

War of the
Burning Sky

CAMPAIGN GUIDE



A 5e Source Book
for the Game Master

Po=as'08

Set the Stage

War of the Burning Sky is a high fantasy campaign saga that thrusts the player characters into a war of mythic proportions. Ever-escalating conflicts, powered by mighty magic and fervent faith, threaten the heroes' freedom and lives, and even the world itself.

Prepare to orchestrate a magic-powered war with the story, background, and rules material in the *War of the Burning Sky Campaign Guide*.

War is coming: what happens next?



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If you're a player, we highly recommend you don't read any further. Any rules material you will need is presented in the *War of the Burning Sky* Player's Guide, available separately.

CREDITS

From the Pen of
Ryan Nock

Conversion to 5e and Layout by
Brian Criswell

Interior Art by
Storn Cook, Tim Divar, effervescence.co.uk, Leo Lingas, Ian Mullen, Juan Navarro, Ryan Nock, Luis Nuñez de Castro, Claudio Pozas, Todd Schumacher, V Shane, Joe Slucher, with selected NPCs inked by Brian Criswell

Cartography by
Sean Macdonald

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Thank you to Julia Behle and Josh Carden for reviewing and providing their insightful feedback.

On the Cover
Claudio Pozas presents key characters from the *War of the Burning Sky* adventure path.



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FOREWORD

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Nothing worthwhile is ever easy, goes the old saying. Right now you're reading the culmination of over two years of work by dozens of fantasy fans, whose efforts came together to create this campaign saga. We came in a little behind schedule at times, what with that whole "new edition of the game" thing being announced, and we apparently missed the memo about not biting off more than you can chew, on the assumption that if Paizo can do this every six months, it must be easy (right?), but now we have a titanic book that I'm damned proud of.

Despite a few rough patches where I'm sure we could have done better if we knew then what we do now, we accomplished everything I hoped we would when I came up with the idea of the adventure series, the foremost of which being that we gave gaming groups the tools to become part of a great, epic story.

I can't speak for what the other writers and staff had in mind when they contributed to the saga, but I know that my main drive for designing it was to put a modern, inclusionist spin on the classic concept of a fantasy war.

War of the Burning Sky drew its initial genesis from a home campaign I ran in college, but it wasn't until a few years later, at Gen Con 2006 in Indianapolis, when I found myself reading *Dungeon* magazine's plans for its latest adventure path, that I realized I had not seen a solid "war for the fate of the world" adventure series during my time as a gamer. Most every gamer reads *Lord of the Rings* at some point, and it sets the benchmark for what many expect from fantasy, but the closest I had ever seen to an epic fantasy war was *Dragonlance*, now twenty years old.

From the beginning, though, I decided *War of the Burning Sky* would eschew cosmic conflicts and classic good-evil dichotomies in favor of a more postmodern perspective, where enemies all have reasons for their actions. Sure, you can play the adventures such that the Ragesians are evil and can be killed without remorse because some of them consort with devils, but I tried to make sure we gave the heroes plenty of opportunities to turn the tide by allying with potential enemies, and more than a few opportunities to damn themselves by taking the easy way out of a difficult situation.

I really need to thank Jacob Driscoll, author of the second adventure, for providing a wonderful moral

dilemma, which should make clear to the players and their characters that they can't just mow down everything that stands in their way and expect a happy ending. Likewise, Lydia Dene, who wrote the original script for the fourth adventure, gave us a great political conflict where just killing the bad guy can end in tragedy.

Still, this is roleplaying, not Risk, so simply winning is not the point of the campaign saga. The triumph of good over evil didn't interest me, because to really matter, such battles must be won internally, not on the field of battle. Instead, I sought the triumph of peace over war. The Torch, and all the power it grants to those seeking conquest, is the real enemy, though, as with other enemies, you have to ally with this one if you want to win. Victory lies in healing and freedom, in restoring a fey forest, in releasing a king from his madness, in drawing a spy back from the brink of betrayal, in rescuing tormented prisoners trapped in a frozen wasteland or from a twisted living nightmare. You end the war by killing a villain, but you only win the war by healing the wounds it caused.

Of course, you can do with the campaign saga whatever you want. Play up the politics to show the corruption on all sides of the war. Go satirical, and run the Ragesians like American settlers, the Resistance as native tribes, and the Torch as the manifest destiny of the railroad. Try pure comedy: toss a Hitler mustache on Leska and have her act like Charlie Chaplin. Be totally awesome, and use a soundtrack with lots of heavy metal.

The importance of understanding your enemies, and of healing wounds to create peace, are just the messages I wanted to weave into the plot. They're just part of the whole picture, standing alongside the thrills and surprises from my fellow authors, the sense of place evoked by our cartographers, the aesthetic wonders of our illustrators and brilliant layout artist, and the perseverance and steady hand of Russ, the man in charge. Together, they crafted compelling villains, dramatic battles, engaging mysteries, and dangers fit to challenge the greatest hero. I want to thank them one last time for all the talent they poured into this saga, and I encourage you to dive into the world we made together, to create a story that matters to you.

Ryan Nock
Campaign Director
War of the Burning Sky

PROLOGUE

NOVEMBER

Desolation. Gray earth trod beneath boots on the march; snapped trees waiting for the flames. And soon, the victorious emperor knew, there would be that fire. There always was. Often enough, he brought it, but even when he didn't, it arose. After every battle, something burned — as if the universe followed some unwritten protocol that conflagration should be the epilogue to carnage. It was even more reliable than the crows.

Castle Korstull was taken. The mighty emperor figured he'd lost, at worst, one man in twenty. He'd known it would be so. Tonight, he would sleep on the sheets of a fallen prince, and the only cost had been a week's planning and the blood of men he did not know. If the victory had meant anything to him, he would've called it a bargain.

When had conquest lost its luster? Was it just the ease, or was it something else? The glorious emperor stared into the flames of the torch he bore in his left hand, the famed artifact he had christened the Torch of the Burning Sky. Since the day he had acquired this strange token, born sixty years before in miracle and catastrophe, he had never lost a battle. It was as if he'd forgotten how.

He feared his own restlessness, and was all the more frustrated to realize that it might be the only thing he feared. What would the ache for challenge drive him to? The inscrutable emperor had begun to calculate the betrayal of his oldest ally; whether it was out of strategy, ambition, or boredom, he could not tell.

That ally, of course, planned to turn on him first. There had been no intelligence of such an act, but it went without saying. His ally went by the unlikely name of Shaaladel, and if the invincible emperor had forgotten how to lose, Shaaladel had forgotten how not to betray.

The all-knowing emperor's foresight fatigued him. He'd spent the final hours of many brave men's lives hoping for some surprise — a sudden ambush, unexpected reinforcements, even a mere change in tactics — that might lend the least excitement to this clash of nations. But like the planets in their courses, his enemies plodded, unwavering, along the path he had laid out to their defeat.

Fate's arsenal had been emptied, it seemed, and no ordeals remained to try the blessed emperor. He had conquered Sindaire tonight, a nation that had already been his in all but name, for no better

reason than that they had given him an excuse. Soon, he would test himself against his other neighbors — Ostalin, Dassen — but knew that they would fall just as quickly. He wondered what he'd done to anger the gods before his birth, that they should curse him by giving him only a single world to conquer. Perhaps, he mused, he should avenge himself on the heavens. He peered up through the gathering cloud-rack and contemplated this, until his view was obscured by a high-vaulted arch passing overhead. He trained his gaze forward now, as the warhorse he sat upon ambled through the yawning entryways of the castle.

Built to resemble the maw of some great beast, the front gates of Castle Korstull had impressed the magnificent emperor when he'd first seen them, but he had raised palaces of his own in the decades since. Now they looked to him like nothing more than the hastily assembled sets of some Wayfarers' comedy. He remembered what Leska had told him before he'd left, that some young bard in Ragos had penned a play about his life, probably in an attempt to earn his patronage. He'd laughed at the folly of that, yet he found himself wondering about it now, about how such a play might begin, about what soliloquies this crowing upstart had written into his mouth.

Would there be a scene of his childhood, a half-orc raised among backwoods highlanders, tribesmen who wandered the mountains of the North, having no land to hold as their own? How many acts would it take him to carve out a nation for his kin, how many trumpets and alarums as he turned it into an empire? Which of his enemies would be judged worthy of their own death scenes, which allies would rhyme couplets after his dramatic exits?

He was certain Shaaladel would be the handsome scene-stealer, declaiming regally on the nature of their fragile peace as they debated the rebellion in Gate Pass, with no hint of the craven schemer beneath the regal façade. And surely Leska would be cheated of her rightful prominence, as misunderstood by a grasping playmaker as she was by all the rest of his subjects. They all looked at her and saw a frightful mask, unaware that the creature behind that grisly visage was far more human — and more terrifying — than they could have imagined. Leska should've been the subject of a play, he thought. She had all the makings of a tragedy, while he had none. His play would be boring, the legendary emperor decided. After all, he always won.

As soon as he dismounted his horse, he was frightfully attended. Inquisitor bodyguards in their horrific masks and blood-splattered lieutenants with word from General Magdus fell in step behind him as he walked. Within a few moments, they had ascended to the throne room, where he took his dinner and dispatched orders. The throne room and the royal bedroom adjoining it were appropriately princely, festooned with tapestries, murals, and other palatial regalia. When the castle was built, these rooms had been prayed over by priests for three days. It was said no one could enter these rooms against the will of the one who sat upon the throne. The great emperor was unimpressed. He placed the Torch of the Burning Sky in a ruby-studded sconce, scraped his boot against the corner of the throne to remove a clump of gray mud, then sat down and called for the leaders of the force that had resisted him.

Hoping their deaths would provide some distraction, he ordered their executions on the spot. He watched attentively, eating stew from a brass tureen, as his bodyguards went about their work. Inquisitors all, trained in the art of torture by Leska herself, the men of his personal guard sensed the dread emperor's apathy, and stretched their imaginations to make each prisoner's end more entertaining than the previous one. But the spectacle soon descended into farce and common vulgarity; he grew listless again. He called for wine from the castle cellars and sat in silence, drinking 50-year-old vintages straight from their bottles. Before long, he grew lethargic and announced that he would retire.

All but a handful of his guards bowed deeply and left. The remaining three would stand outside his chamber as he slept. The immortal emperor extinguished the torch as he pulled it from its sconce and walked towards the bedroom, yet he stopped before the door, turned to one of his guards, and began to speak. He said, "I am more weary than I ever knew a mortal or immortal man could be. This world of half-men and vain posturing, this age of sheep who masquerade as lords, diminishes in my eyes by the day. I thought the gods would not long tolerate ambitions such as mine, but like a pack of beaten whores, they offer not defense but more accommodation. Everything that I once coveted turns stale. I grasp the fruits of conquest and each morsel tastes of ashes in my mouth. In seven months, my pennants could cast shadows over all the nations of the known lands, and yet this

spent and whelping bitch they call the world cannot, for all my ravaging, yet birth a cur whose sharpest fangs don't break against my skin. When I bid you to kill those men tonight, I found myself searching their eyes for signs that, in their fatal throes, their dying souls might glimpse another realm, a realm that better suited me. But I saw none. Did you see anything at all?"

The inquisitor, Darius, stared for a long time into those wild eyes, dumbstruck by this strange and sudden candor. In the end, shamed by his lack of a proper answer—or any answer at all—the bodyguard merely shook his head. Somehow disappointed, and knowing himself a fool for it, the doomed emperor walked away without a word and locked his bedroom door behind him. His name was Drakus Coaltongue, and his curse was to be the most powerful man in the world.



The General of the Emperor's First Army camped far from the castle that night. He did not eschew the comforts of the stronghold he had seized out of some sentimental desire to sleep in the same conditions as his soldiers. Even in the field, he had a larger tent, better food, assistants to see to his needs, and finery on which to rest. He simply felt as though here, with his troops, he could get things done, and in the castle he would be up sending messages all night. General Magdus was a practical man, and from the camp he could run his army better.

Yet for all his practicality, he was superstitious. Soldiers were like sailors that way, spending so much of their lives subject to the whims of fate that they sought signs of good and bad luck, not out of imagination, but out of fear. And the general did not like the clouds racing above his head tonight.

A storm brewing would be trial enough. Trudging through rain and muck was enough to demoralize even disciplined men. But these low black clouds moved faster than the wind, it seemed, as if intent on their destination. And they all seemed to be congregating in one place. The black thunderheads billowed highest directly above Castle Korstull. And they were not traveling, but remained stationary, whirling in place like water down a drain.

It was clearly an ill omen, he decided. Magdus was practical enough to grant fortune its place in his calculations. He gave orders to increase the frequency and size of his patrols, and told his adjutant to wake him half an hour earlier in the

morning. All the confidence his victory had afforded him was melting away, and he was left with a deep unease. There weren't enough soldiers between here and the sea to give his army a moment's worry, but who could say what trouble the raging heavens might bring him?

As he put his head down to seek sleep, the general was reminded of a strange saying he'd once heard from an old sergeant. "You can conquer a land's people; you cannot conquer its gods." He didn't know if he believed that, or even what it was supposed to really mean, but he did believe this: if the heavens were angry, tonight someone would be paying the price.



Darius saw the other two bodyguards die before he even knew they were under attack. The murder in the peripheral vision to his left he barely saw. It was just a smudge of motion that made a wet sound before it was over. But turned to his right as he was, he caught his other comrade's end. He saw the last half-second of a man stepping from the shadows in the corner, as if walking out of a door, slashing the guard's throat with a curving black blade and receding as swiftly and stealthily as he'd come.

Hefting his mace, Darius drew in air to shout, but there was a sound like a thunderclap and a sharp pain as something lashed across his adam's apple. He saw a woman in the doorway—had it opened just now or had she been there all along? She yanked the handle of a whip, and he found himself pitching forward, his throat burning and constricted. Her weapon had him by the neck, and he struggled to keep his feet as she pulled him towards her.

Helpless against the tight constriction of his windpipe, he struck out wildly with his mace, bludgeoning the air. The woman was rushing towards him—or he was hurtling towards her—and for a split second he had the incongruous realization that she was beautiful. Yet the colors of her hair and skin were wrong. Had she dyed them? Something knocked the mace from his hand. Her face came at his. What was happening? Was she head-butting him, was she going to bite him? Had the Emperor been attacked by lunatics?

Still choking, he felt her lips on his. A kiss. Her mouth was warm. Was he awake? She tasted like blood.

When she released him, there was something in his mouth. A grainy liquid, it tasted the way violets

smelled. He felt the whip slip from around his neck, and realized the woman had already moved past him, towards the Emperor's bedroom. He spun, looking for his mace, but the world kept spinning when he stopped, and he crumpled to the ground. This was no dream. He'd been poisoned.

When he recovered his breath, he finally called out. There was a clatter as the Inquisitors from the waiting chamber rushed in, but of the attackers he could hear nothing, until the din of clashing blades arose. His vision was too blurry now to see who fought or who fell.

The poison moved through Darius like a shiver. Helpless, the world dimming around him, he thought of the Emperor's question, hours before. Would he see a better world now, he wondered, in what had to be his last moments?

But there were only shadows moving in the blur. Now, as before, Darius could see nothing.



It was instinct that awoke him. There was someone in his room.

The Emperor's reflex was to spring from his bed and find a weapon, but as soon as he had opened his eyes, his torso exploded in pain. He went to move and found himself pinned to the bed. He looked down at his chest.

Someone had driven a stake through his heart.

Another man would have panicked. But Coaltongue had faced death many times before, and while he was alarmed, he could not help being curious. He looked around the room, but saw no sign of his attacker. None of his generals would've pulled this off, not with dog-loyal Magdus, the best of them all, camped so close. Shaaladel would've planned something more intricate, more unnecessarily complex, something he would've seen coming. Leska?

