

The Massacre at Karsus (part one)

Cy 4850 Juniand 15th

Malathrax, a young noble Menelothian sorcerer, surveys the *brothel* he has purchased. Twenty acres of land and a few outbuildings with only one survivor from the battle previously...her name Sureshar. The party are joined by a young and talented druid called Osmedrain Windsheer from the Jandraki Coast and they begin a detailed search of the brothel and its surroundings. Malathrax believes that all is not what it seems...his intuition tells him something is not right with the set up at the brothel.

Further questioning of the girl Sureshar (a former prostitute) reveals that a sorcerer called Caldron – a mysterious and reclusive character that resides in the forest to the north, owned the place. His sorcery was used to give the clients the illusion that they could have whatever pleasures they desired (including pigs if that's your bag!) and whilst they indulged in these pleasures the girls would gather information and filter it back to Caldron.

The party decide that they should investigate this man. There are still many questions left unanswered. The journey north to the woods takes them a day (with a slight detour to Dros Goran for provisions) and when they reach the wood it takes them no time to find the reclusive sorcerer. Caldron is Rosen and both the sorcerer and Nyronnd, a Malakar priest and the only elf in the party (Ygran), sense a deep power within him. Caldron is surprisingly calm and greets them with a warm welcome – even the ten thooligans (theological/hooligans) that accompany the priest don't faze him.

Malathrax lays claims to the brothel but Caldron merely smiles; "you can have the deeds if you do me a service," he says. The party ponder this, not wanting to take on such a sorcerer they decide to hear what he has to offer. Caldron tells them of a small village to the northwest (two leagues distant) called Karsus. It lies in Drenai territory but is only yards away from the border of Rosen – the realm of the god/king Malakar.

Caldron explains; "the village itself is unremarkable in many ways and has a population of fifty or so. In the centre of it is an oak tree from Elenoria, a gift from Queen Illyanth to the Drenai, the elves relocated it and it has a deep significance for them. Pilgrims come from miles around to see it and worship under the branches.

"To win the deeds and my gratitude I want you and your companions to destroy it...the whole village. Kill everyone in it and make sure the tree burns. Use only fire as axes will have no affect on the sturdy oak."

The party are stunned, with the exception of the priest Nyronnd, who relishes the idea of taking the fight to Willowstar. Malathrax decides to go to the northwest to reconnoiter the village before they decide what they will do. The young sorcerer is taken with the mysterious Caldron – particularly with the easy manner and calm power he displays...perhaps, he thinks, I can learn from this man.

They head to Karsus which is situated on the edge of the towering mountains that make the border to Rosen. It is in a natural bowl with trees all around. Malathrax, the druid Osmedrain and the martial artist, a Kordian named Danat Perez, decide to spend a day in the village whilst the priest Nyron and his ten thooligans remain hidden with the horses.

Karsus has five structures; a tavern, two farmsteads, a monastery and a shrine. The tree sits in the middle of a shallow river that runs through the middle of Karsus, a place where pilgrims come to contemplate. Malathrax heads into town. They take top floor rooms in the tavern where ten people are housed...it is run by a Drenai called Rogart. To their horror they see an elf in the corner polishing what can only be described as a Darkbow. All try to empty their minds as the Marraq's eyes and mind are upon them.

They consider calling the whole thing off until Malathrax informs them that Marraqs have no love for Elenorian shrines. Next they head for the monastery where master Kelomar – an ageing martial artist with five young students – greets them and makes them welcome. He demonstrates his skill for them as well as a unique ability to use his mind to grab and pull things towards him.

The shrine is managed by a lowly Willowstar priest called Manjin and there are several pilgrims with him (he runs guided tours and history lessons about the tree). The two farmsteads are run by Mulusk and Bencher respectively, stout Drenai farmers with a handful of family and workers.

On their return that evening to Nyron the decision is made...Karsus will be hit at first light. The decision was made easier by the Marraq's mental communication with the party; *I am with you!* He says into their minds.

The tactics are as follows: Malathrax, the druid and the martial artist will make a defensive position on the roof of the tavern whilst priest Nyron and the thooligans will rampage on the ground. Malathrax and the druid can offer archery support as the priest and his men move into each structure at dawn.

The tavern is the first building to be stormed. The thooligans butcher many before the alarm call is raised. From their vantage point above they see two students from the monastery emerge, swords in hand. Malathrax and the druid shoot them in the throat with their longbows as the bloodshed in the taproom flows. Nyron strikes down the tavern keeper Rogart and orders his men out into the other structures as he heads for the shrine and the priest of Willowstar, his face grim and determined.

Master Kelomar emerges with his remaining students (one of which takes an arrow into his heart) and rushes to face the thooligans. Standing in the doorway of the tavern is Veldus (the Marraq) and on *his* face is a smile blacker than night itself. His hand is a blur and there is a clap of thunder that heralds his first shot. Kelomar lurches back...his hand tries to pull the dark arrow from his jugular but it is too late...he slumps to the ground. The students turn on the Marraq but they are woefully slow...he takes each on in the eye with deadly efficiency.

Nyrond is now at the shrine where the Willowstar priest raises a hand to defend himself...but soon his blood and the unholy water of Malakar desecrate the small shrine. The Malakarian gathers more holy water and kindling and heads for the tree itself...

Malathrax, the druid and the martial artist join the Marraq Veldus and the remaining six thooligans as the two farmsteads are suddenly roused by the noise. Farmer Mulusk stares over his gate, axe in hand, and dies at the hands of a deadly Marraq arrow.

Whilst the party move upon the two farmsteads Nyrond, the Malakar priest, stands at the roots of the tree and carefully places kindling all around the base. He uncorks a vial of unholy water and smiles with grim satisfaction...

Here ends the first chapter of the Massacre at Karsus...

The Massacre of Karsus (part two)

Cy 4850 – Juniand 15th – 17th

Nyrond watches the tree burn with a grim smile. The marraq, Veldus, storms the two remaining farmsteads with the remaining thooligans. A Nadir sorcerer called Hujal Nazan, a nomadic talented sorcerer from the steppes below Drenai, joins him. The rest of the party (Osmedrain, Danat and Malathrax) are on the roof of the tavern giving aerial support with their bows.

The marraq archer is ruthless. His undoubted skill with the dreaded darkbow takes a heavy toll as the thooligans mop up what little resistance the farmers give. Hujal is alongside him, his shamanic magic hurls balls of energy into the fray, and the farmers are left desolate and beaten.

Nyrond, the priest of Malakar, heads back into the tavern where his companions are already turning the place over in an attempt to find anything of value. Their search proves fruitless save for a valuable bracelet and a sacrificial knife that has the sorcerer's twitching...it throbs with the strange inner vibrations that tell them it is magical. A simple spell by Hujal reveals it to be **the Knife of Asgar** – because of its lethal appearance all but the priest of Malakar refuse to touch it. Nyrond takes the knife and secretes it deep within his tunic.

The village is dead. The party regroup and are joined by the marraq Veldus. He thanks them for their support but refuses their offer to join them. "I head north into the Olshay range," he says, "and from there into Myrid where I will hunt more Elenorians. Who knows, I might even reach the Elenorian Forest itself..."

The next visitor is the dark sorcerer that gave them the task in the first place. Caldron smiles at the carnage, he is particularly pleased with the sight of the burning tree. "It will burn for a hundred years," he gloats.

To Malathrax he hands the deeds to the brothel a few leagues away and explains that he has earned the right to them for the actions of the day. To Nyronnd he hands a scroll case that houses a seemingly blank parchment. "The words will come evident in the strangest of lights," he says cryptically, "it is aid in the darkest of hours..."

And Caldron is gone...

The party decide that they must leave the scene quickly and plan to return to the city of Dros Goran to restock. Osmedrain casts a number of *pass without trace* spells to cover their tracks.

They reach Dros Goran and Malathrax – now the owner of a brothel – searches for a man called Lord Snuffnir (he had promised the sorcerer to find girls for the business). The city is busy and as the party move through the streets they are horrified to see the noble lord Snuffnir manacled to a wagon – the Drenai have arrested him for some reason and he is heading towards the dungeons.

Malathrax sneaks up to the noblemen and Snuffnir whispers, "get my sword! It is in the magistrates office." As a fellow wielder of the katana Malathrax understands the need for his weapon. The talented sorcerer casts *invisibility* and heads for the magistrates office. The katana hangs like a trophy behind the magistrate's chair. Stormil, the magistrate, is talking to Meela (a Drenai posing as a Madame but is in fact a spy).

Malathrax steals the blade and heads back alone to the brothel. The rest of the party head back on horseback while Meela heads for the brothel with five women in tow that she had promised the sorcerer (girls to work in his new venture).

With Malathrax staying off the road it is Nyronnd, Osmedrain, Hujal and Danat who arrive back at the brothel first, unaware that the woman is a Drenai spy. Malathrax hurries back to his place and is joined by Snuffnir...together the two men reveal the true extent of Meela's deception. There is a flurry of activity and the girls and Meela are soon ensnared (with *web* and *entangle* spells).

Nyronnd brings out the **Knife of Asgar** and smiles at Meela; "Time to try out this sacrificial knife I think..."

Her screams reached the mountainous border of Rosen several leagues distant...

The Shadow Grows

Cy 4850 Juniand 18th – 19th

As day breaks lord Snuffnir prepares to leave, The nobleman thanks Malethrax for his help and decides to head into Rosengrad and relative safety. "There are those who believe I have committed treason," he says, "so I shall put distance between me and them...but many thanks, Malethrax, your help saved my life and I will never forget it."

As the nobleman departs Nyron, the dark priest of Malakar, works with stone magic to fortify the building (an ex-brothel) where he and his companions now dwell. His aim is to create a secret chamber underground along with an escape tunnel that they can use in times of difficulty. The project – even with his sorcery – will take days so he concentrates on creating a hidden chamber first.

The party – with the exception of the martial artist Danat Peres – are mainly sorcerous. Three of them (Malethrax, Osmedrain and Hujal) possess familiars ([Find Familiar](#)) and these act as lookouts and hidden eyes at the perimeter of their land. Hujal and Osmedrain have hawks whilst the Nadir sorcerer has a rat called Skurm. Early that evening it is the hawks that spot movement. Their masters are quick to alert the party and they watch as thirty to forty men wander across their land and head straight for them.

A ragged bunch they are dirty, unkempt and possess a wide variety of weapons, many stolen from the dead of previous fights. Outlaws. Malethrax stands in the doorway and the outlaw leader, Amitrar, greets him pleasantly. "We look for food and perhaps shelter for the night," he says.

As the thooligans prepare to roast a pig for their guests the outlaws gather in the courtyard to enjoy Malethrax's hospitality. They eat and the talk is pleasant, the party are wary of the outlaws but Amitrar is a strong leader and explains that his band are from the White Woods to the north. "We come south to gather provisions periodically," he says, "the Woods offer us sanctuary but lately the Rosen patrols are getting more frequent."

The outlaws retire to the barn where Hujal's familiar Skurm the Rat spies. Despite some outlaws wanting to attack their hosts Amitrar forbids it. The party post guards that night and sleep is not easy to find. But it is as the outlaws leave that Danat Perez's keen eyes register something is different about them that morning...they have aged! Last night their hair and beards were black and red but as they trudge away east there is grey in them. Malethrax sends his hawk to watch them and he too notices that their movements are slower the closer to noon they get.

They shudder as they speculate what might have visited them in the night...outlaws? Ghosts? Undead? Malethrax recalls the hawk and the mystery is left unsolved.

The next visitors arrive an hour after noon. A Rosen border patrol consisting of a young captain called Sparrish and ten veteran troops ill at ease with the youngsters company. The brash youth speaks with Malethrax. "I am searching for a woman by the name of Meela," he says, "she is supposed to have passed this way but no-one hereabouts has seen her. May I search your home?"

"Be my guest," Malethrax says confidently.

For the next hour the soldiers pair off and search the outbuildings, stables, barn and even the main house. Malethrax is confident that they will find nothing largely due to his druid friend Osmedrain who seems adept at covering tracks. Sparrish seems unconvinced that they have nothing to hide but without evidence he turns and leaves.

Six hours pass and the summer evening light fades gradually. The hawk familiars spot another visitor. A heavily armoured knight and his squire lead a lame horse towards the house of Malethrax. He introduces himself as Gilabert – a Talkhand human – and his squire is called Rogert (also from Talkhand). The priest Nyronnd is uneasy in the presence of the knight (he suspects Gilabert to be a religious warrior of another faith) – Gilabert is equally uneasy with the priest so, at supper, the priest removes himself from sight and goes to his shrine to prey.

Gilabert is grateful to Osmedrain the druid who tends to the horse's leg injury with sorcery, within a couple of spells the horse is cured. Danat Perez then makes a startling discovery as he talks to the squire alone in the kitchen. The squire is in fact a young girl, the daughter of a Talkhand Jarik priest captured by Rosen marauders. Gilabert is aligned to the Jarik priesthood, a religion charged with dispensing justice and balance throughout Grayhawk.

Nyronnd gathers his companions. The Malakarian priest suggests that the knight represents an opportunity to do the work of his dark god, an opportunity to sacrifice the girl and dedicate her soul to Malakar himself. With Rosen trackers following Gilabert the party decide to wait until they arrive...

At dusk the hawks of Osmedrain and Malethrax spot twelve Rosen soldiers moving in on the house of Malethrax. Gilabert takes a huge two handed greatsword from his horse and bids them all to stay and protect the girl...little does he know that the four men within have no intention of letting her go!

Gilabert – in a composite of chainmail and plate armour – rushes into the courtyard to face the Rosen soldiers head on. A consummate swordsman he disembowels the first and beheads a second within a blink of an eye. He becomes a one man battering ram as two more Rosens die at his feet, the greatsword moves with the speed of a rapier in his expert hands.

But treachery lies behind him...

Osmedrain, Hujal and Malethrax are on the roof (obscured from view by a phantasm the Menelothian has cast). With grim determination they prepare to attack the knight from above and behind as the Rosens struggle with the swordsman from the front. Malethrax sends an arrow crashing through his helmet and an explosion of blood showers Gilabert's armour. In that instance the knight knows he is doomed. Hujal – the Nadir sorcerer – throws balls of energy into the steel-clad knight and despite terrible wounds Gilabert fights on.

Two more Rosens fall to him as the great warrior struggles with the archer / sorcerers above. It is Osmedrain – the druid – who launches the killing shaft. A second arrow to the head punctures Gilabert's eye and the knight falls dead to the soft earth. Four Rosens remain and they approach Hujal and Danat Perez grateful for their intervention. The Nadir sorcerer has no intention of stopping. He flicks a *Web* spell to ensnare the Rosens and Danat carefully...one by one...slits their throats.

