

W1

FOR 4TH EDITION
D&D™ GAME

Player's Guide W1

Scales of War

AN ADVENTURE PATH FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 1-3



“We are mercenaries, all of us, but only a precious few have honesty enough to admit it. Whether we sell ourselves for coin, for honor, or ideals, we all have a price whose continued payment leads us inevitably to our end. But when that end comes, will you admit to your balance sheet? Or will you lie when you claim that the blood on your hands was spilled for just cause, not simply your hunger for glory?”



To the north, outside the borders of the Vale lie the ruins of the city of Rhest, once the center of a kingdom that spanned the entirety of the vale, but now a long crumbled remnant inhabited mostly by Lizard folk and other creatures best left unmentioned.



Ancient History of the Vale

The scattered human towns and villages of the land now known as the Elsir Vale grew up along the Dawn Way, an important east-west trade road linking the heavily settled lands that lie northwest across the Endless Plains with the exotic kingdoms and goods of the coastal lands lying to the southeast.



Many of the Dwarven residents of Elsir Vale trace their heritage back to an ancient kingdom lost in time.

Much of the Dawn Way was built by an ancient dwarven kingdom that spanned the Wyrmsmoke and Giantsshield Mountains more than a thousand years ago. While their kingdom is long gone, their roads, bridges, and cisterns remain in use to this day. After the kingdom passed, the presence of various monsters and raiders kept traffic along the Dawn Way light for many years; few caravans dared the long and dangerous trek. Few humans lived in Elsir Vale during those years - only scattered settlements of druidic folk who tapped into the rich planar magic of the Vale. In the end, however, they left behind little more than grassy barrows and stone circles on the hilltops.

About five hundred years ago, the nearby city of Rhest came to control the vale and a large swath of land north of the Giantsields as well. Soldiers from Rhest secured the roads all the way to Dennovar and beyond, creating a safe passage for trade. More and more traders traveled the Dawn Way, and the kingdom of Rhestin grew wealthy on the tariffs exacted from the passing merchants.

Under the kingdom's shield, the towns along the Dawn Way - Brindol, Dennovar, Talar, Terrelton, and the rest - grew up from tiny hamlets or lonely soldiers' posts to flourishing human settlements.

The kingdom of Rhestin eventually collapsed under civil strife, monstrous incursions, and magical blights. Almost two hundred years and fifty years ago, the city of Rhest was burned by a savage horde that descended swiftly from out of the Wyrmsmoke Mountains. Although the warriors of Rhestin killed much of the horde, the city was abandoned and the already weakened kingdom broken. The locks and canals surrounding Rhest fell into disrepair, and the Blackfens Swamp swallowed the ruined city.

In the years after the kingdom's fall, the towns of Elsir Vale came to look after themselves. Most of the local lords still held titles derived from the old kingdom of Rhestin. While everyone knew that the kings of Rhestin were long dead, no new realm arose in the Vale.



The Red Hand of Doom

For centuries following the collapse of Rhestin, the dry and dusty Wyrmsmoke Mountains were home to dozens of goblinoid tribes. Although travelers were forced to skirt the goblin-infested hills by a generous margin, in general the Wyrmsmoke tribes, depleted by the battles surrounding the collapse of Rhestin, posed no significant threat to the nearby human towns and settlements other than the occasional bloody raid.

Yet, deep within the mountains lay hidden something that would spell doom—an ancient temple dedicated to Tiamat, the Queen of Evil Dragons.

Built hundreds of years ago to serve as the hidden redoubt of a despicable cult of dragon worshippers, the temple was eventually cleansed by a band of heroes from the human city of Rhest. For several centuries the complex lay empty. Then, eighty years ago, the young half-dragon hobgoblin warrior Azarr Kul discovered the abandoned temple and was awed by the teachings of Tiamat he read on the walls therein. He abandoned Maglubiyet, the traditional deity of his people, and dedicated himself to leading the rest of his nation to Tiamat's worship.