His hands had found the stake—everything was harder now, it seemed, with his heart not pumping blood—and tried to summon up the strength to pull it out at once.

Then, from the shadows, an aged face, dyed with ashes. A black scimitar, edged with smoky diamonds, arcing at his throat.

Him? Coaltongue thought. *Of all the enemies I have in this world? Him?*

The blade fell. Staked to the bed, the emperor could not roll out of the way, and his arms were too weak to pull it out or block the blow.

The pain of the beheading was not much, he found. Far less than that of being stabbed in the heart. He was less conscious of the blow itself than of the cold air on the insides of his neck. Completely severed from his body, Coaltongue's head rolled over to the left side of his pillow.

His head was still alive, still conscious and bewildered. From the angle at which his head had fallen, he could see a second assailant, her hands lifting the Torch of the Burning Sky from the wall-mount where he'd left it. They were thieves as well as assassins.

The Emperor heard sounds of swordplay from the room outside. There were at least three of them, then. It was all starting to make sense. He even knew how they would make their escape. Suddenly, he became very tired. It seemed to happen all at once. He tried to rub his eyes, but obviously could not, and this simple fact provoked in him a very acute distress.

He was falling asleep. There was no preventing it. The Emperor of Ragesia had gone down without a fight, without even a sword in his hand. In other circumstances, he might have laughed.

As oblivion claimed him, he thought, *I have to hand to it to the Fates. This, I did not see coming.*

Then there was a sudden pang of regret; disappointment that he would not be there to see the cataclysmic change his death would wreak, the conflict. This, he thought, would've been a world worthy of me.

Then, blackness.



Magdus couldn't sleep. It wasn't just the turmoil in the heavens, he knew. He was a lifelong soldier, hardened by decades of warring, yet he often found himself sleepless the night after a battle. The images of slaughter in his memory needed time to fade, and until then they haunted his mind's eye like fever-dreams. He had not attempted to purge himself of this frailty. He thought, perhaps, it made him better at his job.

He threw on a tunic and his boots, and grabbed his cloak on the way out of his tent. His walk through the camp was punctuated with crisp salutes and the occasional "Sir." Troubled as his mind was, he tried to return them all.

The general jogged up a pebble-strewn path up the side of the canyon to a look-out point. No bodyguards accompanied him, though the men

stationed outside his tent had reported his sudden departure to their officers, who noted it but bade them only to sit out the remainder of their watches. Their general was a private man, and they'd grown accustomed to his frequent need for solitude. They did not worry for his safety. After all, Sindaire had been conquered.

At the top of the rise, Magdus met the watchmen he had posted here and gave them permission to stand down and start a fire. The wind had teeth at this high above the camp, and he wished he'd brought furs instead of just a cloak.

The sky looked just as angry as before. The clouds were no longer in motion, but perched threateningly above the towers of Korstull, the obscured moon barely silvering their edges. There was neither lightning nor rain, but the thunderheads seemed to pulse like black hearts beating in the firmament.

Perhaps he had overreacted to this suspected omen. The night, it seemed, was passing quietly. There were few lights from the castle windows.

In his life, he had heard many tales of signs before catastrophe, most unheeded until after the event. Here in Sindaire, just before the first time Ragesian armies had crossed its borders, prize royal horses had fought each other like baited dogs, with the winners eating those they killed. They said a lioness had whelped in the streets of Kistan the night the first Khagan of Ostalin had passed away. Fifty years before, the day before the First Dasseni Civil War had begun, there had been an eclipse of the sun. Certainly, a strange formation of clouds was not so dramatic as these.

Then, Magdus realized what each one of those strange portents had in common, and all at once his blood ran cold. Each one had heralded the death of a king.

As if in answer to his realization, lanterns began to flare in the distant windows of Castle Korstull. From this far he could not hear cries of alarm, but the general knew at once that his instincts were far more than paranoid superstition.

He shouted to the nearby watchmen, "Sound an alarm! Run down to the camp, now, and tell your Captain to take a detachment to the castle at once!"

The men blew their horns, then rushed down into the canyon. Magdus remained, watching the castle. In close succession, three flaming arrows were fired from the battlements, a signal. His fears had been confirmed. There were attackers in Korstull.

The lights in the stronghold's windows were being answered by torches being lit in the camp below. If

it were an assassination attempt, there was little he could do from here, but he would mobilize his forces and be prepared to hunt the would-be murderers to the ends of creation.

Hoofbeats on gravel echoed across the canyon, and Magdus saw a clutch of his officers riding up to meet. Adjutants brought his horse and armor, and—he was grateful—heavier garments.

The general hurried to dress and mount his horse. The armor could wait. All of his captains, just jolted out of bed, began to ask questions at once. He quieted them quickly and began to dispense orders.

A yellow-orange light suddenly shone across the assembled faces. Magdus turned to see that the roof of the castle had erupted into a rising column of flame.

The officers stood in silence, mouths agape. The general clenched his jaw, enraged, calculating.

“Prepare for a siege,” he called out, not taking his eyes from the fiery pillar atop Castle Korstull. “We have taken this castle once today. We may have to do so again. Tell your cavalrymen. . .”

Magdus never finished his order. The ominous heavens, already roiled with rage, opened up and gave the general a sign no man could disbelieve.

Above Castle Korstull, the sky began to rain fire.

DECEMBER

Snowflakes fell fast that New Year’s Eve, too fast, racing at the earth like falling stars. Watching it come down like that, it was easy to believe what they were saying in the east, that such a punishing winter had to be the retribution of an angry god.

Washing a glass, Viv Finner looked out the window of her closed-down, boarded-up pub and saw the snow still piling in the streets. It would be a long walk to her brother’s house tonight, she decided, so she had better hurry.

The Poison Apple Pub was a dive, but a popular one. A shabby, low-class establishment in one of the poorer districts a mile from the West Gate, it had a coterie of devoted regulars and reputation for not watering down the drinks.

Everyone knew the man who owned the place, Trehan Finner, was a magus. They knew it as much from the twinkle in his eye and his perpetual smirk as they did from the fact that he could put a rowdy customer to sleep with a handful of dust. But no one seemed to mind. Most Gate Passers didn’t trust magi as a group, but just about everybody who knew Trehan Finner liked him.

When the City Council announced they hoped to appease the approaching army by handing all of the town’s users of magic over to the Ragesian inquisitors—the ruthless magus hunters known locally as the Scourge—in order to spare the town conquest by the Ragesian army, few people complained. But when the city guard came for Finner, the pub’s regulars were in an uproar. All over the district, everyone who knew the man could be heard loudly decrying the unfairness of it all.

Everyone, that is, except Trehan’s wife. Viv Finner did not cry when she found out her husband had been taken, nor did she panic. Instead, she quietly bundled up her children and took them to her sister-in-law. She told her eldest to be brave, and to take care of his brother, and told both her sons she might not see them for a little while. That done, the suddenly husbandless mother of two headed down the Emelk Way to the Chapel of the Aquiline Cross. She walked right up to the curate, announced she knew the Chapel was a Resistance safe-house, and asked how she could go about joining.

After hours of Viv’s refusals to leave or take no for an answer, the curate, a Knight of the Aquiline Cross named Buron Watcher, finally said that if she really wanted to help the Resistance, they did need a private place to meet a contact. Viv already knew Torrent, who was an occasional patron of the Poison Apple, and she volunteered her pub for the meeting. But if the priest had hoped that contributing her family’s place of business for the night would be enough to satisfy Viv, he was disappointed. On the way out of the temple, she stopped and said, “After the meeting, I’ll be back for another mission.”

Though her pub was closed, she had taken the meeting so seriously that she’d gone back and cleaned it up until it was as nice as it had been the day she and her husband bought it. Every glass was polished, every corner swept, even the rags were washed and bleached. Viv imagined brave fighters of the Resistance coming here, making plans to fight back against the monsters who had taken her husband away. Such champions, she had determined, would get the best of everything if she could help it.

Finishing the glasses, Viv stole a glance at the melting candle she had lit when she’d started and realized how late it was. Time for her to get going. She planned to be long gone before Torrent arrived. She bundled herself up against the cold, lit a lantern, blew out her candle, and let herself out the back door.

On the way out, she paused and looked around the lantern-lit interior of the pub. Had she done everything? Was it all be suitable?

Then she remembered what kind of place it was. It was local watering hole; not much to look at, but tended with love by its owners and loved equally by its regulars. People came here to laugh, to cry, to recollect, to tell ludicrous stories to old friends and hear their approbations or derision. They didn't come because the wood was polished, they came to drink with people they liked and trusted and share with them the joys and woes of being alive.

It was, she decided—as she locked the door and vanished into the snow—a perfect meeting-place for heroes.



Gate Pass's skyline seemed to sag beneath the mantle of snow. The city huddled between the mountains, looking wary as a beggar in an alley, tucking in under a white blanket and wondering where to turn for a friendly face. Its streets were thick with slush, barely foot-printed. Rumors of war, Kathor thought, must have been keeping even the drunks at home.

The usual all-night parties and intoxicated revelry weren't spilling out of doors this year, and the folks who were celebrating seemed to have all picked their tavern early in the evening and stayed there. Some cities capered and caroused on the eve of war, a final riot in the face of destruction, but tonight, in the Free City-State of Gate Pass, the celebrations seemed muted, solemn, almost funereal. The city was dark, the waning moon only a thin silver splinter, and there weren't lights in most of the windows. Even a few inns had closed their doors at sundown.

No one was doing business outdoors tonight, it appeared, except for the Resistance. And because the Resistance was on the move, so were their enemies.

The bounty hunters called themselves the Black Horses. Their leader was a man named Renard, but those inside the city walls tonight were under the command of Renard's second, a former soldier who hailed from Ragesia, the vast empire just west of Gate Pass. That was Kathor, and he didn't want to be there.

Standing high above the streets now, atop one of many vantage points in this city of towers and buttresses, Kathor could see out for miles, over the ice-topped walls and into the west. Across the

valley and the bottom of the nearby pass, distant fires dotted the horizon. Scattered in groups, they twinkled through the falling snow like earthbound constellations. The glorious Second Army of the Ragesian Empire was camped on the city's doorstep, far sooner than expected, and the locals expected an attack within the week. But Kathor knew how fast that force could move, and to his mind, a week was very wishful thinking.

He couldn't help thinking that he belonged out there, with the army. With his father. For a second, impossible as it was, Kathor let himself search for the blur of a high banner in the wind, or the circle of larger fires that would surround the general's tent, before he turned away, shaking his head. Even if he knew where the old man was, what would be the point?

As much as Kathor wanted to be out there with the army, he knew the conquest of Gate Pass would not be for the glory of the Empire. It would be for the glory of one woman. Since the assassination of Drakus Coaltongue, the Emperor of Ragesia, less than two months before, the world had descended into madness. Coaltongue's chief allies and lieutenants had immediately begun positioning themselves as the next in line. Over time, two candidates had risen as the likely successors: Lord Shaaladel, ruler of the Shahalesti elves, and Leska, Coaltongue's Supreme Inquisitor.

It was Leska who had seized command of the scattered Ragesian armies. Instead of summoning them together, she had set those forces to work on pursuing new conquests of Ragesia's neighbors. This tactic provided multiple benefits: it kept the generals too busy to plot against her, and kept rival nations too busy to interfere. But the conquest of Gate Pass was different.

The Free City-State of Gate Pass had been free since the insurrection thirty-eight years before because of its location. Gate Pass was named for the narrow passage between the mountains that separated Ragesia and Shaaladel's kingdom of Shahalesti. In Coaltongue's time, keeping that central city neutral had held together the peace and sometime alliance between the Emperor and Shaaladel. But now that Lord Shaaladel had emerged as her chief rival, Leska was surely seizing the city to gain further advantage against the elven king.

Dragging his gaze from the far-away encampments, Kathor looked down on the pair of humble two-story buildings he'd come up to reconnoiter. They were

connected by a bridge, leading from the top floor of the taller one to the roof of the shorter. The taller was a home, while its squat companion was a pub, named the Poison Apple in an example of the locals' flair for the perverse.

Gate Pass was a city packed with bridges and heights, a web of widening arches crisscrossing over every street, all now rimmed with ice and snow, yet in many places still welcoming, even majestic. A marvelous place, Kathor had thought, years before, when he'd admired the tall buildings. Back then, he'd seen them as a testament to clever citizens who made the most of the narrow mountain pass confining their city.

Nowadays, Kathor didn't feel much wonder walking these streets. Perhaps, he mused bitterly, the novelty of those clever citizens' achievement had worn off when he'd started kidnapping them.

Tonight's targets were meeting at the Poison Apple. The pub was closed, since the owner, a magus, had been carried off by the city guard the night before—Kathor didn't have to read the note on the door to know that, having led the city guard there himself.

The guardsmen had already been locking up the city's magi when Kathor had arrived in town, as an attempt to appease the Ragesians and forestall further hostilities. But sometimes, when orders came from Ragesia, he was told to make sure certain ones were picked up immediately, before they could sneak out of town. Yesterday, such an order had come for the magus who owned the Poison Apple. Tonight, one had come for a member of the Resistance, a witch called Torrent.

Information said Torrent would be using the empty tavern to meet a contact. How and when his Ragesian employers got their intelligence, he didn't know, but all their messages so far had been eerily precise. The plan was to attack right after midnight, when the noise of an ambush could be mistaken for nearby New Year celebrations.

Glancing down at an alley around the corner from the Poison Apple, Kathor saw his men trying to look nonchalant as they waited for his signal to attack. Some kicked at the brownish snow shoveled into a pile at the curb, others fiddled with a tarp that hid the weapons on their wagon, but most just couldn't stop creeping to the corner to peek out at the pub. Clearly, the Black Horses weren't used to being subtle.

Kathor found it hard not to hate them.

He wished he hadn't brought so many. Kathor had only joined these bounty hunters a month before,

and he was already fed up with their company. But Torrent was a witch, and their source said she had a bodyguard of some kind, so overwhelming force had seemed like the safest strategy.

Now, watching all ten men fumbling attempts to stay inconspicuous on the street, he was rethinking his tactics. *If Torrent were tipped off...*

Mid-thought, he caught his first glimpse of her, strolling down the alleyway along the city's southern wall, a few blocks away. As expected, she was walking with a massive man, two heads taller than she, wearing a bearskin as a cape over a small fortune in armor. He looked Ragesian. No doubt he was some kind of bodyguard, who would escort Torrent to her mysterious meeting. But he was unlikely to accompany her to the meeting itself; surely the Resistance would not trust any Ragesian, even a turncoat, to be privy to its secretive dealings.

Kathor figured the bodyguard was too tall not to have orc blood in his veins. Half-orcs never went down easy, and though this one would probably be long gone before Torrent reached the Poison Apple, Kathor decided bringing ten men had been right after all.