Osmedrain and Malethrax casts spells to clear the area, every blade of blood-stained glass, every piece of evidence to show there has been a fight is hidden by the use of [*Stone shape*](#) spells and careful cleansing.

Meanwhile, in the hidden chamber beneath the house, the evil priest Nyronnd – accompanied by the craven Nadir sorcerer Hujal – come to the girl (the Jarik priest's daughter). All hope dies in her eyes when she sees the knife of Asgar, the cruel sacrificial dagger hefted by Nyronnd. "I will have her before you priest," Hujal says. Nyronnd smiles grimly. "I can wait," he says with an expression of pure evil. The girl's screams are heard by no-one...there is no knight to save her...before long Nyronnd holds her beating heart in his hand and laughs cruelly. "For you my lord!"

As the last remnant of the fight is cleared horses once again come into the courtyard. The young Drenai captain, Sparrish, and his ten guards have returned. A naturally curious young man he greets Malethrax less than formally...he rudely declares that Malethrax has something to hide. "I will take this place apart stone by stone!" he states.

Malethrax is calm however, a fact that annoys the young captain even more. "I have nothing to hide," the Menelothian says.

The atmosphere darkens like an impending storm. The sense of danger is thick in the air and the party prepares for what they believe to be an inevitable fight. When violence occurs it is as swift as it is startling. A burly veteran guard sat directly to the right of Sparrish flicks out a hand with astonishing speed. A dagger plunges into the young man's throat and Sparrish falls, wide-eyed with horror. He is dead before he hits the ground.

"I am Drusor Luckwarden," the killer says calmly. "We apologise for his insolence Malethrax. I take it you can see that his body is never found...it would look bad if it was." Malethrax smiles and winks at the veteran. "You can be certain he will never be found."

Drusor leads his men away from the scene and the party relaxes...

In the floor of the hidden chamber, lay in a pool of the girl's blood and gore, is Gilabert's greatsword. It gives off a subdued glow in the darkness, as if it is a visual lament to her passing...

The Chateau Malethrax

Cy 4850 Juniand 19th – 20th

The chateau of Malethrax is quiet when morning comes. Only the fine warhorse is evidence that Gilabert, the Talik knight, and the young girl he rescued have ever been here. The priest of Malakar, Nyronnd, rises late to see Oasmedrain Windsheer building a grove in one of the large fields at the ten acre chateau. Meanwhile Malethrax and his

two friends Danat Peres and Hujal have taken a cart and headed into Dros Goran to replenish supplies.

Dros Goran is crowded. All of its four markets are full and the three men move quickly about their task. The most notable change from their last visit is the quiet mobilisation that seems to be happening in the citadel. Hundreds of soldiers are visible, on every spare piece of open land drill sergeants bully the Drenai soldiers into shape. Malethrax buys wine and foodstuffs along with a number of sheep for his fields. His last purchase is one he is most proud of...from a local sign maker her has a sign constructed to display the name of his house – *Chateau Malethrax*.

On the way back to the chateau the three men come upon a mixed bunch of travellers. Twenty five men of various races led by a Drenai called Fillitch. They are pilgrims. "We are on our way to the Unholy Land," Fillitch says brightly, "to see for ourselves the splendour of the realm of god." Malethrax tells them of the shrine and of Nyronnd, the resident priest, and the pilgrims are eager to spend the night at the chateau before heading out to Rosen.

They are greeted by Nyronnd who observed the usual religious rites on them. The priest is alert to a shifty Drenai amongst the pilgrims, an unremarkable man called Boorst, and he is convinced – through instinct or divine inspiration – that the man is a spy. He smiles grimly as he wonders what lies ahead for the spy.

At an evening meal in honour of the pilgrims Nyronnd discusses the spy with his companions. Aware that the priest has designs for sacrifice Malethrax, Danat, Hujal and Osmedrain cover all the exits, the thooligans act as back up outside. Boorst is an astute man. He knows that he has been spotted but it is too late. Every exit is sealed and he can feel the priest bearing down on him. As Nyronnd moves in the spy tries to run for it. Like a frightened squirrel he darts this way and that but escape is impossible.

Nyronnd casts a *Fear* upon the spy and Boorst collapses to the floor in tears. The pilgrims haul him up and force him down onto a makeshift altar as Nyronnd the Malakarian prepares the dread dagger of Asgar.

Osmedrain is outside. As the commotion inside reaches fever pitch he spots a movement in the shadows. Stood before him is a robed and cowelled figure. "Do not be alarmed, I am Ulthor, my task here is to protect the priest."

"Does he need protecting?" Osmedrain says.

"We will see..."

There is horror within the chateau. The well-practised strokes of the sacrificial dagger have wrenched another beating heart from a victim. But today is different. Within the room the chants and songs for Malakar resound menacingly around the hall. Nyronnd tries to eat the beating heart! It is quickly obvious that something is wrong...a surge of power erupts. The priest chokes as he tries to consume the soul of the spy. Osmedrain rushes into the scene of carnage and casts the only curing spell he knows.

With good fortune – or more divine intervention – Nyronnd stops choking. He clasps a grateful hand on the shoulder of the druid. "My thanks friend."

As the night progresses the pilgrims continue their observances to Malakar under the watchful eye of the priest. Osmedrain decides to head for his grove, where he slips easily into the shape of a tree...it affords him solace and rest.

The pilgrims are gone by first light. The summer sun beats furiously down on chateau Malethrax and the air is thick and humid. It promises to be a hot day...

At mid morning Nyronnd spots flames coming from the far barn and he immediately goes to investigate. When he is only yards from the small fire he realises it was started deliberately. He has walked into a trap. Two outlaws – a common sight in the borderlands – spring out of cover with longbows. Two others flank him and make their way towards the chateau where they believe there are rich pickings.

Nyronnd instinctively casts a *Prayer* and his companions are instantly alerted. Malethrax climbs to the roof where his height advantage gives him a clear field of view for the oncoming fight. Danat Peres slinks into the undergrowth to track the two oncoming outlaws whilst Osmedrain knocks an arrow into his longbow.

The druid sees the priest in trouble and instinctively aims to shoot the outlaw who is preparing to fire at him. But Osmedrain misjudges the distances and his first arrow goes astray. There is a deep *thud* and the party stare in horror as Nyronnd has been shot through the head...the wound so bad he falls dead instantly.

Osmedrain is rocked by his error though he keeps firing at the outlaws who smell victory in the air. The druid trades shots with the outlaw archers but his fate is at hand...an arrow punctures his left eye and the druid falls dead in his grove. Danat leaps with knife and fist at one of the outlaws. Vicious hand-to-hand fighting ensues and the martial artist takes a severe cut to the stomach. Through the pain and blood he continues, his great tenacity soon has the outlaw on the floor where a deadly strike disembowels his victim.

From the roof Malethrax pins down the remaining archer whilst Hujaj hurls *magic missiles* at the other one. A combination of his sorcery and Danat's unarmed skills puts the third outlaw down. A vicious shot by Malethrax (who is concealed by *phantasmal force*) puts down the last outlaw and Hujaj and the other sorcerer go to the aid of Danat who bleeds profusely from a stomach wound. Malethrax is able to staunch the flow with a few carefully placed bandages and the three men go about the grim task of burying their companions.

Hujaj Nazan picks up the dagger of Asgar and secretes it in the folds of his robes.

Malethrax stakes out the heads of the outlaws and places them where any others will see – to deter more outlaws from attacking them. Barely has the ceremony to bury Osmedrain and Nyronnd finished when a long line of Drenai soldiers come down the road. They number more than a thousand, mainly foot soldiers, they move by without much trouble. One of their number – a captain on a large horse – crosses into the chateau grounds to speak with Malethrax. It is an old friend. Drusor Luckwarden

advises them to leave the borderlands. He explains that tensions are high due to the massacre at Karsus; his men have been dispatched to bring order to the borderlands and counter any possible Rosen threat.

When the captain leaves – after sampling much of Malethrax's wine – more soldiers enter the chateau grounds. These are Rosen scouts; twenty in all, led by a well-camouflaged soldier called Nayken. He accepts water from Malethrax and attempts to give the nobleman the same advice that Drusor did.

At that point in the evening Drusor Luckwarden returns. The Rosen scouts melt into the undergrowth except for their leader, Nayken. With Malethrax in between them the two leaders can barely be civilised to each other. The Menelothian casts an [ESP](#) and manages to learn that Nayken, the Rosen, has heard of Drusor (he is a legendary figure in the borderlands) whilst Drusor is calm.

Malethrax is careful not to stir the uneasy atmosphere between the two men. Eventually Drusor gets on his horse and departs, followed by the Rosen scout...Malethrax sighs with relief at what could have been a tricky diplomatic incident...

On the Eve of War

Cy 4850 Juniand 20th to 24th

As another warm summers day begins at Chateau Malethrax two more visitors join the party. One is a Myrid called Zavien Scurge, an assassin from the north. The second is an elf, a Muhaki sorcerer called Fray Sool. Malethrax greets them both warmly.

Just after breakfast Malethrax's hawk, Breeze, spots a lone rider approach the chateau. The thooligans, who are working in the fields, can smell the stench from the scraggy-faced man. Danat Peres is the first to greet him; the man is called Rell, a Talik mercenary captain from the south who asks to speak to the owner. Soon Malethrax greets the stranger (with an [ESP](#) running) and offers food and lodgings and – most importantly – a place to bathe.

Rell tells them that he is in the area because of the trouble in the borderlands. "Wars are good for business," he tells them. "I am looking to put together some men and sell their services to the highest bidder." It is an idea that inspires Malethrax – always on the lookout for a business opportunity – and the two men make plans to travel to Dros Goran to find mercenaries for Rell to train. The mercenary captain tells the party that he has been fighting (as a mercenary of course) in the employment of Illeum Runesabre, whose forces are locked in a civil war with the forces of Korven the sorcerer.

Meanwhile Fray Sool casts [Find Familiar](#) on a barn owl. The bird is charmed by the spell and the Muhaki sends it forth to scout the chateau and grounds.

The next morning Malethrax, accompanied by Rell and Zavien, head for Dros Goran. On the way Malethrax sees something that disturbs him. A farmer and cart are laden with equipment...it is clear that the man has abandoned his home and heads for the city walls and safety. "You would do well to pack up and leave," the farmer tells the Menelothian, "the soldiers are building a barrier to repel the hordes of the god's army. All my neighbours have fled. You don't want to be in the open when the Rosens come."

Dros Goran is crowded. Soldiers are everywhere. Gone now is the pretence of quiet mobilization for every able-bodied man and woman is being enlisted into the service of Drenai. Rell leads Malethrax and Zavien into the more dangerous parts of the city – a place where he hopes to find a band of reasonable mercenaries. Zavien senses soft footfalls behind him. His keen hearing and attuned perception spot a hidden follower. A spy? An assassin? He lags behind the two taller men and instinctively Malethrax and Rell know what he is doing.

Zavien waits until he is in shadow before leaping acrobatically backwards onto a ledge ten feet above the street. There he waits for the inevitable sneak to pass him. When the tracker passes him Zavien Scurge leaps down behind him, knife in hand. The sneak spins quickly and flashes steel at the young killer. Zavien dodges and turns to flee...only to slip on the cobbles! He awaits the death blow...

Malethrax glides across the distance, his deadly katana is like a gust of wind as it leaves the scabbard. He reaches the sneak in a heartbeat and splits his skull in two with a blurred strike. Such is the force of the blow that he drives the steel deep into the dead man's chest cavity and as he sheathes it the street is silent once more.

"For a sorcerer you have an astonishing skill with a blade," Rell adds. The mercenary had not even drawn his blade halfway from the scabbard before the fight was over. Malethrax just grins and the three men enter a tavern. Zavien rapidly searches the man and hands Malethrax a scroll case, which he secretes for later.

Rell goes about his business efficiently in the tavern. He gathers many mercenaries about him promising them wealth and fame if they gather in the courtyard at first light.

In their room at the Wallside Tavern Malethrax examines the scroll case and is shocked to see a wanted poster with his name on! The reward is one thousand pieces of gold alive and was issued by the local magistrate Stormil. He is a little aggrieved by the low price.

Next morning Rell, Malethrax and Zavien are pleased to see one hundred prospective mercenaries ready for the short journey to Chateau Malethrax. They leave immediately.

The mercenaries are set tasks by Rell to rebuild the outer barn, construct barracks, practise ranges and generally help to build themselves a place to train. By early evening the distinctive sound of a hundred horses canter down the lane towards them. An elite band of Drenai cavalymen stop at the chateau and their leader, a lieutenant called Akromar, speaks to Malethrax.

He warns them that by staying they risk being swamped by the forces of the god king. "The Rosens have specialists in the area; dark scouts up to no good. There have been rumours of sorcery also." The lieutenant then goes on to enquire about Drusor Luckwarden and the party sense a hidden agenda. There is clearly no love lost between the two men and when it becomes clear to him that he will get no confessions of wrongdoing from them he turns and leaves.

The next morning an old friend wanders into the chateau. Drusor Luckwarden is alone; after sharing pleasantries (and a couple of glasses of wine) with Malethrax he turns his attention to the mercenary captain. Malethrax casts *ESP* and listens intently to the conversation. There is a grudging respect from both men but it is not clear how well they know each other.

When Drusor leaves Rell tells the party that his great grandfather – a mercenary captain like him – fought against a great warrior called Drusor...he speculates that if that was the same man he would be nearly two hundred years old. "He might be a half elf," Fray Sool suggests. The party return to training.

The next visitor arrives that evening, just as the sun sets. A small one-eyed Rosen man called Nethar greets the party and asks to pray at the shrine. Malethrax, Hujal and Fray can sense a strong sorcerer. In the distance a storm can be heard trundling over the Lanik Range as it heads straight for them. Hujal remains close to the strange man as he prays. His interest in Malakar tweaked recently since his involvement with the priest Nyron. He is shocked to see Nethar cutting his forearms and letting the blood trickle onto the shrine. Hujal rushes to the man's aid as he topples over but the sorcerer stares at him directly and hisses; "Use the dagger." It can only refer to the dreaded Dagger of Asgar.

