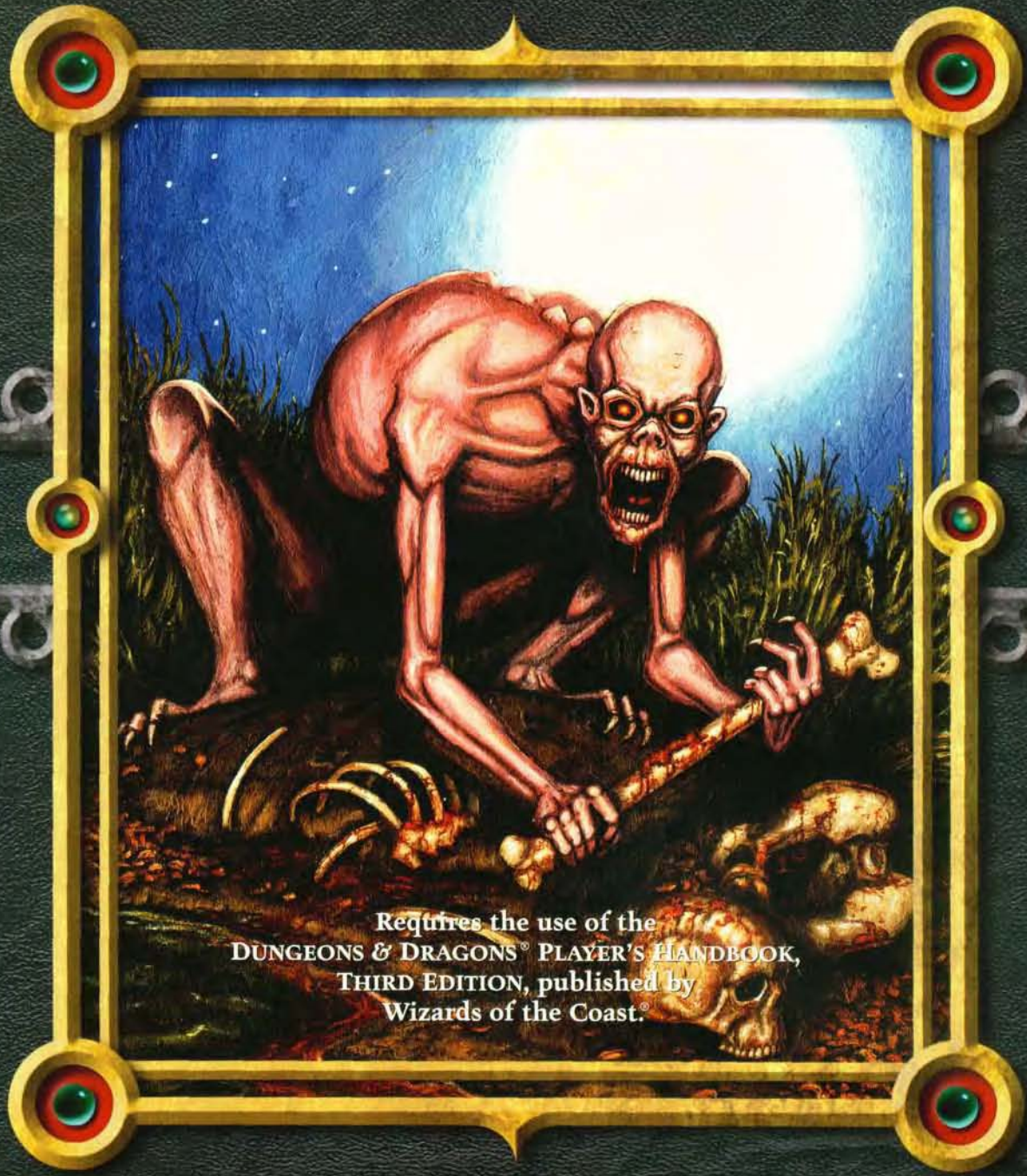




RIVER OF BLOOD™



Requires the use of the
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RIVER OF BLOOD



Wars make monsters of men.

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DEDICATION

For Dave and Steve
Okuno, who first per-
suaded me to while
away my afternoons
exploring imaginary
worlds.

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RIVER OF BLOOD

"But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all, 'We died at such a place,' some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afraid there are few die well that die in a battle..."

—Shakespeare, Henry V

WINTER ON THE RIVER OF BLOOD

Captain Anders Gar, soldier in the service of King Thorston V of Tohr, hated patrol duty, especially in winter. Every year, all of the contending armies of the Three Kingdoms region went into camp until the spring, so nothing important ever happened during the winter. The war-nobles who gave the orders might think it worth his blood to keep watch along the River Pauvaas and make sure the other kingdoms didn't try anything sneaky. But Gar and everyone else who manned the front lines knew that anyone who got himself killed in a wintertime skirmish died for no good reason. As a brave and experienced soldier, the prospect of dying in battle did not bother him as much as the idea that his life and those of his men might be wasted.

So even in the best of times, he hated winter patrols. Now, in this troubling winter of unexplained ambushes and lost sentries, he dreaded them even more. What were the Tyndalese and the Vedalians doing? There was no sign that either of them was planning a winter campaign — and a campaign in winter would be madness anyway — so why attack our patrols and outposts? Now, as his ten men spread out on either side of him into the morning fog that rolled over onto the banks of the river, he could make no sense of it. His only consolation was that he had his old friend Corporal Vick, who had stood with him in plenty of tight spots, on his right hand. "A good man, Vick," he thought. "I can always trust him to keep the men steady, and me, as well."

Suddenly, out of the fog they struck. Before any of the patrol could react, they had closed to handstrokes. Captain Gar couldn't quite see who — or what — they were; he barely had time to bring his sword up and fight for his life. "Steady! Close ranks and rally to me!" he cried out. Then he heard the dull, sickening sound of a blade piercing flesh next to him, the hiss of air expelled between gritted teeth... and he knew that Vick was down. Gar swung blindly at his right, guided by instinct rather than sight. He felt the edge of his blade strike something.

And then, just as quickly as it had begun, it was over. Their foe, whoever — or whatever — they had been, melted back into the impenetrable fog rising off of the River of Blood. It was quiet now, except for the groans of the men who had been hit. Gar knelt down, and there was Corporal Vick, his body run through by a strange longsword with a blade as black as jet...

When the messenger found him, Arden, Duke Regent of Tyndall, sat in his chamber of state, peering closely at a sheaf of documents pertaining to the number of bullock carts that his army would need if they were to go on campaign in the spring. Duke Arden was tired of documents, and especially tired of ones pertaining to war. He had never counted on such responsibilities. As the late King's younger brother, he had been only fourth in the line of succession behind his two nephews, and he was quite happy to remain at his estate in Calewood. He had expected to visit the capital only for occasions of state and family, never to live among the poisonous politicking of court, the obscene flattering and scheming.

And yet here he was, placed by a fate he had not chosen, required to administer affairs of state while constantly interrupted by all manner of advisors, courtiers, favor-seekers — and messengers. He sighed and looked up. "Yes, what is it now?"

The messenger bowed. "Couriers from Tohr and Vedalia have arrived, My Lord Duke," he said. "They arrived together, and desire the favor of your reply as soon as possible."

From Tohr and Vedalia together? Whatever it was, it must be serious, if the Tohr and the Vedalians could set aside their feud and present him with the same message. All the previous year, they had jockeyed for the favor of Tyndalese, even as their armies fought each other savagely — and also

raided across the Pauvaas, plundering Tyndalese villages when they needed food or money or women. But that was before this mysterious winter, when soldiers began disappearing and dying in numbers previously unheard of in the off-season — another care laid on his shoulders. The Duke Regent sighed and took the parchment and unrolled it.

The message did indeed bear the seals of both Thorston Iron-Hand of Tohr and Malvina of Vedalia, placed side-by-side. It began with the usual elaborate diplomatic greetings, then went on to speak of Captain Gar's ill-fated patrol and of the strange sword that struck down Corporal Vick. Neither the Tohr nor the Vedalians had ever seen such a blade, and at best, their scholars could only say that it had been infused with some sort of necromantic power some time after it had been forged. Would the Duke Regent summon his generals and his finest scholars to study this weapon and draw whatever conclusions they could about its origins?

The message went on to say that given the enigmatic nature of this sword and the unfortunate means by which it had been discovered, and given the mysterious attacks that all of their armies had suffered recently, surely Duke Regent Arden must consider the possibility that someone (or something) of which they were not aware now threatened the entire region. King Thorston and Queen Malvina had already reached such a conclusion, and had agreed to a truce for the duration of the present crisis. It concluded with an invitation for him to come to Valoro, where the King of Tohr and the Queen of Vedalia were already meeting, to join the discussion over what steps they would take next.

Arden rubbed the edges of the parchment with his thumbs — a nervous gesture — as he thought. No doubt some of the nobles would counsel that this is a trick, that the Tohr and Vedalians are trying to get the Tyndalese to drop their guard so they can seize their land and divide it between them. "No doubt, some of the nobles will counsel the exact opposite of whatever I think simply because I think it," he thought to himself. "Very well," he said at last. "Tell them that I will summon our scholars to examine this sword, and I will consult with my nobles. Then I will come to Valoro at their Majesties' pleasure."

As the messenger bowed and left, the late afternoon sun fell in slants across the room and highlighted the worry lines under the Duke Regent's eyes. He looked older than his years, and at moments like this he felt older, too. Not an armistice, but a truce — a temporary cessation of hostilities. War, always war, nothing but war. It was all his father's generation had known, and his grandfather's generation, and his great-grandfather's generation.

He had tried to bring peace to Tyndall even if the Tohr and the Vedalians wished to keep bleeding each other, but he knew many of the nobles thought differently, and they considered his position weak because he was only the Regent. He thought of his young nephew, the King, whose father died leading a war whose cause no one could explain in terms that made any sense. He was only six years old. Just a boy. "He should not be King, and there should be no need for me to serve as his guardian. His father should still be alive."

And then, like a sudden chill, it came to him: War. A sword. A man nearly slain by necromancy. It's the dead. The dead have come to exact their revenge

on us.



DM INTRODUCTION

River of Blood is an adventure designed for four to six characters of levels 7-9. It is highly advisable the party have at least one PC capable of turning or rebuking undead. Healing spells are also important as the PCs face powerful encounters that may inflict considerable physical punishment on them (they also have a chance to rest between each of the adventure's three "acts"). If the PC group is large and powerful (6 level 9 characters for instance), it is recommended you increase the number of monsters in the encounter. In terms of gaining experience, the PCs should advance a

level by the adventure's conclusion. However, the encounters have little or no treasure to speak of, so the PCs may find this adventure depleted their resources.

The adventure takes place along the River Pauvaas, in a region that is known as the Three Kingdoms because this stretch of the river forms the border between the Kingdoms of Tyndall, Tohr and Vedalia. You may run it as a stand-alone adventure, or incorporate it into an existing campaign.

All three kingdoms have fought each other almost constantly for nearly five hundred years (and Tyndall and Vedalia with each other for much longer than that), invading, raiding, and skirmishing with each other. The causes have varied, as have the alignments of the three kingdoms. Succession struggles, border adjustments, personal feuds between monarchs, raids for plunder — the three kingdoms have known all of these, and more. The ages have seen every possible combination of enmity, neutrality, and alliance in war between them. The only constant is that most of the fighting has taken place on or near the banks of the River Pauvaas, which defines much of the common borders between the kingdoms. Their various wars have taken so many lives within shouting distance of the Pauvaas that it is popularly known as the "River of Blood."

At the moment, however, the Three Kingdoms region enjoys a moment of peace as unsettling as it is rare. At the end of the last campaign season, all three armies withdrew and went into winter camp as they did every year. As a general rule, very little fighting happens during the winter; bad weather makes marching and reconnaissance uncomfortable and difficult, and there is no food about to support armies on the move. Many soldiers go home to their villages and do not return until the spring thaw. At most, the armies leave outposts here and there and send out the occasional patrol, just to make sure the other sides aren't up to anything sneaky.

This winter, however, the field commanders entrusted with keeping watch over the Pauvaas while their brethren feast at home and sleep by the hearth report strange and troubling occurrences. In keeping with standard operating procedures, they sent out two-man teams on sentry duty all along the river, but some never returned and no trace of them has been found. Of course, desertion was not unknown to the armies of the three kingdoms. But never had so many men deserted before. Furthermore, patrols came back bearing dead and wounded, reporting that they had been ambushed. None could say by whom, however, for the assailants always struck under cover of fog rising from the river, or in the middle of a heavy snowfall.



Each of the three kingdoms immediately suspected the others. But when a Tohr patrol came back with a man run through with a sword giving off a strange necromantic energy, they sensed that something more serious than heavy skirmishing in the off-season was going on. Sages and scholars from all three realms were summoned to examine the object, but none could say with any certainty what it was, and the military men maintained that they had never seen anything like it.

Sobered and far more worried by this than they could be by any feud amongst themselves — they were quite used to fighting with each other after all — the rulers of the three kingdoms agreed that whatever this new menace was, it threatened them all alike, since all of their armies were suffering equally from these attacks. They signed a truce, forswearing any hostilities against each other until they could discover the true nature of the threat and eradicate it. They also agreed to hire impartial investigators from outside the region and send them down the River Pauvaas to find out the source of the menace.

In truth, the mysterious casualties from this winter of dread along the River of Blood have several causes, all of them stemming from the fact that the endless years of warfare have rendered the lands on either bank of the Pauvaas desolate and sparsely inhabited. A bulette with a large appetite has staked out its territory near the elbow of the river known as the Great Bend, and has turned some Tyndalese outposts into hearty meals. A trio of werewolves have also wandered into the area undetected, and have made short work of isolated groups of soldiers. Finally, a tribe of sahuagin have made their way upriver from their homeland near the Great Sea, drawn by rumors that stretches of the Pauvaas in the Three Kingdoms region have been all but depopulated by constant warfare. They hope to claim a large area for themselves and split off from their parent community by the mouth of the Pauvaas, and they have sent a large party of warriors to see if the rumors are true and stake out some territory.

But one phenomenon above all has killed more soldiers this winter than any other, and it is the real and root cause of the terror that descended upon the Three Kingdoms. For the most part, the dead from all of the battles fought on the banks of the Pauvaas down through the ages were not given proper burials. At best they were dumped into mass graves before the army that occupied the field moved on. Very often, the dead were not buried at all, but left for carrion feeders. The desperation and agony of their violent deaths was barely noted, if at all. Some places along the river were fought over not once or twice, but many times, and dead were laid on top of long-forgotten dead. Those

who still live near the river sometimes remark that once a field has been fought over three times, the grass starts to come up red instead of green.

In the last campaign season, Veralia fought many battles with Tohr while Tyndall sought to stay neutral, but was forced at times to repel incursions into their side of the Pauvaas. The toll from the year's battles added to the accumulated piles of dead so that finally the weight of so much killing and suffering collapsed upon itself, imploding into a burst of necromantic evil that swept across the ancient battlefields. The dead began to rise from their resting places in all forms, both corporeal and incorporeal, all along the sections of the River of Blood that had been fought over most heavily. They began to strike at the living, looming out of the mists and rising from the marshes, many still clutching the weapons they held as they died.

The question of whether these undead intend vengeance against the living for their gruesome fates is a complicated one, since there is no single intelligence controlling this uprising. For instance, no one is giving orders to the skeletons and zombies, who really have no minds of their own. Undead hate the living as a matter of general principle, so they don't need a specific reason to attack. A two-man picket caught out in a heavy snow is an easy target.

This burst of necromantic energy also created six particularly powerful undead — creatures that can provide valuable insights into what is going on, either directly or indirectly. In life, they were all soldiers or war leaders who died horrible deaths as a direct result of the incessant wars between the three kingdoms. Unless they are destroyed by the spring thaw (i.e., the beginning of the next campaign season), an army of undead will coalesce around them and wreak organized terror and destruction upon all three kingdoms. And even if they are destroyed in time, the region's war-dead will continue to rise and plague the living unless the adamantine shield of Arnauf of Glor (see encounter #16) is recovered and destroyed. This item has somehow come to act as a magnet for necromantic evil, and acts like a battery, storing the power that drives the spontaneous creation of undead along the River of Blood.

Destroying Arnauf's old adamantine shield will defuse the present crisis, and that is where the PCs come in. But over the longer term, only a lasting peace between the three kingdoms allows the dead to rest, and to complicate matters, the rulers of each kingdom have their own private agendas. They are enacting their own storylines, of which this present affair is simply an episode — and one they may not fully understand at that.

Arden of Calewood, Duke Regent of the Kingdom of Tyndall, rules in the name of his six-year-old nephew, Stefen. A kindly man with an air of wistfulness about him, he does not enjoy his position of power. But when his older brother, King Elden IX, died while on campaign two years ago, falling off of his horse and breaking his neck, the nobles chose Arden to hold the kingdom in trust for the rightful heir. Since then, he has proven himself a wise and able ruler, but he longs for the day when Stefen reaches his maturity so he can retire to his estate. King Elden's less than soldierly death also inspired a pacifistic streak in Duke Arden, and he wishes to use the present crisis as the starting point of a lasting peace between the three kingdoms. He alone suspects the truth behind the mystery, that the many who have died violent deaths in the kingdoms' wars down through the ages have risen to avenge themselves upon the living.

King Thorston V, Iron-Hand of the Kingdom of Tohr, is a true warrior-king, a tough old campaigner who still enjoys plunging into the midst of battle. Tohr has been at war with Vedalia throughout his reign and sometimes with Tyndall as well. Peace does not sit comfortably upon his shoulders, and he is anxious to find a solution to the present crisis so that they can all get back to fighting again. He lacks the political imagination to contemplate anything other than a state of perpetual war; it's all that he has ever known and the only thing that he really thinks about. Even a complete victory over his neighbors would leave him at a loss, and if he knew of Duke Arden's hope for a long-term peace settlement, he would not know what to make of it. He doesn't fully understand what is happening around the River of Death and he doesn't really care; he just wants someone to get rid of it, whatever it is.

Queen Malvina of the Kingdom of Vedalia is a young woman, still in her early 20's, but canny beyond her years and ambitious. She leaves the actual conduct of war to her nobles, who constitute the army high command, but keeps her goals of statecraft firmly in hand. Above all, she has committed her army to the destruction of Tohr to avenge her grandfather's death, for which she holds King Thorston's father, Ralf, responsible (see Encounter #9). Malvina considers the present crisis a nuisance and a distraction, and she is just as eager as Thorston to resume hostilities. She will pay any price to clear up the mystery and resume a state of bellicose normalcy. She doesn't particularly care what's going on as long as someone puts an end to it for her. She has no idea that her beloved grandfather is now a wraith that has preyed on her own soldiers near the spot where he fell.

Only Duke Regent Arden among the three rulers perceives the true nature of the problem at hand. But even among his own nobles and advisors, old ways die hard, and not all of them embrace the idea of an enduring peace with Tohr and Vedalia. In the course of exploring the River of Blood for clues to this mystery, however, the PCs uncover bits of evidence that may yet persuade everyone that lasting peace between the three kingdoms is the only way to solve the problem. If they live to present that evidence, the people of the Three Kingdoms region will owe them their enduring gratitude, and the valiant dead will finally rest.

CHARACTER HOOKS

Ultimately, how you get the PCs to the starting point of the adventure (see below) in Valoro, the capital of Vedalia, is your own business, but here is a suggestion:

On the road, the PCs spot an elegantly dressed man on a lathered horse riding hard in the opposite direction. The man sees them, draws rein, and as his horse struggles to regain its breath, he looks them up and down through narrowed eyes. At last, he dismounts, makes a sweeping bow to them, and introduces himself as Lord Paray, courtier and trusted aide to Her Most Royal Highness, Queen Malvina of Vedalia. "I have been searching for you my lords. Word has it, your skill is what the kingdom need."

He explains that the Queen has given him a vital commission to seek out brave and powerful personages (i.e., adventurers) who can aid Vedalia in its hour of need. She promises rich rewards to any who successfully help the kingdom defend itself. If the PCs accept, he guides them to Valoro, all the while regaling them with all manner of boasts about the greatness of the Kingdom of Vedalia and the virtues and beauty of his Queen.

REGIONS

On the map are several regions. Each is detailed below briefly, feel free to flesh them out as much as you like for this adventure, especially if you intend to run this as part of an ongoing campaign.

BRIDGE OF DUNELDING

The largest, oldest, and most famous crossing point on the Pauvaas. Built by a fellow named Dunelding, a village chieftain who once led the League of Twelve Hearths in the ancient days before the founding of the

Kingdom of Tyndall, who rather immodestly named it after himself. It is the main crossing point on the border between Tyndall and Tohr, and the two kingdoms have fought over it time and again.

GOLDEN MARSHES

The Golden Marshes is the informal, vernacular name for the morass north of the Great Bend that is bisected by the border between Tyndall and Vedalia. It is so called because prospectors allegedly found nuggets of gold there, setting off wars between the two kingdoms for its sole possession.