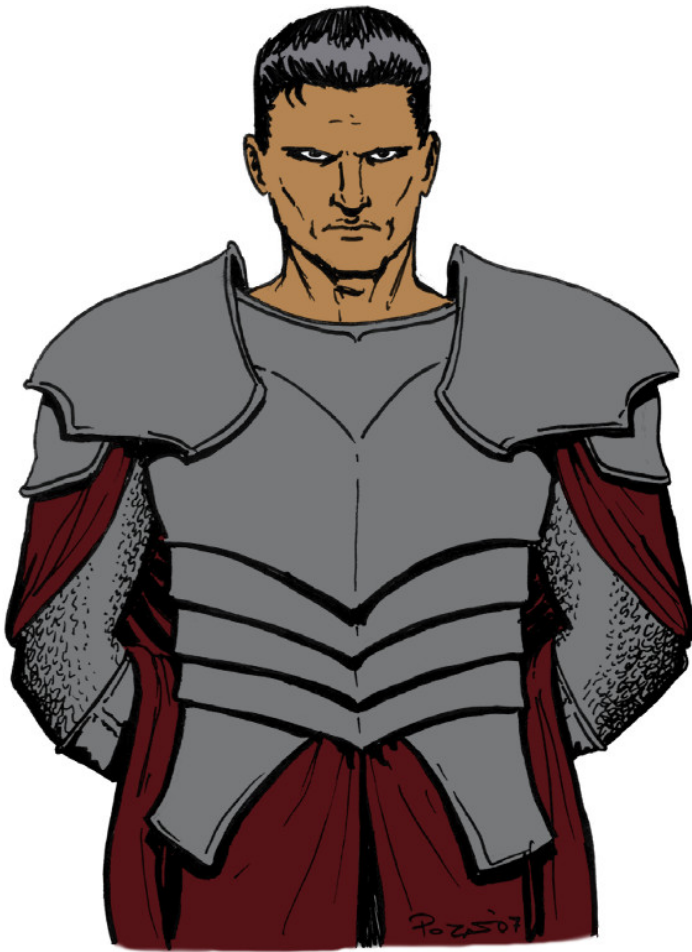
As for Torrent herself, she looked just like the description he'd received: tall for a woman, shock of short white hair, carrying herself like a soldier, and sporting an expensive breastplate he could see gleaming in the dim moonlight even from a distance. Tonight she was wearing a dark winter coat, open in the front, probably because the heavy fur concealed a weapon and she wanted ready access to it. She didn't look like a witch.

Then again, Kathor thought, neither do I. And if I weren't, I'd be outside these walls where I belong.

He leaned over the railing to try and catch one of his men's attention. It took longer than it should have. Kathor was six stories up, watching from the balcony of a boarded-up temple to the Red Archer, a god of summer, of sunrise, and hope, a god who seemed to be out of worshippers nowadays.

When he finally got one of the Black Horses to look his way, Kathor's signal had them back on task in a hurry, but it took him a long minute to decide Torrent and her friend hadn't seen him trying to get the bounty hunters to notice his gestures. Fortunately for him, they were stopping often, taking quick turns, clearly more concerned with making sure they weren't followed than watching for signs of ambush at their destination.

He spared a glance to check on his men—they had one of the wheels off the wagon now, as planned,



and were doing a passable job of pretending to try and repair it—then made a quick estimate of how long it would take Torrent to reach the tavern.

She was closer now, and he could just make out the handle of a weapon slung across her back, not hidden, but carried openly in defiance of city law. Her companion had no obvious arms, but a man didn't wear that much armor without expecting to fight, so he probably had something. Either way, despite all the battlefield trappings, the two strolled casually beneath a picturesque array of icicle-draped archways and bridges, and their constant looking back to avoid being tailed made them look more like tourists than members of an armed insurgency.

An insurgency against an occupation that hasn't even happened yet, Kathor reflected, with grudging admiration. Say what you would about the folk of Gate Pass, there was no doubt they had courage. The Resistance, the movement that had helped drive out Gate Pass's Ragesian conquerors thirty-eight years before, had never broken up, presciently choosing to remain vigilant against future incursions. Torrent was one of their more prominent agents, which might have been why Ragesia had marked her

for special attention.

Not that the why mattered, Kathor reminded himself. Being second-in-command of this gang of thugs was how he paid the bills, even if he had grown to dislike the men—or more accurately, loathe them—in the past few weeks. Their leader, Renard, had been the first to take Kathor in when he left the army, and that debt had to be respected. Sure, there was no honor in hauling these alleged “enemies” of Ragesia away from their homes and loved ones, but there was honor in fulfilling an obligation. Besides, as much as he hated the work, he'd left behind the only other world he'd ever known, and he honestly had no idea what else to do.

“This is my life now,” Kathor said, out loud, shaking himself out of his reverie. He took one last look at his father's army in the distance, and then rushed down the stairs. Whether they were fighting for their freedom or not, whether they were witches or not, and whether they deserved it or not, it was time to take these two in.

If he'd planned right, they'd go down quickly. There wouldn't be any surprises inside the Poison Apple; Kathor already had a spy inside to make sure of that. Except for the owner's wife, no one else had entered the pub all night.

Beyond better intelligence and better control of the battlefield, Kathor had numbers. He had eleven Black Horses, including himself, although he didn't expect to fight—Kathor still thought of himself as an officer, after all, and there was no honor in ambushing outmatched foes. The targets would be only Torrent and whoever she was meeting, and his information said that group would be fewer than half the number of soldiers he'd brought. And if Torrent or the others had witchcraft, well, he had an answer for that too, didn't he?

Everything was set, Kathor thought, as he emerged from the temple and joined the company of the men he despised. When the time came, and the midnight bells chimed the New Year, he would be ready.

by Jeremy Forbing

CAMPAIGN OUTLINE

As the new year dawns, weather across the lands of Ragesia takes a sudden chill turn. The sky darkens with the shades of oncoming winter, and worry rises as regular channels of communication between nations suddenly cease. Slowly, throughout the lands claimed by the Ragesian Empire, rumors spread between isolated villages, traveling by foot and horse and word of mouth, rumors that Drakus Coaltongue, the immortal emperor whose armies conquered every land he set his gaze upon, has fallen in a distant land to the west. How the tyrant was defeated is unknown, but if it is true, everyone knows that a war is coming. The generals of Emperor Coaltongue will strike for control, oppressed peoples will rise up in rebellion, and dangers once held in check only by fear of the immortal emperor will bring doom to the world.

Those in power are preparing for the coming conflict, readying fervent armies and powerful weapons and subtle, deceptive plots, but two questions burn in their minds: who killed the immortal Emperor Coaltongue; and what has become of the artifact that would let a man rule the world? Who has the Torch of the Burning Sky?

Driven out of their homelands by the dogs of war, the heroes head for a distant safe haven, a magic academy named Lyceum, which has sent up a rallying cry for those who wish to resist the warmongers. Sent on missions by the leaders of Lyceum, the heroes form alliances to build an army, and they discover strange secrets that underlie the conflict. As the war reaches a climax, powerful magic superweapons threaten to scorch the world or sunder reality and leave nothing but nightmares.

War of the Burning Sky is a high fantasy campaign saga that thrusts the player characters into a war of mythic proportions. Ever-intensifying conflicts, powered by mighty magic and fervent faith, threaten the heroes' freedom and lives, and even the world itself.

Throughout the course of the saga, a party of heroes will become involved in an escalating war between mighty magical nations, and after many adventures, military battles, and mysterious intrigue, it will be up to them to decide who will rule in the aftermath.

Starting any campaign and seeing it through to the end can be challenging, so we present this chapter as an overview of the campaign saga, the characters and locations involved, and ways in which game masters can customize the saga.

INTRODUCTION

While every adventure should be fun and exciting, when we designed the *War of the Burning Sky* campaign saga, we wanted to do something novel, and give the players a chance to influence political events in the world, to lead armies into battle, and to possibly rule the world or let it be destroyed as they see fit. The PCs will get to play with some big guns, and as the campaign nears its climax you will witness the horrifying potential of magic on the field of war. Before the campaign is over, the players will:

- Fight the living incarnation of an eternal forest fire.
- Battle a cell of magical spies while a hurricane rages around them.
- Carry out military operations ranging from infantry maneuvers and spying, to cavalry charges and tactical strike missions.
- Adventure through the memories of an enemy ruler in order to learn her secrets.
- Defend against a battalion of soldiers mounted on war mammoths and their frost giant allies in an arctic waste in order to protect a vital teleportation circle.
- Engage in street-to-street fighting in an occupied metropolis, led by a traitor toward a trap that will destroy the entire city.
- Get their hands on an artifact and actually use it to turn the tide of the war.

If you'd prefer to avoid the admittedly complicated events of high-level adventures, we've included ways to end the campaign satisfactorily after the fourth or eighth adventure ([abridged campaigns](#)). If you'd like to start the campaign with player characters that are already reasonably powerful, we've included ways to instead start the campaign with either of those two adventures. But of course we hope you'll take it from its portentous beginning to its epic finale.

Finally, while not everyone looks for morality tales in their gaming, we hope that players may find more in this war than simple heroism and epic conflicts. The most memorable stories in war are not about the battles, but about the people, and how they are affected. The campaign saga is designed, ultimately, to encourage peace, and winning with the aid of allies, even those who might normally be perceived as enemies. While the heroes will face true villains and scoundrels, this is not wholly a battle between good and evil. Seeking peace is the harder option,

but without peace, even the final enemy's fall cannot bring true victory.

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

War of the Burning Sky consists of twelve adventures, which should take characters from 3rd level to 20th level. We've included four options for running an abridged version of the campaign as well, detailed later in this section.

The Plot in a Fiery Nutshell

The campaign begins after the assassination of Drakus Coaltongue, the emperor of the Ragesian Empire ([timeline](#)). Various leaders look to claim power in the resulting vacuum, and while this will eventually lead to open war, the most immediate threat comes in the form of the Scourge, a decree that all disloyal users of magic in Ragesia and surrounding lands are to be captured or killed.

The decree is from Supreme Inquisitor Leska, who commanded Ragesia's anti-magic inquisitors and who now wants to rule. Meanwhile Shaaladel, ruler of the Shahalesti nation which has an unstable peace with Ragesia, attempts to retrieve the Torch of the Burning Sky, source of the Ragesian Empire's power. In the remote Monastery of Two Winds, a wizard named Pilus creates a doomsday weapon in the form of a living airship powered by elemental forces, which he plans to use to seize power after he betrays his Ragesian allies. Finally, a race of dream monsters called the trillith ascend from deep underground; they sense a weakness in the Material Plane that will let them sunder the world into dreams.

Now, as the Ragesian armies scramble to quell the rebellions that followed in the wake of the emperor's fall, those magic-users at the edges of the Ragesian Empire see a brief window to escape. All that stops them is the question, where can they hide? For no land is beyond the cruel, searing reach of the Ragesian Empire.

ABOUT THAT SCOURGE...

The Scourge refers to two separate things. When the heroes start out, rumor has spread that Leska has initiated the Scourge, a program to round up spellcasters that are enemies of Ragesia. Later on the heroes will learn that the Scourge is actually the code name for the Koren Obelisk, a magical superweapon that Leska will use to bring all lands and peoples under her control.

Hope comes from the south, in a meager coastal town called Seaquen, where a small magical academy known as the Lyceum has called those who oppose the Empire to rally under its banner. All across the Ragesian Empire, thousands of stalwart or desperate people have set out, hoping to find safety at this insignificant, overlooked academy.

Running the Adventures

Each adventure is written assuming a party of four PCs of the suggested level for the adventure. Each encounter offers a suggestion for how to modify the encounter if you have a party of a different size—including when NPCs contribute significantly.

As this adventure is converted from an earlier version of the rule set, we recommend having the PCs gain levels at predetermined points throughout the adventure. Where ad-hoc experience was originally awarded for succeeding at optional goals, we have suggested awarding inspiration to the PCs who directly contribute to a given task. The first adventure starts the characters at level 3. The resistance will not hire complete novices to help Torrent after all, and it helps ensure that the party does not get wiped out in the first encounter.

Magical items and treasure pop up from time to time, but whether to hand these out or give the PCs some spending money is up to you.

CONTENT

The rest of this document helps prepare you to run *War of the Burning Sky*. The Adventures gives a brief overview of each chapter, and The Timeline denotes what has led up to this point and how the campaign might turn out. Campaign Variants describes ways that you can tweak the campaign to fit your needs. New Rules Material highlights important information that you generally will not share with the players outright while the various Player Handouts include rules content you may allow the players to use at certain points of the campaign. Finally, Warfare for Beginners shows the original system that the warfare sections of the campaign were built around.

Important Note

While *War of the Burning Sky* encompasses many pages of content, we want you to feel free to customize and personalize the campaign saga as needed to suit your style, your players, and their characters. This is your campaign now!

THE ADVENTURES

ONE: *The Scouring of Gate Pass*

Level 3

As the Ragesian army marches upon the neutral city of Gate Pass, the PCs must retrieve vital war intelligence from a spy and deliver it to the distant magic academy of Lyceum, but first they have to find a way out of a besieged city before it falls and the inquisitors, Ragesia's infamous skull-masked, mage-hunting clerics, find them.

TWO: *The Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar*

Level 4

The journey between Gate Pass and Lyceum is dangerous, and along the way the heroes must survive passage through a forest that has burned for decades, where a dream monster known as a trillith holds sway. The trillith, which calls itself Indomitability, is trapped by the last survivors of the forest, a clan of long-suffering fey whose magical song holds the key to defeating these strange nightmare beings.

THREE: *Shelter From the Storm*

Levels 5–6



Once the heroes reach Lyceum, located in the small seaside village of Seaquen, they have to navigate various political dangers (like spies from Ragesia, power hungry refugees, and a fleet of hostile Shahalesti elves), prove themselves loyal to the fight against Ragesia, and rescue the town when a magical hurricane strikes, conjured by agents of an unknown villain. They learn that teleportation magic has gone awry, and the heads of Lyceum think it has something to do with the missing Torch of the Burning Sky.

At the end of the adventure, word comes that Ragesia has taken note of Lyceum, and that an army has been dispatched to destroy the school.

FOUR: *The Mad King's Banquet*

Levels 7–8

Lyceum sends the heroes on a mission to find allies in the nearby nation of Dassen before Ragesia's army arrives. There they discover that a trillith named Madness, another dream monster like the one in the fire forest, is manipulating the king. The heroes help a sympathetic noble named Duke Gallo battle the forces of the mad king. Seaquen's survival depends on their success.

FIVE: *The Monastery of Two Winds*

Levels 9–10

The heroes are sent on another mission by Seaquen, to a monastery in Ostalin where monks who worship the wind are being threatened by the remnants of the army the Ragesian emperor was commanding before he was assassinated. The heads of the monastery, a pair of brothers named Longinus and Pilus, offer to aid the PCs in retrieving the lost Torch of the Burning Sky if they help them fight the army, but clues suggest that the monastery may have been responsible for the hurricane in Seaquen.

SIX: *Tears of the Burning Sky*

Levels 11–12

The heroes race ahead of an enemy army, fighting their way inside Castle Korstull, the abandoned fortress in the nation of Sindaire where Emperor Coaltongue was slain. The castle is now overrun by undead, animated by a strange fiery tear in the fabric of the planes. The castle holds the clue of what has happened to the Torch, but the heroes will have to fight to learn it.

SEVEN: *The Trial of Echoed Souls*

Levels 13–14

In the haunted forest of Ycengled, the heroes locate the assassins who have the Torch but learn that they have damaged it, removing a key piece of its magic in a nearby temple, which the party must brave if they wish to use the powerful artifact. In the temple, the heroes face dangers of the past, and learn secrets that drive the next several adventures. The Torch is only partially repaired, giving the heroes mobility, but not enough power to teleport armies.

EIGHT: *O Wintry Song of Agony*

Levels 15–16

A clue from the temple leads the heroes to a secret facility operated by minions of Leska in the frozen reaches of northern Ragesia. Under the facility is a strange prison where waves of agony overwhelm the inmates—all of them captured spellcasters seized by the Scourge. The agony comes from a trillith, who is being used to power experiments with some strange superweapon Leska is working on. The heroes rescue Etinifi, a prisoner who knows Leska's weaknesses.

NINE: *The Festival of Dreams*

Level 17

With the aid of whatever allies they have secured, the heroes return to the city of Gate Pass where the campaign began, with the goals of liberating the city and swaying the allegiance of Leska's armies. They learn that while Leska was trying to use captured spellcasters as fuel for a device that will let her control magic over a long distance, the trillith have another desire—to release the bonds of the world and turn it into nothing but dreams. When a defiant religious festival is interrupted by the appearance of a nightmare swarm, the heroes must locate a disloyal trillith who can help them stop the incursion.

