

MIDNIGHT

CROWN OF SHADOW



An Epic Quest Across Eredane



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Contents

Introduction	3
Adventure Overview	3
Chapter 1: The Forging	6
1-1: Setting Out	6
1-2: Rendezvous at the Trading Post	6
1-3: Skirmish at the Trading Post	9
Chapter 2: The Fall of Durgis Rock	11
2-1: The Trail to Durgis Rock	11
2-2: Durgis Rock	12
2-3: Aftermath	16
Chapter 3: Down from the Mountain	19
3-1: Return to the Trading Post	19
3-2: Hungry Humanitarianism	20
3-3: Hunted	22
Chapter 4: Through the Darkness	24
4-1: Unsafe Refuge	24
4-2: To the Rescue	26
4-3: Pardrum Holdfast	26
Chapter 5: Across the Plains	32
5-1: Big Sky Country	32
5-2: Slavers	33
5-3: Wary Horsemen	35
5-4: Fell Welcome	36
Chapter 6: Against the Current	40
6-1: Northbound	40
6-2: Break in the Clouds	42
6-3: Baden's Bluff	45
Chapter 7: Predator and Prey	47
7-1: Hunter and Hunted	47
7-2: My Enemy, My Friend	49
7-3: Endgame	51
7-4: Death in the Trees	53
Epilogue	55
Appendix	57
Scaling the Adventure	57
Route Map	58
Foes	59
Items	60
Allies	61

Introduction

Crown of Shadow

*...the raven winging
darkly over the doomed will have news,
tidings for the eagle of how he hoked and ate,
how the wolf and he made short work of the dead.*

— Beowulf

Welcome to *Crown of Shadow* (CoS), the first full-length campaign in the MIDNIGHT setting. CoS is designed as a detailed introduction to the world of MIDNIGHT and is intended for a group of four to six 1st-level player characters (PCs). The text assumes the DM is thoroughly familiar with the MIDNIGHT campaign setting (MN). Other resources, such as *MIDNIGHT: Against the Shadow* (AgS), and the *Legends & Lairs* series of d20 System supplements, are also useful in running this adventure.

CoS assumes that all character races and classes are selected from the options presented in MIDNIGHT, and in addition strongly encourages that DMs prohibit their players from creating elven or orc characters, at least for the first part of the campaign. Such characters would be cumbersome for the DM and would rob the plot of some of its mystery, as well as some of the wonder of discovery the characters are meant to experience during play. Though the adventure is presented as if elves and orcs are not party members, this is not an absolute restriction, and suggestions for including characters of various types are offered in the section below called **Joining the Party**.

Adventure Overview

What follows is a short summary of the CoS campaign. If you are a potential player and do not wish to ruin your gaming experience, **stop reading now**.

In CoS the party is drawn into a quest to deliver an object of great value to the elven war effort against the forces of Shadow. The delivery requires a long and dan-

gerous journey across the continent of Eredane from the dwarven settlement of Durgis Rock in the Kaladrin Mountains to the Court of the Witch Queen in the Forest of Erethor. The first challenge is for the members of the party to simply learn to trust and depend on each other. The party must make their journey with little experience, minimal resources and no support, crossing dangerous lands occupied by enemy forces and in which the party members are strangers and proscribed outlaws. The party encounters numerous challenges and surprises along the way and is tracked from the start by agents of Izrador intent on preventing the PCs from completing their quest. In the end the party must face and overcome the worst form of betrayal when one of its own becomes a minion of Shadow.

Adventure Background

The elven war against the forces of the Shadow is increasingly desperate and in her never-ending effort to give her people the advantage, Aradil, the High Queen of Erethor, has been seeking a way to supply her people with mithral weapons and armor. Supply of the material is not an issue, as there are known lodes of it in the Highhorn Mountains that jut into the Veradeen. The problem is one of skill and knowledge; there were once dwarven craftsmen living among the elves and working for them to create such wondrous items, but these honored visitors never taught the craft to outsiders and they have all died or been killed in the wars over the centuries.

For more than 50 years Aradil has tried to obtain the secret of working the ore, but unfortunately the paranoid dwarven people are hidden deep in their holdfasts a continent away, making the task difficult. The queen has sent many agents to parley with the dwarves and those that have not been lost on the journey have either been unable to gain entry into any occupied holdfasts or have been sent away by dwarves incensed at such a pre-

posterior request. No true-hearted dwarf would give up the dwarfkin's greatest secret: that of forging mithral. That is, until recently.

By means of a *dream* spell, Aradil made contact with Woden Durgis, Dorith of a small Durgis Clan settlement in the Kaladrin Mountains called Durgis Rock. The Durgis are a clan of Kurgun dwarves, surface dwellers. Though still isolated and suspicious, the Durgis are more enlightened than their kin and the Dorith was willing to hear her out. He was well aware that the dwarves were losing the war and that the elves might be the last best hope for resisting the Shadow. After careful negotiation with Aradil via *sending* spells, Woden agreed to give the elven queen the instructions and magical formulae for forging mithral, provided she send a trusted and capable agent to collect them in person. The old dwarf had little faith in magic that didn't involve stone or metal, and did not trust the arcane means Aradil wanted to use to collect the scrolls. Aradil, motivated by the concern that Woden might change his mind, hastily dispatched one of her own avatars to collect the valuable documents.

Meanwhile, the forces of the Shadow were not resting idle. The primary villain in this quest, a soldier legate called Jael the Hunter, has searched for years for a legendary magic item that would allow him to infiltrate the elven forest and wreak havoc. He recently found the item, called the *crown of shadow*, after much grueling research and a dangerous quest. The quest for mithral will, unfortunately for the forces of good, be exactly the opening Jael needs to make use of this new weapon.

Rhiann, one of the queen's avatars and a powerful channeler in her own right, and two high-level bodyguards, Bayal the wildlander and Eirinn the fighter, left for the Kaladrins immediately. They traveled down the Felthera River, taking to the forest when the orc patrols grew too thick. They left the wood and crossed the plains, meeting gnomish smuggling contacts on the southwestern shore of the Ardune. From there they traveled to the Ghost Raft and transferred to one of the river barques of the Gale trading company. From the Raft they were taken upriver and put ashore just north of the gnomish village of Swift Water.

Guided by an old gnome trader named Wendell who had once led trading caravans to the Kaladrins and the Durgis clan, they moved overland across the eastern plains. They traveled by night and within an arc (approximately one month; see MN, page 165) made it unmolested into the foothills. Following an old trading road upstream along the Carina River and deep into the mountains, they eventually reached the long-abandoned Durgis trading post at Kurgun Falls.

It is at Kurgun Falls that the elven emissaries and their escort meet the suspicious party of dwarves sent from Durgis Rock to guide them to the settlement, and it is here that the story truly begins.

Intent of the Campaign

The structure of CoS is intended to provide a broad introduction to, and geographical tour of, the world of MIDNIGHT, while establishing a party of characters within the setting and bringing them from 1st to as high as 5th level. The adventure is designed to feature many of the unique elements of the MIDNIGHT premise and provide a story consequential to the setting's background. The adventure highlights the geographic and racial isolation that is a legacy of the war with Izrador and emphasizes the sense of mystery, distrust, and rediscovery inherent in the lack of familiarity between the setting's races. In fact, the adventure is an excellent first campaign for players new to MIDNIGHT, as their unfamiliarity with the setting can be exploited to heighten the intensity of the cultural mystery and the strength to be gained in overcoming it.

Versatility for the DM

In its basic form, CoS is a simple quest, structured as a series of encounters along the path of a long journey. This structure gives DMs a great deal of flexibility, allowing them to include characters of almost any race and giving them the opportunity to expand or contract the campaign's scope to best fit the style of their gaming group. The adventure can easily be expanded by the inclusion of additional encounters, staged where geographically appropriate along the route. Conversely, it can be shortened by removing encounters the DM does not wish to run. The individual encounters can also simply be stripped out and used in other adventures.

In addition to being a campaign-length adventure, CoS is also intended to serve as a valuable setting resource. In addition to MIDNIGHT-specific encounters, it also provides details on MIDNIGHT geography, cultures, settlements, creatures, magical items, and the war with the Shadow.

For information on scaling the adventure for higher levels, see the appendix.

Joining the Party

The PCs become involved from one of two directions: either they are associates of Wendell who are leading the elven emissaries, or they are residents of Durgis Rock sent to meet the emissaries partway along their journey. It is preferable for at least half of the party members to be from Durgis Rock, but it also makes for a more interesting and diverse game if at least some of the party members are also outlanders—humans, halflings, gnomes, or river dwarf. Varied backgrounds will provide the party with valuable knowledge, skills, and abilities that will help it make its way once beyond the mountains.

Because the Durgis clan is known for initiating non-dwarven members, dwarf, dworg, or even

human characters can also be inhabitants of the settlement and therefore easily drawn into the party. Dorns and Erenlanders descended from the House of Orin would be the most appropriate humans, though character backgrounds could be designed that would allow refugees of any human race to be clan members.

If a player insists on running an orc character, or if the DM simply thinks it would be fun to allow it, an orc is easy enough to include in the party. Some Durgis settlements are rumored to have taken in orcs that belong to a secret, persecuted sect, known as the Followers of the White Mother, that opposes the reign of Izrador. If the DM wishes to incorporate this rumor into his campaign, it can be used to account for the PC's presence at Durgis Rock. DMs should be forewarned, however, that an orc is going to make things extremely difficult for the group through much of its journey. Keeping the story true to the intent of the MIDNIGHT setting means being prepared to spend a lot of game time dealing with the prejudices, conflicts, misconceptions, and dangers the presence of an orc PC will create, both with the NPCs the party meets and within the party itself.

If a player insists on running an elf character, there are several options for including her, though each requires that the character have an unlikely background that detaches her from the traditional elven cultures of MIDNIGHT. To preserve the intrigue of the plot and the charm of rediscovery it is important that however an elf PC is included, her background is contrived to limit her knowledge and familiarity with elven culture and Erethor.

It is conceivable that elven enclaves cut off from Erethor by the Shadow's invasion of Erenland might have retreated to the small woodlands in the western Kaladrin foothills. Perhaps individuals from such a group are involved in guiding the elven emissaries into the mountains. Perhaps such a group was raided by orcs and the refugees or orphans were taken in by the Durgis, or have been living with nomadic, free halflings that get involved with the gnomes smuggling the emissaries. The simplest gimmick would be that years ago a Durgis patrol found a half-starved elven child wandering alone in the foothills with no coherent memory of how she got there, and that she was subsequently raised within the clan.

Taking Turns

The structure and route of CoS makes for a unique rotation of authority and character expertise within the party, and as the DM you should work to take advantage of this, encouraging each player in his turn to become the party's guide. The course of the PCs' journey takes them from the Kaladrins to the eastern plains, along the Eren River, into Baden's Bluff, and then finally across the northern Westlands to Erethor. In the mountains the dwarven PCs have the advantage in knowledge, survival skills, and social interactions, and as such are the logical

leaders. Halfling characters will likely be the most skilled and experienced regarding the plains, and therefore the most capable leaders in those surroundings. Gnome PCs become the most appropriate guides on the river, while humans are most appropriate at Baden's Bluff. Once they strike out west from the city the party must pool its collective knowledge and work together to make its way. Such a rotation of in-game authority gives each player his own time in the spotlight, something not easily managed among the strong personalities in most gaming groups.

Chapter Organization

CoS is organized into chapters, each of which is divided into various encounters, some that are central to the plot and others that are not. The chapters are organizational divisions that represent natural breaks in the story and focus on the events that take place in specific geographical regions along the route of the quest. Each chapter begins with a short synopsis and includes descriptions, encounters, mechanisms, and suggestions that help the DM transition the party from one encounter or chapter to the next.

Recurring foes, notable NPCs, and special items are detailed in the appendix. In the case of NPCs that are only mentioned or have a limited role, relevant stats are provided in the text.

This campaign uses the story experience award method as described in the Rewards chapter of the DMG. The suggested awards for each significant event in a chapter are listed at the end of that chapter by encounter. The points are for the entire party and unless otherwise stated, should be divided evenly among the PCs. If, as the DM, your players avoid certain challenges or you choose to add in additional encounters, be sure to adjust the experience awards accordingly. As written, CoS is a considerable challenge for a party of four characters, but assuming the PCs succeed in the quest, they should reach 5th level by the end of the campaign. The adventure can easily handle five players, but unless the party earns the maximum experience awards, the rate of level advancement may be reduced.

DM Advice

The author has thoroughly playtested the adventure with a variety of character types and players. The playtests have served to make the campaign as detailed, complete, and user-friendly as possible. Throughout the book there are suggestions provided to DMs on running given scenes, presenting specific encounters and on general gaming in the world of MIDNIGHT. These asides are tagged as DM Advice and are intended to make running CoS as simple, effective, and fun as possible. These suggestions are only recommendations, however, not absolutes. As a DM you should follow them only where they fit your style and gaming group, and ignore them where they do not.

Chapter 1

The Forging

Synopsis

The PCs arrive at an old dwarven trading post called Kurgun Falls. Dwarven PCs and any outlander PCs meet for the first time and have the opportunity to size each other up. The PCs also have a chance to observe and question the enigmatic elven emissaries about their mission and the world beyond the mountains.

While the PCs spend the night camped at Kurgun Falls, a goblin patrol comes upon the outpost and chooses it as an obvious place to rest. The battle that likely ensues between the PCs and the goblins would be a short one, and hard on the goblins, if not for the fact that the goblins are leading a stone golem to a larger orc force already gathering near Durgis Rock.

Presumably having defeated the goblins, and unable to defeat the golem, the PCs are forced to flee the area, and head deeper into the mountains towards Durgis Rock.

1-1: Setting Out

The action begins with the characters meeting at Kurgun Falls. They arrive either as members of a dwarven patrol sent out from Durgis Rock to meet the elven emissaries, or as members of the emissaries' small escort.

From the East

Aradil is in constant contact with her avatar Rhiann, and has communicated to Woden that her emissaries are nearing Kurgun Falls. Woden has sent out a patrol from Durgis Rock consisting of any PCs from the settlement as well as a single dwarf NPC named Dunkan (Wildlander 2), commonly called "Dunk" by his friends. The PCs may have been chosen because they have recently come of age and are meant to learn the trails

that Dunk knows so well, or perhaps because they are able fighters.

No one in the group, including Dunk, has been told anything of their mission except that they are to meet a party of outlanders at Kurgun Falls and guide them back to Durgis Rock. Woden's recent secretive behavior and strange orders makes the whole business mysterious and should generate a great deal of curiosity, excitement, and even a little suspicion among the PCs. However, life in Durgis Rock is fairly mundane and cloistered, so they should be excited at such an opportunity. Up until now, Durgis Rock has avoided the brunt of the war, and its warriors are either old veterans or unblooded youngsters. All that is about to change.

The patrol from Durgis Rock to Kurgun Falls takes three days and follows various old trading paths, low passes, defiles, and hidden trails that Dunk knows fairly well. Kurgun Falls, however, is as far west of Durgis Rock as even the wildlander has ever been before. The Durgis Rock PCs would know to travel during daylight to reduce their chances of encountering the mostly nocturnal orcs.

From the West

PCs that aren't from Durgis Rock will be approached by their friend, associate, or employer, a gnome trader named Wendell. He will explain that he has need of bodyguards, porters, or simply friendly companions for a trip he is about to undertake on behalf of his merchant house, the Gale family. Any pay is irrelevant, as it should be obvious to the PCs that the trip is not an above-the-boards expedition; rather, this is an opportunity to assist the effort of the war against the Shadow.

Wendell won't explain anything more than that he has been asked to guide some "very important emissaries" into the Kaladrans. The PCs are in for a shock when those emissaries arrive at Wendell's pre-determined hidden glade in the foothills of the Kaladrans

south of Kardoling: These emissaries are elves! The journey gets underway immediately and takes nearly a week.

As the DM, you should pique the PCs' curiosity about the elves, emphasizing their exotic appearance and enigmatic behavior. Remember that Rhiann is an avatar of the Witch Queen (see MN, page 120, and AgS, page 69), and as such her all-black eyes should seem singularly creepy to the PCs. The PCs should be made curious about their mission, but frustrated because the elves either ignore or patronize them and will not divulge any details as to their purpose. They either do not respond to the PCs' questions, deftly change the conversation, or respond simply that "it is vital we meet with Woden the Durgis Rock dorthane."

Even Wendell, usually a talkative know-it-all, pretends to be keeping any details a secret from the PCs. He merely tells them that his captain ordered him to guide the elves to the Durgis clan at Durgis Rock and that he cannot reveal anything more. In truth, he knows nothing more than that. He is genuinely ignorant of what they are about and this clearly bothers his sense of self-importance.

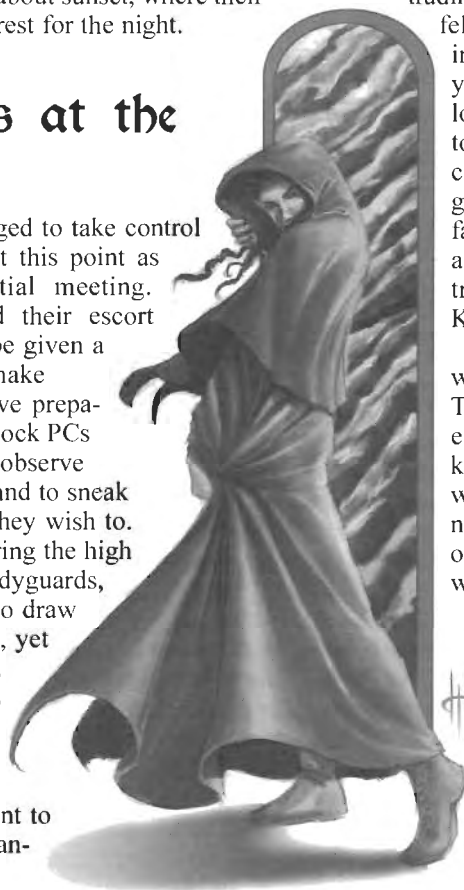
The elves politely decline any food offered them by the PCs, instead preferring to consume only a dark broth they heat in small silver cups on a magical black stone.

The DM should orchestrate the timing so that both parties meet at Kurgun Falls at about sunset, where their respective guides suggest they rest for the night.

1-2: Rendezvous at the Trading Post

The players should be encouraged to take control of the progression of events at this point as they play through their initial meeting. Assuming the emissaries and their escort party arrive first, they should be given a chance to explore the area and make whatever camping and defensive preparations they wish. The Durgis Rock PCs should be given the chance to observe the outlanders from a distance and to sneak up on the emissaries' camp if they wish to. This might be difficult considering the high-level abilities of the elven bodyguards, giving you ample opportunity to draw the PCs into tense, challenging, yet eventually humorous situations.

At some point the PCs should come to some level of understanding and begin cooperating if not actually trusting each other. They will likely want to set up group watches at good van-



DM Advice: Initial Mystery

As the DM, the more you play up the mystery and suspicion of their circumstances, the more the players will carry this over into their roleplaying. This might very well lead to PCs stalking around in the dark trying to spy on each other, and you should encourage or perhaps even instigate this. As is inevitable in roleplaying games the PCs will eventually become trusting allies; encouraging mistrust and suspicion initially, however, will give their meeting and eventual alliance a more interesting and realistic flavor.

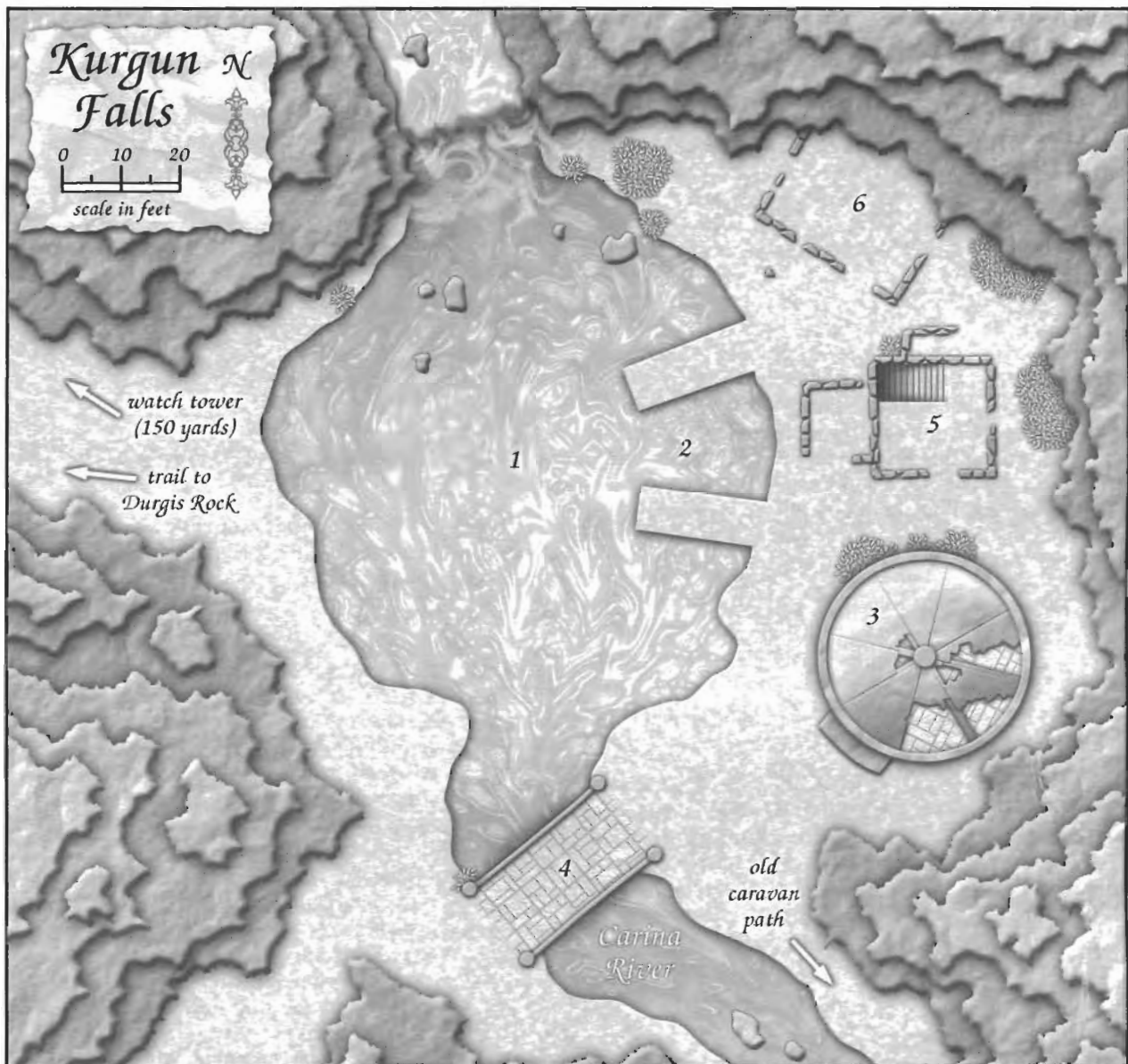
tage points or set up ambushes for any threats. This is a good opportunity to get the players working together and to give the characters a chance to learn about each other.

The Trading Post

Kurgun Falls is as far up the Carina River as gnomish trading skiffs ever traveled before the Shadow fell, and even then the river was often impassible depending upon the time of year. In seasons with exceptionally high or low water, the gnome traders were forced to take mule-drawn caravans up the narrow cart path that paces the river to bring their goods to the trading post. Several trading families made yearly trips to Kurgun Falls and each would spend most of an arc there, trading goods and news with regional Kurgun clans.

As dwarven trade with the outside world dwindled over the last half of the Third Age, fewer and fewer caravans traveled to Kurgun Falls. As far as any gnomes know, the last caravan to the trading post was sent over two hundred years ago and never returned. It was presumed lost to orcs and gnomish traders decided the post was simply too dangerous to maintain.

Kurgun Falls itself is a narrow cataract that separates the head waters and lower reaches of the Carina River. The Falls is almost 60 feet high and flows through most of the year. The water cascades into a small pool from which the Carina continues downstream. The falling water drowns out most sounds in the small valley around



the pool and leaves a chilling mist hanging in the air. As a result all Listen and Spot checks made in the valley are at a -4 penalty.

The valley itself is shallow but steep-sided, with many overlooking crags and a number of trails and rugged defiles leading up into higher country. The vegetation is much thicker than along the surrounding mountain trails.

1. Pool: Over the eons the water from the falls has eroded a deep pool out of the stone floor of the vale and now fills much of the valley floor. The pool is steep-sided and as deep as 45 ft. in places. The water is cold and frothy from the cascade. It contains nothing but some fat mountain trout and any characters forced to spend significant time in the water are subject to hypothermia (see DMG, Chapter 3, The Environment).

2. Quays: Long ago, when the trading post was first built, the bedrock of the eastern shore of the pool

was excavated by dwarven stoneworkers into two small quays for docking gnomish trade skiffs. Though they have suffered notable weathering over the centuries, they are still solid structures.

3. Trading Hall: The trading hall is a squat, two story round tower, built in a traditional dwarven style. It is about 35 feet in diameter and though the roof has mostly caved in, the structure itself is still in good condition and fairly defensible. There is a gaping entrance-way that was once secured with metal doors that were long ago scavenged by human refugees. Two largish, dwarf-height windows occupy opposing points on the walls but they are shutterless and empty.

The outside walls of the hall feature several fanciful gargoyle-like carvings of various mountain spirits as well as a bas relief representing a well known dwarven tale involving them. The inside of the walls of the first floor are half-covered with chiseled pictographs

describing each of the major trade meets that occurred at Kurgun Falls over a period of about 800 years. Any character literate in Old Dwarven willing to spend the time looking over the accounts will discover that the most recent recorded meet occurred more than 300 years ago.

The interior is dark, dusty, low-ceilinged and devoid of anything but a few crumbling bits of stone. A curving, column-like stone stair against the north wall leads up to the second floor and down into a dark basement. The ground floor was once where the business of trade, and the social interaction that accompanied it, took place.

The upper floor has four large windows in opposing positions around the wall and was once a dormitory for the visiting gnomish traders. About one third of the roof has caved in and pieces of stone are scattered across the floor. With a Climb check (DC 10) a character can easily climb up onto the roof, gaining a clear vantage and line-of-sight to the entirety of the small vale.

The basement is very dark, even during the day, and once served as the dwarven quarters. There is old sign of squatters scattered about, perhaps goblin, but nothing else. Any dwarf with stonemasonry or any character with a Search check (DC 12) will discover a thin stone door that leads to a narrow underground passage. The passage leads to the basement in the ruins of the storage outbuilding.

4. Bridge: At the southern end of the pool is a narrow stone bridge that arches over the head of the Carina. Once a solid example of the stoneworker's art, neglect and the passage of countless seasons have caused a small section at the eastern end of the bridge to collapse. The span is still sturdy enough to support up to 500 lbs. at a time, but any load in excess of that, or any sudden blows over 250 lbs. in force, will cause the whole bridge to collapse into the river.

5 & 6. Storage Ruins: Roofless stone walls and foundations just north of the hall are all that is left of a pair of squat storage buildings. There is a short, wide stair that leads to a basement below the storage area. A hidden passage connecting the basement to the lower level of the trading hall is easily noticed by any characters with stonemasonry or a Search check (DC 12).

About 150 yards from the trading hall atop an overlooking cliff are the ruins of an old dwarven watch tower. Thousands of years ago it was a first defense against Dornish invaders that might have come up the Carina. Its walls are all but crumbled, and the chambers beneath are caved in. A winding trail leads from the small valley up to the tower, and from there many trails head off into the surrounding mountains, including the one to Durgis Rock. PCs exploring the tower will discover it provides little protection from the elements, but offers an excellent, hidden vantage on the valley floor below.



1-3: Skirmish at the Trading Post

The orc army that has been moving into the region around the Durgis clanhold over the past year has begun to introduce powerful magical constructs into its forces. Jael the Hunter has, along with the Crown of Shadow, uncovered a long-buried fortress with several stone golems within, and has commanded orc channelers to repair those ancient constructs and use what lore they found there to begin creating their own. These golems are crude sculptures with only rudimentary anatomy and autonomy. Most of them are under the control of goblin handlers who guide their movements and direct them in battle.

One such group of goblins is passing through the area on their way to join the assault force headed to Durgis Rock. They are familiar with Kurgun Falls and plan to hole up there and rest during the day. They arrive at the falls, oblivious to the presence of the PC party, about an hour before dawn.

The goblin troop consists of 12 inexperienced goblin warriors that serve as support for the real warriors, the orcs. Though armed, they do not represent much of a threat to the PC party. The golem they are attending, however, is a lethal danger that must be avoided at all costs.

EL 3, Goblins (12): 4 hp; see MM.

EL 11, Stone Golem: 108 hp; see MM.

DM's Advice: Naming Monsters

When running MIDNIGHT games, DMs are encouraged to foster the air of mystery and danger associated with the unknown. One way to do this is to avoid describing familiar monsters by their common names. Whereas the party members will likely have encountered "goblins" before and know them as such, none of them have likely ever encountered "golems" so this scene should be played as a unique and frightening moment. The DM is encouraged to describe the construct along the lines of "a ponderous monolith of crudely carved rock, terrifying in its animation" rather than simply calling it a "stone golem."

Tactics: If unchallenged, the goblins and their charge approach the trade tower from across the river. The goblins are contentious and quickly get in an argument among themselves about whether the bridge will support the weight of their stone monster. After the argument comes to blows a decision is made and the goblins cross the bridge, followed by the construct. The bridge inevitably gives way and collapses into the river along with the golem. The golem will eventually climb back out, but this takes 1d4+4 rounds. In the meantime most of the goblins will continue to squabble among themselves and make their way to the shelter of the trading hall.

