm-twisting, could get the job done.

Effecting a jail-break should be difficult and is worth up to 500 XP for each participating PC—assuming it is done in a clever and daring manner. The DM will have to come up with some traps and obstacles apart from the usual guards for the Heroes to bypass or overcome, but the scenario should be exciting.

Should the PCs accomplish the mission, they also gain the thanks and gratitude of Raen's uncle. If any of the PCs are regents in a realm where the adviser has influence, give each of them 5 bonus Regency Points during the next domain turn, as the court adviser goes out of his way to make sure everyone knows how heroic the PCs actually were.

fang of kriesha

"Knights in bright armor, wizards throwing fiery spells, and priests performing miracles before awe-struck crowds . . . these are the heroes that populate the legends of Cerilia, the legends of the Hero-Kings.

"But there were other heroes among our ancestors as well. Sometimes might and magic were not enough to carry the day; sometimes a wizard's spells or a priest's holy miracles could not save the land from those who threatened it. Sometimes heroes were born out of the shadows, in the back alleys and dark streets where we know them the least . . . but need them the most.

"This is a tale of one such occasion. A great evil threatened to infest the land and control the hearts and minds of its people. Hurthang the Cold, War Priest of Belinik, came out of the northlands and spoke to the fear and envy of the people. They harkened to him because all was not as they wished it. Hurthang preyed upon their gullibility and anxiety until he had a toehold in a mighty province. And where Hurthang's toe landed, his heavy foot was sure to follow. . . ."

Event Type: Heresy or Great Captain (result of 19 on Table 15). "Fang of Kriesha" may also be used as an Unrest or Rebellion (result of 17) event in a domain with low enough loyalty.

The Heroes: This legend is most appropriate for mid-level rogues and other characters willing to use subtlety, stealth, and cleverness over brute force and powerful magic. Even though a group of warriors or wizards could eliminate Hurthang and his minions, the most satisfactory outcome of the adventure occurs only if Hurthang is defeated by his own pride and by his own means.

"Fang of Kriesha" is designed for four to six mid- to low-level PCs (total number of levels not to exceed 24). The adventure is most interesting (and immediate) if one of the Heroes is a beginning regent of law or temple holdings, but any PCs will do—as long as they are acting on behalf of a regent in a friendly, generally good domain.

The Challenge: Hurthang the Cold is a Vos scion and a War Priest of Belinik. After an unsuccessful coup attempt against one of Vos-

gaard's regents, Hurthang wisely chose to flee south with a small group of followers. Before he left, however, he managed to procure from a rival sect an ancient artifact: the *Fang of Kriesha*.

Kriesha (also known among the Vos as "the Ice Lady" and "the Winter Witch") is a terrible northern goddess who can take the form of a giant winter wolf. Kriesha's priests, always women, wield significant power in Vosgaard—power that over the years has engendered jealousy in many of Belinik's priests, Hurthang included.

The *Fang of Kriesha* is said to be an actual tooth from the mouth of Kriesha's wolf form. Legends disagree about how the tooth found its way into human hands; most of Kriesha's priestesses believe the goddess herself sent it as a gift to her faithful followers, while some priests of Belinik say their god ripped it from her mouth during a battle between the two avatars.

Whichever the case, Kriesha's priestesses value and hallow the *Fang*, and curse the day Hurthang managed to steal it from their clutches. He claimed it as a trophy of the War Priests of Belinik and carried it south, where Kriesha's power is the weakest. He has used its magic to impress and intimidate people in the local provinces.

Hurthang intends to undermine and subvert the local people's faith, then take advantage of the state of agitation to establish holdings in area provinces. When the adventure begins, he already controls several 0-level temple and/or law holdings in any provinces where the PCs (or their employers/friends) control like domains. He intends to expand his influence and subvert the power of local regents until he can dominate their realm(s).

The province ruler (who does not have to be a PC, but should at least be on friendly terms with the Heroes) cannot simply use his military might to oust Hurthang. Hurthang the Cold has used his own priestly powers, his followers' strength, and the power of the *Fang* to make himself a force among the people. Many will rally to his banner if the situation comes to war, and the ruler will end up with his provinces in rebellion if he attempts an out-and-out fight.

However, if the Heroes can somehow discredit Hurthang and weaken him at the same time, the rightful regent can agitate against him and cause the people to turn away from the war priest. Further, if

Hurthang's own followers start to lose confidence in him, his influence over the local people will fade quickly.

The best way to weaken Hurthang's credibility is to steal the *Fang of Kriesha*. Hurthang has made much, publicly, of his treasure, and boasts that as long as he holds the artifact no force can stand against him. He calls himself "blessed of Belinik" because he holds the sign of his god's favor, and claims he has the right to use the *Fang* because he holds it.

If the *Fang* were stolen from Hurthang, he would lose prestige (not to mention regency) and many of his own followers would likely desert him. Also, because the *Fang* has certain magical powers that Hurthang has used to impress the locals (claiming that only he can use the *Fang* in the way Belinik has decreed), a PC wielding the *Fang* would demonstrate that it is nothing but a powerful magical artifact, not a symbol of favor from the gods.

So the Heroes' mission is simple: infiltrate or break into Hurthang's stronghold, steal the *Fang of Kriesha*, and demonstrate its powers to the people. If they can do that, Hurthang will have little choice but to give up his usurpation attempts in the PCs' provinces.

The Heroes, if successful, will have much to reward their efforts. Gaining the *Fang of Kriesha* should be a powerful incentive for the PCs to embark on this adventure, though it is up to the DM whether they keep it or not. Kicking Hurthang out of the area will help any regents worried about being contested or agitated against during the domain turn. And completing this mission without slaughtering the citizens of the domain should generate loyalty and regency for any PC ruler (of any type of holding), as well as the gratitude of any NPC rulers in the area. (Nobody likes having Hurthang around.)

introducing hurthang

Begin this adventure by announcing during a domain turn that the PC regents in a given area are being agitated against. Hurthang has only a few Regency Points to spend (DM's option as to how many), but he has a

number of 0-level holdings in at least one PC regent's domain.

The agitation should surprise everyone, as it seems to have come out of nowhere.

The Heroes most likely investigate the situation. Their informants, contacts, and advisers tell them what they know of Hurthang (which is very little). They say that a priest and his followers have begun to introduce a new religion to the people of the provinces—one that can affect temple, law, and even guild holdings. Hurthang and his followers preach that the peasants are being unfairly subjugated by those who just happen to be born with the right blood, and that they must learn to strike back at their oppressors. By spreading his agitation among several different domains, Hurthang hopes to sow confusion and disharmony.

Soon, tales from the countryside begin to trickle in: stories of Vos priests killing gnoll and goblin raiding parties, smiting bandits, and using miracles unseen before in this land to help peasants and traders. The reports also tell of Hurthang the Cold, a priest with a holy artifact in one hand and an axe in the other—*he*, the peasants say, really *cares* about what's happening in the provinces, because he is out there doing something about it.

This news should make all the local regents feel pretty uncomfortable. Priest regents will see the Temple of Belinik as a rival for the people's attention. Guildmasters will notice a drop in revenue when Hurthang starts providing free food and shelter to the peasants. Naturally, law regents will feel the pinch—Hurthang cries out for rebellion against "the people's enemies" (who, of course, happen to be the Heroes themselves).

Imply to the regents involved that simply sending the army out to obliterate Hurthang and his followers would be an extraordinarily bad move. Obviously, Hurthang has been working at this plot for months and he has sown lies among the people—the chief one being that the local rulers cannot stomach dissenting opinions or a voice that "dares to tell the truth." Sending an army into the field would simply prove to the peasants that Hurthang is right.

So the Heroes must use subtlety. The regents and their most trusted allies (ideally other PCs, though some NPCs can be included as well) should go out and investigate Hurthang and the Temple of Belinik.

finding the temple

Any regent or character familiar with the local area should have little trouble locating Hurthang's main temple. The DM should place the Temple of Belinik near the northern border of a domain in which the PCs have an interest. Ideally, this will be a sparsely inhabited province the Heroes haven't visited recently.

The PCs' advisers and contacts will be able to narrow down the temple's location to within a few square miles—no one is keeping its location a secret, but too intense a questioning by known operatives of a regent will make the locals suspicious and, perhaps, alert Hurthang that trouble approaches.

If the Heroes choose to set out with a small party to find the temple and learn more about Hurthang, they are following the ideal course of this adventure. Should they refuse to take the advice of their trusted advisers and friends and set out with a large retinue, you might have to adapt encounters accordingly.

on the road

The Heroes first encounter the War Priests of Belinik while journeying to the temple. The party is within a day's ride when it comes upon an overturned wagon, a pair of peasants, and a small group of brigands. The brigands are robbing and assaulting the helpless peasants.

Brigands, MA, F3 (6): AC 6 (ring mail and shield); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 22, 20, 24, 25, 19, 27; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); SZ M (5' 8" tall); ML average (8); Int average (8); AL CN; XP 65 each.

The brigands have actually been hired by a war priest in disguise. They were told to assault the peasants but not kill them and to run off when the war priests set upon them.

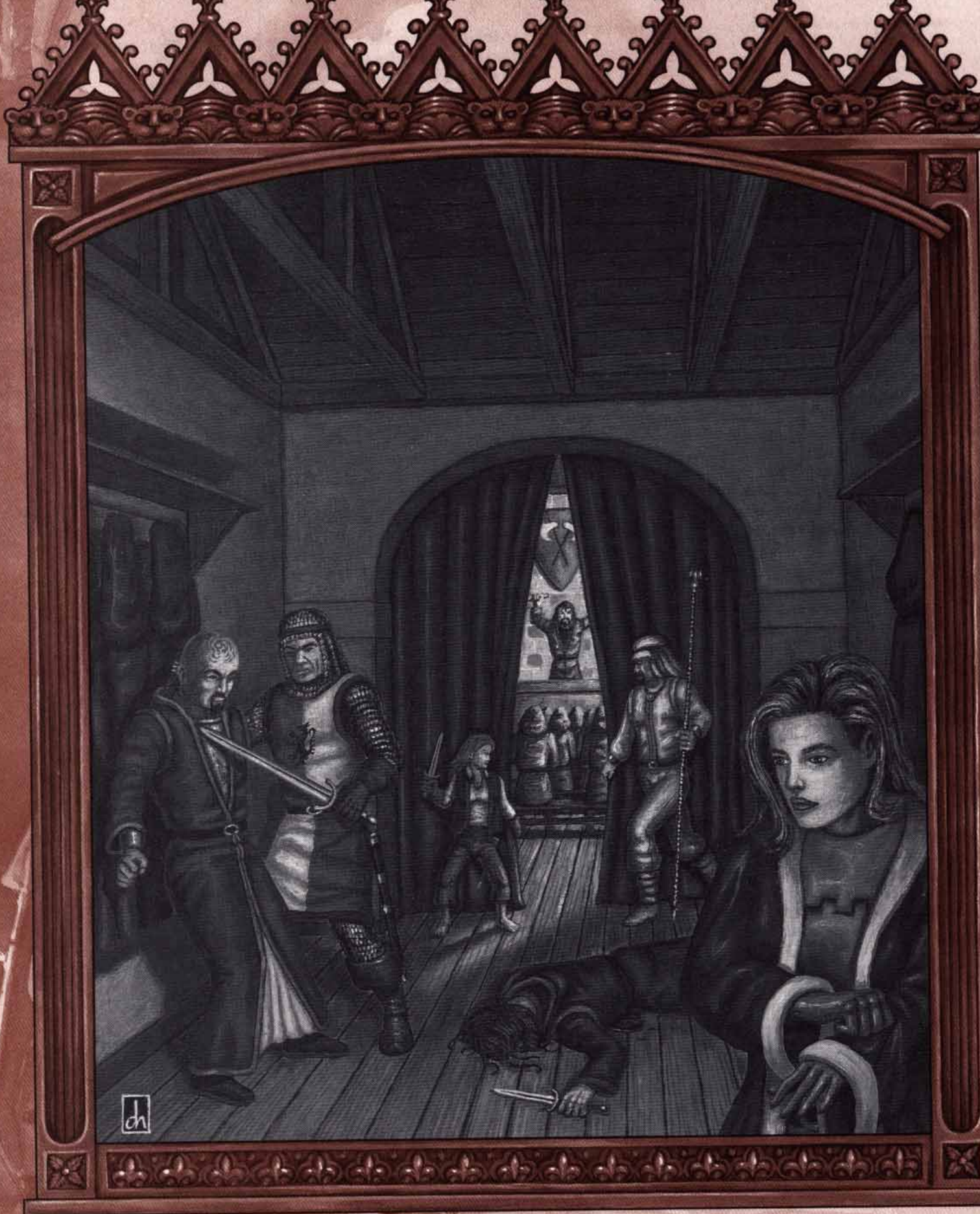
At this point, the PCs have two rounds in which they can do something. After two rounds, a group of peasants led by a tall, fierce man wielding a battle axe and wearing leather armor crashes out of the woods and starts attacking the brigands.



The axe-wielder is a War Priest of Belinik. He hired the brigands, then raised a group of peasants to rescue the brigands' victims. Though the war priest ordered the brigands to flee upon his arrival, he intends to allow his men to slaughter the brigands so that they can never tell the tale.

The war priest, whose name is Victorr, will be surprised by the Heroes' presence and will react in one of two ways:

- ◆ **If the PCs' appearance obviously distinguishes them as nobility**, he will cry out that the PCs hired the brigands and incite his men to attack them as well. See "A Fight Breaks Out," below.
- ◆ **If the PCs look like wanderers or—better yet—peasants**, the war priest will continue attacking the brigands until they are all dead or fled and then try to convert the PCs to the fellowship of Hurthang and Belinik. See "Comrades in Arms," below.



ch

a fight breaks out

If Victorr suspects that the PCs are nobles or operatives of a regent, he will incite a fight between the Heroes and the peasants even though he knows his men are only marginally trained and will probably be slaughtered. He will try to make certain that all the brigands die in the conflict (they know they were hired to assault the farmers, even though they don't know it was he who hired them), then will flee into the woods and make his way back to the temple. If he escapes, Hurthang will be alerted (see "Alert!" below) to the Heroes' involvement in the adventure.

Victorr, War Priest of Belinik, MV, Pr4: AC 7 (leather); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 31; THAC0 18 (17 with hand axe, his weapon of choice); #AT 3/2 with hand axe; Dmg 1d6 (hand axe); SZ M (5' 10" tall); ML elite (14); AL LE; XP 420.

S 15, D 8, C 13, I 8, W 10, Ch 11.

Equipment: 2 hand/throwing axes; holy symbol of Belinik; spell components.

Personality: Zealous, intimidating, persuasive when he tries to be.

Spells (4/2): 1st—*command*, *cure light wounds*, *curse*, *fear*; 2nd—*charm person*, *enthrall*.

Peasant followers, MA & FA, F1 (10): AC 10 (no armor); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 10, 10, 9, 9, 8, 8, 7, 7, 6, 5; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (club); SZ M (5' 6" tall); ML elite (13); Int average (8); AL N; XP 15 each.

Notes: At least one or two of the peasants is under the effects of a *charm person* spell and will not have to check morale unless Victorr is killed, rendered unconscious, or flees.

The peasants have been trained by Victorr and are loyal to Hurthang. They will not believe that Hurthang is evil or that this whole encounter was a setup no matter what the PCs do or say. They will fight the Heroes if Victorr commands it, though they will probably flee if they are terribly outmatched. They all know the exact location of the temple and will not hide this knowledge, even if the PCs are hostile—Hurthang has told them repeatedly to direct anyone they encounter to one of his holdings.

comrades in arms

If Victorr believes the PCs are commoners or very low-ranking nobles, he will use his heavily accented tongue to cajole and persuade them to stop by the Temple of Belinik and hear the "true words" of Hurthang.

If the PCs respond in a nonthreatening manner, no alert will be raised at the temple (see "Alert!" below). Victorr will direct friendly characters to the temple but will not accompany them: His mission is to "patrol" the area and "spread the word" about Hurthang and the great god Belinik.

clues for the clever

Perceptive PCs could pick up several clues during this encounter:

- ◆ **If the Heroes can somehow wrest a brigand from the battle and keep him alive**, the bandit will not hesitate to tell them that he and his compatriots were hired to attack—but not kill—the peasants. They expected the war priest and his followers to show up; however, they were told that the peasants would only pretend to attack and that they were to flee after putting up weak resistance.
- ◆ **Victorr's alignment is lawful evil**. Even if the PCs don't have a *know alignment* or *detect evil* spell at their disposal, they will witness definite indications of Victorr's cruelty if they spend any time with the man. Among the more graphic indications: He will terminate any wounded or helpless brigands—even if they surrender—proclaiming that "it is the will of Belinik."
- ◆ **Particularly observant characters will notice** that at least one or two of the peasants following Victorr seem a little too obedient and compliant—even for fanatics—especially since Victorr orders his troops around with thinly-veiled contempt. They have been *charmed*.
- ◆ **The peasants are, undoubtedly, peasants**. Where a group of peasants, poorly armed and unarmored, learned to fight so well should be a valid question.



Do not give away this information, but try to prompt the players through role-playing to ask questions that reveal the answers. Clever characters should be able to hide their opinion of Victorr's bully tactics to gain the information they need.

back on track

The encounter with Victorr concluded, the Heroes can continue their expedition to the temple and now might even know its exact whereabouts (if they talked much with Victorr or the peasants). If the PCs do not yet feel they have enough information about Hurthang or the temple, they can canvas the area to learn more about the *Fang of Kriesha* and the extent of Hurthang's power in the area. If the PCs instead decide to head straight for the temple, skip this section and go to "A Rose By Any Other Name."

local rumor

The Heroes can stop in any nearby village, farm, or inn and hear tales of Hurthang and the *Fang of Kriesha*—they are the talk of the territory, and any sort of question will elicit a tale or rumor about the Temple of Belinik and its followers. The following are several examples of these rumors; reveal information at your discretion.

the fang of kriesha

The PCs might hear several different tales about the *Fang*. All include the following "facts":

- ◆ **The *Fang* is a giant tooth** wrested from the evil Winter Witch, Kriesha, by the great warrior god, Belinik. It carries some of the goddess's essence inside it, granting its rightful wielder (Hurthang) marvelous powers.
- ◆ **Hurthang wields the *Fang*** during every daily service at the Temple of Belinik, just up the road. That he possesses it is an obvious sign of the god's favor.
- ◆ **The *Fang* is enchanted** so that only the rightful wielder can hold it. Anyone who sullies it with their unhallowed hands will be frozen in ice/transformed into a cold wind/torn apart by ice wolves summoned out of the north. (Opinions vary regarding what will happen to the unfortunate fool.)

hurthang the cold

The "facts" churning in the rumor mill about the chief war priest should sound more than a little artificial to any Hero familiar with the machinations of agitation and intrigue:

- ◆ **Hurthang left the northlands** when the barbarian Vos refused to heed his call to order. He will one day return and force the Vos to live like civilized people (like the people here, of course).
- ◆ **The war priest is teaching the peasants** how to defend themselves because the nobility should not have a monopoly on power. Strength is the only answer to the problems that plague the common man.
- ◆ **Hurthang does not advocate rebellion or disobedience . . .** but he says it will come naturally because the rulers of this land are oppressive and evil.

the temple of belinik

Of all the topics fueling the rumor mill, talk about the temple itself is the most likely to be true. The Heroes can obtain directions to the temple from anyone in the area.

- ◆ **The temple is a remodeled inn.** The innkeeper, when he heard a true priest was coming to the area, voluntarily gave up his business and his home so Hurthang could have a base of operations. Most believe that the innkeeper and his family have gone to another province on Hurthang's behalf to spread the word of Belinik.
- ◆ **Hurthang and at least three or four acolytes are always at the temple.** They hold daily services, followed by arms training. Several young men and women of the area, formerly layabouts and thieves, have found honest work with Hurthang as guards and assistants.
- ◆ **The war priests welcome all people** to the temple, though nobles and "tools of the oppressors" will find it a cold welcome indeed.
- ◆ **Donations from worshipers** wishing to enter the temple are not required but are encouraged. Most of the people donate food, livestock, or piecework, since the nobles keep all the gold from the peasants.

works of the war priests

Since the war priests arrived in the area, rumors have spread about the contributions they have made to the province.

- ◆ **Bandits and criminals fear Hurthang.** The worst have been killed or driven away, while “misguided youths” have been converted to the order of Belinik.
- ◆ **A northern lord in another domain tried to assassinate Hurthang** (to keep him from spreading the true word), and his people rose up against him in a great rebellion.
- ◆ **Generally, everyone favorably regards the war priests’ presence.** Sure, the priests are pretty harsh with criminals and they do require some considerable upkeep, but having them around is a lot better than being ignored and abused by the nobles and the bandits.

the unconvinced

You may also choose to work in a few unfavorable stories and rumors about Hurthang and the temple—undoubtedly some people exist who are discontented with or worried about Hurthang and the Temple of Belinik. However, Hurthang has encouraged the peasants to identify any malcontents to him so that he can “bring to their ears the true word of Belinik.” Such “malcontents” will exercise caution and approach the PCs only if they feel sure the Heroes are not Hurthang’s men in disguise.

If you think the PCs need assistance against Hurthang, some skeptical or desperate NPCs might come out of the woodwork to offer their abilities. Some possible NPC allies include:

- ◆ **Baronet Noelon Reison:** This scraggly young man has been following Hurthang for over a year. A former lieutenant in a province Hurthang visited some 16 months ago, the baronet made the mistake of sending armed men after Hurthang. While the priest was forced to flee for his life, the peasants caused such an uprising in his province that Reison’s liege lord had no choice but to pillory and exile the baronet rather than risk an open rebellion. Reison seeks revenge against Hurthang and will help in any way he can.