TEN: *Sleep, Ye Cursed Child*

Level 18

With news arriving that Leska is preparing a new doomsday plot and that Pilus's airship is aimed for Seaquen, the heroes need to reactivate the Torch, so they can respond to both threats. Their mission takes them into the Underdark, to the lair of the Mother of Dreams, source of the trillith, whose power created the Torch of the Burning Sky, and who they hope can fix it. While war rages on the surface, the heroes must find unlikely allies amid the evil races



of the deep, and must battle the nightmares of a sleeping dragon in order to free her from her curse.

ELEVEN: *Under the Eye of the Tempest*

Level 19

Certain of his own invincibility, the stormy archmage Pilus sets his sights on destroying his old rivals, the mages of Lyceum Academy. Once again a storm rolls over the town of Seaquen, but this tempest bears an army amid its thunder. The heroes board Pilus's mile-long living airship and fight their way to its heart, but to kill the leviathan's master, they must slay the beast as well.

TWELVE: *The Beating of the Aquiline Heart*

Level 20

The immortal blood of Avilona, elemental spirit of air, runs in the veins of Supreme Inquisitor Leska, and she has had enough time to gather a great deal of power. Her armies defend the great rift called the Heart of History where lies the still beating Aquiline Heart, and the heroes must lead one final assault into the fiery breast of the Ragesian Empire where their actions could heal the land—or destroy it.

THE TIMELINE

WHAT CAME BEFORE

What follows is a brief history of the events that shaped the world up to the Ragesian attack on Gate Pass in *The Scouring of Gate Pass*. Events are categorized by years Before the Scouring (BtS).

Primordial Times. The ancient elemental spirits rule the world. They are the Flamebringer dragon (fire), Stormchaser eagle (air), Worldshaper worm (stone), and Tidereaver kraken (sea). The dragon tore out the eagle's heart and drank her blood, gaining immense power and ensuring the strength of his draconic progeny. But the spirits of sea and stone sensed the dragon's growing might, and the dragon knew that if he consumed the heart and slew the eagle fully, the other two spirits would unite to destroy him. So the dragon hid the still-beating heart in a place to which he could never return, preferring to live rather than risk death by seeking more power.

Buried beyond the sight of any creature, the heart's blood pulsed into the roots of the world, nourishing it and fostering life above and below the surface. Ages marked the world, and as civilization rose, rumors of this font of life spread throughout the lands that would become Ragesia and its neighbors. Spellcasters could sense its power, and the power-hungry and the desperate sought it out, but only the scantest clues hinted at its location, or at the dangers that awaited those who found it. The Aquiline Heart passes into legend, becoming a symbol of the unattainable.

99 BtS. Drakus Coaltongue is born.

60 BtS. Coaltongue and Shaaladel form an alliance. Together they succeed in toppling the empire of Morrur. Coaltongue takes over its capital of Ragos and the Shahalesti forge a nation of their own to the east of Ragesia.

An amazing confluence of events leads to the creation of the Torch of the Burning Sky. Elves rescue the gold dragon Trilla and escape through the caverns below Gate Pass. Trilla's dreams create the Trillith who eventually imprison their mother in the deep caverns under the city.

50 BtS. Coaltongue first sweeps through the lands of Sindaire and Ostalin to apocalyptic omens. Two brothers, Lsi Nu Gon and Lsi Pu, join the resistance after watching their hometown in Ostalin burn. They withdraw from society to follow their different philosophies, assuming the new names Longinus and Pilus.

Jutras uses the Book of Eight Lands to determine who to kill in order to gain the crown of Dassen. He is hung for his crimes.

45 BtS. The trillith Indomitability arrives in the forest of Innenotdar and is defeated, but not killed, by the elvish hero Anyariel.

40 BtS. Emperor Coaltongue defeats the army of Gate Pass, sets up a military government, and erects a 90-foot-tall statue of himself in the grand square on Summer's Bluff before moving on to his next conquest.

When the elves of Innenotdar refuse to ally with Shaaladel against potential Ragesian incursion, he has their forest set on fire and blames Coaltongue. Because of Indomitability's presence, the fires never stop burning. Etinifi escapes the forest and tries to find a way to save his people.

Fearful of the growing might of Ragesia, Lord Shaaladel tries to create a "torch" of his own. He returns to Ycengled to secure the aid of the Taranesti. When they refuse to divulge the location of Trilla, he declares them a danger and wipes out almost all of the Taranesti.

A young Leska tries to defend her town from Coaltongue by countering the activation of the torch. Rather than kill her, the aging Coaltongue gives her town a reprieve. She has one year to find a way for Coaltongue to cheat death from old age. She meets Etinifi in her travels.

39 BtS. During the journey of Leska and Etinifi, they fall in love and find the route to the Aquiline Heart. The defenses were too strong however, and Etinifi betrayed Leska, draining her life force to attain immortality. Though left as little more than a husk, Leska survives and claims immortality for herself. She returns to Coaltongue with some of the blood from the Aquiline Heart, granting him immortality as well.

38 BtS. The Gate Pass insurgency finally makes Coaltongue decide the city isn't worth the trouble. Ragesian forces withdraw after Coaltongue and Shaaladel agree that the city is neutral territory.

20 BtS. Haddin Ja-Laffa forcibly reforms his criminal brother through mind-control magic. He is exiled from Gate Pass as people are afraid he has used his magic on them as well. Balance emerges from the caverns below Gate Pass and wanders the world before settling at the monastery of the two winds.

15 BtS. Steppengard unites the 8 lands of Dassen, carving out a 9th land for his holdings.

10 BtS. The Order of the Aquiline Cross emerges in Sindaire. In Ragos, Leska plays politics to get her cronies and disguised devils into power in the Bureau of Justice.

9 BtS. Ragesia's expansion into other territories abates.

4 BtS. Katrina parts ways with her brother Rantle and finds herself in the employ of Ragesia. She serves Leska and meets Coaltongue on several occasions. Aurana, an agent of the Shahalesti, attempts to assassinate Leska and fails. Leska turns Aurana into a vampire.

1 BtS. Leska tasks Kreven with building the Koren Obelisk. The Bureau of Justice prison in Ragos swells with inmates who have been replaced by disguised devils.

July. Knowing they cannot compete militarily, nobles in Sindaire organize a rebellion of subterfuge and sabotage against Ragesia.

October. Coaltongue weeds out the traitorous Sindairese nobles by demanding that all noble families send a son or daughter far away to serve in the Ragesian armies. Loyal nobles comply readily while the traitors hesitate.

November. Emperor Coaltongue crushes the rebellion in a single day. That night he is killed in Castle Korstull and abducted by the drow assassins. Teleportation becomes deadly. The First Ragesian Army is left stranded in Sindaire under the command of General Magdus. He orders a retreat from the flaming storm over Castle Korstull.

December. Supreme Inquisitor Leska, who seeks to seize control of Ragesia with a strong show of force, orders General Magdus to move his forces to settle in for the winter and then join up with the Ragesian Imperial Navy when it begins a blockade of Turinn, the capital city of Sindaire, in March. Ragesia announces its intention to retaliate against the nations of Sindaire and Shahalesti for their involvement in the assassination of Emperor Coaltongue.

In response to the announcement, Shahalesti sends out diplomatic envoys to nearby nations, seeking allies. Kathor Danava leaves the Ragesian military and joins the Black Horses mercenary group.

WHAT MAY COME TO PASS

Assuming you use the full version of the campaign and that the PCs are successful in their adventures, the war will likely progress as follows. This is a very

rough timeline, so feel free to expand or compress periods of time to account for the PCs taking side quests, traveling at different speeds, or spending time training or crafting magic items. Obviously, access to swift travel, particularly teleportation, may speed up these events, but in general the war moves at the speed of normal troops, because no small group of teleporting adventurers is able to destroy an entire army by itself. At least not until they are a bit higher in level.

January. The Second Ragesian Army, under command of General Danava, assaults Gate Pass (*The Scouring of Gate Pass*), while the Fourth Army marches through the mountains in the northlands, both attempting to press into Shahalesti. Gate Pass resists, and so Danava lays siege, demanding that the city open its gates to a contingent of Ragesian inquisitors, who will check whether the city is harboring enemies. Gate Pass yields, allowing the inquisitors inside, but this is a ruse to lure them away from the bulk of the army, leaving the Ragesians vulnerable to evocation magic cast by the archmage Gabal and his students. The inquisitors slay Gabal, but not before he destroys the Ragesian siege engines. Danava retreats to regroup.

February. The trillith begin locating lost brethren, gathering their power while secretly working with Leska to develop her Scourge (*The Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar*). The Third Ragesian Army, under the command of General Revulus, joins Danava's army, and by the end of the month the two armies assault Gate Pass again. The fight lasts more than a month.

A fleet bearing the Shahalesti diplomatic envoy arrives in Dassen. Paranoid king Steppengard believes they are enemies, so the envoy tries to contact other people in power, including the headmaster of Lyceum.

March. Despite the fact that winter seems not to be turning to spring, a supernatural hurricane strikes Seaquen, destroying the Shahalesti fleet at an inopportune moment, ruining the chance for diplomacy (*Shelter from the Storm*). Seaquen looks for defenses against Ragesia and others, and sends envoys of its own to various Dasseni nobles. They also send a group to the Monastery of Two Winds, to investigate clues that suggest the hurricane was directed by someone there.

In northern Shahalesti, the Fourth Ragesian Army conquers important elven cities on its way to Nacaan, capital of the northern Shahalesti state.

In Sindaire, the blockade of Turinn begins, but

before the first army under Magdus can move to their aid, the army of Ostalin invades Sindaire from the south, looking to expand its holdings. Magdus stays put, and protests with Leska, whom he does not recognize as the legitimate ruler of Ragesia.

April. Gate Pass falls to Ragesia, a costly first step into Shahalesti. Danava's Second Army marches on to Shahalesti, while Revulus takes his Third Army south, into Dassen. They make their first assault toward the end of the month, and find little resistance, since Steppengard, the paranoid king, has pulled all his armies inward to defend himself, leaving the borders unsecured. However, Dasseni

loyalists, with the aid of Seaquen, hold off their entrance to the country (*The Mad King's Banquet*).

The Fourth Army captures Nacaan. Things look bleak for Shahalesti as the Fourth and Second Armies link up and make plans to march on Calanis, the capital.

May. Shalosha of Shahalesti contacts General Magdus and convinces him the elves will support a bid by him to rule Ragesia.

An ambitious archmage named Pilus, hosts Khagan Onamdamin, the ruler of Ostalin. Pilus reveals Tempest, his experimental airship, which is large enough to carry an army. The airship is close to completion, but while Pilus plans to use it to seize power for himself, Pilus and Longinus help agents of Seaquen clear away the firestorm over Castle Korstull (*The Monastery of Two Winds*).

June. Magdus and Shalosha pursue the agents of Seaquen to Castle Korstull, but are unable to retrieve clues to the location of the Torch of the Burning Sky (*Tears of the Burning Sky*). Shaaladel, knowing the Torch would help him stop the Ragesian drive into Shahalesti, devotes a massive amount of resources to tracking down those who pursue the Torch.

July. Agents of Seaquen recover the Torch and use it to aid their allies (*The Trial of Echoed Souls*). Who those allies are will depend on the heroes' actions and opinions.

August. The resistance launches the first strike in their counteroffensive: an attack against Leska's frozen research fortress where she was developing her Scourge superweapon (*O Wintry Song of Agony*).

September. The resistance succeeds in stopping the Ragesian occupation of Gate Pass. However, celebrations are cut off by the arrival of a massive horde of trillith from under the earth (*The Festival of Dreams*).

October. The conflict comes to a head in one of several possible ways. First the trillith discover where the Aquiline Heart is located, and they create the Dream of Annihilation to destroy the Heart and with it the material world (*Sleep, Ye Cursed Child*). Meanwhile, Pilus and his airship, loaded with the army of Ostalin, allies with whomever the party likes least and sets out to destroy Seaquen (*Under the Eye of the Tempest*). Finally, Supreme Inquisitor Leska must be defeated before she dooms the world to eternal war (*The Beating of the Aquiline Heart*).

WHAT IF THE PCs DO NOTHING?

Without the PCs present, events follow the timeline up until adventure four, *The Mad King's Banquet*. Without the heroes' aid, Dassen falls before the army of Revulus. Then, instead of the PCs getting help from Longinus at the Monastery of Two Winds, Shalosha convinces Magdus to remove his garrison, and so Shalosha and Magdus head to Castle Korstull to find out where the Torch is.

Then, while Shahalesti elite forces rush to retrieve the Torch, Magdus takes his army to Turinn, capital of Sindaire, which is under naval blockade and under attack by Ostalin. Magdus's army, aided by the native Sindairese, breaks Ostalin's forces, then uses treachery to destroy the Ragesian fleet. Pilus, sensing success, sides with Magdus and the Shahalesti, with full intention of betraying them later. Ostalin turns its attention to Dassen, and either they or Revulus's third army destroy Seaquen.

The Shahalesti retrieve the Torch, and use it to their advantage, but because they do not have access the military intelligence that the party delivered out of Gate Pass way back in the first adventure, they don't know about Leska's superweapon. Even with the aid of the Torch and Pilus's airship, they cannot do much when Leska starts turning off magic. After a few spectacular aerial assaults, Pilus's airship falls unceremoniously from the sky.

Eventually, Shahalesti forces destroy the device powering the Scourge, and it looks like the war will devolve into a traditional, gritty ground war, with armies slowly grinding for territory. Shahalesti starts rounding up captured orcs and half-orcs and discreetly having them killed even though they are officially prisoners of war. Then, while no one is paying attention, the trillith destroy the Heart, and everyone dies.

The actions of a small group of low-level PCs will, in short, be pivotal.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following non-player characters play a significant part or heavily influence the story of *War of the Burning Sky*. They are listed in alphabetical order by last name.

Emporer Drakus Coaltongue. Decades ago, a warlord arose among the orc tribes of what is now Ragesia. Drakus Coaltongue, half-orc son of a human noblewoman, brought a level of patience and political cunning rarely seen among the savage orcs. He united many tribes, slew the gold dragon Syana, and prepared his people for glory. And then, to everyone's surprise, he did not sweep into human lands for a bloody but ultimately short-lived rampage. Instead, Coaltongue allied with various poor human nations, helping them drive back the predations of the strongest country in the region, Morrur. Coaltongue even gained the aid of the insular elves of Shahalesti, until finally he was ready to lead a coalition army against Morrur. For this great assault, Coaltongue revealed a devastatingly powerful artifact that would lead him to victory, the Torch of the Burning Sky.

Created at the conflux of divine, devil, and psionic energies, the power of the Torch was to call down fire from the sky, and to carry Coaltongue's army hundreds of miles in an instant, plucking them up with one pillar of flame, and depositing them with another. Coaltongue and his allies easily defeated Morrur, and from the nation's burning remains, Coaltongue created a new kingdom for himself and his orcish followers, Ragesia.

For a time Coaltongue and his allies coexisted in relative peace. Coaltongue was content with his new homeland, and did not want to jeopardize it by reaching too far and falling before the might of many nations, as Morrur had fallen before him.

But slowly, Ragesia expanded its borders. It took years for events to play out, and always in a way that Ragesia's imperialism was justified, either in response to enemy attacks, or to aid another nation that was being threatened. With the benefit of hindsight, many suspect that somehow Coaltongue provoked these conflicts. Finally, when Coaltongue was far older than any half-orc had right to be, all the lands that had once belonged to his allies were his.

Recently, after nearly a decade of inactivity, Coaltongue offered to help the Exarchate of Sindaire put down a rebellion within its borders, and the nation nervously accepted, fearful of being swallowed up by another trick. What Coaltongue was planning

may never be known, because he was slain the night of his victory.