Any characters on watch at the trade hall have no problem observing the goblins (Spot or Listen checks DC 8) as they first approach the bridge, and therefore can wake the rest of the party. If forewarned they should have plenty of time to act before the goblins enter the hall. If the PCs are unaware, the elves will alert them with only 1d4 rounds with which to prepare. Because of the darkness, the noise of the falls, and their unfamiliarity with such entities, the PCs will not know what accompanies the goblins, only that it is large and ponderous. The elves, however, sense the magical power of the golem and recognize the threat it represents. As soon as they become aware of its presence they will run off to deal with the golem and leave the PCs to deal with the goblins.

Development: The PCs should handily defeat the goblins; remember that Dunk and Wendell will join the fray to help any overwhelmed PCs. If at any point the goblins are reduced to three or less, the survivors will attempt to disengage and flee into the night.

Gliding the "Stone that Walks"

Dealing with the golem is an entirely different matter. Its damage reduction and immunity to magic make it a formidable opponent even for the elves. They will attempt to harry the construct as long as it takes the PCs to deal with the goblins, but as soon as that threat is either eliminated or evaded, Rhiann will warn the group that the creature is beyond even her magic to destroy. At some point she will have attempted a variety of violent, visually impressive spells against it. These are easily observed by the PCs across the river and serve to put emphasis on her words as well as to keep any surviving goblins at bay. She orders the party to flee, and assuming they comply, she and her bodyguards follow suit. Though in truth Rhiann has access to spells that might serve to combat the golem, she is loathe to spend the magical energy to do so if they can simply flee the creature.

If the PCs delay and remain holed up in the trading hall, the golem will eventually cross the river despite the best efforts of the elves. Unable to enter the dwarf-high door, the golem will simply begin to smash at the old stone building, intending to knock it down to get at the PCs inside. At this point flight is obligatory, as eventually the golem's crude tactic will succeed and any PCs caught inside the collapse will be severely injured or killed.

The assumption is that the group rendezvous across the river and hurries up the trail leading to Durgis Rock. The golem is too dim-witted to note the PCs' flight, and if the goblins are dead or scattered it is unable to pursue on its own. As they race away, the PCs' last view from the ruins of the watch tower is of the flailing golem smashing at the trade hall, searching for targets to destroy.

Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards

Encounter:	XP:
• <i>Successful meeting between the PCs that avoids hostilities and results in at least a semi-cooperative party</i>	400
• <i>PCs defeat goblin soldiers</i>	360
• <i>PCs show enough common sense not to tangle with the golem and successfully avoid the threat it represents</i>	500
• <i>Individual PCs take actions that earn the respect or trust of each other or the elven emissaries</i>	0-150 per PC at DM's discretion

Total Potential XP: 1,410

Chapter 2

The Fall of Durgis Rock

Synopsis

On the hike back to Durgis Rock, the party discovers signs that an orc assault force is in the area, and only miles from the settlement the PCs encounter a badly wounded orc and likely surmise that the foul creatures have attacked the town.

The party arrives at Durgis Rock only to find that it has fallen to an orc raid and most of the residents have been killed. A few raiders remain, shepherding prisoners and gathering plunder. The PCs infiltrate the village and battle a number of orcs while the elven emissaries deal with three stone golems that accompanied the assault. The party encounters a mortally wounded Woden who entrusts them with his dying command, and the elven emissaries are killed defeating the golems, leaving the party with a charge to complete their vital quest. Chapter two ends as the party deals with the aftermath of the raid, decides what to do, and presumably prepares for a long journey to strange lands.

2-1: The Trail to Durgis Rock

As the DM you should present the trip to Durgis Rock as an opportunity for the PCs to get to know each other and to learn something about the elves and their mission. The hike takes all of three days, so as they march, forage, and camp, give the players plenty of opportunity to roleplay.

The PCs from Durgis Rock should experience the same reticence and mystery from the elves that the outsider PCs are already familiar with. Perhaps a PC will step up as the “elf expert” to explain the elves and their ways to the curious newcomers; if none do, Wendell will gladly regale the dwarves and their allies with his spotty knowledge of the emissaries, hoping to impress his mountainborn kin.

The dwarves themselves should be just as much of a mystery to outsiders, and it’s even possible that, not only have the dwarves never seen elves before, but also have never interacted with humans, halflings, or even gnomes. The first days of their association should be full of mistrust, curiosity and the comedy of cultural misunderstandings. Emphasize these to your players and the roleplaying will be far more interesting and entertaining.

The dwarven PCs should insist that the party travels during the day and camps at night to best avoid orc patrols, and though the DM is encouraged to make the players feel like a dangerous encounter is imminent at any point, the trip should be relatively uneventful. To maintain the sense of danger the DM should ask those on watch during the predawn hours of the third day to make a Listen check (DC 12). Any that succeed will recognize a distant orcish warcry but the echoes inherent in the mountains make its direction indiscernible.

DM’s Advice: Culture Shock

As a MIDNIGHT DM you should play up the mystery and unfamiliarity that exists between most of the various PC races. When characters of one race encounter characters of another they have limited contact with, you should emphasize this through careful description and roleplaying. There should be suspicion and curiosity colored by stereotypes derived from myths and legends. Play these up and you will create more interesting and fun PC interactions.

A Wounded Orc

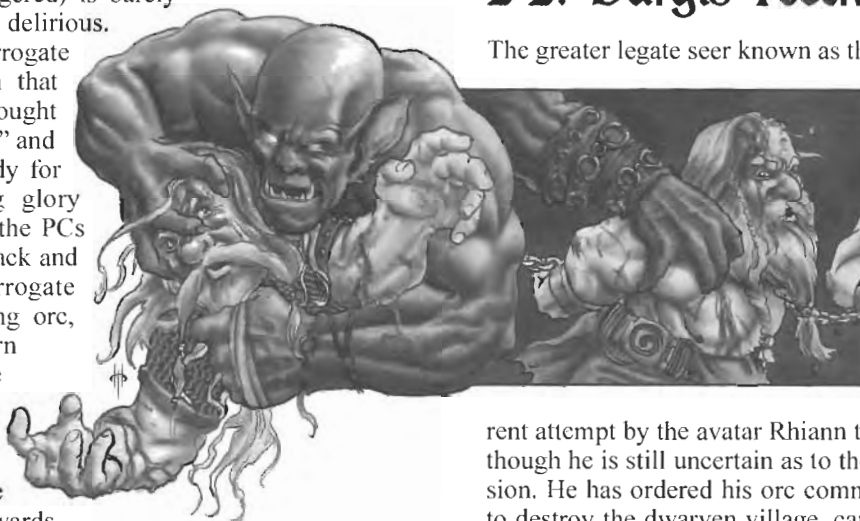
The party will be just a few hours from Durgis Rock when the sun sets on the third day, making it likely that they will push on. The decision is made for them, however, when any advance scouts see a wounded orc first as it stumbles along the path towards the party, and then collapses a hundred yards short of the group's position.

Dwarven characters are likely to kill the helpless warrior, but if the rest of the PCs restrain them, the party gains some important intelligence. The orc (0 hit points, stable but staggered) is barely conscious and delirious.

PCs that interrogate him will learn that he has "just fought in a great battle" and that he is "ready for the everlasting glory of Izrador." If the PCs take a subtler tack and carefully interrogate the hallucinating orc, they can learn the size of the orc force, what direction it came from, and that there were "extra rewards offered for the warriors that caught the elven spies."

If the PCs overtly threaten the orc he will rage, come out of his stupor, and try to fight back. He has lost his weapon along the trail, however, and has only a large knife at his belt with which to attack.

Orc Elite: 0 hp; see appendix.



2-2: Durgis Rock

The greater legate seer known as the Master in Grey has long been wary of Aradil's continuing efforts to parley with the dwarves and has used his vast spy network and his considerable scrying abilities to keep track of such efforts. He is aware of the current attempt by the avatar Rhiann to reach Durgis Rock,

though he is still uncertain as to the purpose of her mission. He has ordered his orc commanders in the region to destroy the dwarven village, capture the elven emissary alive, and to bring her to him. Unfortunately, the small orc legion sent to assault the town attacked a few hours too early. The bloody battle was fierce, but most of the fighting is over, and in fact, most of the orc force has already departed by the time the PCs arrive at the settlement.

The orcs used their cadre of three stone golems to sunder the village's north gate, and between these unstoppable monsters and several hundred orc soldiers, the inhabitants of Durgis Rock stood little chance. All 273 inhabitants, except for six badly wounded young women and 17 young children, were slaughtered in the battle. Though the dwarves made a good accounting of themselves, they were simply overwhelmed and, as is their way, fought to the death.

Description of Durgis Rock

Durgis Rock is an old surface village and the westernmost settlement in the Durgis Clanhold. It is a small village that was once a key outpost on the trade routes between the dwarves and the Dornish humans and the gnomes. Like most dwarven towns, Durgis Rock is now mostly empty with, until the attack, only 273 residents living in a settlement that at one time held over a thousand. The Rock, as most of its residents call the place, is surrounded by a formidable wall, and though there are many surface buildings, there is a substantial under-

Dwarven Gates

The natural proclivities of the race and thousands of years of warfare have made dwarves master defensive architects. The typical dwarven gate is a large circular entranceway, which can be sealed by a huge, thick disk of carefully worked stone. The stone disk rests on its edge and is so perfectly weighted and tooled that it can be rolled side to side by a dwarven child. The disk door is set into a space within a wall adjacent to the gate opening, and rolled sideways along a track to close the entrance. As these doors are rolled open or closed, the crescent openings they form artistically complement the Mother Moon and Father Sun motifs that typically adorn the gates and door stones.

ground complex as well. With its reduced population, many of the peripheral buildings and unused portions of the underground were sealed off for defensive purposes.

The wall around Durgis Rock is an excellent example of dwarven stonework. Much of it is cut and excavated from the original crags that once stood on the site of the town while a few sections are of placed stone. It is 30 feet high and well maintained, with a wide base that tapers to five feet thick at the top. Unfortunately, the small village population means the wall was not as well guarded as it should have been and the town has paid the price. There is a large gate at the southern edge of town, and a smaller one, now shattered, on the northern edge. Both are built in a traditional dwarven style.

The Approach

As the party approaches, successful Spot checks (DC 10) will allow them to note a burning smell on the breeze. Succeeding by five or more allows them to recognize the smell of burning flesh. If this does not rile the dwarven characters to a fighting frenzy, nothing will.

The trail the party is on leads to the village's front gate, which still stands intact. Other trails follow the village walls to the rear gate, which is broken and collapsed, allowing ready entrance for any bloodthirsty, headstrong PCs. Still other trails lead to high vantage points in the surrounding crags that allow more cautious party members a good view of the village center. There are 15 goblins and three stone golems visible; five of the goblins have chained together the dwarven survivors and are preparing them for the march to join the main orc force. The rest of the goblins are collecting plunder and piling it onto three huge travois that are to be towed by the obedient golems. This booty consists primarily of food and other domestic goods, as most of the quality arms were already taken by the departed main force. The stone golems are lumbering back and forth into the darkness, collecting dwarven and orc bodies alike and dumping them into a large bonfire in the middle of the village center—the light from the fire illuminates the scene eerily, casting freakish shadows from the scurry-

Take No Prisoners

Orcs never take adult dwarves prisoner. Their formidable nature simply makes them too dangerous. Orcs will sometimes take adolescent females for sexual sport, but even these they soon kill and eat. When they can capture them however, orcs prize dwarf children—small enough not to pose threats, yet hardy enough to make excellent slaves. As these unfortunates reach adult size, however, they are culled from the work crews and added to the larder.



ing goblins and monstrous golems. Patient observers that watch for several minutes see an orc bring an armload of plunder from the great keep, dump it on a travois, and head back into the structure.

As the PCs make their plans to deal with the remaining invaders, one of Rhiann's divinations reveals that there are only a few orcs in the Great Keep. The elven emissaries offer to take on the golems and their goblin handlers if the rest of the party is willing to clear the Keep of the orcs. This seems like a good plan as, while the PCs are wholly unequipped to deal with the golems, the dwarves among them have intimate knowledge of the Keep's interior and its secret ways. Though not necessary, separating the PCs and the emissaries here will make orchestrating subsequent events easier. To this end the DM should contrive to have the PCs, Dunk, and Wendell sneak into and retake the Keep. The party should part ways with the elves sneaking off and disappearing into the darkness as they pull up the hoods on their *cloaks of elvenkind*.

Marmot Holes

If the PCs charge in through the sundered gate and attack, there is a good chance that all will be lost and the adventure will end before it really gets started. There are just too many foes for them to deal with head on, even with their high-level elven compatriots. PCs from Durgis Rock will be able to suggest another option.

Surrounding the walled village are crags and cliffs full of hidden paths and defiles well known to the Durgis Rock PCs. In this stony maze, there are half a dozen secret entrances to the village that can be found only by characters with stonecunning. The doors over the entrances are thick slabs of natural-seeming stone with clever latches that only the sensitive eye of a dwarf or dworg can see. These doors lead to low passages too

small for the average orc and a tight fit for dwarfs. The passages lead down and into the warren of chambers under the surface village and provide the PCs simple and hidden access to the town.

The children of Durgis Rock have long played a game they call Marmot Hole, in which they start in different parts of the village, and using their knowledge of these hidden passages and the complex of halls and chambers under the village, race each other to various locations. Long hours of youthful play will now serve the dwarven PCs well as they can move from one part of the village to any other unseen by their enemies.

Hall of Heroes

Presumably, the PCs enter the Keep through one of these secret passages. Dunk and Wendell will guard their escape route while the PCs search out the orcs. As they skulk, the PCs will come across various atrocious scenes of battle and slaughter. Durgis Rock PCs will recognize fallen friends and family members and the DM should play up the wrath and desire for vengeance these grisly finds create within them.

Eventually, harsh orc voices lead the PCs to the Hall of Heroes. The orcs are all lowly recruits left behind to gather plunder and escort the slaves. When the PCs find them, they are arrayed about the room randomly, piling up weapons as booty, smashing art objects, and urinating on the artifacts and the bodies of the many dwarves that died defending the chamber.

The great keep's Hall of Heroes is a large, low ceilinged, circular room, dominated by 12 stone columns arrayed in a ring centered on the middle of the floor. The pillars are carved with the intricate pictograms of Old Dwarven, and the dwarven PCs know they depict several thousand years of Durgis Clan history and commemorate the contributions to that history made by the residents of Durgis Rock. One pillar in particular holds an endless list of names of those Durgis Rock sons and daughters that have fallen in battle.

The walls, pillars, and platforms displayed many arms and artifacts important to Durgis history. There were weapons and armor, metal-paged tomes, golden

works of art, and numerous stone carvings. Each had a detailed, legend-rich history and was considered sacred by the residents of the town; most are now destroyed.

EL 4, Orc Recruits (8): hp 7; see appendix.

Quest of the Mountainborn

The battle might be a bloody one, but the PCs should prove victorious. Once they have eliminated the orcs and they have a few moments to look around the Hall, they will discover several things.

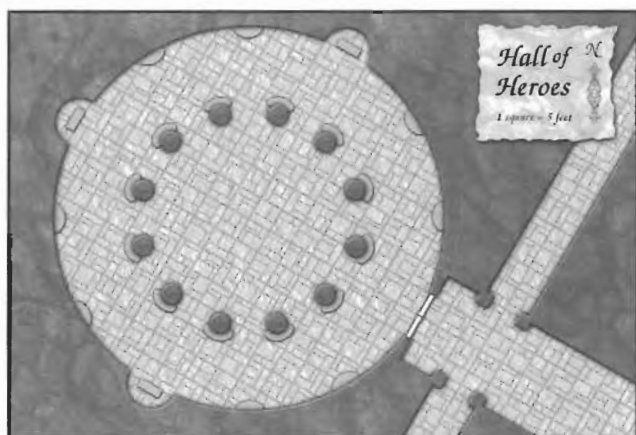
Most the arms from the Hall, relics and trophies of legend, have been dumped in piles, some of which have already been moved outside. All the works of art and any books, scrolls, and other items the orcs thought worthless have been piled up and are already burning.

In the back of the room are the bodies of dwarven warriors that fell defending the Hall and the dozens of orcs they killed. Though most of the children the warriors were apparently protecting are now outside in the slave chain, several youngsters were killed in the battle and their bodies still lie among those of their defenders.

There are 14 fallen dwarves, and one is Woden, the Durgis Rock Dothin. Anyone that checks will discover that he is still alive, but barely. He lies in a pool of his own blood, pierced by four javelins and surrounded by a pile of at least 18 orcs. He still clutches his axe and actually tries to fight off any PC who approaches until he realizes a round later that the PC is not an attacker. A Heal check will show that the javelins were poisoned with deathblade (See DMG, Chapter 3, Special Abilities, Poisons); with that many doses in his blood and exhausted from his rage, Woden is likely done for. In his off hand he clutches a leather case sealed with a golden cap in the form of an intricately worked dragon and covered in orc and dwarf blood.

In a strained and gurgling voice, Woden asks about the children, the ones he and the other warriors were defending. "Did they survive?" "Did you save them?" "Is the attack over?" If the PCs try to calm the old man with assurances, he quiets. Then he suddenly beseeches any Durgis Rock PC close enough to grab and thrusts the dragon case into the PC's grasp. He trembles and his eyes grow wild as he speaks, demanding that his last order be followed. He demands that the case be "taken to the queen of the elves in Erethor." He demands to be obeyed and works himself into a fervor and a bloody coughing fit that lasts until one of the dwarven PCs gives his word he will do this thing. He calms down then and relaxes. A few rounds later his eyes lose focus and he dies.

As the DM you should play up this scene to draw on the emotion of the moment to motivate the PCs to do everything in their power to complete what is a solemn, dying command. They should be left feeling honor-bound to deliver the case and certain that the quest is one of great importance.





The Dragon Case

The Dragon Case is a hard leather tube 2 1/2 feet long and four inches in diameter. It has a shoulder strap and is marked with golden runes embedded in the leather of the case. It is worn and scuffed and relatively light. The ends are capped in gold, and one cap is held in place by an intricately worked golden dragon that looks very life-like. Its body covers the endcap, its limbs grip the sides of the case, its wings are folded against its body, and its long tail wraps around the upper half of the tube. Unknown to the PCs, the case contains a number of scrolls describing the mundane and magical aspects of forging mithral. The documents themselves are non-magical but they are what all the concern and slaughter has been about.

The dragon appears as only a fancy decoration until anyone attempts to open the case. It then rears up on its hind limbs and spreads its wings as if alive, snapping at any fingers that actually attempt to touch the endcap. It has two melee +10 attacks per round. Any successful attack injects the target with equivalent of wyvern poison (see DMG, Chapter 3, Special Abilities, Poison). The venom reservoir refills magically after each attack and for purposes of dispelling magic the case was enchanted by a 20th-level channeler.

Quest of the Forestborn

Outside, Rhiann has put all the goblins down using *sleep* spells and has turned her attention to the three stone golems. Unable to hurt them with destructive spells alone, Rhiann may only play a support role while Bayal and Eirinn attack with their weapons. If there were only one of the monsters to fight, or maybe two, the outcome might be different. Unfortunately the elves prove only just a match for the stony constructs.

When the players emerge from the Keep they come upon a sad and disturbing tableau. The golems are now inanimate. One is still standing but missing an arm and several large chunks have been chopped from its body. The other two lie on the ground—one on top of Eirinn. The two bodyguards are clearly dead, and Rhiann lies a short distance away fighting for breath, attended by a freed dwarven woman and several children. In the background, lit by the flickering firelight, the rest of the dwarven women slit the throats of the sleeping goblins with the slavers' own knives.

When the PCs approach Rhiann, she will smile gently and assure them that there is “nothing to be done.” Her Constitution has been drained too far in casting spells against the golem, and it is only by the will of Aradil that her life continues for these last few moments. She will implore the PCs to “promise that Woden’s gift will be taken to Aradil.” She tells them that



“the resistance against the Shadow may depend on it.” As she begs the PCs to complete her quest she begins to tremble and her voice suddenly changes, becoming deeper, huskier, with a palpable air of antiquity and wisdom. The voice is calmer and resonates in the minds of those listening. It implores the PCs to “bring the case to Caradul . . . bring the case to me.” Though the players may not understand, this is the voice of Aradil, speaking directly through her avatar. After her body speaks these words, Rhiann collapses and stops breathing. Her eyes slowly clear to a natural, beautiful green as she dies.

Whether or not the golems are really a challenge sufficient to kill all three elves, it is important to the success of the campaign that as the DM you make sure they are eliminated from the story at this point. If they are not, then the PCs become only the low-level lackeys of these powerful characters who would realistically then make all the key decisions and meet all the adventure’s challenges. Such a situation would leave most players frustrated and unsatisfied so it is vital that the elves die and the PCs become responsible for the completion or failure of the quest. If any PCs insist on helping in the fight against the golems, you have two options: You may play out the battle, with any PCs being fair game to be knocked unconscious (awaking to find the elves dead and the golems defeated), or you may simply convey the outcome of the battle in storytelling mode.

2-3: Aftermath

How the PCs deal with the aftermath of the battle at Durgis Rock is open-ended and should be left up to them to manage. They discover that every dwarf save the few women and children present fell in the assault. Any Durgis Rock PCs have therefore lost their families and friends and now have a huge emotional blow to deal with, as well as a burning motivation for revenge.

The dwarven PCs might hesitate to depart immediately on their quest out of concern for the village survivors—likely friends or even family members—and may want to see them safely to the closest dwarven settlement. Dunk is perhaps the most heartbroken of the dwarves and feels a terrible guilt for not having been present to defend the village when it was attacked. It quickly becomes clear that he is unwilling to join in any quest that is going to take him away from what is left of his people. He is willing, along with the young female survivors, to escort the children to Silver Vein, a Durgis mining town five days to the northeast. If the PCs decide to separate from the dwarves, they can depart as soon as they are geared up. If they insist on escorting the survivors themselves, the trip and the visit to Silver Vein can become an entire mini-adventure in itself.

The most significant complication in going to the settlement occurs if the PCs tell the dorthane of Silver Vein of Woden’s apparent plans and dying request. The Dorith will countermand Woden’s instructions and demand the case be turned over to him. At this point, unless the PCs are unusually resourceful and willing to disobey their clan superiors, they will never see the case again and their quest will effectively be over. As it is, the PCs are best served by not mentioning the case or their quest and leaving Silver Vein in secret when it comes time for them to depart, the better to avoid any complications with their kin.

Dealing with the Dead

This is an excellent point for you to acquaint any players not wholly familiar with the world of MIDNIGHT with the threat of the Fell. You should explain that the PCs are well aware of the threat and would therefore make sure that every corpse, dwarven or otherwise, is prevented from rising as undead. There is no time for the traditional dwarven ceremonies and the most practical option is to continue the golems’ job of burning the bodies. Another, simpler option, but far more gruesome, is to behead each corpse with an axe.

Goading Them On

Whether the PCs are torn between leaving on their quest immediately and escorting the surviving villagers to Silver Vein, they should realize that staying at Durgis Rock much longer is simply too dangerous. They know when the orcs and goblins they have just killed fail to arrive with the village plunder and their golem charges, a larger party of orcs will likely return to see what has befallen them. With so few able defenders it would be obvious folly to remain in the Rock.

A sense of pursuit, the feeling that the party is being hunted, is a key part of the campaign, and it is important to establish this tone right from the start. As a means to begin building that sense of pursuit, at an opportune point the DM should have one of the female dwarves reveal that there was a strange man, she thinks “maybe even a human,” among the orcs who seemed to have authority over them. He was furious that the “elven spies” were not in the village and demanded the orcs “find them at once or suffer the Shadow’s wrath.” He rode off on a great black horse, accompanied by two massive wolves, just before the main orc force departed.

This man is Jael the Hunter, a powerful soldier legate who serves the Master in Grey. The Master has ordered him to find and capture the elven emissaries at Durgis Rock. Furious that they have apparently eluded his ambush, Jael has departed to consult magically with the Master.

Packing to Leave

Once they decide to go, the PCs will invariably attempt to scrounge as many resources as they can from the village in preparation for their journey. Though much of the village’s valuables have already been taken away by the main orc force, there are still enough goods to provide the PCs with decent travel kits.

They can collect enough food to feed the survivors on their five-day hike to Silver Vein, and another 15 man-days worth for their party. They can cobble together enough travel gear, including packs, bedrolls, and warm clothing, for everyone. There are enough steel chain shirts to outfit any unarmored adult dwarves, but all other armor has been destroyed or is gone. There are also enough weapons to arm even the children, and the survivors will insist on packing whatever extra weapons, other items of practical value, and relics from the Hall of Heroes they can carry.

Dwarves are nothing if not pragmatic, and despite the sacred nature of the collection, the surviving artifacts from the Hall of Heroes are also valuable resources. The most valuable have been claimed by the commanders of the raiding army, but there are enough normal axes, urutuks, and hammers that each PC can be armed with one should they wish. In addition, there is a covenant item of great power in the great hall. A pair of matched mithral urutuks called Wrath of the Moon and

Dwarven Grief

Dwarves are a stoic warrior people that have become rather pragmatic in dealing with their grief. The death of friends and loved ones in battle is the course of life for the mountain people, and their culture is rich with ways to remember those that have fallen. One tradition, known as *caernfan* or “sounding the earth,” is common among all the clans. When the name of any comrade who has recently fallen in battle is spoken, any listening dwarves tap the hafts of their axes on the ground with two quick blows. Lacking a weapon, a booted heel will do, or even a mailed fist against a stone wall, or a tankard against a table. To fail to sound the earth when a recently fallen warrior is mentioned is a sign of gravest disrespect.

Fury of the Sun (see appendix) can be found buried in an orc’s chest in one corner of the room. Woden himself was wielding a mithral (and therefore masterwork) dwarven waraxe.

If the PCs are thorough, they are also likely to loot the bodies of the elves for useful resources. Though much of what they carried was destroyed in the battle with the golems, there are several valuable items that can be recovered. Each elf was wearing a *cloak of elvenkind*, but only Rhiann’s is in good enough shape to be anything more than a soft rag. Unfortunately it is elf-sized, and any attempt to alter it to fit a dwarf or Small humanoid creature destroys its magical properties. In her pack she also has a single hearthstone and a capped wooden cylinder now containing 23 servings of Erethor Tea. She also has an elven leaf-bladed short sword, but her longbow was apparently broken by a blow from a golem and her quiver contains only five Caraheen arrows.

Bayal’s body is a broken mess and lies at the base of a bloody smear down the face of a stone wall. His weapons are his only possessions that remain intact and useful. He has a pair of Erunsil fighting knives and an icewood longbow—its tines are wrapped in protective leather skins that hide the bow’s translucent appearance. Unfortunately for the PCs, the knives, though masterwork weapons, are a rather recent acquisition and have not yet been enchanted. Bayal’s quiver is empty, evidenced by the many Caraheen arrow shafts that still protrude from the body of a golem (assume that Aradil cast *stone to flesh* on the golem or *greater magic weapon* on Bayal’s arrows so they could penetrate DR).

Eirinn’s body and equipment are hopelessly crushed under the full mass of one of the golems. Nothing useful remains of his gear except his quiver and arrows,



which lie on the ground some distance from his body. The quiver contains 11 Carraheen arrows, but it is the quiver itself that is uniquely valuable—it is a covenant item known as Elenial’s Quiver (see MN, page 87).

Geared up and ready to go, it is now up to the PCs to decide where to head and how best to get there. As the DM you should encourage them to plan the route carefully, and to give you details about when and how they plan to travel as such decisions will help you present future encounters most effectively.

Tagging Along

Note that Dunk, as much as he will sincerely miss any dwarven PCs with which he is friends, refuses to leave the survivors to “go on some wild ort chase” for some “bastard elves that are the reason most everyone we know is dead.” Wendell, of course, will accompany the group, and as he assumes himself the leader he will feel obliged to continually give orders, whether he knows what he is talking about or not. He will also insist that the dragon case “be taken to the Captain, cause he’ll know what to do with it.” For DMs that want the humor and conflict associated with such an NPC as part of the party, Wendell is invaluable. For those DMs that do not like the idea of a tag-along NPC and want to add further tragedy and motivation to the story, Wendell can easily be “killed off” during any subsequent combat encounters.

Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards

Encounter:	XP:
• PCs simply kill the wounded orc	100
• PCs coax information from him (depending on how much they learn and how clever they are in learning it)	200–400
• PCs devise the plan, or make significant contributions to an elven plan, that successfully liberates the dwarven survivors	400
• PCs defeat of the orcs (assuming the elves are busy elsewhere).	1,100
• PCs obtain the dragon case	200
• PCs spend the time and resources to escort survivors to safety	500
Total Potential XP:	2,600

Chapter 3

Down from the Mountain

Synopsis

In this chapter the PCs leave Durgis Rock and begin their quest. Their first encounter is a return visit to the trading post at Kurgun Falls where they are attacked by the Fell creatures arisen from the goblins they themselves killed some days earlier. Farther on the party encounters three human children and are taken to their camp where the PCs' humanitarianism is put to the test by a starving group of Dornish refugees.

Further along the trail the party discovers an ancient dwarven refuge and then comes across a goblin supply caravan. The caravan is guarded by an orc warband that ultimately forces the PCs under the mountains and into the lost ways of the underground.

3-1: Return to the Trading Post

At some point the PCs will begin their quest and head westward along trails leading out of the mountains. Whether they leave directly from Durgis Rock or depart from Silver Vein, in the end they have to use the trail that leads to Kurgun Falls. Not only do the party members know that route, it is also the fastest and safest way. If the journey begins in Silver Vein add an additional four days on to the three it normally takes to hike from Durgis Rock to Kurgun Falls. Silver Vein is northeast of The Rock and a more direct route from that town joins the trail to the trading post but bypasses the now dead town of Durgis Rock.

