

KEOI6-02

Wasteland

A One-Round D&D[®] LIVING GREYHAWK[™] Keoland Introductory Adventure

Version 1.0

by Charles Skidmore

Reviewer: Keoland Triad

Playtesters: X

The last few years have seen the Earldom of Linth has been blasted by both physical confrontation and spiritual assault. After a forced evacuation, the court of the land has declared Linth to be habitable again, and a stream of people has started to return to their lands. However, the returning refugees are finding that not everyone left Linth, and that life in the Earldom is about to change.

Note: This adventure is playable by first level characters only.

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®] rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

This game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission of Wizards of the Coast. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 SYSTEM license, please visit www.wizards.com/d20.

This is an official RPGA[®] play document. To find out more about the RPGA and to learn more on how you can sanction and run DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game events of all sizes, visit our website at www.rpga.com.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, GREYHAWK, LIVING GREYHAWK, D&D REWARDS, RPGA, *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc, in the US and other countries. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. © 2005 Wizards of the Coast, Inc and the adventure author or authors.

Visit the LIVING GREYHAWK website at www.rpga.com.

For questions specific to this document and your region please e-mail your triad point of contact (POC) at keolandpoc@adelphia.net. For LIVING GREYHAWK campaign questions email rpgahq@wizards.com.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Earldom of Linth has undergone several upheavals in the last three years. First, the peasantry of the Earldom rose up against the ruling class, described in KEO3-3 *Will of the People*. The initial cause of the uprising was a growing division between the peasantry and the ruling classes, which was exacerbated due to food shortages caused by a massive blight across the land. After an attempt on the Earl's life was defeated in *Will of the People*, the spirit of a former Linth Countess, Sera Linth, assaulted the Earl's heir Hanna in KEO4-5 *A Last Dance at Midnight*. During this assault, the Earl and his wife were slain despite the best efforts of a group of adventurers to save their family. Unbeknownst to her, Hanna herself was the focal point of the blight spreading across the Linth lands, or more precisely, the family heirloom she wore around her neck was.

The Nethernight was a magical artifact wrought by Dispater himself with the aim of bringing ruin to the material plane. When its powers awoke, it drained the ley lines of the Earldom, causing untold harm to the natural fabric of the realm. The blight killed crops, poisoned the water and mutated animal life, slowly turning the entire Earldom into a wasteland.

Things might have still been resolved peacefully at this point, had it not been for the assassination of the King of Keoland, Kimbertos Skotti. Through the use of a *magic jar* spell, an agent of the Iron Cabal possessed Holphin Neheli and struck down the King with the cursed sword Blackrazor.

In an insane fit of rage, the new Countess Hanna Linth ordered Knight of the Watch Most Truthful Banshee Lugh Narthistle to lead his forces on a genocidal rampage against the Oerdian people of her realm. A very bloody schism ran through the Earldom of Linth, and with the intensification of the blight, a royal edict was handed down; the Earldom of Linth was to be abandoned in its entirety, on pain of death.

With the cessation of the blight in KEO6-3 *Baby's Breath*, the royal edict has been lifted, and the populace has started to return to the Earldom, although the rulership of the realm is in question, as Hannah Linth currently is a guest of Dilwyth and Averyn Linth has renounced his claim to the Earldom.

Now, enterprising merchant companies have been contracted by the crown in an effort to relocate and resupply the Earldom. The first wave of refugees is returning to Linth and they are finding out that even though the blight has ceased, the land is still twisted and poisoned.

The Brokenback Merchants are a Keoish merchant consortium run by a pair of brothers, Hadrian (HAY-dree-an) and Artaxerxes (Ar-tuh-ZERKS-zeez), with close ties to the Neheli of Keoland. Personal friends of Holphin Neheli and others, these brothers see this as an opportunity to shore up support for their allies which has been steadily eroding over the past year. When they were granted the rights to create a new trading town, the brothers settled on a new site on the northwest of Lake Athetki which is located on a main trade road. The new site is named Yorora in honor of the brothers' departed mother. If it succeeds, it will be a very lucrative venture.

The merchants have put together two caravans. The first, which has already arrived at the site for Yorora, is comprised of well over three hundred craftsmen of all sorts. Designed to be the nucleus for the new town, the total number of people that went with the first caravan is around nine hundred. The second caravan is comprised of another hundred or so people, and a large supply of food and other consumables for the new town. This is the caravan in which the heroes will travel, where they will discover the new Linth.

Unfortunately for the merchants and craftsmen who went to found Yorora, there is an unexpected problem: the waters of the lake and river Athetki are poisoned and cause those who drink from them to succumb to a raving sickness which kills them painfully. The new town of Yorora is well on the way of dying from dehydration when the heroes arrive.

The reason for the poisoning comes from the source of the river, in the hills of Linth, near the border with the County of Nimlee. When the Royal Standards came to enforce the evacuation of Linth, there were those who refused, either because they could not or would not abandon their homes or loved ones. Tales are told that those who refused to evacuate were killed by either Knights of the Watch or the Keoish Royal Standards. True or not, these stories caused many to band together for safety. One such enclave is the town of Bakersfield.

The town of Bakersfield was founded by a simple man, Heinren Bakerson, who refused to abandon

his elderly parents to the ravages of Linth. Unable to afford passage out of the Earldom, he and his parents traveled as far as they could from their homes in Laketowne. When they could go no farther, they were in the low foothills, thoroughly lost. It must have taken the intervention of a beneficent deity, because the three survived and soon more refugees found their way into the foothills, drawn by something they could not name. Banding together, these people created Bakersfield, where all were welcome regardless of race or background.

The residents of Bakersfield weathered the Blight as best they could, forming an extremely tight-knit community. However, in the darkest days of the Blight, a change came upon them all. A gnawing hunger overtook all of them, and they found that they could no longer consume regular food. Instead, that which they craved was in the ground near their feet; ores and stones of all varieties.