If he is brought back to life, his defeat actually humbles him. He will likely play a more behind the scenes role and name a formal successor who will rule Ragesia but not the outlying lands that were once independent countries.

General Ashok Danava. The general of the Ragesian Second Army is a humble, honorable man forced to direct a war he does not believe in. When he took the mantle of general he accepted a powerful, unending *geas* that bound him to never act against the ruler of Ragesia. He is forced to be Leska's lackey, and he believes it is better for him to stay in charge of the army and try to keep the amount of suffering down, rather than let someone more bloodthirsty take his place.

Kathor Danava. Kathor was formerly in the Ragesian military — his father is the general leading the army coming to Gate Pass — but left after discovering he had magical powers, afraid he would be taken in by the inquisitors. This magic — which he is learning to control — comes from being endowed by the trillith Justice, a process of which he is not aware.

He joined up with the first group who respected his horsemanship skills, and in the few weeks since then he has slowly come to regret it. His father was once a friend of the city, so Kathor possesses a diplomatic passport which allows him (but only him) to enter or leave the city freely.

Deception. This lying, scheming trillith agent seeks to find lost brethren and further the trillith agenda. He also acts as an ambassador to Leska. The heroes will likely encounter Deception several times in different forms.

Etifini. He was the strongest of the Seela, and when the forest of Innenotdar was set ablaze, he escaped to find a way to save his people. During his travels he met and fell in love with Leska but betrayed her to save himself. Now he is a broken shell of a person who longs for the death which alludes him in his immortal form.

Gabal. Hero of the original resistance movement and head of the wizard school in Gate Pass, Gabal holds contempt for those who do not gain their magical knowledge from intense intellectual study. He will lead a successful raid to destroy the Ragesian siege equipment after the heroes initially escape from Gate Pass but pay with his life. While this earned Gate Pass a temporary reprieve from the attacking

armies, Ragesian inquisitors capture his soul and turn him into a wraith to use against the resistance in Gate Pass.

Headmaster Simeon Gohanach. The head of the Lyceum Academy rises to prominence by sending out a call to all the people in and around Ragesia, asking for them to stand up against the threat posed by the Ragesians and their new leader Leska. He is casual and folksy and realizes that he best serves the resistance as a facilitator rather than a leader.

Inquisitor Guthwulf. The “Minister of Pain” rose to infamy in the inquisitor ranks through his talents for interrogation and torture. His use of devils to accomplish external tasks means that his name is not as well known to outsiders. By the time the heroes actually meet him, he has been stripped of his position and imprisoned for his failure to deal with them.

Haddin Ja-Laffa. Haddin was a skilled artist and respected citizen of Gate Pass until he forcibly reformed his criminal half-brother with mind-control magic. The people of Gate Pass, afraid that Haddin had used his powers on them as well, rioted, killing his half-brother. Haddin escaped the city with his wife and infant daughter. His exile and the death of his wife and half-brother have twisted him. He is a bitter man with a bad cough from living downwind from the burning forest of Innenotdar for years. Lacking in empathy he views his daughter Crystin not as a child, but as a tool. If he ventures with the party, his self-centered actions serve as a constant annoyance and detriment.

Crystin Ja-Nafeel. Crystin appears to love her father and will not leave without him, but this is the result of years of his mind-control magic that she is slowly learning how to resist. If broken free of his control, she wants to escape her father’s reach. She is endowed by the trillith Foresight which passed to her after the death of her mother. This provides her with prophetic but cryptic dreams.

Katrina. Even though Katrina found herself in Ragesian employ after parting ways with her brother, she holds no particular loyalty to them. She just wants to survive this war. Her time helping the inquisitors hone their magic countering abilities has left her callous and Machiavellian, but she still fondly recalls her childhood with her brother Rantle. She does not realize it, but she is looking for someone to show her the way. Depending on her interactions with the heroes she may fulfill her role as spy and traitor or become an ally.

Aurana Kiirodel. Lord Shaaladel’s chief advisor was sent to assassinate Inquisitor Leska years ago and failed. Leska forced Aurana to drink her immortal blood, turning Aurana into a Vampire. Cut off from being able to experience the daylight that is so important to members of the Solei Palancis, she burns with desire to finish her task and destroy Leska.

Rhuarc Knightsbane. This half-Taranesti led the team that assassinated Coaltongue. He used his magical scimitar to extract Coaltongue’s soul from his body and the portion of Trilla’s soul from the torch. This ensured that the torch cannot be used to transport an army and Coaltongue’s immortal blood cannot return him back to life. He now guards the torch so that no one can ever use it again.

Inquisitor Kreven. Second in command of the Inquisitors and Leska’s right hand, the old sorcerer Kreven supervises the creation of the Koren Obelisk.

Guildmistress Sheena Larkins. The Guildmistress of the Wayfarers is a middle-aged half-elf who views her performers as schoolchildren who need to be reined in. She is a native of Ostalin who has taken the Lyceum up on their offer to make a home port for the Wayfarers in Seaquen.

Longinus. When Lsi Nu Gon and his brother watched their village in Ostalin be burned to the ground by Coaltongue, they joined the resistance. After several year, he determined that while individual deaths in war are tragic, nothing can truly be destroyed. As the brothers started a monastery to teach their philosophies, Lsi Nu Gon changed his name to Longinus at his brothers behest.

Longinus is now an old man and hides his face behind a mask. His philosophy of ascetic detachment has caused him to not challenge his brother’s more extreme philosophy, and he has allowed the grand schemes of Pilus to grow unchecked.

Once he is made aware after the heroes pass through the monastery, the brothers go their separate ways. His wavering faith in his brother may provide an opening for the heroes to gain his assistance in defeating Pilus.

General Magdus. The general of the emperor’s First Army is a practical man who prefers to lead from amongst his troops. He was intensely loyal to Coaltongue and witnessed the portentous storm of fire that signalled the emperor’s death. He does not recognize Leska’s right to rule Ragesia and will likely ally with Shaloshia in a bid to take the throne.

Leska Merideus. All Leska wanted to do was save her village, but when she cancelled the summoning of Coaltongue's army from his torch, her life was set on a tragic path. The aging Coaltongue gave her the impossible task of finding a way for him to live forever. If she failed to find a solution within a year, her life and her village were forfeit.

In her travels she met Etinifi, and they fell in love. Together they located their goal, the Aquiline Heart. However its defenses were deadly, and Etinifi betrayed Leska to save himself, draining her life force before escaping. Leska, left a husk with a faint shred of life, dragged herself through to the heart and drank of its blood. She gained immortality and took a vial of blood to bring back to Coaltongue. With Coaltongue now immortal, Leska was elevated to the leader of the inquisitors. Her village should have been spared, but Shaaladel had destroyed it as a gift to Coaltongue.

Her experiences have changed her, and she has lost any glimmer of compassion for others. She begins to set plans in motion to accumulate enough power that she will never answer to anyone else ever again whether they be man or god. She replaces politicians, influences rebellions to cause Coaltongue to increase Ragesia's lands, and orchestrates the emperor's assassination.

With Coaltongue out of the way, Leska assumes the throne and arranges the final events needed to wield ultimate power over the land so that she will never need to bend the knee to man or god again.

Pilus. Lsi Pu watched his home burn with his brother Lsi Nu Gon. Though they initially joined the resistance, they eventually realized the fight was hopeless and withdrew to meditate and contemplate on a new path in life.

While his brother withdrew from threats, Pilus had lost too many who were close to him and developed a philosophy of swift, surprise attacks—whether retributive or preemptive—to ensure no one was ever powerful enough to threaten the innocent.

Loving a good secret, it was his idea to change their names when he and his brother started their monastery. While Longinus spends his time in meditation and teaching, Pilus and a select group of students have been dabbling in several magical arts. Knowing that he would need time to defeat the immortal Coaltongue, Pilus learned how to become immortal by binding his soul to the elemental air energy of the tempest that perpetually rained down over the nearby sacred Valley of Storms.

With all the time in the world, Pilus used his new

magic of biomancy, the art of altering and crafting creatures, to make living weapons. Starting with small creatures and guardians, he has slowly worked his way toward his masterpiece, a mile-long living airship. After he parts ways with Longinus, Pilus gathers the army of his Ostalin army and flies his airship to destroy Seaquen.

Rantle. This rogue follows his own moral compass. He came to fame because of an elaborate confidence game to steal from a female merchant. One night when his scam was near fruition, he was with the merchant when she was attacked by a trio of common thugs who intended to have their way with the woman. Rantle fought them off, then stayed around to protect her while the city guard arrived, even though he knew he would be recognized and arrested. Public support for his heroism got him pardoned, and many people have begun calling for him to join the city council.

He will soon become a leader of the Gate Pass resistance. Beloved as a daring hero who laughs in the face of danger and regularly defies the Ragesians' attempts to catch him, Rantle is vital to the rebellion's morale.

Lord Shaaladel. Shaaladel started his military career looking to establish a nation for the Shahalesti. After he allied with Coaltongue, they both managed to carve out lands for themselves. Shaaladel slowly became both jealous and fearful of Coaltongue, his armies, and his torch.

Shaaladel resolved that no people mattered aside from the Shahalesti—even other elves. He slaughtered the Taranesti when they would not help him create a magical artifact of his own to rival the torch, and he had the forest of Innenotdar set aflame when the elves there would not ally with him against Coaltongue.

As an elf, Shaaladel has played the long game to gain the throne of Ragesia and became frustrated when Coaltongue did not die from old age. When Coaltongue was assassinated, he was further frustrated when Leska took control of Ragesia. He is a master diplomat and manipulator, and he will make allies before stabbing them in the back.

Shalosh. Shaaladel's daughter is not power-hungry like her father. She has never had reason to doubt her father until recently, but though she wants to protect her homeland, she does not think the world is divided strictly into friends and enemies. So she hesitates to support the draconian measures her father requires.

Whether Shalosh turns out to be an enemy or an

ally depends heavily on the heroes' conduct.

Tiljann. The heroes encounter this young, 55-year-old Seela woman shortly after entering the fire forest of Innenotdar. While a faction of the Seela have decided to stop singing the Song of Forms and die to end their misery, she steadfastly searches for another solution.

She will likely go with the heroes to explore the world as Etinifi did 40 years ago, joining the Wayfarers and becoming a cirqueliste.

Torrent. A battle-hardened cleric from Seaquen, Torrent has been tasked by the resistance to deliver a package to the Lyceum in Seaquen. She knows the city of Gate Pass well and is an adept warrior who focuses on keeping spellcasters protected and saving the dying before engaging in combat. She sees her role as a battle cleric and delegating leader, but her latest training has had her learning the gentler aspects of her god. Her current mentor is Lee Sidoneth, and she often quotes his pithy sayings.

Torrent is devout and sees hardship as a test of faith. Having finished several successful missions, she is normally cool and resolute. However, if things become difficult for too long, her devotion may waiver as she seeks other paths to solve her problems. She will view concerns or questions as criticism, and actual criticism will cause her to become defensive and play the role of the martyr, attempting to prove her worth all the more through reckless decisions and foolhardy fighting.

Trilla. The daughter of Syana, the gold dragon guardian of Ycengled, was born with latent magical abilities, but her life has not been her own for the last 60 years. Coaltongue captured her and used her as leverage against her mother Syana. When she witnessed her mother's murder, her manifesting power exploded outward and mixed with celestial and infernal energies to create the torch.

She was rescued by Taranesti survivors and secreted away under the city of Gate Pass, the last time she saw the sky, and she viewed the underground as her prison. Her powerful abilities caused elements from her nightmares to be born as the trillith. Over the years, the trillith feared what would become of them if their mother died. They imprisoned Trilla in her own dreams so that she never woke. She has not had the opportunity to grow and learn and therefore seems like she is still but a child.

POWER GROUPS

The following three groups play a role in the campaign saga. More details are provided whenever they show up in the adventures.

Knights of the Aquiline Cross

In the last decade small chapels that teach the doctrine of the Order of the Aquiline Cross have grown up throughout the lands of Ragesia and its neighbors, preaching mercy, sacrifice, and a fierce defense of life. Knights of this order dress in white and red tabards marked with a cross surrounded by a halo of feathers.

Inquisitors

Dressed in bear skins, their faces concealed by bear-skull masks, inquisitors are the feared blade of Ragesia, expert in cutting out those who resist its rule. They fervently serve Ragesia's supreme inquisitor, an aged witch named Leska.

Wayfarers

Every port in the region has at one time or another been host to the Wayfarer Theater, a beautifully-decorated ship that is both home and base of operations for the wayfarers. The wayfarers are both master acrobats and skilled mages, prone to dress in elaborate and eclectic costumes cobbled together from dozens of lands.



CAMPAIGN VARIANTS

ABRIDGED CAMPAIGNS

In the full version of the campaign, there are two major nations at war—Ragesia and Shahalesti—plus Pilus, a third party who wants to seize power, and the trillith, who see the war as an opportunity to reshape reality to their whims. The conflict engulfs the region, and the party must deal with multiple foes and allies at once, but they ultimately have the chance to decide who will rule in the war's aftermath.

Freeing Gate Pass

This shortened version uses adventures 1 through 4 and stops when the PCs are around 8th level. The conflict begins the same, between Ragesia and Shahalesti, and the party's goal is to gain allies to come to the aid of the neutral city Gate Pass, which is a proxy battleground between the two nations. The campaign ends once the party succeeds in bringing in Dassen as a third power to force an armistice.

Defeating the Ragesian Empire

This version uses adventures 1 through 8, stopping when the PCs are around 15th level. As above, the party seeks allies to rescue Gate Pass, but Ragesia does not relent, and the party must recover the Torch, ally with Dassen and Shahalesti, and kill Leska while she is overseeing the final stages of her superweapon's construction. (Sort of like *Return of the Jedi*.) Pilus and the trillith play only a minor role.

Restoring the Rightful Ruler

In this unusual version, which uses adventures 4 through 8, Dassen becomes part of Ragesia, loyal to the fallen emperor. Leska had the emperor killed and kidnapped (hiding him so he could not be raised), and she intends to secure her rule through a reign of terror. The party must first defend Dassen from Leska's armies, then locate and rescue Coaltongue, climaxing with an assault on Leska's base of operations in the northern tundra.

The Trillith Incursion

This final alternative uses adventures 8, 9, 11, 12, and finally 10. The trillith have corrupted the empress Leska, and with their ally Pilus they seek to destroy the world. This story arc begins with the party learning about a strange research facility in



the tundra, and upon investigating they learn of the trilliths' plan. The trillith make Leska attack Gate Pass with her armies, allowing them to emerge and take bodies. The party must stop Pilus and his airship of nightmare creatures from laying wastes to cities, then thwart the trilliths' plans to seize the Aquiline Heart. Finally, the party must delve deep underground to finish off the dreaming mother of the trillith.

TWEAKING THE SETTING

War of the Burning Sky is intended to fit into any setting, but we use a baseline setting as the core of the campaign saga. If you want to place this campaign saga in an existing setting, you might simply say that Ragesia and the lands around it lie far from the realms the PCs have previously experienced or in a distant part of the world. Or you might prefer to find an area that closely parallels the terrain and nations of the campaign saga.

You can easily change a great many details about the adventures in the campaign saga to fit your own setting, without ruining the plot of the adventures. There are only three major requirements for choosing

a location for the campaign. First, two nations must be willing to go to war, and several nearby lands must be affected or threatened by this war. Second, the two main nations must have some sort of difficult passage separating them, which they must claim before they can press into each other's land—a mountain pass, a narrow isthmus, a magical portal, or a safe road through trackless wastes. Third, you have to be willing to create a few minor locations, such as towns, monasteries, temples, and forests.