If, as the DM, you wish to increase the length of your campaign or you have a group of players that is particularly motivated by combat, the return trip from Durgis Rock to Kurgun Falls is an excellent place to provide additional planned or randomly generated

encounters. Just be careful to include any experience awards for additional encounters, and to calculate them according to the story rewards variant in the DMG.

The DM should contrive to have the party arrive at Kurgun Falls just in time to set up camp. This is not necessary, but nighttime darkness enhances the mood of the subsequent encounter. If the PCs push on or refuse to camp in the valley, simply stage the encounter as they cross the river at the Falls. Crossing the Carina in itself can be a trial if the party is not careful, especially for the water-wary dwarves. Remember that the only bridge was destroyed under the weight of the "stone that walked" so the characters need to devise a safe means to get themselves and their heavy gear to the south side of the narrow but deep and swift water.

A quick look around reveals that the stone golem is still in the valley, but also that it is now completely inert. Lacking any self-motivation, it stands unmoving

DM Advice: Eating on the Run

One of the key assumptions of MIDNIGHT is that resources are scarce—so scarce that even sufficient food is often a struggle to obtain. Throughout the journey the party should be both challenged and plagued by its need for food. In a storytelling sense it should affect the routes the PCs take and the demeanor and motivations of the party. It should drive them to take risks or to make contact with NPCs they might otherwise avoid. In a game sense, the need for food should give wildlanders and other characters with Wilderness Lore skills chances to hunt and forage and should make the risks of subdual damage and fatigue real dangers. The scarcity of food can greatly slow the rate of travel as time must be spent hunting and can make lifesavers of the *purify food and drink* and *goodberry* spells.

in the shadow of the trade hall, waiting patiently for further orders. Nothing the PCs do initiates any sort of reaction, and if they attempt to destroy the creature it simply ignores them, even if they try breaking it apart.

We Meet Again

Having presumably been left untended when the PCs fled the area, two thirds of the goblins the party killed at the trading post have subsequently risen as Fell and are hiding in the pool at the base of the Falls. If the players camp at the site, the goblin ungral wait until the middle of the night and then make their move. The Fell are starving for flesh but patient and clever in their tactics.

Ungral Goblin Warriors (2-9): CR 1; Small humanoid (undead); HD d12; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 16, touch 12, flatfooted 15; Atk +1 melee (1d8-1, crude mace) or +1 melee (1d4-1, slam); SQ Darkvision, undead; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13, Con —, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 3.

Skills: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3

Languages: Black Tongue, Goblin

Possessions: Crude, soaked and ripped leather clothes, damaged leather armor, orc-made iron mace.

Appearance and Personality: These gruesome creatures are frightening parodies of their past selves. They show gaping wounds that have turned black with rot and drip dark water. Their eyes are sunken and many shamble along with limbs that hang loose or with spines or necks that allow their heads to loll about as they attack. They make little noise except for the squishy sounds of their movements and a gurgling sort of moan that can only be heard by the creatures victims as they clutch at them.

Tactics: The ungral remain hidden in the darkness and try to lure any PCs on watch near the edge of the pool. They toss small rocks, make shuffling foot steps, or otherwise make noises that might draw PCs from the relative safety of their camp to investigate. If a PC approaches the water's edge, several ungral attempt to grapple him and pull him into the water and drown him. If the undead goblins succeed in their grapple and get the PC into the water he is subject to drowning rules (see DMG, Chapter 3, The Environment, Water Dangers).

If the PCs continue beyond the site, the ungral crawl out of the water after them and either make a desperate attack immediately or follow after the party, intending to make their attack after dark. If they do, their tactics depend on where the party camps and how many stand watch. The ungral's first choice is to take out any guards as quietly as possible, perhaps by luring them away to an ambush, then attack the sleepers without warning.

DM Advice: Undead are Scary

Be sure to carefully describe the scene the players see as the ungral attack. The creatures are horrid and pale, dripping water, weeds and gobbits of rotting flesh. They are silent but for their soggy foot pads and strange bubbly groans, and they attack with a ferocity uncharacteristic of goblins. Avoid simply calling the creatures "zombies," or even "undead," and play up the horror of the PCs having to put down a foe they have already killed once. MIDNIGHT is a world of darkness and despair and such encounters with the Fell can serve to fortify that tone and mood.

3-2: Hungry Humanitarianism

Presumably, the party will choose to follow the same trade route out of the mountains that the emissaries followed in, being guided mostly by Wendell or by the recollections of any PCs that were part of the escort. If they do not, the same encounters may be run with minor tweaking. Two days of hard travel bring the party farther down the river and much further away from home than any of the dwarven characters have ever been. Here the stream is a bit wider, shallower and slower, but still swift enough to be a dangerous swim. At some point in the afternoon the party comes across three human children fishing on the banks of an eddy pool. This may be a compelling surprise for any dwarven PCs that have likely never seen human children before, and may even think that the grubby, rag-clad creatures are some kind of pale goblin.

If the party surprises the children they react with fear but do not run away, cowering between the party and the water. If the PCs intimidate or chase the children, they will bolt in fear, and might even jump into the water to get away if that seems their only option. If the PCs take a softer approach and do a good job of winning over the children, the kids will quickly turn from frightened to curious, and will insist on taking the party to their camp.

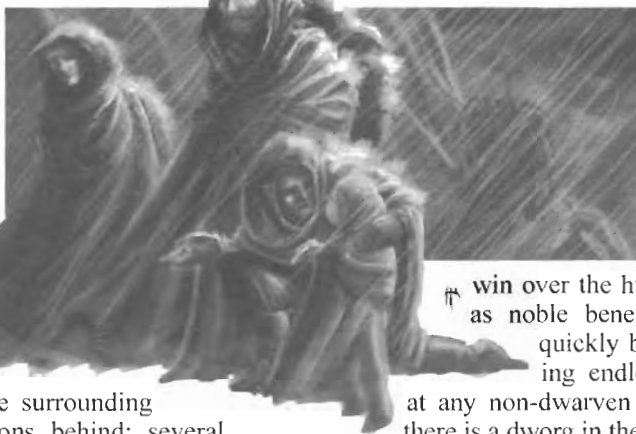
If the children hear the PCs coming they flee up a small game trail leading to higher ground south of the river. The PCs see their retreating backs just as they disappear among the rocks. If they choose not to pursue, the PCs bypass the encounter entirely as the group of adults the children roust from their camp are not willing to pursue some unknown quarry.

A five minute hike up into the craggy bluffs south of the river brings the party to the camp of a truly pathetic group of human refugees. There are about 30 individ-

uals, mostly women and children. Eight adult men and two male teens quickly roust at the approach of the PCs, brandishing a number of rusty or improvised weapons. They do not attack, but seem perfectly willing to defend their wretched home against the better-armed PCs—an almost feral glint in their eyes leaves no doubt of that.

If the PCs are aggressive or make threats, the defenders order them to “be gone or risk death.” If the party remains threatening, the humans attack and a hopeless battle ensues. Even the women and children get involved wielding sticks and rocks. Such a fight is likely a short one for as soon as five of their number fall the humans break and scatter into the surrounding crags leaving their few possessions behind: several poorly-tanned hide windbreaks, firewood, a collection of simple old tools, ragged dirty clothes, and only 11 man-days of food.

If the party is placating and shows no sign of threat, the leader of the refugees, Gareth Orin, of House Orin, steps forward and demands to know the party’s intent and origin. If the PCs are forthcoming and offer assurance of their peaceful purpose the tension quickly leaks from the situation and Gareth invites the party to “gather around the fire.”



If the PCs actively earn the refugee’s trust, Gareth will invite them to stay the night. In fact, he values them as well-armed defenders in the event the village is attacked. He will even offer them a share of the camp’s meager and wholly inadequate rations. If the PCs

instead share their food, offer up the Erethor Tea, or better yet, turn over Rhiann’s hearth stone and spend several days hunting wild game to supply the camp, they quickly

win over the humans and are treated as noble benefactors. The children quickly become obsessed, asking endless questions, staring

at any non-dwarven fey in fascination. If there is a dworg in the party the children are doubly amazed while the adults keep a prejudiced and wary eye on him. Any overt demonstrations of magic meet with awe from the children and concern on the part of the parents for what evil attention they may attract.

If the party departs soon after arriving, the still leery adults seem glad to see them leave. If they depart after spending a night or more and supplying food, the PCs’ departure is cause for regret among the adults and outright sadness among the children. If they leave under these circumstances, Gareth will take them aside and

Friends in Need

The PCs learn that the humans are the descendants of Dornish refugees from the coastal town of Low Rock who fled the invasion of the Shadow and joined their dwarven trade partners in the mountains. For the last 100 years their kin lived as allies of the Bothen Clan to the north in one of their abandoned surface towns, until a massive orc raid drove them from the settlement almost four arcs ago. They lost over two hundred people in the raid and have lost almost fifty since. They are headed south, hiding as they go, trying to stay ahead of the orc invaders as best they can. They have few resources, cannot travel very quickly with the children, and are close to starving.

As the DM you should play up the plight of the refugees, using them to pull on the players’ heart strings and to demonstrate the nature of life under the reign of the Shadow. They are dirty and gaunt, their shelters are insufficient, they have few blankets and almost no warm clothes. The refugees are pathetic and desperate, but there is a nobility to their tenacity in the face of despair. Make their hard circumstances obvious, forcing the PCs to evaluate their own misfortunes, consult their own consciences, and perhaps make a hard choice between aiding the refugees and conserving their own resources to best serve their quest.

Unsocial Animals

There are less than 1400 dworgs in all of Eredane, however the race holds an appeal for certain kinds of players, and as a result there will be far more dworgs in games than their population in the MIDNIGHT setting would imply. If, as the DM, you want to run MIDNIGHT with the same dark intent with which it is written, then you need to give any dworg character a hard time of it. Dworgs are outcasts among the dwarves, and many do not even survive to adulthood as a result. They suffer ill treatment and prejudice at the hands of their own people, and other races, unfamiliar with dworgs, often mistake them for orcs and respond accordingly. Though fearsome in combat, dworgs are brutish and socially inept, often having grown up alone, shunned by society. Therefore, in almost every social interaction involving dworgs, especially with those unfamiliar with the race, there should be prejudice, fear, misconception, mistrust, and the tension of potential violence.

say that some of the children have noticed animals in the mountains acting strangely, wolves following them but not attacking, etc. This is Jael pursuing them, and should give the PCs a sense of being hunted. They will have to move on to keep harm from coming to the humans, in any case.

3-3: Hunted

Jael the Hunter left Durgis Rock with little hope that the orc soldiers would capture the elven spies, having tipped their hand with the premature assault. Returning to the abandoned dwarven fortifications that houses the orc legion, Jael shut himself away and entered a long arcane consultation with the Master in Grey.

The Master has decided to turn the situation to his advantage and orders Jael to track the elven emissaries and anyone traveling with them. He is instructed to follow them to discern where they are going, what purpose they pursue, and who gives them aid. Jael is commanded only to watch and not interfere. Then, as the emissaries pass, he is to order local authorities to arrest any collaborators, question them, and then execute them. The plan is that Jael will follow the emissaries as they eventually return through the trackless ways of Erethor and, if the opportunity presents itself, use the emissaries to penetrate the glamor hiding Caradul and thereby infiltrate the elven capital.

Jael begins his pursuit by commanding his astiraxes to possess the wildlife of the Kaladrans and sending them out as spies. They alternate between birds for a wide view of the party's whereabouts and wolves so that they may track them by scent, constantly tracking the party's covenant items with their ability to sense magic. He also sends out orc scouts for more detailed information. He discovers the fate of the elves, but also learns of the existence of the PC party. Though his scouts find sign of the PCs' passage from Durgis Rock, his spies lose them if they enter the dwarven refuge (see below) and continue underground. Jael will not pick up their trail again until astiraxes report the party's presence on the eastern plains, beyond the mountains.

Door to the Dark

A day and half farther down the old trail, any characters with stonemasonry have a chance of noticing (Spot DC 10) ancient dwarven guidemarks carved on boulders and rock walls along the route. They are widely spaced, and many are so weather-worn that even the dwarves cannot see them. The marks indicate that somewhere ahead there is an old dwarven refuge. A few miles further on, a different mark points to a crevasse in the bluff face that leads to the south and higher ground.

The entrance to the crevasse is hidden among a fall of boulders and has apparently been worked by a master stone carver with the same subtlety used in mak-

Dwarven Guidemarks

Goral fen, or guidemarks, are an ancient dwarven symbology, typically used in the underground to mark the direction and destination of given passages. They are subtle marks carved with guile so that only those with stonemasonry can read them. Even when pointed out to those without the ability, the marks seem nothing more than natural, meaningless forms. Their nature keeps orcs and other enemies from taking advantage of the information the guidemarks hold.

There are dozens of different marks, and though the meanings of many of the older ones have been lost, they remain a valuable asset against the orc invasion. Dwarven PCs are familiar with the more basic symbols: signs for navigating in the mountains and underground, symbols that indicate the shortest local route to the surface, to water or to a fortified refuge, and even marks that tell of hidden passages or warn against ways that lead only to danger.

Only characters with stonemasonry and Craft (stone carving) can make guidemarks, and doing so requires a successful Craft check (DC 20) for each symbol.

ing guidemarks. The passage is cut so that from the outside is seems only a shadow, too small to hide even an ort. From the inside the passage is open and plenty wide enough, even for a dwarf. The deep joint in the rock leads upwards, appearing natural in places and worked in others. Frequent guidemarks lead up the narrow path and there are even occasional stairs. The cave-like crevasse climbs quickly out of the gorge through which the river flows, and wanders perhaps half a mile until it narrows to an overhung, impassibly narrow crack. Just before the joint becomes impassible, a ring of weathered dwarven pictographs carved in the rock marks the right hand wall. The ring is about a foot off the crevasse floor and three and a half feet in diameter. Those with stonemasonry will notice a guidemark in the middle of the ring, indicating the entrance to a dwarven refuge.

On the Doorstep

The entrance to the refuge is an antiquated, enchanted door, built in such a way that only dwarves are likely to gain entrance. The door is also armed with a dangerous trap that could be lethal, especially if any of the party still bear wounds.

Around the door's edge, however, are clearly visible but badly weathered Old Dwarven pictographs. The pictographs correspond to the words of a dwarven nurs-

ery rhyme that every dwarf child knows by heart, but are arranged in a random, nonsensical order.

The door is opened simply by touching each of the pictographs in the proper order of the rhyme. Any dwarf or mountain dwarf character can recognize the words of the poem and then recall the rhyme correctly with a Knowledge (Kaladrun Mountains) check (DC 10). Any dwarf character can recall the poem correctly with a Knowledge (Kaladrun Mountains) check (DC 15). Because the gnomes avidly collect stories and songs from other cultures, any gnomish or river dwarf character can recall the rhyme with a successful Perform or appropriate Knowledge check (DC 20).

Trap: The DM should make any rolls for a character attempting to recall the rhyme. If he succeeds and then proceeds to tap each of the pictographs in a corresponding sequence, read the poem aloud and describe the door opening. If he fails, read the lines in the wrong order. If the character then taps out that sequence, the trap goes off: iron spears rain down on the party from holes in the ceiling.

Iron Rain Spear Trap: CR 2; +10 ranged (1d2 spears per PC for 1d10 points of damage per successful hit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20). *Note:* Trap targets anyone within 10 ft. of the door when the trap is triggered. There are enough spikes that it can be sprung four times before running empty. A character can make additional checks to recall the rhyme once each day.

A Rock and a Hard Place

It is likely that even if the party finds and explores the crevasse the PCs will choose to continue down the trail—it is the known route after all. They are now aware of the door, however, and will consider it a viable escape route when things turn sour.

A large military supply caravan out of Kardroling is currently making its way up the same trail down which the party is now traveling. It consists of eight ogre-drawn travois loaded with weapons, armor and food stuffs. There are 15 goblin caravanners as well as a Feral Mother warband of 65 recruit rank orc soldiers, its cadre of orc scouts, and 10 worgs being used as flankers and trackers.

If the party is traveling during the day, they encounter the caravan encamped in a wide spot along the river trail. No fewer than 20 attentive orc pickets man tactical vantage points around the encamped caravan. If the PCs are traveling at night they meet the caravan underway. Twenty orc outrunners consisting of scouts and recruits spread ahead of and behind the caravan

while the worgs flank the caravan for half a mile on both sides.

If the PCs detect the advancing orcs before they are discovered, it is possible for the party to flee back the way it came; the river gorge is so deep and sheer here, however, that the PCs must backtrack for most of a day before they can climb out, and even then they will be unfamiliar with alternative routes. It is possible for them to hide somewhere within the rugged terrain of the gorge and let the caravan pass, but the worgs and trackers will find the party's spoor and hunt them down.

Ogres (8): hp 26; see MM.

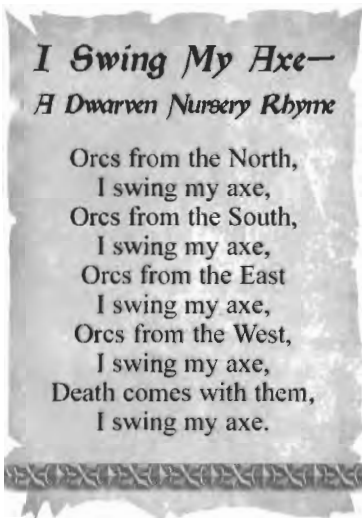
Orc Recruits (65): hp 7; see appendix.

Orc Scouts (10): hp 12; see appendix.

Worgs (10): hp 30; see MM.

If the party could simply retreat further back into the mountains, they might be safe. Jael's orc patrols are close behind them, however, and if the party retreats back up the trail they should be spotted by the patrols just as they return to the area near the hidden refuge entrance. Standing and fighting the warband or the patrols might be momentarily dramatic, but is certain suicide. At best, the PCs might manage a fighting retreat into the refuge; once they are within the crevasse they can easily lose their pursuers.

Jael's Orc Troopers (patrol of 8): 17 hp; see appendix.



I Swing My Axe— A Dwarven Nursery Rhyme

Orcs from the North,
I swing my axe,
Orcs from the South,
I swing my axe,
Orcs from the East
I swing my axe,
Orcs from the West,
I swing my axe,
Death comes with them,
I swing my axe.

Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards

Encounter:	XP:
• PCs avoid the ungral goblins altogether	25 per goblin
• PCs destroy the ungral goblins in combat	75 per goblin
• PCs fight the refugees	0
• PCs deal with refugees but leave them to their own resources	100
• PCs befriend the refugees and spend a day or more hunting for them	150 + 100 per day up to 5
• PCs give refugees their store of Erethor Tea	250
• PCs give refugees their hearth stone	350
• PCs discover refuge	100
• PCs overcome Steel Rain trap	200
• PCs effectively evade caravan	600
• Each orc recruit killed by the party	100
• Each orc trooper, ogre, or worg killed	200

Total Potential XP: 2,825+

Chapter 4

Through the Darkness

Synopsis

In this chapter the party enters the ancient world of caves, caverns, and dwarven passages that riddle the underside of the Kaladrin Mountains. The party is attacked by a wounded mother faarn and then stumbles upon a bloody skirmish between orcs and a dwarven patrol from the besieged holdfast of Pardrum. If they return the survivor to the holdfast, they are offered shelter, succor, and the “honor” of participating in a celebratory pit fight. They also find a guide willing to lead them from the underground to the plains beyond the mountains.

4-1: Unsafe Refuge

The dwarven refuge revealed behind the secret door is a series of four small chambers. The first room is empty but for thick dust and a midden of bones from perhaps six orcs tossed in one corner. The second features a low stone slab table typical of dwarven furnishings, and an alcove stacked with crates and casks of food supplies that are so ancient as to have decayed away to loamy remains that even spells cannot make edible. In the third room is a metal chest filled with rusty weapons. A successful Search check (DC 15) uncovers a fine mithral dagger, however, and a successful Knowledge (Kaladrin Mountains) check (DC 18) lets a dwarven character recognize the maker’s mark is of the Cardaal Clan. Any dwarven PCs know that the Cardaal are underground dwarves that once held the mountains east of the Durgis Clanhold but with whom they long ago lost contact.

The fourth room is smaller than the rest. It contains the body of a long dead dwarf, or at least the upper body, as the lower torso and legs seem to have been torn away and are nowhere to be found. The corpse is naturally mummified and the remains of his chain shirt and

his axe, which lies nearby, are both badly rusted. If anyone searches the body, a number of various beautifully cut gems pour from a rotten pocket.

A dwarf-size doorway in the back wall of the room leads down a long darkened stone stair. What appears to be the remains of a thick stone door lay scattered across the floor.

Down Down Down

The stair leads down and down for hundreds of feet. At first the passage is rough-cut through solid stone, but later it becomes a widening way in a dank natural cavern with cut stairs as the only sign of workmanship. At the bottom the cave empties into a much larger cavern where an old guidemark on the wall indicates that a holdfast lies somewhere down the right passage. The greater cavern is truly vast, and much of it is hidden in the black beyond even the range of dwarven darkvision. Huge and wondrous stone formations hang from the hidden ceiling or climb up from the tacky mud of the cave floor. A narrow stream of seep water wanders back and forth along the ground, trickling slowly to the right. To the left the cavern narrows quickly and becomes rugged going as a large cave-in makes passage progressively more difficult until the way is completely blocked.

The way to the right is clear and even PCs without Track notice animal tracks and game-like trails in the mud along the stream indicating the passage of cavern creatures, especially orcs (see MN, page 186). PCs with the Track feat notice (DC 14) the occasional boot print but realize that due to the lack of erosion within caves the tracks could be hundreds of years old.

Hiking along the cave floor is easy, and though PCs with darkvision can occasionally see the walls from the edge of the stream, there are dozens of side passages that disappear into the darkness. The main passage remains the largest, however, and Search checks (DC 15) reveal guidemarks carved on stalagmites and other

rock formations every 500 to 1,000 yards. If the PCs choose other passages they will find themselves stymied by dead-ends, ever-narrowing passages, cave-ins, and warrens of dangerous creatures. They should eventually realize that following the guidemarks is the only safe and reasonable option.

DM's Advice: The Darkness

Traveling through the underground of the Kaladrún Mountains is a dangerous and creepy thing, and as the DM you should use vibrant description to impart this to your players. Constantly remind them of the oppressive darkness, the humid air, the strange rock formations, and the directionless echoes of strange cavern beasts, unseen in the black. Describe how the tacky mud of the cavern floor sticks to their boots, and how the flickering light cast by any lanterns turns shadows into lurking monsters. Really work the sights, smells, and other sensations of the environment to help the players to truly imagine their circumstances.

Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

If the PCs continue down the passage, they travel along the twisting, contorting, and ever-downward path of the cavern for most of a day—10 to 12 miles of passages at least. The stream slowly grows as more seep water and other little streamlets join it from side passages. At some point the PCs come to a narrow, bottomless chasm, about 5 ft. wide, that cuts across the cavern floor, ceiling, and walls. An ancient earthquake once cracked the ground here and the stream the PCs were following simply cascades into the darkness below.

Just on the other side of the chasm, a widening in the main cavern has become a battleground between two *faarn* (the Old Dwarven term for umber hulk). A large female chose that section of cavern in which to build her nest and was brooding a clutch of eggs. A hunting male has inadvertently stumbled into her territory and as the PCs approach the chasm they hear the feral sounds of their battle. The sounds subside after a few seconds, leaving only the hiss of the stream as it spills into the dark.

If they cross the chasm and explore the cavern on the other side the PCs first discover the old bones and half-rotten remains of the mother *faarn*'s various prey animals along with large piles of horrid-smelling dung.

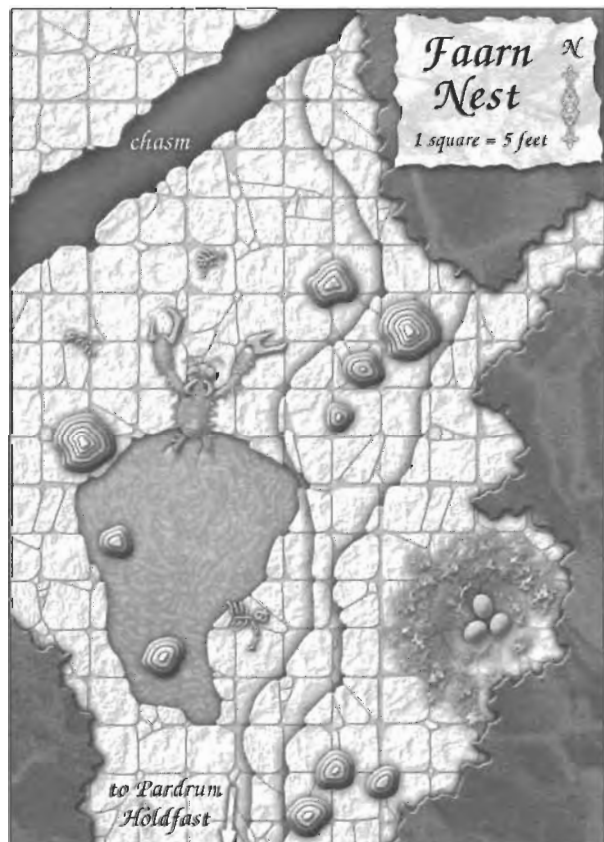
Second, they find the gore-spattered site of the bloody battle between the two *faarn*s and the freshly dead carcass of the male creature. Though none in the party has ever seen such a beast before, residents of Durgis Rock and anyone making a successful Knowledge (Kaladrún Mountains) or Knowledge

(nature) check DC 14 means the character has heard of such a beast, knows it is called a *faarn*, and that they are extremely dangerous. They will also be able to explain that the creature's gaze is perhaps its most potent weapon, and that eyes should be averted when fighting it (see DMG, Chapter 3, Special Abilities, Gaze Attacks). Though the PCs are not familiar with the creature's anatomy, any successful Spot check (DC 12) will reveal that, while the dead *faarn* seems to still have all of its limbs, there is a bloody and clawed left arm just like his lying in the mud nearby. The players are likely to realize a wounded *faarn* is still in the darkness somewhere.

If the PCs approach the east side of the cavern, they discover a large crater dug out of the mud and filled with rotten carcasses of various kinds. Half buried in the furry, rancid muck are three large greenish globes that the PCs should quickly recognize as eggs. Scattered about are many ort, orc, and dwarf bones, and various rusted bits of weaponry and armor, all trampled into the mud. This is the mother *faarn*'s nest. As the players make this realization the mother *faarn* charges out of the short tunnel to the northeast and attacks.

Umbur Hulk (wounded): 50 hp, one claw; see MM.

Tactics: The territorial monster is simply defending her young. Half-crazed, she will fight to the death to defend her territory. The creature has lost an arm in her fight with the other *faarn*, and the intent of this injury is to add a bit of color to the encounter while gearing down its challenge rating to a more appropriate level. She is



too enraged to actively use her gaze attack, though it still has an effect on those who look directly at her.

Treasure: If the PCs dig around in the muck, they find evidence that many dwarves and orcs alike have been killed and eaten by the creature. There are rusted weapons of various kinds, lots of ruined armor, and the occasional gold trinket or bit of jewelry. A successful Search check (DC 12) uncovers a bag of old coins and cut gems that bursts open when disturbed.

4-2: To the Rescue

Guidemarks past the faarn nest continue to lead the party westward through the darkness. Just after breaking camp on the second day of travel, PCs making successful Listen checks (DC 12) will hear the sounds of another pitched battle, but this one features the familiar ring of steel and an occasional dwarven warcry. The fight seems to be taking place up a side passage a bit farther along the main cavern.

If the party hurries up the passage to investigate, they come across a raging skirmish between a band of orcs and a dwarven patrol. Muddy water forms a wide, foot-deep pool in the middle of the basin-like floor. Billows of orc and dwarf blood drift from the half-submerged bodies of the fallen, turning the dark water red. Two dwarves stand back-to-back in the middle of a sizable chamber. They are knee deep in seep water and are shouting challenges at the ring of 10 orcs that surround them. Both seem badly wounded. 13 dead orcs and eight fallen dwarves lie about the vault.

Orc Recruits (7): 7 hp; see appendix.

Orc Troopers (4): 17 hp; see appendix.

Tactics: If the party charges into the fray, the tide of the battle will likely turn quickly. The orcs fight cooperatively, forming a loose skirmish line, and until at least two of them fall they each gain the orc racial attack bonus of +1 for fighting in a group.

Development: When the battle ends, the PCs discover that only one of the dwarves, Golan of Cardaal Clan, still lives, though he is badly hurt and unconscious (-7 hit points). As the DM, you should contrive to have Golan and his compatriot Badel account for two troopers and one recruit before they fall, effectively leaving only eight for the PCs to deal with.

If the party is slow to respond or takes its time to sneak to the scene, the fight is over by the time it arrives and the PCs discover only the aftermath. Ten dead

dwarves and 16 dead orcs lay about the chamber, most awash in a bloody pool. The surviving orc victors disappeared up a side passage to their not-too-distant camp.

The dead yield up weapons, armor, clothes, and accessories according to their kind. The orc arms are serviceable but well-worn. The dwarven metal goods are of fine quality, but no better than those of the party. There is a single mithral warhammer among the fallen, and a combined total of 23 man-days of edible, albeit now soggy, rations.

If the party chooses to track the orcs, the PCs will likely be forced to make a glorious last stand as they are confronted with overwhelming numbers of Feral Mother warriors, part of the orc legion besieging Pardrum holdfast.