KINGDOM OF TYNDALL

The Kingdom of Tyndall lies in an area blessed with fertile agricultural land, bordered on the south by the Pauvaas and the east by the Golden Marshes. The Tyndalese have a long history of warring with their neighbors, but at present, the young King's uncle runs the government as Regent, and he wishes to make peace with Tohr and Vedalia.

KINGDOM OF TOHR

The most recently established of the three kingdoms, Tohr is bordered on the east and north by the Pauvaas. They are a warlike people who honor martial

virtues, and their King and his war-nobles do not shrink from a fight. They are presently at war with Vedalia, and would fight Tyndall if the Tyndalese did not keep ducking them.

KINGDOM OF VEDALIA

Vedalia is the oldest and most venerable political entity in the Three Kingdoms region, bordered on the west by the Pauvaas and the Golden Marshes. The imperious young Queen of Vedalia considers her present war against the Tohr to be a blood feud against their ruling dynasty.

RIVER PAUVAAS

A vast river that extends from its source high in the Acalsus Mountains, the Pauvaas runs north and then west until it empties into the Great Sea. At the point known as the Great Bend, the Pauvaas changes course at a right angle. The stretch of the Pauvaas around the Great Bend defines the borders of the Kingdoms of Tyndall, Tohr and Vedalia.

ACALSUS MOUNTAINS

The vast Acalsus Mountains stretch in a broad band south of the Three Kingdoms. The Pauvaas originates in a secluded lake due south of Valoro, a fact in which many Vedalians take rather senseless pride.

VALORO

Valoro is the starting city where the PCs begin play. It is set in the Kingdom of Vedalia. The royal castle of Vedalia is here, in addition to a once thriving city. For game purposes, it is considered a small city, but the GP limit for buying equipment is only 1,750 gp. More information about Valoro can be found in the chart on this page.

ADDITIONAL CITIES AND VILLAGES

Many locations in the area are not defined within this text. Additional cities and villages within 50 miles of the river have all suffered the effects of the war. Most are trying to rebuild during this short respite from the fighting, but those closest to the river have lost hope and do little more than scavenge among the rubble.

NPCs in these villages are left to the GMs' machinations. How much they know and how they can aid the PCs is ultimately up to them. No village within 50 miles of the river should have a single item worth more than 75 gp available for the PCs.

"VALORO (SMALL CITY)"

Conventional; AL LN; 1,750 gp limit; Assets 875,000 gp; Population 10,000; Isolated (human 94, halfling 2, elf 1, dwarf 1, half-elf 1, gnome 1).

Authority Figure: Queen Malvina of Vedalia, female human Ari16.

Important Characters: King Thorston Iron-Hand of Tor, male human Ari20 (visiting King of Tor); Duke Regent Arden of Calewood, male human Ari18 (visiting ruler of the Kingdom of Tyndall); Duke Aldray male half-elf Ari12 (Lord Chamberlain of Vedalia); Deaconess Meres, female human Clr11 (head of the local temple of Pelor); Krantz, male gnome Exp10 (owner of True and Reliable Dry Goods); Lord Jesain, male human War10 (leader of the Vedalian Royal Guard), Bedemin, male halfling Exp8 (owner and proprietor of the Buttered Loaf Inn and Tavern).

Others: Royal Castle Guards, War2 (100); Town watchmen, War 1 (200); Clr6 (10); Clr3 (30); Clr1 (60); Exp3 (50); Exp1 (150); Ari10 (10); Ari8 (20); Ari4 (60); Ari1 (100); Com1 9,210.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

River of Blood centers around six relatively powerful undead who in life were soldiers or war leaders for one of the three kingdoms: mercenary captain Gareth Hawkwood, Tohr war-noble Baron Fredegar of Attan, King Fernan XI of Vedalia, a lowly and unfortunate Vedalian footsoldier named Levan, a Captain in the Tyndalese army named Brashear Mornett, and the legendary Tyndalese warrior Arnauf of Glor. Most of the encounters in this adventure relate to them in one way or another. Some may provide information about them, while others are red herrings that may throw your players off track.

The encounters are divided into three separate missions or "acts" which must be completed in sequence. At the conclusion of each act, the PCs return to their starting point where they receive instructions for the next mission. They may rest and refit as needed in between. You may also choose to conclude this adventure at the end of Act I or Act II. Perhaps your players decide to cut bait and end their obligations to the rulers of the three kingdoms before they run into more difficult encounters. Or perhaps you will wish to use only part of this adventure for your campaign. In such a case you should take note of the epilogues to each act. If your players cut out of the adventure before Act III, the consequences for the Three Kingdoms region differ from those of pursuing it all the way through the end. It means dire times ahead for the region, but this could also set up a further adventure for your players as it leave open the possibility they could return to finish what they started.

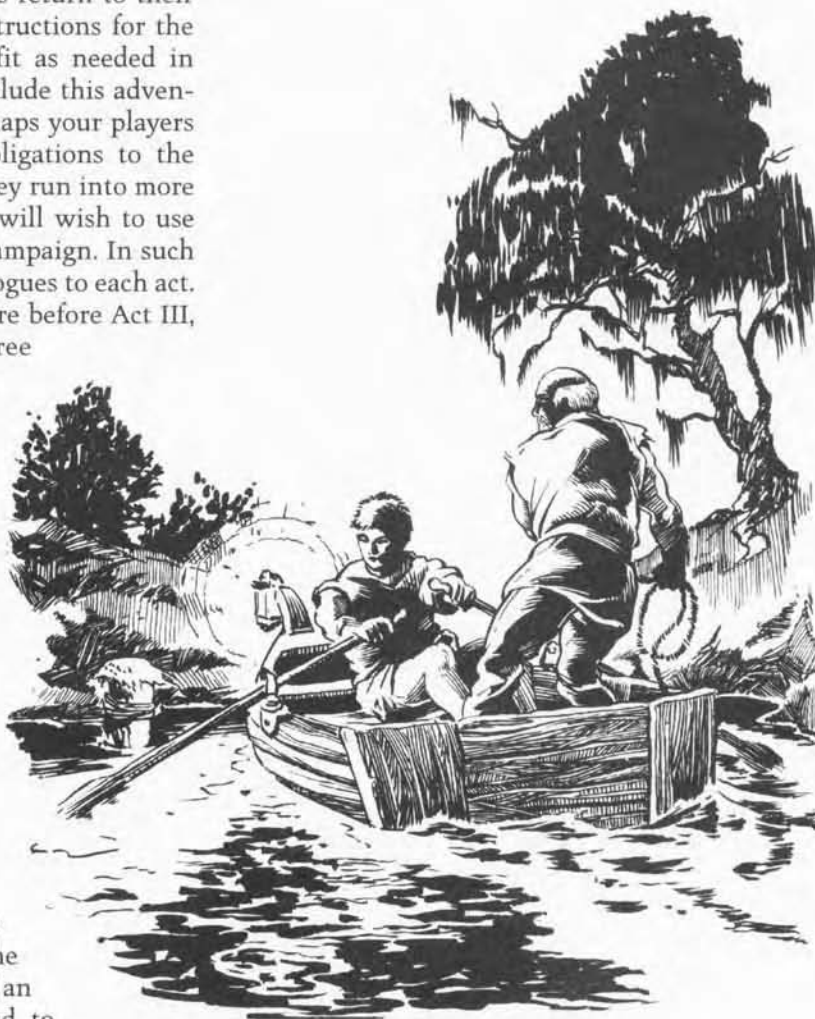
To begin Act I, maneuver the PCs to the starting point of the adventure, the Royal Palace of Vedalia (see below), using whatever means you must. Here, they meet the rulers of the three kingdoms, who brief them on the mission, define its objectives, and offer terms of employment.

As your players head down the River Pauvaas, they come upon the encounter areas. At the beginning of an encounter, read the boxed text aloud to them, or paraphrase it for their benefit.

Bear in mind that most of these encounters are lengthy combats, designed to challenge the PCs. This adventure can provide many evenings of adventure if paced well. Dividing up the time spent in combat, with role-playing opportunities or discussions about the ramifications of the undead, can extend the value of this adventure. DMs are encouraged to throw additional encounters at the PCs when necessary.

DMs looking for a one-night adventure should shorten the number of encounters or only run the first act.

Lastly, the encounters in here are not easy. Many of the undead are additionally fueled by the unholy ground they walk upon. Many of these ghouls and



wights are more powerful than the PCs may have encountered before. Having a cleric or two to aid them is not a bad idea and PCs without a way to heal damage and restore lost ability score points, are at a significant disadvantage. If the PCs gain enough experience to go up a level, it is recommended they be allowed to advance during game play.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

If you wish to throw some random encounters at your players to add a few extra challenges and an element of unpredictability, use the following guidelines. Once every hour the PCs spend exploring the adventure area, roll 1d20. If it is daytime, a result of 18-20 produces a random encounter; if it is night, a result of 16-20 produces one. To determine what manner of creature stumbles upon the PCs, roll 1d20 and consult the table below.

Die Roll Encounter

1-3	Corporeal Undead, Encounter distance
4-5	Corporeal Undead in <i>obscuring mist</i>
6	Incorporeal Undead (only appear at night)
7	Incorporeal Undead (only appear at night) in <i>obscuring mist</i>
8-9	Scavengers
10-11	Outpost or Patrol
12	Outpost or Patrol in <i>obscuring mist</i>
13-14	Dead Patrol
15-16	Sahuagin Patrol
17	Will-O'-Wisp
19	Roll again. This encounter is on <i>unhallowed</i> ground. Only undead gain the benefit of the spells like <i>freedom of movement</i> or <i>endure elements</i> . Silence targets everyone.

The following spells are tied to the place.

- 1 *cause fear*
- 2 *dispel magic* (as a 10th level caster)
- 3 *endure elements* (all)
- 4 *freedom of movement*
- 5 *invisibility purge*
- 6 *silence*

These spells are cast to the benefit of the creatures encountered. In addition, the land is shrouded in *obscuring mist* per the spell of the same name.

20 Roll twice, combining results.

SPELL EFFECTS

For ease of reference, shorthand for the spells in the PHB are reprinted here.

Cause Fear

When the PCs first enter the area, they must make Will saves (DC 15) to negate the effects of the spell. Each PC must make a save and the duration lasts for as long as they remain in the area. Retreating 60 ft. or so negates the effect, but re-entering the area forces another Will save.

Those effected suffer a -2 penalty on attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, and saving throws.

Desecrate

Several game effects take place on desecrated ground. Because the land here is befouled by something more powerful than man, the land is considered its own altar and the effects from the PHB are doubled.

- All turn checks suffer a -6 profane penalty.
- Undead gain a +2 profane bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws.
- Undead gain +2 hit points per HD.

Dispel Magic

Upon entering the area (a 30-ft.-radius burst), all magic effects (such as mage armor, etc.) are dismissed as though dispel magic were cast by a 10th level caster (1d20 + 10 vs. DC 11 + spell caster's level). Each magical effect on the PC is targeted separately and all spells cast within the area are targeted as if counterspelled. However, a roll must still be made against the spell per the rules above.

Endure Elements

Each round that the PCs attack the undead, the first 5 points of element damage are absorbed. Treat this as though each creature had the spell cast on them.

Freedom of Movement

The undead in this encounter cannot be slowed, held, paralyzed or otherwise deterred. They move through the water with ease.

Invisibility Purge

When the PCs step foot on the unhallowed ground here, all invisible objects and people become visible. The effect is instantaneous and there is no saving throw.

COMBAT

This adventure has many augmented rules for combat. Many encounters involved spell enchantments that keep the undead at bay. Be aware of the conditions of desecrate, unhallow and the like. Be aware of how different they are. This will speed combat and increase game play.

Be aware that the river is slog-bottom and movement along it's bank is halved. PCs that move too far from the patrol paths are sure to slow their speed and impede their fighting on unsure ground.

Silence

Complete silence prevails in the affected area. All sound is stopped and spells requiring a verbal (V) component cannot be cast. Attempts to break through the silence, require a Will save (DC 16) and spell resistance may also be taken into account. Only one save may be made per area, whether or not a PC exits and re-enters the unhallowed ground.

Obscuring Mist

A bank of fog (30 ft. radius, 20 ft. high) blankets the area. Visibility is reduced to 5 ft. and all combatants within the mist (up to 5 ft.) have one-half concealment (20% miss chance). Beyond 5 ft., the mist provides total concealment (50% miss chance). Spells may disperse the mist, but it always returns in 1d6 minutes.

Unhallow

Several game effects take place on unhallowed ground.

- The unhallowed ground is nearly everywhere. For game purposes, it fills a 60-ft.-radius burst centered on the encounter point. Attempts to detect magic or evil radiate in nearly every direction. Only intense concentration (5 rounds or more) allows a spellcaster to locate a center of unhallowed ground.
- All good PCs are affected as though protection from good were cast. Undead subjects on unhallowed ground gain a +2 deflection bonus to AC and a +2 resistance bonus on saves against good PCs.
- Good PCs may not attempt to ward the undead.
- Summoned or conjured creatures may not use their natural weapons against the undead. Evil creatures are immune to this effect.
- All turning checks suffer a -4 profane penalty. Clerics that attempt to rebuke the undead in this adventure find it just as hard as turning.

ENCOUNTER DESCRIPTIONS**CORPOREAL UNDEAD**

A roving band composed of 3-6 (1d4+2) medium skeletons, 2-5 (1d4+1) medium zombies and 1-3 (1d3) ghouls. These are corpses of soldiers slain in the wars — some long ago and some recently. The spontaneous burst of necromancy that created the present crisis animated them. They have formed themselves into small ad hoc groups, terrorizing the living wherever they may find them.

Each skeleton carries a standard-issue military weapon (see below). They also wear shreds of armor that augment their natural AC, as do the zombies. Except for the occasional helm, however, these fragments of armor are of little use if PCs strip them from their former owners. The ghouls wear no armor and fight with their claws. However, for each ghoul present, there is a 1 in 20 chance that it possesses a *+1 wraith touch longsword* (see New Magic Items) which it uses instead of its claws.

No coordinating intelligence guides these undead. They are tactically unsophisticated. They simply attack living creatures on sight and charge into battle.

The encounter distance is 10-60 ft.

Skeletons: CR 1/3; SZ M (undead); HD 1d12; hp 7; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 armor fragments); Atks +0 melee (by weapon); SQ Undead, immunities; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 11; AL N. Feats: Improve Initiative.

Zombies: CR 1/2; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12+3; hp 16; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (-1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 armor fragments); Atks Slam +2 melee (1d6+1), or +2 melee (by weapon); SQ Undead, partial actions only; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 8, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1. Feats: Toughness.

Ghouls: CR 1; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12; hp 13; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +2 armor fragments); Atks Bite +3 melee (1d6+1 and paralysis), 2 claws +0 melee (1d3 and paralysis), or +3 melee (by weapon); SA Paralysis, create spawn; SQ Undead, +2 turn resistance; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 15, Con —, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16; AL CE. Skills: Climb +6, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Search +6, Spot +7. Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (bite).

Weapons

1d20	Melee Weapon
1-4	Battleaxe
5-7	Halberd
8-10	Longspear
10-16	Longsword
17-20	Warhammer

INCORPOREAL UNDEAD

The undead remains of an officer or noble killed in the wars returns as a wraith. It appears as a man in full battle armor.

The encounter distance is 10-40 ft.

Wraith: CR 5; SZ M (undead, incorporeal); HD 5d12; hp 32; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection); Atks Incorporeal touch +5 melee (1d4 and 1d6 permanent Constitution drain); SA Constitution drain, create spawn; SQ Undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance, unnatural aura, daylight powerlessness; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6; Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15; AL LE. Skills: Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +12, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +12. Feats: Alertness, Blindfight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative.

SCAVENGERS

This encounter features a party of 2-5 (1d4+1) humans engaged in looting corpses and digging up graves. This is considered a crime by all three nations, however none seem to enforce this law at the moment for fear that without looting their nation's peasantry will starve. If the PCs kill or arrest the scavengers they are given commendations.

Scavengers, Rog2: CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d6; hp 10; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 partial armor); Atks Short sword +3 melee (1d6); SA Sneak attack, evasion; SV Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 11; AL N. Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +4, Climb +4, Decipher Script +2, Hide +6, Intuit Direction +3, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Search +4, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5. Feats: Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (shortsword).

OUTPOST OR PATROL

Either a two-man sentry post or a ten-man patrol makes up this encounter. Allegiance of the soldiers depends on where the party encounters them; if they are in Tyndalese territory, they are soldiers of Tyndall, etc.

For description of a typical sentry outpost, (see encounter #1). Sentries stand guard at appointed areas along the front line. Their job is to make sure spies, raiders, and contraband cannot infiltrate into friendly territory. If faced with a large-scale enemy movement, they are to run to the rear and give warning.

Patrols circulate through pre-designated stretches of territory along the front lines, although sometimes they are ordered to sneak into enemy-held lands to sniff out what's going on in there. Their job is to gather intelligence as much as it is to provide security. Patrols consist of eight rank-and-file, a corporal or sergeant, and a low-level officer generically known as a captain.

Neither should offer the party any trouble unless the PCs badly mishandle the situation. The party's safe conduct pass (see *Starting Point*, below) gains the soldiers' trust, and they willingly share what they have learned. You may use such an encounter, for instance, to warn your players about an upcoming encounter or share rumors about the politics of any of the three kingdoms.

Each soldier carries a pouch tied around the waist containing 10-40 sp. Corporals and sergeants carry 1-10 gp, and captains carry 2-20 gp.

The encounter distance is 20-120 ft.

Human Soldiers: CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d10+2; hp 11; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., AC 15 (+1 Dex, +4 scale mail); Atks Battleaxe +3 melee (1d8); SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; AL LN. Skills: Climb +5, Jump +5, Listen +1, Spot +1. Feats: Dodge, Power Attack, Toughness.

Human Corporal/Sergeant: CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d10+2; hp 23; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., AC 15 (+1 Dex, +4 scale mail); Atks Halberd +6 melee (1d10+3); SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12; AL LN. Skills: Climb +5, Jump +5, Listen +2, Spot +2. Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Toughness.

Human Captain: CR 4; SZ M (humanoid); HD 5d10+2; hp 38; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 scale mail); Atks Longsword +8 melee (1d8+3); AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 13. Skills: Climb +5, Jump +5, Listen +2, Ride +4, Spot +2. Feats: Cleave, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Toughness.

Weapons

1d20	Melee Weapon
1-4	Battleaxe
5-7	Halberd
8-10	Longspear
10-16	Longsword
17-20	Warhammer

DEAD PATROL

The PCs happen upon a ravaged patrol. The men are torn apart and the scene is gruesome and savage. Feel free to give the dead soldiers names if you like. Perhaps some of them have personal effects or letters from home. They were obviously attacked by something vicious and some of them have been gnawed upon.

Allegiance of the soldiers depends on where the party encounters them; if they are in Tyndalese territory, they are soldiers of Tyndall, etc.

Additionally, the PCs could stumble upon an aberration or shapeshifter that has turned itself inside out and died. The remains are a horrific sight and it might take several minutes to figure out exactly what has happened.

The encounter distance is 10-40 ft.

Weapons

1d20	Melee Weapon
1-4	Battleaxe
5-7	Halberd
8-10	Longspear
10-16	Longsword
17-20	Warhammer

SAHUAGIN PATROL

This random encounter should only take place after the PCs meet the sahuagin patrol in encounter #7.

A small scouting party of sahuagin make their way along the edge of the river. There are 1-4 (1d4) soldiers with tridents and 1-4 (1d4) with crossbows. They are only a patrol and retreat if overwhelmed. They remain hidden and attack from an advantage if necessary, but are smart enough to notice if the PCs are powerful or not. Sahuagin patrols do not carry treasure.

The encounter distance is 20-120 ft.

Sahuagin: CR 2; SZ M (humanoid, aquatic); HD 2d8+2; hp 12; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural); Atks Trident +3 melee (1d8+2), 2 rakes +1 melee (1d4+1), bite +1 melee (1d4+1) or light crossbow +2 ranged (1d8); SA Blood frenzy; SQ Speak with sharks, underwater sense, light blindness, amphibious; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 9; AL LE. Skills: Animal Empathy +2, Hide +6, Listen +7, Spot +7, Wilderness Lore +1. Feats: Multiattack.

Note: The sahuagin scouts in the adventure are unaffected by freshwater.