- ◆ **Abriana Kasarji:** A local bandit leader, Abriana saw two of her best men “convert” to the faith of Belinik. Certain that they fell under the effects of a *charm person* spell, she seeks to free them. (They are among Hurthang’s temple guards.)
- ◆ **Torele Bootblack:** The nephew of the innkeeper who “donated” his inn to the War Priests of Belinik, this young man is convinced that Hurthang killed his uncle, aunt, and cousins and then spread lies about the inn being given to the worship of Belinik. Unfortunately, Hurthang has convinced most of the locals that Torele, always a rogue, conspires to oust Hurthang because he resents his uncle’s conversion to the true faith.

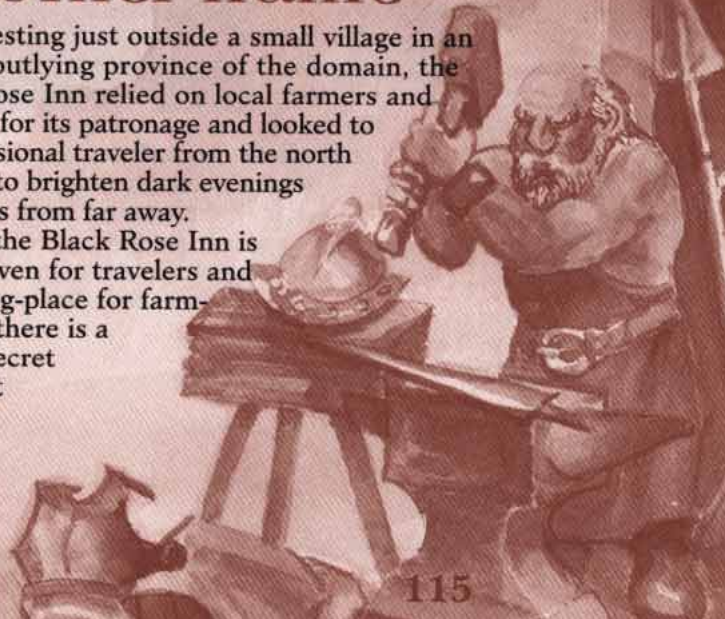
These NPCs can be 0-level or higher, depending on the party’s needs. Remember: This is supposed to be a thief’s, or at least a subtle, adventure—none of the NPCs should be used to encourage a bold, frontal assault on the temple.

But the NPCs can be useful in other ways. Reison has seen the *Fang* in action and can describe at least a few of its powers accurately. He also has become at least passingly familiar with the faith of Belinik and can probably tell the Heroes about the god and his followers (see the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook* and *Atlas*). Abriana is a rogue with some contacts among the local thieves who haven’t been scared off by the war priests. Torele knows the inn fairly well; he can identify which parts of the “temple” have been built since the takeover and can describe most of the building’s features.

a rose by any other name

Resting just outside a small village in an outlying province of the domain, the Black Rose Inn relied on local farmers and villagers for its patronage and looked to the occasional traveler from the north country to brighten dark evenings with tales from far away.

Now the Black Rose Inn is still a haven for travelers and a meeting-place for farmers, but there is a darker secret behind it as well.



Hurthang and his followers arrived at the inn nearly a year ago. At first, they “spread the word” by canvassing the local countryside, befrienders villagers and farmers. But they needed a place to hold services and chose the Black Rose. The innkeeper and his wife soon grew concerned for their business and their children—while Hurthang disguised his evil when he was out among the people, at “home” he was brutal and cruel.

The innkeeper asked Hurthang and his people to leave. In a fit of rage, the war priest killed the man, then his wife and children. To cover up his crime, he buried the family in the cellar and planted the rumor that they had “donated” the Black Rose Inn and “gone on a pilgrimage” to spread the word of Belinik. A few subtly cast *charm person* spells, mixed with the right number of *enthralls*, convinced most people of the story. Those who didn’t buy it found life very unsafe around the Black Rose.

the new neighbor

When the Heroes arrive, Hurthang could be in one of several places. If services are going on, he will be in the church. Otherwise, he will either be on the training ground (20% chance), upstairs making plans or praying (40% chance), at or near the altar preparing for services (20% chance), or outside—but in the immediate vicinity—spreading the word among the peasants.

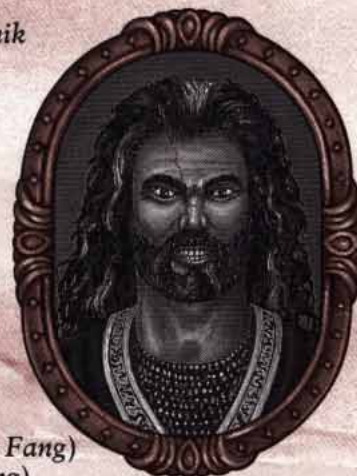
If the PCs arrive at night, he will either be sleeping in his private quarters (60% chance) or in the church holding a private service (40% chance).



hurthang the cold

9th-level priest of Belinik

S:	12
D:	9
C:	17
I:	13
W:	17
Ch:	16
AL:	LE
AC:	2
hp:	60
MV:	6
THAC0:	16 (13 with Fang)
#AT:	1 (3/2 with Fang)
Dmg:	1d6+3 (Fang)
XP:	8,000



Bloodline: Vorynn, major, 30.

Blood Abilities: Character reading, travel.

Equipment: *Fang of Kriesha* (weapon of choice; see full description below), *chain mail* +2, two hand/throwing axes (1d6 dmg), key to his private quarters.

Spells Usually Available: 1st—*command*, *endure cold/endure heat* (×2), *protection from good*, *purify food and drink*, *sanctuary*; 2nd—*charm person* (×3), *enthrall* (×2), *spiritual hammer*; 3rd—*dispel magic* (×2), *cure disease*, *remove curse*; 4th—*leadership* (×2, ToM), *tongues*; 5th—*flame strike*. Also: *fear* once per day. If the temple is on alert, Hurthang might have had time to pray for different (more offensive) spells.

Description: 5 feet 10 inches tall. Autocratic, charismatic, imperious.

Background: Hurthang got his nickname “the Cold” by building a reputation for brutality even among the Vos. When an enemy of Hurthang’s was captured alive by his men, the war priest would take that person out onto the northern ice floes and strip him down, using his priestly magic to protect his victim from the cold. Then, he would have his followers cut a hole in the ice and put the man in it—up to his knees, waist, or neck, depending on how much this person had angered Hurthang. Still protected by Hurthang’s spells, the person would feel no discomfort, but would soon be unable to move as the ice hardened quickly around him. When the ice was solid again, Hurthang would leave the man to wait for the priest’s cold resistance spells to wear off . . .

and contemplate the offense he had given to the priest of Belinik. Seldom did anyone ever have a second opportunity to get on the bad side of Hurthang the Cold.

Since he obtained the *Fang of Kriesha*, the artifact has become Hurthang's weapon of choice. As such, Hurthang gains +1 to attacks and can attack 3 times per 2 rounds when using it. Hurthang has made use of the *Fang's* power enough times that in return he now suffers a -1 penalty to saving throws vs. fire-based attacks and +2 to each die of damage from fire-based attacks.

During worship services and times when Hurthang expects trouble (such as when the temple is on alert), Hurthang carries the *Fang of Kriesha* on his person. At other times he locks it safely away in his private quarters. If caught without the *Fang*, he will use his hand axes in combat.

Note that as a high-level priest of Belinik, Hurthang gains a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. mind-affecting magic.

the fang of kriesha

Whether the PCs believe the legend of the *Fang of Kriesha* or not, it is still a very potent magical item. It grants the following powers to its wielder:

- ◆ It may be used as a *melee weapon* +3, but it requires a separate proficiency to use effectively.
- ◆ The wielder may summon a 12HD ice elemental (same stats as an Elemental, Water from the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome) once per day. If the wielder is a follower of Kriesha, the elemental will obey the summoner for one hour and then depart, otherwise it will have to be persuaded or magically commanded for that time.
- ◆ The wielder gains a 25% magic resistance when holding or carrying the *Fang*.
- ◆ The wielder may cast each of the following spells once per day at the 12th level of ability: *chill touch*, *cone of cold*, *wall of ice*. *Monster summoning V* may be cast once per week to summon winter wolves only.

Being a powerful artifact, the *Fang* does exact some penalties from those who use it. The artifact has the following effects on its wielder:

- ◆ The first time one of the *Fang's* powers is used (beyond using it as a melee weapon), the caster accepts a -1 to all saving throws vs. fire-based attacks and a +1 to every die of damage inflicted by fire-based attacks. After each use of a power thereafter, the wielder must roll a saving throw vs. spell or accrue a cumulative -1 penalty to saving throws and +1 to each die of damage from fire-based attacks.
- ◆ If the wielder is not a worshiper of Kriesha, any priestess of Kriesha who comes into contact with the wielder must succeed at a saving throw vs. rod at -2 or instantly know the *Fang* is in a nonbeliever's possession. Any priestess who comes to this realization has no choice but to try to retrieve the *Fang* for Kriesha in any way possible.

The Heroes, of course, have no knowledge (at least at the beginning of the adventure) of Hurthang's abilities or the *Fang's* properties. Any Vos character has a chance to know something useful about either Hurthang or the *Fang*. (Have the PC make an Ancient History proficiency or Intelligence check to know some of the *Fang's* history; the DM decides how much he knows.) Bards can make their normal lore checks to have knowledge of the *Fang*. Unless non-Vos PCs have been adventuring in Vosgaard recently, they probably haven't heard much about Hurthang himself.

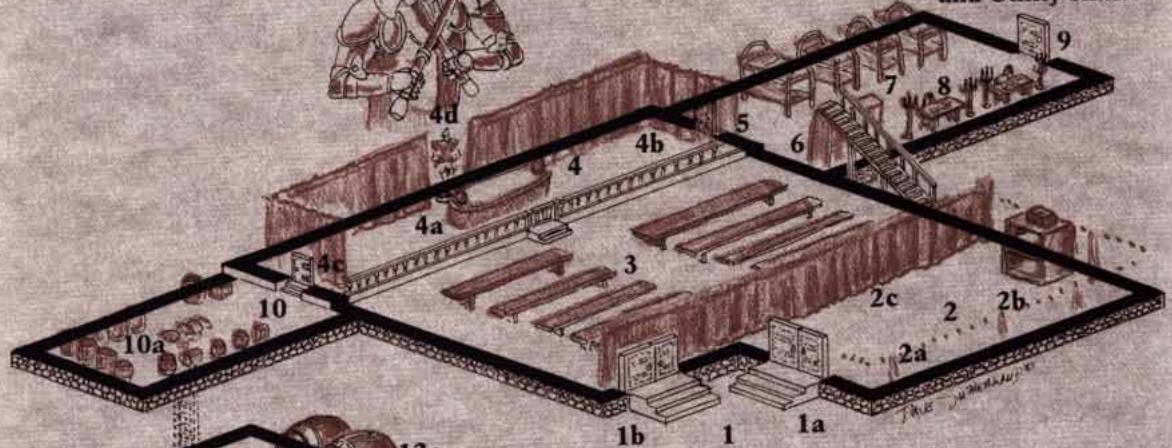
the temple of belinik

Since Hurthang's takeover, the inn and its grounds have been given over to worship of the war god Belinik. The inn has been remodeled, new additions have been built, and the grounds have been converted to a small training field. The Temple of Belinik bears more resemblance to an armed outpost than either the inn it used to be or the church it is supposed to be.

Temple of Belinik



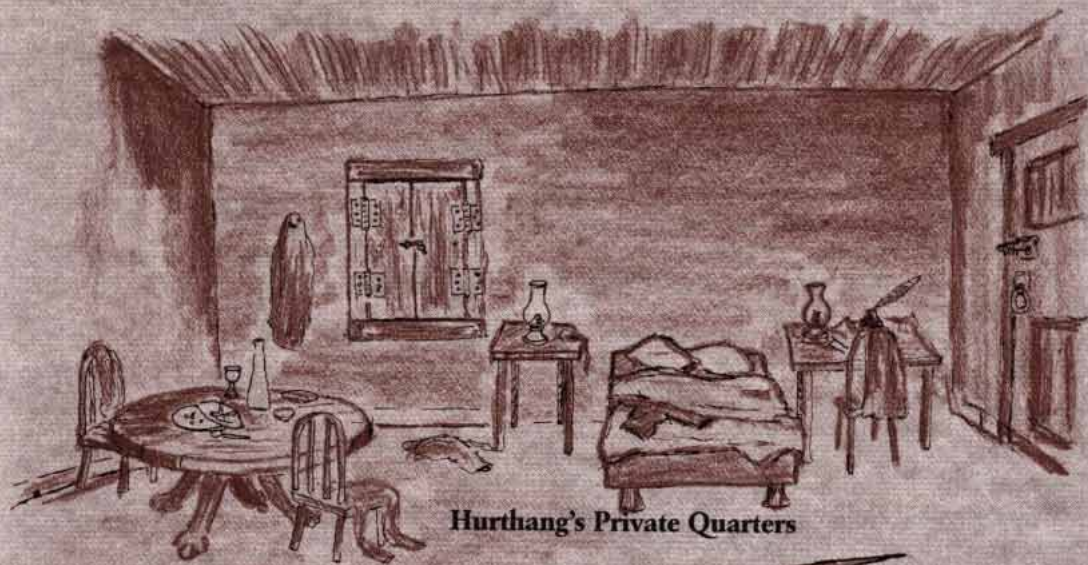
To Training Field
and Utility Shack



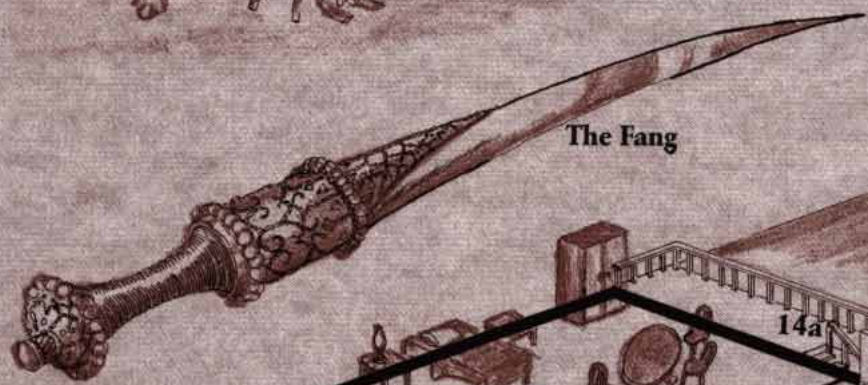
Main Floor



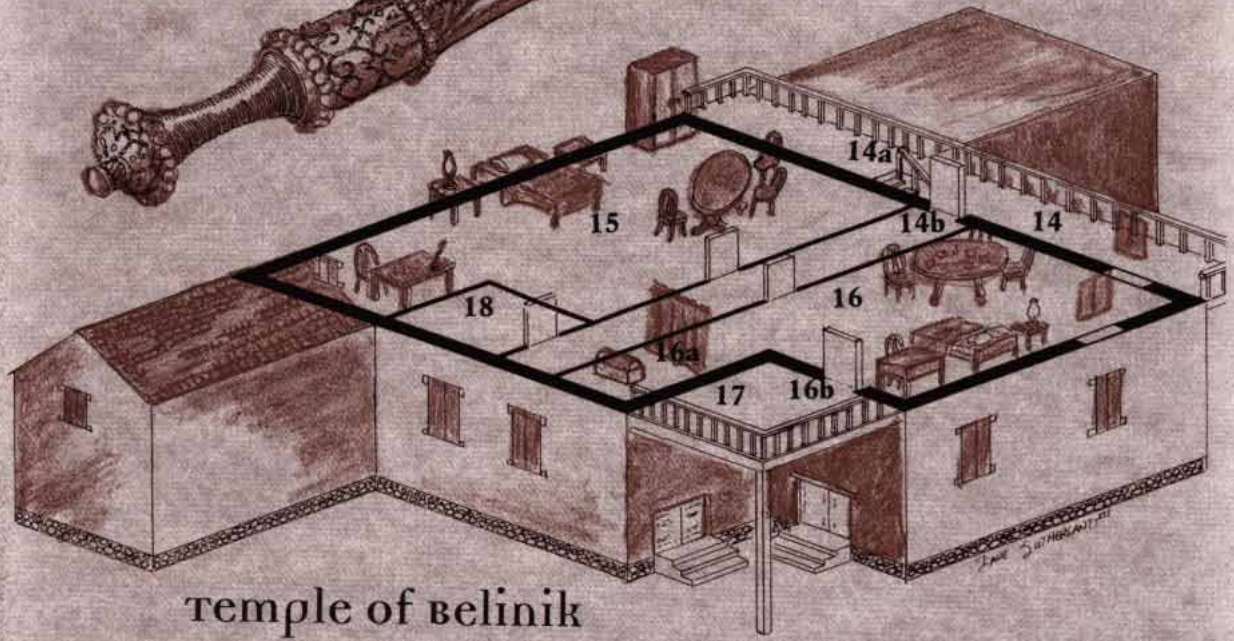
1 inch = 20 feet



Hurthang's Private Quarters



The Fang



temple of belinik
Upper Floor

It should be noted that Belinik's worshipers in Vosgaard conduct their services (and sacrifices) outdoors. However, because Hurthang is trying to disguise the brutal nature of the god from the local authorities (and the peasants he hopes to win over), he conducts his services indoors.

The "Temple of Belinik" map on pages 118–119 shows an overhead view of the temple and its grounds. The large building is the temple, which has three obvious entrances. The main doors, at the southeastern corner of the building, are sheltered by a porch-balcony. The northeast corner features a new addition to the building, with a door in the side that leads toward the practice field. Also on the north side of the temple, an outdoor staircase leads to an entrance on the second floor.

The building on the opposite side of the practice field is a small utility shack once used by the innkeeper, and now by the war priests, for storing garden implements and tools. Most of the tools are rusty and forgotten except for a scythe—that is kept polished and clean. The grass in the training field must be kept short.

the training field

The training field is about 100 feet long and 50 feet wide. Archery targets line the eastern edge (the peasants have to learn to shoot into the sun in the morning, after all), and a well-trodden sparring pit occupies the west end.

On a normal day, two to four war priests will be on the training field at any given time, either practicing with their weapons or teaching eight to twenty 0- to 1st-level fighters and rogues how to use their weapons. These trainers perform one of the main duties of a war priest: teaching the peasants how to fight. Few regents looking on this scene should feel comfortable.

If the temple is on alert (see sidebar), the war priests will pay far less attention to their trainees than to the surrounding area. They will be armed, ready for an attack at any time and very hard to surprise. They will also distribute real weapons to their charges, instructing them that, should the temple need them, they must be ready to die for Belinik's cause. The war priests are not above using a few *charm person* spells on anyone who seems a little hesitant.

alert!

Throughout the adventure, opportunities arise for the war priests to learn or suspect the Heroes' intentions and go into a state of "alert." (For example, if the PCs got involved in Victorr's fight on the road and things went poorly, the temple might be alerted to the fact that someone is poking around and trying to act against Hurthang.) Many of the descriptions of the war priests, Hurthang, and the Temple of Belinik include notes about how a situation differs if the temple is in a state of alert.

Several occurrences can cause an alert. If the Heroes act directly against the war priests and Hurthang is notified, the temple will be alerted. If the PCs neglect to exercise subtlety when asking questions about or discussing Hurthang and the Temple of Belinik, peasant spies could inform on them. Finally, if the war priests discover any attack on or theft from the temple, they will immediately issue an alert.

The results will be threefold. First, Hurthang and his priests will arm themselves with their best weapons and armor and keep an eye out for trouble. Second, the guards at the temple will watch very carefully for anything suspicious and will not hesitate to use violence against anyone who seems to warrant it. Third, Hurthang will use any free time he has to pray for more offensive spells than he normally keeps ready.

War Priest Trainers, MV & FV, Pr4 Belinik (4): AC 7 (leather); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 26, 24, 28, 30; THAC0 18 (17 with hand axe, their weapon of choice); #AT 3/2 with hand axe; Dmg 1d6 (hand axe); SZ M (5' 8" tall); ML elite (14); Int very (12); AL LE; XP 420 each.

Notes: If the temple is on alert, the DM should equip the trainers with gear hidden in the secret armory.

Equipment (each): 2 hand/throwing axes; holy symbol of Belinik; spell components.

Spells (4/2): Each priest may have a different assortment of spells; the following list indicates which ones they are most likely to have ready at any given time: 1st—*command*, *cure light wounds*, *curse*, *detect good*, *detect magic**, *endure cold/endure beat*, *fear*; 2nd—*aid*, *charm*

person, *enthral**, *know alignment*†, *spiritual hammer*, *wyvern watch*†. *Indicates favored spell. †At least one of the priests will have this spell ready.

Trainees, MA & FA, F1 or T1 (8-20): AC 10 (no armor); MV 12 (unencumbered); 1d10 or 1d6 hp; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (blunted short sword or padded quarterstaff); SZ M (5' 6" tall); ML steady (12); Int average (8); AL N; XP 15 each.

Notes: If the temple is on alert, most of these fighters and thieves will have real weapons (short swords or quarterstaves, dmg 1d6), as well as leather or padded armor (AC 8). At least 10% (round up) of these trainees have been *charmed*.

the main building

The Black Rose Inn has undergone a few modifications but still looks, at least from the outside, like an inn. There are two new additions (detailed below under "The Rectory" and "The Armory").

When visitors come to the temple, the priests scrutinize them carefully. If anyone doesn't look like a peasant, or acts at all suspicious, they use *detect magic* and *know alignment* spells to find out as much as they can. There is a base 20% chance that any PC who enters the temple will have one of these spells cast on him by one of the war priests. This chance can be increased or decreased based on the Hero's appearance. (Being disguised as an old peasant would help; wearing plate armor and carrying a shield would hurt.) If the temple is on alert, the chance is increased to 60%.

ground floor

1. Entrance: A path from the nearby road leads right up to the temple doors. The packed-earth surface outside holds no identifiable tracks, but anyone can see that this former inn has had no decline in its patronage.