Scion of Pardrum

Assuming the party arrives in time to save at least Golan, the PCs may either heal him, hole up somewhere and wait until he is fit to travel, or carry the injured dwarf along.

If the party heals Golan or waits until he is fit to travel, he thanks the PCs for their help, tells them of Pardrum Holdfast, and invites them to accompany him to his home. Should

they accompany Golan there is plenty of time along the journey for the PCs and Golan to get to know each other. Having come to his rescue and therefore earned his thanks, Golan quickly forms a friendship with the party. If the party arrives with Golan, their initial encounter with the besieged dwarves of Pardrum is therefore less tense and dangerous.

Note that if the party stays in the area without beheading or otherwise destroying the dead dwarves and orcs, they are likely to be attacked by hungry ungral a couple of days after the battle. This optional encounter should be used only if the party is not too badly hurt from their recent battles with the faarn and the orcs, or if the particular group of players thrives on combat.

Ungral Orc Recruits (4): Medium-size undead; 6 hp; AC 19; otherwise same as orc recruits (see appendix).

Ungral Orc Troopers (4): Medium-size undead; 13 hp; AC 20; otherwise same as orc troopers (see appendix).

4-3: Pardrum Holdfast

The party may follow guidemarks or Golan and, at the end of a short day's hike from the site of the skirmish, arrives in the environs of Pardrum Holdfast. Near the left-hand cavern wall are a dozen five-foot iron poles



sticking up from the mud, topped with grisly trophies: the heads of freshly killed orcs. Other orc heads adorn the poles below these, like bloody beads on a gruesome necklace. From the top down the heads are increasingly rotten. Many of those nearest the ground are half-mummified and show signs of being picked at by scavenging orcs.

The poles are scattered rather haphazardly in front of what was a huge and ornately worked opening in the cavern wall. The entranceway was once sculpted in the shape of a dragon's maw, but much of the dragon's features have been broken away and most of the mouth has been filled in with heavy stone masonry, leaving only a small opening in which even a halfling would have to crouch to pass. Any Medium-size PCs are forced to crawl on hands and knees within the passage and Large creatures will require hours to struggle through the narrow passage.

After 50 feet the tunnel empties into a circular room 30 feet in diameter. Across the room is a large, securely closed circular gate of typical dwarven design. The walls are 30 feet high, very smooth, tapered slightly inward, and crenelated at the top. PCs that succeed at Profession (soldier) or Spot checks (DC 12) will immediately recognize murder holes in the ceiling. As the PCs crawl into the room and come to their feet, there is a massive shuffling of boots overhead and the clang of many weapons as 30 dwarven warriors step to the edges of the wall and aim spears and crossbows down at the party.

If the party is alone, Golan having died in the caverns, the PCs are subjected to the encounters described in the Dubious Acquaintance section below. If Golan survived and accompanies the party, conscious or otherwise, the DM should skip to the Trusted Friends section.

Dubious Acquaintance

A deep dwarven voice, full of command, rings out from the darkness overhead, yelling "Welcome to Pardrum—put down your weapons or die." If the party complies, the gate rolls open after a few tense moments and the PCs are rushed by guards, surrounded, and taken directly to a dungeon in a lower level of the holdfast.

If the party refuses to comply with the order to disarm, the voice commands "Kill them!" and the defenders rain spears and bolts down on the PCs, likely killing the whole party. If you want the party to escape, give each PC a couple of hits and then let them retreat back out the tunnel. If they insist on staying and trying to fight, but you still want them to survive, let each take hits until unconscious and then have them wake, wounded but bandaged, in the dungeon cells as described below.

In the dungeon the PCs are stripped of all possessions save their clothing and locked into individual adjacent cells containing nothing but stone benches and midden buckets. Unconscious PCs are tended to, but any other injured party members are left to their own

devices. Two guards at the entrance to the hall of cells stand watch just out of sight and ignore any questions or threats from the PCs.

Steel Bars: hardness 10; hp 30; Bend DC 30.

The cells across the hallway contain several beaten and possibly dead orcs and goblins. Two conscious goblins and an orc stare sullenly across the hall at the PCs, while another orc alternates between howling in rage and slinging foul insults at both the guards and the newly arrived PCs. The potential interaction between the party and the other prisoners offers the chance for some entertaining roleplaying.

Interrogation

The party is left completely alone to suffer orcish insults for more than a day. The guards give them one meal of dried ort meat, mushrooms, and water about halfway through their incarceration. After almost 35 hours new guards lead the party from the dungeon, along winding ways and up long stairs, to the great keep's council chamber.

The council chamber is wide and circular with a low ceiling. A round stone table fills the middle of the room, and six aged dwarves in burnished mail seated on one side of it stare suspiciously at the party members. Several torches offer flickering light and glint off of various fine arms and armor adorning the walls.

The guards stand warily around the party while they are interrogated by Thedron, the dor of Pardrum, and his council. He asks who they are, where they are from, what they are doing in the underground, what business they have with Cardaal Clan, and so forth. He suggests that they are probably in league with the traitorous Black Blood Clan (see MN, page 188) and that he should kill them outright.

This is an opportunity for some serious roleplaying and careful oration on the part of the players. They need to convince a suspicious Thedron that they are not a threat to the holdfast and can in fact be trusted. Diplomacy, Bluff, and even Perform checks (DC variable) can help tongue-tied PCs, but the DM needs to ultimately decide if the players eventually prove convincing on the merits of their roleplaying. The more dwarves in the party, the easier it will be to convince Thedron. The more orcs or dworgs in the party, the harder. If they succeed, all of their gear save their weapons is returned to them and they are offered an invitation to stay until their wounds are healed, and are given use of the room in Trusted Friends, below. They are allowed to move freely about the common spaces of the great keep but are always accompanied by at least one chaperone.

When the party appears healed, their gear and weapons are returned, along with a sack containing 10 man-days worth of mushrooms and dried ort meat. They are escorted to the gates by guards and a few onlookers and sent unceremoniously on their way.

If the PCs fail to convince the dor, the group's gear, sans weapons, is returned and the PCs are imme-

diately escorted to the murder hole outside the gate. Here they are given the bag of food described above as well as all of their weapons and equipment except the Woden's mithral waraxe and the Sun and Moon urutuks. They are ordered to leave the Cardaal Clanhold immediately and to never return on pain of death.

In either case the party is now alone again in the underground with only two options: continue blindly on, or retrace their path to the old refuge. Either way, the DM is encouraged to make their way a dangerous and challenging one as orc patrols and worse hunt the surrounding caverns and tunnels.

Trusted Friends

A deep dwarven voice, full of command, rings out from the darkness overhead and demands "Who are you and how come you to travel with a son of Pardrum Holdfast?" Golan reassures the speaker—Thedron, Dor of Golan Clan—that the PCs are friends. Thedron then says "We shall see," and though he does not demand that the PCs drop their weapons, the defenders do not lower theirs either. A tense half-minute passes and then the gate rolls slowly aside.

When the gate opens the PCs are rushed by guards who encircle them warily, weapons ready, but otherwise do not touch the PCs. If the PCs antagonize the warriors or make any threatening moves the dwarves attack and the PCs are put down as described in the previous section. Assuming they remain docile, Golan is spirited off and the party is escorted to a small but comfortable chamber in the middle levels of the holdfast's great keep. The room is windowless and is furnished with two beds, a stone table, chairs, empty shelves, and a clean chamber bucket. The door is locked and two guards stand outside. They refuse to answer any questions. After an hour the guards bring the party a meal of fresh ort meat, mushroom bread, cave peppers, and beer. Two hours after that the PCs are escorted down some stairs and a short hall to the council chamber, which is described in the previous section.

Golan is waiting for the party in the council chamber, all health and smiles. The guards are dismissed and the PCs are warmly received. It turns out that Golan is the son of a council member and has told his father all about the PCs coming to his aid. The council will politely question the party about their homes and travels, and will in turn answer questions. The PCs are invited to stay as long as they wish and are offered spacious quarters and free access to the holdfast.

Honored Guests

The PCs will discover that Golan is actually a favorite son of all the holdfast and in saving his life they have become honored guests and minor celebrities themselves. For the first day or so, Golan will escort the PCs everywhere and introduce them to his family and

friends. Everyone is eager to meet outsiders and has endless questions about the outside world—the advance of the orcs, the status of other clans, and so forth. Non-dwarves draw the most questions and are stared at and accosted by curious dwarves wherever they go.

Pardrum Holdfast is typical of those throughout the Kaladrans. It is almost a thousand feet below the surface and surrounded by natural and dwarf-made tunnels. There were once thousands of residents, but attrition has left the population at just over 1,200. Much of the holdfast is abandoned and many of the chambers and surrounding passages have been sealed off for defense against the besieging orcs. For details of the layout and contents of the holdfast see the accompanying map and refer to the description of dwarven holdfasts in the *MIDNIGHT* core book (page 183).

As days pass and the party learns the lay of the land they are increasingly left to their own devices; the small hall where they eat each day, however, is crowded with curious locals at every meal. During the days the party spends in Pardrum stage any or all of the following roleplaying encounters as is appropriate to the PCs' activities or behavior.

Children Underfoot: The holdfast's children will immediately gravitate towards the PCs, fascinated by their novelty and romantic notions of adventure. If there are non-dwarves in the group they will suffer constant questions and demands for attention. Any gnomes can enthrall the children for hours with their stories, and the PCs are likely to receive various child-made gifts when they finally depart.

Dworgish Kinship: One child in particular, a nine-year-old dworg girl named Fedwyn, is immediately obsessed with any dworg PC. A virtual outcast in her own clan and completely friendless, her fascination for the only other dworg she has ever seen is understandable. In fact, she will follow the PC everywhere, and though incredibly shy, Fedwyn will hang on his every word and action, imitating everything she can. If the PC encourages her, the PC's visit will be the happiest time in her life. If the dworg PC dotes on Fedwyn, the other children start acting more civil towards her, and begin including her in their activities. Eventually, at some quiet moment, a tearful dwarven woman named Uudra (Fedwyn's mother) comes to the dworg PC and expresses her heartfelt gratitude for what he has given her unfortunate child. In fact, when the party leaves, Fedwyn, gear all packed and an old rusty axe in tow, will try to leave with them, and some careful roleplaying is required to keep the child from being terribly hurt when she is invariably left behind.

Taking a Shine: Perhaps it is only the novelty of the visitors, or the suave roleplaying, but any dwarven, gnomish or even human characters are likely to suffer the amorous attentions of one or more residents of the holdfast. Golan himself takes a shine to any female dwarf PC, and he has plenty of friends that could be interested in the other party members. Some of the old timers, remembering the way things used to be, may

take runs at any gnome PCs, and even crotchety Wendell, if he is still with the party, is likely to revisit his youth by having the chance to “trade” with a dwarven matron.

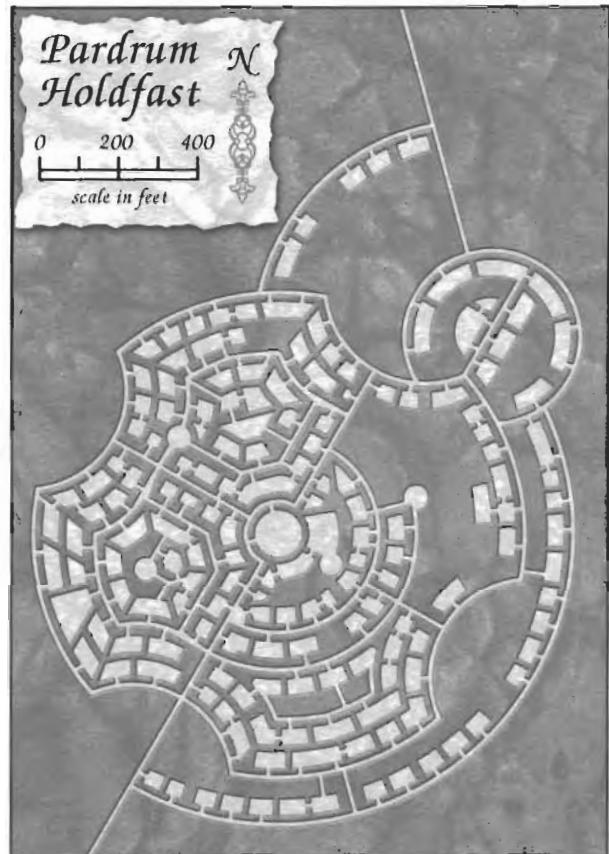
Professional Interest: Several of Pardrum’s fine weaponsmiths are particularly interested in Woden’s mithral waraxe and the Moon and Sun urutuks the PCs carry. In exchange for the chance to examine them and answers to questions about them, the smiths happily offer the PCs minor repairs and bargains on other gear. In fact, the visit to Pardrum is one of the only opportunities the party will have to safely barter for any goods they may need. Assuming the PCs have items worth trading, the various craftspeople and food suppliers will offer them fair deals.

Curious Loremaster: Dola Cardaal, the loremaster of Pardrum Holdfast, is a grizzled old woman. An orc fight in her youth cost the old woman her left eye (a badly scarred and empty socket is all that remains) as well as her left arm from the elbow down. She remains quick-minded and feisty however, with a sarcastic sense of humor. She is keen to interview the party and wants to know about their clans or homelands and any other news from the outside world. She also wants to know about their business in the underground and why they are so far from their homes. She will question them for hours if the PCs sit still long enough and the players should be left with the impression that even their evasive answers let on more than they might have intended. The wise channeler is also willing to offer magical services in exchange for their time should the players have need, and she can reveal the upper level powers of any covenant items the party may be carrying.

Pit Fighters

As detailed in the MIDNIGHT core book, most of the subterranean dwarf clans have a long-standing tradition of gladiatorial combat. Used to blood young warriors, train inexperienced ones, execute enemy prisoners, or simply as cathartic entertainment for a hopeless race, pit fighting among some clans has become a celebrated feature of holdfast life, and as the PCs find out, it is no different among the Cardaal.

At some point near the end of the PCs’ stay, as they go about their day’s activities, socializing, preparing for their departure, or having some of the other encounters described above, they should start overhearing rumors about “the fighting in the pit.” A PC may overhear two blacksmiths talking about the upcoming fight and how one PC dwarf is going to be fighting an orc prisoner or a PC dworg is going to be pitted against an ogre. Perhaps one of the clan children will ask a PC outright if he is ready for his fight. If they ask around about the fights the PCs get knowing looks, smiles, and vague comments, but no straight answers as it is considered bad luck to talk to potential pit fighters about their matches until after they have been fought.



Two nights later, there is an air of anticipation and excitement throughout the holdfast. After the evening meal the residents, almost to a person, leave their normal routines and gather around the fighting pit. It is likely that the party will find their way there simply by following the flow of the crowd, and it is probable that the PCs have already seen the pit in their time at the holdfast.

The fighting pit of Pardrum holdfast is typical of such things. The pit sits in the middle of an open plaza and is roughly 40 feet square and 15 feet deep. There are five stone pylons, each two feet at the base and 10 feet high, arranged in a ring around its stone floor. Tall, smoky flames burn from oil-filled basins in the top of each pylon, casting the pit in flickering yellow light. Crude iron spikes line two opposing walls and several of the pylons, while the other walls have openings sealed by doors of heavy steel bars. The floor and walls sport dark, rust-colored stains of various sizes, and there is a faint scent of death about the area. Around the edge of the pit are three rising tiers on which spectators stand to get better views, and at one end, a taller dais on which the dor and his council stand and watch.

Kurgun dwarves are not known for the pit fighting tradition, so the Durgis PCs are likely unfamiliar with the customs. When they arrive at the pit most of the holdfast’s residents are already present, but the PCs can still find good vantage points along the edge. The crowd



is already worked up and a fight between a young, unblooded warrior and one of the goblins from the dungeon is about to begin. The dor taps a heavy steel staff on the stone at his feet and when the crowd quiets he says in his deep voice “Let the time of youth be left behind and the life of a warrior begin.”

With that, one of the barred doors in the pit opens and a feral-eyed goblin stumbles out of the opening, obviously prodded from behind. The dwarven youth is armed with an axe and the goblin wields a spiked iron mace. The fight begins tensely when the boy stumbles once, but it is ultimately a short bout, as the youth kills the goblin with a chopping blow that lays open its chest. The crowd erupts in frenzied cheering, hauls the new warrior out of the pit, and mobs him in congratulations.

Again the dor pounds his staff on the stone and the crowd quiets. Thedron then says “there are honored warriors among us. Shall we offer them a test of that honor?” With that the crowd parts, leaving the knot of PCs standing alone on the edge of the pit, and waits expectantly with a sea of wild eyes.

If all of the PCs decline to fight, murmurs of disbelief ripple through the crowd, and ultimately the fights resume with members of the holdfast taking to the pit. In their refusal to participate, however, the PC have forfeited their honored status, and the rest of the evening, and indeed, during the rest of their stay in Pardrum, they are treated with less respect and in some cases outright scorn.

If any of the PCs step forward to fight, the crowd erupts into roaring cheers and takes on a fevered air. One by one, or in teams if the PCs choose, they can jump into the pit and take on various foes in mortal combat. The DM is encouraged to carefully match the enemies the PCs fight to their abilities—the dwarves have several goblins, orcs, a worg and even an ogre held captive in chambers around the pit. If halflings enter the pit, set them against goblins armed with maces. If a dwarven fighter steps up, pit him against an orc recruit armed with a vardatch. If a dworg wants to fight, set him against an ogre with a greatclub (but suffering from a wound that lowers his hit points a bit). Whatever you, as the DM, set against them, make sure it is enough of a challenge to threaten the characters, adding true excitement to the situation, but make sure the combat will not simply kill the PC outright. Some of the various NPCs described in the the first four chapters provide a range of appropriate foes for the pit fights.

If any of the PC fights goes badly and a character is knocked unconscious, the residents will not come to his aid, for that is simply “the way.” Afterwards they will kill and likely eat the orc that killed the PC and will long honor his memory in stories of the fight, but they will not interfere. If any of the other PCs jump to the injured party member’s aid, the holdfast residents will subsequently treat the whole party with scorn.

When all the PCs that want to fight have done so, the bloody celebration loses its violent edge and turns into a long night of drinking, singing, and storytelling back in the feast hall of the great keep. Any fighters are treated as heroes and are lauded throughout the night.

Soothsaying

At some point just before the PCs depart Pardrum, the Loremaster will request that the party rejoin her in her chambers one last time. They find her sitting at a low stone table lit with a couple of ort lard candles. A pile of small unremarkable stones and a silver hammer lay in the middle of the table. The old channeler offers no welcome or explanation and when the party is seated she says the following: “The path you take is fraught with peril. The dead lie behind you, the unknown lies ahead, and enemies are close at your heels. The burden you bear is a mystery for which you risk your lives, and though it may serve small comfort in your darkest hours, I sense your quest is worth those risks.

“Most dwarfkin believe prophecy is dangerous and leads those that heed it on fools’ errands. I believe it is a tool, and like any tool can be used to create or destroy. I offer my small soothsaying for what use you may make of it. Listen with your ears but understand with your hearts. Champion each other, and rely on friendship before your weapons.”

That said, she commands each PC to choose a stone from the pile and in turn bids each to smash his

stone with the hammer. Oddly, as hard as the PCs may strike their individual rocks, they only break once, roughly in half. After the stones are all broken the Loremaster gathers the pieces and speaks, as if in a trance, to each of the PCs in turn, gently fondling the pieces of the specific rock he broke as she does so.

Modify the following fortunes, or come up with your own, to best fit your individual players and their characters. Face each player in turn and read the appropriate fortune. Work the mood and tone, and play up the serious air of the previously sarcastic Loremaster. Use a solemn and gravelly voice and speak slowly. Try to make the players feel the auspicious nature of the woman's words.

Human Warrior: "Wildlander (or warrior, or Northerner, or rebel). I know your teacher. Trust what he taught you and trust your friends. The only deception they will offer you is that already in your heart."

Halfling or Elfing: "Plains kin, little one. You have a strength that belies your size. Use this to your advantage and keep faith with your brethren. The journey may see your end, but the path you are on is the one you must take."

Channeler: "You fear your hunters but would fight for freedom. Do not lose heart but know that the magic in yours may betray your company to the darkness."

Gnome or Dwarf: "River blooded. The fate of your family has come to pass and your beloved Eren flows with tears. Be strong and hold true a promise. The ends are indeed justification of the means." (This fortune is an important one and foreshadows events in chapter 6. Try to work it into the scene in some fashion, even if Wendell is the only option for a gnome subject).

Dworg: "Mountain kin. Fear not your dark blood. You are no more orc than I. Remember your people and die for them as they died for you. The hall of heroes is your fate."

Dwarf: "Stoneheart. The blood of heroes flows in your veins. Do not fear to spill it for your friends. The future for you is a branching tunnel. Choose wisely and doom may yet be averted. Prove weak of heart and all is lost."

When she finishes with each PC, the Loremaster says: "The way calls to you, and you must soon depart. Stay to the path of honor, friendship, and faith, and though some of you will not live to see its end, your quest will prevail."

The Loremaster appears drained and a bit disoriented. She thanks the PCs for their indulgence, but will offer no comment or explanation of her words. She gently, almost sadly, wishes them farewell and sure footing on their journey, and with the help of a younger assistant, retires to her inner rooms.

A Long Dark Way

Eventually the party will plan to depart and continue on their journey. When they do, Thedron offers the PCs the

services of a guide, a young wildlander experienced with the paths of the underground. Her name is Calia and she promises she can lead the party to the western side of the mountains. She assures them she knows the way, but also assures them the way is a dangerous one.

When they finally depart, the council offers the party 20 man-days of dried meat and mushrooms, and provides crossbow bolts and axes to any PCs that need them. Many of the friends they made and all of the settlement's children (and possibly a determined Fedwyn) turn out at the gate and solemnly wish the party a safe journey as they pass out through the small entrance tunnel.

Calia leads the party through three days of hiking, climbing, and sneaking as they go from large caverns and cut tunnels through small passages and muddy crawlways. If you wish to offer your players additional combat encounters, feel free to plant an orc patrol or two along the route. If the PCs are stealthier types, offer the patrol encounters, but do so in a way that allows them to sneak past, avoiding trouble. Play up the tension of such encounters and use careful description and plenty of Move Silently and Hide checks to keep the players honest.

At the end of the third day, changes in the nature of the passage walls indicate to any dwarves that the party is nearing the surface, and a faint draft bearing the smell of wildflowers is a welcome sensation to any non-dwarves in the group. The party has passed under the mountains, and Calia is about to lead them onto the open plains west of the Kaladrans.

Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards

Encounter:	XP:
• PCs defeat the enraged brooding faarn	900
• PCs rescue Golan	2,000
• PCs prevent the dead from rising	200
• PCs fight off risen ungral	100
• Party is accepted without Golan	500
• Party gives a good accounting of itself at the council meeting without jeopardizing the continuation of the quest	500
• Roleplaying encounters at Pardrum	0–1,000
• PCs succeed in pit fights	300
• Party finally reaches the plains	500
Total Potential XP:	6,000

Chapter 5

Across the Plains

Synopsis

The party exits the underground to find themselves on the eastern edge of the great plains and faced with an arc-long and arduous trek across a sea of grass. The initial challenge is for the dwarves to simply get used to the big sky and the wide horizon. Then the PCs face a string of encounters that will test their compassion, bravery, and sanity while keeping their weapon arms fit. First they come across the remains of a raided halfling camp and an odd orc soldier left to die by his comrades. When they learn that a large number of the halflings have been taken prisoner by orcs, the PCs must decide if they are going to rescue them and how they will do so. Later a challenge by Sarcosan riders tests the party's restraint and diplomacy. The chapter ends with the PCs' magic failing as they come upon a seemingly abandoned Eren River army checkpoint where they suffer a dreadful encounter with its population of faengral Fell and their undead legate master.

5-1: Big Sky Country

As the party approaches the surface, sure signs mark their progress—the spoor of surface animals dots the passage floor, roots penetrate the crumbling rock of the cavern walls, and the air carries the scent of vegetation. The DM should emphasize the relief the party feels and play up the sense of accomplishment that making it this far represents. The DM should also play up the strange and perhaps frightening experience of any dwarven characters as they encounter the open plains for the first time.

The exit from the underground is from an old dwarven smuggling tunnel that reaches to the very edge of the foothills. It comes out into a panock tree oasis, and is half collapsed and hidden within a natural-seem-

ing boulder pile. When the party exits, it is nighttime on the surface. Whether they camp here or move on, when the sun finally rises, the dwarven characters are in for one of the biggest shocks of their lives. As the DM you should emphasize how frightening this new world appears. It is like looking over the edge of the highest cliff, and any misstep would be like falling off Aryth itself. This moment allows for some great roleplaying opportunities that can provide some much-needed comic relief to the storyline.

When the party decides to begin their trek, Calia will take her leave, thanking them for reminding her and her people of the wider world beyond the holdfast. With a last glance over her shoulder and a wave, the dwarf maiden quickly disappears into the dark entrance to the underground.

The trek to the Eren River should take about 30 days as the party will be slowed by staged encounters and the necessity of having to hunt and forage for food along the way. Because of the non-linear nature of the PCs' course over the plains, however, this chapter is a good place to shorten or lengthen the campaign. The DM should feel free to eliminate any plains encounters he does not wish to run or add any random or staged encounters he wishes.

The transition to the plains also means that any halfling, Sarcosan, or Erenlander characters become the de facto party leaders and the DM should work to make this happen. The dwarves, now completely out of their element, should begin to defer to their other comrades, offering an interesting change in group dynamics.

As the dwarves stare in wonder at the plains and the PCs start westward, give them a good initial description of their environment, and as they proceed occasionally offer a reminder of their surroundings. The horizon is lost at the edge of vision but the world seems to go on forever. Gentle rolling hills hide each other from view and shallow, chalky, seasonal streambeds cut here and there between them. The grass is spring green and neck

high to a dwarf and any halflings or gnomes are all but lost within it. It is stiff and coarse, with jagged edges that catch at clothes and drag at boots. Scattered wildflowers explode with color and songbirds fill the air with sounds the dwarves have never heard. Small game trails tunnel through the grass along the ground, and birds of prey hunt overhead. Wild boros and antelope herds move slowly across the horizon, and by noon the high bright sun is brutally warm.

Dreams in the Grass

At some point early in their journey across the plains, ask the players to make Will saves one night while the PCs are encamped. The character with the poorest result has a strange dream that seems to bear significant portent. The dream features a shadowed forest glen and a tall elven woman with eyes that are completely black—Aradil is contacting the party through a *dream* spell. She stands in a single ray of sun that falls on the forest floor, but her features remain strangely shadowed. When she speaks, her mouth does not move, but her compelling voice resonates in the mind of the dreamer and sounds somehow familiar. As she speaks, read the following to the targeted PC.

“Brave courier. I dared not hope you and your companions would make it even this far. There is more about you than one would guess, and there is the air of destiny to your little band. The fate of many may be linked to your own. Come west, and continue as you are. Come to the city by the sea, the city of bluffs and spies, the city of Baden’s sons. There you will find allies, as I will send kin to guide you. Seek them and they will find you. Take every caution, however, as even now you are pursued. Agents of the Shadow track you and your friends. Beware these foul hounds and fly as quickly as fortune may carry you.”

The dream’s timing accomplishes several things. First, it reinforces the importance of the quest. Second, it will likely lead the PCs to Baden’s Bluff, and therefore assure they follow the general course of the adventure. Third, it sets up the party’s assumption that they should search out an agent of the Witch Queen in Baden’s Bluff which will allow Jael to his eventual plans. Finally, it confirms that the party is being stalked and may be in imminent danger, providing a driving force to keep the tension high and the PCs moving.

5-2: Slavers

About a week into the plains, legs tired and muscles sore from the endless hiking, the party is trudging along in the afternoon when Spot checks (DC 15) alert the PCs to the presence of a large number of vultures circling over a point about a mile to the southwest. Without investigating there is no way to tell what might be attracting the scavengers, and the DM should add an ominous tone to his description of the scene.



If the PCs decide not to check out the site let them continue on, but later that same day, have them stumble across the trampled grass trail left by the orc slavers as described below. If the party still refuses to investigate, assume the party loses its opportunity to rescue the slaves and skip ahead to the Wary Horsemen encounter described below.

If the PCs approach the circling birds they discover a gruesome sight that likely enrages any halfling characters and proves to any dwarves that they are not the only ones fighting the orcs. The scene is one of carnage and wanton destruction. In a shallow vale between two low hills lie the remains of a halfling nomad camp. The hide tents are flattened and torn, and debris from the camp is scattered about in the trampled grass. As the PCs enter the camp dozens of vultures flap into the air, rising from the corpses of perhaps 18 halflings—warriors, herders, and children alike. Among the dead the PCs also find three orcs and the ravaged carcasses of four adult wogrens. The bodies are no more than three days old, and none have been beheaded to prevent their rise as Fell.

Anyone checking the bodies will find that one of the wogrens is in fact still alive, though unconscious and badly hurt (stable at -2 hp). If the PCs revive her, her suspicion and standoffishness quickly turns to friendship with any halflings in the party who try to earn her trust. She cautiously follows the party when it leaves,

and eventually becomes devoted to any halfling characters. She will eventually begin responding to whatever name the characters give her. Wogrens are alert protectors and fearsome fighters so her presence could prove a boon to the party.

If there are no halflings in the group, the wogren will follow at a distance, sort of shepherding the party, charging in to help in any fight. When the party reaches the Eren she will sneak off and leave them, seeking a halfling tribe to join.

The camp was large enough to have supported 50 to 70 individuals, and any halfling PCs should quickly realize the rest have been taken as slaves. The camp livestock, metal goods, and food stores are also missing, presumably taken by the raiders. A wide, very unnomad-like trail of trampled grass leads off to the northwest.