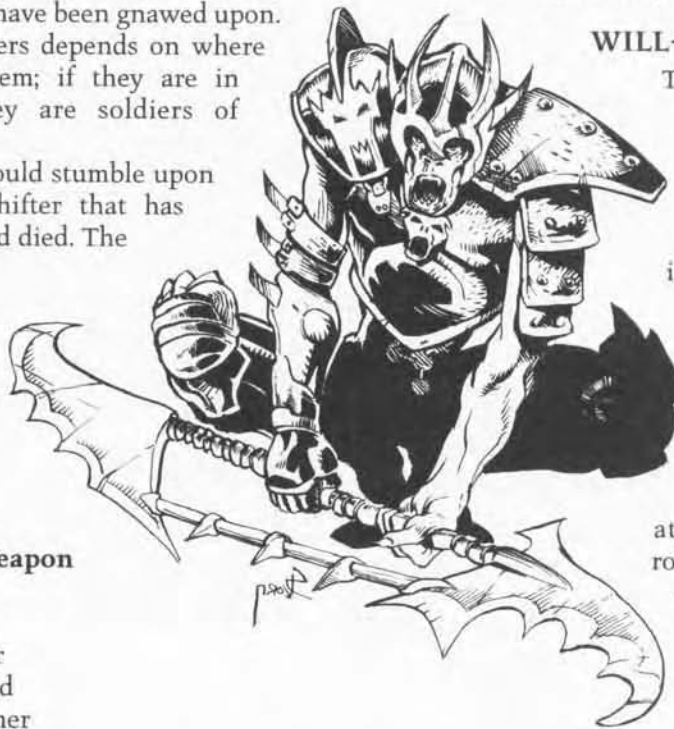
WILL-O'-WISP

The PCs come upon a strange light in the night; a shimmering glow piercing through the undergrowth. It is a will o'wisp drawn by the deathly presence of the river or is itself a by-product of its evil. It is merciless and attacks without fear, which is counter to its nature. It radiates an aura of doom that affects everyone within 30 ft. All who oppose it suffer a -2 morale penalty on attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws. In addition, those struck by the wisp's shock attack must make a Will save (DC 13) or suffer the effects of the spell random action.

If reduced to 15 or fewer hit points, it uses its natural *invisibility* to escape.

The encounter distance is 20-80 ft.

Will-O'-Wisp: CR 7; SZ S (aberration, air); HD 9d8; hp 50; Init +13 (+9 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd Fly 50 ft. (perfect); AC 29 (+1 size, +9 Dex, +9 deflection); Atks Shock +16 melee (2d8, plus random action); SQ Spell immunity, natural invisibility; SV Fort +3, Ref +12, Will +9; Str —, Dex 29, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 12; AL CE. Skills: Bluff +11, Listen +17, Search +14, Spot +17. Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Dodge, Improved Initiative.



THE RIVER OF BLOOD, STARTING POINT

The adventure starts in Valoro, capital of the Kingdom of Vedalia, which is located upriver on the Pauvaas, south of the Great Bend. When the party arrives at the Royal Palace, guards stop and question them regarding their identity and their business. No matter what answer the PCs give, the guards summon their captain, who asks them the same questions (security is tight in the Three Kingdoms these days). Assuming the PCs give him a reasonable answer, the captain of the guard looks them over skeptically, then leads them to an antechamber to await an audience with the rulers of the three kingdoms.

They won't have to wait long, because King Thorston Iron-Hand and Duke Regent Arden are already in Valoro to confer with Queen Malvina about this crisis. As the party enters the audience chamber, they see Malvina, a young, raven-haired and rather severe-looking young woman seated in her throne on a dais. Thorston, weatherbeaten and rugged, wears his ceremonial suit of half-plate and sits on her left, a strange longsword across his lap. The world-weary Arden sits on her right. Both men occupy luxurious chairs that have been brought in for the purpose, but since there is no room on the dais for them, their position relative to Malvina's has a distinctly subordinate

appearance (this is also a reflection of Vedalia's self-image as the most venerable of the three kingdoms). Thorston and Arden understand this, but are not happy with it. The mood is tense and the PCs should be able to notice the uncomfortable air about them.

Queen Malvina rises to greet the party. "Welcome," she says, smiling while at the same time appraising them with a keen eye. "I hope that you are the ones who can help us." She then outlines the predicament in which they find themselves. They are all losing soldiers stationed along the Pauvaas at a highly unusual rate and none have been able to discern why this is happening. They are, however, confident that some agency other than their own is responsible. They have agreed to hire impartial investigators to find answers for them.

"Given the history of relations between our kingdoms," Arden interjects as diplomatically he can, "we agreed that only the judgement of an impartial party would be trusted equally by all sides."

Thorston then rises and shows them the sword. The blade is jet-black, and it seems to glow in the muted light of the audience chamber. "Our only clue is this. Not long ago, one of my men came back from patrol with it sticking through his ribs. His captain says they were ambushed from out of a heavy mist, and that he does not know who his attackers were. None of our war-nobles has ever seen anything like this sword, and none of our scholars can figure it out. All they can say



OPTIONS

If you do not wish to use the actual rulers of Vedalia, Tyndall and Tor in this adventure, you may use these lower-ranking (but still important) court nobles as NPCs acting as their official representatives. They may handle all interactions with the PCs, but keep in mind that they may have a slightly different view of events than their sovereigns.

Count Bernano, Lord Chamberlain of the Court of Vedalia. Queen Malvina's highest-ranking court official, Count Bernano functions as her political chief of staff, not only overseeing the day-to-day running of the palace, but who gets an audience with the Queen. A thin, somber-looking man nearing his 60th year, he sometimes plays the patient father-figure to Malvina's strong-willed daughter. With everyone else (including other court officials) he maintains a haughty demeanor, and hardly conceals the fact that he considers the Tor barbarians and the Tyndalese a bunch of bumpkin-farmers compared to the refined Vedalians. He doesn't like having to cooperate with them during the present crisis. King Fernan's signet ring (see Encounter #8) will not make as much of an impression on him as it will on Queen Malvina.

Duke Wynn of Tramford. A high-ranking Tyndalese nobleman appointed by Duke Regent Arden as Special Ambassador to the Court of Vedalia for the duration of the present crisis. A supporter of the Duke Regent's pacifistic leanings, he understands even better than does Arden the political risks that he takes in wanting reconciliation with Vedalia and Tor. He behaves more or less as Arden would in any given situation.

Baron Gerhan of Fromm. Officially, the King of Tor is Commander in Chief of any Tor field army whether he is present or not. But all of King Thorston's war-nobles recognize Baron Gerhan as the senior among them, and he functions more or less as the King's Chief of Staff. Every scrap of military intelligence reaches him before it reaches the King. Gerhan serves his monarch faithfully, but cautiously, and he is reluctant to make major decisions on his own.

is that it is a thing of necromancy, no more. We do not know who forged it, or for what purpose, but it is the only material clue that we have to this mystery. That fact alone is what keeps us from having it destroyed in holy fire."

The sword is, in fact, a +1 *wraith touch longsword* (see New Magic Items). Its power comes from the necromantic energies emanating from the river. This however, is not obvious and takes some time to discover. If the PCs wish to examine it and try to identify it by magical means, King Thorston allows them to do so, but only in the presence of the three rulers. The PCs do not learn anything more than the fact that the sword is necromantic in nature.

If the PCs choose to examine the sword right then and there, the rulers take the opportunity to confer amongst themselves. They resent any attempt to listen in on them by physical or magical means (they hear the somatic component of a spell such as clairaudience), and the guards quickly move in to break it up. They are, in fact, discussing the "cut of the party's jib." When the PCs finish with the sword, the rulers resume their places with the air of having come to a decision.

Queen Malvina continues the briefing. She tells the party their charge is simple: They are to cross over to the west bank of the Pauvaas and follow the bend of the river until they reach the site where Captain Anders Gar's patrol was ambushed. Captain Gar himself will guide them. They are to search the area for any clues as to who or what ambushed the patrol. If they return to Valoro with evidence of their assailants, each of the three rulers reward the party with 1,000 gp in coins and traveling gems.

If the PCs accept this mission, Queen Malvina gives them a safe conduct pass bearing the seals of all three rulers. Unless they have further questions or objections, they should proceed to the docks, where Captain Gar meets them. A boat also waits there to ferry them across the river.

RIVER OF BLOOD, ACT I

When the party reaches the docks, a lean, severe-looking man clad in a chain shirt approaches them, introducing himself as Captain Anders Gar, servant of His Majesty, King Thorston of Tohr. Captain Gar understands he is to guide the party along the far bank of the Pauvaas to the spot where his patrol was ambushed and help them look for clues to the identity

of his attackers. He is not terribly enthusiastic about this assignment, as the experience is still fresh in his mind, but like any good soldier, he obeys his orders.

If the PCs ask him for information beyond what they already know, Captain Gar adds nothing new. It all happened so fast that a quick sketch of the incident is all he can provide. He does, however, give a soldier's view of the situation. Even in normal times, he says, no one likes patrol or outpost duty near the Pauvaas. The river gives off a creepy, unsettling feeling, especially in the winter when the weather is bad and no one is about. The soldiers currently stationed along the river are nervous, but not really surprised by these mysterious attacks and disappearances. Every winter for as long as he can remember, some get the feeling the river itself is watching them and has it in for them. It's the upper echelon commanders — the war-nobles and the royals — who seem flummoxed by what's going on.

Captain Gar is a 6th level fighter. In combat, he proves a steady ally, but he does not take any extraordinary risks to help the party. His orders are to guide them, not defend them with his life.

Captain Anders Gar: CR 6; SZ M (humanoid); HD 6d10+3; hp 63; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 chain shirt); Atks +1 longsword +10/+5 melee (1d8+4); SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 17, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 15; AL LN. Skills: Climb +6, Handle Animal +5, Jump +7, Intuit Direction +2, Listen +5, Ride +5, Spot +4, Search +1, Swim +6, Wilderness Lore +2. Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Power Attack, Toughness, Track.

ENCOUNTERS

The following encounters are in order as they appear on the map. The key to this adventure is to give the PCs the feeling they are in control, when in reality, the river is controlling them. Events will happen in almost this exact order, however, feel free to add or delete encounters as you see fit.

Encounters 1 through 4 lead to the ambush point. It is not entirely necessary for all these encounters, but having the PCs arrive at encounter 5 without a struggle does not fit into the theme of this adventure. The time between encounters is ultimately up to you, but 1-3 hours of travel time is not excessive.

I. Who Goes There?

Two men approach out of the looming mist, wearing heavy cloaks that almost conceal their chainmail and helms. You get the sense that they're shivering, in spite of their heavy garb. One carries a halberd, the other a longbow. Once within line of sight, the Bowman notches an arrow and aims it at you. The other holds his weapon at the ready. "Who goes there? Don't come any closer!" the one with the halberd calls out, but his voice quavers.

Encounter

This nervous pair of Tohr soldiers stand picket duty. Once they notice Captain Gar, however, the sentries relax and apologize. "I'm sure I don't have to tell you, sirs, since you know how it is. Everyone's been jumpy around here. No one knows what's going on. There's some as don't want to know, neither. They just want it to stop." If the PCs explain their mission, they will reply, "Well, I'm not surprised they're bringing in outsiders for such a job — no offense meant. Just that none of us lads would do it, I tell you, not this winter. Captain knows what I mean, eh? We don't want to spend any more time near the river than we have to, and I expect it's the same for the Tyndalese and the Vedalians."

The sentries don't know anything the PCs haven't already been told. They just follow orders and listen to gossip. They tell the PCs, however, that although few people still live on the banks of the river, sometimes folks venture out here to loot corpses and even dig up bodies in their search for easy plunder. It's considered a crime against the crown to loot, but most veteran soldiers can't be bothered to worry about it. "Can't say I like what they do, but can't say as I blame 'em, either, life in these parts being what it is. Anyway, they'd know more than we do, if you can find 'em."

Each soldier carries a pouch containing 10-60 sp.

Sentry with Halberd: CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d10+2; hp 11; Init +1 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft., AC 15 (+4 scale mail, +1 Dex); Atks Halberd +4 melee (1d10+3); SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; AL LN. Skills: Climb +5, Jump +5, Listen +1, Spot +1. Feats: Dodge, Power Attack, Toughness.

Sentry with Longbow: CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d10+2; hp 11; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 30 ft., AC 17 (+4 scale mail, +3 Dex); Atks Longbow +4 ranged (1d8); SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; AL LN. Skills: Climb +3, Jump +3, Listen +1, Spot +1. Feats: Dodge, Point Blank Shot, Toughness.

2. Landshark

It is as if terrible battles have taken place here. Scattered at random intervals are weapons lying on the ground, most of them damaged — notched, broken or even with large chunks taken out of them. But, eerily, there are no corpses to be found, no blood soaked into the ground. However, you do see places where the soil seems to have been disturbed, and the vegetation has been violently upturned.

Suddenly, the ground beside you explodes. An enormous quadruped with a huge, slanted head leaps out at you. It fixes its gaze on you, its enormous eyes peering past its chitinous hide.

Encounter

This horrendous beast is a bulette (or landshark). It attacks with surprise, unless a PC states that he is keeping his eyes peeled for anything unusual. Allow a Spot check (DC 20); if it is successful, he or she notices a patch of soil that is looser and less even than the surrounding ground. The PC is allowed a Wilderness Lore check (DC 20) to ascertain that a predatory creature of some kind is lurking nearby. The bulette stills attack as the PCs pass within range of its tremorsense (60 feet), but any PC on the alert is not surprised during the first round of combat.

If your PCs deduce something staked out this piece of ground as its feeding territory, they are correct. The weapons scattered about belong to sentries that it ambushed and consumed, armor and all. If the PCs avoid the area completely (about a half an hour to circumnavigate), the bulette continues to hunt into this area. Its presence goes undetected, and over time, the rulers and counselors of the three kingdoms suspect that the party has cheated them out of the reward money.

The encounter distance is anywhere from 0-60 ft.

Tactics

The bulette has learned to detect the heaviest footfalls, attacking the largest party member as they pass. If it senses too many footfalls it rises behind the PCs, but otherwise comes out of the earth right in front of the largest PC.

Bulette: CR 7; SZ H (beast); HD 9d10+45; hp 94; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 40 ft., burrow 10 ft., AC 22 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +12 natural); Atks Bite +12 melee (2d8+8), claw +7 melee (2d6+4); SA Leap; SQ Scent, tremorsense; SV Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +4; Str 27, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6; AL N. Skills: Jump +12, Listen +6.

3. Gareth Hawkswood, A Ghost

Their stench reaches you even before you see them through the mist rising and rolling in from the river. Four gaunt humanoid figures with mottled skin and mean, yellow eyes crouch in a rough circle on the soggy ground. They gnaw on the flesh and bones of what may or may not be an animal. One of these creatures — the one with its back turned — is distinctly larger than the others.

They leap to their feet. The three smaller creatures position themselves between you and the larger one, but not before you get a look at the apparent leader. It wears a bright red sash across its body, a ruby ring on one finger and an amulet inlaid with rubies on a chain around its neck. Some bits of plate armor still remain on its body, as if never removed.

As the smaller creatures move into position, the largest picks up a greataxe from the ground. The head is covered in a chipped red dye.

Encounter

The large and (relatively) well-accoutered humanoid is a ghost; in life, it was Gareth Hawkswood, the legendary soldier of fortune. The three smaller creatures are ghouls who were once associates of his.

The ghost glowers at the party, "Betrayed... Betrayed... You did this to me!" Then it will attack, and the ghouls along with it. If the PCs try to question the ghost, it only repeats itself; perhaps muttering something about revenge. But sooner or later, it attacks. It also has the power of command over the ghouls, and they sacrifice themselves to protect it.

The encounter distance is 30 ft.

Tactics

Roll initiative separately for each creature. They are familiar with small unit tactics and the individual ghouls strike independent of Gareth. Gareth is highly skilled with the axe and knows how and when to use his Power Attack feat. In addition he and his men still maintain some of their tactics from when they lived. They are slightly familiar with sorcery and know to attack magic-using PCs. One of the ghouls delays his action, waiting for a spell-caster to begin a spell.

In addition, the land here is considered desecrated, per the spell. Attempts to turn the undead are met with a -3 profane penalty. Attempts to dispel the desecration are done so as if desecrate were cast by a 12th level caster. Bear in mind that ghosts and ghouls are considered 8 and 4 hit dice respectively against attempts to turn them.

Treasure

Gareth's weapon is a +2 *ghoul touch greataxe* (see new Magic Items). His ring is a *ring of protection* +2. The ruby set into it is worth 200 gp, but if pried loose, loses its magical properties. The ring fetches no more than 20 gp without the ruby. The amulet and chain together are worth 1,000 gp. On the reverse is an inscription:

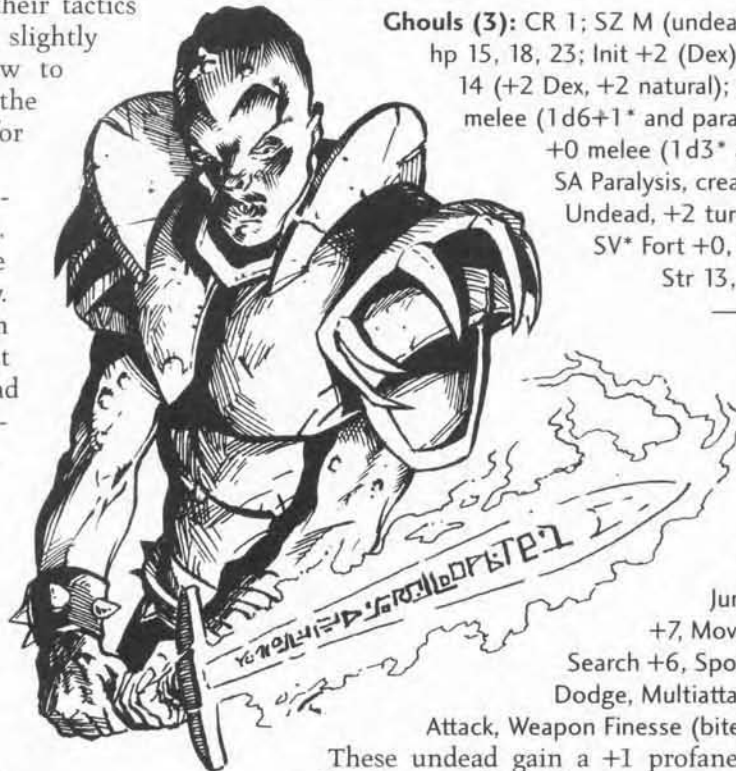
"To my loyal friend Capt. Gareth Hawkswood, greatest of soldiers. — HRH Mervyn of Vedralia."

A cursory search of the surrounding area (no skill check needed) reveals the remaining items of value that Hawkswood had on him when he was slain — a masterwork suit of half-plate armor and 34 pp dispersed among the decayed fragments of a leather pouch. Many bones litter the area, indicating that more than one scuffle has taken place here.

Ghast (Gareth Hawkswood): CR 6; SZ M (undead); HD 6d12; hp 50; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft.; AC 21 (+3 Dex, +4 natural, +2 armor fragments, *ring of protection* +2); Atks* *Ghoul touch greataxe* +7 melee (1d12+4* and 1d6 + paralysis), or 2 claws +x melee (), bite +1 melee (1d8+2* and paralysis); SA Stench, paralysis, create spawn; SQ Undead, +2 turn resistance; SV* Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 15, Dex 17, Con —, Int 13, Wis 14,

Cha 16; AL CE. Skills: Climb +6, Escape Artist +8, Hide +8, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +8, Move silently +7, Search +6, Spot +8. Feats: Combat Reflexes, Cleave, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Finesse (bite), Weapon Focus (*greataxe*).

Ghouls (3): CR 1; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12; hp 15, 18, 23; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural); Atks* Bite +3 melee (1d6+1* and paralysis), 2 claws +0 melee (1d3* and paralysis); SA Paralysis, create spawn; SQ Undead, +2 turn resistance; SV* Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 15, Con —, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16; AL CE. Skills: Climb +6, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +7, Move silently +7, Search +6, Spot +7. Feats: Dodge, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Finesse (bite).



These undead gain a +1 profane bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws due to the effects of *desecrate*. The bonus hit points have already been calculated.

4. Baron Fredegar and Ereik

Two black, disembodied forms hover in the air, silhouetted sharply against the gray fog. They are vaguely humanoid in shape, but they have no features that you can see. One is slightly larger than the other. Both mutter and whine in soft, eerie voices. The words are mostly indiscernible, moaning gibberish and guttural nonsense. But from the larger comes moments of clarity, "Mustn't take me alive... Disgrace... Fall... Don't let them get me..."

Encounter

These two allips are what remain of Baron Fredegar of Attan, once one of the most important war-barons of Tohr, and one of the men who stood with him in his last battle, a rank-and-file soldier named EreK. They attack any and all living creatures on sight; and since they are insane, the PCs cannot parlay with them. In fact, the PCs may have no alternative but to destroy the allips before their supernatural ability of hypnosis (babbling) disables them.

The encounter distance is 30 ft.

Tactics

These allips will not turn. Despite being levels 6 and 9 for the purposes of turning, the two allip are tied to the land here (having died fighting). If a cleric or paladin successfully turns one of the allips, it merely keeps a 20 ft. berth from the turner's holy symbol, but does not flee as normal. It can still attack, so long as it does not breach the 20 ft. barrier for the duration of the turn.

Treasure

Before he killed himself, EreK took the Baron's most valuable possessions and hid them from looters. If the PCs successfully search the immediate area (Search, DC 20), they spot a glint of metal from under a pile of rocks and deadwood. A successful Search check (DC 15) reveals a crude trigger mechanism made from rope tied around a rock. EreK did in fact try to construct a trap here, rigging a rock so that when it was moved it would jerk a rope tied to the trigger of a crossbow, which would then fire through the gap between two rocks. The components have shifted with time however, making it the trap useless.