Bakersfield quickly became a town of miners. Within days, they had reopened an old mine located in the hills, and started excavations. During their labors, they discovered a new kind of greenish-brown rock that seemed to satisfy their hunger more than any other. This rock was easily identifiable because after exposed to sunlight it heats up, and when taken from the sun it emits an eerie red glow, as well as a sizeable amount of heat. The residents quickly took to calling it "Heatrock".

Things went as well as could be imagined for Bakersfield for the duration of the rest of the Blight. The only major problem that occurred is that while delving into a particularly lucrative shaft of heatrock, the miners came across a solid stone door, etched in various runes. Foolishly, they decided to break the seal, believing there would be treasures beyond. What they found was a pair of active natural portals to the elemental planes of fire and earth. The creatures that resided near the portal killed several miners and drove the rest out of the mine.

Bakersfield has since been forced to start new mines in much less desirable places. The byproducts of this mining are much more dangerous, flooding the river with poisonous waste and contaminating both the river and the lake.

Cut off from outside communications, the residents of Bakersfield have no idea that the Blight has ended and the ban lifted. As well, they have no idea that the actions they are taking to

survive are slowly killing others downstream. This is where the heroes come in.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

In the Introduction, the heroes meet Hadrian and Artaxerxes, leaders of the Brokenback merchants, during a "cattle call" in Niole Dra for guardsmen and adventurers to travel to Yorora with their second caravan.

In Encounter One, the heroes meet a few notable NPCs of their caravan and are assigned to be forward scouts.

In Encounter Two, the heroes travel through the countryside near the capitol and into the blighted wasteland of Linth. Along the way, they encounter some of Linth's more dangerous byproducts and are forced to defend themselves.

In Encounter Three, the heroes are sent to scout Laketowne ahead of the caravan. Here they will meet a single important NPC and discover the truth of the fate of many who refused to evacuate Linth.

In Encounter Four, the heroes complete their travel to Yorora, meet with important NPCs there, and discover that the town is slowly dying. The town leaders ask the heroes to travel upriver to determine the cause of the poisoning.

In Encounter Five, the heroes are attacked by wildlife tainted by Linth's Blight while moving along the river.

In Encounter Six, the heroes discover Bakersfield, meet the important NPCs there, and are assured that the town can stop poisoning the water if they have access to the cleaner ore in the mineshafts.

In Encounter Seven, the heroes fight past creatures that are guarding the portal, and attempt to seal it.

In Encounter Eight, the heroes must return to Yorora as quickly as possible to tell the town that the water of the river is clean again.

PREPARATION FOR PLAY

As an introductory adventure, it is designed to be one thing above all else: fun. If at any time the players are bogged down or not having fun in an encounter, feel free to move the encounter along in any way possible.

As a secondary goal, an introductory module is designed to teach players about a facet of the

game with which they might not have much experience. In this case, it is the rules on dehydration as printed in the DMG. For your reference, they are listed again below.

Characters might find themselves without food or water and with no means to obtain them. In normal climates, Medium characters need at least a gallon of fluids and about a pound of decent food per day to avoid starvation. (Small characters need half as much.) In very hot climates, characters need two or three times as much water to avoid dehydration. For purposes of this adventure, Linth is still considered temperate climate, despite the boxed text about heat.

A character can go without water for 1 day plus a number of hours equal to his Constitution score. After this time, the character must make a Constitution check each hour (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage.

A character can go without food for 3 days, in growing discomfort. After this time, the character must make a Constitution check each day (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage.

Characters who have taken nonlethal damage from lack of food or water are fatigued. Nonlethal damage from thirst or starvation cannot be recovered until the character gets food or water, as needed—not even magic that restores hit points heals this damage.

Since this is an introductory adventure, it is understood that the heroes are considerably more fragile than they will be later in their career. To prevent the heroes from dying too many ignoble deaths, allow them to halve the DCs of all saves and damage taken from thirst if they manage to get some water intake, at least half a gallon of water per day.

Industrious heroes may attempt to locate other sources of water. Water created through the means of *create water* is perfectly acceptable to drink, as is water cleansed through *purify food and water*. Heroes who attempt to undertake lengthy tangents, such as creating their own wells, should be discouraged. As will be come evident, time is of the essence.

INTRODUCTION

Winter lies upon Nirole Dra, but that simply means a heavier set of garments is necessary

rather than the heavy furs and clothes of less civilized realms. Pelor's blessing shines down on the capitol of Keoland as the denizens of the grand city go about their business. Even in the heart of winter, Keoland sprouts with life.

For any of a variety of reasons, you find yourself standing in a popular square off of Farrier's row. The square itself is unremarkable but for the large fountain that dominates the center of it, topped with an alabaster stone statue of Keoland's leader, King Skotti. The fountain became a popular place to mourn the lost king and place offerings for his soul because of a peculiar discoloration on the statue at the waistline that was only seen after the king's death.

Returned to life and the Lion Throne, the fountain remains a popular location to pray for the health of the king and Kingdom, and it has been said that those who offer true offerings and drink from the waters at the king's feet find themselves cured of whatever malady aids them.

What draws so many to Farrier's Fountain today is the formation and recruitment of a troop of guards to travel with an important caravan bound for Linth. You hear several rough-looking men remark that the pay will be easy and high, as Linth's blight has ended and the lands are safe again.

This is a suitable opportunity to have the players introduce themselves and their characters. If they are interested in joining the caravan guards, then they are in luck. If they are uninterested, they are soon to find themselves with good incentive to join anyway.

After the players have introduced themselves, the crowd grows a bit uneasy from waiting and Hadrian (HAY-dree-an) and Artaxerxes (Ar-tuh-ZERKS-zeez) will enter the crowd and begin recruitment for the day.

The restlessness of the crowd ceases as two men enter the square from the north. One is tall and muscular, the other short and roundish. They are both obviously of pure Suel ancestry, and they bear an almost identical resemblance to each other...from the neck up, at least. The taller of the pair wears a golden holy symbol of Saint Cuthbert around his neck.

Behind the two walk a pair of the most...interesting...creatures you have likely ever laid eyes upon. Quadruped, they look

much like horses, save for a pair of odd humps sticking out of their back.