1a. Double Door: Usually unlocked in the daytime, this double door can be barred at night. It might be barred during the day if the priests of Belinik are having a "private service." Though the stout door has a lock that can't be picked, it can be broken down normally. If the temple is on alert, the door will be barred; a temple guard (area 2) will respond to knocking or calling at the entrance.

1b. Double Door: This door has been padlocked since the inn closed; the priests and the regular congregation don't think about it much. If it were opened, it would reveal a dark, red curtain (area 2c). The padlock is oversized and strong, but a thief has a +10% chance of picking it.

2. Foyer: During the day, before services, 1d4 peasants will almost always occupy this room, waiting for services to begin. There is an 80% chance that 1d3 temple guards (see below) will also be present keeping an eye on things. A small (25%) chance exists that one of the war priests (with the same statistics as those listed under "The Training Field," above) will also be here before or after services. If the temple is on alert, three guards and one war priest will be here at all times.

At night the foyer always has a watch, either two temple guards (60% chance) or one of the priests (40% chance). Again, this guard is increased when the temple is on alert or Hurthang expects trouble.

Temple Guards, MV & FV, F2 (12): AC 7 (leather armor); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15, 15, 14, 14, 13, 11, 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (battle axe); SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int very (11); AL N or LE; XP 35 each.

Notes: Whenever this adventure refers to "temple guards," use these stats. Keep track of how many die or flee during the adventure, however, because Hurthang does not have replacements. Some of the guards (2d6) have been *charmed*.

2a. Wall Pegs: The peasants hang their outer clothes, hats, or other gear here during the services. The priests of Belinik do not restrict any type of clothing in their church, and weapons and armor are welcome in the church itself . . . though anyone wearing armor finer than leather or carrying expensive weapons would draw a lot of attention from the priests.

During daytime hours, any number of cloaks, hats, hoods, packs, and even tools hang here. If the whole mess were thrown in a barrow and sold at auction, it might raise a few silver pieces. Rooting through the pockets could yield 1d10 copper pieces. Nighttime is even less

profitable for would-be thieves: Barring the occasional forgotten hat or tool, there isn't anything interesting.

2b. Offerings: At first, the priests had a large coffer with a slot in the top where worshipers could insert coins. This construction, unfortunately, left no room for eggs, chickens, bread, and other more common offerings. Now there is a cupboard with the coffer sitting on top. Inside the cupboard, the peasants place foodstuffs and small tools they make, while they can still put the occasional coin in the top. At any given time the coffer will contain 2d6 cp, 1d6 sp, and 1d6-3 gold pieces (treat negative results as 0).

The coins are usually removed in the evening (70% chance), though they might be removed after the morning service (30% chance) if the temple had a large crowd. Foodstuffs are generally removed from the cupboard when a priest or guard on duty in the foyer gets hungry.

If the temple is on alert, there is an 80% chance one of the war priests will think to leave a little surprise for anyone breaking in. Three or four times the number of coins will lie in the coffer, but a *wyvern watch* spell will protect the offerings.

2c. Curtain: This heavy red curtain divides the entrance to the temple from the church itself. It hangs from hooks on the ceiling and has a slit in the middle. No more than one person can pass through the slit at a time, though crawling under the curtain is, of course, possible. The curtain is also hooked to each side wall, so going around it proves very difficult.

Note that if a character unlocked the doors at **area 1b**, he could stay behind the curtain unnoticed quite easily. As long as he didn't move around too much or come into the entryway, the chance that anyone would see him is slight.

3. The Temple of Belinik: The war god's temple is far from being the most opulent in the land. One can easily tell why this temple is only a holding (0), but it does have a lot of potential.

Four pews (really just log benches) line each side of the aisle, all of them exhibiting the worn appearance of regular use. At the end of each pew, a pair of crossed battle axes hangs

on the wall. Each axe is obviously serviceable and easy to remove from the wall. The congregation is separated from the altar (**area 4**) by a half-height fence with a gate in the middle.

During services, up to 6d6 worshipers occupy this area, along with 1d6 temple guards and at least one lay priest assisting worshipers with the proper forms of prayer. If a fight breaks out in church, half the worshipers have statistics equal to the trainees detailed in "The Training Field," above. The others are noncombatants—old people and children.

At first Hurthang held services every third day, but his popularity has grown to the point where he now holds services every day. At any particular time of day, there is an 80% chance that a service is going on (even if the temple is alerted).

During services, Hurthang and his priests cast *enthrall* and occasional *charm person* spells to enhance the effects of their preaching. Even though the spells wear off, most of the peasants come away thinking they were "truly moved" by the sermons. Any PC who watches a service must roll at least one saving throw vs. spell to avoid being *enthralled* or *charmed*.

At any time during the night, there is a 40% chance that Hurthang, 1d4 war priests, and 1d4 temple guards will be holding a private service to Belinik in the temple, or possibly outdoors in the nearby woods. This service involves sacrifice and bloodshed and would certainly horrify most of the peasants if they witnessed it.

4. Raised Dais: The altar area has been recently remodeled. There are still signs (if one knows where to look) that this area was once a kitchen, divided from the former inn's common room by a wooden interior wall. Now the half-fence rests where the wall once was, and an altar sits over the old cooking pit. The floor of the altar area has been built up a foot higher than the rest of the church, making it a kind of stage. A red curtain identical to the one in the back of the church hides the walls on the side and back of the area.

4a. Altar of Belinik: Though the peasants don't recognize this fact, experienced adventurers will probably realize that this altar was designed for blood sacrifice. It features blood gutters and tool holders (empty now) worked into the carvings of the symbols of Belinik. Close inspection will reveal specks of blood and gore caught in some of the cracks.

4b. Rectory Door:

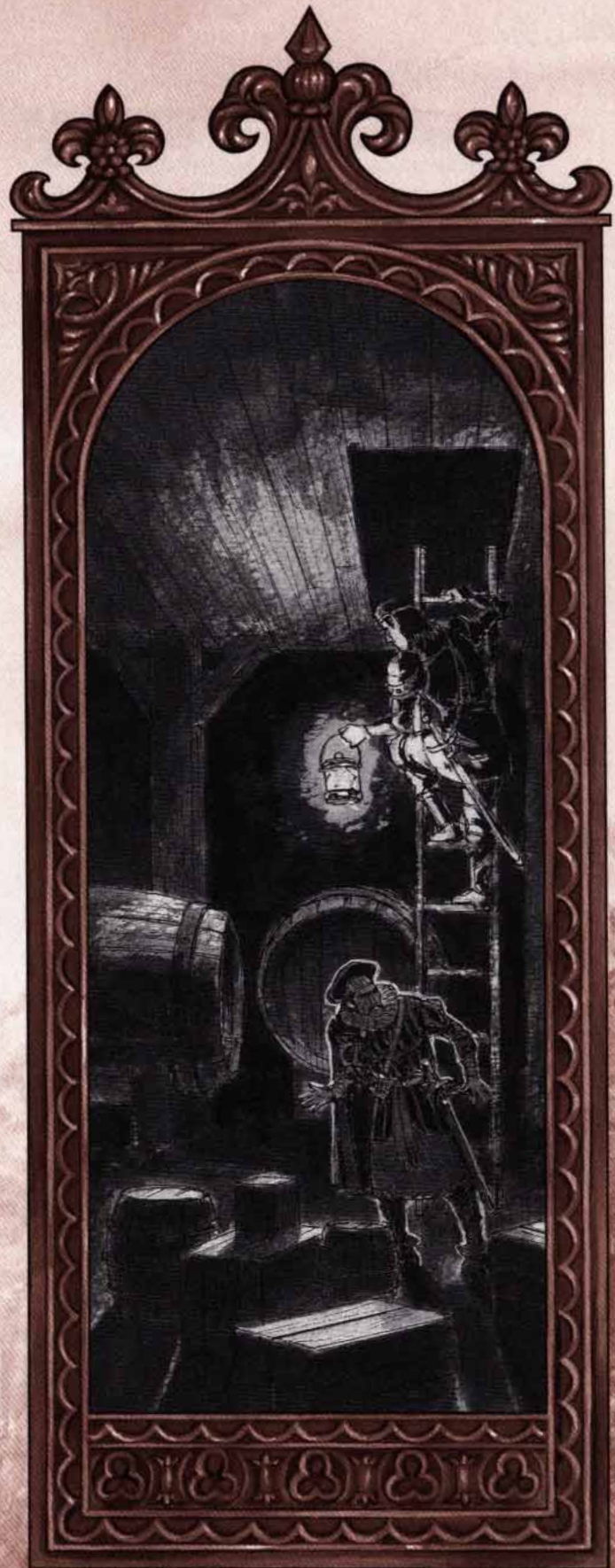
Behind the curtain to the right of the altar is a door leading to the rectory, or priests' quarters. The door used to lead outside, but the small addition was built right up against it. The door is seldom locked, even at night. If the temple is on alert, however, there is an 80% chance the door is locked at all times.

4c. Armory Door: This door, also concealed behind the curtain, is always kept locked. Originally leading to the wine and food cellar, it now opens to a small storage room that leads to the temple's armory.

4d. Crossed Axes: Upon a raised podium is a stone likeness of Belinik in his warrior avatar form. If a *detect magic* spell is cast on the statue, it radiates strong magic. However, the statue itself is nonmagical—the magic emanates from the crossed axes (the symbol of Belinik) held by the statue. One is an *axe of sharpness* +2 and the other an *axe of wounding* +2. To remove them from the grip of the statue, a character must either be a priest of Belinik or succeed a bend bars/lift gates roll. If the latter is performed successfully, the hands of the statue are broken off.

PCs should beware using the axes. When a person other than a devout follower of Belinik wields either weapon in combat, the DM makes a secret saving throw vs. spell for that character. If the character fails, the axe functions like a *sword, cursed berserking*. After the berserker rage leaves the character, he must then make a system shock roll. If he fails, he loses one point of Constitution permanently. (*Wish* and *restoration* spells can return this point, as can other magical means.)

If a follower of Belinik uses one of the axes in combat he automatically goes into a berserker rage, receiving a +2 bonus to his THACO and a -2 modifier to his AC, making him a better, harder-to-hit warrior. He can distinguish followers of Belinik from nonbelievers and will attack the latter until they are dead or fled. Hurthang used to wield these weapons until he came upon the *Fang of Kriesha*. He may, occasionally, allow a subordinate to use them in need.



the rectory

All the war priests, with the exception of Hurthang, live in the rectory. The rectory is a new addition to the northwest corner of the building, built flush against the northern exit to the temple.

5. Temple Door: This large, heavy door used to be an exit from the inn's kitchen. It is seldom locked unless the temple is on alert. There will almost always (90% chance) be at least one priest in this room, even during services. During the daytime, there is a 40% chance that 1d4 priests will be here when services are not in session. At night 2d2 priests will always be here unless they are on duty elsewhere. These priests are the "war priest trainers" described in the "Training Field" section above.

6. Lockers: In these cabinets the subordinate priests keep their vestments and sacramental items. Among the red and black robes, gold rings, and smaller symbols of Belinik, searchers will find a small box emblazoned with a pair of silver axes. The box is locked but untrapped; a character who succeeds a bend bars/lift gates roll can break it open.

Inside the box lie several tools any character with the Healing proficiency will recognize as surgical instruments . . . but something seems not quite right about them. First, all of them are made from silver (a softer metal than steel). Second, they are oversized. Third, the largest of the instruments is an incredibly sharp miniature axe that looks like it is made for cutting bone.

These instruments are actually designed for animal and human sacrifice. They have been well cleaned, but careful examination (an Intelligence check at a -5 penalty) could reveal dried blood trapped inside some of the joints and cracks of the instruments.

The entire contents of the cabinet, minus the sacrificial tools, are worth about 15 gp. The silver scalpels, axe, and other items in the small box are worth about 40 gp.

7. Bunk Beds: Each priest has his or her own bunk. There are eight beds, though not all are slept in on any given night. At the time this legend takes place, four

war priests (besides Hurthang) serve at the temple and four are out among the peasants.

At the foot of each bunk are hooks and holders for each priest's personal weapons and armor (listed above, under the description of the war priest trainers). In addition, each priest has one missile weapon hanging here (DM's choice), along with ammunition. Priests who are out preaching the word or working in the temple usually leave their missile weapons here.

8. Desks: Creating a holding in another regent's domain takes some doing, and the priests of Belinik work day and night to get the job done. Paperwork and plans for the takeover litter each of four double-desks. Most of the papers are fairly innocuous—reports on crop production, census information, and temple expenses—but, if the area is searched thoroughly (the PCs must indicate they are looking for valuable information), the Heroes discover notes concerning the priests' rivals in the domain. There are notes on the state of the local army, any lieutenants in the domain, the various temples' strengths and weaknesses, and other helpful information. Taken as a whole, these papers show conclusively that the priests of Belinik really know how to go to war.

9. Door to Outside: This door leads to the training field and the outer staircase. It is almost always (80% chance) locked and is unlocked only when there are at least two priests inside during the day (90%) or someone forgets to lock it up (10%). If the temple is on alert, the door will definitely be locked and has a 50% chance of having a *wyvern watch* or *fire trap* spell cast on it at night.

10. Door to Temple: This room originally served as a storage area for the inn and continues to serve that purpose for the temple. Stores of food, wine, and miscellaneous items sit in piles around the walls. A large pile of goods and dirty clothing lies in the center of the room.

10a. Trap door: The large door to the cellar lies in the center of the storeroom's floor. It has been covered by bags of supplies and piles of training clothes waiting to be washed, but a casual observer has a 1 in 4 chance to notice it anyway. Simply moving a little of the pile will reveal the trap door with its big, iron handle. The door is unlocked and can be opened by anyone. It leads to area 11.

the armory

Once a storeroom attached to the inn, the converted armory is vital to the war priests' faith and Hurthang's plans for conquest. Hurthang requires the war priests to train the congregation in the use of arms as part of their duties. Here, the sect secretly stores enough weapons to equip a sizeable band of followers.

11. Cellar: A ladder leads from the trap door in the storeroom (area 10) directly down into the inn's old wine cellar. The room is dark and a little damp, and the smell of freshly turned earth comes from its south end. A small table stands in the center of the room near the base of the ladder. On the table sits a lantern about half full of oil.

12. Wine Casks: Against the northern wall rest two giant ale or beer casks, and a wine rack where the innkeeper once kept his finer drinks. Now the wine rack holds arrows and spears, and dust covers the casks.

In fact, the casks look so innocuous that anyone not familiar with the Black Rose Inn or who doesn't carefully examine the casks will miss a very interesting fact: One of the casks is made out of oak (a common wood for storing wine or beer), while the other is fashioned from pine (a far less popular choice). The reason for the difference: The inn has always had the oak cask but not the pine cask. The war priests brought the pine cask themselves for secret storage.

12a. The Pine Cask: This false cask features a clever catch. A turn of the handle causes the spigot to pour out beer—about a jug full. Then, if a character turns the spigot off and immediately on again, the whole front of the cask swings open. Inside the door is a place to pour the beer back in (to reset the catch); inside the cask is the priests' secret weapon stash: five *battle axes +1*, four *slings +2*, four *javelins of lightning*, one human-sized suit of *missile-attracting chain mail*, one *staff of striking*, five *potions of extra-healing*, and two *potions of poison*.

If the temple is on alert, most of these weapons will be in the hands of different war priests or temple guards. Hurthang, however, will order his followers to leave at least two of the *potions of extra-healing* with the poisoned potions, just in case his enemies get this far.

The *missile-attracting chain mail* will also stay in the cask.

Each of the potions has a different colored stopper: green, blue, yellow, brown, orange, red, and black. The red- and black-stoppered potions are the poisoned ones (red and black being the ceremonial colors of the priests of Belinik).

13. Sewage Tunnel: In more prosperous times, the innkeeper of the Black Rose had begun to build a sewage system leading from the storage room to a nearby creek. Unfortunately, he never got much past the tunnel-digging stage before the war priests took over.

They have continued his work, but for another reason.

The southern wall has a man-sized hole in it, leading to a gradually-shrinking tunnel. The innkeeper got about 20 feet through the dirt, shoring up and leveling off the ceiling and walls. The war priests have dug out another 40 feet of earth but they have not been nearly as fastidious—the earthen tunnel is so narrow, a character traveling through it would have to get down on his belly and crawl in the damp mud. But it serves its purpose—if ever a war priest has to escape the temple secretly, he can come down here and crawl out, washing off in the small creek at the other end.

The tunnel ends at a well-disguised trap door by the creek. Turf has been laid over the board so that a casual observer would have only a normal chance of detecting secret doors to notice it. Anyone looking for the door, however, would be able to find it fairly easily—just stomping around and kicking up ground gives a character a 1 in 4 chance per turn spent searching. Anyone intimately familiar with the inn or who knows about the tunnel (such as a war priest, the NPC Torele Bootblack, or anyone who has seen the tunnel from the other side) should be able to find the entrance eventually.

Also in the Tunnel: At the point where the finished tunnel ends and the dirt tunnel begins, there are four lumps in the earth. This is where Hurthang buried the innkeeper, his wife, and their two children after they "donated" the inn to the Temple of Belinik. Though they are all in a state of decay, just about any peasant in the area can recognize their remains.



the upstairs

An outside staircase on the northern wall of the inn leads to the upper floor of the temple. Unlike the main floor, the upper story has not undergone extensive remodeling. It still looks like the second story of an inn.

14. Balcony: The stairs along the side of the inn lead up to this long balcony. The sturdy railing has been reinforced by the war priests; therefore anyone standing on the balcony automatically receives at least 50% cover if attacked by someone on the ground. The balcony looks over the practice field and runs the length of the building. In the evening, there is a 1-in-10 chance that a war priest (25%) or a temple guard (75%) will be stationed on the balcony as a guard. If the temple is on alert, two temple guards will always be on the balcony, and there is a 25% chance that a war priest may walk through at any given time.

14a. Stairs Down: These stairs lead to the practice field.

14b. Outer Door: This door has a bolt-catch on the inside, but Hurthang

seldom locks it. It leads to the second-floor hallway. If the temple is on alert, the door will remain unlocked—the temple guards must be able to go inside quickly to shout warnings or make reports.

15. Guest Room: Hurthang often uses this old guest room to house visiting “dignitaries” from across the domain. Wealthy commoners, disgruntled nobles, and even a few unfulfilled priests have come in the past few months to hear Hurthang speak; they now “spread the word” among the populace of the domain.

Evidence of such occupancy lies scattered about the room. The bed has not been made up but the sheets are still relatively fresh—someone stayed here just last night. Whoever it was left a silk shirt in the dresser and a very expensive bone comb on the nightstand.

On the desk, near the southern window, lie papers, a pen, and a near-empty inkwell. Someone has been writing a lot here recently, and PCs who spend the time to search the desk find a few ink-stained discards in the drawers:

“... trade in the outer regions. H. will provide gold for considerations and—”

“... work on the old miller. He will come over to our side, and with him a dozen farmers. Keep prodding M., but not too hard. By all means, don't let him get to the regent—”

“Two dozen eggs, twelve silver pieces, one gold, and a bushel of mixed vegetables. Y. R. promises two sheep and a bearskin. See if you can—”

Everything else appears fairly clean. The chamberpot has been scrubbed recently, the furnishings hastily dusted. If the temple is on alert, one of the war priests might be staying here as a bodyguard for Hurthang.

16. Hurthang's Private Quarters: This apartment belongs to Hurthang himself. Once the best room in the inn, it still retains that status—though it is most often untidy and littered with papers, bits of unfinished food, and clothing.

Hurthang always keeps the door locked with a good, solid mechanism (–20% penalty to attempts to open it) that has only one key—which Hurthang keeps in his possession at all times. The two windows are small and often shuttered, but there is a 30% chance that either of them will be open at any given time.

Hurthang allows no one in his room when he is not present, which is probably why the place has acquired such a cluttered state. The War Priest of Belinik is not accustomed to cleaning up after himself, so he leaves his gear and food trays on tables, chairs or even his bed when he finishes with them. Right now, about four days' worth of refuse has accumulated.

The room is unoccupied about 80% of the time during the day (while Hurthang holds services, observes trainees on the practice field, or canvasses the nearby countryside "spreading the word"), and about 40% of the night (Hurthang is often downstairs in the temple, praying for new spells, meeting with operatives, or holding private services for his fellow priests).

The desk against the eastern wall supports piles of papers and ledgers. Most (60%) of them are written in whatever language is common for this area of Cerilia; the remainder bear runes and pictographs said to be used by Vos wizards and priests for written communication (the Vos have no script of their own). A few of the documents appear to be startlingly accurate reports on the state of the domains in this area—especially the one containing Hurthang's temple. The war priest has obtained maps and diagrams of trade routes, temples, guilds, and law holdings marked out on separate sheets of paper; he even has sketchy projections of any ley lines that happen to run through the area. A regent of any domain will recognize these reports immediately and should probably feel more than a little nervous about the fact that Hurthang has them.

The rest of the documents, if PCs can somehow decipher the symbols (perhaps through an

Intelligence check for Vos, wizard, or priest PCs or those with a relevant nonweapon proficiency), talk of the different plans Hurthang has set in motion to agitate against the local rulers. He intends to threaten the temples first, the law holdings second, then the guilds, and finally—with the help of a wizard with whom he is still negotiating an alliance—the sources. He has a map of the domain with several circles on it—all designating other 0-level temples he is using to foment dissatisfaction. All of them, however, are tied to this temple—all orders, all monies, and all supplies come from here.

16a. Closet: A burgundy curtain separates most of Hurthang's room from this small closet. Each wall of the closet has several pegs for hanging clothing, but Hurthang leaves most of his clothes scattered about the room.

This practice proves unfortunate for the war priest, since a closet full of clothes would undoubtedly conceal the small chest which lies on the floor toward the back. This chest is very important to Hurthang, to the temple, and to the war priest's plan to take over the area.