Nethar departs quickly then. Hujal is the first to sense the growing power within the shrine...his companions gather to see a small globe of pure blackness at the centre of the shrine. Worse it begins to expand slowly! The sorcerers sense an enormous power as the fabric of Grayhawk is been torn before them! Hujal tries to *Identify* the growing darkness but the power is so great he is catapulted fifteen feet back against the wall. The storm is now fully upon the chateau. Lightning bolts shower down upon them as the globe continues to grow.

When it stops expanding it measures ten feet in diameter and totally obscures what was the shrine to Malakar. Malethrax and the party hold a conference and the Menelothian slips his hand into the dark globe before anyone can complain. He withdraws it full of ice. The decision to enter is made quickly after that and Malethrax and Zavien volunteer to be roped together.

Once inside it becomes clear that the globe is a portal. It is a dark cylinder, roughly ten feet diameter, and the two men edge into it cautiously. The exit twenty feet further on...into a colossal stone cathedral.

Walls a thousand feet high and doors a hundred feet across dwarf them. In the very centre of the room is a raised platform with a globe identical to the one inside Chateau Malethrax. Through openings two hundred feet up they can see the storm. Malethrax wonders whether this place is Rosengrad – the god king's capital. As Zavien scales

the walls Malethrax [Levitates](#) to a portal and the two men witness a breathtaking scene. In a courtyard surrounded by huge walls are hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Ranks and ranks of them. Then they hear the voice of Malakar – the god king addresses his troops from above.

"We must go," Malethrax says, his face white. "And we must hide."

Back through the portal they drag provisions and all the mercenaries, thooligans and anyone else into the tunnels Nyronid built before his death. As a precaution Malethrax sends Breeze up into the air to witness the events, the Menelothian studies the scene through his familiar's eyes carefully.

Above them a muffled chaos erupts. From the hawk's eyes Malethrax sees the shrine and surrounding building collapse as winged creatures – as large as a vulture – soar into the air. To his dismay there are twenty more such outpourings from the surrounding area. Next come the soldiers. Like thunder above them the party hear many thousands of boots overhead as the ranks of the Rosen army form above them. Rell silences his newly formed band. Some of the less experienced soldiers want to flee.

"If they discover us we are all dead," he says solemnly...

The Lanik Pass

Cy 4850 Jun 26th – 27th

The heavy boots of the Rosen army can be heard above them. Malethrax and his companions, along with Rell the mercenary captain, one hundred mercenaries and the remaining seven thooligans share sanctuary in the tunnels beneath chateau Malethrax. Above the chateau Malethrax's hawk, Breeze, surveys the area – through the birds eyes the elementalist sees the Rosen troops strip his chateau of livestock, food and anything else useful. The mustering force is quick to assemble and quick to march east toward their target – Dros Goran.

Rell and the party discuss the wisdom of joining either army. The mercenary captain is eager to ply his trade and is not concerned particularly which army he joins. A consensus is reached to head west to the border where Drusor Luckwarden, the legendary Drenai captain, has a force of more than a thousand men.

Hujal Nazan and Malethrax cast [Mount](#) spells and lead the group west.

Before they have travelled a league they notice five bodies in a field. Rosen scouts probably. Zavien Scurge checks their wounds; each man has been felled with a single bow shot to the throat...there are no other injuries.

The Lanik Range marks the border between Drenai and Rosen. It is a towering range of mountains with few natural passes for an army to cross. As the party reach one such pass (the Lanik Pass) they notice Drenai veteran troops regarding them

cautiously. Malethrax and Rell are unchallenged as they make the steep climb toward the summit of the pass.

The tall figure of Drusor greets his friend, "What a rabble!" he laughs. "But a welcome rabble...come my friends and eat."

Just behind the warrior stalks another old friend. The tall Marraq archer called Veldus inclines his head with an evil smile, his deadly Darkbow already knocked with an arrow.

The Lanik Pass is a narrow gorge between two imposing rock walls. Along a natural break in the walls are the battlemented parapets and natural fortifications of the soldiers of Drenai, at two hundred feet above the pass they have an unrestricted view of anything that moves. At the southernmost end is a narrow opening and the spot where the stone is stained with the blood of many Rosen soldiers. Malethrax grins; "It's a killing ground."

As night falls the Rosen troops hurry into the pass. The vanguard of heavy infantry head straight for Drusor in an attempt to punch through the lines and double back up onto the walls of the gorge. But Drusor has his most experienced veterans with him and the tide of Rosens crash like a tide against a solid wall. Grapples and rope ladders are quickly deployed as the Rosens attempt to gain a foothold on the walls. As they climb the Drenai loose arrows and oil onto them. The initial death toll is staggering – but still the Rosens come.

Malethrax unleashes an *Ice Storm* at the climbers; huge fist-sized rocks of ice that knock them off their perches and to their deaths below. Hujal, Zavien and Danat Peres hurl rocks or shoot arrows into the Rosens and it appears the battle is almost won.

But the Rosen archers step up to support the climbers. A swarm of shafts rain down on the Drenai positions like locusts the air is filled with death. Many Drenai soldiers fall to their deaths and Fray Sool, the young sorcerer, is among them. A further scream from Malethrax sees a shaft skewer his leg, felling him in pain. Suddenly the fight seems more dangerous. Soon some of the Rosens begin to gain footholds but Danat and Zavien are upon them. The martial artist kicks several to the ground as the assassin fights hand-to-hand with others.

Despite the pain Malethrax hurls another *Ice Storm* into the battle as he tries to staunch the flow of blood from his severe leg wound. Hujal Nazan casts a *Shield* and grins as the arrows bounce off the invisible shield. He studies the battle carefully, trying to find a leader figure, a captain down below that commands the troops. Sure enough he spots a man who manipulates the men around him with words and deeds. Hujal concentrates hard and brings to the forefront of his mind the Power Word of Destruction. He is a fledgling adept of one of the most powerful of the *Nine Arts of Magic* – but he draws power from within.

He focuses on the leader, his mind only seeing the destructive force of his own will. With the utterance of the single word all sound ceases. A brief second where no howls of pain or shouts of anger can be heard, as if the sheer force of his will forbid

anything but the power itself. Suddenly the Rosen leader's head topples from his shoulders to the horror of the men around him.

Hujal rejoices in his first Power Word, tastes the bittersweet taste of raw power. The Rosens lose heart then. Like the tide ebbing away they retreat amid the taunts of the Drenai soldiers. Drusor gathers the party around him; he surveys the damage, the casualties with a practised eye. Upon seeing Malethrax he calls for the priest. Irilea is a dark-haired Drenai beauty – a young priestess of Willowstar who has found herself in the middle of a horror.

"The wound is bad," she informs Drusor, "I am not sure I have the power left to heal him – there are many wounded."

"Just make him walk," Drusor states.

After a [Cure Serious Wounds](#) spell Malethrax thanks the priestess. He can walk – albeit with a limp.

Rell has lost all but eighteen of the hundred or so mercenaries that came with him. He sighs as Drusor gives him an encouraging slap on the back. The veteran warrior moves around his troops giving solace and support where it is needed.

Inevitably the second wave of Rosen troops enters the pass. Hujal takes the precaution of casting [Shield](#) on Malethrax, Danat and Zavien before the next wave hits. The Drenai watch enthralled as a wooden construction on wheels (like a fortified moveable building) trundles up the pass. As the Drenai hurl rocks and fire arrows onto it slits appear in the roof and small detonations can be heard inside. From forty small holes come fizzing balls of heat that leave snake-like trails of steam behind them. Some explode violently in mid-flight whilst some shatter against the parapet of the walls and unleash death. Small projectiles rain onto the Drenai cutting many of them to pieces. The party shelters wisely as a second volley of missiles is in the air. Following the second strike the climbers with grapples and the spearhead to take on Drusor rush forward.

Initially the numbers of defenders are depleted allowing the Rosens to gain a better foothold on the walls. Soon reinforcements take the place of the slain and the fighting is as fierce as ever. Danat Peres kicks one man over the edge before driving his cruel dagger into the face of a second. Zavien battles with a sneaking killer eventually seeing him fall backwards off the edge. Malethrax hurls a [Fireball](#) along the wall. The flaming conflagration takes a dozen Rosen troops off the walls as their ropes snap or their skin burns.

Hujal gathers his thoughts once more. But now it is a second Word of Power that he focuses upon. That word is *Death*. The adept unleashes his second word and watches as ten of the enemy collapse around him and fall dead into the pass. The intervention of Malethrax and Hujal turns the tide of battle instantly. The foothold the Rosens gained initially is now gone – the Drenai urge the attackers back to their deaths and the corpses pile up below.

But such power does not go unnoticed. In the crush of soldiers below is a slender dark robed sorcerer who has witnessed Hujal's threat and gathers his power around him to strike. Malethrax is the only man to see the danger. His Menelothian gift of *Spirit Sense* knows something is wrong – he knows that a sorcerer will soon target his friend. Malethrax gathers his own power...

Hujal cannot even see the danger as there is a crack of thunder about his head. It is so swift and sudden that he cannot react – a *Lightning Bolt* knocks him back against the rock wall but the men of the Nadir are sturdy and strong. The wound is superficial and Hujal snarls angrily.

Malethrax spots the sorcerer. He casts *Summon Swarm* and nagging insects surround the Rosen magician. To those above it is like the sorcerer has a banner above his head. There is a second crack of thunder but this time it is Veldus, the Marraq archer, who unleashes a deadly black shaft into the open mouth of the Rosen sorcerer.

For the second time that night the Rosen forces lose heart and the tide of foot soldiers retreat back into the Lanik Range to regroup. Drusor once again is at the heart of his troops. "Keep sharp lads," he says, "this night is not over by a long way..."

The battle in the Borderlands

Jun 27th – 28th cy 4850

The Rosen forces move against Drusor Luckwarden's position relentlessly. For the third time that night a wave of marauding shock troops try to puncture their way through his fortification at the mouth of the Lanik Pass. Above him Malethrax, Danat Peres and Zavien Scourge watch the grapples and rope ladders arrive – but this time the approach is different.

Malethrax senses higher spirits below and his fears are greeted by a rising shroud of thick fog. As Danat hurls large rocks onto the climbers both Malethrax and Zavien launch arrows at the start of combat. An arrow from the assassin Zavien slips through the semi corporeal form of a sorcerer causing an unearthly scream from the figure. A further arrow sees a cloak fall to the ground as the sorcerer disappears.

As the fog lifts so the killers climb under the cover of it. Zavien's highly tuned senses can feel the danger rise. "They send assassins!" he yells to the Drenai on the walls of the pass.

The first Rosen killers are up on the walls and the fighting is ugly. It soon becomes clear that these are specialists in hand-to-hand fighting, their swift knives and cruel blades take a heavy toll as they struggle to gain a foothold. All the men know that if the walls of the pass fall then all is lost. Zavien sees the danger more than anyone; his first action is to emerge from the shadows to slit the throat of a Rosen killer...so expertly that he melts back into darkness to await another opportunity. More present themselves. Within three minutes he has sliced open the throats of three more and sent them into the foggy abyss below.

Danat, the martial artist, lashes out with a deadly combination of unarmed and knife work. Trading blows with a Rosen he manages to kill one before he takes a vicious underhand cut to the face. Blood gushes into his eye as he struggles for balance on the edge of the walls. Despite the pain and disorientation he manages to kick his assailant off the wall to his death.

Malethrax *levitates* above the combat and after a *phantasm* he launches arrows at the fight below. The combat is vicious and even the Drenai veterans are pushed to the limit by the two score assassins all around them. Malethrax's aim is true and he picks off several Rosens selectively, concentrating on supporting Danat.

But the tide of the fight is turned by one man. Zavien Scourge is amongst the killers, his unseen hands strike at them when they least expect it...from his hands alone almost a quarter of the killers are despatched. As the battle beneath dies so the assassins lose heart and flee – to the great rousing cheers of the Drenai. Drusor is amongst the men again but the Drenai have a new hero as many of the fighters on the walls turn to Zavien and salute him. Even Drusor – the veteran slayer – smiles at the young assassin and slaps him firmly on the back.

But the Rosens delivered a heavy blow on the third wave. Malethrax is already amongst the injured, Irilea, the Willowstar priestess, helps him as they try to bandage and splint and care for the wounded. Danat is bandaged but his head wound is severe. Rell, the mercenary captain, brings his five remaining men up onto the walls to help with the wounded.

A scout calls and the attention of all on the walls is on the pass. A hooded man limps up the track but the volley of arrows pass harmlessly over him. Malethrax recognises the dark feted Rosen. "He is called Nethar," he explains to Drusor.

"I wish to talk," Nethar says.

Before anyone can stop him Malethrax *levitates* down and the two men face each other once more.

"I offer you a way out," Nethar says, "for the time of these Drenai runs short...soon they will be dead. Your hospitality and talent will be rewarded. Meet me at the western edge of the White Woods and I will offer you and your friends sanctuary."

Malethrax sighs but refuses to respond. Instead he returns to Drusor and reports the conversation. At this point a scout enters the company and informs Drusor that the White Woods and all other resistance in the area is gone. The Rosens are marching three thousand men to cut them off from behind...the scout says that they will arrive in twelve hours.

Drusor, Rell, Malethrax, Danat Peres, Zavien Scourge and the other captains debate what to do next. To stay would mean death. After lengthy talks they decide to head east to join the siege of Dros Goran – if the citadel remains in Drenai hands. Drusor orders the priestess and the sorcerers to rest for four hours (to regain some of their magical strength) —after that the depleted battalion march east out of the Lanik Range.

Malethrax has the idea to gather Rosen uniforms from the dead troops and Drusor laughs at the irony; "Never thought I'd join the Rosen army!" But the disguise helps them move quickly through the borderlands. At the start of the journey Irilea cures Danat's head wound and the Drenai troops move cautiously across the borderlands – their first stop is at the deserted chateau Malethrax.

As they get closer to the city the paraphernalia of war is all around them. Siege engines, supply wagons, reservists going to and from the front line. Drusor and his men move without being challenged. Malethrax casts an [alter self](#) to disguise himself more thoroughly. As they near the smoking citadel they can clearly see the siege in its full swing but as yet the walls have not crumbled. Malethrax casts [stone tell](#) in an attempt to find a possible route under the army and into Dros Goran.

But an alert guard spots him.

A Rosen captain called Getheren advises Malethrax that he should – as a spellcaster – wear a sash that marks him out to the commanders. He then suggests that he and the rest of his men go to see Sadrak, the general in charge of the god king's armies. With little chance of escape Malethrax, Drusor and the rest are taken deep into the inner sanctum of the Rosen army.