The hoard consists of a broken heavy crossbow, a rusty scabbard inlaid with five small gems worth 100 gp, a *ghost touch helm*, rusted pieces of plate armor (useless), a baton made of silver (worth 500 gp), and 42 pp scattered about. EreK's body was looted, and none of his possessions remain.

There is an inscription on the baton that reads: *"Presented to General-Baron Fredegar of Attan by HRH Theodor of Tohr, in recognition of his loyal service in the tradition of his forefathers."*

Allip (EreK): CR 3; SZ M (undead, incorporeal); HD 4d12; hp 26; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd Fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 15 (+1 Dex, +4 deflection); Atks Incorporeal touch +3 melee (1d4 permanent Wisdom drain); SA Babble, Wisdom drain, madness; SQ Undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance; SV Fort

+1, Ref +2, Will +4; Str —, Dex 12, Con —, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 18; AL NE. Skills: Hide +8, Intimidate +11, Intuit Direction +4, Listen +7, Search +7, Spot +7. Feats: Improved Initiative.

Allip (Baron Fredegar of Attan): CR 5; SZ M (undead, incorporeal); HD 7d12; hp 46; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd Fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 deflection); Atks Incorporeal touch +3 melee (1d4 permanent Wisdom drain); SA Babble, Wisdom drain, madness; SQ Undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +4; Str —, Dex 14, Con —, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 18; AL NE. Skills: Hide +9, Intimidate +11, Intuit Direction +4, Listen +7, Search +7, Spot +7. Feats: Improved Initiative.

5. The Smell of Death

You notice a heavy mist, almost a solid fog, enclosing you as it rolls in off of the river. All noise ceases, and you realize your own breathing seems unnaturally loud. Then six skeletons and four ragged humanoid figures seem to burst out of the fog at you. Even though they move no faster than undead shamblers, the suddenness of their appearance startles you. They are partially clad in fragments of armor, but what clothes they wear are literally in tatters. The largest of the ragged humanoids has had its right forearm slashed just below the elbow and almost severed. Those who have eyes glare at you with pure malice.

Encounter

The party has stumbled into the same group of undead that ambushed Captain Gar's patrol. It is composed of six skeletons (three armed with longswords and three armed with battleaxes), four zombies and a wight. The wight is initially hidden but makes its presence known soon enough. They are all the remains of slain soldiers who were buried more or less where they fell, under the battlefields of the River of Blood. Captain Gar doesn't recognize the place right away because he last remembers it smothered by fog even heavier than is now present, but the wight with the maimed arm strikes a chord of recognition.

The encounter distance is 20 ft.

Tactics

Although the wight is the most powerful creature of the lot, there is no real leader here. The undead attack anything that's alive without tactical coordination or subtlety. As the PCs get deeper into the swampy undergrowth of the riverbed, the undead grow more powerful.

The ground here is *unhallow*, meaning turning is more difficult and the undead are slightly more powerful than before. Turning attempts are made with a -4 profane penalty to the check. In addition, the undead here are protected by *endure elements* (per the spell) against all forms of attack and a doom cast over the area that causes the PCs to suffer a -2 morale penalty to attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, ability checks, skill checks (including Concentration), and saving throws.

Lastly, the area is warded against good per the spell protection from good. The undead receive a +2 deflection bonus to AC and a +2 resistance bonus to all saves against good PCs. They cannot be possessed by any means and no bodily contact can take place between good PCs and the undead (short of the undead clawing the PCs).

To make matters worse, the wight in this encounter is hidden (Spot check, DC 28 or Search check DC 23 to find). He is preparing to ambush the PCs from behind at the beginning of the third round of combat (his initiative check during this battle is a 21, no need to roll).

The overwhelming feeling of dread should be quite obvious to good PCs. Priests of lawful or good gods need not detect evil to know something foul is afoot.

Treasure

The wight carries 100 gp in a pouch tied around its waist. In addition, a successful Search check of the area (DC 25) turns up a brass amulet in the shape of the sun. It has Corporal Vick's name inscribed into the back, and it is a holy symbol of the sun god that he carried with him as a talisman. It must have slipped out when his comrades lifted him and carried him from the field. Captain Gar recognizes it. This bit of evidence confirms in his mind that these undead ambushed his patrol and are responsible for the events of late.

Skeletons (6): CR 1/3; SZ M (undead); HD 1d12; hp 6, 7, 8, 10, 10, 11; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 armor fragments); Atks Longsword or battleaxe +0 melee (1d8); SQ Undead, immunities; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 11; AL N. Feats: Improved Initiative.

Zombies (4): CR 1/2; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12+3; hp 16, 18, 19, 23; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (-1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 armor fragments); Atks Slam +2 melee (1d6+1); SQ Undead, partial actions only; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 8, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1; AL N. Feats: Toughness.

Wight: CR 3; SZ M (undead); HD 4d12; hp 26; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Dex, +4 natural, +1 armor fragments); Atks Slam +3 melee (1d4+1 and energy drain); SA Energy drain, create spawn; SQ Undead; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 12, Dex 12, Con —, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 15; AL LE. Skills: Climb +5, Hide +8, Listen +8, Move silently +16, Search +7, Spot +8. Feats: Blind-Fight.

ACT I, CONCLUSION

Upon their return to Valoro, guards summon the PCs into the presence of the rulers, who debrief them. They ask the PCs to relate what they learned about Captain Gar's assailants, and anything else of note they encountered along the way. Captain Gar himself remains at the party's side and corrects them if they fudge the truth.

The three rulers also ask to see anything of significance that the PCs have found. If the heroes produce the amulet inscribed to Gareth Hawkwood and show it to the rulers, they all recognize Hawkwood's name, for his reputation has spread not only far and wide, but down through the pages of history as well. Queen Malvina shifts uncomfortably in her throne, for she knows what her forbear did to him. She offers the party three-quarters of its market value for it (full market value if the PCs bargain hard), so she can hide it in the family treasury. If the PCs resist, she does not make a scene of it, but rather tries to have one of her guards retrieve it later.

If they show Baron Fredegar's electrum baton, King Thorston regards it with wonder and a touch of sentiment, for the chronicles of the Kings of Tohr record that the Attan have always been among the most loyal of his dyansty's war-nobles. He offers the party full market value for it.

Just as importantly, knowing these items were taken from ghouls and the like suggests to the rulers that undead may be the scourge that now plagues them. The same goes for knowing the party encountered zombies at the point where Captain Gar's patrol was ambushed. They still won't know the source of the problem, but they have a clearer understanding of what they are dealing with.

If the PCs are successful in their endeavors, they abide by their promise and pay the PCs their 3,000 gp.

At this point, the PCs may opt out of any further service to the three rulers. They have fulfilled their original charge and received their promised reward, as well as the thanks of their employers. However, the three rulers have another proposition up their collective sleeves. Many ambushes have been reported in the so-called Golden Marshes, the swampy area north of the Great Bend and patrols have gone missing there as well. The worst is feared. If the PCs follow the military trail that winds through the marshes, each ruler pays them a further 1,500 gp in coins and traveling gems for any information that further explains the strange happenings.

If the PCs refuse, there is no one to do the work. As such, by spring, the three kingdoms will be in a pitch battle with a vast army of undead bent on destroying every living thing within their reach. The war will go poorly for all of them with a powerful leader or small group of leaders driving the undead (see finale for more information on this). The armies of the living cannot stand long against them.

RIVER OF BLOOD, ACT II

If the PCs accept the offer, Queen Malvina provides them with riverborne transport to the head of the military trail through the Golden Marshes. They are not escorted beyond this point, but are given general directions. The trail is basically a flat embankment of packed earth solid enough to support horses and wagons. It is about six feet wide, which means that medium-sized or large creatures can only walk along it single file (and creatures huge or larger cannot use it at all), and rises only about a foot above the surrounding marsh. Engineers in Vedalian employ built it generations ago to permit military operations in and through the marshes, which are shallow, but swampy enough to prevent easy movement of men and materiel.

ENCOUNTERS

The following encounters encompass some of the patrols the PCs make into the Golden Marsh. It should take them roughly five days for these six encounters, but feel free to stretch them out a little more, with random encounters of ghouls thrown in. Note that there are fewer undead encounters this time around. This is intentional. The necromantic evil is doing more than just turning men into zom-



bies and wights. As the PCs explore further, they find they are in deeper than they could have imagined.

6. Scavengers' Hunt

As you near the trailhead, three gaunt, thin, humanoids seem to be picking at something on the barren ground. They wear old, tattered clothes and their bodies are hunched over, withered and tired. Their thin, mean eyes glare at whatever has got their attention.

Encounter

As the PCs get closer, they can see that these ragged figures are not undead, but human and living — more or less. They are local villagers reduced to scavenging battlefields, both old and recent. Clothes can be used as rags, weapons and armor can be sold or melted down and recast, and of course, coins and jewelry are always welcome finds. If they cannot find bodies lying on the open ground, most are willing to dig up graves.

These three are experienced hands at this occupation, and they have done their share of stripping and digging. They carry shortswords strapped around their waists. They also keep a two-wheeled cart nearby. Presently, they are working on some half-buried skeletons of soldiers who have evidently been dead for some time. As the PCs approach, make a Listen check for each scavenger (DC 10, unless each approaching PC is attempting to Move Silently). If one scavenger makes a successful roll, he stands up and eyes the party warily. The others soon follow suit.

The encounter distance is 50 ft.

Tactics

The scavengers defend themselves if attacked, but if they are badly outnumbered or outclassed, they flee, leaving their cart behind. If the party defeats or chases off the scavengers, they find a pile of used and tattered armor and weapons in the cart. If the PCs wish to take some for themselves, you may allow them to find at least one of any non-exotic martial weapon or shield, and at least one suit of scale mail, a chain shirt, a breastplate, or a partial suit of splint mail. The scavengers themselves carry no possessions of note beyond their weapons.

If the PCs wish to parlay, the scavengers treat them with understandable suspicion. If the PCs try to question them, they play it cagey until they are assured the adventurers do not intend to arrest them or, even worse, steal from them. You may require PCs to make Diplomacy checks (DC 18) in order to gain their trust.

Once they have turned that particular corner in their relationship, the scavengers share information with the PCs fairly openly — as well as try to sell them some of their *wares*, something the PCs should find abhorrent. They reveal that most everyone they know has done this sort of thing at one time or another. There's always plenty of pickings, so why not, especially if these same soldiers might have requisitioned part of your crop or set a torch to your house?

Information

They have heard stories of dead soldiers rising from their graves to attack the living, but haven't seen anything themselves. They have also heard (from a very reliable source, mind you) that the Bridge of Dunelding, (farther downstream) is haunted. PCs should make a Sense Motive check (DC 14) to realize they believe what they are saying.

They also half-handedly talk about "Bonegnawer", a carrion dragon that feeds on the dead, as though the PCs already know about it. If questioned, the scavengers reply that Bonegnawer is an enormous dragon that has filled its belly several times over on the dead soldiers of the Pauvaas. Most consider it speculation and fable to speak of Bonegnawer. After all, few have ever seen it, but these scavengers believe he is real.

Scavengers, Rog2 (3): CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d6; hp 9, 10, 11; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 partial armor); Atks Short sword +3 melee (1d6); SA Sneak attack, evasion; SV Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 11; AL N. Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +4, Climb +4, Decipher Script +2, Hide +6, Intuit Direction +3, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Search +4, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5. Feats: Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (short sword).

7. Visitors

You notice an unpleasant fishy smell cutting through the stench of the marsh. Ahead in the path, six odd humanoid creatures move in single file down at the water's edge; in fact, they seem to be wading in shallow water. They have large webbed extremities, tails, and spined dorsal fins. Three carry crossbows, while the other three clutch tridents. They move slowly, in battle crouches, as if aware they are in enemy territory.

Allow each PC a Spot check (DC 20), before reading the following text to those who have rolled successfully.

Encounter

These strange creatures are sahuagin, and they originally come from a loose confederation of tribes that occupy the delta of the Pauvaas, many miles down river. Generations of living in close proximity to a river have acclimatized them to freshwater, so that they no longer possess freshwater sensitivity. The tribe to which these four belong recently split off and headed upriver, drawn by rumors that war had depopulated large stretches along the Pauvaas in the Three Kingdoms. They are excited by the prospect of having vast new grounds for hunting and fishing all to themselves, and hope to use their control over new territories to increase their power and influence over the other tribes. As an early step toward that goal, they have sent this scout party farther upriver to reconnoiter — hence the obvious caution with which these four are proceeding.

The encounter distance is 100 ft.

Tactics

Allow the scouts an opportunity to spot the PCs. If the PCs attempt to hide, then the sahuagins are checking against their Hide DC. Otherwise they need a DC 15 to spot the them.

Once the scouts become aware of the PCs, they immediately seek cover by diving into the river, then peek above the surface to see what they are doing. If attacked, the sahuagin with crossbows open fire, while the ones with the tridents wait and execute a charge attack at the first available opponent.

If the PCs manage to communicate with the sahuagin, they reciprocate, but keep their distances. They reveal little or nothing about their mission, and say only that they are from “down river” or “near the Great Sea.”

Sahuagin (6): CR 2; SZ M (humanoid, aquatic); HD 2d8+2; hp 11, 11, 12, 14, 14, 16; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural); Atks Trident +3 melee (1d8+2), 2 rakes +1 melee (1d4+1), bite +1 melee (1d4+1) or light crossbow +2 ranged (1d8); SA Blood frenzy; SQ Speak with sharks, underwater sense, light blindness, amphibious; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 9; AL LE. Skills: Animal Empathy +2, Hide +6, Listen +7, Spot +7, Wilderness Lore +1. Feats: Multiattack.

Note: The sahuagin scouts in this adventure are unaffected by freshwater.

8. King Fernan of Vedralia

Looming out of the darkness, four zombies stand before you clad in fragments of armor and armed with handsome bastard swords. Hovering in their midst is a spectral figure, grey as death; its only feature is the two pinpoints of red light that seem to serve as its eyes. As they spot you, the zombies close ranks around the incorporeal creature and glower at you, as if waiting for further orders.

This encounter takes place as the sun goes down. If the PCs decide to camp, the creatures come to them. If not, just as they are looking for a clearing, they spot the following:

Encounter

The incorporeal being is a wraith that was once King Fernan of Vedralia, the grandfather whose death still drives Queen Malvina's desire for vengeance against the Tohr. The well-equipped zombies are the undead remnants of his last four royal bodyguards. They were with him when Tyndalese soldiers cut them all down.

The encounter distance is anywhere from 20 to 50 ft.

Tactics

As the defensive posture of the zombies suggests, they do not attack pell-mell; instead, they take a moment to form up and even wait to gauge the party's intentions. The party hears a voice, like a whisper on the wind: “*Where are the Tor? I am betrayed. You'll not put a King of Vedralia in chains.*” Then they rush forward and attack. The zombies interpose themselves between the wraith and any threat to it, protecting it at all hazards (as if a wraith needs any protection). In essence, they act like the bodyguards they were in life.

Treasure

If the party searches the immediate area, they find some items of value that the King and his bodyguard had when they fell. On a successful Search check (DC 20), they find approximately 380 pp scattered about and a decayed leather pouch containing four thunderstones. If no one in the party makes a successful Search check, they only find 120 pp and the pouch. In addition, each of the bastard swords carried by the zombie

guards has a cut sapphire with a daub of gold on one of the facets (worth 500 gp) inlaid into the pommel. These gems were tokens of rank that Fernan bestowed upon his personal bodyguard.

Most importantly, however, as soon as the party defeats the wraith, a large gold signet ring on a gold chain drops to the ground, as if the wraith had been carrying it around. The engraved pattern on the signet consists of a crown and below it the words "HRH Fernan." Close examination reveals bits of sealing wax still trapped in the grooves. This is, of course, a one-of-a-kind item, King Fernan's royal signet ring, of great importance to the Vedalian monarchy. The Vedalians were never able to recover it after Fernan's death, and its loss has been an enduring source of shame to his descendants (especially his granddaughter, Queen Malvina).

Zombie Guards (4): CR 1/2; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12+3; hp 16; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (-1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 armor fragments); Atks Bastard sword +2 melee (1d10+1); SQ Undead, partial actions only; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 8, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1; AL N. Feats: Toughness.

Wraith (King Fernan of Vedalia): CR 7; SZ M (undead, incorporeal); HD 7d12; hp 46; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection); Atks Incorporeal touch +5 melee (1d4 and 1d6 permanent Constitution drain); SA Constitution drain, create spawn; SQ Undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance, unnatural aura, daylight powerlessness; AL LE; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6; Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15. Skills: Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +12, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +12. Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative.

9. Lies

Two men stand about, wearing chainmail and winter cloaks. They blow into their leather gloves in an attempt to warm their hands. Each is armed with a longsword and a shortsword hanging from a cord loop around the waist. As you approach, they call out in a friendly challenge, "Hullo! Who goes there?"

Encounters

These two are really dopplegangers pretending to be Tyndalese sentries. To date, they have worked a fair bit of mischief in this area by gaining the trust of unsuspecting passers-by (they're soldiers of Tyndall, after all), then attacking them at a vulnerable moment. One of their favorite ruses is to approach a sentry post under the pretense they have come to relieve the sentries ahead of schedule. The dopplegangers strike the moment their victims show their backs to them.

The encounter distance is anywhere from 20 to 50 ft.

Tactics

With the PCs, they attempt one of the following ploys:

1. If the PCs show them their safe conduct pass, the dopplegangers act as if they'd been expecting them and claim that their commanding officer has something important to show them. One doppleganger leads them off while the other drops behind, bringing up the rear. As soon as it is sure no one is watching, it strikes from behind.
2. They try the old "Look behind you!" trick, pretending that they see something alarming behind the party to get them to turn their backs to them. It's quite primitive as ruses go, but it has worked for them in the past.



3. They smile, wish the party a nice day and give them permission to move along. As the party passes, the dopplegangers subtly position themselves so that they have a good striking position on the rear of the party.

Treasure

The dopplegangers keep a small cache of treasure under some nearby rocks. If the PCs track their footsteps through the marsh they find the rock easily (Wilderness Lore check, DC 10), however without a Search check (DC 20), they don't know there is a strongbox under the stone.

Inside the strongbox is 320 gp and 3 gems, each worth 100 gp. Minor keepsake items, like locket, amulets, and rings made of base metals are tucked inside a small bag in the box. Many of them are inscribed to individual soldiers. These items are worth very little if sold on the open market, but the party may receive rewards and thanks from the families of these unfortunate fellows if they can track them down.

Dopplegangers (2): CR 3; SZ M (shapechanger); HD 4d8+4; hp 22, 22; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural); Atk Longsword +4 melee (1d8+1); SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 13; AL N. Skills: Bluff +12, Disguise +12, Listen +11, Sense Motive +6, Spot +8. Feats: Alertness, Dodge.

10. Lycanthropes

Turning a bend in the patrol path, a barren patch of ground appears recently excavated just ahead. At present, three men dressed in peasant clothes are digging about with shovels. A small empty cart rests nearby. A few small personal items lie on the ground around them. Much like the scavengers before, these men are entirely unexceptional in their appearance, except for their obvious destitution.

The following encounter can happen at day, night, or dusk. It's a good encounter if the PCs are pushing on.

Encounter

These men are really werewolves in human form. They have been prowling the no-man's land along the Pauvaas all winter, looking for victims to ambush.

When they cannot find prey, they loot graves and pillage corpses — as they are doing when the party comes upon them.

The encounter distance is 80 ft., however the PCs are most likely at ease seeing more scavengers and close to 10 ft.

Tactics

The werewolves maintain their human form as long as it suits their purposes, pretending they are just scavengers (such as those found in encounter #6). If the party attempts to communicate with them, they reciprocate. All the while, they prepare to attack. With great care and subtlety, two werewolves shift position, moving out on either flank of the party. They conceal this maneuver as a series of casual movements, like shifting their weight as they stand, or looking at something curious on the ground to one side. One werewolf remains in the center, facing the party head-on. He does most of the talking to divert their attention from the other two.

They ultimately wish to surround the party. Once the werewolves on the flanks have maneuvered themselves into position so that they can attack the back of the group within the space of one round by charging, all three change form and attack. If the encounter takes place during the day, they change into hybrid form. If it is night, they change into wolf form.

Treasure

On the ground are some personal effects, while the cart has a small bag buried under blankets. Inside the bag are nearly 1,000 sp and 400 gp. A bundle of three sunrods and some kindling help to conceal the bag among the blankets.

Werewolves (3): CR 3; SZ M (shapechanger); HD 2d8+4; hp 13, 13; Init +0, +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init) as wolf or hybrid; Spd 30 ft., 50 ft. as wolf or hybrid; AC 12 (+2 natural), 16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural) as wolf or hybrid; Atk +0 melee (1d6 shortsword), +3 melee (1d6+1 bite) as wolf or hybrid; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +2; Str 11, Dex 11, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10 as human, Str 13, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10 as wolf or hybrid; AL CE. Skills: Hide +3, Listen +14, Move Silently +4, Search +8, Spot +14, Wilderness Lore +0 as wolf or hybrid. Feats: Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Weapon finesse (bite) as wolf or hybrid.