As the pair passes the line, the taller one stops suddenly and looks at you. The animal he leads almost runs into him, but he seems not to notice. Watery blue eyes meet yours and he says in a deep voice

“You.”

He smiles and waves for you to follow him.

Artaxerxes and Hadrian will head to a smallish tent flanked by two guards bearing polearms and wearing surcoats that have a picture of the strange beasts bearing a rider on the breast. A **Knowledge (Nature)** check **DC 10** will tell the heroes that the animals are camels, and a **Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty)** check **DC 10** will tell the heroes that this is the personal livery of the Brokenback merchant consortium.

When the brothers enter, they will quickly sit in a pair of chairs, and gesture for the heroes to have a seat on chairs that the guards bring for them. Without saying anything, Hadrian will openly examine them while Artaxerxes will look down and play with the holy symbol around his neck.

Hadrian will then speak:

“Well, friends, introductions are in order. I am Hadrian, and this is my brother Artaxerxes. Together we run the Brokenback merchant consortium. Today we are doing the last of our hiring for a second caravan to Yorora, in Linth. Tell me who you are and why my brother thinks you are so important.”

Hadrian will listen to the heroes, noting their responses. Even if they simply say that they have no idea why Artaxerxes chose them, he will nod and listen.

After the heroes are done, Hadrian will speak again.

“Well, my brother claims divine guidance in his actions. I have no such saint to guide my steps. However, I trust in his judgement. Will you accept a commission to travel to Yorora as guards for our caravan? I can offer you each the sum of four hundred and fifty gold for the trip.”

Artaxerxes suddenly looks up and speaks a jumble of words. They come slowly, as if it takes great effort to force them past his lips.

“You must go to Yorora. There is much anger which will need to be quelled, an old wound that must begin to be healed. An old enemy forged into a new friend. A mistake unmade and a trophy unstuffed.”

Seemingly overcome by his fit of words, Artaxerxes lowers his head and rocks back and forth in his chair. Hadrian quickly steps behind him and starts to soothe him.

If the heroes immediately agree:

“Outstanding! You leave in two hours time. Speak to my quartermaster outside and he will tell you what you need to bring and where you can obtain it.”

If the heroes decline, or seem disinterested, Artaxerxes will speak:

“There will be no growth in Yorora without your aid. I beg you to go, in the name of Cuthbert.”

Hadrian looks at his brother askance, then back to you.

If the heroes continue to decline, award them no XP and no gold, this adventure is over for them.

After the heroes agree, Hadrian will thank them and usher them out of the tent to go see Bella the quartermaster.

Some basic information the heroes might ask for:

1. Yorora is the name of the new town being founded by the Brokenback Consortium. It is named for the departed mother of the brothers.
2. This is the second of two caravans to go to Yorora. After this caravan, the town is expected to become self-sufficient.
3. This caravan is smaller than the first, and contains mostly family of the first caravan as well as supplies.
4. Yorora is located on the northwest shore of Lake Athetki, on what will become a hub of trade in the new Linth.

ENCOUNTER 1: THE QUARTERMASTER

Bella is a female dwarf, hired by the Brokenback merchants to act as their supplies and quartermaster. She is quite young for a dwarf, under fifty, and bears what can only be described as a disturbing resemblance to a male dwarf.

Despite this, and the rudeness she invariably gets from just about everyone, she performs her job well.

When the players approach her:

You see a young female dwarf directing people near the fountain itself. By the description, this must be the Brokenback quartermaster, Bella. As you approach, she snaps out:

“An who’re you? Dun tell me that lack-wit Artaxerxes is sendin’ YOU to me? By Moradin’s twisted toes, you have no more business bein’ on the road than an unhatched egg.”

After grouching, Bella will direct the heroes to get their basic gear. This is a good opportunity to introduce new players to the Goods and Services section of the PHB. Normally it is assumed that upkeep costs handle much of the drudge labor in this area but for this adventure it is essential to know how much of everything the heroes have at their disposal.

During the walkthrough, Bella will continually grouse and gripe about the size of the caravan (100 or so non-combatant types), the amount of wagons needed to get that many people moving (another 200 or so, with supplies) and the amount of animals that had to be procured (400 or more horses and mules). Bella will reluctantly admit that even though this undertaking is massive, it’s only a third of the size of the first caravan.

After the heroes are settled in with their gear, Bella will walk the heroes to the staging area where they will meet the caravan’s mercenary captain, Drekken.

Drekken is a short and swarthy Oerdian man who dresses in typical mercenary fare: chainmail hauberk and a longsword. He will quickly and efficiently eye the heroes, assign them each a light warhorse “to be returned in the shape it was given” and tell them their duties.

Drekken efficiently gets you settled in with your mounts from the stables. Patting his own roan, he speaks to you.

“You’re to be our advance scouts. The kingdom typically has little problem with banditry but once we enter Linth all bets are off. The stories I’ve heard there are all ugly. You are to move a mile ahead of the caravan once we get moving, deal with any troubles you can, and report those you can’t.”

If pressed for further information, Drekken is remarkably ill-informed. He will say that it’s simply his job to be prepared and that he doesn’t really expect anything to attack a caravan this size in civilized lands. Of Linth, he will say that he’s heard most of the creatures still alive are warped and twisted, but that he’s also heard that much of the wildlife is dead or fled.

Once the heroes are gathered, geared up, and prepared, on to the adventure!

ENCOUNTER 2: TRANSITIONS

The caravan gathers and begins to move with surprising speed. By midday you are a good ten miles from the capitol, with the body of the caravan about a mile behind you. The roads in this section of the kingdom are exceedingly well maintained, leading to the high rate of travel.

The fields of Keoland remain green through even the harshes of winters. Only a freakish cold snap during the winter of CY595 can be remembered as a difficult time in recent memory.

The road threads around a small hill, turning south, and all the lush greenery you are surrounded by suddenly...stops.