At the general's tent Drusor, Malethrax, Danat Peres, Zavien Scourge and the Marraq Veldus are led in. Sadrak is an urbane, polite man with exquisite manners. He informs the Menelothian that he knows of his reputation for fine wines. At this point Malethrax reaches into his backpack and produces a fine vintage. Sadrak drinks it slowly as the tension in the tent rises. Drusor is impatient – like a caged tiger – and he asks Malethrax bluntly; "Death or siege?"

Malethrax says; "Death."

Any pretence of a fight is quickly abated as the Rosen elite guards swarm the tent. General Sadrak does not move a muscle as Drusor, Veldus and the rest have knives put at their throats. The general is less than pleased at the attack but seems to have a degree of respect for Malethrax. "I like you," he says, "which is why I'm going to let you back into Dros Goran with your friends...that is, of course, without the veteran and the Marraq. I have uses for those two."

The remaining Drenai battalion are released into the citadel of Dros Goran. The scars of two days under siege are clear to see. Malethrax and Irilea head straight for the Willowstar temple. "We need to rescue Drusor," the Menelothian says.

At the temple they are greeted by Aenor, an Elenorian high priest, who shows concern at their plight. Malethrax begs the elf for Willowstar's help and he is led to the altar. "To save Drusor you will need a sacrifice," the high priest says. "His life for another."

Zavien, Irilea and Danat watch in horror as Malethrax hefts his katana and turns it on himself. Before any of them can react the blade bites deep into the flesh of his abdomen as Malethrax commences the ritual suicide. The atmosphere in the temple changes. Even the high priest, Aenor, is startled by the spirit that suffuses Malethrax

who continues the ritual oblivious to his surroundings. Both priests of Willowstar are now on their knees – the katana finishes the final cut...but there is no blood!

As the weapon exits Malethrax's stomach there is mark on the Menelothian – he sheathes the sword amid the wailing of the priests and a figure begins to appear on the altar. Malethrax grins as Drusor Luckwarden is amongst them.

The veteran warrior can barely contain his anger. "Get me a sword!" he growls. As he marches from the temple he says nothing – no thanks to Malethrax, no friendly words to his saviour. Instead he moves like a brooding storm up into the higher levels of the citadel. Drusor Luckwarden heads for the Ducal palace with Malethrax and his friends behind him.

An old friend, Lord Snuffnir, greets Malethrax. The thin nobleman throws a question to the Menelothian. "Where's he off to?"

Malethrax shrugs. "I think our friend here is about to take over the city..."

Wordmaster

Cy 4850 Jun 28th – 29th

Drusor Luckwarden heads for the stronghold of Dros Goran. In his wake are Malethrax, Hujal, Zavien Scourge, Danat Peres, Rell, the six thooligans and five mercenaries. The tall Drenai veteran has a dark disposition and Malethrax tries to calm the situation when they reach the locked gates of the stronghold. The Menelothian uses his exquisite manners and etiquette to converse with the guards and persuade them not to arrest Drusor for his belligerent behaviour.

Soon they are greeted by a tall thin man called Murigan, the spymaster, lord of all spying that occurs in the citadel. After a brief discussion Murigan leads them into the stronghold and the party head for the war room. Three other men greet the newcomers. Duke Andrilar – youngest brother of the Drenai king, general Gerith – commander of the forces in Dros Goran, and Baltior – a quiet sorcerer and advisor to the duke.

Gerith cannot hide his contempt for Drusor Luckwarden, he makes an acid comment regarding his dubious parentage (legend has it that Luckwarden is a half elf). The duke calms the heated situation and tells them all to stop bickering. "I will not turn away any help," he tells the room, "especially help in the form of a soldier. Furthermore I want Drusor to take charge of the men on the two walls." Gerith shakes his head as Drusor grins.

The focus then turns to the situation at hand. Duke Andrilar guesses that the king of Drenai will have an army at Dros Goran in three weeks – which means that they have to secure the citadel until then. Whilst Drusor is not prone to pessimism he informs them that the greatest threat is the Marraq, Veldus, the elf was captured and Drusor is worried that if turned against them he will be a deadly long-ranged assassin.

Malethrax and his companions decide that the best way to solve the problem of the Marraq is to infiltrate the Rosen camp and assassinate him. Still dressed in Rosen attire Malethrax, Danat, Zavien and Hujal head out across the killing ground towards the Rosen forces under cover of darkness. Hujal casts *shield* on everybody and sends Skurm – his rat familiar – into the camp to find the Marraq. The rat soon finds two large tents. One contains the Rosen general, Sadrak, and the other houses the Marraq Veldus. Two Malakar priests have tied him to a chair and interrogate him brutally. Outside are two heavily armed temple guards.

The plan is simple. Malethrax casts *alter self* to make him look like the general and staggers ‘drunkenly’ past the guards who do not challenge him. Zavien uses the distraction to crawl under the tent and get into a position to strike the Marraq whilst the priests are distracted. But the Marraq has other ideas. A thought enters the head of Zavien; "don't you dare!" Zavien decides to go for the priests instead.

Danat Peres and Talarn are poised outside to attack the temple guards. As Zavien strikes so Malethrax unleashes the katana and the fight explodes in the tent. Danat rushes the guards as they turn to help the priests within.

One of the priests *holds* Zavien but Malethrax carves a couple of deft blows to his back and as the priest falls dead the spell on Zavien is broken. At the entrance Danat and Talarn take on two expert guards. They exchange rapid attacks and parries. The sound of steel rings out in the night. The remaining priest is tenacious but cannot contend with the two men before him...soon Zavien cuts him down and the Malethrax is upon the guards with a quick stride. Soon the guards fall, small wounds slowing them enough to wear them down...eventually as their blood is spilt the Marraq is free.

Meanwhile Hujal is at the general's tent. The dagger of Asgar cuts a hole in the canvas and he sees a chamberlain administering even more wine to the drunken general. He *sleeps* the chamberlain and cuts his way in.

General Sadrak rises and hefts an empty wine bottle, his drunken eyes regarding the Nadir tribesman with contempt. Even without a normal weapon the general is a dangerous opponent. Hujal raises the dagger – but not for a strike – instead the young wordmaster focuses on one of the Nine Words of Power. "Death," he says almost negligently.

The general's chest explodes outwards as his heart leaps onto the dagger that skewers it firmly. Amid the blood and gore at the end of Asgar the heart continues to pump as Hujal stares at the ruined body of the fallen general.

He waits.

Just one more minute...

As he casts the next power word of death Hujal squeezes the life out of the heart until it beats no more, the awful focus of his power is now the soldiers around the general's tent. The backbone of the besieging army. The very earth groans at the power he unleashes, the tribesman feels the awesome force once wielded by Prometheus.

Hujal Nazan leaves the tent to join his companions who quickly flee the scene. The Rosen soldiers around them are silent and appear to be asleep...but Hujal knows otherwise. The Rosens have entered a sleep they will not wake up from.

Rope ladders are slung down the outer walls by Drusor and his men. The party are greeted with cheers by the Drenai troops. But Hujal is singled out by the Marraq. Veldus bows to the young tribesman and lays his darkbow on the ground in a mark of respect.

As dawn breaks wagons are piled high with the dead Rosen soldiers. Once again the Drenai troops cheer as the Rosen army retreats to the west...back to the borderlands. A lone dark-robed priest walks up to the walls. Veldus wants to shoot him but Drusor stops him – the priest bows in respect to the forces of Drenai and leaves the field.

That night Duke Andrilar throws a banquet in honour of Drusor, Hujal and the rest of the party...

Old Friend, New Enemy

Jun 29th – Jultar 2nd

At the end of the banquet in their honour the party speak to Duke Andrilar of Dros Goran. Malethrax wants horses to travel east to the coast where they plan to head for the wealthy kingdom of Myrid. The duke gives Malethrax a letter of introduction to the king – his brother – and the noble leader of Dros Goran thanks them for their bravery and prowess during the siege.

Drusor Luckwarden embraces Malethrax. "I'll miss you my friend," he says, "but I cannot leave this citadel when there are armies close."

After buying provisions the party, which include Rell and his remaining five mercenaries, ride out on the eastern road. Malethrax *Spirit Senses* the thooligans and discovers that they are bound to them in a strange way.

Rell has his mercenaries scout ahead and behind. A couple of hours out of Dros Goran the scouts report a lone Rosen horseman ahead of them. Malethrax, Zavien and Danat ride ahead to greet an old friend...Caldron the sorcerer. It was Caldron who had employed the party to attack the village of Karsus in the borderlands – an action that laid the foundations of the current Rosen attack.

"We meet again Malethrax," he says pleasantly.

But Malethrax and his friends are cautious. Caldron wants their help to take Dros Goran but the party is not interested. Barely able to hide his disappointment Caldron says; "We part as enemies, Malethrax."

The next night is quiet. As they ride through Drenai the roads and villages are deserted. The closer they go east the more habitation they see. A makeshift barricade by an elderly gentlemen wielding a spear does not stop their easterly journey. He is

called Barthwaite – Drenai home guard – and the old man mistakes the party for a Rosen horde.

At noon on the same day one of the mercenary scouts reports that a Rosen death squad (containing ten killers) are tracking them. The party decides to lay in wait to ambush them.

The five thooligans, Rell, two mercenaries and Malethrax find suitable locations at maximum longbow range. Closer are Danat Peres, four other mercenaries, Zavien Scourge and Talam. The plan is simple: when the longbowmen open up those closer will engage in hand-to-hand...but the Rosen death squad has other ideas.

Trained in the art of stealthy movement the Rosens get close before the longbowmen can engage. Talam suddenly faces a killer and reacts with a couple of strokes of his blade. Zavien remains in the shadows as the unseen killers hurl small projectiles – shuriken – into the fray. Malethrax is hit in the head with a small five-pointed star and collapses...though the wound is not sufficient to kill him he topples over paralysed. At the same time Danat is hit in the stomach but the poison is unable to take a hold of him.

The Rosen killers are suddenly upon the group. Rell has his throat cut, as do several of his mercenaries. The thooligans see the melee and decide to launch arrows into it. Several of the Rosen killers are felled by the salvo but a stray shaft hits Talam, he clutches his side but continues to fight despite the deep wound.

Danat Peres slashes one of the Rosens to death with his deadly dagger and spins dextrously to kick a second in the face and another Rosen falls. Zavien slides from the shadows, his dagger rips through the spine of an unsuspecting killer and he slinks back out of the fight to wait for his next victim. Danat backs up against a tree as protection against the unseen killers. To his horror a metal garrotte is placed around the tree – and his throat – and pulled tight across his neck.

Zavien realises that Danat has only seconds to live and leaps at the killer from the shadows. His knife rips a ten inch gash in the Rosen's arm, the tendons, muscles and nerves are all severed and the garrotte falls harmlessly to the ground. Angered Danat removes the shuriken from his side and stabs the killer – the fallen man is instantly paralysed and Zavien ties him up for later interrogation.

The battle is over quickly. Rell and his mercenaries are slain but the thooligans are undamaged. Malethrax wakes groggily from his paralysis and the interrogation of the Rosen killer can start. An [ESP](#) aids the interrogation – Malethrax sees in the man's mind Caldron soliciting their help.

Malethrax decides to ride all night, fearing Caldron has other surprises in store for them. He *Spirit Senses* The Bloodstone – an item Zavien has in his possession – and determines a tentative spiritual link between it and Malakar.

The next morning Malethrax's hawk spots Caldron on a swift steed galloping toward them from the west. Malethrax pushes the party on as his hawk keeps an eye on the dark sorcerer. When Caldron stops a couple of miles behind them he starts to create a

circle in the earth (they fear he is about to create a pentacle). They all decide that if the sorcerer summons they will be in trouble and – as a unit – they turn their horses and gallop toward him. Malethrax reasons that he will not have time to complete the pentacle in time before they are upon him.

Malethrax's plan is correct. As Caldron sees them in the distance he abandons the pentacles but gathers his will about him. He casts a *Demonic Horde* and sends many baying, slaving creatures at the onrushing party. The horses are spooked. They sense the demonic souls and each man has trouble controlling them...only Talarn, a skilled horseman, is able to drive his horse around the horde and he is within a few hundred yards of the sorcerer.

Malethrax, Zavien, the thooligans and Danat leap from their horses and decide to meet the demonic horde head on. Zavien moves expertly into the shadows and Malethrax (who has already cast *Invisibility*) casts *Jump* – he knows that the demons can sense his soul – he cannot rely on the *invisibility* protecting him. Danat and the thooligans take the brunt of the demons, their blades cutting the imp-like horrors to pieces.

Talarn is close now. He raises a weighted dagger as he bears down on Caldron, his skill with the throwing knife as yet untried. But Caldron is ready for him and casts the awful *Death Spell* – which stops Talarn and the horse instantly...they fall dead at the sorcerer's feet.

Malethrax and Zavien have broken through the demonic horde and now stalk Caldron. They are aware that speed is of the essence but both men know that the dark sorcerer will be able to cast another spell before they reach him...

Caldron gathers his will...

The spell is not what either Zavien or Malethrax expect. There is a white glow around the sorcerer and he vanishes instantly...along with the remains of the demonic horde...

Deep Water

Jul 2nd – Jul 4th

The party take the road east toward the citadel of Dros Drenai. They are joined by a priest Jarik, a man called Locan, who travels with them on their quest for the Drenai capital. At night the temperature plummets, an unseasonal cold. Zavien Scourge and Malethrax are both aware that Caldron's influence is close at hand.

At the western tip of the Lone Lake – a vast inland sea in the middle of the Drenai lands – the party face a choice. The road splits north and south of the lake; the northern road is the main highway to the capital whereas the southern way is quieter. They decide on the quieter southern route.

They pass many small fishing villages along the way. Many of the inhabitants are suspicious of strangers and lock their doors as Malethrax and his companions ride

past. One man offers them lodgings however, but the party decline and move on. All the while the spectre of Caldron's influence can be felt, like a deep chill in the bones.

A deserted village makes the horses nervous. Broken windows, sunken fishing boats and general decay greet them...the horses have no desire to venture into it so Malethrax steers the horses around it and out into the wilds.

The night is unnaturally cold once more. Away from the water's edge but no away from the cold they camp a few miles from the Lone Lake. Zavien handles the Bloodstone; he hopes to gain some kind of sensation from the magical gem. He senses double heartbeats amongst the party. He wonders whether it is the influence of the dark sorcerer Caldron...Zavien does not have long to wait before he discovers the meaning of the strangeness.