Over the next twenty years, Azarr Kul grew into a powerful warlord and a mighty priest of Tiamat. Early in his rise to power he struck up an alliance with his sire, the blue dragon Tyrgarun. Aided by this powerful ally, Azarr Kul converted his entire tribe into fanatical worshippers of Tiamat. He renamed the tribes that had fallen under his wing the Kulkor Zhul and began to lay his plans for conquest of Elsir Vale.

Dedicating themselves to the Queen of Evil Dragons with the fanaticism of the recently converted, the members of the Kulkor Zhul grew strong, stronger than any Wyrmsmoke tribe before them. Adopting the standard of the Red Hand, an ancient symbol of Tiamat's cult, Azarr Kul created an elite caste of warpriests, monks, and dragon-favored champions to lead the Kulkor Zhul.

Eventually, Azarr Kul and his dragon-worshipping zealots destroyed the last opposition to his supremacy over the Wyrmsmoke tribes, slaughtering the Black Knife Goblins and the tribes allied to them in a ferocious onslaught. The survivors accepted his sovereignty and were absorbed into his realm.

Azarr Kul named his new kingdom Harg Kulkor, or "Land of the Dragon."



After a long season of rebuilding his strength, offering bribes to many of the intelligent monsters in the region, and cementing the power of his Red Hand warpriests over the disparate tribes he ruled, Azarr Kul finally turned his attention to the lands beyond the Wyrmsmoke Mountains. What he saw



Banner of the Red Hand of Doom

whetted his ambition for power; no city or state within hundreds of miles could field an army as strong as his. The High Wyrmlord dreamed of carving out a hobgoblin empire stretching from the Sunset Sea to the Golden Plains - and the first step was to crush the human towns in Elsir Vale.

The civilized folk of Elsir Vale, long used to avoiding the Wyrmsmoke mountains, were completely unaware of the host marching upon them. Kul's generals sent well trained scouts ahead to silence any that might alert the Vale to their approach.

But the Vale was not without its own skilled warriors. A band of adventurers who had travelled to Brindol from the Sword Coast in search of treasure was exploring ruins at the base of the Wyrmsmoke Mountains, Vraath Keep.

These adventurers, who would in time come to be known as the Diamond League, were alerted to the presence of the army by nothing more than sheer chance of happenstance. However, this simple bit of luck would in the end prove the savior of the Vale and all its peoples.

Realizing they could not simply could not fight an army by themselves, the members of the Diamond League set about delaying the army in any way possible. To that end, they destroyed the ancient dwarven bridge at Skull Gorge. Upon succeeding, they immediately headed for the nearby town of Drellin's Ferry, raising the alarm and giving the people what time they could to prepare.

While the warnings of the Diamond League saved countless lives, and the destruction of the bridge slowed the advance of Azzar Kul's host, no force in the Vale could stop it.

While a few brave souls and bands of scattered soldiers managed to slow the army at a river or mountain pass, the host moved forward, bringing with it an inevitable doom.



The bridge at Skull Gorge, rebuilt since the time of war.

During this time, the Diamond League proved themselves valiant defenders of the people. They led raids on the Red Hand supply lines, garnered allies from neighboring elven and dwarven settlements, and ruined more than a few of Azarr Kul's war plans.



As time went on though, it was evident that not even the Diamond League could stop the advancing army. It spread through the eastern plains of the vale, right to the gates of Brindol. Members of the farm communities surrounding Brindol fled inside its walls for protection.

The walled city was the first real obstacle the army had faced. They laid siege to the town and wore down its defenses relentlessly. Large amounts of the population of Brindol fell defending the town's walls, and countless more died of starvation and plague from the crowded conditions. It seemed that the folk of Brindol, and by extension, the Vale, were without hope.

The siege of Brindol led to great loss of life. Then, as if by a miracle, the army of Azzar Kul tore itself apart. For no reason the people of Brindol could immediately divine, the leaders of the army suddenly began fighting amongst themselves, vying for control of the host.