A Strange Ally

At the south end of the camp, initially hidden by half crumpled tents, the PCs find a single orc, trussed securely to a tall bundle of tent poles with its end buried deep in the ground. His head lolls forward and at first glance he seems dead, though he is only unconscious. He is badly bruised and has dozens of long, shallow knife cuts across his bare chest. If the PCs prod him he will rouse to consciousness and look about wild-eyed, only half-comprehending what he is seeing. Between his torture, wounds, and the added subdual damage of three days of sun exposure and dehydration, he is almost delusional (he is at 14 of 25 hp and has suffered 8 points of subdual damage from exposure).

The orc's name is Sardric. He was a member of the Mother of Blood Tribe and an experienced soldier who has served for some time in central Eredane. He was also a secret Follower of the White Mother but is now outcast from both his warband and his tribe. Sardric's patrol was looking for insurgent camps on the eastern plains when they came across the nomads and raided them for slaves and fresh meat. During the raid, Sardric's growing convictions came to a head and he cut down a fellow orc who was torturing a wounded halfling. In seconds his fellows had beaten him into unconsciousness, slashed open his skin, and left him exposed to the sun and any Fell that might arise from the battle dead.

Sardric: Male Orc Ftr3; Medium-size humanoid; CR 3; HD 3d10+9; hp 25; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 11, touch 11, flatfooted 10; Atk +6 (+7 against dwarves) melee (1d3+3, unarmed attack); SA +1 attack bonus in groups of 10 or more, +1 attack bonus against dwarves, night fighting; SQ +2 bonus to saves against spells, darkvision, light sensitivity, cold resistance 5; AL CG; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +2, Intimidate +3, Jump +2, Knowledge (Northern Marches) +1, Wilderness Lore +2.

Followers of the White Mother

The orcs are a fanatical, magically bred race, born to serve Izrador. Even the Shadow is not omnipotent, however. Among the orcs there is a small group of zealots known as the Followers of the White Mother. No one knows where or how they started, but the group consists of silent dissidents who believe that the orcs are only slaves to Izrador's will and not his Chosen Ones at all. They believe that in the end, when they are no longer needed, Izrador will turn on the orcs as well, sacrificing the race to his dark purpose.

The Followers are secretive, and perforce never gather or speak openly about their beliefs. They spread their ideas one carefully chosen recruit at a time, from tribe to tribe and from warband to warband. Though there are very few of these dissidents, there are rumors that small groups of them have broken with their kind and hide out in northern Erethor and the Kaladrans, forced to evade both their own people and the elves and dwarves as well. Their eventual goal of freedom for the orc nation seems as hopeless as the end of Izrador's reign.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Run
Languages: Black Tongue, Old Dwarven Pidgin, High Elven Pidgin, Orcish.

Sardric is still an orc, filled with his kind's inherent rage and hatred. But he also believes the teachings of the White Mother are right, and has turned that hatred against Izrador. If the party kills him outright, so be it—he becomes just another dead orc. If the party questions him before killing him, he will stoically claim that “not all orcs are as they seem.” If they show him greater mercy by cutting him down and perhaps offering food, water, and healing, Sardric will begrudgingly tell them what happened in the camp and mention the Followers of the White Mother. He will be clearly surprised at any compassion the PCs show, and will hesitantly parley with them, even speaking to dwarves.

If allowed, he eventually gathers up a few useful items from the wreckage of the camp—a tent pole, a canteen, rope, a section of tent cloth and, if he can borrow a knife, a whole leg from one of his fallen ex-comrades. Sardric then limps away to the north and disappears over a hill. He soon backtracks, however, and lies in wait for the party to leave. If the party tracks the slavers, and if the PCs come to blows with the patrol, Sardric will rush in and help them. Not so hurt as he lets on, Sardric can easily keep pace, especially since many of the PCs are likely of shorter legged, slower races. If the PCs do not go after the orcs, he tracks the patrol

alone in hopes of doing something to help the halflings himself.

The encounter with Sardric is one of the most potent roleplaying moments in this campaign, and DMs should stage it carefully to maximize its effect. Any dwarf or halfling character is sure to want to kill the orc outright, but might be confused and conflicted by the circumstances. Other characters may be more willing to question the orc first, but none will trust him. Sardric may be bred to hate non-orcs, but he is rational, subdued, and obviously not typical for his race. The situation is confusing and troublesome, and should make the characters and players question many things. Carefully presented, this encounter can be one of the most compelling scenes in the adventure.

To the Rescue

If the party decides to pursue the slavers, or the DM wants to present an encounter with the orc patrol without the encounter with Sardric, the trampled-grass trail left behind by the slavers and their prisoners is obvious enough for even a dwarf to follow. Though the orcs have a three day head start they are moving slowly because of the halflings. Therefore, it will take the PCs only five and a half days to catch up with them, assuming they make a forced march (see PHB, Chapter 9, Overland Movement) for at least three hours each day and do not stop to hunt.

The trail improves as the party closes, and every 15 to 20 miles the PCs come across a wide area of flattened grass made by resting orcs and huddled halflings. At each camp they also encounter the remains of halflings that have been butchered and consumed as fresh orc rations. It appears that the patrol is resting during the day and marching at night.

When the party comes upon the slavers it gets its first view of their camp from about 300 yards away, atop a small rise. It is the middle of the day and the orcs are encamped in a circle of flattened grass. Four attentive guards stand watch around the perimeter and the rest lay scattered about, asleep. There are 12 orc warriors altogether. Thirty seven starving halflings lay huddled together for comfort inside the circle, neck chains binding them together. Eight boros loaded with halfling-style sedans and camp plunder stand staked 20 yards to one side.

Twelve experienced orc warriors are a lot for the PCs to handle without careful planning, and the DM should encourage them to be cautious—as the players should have learned by this point, MIDNIGHT orcs are foes to be reckoned with.

Orc Scouts (6): 12 hp; see appendix.

Orc Troopers (6): 17 hp; see appendix.

Tactics: If attacked outright, the guards will roust the sleepers with calls to arms who will then join the battle in 1d3 rounds with vardatches and shields but unarmored. If all together, the orcs attack in teams of three or four per party member. If the PCs create a diver-

sion to lure away the guards or otherwise divide the orc force, three pickets leave to investigate while the fourth wakes three sleepers to take their places. If attacked, any smaller groups of orcs move together, protecting each other's flanks while fighting to the death. The DM should remember that orcs suffer a -1 attack penalty in full daylight, and gain a +1 attack bonus in groups of 10 or more.

Development: Exhausted, unarmed, chained together, and having spent their magics keeping each other alive, the halflings are useless through most of the fight. If the opportunity arises, however, they will act to trip up or at least distract any orc soldiers that come close enough.

If the PCs defeat the orcs and free the halflings, the nomads will invite any halfling PCs to formally join their tribe, and make honorary members out of any other PCs, regardless of race. As the DM, you should treat this as a solemn honor, and play up its significance. The ceremony is a simple one in which a few drops of blood are collected from each initiate and ultimately mixed and then sprinkled on the plains grass.

If the orc Sardric joins the battle and survives, the halflings, having witnessed his actions back at their camp, and now in this battle, offer him membership as well. The unprecedented offer likely stuns most PCs and NPCs alike, but seems appropriate under the circumstances. Having nowhere else to go, Sardric accepts their offer, and departs with the nomads when they head east again the following morning.

5-3: Wary Horsemen

Several days after saying farewell to the nomads, the party encounters a band of Sarcosan freeriders. If the PCs are moving deliberately, with little effort to conceal their trail or keep off the hill tops, the riders surprise them, race in from all directions, and surround them. If the party is trying to stay hidden, keeping between the hills and in the creek beds, the PCs hear hoof beats first and have 2d6 rounds to act before the riders come upon them.

With successful Hide checks (DC 12) for each party member the PCs can hide in the grass and allow the Sarcosans to simply pass by. If anyone in the party fails the check, one of the many keen-eyed riders will spot some spoor and sound a warning that brings the horse warriors down on the party.

Light Warhorses (23): 22 hp; see MM.

Sarcosan Riders (23): Male Sarcosan Ftr2; CR 2; HD 2d10+4; hp 15; Init +6; Spd 30; AC 16, touch 12, flatfooted 14; Atk +3 melee (Sarcosan lance 1d6+2) or +3 melee (scimitar 1d6+1) or +4 ranged (1d6, short bow); SA +1 damage from horseback; SQ Natural horsemen; AL CG; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will -1; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 13.

Skills: Handle Animal +5 (+9 horses), Intimidate +3, Jump +2, Knowledge (Southern Erenland) +2, Listen +1,

Ride +6 (+10 w. horses), Spot +1, Wilderness Lore +1.
Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Ride-by Attack.

Languages: Colonial, Erenlander, Halfling.

Possessions: Sarcosan lance, scimitar, cedeku, studded leather armor, buckler

The horsemen surround the party, encircling them in a ring of lance points. There are 37 riders, armed with Sarcosan lances, scimitars, and cedekus, and clad in loose, dirty robes. The horses are lean and sweat-stained but energetic, moving as one with their riders. If the PCs remain calm, Sharu Danku, the riders' leader, demands to know "who travels the free plains armed like orcs?" Confused by the presence of armed fey, and never having seen a dwarf before, Danku is not sure what to make of the trail-weary travelers. This is an opportunity for some careful and inspired roleplaying where the words and attitudes of the PCs make all the difference.

If the PCs are simply contentious, the riders decide that the party is its own worst enemy and moves on, Danku wondering aloud if "plains leopards like dwarf meat as much as they seem to like halfling."

If the party is aggressive, the horsemen attack and a hopeless battle ensues that likely means the death of the PCs unless they quickly surrender and drop their arms. If this happens the PCs are forced on their faces at lance point, and after a quick search during which any food, weapons, and the *cloak of elvenkind* are taken, the

Sarcosans remount and ride off, laughing over their shoulders.

Regardless of the PCs' reaction to the riders, if the party includes a dworg, the horsemen aggressively separate him from the rest of the group, disarm him and hold him pinned to the ground with a lance tip against his back. If he resists, the entire party is attacked as described above. If he remains calm and his orc-like appearance is satisfactorily explained, he is grudgingly allowed to his feet to join the rest of the party.

If any PC succeeds in a Bluff or a Diplomacy check (DC 14), the riders will ultimately put up their weapons and parley with the party, but as the DM you should still make the players work for the privilege. If the party is calm and restrained and the PCs give a good accounting of themselves, the Sarcosans warn there are orc patrols in the region and ultimately offer to speed the party on its way by taking the PCs to horse. They ride west for two days, then take their leave of the party and turn south. During their time with the riders there is ample opportunity for roleplaying through which the PCs can learn something of the Sarcosan race and of the state of the occupation in central Erenland. They also learn firsthand of the pains of horse travel as any PC lacking ranks in the Ride skill takes 1d4 points of subdual damage per day from abused and strained muscles.

Marked in Red

The gnome rivermen have an elaborate code of flags, banners, pennants, and streamers that they use for boat-to-boat communications as well as more clandestine messages and warnings. Most are traditional signals such as a wide red flag on the forward mast indicating a boat unable to maneuver properly or a white flag midships proclaiming a crew in need of assistance. Others have more subtle and secretive meanings. For example, a small black streamer hung from a forward line signals there are soldiers or other agents of the Shadow on board, a yellow streamer flying from the highest point on a boat means safe refuge, and a blue pennant hanging off a mooring line means spies are watching the boat. Other markers indicate local hazards such as swift currents, hidden rocks, warnings of occupying forces, or lurking predators. A red streamer tied around the piling of any dock is an unspecified signal of danger warning gnomekin away at all costs.

There are four such red streamers tied about the outer pilings of the dock at Redwinde.

5-4: Fell Welcome

A week after first encountering the horsemen, or a day or two after riding with them, the party enters the 100 mile outer limit of the region affected by the *zordrafin corith* at the village of Redwinde described in the next section. The PCs' magical items and spells are subject to the proximity of the village temple's red mirror (MN, page 196)

This will seem a mysterious event unless any of the PCs have reason to be familiar with the effects of Izrador's foul temples. The effects are somewhat unpredictable but will likely be a cause for concern within the party. If a PC is currently wearing Agonc's Coil he may suddenly reappear as it stops working. If a channeler casts a spell she will find she needs to pour more spell energy into it, if the players drink Erethor tea it might not work, or if someone is wearing Rhiann's *cloak of elvenkind* it may cease to function. The effects could range from inconvenient to dangerous and should cause considerable consternation and perhaps a bit of fear.

Conversely, when the party leaves Redwinde, the effects of the corith fade with distance and by the time they reach Swift Water (Chapter 6) the party should be reassured as its magic again manifests normally.

At the River

After most of an arc of hard travel across the plains, perhaps shortened a few days by the Sarcosans, the party

arrives at the river. The first sign of its proximity is a subtle change in the kinds of birds in the air, and is noticed only by any wildlanders in the party. Eventually the party comes suddenly upon the high limestone bluffs that mark the eastern edge of the Fren River Valley. The bluffs here are almost 100 ft. high and spread out below is a vast woodland swamp and a broad stretch of glistening river. Not only are there more and far bigger trees than any dwarven PCs have ever seen, but they also find it hard to believe that the huge shining ribbon is truly a river.

As the PCs rejoice at having returned to the river or gawk in wonder at yet more unimagined sights, ask for Spot checks (DC 10). Those that succeed notice the party is standing in the midst of an agricultural field, but one that was allowed to go to seed just after planting—perhaps an arc ago, but no longer. Looking around leads to a trail that parallels the bluff edge, passes other abandoned fields and eventually slopes down a shallow draw to enter an Erenlander river village at the base of the cliff.

The Village of Redwinde

The village of Redwinde had long been a quiet Erenlander community that traded agricultural products to the gnomes for the few goods it could not produce itself. Then, about 30 years ago, the orcs established a small garrison and a river checkpoint in Redwinde, and with the orc presence came a Temple of the Shadow and its zordrafin corith. Life was hard under the orcs, and most of the villagers became de facto slaves, working the fields and raising livestock to feed their orc masters with little left for themselves. For years the tension grew and finally, just over one arc ago, the suffering all came to a head. A despairing young human bride, whose betrothed was killed by an angry orc soldier, managed to sneak into the temple and foul its corith. By doing so she released deadly magical forces that killed all but a lucky few, who quickly fled the cursed town.

Many of the dead subsequently rose as Fell, including the temple legate once known as Astegar.

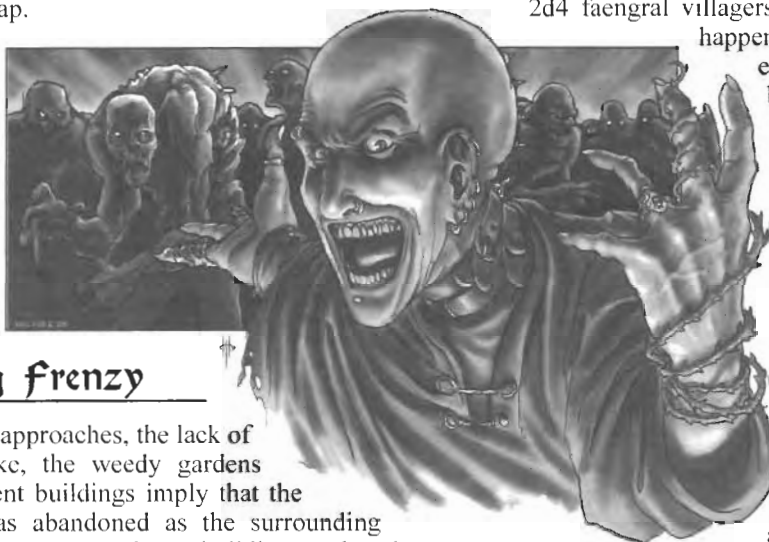


With his legate powers Astegar now commands the almost 100 faengral villagers that inhabit the village. Most of the time they lie in wait to ambush unwary river travelers and freerider patrols. They hide in root cellars, in roofing thatch, and in the dark confines of the temple, feeding on any living soul unfortunate enough to enter the town.

The village is bordered by limestone bluffs in the east, bottomland forest to the north and south, and the Eren River to the west. It is built in the typical Erenlander mix of Dornish and Sarcosan architecture and consists of perhaps 30 rather decrepit buildings, numerous kitchen gardens, and two dozen now-empty barns and livestock pens. Agricultural fields occupy the blufftops and cleared patches in the surrounding woods.

Three imposing and markedly out-of-place structures also occupy the village: The large river checkpoint pier, the orc army barracks, and the Temple of Shadow. The pier is a long wooden structure suspended high above the water on tall pilings. It supports several small out-buildings and is well constructed, made of heavy, creosote-soaked beams and planks. There are no boats of any kind moored here, however, as they were all used to flee by the few who managed to escape. The barracks is equally stout, built of thick timbers atop a stone foundation. It once housed a garrison of 30 orcs and 15 goblins who worked the inspection station and guarded the temple.

The local Temple of the Shadow is made of dark stone and is the most impressive building in the village. It is windowless, with large iron doors marked with cryptic runes in abstract patterns. Characters that have spent time in any of the large cities of Erenland should recognize the temple for what it is. There are old foundations in the ground around the temple where older buildings were knocked down to make space for the dark church, and several of the surrounding buildings show strange burn-like damage—a consequence of the corith mishap.



Feeding Frenzy

If the party approaches, the lack of wood smoke, the weedy gardens and the silent buildings imply that the village is as abandoned as the surrounding fields. PCs that approach any buildings and peek inside find no people and no untoward signs of struggle or damage. Any PC actively searching for the inhabitants can make a Search check (DC 22). If he succeeds he discovers one of the hiding faengral who then attacks, which signals the rest to come pouring out of their hiding places and attack the food that has stumbled into their ambush.

If the PCs skirt the village, observing from a distance, they see a small girl playing alone by the village cistern fall in and flounder as if drowning. She is only clever faengral bait, and if any PC comes to her rescue, as he pulls her from the water she attempts to grapple and the rest of the faengral stumble out of hiding to attack.

Faengral Children (8): Ungral Erenlander Com1; Small Undead; CR 1; HD 1d12; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 20; AC 13, touch 11, flatfooted 12; Atk +0 melee (1d4-1, slam); SQ Natural armor, undead; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will -1; Str 8, Dex 12, Con —, Int 6, Wis 8, Cha 8.

Skills: Hide +9, Listen +3, Move Silently +5, Spot +3.

Feats: None.

Possessions: None.

Faengral Villagers (4): Faengral Erenlander Com1; Medium-size Undead; CR 1; HD 1d12; hp 9; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 14, touch 11, flatfooted 13; Atk +1 melee (1d6+1, slam); SQ Natural armor, undead; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 12, Con —, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Craft (varies) +2 or +4, Handle Animal +3 or +5, Hide +5, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spot +5

Feats: Alertness, Toughness, Skill Focus (Craft) or Skill Focus (Handle Animal).

If the PCs do not trigger the faengral ambush as they explore the town, when they reach the village square the undead burst out of their hiding places and attack en masse. The first wave of undead attackers includes those listed above. When the PCs have just about finished dealing with these, a roaming band of 2d4 faengral villagers and 2d4 faengral children will happen upon them. The PCs should see even more lumbering shapes behind these new foes, converging on them from throughout the town.

The intent is to make the PCs feel overwhelmed and desperate. They have two options: try to break through the hordes of undead, or escape to the only defensible position in town. Make sure they have a clear path to that spot, which happens to be the Temple of the Shadow. If they need further prodding, Astegar will appear at the main door of the temple and beckon them in from the shadowed doorway, saying “Come quickly! You’ll be safe in here!”

Once the PCs are inside, Astegar will have two of his now-undead acolytes close and bar the door behind them. This keeps the mob of undead out . . . but the PCs are now locked in the temple with a dangerous and homicidal undead legate. He will banter with them for some time, leaving the PCs uncertain as to whether they have walked into a sanctuary or a trap. When they simply can’t take it anymore and demand to leave, Astegar will merely laugh and he and his acolyte will attack them. While opening the door and allowing the legions of undead in would make the fight easier, Astegar is more interested in murdering the PCs himself and will let himself be defeated before using the faengral for reinforcements.

Astegar the Damned: Male Ungral Erenlander Leg5; CR 6; HD 5d12; hp 33; Init +0; Spd 30; AC 14, touch 10, flatfooted 13; Atk +4 melee (1d8+1 heavy mace) or +4 slam (1d6+1); SA Death touch (5d6), rebuke undead; SQ Natural armor, undead; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +7; Str 12, Dex 11, Con —, Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +6, Craft (Manuscript Illumination) +5, Diplomacy +8, Knowledge (Arcana) +8, Knowledge (Central Erenland) +2, Knowledge (Order of the Shadow) +8,

Feats: Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Still Spell.

Spells Prepared: (5/5/4/3; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0 – *guidance, detect magic, inflict minor wounds, mending, virtue*; 1st – *bane, cause fear, inflict light wounds, obscuring mist, sanctuary*; 2nd – *death knell, desecrate, enthrall, hold person*; 3rd – *dispel magic, magic circle against good, stilled hold person*.

Domains: Death, Magic

Language: Colonial, Erenlander, Orcish, Trader's Tongue

Possessions: Once-fine, tattered black robes (caked with dried blood and dust), light leather shoes, silver pendant denoting legate rank and position, heavy mace, bracers of armor +1.

Appearance and Personality: Astegar is gaunt with drooping skin and sunken eyes. He moves with an odd, shambling grace and an eerie silence. He was a creepy and cruel man before he died, and the insanity of death has only made this worse. He manipulates the Fell of Redwinde into sending him meals and company, but detests the beings that he exists among.

Acolytes: Male Erenlander Ungral Leg1; CR 2; HD 1d12; hp 6; Init +0; Spd 30; AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13; Atk +2 melee (1d8+1 longsword); SA spells, rebuke undead; SQ Natural armor, undead; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +4; Str 12, Dex 10, Con —, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 12.

Skills: Concentration +4 (+8), Heal +4, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (Central Erenland) +2, Knowledge (Order of the Shadow) +4, Listen +4, Profession (Temple Guard) +2, Spot +4.

Feats: Alertness, Combat Casting, Weapon Focus: Longsword

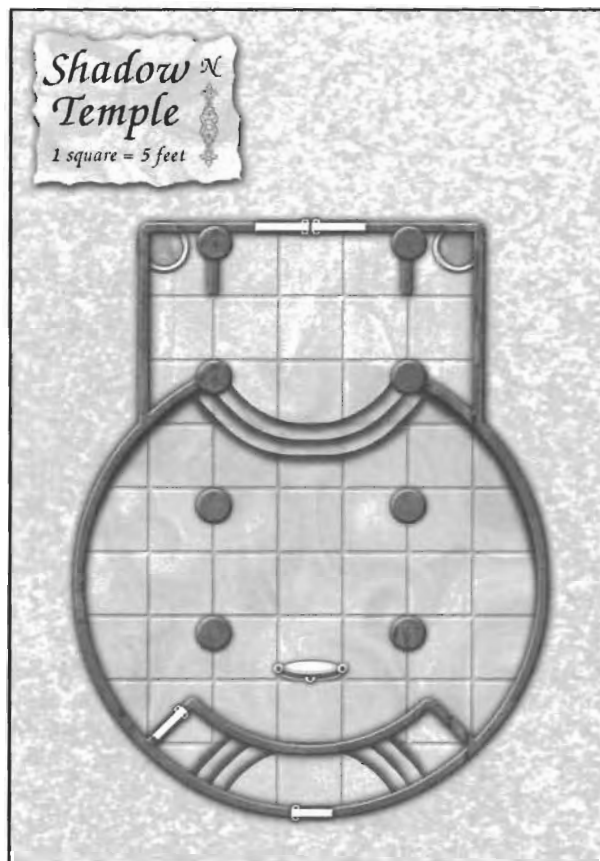
Spells Prepared: (3/2; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0 – *guidance, resistance, virtue*; 1st – *inflict light wounds, protection from good*

Domains: Evil, War

Language: Colonial, Erenlander, Trader's Tongue

Possessions: Simple black robes, longsword, sandals, brooch signifying temple guard rank.

Development: Once the PCs have defeated Astegar, they will have all the time they wish to rest and heal in the temple . . . except that no arcane magic works there because of the black mirror inside. They will have to get by with mundane means or any healing available through their heroic paths. The faengrel outside will have assumed, with their limited understanding, that Astegar killed the PCs and kept their flesh for himself, as usual. They resent his power, but fear his ability to rebuke undead too much to try assaulting the temple. Because the Fell villagers are so slow and easily duped, the PCs can easily escape the town by impersonating the legate and his acolytes, by causing a distraction elsewhere and then sneaking out, or by simply making a run for it.



Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards,

Encounter:	XP:
• PCs recognize significance of dream	200
• PCs kill Sardric without questioning him	0
• PCs kill Sardric after interrogating him	100
• PCs free Sardric and get information	500
• PCs attempt to rescue halflings but fail	1,000
• PCs succeed in rescuing halflings	2,000
• PCs defeat first wave of Fell in Redwinde	500
• PCs ignore temple and leave town	500
• PCs destroy Astegar and his acolytes	1,000
• PCs defeat additional waves of Fell	500 per wave
Total Potential XP:	6,300+

Chapter 6

Against the Current

Synopsis

This chapter begins with the PCs having reached the river and deciding how to continue their journey. Presumably, they find their way to the gnome smuggler's den of Swift Water where they seek refuge, supplies, and passage upriver. Any riverfolk PCs discover the fate of their family and the whole party gets a firsthand look at the town's smuggling operation when they hide out in the "wine cellar" and are put in contact with a captain willing to take them to Baden's Bluff. While they are there, Jael arrives on the party's trail and shows up at Tuk's in a magical disguise. Eventually the party heads north on the Eren River aboard a gnomish trading barque. Suffering through one orc inspection, the party runs afoul of a second and may endanger their hosts as a result. After being offloaded in Baden's Bluff, the party finds its way about the strange city dealing with its nefarious resistance underground and is eventually contacted by an elven guide that the PCs assume is an avatar of the Witch Queen. In reality, however, the supposed avatar is really Jael the Hunter in disguise.

6-1: Northbound

Having escaped the undead ambush in Redwinde and now presumably wandering in the swampy woods some miles away, the PCs have a decision to make. Do they go south, north, or do they try to cross the river here and continue west? Any party members from the plains will know enough about geography and the occupation to know that heading south takes them far out of their way, and continuing due west leads into the midst of the orc armies assaulting Erethor. Heading north, however, does get the party closer to Baden's Bluff and this should be the deciding factor. It is likely that any gnome or river dwarf PC will also be looking to contact family or

fellow smugglers on the river in hopes of news, assistance, and resources. Swift Water is well known to all river folk, and is just the place for one of the kin to find all of the above. A little scouting along the shore and a Knowledge (Eren River Valley) check (DC 15) allows any gnome or river dwarf to realize that Swift Water lies several days hike to the north.

If the party does not decide to head north on its own, the DM may need to provide incentive in the way of orc patrols, hunting Fell, subtle hints or simply by assuming the PCs reached the river north of Swift Water and come across the settlement as they head south. Any river folk should also know that attempting to cross the river in anything but a real boat is a very dangerous prospect, especially with any water-wary dwarves in tow and the constant threat of river eels.

Swift Water

Swift Water is one of the oldest gnome settlements on the Eren (MN, page 180). In addition to being the home of the Swift Water Trading Company, the village has become the center of gnomish smuggling on the northern Eren. The blind eyes the local orc warchiefs turn towards their favorite brewery affords the gnomes a freer hand there than anywhere else along the river. As a result, there are always contacts and resources to be found in Swift Water that are much harder to acquire elsewhere.

When the PCs arrive in Swift Water, they will likely be looking for a place to recoup and a chance to resupply. They should also be looking to find safe passage upriver to Baden's Bluff. The most likely place to find all of these is Tuk's Tradehouse, an establishment of some notoriety along the Eren.

Tuk's Tradehouse

Tuk's is a unique combination of barter hall, tavern, spirit wholesaler, and smuggler's clearinghouse. At any given time of day or night, the place is packed with local and visiting river folk drinking, eating, listening to gnomish music and stories, and conducting business, both legal and otherwise. Not only gnomes take advantage of Tuk's offerings, but human freeriders, escaped halfling slaves, and even the occasional trail-weary orc raiding party avail themselves of the goods and services that can be found at the Tradehouse.

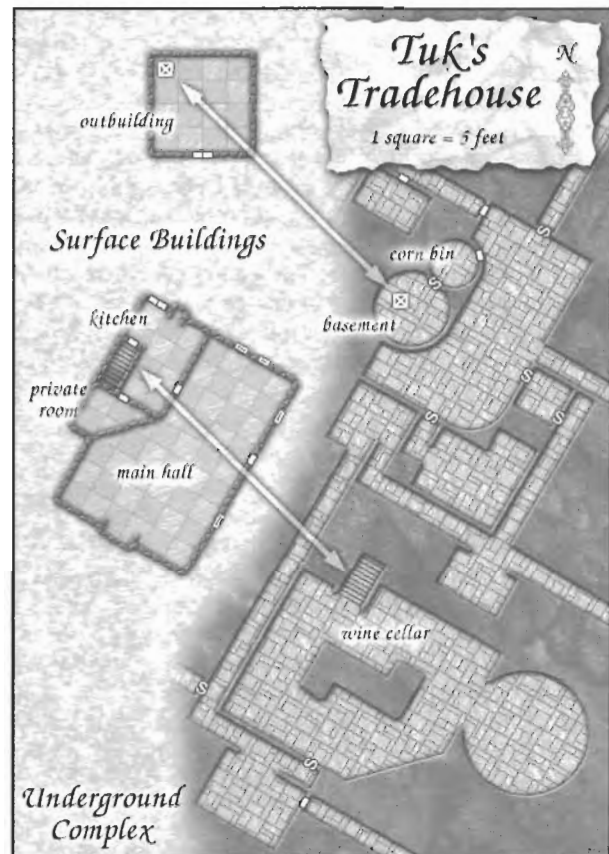
Tuk himself is an outwardly jolly and simple-minded gnome of the Swift Water Family, and has been the house's proprietor since well before the invasion. Secretly, he has a sharp intellect and is an able smuggler, dedicated to the resistance. He is almost as well connected as Gorba Vaban of the Ghost Raft, and though he is getting on in years, he has not lost a step. Any river folk in the party will certainly have met Tuk before, and as he is rather famous for never forgetting a face, Tuk will probably remember the PCs.