The five remaining thooligans stand up around the party and draw their swords. Instantly Zavien – and his companions – realise that the thooligans are under some kind of possession. Violence explodes in the camp as the party reach for weapons to engage the warriors about them.

Malethrax casts *jump* and exits the combat immediately. A thooligan stabs at Zavien with a longsword but the assassin swerves out of the way before somersaulting backwards – out of the fight – and into the shadows of the night. As two thooligans move toward Malethrax Danat and Locan are left to engage three thooligans together. Danat Peres slashes at the face of an attacker and the poison on his knife (by Zavien) paralyses the thooligan. Locan, the young priest, cannot cope with the expert swordsmen before him and he is cut down instantly, his throat cut by a well-aimed blade.

Malethrax backs off and casts *invisibility* and the two thooligans are temporarily confused. Zavien uses this confusion to attack one from behind. As the blade slices into his sword arm the warrior is also paralysed from the poison on the blade. Danat engages a second thooligan, his skill with the deadly knife too much for the warrior and a third is paralysed.

Malethrax draws his longbow under the security of his invisibility and shoots a thooligan in the back of the head. The last warrior turns on the Elementalist but Malethrax puts an arrow into his mouth and the fight is over.

Zavien binds the three thooligans and uses the Bloodstone to interrogate them. It becomes clear that Caldron's influence is still upon them – some form of possession. Zavien slaughters the three men mercilessly...but in respect of their help over the last few weeks the thooligans are given a decent burial.

The party sleep during the day and move at night. The cold dogs their movement once more. In the darkness a horse accelerates up in the air to fall down to earth hundreds of yards away...it becomes clear that something fast and flying is amongst them. Zavien and Danat let the horses escape – Danat has horsemanship and will be able to round them up later.

To the party's horror a huge skeletal monstrosity descends amongst them. It's eyes are blood red, it's fangs drip with blood, and it's claws are the size of small knives. Malethrax and Zavien realise that they have no weapons to even mark the demon...they flee the battle (Malethrax [jumps](#) once more) leaving Danat alone with the beast. He hefts a small dagger of speed, the only possible weapon that can affect it. Whilst Malethrax and Zavien sprint for safety Danat Peres – martial artist – attacks the demon.

It takes all his skill and composure to stop the beast's razor-like claws ripping him to pieces. To add insult to injury the demon is protected by an aura that deflects all but the very best attacks. With sweat in his eyes and panic rising Danat becomes more desperate. Eventually his blade punctures the beast's defences and it howls in pain into the night – green acidic blood spills onto the earth. But the beast reacts angrily; it's vicious jaws bite deep into Danat's shoulder. Never in his life has he felt such exquisite, mind-sapping pain. It is not a physical wound; Danat feels the beast drink his soul!

Danat recoils, his whole body limp and subdued. To his annoyance the demon's wounds have healed the effect of drinking a soul...the demon is invigorated by the nourishing power of Danat's soul. But Danat Peres draws on impossible reserves of strength. He lashes out at the beast; the blade punctures the left eye and sprays green acid everywhere. Another howl fills the night and drives away anyone who hears it.

The demon spins with a maddening scowl and lashes out ferociously. But Danat skips and rolls away from the deadly claws. Despite the awesome pain he drives the dagger into the ribs of the beast and more blood is spilt. Zavien and Malethrax watch from a distance, unable to believe that Danat is still alive.

But the demon is hurt badly. Slowed by two cruel wounds he launches a desperate attack...Danat ducks under the blow and comes up under it's defences – he drives the dagger with all his fading strength into the face of the beast. As the right eye explodes the demon is blown into a thousand pieces...those pieces evaporate instantly and Danat slumps to the ground, his face lined with exhaustion.

Malethrax decides that the quickest way to reach Dros Drenai is by boat across the Lone Lake. "I will cast elementals," he says. Danat and Zavien agree. At the next fishing village they hire a boat from a man called Dovit, a Drenai fisherman, and Malethrax casts [summon elemental Earth & Air](#) to aid their journey.

Their progress is swift. The fisherman Dovit is unaware that his boat is travelling so quickly. Only when he sees other fishing vessels in the area does he realise that something is wrong.

After a day Malethrax halts the boat. A tower of steam is a quarter of a mile in front of them. Despite his attempts to outrun the steam Malethrax realises that whatever is in the water has them trapped. At first he fears demonic influences but when Dovit points out a wall of water behind them he realises that they face elementals. Malethrax watches as the wall of water grows behind them...at fifty feet he realises that there is no escape. He casts [water breathe](#) on Zavien and himself just before the catastrophic wave sinks them all...

When they wake the debris of the shattered fishing boat surrounds them. Water laps around them and they find themselves unhurt and on the shore of a large underground lake. On closer inspection Malethrax realises that they are underneath the Lone Lake, the ceiling of the *cave* is actually the water of the lake above.

A figure rides toward them. Initially the rider appears human but webbed feet and hands reveal that he is anything but. Even his horse has webbed feet.

"I am Sir Antiar," he says, "the chancellor of Lord Segar of the Lake...he is expecting you."

They are shown through a waterfall into a natural cavern that is dominated by a pool. Waterfalls feed the pool but Malethrax senses elementals everywhere...some of the waterfalls flow up hill. Lord Segar is an elemental in the pool itself.

"Greetings Malethrax," he says. "I have been expecting you."

Malethrax explains the situation but the elemental lord is more concerned by the fact that elementals were summoned into *his* lake. After an apology it appears to the party that Lord Segar is not acting alone in this matter. He explains that he has another sorcerer (Caldron) who was interfering with the lake...he has secured him in a similar cavern. "The king of Drenai and I have a pact," Lord Segar says, "I maintain the lake and he leaves me alone...although I concede you had no idea of this arrangement Malethrax. I will therefore accept your story and send you to his majesty at once."

They are led to a waterfall, which flows directly upwards. Once inside they are propelled rapidly to the surface of the Lone Lake, on the northern shore. Drenai soldiers are everywhere. A thousand troop ships litter the lake. Soldiers haul the travellers on board and a burly sergeant gathers Zavien, Malethrax and Danat together.

"Go and fetch the king," he says...

The Dark Killer

Jultar 3rd - 4th

King Rufus IV of Drenai greets Malethrax, Danat, Hujal and Zavien as they climb onto one of a thousand small vessels that congregate on the northern shore of the Lone Lake. The elite palace guards help them to the king who takes the letter from Malethrax (given to him by the king's brother – Andrilar). Upon reading the letter Rufus mellows, his eyes warm to the travellers and he says; "It seems I owe you a debt of gratitude, my friends, for if it wasn't for you I would have lost a citadel by now."

Malethrax introduces his companions and the king seems genuinely grateful to the party. Rufus is the head of the greatest spy network on Grayhawk and his knowledge of the war is comprehensive – he even refers to Caldron and the sacking of Karsus as the start of the war with Rosen. Malethrax shifts uncomfortably in front of the king and changes the subject quickly.

King Rufus IV learns of their plight towards Myrid and gives Malethrax a letter to give to the king, Viator Varkos, or at least to whatever authority is in charge. Along with the letter Rufus provides five excellent riding horses – all fully equipped – and a number of weapons to help against Caldron and his demons. "These we took from our enemies," he says. The party share between them a magical longsword, a pair of daggers (one white one black), a battleaxe and an elven ring.

Soon they are on the road eastward...their journey is to Dros Yali, a seaport, the king has promised them a ship will be at their disposal should they reach it. But as they make good speed on the road Zavien – the dangerous killer – senses they are being tracked. Worse, he fears they are being tracked by an expert.

Hujal sends Skurm – his familiar – to scout around when the party finally stop for the night. Through the rat's eyes Hujal is able to see Skurm in the hands of a beautiful elven woman, who stares at the rat curiously. Reacting instantly Hujal casts [Web](#) through the rodent but the only effect is to annoy the woman. She places the rat inside a pocket in her robe. Still undeterred Hujal casts [magic missiles](#) from the rat, even though he cannot see a target. The elf is now angry, "this robe cost me a fortune!" she hisses. She knocks Skurm unconscious and Hujal loses contact.

The party are secured in an [earth elemental](#) dome Malethrax has created. He sends out Breeze – his hawk [familiar](#) – to find the elven woman. The party decide to confront the woman, though Malethrax and Zavien are suspicious of her. She is called Fuviel and after handing back Skurm she explains that she has been sent by the king to aid them against Caldron. Malethrax helps her up onto his horse and the party head east.

Malethrax casts an [ESP](#) and this allays some of his fears about the woman. Zavien and Hujal are more suspicious, however, when Hujal's horse starts to back away from the elf. The Nadir adept of the Power Words decides that something a little more creative is called for – he intones a word and creates a compass to find Caldron. It is a simple needle on a piece of thread...they all watch in horror as the needle gravitates in the direction of the elven woman.

The visage of the elven woman changes...she is Caldron! The dark sorcerer reacts quickest; he casts a spell into Malethrax and the elemental disappears in a flash of light. Danat, Zavien and Hujal launch themselves at Caldron. The sorcerer turns aside every blow with a knife, or ducks under their desperate attacks. A minute after the first spell Caldron casts another...and vanishes.

Speed is vital. Hujal is already gathering his thoughts to cast another Power Word. He creates a shimmering arch in front of them, with the compass in hand he forms a gateway to where Caldron (and probably Malethrax) have gone. Danat fears for his life and declines Hujal's invitation to take the gate...but Zavien is close behind the Nadir.

At the other side of the gate the two men face a dark purple sky with angry clouds and sweltering heat. It can only be one place.

The Abyss.

Before them is a castle; imposing, impenetrable with walls a hundred feet high. Along the battlements sit twenty demons, their cruel faces watch Zavien and Hujal carefully, their demonic lips salivate at the prospect of food. Hujal casts [spider climb](#) and the two men clamber up the gatehouse to face claws and talons.

Hujal is knocked from the gatehouse and is set upon by many demons. Rather than rip him to pieces they incapacitate him and fly him over the walls to an inner courtyard. He is deposited in the centre of a pentacle next to the naked form of Malethrax. Hujal knows instantly that the pentacle is a prison and that his magic – and Malethrax's – is useless within it. Caldron smiles triumphantly at the two men. To a demon he says; "There is an assassin out there – find him and bring him to me."

Zavien melts into the shadows as the demonic guards are everywhere. He slows his heartbeat and breathes economically; his whole being becomes the darkness all around him. The killer moves into the inner courtyard with eyes fixed only on the dark sorcerer.

Caldron gloats over his captives, but his cruel smile is short lived. From behind him – with an expertise beyond his years – Zavien Scourge pulls a milky white blade across the demonologist's throat. Caldron is not able to say anything, no spell will come, only blood flows from his now. The pentacle disappears with the death of the sorcerer and the three men turn to another danger. A snarling twenty feet high demon towers above them.

"I am Morash," it says plainly, "this is my castle once more. The deadly sorcerer had usurped it for his own needs and I thank you for slaying him." Malethrax has his equipment returned and Hujal rifles the body of the dead sorcerer...before Morash opens a gateway to the Astral Plane...

The Road East

cy 4850 Jul 4th – Jul 9th

In the aftermath of Caldron's death Malethrax carves the heart from the dead demonologist as well as a sharp-looking canine tooth. He dons a silky black cloak and places a magical ring on his finger, he also slips three scrolls into his backpack for later study. Zavien takes two small vials of magical poison but the rest of the demonologist's equipment is left to rot in the Abyss, under the watchful eye of the demon lord Morash.

As a Menelothian the Astral Plane is like a second home to Malethrax. His entire race has led an interplanar nomadic existence and he believes he can find his family. This brief search proves futile so they decide to head back to the Prime Material Plane – to Grayhawk.

They emerge back on the North Drenai road where Danat Peres and Elkin, an enormously strong Tilean Martial Artist, await them. Only two hours have past and soon the party head east once more, their destination the seaport of Dros Yali. Malethrax summons an [air elemental](#) to help the horses travel faster (tail wind etc) and they make excellent progress in the hot summer sun. Whilst on the road

Malethrax turns his attention to the three scrolls he took from Caldron. Two of them he is able to read into his repertoire but one is just beyond his skill at present. He absorbs [Caldron's Decay](#) and [Combat](#).

Each night on the road Malethrax is able to create a sheltered bunker ([earth elemental](#)) where the party are secure. But since the death of Caldron the feeling of oppression, the feeling that they are being watched, disappears. For the first time in weeks they can enjoy the ride.

But on the fifth day of Jultar Zavien is troubled in his sleep. Half awake he opens his eyes to see Malethrax and Danat on guard talking quietly. But there is a woman dressed in black next to them with undistinguished features! He wonders why his companions cannot see her. His attempts to move are futile. His muscles are like solid granite – is it a dream?

To his horror she reaches out for him. The more he tries to move the harder it becomes...he feels a tingling sensation as she reaches through his chest (as though she put her hand in water) and touches his heart. Zavien snaps awake. Malethrax and the others are unaware of the woman or his apparent ordeal...the assassin turns his senses inward.

He feels *healed* – as though the woman reached not his heart but his soul and swept away an influence. Zavien cannot fathom the woman's identity and for the rest of that days ride ponders who she could be.

The next day a Drenai patrol led by a young officer stops the party. Despite Malethrax displaying the letter with the king's seal the youngster is out to cause trouble. Malethrax is adamant that the officer will not get his hands on the letter...even the soldiers fear where the Drenai's attitude is going. The ten guards try to explain to him that the katana at his side reveals much about the sorcerer. Just when it seems that there is going to be a fight the soldiers manage to persuade their leader that attacking this party would be a bad idea. As a parting gesture Malethrax casts [Caldron's Decay](#) on the man and they move on.

Zavien has his attention elsewhere during the conversation with the patrol. In the distance, deep in the shadows, he spies the woman who came to him the previous night...her gaze is focused on him alone.

The next morning they meet a young mercenary captain called Grimbor, fresh from Dros Yali where he has picked up twenty mercenaries. "The war is that way," Grimbor quips to Malethrax. The two men share information but after a brief chat the party continue on their easterly trek. The road climbs steadily but the excellent horses make good progress and the weather is kind to the party.

That night Zavien – whose skill at the manufacture of noxious substances is greatly enhanced - brews a nasty poison he calls *Scourge of Drenai* – a lethal ingested poison.

As the road climbs into the hills Breeze – Malethrax's [familiar](#) – spots a band of outlaws waiting in ambush along a narrow ridge overlooking the road. Forewarned is forearmed – Malethrax takes the entire party down into the rock via an [earth](#)

[elemental](#) and he manoeuvres them slowly above the potential attackers. They overlook a band of twenty ruffians, ten on each side, Malethrax forms arrow slits in the rock via the elemental.

