



Prologue

The Blood Lord sat on his throne of bones and blood-oozing skulls, engulfed in darkness and the putrid stench of death and misery. Cries of pain and anguish played in the background of Orcus' residence of Undeath. Nothing of this reached the dark lord. His blood-hazed eyes were lost into the distance, his mind stretching out to listen to the calls and prayers of his dark clergy and followers. Like buzzing flies, their requests and calls for favors left no impression on the Demon Prince of Undeath – his schemes of power were on a level incomprehensible for his mortal followers. But suddenly his eye twitched, a prayer – no not a prayer – a whispered word that brought back memories of lost causes and unpaid debts. Orcus focused his divine attention towards the source, spanning his godlike awareness cross planes and dimensions.

"...Master of Undeath, Tear in the shroud of Death, listen to the words of your humble servant, a maggot in your godlike corpse. I have found out where the followers of Bahamut have hidden the Rod of Ruin! The paladin of Bahamut I defiled and brought back in your name knows of its hiding place, great Master."

The Rod of Ruin – Found! The Blood Lord clenched his fist around the Wand of Orcus, blood dripping between his fingers. This opened up new possibilities, the chessboard had suddenly shifted, and things were tilting in his favor again. As Lord of the Undead, Orcus had the everlasting patience of the dead, a trait seldom seen among his demonic cohorts and enemies.

But Orcus knew that if he waited long enough in the darkness, secrets held in life would resurface in the afterlife. It was just a matter of time, and that time was now. With the Rod of Ruin resurfacing he could send his pawns to collect it and complete the task once started but never finished – turning the living world into a realm of undeath and eternal darkness. His divine mind immediately identified the hundreds of actions needed for setting the plan in motion, but first – he poured a fraction of his essence into the world of the living. His aspect materialized in the crypt of his maggot, pulling darkness and the chill of the grave with it. The priest screamed in terror as his eyes started to bleed at the sight of his true Lord. There were still questions that needed answers and a debt of a soul to be paid...



The Nentir Vale

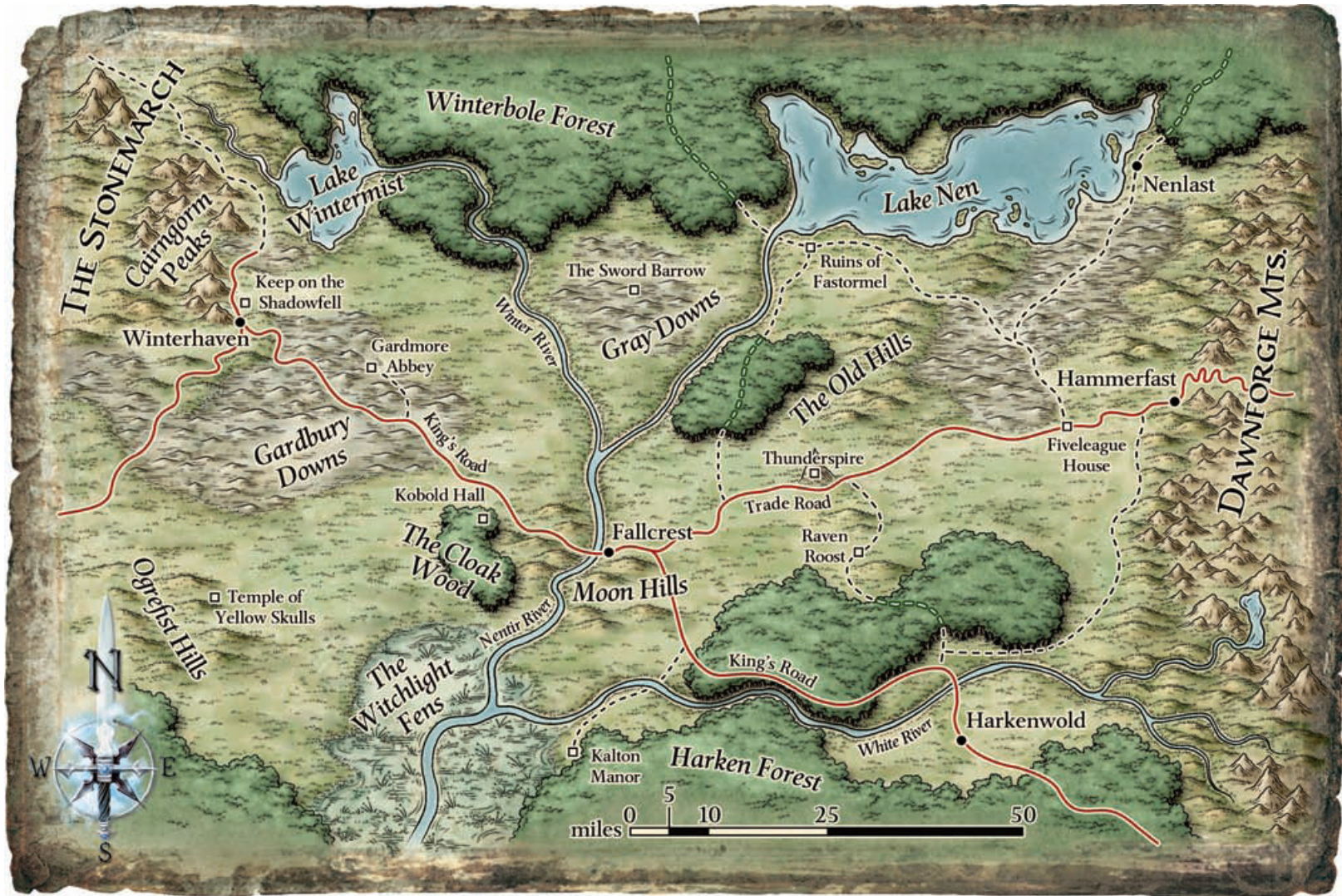
The broad borderland region where the campaign begins is known as the Nentir Vale. The vale is now mostly empty, with a handful of living villages and towns scattered over this wide area. Abandoned farmsteads, ruined manors, and broken keeps litter the countryside. Bandits, wild animals, and monsters roam freely throughout the vale, threatening anyone who fares more than a few miles away from one of the surviving settlements. Travel along the roads or river is usually safe—usually. But every now and then, travelers come to bad ends between towns.