Ahead of you, the ground is cracked and parched, the grasses and trees withered and dead. The soil itself has the consistency of baked clay, with cracks a handwidth wide running in every direction. Eerily, the transition from lush greenery to desolation is razor sharp. You can clearly straddle the line where the two border, and it extends as far as you can see in either direction.

Linth suffered the Blight when the ley lines surrounding it were sundered. When the ley lines were restored, Linth regained the potential for growth again. Obviously, this is a situation that will have to be helped along with human hands and will.

If the Heroes return to the caravan, Drekken will tell them to bear south on whatever road remains to Laketowne.

Once the heroes move into Linth, play up the sense of desolation and detachment that the land now suffers from. Any hero who is a Druid or Ranger will feel ill at ease here. All animals the

heroes have with them will be skittish and spook easily. Whenever the heroes are with the caravan, the travelers and other guards will be extremely unsettled. This is land that many of them have seen in years past, now totally altered. Almost immediately, the cry of “everything will be fine once we get to Yorora” will pass among the caravan like a mantra. Make sure that the heroes hear this numerous times whenever they are with the caravan.

Everything in Linth was hurt deeply by the Blight. The heroes will pass through groves of trees that are little more than standing skeletons without leaves, and pass over dried out streambeds and gullies. They will pass many dried out skeletons of farm animals, and pass homesteads and villages all emptied by royal edict.

The sun will begin to set about an hour after crossing into the Linth border, and the heroes should return to the caravan and set up camp. As they are returning to the caravan, a twisted denizen of Linth attacks them!

APL 2 (EL 3)

Giant Praying Mantis: hp 26; *Monster Manual*, page 285.

After returning to the caravan, the heroes will be lauded by the other guardsmen and the passengers for their bravery and heroism. The caravan will grind to a halt on the cracked rocks of the land and settle in for a long evening.

During the evening the heroes will discover that Linth has more in common with a harsh desert these days than the rest of the kingdom. The temperature will drop to below freezing, prompting the caravan’s passengers to huddle for warmth and to start fires with what wood is available. The heroes are free to set whatever watch they wish. Other than the howl of a few nocturnal scavengers during the evening, nothing of interest occurs.

In the morning Drekken will advise them to once again take lead scout positions and to follow the road to Laketowne. He advises them that they are to enter the town, scout it for any danger or goods of value, and return.

ENCOUNTER 3: A TOWN REMEMBERED

Laketowne was once a thriving town, but it suffered heavily during Hannah Linth’s murderous pogrom against the Oerdians and the Blight

afterwards. By the time the Royal Standards and the loyal Knights of the Watch arrived to enforce the evacuation order, only a sliver of the population remained.

Every man has a limit to what he will do before he reaches a limit and says “no more.” The people who remained in Laketowne banded together behind the innkeeper who owned the largest and most prosperous inn, The Flustered Flumph. When they were ordered to evacuate Linth by the largely Suloise forces of the Knights of the Watch, the Knights responded by slaying the townsfolk. A detachment of the Keoish Royal Standards who was in Laketowne to enforce order then attacked the Knights, and was butchered to the last man. This series of crimes has remained hidden, until now.

Traveling on the road towards Laketowne, you remain surrounded by arid cracked rock in all directions. No clouds dot the sky, no rainfall will be along to quench this land today. By the looks of it, no rainfall has touched the ground in years here.

As the sun rises to midday so does the temperature. Ahead of you on the road the heat begins to distort your view of the distance. Sweat begins to blossom on your skin.

After traveling for two hours more, the haze ahead of you seems to miraculously clear as you top a small rise. The road runs down towards a peaceful looking town set along the shores of a lake with deep blue waters.

Allow the heroes to move in towards Laketowne. From this point on the rise it will take them about a half hour’s ride to reach the outskirts of town and see the condition of the town. Many of the outlying farms are burned out hulks, with skeletons of farm animals everywhere. As the heroes move into the town itself they can see that the destruction continues and that there is obviously nothing of value in many of the ruined buildings.

The road through town runs to a central square, where the Flustered Flumph still stands as the only building more than partially intact. The heroes can easily see it standing over the ruins of many other buildings.

Moving through the ruins of Laketowne, it is painfully obvious that something horrible occurred here, and that little of value is left. The entire town would have to be razed to the ground and rebuilt to be made habitable.

When the heroes move to the Flustered Flumph:

Until now the skeletons you have seen have all been farm animals of one type or another. Closing in on the lone remaining building in Laketowne this abruptly changes. The town's central square is awash in fallen skeletons and even from this distance you can see that most of them are wearing armor.

The central square is the scene of Laketowne's massacre. As the heroes move into it they can see that all other exits from the square other than the road they stand on have been barricaded off by carts and other debris. Jumbles of skeletons lay toppled by the barricades. These skeletons are not wearing any armor, and are the bodies of the townsfolk.

Away from the barricades, towards the square's well, it is obvious a pitched battle was fought. At least a hundred distinct skeletons can be made out, most with obvious signs of external trauma. Laying at the base of the well is a broken banner bearing the heraldry of the Keoish Royal Standards. The majority of the square is covered in dried blood.

The bodies are all well preserved, and the weapons and armor appear to have suffered from exposure although none of them show any signs of rusting or corrosion. It is obvious that it has not rained here in a long time.

In case any hero asks, the well is bone dry.

After the heroes have had their fill and are starting to wander or make for the Inn, read or paraphrase the following:

"War. War never changes," Calls out a deep, deliberate voice. Sitting in a chair on the porch of the inn is a dark skinned man with black hair pulled back into an elaborate braid. Ornate plate mail covered in light blue runes protects his body. His elbows rest on his knees and his cheek rests on his hands which are closed around the hilt of a sheathed greatsword.

"You're the first people to come here in a long time, travelers. Have you come to bear witness to the horrors of Laketowne? Or have you come at the behest of the masters, to clean and hide their mistakes?"