It is the resting place of the *Fang of Kriesha*.

While Hurthang goes about his business in the countryside or out on the training field, or when he lies asleep in his bed, the *Fang* stays locked in this chest. Though the war priest values the artifact above all other things, carrying it around makes him nervous. He brings it out of the chest only to impress the locals or show it off during a service. Otherwise, it rests in its special casket.

The lock on the chest is a simple (+10%) one for a thief to pick. Hurthang keeps the only key on his person at all times. But before a would-be thief starts fiddling with the chest, there are two important details he probably would like to know.

First, the chest itself is trapped. Any attempt to open it or move it will set off an alarm in the temple: The symbol of Belinik above the altar will begin to glow bright red. After three rounds, if Hurthang has not deactivated the alarm, a great clamor will arise out of thin air. The sounds of a great battle from the past will reverberate through the temple and its grounds, awakening and alerting everyone in the area to the thief.

Second, the inside of the chest is trapped. When the chest is opened and the contents exposed to fresh air, a *fire trap* spell will explode in the

closet, causing 1d4+9 points of damage to anyone in its blast radius. A successful saving throw vs. spell reduces damage to half.

The first trap can be disarmed by simply using the proper key. If the key is turned in the lock, the clamor-trap automatically disengages. Otherwise, only a *dispel magic* cast against the spell of a 9th-level caster will disarm it. This spell is also the only way to disarm the *fire trap*—and the spellcaster must throw it on the chest *after* the first trap has been either disarmed or deactivated.

Inside the chest lies the *Fang* (unless Hurthang has a reason to carry it on his person at the time the Heroes open the chest). It is wrapped in soft velvet and feels extraordinarily cool to the touch (see the above description of the *Fang of Kriesha* for more details).

16b. Door to the Balcony: Hurthang always means to lock this door with the same key as the one on his hall door, but he often forgets (30% chance). The war priest works late into the night or gets up early in the morning and needs the fresh air of his balcony to keep him energetic.

17. Balcony: An appealing feature of the former inn's best room, the balcony looks out over the main entrance to the inn and down the road toward the nearest village. The rail around the balcony originally served to keep drunken revelers from falling onto those entering or exiting the inn, though that contingency has not been a problem since the War Priests of Belinik took over the building. If the temple is on alert, a temple guard could (50% chance) be stationed up here.

18. Linen Closet: The temple guards and lesser priests who act as servants of the temple keep fresh linens and cleaning tools here (as well as spare chamberpots). The door is unlocked; there is a 25% chance of finding a guard asleep here at any time, day or night.

fighting the good fight

If the Heroes emerge victorious at the end of this adventure, they deserve some reward.

Some suggestions, based on their actions and the adventure's outcome, are described below.

subtle and complete success

The Heroes steal the *Fang of Kriesha* right out from under Hurthang and the war priests' noses. They show it off to the local populace and demonstrate that Hurthang is not the only one who can use it, nor does he have the commoners' best interests at heart when he does. This outcome is worth a base reward of 5,000 XP for each character, adjusted as follows:

- ◆ -100 XP for every temple guard killed;
- ◆ -150 XP for every war priest killed;
- ◆ -1,000 XP if Hurthang is killed;
- ◆ +500 XP if the PCs prove the war priests use blood sacrifice in their secret rituals;
- ◆ +1,000 XP if the PCs unearth and reveal the bodies of innkeeper and his family.

Also, if any of the PCs are regents of any type of holding in this domain, the agitation in the domain stops and they each gain 2 Regency Points.

not so subtle, but complete

This outcome occurs if the Heroes, rather than sneaking around and infiltrating the temple, instead ride up and essentially challenge Hurthang's power. If they defeat Hurthang and his war priests and drive them out of the domain, they receive 2,000 XP each, with the following adjustments:

- ◆ -1,000 XP if an army or large force is used against the temple;
- ◆ -1,000 XP if the peasants in the area know the Heroes are regents or acting on behalf of a regent;
- ◆ -200 XP for every temple guard killed;
- ◆ +500 XP if the bloodshed is minimal;
- ◆ +500 XP if the PCs achieve possession of the *Fang*;
- ◆ +500 XP if the PCs expose Hurthang as cruel and evil;
- ◆ +500 XP if the PCs discover the bodies of the innkeeper and his family.

If the XP award is equal to or less than zero, then the adventure may have been a success but the outcome a failure. The next domain turn, all the PC regents who participated lose 1 Regency Point for every province they rule and have to deal with at least one Unrest or Rebellion event

in addition to whatever else is going on in their domains: Word has spread that they seek to suppress opposing ideologies and faiths. If the XP award is greater than zero, nothing of this nature happens.

Note that if this ending occurs, Hurthang's death (or survival) is immaterial. Chances are good that the PCs will have trouble with the populace regardless of whether he dies.

failure

The PCs could fail this adventure in several ways, most dramatically by attempting to steal the *Fang* or kill Hurthang (or both) and instead being caught and exposed as agents of the local regents (or the regents themselves). If failure occurs, all the provinces in the realm immediately go into Rebellion (see "Random Events" in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*) and all the other regents involved in the adventure (whether it takes place in their domains or not) lose 5 Regency Points and must deal with Unrest in their holdings.

A more subtle failure transpires if the Heroes fail to steal the *Fang*, discredit Hurthang, or do anything that seriously undermines the Temple of Belinik in the area. In this case, the trouble gets worse. During the next domain turn, the Temple of Belinik *automatically* becomes a holding (1) in this province, even if its increased influence requires reducing another temple holding by one level. In addition, all regents in the area must deal with either a Diplomatic Matter or an Unrest/Rebellion event *in addition to* any other random events rolled during the turn. The Unrest or Rebellion event would involve Hurthang agitating and gaining more strength in the regents' domains; a Diplomatic Matter would indicate that Hurthang thinks the local regent wouldn't mind becoming a vassal or puppet of the War Priests of Belinik.

Note that this result can still occur if Hurthang and his war priests are killed—as long as the PCs did not manage to sway the populace against the Temple of Belinik. There are more war priests around, and one of them would be willing to take up the *Fang of Kriesha* (or, at least, the banner of Hurthang) to continue the struggle.

continuing the legend

If the Heroes fail but survive, the adventure can continue during a mixture of domain turns and adventures. Hurthang's war priests persist in their efforts to foment rebellion, stage raids against loyal peasants, and fake disasters and crises for themselves to deal with heroically (and thus win the people's confidence). Hurthang continues to rule up his holdings at the expense of other regents. He gains regency and spends it, and he uses his operatives to cajole, attack, and persuade other regents to join his side.

If the Heroes complete the adventure successfully, then they have wrested the *Fang of Kriesha* from Hurthang and driven him from the land. He might try a few parting shots—like burning a rival temple or butchering some peasants—if he has the power, but he no longer poses a threat. Everyone is happy that things are getting back to normal . . . until the Priestesses of Kriesha show up looking for the *Fang*.

The priestesses will likely send a diplomatic envoy to the Hero who holds the *Fang*, haughtily demanding its return. They believe they are the only people on Cerilia with the right to touch the artifact—much less own it—and unless the wielder can prove himself worthy, the priestesses will stop at nothing to obtain the *Fang*. Since the priestesses don't expect anyone to prove himself worthy of the *Fang* who isn't a Priestess of Kriesha (unlikely, for a PC), they will probably start planning their strategies immediately.

If the domain where the *Fang* rests is near Vos territory, this conflict could escalate from sabre-rattling and personal attacks to all-out war. Should a neighboring regent be of evil alignment or at least very militant in his own right, the Vos priestesses may convince him to take their part in a war—with a promise of concessions and valuable northern trade goods as an incentive. Otherwise, plan for a series of Assassination attempts, Brigandage, Blood Challenges, and all manner of unpleasant events to occur until the priestesses are pretty much wiped out (an unlikely occurrence), the wielder "proves himself worthy" (an even more unlikely occurrence), or the *Fang* is surrendered.



“Centuries ago, when heroes still walked Cerilia in the guises of beggars, wanderers, and kings, a great sickness swept over the land. In which realm it began, no man now can say. But soon it threatened all Cerilia and her races. Men and halflings, dwarves and elves sickened and died from the accursed malady . . . and no healer, no matter how skilled, and no cleric, no matter how faithful, could cure or contain this deadly disease.

“At last, word came from the northern lands that the plague was no simple sickness . . . it was a curse. Evil priests of Belinik who, at that time, dwelt mainly among the Vos proclaimed it ‘the Gift of Azrai.’ It was, they said, the dead god’s way of harvesting the weak, the infirm, and the nonbelievers among Cerilia’s people. The followers of Belinik boasted that soon they would be the only people left on the great continent.

“Unable to bring war against the Vos in this time of great illness, the southern and western kingdoms conspired with their loremasters and their sages in a desperate attempt to find a cure for Azrai’s Gift. While commoner and blooded alike died outside their towers’ walls, the learned men and women of many races pored over ancient tomes and offered many prayers and supplications to their gods.

“The answer came to a young bard, a student serving his master, who found an ancient book written by a loremaster of the forgotten Masetians. Before the cataclysm of Mount Deismaar, the Masetian people worshiped Masela, goddess of the sea. As the armies of Cerilia geared up for the War of Shadow, Masela vowed to protect the Masetians and all Cerilia’s people from the evil of Azrai. According to legend, she gave them a gift that survived the death of the gods and the destruction of the Masetian empire.

“The tome then mentioned Nesirie, who took Masela’s place as goddess of the sea. Nesirie, also known as the Lady of Mourning, hallowed Masela’s gift and grieved in memory of the Masetians, her favorites among the people of the land. According to the tome, any true Masetian—not just one of Masetian blood, but one of true Masetian heart—could retrieve Masela’s gift from Nesirie and use it to counter the direct influence of Azrai on Cerilia.

the gift of azrai

Event Type: Magical Event (result of 20 on Table 15). “The Gift of Azrai” can also be used as a Natural Event (result of 6) if the event is a cataclysm.

The Heroes: Any Heroes, or mix of Heroes, will do for this adventure; four to eight PCs of 6th to 9th level (30 levels maximum) are recommended. The land of Cerilia is under siege, so even enemies will bury their differences to seek the cure. Regents of southern provinces, particularly those with coastlines and seaports, will be especially well equipped.

The Challenge: As a deadly plague sweeps the continent, the Heroes must seek a true member of the forgotten Masetian race to find a cure. The Masetians, as most loremasters know, were a seafaring people who dwelled along the coast of the Baïr el-Mehare (Sea of the Golden Sun). Of the few Masetians who survived the Battle of Mount Deismaar, some mingled their blood with the Basarji, the tribe that later became the Khinasi; the rest consolidated in the southeastern island states, where the race dwindled rapidly. The only place likely to yet have true Masetians is the Isle of the Serpent, where rumors credit nearly 45% of the population with at least some Masetian blood and many still remember the legends of the old empire.

Finding a Masetian on the Isle of the Serpent who worships any god other than the Serpent—let alone Nesirie—proves difficult. The search involves slipping past the Serpent’s coastal ships, infiltrating his kingdom, and avoiding his spies and patrols while seeking a traitor in the awnshegh’s own land.

After finding a Masetian, the Heroes learn of the Isle of the Tree. There the blessing of Masela lies, protected by Nesirie. The PCs escape the Serpent’s realm and sail to this legendary island. Enroute they encounter forces sent by the Serpent, who has learned of the

plague and wishes to let it ravage the mainland, rendering the southern coast vulnerable to his armies.

Once at the Isle of the Tree, the Heroes must confront Nesirie and secure her permission to violate the hallowed ground to pluck a fruit from the Tree of the Masetians. She also helps the PCs determine how to use the single piece of fruit to cure a whole continent of sufferers.

On the way home, the Heroes face one final obstacle: An enemy of Cerilia's peoples attempts to keep the PCs from using the fruit to release Masela's blessing. If the Heroes manage to foil the attempt, they save the continent—and remain forever in Nesirie's debt.

the word goes out

The Heroes can be anywhere at the time the adventure begins. Regents can be in their domains or visiting other regents, or the PCs can hear the news as they conclude another adventure. A panting courier arrives at each Hero's location with the following message (tailored to the individual PC's position and circumstance):

"My lord, I come from the northern border. A great plague is upon your subjects! It began when refugees from the north entered your kingdom, bringing a sickness upon us for which no cure can be found. Your people fall ill and cough their lung-blood out onto the ground. Even now, the first victims of the plague lie dying."

The young man (or men, if the Heroes are not together) tells much of the information presented in the first two paragraphs of the legend seed, though that tale also contains some exaggeration. Both human and demihuman peoples of nearby realms are dying of this sickness, but the plague's scope is presently limited to *nearby* kingdoms only. No one knows how to cure the malady or even treat its symptoms: It starts with a cough and a mild fever, then the cough becomes broken and debilitating. After a few weeks of incapacitation the victim dies, his lungs filling with blood as he coughs his life away.

The Heroes should be encouraged to coop-

erate with each other in seeking out loremasters, healers, and clerics from the afflicted kingdoms. Obviously, those who have been treating the sick and spreading word of the plague have had more experience with the disease and might know something that could aid the search for a cure. Even enemies (human and demihuman) of the Heroes call upon the PCs to combine their resources and solve this crisis.

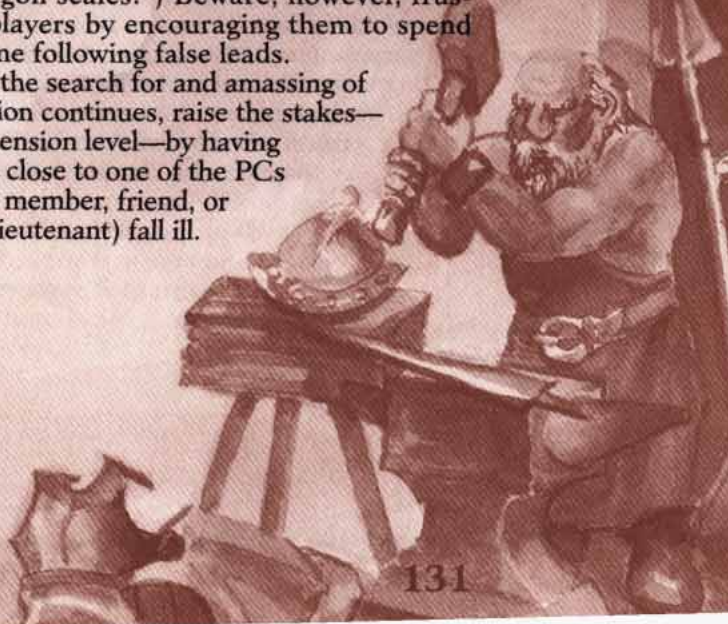
a pool of knowledge

When the Heroes have gathered together with some knowledgeable NPCs, they learn most of the particulars from the legend seed. They find out that the disease isn't just a disease, but part of a curse. Unfortunately, the Gift of Azrai is so strong a curse that it defies removal and cure without some sort of direct divine aid.

You, the DM, should allow the Heroes to exhaust any avenues of research they can, dividing up the clues (given in the legend seed and summarized below) and revealing them one by one—as the PCs would discover them. Different characters such as traveling bards, clerics, priests, scholars, and evil emissaries (worshippers of Belinik who want to taunt and terrify the PCs) can all be used as sources, as can old literature, holy writings, history texts, peasant folklore, and even nursery rhymes.

At your discretion, throw in a few red herrings—on the order of "old wives' tales"—to make the search more realistic. ("Haele told Gael that Niela's aunt Renae heard from her cousin Mieve that the disease can be cured with dragon scales.") Beware, however, frustrating players by encouraging them to spend much time following false leads.

While the search for and amassing of information continues, raise the stakes—and the tension level—by having someone close to one of the PCs (a family member, friend, or favorite lieutenant) fall ill.



The Heroes' research yields the following intelligence:

- ◆ **Apparently, no one is immune to this plague.** Humans, dwarves, halflings, and elves are all affected, and rumors say that some goblin and orog tribes have fallen under the curse. Even the Vos who worship Belinik have not been spared—though they claim that “those of true faith will survive.”
- ◆ **The plague is said to have started in the domains just northeast of where the PCs are, and to have moved south quickly.** No evidence suggests that close proximity to a victim of the plague will cause a healthy person to contract the disease, nor will isolation safeguard one from affliction. Symptoms of the disease have appeared in almost a dozen realms so far.
- ◆ **No normal cures, spells, or remedies seem to affect the spread of the plague.** People contract the disease, suffer for about a month, then die. Fortunately, the plague is not known to have existed for very long—its own virulence and unpredictability have called attention to it quickly.
- ◆ **After someone close to the PCs contracts the disease, a few obscure, cryptic references to Masetian cures will be found.**
- ◆ **Eventually, someone will stumble upon the legend about finding a “true Masetian” who can lead them to “the blessing of Masela.”** Anyone (such as scholars, loremasters, or oral historians) possessing knowledge of the ancient Masetians will advise the PCs to begin their search on the Isle of the Serpent, the last bastion of Masetian culture in the wake of the Deismaar cataclysm. Some might even recall that the Serpent himself was a Masetian before his “ascension” to “godhood.”



Presumably, the Heroes will immediately form an expedition to set out in search of a “true Masetian.” Unless the PCs, right from the start, make every effort to keep their voyage a secret from all but their closest advisers, word gets out quickly. Those people in the area not yet ill turn out to praise the PCs and offer them any assistance they can. Finding a crew and a ship will not pose a problem—healthy volunteers practically crawl out of the woodwork, and (if one of the PCs does not own a ship) a nearby regent offers the best ship he can for the voyage.

ambush!

But all this adulation has a downside. Followers of Belinik have infiltrated the port city from which the Heroes will leave. They believe that their people have fallen prey to the Gift of Azrai because they have not done enough to spread the disease and defeat those who would work against it. They are determined to keep the ship from sailing.

During the few days the Heroes spend preparing for their voyage, they will at some point be on the docks or running errands around the city. When the party is either alone or with as few effective allies as possible, the PCs are attacked by the War Priests of Belinik and a few hired thugs.

War Priests of Belinik, MV & FV, Pr6 (4): AC 4 (splint mail + shield); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 36, 33, 38, 29; THAC0 18 (16 with *battle axe* +1 and weapon of choice +1); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+2 (+1 Str, *battle axe* +1); SA *turn undead*; SZ M (5' 8" tall); ML fanatic (18); Int very (12); AL CE; XP 1,080 each.

Equipment: *Battle axe* +1 (4), splint mail (4), shield (4), *potion of extra-healing* (2), *scroll of protection from magic* (2).

Favored Spells (5/5/1): 1st—*magical stone*, *call upon faith* (ToM), *protection from good*; 2nd—*silence 15' radius*, *spiritual hammer* (×2); 3rd—*bestow curse*.

Hired Thugs, MA & FA, F3 (4–12): AC 7 (leather armor); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 24, 22, 21, 18; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (club, Str +1); SZ M (6' tall); ML avg (7); Int avg (8); AL N; XP 65 each.

The war priests were sent to ascertain the progress made against the disease. When they heard about the expedition, they quickly hired a group of thugs to help them ambush the PCs. The tougher the PCs are, the more thugs should be involved—however, this combat should not pose too serious a threat to the adventure. The war priests have had to lay low and are ill-equipped for a pitched battle. If the situation begins to look bad for them, the thugs will flee and the war priests will try to escape; if the priests can't escape they will team up against one foe and try to take someone down with them.

Note: Because the thugs are all natives of the area, if they recognize the realm's ruler (or another powerful regent) as part of the PC group they will immediately make a morale check with a -4 modifier. If the check succeeds, they switch sides and fight against the war priests; if the check fails, they flee the battle. If the thugs discover that the PCs are the adventurers they've heard about who are setting sail to find a cure for the disease ravaging the land, they will automatically switch sides (The war priests didn't tell them anything beyond "Here's some gold; help us attack these wanderers.")

After the Battle: If the PC party kills or drives off all the war priests, the Heroes win but probably don't know much more than they did before. Well-traveled PCs might recognize certain items on the war priests' persons (symbols of crossed axes, engraved axe-hilts) as coming from Vosgaard or being associated with the worship of Belinik; a few might recognize the language (Vos) the war priests spoke to one another.

If the PCs manage to capture a war priest, he arrogantly reveals his purpose to them: He and his fellow priests were sent to make certain that the lesser people of Cerilia are consumed by "the Gift of Azrai." (His statement could be the first time the PCs hear the plague called by this name). He swears that other priests and Vos warriors will come soon, and that the PCs should just give up—perhaps the god Belinik will spare their miserable lives. He knows nothing else helpful and will, if allowed, pray for spells that enable him to hinder the

Heroes in their quest. Good PCs would do best to lock up their captive where he can't do any harm (a spell-proof cell); evil or malicious neutral characters might simply kill him.

Should the PCs lose (or appear in danger of losing) the fight, the city guard should show up to save them. Their arrival might not prevent a few PCs from getting killed or badly wounded, but unless the DM wants to start the adventure with a whole new party it's a logical solution.