Encounter

The PCs may begin to suspect that something is amiss, since two different groups of shapechangers have attacked them. This should hint at a greater evil beneath the surface. But don't give too much away. Allow the PCs to speculate all they want.

II. Levan, a Tortured Soul

The sun drops in the sky again. The nights are long here and it seems like every day that you wake to patrol the grounds, the sun drops after a few hours. Cutting your way through the underground, a small clearing emerges. The insubstantial figure of a man in torn clothing hovers before you. Despite his incorporeality, you can see that his features are contorted in anguish and his body bears the marks of someone who has been whipped, scourged, beaten, and slashed. His left arm is skewed at a painful angle, as is his right leg.

Encounter

This most unfortunate creature is a spectre who was once Levan, a common soldier in the Vedalian army. He was taken prisoner by the Tyndalese and died a terrible death at the hands of his captors. If the PCs try to communicate, it responds but believes they are its former tormentors. It rehashes the details of its death and who it was in life, but does so as if the party ought to know it already, having already beaten it out of him. Finally, it cries out for the party to leave it alone, then attacks.

Treasure

Nothing that belonged to Levan may be found on the spot where he was killed, except for a ring given to him as a keepsake by his sister Leticia. He swallowed it upon being captured so that it wouldn't be taken from him. The inside of the ring bears a brief inscription to this effect, as well as the name of the village from which he hailed (Channelwood). The ring itself is forged from iron and worth very little based on its materials, but it may have some value to his village. They still remember Levan, as family lore has enshrined him as yet another native son who went off to war and never returned.

Spectre (Levan): CR 9; SZ M (undead, incorporeal); HD 9d12; hp 58; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 40 ft., fly 80 ft. (good); AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection); Atks Incorporeal touch +6 melee (1d8 and energy drain); SA Energy drain, create spawn; SQ Undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance, unnatural aura, sunlight powerlessness; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +7; Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15. Skills: Hide +13, Intimidate +12, Intuit Direction +10, Listen +13, Search +10, Spot +13; AL LE. Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative.

ACT II, CONCLUSION

It is up to you at what point the PCs think they have enough information about the missing patrols. Short of a few more random encounters (and maybe another run-in with sahuagin), the PCs have cleared the Golden Marshes as best as they can. If they return to the drop-off point a much smaller boat waits for them this time.

As before, guards bring the party to an audience with the three rulers upon their return to Valoro. They expect the PCs to tell of who and what they encountered along the military trail and show them any related items of interest. It is unlikely the PCs know much, but the rulers are still anxious for details.

Information about any undead encountered in the area pique their curiosity the most. If the PCs show them King Fernan's long-lost signet ring, Queen Malvina turns pale at the sight of it, visibly stunned. She offers them three times its market value for it, but good PCs should know to just give her the ring. If they accept, she thanks the party for finding it, as this particular item means a great deal to her family. If not, she does what she can to coerce them after the meeting.

The rumor about the ghost haunting the Bridge of Dunelding also catches their attention. They have not heard it before. Overall, the accumulation of evidence continues to lead them to the conclusion that undead are overrunning the banks of the River of the Blood, and that it is their own war dead who are coming back to haunt them.

Otherwise, the three rulers show the most interest in the sahuagin scout party. They have no prior knowledge that such creatures encroached on their lands, much less that they plan to take some of it for themselves.

Assuming that the PCs provide the three rulers with the above information, they pony up the promised reward of 4,500 gold. If you wish to conclude the adventure at this point, the rulers release the PCs from any further service.

Like before, if the PCs no longer aid the nations, a war breaks out. If the sahuagin scouting party never returned (the PCs killed them), it is likely the sahuagin are drawn into the war now as well.

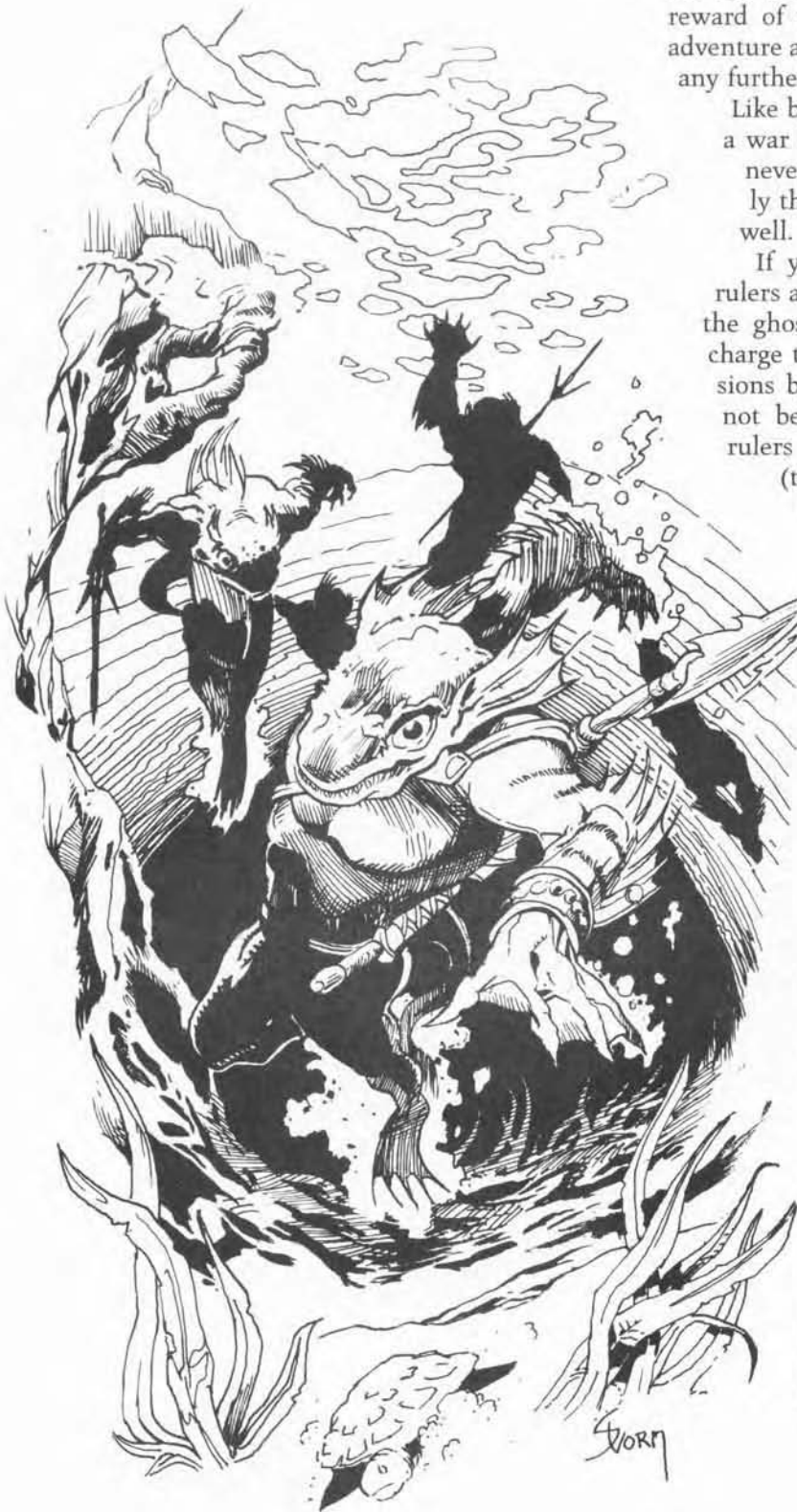
If you wish to continue, however, the three rulers ask the party to check out this rumor about the ghost at the Bridge of Dunelding. They also charge the party with repelling any further incursions by sahuagin. These evil sea creatures must not be allowed a foothold in their lands. The rulers offer a handsome reward of 10,000 gp (total) in jewels and gems if the PCs learn the true of nature of the atrocities.

RIVER OF BLOOD, ACT III

If the PCs accept this last mission, the three rulers charge them with proceeding on foot along the south bank of the Pauvaas until they reach the Bridge of Dunelding. They are to learn what they can about the alleged ghost, then return and report. King Thorston provides a boat and crew to take the party down-river to a point just east of the area for encounter #12.

ENCOUNTERS

The following encounters happen over the course of one week, and should be haphazard and chaotic. The key here is to throw the PCs to the wolves. Have two days go by without an encounter and then attack them with more than they can handle. Force them to retreat and rethink their options. As they near the heart of the adventure, make it obvious there is more to the River of Blood than meets the eye.



12. More Visitors

The march is tiresome and the ground is slippery. Then, a terrible stench that you have smelled before reaches you, only it is stronger than you remember it. Down by the river's edge, their weird shapes visible through the mist, over a dozen sahuagin lounge in and near the shallow water. One of them seems a bit larger than the others, and it wears a heavy vest that appears to be made of a cured hide. Crossbows and tridents lie close at hand.

Encounter

There are 16 sahuagin in all. This patrol-sized group is an advance party sent by the adventurous sahuagin tribe discussed in encounter #7 to probe for resistance to their presence and set up a base of operations. The six-sahuagin team from that encounter was detached from this group.

The sahuagin wearing the leather vest is the leader of the patrol, a 6th level ranger/captain. He is assisted by three 3rd level lieutenants. All three of these lead-

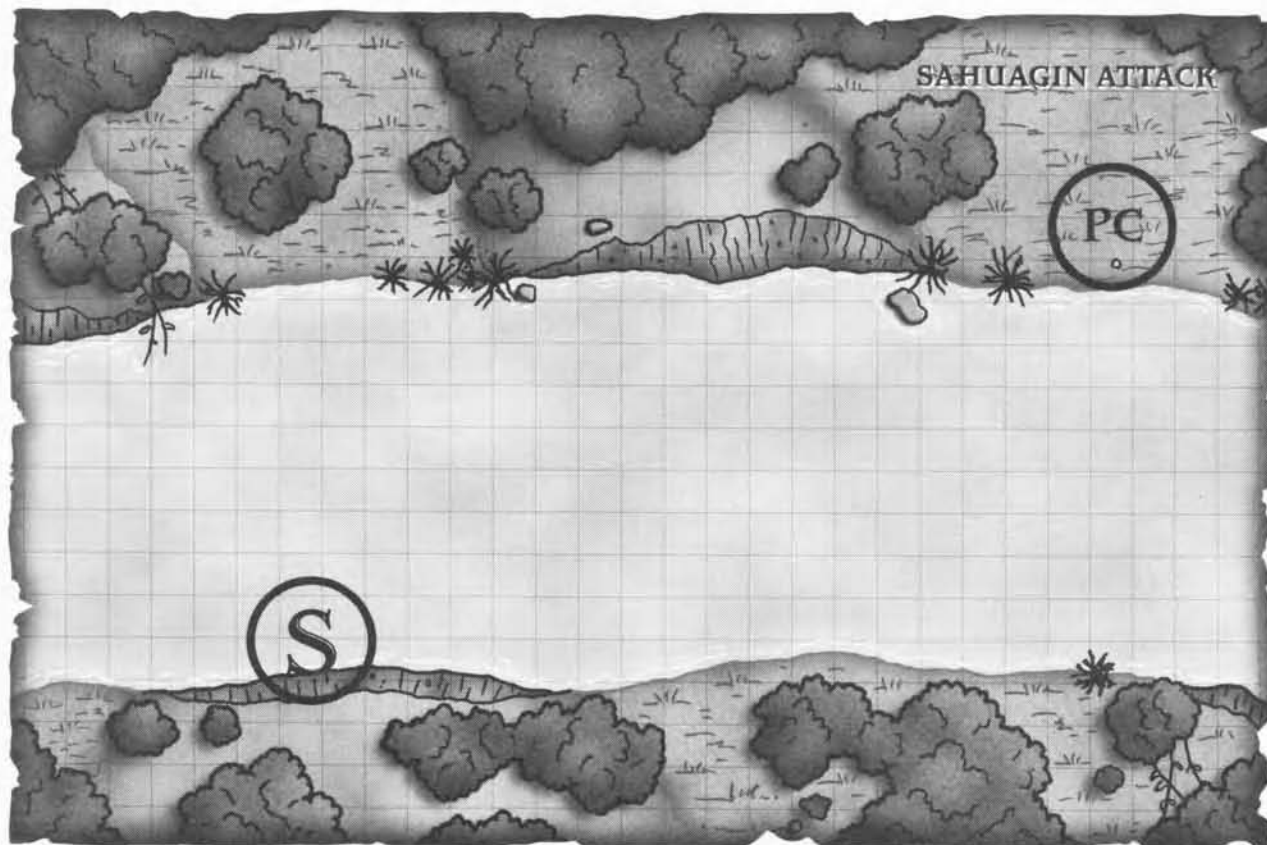
ers carry tridents. Of the 12 rank-and-file, six carry heavy crossbows and six carry tridents. With greater numbers and a strong leader, this group behaves with more confidence and aggressiveness than the scouting party in encounter #7. If the PCs engage, they stand with weapons at the ready. Any hostile gestures provoke an attack.

The encounter distance is 100 ft. at first, but if the PCs move closer, the sahuagin have an opportunity to spot them.

Tactics

The sahuagin armed with crossbows fire at targets of opportunity while those with tridents split into three groups of three, each led by a lieutenant. One of the groups also includes the captain. The groups led by the lieutenants alone attempt to flank the party while the group led by the captain splits the middle of the party's formation, hoping to strike at exposed flanks or backs while the PCs face the threats to either side.

Because of the evil permeating the area, the sahuagin have a +2 profane bonus to all attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws. They are unaware of this but fight on as normal.



Information

The sahuagin have learned that both banks of the Pauvaas are sparsely inhabited, which is why they feel justified in claiming a stretch of the river for their own. They have seen many unburied skeletons dressed as warriors lying about, and they have drawn the conclusion that no one lives here anymore because the land-dwellers keep killing each other. They have also seen live soldiers about in groups of two or ten, and they admit to attacking and slaughtering some of the smaller groups.

Like their scouting party, they have also seen humanoid shapes walking along the riverbank that didn't quite look human and strange floating shapes that struck them as chilling and menacing. They have also seen these strange beings fighting with — and getting the better of — living soldiers. They don't know anything about the ghost at the Bridge of Dunelding.

Sahuagin (12): CR 3; SZ M (humanoid, aquatic); HD 2d8+2; hp 12; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural); Atks Trident +3 melee (1d8+2), 2 rakes +1 melee (1d4+1), bite +1 melee (1d4+1) or light crossbow +2 ranged (1d8); SA Blood frenzy; SQ Speak with sharks, underwater sense, light blindness, amphibious; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 9; AL LE. Skills: Animal Empathy +2, Hide +6, Listen +7, Spot +7, Wilderness Lore +1. Feats: Multiattack.

Sahuagin Lieutenant (3): CR 6; SZ M (humanoid, aquatic); HD 2d8+2 + 3d10+3; hp 40, 42, 43; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +5 natural); Atks Trident +6 melee (1d8+2), 2 rakes +4 melee (1d4+1), bite +4 melee (1d4+1 bite); SA Blood frenzy; SQ Speak with sharks, underwater sense, light blindness, amphibious; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 10; AL LE. Skills: Animal Empathy +4, Hide +9, Listen +10, Spot +9, Wilderness Lore +3. Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Multiattack, [Track].

Sahuagin Captain: CR9; SZ M (humanoid, aquatic); HD 2d8+4 + 6d10+14; hp 68; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural); Atks Trident +10/+5 melee (1d8+3), 2 rakes +8 melee (1d4+2), bite +8 melee (1d4+2); SA Blood frenzy; SQ Speak with sharks, underwater sense, light blindness, amphibious; SV Fort +7, Ref

+4, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 11; AL LE. Skills: Animal Empathy +6, Hide +11, Listen +11, Spot +10, Wilderness Lore +5. Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Multiattack. [track]

Note: The sahuagin scouts in this adventure are unaffected by freshwater.

13. Bonegnawer

Ten corpses lie in heaps on the dry ground where they fell. Crows and vultures cluster around them but do not touch them, for in their midst, sniffing and probing at the bodies, is an enormous, but disheveled dragon. Its hide is a dull purplish-black, and its crest resembles a head of hair that hasn't been properly combed. You get the feeling the carrion birds are deferring to it, waiting for it to make up its mind.

Then the dragon raises its head and looks at you with an indecipherable glint in its yellow eyes. "Neither dead nor undead," it rasps, speaking in the Common tongue. "You make a curious sight in these parts."

Encounter

This strange and forbidding creature is an ancient carrion dragon (see *New Monsters*). It has dwelt by the banks of the Pauvaas for more years than it cares to remember, and for good reason. True to their name, carrion dragons live primarily on dead flesh, and this particular dragon has always found plenty of food close at hand. Like most of its kind, this ancient fellow bears no real ill will toward the living, reserving its hatred for undead only. Its temperament is less than friendly, but it does not attack the party unless attacked first. It speaks fluent Common, as well as enough Elvish, Dwarvish, and Orcish to get by.

The encounter distance is 120 ft. at first, but as the PCs move closer, the carrion dragon speaks to them.

Information

If the PCs describe their mission and present credible evidence of it (such as their safe conduct pass), the dragon may even turn moderately friendly. It knows that the banks of the Pauvaas are swarming with undead, and it instantly concludes that any enemy of its enemy may turn out to be its friend.

The dragon has lived in this corner of the world for hundreds of years, and it willingly shares what it knows. Within reason, use the carrion dragon to provide the PCs with useful information they have yet to discern on their own (assuming that the PCs ask it the right questions).

Treasure

This carrion dragon keeps its hoard in the trunk of a large hollow tree that rises out of the marsh. The party may discover it if one member makes a successful Wilderness Lore or Tracking check (DC 18). The hoard totals 24,000 gp in loose coins, 30 gems worth an average of 200 gp. each, and a *wand of summon monster III*. Needless to say, however, the party is well advised not to fight this dragon, or to anger it by trying to pilfer its treasure. If a PC tries to steal from the dragon's hoard, one of its attendant carrion birds almost certainly spots him.

Bonegnawer, Black Carrion Dragon: CR 20; SZ G (dragon); HD 33d12+231; hp 445; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft., fly 200 ft. (poor), swim 60 ft.; AC 38 (-4 size, +32 natural); Atks Bite +45 melee (4d6+12) crush +45 melee (4d6+18), tail sweep +45 melee (2d6+18), 2 claws +40 melee (2d8+12), 2 wings +40 melee (2d6+12), or tail slap +40 melee (2d8+12); SA Breath weapon, favored enemy (undead), spell-like abilities; SQ Dragon, damage reduction 15/+2; SV Fort +25, Ref +18, Will +25; Str 35, Dex 10, Con 24, Int 25, Wis 25, Cha 24; AL LN. Skills: Bluff +50, Concentration +50, Diplomacy +50, Escape Artist +43, Knowledge (arcana) +50, Knowledge (nature) +50, Listen +50, Scry +49, Search +50, Spot +50. Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Flyby, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell-Like Ability, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability, Snatch, Sunder.

14. Predator

Here the river spreads out into marshland on either side. As with any marsh, reeds sprout from the fetid water and small animals lurk in the shallow mire. Larger plants hang from drooping vines. As with any marsh, the smell of rot and death is ever present, much of it rising off of heaps of decaying plant matter.

Encounter

One of these heaps of rotting plant matter is a shambling mound. At one point in the distant past, there were villages and farms on the edge of this marsh, but frequent warfare drove the inhabitants away. Since then, shambling mounds have come into the area, making it even less attractive to anyone who might think about resettling here. They feed on local animal life, and just about anyone who might pass by. The inherent evil of the river has made unnatural occurrences like shambling mounds more common.

Tactics

Have each party member make an opposed skill check pitting his or her Spot or Wilderness Lore against the shambling mound's Hide skill (remember, shambling mounds receive a +12 bonus to Hide checks when concealing themselves in swamp). If no one succeeds, the shambling mound strikes as they pass within 20 feet of it, catching one of them flat-footed. If at least one PC succeeds and warns the others, they notice the mound stirring and have time to set themselves before it strikes at them.

The encounter distance varies from 0 to 60 ft.

Treasure

If the party searches the shallow water surrounding the shambler's lurking place, they find treasure shaken loose from its victims. On a successful Search check (DC 25), they find 340 gp and 4 gems worth 300 gp each scattered about the immediate area. If none of the party members makes a successful search check, they only find 120 gp and 1 gem.

Shambling Mound: CR 6; SZ L (plant); HD 8d8+24; hp 60; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20 (-1 size, +11 natural); Atks 2 Slams +10 melee (2d6+5); SA Improved grab, constrict 2d6+7; SQ Plant, electricity immunity, fire resistance 30; SV Fort +9, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 21, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 9; AL N. Skills: Hide +4 (+12 in swamp or forest), Listen +4, Move Silently +4.