To help reduce the amount of work necessary to make the campaign fit your setting, the following section provides suggestions on what to look for when choosing the people and places that will stand in for those written into the campaign saga.

Nations and Cities

When looking for nations in an existing setting, Ragesia's stand-in should be able to field a large enough army to potentially conquer all its neighboring lands. Shahalesti's stand-in should be slightly weaker than Ragesia, militant but not evil. The two nations should be neighbors or fairly close. The events of the adventures one and nine hinge on there being a neutral city between the two nations, which stands in the way of their conflict, though any restrictive terrain could work as well as the mountain range assumed by the adventure.

The rest of the surrounding nations can be whatever you want, though you will want a similar geographical relation between Ragesia and Dassen, so that the Fire Forest of Innenotdar can provide an actual shortcut. It's a small enough area that it should not be hard to add.

There could be many smaller nations involved in this conflict, but whatever you do, make sure that the conflict doesn't stretch far enough that nations far more powerful than Ragesia and Shahalesti get involved. The PCs should feel like they're the underdogs, and that they have a big fight ahead of them. Other nations should not be interested enough to simply sweep in and save the day; that's for the party to do.

Major NPCs

The two biggest events that spark off the war are the vacuum left after the fall of a powerful warlord and the desire to retrieve the artifact that brought him to power in the first place. The specifics of the warlord can vary easily. Emperor Coaltongue's stand-in just needs to be feared and cunning, and to have



commanded armies, but his age, race, and even class could certainly change. He might have only recently begun his march to power, and he might only have had the Torch of Burning Sky for a short time.

Leska and her anti-magic inquisitors are a fairly large component of the campaign setting, but any would-be dictator and worshipful group of ominous minions works in their place. The inquisitors could be a recent development, rather than a deep institution of Ragesia. Leska's stand-in just needs to be the "hands-off manipulative genius" style of villain.

A group of non-good elves who aren't drow might not fit a lot of settings, so any group, racial or otherwise, that mixes warcraft and spellcraft can be substituted for the Shahalesti. The character used as Shaaladel's stand-in should be motivated by a sense of moral superiority, not generic "evil intentions." Shaaladel's stand-in needs to be highly charismatic — enough to have convinced people to do things they might normally think wrong, which means they might come to their senses and choose otherwise if given the option.

Pilus, the trillith, and the leaders of Seaquen had no political power before the start of the war, and so are easy to fit in anywhere.

Immortality and the Aquiline Heart. The Aquiline Heart is an artifact that is hinted at throughout the campaign saga, which provides immortality to those who taste of its blood. Destroying the artifact will end the grant of immortality, but it might have other disastrous consequences. Leska is immortal by virtue of the Aquiline Heart, which means that she does not age and that she regenerates from any wound not caused by a true dragon. The Heart gives the players a memorable way to strike a seemingly



invincible foe in her weak spot. The myth of the Aquiline Heart can be a famous old legend that people only half believe, like the tales of the Holy Grail, or it could be a little-known legend, isolated to Ragesia. If you substitute an existing legend of the setting, you might lose some of the phoenix imagery in the later adventures, so try to find something that involves fire so it ties in well with the “burning sky” part of the campaign.

Trillith. The trillith are a totally new group, and since their existence is relatively unknown it should be easy to fit them in. You might need to alter the timeline of the Mother of Dreams somewhat, to make sure she keeps her ties with the creation of the Torch.

Adventure Locations. Any setting has enough uncharted terrain that it shouldn't be hard to work in a fire forest, a monastery, a psychic temple, and an underground prison. Don't worry about having to use famous locations from a setting. Just because the PCs don't personally fight the battles

in a well-known city doesn't mean that the battle isn't happening. The conflict should appear massive, much bigger than the PCs. Of course, players like to feel a little bit legendary, so at least in the climax adventures, try to use notable locations.

Some of the adventures, particularly adventures four (*The Mad King's Banquet*), five (*Mission to the Monastery of Two Winds*), and eight (*O Wintry Song of Agony*), are intended to give you as game master a lot of leeway as to specific location. You just need to decide where a strategically important battle would occur, then send the PCs on the particular missions of the adventure, which are intended to be pivotal to the conflict.

EXPANDED CAMPAIGNS

As designed, the campaign saga should take a party from 3rd to 20th level. However, you might have PCs gain levels from experience points or simply want to have more encounters to showcase the scope of

the war. You could also have a “B” team running missions outside of the main adventure path for the players to experiment with and develop backup characters. In any case, you might want to try some of these adventure hooks.

Gate Pass

The Spells of the Master. At some point in the middle of the campaign saga, the party might return to try to recover the spellbooks of Gabal, full of spells designed to thwart inquisitor tactics. Perhaps they are guarded by the ghosts of his students, by a rampant golem, or by the spells themselves, brought to life by latent energy of the trillith.

Unity Wedding. The roguish hero Rantle has fallen in love with Shaloshia, the princess of Shahalesti, and despite the chaos of war, they plan to be wed in a properly regal (and time consuming) ceremony. Rantle, who holds quite a bit of sway in Gate Pass, enlists the party and some of his guild friends to make sure the ceremony doesn’t get interrupted by unwanted guests (such as the father of the bride).

Fire Forest

War Crimes. After the war is over, the party might need to race against an effort by the Shahalesti to hide their crimes, such as the slaughter and burning of the Innenotdar Fire Forest. The party needs to find a way to protect the evidence. Of course, the dead might still be able to offer testimony.

Seaquen

More Spies in the Steam Tunnels. Under Seaquen lies a complex hive of caverns, carved by sea and magma. In addition to providing steam that keeps the city warm during the winter, these tunnels can also be the lairs of spies. The spies try to sabotage the party, steal vital magic items, or trigger a volcano by accessing a hidden seal to the Elemental Plane of Fire.

Dreamcatcher. A trillith who calls itself Wanderer passes through Seaquen, appearing as a tall man, wrapped head to toe in sandy robes and veils, with a staff that curves at the top, ending in a knot that looks like an eye. He is collecting the dreams of the city’s inhabitants — many of whom are refugees who have seen great horrors and tragedies — to be distilled and refined in order to torment Trilla and create new, unique trillith. He lurks on the Wayfarer’s Theater, enjoying the psychic emanations of people watching their performances.

Amphibious Assault. A fleet from Ostalin, accompanied by hippogriff cavalry, attempt to seize the Seaquen docks.

Dassen

A Harvest of Hope Forlorn. Some minor member of the Dassen nobility is up to the same old selfish tricks, except this time a vague, unsupportable claim to the throne threatens to override the immediate needs of stopping the world from ending. The pretender might be endorsed by one of the other powers in the war, or they might just be megalomaniacal.

The Shrieking Wurm. People report hearing a vicious keening in the bayou north of Seaquen. In truth, it is a large brood of infant green dragons, wailing for their mother, who was injured by a lost military convoy. If the party can nurse her back to health and protect her children, she might be willing to lend her aid to the war. Unfortunately, the father is territorial, and he wants custody of the children.

Refugee Train. In a line of thousands of desperate refugees, many are neglected or exploited, and some are not what they seem.

Ostalin

Fight or Flight. A group of Ostalin expatriates, trained under Longinus and Pilus, are trying to rally their people to resist Khagan Onamdamm in while his army is distracted. The flying monks plan a strike against the breeding aeries for the nation’s hippogriff cavalry, stealing mounts of their own, and killing those they can’t.

Feast or Famine. A rich merchant with a fleet of ships is supplying food to the Ragesians, who are having trouble feeding their armies with the extended winter. The party might try to destroy the shipments, or stow away on board in order to sneak into Ragesia, or through the blockade in Turinn. However, one of Pilus’s agents has slipped a biomanced creature on board: a fast-breeding horde of hybrid rat-cockroaches that devour everything they find.

Sindaire

Small Wars. After the assassination of Coaltongue, his army splintered. Without a clear chain of command, many smaller units took it upon themselves to crush the rebellion that originally brought Coaltongue to Sindaire. The party would gain the favor of many if they could protect the

commoners in the region, but it is their misfortune that the most notorious of these rogue Ragesian warbands is actually on a noble mission, trying to track down a demon summoner who is using the townsfolk as a human shield.

Fey Tracks. The party hears a local legend of a faerie who lived in a nearby grove for a time, his feet wilting grass with every step, his touch rotting trees, but he was still favored by the forest's druid. They hear a barkeep whistling a tune identical to the song of the fey of the fire forest while he wipes down his tables. If the party braves the natural guardians of the druid's grove, they can earn the old woman's favor, who tells them a story of meeting the fey Etinifi, and teaches them the spell *enforced flesh*.

Ragesia, Lower

Nature's Aid. The party hears of a horse master druid who lives with a herd that would make fine mounts for whichever army can court his favor best. The druid sets up a competition between the party and a contingent of Ragesian rangers: a race through dangerous wilderness terrain, over twenty miles long.

Catch Me If You Can. A gnome caravan, trying to protect a pair of injured sorcerers fleeing the Scourge, have been chased for weeks by a small Ragesian cavalry detachment, and now they are trying to cross the mountains into Dassen. They cross paths with the party, and ask them to help with a tricky plan to stop the Ragesians from



following them.

Ragesia, Upper

The Old Fashioned Way. The PCs are called upon to assassinate Rowern, head of intelligence operations for the Ragesian army, and then impersonate him in order to sow misinformation for as long as possible. In preparation for this mission, the heroes are told that Rowern likes to spend his evenings drinking with old army buddies at an upscale brewery in Ragos, the Ragesian capital. Of course, in a city so full of inquisitors, magical disguises are all but useless, so the party will have to use more traditional techniques to pull off the caper.

Failed Experiments. A traveler who was lost in the wastes of northern Ragesia reports that he came upon a ghost town in a crater shaped like a giant feather, where the only activity he saw was a distant, hulking shape loping across the frozen lake in the crater's center. The demise of this town is a direct result of a failed test of Leska's Scourge superweapon. To make things more interesting, a small group of inquisitors are roaming the city, trying to determine what went wrong and extracting all the information they can.

Shahalesti

Moral Dilemmas. A camp of tortured orcish prisoners and a captured erinyes spy, their celestial overseers, and the hateful elvish summoner in charge of the camp are the ingredients for an unorthodox rescue mission. The erinyes has stolen the soul of an elvish general and hidden it. She is a valuable agent in the war, and the party could benefit greatly from her knowledge, but she just happens to be blisteringly evil.

Pride Before the Falls. In the capital city of Calanis, the party is close to convincing the Shahalesti to ally with them, but one of Shaaladel's generals, an egotistical wizard who believes he is the greatest spellduelist of all time, manages by persuasion, wheedling, and general diplomacy to keep the ruler from siding with the PCs. If the party can prey on the general's pride or insult his honor, he might decide to settle his dispute with a spell duel at noon on the cliffs overlooking the city's majestic waterfalls.

NEW RULES MATERIAL

Also available freely from EN Publishing is the *War of the Burning Sky* Player's Guide, which presents new game materials—new feats, class features, items, spells, and even four new subclasses. These items show up throughout the campaign saga, but their availability for players is up to you. Of course, we encourage you to let them, since we feel they will add a unique flavor to the campaign. While some of the abilities are designed primarily for the antagonist groups, if a player is interested in the abilities they might make their character be an outcast from the villainous group.

Among these new rules are a set of features called “Gate Pass Connections”. The first and ninth adventure of the campaign saga are based in the city of Gate Pass, and if you want to give the players an incentive to have their characters have ties to the city (and thus a stake in its survival), let them choose one of the six city groups to be associated with, and grant them the appropriate Gate Pass feature. The features are relatively minor, but provide interesting options for the party, and they make it a little easier on you as the GM to get the players invested in the campaign from the beginning.

While there are a fair number of new toys for the players, the following sections contain rules that players should not necessarily be aware of from the start of the campaign.

THE TORCH AND THE BURNING SKY

The Torch of the Burning Sky is an artifact with teleportation powers, and so it is tied to the Astral Plane, as well as the Elemental Plane of Fire. When Emperor Coaltongue was killed, one of the assassins intentionally damaged the Torch, which likewise caused damage to the local fabric of the planes. The nearby Astral Plane is being suffused with energy from the plane of fire, which has two effects.

First, things are getting colder. The campaign starts in early winter, and there is no spring in sight for Ragesia and the lands bordering it. Druids can sense that something is amiss, and the sky is filled with flocks of confused birds trying to flee this unnatural winter. By the later adventures in the campaign saga, temperatures across the region are perpetually below freezing, with some regions even more dangerously cold. By the campaign's finale, the PCs will have a chance to end the winter, and for a



few months spring renews the land, until the natural turn of seasons again takes its course.

Second, teleportation and other forms of astral travel are hot and dangerous. This effect, which will come to be known as The Burning Sky, has a limited effect on travel between planes. Whenever a creature undergoes planar travel to or from the lands involved in this campaign, that creature takes 1d6 points of fire damage. Creatures arrive in a small burst of flame, enough to easily alert onlookers. This affects all summoning, calling, and teleportation spells, except for those that use the ethereal plane or plane of shadow.

The Burning Sky has a greater effect on travel across the plane. For every hundred feet (or fraction thereof) you teleport at a time, you take 1d6 points of fire damage, to a maximum of 40d6.

There are various methods for bypassing this danger, typically involving either transforming into a creature immune to fire, or using a spell to grant fire resistance. Desperate characters might all climb into a *bag of holding* and let the wizard hope his *protection from energy* spell holds out.

The reach of the Burning Sky is up to you, but it covers the entire region of Ragesia and the nations surrounding it. Characters who wish to teleport outside the area during the campaign will have to sail or hike outside the reach of the Burning Sky.

TALKING IT OUT

NPCs can be Hostile, Neutral, or Friendly to the PCs. Sometimes the PCs will want to change an NPC's attitude. The PC can make a Charisma (Deception

or Persuasion as appropriate) check contested by the NPC's Wisdom (Insight) check. The actions of the PCs could also change the attitude of a NPC by one step. For instance, if the PCs drag unconscious mercenaries out of a burning building, their leader could start at Neutral instead of Hostile.



DEVILS

Devils pop up several times in the campaign. In this campaign setting, they are able to innately cast *teleport* a number of times per day equal to their Charisma modifier. The devil may only teleport itself and may not take any passengers.

TRILLITH

Trillith are a race of dream-spawned monsters who lack bodies of their own. Every trillith has a visual appearance that is unique to it, based on its nature. The trillith's stats and abilities match this form, but normally a trillith is incorporeal, so it cannot easily affect the material world. However, a trillith can create a body for itself if it has appropriate material, and some magic can turn a trillith corporeal.

When viewed with truesight, a trillith is revealed to be something like a wispy, sinuous dragon with no wings. However, a trillith normally appears as some sort of monstrous creature, though it can disguise itself in a humanoid form. Each trillith only has a single monstrous and a single humanoid form. In all its forms, a trillith's appearance is still determined by its nature, so a trillith that normally takes the form of a flaming stag would look fiery in its draconic true form, and its humanoid form might

be a mighty orc with antlers, dressed in red furs.

Trillith are aberrations that possess the following traits unless otherwise noted in a creature's entry.

Telepathy. Trillith can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet of it that has a language. While corporeal the creature seems to actually speak the words that it sends.

Creatures of Dreams. Trillith do not sleep, and magic can't put them to sleep. Unless they are trapped in a physical form they do not need to eat or breathe.

Mutable Nature. The nature of a given trillith can change over time, and if a trillith's personality alters significantly, it may change its powers and appearance, as well as its name. Such a change is very rare, and seldom happens more than once in a given trillith's life.



Incorporeal Movement. The trillith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Project Image. A trillith that is incorporeal can assume the appearance of a medium or small humanoid. Each trillith has only a single such form. Most trillith prefer to keep their natural form unless they need to conceal their identities or want to avoid disturbing people.