The great army splintered, with large parts of its forces simply heading back to the Wyrmsmoke Mountains. In response, the forces that had rallied to the defense of the Vale quickly shifted to the offensive. Disjointed and surrounded, the goblinoid tribes were pursued, isolated, and crushed. The host of the Red Hand was no more.

Shortly thereafter, the Diamond League reappeared, prominently displaying the body of Azzar Kul. They had skirted around the main army and ventured all the way to the Fane of Tiamat in the heart of the Wyrmsmoke Mountains, and struck directly at Azzar Kul himself. With the charismatic leader of the Red Hand dead, the various factions and tribes that made up the Kulkor Zhul fought amongst themselves for supremacy and proved their own undoing.

Stories of these brave heroes and their unlikely deeds spread like wildfire, spurring the good people of the Vale to further action. The military forces, as meager as they were, went on the hunt and killed thousands of the remaining goblinoids, crippling their numbers for a generation. Hunting down the more powerful members of Azzar Kul's host themselves, the Diamond League defeated Tyrgarun the blue dragon, their third dragon kill in as many months.



The threat was over, but the damage wreaked by the armies of the Red Hand were significant, and it would take a generation before life returned to normal. Even now, there are places in the Vale where the scars of war have not fully healed... outlying communities remain abandoned, dwarven outposts which once were manned by a few brave soldiers now lie in ruins, and the dangerous creatures that inhabit the Blackfens are bolder than they once were. Some whisper that while the Red Hand was defeated, the scales have tipped in favor of darkness.

And what of the Diamond League? They worked alongside their neighbors and friends, restoring what they could, until finally, there was nothing left for them to do in the Vale.

They were wealthy heroes, retired adventurers, middle aged now, some with families. Several of them settled down in the Vale and lived out their years in peace. Others would never settle down,

and so they moved on in search of some new adventure in far off lands, never to return to their humble birthplace in Elsir Vale.

Forty years have passed since the fall of Azzar Kul, and in that time the Vale has enjoyed peace.

Gradually, the people spread back out into the shattered hamlets and farmsteads. Dwarven mining settlements in the foothills on the south end of the Vale expanded, and trade picked up.

Today, the war of the Red Hand is little more than a story told by



**The Diamond League, Heroes of the Elsir Vale.
From left to right Arryk, Valkondinar, Linaera, and Frinda.**

old timers to frighten schoolchildren, a fading museum with an elderly caretaker, and a local holiday occasioned by picnics and revelry.

All is at peace. At least for now...

The Town of Brindol

Bringdol is a small city in the heart of Elsir Vale. One of the largest settlements in the Vale, Brindol is a prosperous farming community and caravan stopover located along the Dawn Way on the south bank of the Elsir River. Orchards of apple and pear trees follow the river's winding shores, while broad grain fields and farmlands surround the town for miles in all directions. Brindol is the home of Lord Aaron Jarmaath. His small keep and the city walls are the only fortifications of note this side of Denovar (city 100 miles to east).

Population: 6,700; another 1,000 live within a five-mile radius of the town itself. The people of Brindol are mostly humans, half-elves, and dwarves. The town's population swells by several hundred whenever some connected halfling clans known as "the river people" are in town.

Government: The city has a council of 13, two-thirds of whom are hereditary landlords and the remainder of whom are guildmasters from the city's important trade guilds. Lord Aldergold is the public face of the council.

Defense: Lord Warden Harrik Orenna is the political head of the Lion Guard, though many view Captain Kartenix as the actual leader. The Lion Guards have about 200 soldiers under arms at all times, with about one-quarter on duty at any given time. In times of crisis, the Lord Warden has access to another 200 well-equipped but poorly trained soldiers by calling up the militia. Additionally, many of the local lords and merchant houses have their own security guards. The city is surrounded on three sides by a stone wall 20 feet tall & 10 feet thick, and the river guards the north side. There's one gate each in the east, west and south walls, and gates at each of the twin bridges in the north.