Zavien, Elkin and Malethrax himself draw their bows. In a deadly volley they cut down five of the outlaws before their enemies even realise they are in trouble. Even when they do manage to form some kind of resistance the deadly shafts find their targets easily, a further six outlaws fall to their deaths on the road below before their morale collapses and they make a run for it.

Further on they can smell the clean air of the sea as they reach a mountainous forest ahead. Through this greenery is the road down into Dros Yali. As night falls the temperature drops. Accustomed to warm humid nights their suspicion is that something is close...something unnatural?

Drowned Rats

Jul 9th – 13th

The hot summer weather continued as Malethrax, Hujal, Danat Peres, Zavien Scourge and Elkin move into the woodlands in the hills above Dros Yali. Malethrax brings the party to a halt in the evening by creating an elemental in a crag by the hillside. For experimentation Hujal and Malethrax discuss the possibility of creating a permanent elemental, one bound to a place rather than the short duration of a [summon elemental](#) spell. The Nadir tribesman cast a Power Word Creation and manages to secure the elemental indefinitely.

Malethrax tells the party of the impending Festival of Rakshasa, an important elemental festival of fire, celebrated all over Drenai by parties and the building of bonfires. But as they settle for the night Skurm – Hujal's rat [familiar](#) – suddenly starts to become agitated...the Nadir sorcerer lets him out of the camp. Danat Peres and Zavien Scourge also slip out of the shelter to investigate.

A familiar sensation visits Zavien, for the assassin senses they are being followed once more. He also senses that the watcher is very careful not to be seen. He decides to take the first watch.

The night passes without incident. The party head off on the descent into the seaport of Dros Yali. Skurm is placed inside [deppockets](#) by Hujal but the rat starts to become even more agitated...as a last resort Hujal [sleeps](#) the rodent.

Dros Yali is sheltered by the towering Olshay Range to the north and its natural harbour made it ideal for smugglers and pirates. When Rufus IV came to power he took control of the city and its people, bringing law and order to Dros Yali. As the party enter the city they are struck by the lack of Drenai soldiers present, adding to the lawless reputation of the place. Mercenaries and merchants abound, what few troops they see are secure behind barrack walls or the main manor house on the hill.

Zavien lags behind his companions. He eventually spots the follower, a young, stealthy Drenai woman whose features are hidden by shadow. He wonders whether she *wanted* to be seen.

Malethrax leads the party up to the manor house and a guard refuses them entry. The Drenai soldier is slovenly and not as disciplined as some he has seen. Malethrax bites his tongue and waits for the guard to return to his barracks...and the sound of dice within. He casts an *elemental* and opens a portal large enough for the horses and his friends.

At the main door a butler quizzes the Elementalist. Malethrax is accustomed to the etiquette of nobility and convinces the butler to let them in...soon the horses are stabled and they are in a study awaiting their host. Lady Arida is the middle-aged wife of the ruler of Dros Yali – Lord Merendar. She is kind and orders her maids to prepare bathing...the party welcome her hospitality though Hujal declines the offer of clean hot water.

At dinner Malethrax charms Lord Merendar and his wife Arida with his exquisite manners and noble breeding. The lord of Dros Yali reveals much about the place and informs them that he knows about the letter from King Rufus IV. He also tells them that the king has enrolled a talented young spy called Raven to follow their progress. She is the king's niece.

Upon hearing this Zavien slips out of the manor house.

As the party retire to bed in the guest quarters Danat seduces a serving wench and takes her to bed...with the aim of gaining more information. Meanwhile Zavien greets Raven at midnight under the dark shadow of the main gatehouse. They talk candidly about the situation. Raven reveals the real reason for her following the party. "If Malethrax fails in his mission then I will take the letter to Van Myrid."

The next morning Lady Arida escorts the party to the merchant vessel the king has set aside for their mission. It is called *The Roseanna* and its captain is a veteran of the Marine Corps called Marlatti. The crew are all either veteran sailors or retired soldiers obviously loyal to the king. Malethrax meets Korren – a tough-looking soldier – and the two talk about Drusor Luckwarden. Korren arrogantly believes that he is the greatest swordsman in Drenai but reveals that Drusor once bested him in a tournament once...Malethrax realises that the veteran has not fully recovered from the shame of that defeat.

The party decide that Dros Yali is a dangerous place and rather than wait for the Festival of Rakshasa they would celebrate it on their own...on the waters of the Jandraki Coast.

Hujal is troubled by Varagas – a small demonic beetle he took from the battle in the Abyss that led to the death of Caldron – the small demon is using its sorcery to infiltrate his mind and threaten him. Hujal suspects that Varagas is meddling with Skurm. He creates an impenetrable globe to ensnare the demon and hurls it overboard. "Good riddance!" he cries as the globe sinks. But Hujal soon realises that demons can

[teleport](#) – worse still he can sense the thing is back in his possession. To his horror Hujal realises that the bug is inside Skurm!

The Nadir exponent of the power words casts a *destruction* on the demon but the beetle is too tightly bound to his [familiar](#). Skurm explodes violently and Hujal is catapulted back as the death of his rat causes him physical pain. The party watch as the beetle Varagas scurries along the deck. Hujal dives onto it and rams the dagger of Asgar into it with such force that the creature is nailed to the deck. Zavien and Danat jump on the demon and hack at it with their knives. The beetle is tough and resists their attacks – in the process it almost possessed Danat's weakened soul. Malethrax hands Zavien the Ring of Souls (taken from Caldron's corpse) and Hujal renews his attacks on the demon.

Finally Malethrax places a magical battleaxe (called Death's Edge – given to him by King Rufus IV) over the beetle and stamps down hard. With a satisfying crunch the beetle is destroyed...Hujal then reveals that it was one of seven *familiars* of Malakar.

The voyage continues north hugging the brutal Jandraki coastline. Korren will not leave Malethrax alone; his jibes and constant attention lead to the Menelothian agree to a sparring match. Korren eagerly produces two wooden sparring swords. Malethrax does not trust the veteran; an [ESP](#) reveals that Korren intends to kill him *accidentally*. The fight is ugly and it soon becomes clear to all on board that Korren is not play-fighting. Malethrax is an accomplished swordsman, however, and although he is outgunned by his opponent's power and number of attacks he is able to combine his unarmed skill to fend off all Korren's attacks. But Malethrax soon tires of the man and casts [Caldron's Decay](#) into the veteran.

The captain Marlatti steps in to halt the battle and a heated argument ensues. As the tension rises Korren wants blood, Malethrax taunts the veteran with news of the spell and violence is threatened once again.

Suddenly Malethrax reacts. The *Rosenna* sits on a large water elemental and the Menelothian sinks the ship...he controls the elemental into a globe that encompasses the vessel and takes them down two hundred and fifty feet. There is widespread panic on board. The crew and the soldiers turn on Malethrax.

"If you kill me now you're all dead!" Malethrax spits contemptuously.

The soldiers inch closer, hands on their weapons. Without warning Malethrax releases his control of the water elemental and the full weight of millions of gallons of water come crashing all around them.

The catastrophic force of water snaps the main mast and crushes many of the crew in the first seconds. As quickly as Malethrax let go of the elemental he regains control and propels his companions upwards towards the surface. The water elemental cradles the ship and this he raises more slowly. Zavien, Danat Peres, Elkin, Hujal and Raven break the surface and gulp air greedily. The entire crew, the captain, all the horses and the veteran Korren have drowned.

The ship emerges under them. Malethrax stands where the main mast once was and commands the water elemental to evacuate the deck. His companions watch as Malethrax removes all traces of water (the elemental) from Raven's silks. The beautiful young woman narrows her dark eyes and stares deeply into the Menelothian's eyes.

"I have met Malakar," she says coolly, "but I find you a much more dangerous man..."

Into Myrid

Cy 4850 Jultar 13th – 21st

The Rosenna is without a mast and without a crew, all drowned – along with the horses in the hold – by Malethrax. The ship sits on the water elemental that he had summoned the day before. Hujal *binds* the elemental permanently to Grayhawk; again creating a force that will remain long after he or Malethrax leave.

The elemental – under Malethrax's guidance – steers the ship north under the shelter of the massive Olshay peaks, the dangerous reefs and razor-sharp rocks no deterrent as the elemental steers itself around the dangers. Many other ships are further out to sea, not wishing to risk the dangerous waters, and as such the Rosenna (or what is left of it) is able to move quickly and unhindered up the coast. Malethrax begins to suspect that his *familiar* – Breeze – has been influenced by someone / something. The hawk's behaviour and sudden use of telepathy would suggest this.

As night falls Malethrax casts a *fire elemental* into a candle flame, allowing Zavien the ability to heat up liquids for brewing, the Elementalist also summons an earth elemental into a diamond, which he then gives to Hujal who binds it once more using a power word.

The next morning Zavien creates another lethal concoction, a poison he calls *Scourge of Hujal* – after the tribesman. Suddenly Malethrax grips his chest tightly as an enormous pain brings him to his knees. Instinctively he knows that Breeze is dead. Moments later the bird falls lifeless to the deck with a large arrow skewering it neatly. Raven examines it. A Marraq arrow.

Malethrax uses his spirit sense discover that the author of the arrow is their old friend, Veldus.

The Elementalist takes the Rosenna into a secluded cove on the 15th day of Jultar – the Festival of Rakshasa. He constructs (with the aid of elementals) a cave with a pool and begins to summon fire into it. The party watch his spectacular display – Malethrax is like a conductor and the fire is his music...they are treated to a concert unrivalled in all of Drenai.

The party are not the only spectators. The conflagration attracts a number of other watchers, notably a huge ogre called Volgul, who Malethrax beckons down into the camp. The party suspect his band (collective noun for ogres?) is close by, hidden eyes in the hills. Volgul brings a cow as an offering of friendship

and the party and the ogre enjoy the festival together. From Volgul they learn much about the difficulties of the Olshay Range and consider a journey across the peaks and into Myrid. The idea is quickly discounted.

The next morning the Rosenna moves into the Jandraki once more. One notable absentee is Raven, the dark beauty is nowhere to be seen as the sun rises...Malethrax steers the ship regardless.

The Rosenna is quicker than any ship afloat. The need for wind and sail is gone, the water elemental moves like the strongest tide north. The party stand on deck and – while they discuss the disappearance of Raven – Hujal notices something odd. He reacts instantly as he detects the telltale thunderclap of a Marraq arrow by yelling at Malethrax. The Elementalist turns a fraction too late, even his agile body swerve is not enough to avoid the arrow and he waits for the pain. Astonishingly Zavien plucks the arrow in mid-flight with a dexterous flick of the hand, the shaft halted instantly by his incredible reactions.

But Malethrax does not stop to thank his friend; instead he draws the ship down into the deep water of the Jandraki, enveloping it in a globe of water elemental. With a few adjustments he is able to maintain the airflow with clever use of air / water elementals. The Rosenna continues north a few hundred feet below the water.

Veldus possesses the naturally telepathic mind of the Marraq and although the party are safe from his arrows he can still reach them with his mind. He taunts Hujal constantly but the Nadir sorcerer ignores the elf, instead he turns his formidable mind to the problem above ground...and the seed of an idea germinates into something dangerous.

In one corner of the submerged ship Hujal puts his plan into effect. He creates (using a power word) a pistol crossbow darkbow. He then binds an air elemental around Malethrax with the hope of slowing / deflecting any future arrows. During their underwater journey Malethrax writes a [Fox's Cunning](#) spell, which Hujal gratefully absorbs into his repertoire.

The party decide to head for the surface and take the fight to Veldus. Malethrax casts [ESP](#) on himself and Hujal. The intention is to trap Veldus – Marraqs use the victim's mind as a target – the two sorcerers then hope to get a shot at him. Remarkably the trap works well.

Veldus does indeed seek the mind of Malethrax who feels the telltale brush of the elf's mind on his. Hujal uses the [ESP](#) to aim into the mind of his opponent and he fires the crossbow pistol at that mind. Veldus realises what is happening but is too slow to react. His left eye explodes as the bolt punctures his brain and exits from the back of his skull. Even then the Marraq howls in disgust at the irony of such a death...it is the last thought his mind ever makes...

The sharp peaks of the Olshay Range end as quickly as they began. The vast rolling plainlands of Myrid stretch as far as the eye can see, all the way to the mighty

Elenoria Forest in the north. When the party close to Van Roten Malethrax sinks the ship and uses the rowing boat to reach the busy, bustling seaport.

In Van Roten Malethrax secures seven good riding horses for the journey west, most of the party are skilled with horses / horsemanship and the trader gives up trying to fleece them. "I know when I am beat," he smiles at Malethrax, "take the horses and leave my dignity intact."

Zavien begins to read the small signs once more. The minutiae that gives him the whole picture...he announces to the party (when they are on the road west) that they are being followed once again. The road is part of a network that join onto the main arterial that leads to the capital, Van Myrid, where Malethrax has been quested by King Rufus IV of Drenai to take a letter.

On the road they pass a Malakar priest on a donkey. After a brief exchange of words the party decide to take the priest's life but their initial attacks fail. It is only when Zavien somersaults onto the back of the donkey and rams a knife into the priest's side that they move on once more.

At night the elemental bunker of Malethrax, a perfect place to safely rest and recover, envelops them. Wolf howls are heard. Malethrax realises these are not real and they sense a group of bandits nearby who have become curious about the sounds and smells coming from the bunker. When two of them can be felt by Malethrax (as they step onto the earth elemental) Zavien slips out and takes one of them (paralysis poison). After a brief interrogation they let the frightened bandit go in the hope that he will scare off his companions.

Next morning Hujal uses the compass he created (using power words) to discover that Raven is directly behind them.

Malethrax returns to the bunker and creates a mud bath...as a sign to the young woman. As he catches up with his companions the image returns to him and Malethrax grins as they ride west towards Van Myrid...

A Black Knight

Jultar 21st - 24th

Malethrax leads the party west across the vast plains of Myrid, a green a luscious land in the full bloom of summer. The party aim to reach the Myrid Highway, the main arterial route across Myrid, which will lead them to their goal – Van Myrid. It is not long before they see a huge herd bisecting their path heading north. Almost a thousand horses on the move.

As they close on the horses they notice the entire herd is shepherded by a lone horseman, who makes his way towards them. Malethrax spirit senses both him and the herd and can sense something unusual, though he cannot discern exactly why the man is so special. He is called Ashar of the Green Glade, half human half elven he bears the distinctive features of Elenoria.