When the PCs show up at Tuk's and identify themselves, Tuk seems both concerned and a bit sad, and quickly shows them to a back room where they can talk "without noses being stuck in our business." Tuk asks a few questions about how long the PCs have been away from the river and when they last spoke with any river kin. He then somberly tells any Gale Family PCs that two arcs ago a large band of orc soldiers arrested or killed the crews of several Gale vessels (including any gnome PCs' families) and torched the ships. Rumors claim that more were killed than enslaved. Word from the few who escaped the raids implies that the orcs were looking for elven spies and punished the Gale Family for aiding them when they could not be found. Those that escaped have joined the crews of other families, and the rest of the Gale ships have pulled their banners and now fly flags of different companies. The sad truth is that the Gale Family, probably that of at least one of the PCs, no longer exists. The PCs at this point may be reminded of the ominous soothsaying of the Loremaster of Pardrum holdfast. Wendell is so heartbroken at this point that, unless he has become an integral member, he will leave the group to join a new family. In time he might become an excellent smuggling contact for the heroes, but for now he can only grieve.

When Tuk learns that the PCs are in need of refuge he refuses to hear more about their quest, claiming "the less I know the less danger for you." He asks what he can do to help and offers to hide the party in his secret "wine cellar" while he makes inquiries about their requests.

Wine Cellar

Tuk's wine cellar is actually part of the large complex of underground chambers and passages that started as



aging and storage rooms for the various beverage works in Swift Water. Even before the invasion, the complex featured many secret and hidden entrances, tunnels, and rooms. Over the past century, however, the complex has become a warren of hideouts and smuggler's ways. Secret doors, counterfeit casks, hidden passages, and false walls, ceilings, and floors are found throughout. There are hidden entrances in most of the major buildings in town and passages that lead everywhere: around town, the bluff tops, the open plains, and even the Eren River through two flooded passages in the lowest level. At any given time there is at least a ton of contraband, including weapons, medicine, books, food, magical goods, and even as many as a dozen escaped slaves, refugees, or fugitives.

If the orcs ever discovered the true nature of the lower levels of Swift Water, booze or no booze, the settlement would be razed, and all its inhabitants would be killed.

In the Basement

Tuk takes the party out of the Tradehouse and into an outbuilding filled with wine barrels. Rolling one aside, he reveals a trap door and a ladder that leads underground to a small empty room stocked with food, wine, candles, blankets, and bunks. A small wooden panel in the wall leads out through a huge bin half-filled with

dried corn and into a vast, dusty chamber filled with rows of casks of aging wine. Numerous other passages, normal and hidden, lead out of this room to other parts of the underground complex.

Two bruised and nervous halflings greet the PCs when they climb down. Their names are Podrick and Kimball, and they recently escaped from a goblin work crew building a new river checkpoint upstream. They were on the run for half an arc before finding their way to Swift Water and refuge. They have been here about 10 days and are awaiting a chance to meet up with a nomad tribe and take to the plains. Both Podrick and Kimball were born as slaves and have never known another life.

Crashing the Party

Any gnomes or river dwarf can essentially move freely about Swift Water, but PCs of other races are better off remaining hidden. Several days will pass, however, before arrangements can be made, and even the most patient players will likely get stir crazy—especially with the sound of gnomish music and the smells of hot food that find their way to the party's hiding place. If any of the PCs insist and come out of their hole before the party is ready to leave, stage the following encounter.



While the errant PCs wander about, or better yet while they sit in the Tradehouse drinking, a harried gnome rushes in and slams the door, hissing in a strained voice “company!” The place instantly erupts into a controlled frenzy as many people dash out the back and many regulars go about hiding various contraband (weapons and the like). The good wine vanishes and a large keg of cheap beer suddenly appears. The gnomish musicians stop mid-song and start with a hard-edged tune any river folk recognize as goblin.

If the non-gnome PCs fail to catch the wind and have not also ducked out the back, Tuk will realize they are still in the tavern and shoo them down behind the bar, not a moment too soon. Just after they hide, the door opens and 12 surly goblin sailors stumble in and take over the place like they own it. The beer flows freely, they are fed a whole sheep, the gnomes that remain play the part of cowed villagers and Tuk the part of collaborationist host. The scene is frightening, disturbing, and comical all once.

If the PCs remain quiet, crouched, and hidden, several hours later the few goblins that can still walk will leave and those that are passed out can be easily passed as the PCs return to hiding. If the PCs do anything to reveal their presence, a terrible fight breaks out. Regardless of the outcome, things go badly. If the PCs kill all of the goblins, their shipmates come to town in the morning looking for them, and tear Tuk's and much of the town apart in the process. If any goblins escape, they race to their ship and come back immediately with more soldiers and rip the place apart looking for the “criminals.” Either way, several gnomes are killed by angry goblins during the search and Tuk orders the party to leave Swift Water immediately and never return.

6-2: Break in the Clouds

After two days of hiding, Tuk brings an older gnome to see the party—Captain Horace of the High Cloud Trading Family. He is headed to Erenhead and is willing to take the party on as “special cargo.” What is more, his sister was married into one of the Gale crews that was killed in the orc attacks and he is willing to extend his trip as far as Baden's Bluff. He also will hear nothing of payment, as he feels honorbound. He refuses to listen to any of the details of the party's quest, knowing that everyone is safer the less he knows. He does say, however, that if the task is important enough that it cost so many Gale lives, it is important enough for his crew to risk theirs. He tells the party to meet the ship at the main river docks west of town in two days, just before dawn.

Stalking Hunter

Jael's astiraxes have been tracking the party since they left the mountains, and he is aware of their presence in Swift Water. The night before the party is to depart, the

Hunter comes into the village magically disguised as a river gnome off one of the ships moored at the main docks. He actually enters the Tradehouse, leaving his astirax dire wolves hidden in the shadows outside town and spends several hours spying on the gnomes and listening in on their conversations. Jael is intent on discovering where the PCs are headed and will use various magics to facilitate his information gathering. By the time he leaves, he will know that the High Cloud ship is taking on some “unexpected passengers” and is now bound for Baden’s Bluff.

To add tension to his visit, and perhaps stir the PCs to rash action, at some point during this night ask for Will saves. As at the beginning of chapter 5, the PC with the poorest roll experiences a strange dream. Whoever “wins” hears the same resonant voice, but this time the dreamer is running over night-time plains, fleeing something. The voice says “Beware—the Hunter comes!” and then a massive wolf leaps from the darkness, driving the PC to the ground, which in turn startles him awake. The queen, scrying on the party, is trying to warn them against Jael’s presence via a *dream* spell.

One round after the dream, the PC awoken by it will hear a growling coming towards him from the darkness of the wine cellar. The astiraxes have become bored with biding their time and have possessed two of Tuk’s guard dogs, then managed to follow him down into the cellar and remain hidden until night fell. They will attack the PC that is awake, hoping to maul him to death while the others sleep and leave his body as a calling card. If the dogs are killed, the astiraxes will gleefully hover above their bodies, using their horrid visage ability to give the PC something to remember them by.

Astirax-possessed Riding Dogs (2): 13 hp; see MM.

This encounter will give the PCs a taste of being hunted and attacked by the phantom creatures that all resistance fighters of MIDNIGHT have come to fear. Jael will be annoyed at his astiraxes, but their actions do not affect his long-term plans.

Up River

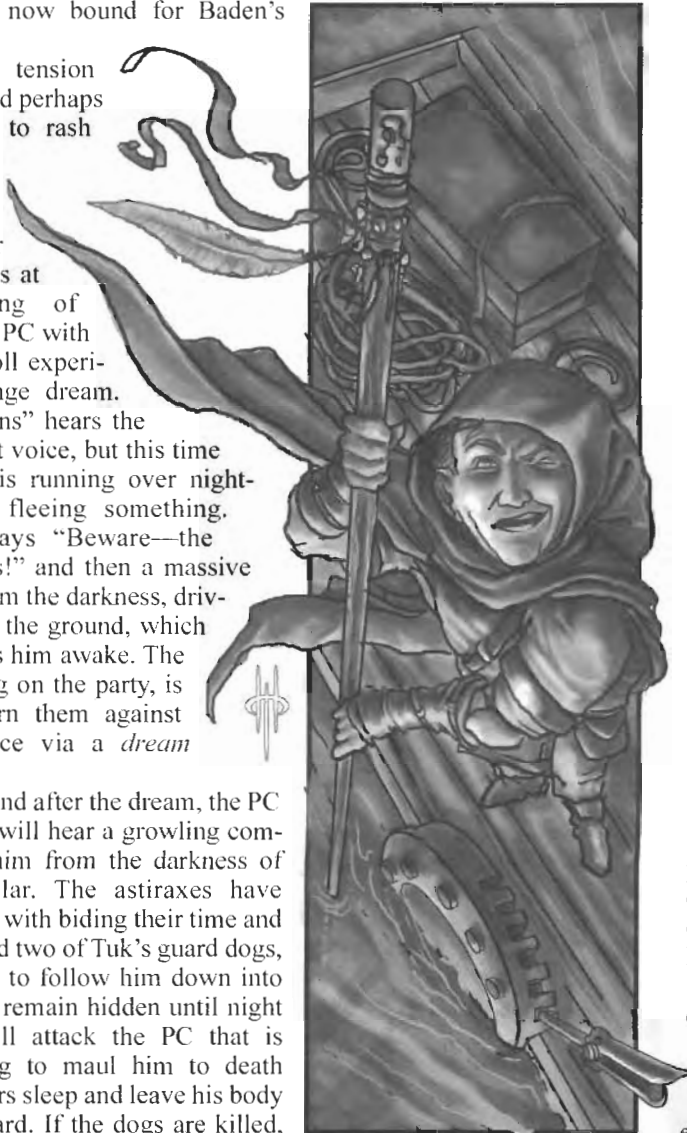
Boarding the High Cloud vessel should go smoothly enough, assuming the party has not run afoul of a dire wolf astirax. The captain and crew quietly welcome the PCs aboard and explain what is expected of them to make the journey as safe as possible. Any gnomes or river dwarf are welcome to assist the crew, but any other PCs are expected to stay below deck, especially during the day.

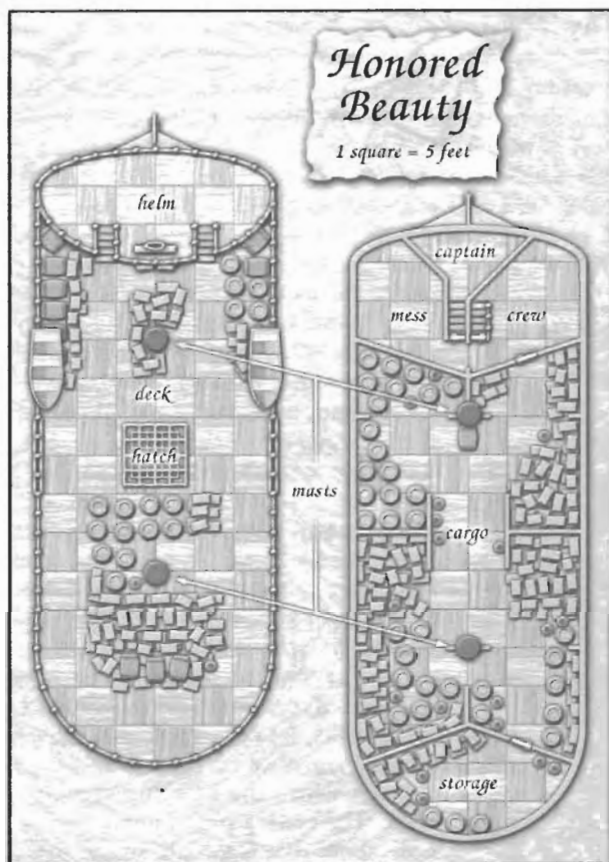
The High Cloud boat *Honored Beauty* is an 80-foot-long river barque—a broad, shallow draft sailing ship with an open upper deck and a single lower deck divided into forward storage, central cargo and aft crew spaces. There are 27 crew members, two masts, lots of sail, and a pair of 10-foot launches lashed to the deck. The helm is on a raised deck aft, and though she is slow, the *Beauty* can carry a lot of cargo and maneuvers well in the confines of the river. The upper deck and cargo hold are stacked to capacity with wine kegs, beer casks, crates, bins, and bales, leaving only a few narrow gaps through which the PCs and crew can walk. The ceiling of the lower deck is only about five feet high, so the space is rather cramped.

The High Clouds are accomplished smugglers and their ship is built to accommodate “living contraband.” There is a low crawlspace between the main deck and the false ceiling of the lower deck in which goods and people are smuggled. The “Hole,” as the crew refers to it, is about half full of cargo when the PCs board, but there is still plenty of space for them to hide. Small characters are rather comfortable and can almost sit up in the crawlspace. Medium-size characters are uncomfortably confined and any dwarves or dworgs are broad enough that they have a hard time even rolling over.

Large characters will be absolutely miserable and will be fatigued after emerging for one day for every day spent in the hold. There is a false panel in the low ceiling at each end of the cargo hold that allows access to the Hole.

As a further precaution, the captain has used his smuggler prestige class ability (see AgS, page 60) to create a magic-dead zone in which the PCs may hide their magic items and weapons. He insists that items be placed in this hidden spot and assures the PCs that holding out on him will likely get the party and the crew killed when they try to pass through Erenhead.





If the wogren the party rescued on the plains is still with them, the captain also insists that she be caged, not as a precaution against her, but as a proof against orc inspections. Passing her off as the exotic property of some legate or rich collaborator is the easiest way to explain her presence.

Boarding Parties

The trip upriver to Erenhead takes about 11 days, as upstream travel is always slow. During this time, the PCs are left to their own devices. Interaction with the crew takes place only in the hold or on the night-darkened deck. Though the PCs are allowed the relative freedom of the cargo hold, they are expected to retreat to the Hole at only a moment's notice from the crew. The PCs should consider this time a welcome respite during which they can rest, relax, heal, and perhaps even work on new spells. Simple food is amply provided and the nights are filled with the pervasive and charming distraction of gnomish music and storytelling.

During the course of the journey to Erenhead, the ship is inspected twice: once at the orc army river outpost of Jerdobat and once while cargo is offloaded and brought aboard in Erenhead. Both times the non-river folk in the party are ordered into the Hole and told "you are to remain hidden, still and quiet—no matter what happens—until you are given leave to come out." Those PCs hidden among the crew see a dozen orcs come

aboard and poke through cargo while officious human clerks look at manifests and talk with the captain. Those in the Hole hear the tread of many boots, the clink of armor and weapons, and harsh orc voices. They may even smell the musky odor of nearby orcs. The time at dock in Jerdobat is barely three hours, an uncomfortably

long period for the PCs. The inspection and cargo handling at Erenhead takes a day and a half. Any hidden PCs are half-crazy by the time the boat leaves port. Sweltering in the heat, having to go hungry, and needing to take care of the most basic bodily processes without leaving the Hole all take their toll. Unless the PCs offer some way to keep their minds and bodies active (using 0-level spells, swapping stories and songs about their homelands, doing mental exercises) the PCs must succeed at Will saves (DC 6) or flee the confines of the Hole, endangering the whole ship.

As the DM you should talk up the potential danger of the inspections and the tension they create. They are trapped and at the mercy of the cleverness of the smugglers; if the PCs were discovered it could mean not only the end of the quest but the death of the High Cloud crew. This is a roleplaying encounter that should allow players to test their characters' emotional fortitude and play with the fear and tension of being caught.

Object Lesson

After the ship clears Erenhead, the going is faster and the PCs are allowed short stints up on deck during the day. Sailing the southern Pelluria is likely a new experience for most of the party and any dwarves are again likely to gawk uncomprehendingly at the vast open water that surrounds them—there is no land to be seen! As the DM you should emphasize the wonder and sensory overload any dwarves have been exposed to since leaving the mountains. Additionally the river barque is an ungainly craft in the open Pelluria, and any non-river folk PCs are subject to debilitating sea sickness for the duration of their journey from Erenhead to Baden's Bluff. Ask for Fortitude saves (DC 15). Success means a given PC is unaffected by motion sickness. Any outlander PCs that fail spend the day incapacitated by nausea and retching. Subsequent Fortitude checks can be made, once per day, to recover and act normally.

If the winds and currents are favorable, the trip to Baden's Bluff takes nine days, during which time Captain Horace keeps the *Beauty* out of sight of shore in hopes of keeping out of the path of orc coastal runners and their random inspections. Unfortunately, his efforts can only go so far, and on the third day the ship encounters a small orc patrol boat. Instead of running for it and thereby drawing undue attention, the *Beauty* waits and takes on a boarding party. The PCs are safely hidden by this time but can clearly hear the orcs and the demanding tone of their arrogant human leader.

The inspector and his escort make their way into the cargo hold, and though the PCs are unable to see

anything, they hear an altercation that comes to violent and deadly blows. One of the ship's watch officers apparently did not offer enough deference and the insulted inspector took offense. In an overzealous response, one of the orc guards cut him down with a single blow. Captain Horace tries desperately to defuse the situation, but the bloodshed has riled the orcs and if the wogren is present she starts to thrash about in her cage and growl. The orcs threaten to tear the ship apart and the inspector only laughs at the altercation.

If the PCs restrain themselves as the captain ordered (remaining quiet no matter what), the orcs calm down after a few rounds and then eventually disembark and sail away. The crew is saddened by the loss of its brother, but the Captain explains "this is the price we pay to keep the resistance alive. This is our front in the war and the way we suffer casualties. His name and sacrifice will be remembered and honored in our stories."

If the PCs act and come scrambling out of hiding to fight, things quickly go from bad to worse. There are four orc guards and the human.

Human Inspector: 6 hp; Search +4, Sense Motive +4.

Orc Troopers (4): 17 hp; see appendix.

Development: While the PCs battle the orcs, Captain Horace, with a look of resignation on his face, sneak attacks the distracted inspector and slits his throat. In the aftermath of the fight he yells at the PCs "you stupid bastards, you've doomed us all!" He then runs up on deck screaming orders to the crew. The sails go up in a flurry of canvas and axes cut the lines holding the inspection boat alongside. Deckhands use crossbows to keep potential boarders on their own ship and the PCs can join in repelling orc sailors. Others throw grappling hooks into the lines and sails of the inspection boat, pulling the sails down as the *Beauty* moves away. Someone tosses a pot of burning oil across the widening gap setting the coastal runner aflame. In only moments the *Beauty* has pulled away and is out of immediate danger.

Inspection Boat Crew:

Orc Recruits (8): 7 hp; see appendix.

Orc Troopers (2): 17 hp; see appendix.

Orc Scouts (2): 12 hp; see appendix.

If the PCs wish, they can board the inspection boat and attempt to slaughter its entire crew to prevent word from getting out. It's only a matter of time before the crew is reported missing, however, and the *Beauty* will eventually be traced to the attack.

In any case, once the ship is out of danger, the captain subsequently berates the PCs for disobeying his orders and interfering. He angrily explains that such encounters are the way of things on the water, and that the gnomish race suffers such assaults to maintain its freedom. He says that "this is the price the gnomes pay in the war against the Shadow. This is our way, our honor." He goes on to explain that his boat will now be declared outlaw, and that his family will suffer just like the Gale Family. He says "where only one might have



died unavenged, many will now die, simply because of your misplaced interference." He blames the PCs for the doom of his crew and his kin and stalks off to attend to his ship.

6-3: Baden's Bluff

Six days later, just after dark, the *Beauty* arrives in Baden's Bluff (MN, page 151). To any PCs that have never seen a large city, it appears that the stars have fallen from the sky and piled up along the shore. The site is both beautiful and a little frightening, and it is not until the ship has reached the docks that the stars resolve themselves into countless lanterns hung on the quays and inside windows all along the waterfront.

If the party has maintained the captain's favor, he tells the PCs to seek out Ail's Quayhouse, and tell Ail that they are "members of the *Beauty's* crew." For a small fee she will provide a safe place to stay and can help with any arrangements the party needs to make. If the Captain is angry with the PCs for their interference he will order them to disembark immediately and when they leave it is under the resentful glares of the crew. His last words to them are the grudging warning: "I'd get out of the city as quickly as possible if I were you."

The DM should foster a level of tension and excitement in the players' attitudes to reflect the PCs' circumstances. They have reached Baden's Bluff, and

are closer to the Erethor than any of the PCs have likely ever been. They are in a large city, many probably for the first time, and there is a palpable sense of threat in the dark streets and shadowed alleys. Any gnomes or halflings have heard enough stories about Baden's Bluff to convince them it is a dangerous den of insurgents, outlaws, and enemy agents.

If any non-gnomish fey in the party hide themselves under cowls and cloaks, the darkness and the nature of life in Baden's Bluff are sufficient to shield them from most prying eyes. The DM should make it clear, however, that despite the pervasiveness of the resistance in the Bluff, fey PCs cannot go traipsing around the city in broad daylight without creating all sorts of problems for themselves.

There are only a few inns, most on the waterfront and one near the main city gates. Ail's Quayhouse is the safest, if not the cleanest, of the bunch. If the party holes up in one of these they will be safe enough as long as any proscribed fey stay hidden and keep to themselves. Another viable option is for the party to leave the city immediately and hide out in the countryside while gnomish or human party members make any necessary inquiries in town.

Which Way to Go

There are several possible courses of action the PCs may choose from at this point. They could simply move out of the city and continue on their own to Erethor. They may hole up in the city, resupply, and try to find useful information or even a guide that could help them reach Caradul. They might also have taken Aradil's *dream* spell message to heart and expect to be met in the city by her agents. Whether they choose one of these options or come up with something unexpected, Jael the Hunter is expecting them and has laid various contingency plans to deal with whatever the party decides to do.

Jael has agents and informants throughout Baden's Bluff, many of whom think he himself is an insurgent. Ask the PCs for occasional Sense Motive and Spot checks (DC 16) to notice that they are being watched, tailed, or observed; should they accost any of the informants, they are unwilling or unable to tell the PCs anything of value about Jael. These encounters are meant simply to keep the PCs on their toes and paranoid.

Jael will know within the hour when the High Cloud ship arrives and where the PCs have gone after disembarking. He will arrange for a cryptic message to reach them in the inn they are staying at: as a PC lifts his mug to take a swallow, the other PCs will Spot (DC 8) a series of lines scratched into the mug's bottom. Anyone looking at the scratches may make an Intelligence check (DC 16) or Knowledge (Eren River Valley) check (DC 14) to realize that the scratches are a rough map of the Baden's Bluff sewer system that start right below Ail's

Quayhouse. If the PCs enter the sewers and follow the map, they will come to a dank, disgusting cistern that empties out to the west of the city on the banks of the Sea of Pelluria. Waiting for them there, appropriately disgusted at being immersed in the offal of a human civilization, but determined to lead the party to safety nevertheless, is an elf with all-black eyes. Their guide has arrived.

Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards

Encounter:	XP:
• <i>PCs reach Swift Water and contact Tuk without undue difficulty</i>	300
• <i>PCs discovered by goblin sailors and forced to fight</i>	0 – 3 0 0 each
• <i>PCs avoid goblin sailors</i>	100
• <i>PCs engage in good roleplaying encounters with Tuk, his customers, Podrik and Kimball, or Captain Horace</i>	400
• <i>PCs run afoul of the astirax</i>	300
• <i>PCs avoid running afoul of Jael and his astirax and escape Swift Water without incident</i>	500
• <i>PCs engage in good roleplaying with encounters with Captain Horace or his crew during their voyage</i>	1 0 0 – 3 0 0 each
• <i>PCs disobey Captain Horace and interfere in the inspection</i>	500
• <i>PCs obey Captain Horace and refrain from interfering, regardless of what happens</i>	1,000
Total Potential XP:	2,200+

Chapter 7

Predator and Prey

Synopsis

In this chapter, Jael magically disguises himself as one of Aradil's avatars to ingratiate himself to the PCs. He leads the party out of Baden's Bluff and towards Caradul. Using his cunning and magic, he attempts to discover the purpose of the PCs' journey and, when the time is right, Jael stages his own apparent disappearance. In reality, he assumes the form of one of the PCs after incapacitating that PC. His intention is to use the guise of the PC to fool the defenses of the Whispering Wood and confound the glamour surrounding Caradul by accompanying the innocent PCs to the capital. When the party nears the city, Jael attempts to kill the rest of the PCs, steal the dragon case, and slip into Caradul. Once there, he intends to plant a magic beacon that the waiting army of Izrador may use to pierce the glamour and follow him into the city of their enemy.

7-1: Hunter and the Hunted

However Jael ultimately joins the party, the players are likely to be rather suspicious, if for no other reason than the journey has served to make all the PCs a bit paranoid. The hunter has several advantages on his side, however, that are likely to eventually win over the PCs. First, Aradil's message to the dreamer set the PCs up to expect one of her agents. Second, though elven, he does not appear to be just any elf. Though only a disguise, his all-black eyes immediately make a comforting connection between Jael's appearance and that of the original emissary, Rhiann. Third, the party will soon be entering Erethor, and will be completely out of any of the PCs' experience, so they will be looking for some guidance. It is likely they will grab at anything the DM offers, including Jael.

Jael passes himself off as an adult Caraheen wildlander with an indeterminate level of magical ability. He arrogantly offers his real name, though the party has no reason to recognize it. Jael is well equipped for this mission, carrying with him a powerful, evil artifact: the Crown of Shadow. To ingratiate himself, Jael helps however he can, hunting food, giving good advice, and keeping the party out of various travel dangers. If any PCs are wounded, he tends to them and might even offer them magical healing.

Jael is a cunning man and a consummate agent. Once he establishes even the least bit of trust, he should have little trouble winning over the party. He appears forthcoming and answers all of the PCs' questions with as much truth as he knows, or dares, and offers believable lies when he has to. For his part, Jael has plenty of questions as well. He asks these subtly, apparently out of simple curiosity. His intent is to discover why the original emissaries traveled to the dwarves, and why the party is bound for Erethor. This questioning offers great roleplaying potential as the DM tries to get the PCs to talk without giving away Jael's intent and the PCs try to answer while weighing their suspicions against their need.

Still, despite his best efforts, there are a number of behaviors that might make the party suspicious of Jael. The DM should play them up just enough to keep the players wary but not so much as to force them to act overtly against the legate. This will help keep the tension up and make the roleplaying more interesting.

First, Jael's incessant questions are bound to make at least some PCs suspicious, no matter how good-natured or roundabout they are. Second, though he is a soldier legate and an experienced outdoorsman, Jael is probably less experienced than any wildlander in the party. Perhaps he misses some tracks, or is not the most able hunter, or does not recognize some edible plants—subtle things but not certain giveaways.

If the wogren is still with the party she will not know what to make of Jael. She cannot sense his evil nature through the glamour of the crown, but keeps her distance nonetheless, never quite warming to the man. This seems to contradict the reputations of wildlanders and elves for being animal friends.

Finally, and most curiously, Jael heads off every night into the dark, alone. He claims, truthfully, to be “communing with his monarch” and “scouting for dangers.” The whole truth is that his monarch is Izrador, and he must commune with the Shadow for spells at midnight. He is scouting for dangers, but dangers for him are elven patrols, not orcish ones. Both statements have enough truth in them that Sense Motive checks will do PCs little good. He is very cautious, however, and sets his astiraxes to guard him; they will be able to detect, with the excellent sensory abilities of whatever animals they possess, nearly any PC. If the PC in question is using the *cloak of elvenkind* or other magical stealth, the astiraxes will still be able to detect him thanks to his use of magic. The astiraxes will alert Jael to any visitors with pre-planned signals, at which point he simply leads them on a merry chase, acting all the while as if patrolling, and forgoes his spells for that night.

Entering Erethor

The party must cross a section of the western plains before reaching Erethor, a trek that takes about 11 days of hard walking. The terrain here is flatter than in the east, and small woodlands are much more frequent. The hunting is good and the forests provide hidden campsites. As the PCs see the thin green line that is the forest on the horizon, the until-now clear and open sky of the plains will begin to seem hazy during the day and darker at night. The reason is the huge amount of ash from the burning forest. Izrador’s orcs assault this part of the forest daily, and the ash in the air blots out all but the brightest stars at night.