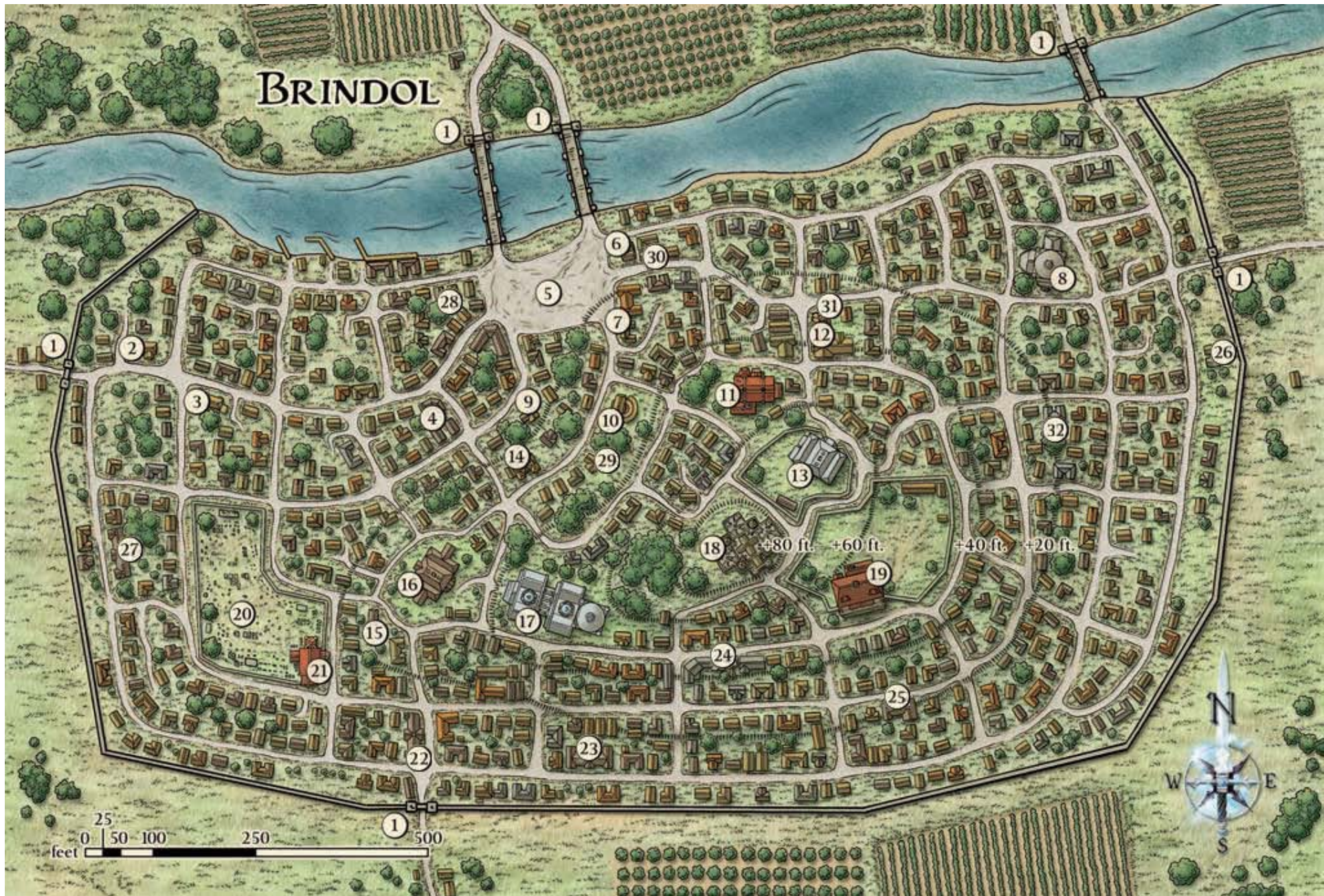
Inns: Chatrenn and Sons; The Red Door; Avandrian Hostel; The Silk and Spoon; Pantashi Inn.