The horselord is guarded with information but pleasant, he and Malethrax exchange what little information each is willing to divulge – Malethrax cannot gain much from [ESP](#) either as the elves have a natural resistance to such magic. Whilst conversing Malethrax feels the unmistakable brush of another mind on his; not the touch of a Marraq mind – this is more subtle, more powerful...it is from within the herd.

As night falls the party reach the Myrid Highway. The road is well maintained, heavy with traffic and has many roadside hostelrys along the way. The party decide to take refuge in one such place, Malethrax buys a ground floor common room for the night whilst Hujal and Danat sample the food and ale of the bust taproom.

A large Bretonian man wearing a cloak that barely conceals his armour is present. His men-at-arms hurry about him like compliant ants attending to the small details such as stabling his horse and preparing his food. Hujal decides to feign drunkenness at the bar and eavesdrops as the Knight tells the barman he is looking for a young woman with black hair (Raven). He pays the man well for information and returns to his friends.

Danat tries to buy information from the barman; only when a gold coin is passed over does he become more responsive. Zavien Scourge decides to take up the offer of a game of dice; he is able to keep an eye on the Bretonian whilst he gambles. All of the party can clearly see the small – yet noticeable – symbol of Malakar pinned to the knight's lapel. The barman reveals his name to Danat: Vostrar.

Zavien does not sleep this night. Instead he perches on the rooftop, which affords him a good view of the knight's room. The only unusual event is that a host of butterflies exit the shutters a couple of hours after midnight – Zavien wonders why such daytime creatures are present...he avoids them and continues to watch.

The next day the party move off the road at lunchtime to cook a meal. When Vostrar and his six men-at-arms come into view the large knight approaches them. With exquisite manners Malethrax invites Vostrar to share their food and the knight reveals a little more of his task. Malethrax does not reveal his name to the knight, instead he uses a pseudonym (Vellius) and soon the knight is on the way once more.

The next evening the party looks for another hostelry. When they see Vostrar's horse and the ant-like men-at-arms around it they enter and find the knight once again. But Vostrar's mood is not as pleasant as at lunchtime. There is an edge to him; his dark eyes are dangerous like an oncoming storm. The conversation is no longer about Raven; instead the attention turns to the elemental. Vostrar focuses himself on the Menelothian and utters the word *Malethrax*. He informs them that Raven is captured and is upstairs. "She has revealed much," he says.

There is a long pause.

Hujal reaches for *Retaliator* – his dark crossbow pistol – and violence erupts in the taproom. Only Danat Peres, martial artist, is able to initiate any form of rapid attack...but none are faster than Vostrar. The dark knight unleashes a broadsword in one fluid motion, before anyone can blink Malethrax is propelled back onto the floor

the blade has severed his left leg, an horrific plume of arterial blood drenches the taproom.

The men-at-arms are also moving; their blades search out the remaining party with deadly efficiency. Hujal is mobbed by two blades, his defence is too slow and a longsword finds him in the eye and the Nadir falls dead beside the screaming Malethrax.

Zavien looks for a quick exit, a place in the shadows to remove himself. He calls on all of his training but the taproom is too crowded, there are no opportunities to slip away. As he looks the men-at-arms lash at him with their swords. Distracted he sees one blade a fraction too late...there is a stupefying pain in his side, as he looks down the man-at-arms wrenches free the longsword that he sheathed inside Zavien. The assassin falls next to Hujal and dies in seconds.

Malethrax regains his composure. He puts aside the mind-numbing pain of the wound and casts *Invisibility* – he then rapidly crawls back out of the quickly-emptying taproom. Despite his enemy being invisible Vostrar lunges after him, slashing wildly at the elemental. Malethrax is spared initially; the knight's blade does not bite his flesh a second time.

Elkin and Danat are back to back, the men-at-arms fight in concert and pin them into a desperate defence. When Elkin screams Danat Peres realises that his companion has fallen. He faces six highly-skilled swordsmen alone! But Danat is tenacious, strong and skilled. His initial reaction is to attack but the odds are stacked firmly against him. A number of small wounds (most notably one to the side of his head) begin to wear him down. *Only a matter of time* he thinks as the blades nibble away at him. He turns his attention to escape. From great reserves of courage he *distracts* the men-at-arms momentarily – a skill martial artists use to deceive an opponent. In the brief moment of hesitation Danat Peres flings himself out of the window and into the courtyard.

Malethrax meanwhile casts *phantasmal force* and creates a fake trail of blood. Vostrar follows it, still slashing at thin air. Malethrax crawls to the threshold of the doorway and can see freedom only feet away.

Danat is up quickly aware that the men-at-arms will be after him. He runs rapidly, though painfully, heading out onto the Myrid plain. As he runs he sees a great white stallion galloping towards him. A proud beast which flanks him as he runs. A skilled horseman and trainer Danat leaps onto the back of the stallion and is away.

Once in courtyard Malethrax can feel stone beneath him and casts an *earth elemental* – the stone envelops him and he descends to the safety of the solid earth. After a minute he casts a *water elemental* and this power holds the stump of his ruined leg, staunching the terrible flow of his lifeblood.

Vostrar is furious. He stands in the courtyard bellowing orders to his men-at-arms. "Bring the girl! We must find these men!"

Danat Peres reins in the stallion. The commotion of the hostelry has died down and he witnesses Vostrar's outburst. He sees Raven carried out and placed unceremoniously onto one of the men-at-arm's horses, bound, gagged and looking as though she has been tortured.

With their attention elsewhere Danat sneaks back into the taproom. Amongst the carnage of his fallen companions he takes Asgar, Hujal's soul compass, Retaliator, the Ring of the Fettered and the Ring of the Enchanted wood. As he leaves he wraps up the severed leg of Malethrax in a discarded tunic and heads out to the stallion.

It is an hour before Malethrax emerges to greet Danat Peres – the martial artist is astonished that his companion still lives. In the secure bosom of the earth elemental they camp for the night. Danat observes Vostrar, the men-at-arms and the bound Raven as they move on towards Van Myrid.

Danat tends to his own wounds as best he can but it is only sleep that will heal him completely...

Into the Wilds

Jul 25th – 28th

Malethrax and Danat Peres are in the presence of a white stallion, a beast that can talk to both men. After a conversation with the stallion Malethrax decides to head into the north to tend to his severed leg before resuming his quest to deliver King Rufus IV's letter to Van Myrid. They are joined as they head north by two others; Amblay, a Marraq sorcerer, and Finzerian, an archer from Jezharrah.

The stallion tells them about a nomadic people, northern Myrids called Myrnarians, a vast tribe of people who nurture horses. Off the road Malethrax and Danat feel safer in the open expanse of the Myrid plainlands. As a precaution Malethrax summons an [*air elemental*](#) that brushes away their tracks as they move.

The next morning the party see caravans. Canvassed wagons with a multitude of horses and horsemen around them...the Myrnarians. These people live in the wilds of northern Myrid and their leader – Ganthar – greets Malethrax and his companions with some concern. He is particularly concerned with the severe wound to the elemental's leg and Ganthar admits that it is beyond any of his healers. "You will have to find a temple," Ganthar says, "or head for the Elenorians to the north."

Malethrax dismisses the route north (he still has the letter to deliver) and instead plans to come to Van Myrid by a northern route. The party dine with the Myrnarians whose hospitality is legendary and for the first time in weeks Danat and Malethrax relax.

The next day they move west and north with the Myrnarians. Ahead of them is a huge tented city, thousands of the nomadic wanderers gathered to celebrate summer and renew old acquaintances.

The Great Summer Festival.

It is alive with music, poetry, and dance. The Myrnarians have no money; instead they barter and trade goods for services – a self-sufficient people who live simple, yet rewarding lives. But soon Grayhawkian life intervenes. Amblay, the Marraq, spots a Bretonian at the festival, a man of sour disposition he later learns is called Cadavir. After following him he realises he is part of a twenty strong band of mercenaries. One of Ganthar's men tells the party that he has been asking about a one-legged sorcerer. Malethrax curses his luck.

Finzerian uses his unique ability to listen at long range and finds Cadavir speaking to his men. He offers a reward of 1,000 gold pieces for the man that gets Malethrax's head. Danat slips away into the tented city in search of the Bretonian.

As Amblay tries to lure Cadavir into a fight but the Bretonian proves a slippery opponent...but not elusive enough for Danat Peres. As Cadavir backs away from the Marraq the martial artist pounces. It is a swift and deadly encounter. Cadavir turns to strike but Danat pushes away the blade and drive the dagger of Asgar deep into his opponent's eye socket. Shortly afterwards the Bretonians are seen leaving the Festival, unable to stomach a fight against Danat and his companions.

During the stay at the festival Malethrax is introduced to Ivara, an Elenorian priestess of Elena, who uses her sorcery to stop the elemental's bleeding, though she can do nothing to regenerate the leg fully. Amblay, the Marraq, talks to Ivara, who is nervous in the presence of her one-time enemy. "It is water under the bridge my lady," Amblay says, "You have nothing to fear from me."

Eventually Malethrax decides to head west to Van Myrid. With the bleeding stopped he is able to fight unhindered on horseback, his natural riding skill an aid to his excellent swordsmanship. Soon his spirit sense realises that a big spirit is following them. Amblay sends his bat *familiar* – Nightwing – to investigate. Through the bat's eyes Amblay sees a robed figure a mile or more distant drawing a pentacle. Malethrax sinks the party in an *earth elemental* and moves slowly west.

Amblay watches horrified as a huge hulking demonic creature appears in the circle...the demonologists forces the creature into a silvery black longsword, which glows with a malevolent light when the binding is complete. When the figure is close Amblay uses telepathy to scan the demonologist's mind – but such is the power of the sorcerer he is knocked unconscious by the sheer force of will.

At dawn Amblay wakes and Malethrax leads them west at a greater pace. Before long they spot a large dead oak tree, the only vegetation for miles around. Upon it they see the naked tortured form of Raven. "It's a trap," Dannat says. Malethrax nods grimly but leads them towards the stricken woman.

As they close on the tree six men-at-arms (the same men who slew Hujal and Zavien) emerge quickly from their underground hideout and jump for the riders. Malethrax, Danat and Amblay spur their horses forward but Finzerian stands his ground and prepares to shoot at the attackers. Despite warnings from his companion Finzerian bravely pulls back the bowstring. The men-at-arms swarm all over him, their blades cut him down mercilessly.

This spurs Malethrax and his two companions on towards the tree. The elemental half turns on his horse and hurls a [fireball](#) directly into the middle of the men-at-arms. A huge ball of fire engulfs them and they scatter, hastening themselves away from the terrible fire, many of them trying to put out burning garments or flaming hair. Danat turns their charge obliquely away from the tree...just in time!

A well concealed pit awaited them. A pit big enough to ensnare them all – including the horses. Danat takes them back towards the tree with Malethrax and Amblay close behind. Suddenly from nowhere the ground opens – the dark knight Vostrar emerges a lethal broadsword in his hand. He places himself between Danat and Malethrax as the two men ride quickly down on him.

Vostrar is a powerful man; he launches a couple of rapid strokes at the two riders. Danat fends off the broadsword but Malethrax is a fraction too slow. The sickening sound of a blade tearing through bone, sinew and flesh fills the air. As the two horses pass the Bretonian Malethrax topples back off his horse, his head bounces several feet beyond his limp body.

Amblay positions himself at a safe distance as Danat rides up to the tree. The Marraq is aware that the men-at-arms are closing on him but on horseback he is able to outrun them...he aims at Vostrar, who kneels over the dead elemental. Amblay fires his first shot astray but coolly draws a second shaft. This time his aim is truer. Whilst Vostrar rummages through Malethrax's clothes an arrow hits him in the left thigh. Vostrar roars in pain as his leg buckles. Blood spills over the dry ground and the Bretonian roars at his men to stop the archer.

Danat puts Raven over his saddle as Amblay draws another arrow. The men-at-arms are closing but the cool Marraq shows no fear. Encouraged by the awful wound in Vostrar's thigh he aims another. Danat urges his companion to flee. "Let's go, Amblay, there will be other days to deal with this dark knight..."

Revenge

Jul 28th - Arr 4th

Danat Peres and Amblay ride away from the scene of Malethrax's death. The young Bretonian spy, Raven, drifts in and out of consciousness as they ride away. Before long they meet three travellers: Aravan, a young Elenorian woman fighter, Banak, a Menelothian fighter dressed in plate armour and carrying a greatsword, and Voltorb, a strange Darim Sword Cultist. The three disparate folk ride north as they flee from the vicious Vostrar and his men-at-arms.

The party are surprised when Danat's white stallion speaks to the martial artist; "She is dying," he says, referring to Raven. Banak steps in and with his survival skill is able to stop the bleeding and prolong her life at least until morning. Danat decides to head north but during the first night lanterns can be seen on the plains – Vostrar and the men-at-arms are closing.

Danat and Amblay ride off north in the hope of reaching the safety of the wilds... Voltorb, Banak and Aravan remain in the hope of steering Vostrar off the trail. Vostrar limps into camp, his thigh heavily bandaged and sodden with blood. He leaves without gaining any information and sends the men-at-arms out to flank Danat. The three travellers sense their opportunity and as dawn breaks make plans to come at Vostrar from behind.

Amblay peels off from his northerly journey and heads for Vostrar; the three travellers close in, the trail of blood easy to track. When Vostrar realises that he has ridden into an ambush it is too late to call for help. Amblay – Marraq archer – launches a deadly shaft at the injured warrior. As the arrow plunges into Vostrar's chest Voltorb, Banak and Aravan move in to complete the attack.

Banak swings the greatsword at the horse and fells it with a monumental stroke. Horse and rider collapse, Vostrar falls heavily and grunts in pain as he rolls onto his injured leg but even badly hurt the warrior has in his hand the broadsword that slew Malethrax. He lashes out ferociously and in seconds he has cut the throat of Banak and caved in the chest of Voltorb. The Elenorian woman, Aravan, swerves away on her horse from the deadly blade as Vostrar struggles towards her.

Amblay has the warrior in his sights. His final arrow is telling – it penetrates Vostrar's skull between the eyes and the dangerous warrior is slain.

Danat doubles back as Amblay and Aravan search the fallen warrior. They retrieve the letter, which has been opened, but are unable to decipher the writing. As a trophy the broadsword of Vostrar is taken and they head north once more, Danat worried for the health of Raven.