Allow the heroes to make their replies as they will. The person seated in front of them is Milo Astra, a Knight of the Watch. In KEO3-3 *Will of the People*, Milo perpetrated an attempt on the Earl of Linth's life in an effort to cause a civil war which would

topple the Linth house and prevent the an ancient prophecy from coming true. He was slain by the Earl's guards, a group of hired adventurers. Afterwards, his body was secretly taken away to the Linth manor house, where it was stuffed and mounted as a personal trophy. After the events of KEO4-05 *A Last Dance at Midnight*, Milo's body was recovered and he was *resurrected* by the Knights of the Watch and returned to duty.

Milo Astra was part of the detachment of Knights in Laketowne when they committed the butchery of the townsfolk. Milo chose to fight on the behalf of the Keoish Royal Standards who tried to protect the townsfolk, and was the only person to survive the massacre from either side. He has been living in Laketowne ever since with the aid of a *ring of sustenance* that he wears on his right hand.

Milo is understandably upset that the order he serves has slunk so low as to be butchering peasants and loyal soldiers, and so he has remained here to avoid being ordered to commit any further atrocities.

If the heroes ask what happened here, Milo will tell them of the final days of Laketowne.

"It was butchery, really and nothing more. We came to Laketowne to enforce the evacuation edict. There were maybe fifty people left in the town, all slowly starving to death. There comes a point where a man says that he has had enough and he draws a line in the sand. These people followed the innkeeper when he drew his line and refused to leave his home.

The Knights barricaded the side streets and ordered them to leave again. The townsfolk refused, claiming their right to live here as "The Will of the People".

"The Knights grew angered at this flaunting of their authority, and they began to slaughter the townsfolk. A small squad of Royal Standards tried to save them, but the Knights killed them as well. Then they trapped the remaining townsfolk in this Inn and set it ablaze. I fought them as well as I could, betraying my oath as a Knight, even, but I was knocked unconscious and left for dead."

Milo is telling the entire truth. He was unable to prevent the slaughter of the innocents and now he punishes himself by remaining here. If the heroes examine the inn, they will see that the interior is burned out and that piles and piles of corpses lay within. It is not a sight for the weak of heart.

Milo will tell the heroes that there is nothing in Laketowne of value, and ask them what they are doing here. He will be pleasant and polite and ask to accompany the heroes back to the caravan. He will mention that he knows the lands of Linth well, and that he feels it is time to leave this town now that others know the truth of what occurred.

If the heroes decline to travel with Milo, he will simply shrug and follow them anyway. Eventually he will see the dust kicked up by the caravan and will join up with it.

Should the heroes head down to Lake Athetki, read or paraphrase the following:

The lake that had appeared so inviting from a distance is muddy and befouled up close. Grains of some mineral as big as grains of rice float in the water, giving off a putrid stench. You see no fish in the water but the shore is littered with dessicated corpses of aquatic life and larger animals that apparently came to drink from the lake and died right here. Lake Athetki is clearly unsafe to drink from.

If a hero is rash enough to drink from the water, they are in much danger. The hero will immediately feel thirstier than before they drank and will have to make a Will save DC 12 to avoid drinking further from the water source. Every round the hero drinks they will suffer one point of strength and constitution damage and the Will save DC increases by 1.

Eventually the hero drinks themselves to death. If this starts to occur, advise the other heroes that they see what is happening. Grappling or otherwise physically preventing the afflicted hero from drinking for a full round gives the hero another Will save and lowers the DC by 1. When the hero makes a Will save, they no longer feel the compulsion to drink.

Some heroes may attempt to filter out the grains of sediment. This will NOT prevent the above from happening.

ENCOUNTER 4: YORORA

When the heroes return to the caravan they are again lauded for returning safely. Drekken will listen to their assessment of Laketowne's viability and will opt against camping there for the night. Instead, the caravan will again rest under the stars. For a second night the temperature will dip

down below freezing and the howls of hungry scavengers will be heard.

When the sun rises, the heroes are a good day's travel from the Yorora site. Drekken will again set them out to scout, telling them to ride west along the shore of Lake Athetki. Yorora is located where Lake Athetki and the Athetki River meet, on the western bank. It will be basically impossible for the heroes to miss.

The journey to Yorora is more of the same: ruined steadings and abandoned homes dot the horizon. The ground is cracked and parched, and the heat rises to unbearable levels during the day. No clouds ever dot the sky. The entirety of Lake Athetki seems poisoned and unsuitable to drink, yet it constantly tantalizes the heroes and their mounts. Continue to play up the theme of desolation and emptiness as the heroes travel the last twenty miles or so to Yorora.

Ahead of you, through the haze, you see the wavering outlines of several buildings. As you close, you can see that they are no heat mirage but rather they are the framework of many buildings in the process of being built. Yorora, at last!

The last few minutes into Yorora should feel satisfying. The heroes have traversed horrid terrain, faced twisted monsters, and seen the devastation of Laketowne. Yorora and some well deserved rest are their reward.

Unfortunately, this is not to be. When the heroes approach Yorora (with or without the caravan):

The exhilaration that you might have felt at seeing Yorora quickly fades. Passing into the town, you see lines of freshly dug graves. There is no work being done in Yorora. Everywhere you look, you see people huddled in the shade, doing as little as they can. A low murmur builds among the first townfolk to see you, and before you know it, a dozen or more townfolk surround you and your mounts.

"Praise to Dalt! They've come!"

"Water, tell us you have brought water!"

"Please, save us from this place!"

"A sip, my lords? My child is so thirsty!"

The situation in Yorora is dire. All the water is poisoned, even from the wells the townfolk have dug. People are slowly dying and the heroes quickly become their only hope.

Eventually a tall and thin man wearing ecclesiastical vestments and the holy symbol of Pelor will rush to the heroes. He will introduce himself as Brother Artus. With the water troubles in Yorora, he has become the de facto leader because he and his acolyte have the ability to summon drinking water. Unfortunately there are far too many people in Yorora for the two priests alone to be able to support. All water has been strictly rationed and rotated. Even with these precautions, Yorora is still on the verge of suffering a massive die-off.