Taverns: Ilya's Cardhouse; The Marooned Schooner; Cleftie's; Brindol Gentleman's Club; the Blue Parrot; the Antler and Thistle.

Major Guilds: Prospectors; Blacksmiths and Smelters; Teamsters and Farriers; Weavers; River Bargemen (halfling controlled).

Supplies: Alchemy by Adronsius; Gavriel Arms and Smithy; Staghunter Outfitters; Alpenglow Trading House.

Temples: Temple of Erathis; College of Ioun; Shrine of the Sun (Pelor); Moondust Temple (Sehanine); Shrine of Bahamut (no permanent clergy); Shrine of the Open Door (Avandra).



Legend

1. City Gates
2. Chatrenn and Sons
3. Axenhaft Security
4. Alpenglow Trading House
5. Brindol Market
6. The Red Door
7. Red Magic and Sundries
8. College of Ioun
9. Guildmaster's Street
10. Shrine of the Open Door
11. Brindol Academy
12. Ilya's Cardhouse
13. Aldergold Keep
14. Shrine of Bahamut
15. Brindol Gentleman's Club
16. The Hall of Great Valor
17. Brindol Council Hall
18. Brindol Keep
19. Haskin Mansion
20. Brindol Cemetery
21. Temple of Erathis
22. Moondust Temple
23. Staghunter Outfitters
24. Gavriel Arms and Smithy
25. Alchemy by Adronsius
26. Avandrian Hostel
27. Shrine of the Sun
28. Pantashi Inn

Places of Interest

Hammerfist Holds

The dwarves in the Wyvernwatch mountains southeast of Brindol have a number of mining communities. None have more than a few hundred people working and living there, but the various mines are quick to come to each other's aid. In total there are probably 2500 people in these villages, almost entirely dwarves. This is the area's only source of raw stone and metal ore.

Marth Forest

This dense wood is northeast of Brindol. The Tiri Kitor call this forest home. These Elves & Eladrin are known to number over 1000, but no one can say for sure how many of them there are. These elusive people are known for their giant owl mounts and superior archery skills. This is the last place you want to go for wood or furs. The Tiri Kitor trade with others in nearby towns, but few outsiders are welcomed into their forest.

Southwood

This light forest stretches from Dauth to Prosser, south of Brindol. It's been heavily hunted and thinned out. The greatest danger here is usually bandits in hiding. Occasionally, rumors spread about ghosts in the woods, but it's usually proven to be bandit tricks and traps to scare off good folk. There was actually a ghost in the woods some 40 years ago that killed a number of people. Bandits or ghosts, most people travel through the woods during the day and in large groups.

The Witchwood

This forest lies west of Brindol, bordered on three sides by mountains or swamp. It is the largest forest in the area. Most wood and hunting goods come from this area. The Tiri Kitor have a presence here, but don't protect it nearly as well as the Marth Forest. Most of this woodland is still wild, and home to all manner of beasts. Roads and humanoid trails generally skirt the edges of the forest. Rumors suggest that creatures from the Blackfens have begun to wander into the Witchwood.

Drellin's Ferry

This small town is THE river crossing for the Dawn Way (main east-west highway in the region). There was a stone, dwarven bridge here hundreds of years ago, but it was destroyed. The stone pillars are still visible in the river, but little remains of the bridge. A hundred feet downstream is the ferry crossing. A large barge floats here, attached to ropes and pulleys on both sides of the river. The river is 30 feet deep here, and the ferry is the only way to get wagons, livestock and such across.

Dennovar

The only other city of any significance in the region, Dennovar lies 100 miles east of Brindol on the Dawn Way. It too has an outer defensive wall of stone. Population 11,000. Dennovar has its share of farm land, but it also sits on a huge lake, Lake Ern. Seafood and water related products are common trade goods from Dennovar. Dennovar hasn't been attacked by anything significant in hundreds of years. In fact, several of the gates are in poor working order, despite the lessons learned by most of

the Vale forty years ago. A merchant council is the governing body.