As they travel, the party should be made aware that the enemy is all around them. They will notice campfires spread out below them whenever they are at elevation, or see the loping forms of orcs on the horizon when they are in valleys. Patrols will pass within miles,

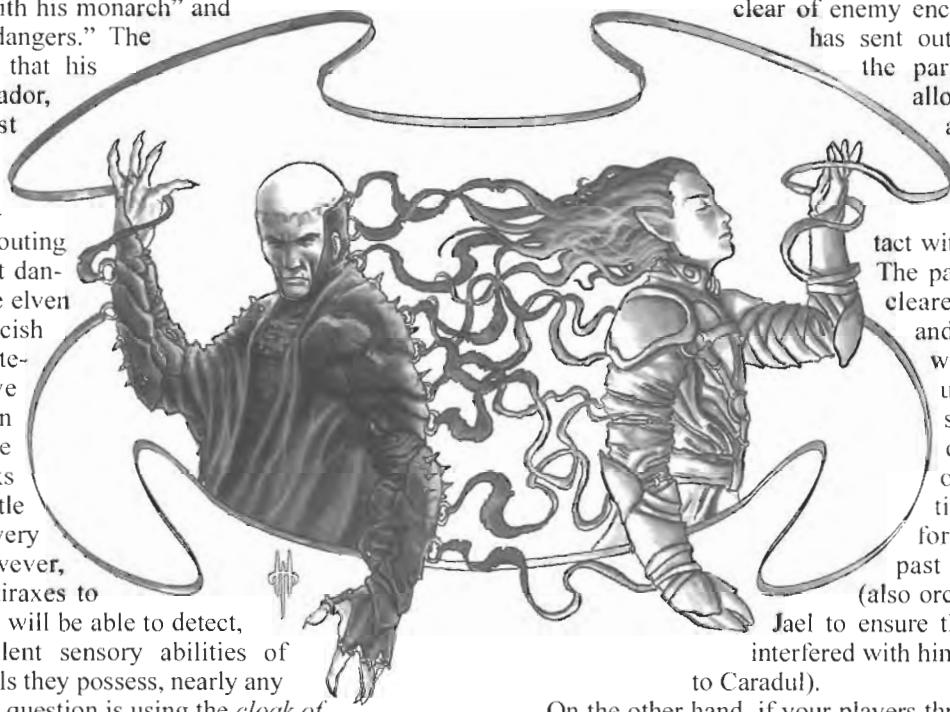
but never seem to pick up on the party’s trail. Whatever paths the avatar is walking, and whatever skills he is using to cover their trail, will seem to the party to be working as if by a miracle. This will hopefully fit with their ideal of the elves as their saviors, as heroes that can do anything . . . and will be that much more devastating when Jael betrays them.

Despite narrow misses and constant tension, the way is clear of enemy encounters. Jael has sent out orders that the party is to be allowed to pass and that all orc units are to avoid contact with the group. The party’s path is cleared of elves and refugess, as well, by an unusually strong series of assaults on this section of the forest in the past few arcs (also orchestrated by Jael to ensure that no elves interfered with him on the way to Caradul).

On the other hand, if your players thrive on combat or you simply want to draw out the campaign, feel free to introduce any number of forest encounters. These could include one or more orc or ogre patrols that did not get Jael’s orders, dire animals on patrol for the elves, other wild creatures, or even an errant demon. Jael, both to protect his own plans and to ingratiate himself with the party, will fight at the PCs’ sides in any of these encounters.

The first sign that the party has finally reached the fabled wood of Erethor is that the patchy forests among which they have been traveling become more frequent, and the grassy places between become smaller and smaller. Eventually, the grassy expanses become only meadows, and then vanish altogether after another day or two. At first the trees of the great wood are smaller than those along the Eren, and so the PCs might feel a bit disappointed at the lack of grandeur. The trees slowly get larger, however, and after three days the party walks among timber giants, fantastic plants that seem to reach the very sky.

The undergrowth varies in density: sometimes open, other times blocking the party’s way. Game trails, meadows, and the dark shadows of the great trees keep it clear enough, however, that only the occasional detour around a thicket is required. Erethor and the Caraheen region are detailed in the MIDNIGHT core book (page 112)



and DMs should make an effort to carefully describe the forest as the PCs make their way. It is important to provide them with mysterious and wondrous mental imagery against which to stage their mind's eye view of events in the Great Forest.

The Great Forest

The following are several descriptive, roleplaying, and potential combat encounters that can add a great deal of flavor and some tension to the PCs' journey through the forest. At appropriate points, stage some or all of the following along the party's path.

Scorched Lands: One afternoon, as the party crests a low hill, they catch the smell of ash in the air and come upon a chilling sight. Below them, a wide valley has been ravaged by fire. The once-great trees stick out of the ashy ground like burnt candle wicks, a stream flows with black mud, and charred branches and vegetation cover the ground like gray snow.

The burned swath is more than 10 miles wide and cuts across the party's course, reaching down from the valley to the north and continuing to the south. Ash kicks up with each step and blows in the wind, stinging eyes and making breathing hard. Halfway across the swath, the party comes across the obvious remains of an elven tree village. It has been reduced to bits of burned and broken shelters hanging from black and almost branchless trees. The ruins are ominous and disheartening, as for the first time it becomes clear to the party that the elves suffer under the reign of the Shadow as well.

Zardrix the Night King is responsible for the devastation. This stretch of forest is one of many that she burned earlier this spring under Izrador's orders. Her attack was swift and sudden—none in the village escaped.

Battle Ground: Deeper in the forest, the party stumbles upon the site of a pitched battle. Scattered around the bole of a great tree are the decaying bodies of 15 orcs and six elves. The level of scavenging and other indicators imply that the bodies have been dead for at least 10 days. Each was stripped of any weapons or other items of value and crudely beheaded. Most of the elves are missing their legs and some their arms as well.

Twelve days ago an elven patrol was ambushed here by an overwhelming number of orcs. The orcs beheaded the dead elves to prevent their rise, and took their limbs for fresh meat. If the players realize the significance of the missing limbs, that understanding will certainly add another layer of dread over the party's mood and circumstances.

If you wish to add additional challenge to the encounter, allow trackers to note (DC 16) that some elves and orcs appear to have left the battlefield after having lain for several days . . . apparently, not all of the corpses were beheaded. Some of the battle dead rose as Fell and are stalking the surrounding wood. You can leave this simply a threat that keeps the PCs on their

guard, as a roleplaying encounter with recently killed ungral who are not necessarily antagonistic, or as a pure combat encounter. The undead elves would make particularly difficult and canny opponents for the PCs. They have gone insane and do not truly realize that they are dead; as such they may confuse the PCs with invaders and attack them outright, or command them to put down their weapons and surrender. Because the raiders speak only elven, Jael may be the only one who can communicate with them. If the elves take them "captive" and begin to escort them to Caradul, they will be overcome by their undead nature within several days and attempt to kill and eat the PCs, forcing a battle.

Ungral Raiders (4): Ungral Wood Elves Rogl/Ftr1; Medium-size Undead; CR 3; HD 2d12; hp 11; Init +6; Spd 30; AC 18, touch 12, flatfooted 16; Atk +3 ranged (1d8, longbow) or +1 melee (1d6, short sword); SA Sneak attack 1d6; SQ Natural armor, undead; AL CN; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 14, Con —, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills: Balance +6, Climb +7 (+11 trees), Hide +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Search +6, Spot +6, Swim +5.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot.

Languages: High Elven

Possessions: Longbow, short sword, woodland leathers, soft boots, 3 man-days of trail rations.

Dire Straights: The dire creatures of Erethor are as vested in the survival of the forest as the elves. Unfortunately, despite their pact with Aradil, they do not always see eye-to-eye with the elven queen. At some point, a pair of dire boars tracking an orc patrol will come across the party's spoor and begin tracking them instead. Whether they did not receive Aradil's orders to stay clear of the party or they are simply following their stubborn natures, the boars follow the PCs and ambush them at the first opportunity. This attack is best staged after the astiraxes have been eliminated by the elven patrol (see below).

Dire Boars (2): 52 hp; see MM.

7-2: My Enemy, My Friend

Jael is a devious agent. He knows of the divinatory powers of the Whispering Wood and of the glamour that surrounds and protects Caradul from those with evil intent (see MN, page 121–124). Because Jael does not know exactly what powers the Whispering Wood possesses, he does not want to risk entering Erethor proper disguised as one of Aradil's avatars. The forest would, he assumes, be able to detect so glaring and blatant a ruse.

His intent is to take the place of one of the PCs using the deceptive spells of the Crown of Shadow. Then, as a trusted member of the party, he can learn exactly what the PCs' quest is all about and hopefully follow their good intentions past the protective glamour



and into Caradul. All the while, he hopes that his role as a stranger to the wood will confound whatever scrying ability it and Aradil might have.

To this end, Jael picks the most unassuming of the PCs with whom to make the switch. He wants one whose competence is trusted by the other PCs but whose personality and skills he thinks he can best imitate without drawing suspicion. He has spent much of the recent trek studying the PC's behavior and making mental notes in anticipation of his becoming a changeling.

At this point the adventure incorporates an unorthodox twist. As the DM, you are expected to bring one of the players into your confidence and make him a shill of sorts within the game. The player you choose is going to be the one whose PC is replaced, and when that happens, he is going to take over the role of Jael, disguised as the player's original character. To make this work, you need to brief the player in advance, and in secret, so as to provide for a seamless transition of control over Jael without arousing any undue suspicions on the part of the other players. Once you have prepped the player, play can continue as normal until Jael acts to kill the characters.

When the opportunity presents itself to be alone with his chosen target, Jael casts *hold person* on the PC and takes his clothing and any unique items he is carrying. He will attempt this attack anywhere that would make tracking difficult . . . on a shelf of stone, for

instance, or while crossing a shallow river. He will cover any relevant tracks with his light step wildlander ability and use a packet of scentbreaker (add 10 to tracking DC when using scent) to throw off any PCs or their animals that track using smell. He then leaves the character behind for one of his astiraxes to find with its sense magic ability. He plants a magic bauble on the character if the PC does not have one. The astirax has been instructed to take the PC to the nearest orc patrol for questioning and torture.

DM Advice: No Shill Player

Of course if, as the DM, you would rather maintain control of Jael, or if you do not have a player who could handle Jael or would want to play a shill, you can take a more traditional approach and play the final scenes straight. Assume that instead of switching places with a PC as the party enters the forest, one of Jael's astiraxes possesses a party familiar, animal companion, or mount. It has with it a smaller version of his beacon, which it activates so Jael can follow the party in. When the party reaches the elven outpost (see below), he strikes.

The simplest way to effect the switch is to lull the PCs into a sense of complacency for a few days of in-game time. Every suspicious noise ends up being a harmless animal, every strange sign ends up having a reasonable explanation, and the food and shelter are plentiful. At some point during this time of plenty, the character and Jael go off hunting at the same time or even together, and while they are gone Jael can make the switch. Another alternative is to have Jael and the PC on watch together. Finally, Jael could simply disappear and wait for the inevitable search, ambushing a lone PC if the party separates at any point.

Regardless of how or when the switch takes place, it should go off without trouble. Jael is powerful enough that he should be able to take any one PC by surprise and incapacitate him without too much trouble. If the PC in question is going to take on the added challenge of playing an adversary and will miss out on the final encounter with his character, by all means give him the fun of playing out the encounter against the legate. The last thing he will remember before blackness claims him is Jael's smirk and a muttered "well fought, rebel."

When the switch occurs, and Jael is nowhere to be found, the players will likely be suspicious and assume all sort of dangers or betrayals are afoot. Given the PCs' hopeful cleverness and tracking skills, chances are good they will trace Jael's disappearance to the shill PC. The Jael-player should have all sorts of feasible explanations, including cryptic messages given him by the legate, odd notes, claims of mysterious shadowy creatures doing battle with the avatar, a sad but silent look in the avatar's eyes as he walks away, etc. Let them search for Jael, balk on their journey, and take extra or even paranoid precautions. Eventually the players will realize he is not coming back and the PCs, including the shill Jael, will be forced to continue on by themselves. Be patient and enjoy the confusion and suspicion. It will help fuel the tension and eventual satisfaction of the finale.

Prepping the Shill

As the DM, you have a choice to make. You need to select a player to take over Jael, and do it in a way that best serves the game. The first thing is to decide which player to choose. You should pick a player who is a good roleplayer and a clever, quick thinker, who can play the part without giving anything away. Most importantly, perhaps, you should pick the person you think the other players would be least likely to suspect.

Once you have picked your shill, contact him outside the context of your normal gaming sessions. You need to talk to him without letting on to the other players that some special plan is afoot. Give the PC a general idea of what might be expected; if he absolutely refuses, you don't want to give too much away to someone who will later be in a position to uncover Jael's deception. If the player is willing to act as the shill, give him a briefing on Jael and his plans.

Explain that Jael was originally hunting the emissaries and then tracked the party across the plains and recently took on the form of an avatar to infiltrate their group. Explain that he intends to take on the form of the player's character so he can use the party to confound the Whispering Wood and the glamour around the elven capital. Explain that he plans to kill the party, take the case, and perform some act of sabotage once they are within sight of the city.

Provide the player with a copy of Jael's stats, perhaps going so far as to have him write it out on a character sheet in his own hand, but with his character's name and more mundane details in the appropriate spaces to prevent accidental discovery by another player.

Make sure that all preparations are made and questions answered before the other players gather for the session in which Jael makes the change, otherwise any note passing or quick DM-player conferences in the next room will seem suspicious.

7-3: End Game

The journey through Erethor is an odd one. Not only is the forest a wondrous, mysterious, and eerie place, but the party encounters few dangers compared to the previous legs of their journey. Jael's orders have cleared the way of enemy and friendly patrols, and the trailing dire astiraxes do a good job of keeping wild beasts away. In addition, the Whispering Wood is tracking the party and Aradil knows exactly where they are. She is using the influence of the Whisper, her own arcane abilities and her elven soldiers to clear the way of any natural or enemy forces that might hinder the party's progress.

DM Advice: Whispering Wood

The Whispering Wood is detailed in the *MIDNIGHT* core book (page 123). If and how it interacts with the PCs depends on the presence of elfkin or wildlanders in the party. Any PC able to sense the whisper will only hear ethereal spirit voices say things like "there is evil among you," or "your path through the forest is one of betrayal," or "death stalks close at hand," or "one of you has left our shade." Though these enigmatic messages obviously refer to Jael and the misplaced PC, what the rest of the PCs make of them is entirely up to the players.

The Witch Queen

Though the Whispering Wood has made Aradil aware of Jael's presence, she is curious about his intent. She is aware of the unnatural pair of dire kin following the PCs, and senses powerful magics among the party that were not there when she last contacted them. As a result, the Witch Queen has dispatched a handpicked patrol of wildlanders and a real avatar to intercept the party and escort them to Caradul. The escort reaches the party still many days from Caradul, but when they do, Aradil commands them to hold off making contact and simply track the party, keeping well out of sight.

Aradil is uniquely canny, and her ways often seem strange, convoluted, and inscrutable, even to her avatars. 8,000 years of life have given the Witch Queen experiences and mental processes that none can hope to fathom, but in the end her way has more often than not proved the better course. Aradil believes that, by letting Jael's plans play out almost to their end, she is certain to gain information about, and perhaps a strategic advan-

Climbing Vines

The over-large vines that wrap around the trunks of large village trees and serve as a circular ramp from the ground to the village decks are wondrous examples of the druid's art. The vines are several feet in diameter and wrap around most trunks five to 10 times before reaching the lowest structures. They often have flattened upper surfaces or even steps grown into them, and though they have no railing, even people with minimal dexterity can use them easily as long as they are not afraid of heights.

The coiling ramp is typically the main stalk of the vine with the root diving into the ground some distance from the tree. Branchlets and tendrils help the vine cling to the trunk and offer more direct climbing surfaces for more agile tree dwellers. Since the advent of the war with the Shadow and the increase in the fortification of elven settlements, many such climbing vines have been enchanted to withdraw, coiling tight and sliding down their given trunk to the ground, either on command or at sunset. This cuts off access to the arboreal structures as effectively as any castle drawbridge.

The vine at the outpost is stretched up to the suspended decks when the PCs arrive, but as the sun goes down so will the coil, isolating the outpost. Jael would know this, and if the shill player can use this to his advantage, he should be encouraged to do so.

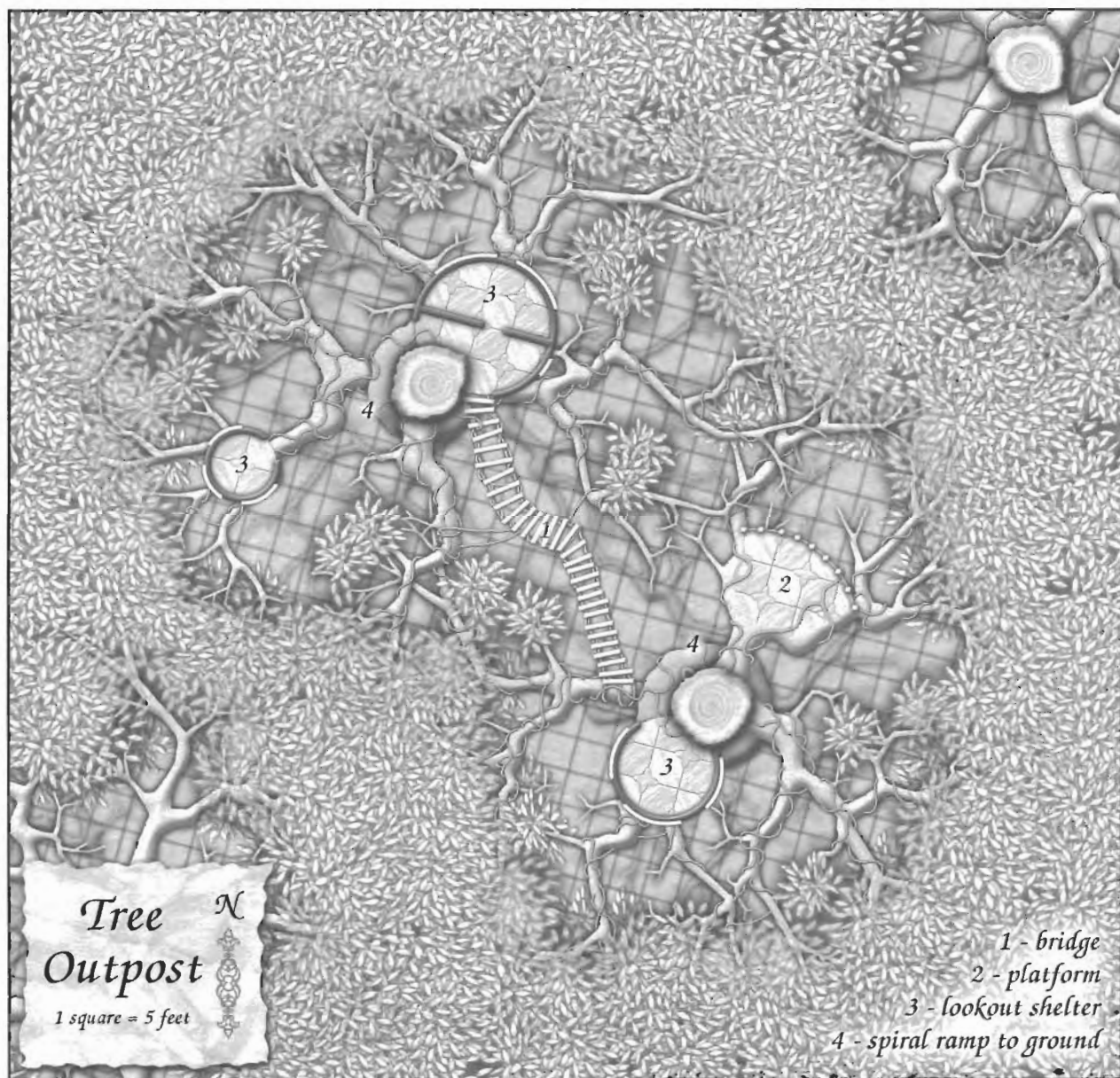
tage in, her battle with the Shadow. During her rule, she has sent so many thousands of her own people to their doom fighting Izrador that endangering the lives of a small party of outlanders to gain such information seems a negligible sacrifice. She is confident that if her machinations and delay lead to the death of the PCs, her patrol is close enough that they can still recover the mithral formulae before Jael can get away. It is a chance she is willing to take.

At some point the patrol will encounter the astiraxes and dispatch their wolf bodies in a quick and bloody fight. If the DM chooses, the PCs can hear the battle and investigate its aftermath. If they do, they discover the two dead dire wolves, stuck with a dozen arrows each and scorched by magic, but that is all. The party may be confused by the encounter, but the Jael player should be surprised and even more wary.

The Glamour

Make sure your shill player knows about the ward around Caradul and understands the effect it has on Jael so he will understand what is happening when it begins to affect him. How you present the in-game effects of the glamour depend on the players' out-of-game knowledge. If they are intimately familiar with the MIDNIGHT setting, assume that they know about the glamour and that drawing attention to the Jael player will be too obvious a tip-off. Let the player merely describe himself as seeming confused and distracted if anyone asks.

If the players do not have extensive knowledge about MIDNIGHT, feel free to use the players' assumptions against them. At various points during their travels in the forest, ask all of the PCs for their Will save modifiers and make a show of making several rolls for each of them as they get deeper into the Carraheen. The PCs' honorable intent frees them of the confusion of the protective spell, of course, and rolling for them is just a ruse so they will be less suspicious when the rolls fail for the Jael player. You should tell the Jael player, in front of the other PCs, that some kind of magical effect seems to be overcoming him and he feels ill, confused, and distracted. The PCs may think it has something to do with race, alignment, or even magic items . . . Jael may even have chosen a specific PC with any of these factors so as to explain away his confusion amidst the glamour. The player's helplessness should make his eventual betrayal that much more shocking.



7-3: Death in the Trees

The journey from the border of Erethor to Caradul takes just over an arc, assuming the party is not unduly delayed along the way. After several weeks, however, as the day nears its end, the party will come close enough to the city that clear paths, orchard groves, and even a few outlying tree structures give Jael enough obvious sign that he can find his own way into the city despite the glamour. It is at this point that the shill player should choose to execute whatever plans he has made to best the rest of the party. As the DM, you should set things up with your accomplice to stage the final confrontation in the elven outpost described below. Arrival at the outpost can be the signal that lets the shill player know he is free to attack while making sure the climax is staged against an interesting and dynamic backdrop.

The accompanying map details the outpost. It is only periodically inhabited by elven patrols, and when the party comes through it is unoccupied. There are beds, hearthstones, food stuffs, water, Erethor tea, arrows, bow strings, rope, healing herbs, and other odds and ends from which the PCs can replenish their provisions and lesser gear. While the PCs are close enough to Caradul at this point that they wouldn't rest here, it is almost certainly worth investigating. Once the PCs (or at least some of them, along with Jael) have ascended, the sun will ominously set and the spiraling vine they would have used to get down (see below) will retract. They are now trapped in the trees with a murderous legate . . . and it's a long way down.

Jael's Tactics

The following tactical suggestions might help less experienced or confident players play Jael more effectively during his final attack. Ideally, the player will select his own spells and tactics. That is, after all, the fun of getting to play the turncoat. Encourage the player to plan carefully and roleplay Jael as deviously and effectively as he can, without concern for the rest of the party. He should be, even in a player's hands, a vile and dangerous servant of Izrador bent on the PCs' destruction.

Jael's two main advantages are his magic and the element of surprise. He should subtly cast as many "buff" spells as possible on himself before the final combat, including defensive, statistics boosting, and combat ability boosting spells. If he can get away with casting *silence* on any party spellcasters before he attacks, he will attempt to do so.

Jael's mind-affecting spells are also a huge tactical advantage. While he probably won't be able to go toe-to-toe with most dwarf or dworg warriors, he can hopefully overcome their natural resistance to spells and affect them with *hold person* and the like. Jael will target the most dangerous fighters with the lowest Will saves first; after that he will attempt to take down any dangerous spellcasters. There is the very real possibility that he will coup de grace held and unconscious PCs, even doing so while less dangerous combatants are threatening him. This danger will keep even the less combat-savvy characters in the fray and desperately fighting to save their and their companions' lives. Assume that Jael has access to all of his player's out-of-game knowledge, including the party characters' stats, equipment lists, spell lists, and even player habits. All of these insights merely simulate Jael's canny and devious ability to gather information.

The multi-level structure of the outpost, the strange tree dwellings, and the narrow walkways interconnecting them offer a unique, dynamic and challenging environment for the final reckoning between Jael and the PCs. Though as the DM you will not control Jael, you should keep in mind that you will be able to control the combat by calling for and arbiting various mechanics like Balance checks, bull rush actions, etc.

This encounter is the climax of the adventure and because it is now player against player, the outcome is hard to predict and harder to control. If, as the DM, your style is to let the dice fall where they may, let the encounter go however the party plays it. If, on the other hand, you want to preserve the drama of a protracted and fevered battle but Jael seems to be in trouble, bring in Jael's astirax companions in new dire animal bodies to give the shill player some allies. If you want to favor the PCs and it looks like they are going down hard, have an elven patrol of fresh recruits happen upon the group to provide some distraction and support. The ideal outcome would be to have several PCs close to death when Jael ultimately falls, or maybe one or two of them actu-

ally dying in the fight. This is, after all, a heroic quest, and the tragedy of a PC death adds an emotional and poignant edge to the story.

Despite the paranoia and confusion sewn by the journey's events, there will hopefully be a fair amount of surprise and shock when the PCs are attacked by one of their own. To add tension and confusion to the encounter, make sure Jael keeps the form of the shill PC for the first few rounds of the combat and then let him drop the guise and continue the fight in his normal form. Not only will the players be confused, excited, and extremely focused as a result, they will also likely be distracted wondering about the fate of their real comrade.

If the DM plays it straight and all the PCs go down before defeating Jael, the elven patrol will track him and finish him off before he actually endangers the city. They recover the dragon case and, in the end, the party's quest is a posthumous success: the elves learn the secret of mithral.

Perhaps **more important than Jael himself is the powerful item he bears: the *crown of shadow*. If he falls, the PCs will be surprised to see a vulture swoop down seemingly out of nowhere, grab the crown, and attempt to fly off with it. This creature is a servant of the Master in Grey, and is attempting to return the item to him. The PCs have one round to target the bird with missile weapons (use statistics for a hawk from the MM with double normal hp) before it escapes above the treeline.**

Encounter Checklist and Experience Awards

Encounter:	XP:
• <i>PCs reach the outskirts of Erethor safely and with due haste</i>	500
• <i>PCs engage in good roleplaying encounters, including trading information, with Jael</i>	0 - 3 0 0 each
• <i>PCs make a good showing of themselves while investigating Jael's disappearance</i>	0 - 3 0 0 each
• <i>A PC expresses suspicion about the shill player, whether openly or secretly.</i>	500
• <i>PCs face and defeat additional encounters in the forest (including dire animals or Fell elves).</i>	500 per encounter overcome
• <i>PCs defeat Jael</i>	4,000
Total Potential XP:	5,000+

Epilogue

Grace of a Queen

Epilogue

Into Caradul

Assuming at least some of the PCs survive the showdown with Jael, at some point during or just after the confrontation the elven wildlander patrol that has been pacing the party reveals itself. Stage this as a surprise by having the three dire bears accompanying the patrol step out of the shadowy undergrowth first, then asking them as the DM for initiative. Time the encounter so that it happens at just the right moment to catch the PCs at their weakest and most spent following the battle with Jael. Just as the first PC is about to take his action, have the elven wildlanders step forward and join the bears, weapons out and arrows notched. Let a few tense moments pass, and then have the avatar step forward and smile as the elven warriors lower their bows.

Give the party the chance to roleplay through introductions and to ask some of their most burning questions. Dehan, the avatar, politely answers most of their questions, but defers when anyone asks about Aradil or the dragon case. He is more than happy to speak of Caradul and the elves, in fact he goes on at some length about his land and his people if allowed. Soon enough, however, Dehan insists that the party press on to the city.

The party's arrival seems a surprise to the locals, and those that see them pass stop and stare curiously at the ragtag group of outlanders that merits the escort of an avatar. The PCs are likely close to exhaustion from their trials, but the DM should foster an air of excitement and anticipation as the party finally arrives in the elven capital. Use the description of Caradul in the core book (page 121) to give the PCs a detailed picture of how strange and fanciful the legendary city appears, a beauty that is hopefully emphasized by the unbelievable

relief the party finally feels upon reaching its long-sought destination.

The PC are not relieved of their weapons, nor are they made to feel like prisoners in any way, as they make their way to and through the city. The party is escorted immediately to the center of the capital, climbing into the upper decks and passing curious faces all along the way. By the time they reach the Elder Tree, giggling children have formed a small parade behind them, and the curious onlookers have become impromptu spectators. As the party crosses the elaborate branch bridge that leads to the Elder Tree, the children stay respectfully behind and curious speculation runs through the spontaneous audience.

The party is lead inside the massive and wondrous Elder Tree, into the very bole itself, where they pass through dark and wooden ways to a suite of fine rooms. Here a flurry of servants provide medical care, food, hot baths and any other services the party might possibly need. If the PCs allow, all of their clothes, armor, and weapons are whisked away and shortly returned, inexplicably in as good, clean, and polished condition as the day they were made.

Audience with the Queen

Dehan remains in attendance throughout and continues to answer most questions the party has. At some point he offers each of the party members a draught of a cloyingly sweet wine that quickly revives tired minds while easing any pains. The party is then led upward and out of the bole and into the most honored place in all the elven world—the Arbor of the Witch Queen (see MN, page 122). The moon is beginning to rise when the PCs arrive, and growing fairy lights clinging to the walls and rafters are starting to glow, bathing the elegant chamber in a strange, silvery, yet warm light.

The group is led forward towards the throne where a small group of people wait. Perhaps 20 elves

stand quietly to either side of the High Throne or sit in the ring of smaller thrones below it. Several have the black eyes of avatars, and the rest are Lord or Lady counselors. A single non-elfkin, unrecognizable at first for his elven silks and clean face, grins widely and steps toward the party. The PC of the skill player was rescued from his orcish captors by another elven patrol several days ago, led to him by the Whispering Wood. At this point, the skill player regains control of his PC and rejoins the party.