New Action: Embody. An incorporeal trillith can create a corporeal form for itself by entering an object (or group of objects) of roughly the same size and shape of its natural form. The trillith still looks like itself, though its composition remains that of the matter used to create its body.

For instance, Deception's natural form is that of a dark, oily humanoid with tentacles for arms and legs. If it was incorporeal it could attempt to embody itself by entering a large pile of oily rags, a mass of dead eels, or a vast pool of soiled blood. It would take the outward shape of a humanoid with tentacles for arms and legs, but this shape would be composed of oily rags, dead eels, or blood, depending on what Deception chose to use.

While embodied, the trillith loses the Incorporeal Movement trait and loses its fly speed unless the new body can fly with its limbs. It loses any



resistance or immunity to damage from nonmagical weapons. A trillith can leave this body as an action. Any damage dealt to the embodied form affects the trillith normally, and stays with it even once it returns to incorporeality.

If a trillith is affected by the fey *song of forms*, it spontaneously embodies, not requiring any object to enter. The effect of being forced into a body is the same as using its embody ability, except that it cannot willingly exit its body.

New Action: Endow. A trillith that is incorporeal can grant its power to any living creature within 30 ft. When it does so, the trillith vanishes, effectively absorbed by the creature. At will, or when the creature dies, the trillith reappears within 5 ft. of the body, unharmed by the ordeal. Each trillith has a description of what powers it grants to creatures that it endows.

A trillith that is endowing a creature can be targeted and affected by mind-affecting effects, and can be driven out with remove curse or a similar effect. However, the trillith itself cannot be harmed while endowing a creature, except by mind-affecting effects.

New Action: Grant Boon. A trillith with a Charisma score of 13 or higher can lend its power to a number of creatures up to its Charisma ability score modifier without actually entering their bodies. To do so it must touch each creature. The creature gains the same powers as if the trillith had endowed it. A trillith cannot grant a boon to another trillith, and it can revoke the boon from any or all creatures as a bonus action.

Rejuvenation. As trillith are creatures of dream and not of flesh, it is hard to kill them. While incorporeal or while embodied, if a trillith is destroyed it does not die, but instead reforms 1d6 days later.

Death Boon. A trillith can only be truly slain two ways. If its body dies while it is trapped by the *Song of Forms*, the trillith dies, and its corpse remains even after the *Song of Forms* ends. When a trillith with a Charisma score of 15 or higher is slain this way, its essence is absorbed by nearby creatures as if the trillith had endowed them. Only intelligent creatures within 150 ft. are affected, and the closest are affected first, to a maximum number equal to the Trillith's Charisma modifier.

Alternately, if a trillith is destroyed and all the damage is caused by psychic damage, the trillith's spirit is obliterated. In this case, no creature gains the benefits of the trillith's boon.

PLAYER HANDOUT: INQUISITORS

The following divine domain is primarily for the game master's reference of the abilities available for inquisitors, but some players may want to play an inquisitor who has left Ragesia and Leska's service.

DIVINE DOMAIN: INQUISITOR DOMAIN

Ragesian inquisitors are clerics who revere their leader Leska almost as a god. Inquisitors are most often lawful neutral, lawful evil, or neutral evil and typically are heretics of gods of fire, knowledge, or magic. Their favored weapon is the hand claw, which leaves their hand free to hold items and perform somatic component of spells.

INQUISITOR DOMAIN FEATURES

Cleric Level	Feature
1st	Bonus Cantrip, Language, and Proficiency
2nd	Channel Divinity: Control Undead, Channel Divinity: Rebuke Magic
6th	Fire Strike (1d8)
8th	Channel Divinity: Overmaster
14th	Fire Strike (2d8)
17th	Greater Rebuke

INQUISITOR DOMAIN SPELLS

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	<i>burning hands, comprehend languages</i>
3rd	<i>scorching ray, shatter</i>
5th	<i>fear, fireball</i>
7th	<i>fire shield, wall of fire</i>
9th	<i>conjure elemental (fire only), wall of stone</i>

Bonus Cantrip, Lananguage, and Proficiency

When you choose this domain at 1st level, your inquisitor training provides the following benefits:

- You may choose *produce flame* as one of your cantrips known.
- You learn the Infernal language if you do not already know it.
- You have proficiency with the hand claw.

Channel Divinity: Control Undead

At 2nd level, rather than being able to Turn Undead, you can use your Channel Divinity to control undead instead of turning them away. As an action, you

present your holy symbol and speak a prayer commanding the undead. Each undead that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is under your control.

On each of your turns, you can use a bonus action to mentally command any creature you control with this feature if the creature is within 60 feet of you (if you control multiple creatures, you can command any or all of them at the same time, issuing the same command to each one). You decide what action the creature will take and where it will move during its next turn, or you can issue a general command, such as to guard a particular chamber or corridor. If you issue no commands, the creature only defends itself against hostile creatures. Once given an order, the creature follows it until its task is complete.

The creature is under your control for 24 hours, after which it stops obeying any command you've given it. To maintain control of the creature for another 24 hours, you must use this feature on it again before the current 24-hour period ends. This use of the feature allows you to reassert your control over a number of creatures up to your Wisdom



modifier.

Any creatures that have advantage on saving throws against Turn Undead also have advantage against Control Undead. Starting at 5th level, when an undead is subject to your Control Undead feature, the creature automatically fails its saving throw if its challenge rating is at or below a certain threshold, as shown in the Control Undead table.

This feature replaces the cleric Turn Undead and Destroy Undead features.

CONTROL UNDEAD

Cleric Level	Controls Undead of CR. . .
5th	1/2 or lower
8th	1 or lower
11th	2 or lower
14th	3 or lower
17th	4 or lower

Channel Divinity: Rebuke Magic

Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to nullify the magic of others.

As an action, you present your holy symbol and evoke negative energy that cancels enemy spells. The inquisitor casts *dispel magic* at 3rd level without using a spell slot or components.

You can also use your Channel Divinity as a reaction to stop a spellcaster while they cast a spell. You present your holy symbol to cast *counterspell* at 3rd level without using a spell slot or components.

This use of *counterspell* or *dispel magic* cannot be countered by *cancel* or *counterspell*.

Fire Strike

At 6th level, you gain the ability to infuse your weapon strikes with fire. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d8 fire damage to the target. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d8.

Once per turn, when you roll fire damage for a spell, you add an additional amount of fire damage equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Channel Divinity: Overmaster

Beginning at 8th level, when you see a creature within 60 feet of you cast a spell, you can use your reaction to take over control of the spell, using your Channel Divinity. Make a spellcasting ability check contested by the target's spellcasting ability check. If you succeed, you redirect the spell to valid targets of your choice within range of the caster.



Greater Rebuke

Starting at 17th level, when you use your Rebuke Magic feature, all creatures and objects within 5 feet of your target are affected as well.

INQUISITOR MASKS

Inquisitors always have a mask, whether they are simple devices or more powerfully enchanted items. The masks alter their voice to be more menacing and feral, granting advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks, and they serve as a holy symbol and spellcasting focus. Male inquisitors favor masks carved to resemble (or actually made from) bear skulls, while female inquisitors prefer ones that look more like heavily-decorated masquerade masks.

Greater Inquisitor Mask

Wondrous item, rare

These powerful masks are given to high-ranking inquisitors who go after dangerous targets. In addition to altering the voice and serving as a holy symbol, the mask grants its wearer advantage on saving throws against being charmed by effects or spells such as *dominate person*.

PLAYER HANDOUT: SONG OF FORMS

In *The Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar*, the second adventure of the campaign saga, the party encounters the Seela, a group of fey who sing the Song of Forms. The fey originally used this magical song in prayers to the spirit of their forest, believing that they could give the forest a body so they could see its physically-embodied majesty. When their forest burned, the Seela called out to the forest spirit for help, but their song conjured something else.

Learning the Song of Forms. To properly learn the song of forms, you must have proficiency in the Performance skill, be able to speak Sylvan, and have learned the song from a Seela.

Using the Song of Forms. Beginning the song is an action, and maintaining the song requires concentration.

The magic of the song draws on your life to create bodies for those that have none. Your maximum hit points are reduced by 1d10 at the start of every 10 minutes or portion thereof that you sing the song. This reduction lasts until you finish a long rest. The song of forms only has a magical effect when sung by a living creature. Fey who are bonded to a location, such as the Seela of the fire forest, do not have their maximum hit points reduced from singing the song of forms as long as they are in that location.

Each incorporeal creature that can hear you must make a Charisma saving throw (DC equal to 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier) or lose its incorporeality for as long as you remain singing and it can hear you.

Effect. Creatures affected by the Song of Forms lose their incorporeality which might manifest itself in one of the following ways.

- Creatures that are only temporarily incorporeal simply return to their normal corporeal form.
- Normally incorporeal creatures that are currently occupying a physical body, such as a ghost possessing a creature or a trillith using its embody ability, are unable to willingly leave their current host.
- Creatures without any normal corporeal form — such as shadows, wraiths, and ghosts that are not in a body, assume a semi-corporeal form.
- Trillith that are not currently occupying a body are affected as detailed by the trillith subtype.

An incorporeal creature forced into a semi-corporeal body is affected as follows:



Corporeal Body. The creature loses its Incorporeal Movement trait and any immunity or resistance to damage from nonmagical weapons.

Its size and type do not actually change, though its body does. The form the creature assumes resembles its incorporeal form, with appropriate modifications that would allow for actual locomotion, such as a wraith gaining feeble legs.

Speed. The creature loses any ability to fly unless its form has wings (such as a ghost manticore). If it had no other movement speed, it gains a speed of 30 ft.

Attacks, Damage, and Abilities. The creature retains all traits, actions, reactions, and legendary actions that are not dependent on an incorporeal form. As a default, you can assume the creature gains a Slam action if it has no remaining attacks, with damage appropriate to its size and challenge.

For example, a ghost's Withering Touch action can either be retained or changed to a Slam action, but its Possession action is not possible with a corporeal body.



ASSOCIATED CONTENT

The following feat and spell are associated with the Song of Forms. The spell is available to bards, sorcerers, warlocks, and wizards.

Feat: Song of Forms Prodigy

You have been an adept pupil for the Seela. You gain proficiency in the Performance skill and you learn how to speak, read, and write Sylvan.

If you already have proficiency in the Performance skill, you may gain proficiency in another skill of

your choice.

If you can already speak, read, and write Sylvan, you learn to speak, read, and write another language of your choice.

Enforced Flesh

4th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

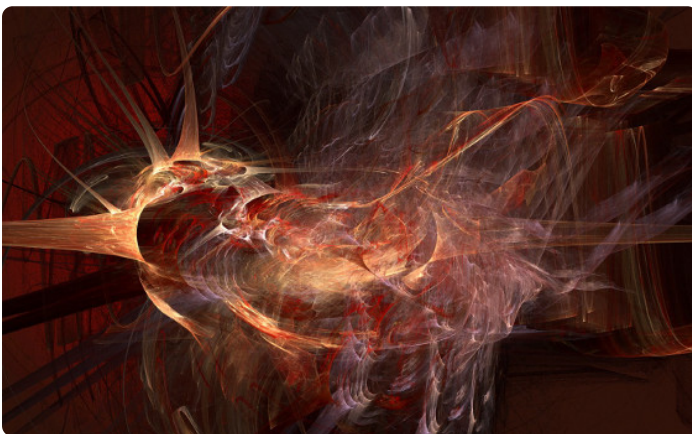
Range: 60 feet

Components: V

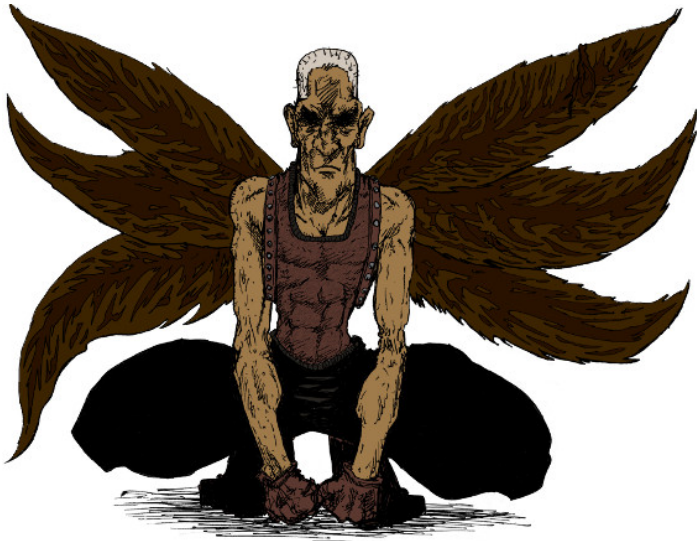
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You have analyzed the Song of Forms and developed a spell that replicates some of its function. Choose an incorporeal creature that you can see within range. The target must make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, it is affected as if it had failed a saving throw against the song of forms. Your maximum hit points are reduced by 1d10 until you finish a long rest.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can target an additional incorporeal creature and your maximum hit points are reduced by an additional 1d10 for for every two slot levels above 4th.



PLAYER HANDOUT: SEELA



Seela are a fey race native to the forest of Innenotdar who have a great affinity with song and wind. Before their forest was set to flame, they served as messengers of the woods, singing news on the wind. Their original vibrant beauty has changed to match the dying conditions of their homeland. They have wings reminiscent of a dragonfly's, or of leaves that got too close to an open flame. Their flesh is naturally pale and sunken, and they look perpetually starving and rather eerie. The seela have suffered years of torment, and thus are physically fragile but spiritually strong.

This section is included primarily to provide the Game Master with information on the Seela. It is presumed that all remaining Seela in the world are within the forest of Innenotdar. However, a player may wish to play a character of this race after the PCs enter the forest and meet the Seela.

SEELA TRAITS

Type. Seela are fey, not humanoids.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 2, and your Dexterity score increases by 1.

Age. Seela are considered to have reached adulthood around the age of 55 years and can live for over 200 years.

Alignment. Seela often follow their whims and emotions and tend toward chaotic alignments.

Size. Seela are as large as humans. Your size is Medium.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision. Your fey nature grants you superior vision in dark and dim conditions. You can see in

dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Fey Ancestry. You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put you to sleep.

Tradition of Song. You have proficiency in the Performance skill. You know the Song of Forms.

Gliding. Your wings allow you to descend safely. While you are not incapacitated or prone, you subtract 20 feet from the distance fallen for the purposes of calculating falling damage.

Fallow Touch. You sap life with the touch of your bare flesh. Your unarmed strikes deal an additional 1 point of necrotic damage. A creature that grapples or is grappled by you takes 1d6 necrotic damage at the start of each of their turns.

Ghostly Sounds. You know the *minor illusion* cantrip but can only use it to produce sounds. You also know the *message* cantrip.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common, Elvish, and Sylvan.

RACIAL FEAT

Longwalker

Prerequisite: Seela

You are strong of spirit and have decided to leave your ashen forest behind and travel to more promising lands. You gain the following benefits:

- Your wings have strengthened. You gain a fly speed equal to your base walking speed. However you must have landed by the end of your turn or you fall. While you are not incapacitated or prone, you subtract 60 feet from the distance fallen for the purposes of calculating falling damage.
- Whenever you deal damage with your fallow touch, you regain a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage that you dealt.
- You are bonded to the land wherever you go. You do not take damage to your maximum hit points while singing the Song of Forms.

WARFARE FOR BEGINNERS

Warfare for Beginners is a short EN Publishing supplement by Russell Morrissey, around which the battle aspects in *The Mad King's Banquet* and *The Beating of the Aquiline Heart* were hinged. The system was modified to meet the requirements of the adventures, but it is presented here in its original form. Game masters can use the supplement as is or modify it to suit their own adventures.