Rhest

Once a prosperous city and center of the kingdom of Rhestin, Rhest is now a half-drowned ruin slowly sinking into the Blackfens (swamp). At its peak, the surrounding lands were well tended fields with levies, irrigation systems, and were clear for miles. Centuries of erosion and lack of attention have turned the farmlands into swamp. Rice and soybean fields are now overgrown with twisted trees, poisonous vines, and are crawling with snakes, crocodiles, and worse. Civilized people abandoned the place long ago. The only intelligent beings there now are lizard folk, if you consider them intelligent.

Aldergold Keep (in Brindol)

Aldergold Keep predates the nation of Rhestin. It was built on the remains of an ancient dwarven keep over 500 hundred years ago. During the reign of Rhestin, the village around the keep grew into a town, then a city. When that great nation fell apart, the commanding officer, Kerden Aldergold, claimed the keep as his own. It's been in the Aldergold family ever since, and at least one member of the Aldergold family has sat on the council of Brindol, typically in a leadership position, without fail...

News and Rumors

Weather

After two goods seasons and exceptional crops, the summer heat has arrived. It's been 100 F every day, and there's been no rain for three weeks. There have been several grass fires lately. The largest one was near Talar. It left several square miles of scorched earth. The Oswald Orchard is installing some sort of irrigation system stemming from the river. It looks good on paper, but we'll see if the results justify the costs.

Economics

The mild winter and spring seasons resulted in some good exports this year. Even hunting in the Witchwood is up. Sales of food and fur have put extra coins in a lot of pockets. Though the Marooned Schooner (tavern) and College of Ioun are trying to garner their share via "cold" drinks and higher tuition.

For Sale

- Lord Aldergold may be putting one of his rental properties up for sale. Lady Mesha has moved to Dennovar. Some say the loss of one of his mistresses has caused the maintenance of the other one (Lady Trelend) to go up.
- Ferrum Ironhammer (local smith) is boasting a new technique for tempering steel. He says his blades are now stronger, more durable and hold a better edge. No doubt they cost more too.

Work Available

- Oswald's Orchard needs strong backs to dig ditches and haul gravel.
- The Hammerfist mines need hard workers. Benefits include shade.
- Drellin's Ferry has started construction of a stone bridge. So much for the ferry.
- The Golden Lions are offering a free two-week training camp to members of the militia, both to better the current members and boost their numbers.
- Even the (wanted) Bandit Lord Lucien is hiring. Skilled professionals are needed for some mildly dangerous work. Working for Lucien earns a trip to the stockades or even possibly the gallows, but some folks whose scruples take a back seat to their interests, it beats baking in the sun all day working a field.

Entertainment

- The Midsummer Day festival was a bust this year. The clergy of Pelor tried to promote the celebration of the sun, but apparently it was too damn hot.
- The renowned bard, Armin Tanzarian, is playing at the Blue Parrot. There's a small door fee, but it's worth it.

News from Abroad

- Red Rock reports a lot of Giant Owls moving between Witchwood & Marth Forest. The Elves must be up to something.
- A band of adventurers from Denovar came through Brindol a few days ago. They're headed to Rhest for some "cleanup and salvage."

Crime & Danger

- Bandit activity in the area is higher than normal. Several Blacksmiths' shipments from Hammerfist have completely disappeared.
- There are reports of ghost activity in the Southwood again. Travel there after dark at your own risk.
- Kip Fargrim was arrested for larcenous activities. Fargrim's whole gang is suspected of having connections to Lucien. This gang has been a nuisance to the PC's for years. They are bullies and thieves. The gang of six is lead by the Thompson twins, Corvin & Ivan.