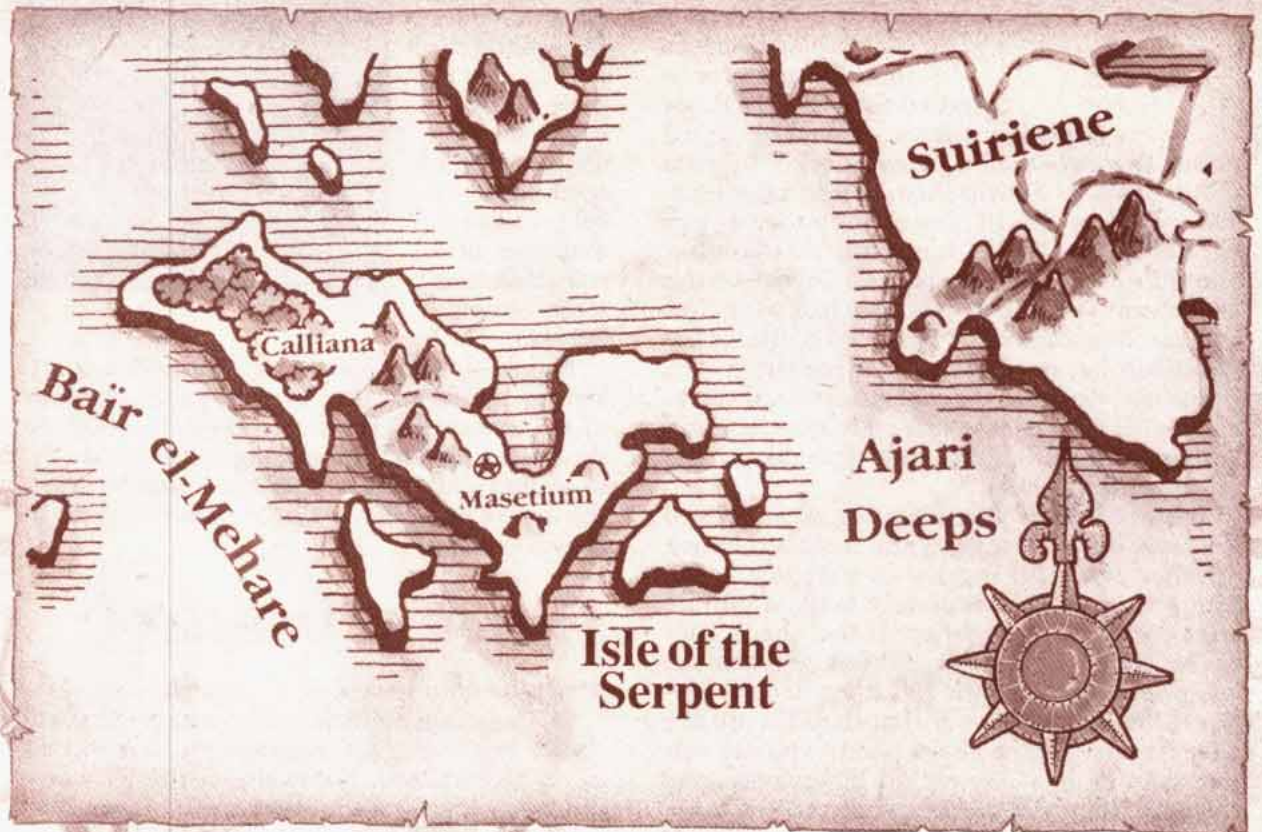


the sea voyage

The ship provided for the Heroes' voyage is a medium-sized coaster called the *Wavecrest*, manned by four of the city's best sailors. Naturally, if the PCs are sailors or know sailors they prefer, they can select their own crew—but these men and women are the best the city can provide.

If the Heroes have a ship of their own, they should nonetheless be encouraged to use the *Wavecrest*. As a ship, it is small and hardly equipped for war, but it is very fast—and the local clerics and wizards have spent a lot of effort blessing and protecting the vessel from enemy attacks and waterborne dangers. Again, if the PCs insist on taking another ship—assuming they have one—they can. However, few ships (and none better than the *Wavecrest*) lie in port right now; most anchored considerably offshore with their crews in hopes of avoiding the Gift of Azrai.

The *Wavecrest's* importance to the adventure is twofold. First, it boasts magical protection—the coaster exudes *protection from evil*, 10' radius from all points, and any person who sails on the *Wavecrest* will enjoy the effects of a *bless* spell while aboard. If the DM wishes, the *Wavecrest* may have other magical effects as well. All of them will wear off in



a week or two, but they should serve for this voyage.

Second, the *Wavecrest* is fast—the ship and its crew have won several awards for speed-sailing. If the PCs choose a slower ship, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people across the affected kingdoms will die in the extra time it takes them to get to the Isle of the Serpent (then to the Isle of the Tree) and back again.

To determine the length of the voyage from the PCs' home port to the Isle of the Serpent and subsequent destinations, you as the DM may use the ship movement guidelines described in both *Cities of the Sun* and *Naval Battle Rules: the Seas of Cerilia* (increasing the *Wavecrest* movement allowance by one point over that of a standard coaster), or simply assign a reasonable amount of time.

shipboard maneuvers

While the crew of the *Wavecrest* easily can sail the small vessel without assistance, any PCs with relevant nonweapon proficiencies (Seamanship, Navigation, etc.) can participate. If the PCs do possess such skills, get them involved in running the ship and distribute small XP awards for good role-playing and enthusiasm. Otherwise, the crew will take care of sailing the coaster and the PCs can just enjoy the rolling, bumping, sliding feeling of being aboard ship. . . .

In other words, as the cruise begins, have every PC on board make a system shock roll—failure means the character experiences seasickness during the voyage. The character suffers a 2-point penalty to all rolls while on board and for one day after disembarking. Any character who goes ashore and recovers must make another system shock roll when he reboards.

A successful roll means the character is not prone to seasickness and need not ever make the roll again (unless the DM requires it) for the rest of this adventure. Characters who

have
been at sea
before (perhaps during
prior adventures) or who have
skills that reflect seamanship do not
need to make system shock rolls at all.

the first trial

The first challenge of the voyage comes when the *Wavecrest* is well out to sea. Despite all the prayers and blessings surrounding the ship and crew, the vessel finds itself becalmed. It is an eerie calm, entirely unnatural for this time of year. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

The air feels hot and dry, more like desert air than ocean. You cannot escape the smell and taste of brine because no cool breeze fills the sails.

Suddenly, the ship rocks with a crash. People and gear fly everywhere but miraculously no one falls overboard. You behold a long, green tentacle reaching up the side of the ship. A kraken!

More forces on Cerilia than the mere priests of Belinik oppose the Heroes' mission. This creature was summoned out of deeper, darker waters by one of those forces to end the voyage abruptly—by destroying the ship and consuming the crew. Fortunately, the protection spells cast on the vessel cause this summoned creature pain when it tries to grip the hull and crush it (as it would normally do), so it must instead attack the crew directly.

Kraken (Squid): AC 5/0; MV Sw 3, Jet 21; HD 20; hp 120; THAC0 5; #AT 9; Dmg 3d6(x2)/2d6(x6)/7d4; SA constriction, poison, spells; SD ink cloud; SZ G (90' long); ML fanatic (18); Int genius (19); AL NE; XP 14,000.

Notes: A successful hit with a tentacle means the character has either one arm (01-25% left or 26-50% right) pinned, no arms (51-75%) pinned but is constricted, or both arms (76-100%) pinned. A constricted victim cannot cast spells but can use a weapon to attack the tentacle at a -1 modifier (or a -3 with one arm pinned). If both arms are pinned, the victim can do nothing.

The kraken can spray a cloud of poisonous ink (usually to cover an escape) 80 feet high by 80 feet wide by 120 feet long. It does 2d4 points of damage to anyone coming in contact with it until it dissipates in two to five rounds.

The kraken can also use spell-like powers. It can create *airy water* in a 120-yard sphere continuously,

and can use the following abilities one at a time: *faerie fire*, *control temperature*, *control winds* once per day, *weather summoning* once per day, *animal summoning III* (fish only) three times per day.

This normal kraken (not the awnshegh known as *the Kraken* described in *Blood Enemies*) is unhappy about having been summoned to what it considers shallow water. Normally, krakens will attack vessels and retreat if they capture three or four victims in their tentacles, or if three or more tentacles are severed. This kraken, however, is being forced to attack the ship; it will make a morale check every round it suffers damage, losing 1 point (in addition to other modifiers) of its morale rating with each check. When it fails the check, it will retreat within two rounds.

landfall on serpent isle

Once they reach the Isle of the Serpent, the Heroes must land at night—avoiding ships attached to the Serpent's coast guard—unless they want to fight their way in. The Serpent, like most of the powerful evil forces on Cerilia, has heard of the disease sweeping the mainland. He intends to take full advantage of the disaster—but only after the time of sickness has passed. Right now, he surrounds his island with patrol ships and scouts to keep any disease carriers from bringing the illness to his people. He has not yet heard of the Heroes' quest, as he has not allowed anyone from the mainland—even his own spies—onto the island. If he does hear about the mission, he will undoubtedly act against the PCs.

The Serpent's Forces: The Serpent and his forces are described in more detail in *Cities of the Sun* and *Blood Enemies*, but the information presented here should be sufficient to run the adventure.

Assuming the PCs take some precautions and do not just sail up to the Isle of the Serpent in broad daylight, they should be well aware of the coastal patrols and able to dodge them. The crew of the *Wavecrest* will advise the PCs to avoid contact with the Serpent's ships. Not only is each patrol boat more heavily armed than the PCs' small

craft, but each is able to summon more ships at a moment's notice.

The Heroes need to use stealth rather than brute force, taking advantage of the fact that their ship's speed and crew's experience exceed those of the patrol boats. If the PCs insist on a winner-take-all naval battle, feel free to throw ever-increasing odds at them until the *Wavecrest* sinks, the crew mutinies, or the Heroes are killed or driven off.



night landing

The crew members advise sailing toward the shore at night to drop off the PCs, then swiftly sailing out again. In order for the Heroes to reboard the ship once their mission is complete, the crew will repeat this maneuver in the same place every night for the next four nights. After that, the full moon will be out and the ship will be unable to sneak past the Serpent's shore patrols as easily. If the PCs have not accomplished their mission and returned within the four days, the crew will give them up for lost and return home.

If the Heroes agree to the crew's proposal, the plan goes into action the next evening.

Assuming no one does anything to interfere with the crew's operation, slipping past the shore patrol is not difficult for the *Wavecrest*. The crew has done it before (see "Friends Ashore," below) and the

Serpent's forces were built for strength, not subtlety. The ship deposits the PCs in the water just offshore and departs.

swimming ashore

The Serpent has land patrols as well; a new, addition since the ship's crew last visited the island. Should the Heroes clamor ashore without looking around first, they will bump right into a shore patrol. Either or both groups can be surprised; a fight breaks out on the beach. The PCs must not allow anyone on the patrol's side to escape and alert other partols, which someone will try to do after the second round of combat—before then, the patrol will just try to kill or capture the Heroes. Should a patrol member sound the alarm, the whole island could be raised against the PCs in a few short hours. Likewise, attention-drawing magics (such as *fireballs* or *lightning bolts*) have a good chance of summoning reinforcements—20% per such incident.

Shore Patrol, MKh & FKh, F4 (6): AC 6 (scale mail); MV 6 (moderately encumbered); hp 33, 33, 36, 30, 30, 29; THAC0 15; Dmg 1d6 (spear or arrow); SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int avg (11); AL LE; XP 175 each.

Equipment: Scale mail, spears, composite long bows, 24 flight arrows, two days' rations.

Waasalien of Mor (patrol leader), FKh, F8: AC 0 (Dex bonus, *splint mail* +2); MV 9 (lightly encumbered—magical armor); hp 60; THAC0 13 (12 with Str, 10 with *morning star* +2); #AT 3/2; Dmg 2d4+3 (Str bonus and *morning star* +2); SZ M (5' 8" tall); ML champion (16); AL LE; XP 3,000.

S 17, D 15, C 8, I 13, W 11, Ch 10.

Equipment: *Morning star* +2, *potion of healing*, *splint mail* +2, composite long bow, 24 flight arrows, official papers and orders, two days' rations.

If the patrol is killed off or captured, the Serpent will not be alerted immediately: The shore patrols operate on three-day rotations. This particular patrol has been out for one day and is not due to check in for two more. The PCs could learn this information by examining the soldiers' packs and making an Intelligence check (food for two days in everyone's pack is a good clue), or if anyone can read Basarji, Waasalien's orders say as much.

Should any members of the patrol escape, other similar patrols will move into the area within the hour. Unless the PCs somehow cover up the battle and vanish completely from the island, they have a 1 in 6 chance of encountering another patrol every hour that they spend moving around the isle, and a 1 in 10 chance of an encounter during hours of inactivity. If the PCs eliminate more patrols, the Serpent's eye will be drawn to this little area and the Sons of the Serpent (the awnshegh's police force) will start sending out more powerful investigators.

scouting the beach

If the PCs sit in the water or come ashore warily, they will see the patrol moving along the beach. The patrol is not very observant, and each character can make a Dexterity check to slip onto the beach without being noticed (you may wish to modify this check according to each character's encumbrance). Failure means the patrol has a 25% chance of noticing the Heroes. Once onto the beach, the PCs can either lie low or ambush the patrol to gain automatic surprise. Considering the consequences of engaging the patrol in combat (described above), the PCs would do best to wait and let the shore patrol pass unharmed.

friends ashore

Once safely on the island, the Heroes next must find their Masetian. If the PCs thought to inquire before leaving the *Wavecrest*, they learned that the crew does not personally know any "true" Masetians on the island but does know of someone who might be able to help. The crew members will give directions for finding this individual but will not accompany the Heroes.

Though not a native, Marcus Kybo resides on the Isle of the Serpent. Coming most recently from the Khinasi states, Marcus has found the lawful evil alignment of the island much to his taste: He's a smuggler. Marcus specializes in smuggling goods and merchandise from the continent through the Serpent's oppressive grip and into the hands of the islanders. For a higher fee, Marcus will also (occasionally) smuggle people off the island—especially those who may have incurred the anger of the Serpent.

The *Wavecrest's* crew members know Marcus

for obvious reasons—they have been supplying the smuggler with goods for months. (How did you think they got so good at sneaking through the Serpent's shore patrols?) They believe Kybo to be fairly honest—for a smuggler—and that he will probably aid the Heroes for a small fee. The increased shore patrols brought on by the plague and the readying of the Serpent's invasion forces have injured Kybo's business, and Marcus has never been a real fan of the Serpent's policies.

Marcus owns an inn between the island's western forest and central mountains, where the nearest village is tiny and an hour's brisk walk from his door—not the best location for an inn, but ideal for a smuggler. The Royal Serpent Inn (an obviously obsequious title) serves both smugglers and sailors; the clientele on any given day depends upon the dual tides of politics and the sea. Marcus has cultivated the impression of a fat, jolly merchant who doesn't have too much on the ball. The soldiers take advantage of his apparent gullibility and fear of the Serpent's power, while he secretly collects information and distributes his smuggled goods.

the royal serpent inn

After a few hours of walking, sneaking, or fighting through the woods, the Heroes come upon the Royal Serpent Inn. It lies on the edge of the woods, with the mountains rising up behind it. The inn was once a large house; Marcus converted it years ago. It features three floors: the main floor where the bar and the common room are located, the second floor where customers with enough money can have private rooms (Marcus' own room is on the second floor), and the basement where the inn's wines and supplies are kept.

One of the huge wine casks has a false compartment in which Kybo keeps some smuggled cheese and fruits from the mainland—just so much that the Serpent's men, if they find it, won't think he is *too* clean, but not so much that a small bribe won't



cover the offense. Marcus keeps his actual smuggled goods in several small caches well away from the inn—that way, even if the goods in one cache are found, Kybo will not be implicated and he'll lose only a percentage of his business.

Speaking of business—it's been bad. The Serpent's constricting coils have wrapped themselves more tightly around the island than ever. The shore and inland patrols keep civilians from moving around after dark (the prime business hours for both of Marcus's trades), and the patrol members themselves are not allowed much free time to indulge in the inn's fine ales and wines. Kybo is growing worried about this interruption of trade and desperately seeks a solution.

Which means he will be more than happy to help the PCs on their mission . . . as long as it doesn't involve anything too dangerous.

able assistance

Upon entering the inn, the Heroes will find Kybo behind the bar. A few other patrons—none of them noteworthy—sit in the corner of the room.

Marcus Kybo, MA, T6: AC 7 (studded leather); MV 9 (lightly encumbered); hp 34; THAC0 18 (16 with *short sword* +2); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+2 (*short sword* +2); SA backstab dmg×3; SZ M (5' 6" tall); ML steady (12); AL N; XP 975.

S 12, D 14, C 12, I 15, W 12, C10.

Personality: Devious, opportunistic, friendly.

Equipment: *Short sword* +2, *ring of chameleon power*, innkeeper's outfit.

Thief Abilities: PP 55, OL 47, F/RT 45, MS 47, HS 37, HN 20, CW 92, RL 30.

Once the Heroes introduce themselves and explain that they seek a Masetian, Kybo is not hard to persuade. Kybo has been spotting Serpent spies for years, and he can tell at a glance that the Heroes are not Serpent mercenaries. And even if they were, what the PCs ask of him isn't exactly illegal.

"So, you want a Masetian? A pure-blood, you say, and for a good cause? Now, m'lads, I'm always willin' to support a good cause, but what's in it for me?"

If the Heroes reveal part or all of their mission to Kybo, he sees "what's in it for him": If the disease is cured, the Serpent will give up on his mainland invasion plans and will pull his shore patrols back to their normal levels. Smuggling will become profitable again, and Marcus will continue to make money. Besides, having his plans foiled will make the Serpent spit venom—and he'll never know who did it.

But that won't stop Marcus from haggling:

"Now, let me get this straight. I point out a pure-blooded Masetian, you get in contact with him, and then you leave. It all *sounds* well and good, but what if he talks? Or what if you get caught and *you* talk? What can poor old Marcus Kybo do but end up in a snake's belly?"

Bargaining with Marcus and offering him a small bribe (under 100 gp) will provoke the right response: Marcus will gladly help, though whatever the Heroes offer will not initially be enough. Threatening Marcus will just make him belligerent (notice his morale is fairly high for an "innkeeper"), and offering too much (over 500 gp) will make him suspicious. Kybo has no reason to think the Serpent would go through such an elaborate hoax to trap him into doing something quasi-legal, but if the PCs try hard enough, they can make him uneasy.

Assuming everything goes well, Marcus agrees to spread the word—discreetly—through his contacts in a nearby village. While recognizing a pure-bred Masetian is no easy undertaking (few exist, and they resemble the Khinasi in appearance), there are those on the island who remember their heritage and are proud to show it. The Serpent does not punish people for being of the same race as he once was.

"But it could take a few days, y'understand? Where are you going t'be until then?" Marcus asks innocently.

If the PCs have played fairly with Marcus up to this point, he will offer his inn as a good place to stay . . . for a modest price. Staying with Kybo is relatively safe, depending on the PCs' activities on the island up to this point. If the Heroes had to fight a shore patrol, or if one spotted them and escaped, they will have to hide in the cellar (perhaps in the false wine cask) or find somewhere in the woods where they can wait for Kybo. Otherwise, they just need to get into some native clothing (Marcus has plenty) and do their best to blend in with their surroundings.

On the other hand, if the PCs have given Marcus a hard time he will insist that they hide somewhere else—the woods, perhaps. He will show them a decent place near one of his smuggling hideouts, but he will be only as helpful as he must. Though Marcus recognizes the importance of their mission, he thinks of himself first. He will be as philanthropic as the PCs are helpful and polite.

the waiting game

Marcus's contacts need only a day or two to find a Masetian. The PCs, however, won't have any idea how much time is needed—for

all they know, the search could take hours, days, or weeks. The players should be nervous and playing "the waiting game."

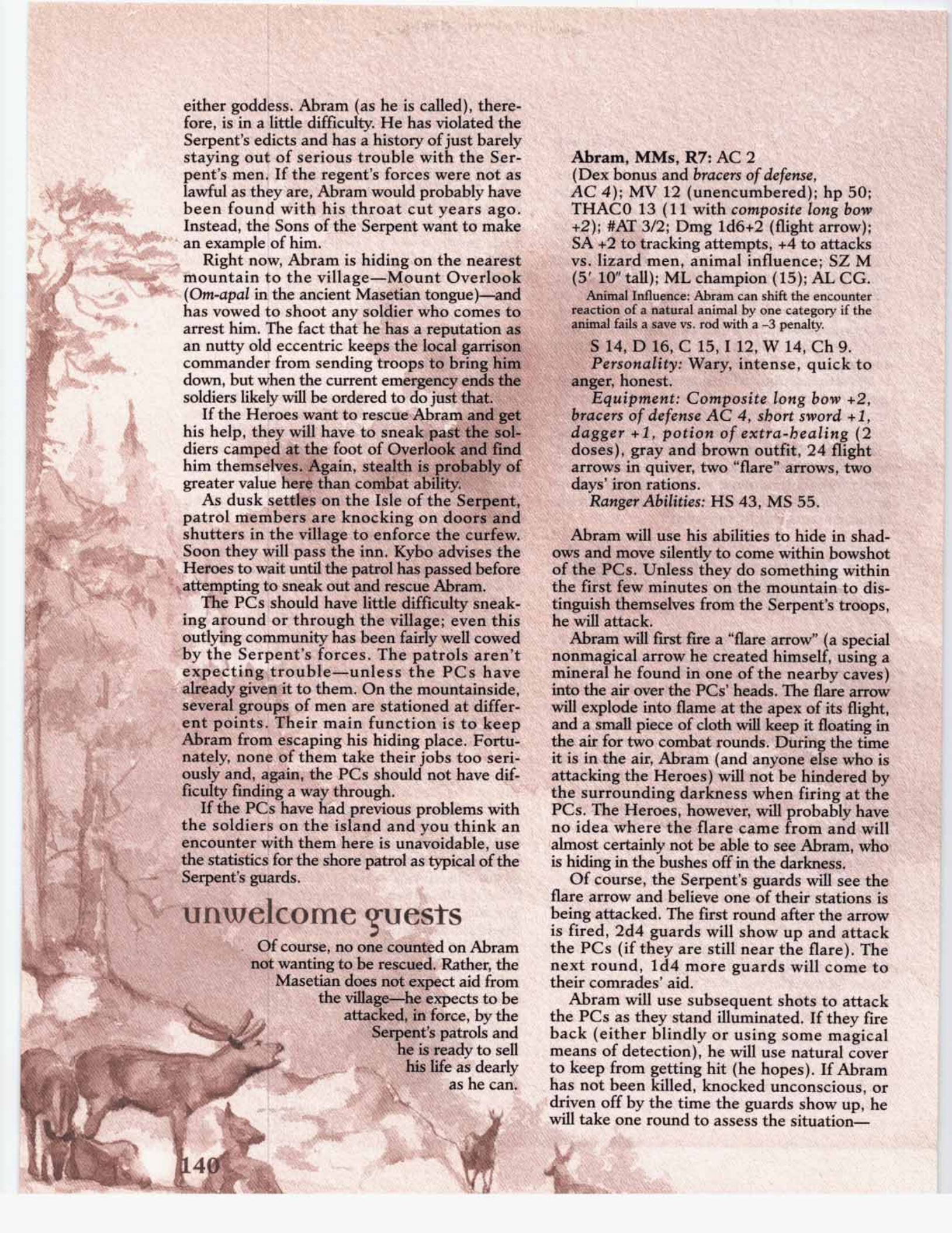
If the PCs are hiding in the woods, they should experience several narrow brushes with patrols (like the one detailed above). If the countryside has been raised against them, such encounters will occur more frequently—and with more deadly results, as they might encounter "elite" patrols containing higher level fighters and maybe a few priests or magicians. The Heroes must make every effort to remain undetected: If discovered, they could face an army of opposition and Marcus would never be able to contact them again. Force the PCs to use their brains rather than their swords to accomplish this part of the mission.