When the caravan rolls into Yorora it will be met with great glee. Before the situation can get under control, many of the townsfolk will gorge themselves on the water supplies of the caravan. Eventually Artus and Drekken will be able to get a handle on the situation but not before it becomes clear how dear the water is to Yorora.

There are many homecomings and many tears as families are reunited and as some find out that loved ones are dead. The late afternoon quickly passes into night and the townsfolk settle in for another chilly evening. A meal is cooked and as the heroes are settling down at their campsite, they are called in to speak with Artus and Drekken.

Summoned from your dinner by a young Pelorite acolyte, you are led to the only structure that was fully completed in Yorora: the church of Pelor. Brother Artus and Drekken are already seated inside as you enter, and the acolyte bows and leaves.

Artus speaks without preamble.

“We are on the crux of a dire situation here, friends. As you can see, Yorora is dying. We are rapidly losing options. Drekken tells me that if we turned around right now, gathered everyone we could and set off, that we would lose every beast of burden in two days, and then begin marching ourselves to death in the waste.

Therefore, we must find a way to cleanse the water of Athetki. I have spoken with Pelor and he is displeased that his brow causes so much pain and death here. He tells me that the waters are being constantly poisoned and that if we cleanse them, that the land shall respond.

The Athetki River flows from the north, in the hills. We will gather what water we can spare and send it with you. You must find the source

of the pollution and stop it within three days time, or hundreds more will die.”

The heroes may have some questions, Artus will answer them as best he can but he isn't terribly well informed. He knows that the five clerics in town (himself, his acolyte, and three more that came with the PC's caravan) cannot conjure enough water for the entire town to survive, and that the additional caravan population is going to force a very ugly decision shortly.

Artus will elaborate that the thirst craze has driven many people and all of the beasts of burden to drink from the waters. When this happens, the drinker dies within two days.

Artus has no inkling of what lies upriver.

When the heroes are about to leave, Milo will enter.

The front door opens and Milo sweeps in, brushing past the acolyte who tries feebly to stop him. With a grunt, Milo pushes him out and closes the door. Turning back to you, he smiles grimly.

“So, you're going to send them upriver? Don't look so surprised, I wasn't eavesdropping. It's what I would do in this situation. You need the river cleansed, and these folk have proven their mettle already.”

Milo salutes you all grimly, drawing his greatsword to do so.

“One word of advice. I know those foothills from which the Athetki flows. There was a dwarven mining operation there many years ago, which was taken over by the Watchers when something went wrong within the mines. I don't know what it was, but I suggest we keep an eye out for it.

No, I don't have a mouse in my pocket. I'm coming with you.”

Milo will absolutely refuse to hear any reason as to why he should stay. He will insist that it is a matter of personal honor for him to attempt to help the people of Yorora, and that by sitting here he is merely leeching off of them.

ENCOUNTER 5: LEAVING YORORA

In the morning the heroes will gather up and the townsfolk will cheer them as they ready to leave. Artus will approach them.

“Here,” says Artus “This is all the water we can spare. It should be enough for you for two days apiece. Unfortunately, the mounts you brought with you will not be able to go further, and they require more water. You will have to go on foot.”

Artus smiles grimly.

“Pelor guide your steps, and thank you.”

Once the heroes leave Yorora, they are on their own in the wilds of Linth. It is a two day trip to Bakersfield, though the heroes don't know that yet.

The first day passes quickly and uneventfully. The river continues to be filled with poisonous sediment, although it is even larger and more obvious as the heroes move upstream. Even the untrained eye can see that they are nearing the source of the corruption

On the dawn of the second day, as the heroes are preparing to move north, they will come under attack by a Salt Mephit released from the Bakersfield Mine.

APL 2 (EL 3)

Thirsty thirsty, Male Salt Mephit: hp 19; see *Monster Manual*, page 184

When the mephit attacks, Milo will be nowhere to be found. As the battle winds down (or if the heroes are in danger of losing), Milo will sweep back into camp and help the heroes. As Milo is significantly higher level than the heroes, it would be a matter of ease for him to dispose of the mephit, but to have him do so will undermine the heroes' accomplishments.

If questioned, Milo will sheepishly admit that he was out doing some early morning scouting and attempting to forage for additional food sources.

DM Note: As this combat takes place in essentially an open plain, no map is included. Have the mephit start 80' away and roll for initiative normally.

Tactics: Thirsty thirsty will leadoff with his Glitterdust ability while flying towards the PCs. He will then attempt to fly into the middle of the largest group of PCs and use his ability to draw moisture from the area, and then his breath weapon before resorting to his claws. When the Mephit uses his draw moisture ability, do not roll 2d8 as stated in the *Monster Manual*; instead apply the average damage of the attack, 9.

Development: Any hero damaged by the Mephit's draw moisture ability must make a Will save DC 15 to overcome with thirst and will immediately need to drink their water ration for the day or suffer the penalties listed in the Preparation for Play section. This will lead to the heroes needing to decide who goes thirsty and how much water they need to share.

ENCOUNTER 6: BAKERSFIELD

After the heroes have dealt with the denizens of Linth, they should continue moving northward. After about an hour's walking:

With the poisonous Athetki River on your left side, you continue traveling north, seeing the source of the river's poisoning. Within an hour, you see smoke drifting lazily up from over some small foothills. It is not the smoke of an out-of-control blaze, but more the type you might see rising from a baker's shop in the morning.

When the heroes move closer, they will see the town of Bakersfield.

The bustling town you see alongside the River Athetki is entirely out of place with the rest of the Earldom that you have seen. Green and lush fields spread out around the town while fifty or more houses line the riverbank, and a small market can be seen. Beyond the town, just to the north, you can see a massive mining operation that abuts the river itself. From here you can see a small sign near the side of the path ahead of you, though you cannot make out what it says from here.

The sign reads "Bakersfield. Population 213. Founded CY 595" in red paint.