People of Interest



Lord Aaron Aldergold, Leader of the Brindol Council

Lord Aaron Aldergold (male human noble) Lord Aaron is a widowed man, 50 years old. His wife fell down stairs in the keep years ago and broke her neck. He has two sons and a daughter, all full grown and married now.

Though he never remarried, he's always been fond of the ladies (some whisper that this was the case even before his wife's accident). He's known to spend time with at least two women in Brindol, though he keeps his personal life as private as possible. Each of the ladies "rents" a small house from him.

The Aldergold family owns a lot of property both within & outside of the city. Most of this is rental property. The one active business Lord Aldergold has is a restaurant in Brindol, the Succulent Salmon. This is one of the finest restaurants in town, frequented by all of the city's upper class. Whatever else Aaron might be, he's an excellent cook.

The populace of Brindol generally regards Lord Aldergold as a capable if somewhat aloof administrator, and the town and its surrounding environs have grown strong under his leadership in the years since the Red Hand invaded.

Lord Warden Harrik Orenna (male human noble)

Harrik Orenna is the political leader of the Golden Lions, the city guard. However, the allegiance of the men is much stronger toward Kartenix, the Captain of the Town Guard.

Lord Eoffram Troyas (male half-elf merchant)

Lord Troyas is the newest councilmember. He's well mannered and has a reputation for being cunning in his dealings. As such, he is less prone to the traditional means of accomplishing important tasks. In a short time, he has established a reputation as an outspoken, and sometimes combative, public figure. A half-elf, he has shown little of his race's good-natured tendency toward patience. The most liberal of the council, Troyas is swift to act and seems to have a knack for being the first in town to know about events. Fresh information is probably a valued commodity for this man. Troyas is the type to exchange favors, but keeps the scales tipped in his favor.

Lord Noel Prasad (male halfling merchant)

Lord Prasad is the head of the River Bargemen guild. He is a shrewd business man and a jocular fellow who is known to joke that rank in the Brindol Council should be reorganized by height – starting with the smallest first.

Lord Eshan Aldergold (male human noble)

Eshan Aldergold is Lord Aldergold's eldest son and likely heir. He has been on the council for three years and has no hesitation reminding others of his position. He is a known gambler and can often be found in Ilya's cardhouse playing various games of chance. While he is a bit haughty, he is acknowledged to be an honest and fair player, and is quite popular as he often buys drinks for his fellow players when he's on a winning streak.

Lord Damon Gunter (male dwarf noble)

The gruff and blunt Lord Gunter is the head of the Prospectors guild. A reasonably powerful Cleric of Kord, he was elected unanimously as leader of the Prospectors guild due to his valor during the siege of Brindol. While not as charismatic as any of the other merchant lords in town, he nevertheless commands a significant amount of respect due to the level of control the Prospectors guild has over the movement of metal goods throughout the Vale.

Lady Ariane Sanja (female tiefling merchant)

Lady Sanja is perhaps the least well liked member of the Brindol Council. She is concerned first and foremost with the acquisition of coin, both for herself and for the city. She constantly bickers with Lords Orenna and Gunter over the cost of the militia, but for reasons not fully known seems to have the ear of both Lords Aldergold.

Lady Natalia Isidoro (female human noble)

Lady Isidoro the scion of a family that dates back as far as the Aldergolds. She is elderly and generally ineffective. Her son Andrei has been waiting for her seat on the Council for upwards of fifteen years now, but she shows no signs of aging.

Lady Maribel Kabiri (female human noble)

Maribel Kabiri is the head of the Weavers guild, and fiercely proud of her position. She began life as a commoner and worked her way up through shrewd bargaining and good leadership, rising through the ranks to become a manager at the young age of seventeen, head of a mill at twenty, and leader of the Weavers guild at thirty (when the prior leader passed away). The Weavers guild has grown strong under her guidance, and textile goods manufactured in Brindol (and powered by the waters of the Elsir River) have begun to be carried by merchants to places as far away as Waterdeep.