15. Captain Brashear Mornett

Suddenly, the horrible visage of something that was once a man rises out of the swamp with a crash of fetid water. Its skin is bone-white and its eyes bulge in what seems like an agony of panic. A sword rests in a scabbard strapped to its side, but the creature seems unaware it has a weapon. You hear something between a rasp and a gurgle escape from between its stiff jaws. It is a sound that scrapes at your very soul: "Cowardice... Left my men... They'll hang me... Desertion..."

Encounter

This wight was once Captain Brashear Mornett, a soldier who served in the army of Tyndall many years ago. It does not respond to any attempts to communicate with it; it simply repeats this thought over and over again until it engages the party in combat. It reflects Captain Mornett's last living flash of consciousness, in which he understood he had deserted his men and he would hang if any of his comrades caught him.

Tactics

This wight is permanently "enchanted" with an *unholy aura*. This increases its armor class by 4 (to 19) and all its saving throws gain a +4 resistance bonus. It also gains an SR 25 against spells emanating from good creatures or spells that are good in origin. The wight cannot be mentally influenced or possessed and those who succeed at a melee strike against it suffer 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage (Fort save, DC 18 to negate).

Treasure

The scabbard strapped to the wight's side bears an inscription: "*Presented to Capt. Brashear Mornett for coming to the aid of his Lord and Commander. — Baron Clayde of Fulgate.*" It also has 10 gems worth 200 gp each inlaid into it. As for the longsword, it has rusted into the scabbard and it's no mean feat to get it out (Strength check, DC 24). It is a +2 *longsword*, though, so it may be of some use if the PCs can remove it and have it reconditioned. Also, three gems worth 175 gp each are inlaid into the pommel.

Captain Brashear Mornett, Wight: CR 5; SZ M (undead); HD 7d12; hp 64; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural); Atks Slam +8 melee (1d4+3 and energy drain); SA Energy drain, create spawn; SQ Undead; AL LE; SV Fort +1,

Ref +4, Will +6; Str 16, Dex 13, Con —, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 15. Skills: Climb +5, Hide +8, Listen +8, Move silently +16, Search +7, Spot +8. Feats: Blind-Fight.

16. The Ghost of Lord Arnauf of Glor

As you approach the bridge, a tingle on the surface of your skin tells you that something is near, and that it is waiting for you. It is completely silent, and as much as you may think you are not afraid, you are afraid, at least a little. The bridge itself stands shrouded in fog. Then a ghostly figure rears up before you, emerging from the heavy mist as if it had just coalesced from the foul-smelling essence of its being. It takes the shape of a large, imposing warrior clad in chainmail, hauberk and helm, and it wields a nasty and deformed bastard sword. The incorporeal figure glowers at you. "So those who yet live come to me," it says. "Name your errand — as if I could not already guess it!"

Encounter

The ghost of Arnauf of Glor is clad and equipped as if Arnauf was in the last moments of his life, in full battle armor, with the magical bastard sword, called *Firetongue*, for which he was quite famous during his lifetime. The explosion of necromancy that created this ghost has turned his armor into +2 *chainmail* and +2 *ghost touch helm*, and *Firetongue* from a +1 *flaming bastard sword* into a +2 *bastard sword of spectral fire* (see *New Magic Items*).

This undead reincarnation of Arnauf of Glor bears quite a grudge against the living for the death he endured (see sidebar), and it is not afraid to say so. Though Arnauf remained loyal to his people to the very end and his heroic action is remembered in legend and celebrated in song, from the ghost's perspective, the survivors of the battle profited from his death, and used it as motivation to perpetuate senseless carnage down through the generations. It believes "there are few die well that die in battle," and that the living must pay for this. To this end, the ghost has attacked any and all living beings it has come across.

Information

If the PCs try to communicate with it, the ghost responds freely and willingly. It knows that it was created by a burst of necromantic evil, and that this phenomenon has spawned a huge number of undead all

along the River of Blood. It admit that, come the spring thaw, it and the other powerful undead spawned from warriors and commanders will lead an army of undead against the three kingdoms and destroy them. If the PCs tell it they have destroyed the others, he responds that more will take their place. It also knows that Arnauf's old adamantine shield is the focus of the necromantic power animating the undead, and destroying it will return the dead to their graves. It does not volunteer this information though, as it is more bent on the PC's destruction.

The ghost tires of banter. It can only guess why they have come to the Bridge of Dunelding and has no interest in seeing them succeed. Before it attacks, it calls out, "Very well, warriors. Destroy me if you must. I have already repaid the living for my fate. But do not blame me if I seek revenge as long as I may!"

If the party defeats the ghost, something of Arnauf breaks through, and they hear a whisper on the wind as its ethereal form disappears, urging them to search for his banner and shield.

"From here, it went against the flow, and now lies near to the heart of one who hates us."

Tactics

Like Mornett, Arnauf is permanently enchanted with an unholy aura. This increases his armor class by 4 (to 26) and all its saving throws gain a +4 resistance bonus. It also gains an SR 25 against spells emanating from good creatures or spells that are good in origin. The ghost cannot be mentally influenced or possessed and those who succeed at a melee strike against it suffer 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage (Fort

save, DC 18 to negate). In addition, because of the nature of his ghost form and the evil that has manifested those who succeed at a melee strike also suffer

1d6 points of damage as if attacked by a weapon of wounding.

Treasure

If destroyed, his magical armor and weapon drop to the ground, remaining in the Material Plane as physical objects even after their owner has been destroyed. If the PCs examine *Firetongue*, they notice a fancy script 'A' inscribed into one side of the pommel, and a pattern of tiny inlaid rubies and red quartz in the shape of a tongue of flame on the other. These gems are worth 2,000 gp (total).

There is no other treasure in the immediate area.

Ghost (Arnauf of Glor):

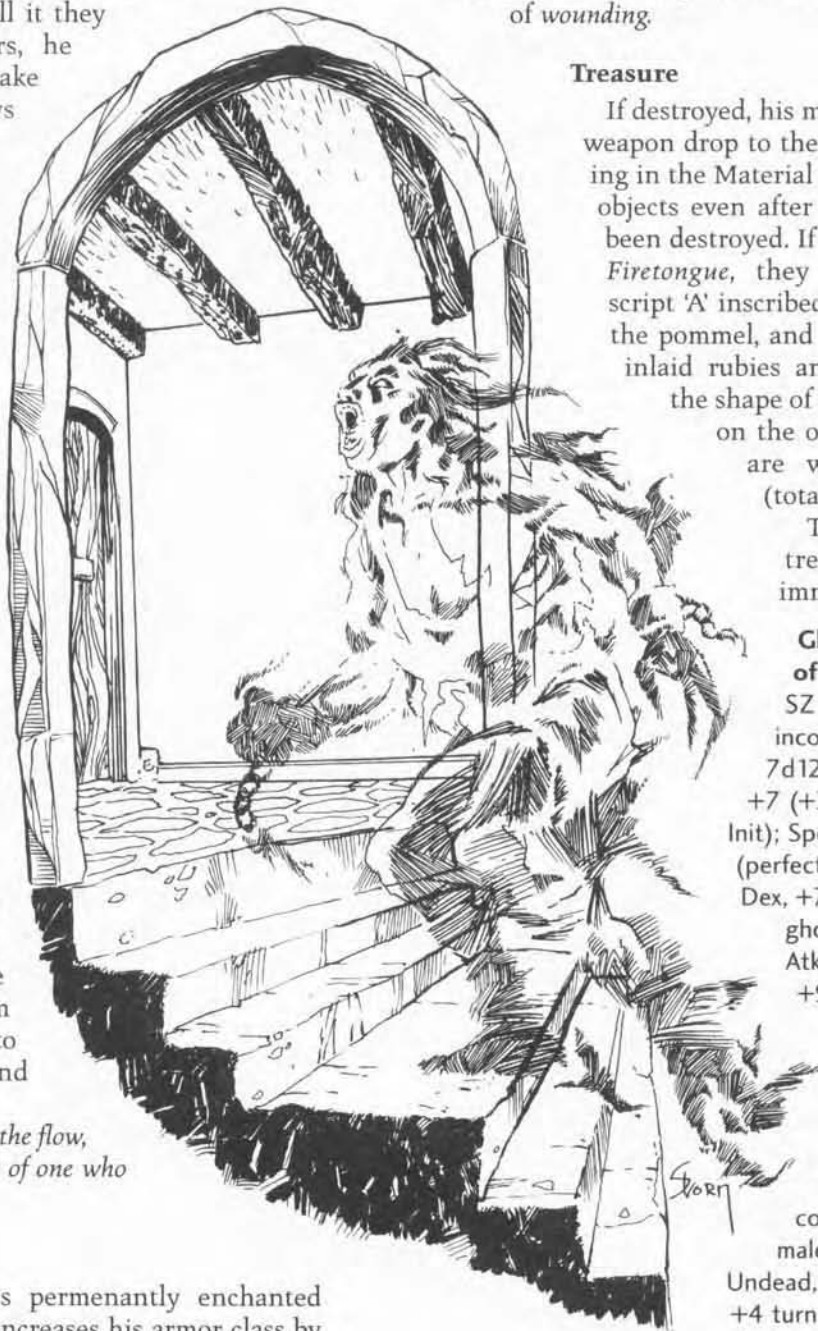
CR 9;
SZ M (undead, incorporeal); HD 7d12; hp 48; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 22 (+3 Dex, +7 chainmail, +2 ghost touch helm); Atks *Firetongue* +9 melee

(1d10+4, 1d6 flame damage and energy drain); SA

Manifestation, corrupting touch, malevolence; SQ

Undead, incorporeal, +4 turn resistance, rejuvenation; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +3; Str

19, Dex 16, Con —, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 17. Skills: Climb +4, Handle Animal +4, Hide +8, Jump +4, Listen +8, Ride +4, Search +8, Spot +8, Swim +4; AL LE. Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency, Improved Initiative, Power Attack.



17. The Shield and the Banner

This last enigmatic utterance by the ghost of Arnauf provides the key to locating his shield. Oddly enough, Arnauf's shield has drifted upstream (hence, it "went against the flow") into the marshes along the south bank and become caught in the exposed roots of the hollow tree in which the carrion dragon keeps its horde ("the heart of one who hates us"). The dragon itself has no idea the shield is there, since it isn't visible from above the water. Any land-based creature needs the aid of water-breathing to spend enough time in the murky water to locate it, but once one is down there it's hard to miss. The necromantic energy stored in it gives it a creepy glow that shows through the tattered silk of Arnauf's battle standard.

Without that evil power suffusing it, it has no magical properties; it's simply a +2 *adamantine shield*. Casting *remove curse*, *dispel magic*, or *break enchantment* disperses the power and returns it to its normal state (the shield is considered created by a 15th level spellcaster for the purposes of resisting magical effects). Once this happens, no new undead are spawned, those that have been spawned return to their graves, and the present crisis abates. The PCs may also remove the evil power by physically destroying the shield — melting it down or dissolving it in acid — but this is hard to do with adamantine. Additionally, the PCs might be

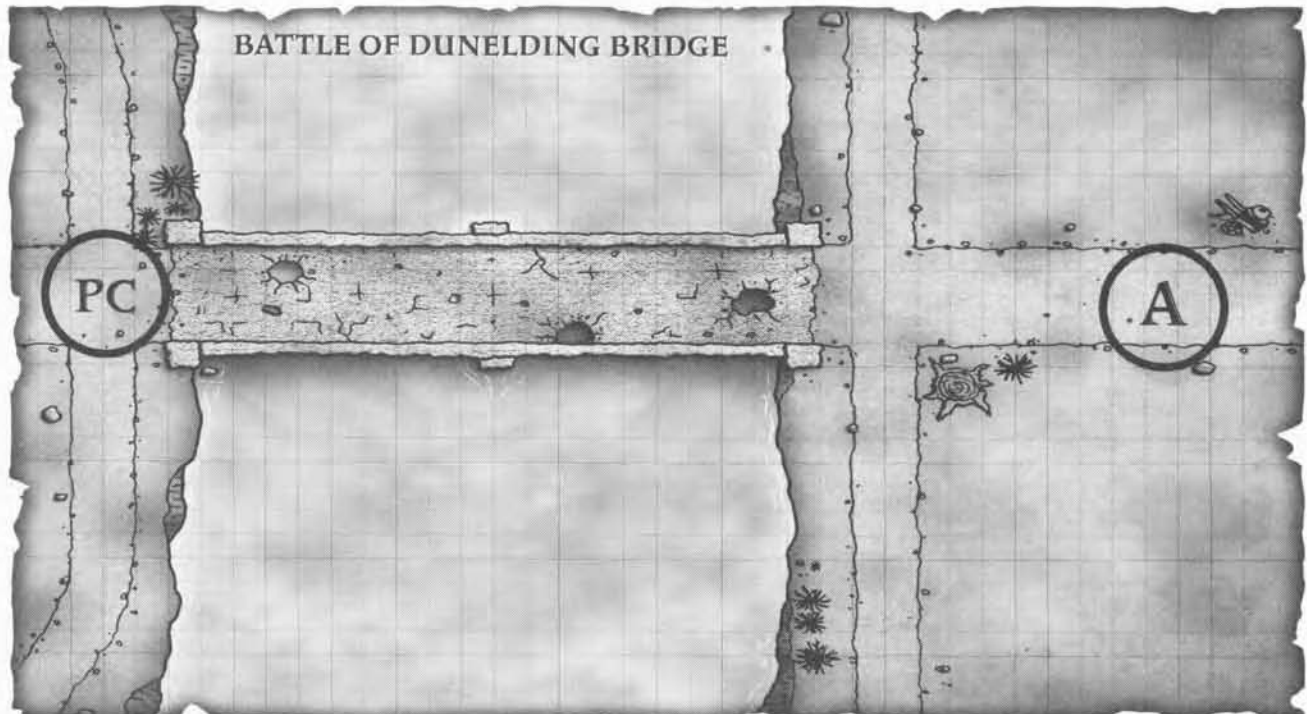
allowed to go on a great quest to forgive the horrors of this place or to find a volcano hot enough to melt the metal.

Bonegnawer, the carrion dragon, does not know what do with the shield. The PCs have to figure it out for themselves.

ACT III, CONCLUSION

Assuming the PCs defused Arnauf's shield, signs of their success precede their return to Valoro. Before they can make their report, the three rulers receive intelligence of undead passing soldiers without molesting them, as if returning to their resting places.

They are somewhat relieved as they gather to debrief the PCs, but still want answers from them. Information about undead will interest them keenly, of course. Assuming the PCs provide a reasonably full account of their encounter with Arnauf's ghost and reveal the cause of the undead uprising along the River of Blood, the information has a palpably sobering effect on them. Until now, Queen Malvina and King Thorston did not fully understand the connection between the incessant wars that their kingdoms fought against each other and the present crisis, and Duke Arden only suspected it.



Furthermore, if the PCs show them Arnauf's sword and armor, Duke Arden gasps audibly in amazement. He recognizes Firetongue on sight by the "A" carved into the pommel and the flame pattern of rubies and red quartz. After all, he has heard the various poems and songs about the heroism and self-sacrifice of Arnauf since he was a small child. He offers the party twice the market value for both items.

At the conclusion of the audience, the three rulers glance briefly at each other, as if searching for mutual agreement. Then Malvina turns to the PCs and addresses them with an air of formality, as if she had prepared a speech for them: "Honorable friends, we thank you on behalf of the three kingdoms for the service that you have rendered us. Great have been your deeds, and you have battled a mighty foe on our behalf. We do not forget those who have done us such service. Come forward, therefore, and receive your promised reward."

Assuming that one or more PCs step up to the throne, she will signal four guards standing in back of the dais. They come forward carrying an iron chest containing 10,000 g.p. worth of jewels and gems, the sum that the rulers had promised the PCs. King Thorston and Duke Regent Arden seem a bit put out at the fact that Queen Malvina spoke for them, but they say nothing, except to express their own brief thanks to the PCs.

In addition, if any of the PCs qualifies as a royal guard (*see New Prestige Class, below*) Malvina will announce to them that they have the additional honor of enlisting with the elite Royal Guards of the kingdom of their choice. "You have proven yourselves worthy of such a distinction," she says, "and as a further reward,

we would gladly accept you in our service." If a PC wants to become a royal guard, but does not wish to lose his freedom to seek adventure at will, the appointment is honorary. The PC gains the benefits of the royal guardsman prestige class, and in lieu of actual service to the kingdom in question, the PC swears to defend its honor and wears its coat of arms at all times.

Assuming that the PCs wish to leave Valoro at the conclusion of the adventure, Queen Malvina will order an honor guard to accompany them to the city gates. As they pass along the main thoroughfares of the city, crowds gather to watch them in silent wonder. They do not cheer, as the general public has heard no official news of their mission (the three rulers and their courts have kept it quiet). At most, rumors may have leaked out here and there about a band of mercenaries hired to look for undead along the River of Blood because the regular armies are too scared. But it's not every day that a royal honor guard accompanies a band of strangers through the streets of the city, and people will stop and stare.



RIVER OF BLOOD, EPILOGUE

If the PCs return to the Three Kingdoms region a year or so hence, they find that some important political changes have taken place. Duke Regent Arden persuaded not only Queen Malvina and King Thorston, but also his own nobles, that a permanent peace treaty would serve everyone's interests. The treaty lasts five

years, but may be renewed upon its expiration. The PCs find Arden happier and his political position within his kingdom stronger. He has placed firetongue and Arnau's armor on permanent display in the Royal Palace as a reminder both of the courage of those who have fought for the Kings of Tyndall, but also of the fact that war has cost the kingdom so many of its finest men. He still looks forward to his nephew coming of age and allowing him to retire, however. Thorston Iron-Hand has largely retired, leaving day-to-day administration of a kingdom at peace to his son and heir, Prince Harøld, and his war-nobles. He finds governing without war to be rather dull, and he now spends his days hunting and hawking. Queen Malvina has given up any thoughts of destroying the Kingdom of Tor, and has devoted her considerable energies to public works and encouraging commerce in her domains. All freely admit that there would be no peace if the PCs had not discovered the true impact that centuries of warfare had made on the kingdoms.

The PCs also find that the undead do not haunt the banks of the Pauvaas so much as they once did, and if the present peace endures, they may just return to their graves altogether. Finally, the PCs find they are remembered throughout the Three Kingdoms as heroes. Perhaps someone has erected a statue or library in their honor.

NPCS

CAPTAIN ANDERS GAR (HUMAN)

Anders Gar is a middle-aged professional soldier who has served the Kingdom of Tor for practically his entire adult life. He is not exceptionally brilliant or wise, and probably would not function well at a higher level of command. But he is brave and good at what he does, and the fact that he has survived two decades of constant warfare is a distinction in and of itself. A tough and competent mid-level field officer, his sort forms the joints and sinew of any good army.

Captain Anders Gar: CR 6; SZ M (humanoid); HD 6d10+3; hp 63; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Spd 30 ft., AC 17 (+2 Dex, +5 chainmail); Atks +1 longsword +10/+5 melee (1d8+4); SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 17, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 15; AL LN. Skills: Climb +6, Handle Animal +5, Jump +7, Intuit Direction +2, Listen +5, Ride +5, Spot +4, Search +1, Swim +6, Wilderness Lore +2. Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Power Attack, Toughness, Track.

NEW MONSTERS

CARRION DRAGON

The Carrion dragon follows the general rules regarding dragons, except as noted.

Dragons are notorious for maintaining wide-ranging diets, but there are those for whom scavenging on dying or recently dead flesh is always the first option. Because of their choice of food sources, carrion dragons make their lairs near flat wilderness areas like vultures or near frequently-used battlefields. Anywhere dead or dying creatures lie in the open a carrion dragon can be found.

Carrion dragons have a mottled black and purple coloration, and those who have survived encounters with them report a hard, unyielding glint in their eyes. As they age, however, they become less impressive to the eye, as their hide loses its luster. Very old carrion dragons take on a curiously disheveled and mangy appearance.

Scholars consider carrion dragons to be less avaricious than their draconic cousins in that they are less aggressive in seeking out material wealth. This is, however, a mistaken impression, for they value gems and precious metals very much; they merely do not have to work as hard to get them. Feeding on the bodies of the dead can bring them valuable personal possessions as well as food. Chasing the survivors off of a battlefield before they loot the bodies can by itself provide a bonanza.

Carrion dragons also share a special bond, somewhere between worship and servitude, with carrion birds such as crows and vultures. Such creatures congregate in great numbers around a carrion dragon's lair, and some swear that they are paying homage to the dragon, as if to a king or even a god.

Because of their unusually intimate relationship with death and dying, carrion dragons have developed strong, hard-and-fast feelings about the boundaries that surround mortal existence. They respect death as the source of their own continued life, and while they do not love and revel in it as evil beings are wont to do, they believe in it as an absolute. This respect for death inspires their hatred of the undead, and they especially regard ghouls and ghoulish dragons as abominations. The notion of resurrection is also abhorrent to them; they regard it as a sacrilegious refusal to let the dead stay dead.