Bakersfield and its inhabitants:

Bakersfield is, as mentioned, a town made up of people who refused to leave during the worst days of the Blight. Because of this, all of the town's inhabitants are changed by the experience. Many of them have obvious deformities such as missing digits or limbs, extra limbs, additional eyes, missing ears, et cetera. The populace is not necessarily all misshapen freaks as some of the deformities are more subtle than others. The primary change that the people have undergone is that they no longer eat 'normal' food to survive. They gain nourishment from the minerals they mine.

The animals of Bakersfield are another matter altogether. Many of the survivors were farmers and they brought their livestock here. Those of the livestock that survived quickly became deformed and adapted to their unusual appetites. Bakersfield maintains an entire herd of cows, all of which have two heads and which seem to eat minerals as well. These animals are well treated and seen as a blessing from the gods, since the population no longer needs them as food.

When the heroes move into Bakersfield, they will cause quite a disturbance.

Your arrival on the path has not gone unnoticed. Below you, you can see people running from the mine towards the town, and the rapid beating of an alarm gong reaches your ears.

At this point the heroes can either decide to approach the town or leave. Bakersfield is very protective of its people, and if the heroes start a fight and cause lethal damage, that hero will be killed. There are simply too many townsfolk to overcome.

If the heroes leave, it will be an unwise decision, leading to the death of many people in Yorora, and likely themselves as they die of thirst in the wasteland.

If the heroes approach the town, they will be challenged as they reach the outer ring of houses. Bakersfield has no wall, so ten townsfolk will approach, armed with makeshift weapons and armor. Leading these guards will be Heinren Bakerson, mayor of Bakersfield.

The heroes will be challenged and asked to identify themselves and their business. If they remain cordial and polite, Heinren will gesture for the guards to lower their weapons and for the heroes to move closer.

You get a better view of the big man leading the guards as he approaches you. In the light of Pelor you can see that his face is misshapen and scarred, with one eye partially closed over with excess skin. He gestures towards you with a hand that has only three large fingers, and when he speaks you can see that his teeth are sharpened stones that sparkle in the light.

“Please, come no farther if you mean trouble. We have had enough of that to last us the rest of our lives. I am Heinren Bakerson, and this is our town. What brings you to Bakersfield?”

Allow the heroes to continue their story. If they don't threaten Heinren, he will invite them into Bakersfield for an emergency town council. Many of the people of Bakersfield will peer out at the heroes from behind half-closed shutters. Every person and animal the heroes see is twisted and stunted.

Heinren will give an impromptu tour of Bakersfield, with more than a little pride in his voice. He will outline Bakersfield's history as written in the Adventure Background, and will advise the heroes that the only reason he had armed guards meet them is that they are wary of outsiders these days. Heinren will look pointedly at Milo and say that the townsfolk will fear any Knight of the Watch until they have had a chance to evaluate him for themselves. Early after the formation of Bakersfield, Heinren sent a scouting team to Laketowne to recover anything of value that they could, and they discovered the massacre but never saw Milo.

The emergency council meeting will be quick and to the point. The majority of the town will attend, and the heroes will be asked a small parcel of questions. Allow the heroes to answer as they may, with Milo privately suggesting to them that the truth is the best answer they have.

Who are you, and why are you in Bakersfield?

If the heroes relay their story, and that of Yorora, the people of Bakersfield will be aghast. Although they are twisted externally, they are basically good folk who have no desire to see others suffer.

Why do you travel with a Knight of the Watch?

Milo will allow the heroes to answer this. If the heroes relay the story of the Laketowne massacre, Milo will confirm it and Heinren will tell of his scouting party to Laketowne.

Eventually the heroes should make the logical conclusion that it is Bakerfields' mining operation that is poisoning the Athetki. If they do not, then Milo will quickly and quietly point out to them that mining operations are known to put out a tremendous amount of waste, and with the amateur miners here, that waste could only be more horrid.

When the heroes bring up the mine, in any capacity, Heinren will speak.

“I knew it would come to this. I can see in your eyes that you recognize some of what happened to us, but you do not understand it all. In the darkest days of Blight, we

all...changed. More than what you see with your eyes, we changed inside. We were overcome with a hideous hunger, one and all. Meats, cheeses, breads...these things no longer satisfied us any more than sand and sawdust might satisfy you.

What we craved was the rock, the metal itself. One might think we'd become dwarves with the way we hungered for these metals, but we hunger for them not to wear or fashion, but to consume as you might a cow.

We re-opened the mine to the northwest of here. For six months we excavated the area, feasting off lesser metals.

And then we discovered heatrock."

Heinren produces a greenish-brown rock from a small bag. All eyes in the place are drawn to it, and you could swear you see some openly salivating over it, despite the fact that they look well fed.

Heinren will go on to explain the rest of Bakersfield's mining history and what they know of heatrock. This rock was easily identifiable because after exposed to sunlight it heats up, and when taken from the sun it emits an eerie red glow, as well as a sizeable amount of heat. Bakersfield uses it as food and a source of warmth during the cold evenings.

Heinren will then tell the heroes about the tragedy in the old mine, where the miners came across a sealed door and foolishly opened it. The creatures that were trapped within burst forth and forced the miners out. Afterwards, Bakersfield started their current mining operation, which Heinren will admit is amateur at best, and probably poisoning the Athetki River.

Heinren will quell the hubbub of the meeting at this point and make the heroes an offer.

"Well travelers, I can see we have a problem. We don't wish to kill our kin in the south, but we must have this ore to survive. The mine in the hills had an underground river for disposal of the wastes there, which apparently never harmed the aboveground river or lake before. If you can find a way to seal the gates and kill the creatures in the mine, we'll gladly return there and stop our operation on the Athetki."

If the heroes agree, the people of Bakersfield have one more demand.

A young boy stands in the back of the hall and points at Milo. You can see that in the middle of the boy's forehead is a third eye.

"They can go, but he has to stay here, and agree to remain peaceable. I've seen what the Watchers did in Lakwetowne, and it won't happen here. He guarantees their good conduct."

The townsfolk will loudly agree, worried about letting any Knights of the Watch out of their sight. Milo will shrug and nod sadly, agreeing. Any hero who argues against this can do so, but Milo will pat them on the arm and tell them that he understands. With a smile he will tell them that they had better not fail.