The men-at-arms disappear. They melt into the background (possibly back to Van Myrid) leaving the three travellers breathing space for the first time in weeks. Just before noon a thousand riders come into view – the Myrnarians are a welcome sight. Their leader Ganthar has with him Ivara – the priestess of Elena – she immediately tends to the stricken Drenai spy. Once healed by the priestess Raven hugs Danat in thanks for her life and sheds a single tear for her fallen companions.

Raven is able to read the letter. She confirms that her uncle, King Rufus IV, has information that Malakar's influence has entered the palace of Van Myrid. She explains that the king wanted Malethrax to deliver the letter so that he could expose the traitor and ultimately deal with him.

For the next week Amblay learns to ride amongst some of the greatest horsemen on Grayhawk. Danat meanwhile ponders what to do about the newfound information...he decides to head for Van Myrid.

Danat Peres, Amblay, Aravan and Raven turn their horses to the southwest and ride towards the capital city of Myrid...

Disaster Strikes

Arrogan 4th - 21st

Danat Peres, Amblay the Marraq sorcerer, Aravan the Elenorian fighter and Raven, Drenai spy enter the bustling citadel of Van Myrid, reputed to be one of the richest kingdoms on Grayhawk. The heat is stifling and the crowds seem to fill every available space. To ensure they are not too obvious Aravan swaps her horse with Danat's talking white stallion and after a brief conversation with a guard on the gate they are allowed through.

Amblay brings up a *thought shield* – a Marraq ability of the mind that prevents attacks and scrying minds. Raven takes the party into the Drenai embassy via a secluded back entrance. Within minutes they are presented to the Drenai ambassador Herretal. Raven introduces him as the head of Drenai Intelligence abroad...and her father! The ambassador hugs Danat and thanks him for the rescue of his daughter. He offers them hospitality and a place in the guest quarters for the duration of their stay in Van Myrid.

Conversation soon turns to the apparent traitor within the palace. Danat hands Herretal the letter, which comes as no surprise to the ambassador. Danat is eager to get to the three leaders of Van Myrid in an attempt to expose the traitor. Herretal comes up with a plan to announce the engagement of Danat and his daughter, Raven. He will invite all the nobility of the citadel in a hope of bringing the three leaders into the embassy.

That night the party bathe and relax in the safety of Herretal's abode. Drenai security is tight. The guards are unobtrusive but present in numbers. For the first time in weeks they sleep soundly...

...The clattering of a shutter against a window frame wakes the three companions in the middle of the night. Outside a sandstorm rages. Denied sleep because of the noise Danat, Amblay and Aravan move about the embassy. There are no guards present outside their rooms; all three draw weapons as they move through the corridors of the embassy...as they move into the master bedrooms it becomes clear that they are alone!

Amblay stretches out his powerful Marraq mind, over a mile in all directions. There are no minds to be felt! At the top of the staircase, on the fifth floor of the embassy, they take over a guard post that offers a good defensive position. They can see two streets outside the embassy as well as a large square around which many other embassies are situated. Still they see no-one.

Through the cacophony of the storm the peel of a bell can be heard. Moving slowly into the embassy square is a dark robed figure, a lone individual in the chaos. Amblay pushes his mind out to the figure but recoils it instantly. Even the slightest brush against it reveals a massive presence and a deep-rooted evil that makes him shudder. He quickly looses an arrow into the midriff and the black shaft buries itself deep into the evil figure. The party watch in horror as the shaft melts, the residue is then absorbed into the cloak.

Amblay takes Retaliator (Hujal's creation – pistol crossbow made from the Mara Tree) and shoots the figure once more...with identical results.

"I have come for you Danat Peres!" the figure yells. Then he turns to the embassy itself and unleashes an unnamed power against the structure. The three companions realise that the first floor of the embassy is collapsing, they feel themselves in free-fall as the walls, and ceiling and floors collapse in on them...

All three wake suddenly...drenched in sweat. No sandstorm, no dark figure. After a brief discussion about their collective dream they find Herretal and Raven at breakfast. Amblay puts a picture of the figure into the ambassador's mind. "It is Sadhagar," he says solemnly. "High Priest of Malakar in this citadel."

Amblay takes himself away for most of the morning. In the comfort and safety of the embassy he embarks on the task of duplicating each and every one of his spells onto parchment provided by the embassy staff. A [foxes cunning](#) aids the creation of these scrolls. Eventually, at noon, he tucks away the twelve spells into his backpack.

That evening Herretal brings Amblay, Danat and Aravan to the cells in the basement. Sat bound to a solid wooden chair is one of the men-at-arms responsible for the deaths of Hujal and Scourge. Four Drenai guards are present. "We found him snooping in the grounds," a guard says.

For the next half hour Herretal and Amblay interrogate the minion of Vostrar. The ambassador asks the right questions and Amblay is able to pick the thoughts from the captive to reveal the plan. The rest of his companions are in the Dragon's Claw Tavern in the Merchants Quarters meeting with an emissary of Malakar, who is paying them well for their services. Later Amblay finds the minds of the rest of the men-at-arms and is able to further discover the true treachery of what they intend. Dressed in Drenai garb (to look like embassy staff) they will attempt to gain access to the building an attack Danat. Aravan instructs Herretal to make sure all his men roll up their left sleeves; she hopes this will make the attackers easier to spot when the attack occurs.

Forewarned with this knowledge the three companions decide to set a trap in the stables. Amblay takes a decent vantage point on the first floor overlooking the entire stables and courtyard. Aravan hides in the hay loft at one end of the stables and Danat secures himself close to the entrance. With four Drenai guards at the stable gate they wait for their attackers.

Three of the men-at-arms enter through the main door of the embassy but two go to the stables. At the very moment they step past the threshold they are ambushed. Amblay looses two quick shafts at the trailing attacker but is surprised to see him parry one and dodge away from a second. Danat is upon the same man, his knife fast in front of him, a blur of speed and power.

But these two men-at-arms are skilled. Danat's blows are expertly turned aside and – at first opportunity – the defender turns attacker with awesome force. A flicked longsword fells Danat, an eighteen inch gap opens in his thigh to expose bone, sinew and a lot of blood. The martial artist collapses in pain but fights on regardless. The second man-at-arms swiftly fells the first *real* Drenai guard and pushes back the others. Amblay can see his companions are troubled and shoots into the melee

(against his better judgement). The arrow punctures a Drenai guardian in the throat and suddenly the odds turn in favour of the dangerous men-at-arms.

With Danat on the ground and struggling the two remaining Drenai guards and Aravan attack in unison. But the men-at-arms are here for one reason...and that is to kill Danat Peres. They both single-mindedly attack the crippled warrior. When the inevitable deathblow comes it is swift and shocking – Danat's head sails clear from the battle.

Momentarily distracted the men-at-arms return to face three assailants. One of the Drenai guards has stepped under the defence of the attackers and drives a longsword up into the mouth of the man-at-arms and slays him instantly.

Amblay discards the darkbow and instead peppers the slyer of Danat with [magic missiles](#). The last man-at-arms is worn down by Amblay's magical assault and – inevitably – succumbs to his wounds. The Drenai guard cuts his throat.

Aravan turns from the fight and heads into the main embassy itself where sounds of combat can be heard. From the stable courtyard an open door beckons and she meets the last of the men-at-arms who is being pursued by a handful of Drenai guards. The last warrior runs straight onto the woman's blade, her shortsword punctures an eye socket and exits from the back of the skull.

In a quiet moment Amblay and Aravan recover the magic from their fallen comrade, Danat Peres. An unlikely union; a Marraq friends with an Elenorian (the race who persecuted them for centuries), Amblay speaks quietly to her: "I don't know about you Aravan but I have had my fill of human affairs. What say we abandon this city and head south?"

* * *

And so Amblay the sorcerer and Aravan a female Elenorian warrior utilize the [fly](#) spell to head south. They roam over the impressive Olshay Range and beyond. Past Drenai and further south over the plains of the Nadir tribesmen, with every league they put between themselves and Van Myrid the two companions put the past firmly behind them.

The lands of Darim and Kulland are visible beneath them as the weeks pass. Only when they spot a creature high above them; a large unnamed beast, do they descend into an unknown land...the land of the Tileans.

The Ruined Citadel

cy 4850, Arrogan 22nd - 27th

The deserted rocky steppes of Vartan Olniak stretch out for miles before the two elves. Amblay the Marraq sorcerer, Aravan, the Elenorian warrior, are joined by two

others: Graz Tak, a thief from the Jandraki Coast, and Axe, a Nadir nomad with a huge greataxe. Since the two elves have flown from the north they are without horses. Axe – a nomad – is accustomed to finding such beasts, particularly in the land of the Tileans who, like him, are a nomadic people.

Before long the Tileans make themselves known. Twenty riders approach the party. Tileans riding camels are all around them, the nomads take a particular interest in Amblay and to a man they make a strange gesture of salute in his presence. Fustor, their leader, explains the affinity between Tileans and Marraqs. The Darims expanded their lands decades ago and swallowed Tirros Tilean (now South Darim). The dispossessed people sought sanctuary south and became nomadic. A few Marraqs aided the Tileans and a bond of friendship exists between them.

Fustor tells them of the ruins of Hurlis to the southwest (the party reveal their desire to go there)...once the capital of the Tileans it fell into ruin after the Darim attacked. Now it is reputedly haunted, few of the Tileans dare to travel there in fear of the hidden dangers. The Tilean leader does not try to dissuade them from Hurlis and sends riders forward to gather horses for them.

Hours later the party have fresh horses from a Tilean called Mofas. Amblay casts [Stoneskin](#) on the nomad as payment for his trouble...he then casts it on the entire party. They continue southwest. A regular series of tremors – minor earthquakes – occur at seemingly regular intervals. As the days pass (and they turn south) the tremors become more powerful though not strong enough to give them problems.

At first light the party see the gold and red uniforms of a Darim patrol. Twenty horses ride in to investigate. Amongst the Darim is a quiet Darklander who lurks behind the leader of the soldiers – a man called Yastrey. Unlike the Tileans Yastrey tries to persuade them to turn from their present course and head north to more civilised lands. After a brief conversation the party ride on south.

An hour after noon they spot a hundred vultures circling something in the distance. Upon investigation they find an adolescent Tilean stripped bare to the waist struggling to survive in the wilds. Axe tends to him with the Nadir survival techniques he has learnt in the wilds. It is the Nadir that notices the anaemic nature of the young lad; also visible are two small puncture wounds in his wrist. Amblay and Axe exchange worried glances. No telepathy is necessary both suspect the same thing...vampires.

Axe comforts Hosul before twisting his head sharply – the neck snaps instantly and the boy is dead. The party burn the body thoroughly.

Night falls and the ruined citadel can be seen in the distance, only two leagues away. They camp outside not wishing to enter Hurlis in darkness. At midnight they are disturbed by a figure moving slowly toward them. The stench and shambling nature of the creature is sickening; flesh hangs from its skeletal frame and flies buzz around it as it approaches. Amblay hurls a [fireball](#) at it but misses. The rest of the party stalk the creature carefully. Aravan is upon the shambling creature with her longsword – the Blade of Menace – and she carves chunks of putrid flesh from it. But there is more to the beast...it wails in an inhuman tongue and both Axe and Graz Tak are gripped by its powerful mind. Realising that the creature is turning his companions against

him Amblay casts *fly* and hovers above the melee, his powerful Marraq telepathy focuses on the creature.

The fight is ugly and confusing. Axe tries to attack Aravan as Amblay wrestles with the creature's mind. A couple of *magic missiles* pepper the shambling foe until Amblay turns his *mind control* against the Nadir...eventually he breaks the hold upon his friends and turns the combat decisively in their favour. Once slain the party burn the creature into ashes...

Next morning they warily enter the citadel of Hurlis and notice the sudden drop in temperature. Amblay sends his *familiar* bat down a narrow opening in the rubble and through it's eyes he sees a shadowy figure. Grey hair, translucent skin that seems to glow with an inner light, the man is unrecognisable – neither elf nor human. Axe and Aravan decide to crawl through the gap and meet him. Amblay tries to latch onto the man's mind but encounters a *thought shield*.

The grey haired creature greets the two warriors with an almost lascivious smile; his dark brown eyes seem to stare directly into their souls. He is urbane but dangerous. He tells them he is a Daywalker – a legacy of Barrios – forced to live off rats in a desolate citadel. He offers them a deal; power for just a pint of their fresh blood. Naturally they decline. Another small tremor seals the crawl-hole they entered from. Axe and Aravan heft their magical longswords and move in on the vampire.

Aravan drives a forceful blow across Dathor's skull and the blade opens a deep gash in the creature's skull. Axe attacks from behind, his own blade bites deep into ribcage. Little blood flows, the Daywalker spins rapidly and attacks. Aravan fends off a backhand swipe but Axe is not so lucky; the Daywalker grabs him by the throat and raises him off the ground with superhuman strength.

Amblay senses the battle below but is powerless to aid his companions. He searches – initially in vain – to find the mind behind the *thought shield*.

Meanwhile Axe remains in the torturous grip of the monster who wishes to squeeze the Nadir into unconsciousness and feast on him later. With Axe immobilised the Daywalker casts *dispel magic* to break the *stoneskin* and Aravan feels vulnerable. She fights bravely and viciously, her blade making small cuts to the creature. When Dathor catches her sword arm she knows she has to react quickly or die. She *lightning draws* her shortsword with her left hand and draws it across the beast's abdomen to open a gaping wound. To her dismay the gash closes quickly – the Daywalker is unaffected by non-magical weapons.

Axe finally falls into unconsciousness and Dathor lets him fall to the ground, now able to concentrate entirely on the woman before him.

At that moment Amblay gets a grip on Dathor's mind. The Marraq grips his foe with a *major control* and Dathor releases Aravan's hand as Amblay drags him up to the surface.

As Dathor is brought slowly to the rubble-strewn streets Aravan puts Axe over her shoulder and climbs quickly into the street. The powerful Daywalker remains in the

firm grip of Amblay's mind – the Marraq draws him slowly into the daylight whereupon he draws back the darkbow. Dathor is unable to twitch.

The first shot is decisive. It penetrates the Daywalker's skull and fells him. Aravan is already moving having witnessed at first hand the regenerative powers of the vampire. She hacks savagely at the beast's throat and decapitates him instantly. As Axe stirs from unconsciousness Amblay hurls a [fireball](#) at the fallen undead and the body blazes furiously in the morning light. He kicks the head onto the fire and the four companions stand back to watch the blaze. The temperature all over the citadel rises, as if the fire burns away the influence of Dathor forever...