Carrion dragons are anything but cruel, however. They have been known to show compassion and pity when they encounter a being suffering more than it can bear. It has a limited spell-like ability to heal, and on rare occasions, when it is especially moved, it uses this power. On other occasions, however, a carrion dragon that encounters a creature in terrible distress may decide that the most appropriate course is to put it out of its misery.

Combat

Carrion dragons do not like to fight, and they are not aggressive unless threatened or in the presence of undead. Any carrion birds in the vicinity instinctively rally to the dragon's defense if it engages in combat.

Favored Enemy (undead): Carrion dragons' intense antipathy for the undead can be compared to the way in which rangers have favored racial enemies. Carrion dragons always attack undead in preference to any living foe, even if the undead are not aggressive. It also attacks ghouls in preference to other ghouls, and ghouls in preference to any other type of undead.

Carrion dragons gain a +5 bonus to Listen, Sense Motive, Spot and Wilderness Lore checks when using these skills against undead. They also gain a +5 attack bonus in physical combat against undead.

Breath Weapons (Su): Carrion dragons can exhale a corrupting stench at opponents. This breath weapon takes a linear shape. Anyone in its path must make a successful Fortitude save or else take full damage from degradation of the flesh.

CARRION DRAGON

Type: Dragon

Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground

Organization: Wyrmling, very young, young, juvenile and young adult: solitary or clutch (2-5); adult, mature adult, old, very old, ancient, wyrm, or great wyrm: solitary, pair, or family (1-2 and 2-5 offspring)

Challenge Ratings: Wyrmling 2, very young 4, young 6, juvenile 8, young adult 11, adult 14, mature adult 16, old 18, very old 19, ancient 21, wyrm 22, great wyrm 24

Breath Weapon: As a black dragon

Treasure: Double standard

Alignment: Always lawful neutral

Advancement: Wyrmling 7-8 HD (Small), very young 10-11 HD (Medium-size), young 13-14 HD (Medium-size), juvenile 16-17 HD (Large), young adult 19-20 (Large), adult 22-23 (Large), mature adult 25-26 HD (Huge), old 28-29 HD (Huge), very old 31-32 HD (Huge), ancient 34-35 HD (Gargantuan), wyrm 37-38 (Gargantuan), great wyrm 40+ HD (Gargantuan)

Inflict Serious Wounds (Sp): Three times per day, carrion dragons may summon the energy of their being to inflict damage on another creature. This ability functions exactly like an inflict serious wounds spell.



Cure Moderate Wounds (Sp): When they choose to succor creature in distress, carrion dragons may choose to reverse the flow of its own energy as if casting a cure moderate wounds spell. This occurs so rarely that they have not developed the capacity to do so more than once per day.

Halt Undead (Sp): Their antipathy to the undead gives carrion dragons a limited ability to cope with them through means other than physical attacks. As many as three times per day, they may attempt to stop undead creatures in their tracks as if casting the spell halt undead.

Stinking Cloud (Sp): Their constant contact with dead and dying things gives carrion dragons the ability to overpower living opponents with a miasma as if casting the spell stinking cloud. They may use this ability up to three times per day.

Slay Living (Sp): Once per day, carrion dragons may attempt to bring death to a living creature as if casting slay living. As carrion dragons do not like to think of themselves as killers, however, they only use this ability in situations in which they feel cornered.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

WRAITH TOUCHED LONGSWORDS

When the area around the River of Blood was flooded with necromantic magic, it not only woke the dead from their resting places, it also infused their swords and armor, often turning them from thoroughly mundane items into proper magic items. The wraith touched longsword is such an item. When it successfully strikes a non-undead target, it causes 1d6 permanent Constitution drain from the target, unless a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 18) is made.

+2 GHOUL TOUCH GREATAXE

This was once the personal weapon of Gareth Hawkwood, the greatest mercenary captain of his time. It was a greataxe forged of adamantine, and as such it was not magical, but the qualities of that ultra-rare metal gave him a powerful advantage in combat. The coating of lurid red pigment that he applied to it before battle made it a distinctive personal symbol. After the Tor killed him and slew his entire company near the banks of the Pauvaas, they at least showed him the respect of burying his weapon with him.

There it lay until the great shockwave of necromancy that ran through the area surrounding the River of Blood touched it. This phenomenon turned the corpse of Gareth Hawkwood into a ghastr, and infused his trademark weapon with dark arcane power. Now, his prized weapon is a +2 greataxe with the power to paralyze. When it successfully strikes an opponent, the target must make a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 15) or suffer an extra 1d6 damage and paralysis as if struck by a ghastr. Elves and other creatures immune to paralysis must still make a Fortitude save, but if they fail they only suffer the extra damage. Any good character touching or lifting the axe must make a saving throw as if struck by it.

FIRETONGUE (MINOR ARTIFACT)

This most unusual weapon was once *Firetongue*, the legendary +1 flaming bastard sword wielded by Lord Arnauf of Glor. When Arnauf was killed covering the Tyndalese army's retreat after the First Battle of Dunelding Crossing, however, his sword disappeared with him, and as much as it and its owner were remembered in story and song, *Firetongue* was never seen again. Throughout the intervening centuries, the sword remained at the bottom of the Pauvaas by the Bridge of Dunelding alongside Arnauf's remains, untouched by the river's currents. When Arnauf was animated as a ghost, *Firetongue* partook of the same necromantic energy and gained another ability.

Firetongue combines the power of a flaming weapon with the ability to drain the life force of its target. When it strikes an opponent, it not only causes an additional 1d6 fire damage, it also drains one level from the target as a wraith. In order to negate this level drain, the target must make a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 18).

Firetongue is a unique item and cannot be replicated.

NEW PRESTIGE CLASS

ROYAL GUARDSMAN

Tyndall, Tor, and Vedia all maintain elite units of soldiers whose principal duty is to defend the person of the monarch. They are known generically as Royal Guards, and their ranks are generally filled by soldiers of the regular army who have distinguished themselves in some way, although mercenaries who have fought especially well in the service of a particular kingdom may be offered places, too. An appointment as a royal

guardsman of any of the three kingdoms is a plum job for a soldier, as they receive much higher pay than the common rank-and-file and better food and accommodations in barracks. Nobles vie for positions of command in the Royal Guards, which are considered highly prestigious posts.

Fighters, paladins, and rangers are much more likely than other characters to provide suitable material for a royal guardsman. Barbarians generally come off as too uncouth, although they may meet the basic skill requirements. Spellcasters usually don't handle martial weapons well enough, and rogues are not useful enough in a stand-up fight. The vast majority of Royal Guardsmen are human, but elves and dwarves in the ranks have not been unknown.

The Royal Guards stand sentry duty around the royal castle. They also accompany the monarch on state visits, public appearances, and on campaign. Even if the monarch does not take the field in time of war, the Royal Guards may still be sent to fight under the royal banner to serve as an example to the rest of the army.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify as a royal guardsman, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any lawful.

Race: Human, elf, half-elf, dwarf.

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Toughness.

Class Skills

The royal guardsman's class skills are identical to those for fighters.

Skill points at each level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the royal guardsman prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A royal guardsman is proficient in all simple and martial weapons, as well as light armor, medium armor, heavy armor, and shields.

Bonus Feats: Royal guardsmen receive a bonus feat with every even-numbered level. This feat may be chosen from the fighter's list of bonus feats.

Defending the King's Honor: Everyone who accepts a commission in the Royal Guards must undergo a formal ceremony in which he swears before the monarch and his commanders that he will defend the life and honor of his monarch to the utmost of his abilities, or die trying. When defending a royal person, a royal guardsman receives a +1 morale bonus to all Fortitude and Will saving throws, as well as a +1 morale bonus to all attack and damage rolls at 1st level, with an additional +1 at each odd-numbered level thereafter. So long as the guardsman is within 50 feet of a royal person and in actual defense of him or her, these bonuses are in effect.

King's Champion: At 10th level, the royal guardsman is honored with the king's favor and given magical armor and sword as his gift for his service. +2 and a +2 are his so long as he serves the king (or queen).

ROYAL GUARDSMAN ADVANCEMENT TABLE

Level	Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+1	King's Honor +1
2	+2	+3	+0	+1	Bonus Feat
3	+3	+3	+1	+2	King's Honor +2
4	+4	+4	+1	+2	Bonus Feat
5	+5	+4	+1	+2	King's Honor +3
6	+6	+5	+2	+3	Bonus Feat
7	+7	+5	+2	+3	King's Honor +4
8	+8	+6	+2	+3	Bonus Feat
9	+9	+6	+3	+4	King's Honor +5
10	+10	+7	+3	+4	Bonus Feat, King's Champion

APPENDIX:

KINGS AND QUEENS

LEGACY OF THE KINGDOMS

TYNDALL

Although the Tyndalese have traded plenty of blows with their neighbors through the ages, they do not think of themselves as war-like. The Kingdom of Tyndall records its origins in an alliance of farming communities that came together to for collective security and commerce. The original mandate of the League of Twelve Hearths, as it was known, pledged its members to mutual defense and free trade, not invasion and conquest. Even now, centuries after the league evolved from these republican roots into a feudal aristocracy that links social and political authority to military leadership, the Tyndalese still see themselves as farmers and tradesmen, not soldiers. To them, war is something forced upon them by outsiders — this, in spite of the countless campaigns in which they have fought and died on the orders of their kings.

When the government of Tyndall was young, the elders of the villages would meet every two years, either to select a new leader for the alliance, or to affirm the current one. Even after Edogar of Tyndall founded the Kingdom of Tyndall and effectively abolished the League, election by the nobility determined the royal succession after the death of a monarch. Candidates were typically restricted to blood relatives of the late monarch. However, the elective monarchy went by the boards when King Wilym IX was killed during a campaign against the Vedalians. Instead of retreating to allow the entire nobility to convene and elect a new monarch, the army commanders crowned Wilym's eldest son, Prince Gaige, and continued with the campaign. Ever since, the Tyndalese throne has passed to the monarch's eldest son (or daughter, if there are no male children).

But even still, the Tyndalese think of themselves as a people among whom even the lowliest commoner's opinion counts. Public gathering places like pubs and the common rooms of inns often host lively, impromptu

many-sided debates about the affairs of the day. And wisps of republicanism and independent thought still linger at the highest levels of government as well. When King Elden XXVII died on campaign, leaving his underage son, Prince Stefen, as monarch, it was a congress of nobles who elected Duke Arden of Calewood to serve as the boy's regent. Though acclaimed by the majority, Arden's election was hardly unanimous, and the nobles who opposed him have not rallied behind him.

That something of the spirit of the League remains in the hearts of the Tyndalese is a tribute to its success. The League did indeed stimulate the economies of its original constituents and the villages grew into towns with satellite villages of their own. The success of the League persuaded other towns and villages to join, allowing its boundaries and population to grow. As a result, it conquered by coin rather than by sword. One of the original twelve villages, Tyndall, grew into a major city, its expansion fueled by its place as an important transportation hub.

As it grew, however, Tyndall touched the Kingdom of Vedalia, already an established power in the region. As the Vedalians launched pre-emptive campaigns to contain their new rival, the League suddenly found their need to defend themselves outstripped the tame and idealistic assumptions that underlay their original agreement. As the League added more towns and villages, the the politics of keeping all of its members together became unwieldy. Edogar, the Lord-Elder of Tyndall, argued that the League could not stop all of their military or civilian operations every two years to discuss the quality of their leadership. Instead, they needed a strong war leader and head of state whose position would never be subject to challenge — in short, a king. As the wealthiest and most powerful of the league's leaders, he naturally proposed himself as the prime candidate. The other leaders agreed, although most did so with some reluctance. In the end, the League gave way to the Kingdom of Tyndall and Edogar turned his estate into a royal palace.

Since then, the Tyndalese monarchy, shaped by the demands of constant warfare with its neighbors, has come to resemble most any other monarchy. Nowadays, it relies more on the solemn oaths of the nobles to support their king than it does on the consent of the governed who marked the League. Even so, the Tyndalese continue to think of themselves as a breed apart.

TOR

The Kingdom of Tor is the youngest of the three kingdoms, having only been founded some 600 years ago. It was then that a group of clans arrived from the Windstair Islands in the north of the Great Sea, fleeing famine in their native country. They sailed up the Pauvaas in longships, looking for a place where they might settle. At that time, neither Tyndall nor Vedralia exercised much political control over the lands to the south and east of the Great Bend, sparring over the area from time to time, but otherwise preferring invasion routes north of the corner of the river. Neither kingdom pressed their claims, collected taxes there, nor garrisoned the towns. The newcomers moved into this vacuum and carved out a new home for themselves.

Yet it might not have been so except for the informal leader of the clans, Torvol Dragon-Heart. According to the chronicle of Tor, which details the kingdom's prehistory, there had been much grumbling and complaint in their longships across the Great Sea and as they proceeded up the Pauvaas. After a few unsuccessful landings, they managed an to disembark unopposed on the south bank of the Pauvaas 20 miles west of Dunelding Bridge. Here, Torvol gathered the clans together and ordered the longships burned. His point — that none could ever turn back — sank in amongst his followers and ever since the tradition of maritime skill that once distinguished Torvol's people faded.

Under the leadership of Torvol Dragon-Heart, the Tor immediately set about conquering towns and villages south of the Pauvaas. There were not enough of them to displace the native population, so the Tor became overlords with Torvol granting lands to his most prominent warriors. This system, as fragile as it might seem, served them well and by the end of his life, Torvol Dragon-Heart had carved out a sizable realm for his people.

Fueled by the wealth that their control of the trade routes in and out of Tor generated, Torvol's successors pushed the boundaries of the kingdom to their natural limits — the banks of the Pauvaas opposite Tyndall and Vedralia. Up to this point, the two more-established kingdoms had taken scarce notice of the newcomers,

too absorbed in their own feuds to think much about it. They had employed Tor warriors as mercenaries or temporary allies, but had not acknowledged the unified Kingdom of Tor. The presence of armies on their immediate borders changed that.

King Atber VIII of Tyndall and King Raimon IV of Vedralia called a truce with each other, and sent a joint embassy to King Gelsen I Blood-Shield in Tor. They proposed a meeting of the three kings as a formal overture to diplomatic relations. Wergil agreed, and the monarchs met in the Vedralian town of Pitenne, near the border with Tyndall. From the start, though, the summit went poorly. As the price of peace, Atber demanded the lands abutting the south bank of the Pauvaas be sworn to him. Raimon demanded the same terms of the Tor nobles who owned land on the west bank of the river, south of the Great Bend. These demands outraged Gelsen, who saw the Kingdom of Tor as every bit the equal of Vedralia and Tyndall. He rose from his seat and thundered, "No descendant of Torvol Dragon-Heart could accept such terms, and may I lose both my crown and my head if I ever do!" Despite the summit's lack of success, this historic occasion went down in the chronicles of all three kingdoms as the Meeting of the Three Kings.

Both Vedralia and Tyndall promptly sent their armies across the Pauvaas to punish those who refused to acknowledge their place in the Three Kingdoms. The Tor fought back with skill and ferocity. First, King Gelsen smashed the Tyndalese and drove them back over the Dunelding Bridge. Then he turned to face the Vedalians and discouraged them with a series of sharp engagements, after which he exhausted them with marches and counter-marches, refusing to allow his numerically superior foe to run him to ground. In two years, King Raimon could never consolidate his gains on the west side of the Pauvaas and he finally withdrew. In the centuries since then, skirkimishes have continued on all sides, but not without hard lessons.

Over the course of generations, the Tor lost their ethnic connections to the rocky, barren islands from which their forebears emigrated. They no longer speak or read the old runic language they brought with them, and their talent as ocean-going sailors has atrophied. No longer needing maritime skill, they take up horsemanship, and their heavy cavalry are considered the finest mounted warriors in the region. They no longer make much of the fact that their ancestors came to the Three Kingdoms from over the Great Sea. Only their fierce, warlike nature remains, and it is an aspect of their character to which the Tyndalese and the Vedalians can well attest.

VEDALIA

The Vedalians view their monarchy as the oldest and most hallowed in the Three Kingdoms region, and with some justification. The origins of their people are shrouded in the mists of time so none is sure whether or not the "histories" are quite true.

According to the Kingdom of Vedalia's central foundation legend, its first monarch was Vedal the Great. The story first mentions Vedal as the Chieftain of the village of Valoro. During his youth, the Pauvaas often overflowed its banks, and these floods devastated the villages on either side of the river. Vedal grew frustrated at his inability to ease the havoc wrought on Valoro year after year. One day, as the waters of the Pauvaas began their annual and seemingly inexorable rise toward the farms surrounding his village, Vedal waded in up to his chest and, brandishing his sword, cried out for the river to leave his people alone. First, he begged the river, then he threatened it, and at last, to everyone's amazement, the waters of the Pauvaas began to recede, and soon they returned to their normal level. When word of this great feat spread amongst the villages along the river, they unanimously acclaimed Vedal and his descendants as their King in perpetuity. Since then, the Pauvaas has never overflowed its banks, and the descendants of Vedal the Great have ruled over the land by right of their ancestor's legendary deed.

Over time, Valoro grew into a great city, the greatest in the region. The grand Royal Castle and city's impressive walls make it a wonder to behold, even from a distance. Most of the trade through this portion of the Pauvaas flows through the port of Valoro, and the city draws traders, artisans, and artists from all over the Three Kingdoms, making it a cultural as well as a military marvel.

Many scholars have tried to verify the legend of King Vedal, but their declared degree of success has often depended more on their interest in currying favor with the monarchy than with any objective finding of fact. The story of Vedal turning back the Pauvaas began as a folktale among largely illiterate people, and so no contemporary documents attest to its veracity. To date, scholars from Tyndall have produced the most skeptical analyses of the legend, although it may be said that, because of the long history of enmity between the two kingdoms, they bring to it just as much bias as their Vedalian counterparts.

In any event, most of these scholars agree that there probably was an historical Vedal the Great. Most likely, he was a village leader, not much different from the leaders of the other fishing and farming villages scat-

tered along the Pauvaas, with the ambition and the force of will to unite everyone under his rule. Through a skillful combination of war and diplomacy, he conquered and absorbed the settlements along the north bank of the river down to the Great Bend. In order to quell any opposition that could not be quieted by force or friendly persuasion, he (or his supporters) created about him a myth that he had performed a superhuman deed in service of his people, which established him as an extraordinary being worthy of supreme leadership. In order to maintain their grip on what became the Kingdom of Vedalia, his descendants have, quite understandably, enshrined the story.

About 200 years ago, with his army backed up against the walls of his capital city by an invading Tor army, King Raimon XVIII suddenly "discovered" a large sword which he claimed to be that of Vedal the Great. Wielding it in battle to rally his troops, he drove the Tor back across the Pauvaas. The Tyndalese scholar Wat Milor later examined the sword and declared that its ornamental work shared more with Vedalian weapons of only 100 years previous than with any known ancient specimens. Nonetheless, this relic of Raimon XVIII remains on display in the Royal Castle in Valoro.

But this foundation myth has a more dangerous side. It specifies that villages on both banks of the Pauvaas swore fealty to Vedal the Great after he saved them from the floodwaters. Vedalia has exploited this "fact" to claim territory on the west bank of the river, even after the Tor had settled in their present domain and established that side of the Pauvaas as their land. This supposedly ancient right of sovereignty remains one of the favorite excuses for declaring war between the two kingdoms. Vedalian monarchs have even used it to claim territory west of the Great Bend, thus inciting war with Tyndall. However, most would never argue that Vedal's original domain extended that far.

On the whole, Vedalians enjoy their status as the most venerable of the Three Kingdoms and assume this makes them the most civilized as well. Vedalian monarchs also presume a certain preeminence that sets them above the Kings of Tyndall and Tor. That is why Queen Malvina assumes an air of superiority when in the company of her fellow rulers, even though she is by far the youngest of the three. Given the present crisis, Duke Regent Arden and King Thorston have chosen to endure her snobbery, but this attitude has led to many diplomatic flare-ups in the past — as if the three kingdoms needed yet another excuse to make war.

As monarchs of Vedalia went, King Fernan XI was no better or worse than most of his predecessors. Under his rule, the Vedalian monarchy collected taxes, administered justice, kept order in its lands, and warred with its neighbors more or less as it had for many generations past. Based on his achievements, a record of his reign was recorded dutifully in the annals of the Kings of Vedalia, but there are no notes of special accomplishments or salutary nicknames immortalizing any personal qualities attached to him. His death, however, made him into a figure of legend, and turned his name to a rallying cry for his descendants.

The Last in Line

In the last year of his life, King Fernan found himself at war with the Tyndalese. The matter in dispute was ownership of the Golden Marshes, in which prospectors claimed they found nuggets of gold. But given the history of relations between all of the three kingdoms, the cause of the war could just as easily have been nearly anything else. In any event, the two sides fought along their common border in skirmishes and small pitched battles with no advantage to either side.