By the time the meeting is done, the noonday meal has passed and it is approaching evening. All throughout Bakersfield the town will become illuminated and warmed by heatrock. The townsfolk have taken larger chunks of heatrock and mounted them on small platforms ten feet off the ground. They cast the town in an eerie red glow by night but provide plenty of light to see by.

The heroes are free to stay the evening and travel to the mine in the morning, or to go immediately. If they go immediately they risk being low on spells and supplies in the mine. If they go in the morning they risk more people in Yorora dying because of their delay as well as being out of water themselves unless they have a cleric or druid with them. Adventuring is full of tough decisions.

If the heroes stay they are invited to the evening "meal" in the great hall where the residents eat a truly immense amount of heatrock. They are invited to tell tales and are in turn entertained by one of the local girls who plays both the violin and the flute, with the aid of her second pair of arms.

Whenever the heroes decide to leave, Milo will pull them aside.

"I don't have any idea what's in the mine now, but I know that dwarves used to live there and that the Knights of the Watch had to go in and seal something up when the dwarves let it out. Apparently every door has a key. Watchers don't have a lot of use for sorcery in general, so I'd guess that the door is more mechanical in nature. Good luck closing it."

ENCOUNTER 7: WHAT LIES BENEATH

The mine is about a two hour walk from Bakersfield. It is easily found, as the path to it is lit with many piles of heatrock. The opening of the mine is littered with mining equipment discarded when the townsfolk fled.

The mine itself is a simple affair, at least in the upper area before the seal. A simple shaft leads down, with a wide path spiraling down. The shaft descends forty feet at a slight angle and then becomes a tunnel going due south at a ten degree decline. Dwarven characters may learn this information with the appropriate Stonecunning check.

After fifty feet of tunnel, the heroes will see a giant double door, wide open.

The tunnel is broken by a massive granite double door covered in runes and etchings. Rather, it would be broken, if the door weren't wide open. In the center of each side of the double door you can see a half circle. If the door were closed, the halves would form a complete circle.

In the chamber beyond is a truly miraculous sight. A slow moving trickle of lava drops down from a hole in the ceiling, runs over hard bedrock, then disappears down another hole. In the middle of the stream of lava is a small glowing hole in the fabric of space. You can clearly see through it, to a realm of solid fire.

On the floor before the lava is a large golden disk, perfectly circular in shape. Two inhuman shapes lounge near it.

The disk is indeed the keystone for the door. If the door is closed (requiring a strength check DC 13) and the disk is slid into place, the entire mechanism will shudder and click, locking itself into place.

The difficulty in this is that the fire creatures in the room don't particularly want to be sealed in here any longer.

APL 2 (EL 3)

(2) Small Fire Elementals: hp 9; see *Monster Manual*, page 99.

The room is a 50' square with the lava river running north-south on the easternmost squares. The golden disk is lying twenty feet from the lava.

Tactics: The Elementals fight mindlessly to defend their portal, but without much in the way of tactics. They attack the closest creature that looks like it could stand to be set on fire.

Development: Defeating the elementals through force of arms, while laudable, is not the goal here. Closing the door is. One round after a small fire elemental is slain, another will leap from the portal and into the fight. If the heroes slay four small elementals (the original two, and a pair of replacements), a full round will pass and a Medium Fire Elemental will leap from the portal and move to attack. The heroes should get the hint long before then, but if they manage to slay the Medium elemental, another full round will pass and then another Medium Fire Elemental will leap out. Should the heroes manage to slay that, another full round will pass and a Large Fire Elemental will leap from the portal.

DM Note: This combat is designed to be an exercise in running combat. Allow heroes to be heroic and drag unconscious heroes out just before closing the door and slamming it shut.

ENCOUNTER 8: BRINGING THE WORD

Now that the heavy lifting is done, the heroes simply have to rush back to Yorora via Bakersfield as quickly as possible to pass the word.

The people of Bakersfield will be delighted at the heroes' success and will gladly release Milo to them. They will agree to use the old mine and not to open the sealed door again. The current mine is shut down immediately and the poison begins to wash its way down the Athetki.

Returning to Yorora takes two days on foot, but the danger for the heroes is over. The River is fast moving and the poisonous granules flow away quickly, leaving nothing but pure water, safe to drink.

When the heroes return to Yorora, the town greets them as heroes and the celebrations commence.

Unfortunately, for every day of the heroes' trip, fifteen people in Yorora succumb to thirst and die. This means a minimum of sixty people die while the heroes travel, but that if they delay many more could die.

Milo suggests that the heroes not spread word of Bakersfield's existence too far, as the people who live there would be viewed with suspicion at best,

and would likely be hunted and burned at the stake by insular Keoish peasants once Linth is restored. Milo promises to speak to an old friend in the army about having the area defended by Royal Standards until a more permanent measure can be found.

CONCLUSION

With your success in bringing clean water to Yorora, you have ensured the safety and stability of the new town. Within weeks, regular caravans are traversing the wastes of Linth as people return to a land vastly different than what they knew. With time and guidance, it may be possible to reclaim even this wasteland.

The town of Bakersfield becomes something of a legend. The town is declared off-limits to travelers and a permanent outpost of Royal Standards is created to protect it. Within a few months, carvings and statuary made of a strange new metal begin to filter into Keoish society. The statues glow red by night and put off an incredible amount of heat. They quickly become prized symbols of social status and it isn't long before many important families have several on display in their homes...

The Brokenback merchants continue their support of the Neheli families, shoring up support for them through tough political climes. Hadrian begins discussions with the peoples of Ulek about expanding imports. The wealth of the consortium grows, angering powerful rivals in the Rhola clans.

The Laketowne massacre becomes the talk of the Kingdom, and the Knights of the Watch undergo another painful schism. However, all is not lost. A star rises in Most Contrite Ironclad Mauler Milo Astra. Returned to the ranks of the Knights of the Watch, many see him as a link between the largely Suloise order and the largely Keogh people it protects.

The End