Sitting in the High Throne, quietly watching the happy reunion, is the most powerful person in all of Eredane: Aradil the Witch Queen. She stares at the PCs with her all-black eyes and, Will saves or not, they feel as if their very souls are being judged. After a long moment, the queen speaks.

"Welcome to Erethor, my faithful friends. According to your companion, the road you have traveled has not been an easy one. Yet, despite danger and betrayal, here you are. I cannot say that even my greatest warriors would have done better. You are truly children of destiny."

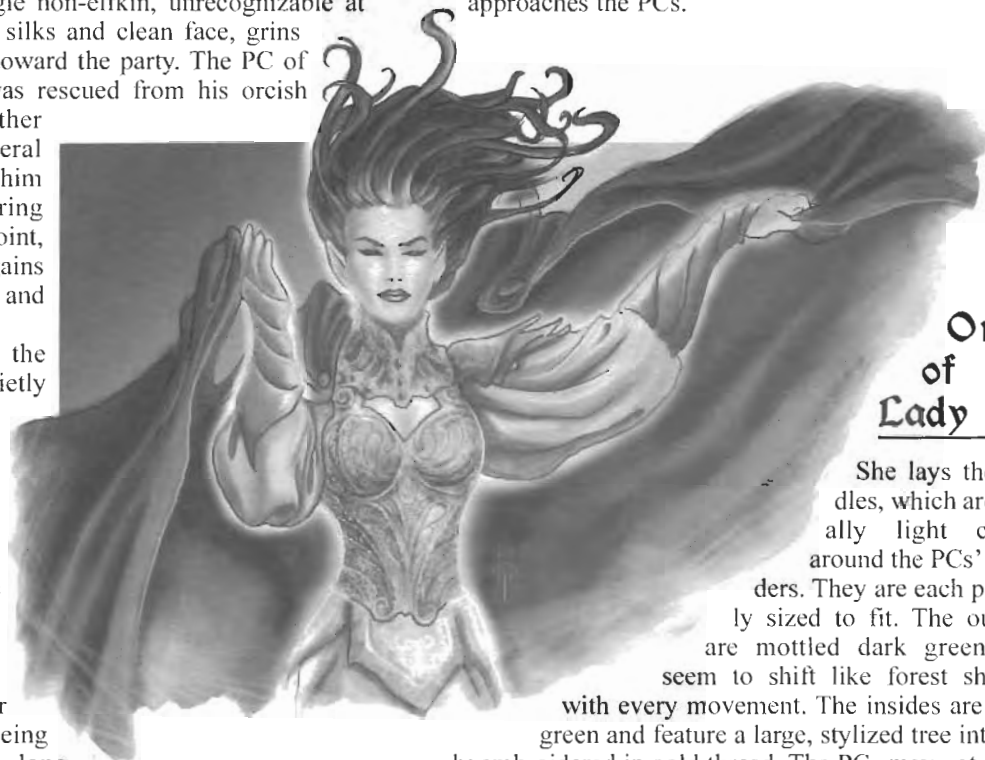
She pauses for a moment, then smiles and says "You have something for me?"

Assuming the party offers Aradil the dragon case, she takes it and carefully examines it for several heartbeats, and then waves a hand over it and whispers a quiet word. At her gesture, the dragon animates, grabs hold of the case's endcap and pulls it open, revealing the contents. The queen extracts a bundle of scrolls and gives them a long look. She truly smiles then, a beautiful radiance appearing on her face that includes her strange eyes, and hands the case and scrolls to one of her avatars.

She then asks, "Do you have any idea of the significance of your gift?" As the party members presumably shake their heads she responds, "You have brought the elves the greatest of dwarven secrets, and in doing so have given us a new and powerful weapon to use against the forces of the Shadow. You have brought us the secret of forging mithral, and for that there is no reward great enough."

The party's reaction to her words determines Aradil's response. She calms them if they are upset and

continues to express her gratitude if they are confused or pleased. After a few moments, an avatar steps forward with several bundles of cloth, and Aradil rises and approaches the PCs.



Order of the Lady

She lays the bundles, which are actually light cloaks, around the PCs' shoulders. They are each perfectly sized to fit. The outsides are mottled dark greens that seem to shift like forest shadows with every movement. The insides are bright green and feature a large, stylized tree intricately embroidered in gold thread. The PCs may not realize this yet, but each has just been gifted with a special *cloak of elvenkind* in the Witch Queen's own livery, called *cloaks of the lady* (see appendix).

When she finishes she says "I offer each of you a place in the Order of the Lady, the highest honor bestowed upon outsiders that become heroes of the elven people. These cloaks mark you as elf-friend and lets all know you have earned my grace. Wear it in pride and kinship. Please accept these gifts, items of great use as befit such heroes of great valor."

The avatars then approach the PCs, one for each of them, each bearing a magic item as a reward for their hard labor. Though simple, each item is valuable beyond measure in that it was crafted at some point in her long life by the hand of Aradil herself. As the DM, you are encouraged to select items that you think are distinctly appropriate for each PC from the following list: a +1 weapon, a matched set of +1 armor and +1 shield, or a wondrous item worth 4,000 gp or less.

With that, the queen gives them each a lingering look and an enigmatic smile, then turns and walks from the chamber followed by most of her avatars.

Onward

The PCs are escorted back to their suite and over the course of the next several days they learn a number of things. The PCs are honored guests and welcome to stay in Caradul for as long as they like . . . permanently if

they wish. They have free reign of the city, and everywhere they go, the residents seem to already know who they are and offer them polite but sincere deference.

If any PC chooses, arrangements are made so that he may join whatever elven occupation suits his interests or intent. Channelers may join one of the legendary elven magical schools, warriors may join the officer ranks of the elven army, wildlanders may join the patrols protecting the Forest, and rogues and defenders may become agents of the crown in the elven resistance. Those interested in becoming wizards, druids, freeriders, or other prestige classes may begin training in those areas. With each post comes training, experience, and resources that would certainly be useful in any of the PCs future adventures.

The party may also decide to remain together, at least until they return to their respective homelands. If they choose this path, the elves will equip the PCs with food and minor magical resources, such as hearthstones, charms, and healing salves, and escort them safely to the edge of the forest.

Ultimately, the campaign ends with the audience with Aradil, and wherever the DM and the players wish to take their game from here is up to them. Their party of characters is now well established in the world of MIDNIGHT and is poised to become a band of truly legendary heroes.

Special Experience Award

Each PC should be given enough experience points as reward for completing the quest that they reach their next level. If the DM has been following the XP award recommendations closely, this means a final award of about 3,000 XP to reach 5th level should be appropriate.

Appendix

Scaling the Adventure

Crown of Shadow makes an excellent introductory adventure for those starting a new campaign in the world of MIDNIGHT, but it may also be used for more experienced adventurers (starting the adventure at 3rd-5th level). Assume that the entire party either has a relation to the Gale Family or Durgis Rock and have been called on to accompany the emissaries.

The encounters are fairly easy to alter due to the modular nature of the enemies faced. Aside from changing the combat encounters, however, be aware that a more experienced party will be less enthused or affected by the sense of newness and discovery that *Crown of Shadow* attempts to instill in players. In place of that

powerful emotion, higher level PCs will probably react well to a sense of desperation instead. Rather than merely making the goal to deliver the formula for Mithral, the formula should contain a method for enchanting Mithral that retains its magic even when in the presence of a black mirror. Also, Jael should relentlessly pursue the party, assailing them with patrols of oruks and his astiraxes on a weekly basis in order to keep them moving according to his timeline. More frequent and dangerous encounters means that the party will often be fighting understrengthened and at less than full hit points.

For parties that start the adventure at 3rd-4th level, make the following changes:

- All goblins become bugbears
- All orc recruits become orc troopers
- All orc troopers become orc elite
- All orc scouts add two levels of rogue
- 1-3: Add two stone golems
- 2-2: Add two hill giants against the elves
- 3-4: Trap launches 1d4 spears against each PC
- 3-4: Ogres in caravan become hill giants
- 3-4: Add 4 astiraxes in dire wolf bodies
- 4-1: Umber Hulk has both claws and full hp
- 5-4: Double the number of faengral in each wave attacking the PCs; add one level to Astegar and his acolytes for every level by which the party average exceeded one at the beginning of the adventure.
- **Jael:** Add one level of legate for every level by which the party average exceeded one at the beginning of the adventure.



DM map of the characters' optimal route



1. Durgis Rock
2. Pardrum Holdfast
3. Halting camp
4. Battle with orcs
5. Meeting with Sarcosan riders
6. Village of Reduinde
7. Inspection at sea
8. Jacl makes his switch
9. Final confrontation with Jacl

foes

Orc Recruits

Orc War1: CR 1; HD 1d8+3; hp 7; Init +1; Spd 20; AC 16, touch 11, flatfooted 15; Atk +5 (+6 against dwarves) melee (1d12+4, vardatch) or +2 (+3 against dwarves) ranged (1d6+4, javelin); SA +1 attack bonus in groups of 10 or more, +1 attack bonus against dwarves, night fighting; SQ +2 bonus to saves against spells, darkvision, light sensitivity, cold resistance 5; AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +0, Intimidate +3, Jump +0, Knowledge (Northern Marches) +1, Wilderness Lore +2.

Feats: Power Attack

Languages: Black Tongue, Old Dwarven Pidgin, High Elven Pidgin, Orcish.

Possessions: Simple clothes of rough cloth and poorly tanned leather (natural colors), heavy hobnail boots, crude scale mail shirt, small wooden shield, wide leather belt, armored greaves, vardatch, large fighting knife, 2 javelins, large belt pouch with 2 man-days of rations.

Appearance and Personality: These orc warriors are wild-eyed with tangled manes, dark gray hides, and yellowing tusks. Their deep voices are thick and rasping and their howls frightening. Each tribe has its own unique markings. They are filthy from countless days in the field and smell of pungent sweat and old blood. Only recruits, they have few kill scars on their arms, but are still unpredictable and savage fighters.

Orc Troopers

Orc Ftr2: CR 2; HD 2d10+6; hp 17; Init +1; Spd 20; AC 17, touch 11, flatfooted 16; Atk +7 (+8 against dwarves) melee (1d12+4, vardatch) or +3 (+4 against dwarves) ranged (1d6+4, javelin); SA +1 attack bonus in groups of 10 or more, +1 attack bonus against dwarves, night fighting; SQ +2 bonus to saves against spells, darkvision, light sensitivity, cold resistance 5; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +1, Intimidate +3, Jump +1, Knowledge (Northern Marches) +1, Wilderness Lore +2.

Feats: Power Attack, Cleave, Weapon Focus: Vardatch

Languages & Possessions: Same as orc recruits, plus large steel shields and 2 extra javelins.

Appearance and Personality: These orc warriors are slightly more savvy than their less experienced counterparts and are more likely to use group tactics and fighting retreats. They are every bit as savage, however.

Orc Scouts

Orc Rog1/War2: CR 2; HD 1d6+2d8; hp 12; Init +2; Spd 30; AC 15, touch 12, flatfooted 13; Atk +4 (+5 against dwarves) melee (1d6+2, hand axe) or +4 (+5 against dwarves) ranged (1d8, light crossbow); SA +1 attack bonus in groups of 10 or more, +1 attack bonus

against dwarves, night fighting, sneak attack 1d6; SQ +2 bonus to saves against spells, darkvision, light sensitivity, cold resistance 5; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +6, Handle Animal +2, Hide +6, Intimidate +7, Jump +2, Knowledge (Northern Marches) -1, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Search +4, Sleight of Hand +4, Spot +6, Use Rope +4, Wilderness Lore +6.

Feats: Dodge, Track

Languages: Black Tongue, Old Dwarven Pidgin, High Elven Pidgin, Trader's Tongue, Orcish.

Possessions: Stained and greasy leather armor, leggings, rough cloth wrappings tied with leather to serve as boots, small wooden shield, small pack with straps for hand axes, crossbow, quiver, and 3 man-days of rations.

Appearance and Personality: These alert and focused soldiers are the vanguards and sentries for the orcish legions. Lightly armed and armored, they have a greater sense of self-preservation than most. They often work with wolves and worgs to help them track. When serving as sentries rather than scouts they will use their shields and any large weapon they can get ahold of.

Orc Elite

Orc Ftr2/Bar1: CR 3; HD 2d10+1d12+9; hp 24; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 18, touch 11, flatfooted 16; Atk +8 (+9 against dwarves) melee (1d12+4, vardatch) or +4 (+5 against dwarves) ranged (1d6+4, javelin); SA +1 attack bonus in groups of 10 or more, +1 attack bonus against dwarves, night fighting, rage; SQ +2 bonus to saves against spells, darkvision, light sensitivity, cold resistance 5; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +2, Intimidate +3, Jump +2, Knowledge (Northern Marches) +1, Wilderness Lore +2.

Feats: Power Attack, Cleave, Improved Sunder, Weapon Focus: Vardatch.

Languages: Black Tongue, Old Dwarven Pidgin, High Elven Pidgin, Orcish.

Possessions: Simple clothes of rough cloth and poorly tanned leather (natural colors), heavy hobnail boots, sturdy breastplate, large steel shield, wide leather belt, armored greaves, vardatch, large fighting knife, 4 javelins, large belt pouch with 2 man-days of rations.

Appearance and Personality: These orc warriors are the survivors of countless battles and the slaughterers of hundreds of innocents. They live for battle and death and are covered with kill scars.

Jael the Hunter

Jael the Hunter, Male Human Rog1/Wld1/Leg7: CR 10; Medium-size humanoid (Sarcosan); HD 1d6+8d8+27; hp 69; Init +0; Spd 30; AC 16, touch 10, flatfooted 16; Atk +7/+2 melee (1d8+1, +1 longsword) or +7/+2 ranged (1d8, masterwork longbow); SA +1 damage on attacks from horseback; SQ Astirax companion, light step, natural horseman, rebuke undead; AL LE; SV Fort

+10, Ref +2, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 14.

Skills: Balance +4, Bluff +6, Climb +5, Concentration +10 (+14 combat), Diplomacy +10, Disguise +24, Gather Information +6, Handle Animal +6 (horses), Heal +8, Intimidate +6, Jump +5, Knowledge (Arcana) +8, Knowledge (Nature) +4, Knowledge (Religion) +8, Listen +7, Ride +4 (horses), Search +7, Spellcraft +8, Spot +7, Use Rope +4, Wilderness Lore +8.

Feats: Combat Casting, Expertise, Improved Disarm, Silent Spell, Track, Weapon Focus: Longsword.

Languages: Black Tongue, Colonial, Courtier, Erenlander, High Elven, Norther, Orcish, Trader's Tongue

Note: The skill player should be allowed to outfit Jael's spell list as he sees fit. The following are simply a suggested spell list for Jael as he follows the PCs through the earlier parts of their journey and when he attacks. His spell list when impersonating an avatar or a PC should be geared more toward information gathering and deception, with a few combat spells should his ruse be uncovered.

Spells (6/6/5/4/3; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0 – *guidance*, *detect magic* x2, *cure minor wounds*, *mending*, *virtue*; 1st – *bles*s, *divine power*; *inflict light wounds**, *obscuring mist*, *protection from evil*, *shield of faith*; 2nd – *bear's endurance*, *death knell*, *shatter**, *hold person*, *silence*; 3rd – *blindness/deafness*, *cure serious wounds*, *magic vestment**, *silent hold person*; 4th – *divine power*; *inflict critical wounds**, *poison*.

Domains: Destruction, War

Domain Powers: Smite (+4 to hit, +7 damage), Weapon Focus: Longsword.

Possessions: Worn black traveling leathers, black legate breastplate +1, stolen grey cloak of elvenkind, tall walking boots, worn brown satchel with personal effects and 5 days of rations, ornate +1 longsword, stolen masterwork elven longbow and small quiver with 16 arrows, vial of *cure moderate wounds*, *beacon of shadow*, *crown of shadow*.

Appearance and Personality: In his natural form Jael is dark-skinned, with a truly sinister demeanor and a chilling gaze. His hair is short for a Sarcosan and he has declined the traditional pale face markings of his ancestors. He is cold and calculating, with a quick wit and deliberate manner. When acting in secret, he can play the part of a charming host, a bumbling idiot, or a humorous drunk, but he is never truly anything but evil and intent upon his goal.

Items

Beacon of Shadow: This small stone is made of a dark ore from the Northern Marches, and is inscribed with evil symbols in the Black Tongue. It has no innate magical powers, and as such does not radiate magic, until it interacts with and then pierces the glamour surrounding

Caradul. It has been created for one purpose only: to reveal the location of the elven homeland to Izrador's forces.

While the city's location has been known for some time, approaching it has been another matter entirely. Izrador's forces, and anyone else who harbors evil intent against the elves in their hearts, simply cannot approach the city; they become confused, dazed, and lose their sense of direction until they stumble back out of the glamour.

This beacon replaces that confusion with a dark, burning pain, not unlike a searing migraine, in the mind of any within 100 miles who harbor ill will toward the elves. This pain increases the closer the victim is to the beacon. By focusing on the pain, Izrador's forces and other enemies of the elves can overcome the confusion of the glamour around Caradul and home in on the beacon, pressing forward until the glamour has been pierced. Coming within 100 ft. of the beacon eases the pain.

Cloak of the Lady: These finally crafted cloaks of elvenkind are made of the softest wool and inlaid with a silver embroidery that marks its wearer as an elf-friend. The embroidery is enchanted to only appear when the wearer wills it and may not be called forth by any but the individual the cloak was woven for. In addition, the cloak dims its own aura and the aura of whatever magic items its wearer is carrying such that they may only be detected by astraxacs at a range of 1/2 mile or less. Second, the cloak imposes a –5 penalty on anyone other than Aradil who tries to scry on the wearer. Finally, the cloaks allow Aradil to know the wearer's location and state of mind.

Crown of Shadow: This twisted iron headband casts a hazy pall over the features of any who wear it. It is one of the closest things to an artifact known on the face of Aryth, and its purposes is almost entirely malevolent. Some say it was forged by Izrador in the days following the Sundering in his bid to spread poison among the ears of the dwarves who would eventually become orcs.

Regardless of its origin, it has been found by Jael the Hunter. He believes he found it on his own initiative and that its existence is a secret, but the Master in Grey, his superior, likely had a hand in it being found and used in the manner for which Jael intends.

The wearer of the Crown of Shadow has any evil aura completely nullified by the power of the item, and instead projects an aura of neutral good to any detection or divinatory ability, spell, or spell-alike effect. Even spells like *True Seeing* and *Wish* cannot pierce the glamour.

Further, the crown allows its wearer to use *alter self* as if he were a doppelganger (as 18th-level sorcerer, no duration, at will as a standard action). This ability may be assume the guise of specific individuals. Just as with the alignment glamour, the spell is immune to all

detection abilities or effects.

The *crown of shadow* is an evil item, and any good character who attempts to wear and use it immediately receives four negative levels. These levels remain until the crown is removed. Further, each time the crown is used by a non-evil character, the wearer suffers a cumulative 5% chance to shift to an evil alignment on the good-evil axis. Should Aradil become aware of its presence after Jael is defeated, she will request that the crown be given to her for safekeeping.

Wrath of the Moon and Fury of the Sun: This pair of matched urutuks are made of mithral and feature stylized engravings of the mythical Mother Moon on one hatchet and of Father Sun on the other. They are beautiful weapons and the epitome of the smith's art. They are also ancient Durgis Clan heirlooms and together form a powerful covenant item.

Legend claims that a common figure of dwarven legend, a mythical youth known only as the Child of the Mountain, was one day hunted by a party of orcs. Wounded and weaponless, the child was cornered in a narrow defile. It is said that Father Sun, hoping to see a noble last stand, bestowed a single urutuk on the boy. The boy fought valiantly but was clearly outnumbered. Mother Moon, seeing his plight, gifted him with a second urutuk to even the odds. Wielded together, the magical powers they manifested allowed the Child to prevail against the orcs.

The Wrath of the Moon and Fury of the Sun are mithral weapons and therefore masterwork items. When wielded together, they also bestow the following abilities on their user.

1st Level: The item grants the user the Exotic Weapon Proficiency (dwarven urutuk) feat whenever he wields the weapons.

3rd Level: If one hatchet is thrown while the other is held, the thrown hatchet gains the *returning* enhancement. It returns to the wielder at the beginning of his next action.

5th Level: The urutuks gain a +1 enhancement bonus.

7th Level: Whenever the user wishes, the weapons will jump into his hands from any distance as long as he has line of effect to them. If the weapons are restrained in any manner they make opposed Strength rolls (Str 18) to free themselves. The urutuks reach their user at the end of the round in which he recalls them. Catching both returning weapons is an instinctual manifestation of the item's power.

10th Level: The urutuks' enhancement bonus increases to +2.

12th Level: The urutuks' powers provide the wielder with defensive prowess in place of the shield he would normally wield with an off hand. The wielder gains a +2 shield bonus to AC.

Allies

Bayal Dethirinn

Male Snow Elf Wld10: CR 10; Medium-size humanoid (elf); HD 10d8; hp 45; Init +11; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 16, flatfooted 12; Atk +12/+12/+7 melee (1d6+3 and 1d6+1, snow elf fighting knives) or +16/+11 ranged (1d8, composite icewood longbow); SA Smite; SQ Cold resistance 5, danger sense, ghost walk, hawk eyes, light step, low-light vision, wolf ears; AL CG; SV Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +4 (+2 against Enchantment); Str 16, Dex 20, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills: Animal Empathy +6, Climb +9 (+13 in trees), Heal +7, Hide +22, Intuit Direction +7, Jump +9, Knowledge (nature) +6 (+8 in forests), Listen +13, Move Silently +16, Profession (guide) +2, Search +6, Spot +12 (+16), Swim +5, Use Rope +8, Wilderness Lore +7 (+ when tracking).

Languages: High Elven, Orcish Pidgin, Patrol Sign, Norther.

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Track.

Spells: *Cure minor wounds, resistance.*

Possessions: Travel kit, traditional snow elf leathers (ocher red), short leather boots, *cloak of elvenkind* (mottled gray), studded leather armor, icewood long bow, two snow elf fighting knives, quiver of 15 Carraheen arrows, skinning knife.

Appearance and Personality: Bayal looks the part of the quintessential snow elf—long white hair, pale skin and hard, fierce eyes. He is a harsh man with no patience for delay, indecision, or mercy. He is a deliberate and cunning woodsman, but not very imaginative. He is fiercely loyal to Aradil, and in turn her Avatar Rhiann.

Dunkin of Clan Durgis (Dunk)

Male Dwarf Wld2: CR 2; Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d8+6; hp 15; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flatfooted 16; Atk +4 meleec (1d8+3, battle axe) or +3 ranged (1d6, shortbow); SA Smite; SQ +1 attack bonus and AC dodge bonus vs. orcs, +1 damage vs. orcs, +2 bonus to saves vs. spells and poisons, danger sense, darkvision, master hunter (orc), natural armor, stealthy, stonecunning; AL CG; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will -1; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills: Animal Empathy +3, Appraise +2 (metal and stone objects only), Climb +8, Craft +2 (stone construction), Hide +1, Intuit Direction +1, Jump +2, Knowledge (Kaladrun Mountains) +4, Knowledge (nature) +1, Listen +3, Move Silently +1, Profession (guide) +2, Spot +3 (+5 for worked stone), Swim +2, Use Rope +1, Wilderness Lore +3 (+5 in mountains and underground).

Feats: Track.

Languages: Durgis Clan Dialect, Old Dwarven Pidgin, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: Goat-fur clothes (black with a few white spots), heavy rabbit cloak (brown), heavy ort-hide brogans, chain shirt, battle axe, short bow, 10 arrows, large

hunting knife, 50 ft. of coarse rope.

Appearance and Personality: Dunk is pale and a bit pudgy, but hardy of both body and spirit. Light-hearted for a dwarf, others find him coarse mannered and abrupt even for his kind. He is emotional and easily distracted, but loyal to his friends and a good ally in a fight.

Eirinn Alluon

Male Wood Elf Ftr10; CR 10; Medium-size humanoid; HD 10d10+10; hp 65; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15, touch 13, flatfooted 12; Atk +13/+8 melee (1d8+1/19-20, masterwork longsword) or +16/+11 ranged (1d8+6, composite longbow); SQ Low-light vision; AL CG; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +3 (+5 against enchantment); Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills: Balance +5, Climb +5 (+9 in trees), Hide +13, Knowledge (Caraheen) +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +5, Search +4, Spot +2, Swim +4.

Languages: High Elven, Erenlander, Trader's Tongue.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (composite longbow), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (composite longbow).

Spells: *ghost sound*, *mending*.

Possessions: Travel kit, elven silks (black), well-worn halfling leathers (dark brown), *cloak of elvenkind* (forest green), heavy walking boots, +3 *mighty composite longbow*, masterwork Veradeen longsword, quiver of 30 Caraheen arrows, long orcish dagger.

Appearance and Personality: Eirinn is gaunt even for an elf, and his mood is as light as his hair is dark. Though not talkative and rarely showing a smile, he seems to always be at peace. His voice is low and kind and his movements are graceful and deliberate. Eirinn is observant and quiet, but a demon in battle.

Rhiann, Avatar to the Queen

Female Wood Elf Chn12/Avatar of the Witch Queen1; CR 13; Medium-size humanoid; HD 12d6+1d10; hp 83; Init +3; Spd 30; AC 13, touch 13, flatfooted 10; Atk +10/5 melee (1d6, short sword) or +13/+8 ranged (1d8, long bow); SQ Lorebook, low-light vision; AL CG; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +12 (+14 against Enchantment); Str 10, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 19, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills: Alchemy +15, Animal Empathy +13, Concentration +11, Diplomacy +13, Heal +13, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (Caraheen) +15, Knowledge (nature) +15, Listen +6, Search +8, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +15, Spot +6.

Feats: Alertness, Craft Wand, Enlarge Spell, Improved Initiative, Magecraft, Spellcasting (Abjuration), Spellcasting (Evocation), Spellcasting (Conjuration), Spellcasting (Divination), Spellcasting (Greater Evocation), Spellcasting (Transmutation), Spellcasting (Universal), Still Spell.

Spell Energy: 16

Spells: Assume that Rhiann knows any spell necessary from the spells she can cast.

Languages: High Elven, Erenlander, Halfling, Jungle Mouth, Colonial, Old Dwarven, Orcish. If need be, Aradil can speak for Rhiann in almost any tongue.

Possessions: Traveler's kit, traditional elven walking dress (leaf green), worn moccasins, *cloak of elvenkind* (mottled green), leatherbound lorebook (300 pages), masterwork elven short sword, masterwork longbow, quiver with 5 Caraheen arrows, wooden canister containing 30+ servings of Erethor Tea, hearthstone, three small silver cups, pens and ink.

Appearance and Personality: Rhiann is light-skinned for a wood elf, with short dark hair. If not for her black avatar's eyes, her face would be pretty, if a bit careworn. Instead, her gaze, even when softened by her ready smile, is hard to meet. As with all avatars, the remnants of Rhiann's personality are hard to distinguish from the calm, aloof demeanor that comes with such a connection to the Witch Queen.

Wendell Gale

Male Gnome Exp3 (Trader); CR2; Small humanoid; HD 3d6+3; hp 13; Init +0; Spd 20; AC 10, touch 10, flatfooted 10; Atk +1 melee (1d6-1, club) or +2 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); SQ +2 bonus to spell saves, hold breath for 36 rounds, low-light vision, smuggling & trading bonuses; AL CG; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +4; Str 8, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 17.

Skills: Appraise +7 (+11 when trading), Bluff +11 (+15 when trading or smuggling), Diplomacy +6 (+13 when trading), Forgery +3 (+7 when smuggling), Gather Information +6 (+10 when smuggling), Innuendo +6, Knowledge (Eren River Valley) +7, Perform (storytelling, wooden flute) +6, Profession (trader) +4, Sense Motive +4, Wilderness Lore +4 (+8 on rivers).

Languages: Colonial Pidgin, Erenlander, High Elven Pidgin, Norther, Old Dwarven, Orcish, Trader's Tongue

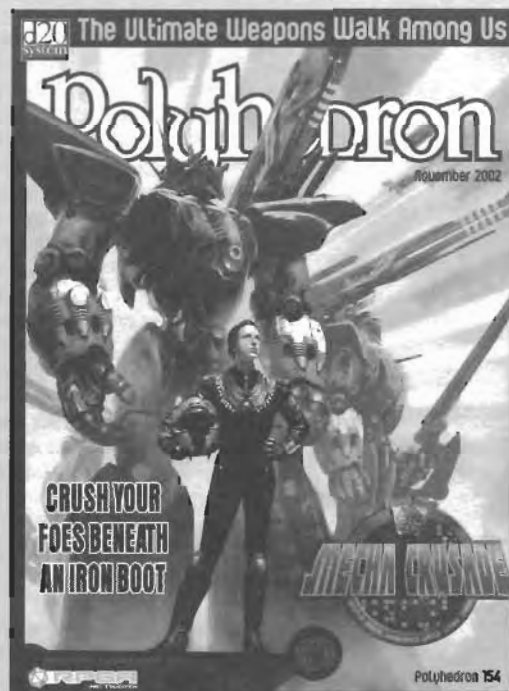
Feats: Inconspicuous, Skill Focus: Bluff,

Possessions: Small traveler's kit, gnome trader's vest with pockets full of odds and ends, wool and leather clothes (brown and maroon), travel cloak (brown), rugged boots, wooden club, light crossbow, belt pouch with 6 steel bolts, pipe and tobacco, 5 days of rations, small knife.

Appearance and Personality: Wendell is a ruddy, grey haired imp with an officious nature and an inflated sense of self-importance. He is a skilled trader and good on the deck of a boat, but not much use in a fight. His only use to the emissaries is his knowledge of the old trade route to the Durgis Clanhold.

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