Fernan's spies in the capital informed him the Tyndal were hiring large numbers of mercenaries to augment their standing army. Obviously, they were preparing to force a decisive battle that would crush the Vedalians and allow them to impose a humiliating peace. Fernan knew he did not have enough in his treasury to match the Tyndalese hired sword for hired sword. Instead, he turned to King Ralf I of Tor, who had watched the conflict unfold with interest, but as yet took no sides. Fernan offered Ralf a share of whatever gold might be found in the contested marshes in exchange for a military alliance. Ralf agreed.

Under the plan they designed, Fernan would cross the border with Tyndall, right up to the nose of the enemy. He believed this would provoke an attack, especially as he was to be outnumbered. The Vedalian army would then feign retreat. As they did, King Ralf would cross the Pauvaas with his army and take the Tyndalese by surprise in their right flank. At worst, they would force the Tyndalese to retreat. At best, they could annihilate them and reverse the course of the war.

As Fernan marched his army toward the border, he received word that Ralf had mustered his elite heavy cavalry and was heading toward the Great Bend. As he reached the border, he received another message saying the vanguard of the Tor army had reached the river and was in position to cross. He forged ahead, and soon his outriders reported that the Tyndalese were marching

to meet him. Fernan dispatched couriers to Ralf, warning him that battle would shortly be upon them.

On a clear summer morning, King Fernan of Vedalia deployed his army in a defensive posture, his heavy infantry in a line, archers slightly retracted, his cavalry in reserve. As he intended, the Tyndalese moved to the attack. A company of Vedalian archers promptly unleashed a volley of fire arrows high into the clear morning sky—not in anger, but as the pre-arranged signal that the Tor should advance immediately. The two armies came to blows, and the Vedalians held on despite the weight of numbers, expecting at any moment to see their allies arrive in front of their left flank—but they never came. At last, the Vedalian army broke and fled, unable to hold out any longer. King Fernan, aided by what remained of his royal guard, tried desperately to rally his troops, but in the end he was trapped by pursuing Tyndalese and as far anyone knew, died fighting.

The Tyndalese army reformed and began to march on Valoro, but Fernan's son and heir, Prince Baquero, quickly rallied the remnants of his father's army and mustered all the garrison troops upon which he could lay his hands. Even before he could be officially crowned as his father's successor, he marched out this scratch force to give battle. In the meantime, many of the mercenaries employed by the Tyndalese went home, as the opportunity to plunder a few Vedalian villages made them fat and happy so that they no longer saw the need for further service. The Tyndalese also received reports that Tor cavalry had crossed the Pauvaas and were operating along their line of communications. Suddenly set back on their heels, the Tyndalese retired back across the border.

The Battle of the Golden Marshes became a source of hot contention between Vedalia and Tor thereafter. King Ralf maintained for the rest of his life he had tried to aid Fernan but could not find a suitable place to ford the river. His son and successor, King Thorston Iron-Hand, accepts that explanation as well. As far as King Baquero was concerned, however, the Tor betrayed his father and left him to die. He spent his entire reign engaged in wars of vendetta against them. His daughter and successor, Queen Malvina, took up this family grudge with equal passion.

As it turned out, no gold has ever been taken from the contested marshland. The initial prospectors' reports, as far as anyone has been able to determine, were exaggerated.

LEGENDS

ARNAUF OF GLOR

The legend of Arnauf of Glor is one of the most celebrated tales in the annals of the Kingdom of Tyndall. It concerns a rearguard action fought at the Dunelding Bridge in the early wars between Tyndall and Tor. At the First Battle of the Dunelding Crossing (many more would follow in the ensuing centuries), King Gwyn III of Tyndall sought to defend the toehold that he had established across the Pauvaas as the first stage of his proposed invasion of the upstart Kingdom of Tor. But King Tarvald I, Stout-Heart of Tor didn't take very kindly to having his lands invaded, even just a little, and he led his army to block the Tyndalese. The two sides met just south of the bridge.

It was an even fight, until a cavalry charge crumpled Gwyn's left flank and rolled up his battle line. He ordered his own reserve cavalry to counter-charge and stop the Tor's momentum, but with his army mauled, it was clear that he had to withdraw across the Pauvaas, and quickly. He needed a rearguard to hold off the enemy as the rest of his men filed over the bridge. For that, he tapped Lord Arnauf of Glor.

Arnauf of Glor was nonetheless the most famous warriors in King Gwyn's army. He was an exceptionally strong, brave and a charismatic leader. Arnauf also possessed a magic bastard sword, which he called Firetongue. He was strong enough to wield it in one hand, allowing him to carry a shield. His strength and his sword won him glory, while his formidable personal presence won him fame.

Arnauf took his men and formed them up in a defensive posture just as the supply wagons and wounded crossed the bridge. The Tor sent several waves, but Arnauf and his men held them off. Eventually, what remained of King Gwyn's army crossed the Pauvaas, but they remained in range of Tor cavalry. So Arnauf and his men held the south bank as their ranks shrank after each assault.

After a dozen melees, only a handful of men remained, standing across the middle of the span, barring the way. The Tor launched yet another try at forcing a passage. This time, they broke through what remained of Arnauf's command and surrounded him. Seeing his inevitable fate, Arnauf took up his battle standard, wrapped it around his shield, and cast it over the bridge to prevent the Tor from taking it as a trophy. He was the last Tyndalese to fall that day.

The last of King Gwyn's army to get away witnessed Lord Arnauf's heroic stand at Dunelding Bridge from a distance, and brought the story back with them as the army regrouped. It brought tears to the eyes of these battle-hardened men to know that one of the very foremost among them in skill and courage had sacrificed himself for their sake, and his tale found its way almost immediately into song and epic. It has been told and re-told and whenever the war leaders of Tyndall feel the need to inspire their men, the story of Arnauf at Dunelding Bridge serves their needs admirably well.

BARON FREDEGAR OF ATTAN

On the surface of it, Baron Fredegar of Attan was born for soldiering. He was the oldest son of Baron Vondermer of Attan, the most successful Tor general of his day, and his uncles, grandfather, and great-uncles had all distinguished themselves rendering martial service to the Kings of Tor. As a child, however, young Fredegar showed inclinations toward music and poetry, and little aptitude for soldiering. This caused his family much consternation, and they did everything they could to make a military man out of him.

Fredegar went through the motions of learning to be a soldier, using the loyalty of his personal servants to conceal the persistence of his true interests from the rest of the clan. As a young man, he served as his father's standardbearer in several campaigns, but he always hide his lute with his personal baggage. When not in the field he valued his solitude, often closeting himself in the family estate to write verse. After a while, Fredegar's perceptive father left him at home rather than take him on campaign.

Fredegar recognized that he had disappointed his father's hopes and much appreciated his indulgence, right up until the day Baron Vondermer was killed in battle against the Vedalians. Suddenly, at the age of 28, Fredegar found himself Baron of Attan, a war-noble by default, and head of Tor's most prominent warrior clan. Naturally, the King and the other war-nobles looked to young Fredegar for leadership, expecting him to assume his father's mantle. At his age, a typical first son of a Tor war-noble already had much campaign experience under his sword-belt. And besides, was he not of the family of Attan?

In spite of himself, Fredegar assumed the role of war leader. King Theodor VI of Tor's first consideration was to lead a new campaign against the Vedalians to avenge Vondermer of Attan's death, and Fredegar threw himself into both its planning and execution, taking a prominent role in the King's war council, and

leading troops in the field. Deep down, however, he still did not see himself as a career soldier. Though he dared tell this to few of his household, he wished to serve only long enough to feel that he had upheld his family's honor; then he would turn over the Attans' military obligations to his younger brother while he retired to pursue his love of the arts. Fredegar's first campaign against the Vedalians turned out well, as did his second, third, and fourth. King Thedeor and the other war-nobles alike praised him as a leader of men worthy of his father's reputation — which only made it harder for him to step down. Before his fifth campaign against Vedalian began, however, Fredegar decided firmly that it would be his last.

It began rather earlier than anyone in Tor suspected, when the Vedalian army made a surprise crossing near the Great Bend and entered Tor lands. Fredegar rushed to the spot with what forces he could muster and confronted them. He was badly outnumbered, however, and his men would not stand against the odds. He tried to rally his men, but the rout swept him along. At last, knowing that he was surrounded, he took his own life rather than allow capture. Disabled by a wound to his right arm, a common soldier in his company prop up Fredegar's sword while he fell on it. Thus ended the reluctant military career of Fredegar of Attan.

CAPTAIN BRASHEAR MORNETT

Brashear Mornett served the Kings of Tyndall as a soldier for his entire adult life. A merchant's youngest son who stood to inherit very little from his father, he entered the King's service at the age of 17 as a common footsoldier. He was determined to prove his worth, and as Tyndall in those days was constantly at war with either Tor or the Vendalia circumstance offered him plenty of opportunity. He distinguished himself in battle after battle and won a steady string of promotions and commendations.

He was a sergeant of infantry serving under Baron Clayde of Fulgate when an invading Tor army laid siege to Fulgate Castle, trapping the Baron and his men inside. Fearing that the King's army might not arrive in time, Baron Clayde ordered a desperate sortie against the besiegers. His force was outnumbered ten to one, and in the middle of the melee, the Baron was knocked from his warhorse. Although they were nearly surrounded, Brashear Mornett rushed to the spot. He not only stood guard over the Baron, fighting off all attackers, but also threatened the baronial standardbearer with evisceration if he did not stand his ground. Eventually, he and his comrades effected an orderly withdrawal back into Fulgate Castle, with Mornett car-

rying Baron Clayde himself. The King's army arrived in time to raise the siege, and Brashear Mornett was promoted to Captain for his bravery.

Over the next 15 years, Mornett saw much hard fighting — and killing and dying — in the service of his King. Outwardly, he handled it as the durable professional soldier that he was. But with time, he slept less than he used to, as scenes of horror and suffering infiltrated his dreams. As time wore on, he dreaded the approach of each new campaigning season.

One day, in his 28th year of service to the Kings of Tyndall, Brashear Mornett found himself fording the Pauvaas with the army. King Alford VII hoped to steal a march on the Tor, his scouts having told him that they expected him to cross at the Dunelding Bridge, farther down river. Ultimately, he meant to attack the Tor army while astride their line of communications. But the Tor had been warned of the movement by their scouts, and bore down on the Tyndalese even as they mustered on the far bank.

It was during the first Tor attack that day that Captain Mornett, worn down by so many years of war, broke. In the middle of the battle, he left the fray, making a great show of helping his wounded to the rear. The Tyndalese army turned back the assault, but before long, the Tor retaliated. Trumpets sounded to recall all able-bodied men to the field, but Mornett could not bring himself to obey. He trembled. Panicking, he ran back toward the Pauvaas and into the marshes, which even then were inhabited by shambling mounds. He was never seen again. Some who know his tale believe he was eaten by a shambler, but in truth he fell and drowned while escaping from one. In any event, the name of Captain Brashear Mornett is remembered in the annals of Tyndall's wars, but seldom spoken.

GARETH HAWKSWOOD

Without a doubt, Gareth Hawkwood, commander of the feared Crimson Blades, was the foremost mercenary captain of his time. He was at once a cunning tactician, a shrewd businessman, a charismatic leader, and a ruthless warrior. According to one of the most notorious of the many stories that make up his legend, he once struck a priest across the face who had the temerity to wish him peace. "Fool!" Hawkwood replied, "Do you wish to put me out of business?"

Hawkwood was born far from the Three Kingdoms. He entered military service at the tender age of 14 as a standard-bearer in the entourage of a local nobleman. He served with distinction in many battles at the side of his lord, earning praise for showing courage and fortitude for one so young. By his 21st year, he had

attained the rank of captain, and his peers already considered him an accomplished officer, a steadying presence both on the battlefield and in the barracks.

However, his liege was slain in battle, leaving the still-young Gareth without a patron. Knowing no other trade than soldiering, he wandered, drawn by rumors of war, offering his sword for hire. He found, however, that a lone soldier did not make an attractive hire unless he was able to bring more swords with him. He returned to his homeland and rallied his old comrades to his banner, filling out the ranks. He named his new company the Crimson Blades.

Over the next 25 years, the Crimson Blades became the most notorious mercenary company in the known world. Their captain led from the front, wielding a fearsome axe that he coated in bright red pigment before battle. They fought for many employers, and the tales of their deeds, both brave and horrible, courageous and cruel, filled a book by themselves. Suffice it to say that Gareth Hawkswood knew the importance of rendering good service, maintaining a sound reputation and being paid in advance. War made him rich, and after a 25 years of soldiering, with few of his companions remaining, his thoughts turned to retirement.

He decided to fight one last war before he holstered his greataxe for good. King Merven IX of Vedalia needed stout warriors to defend his kingdom against a powerful invasion by Tor and hired the Crimson Blades. Hawkswood helped fight off the invaders; then the Crimson Blades spearheaded the counterattack into Tor lands. The Tor rallied and marched to meet the Vedalian host, but as he had so many times before, Hawkswood saw his way clear to the end of a victorious campaign.

Gareth Hawkswood fought his last battle in the 50th year of his life, near the banks of the Pauvaas. On a bright summer day, he deployed his men in the center of the Vedalian line with regular Vedalian troops on either flank, preparing for the battle. Unbeknownst to him, however, King Merven and King Orwalt II of Tor had secretly agreed to a truce, under the terms of which, both sides would withdraw to their side of the Pauvaas, keeping the traditional border intact. As Orwalt led his army forward to meet the "invaders," the Vedalians braced to receive them. But at the last moment before contact, Merven gave his flank commanders a pre-arranged signal and they suddenly withdrew, leaving Hawkswood's men alone. Before they understood what was happening, the Crimson Blades were surrounded. Hawkswood and his entire company were slaughtered. Ever after, King Merven boasted about the ingenuity with which he had avoided paying the greatest soldier of fortune of his time.

LEVAN

Levan was born to a modest farming family in a village in Vedalia. He was an able-bodied lad, good for swinging a scythe or pushing a wheelbarrow, but not unusually talented at anything. Shortly after he came of age, a local nobleman came through the village. He was obligated to provide the King with young men who would do for soldiering, and he was still shy of his quota. So soldiers with swords and heavy armor came to Levan's family's house and took him away.

Levan arrived outside the walls of Valoro where the army was pitching camp. He was not excited by the prospect of adventure and missed his family. He was not keen on wearing an ill-fitting suit of mail nor learning how to wave a heavy sword about, but he was used to doing as he was told and make the best of it.

Soon he was marching north with the army along the banks of the River Pauvaas, then past the Great Bend, and then west into Tyndalese lands. One morning, he heard trumpets sound as the army scrambled to form ranks and send the baggage to the rear. The entire Tyndalese army stood deployed before them it seemed.

Then they attacked.

In his first and only battle Levan didn't last terribly long. Everything was a swirl of clamor and motion about him; he was not even sure if he got his sword up once to strike. Then he fell, and when he woke up again, he was bleeding from a wound to his head. The army to which he had belonged had gone except for the dead men lying all around him.

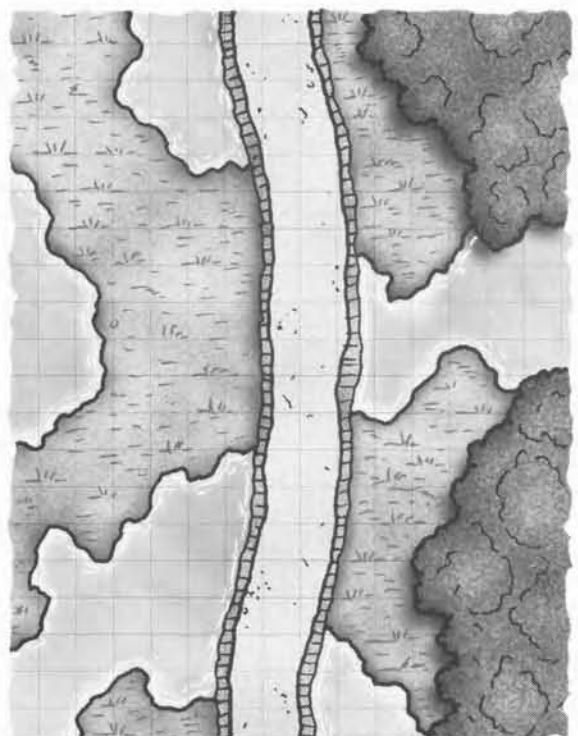
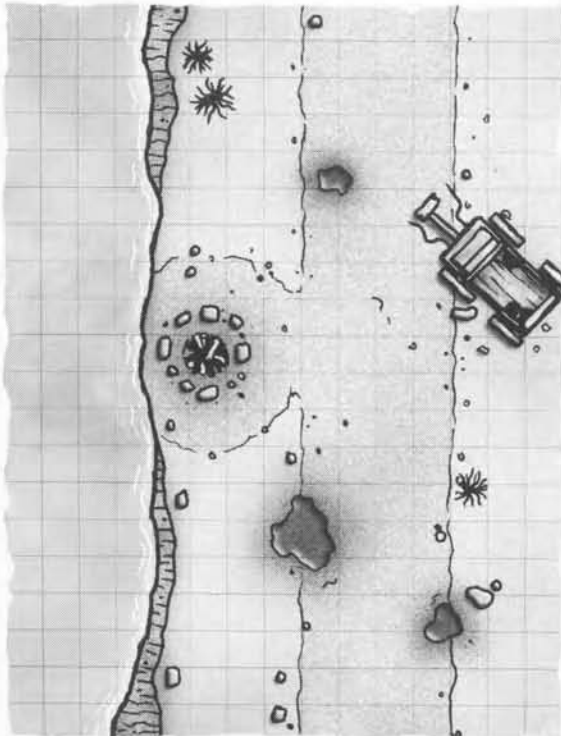
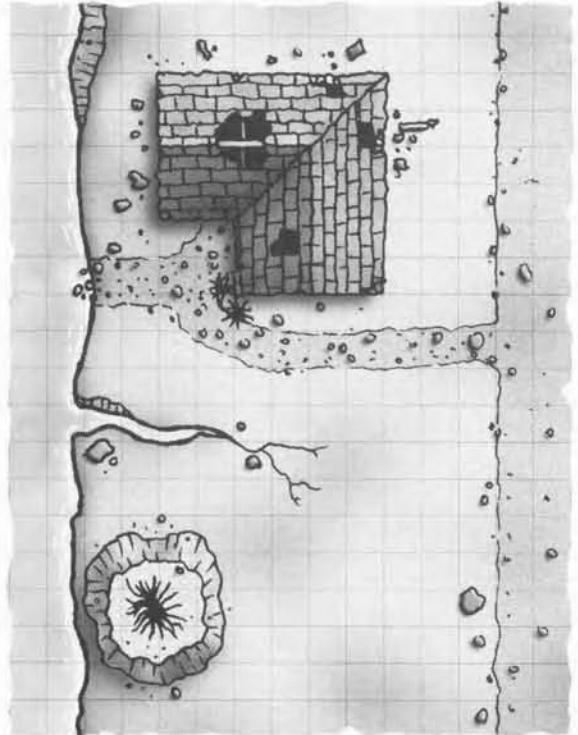
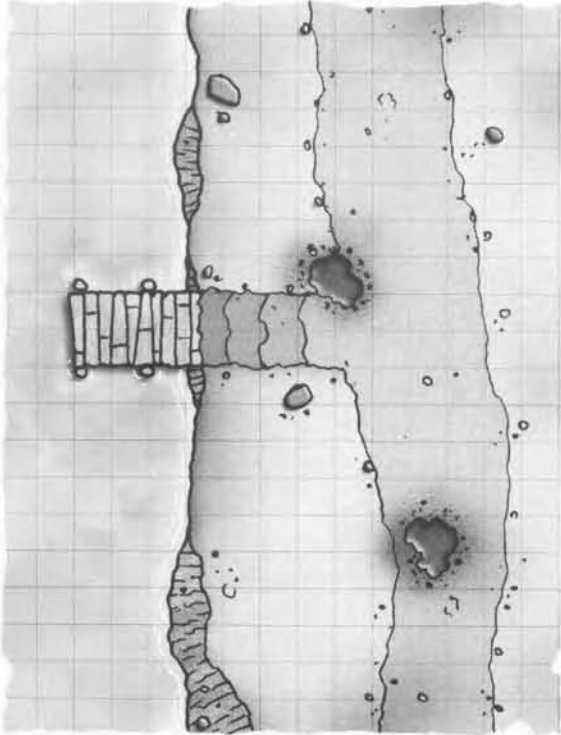
The Tyndalese made him their prisoner. From them, Levan learned that his commander had been slain. They had heard rumors that he kept precious gems and a magic item of great power. But they could not find it. Where was it hidden? Levan knew nothing, and told them so. They didn't like this answer, so they tortured him to get another one. Levan, an honest soul, could not tell them what he did not know, while his captives punished his body by every means they could think of. At last, tired of their sport, the Tyndalese soldiers left him to die, and when life finally departed his body, the carrion birds took what was left.

As anonymous as his life was, Levan was not entirely forgotten in death. His screams could be heard in that desolate place and a local legend grew from the poor soldier whose ghost still haunted it. In truth, however, no undead remnant of Levan ever existed until now.

RIVER OF BLOOD



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