This supplement presents an easy-to-use mass-battle system which involves your player characters on an individual level. The key to the system is focusing on tactical and strategic missions which affect the overall outcome of a large battle.

The system assumes that the player characters are integral to the battle—in other words, without their actions, the battle will be lost. That's why we play fantasy role-playing games, right?

You'll find that the system is remarkably simple to use, and allows your players to feel they truly are affecting the course of the battle in a vital way, without forcing you to adopt large-scale and clunky mass-battle rules involving army units and the like.

THE BASICS

The system works on a basic Victory Points scale. Successful missions performed by the PCs earn their "side" Victory Points, while the passage of time deducts Victory Points. The scale runs from 0–20; if the PCs' Victory Points total reaches 20, the battle is won; if it reaches 0, the battle is lost.

Generally speaking, the heroes' side will start with 10 Victory Points, adding Victory Points when the PCs succeed in a mission and deducting Victory Points as time passes. This creates a sense of urgency, because if the PCs sit around doing nothing for too long, the battle will, left to its own devices, be lost.

Missions include such things as: assassinations, captures, reconnaissance, spying, sabotage and so on. A successful mission will earn 1–4 Victory Points: the more difficult the missions, the more Victory Points.

Passage of time reduces the PCs' Victory Points tally at a rate of 3 Victory Points per day.

Optional Rule

Make the PCs' task easier or harder by increasing or decreasing the starting score. Apply a 2-point bonus or penalty for major conditions that affect one side or the other, such as being greatly outnumbered,

having significant fortifications, having flying troops, being thoroughly prepared or being completely surprised, and/or for having either extensive or next to no experience. Try not to add or subtract more than 6 Victory Points, or the PCs' job may become either trivial or next to impossible.

THE MISSIONS

Each day, roll 1d20 three times and offer the players the three resultant missions. They are free to attempt any or all of the missions available. Any missions not succeeding or not undertaken on a particular day may be undertaken on a later day unless failure incurs a penalty, in which case the damage has already been done to the heroes' side.

A successful mission gains the party's side the number of Victory Points indicated in the "Success VP" column. A failed mission means that the party's side loses the number of Victory Points in the "Failure VP" column.

If the failure penalty is 0 Victory Points, the mission can be attempted again at any point.

Important Note

Missions with a penalty for failure count as failed if they are not undertaken. They are time-critical: the PCs don't get to wait until tomorrow to defend that breach in the wall.

MISSION VICTORY POINTS

Roll	Mission	Success VP	Failure VP
1–2	Minor Assassination	1	0
3–4	Major Assassination	3	0
5–7	Minor Sabotage	1	0
7	Artifact	4	0
8	Major Sabotage*	2	-1
9–10	Reconnaissance	1	0
11	Spying	3	0
12–13	Minor Abduction	2	0
14	Major Abduction	4	0
15–16	Defense	2	-2
17	Bodyguard	1	-2
18	Counterspy	2	-2
19	Morale	2	0
20	Allies	4	0

*Major sabotage may constitute a larger, or better defended installation than Minor Sabotage, or it may be a third successful act of Minor Sabotage.

DAILY EVENTS

Each day, roll 1d12 for a Daily Event. The event can apply to either side in the battle—which side that is should also be determined randomly—such as with a coin flip. The heroes' side gains or loses the number of Victory Points indicated, depending on whether the event benefits them.

DAILY EVENT VICTORY POINTS

Roll	Daily Event	VP
1–2	Weather Change: A change in weather favors one side or the other.	1
3	Reinforcements: Reinforcements arrive for one side or the other.	3
4	Illness: Plague or other widespread illness affects one side or the other.	3
5–6	Spy: One side's secrets are leaked to the others' by a spy.	2
7–8	Hero: One side is badly damaged by a successful mission by a hero of the other side.	2
9	Omen: An omen reduces morale of one side.	1
10	Desertion: Desertion problems weaken one side.	2
11	Traitor: An important individual or unit defects to the other side.	3
12	Major Death: An important individual or unit dies, either slain on the battlefield or at the hands of an assassin.	3

PUTTING ALL THIS INTO PRACTICE

The preceding sections outlined the basic mechanic for outlining the course of a battle. However, this needs to be put into practice. You can't just tell your players: "Your daily event is Illness. Missions available are Major Assassination, Minor Sabotage and Defence, plus the Reconnaissance saved from yesterday." You need to translate these results into interesting and varied game encounters!

You should keep your players apprised of the score they have achieved, and the Victory Points available for each mission. This allows them to weigh their strategic and tactical options and creates tension when the score approaches one end of the scale or the other.

Each available mission should be described as an encounter. For example:

Major Sabotage. "General Arvistas calls you to his tent. He informs you that three artillery pieces

mounted on the hills to the east are creating havoc amongst the defenses, and that it is imperative that these weapons be destroyed. As far as he knows, each is manned by three ogres."

Major Abduction. "Spies have identified the tent of one of the opposing generals, Lord Borstas, and General Arvistas has decided to attempt to abduct him. A small group will need to sneak through the enemy camp at night, infiltrate his tent while he sleeps, and transport him back to the fort."

Morale. "Morale is low, and supplies are running short. In the nearby village of Bitterne, a cellar full of beer can be found. Obtaining this beer and bringing it back for the troops will result in a great morale boost."

The mission possibilities are almost endless.

Designing the Encounters

The most important piece of information you need when designing the mission encounters is the same piece of information needed when designing any encounter: you need to know how powerful your PC party is and create a challenging mission.

Some missions will be easier than others. The difficulty of the mission matches the number of Victory Points gained for succeeding: between 1 and 4 Victory Points. A 1-point mission should be fairly easy, while a 4-point mission should stretch the party to its limits.

In terms of challenge, a 2-point mission should be a middle of the road encounter for the party. A 1-point mission should be middle of the road for a party 1 level less than the party; a 3-point mission 1 more; and a 4-point mission 2 more. For each additional party member.

So a party of 8th-level characters undertaking a 2-point mission will find that the encounter will be of average difficulty. If they undertake a very difficult 4-point mission, the mission would be of average difficulty for 10th-level characters.

The Mission Itself

You should divide your mission into three parts:

1. The Approach: Do the PCs need to scale a cliff, sneak through the enemy camp, fight their way across a guarded bridge, or explore a secret tunnel or cave?
2. The Mission: This is the bit where the PCs actually accomplish the task they have been set.
3. The Escape: In most cases, the PCs will need to

MISSION IDEAS

This sidebar presents ideas for missions the heroes can undertake on behalf of their side.

Assassination/Abduction.

- Leaders (generals, clerics, wizards)
- Monsters (giants, dragons)
- Hero (captain, gladiator, champion)

Sabotage.

- Artillery (catapults, cannons, onagers)
- Structure (bridge, viewing tower, gateway)
- Magic (portal, scrying pool, altar)

Artifact.

- Obtain the MacGuffin of Winning (a lance that is quite good at killing dragons; a torch that can teleport armies)

Reconnaissance.

- Scout out a nearby hilltop
- Investigate a cave complex
- Search for a way across a river or gorge

Spying.

- Obtain maps, plans or other documents
- Eavesdrop on a meeting or council
- Recruit an agent

Defense.

- Rush to a breach in a wall
- Guard a bridge or other strategic location

Counterspy.

- Identify and apprehend a spy or traitor

Morale.

- Organize a bardic performance
- Activate a symbol (a beacon, a flag)
- Obtain resources (ale, an entertainer, food)

Allies.

- Incite an uprising of the populace
- Convince the nearby dwarves to help out

go back the way they came—but this doesn't necessarily always have to be the case.

Passage of Time

As mentioned earlier, the default assumption is that, without the PCs' help, the battle will be lost. Therefore, every day, the heroes' side automatically loses 3 Victory Points. In other words, if the PCs do nothing, eventually their Victory Points will reach zero and the bad guys will win.

Scaling

It's easy to scale these rules. The default assumption is a battle of 2–7 days, roughly, with short missions that can be accomplished in a day.

You may want to use these rules to handle more epic battles lasting weeks, months, or even years. All you need to do is replace “days” with whatever unit of time you prefer, and make the missions themselves larger in scope.

For example, you could have an engagement which you plan to take months. The PCs have a month to accomplish a given mission. These lengthy missions may involve long-distance travel or major exploration of expansive locations.

In this way you can even build an entire campaign around this system. Each mission can be an entire adventure in itself.

Sample Battle

Castle Northam is under siege! Manned by a few regiments of green troops, it is surrounded by a massive army of veteran killers. To make matters worse, the enemy has brought monstrous allies: a group of hill giants who are bombarding the fortifications with massive boulders, and are busy digging a massive tunnel under the walls. The enemy is led by an evil wizard, Count Jarvis, and his three lieutenants. It is rumored that the enemy has a small dragon, but this has not been seen as yet.

Start

Default. The defenders of Castle Northam start with 10 Victory Points.

Bonuses. Castle Northam counts as a significant fortification (+2 Victory Points).

Penalties. The defenders are outnumbered (-2) and are rookies to boot (-2).

Result. With 8 Victory Points, the castle will fall in three days if nothing is done. Enter the Heroes of Northam!

Day 1

Daily Event: Hero. A mighty minotaur, hero of the enemy army, slays an entire unit of soldiers singlehandedly (-2).

Mission: Minor Sabotage. The enemy is using a strange mechanical digging machine to construct its tunnel. The heroes infiltrate the tunnel and destroy the machine (+1).

Mission: Minor Abduction. The castle commanders have decided to abduct a staff member on the enemy side. The heroes sneak through



the camp at night and attempt to abduct a cook. Unfortunately, they are spotted and barely escape with their lives (+0).

Mission: Bodyguard. Spies report that agents within the castle intend to make an attempt on the general's life. The heroes mount a secretive watch, and intercept a small band of goblins as they close on the general's private quarters (+1).

Result. At the end of the first day, the heroes still have 8 Victory Points. They will need to do better than this if they are to save the castle.

Day 2

Passage of Time. The heroes' side loses 3 Victory Points automatically.

Daily Event: Desertion. Reports indicate that the enemy's hill giant unit has grown tired of the battle and left (+2).

Mission: Minor Sabotage. The enemy has constructed another digging machine. It is not in the tunnel yet, and the heroes sneak behind enemy lines and manage to destroy it (+1).

Mission: Major Sabotage. The enemy is almost certain to build further digging machines. The only long-term option is to flood the tunnel. The heroes

make their way to a nearby dam and manage to destroy it, causing the enemy's tunnel to fill with water (+2).

Mission: Defense. The castle has a small lookout tower one mile to the east, which has been used to spy on the enemy camp. Unfortunately, the enemy has decided to deal with this nuisance and has dispatched a unit of ogres to tear it down. The heroes mount a stalwart defense, barely scraping a victory. For now, the tower stands (+2).

Result. Today was a much better day for the good guys, who close the day with 12 Victory Points. The tide of battle seems to be swinging in their favor.

Day 3 and Beyond

If the heroes can keep racking up victories, and especially if they can find and defeat that dragon, the defenders of Castle Northam may yet snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

AFTERWORD

This originally appeared in the War of the Burning Sky: The Complete Campaign in 2009.

When Ryan Nock initially approached me and floated the idea of our publishing a series of linked adventures, I said no. I didn't believe that we could do it well, and I didn't believe that we could sell the product. EN Publishing is a small company, and this proposal would be the most expensive thing we'd ever attempted by an order of magnitude.

But when I saw his outline for the adventure series, I was floored. From the adventure titles (I'll take *Sleep, Ye Cursed Child* and *O, Wintry Song of Agony* over *The Lava Caves of Xyrthenrrgggh* any day) to the huge cast of fully fleshed-out NPCs; from the sheer variety of tasks (rescuing prisoners from a secret underground ice prison where they are tortured and their pain used to fuel a magical weapon, assaulting a mile-long living biomantic airship, traversing the Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar), to the epic climax which evokes the Battle of Minas Tirith as civilizations clash in a mighty battle, I saw reasons not to say no everywhere I looked. And so, finally, I said yes. And, if you look again at that long sentence you just read, you will also see why the bulk of the writing work would not fall upon my shoulders. We plunged into this herculean task without the faintest idea of what we'd let ourselves in for.

We had no idea, at the time, of just how difficult producing a fully-fledged adventure every month on time would be; over a year of waiting on tenterhooks for art to arrive in time, for writers to deliver manuscripts, juggling all these tasks, somehow paying for them (and the costs were mounting up and up—I could have a pretty nice, brand new car for what I spent on this campaign saga), and then trying to find the time to persuade people to actually buy the darn thing—only to have 4e announced partway through and our sales to drop to almost nothing.

Man, producing this thing was hard. Most of the time we were behind schedule, and falling further and further behind: what was supposed to take one year (twelve adventures, one per month) took nearly two years; thankfully, it seems it took most folks more than a month to play through each one and so we never found ourselves in the unfortunate position of having our customers caught up and waiting for the next one with nothing to do.

We did get lucky in places. Notably, we managed

to persuade veteran writers such as Ari Marmell (*Heroes of Horror, Tome of Magic*), Wolfgang Baur (Editor, *Dungeon Magazine*, 1992–1995), Wil Upchurch (*Midnight, Champions of Ruin*) and Darrin Drader (*Book of Exalted Deeds, Serpent Kingdoms*) to write for us for knock-down prices.

We finally released *The Beating of the Aquiline Heart* in late 2008 with a massive sense of accomplishment. We'd done it! We'd finished! Yes, we took much longer than we said we'd take; yes, it cost far more than we thought it would; yes, we fell out on numerous occasions and nearly gave up—but we did it, by jove! We had our fully-fledged campaign saga and, damn, it was good.

Thanks does need to be given to an incredibly large list of people—the writers, artists, playtesters, and editors. Especially Ryan Nock, who not only saw this thing through to the very end, but did far, far more than he was actually paid for simply because he wanted to see this thing done right. Equally, other contributors stuck with us the whole way through—Claudio Pozas who did so much of the art, Sean McDonald who created the majority of the maps, and Eric Life-Putnam who still hasn't been paid, but is hard at work laying out this epic tome as I write this despite recently becoming a father to twin girls. This project really was a labour of love.

Russell Morrissey
Owner, EN Publishing

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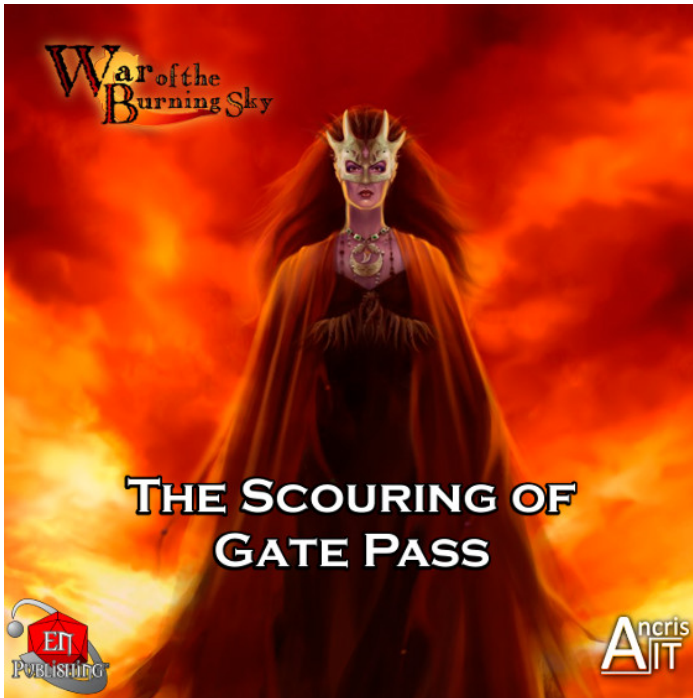


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