The same advice applies if the Heroes stay at the inn. Patrols will stop in daily for food, drink, and a friendly discussion with Marcus. Other patrons will move through as well, some of whom could be the Serpent's informants. If they note a group of strangers hanging nervously around the inn with no good accounting of themselves, an investigation could ensue. (On the other hand, if the Heroes come up with a good cover story for being at the inn during an island-wide curfew and are affable and relaxed, they should be able to pass.)

If circumstances lead to a fight in the inn, Marcus will help out if he can. He will strike a blow or two from behind and hide the bodies afterward. However, he will not be pleased—most likely, the Heroes could end up wrecking his carefully-cultivated setup, an occurrence that will not make his life any easier. At worst, Marcus might have to hitch a ride back to the mainland.

a thin line

Within a day or so, one of Kybo's contacts comes through for him. If the PCs have experienced difficulty—such as a fight in the inn or having been routed from the woods—the contact shows up just in time. He reports that a Masetian man lives in a nearby village. The man claims to be a pure-bred Masetian and proud of it. Some of his neighbors claim he pays homage to Nesirie and the memory of Masela, even though the Serpent has instituted a policy of capital punishment for worshipping



either goddess. Abram (as he is called), therefore, is in a little difficulty. He has violated the Serpent's edicts and has a history of just barely staying out of serious trouble with the Serpent's men. If the regent's forces were not as lawful as they are, Abram would probably have been found with his throat cut years ago. Instead, the Sons of the Serpent want to make an example of him.

Right now, Abram is hiding on the nearest mountain to the village—Mount Overlook (*Om-apal* in the ancient Masetian tongue)—and has vowed to shoot any soldier who comes to arrest him. The fact that he has a reputation as an nutty old eccentric keeps the local garrison commander from sending troops to bring him down, but when the current emergency ends the soldiers likely will be ordered to do just that.

If the Heroes want to rescue Abram and get his help, they will have to sneak past the soldiers camped at the foot of Overlook and find him themselves. Again, stealth is probably of greater value here than combat ability.

As dusk settles on the Isle of the Serpent, patrol members are knocking on doors and shutters in the village to enforce the curfew. Soon they will pass the inn. Kybo advises the Heroes to wait until the patrol has passed before attempting to sneak out and rescue Abram.

The PCs should have little difficulty sneaking around or through the village; even this outlying community has been fairly well cowed by the Serpent's forces. The patrols aren't expecting trouble—unless the PCs have already given it to them. On the mountainside, several groups of men are stationed at different points. Their main function is to keep Abram from escaping his hiding place. Fortunately, none of them take their jobs too seriously and, again, the PCs should not have difficulty finding a way through.

If the PCs have had previous problems with the soldiers on the island and you think an encounter with them here is unavoidable, use the statistics for the shore patrol as typical of the Serpent's guards.

unwelcome guests

Of course, no one counted on Abram not wanting to be rescued. Rather, the Masetian does not expect aid from the village—he expects to be attacked, in force, by the Serpent's patrols and he is ready to sell his life as dearly as he can.

Abram, MMs, R7: AC 2

(Dex bonus and *bracers of defense*, AC 4); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 50; THAC0 13 (11 with *composite long bow* +2); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d6+2 (flight arrow); SA +2 to tracking attempts, +4 to attacks vs. lizard men, animal influence; SZ M (5' 10" tall); ML champion (15); AL CG.

Animal Influence: Abram can shift the encounter reaction of a natural animal by one category if the animal fails a save vs. rod with a -3 penalty.

S 14, D 16, C 15, I 12, W 14, Ch 9.

Personality: Wary, intense, quick to anger, honest.

Equipment: *Composite long bow* +2, *bracers of defense* AC 4, *short sword* +1, *dagger* +1, *potion of extra-healing* (2 doses), gray and brown outfit, 24 flight arrows in quiver, two "flare" arrows, two days' iron rations.

Ranger Abilities: HS 43, MS 55.

Abram will use his abilities to hide in shadows and move silently to come within bowshot of the PCs. Unless they do something within the first few minutes on the mountain to distinguish themselves from the Serpent's troops, he will attack.

Abram will first fire a "flare arrow" (a special nonmagical arrow he created himself, using a mineral he found in one of the nearby caves) into the air over the PCs' heads. The flare arrow will explode into flame at the apex of its flight, and a small piece of cloth will keep it floating in the air for two combat rounds. During the time it is in the air, Abram (and anyone else who is attacking the Heroes) will not be hindered by the surrounding darkness when firing at the PCs. The Heroes, however, will probably have no idea where the flare came from and will almost certainly not be able to see Abram, who is hiding in the bushes off in the darkness.

Of course, the Serpent's guards will see the flare arrow and believe one of their stations is being attacked. The first round after the arrow is fired, 2d4 guards will show up and attack the PCs (if they are still near the flare). The next round, 1d4 more guards will come to their comrades' aid.

Abram will use subsequent shots to attack the PCs as they stand illuminated. If they fire back (either blindly or using some magical means of detection), he will use natural cover to keep from getting hit (he hopes). If Abram has not been killed, knocked unconscious, or driven off by the time the guards show up, he will take one round to assess the situation—



and realize his mistake. He will then fire his arrows at the guards instead.

Situation Summary:

- ◆ The PCs climb the mountain, avoiding the patrols, and are bushwhacked by Abram. He fires a flare arrow into the air, surprising them, and fires other arrows at them.
- ◆ The Heroess react, fighting back, trying to find Abram or doing whatever they can to defend themselves. Abram keeps shooting, hiding in the darkness and behind cover.
- ◆ The guards attack the Heroess; Abram is surprised and waits to see what happens. Presumably, the Heroess fight back.
- ◆ The PCs and guards fight. More guards show up. Abram realizes that the Heroes are not the Serpent's men and fights on their side.

The combat ends when the Serpent's men flee or are killed. Abram will approach the PCs and apologize for attacking them. He will also ask what they want.

"Masela's blessing? I've heard of it, but I don't know any more than you do. You think it'll stop this plague, that's great—Masela never had no cause to love Azrai, so I believe she'd help if she could. Nesirie, though, she's a newer goddess—we call her Nasri in this part of the world. She mourns the Masetians, but will she help us?"

With that heartening thought, Abram informs the Heroes that he will gladly accompany them on their voyage—especially since he's certain an alarm has been issued throughout the island by now.

flight to freedom

The PCs must now take Abram and meet up with the *Wavecrest*. They may head back to the beach immediately (it is still nighttime) or they may go by way of the Royal Serpent Inn.

If the PCs are on schedule, they have one more night (after this one) to rendezvous with their ship, but they don't necessarily have the luxury of taking their time—the countryside has been raised against them and they may find it harder to get off the island. If they head out now, they should be able to get to the meeting point without encountering any patrols.

However, the Heroes may have injuries or other reasons for returning to the inn. If they make this detour, the PCs should almost definitely have to fight at least one patrol between rescuing Abram and getting back to the beach.

Either way, you decide how quickly the Heroes reach their destination. The PCs should have the feeling that they just barely escaped the Serpent's forces. If this means throwing in a few encounters with the Serpent's guards (and, if the PCs are especially tough, a few DM-created Serpent priests or magicians), then so be it. If the players realize their characters' danger and try to get them out as quickly as possible, these encounters are redundant.

The *Wavecrest* will drop anchor offshore a little after midnight and wait for the Heroes as long as it can. It should be in the midst of pulling up anchor and leaving just as the PCs make it to the beach. At your discretion, the PCs might have to fight their way through one last shore patrol before reaching the boat. Keep the tension high and the action moving.

Once the PCs board, the crew will take over. The ship narrowly escapes capture by a Serpent vessel (maybe a few flaming arrows hit the rigging, but nothing too dangerous), and heads for open sea.

the isle of the tree

Up until this point, Abram has assured the Heroes (if they've asked) that he knows no more than they do about Masela's blessing and has no idea where to find it. When the *Wavecrest* makes sail, however, Abram does suggest heading out into the Sea of the Golden Sun, away from the mainland. "Masela was a deep-water goddess, and we asked her protection when we sailed over the deepest oceans. If we are to receive her blessing, we must seek the old waters."

If the PCs become insistent, Abram gets more and more cryptic, frustrating everyone including himself.

Use the situation, Abram, and the crew to pump the players into a fit of nervousness.

The crew members are anxious to find the blessing of Masela, not only because they need to find a cure for the disease killing off their friends and loved ones back home, but also because the ship has

already been attacked by one sea monster and they don't like hanging about. Serpent vessels have been spotted on the edge of the horizon, and they have had to employ some masterful sailing to evade them.

Everyone should be getting good and mad at Abram by the end of the first day, with Abram none too pleased himself. He stalks off to be alone and ends up dozing off in the warm sun. Later, he awakens with a start.

"I've seen it in my dreams!" Abram shouts. "I know it's here; it *should* be here. Wait until the stars are out, and I'll show you!" Abram then strides to the other end of the ship and sits in silence, peering intently at the ocean.

If the PCs ask Abram what he saw in his dreams, he gives them a vague description of an island shrouded in mist, with a tall tree sticking out of the fog.

When nightfall comes, the moon rises. Abram curses it because he can't see the stars. Meanwhile, several disruptions occur in the sea's tranquility—a sail is sighted but then disappears, something bumps against the hull of the craft but the PCs find nothing upon investigation, and other such signs of apparent trouble. Everyone should be biting his nails by the time the moon sets.

Abram studies the stars, staring into the sky and muttering to himself. He uses the crew's navigational apparatus, then throws it aside, cursing.



"I don't understand," he finally says. "The stars just aren't . . . right. I see the Isle of the Tree in my mind and I look up at the stars to get a bearing. But the stars are different, like nowhere in the world I've ever been."

Abram will describe the constellations and the positions of the stars as he sees them in his mind. A member of the crew will make a crude star-chart out of the patterns, and they do look different from the stars in the sky above . . . but not *that* different. Too many similarities exist to just say the ship is in the wrong place.

Actually, Abram is seeing the stars in a vision sent by Nasri. The sea goddess remembers the Masetian people, and yearns for the days when they sailed her seas and honored Masela. The stars are in the positions they were in when the Masetian Empire still existed.

If the Heroes put their minds to it, they can use several skills to figure out this puzzle. If the players can't draw a conclusion on their own, have any PC with a Navigation, Ancient History, or

Astrology proficiency make a check. Also, any priests who worship Nesirie have a 5% chance per level of deciphering the clues, and bards can use their chance of generally identifying magical items (5% per level) to understand Abram's vision.

If all else fails, Abram or a crew member will eventually make the connection. (Of course, you might want to throw in a few sea encounters to spur things along.) After arriving at the solution, anyone with the Navigation proficiency (including the crew of the *Wavecrest*) can easily plot a course for the supposed location of the Isle of the Tree. The journey should take under half a day . . . assuming there is no trouble.



trouble

When the *Wavecrest* approaches its destination but before anyone can sight the Isle of the Tree (as the Masetians called it long ago), a dense fog arises, seemingly out of nowhere. The mist blankets the ship so completely that the crew cannot see from one end of the small craft to the other. The sails are trimmed, the emergency oars brought out, and all must lend a hand.

At this point, Abram swoons. All scions of Masela's bloodline and anyone with even a portion of Masetian blood (Khinasi, especially those born in or near Ariya or the Island States, might have Masetian ancestors) feel dizzy and may pass out as well—characters must succeed at a saving throw vs. spell or fall unconscious.

The swoon does not last long. Abram awakes with a shout and rushes toward the front of the ship, pointing into the mist.

"There! The Isle of the Tree! Nasri will guide us!"

The fog parts . . . slowly. It seems as if the ship is entering a dark tunnel. Water laps gently against the hull; all else is silent. After a few breathless moments, the island comes into view.

It is a small island. On the beach stands a small tree, just larger than a sapling, bearing blue-white fruit. Abram insists it is the tree from his vision, despite its size. The ship moves slowly toward the island, the crew crowding along the prow.

And then it happens.

the last challenge

A giant skeleton erupts out of the froth on the shore. It wears the remnants of a Masetian sea champion's armor and carries a spear with a vicious hook at its tip. The armor and clothing around the skeleton's torso have been burned away, revealing a bright flame inside its ribcage.

A female voice, sounding like the crashing of waves against the shore, speaks from somewhere beyond the skeleton:

"Who dares come to the Isle of the Tree, the last memorial to the goddess Masela and the Masetian people who once revered her? Who violates this most holy of places?"

Before anyone else can speak, Abram jumps on the forward rail and shouts, "Nasri, Nasri! O goddess! Hear one who has worshiped you faithfully! Let us pass, so that we may experience the blessing of Masela!"

The giant skeleton starts to move forward but stops, seemingly straining against invisible bonds. The voice speaks again, more softly, like water lapping against the sand:

"Abram the Faithful, you are a true Masetian; else you would not have found this place. But those with you are not, and they might bring others to the Isle of the Tree. The Serpent follows you, and you must prove that you are more worthy than he to see the blessing of Masela. I am sorry, Abram, but your friends must fight to prove their mettle."

The voice ends with a crash of water against the shore. The giant skeleton, free of its bonds, starts forward. . . .

Skeleton, Giant (6): AC 4; MV 12; HD 4+4; hp 32, 28, 27, 26, 30, 34; THAC0 15 (13 with *hook spear* +2); #AT 1; Dmg 2d8+2 (*hook spear* +2); SA *hook spear*, 8d6 *fireball* once per hour; SD see below; SW holy water (2d4 points damage per vial); SZ L (12' tall); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 975 each.

Notes: SA—Anyone hit by the hook-spear must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation. Spear inflicts only 1d6+1 damage if used by anyone with less than Str 19. SD—Immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold* and similar mind-affecting spells. Cold-based spells inflict half damage; immune to fire-based attacks. Half damage from edged or piercing weapons and only 1 point of damage per die from arrows or other pointed missiles. Turned as mummies.

While only one giant skeleton initially threatens the boat, five more rise out of the sea in succeeding rounds. They attack passengers and crew alike except for Abram, who is immune to all their attacks including *fireballs*. Abram will fight on the Heroes' behalf.

There are two ways to defeat the skeletons. First, the Heroes can use brute force or priestly powers to subdue them. The giant skeletons are enchanted so they can walk on water, but if they are turned or destroyed they sink back into the sea, defeated.

Second, the Heroes can draw protection from the Tree of the Masetians. Getting past the skeletons should be tough (Dexterity, Tumbling, and other special abilities or proficiencies might come into play). Anyone touching the Tree of the Masetians becomes immune to the skeletons' attacks. If the entire party of Heroes (the crew doesn't count) touches the tree, the giant skeletons depart.

If the Heroes overcome the giant skeletons, a vision appears to them: a beautiful, sad-looking woman with hair as long, white, and flowing as the water in the ocean from which she rises. She stands just offshore, her feet caressed by the waves. She appears to be weeping.

"Welcome to the spiritual home of the Masetians, adventurers. You have proven yourselves worthy—what is your boon?"

Any character with Masetian blood must make a saving throw at -4 or be *charmed* by Nasri. Other seafarers (those of Brecht or Khinasi descent, or with sailing experience beyond that of this adventure) must also make the saving throw but without penalty. Nasri does not *charm* people intentionally . . . she just has that affect on those who love the sea.

Abram is awed by Nasri's presence and falls to his knees. The goddess walks to him.

The woman puts her hand under Abram's chin and gently brings him to his feet. "Rise, faithful one. Your waiting has been rewarded. You are come to the isle of your dreams." When you look at Abram, you see he is crying—with relief. The woman turns to you. "And what do you want, adventurers?" she asks again. "What does the Isle of the Tree hold for you?"

If the characters explain exactly why they are here, Nasri nods knowingly.



"You have passed through many dangers to come to my island, to pluck a fruit from my tree. It will save the land-dwellers, you believe? Why should I save the land-dwellers, who none of them remember my beloved Masetians?"

Attempting to explain to Nasri that the Masetians are not all gone and that they are surely not forgotten is likely to provoke an argument . . . one the PCs cannot win. Telling her that there are others on land who worship her and need her is the key. She will concede that though the Masetians are scattered and destroyed as a people, other races still on Cerilia need her help.

"Very well. You speak truly, adventurers, though your words are not as fair as men's once were. I will aid your quest. Choose one fruit from my tree and carry it back to the land. Find a high tower that looks out upon both the sea and the land. Climb to the top and feed the fruit to an afflicted person while casting your curing spells. When that person heals, so shall all be healed.

"But I warn you, adventurers, the sea may need you someday. Will you answer its call? Will you help Nasri when she asks it of you?"

The only suitable answer here is "yes." If the PCs answer "no," then Nasri slips back into the sea and the island vanishes as if it had never been (leaving those who had been standing on the island now bobbing in the middle of an ocean). Otherwise:

Nasri turns to walk into the ocean, her feet sinking into the waves.

"A final warning, adventurers. There are those in the sea who still wish the land bereft of life. I cannot help you regain your shores, not against those of the sea who might oppose you. Your journey is not over."

With that, Nasri disappears into the waves.

At this point, the PCs can pluck a ripe fruit from the tree. Any attempt to pluck a second will be answered by crashing waves that nearly swamp the island and break the *Wavecrest* apart.

Further attempts at plucking more than one fruit will undoubtedly result in disaster.

But if the PCs keep faith with Nasri, they can take their fruit from the tree and depart. A tunnel appears in the mist again, the sea is calm, and a comfortable breeze blows in the direction the PCs want to go.

At your discretion, Abram might want to stay on the Isle of the Tree. Nasri would be more than happy to support a true Masetian on her island. (Enough vegetation grows to provide him plentifully with food, and Nasri will assure Abram that he can leave whenever he wants). If you think the party is strong enough to handle the last encounter of the adventure (see below), then Abram should stay behind. Otherwise he will continue to aid the quest.

punishment of the weak

Earlier in the adventure, the PCs either killed or escaped a kraken. The kraken had been summoned by some evil power (perhaps the same power that started the plague), but it failed to end the Heroes' quest there and then.

It has been punished.

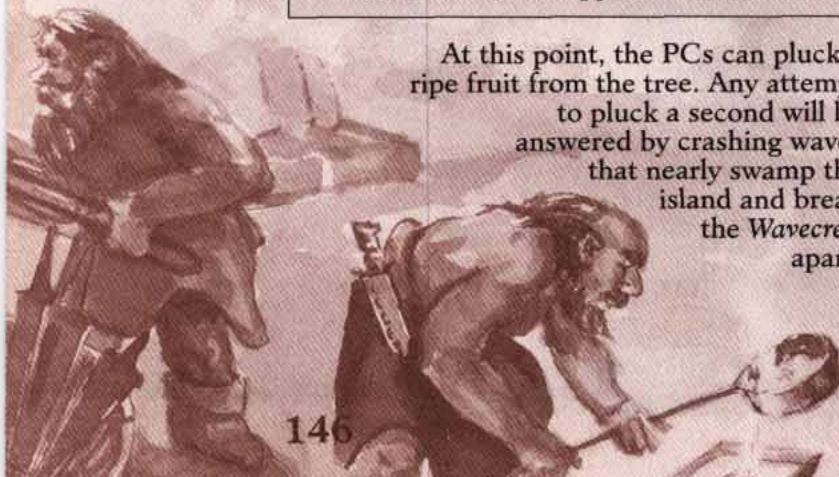
You have all had a chance to rest and sleep. Nasri must have been mistaken about this leg of your voyage: You are only a day or so away from home, no clouds threaten, and the ocean is calm. Nothing could happen.

And then someone shouts.

Bubbling out of the ocean is a familiar sight—tentacles surrounding your ship. This time, however, there is no interruption in the wind; if this is the same kraken you faced before, it decided not to use the same trick twice. Hopefully, you can outrace its grasp.

Then you get a good look at the tentacles.

The kraken the party encountered before is back . . . from the dead. It doesn't matter whether the Heroes killed it before or not—if they did, it has been reanimated; if they didn't, something else killed it and brought it back. This tortured, horrific creature bears only a frightening similarity to what it was before.



The tentacles, once strong and firm, are now a mass of slime and exposed cartilage. Parts have gone rigid and are sharp as spears. Others only wave in the air angrily, casting a foul odor over the ship.

The undead creature attacks with blinding speed. Before anyone can react, one of the smaller tentacles knifes through the air and into the chest of a luckless crewman. He didn't even have time to scream.

But now everyone else does.

Undead Kraken: AC 2/-1; MV Sw 2, Jet 18; HD 24; hp 134; THAC0 1; #AT 7; Dmg 2d8(x6)/7d4; SA spear tentacle, fear; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SW turned as special; SZ G (90' long); ML fanatic (18); Int non (0); AL N; XP 14,000.

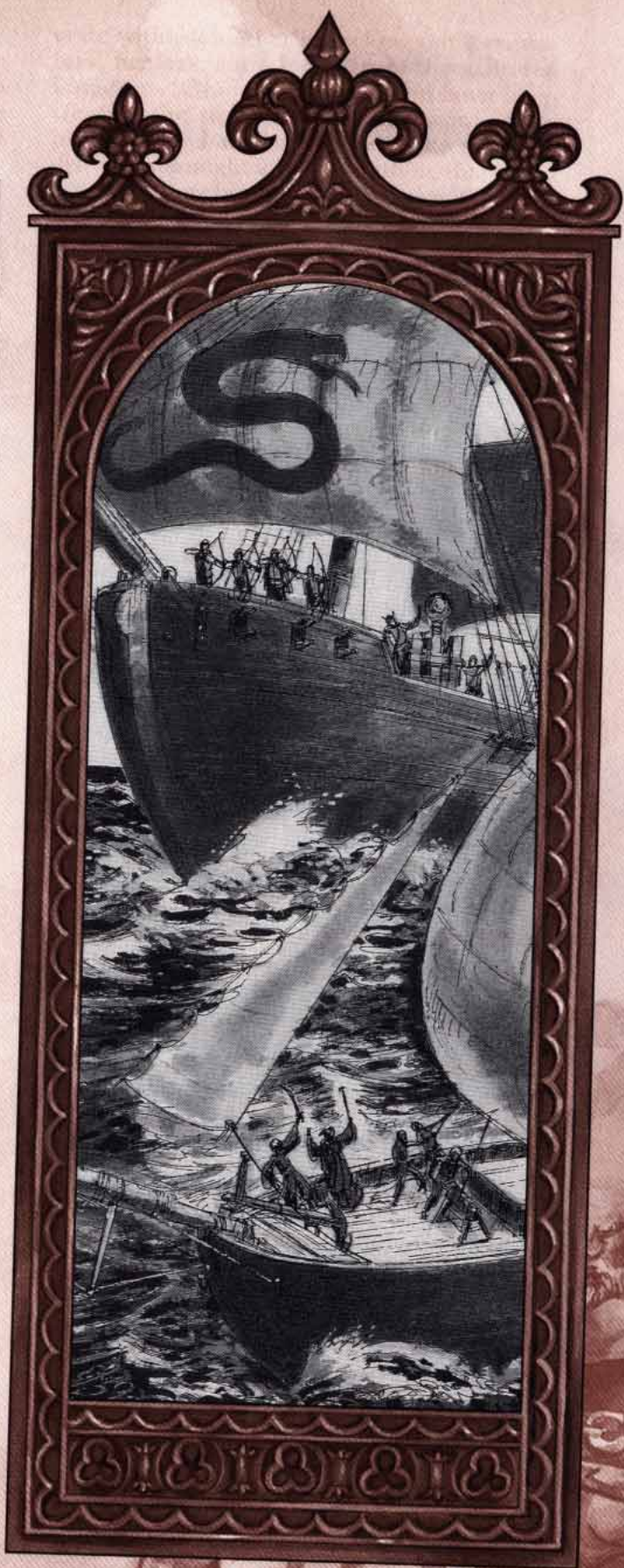
Notes: The undead kraken has lost the spell abilities, constriction attack, and ink jet it had as a living creature. However, it does have the following abilities:

SA—If hit by a tentacle, the victim must succeed at a saving throw vs. paralysis with a -2 penalty or be impaled. An impaled character suffers 4d10 points of additional damage. The victim can disengage himself from the impaling tentacle by severing it (with 18 points of damage) or by succeeding in a Strength ability check (while performing no other actions in the round).

When the kraken appears, it causes every character to save vs. spell or panic for 2d8 rounds. Panicked characters will try to hide from the kraken, possibly diving into the sea on the other side of the ship.

Whatever force or god punished the kraken did a good job . . . and the kraken will in turn do its best to punish the PCs. Though no longer intelligent, it is motivated by a vengeful hatred of the living.

The undead kraken will attack characters and crew members indiscriminately. If it gets angry enough, it will try to crush the *Wavecrest* with its larger tentacles. This tactic could prove its undoing: The kraken's larger tentacles apparently were cannibalized by its necromantic creator to repair damage to its smaller tentacles and body; its large tentacles are useless. The undead kraken could spend a round or two realizing this, leaving the PCs and crew time to escape or fight back.



a dreadful homecoming

When the Heroes land in their home port, a horrible sight greets them: Just about every person they see manifests some stage of the disease. The Gift of Azrai is on the verge of overcoming all resistance in the afflicted kingdoms. The PCs must hurry to complete Nasri's instructions.

Finding a competent cleric should not be hard—they still minister to the sick though they are dying themselves. If one of the Heroes has a *cure disease* spell memorized, he can perform Nasri's healing rite. If all else fails, a paladin's disease healing capability might suffice (DM's discretion).

Ascending the tower with a victim of the disease, administering the fruit, and casting the spell should culminate the adventure. When the fruit is consumed and the spell cast, everyone in the area hears the sound of sea gulls and waves crashing on a faraway shore. The caster of the spell and the symbolic patient see the face of Nasri. Very briefly, the Lady of Mourning smiles, then disappears.

The miracle occurs just as foretold. Waves of healing ripple out in all directions until everyone afflicted with the disease is cured. Victims who died of the Gift of Azrai are still dead, but there will be no more fatalities.

too easy?

If you think the encounter with the undead kraken is not a proper final confrontation, you can throw in an additional challenge: The evil force that reanimated the kraken has started to work on plague victims. Plague zombies, skeletons, and other restless undead will attack and stalk the Heroes while they find a living plague victim and go to the tower.

a job well done

Rewards for the Heroes consist of any, or all, of the following tributes, at your discretion:

- ◆ **In the next few days and weeks, emissaries from several kingdoms arrive bearing gifts for the Heroes.** Nonregents gain one random or DM-choice magical item (at least as good as any magical item the character already possesses, if not better). Regents gain promises of alliances and treaties, and possibly invitations to take over guild, temple, and source holdings in neighboring realms (to replace regents who succumbed to the disease).
- ◆ **Locals revere the Heroes** and sculpt statues, paint murals, or otherwise honor the Heroes for posterity. From this point on (or until something else happens to contradict the situation), the Heroes all receive an effective +2 to their Charisma abilities (to a maximum score of 18) when dealing with characters from this locale.
- ◆ **A nonregent scion is offered the chance to take over a small domain** (one province) that has been left leaderless by the disease. The scion must, of course, overcome obstacles and rivals in the province (making this reward a series of adventures itself), but the goodwill of most of the people is behind him.
- ◆ **All of the Heroes gain a bonus number of experience points** up to 25% of experience earned through combat, depending on your appraisal of how much they contributed to the mission.
- ◆ **Those Heroes with a coat of arms** can add a special flourish to their shields, designed by one of the foremost heralds in the land.
- ◆ **Any other reward** you think appropriate.

the price of success

Unfortunately, some repercussions result from the Gift of Azrai. Again, you can enforce any or all of these negative situations as you see fit:

- ◆ **Due to the disease's effects, tax collection is at an all-time low.** Roll percentile dice for each domain controlled by a Hero to determine the percentage of its usual revenue that the domain will produce this domain turn. For example, if a domain normally brings in 10 GB, and the die result is 63, the domain brings in only 6 GB.
- ◆ **A Hero's circle of acquaintance has not survived unscathed.** If a Hero has important advisers, allies, or NPC friends, roll a saving throw vs. death magic (with a +4 modifier as a reward for the PCs' success) for each NPC. Failure means death. At your discretion, some NPCs can be exempt from this roll (in other words, if you have an NPC you just don't want to kill, you don't have to take the chance).
- ◆ **The Heroes are marked men.** The Vos war priests, the Serpent, and other evil forces have singled out the Heroes, their friends, and their domains for destruction. Future adventures should take this into account.
- ◆ **The "unknown force" behind the kraken (in both its living and unliving state) is very angry and will send supernatural minions against one or more of the Heroes with no warning whatsoever.**
- ◆ **At any time the DM wishes, one or all of the PCs feel an irresistible urge to go to sea.** This is Nasri, calling in her debt and sending the Heroes off on some adventure of her own. They find they are under the effects of a very powerful *geas* spell and must do what she wants.
- ◆ **The Heroes experience any other repercussions you think appropriate** (especially those that affect regents' domains).

the price of failure

Ideally, this contingency will not occur. But what if the Heroes fail to bring back the fruit of the tree and the plague goes unchecked? What happens to Cerilia and the entire BIRTHRIGHT campaign?

Fortunately for the peoples of Cerilia, the Gift of Azrai falls well short of its goal. A devastating 30% of the population of each afflicted

realm (which should include any domains ruled by the PCs) die horribly, but then the disease peters out. Blooded and unblooded, noble and peasant alike perish. The awnsheghlien, undead, and monsters of the nearby domains will have an upper hand for awhile, but the Heroes can fight to restore order to their territories.

If you really want to make this experience a painful one, have every PC and important NPC (lieutenants, regents, agents, etc.) in the campaign make a saving throw vs. death magic. If the character fails, he dies. You can, of course, skip over your favorite NPCs, but this is a good way to punish failure and thin out a campaign world.

continuing the adventure

The logical continuation of "The Gift of Azrai" involves hunting down the powerful force behind the plague. It could have been a mighty awnshegh, such as the Gorgon or the Magian, or even one of the lesser gods.

Perhaps someone—or something—from the Shadow World caused the pestilence. The search could turn into another quest or even a series of adventures. The PCs might never discover who created the plague but they'll certainly not lack for things to do.

If possible, involve Nasri in some future adventures. The PCs now owe her a favor, and she will eventually collect. Until then, she might wish to use them in minor, sometimes annoying, ways—or she might choose to help them to ensure they will "be around" when she needs them.



Part Three of the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook* offers DMs some guidance for running a BIRTHRIGHT campaign, creating adventures suitable for the BIRTHRIGHT setting, and dealing with multiple regents in an adventuring party. This appendix picks up where the boxed set leaves off, further addressing the unique challenges facing you as a BIRTHRIGHT DM. Foremost among them: how to motivate the most powerful men and women in Cerilia to come down from their ivory towers and get their own hands dirty—in other words, how to create adventures fit for a king.

appendix: out of the ivory tower

Every DM must establish the tone of his own campaign. The players should know how their role-playing affects Cerilia as a whole and their own domains (if they *have* domains) specifically. As the DM, you need to help them decide how and why their kings, guildmasters, high priests, and regent wizards—or their scions and commoners—respond to the call of adventure. The answer will vary for each character and campaign.

types of campaigns revisited

The *Rulebook* recommends five different types of campaign structures for the BIRTHRIGHT setting:

“Collective Rule” advocates the PCs run overlapping domains within the same geographic location.

“The High King” explores the possibility

of everyone playing the ruler of a domain, with one player assuming the role of overlord.

“It’s Lonely at the Top” suggests one player assume the role of a regent while everyone else plays his servants or supporters. In a “Common Heroes” campaign, no one begins the game as a regent; everyone just adventures normally. “To Each His Throne” takes the opposite tack—each player runs a regent character with his own domain, and these domains may or may not be interconnected.

The following section discusses in more detail the pluses and minuses associated with these different systems and suggests possibilities for creating and running adventures in each.

collective rule

This type of campaign works very well for veteran role-players and novices alike. Each PC, or a majority of PCs in the party, controls his own domain within the same realm. One regent (perhaps the fighter of the group) controls the law, another (the priest) controls a temple, a third (the wizard) controls source holdings, and a fourth (the thief) controls a guild.

Multiple regents of the same character class can split domains fairly—for example, the domain of Tuornen, in the Heartlands of Anuire, could be split between two law holders quite easily. They could be siblings or joint heirs, both taking over for an old NPC regent and controlling half the provinces. Or they could split the law holdings of each individual province—a province (5/0), for instance, could support one regent with a law (3) and one regent with a law (2). Each PC might be a baron or a count, or one could be the “senior” noble and the other a “junior.”

Dividing holdings among other types of regents is even easier. For example, two guildmasters in the same province could produce completely different types of goods, all the while working with the law holder to increase the level of the province (and, by extension, the potential for guild expansion). The entire party could engage in a whole new level of role-playing: They would still be “alone against the world,” but on a much larger scale.

Benefits: This sort of campaign works extremely well when the PCs cooperate. They find early on that the NPC rulers in the same area do not cooperate nearly as well as they do, and the PCs learn to use teamwork to

their advantage. Eventually they take over neighboring realms, expand their holdings, and forge alliances with more powerful regents. They have ample reason for adventuring together (common goals, common interests, and friendship), and they form a strong, cohesive unit.

Drawbacks: If the PCs work too well together, they stop thinking as individuals. When they lose sight of their individual interests, the players might not role-play their characters as intensely. Suddenly domain actions overshadow adventures: Adventures just “get in the way” of taking over the world.

You as the DM can prevent this possible turn of events by using NPCs to tempt individual PCs with beneficial alliances and bribes, and by using NPC lieutenants, advisers, and even commoners to create rivalries and conflicts.

For example, if a guildmaster and a temple holder in the same party seem to be getting along too well, the guildmaster's best lieutenants might get caught engineering a theft at one of the priest's richest temples. This apparent act of betrayal produces friction between the temple and the guild. Though the guildmaster did not order the robbery, he must act to extricate his henchmen from the difficulty they've gotten themselves into. And while the priest might understand that the guildmaster had nothing to do with the burglary attempt, the temple's other priests, its congregation, and its servants all call for blood. If the priest backs down, he loses prestige in the eyes of his followers (possibly accompanied by a loss of RP and/or GB).

Players role-play to have fun and to be challenged; a good DM facilitates their endeavors. The DM is not wrong for trying to breed conflict among the PC regents—part of the challenge of role-playing is working together when everyone else tries to tear you apart.

Another drawback to this type of campaign structure can occur if players find the temptation of “absolute power” too great. How should you as the DM respond if the PCs start backstabbing each other politically and prove increasingly unable to adventure together or honor alliances?

What the ruler does, the commoners notice—and react accordingly. If a province ruler treats a guildmaster in his realm like a second-class noble and abuses him in public, the ruler's servants and followers do the same to

guild members and those loyal to the guildmaster—to an even greater degree. If a priest regent persecutes apprentices and servants of a wizard regent in an attempt to limit the sorcerer's influence in the area, lesser priests and lay people might start stoning or burning mages and/or those who are friendly to them. Little ripples cause big waves.

You can diffuse such a situation by using each PC's advisers to warn the regents of trouble among the populace. The advisers advocate a show of solidarity and unity among the nobility.

The law regent might be forced to present the guildmaster with some special award (say, a key to the capital city worth one Gold Bar or a special ship designed and built by the ruler's own master shipwrights), while the priest regent almost certainly has to go out among his own laity and preach against the abuse of mages. Players might well consider such displays a “waste” of domain actions, but should also understand their necessity if the PCs don't want more trouble.

Of course, this approach might not work. Perhaps things have gone too far or the players just won't cooperate. In this case you as the DM can make full use of your NPC rulers to rein in the situation: Even good, cautious rulers in the area perceive the fractious nature of the kingdom controlled by the PCs; invasions, agitation, and monster appearances become frequent—one or two every domain turn, accompanied by other negative events. Soon the PCs become too busy to mess with each other as they set aside petty differences to keep a common threat from deposing them and taking over their rightful regency.



the high king

Experienced role-players, or one or two veterans mixed with a few novices, should enjoy the role-playing challenge of a "High King" campaign. Voluntarily putting one PC in charge means each of the other players agrees to honor this "imperial alliance" intended to carve out a stronger, larger piece of the Cerilian pie for all.

Many role-playing groups choose to put their most experienced role-player or cleverest strategist in charge of "the empire" when they play in this type of campaign. That tactic works well—the person most able to rule, does. This role makes the individual responsible for the most bookkeeping (since he rules the empire) and the most decisions. Everyone else provides input and advice, but the high king's say goes. This variant on the old "party leader" concept can be a lot of fun.

An alternative challenge, however, involves putting the *least* experienced player's PC on the center throne. (Remember, not all rulers in history had the benefit of being fully prepared—or even fully grown—when they inherited their crowns.) While this setup might create rough times ahead, it prods the player to learn the BIRTHRIGHT rules inside-out and get involved in decision-making rather than allow the more experienced players to run the show. As his vassals, the veterans can keep him out of trouble by giving him good advice—but the ultimate decisions still fall to him.

Benefits: The advantages to this style of campaign mirror those of the "Collective Rule" game. The PCs work together toward a common goal: the expansion and solidification of the empire.

Other advantages to this campaign structure also exist. Consider, for example, a campaign in which the PCs control Roesone, Medoere, and Ilien. One PC assumes the throne of each of these realms while the rest of the PCs divide up the interior holdings (guilds, temples, and sources).

The players designate the ruler of Roesone, the largest of the three realms, as the high king. Medoere and Ilien pledge vassalage, and the other domain regents recognize this arrangement. The players individually negotiate any tribute of Regency Points or Gold Bars.

As the high king, Roesone agrees to manage most of the external concerns of the empire—diplomacy, trade, war, etc. As his vassals, everyone else agrees to rally to the emperor's banner in times of trouble and to provide advice when necessary. In addition, the high king has the power to step in and help settle internal troubles for each domain in the three realms when necessary—even if his decisions require taking resources from one domain for use in another.

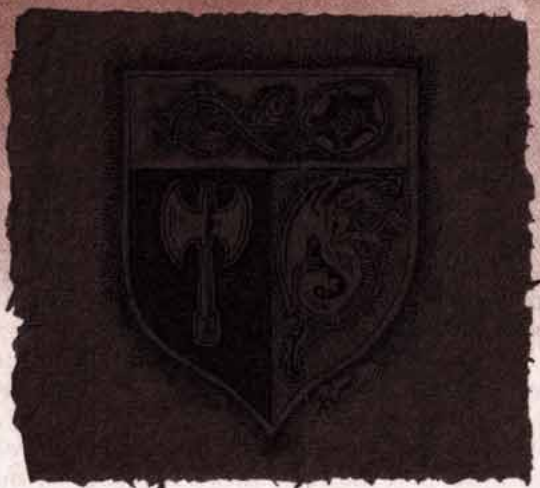
The cohesive and decisive nature of this group makes the empire extremely efficient. The power and influence of the domains triples, effectively, and everyone in the region must recognize it as a significant power. Oncepredatory nations start looking elsewhere for easier pickings. Smaller domains (run by NPCs) begin to consider alliances and vassalage of their own.

Drawbacks: Megalomania can threaten to take over at any time. If the high king becomes too "high" on himself and his voluntarily granted powers, he might start looking at each province and each domain as his own, not something over which he has stewardship. He starts to think only in terms of what *he* wants to do, not what the other PCs are interested in doing.

This situation could actually fuel some exciting role-playing if the players are mature enough to handle it. Civil war, squabbles over the high kingship, and internal and external intrigues can produce fun gaming sessions. However, many players might take the game's conflicts too personally, a reaction that can endanger the gaming group as a whole.

You can help by dramatically increasing, through certain events, the power of an individual holder in the empire—or by suddenly decreasing the High King's influence. For example, in the Roesone-Medoere-Ilien empire, Diemed might approach Medoere and Ilien and offer to pledge vassalage to *them*, in exchange for protection from Ghoere and the Spiderfell. The regent of Diemed might offer Regency Points, Gold Bars, and/or military support to them, but only if Medoere and Ilien offer assurances that the "power-mad high king" gets none of it. (You see, rumors about the high king's ego have spread throughout Anuire. . . .)

At the same time, the Spiderfell might send raiding parties into Roesone, burning villages (thereby decreasing law holding and province levels) and annihilating unprepared troops.



When the high king calls for southern reinforcements and money to support them, Medoere, Ilien, and the empire's other regents can "hold off" their support. As the high king feels his empire slipping away, he can try to institute a few reforms—beginning with his attitude.

As a final drawback, the players might take to the high king scenario *too* well. Like the "Collective Rule" campaign, it can become a devastating power bloc. The "empire" begins to become a *true* empire, marching over everything in its path.

While you, the DM, can use the same solution suggested in the "Collective Rule" section, there is another one that can be even more fun. Start forging an empire of your own. Make it big. Make it evil. Make it sweep down suddenly from the north, or up from the south, or from wherever is appropriate, and have it snap at the PC empire's heels.

it's lonely at the top

Similar to the "High King" campaign but on a smaller scale, the "It's Lonely at the Top" style of play allows the PCs to experiment with rulership and obedience to law. One player assumes the role of a regent (any type); everyone else plays his supporters, followers, or nonregent acquaintances. Some of the other PCs might actually be nobles with bloodlines—perhaps they are heirs to thrones of their own, or aspiring to a place at the top—but some might simply be commoners.

Benefits: This setup makes regency something special. As the DM, you can imply that regency *isn't* all that easy to come by.

"Compensate" nonregent PCs with other benefits—like heirlooms, extra experience, or bonuses on their character statistics. Though the BIRTHRIGHT rules do not go so far as to advocate these types of bonuses for nonregent

PCs, individual DMs can use their discretion in deciding how to make a campaign fun and interesting for all involved. Players then choose whether to run a kingdom or gain a little more individual power.

This campaign style makes it easy for you to set up adventures: Something happens that affects the PC regent's domain; he calls on his supporters to help solve the problem; everyone goes out and does his job.

DMs starting up this type of campaign might want to initially limit the scope of the PC regent's domain, perhaps guiding the player toward nonlaw holdings. That way the difference in power between the regent and nonregent characters isn't too disparate at the outset: It's easier to believe the regent still maintains contact with those who "knew him when."

Drawbacks: On a smaller scale, the same problem that threatens the "High King" campaign can also assert itself in this scenario: One person becomes "the boss" while the others are mere minions or minor allies. Of course, if the nonregent PCs clearly indicate that they won't put up with powermongering from the regent, the individual playing said regent might tone down his "royal manner" before things get out of hand. Otherwise, everyone else just votes to go off and adventure somewhere else—excluding him from the party.

However, the major drawback to this style of play lies in the fact that only one player (at least initially) participates in domain turns. One of the best features of the BIRTHRIGHT game is that players can explore the possibilities of running a domain in a place where their decisions have potentially worldwide consequences. If only one player gets a chance to do this, much of the game's potential can go untapped.

But this limitation need not have negative results. Players reluctant to jump into the kingly role could—after watching one of their own administer a domain for a while—aspire to greatness themselves. You can then fulfill this royal ambition as the characters prove their worth: "Common" characters can be invested with bloodlines and even achieve regency over the course of a few adventures.

In the meantime, encourage the regent character to use his lieutenants and friends (the other player characters) as often as he can to solve problems in his domain. For example, if the PC regent wants to perform an agitate action, he might

assign his friend—a nonregent PC priest—to do it as his lieutenant. You can ask the nonregent to describe how he's going to agitate, and award bonuses for clever ideas to the regent's die roll when it comes time to resolve the action. Alternatively, if you use adventures (such as the ones in this book) instead of simple die rolls to resolve domain actions and random events, the nonregent priest could lead an expedition to do the job (with the other PCs accompanying him as assistants).

Encouraging the PC regent to involve the other player characters in decision-making and domain turn resolution helps you instill interest in the regency aspects of the campaign. Don't be afraid to give the PC regent obvious bonuses for actions that he accomplishes with the help of his friends.

common heroes

This campaign style offers the most typical fantasy role-playing scenario. Players assume the roles of adventurers out to make their fortunes. They have responsibilities only to themselves as they wander across the land slaying orcs and goblins and making a name for themselves.

Benefits: Regency and bloodlines aside, Cerilia offers a rich campaign setting in and of itself. Its unique cultures, history, magic, and villains can provide plenty of challenges for generations of itinerant adventurers. And even if the PCs never themselves aspire to rulership, NPC regents are more fully defined in this setting than in any other—providing context for the grand adventures on which characters embark.

True, one of the most unique characteristics of the BIRTHRIGHT setting is that players have the option of assuming the role of regents and rulers of domains. But that isn't the *only* thing the game has going for it.

Drawbacks: For players (or DMs) reluctant to try out the regency aspect of the BIRTHRIGHT setting, a "Common Heroes" campaign can offer a non-threatening way to become familiar with Cerilia. But what if, once the campaign is in progress, players or the DM change their minds and want to explore regency?

As the DM, you can gradually integrate the concepts of PC domains and rulership. After the player

characters

participate in a couple adventures and have interacted with a few NPC regents or nobles, they start to get recognized at social events. People come calling, looking for help. Soon, offers of appointments at court arrive, and the PCs get drawn into the royal game as courtiers, well-paid advisers, and lieutenants.

From there, they get to learn more about running a domain by watching it happen and occasionally contributing advice and assistance. They go adventuring on behalf of their sponsors, and they are drawn together by the exchange of favors between regents and by common orders. Within a few months or years, one or more of them might assume important positions either near or at the head of prominent domains. Investiture and bloodtheft make it possible for a once-unblooded PC to become a regent if he chooses; the only limit to any PC's ambition is—well, his ambition.

Eventually, if you, the DM, keep showing rulership and regency to the characters as part of the role that NPCs fill in the game, they will want to give it a try. Bring them in slowly, if they want to keep their existing characters, by progressing to a "It's Lonely at the Top" campaign, and then explore "Collective Rule."

to each his throne

If you allow the PCs to run their own kingdoms throughout Cerilia, you put the fate of the continent in their hands. This style of campaign is best reserved for experienced DMs and a gaming group comprised at least partly of experienced players.

Benefits: The players take an active role in determining the events and course of the campaign. As they explore their characters' ambitions and manage their PCs' domains, they generate adventures and plot ideas *for you*. They conspire with and against each other (not to mention the NPCs you introduce). They plot to overtake the holdings of rivals and plan to defend their domains from those who would annex them. Instead of relying on you to create fun role-playing situations, the players themselves make them happen. The campaign benefits from the imaginations of each player, not just you.

Drawbacks: This style of campaign requires constant DM vigilance. From the very start, as players choose their domains, you must take care to ensure compatibility: If the players do

not choose kingdoms located near each other geographically, your workload triples just trying to get them all together for adventures. Why, for instance, would a high priest of Avani in the city-state of Ariya be at all interested in something happening in the Stonecrown Mountains? As a good DM, you can probably come up with a reason—but what happens when you *can't*, or when the players gripe about constantly adventuring in everyone *else's* domain and not theirs? Things become more difficult and less fun.

However, if you restrict player choices at the start of the campaign by presenting a list of law, guild, temple, and source holdings from which they can choose, you control at least a reasonable amount of their decisions. Keeping everyone in neighboring or otherwise-allied domains and holdings makes your job easier.

This campaign style also holds the potential of creating the most bookkeeping for you as the DM. Most DMs like to keep track of all the domains that border those of PCs—at a minimum. If your party has six PCs, each with his own realm, you could easily spend days doing nothing but NPC domain turns.

The best way to handle this situation? Don't knock yourself out keeping track on a turn-by-turn basis of every single NPC realm. Choose a handful of "primary players," keep track of them, and let the rest remain "inactive" until the PCs draw them into events. At that time, determine what alterations should be made to the basic information listed in *Ruins of Empire* (or the appropriate campaign expansion) to make a given NPC powerful enough to be a significant foe or ally of the PCs.



adventures and campaign types

Once you choose a type of campaign, how do you motivate these regents, nobles, and/or commoners to adventure together?

"A man walks into the tavern and offers you 500 gold pieces to keep the orogs from raiding his cattle. . . ." It's a typical adventure hook, and offering a commoner or nonregent character gold pieces, a magical item, or some other interesting treasure will probably get him on the road to adventure. But imagine that same reward offered to a PC regent:

"Five hundred gold pieces? I spend twenty times that on my court in a single season!"

"Surely you jest—my guilds will net me that much profit before I go to bed tonight."

"Okay—I'll send a lieutenant to take care of this afternoon."

Obviously, a character who daily faces the challenges of regency requires stronger temptation to face the challenges of hand-to-hand combat and other dangers of adventuring. So what's a DM to do?

interests and motives

Consider the characters' motives. Regents want to rule their domains and become more powerful and more influential—or, at least, maintain the status quo and not lose any ground. The adventures in this book almost all concern events that could reduce a regent's power in his domain and possibly cause his downfall. PCs react pretty quickly when their power is at stake.

So much for individual motivation—you still must get the rest of the party involved. Why would one regent risk his own personal safety to help another? Friendship provides a reason, as do alliances. Families might be related through marriage. Forethought also becomes a good motivational tool: "If I help him now, he'll help me later." But even these valid reasons don't always keep parties together.

Common threats provide another motivational tool. If the Gorgon raises an army, everyone in the west of Cerilia has a stake in the proceedings, not just the rulers of Dauren and Tuarhievel (two of the Gorgon's immediate neighbors). The rulers of these two domains might instigate the adventure, but getting the Anuireans involved or appealing to Rjurik leaders for help shouldn't prove difficult.

A challenge often has the same effect as a common foe. You can introduce NPCs of great power or influence and encourage the PCs to compete for their favor. Then a crisis or an adventure comes up. The NPCs make it clear that they value heroism, selfless acts, and general bravery—and the PCs have no choice but to take up the gauntlet and do the job.

adventure themes

As with motivational factors, you need to choose themes carefully. The average PC, responsible to no one but himself, can decide to go off and explore a dungeon or a cavern, or ride along with a caravan or a rich merchant. But regents who are interested in joining such an expedition need to justify why it's worth tearing themselves away from affairs of state for a period of time.

The theme of every adventure should involve not only a challenge that captures the players' *and* the characters' interest, but also a challenge that begs for the PCs' personal attention. Again, striking a blow against a common enemy always makes a good theme. If the newly created dungeon appears on the border of the evil domain of Ghoere, or the caravan *has* to pass through the Gorgon's Crown, a regent presence might be required.

Every adventure does not have to be of Cerilia-shaking importance to deserve the attention of a regent (though most should). Every once in a while, the king, guildmaster, high priest, and

regent wizard deserve a break. They can escape from the palace for a little while to go out hunting orogs or beating up bandits or searching for a lost child. Often they go on such missions incognito, only

revealing their identities at the climax of the action—if at all.

Regents tend to go on *reactive* adventures. They adventure because they have to: Some threat or opportunity comes up and they cannot resist the challenge.

Either the threat is too great or too subtle for their hirelings and lieutenants, or their egos are in need of a little stroking. The very nature of regency dictates that most of the time rulers don't have to go looking for adventure—adventures find *them*.

However, each court, each temple, each castle, and each guildhall should be rife with rumors of heroic deeds and quests needing to be performed. Regents and the other PCs should hear all the news, embroidered and embellished, as quickly as possible. There should always be at least three or four tales of adventure coming to the regent's ears at any given time.

And the regent, if he is like most PCs, will be aching to put down the mantle of rulership for a little while and pick up the sword of adventure.

Delay him. Make him deal with regency and domain actions first. Have his advisers nag him and take up his precious time. Make him *really want* to go off after every red herring you throw at him.

Tease the whole party this way. When one regent hears a tale, he tells another or they hear it themselves. Soon, the entire group wants to adventure, but they can't . . . not yet, anyway. When they finally do, they will be excited and inter-

ested in everything that happens.

Of course, the PCs could go the other way down the regency road. They could become so interested in running their domains that they want to pass up adventuring altogether. In that case, the DM needs to appeal to the only drive stronger than their ambition:

Their egos.

"My lord," the tremulous adviser says, "we've just received another report of your lieutenant's heroic actions against the Ghoere raiders last month. Why, I think all your subjects are fascinated with him! They all cry for his promotion and investiture with the rulership of a province. What? Um, no, my lord, I



don't think anyone still talks about your battle against . . . what was it?

Oh, yes, the great wyrm of the Stonecrown Mountains. Well, you have to expect they'd forget—it's been so long since you did anything heroic. . . ."

Remember the Great Captain random event? It doesn't always have to be random. Spring *that* on the PCs a few times, lower the loyalty of a few provinces, and see how fast they come out of their ivory towers.

retainers, armies, and other DM nightmares

When you run an adventure, you want to run it for a party of PCs—not a whole band of servants, henchmen, and retainers. They don't help the drama of the game and they tend to get in the way. There are a few ways to handle this situation, some of which are mentioned in the individual adventures of this book.

Sorry, They Aren't Available: You can always plan domain events or situations that preclude the use of certain resources. Border skirmishes and banditry can tie up armies and lieutenants, and hirelings get sick or sent off on minor quests by unknowing advisers. Whenever you don't want a particular NPC in an adventure, you can resort to many different sorts of manipulation—such as announcing a random event, suggesting that the NPC in question handle it and then, after he's left, introducing the adventure. Oops, sorry—no time to call him back. Or introduce an adventure; when the PC regent calls for his favored retainers to come along, roll some dice, shake your head, and say, "I'm sorry, your adviser sent him out on a mission a hundred miles away. However, his son, the jester, is at hand. Should your adviser fetch him?"

Share the Glory, Share the Wealth: Somehow, most of the regent's henchmen have much more stringent job descriptions than the players remember other retainers in other campaigns ever having. As a result, if a PC regent wants his 7th-level paladin to go riding into the Stonecrowns on an adventure instead of leading, drilling, and exercising the army he hired him to run, it'll cost him . . . say, one-half of the adventure's total treasure, donated to the the Militant Order of Cuiraécen.

. . . Not to Mention the Experience: Regents, unlike other PCs, can employ NPCs of higher level than they are. This makes sense: A king shouldn't have much trouble locating a talented warrior or mage among his subjects or the subjects of nearby kingdoms, if he makes a reasonable effort. However, if a group of 4th-level regents go adventuring with their 6th-level retainers, who is *really* doing the work? Let the players know that you will award the NPCs most of the experience points if those characters do most of the actual fighting.

Honesty: While experienced gamers pick up hints fairly quickly, novices might need a more direct approach. But if you let your players know that bringing along an army and a few dozen retainers would spoil the adventure, and if you create logical reasons for the NPCs to be elsewhere engaged, they will most likely capitulate. Most players agree that the goal is to have fun, not to thwart the DM.

adventures by campaign type

While the BIRTHRIGHT setting inspires endless adventure premises, many suggest themselves just by the type of campaign you run. Here are brief examples of scenarios and adventure hooks you might want to use in your campaign.

the collective kings' quests

In "Collective Rule" campaigns, the adventurers already want to work together. They hurry to help each other out of difficulty and they unite to pursue common goals. They deal with internal and external threats the same way: Band together and fight until they solve the problem.

Foster this cooperation early in the campaign. Try to build camaraderie between the regents. Sometimes one or two of the regents, particularly among groups of veteran role-players, want to create their own agendas—often at the partial expense of the rest of the party. They stop just short of really *hurting* anyone

(one hopes), but they play little games with each others' interests and resources.

When you create adventures early in the campaign, try to build up one or two local villains that seem virtually untouchable by the PCs. Their minions can be fought and beaten, but the enemies themselves remain out of reach. If the constant threat stands just outside the PCs' grasp, but within striking distance, the regents should bond with each other rather than fighting among themselves.

For example, if you run a game set in Anuire, you could make the Spider and the Baron of Ghoere two recurring villains. Both are evil, and both "hide" in the center of powerful domains. They can strike outward at Roesone, Medoere, Endier, and all the other "good" domains in the area, but they are too tough for individual PCs to defeat them. The regents must *unify* to fight the common foe.

Encourage the PCs to establish a group *modus operandi* (method of operating) in dealing with outside threats. Continuing with the Anuire example, consider how the group could face aggression from both the Spiderfell and Ghoere.

The Spider is an insane awnshegh with terrific power. His goblin raiders strike without warning—and seemingly without a centralized plan—at the southern kingdoms, pillaging, burning, and destroying as they go. The Spider does not care if they destroy themselves as long as they damage the surrounding kingdoms. He can always get *more* goblins.

Add to the equation Caine's magical power. Caine (the wizard of Endier) remains a force for good, but a very subtle one. He barter his favors and can be used to motivate reluctant PCs to action against the Spider. Though he does not care to provoke the Spider's direct enmity, he does not fear it either.

If the campaign began with the Spider's goblin raiders attacking all of the regents at once (during a domain turn), they likely would waste little time creating political alliances with each other. Next, a local NPC regent (perhaps Caine) contacts the PCs and asks them to lead a small foray into the Spiderfell itself. Someone has heard of a magical artifact possessed by one of the Spider's goblin lieutenants—the PCs could steal it if they were quick and stealthy. Without an army at their backs, the adventuring hero-kings would have to depend on each other.

Meanwhile, Gavin Tael, the power-hungry Baron of Ghoere, pressures the weakest of the regents to form an "alliance" with him. Naturally, the PC resists and needs the aid of his friends. Personal adventures—perhaps fending off assassination attempts or bloodtheft—occur, and the party now has two common foes . . . and many adventures to come.

the higher the king . . .

Foil the "High King" campaign party with a mirror-image foe: another "empire" with equal or more strength that challenges the PCs at every turn. This tactic works extremely well, as it forces the individual PCs to strive for discipline and efficiency if they want to survive. They *can't* go off acting on their own or, like sheep straying from a flock, they'll become prey to the wolf pack.

For example, create an NPC empire of several regents under the rulership of one dominant regent. The Baron of Ghoere offers an ideal choice for high king (it's his dream), but other regents or awnsheghlien work as well. Adventures for the PCs involve not only great battles, but diplomacy for their own federation and against their foes.

In Anuire, Ghoere could swallow up Endier and Elinie, then court Osoerde for its quick access to the coast. To a PC southern empire (forged out of Roesone, Ilien, Medoere and Aerenwe), this would mean the threat of a Ghoere-allied navy on their eastern coastline.

An adventure might begin with a diplomatic envoy, made up of the PC regents of domains in the "southern empire," sent to convince Osoerde to ally with them instead (or at least remain neutral). Only the PCs and their retainers could go, since bringing an army would look like an invasion.



But when the player characters arrive, they find Ghoere already there. The emissary from their enemy has just about convinced the Osoerde regent to “go along” and become a vassal of the evil empire. The PC regents must do some fast talking to keep from losing the diplomatic battle before dinnertime.

If they succeed, then the adventure continues with assassination plots against the Osoerde regent, fights against monsters and brigands sent by Ghoere, and possibly a war in which the PCs must participate themselves alongside the Osoerde army while they hope word gets through to their forces in Roesone and Aerenwe. Dramatic, climactic, and important events—all major workings of a BIRTHRIGHT adventure.

not just lonely— dangerous

“Lonely at the Top” adventures tend to get dirty and gritty for the PCs. Instead of court-hopping and commanding regiments, the player characters need to budget their hard-won power and the PC regent must delegate his authority carefully.

Here, you should try to rotate the focus of each adventure. Too easily, the PCs and you can fall into the he’s-the-regent-so-everything’s-about-him trap. That’s not just bad role-playing; it’s bad politics.

Since the Anuirean Southern Coast example has held up so well, let’s beat it into the battlefield a little more. Say the PC regent runs Ilien, a tiny but fairly prominent kingdom on the coast. The PC regent controls the law holdings, while the other PCs make up his retinue of retainers, advisers, and relatives. They support him ostensibly because he is the regent (and he pays them), but also because they are all Ilienese and understand the need to defend their small kingdom from predatory nations.

If the nonregent PCs appear at all formidable (which a character of any level does—remember, most people don’t even have classes and levels), they become targets. Any enemies or rivals the PC regent has, even within his own domain, will try to lure them away, neutralize them, or kill them. Keep one or more of the PCs the focus of such a plot at all times. Perhaps the party’s wizard has a standing offer

to become court wizard of Medoere, while a paladin in the group is the target of repeated assassination attempts by a thief guildmaster in Roesone. Every character should get this sort of “attention” so each can decide how to deal with it.

And don’t stop with the nonregent PCs. “I’ll take you on as an ally,” the regent of Aerenwe says, “but you have to dismiss that known thief you have at your court.” Or, equally as likely, another regent could offer the PC regent Gold Bars and/or Regency Points for “trading” him a valuable retainer.

Sometimes, these plots should succeed. Perhaps an individual PC decides to accept one of the hiring offers he receives. No reason exists (unless you create one) that prevents a player character serving an NPC regent from adventuring with the PC regent. Of course, it may cost him something. . . .

nothing common about heroes

“Standard” adventures work for common or nonregent characters, and most DMs can create premises for them with little trouble. Cerilia, its people, and its history present PCs with endless possibilities for adventure.

One recommendation: Keep regency and political power in mind while planning adventures. Kings, guildmasters, awnsheghlien, and other regents (or would-be regents) write the scripts of nearly every plot in Cerilia. No one gets away from the central focus the BIRTHRIGHT setting: The quest for power is always out there, in one form or another. Even if the PCs don’t know the political forces that shape their adventures, you should.



carving out a kingdom

A "To Each His Throne" campaign relies on player initiative and DM inventiveness. Keep the domain turns moving and try to make each adventure count. The passage of time in this sort of game goes quickly—you might not want to work adventures in more often than every few months, making role-playing between adventures even more important.

Each PC needs to start setting up a dynasty. This involves building families, alliances, and heirs that do not include the other PCs. You and individual players might meet before or after game sessions to talk about plans and personal adventures.

This type of campaign is excellent for a group of players whose real lives and schedules make it difficult for the whole group to get together for regular game sessions. If one or two players cannot attend a session, their characters spend it busily running their kingdoms. The DM should try to run small party or solo adventures for these PCs when an opportunity arises.

Such free-form sessions can be a lot of fun for both the players and you as the DM. Suddenly, you don't have to worry about everyone being included in an adventure and not being allowed to drag

along retainers. If only two regent PCs embark on an adventure, they can bring their servants and retainers while keeping the numbers manageable. Don't forget, during these breakout sessions, to maintain balance—in other words, PCs should be advancing in experience, acquiring treasure and magical items, etc. at about the same pace.



Keep the players apprised of what everyone else is doing. At the beginning of each game session, you can announce what the PCs have heard from neighboring realms and other regents, and everyone can spend some time discussing events.

When running full-party game sessions, try to generate plots that give each regent an individual stake in the outcome of the adventure. If Roesone's daughter is kidnapped and in need of rescuing, perhaps Aerenwe is betrothed to the princess, the wizard abductor is Ilien's archrival, and the hostage is guarded by undead legions—the bane of Medoere's existence. By supplying each regent with his own motive for getting involved, the PCs take a greater interest than if they go along with events just because "that's the adventure."

a final word

If you didn't already have more ideas for BIRTHRIGHT adventures than you could run in your PCs' lifetimes, you should now. Take your time exploring different aspects of the rules and finding ways to translate them into adventure premises. This book has shown you how to turn a simple random event roll into a full-blown adventure; the boxed set and other accessories are filled with additional possibilities. (Imagine, for example, an adventure plot built on a single blood ability—such as blood history—or a quest to reveal the identity of the Sword Mage or other enigmatic NPCs.)

Don't be afraid to make mistakes. If, after the first few adventures and domain turns the PCs own half of Cerilia, you can always stage another Mount Deismaar or some other disaster to wipe the slate a little cleaner.

Keep your adventures exciting, important, dramatic and (of course) fun. In a BIRTHRIGHT campaign it's good to be king—but it's even better to be the Dungeon Master!

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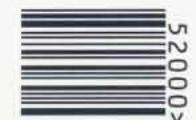
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