The Nentir Vale is a northern land, but it sees relatively little snow—winters are windy and bitterly cold. The Nentir River is too big to freeze except for a few weeks in the coldest part of the year. Summers are cool and mild. The “clear” parts of the map are covered in mixed terrain—large stretches of open meadowland, copses of light forest, gently rolling hills, and the occasional thicket of dense woodland and heavy undergrowth. The downs marked on the map are hilly grassland, with little tree cover. The hills are steeper and more rugged, and include light forest in the valleys and saddles between the hilltops.

In the century since the fall of the great Nerath Empire to the south, darkness has gradually consumed most of the Vale. Struggling against this growing evil are a few “Points of Light,” which your characters will rise to defend as Champions. You probably grew up in or around one of these towns, most likely Fallcrest. For detailed information on the town of Fallcrest, see Chapter 11 of the Dungeon Master's Guide. I can supply information on the towns of Hammerfast, Harkenwold, or Nenlast as needed. The first chapter of the campaign will take place in and around Winterhaven, and for story-related reasons, characters should not be from this town if they are trained in History, Streetwise or Arcana. Characters without these skills may be from Winterhaven with prior approval.



Horns of Doom





Character Races

For the start of the campaign, you can use any Player's Handbook race, and play any PHB, PHB2 or PHB3 class.

Dragonborn: No dragonborn are native to Fallcrest, but travelers occasionally pass through and take up work for a time, especially as bodyguards or caravan guards. The Halfmoon halflings, House Azaer, and the importer Naerumar have work available for a capable adventurer.

Dwarf: A fair number of dwarves live in Fallcrest, so a dwarf character could easily be a native of the city—perhaps a relative of Teldorthan Irontooth. If not, the nearest dwarven homeland is Hammerfast, a week's travel distant. Merchants and crafters from Hammerfast travel to Fallcrest to trade or work, lodging in one of the local inns for a few weeks.

Eladrin: Eladrin are not often seen in Fallcrest. Some of the old manors in the Moon Hills and the nearby parts of the Vale were once the homes of well-off eladrin families; a player character eladrin might hold the title to an abandoned estate a mile or two out of town.

Elf: Elves are also scarce in Fallcrest, but a small number reside in and around the town. Ressimae Starlight of the temple of Sehanine might be a relative or an old friend of an elf character. Elves from outside Fallcrest might belong to the Woodsinger clan from the Harkenwold Forest.

Half-Elf: A small number of half-elves reside in Fallcrest or the vicinity. Most are well-off farmers or herders living in the Moon Hills near the town; the rest are expert artisans—jewelers, tailors, or woodworkers—in the town. A half-elf player character can be the child or relative of a Fallcrest family.

Halfling: Halflings are the most numerous people in Fallcrest aside from humans, and they come

from any walk of life. A Fallcrest native might be related to the Halfmoon family, the Ostermans of the Silver Unicorn, or the Thistletons of Fallcrest Stables. Halflings descended from the traders who pass through Fallcrest can be members of the Swiftwater clan.

Human: Most of Fallcrest's people are human. Characters with rural backgrounds likely grew up on the farms in the nearby Moon Hills. Characters with an urban upbringing might be the children of well-off landowners such as the Kamroths, or ruffians and sellswords who had a hard childhood in Lowtown.

Tiefling: Two tiefling families and a few individuals live and thrive in Fallcrest, including the Azaers and the Naerumars.

Character Connections

As you think about your character background, please consider connections between your character and the other player characters, and try to forge a strong bond with at least one other character.

Besides other player characters, you might also have ties to NPCs in the area. Feel free to ask me for details, or to approach me with your own ideas. In addition, you might consider a tie to one of these two characters and their stories:

Douven Stand: Likely a mentor for a character trained in Arcana, Dungeoneering, History or Streetwise. The man who trained you for a life of adventure bade his friends farewell three months ago and headed for Winterhaven. Douven, an archeologist and explorer of old ruins, always looking for forgotten lore, had found an ancient map that revealed the location of a dragon's tomb not far from the village. He reasoned that if a dragon were buried there, it would be rich with archeological relics and maybe even its hoard.

Douven should have returned some time ago, and his continuing absence bodes ill. His wife fears

the worst and has asked you and your friends to find out what happened to him.

Major Quest: 250 XP/Player for discovering Douven's fate (an additional quest follows this one).

Marla Kingsblood of the Church of Bahamut has contacted a character trained in Religion with dire news. She has received a disturbing message from the small shrine at the holy spring of Kalin. An evil artifact, only known as the Rod of Ruin, that had been hidden for centuries by the Church of Bahamut has been stolen and the shrine defiled. No one alive remembers the Rod's purpose and if any records of this existed, they are now lost.

All of the monks guarding the Rod were killed and brought back as vile zombies, save one. He survived and witnessed a small group of death cultists steal the Rod and then leave for Winterhaven. He heard a name being mentioned, a name he thought was the name of the dangerous and twisted high priest of the cult - Kalarel. Marla suspects that this Kalarel has set up a secret cult in the area and is conducting unholy ceremonies, and fears what he might do with the Rod. She asks you to travel to Winterhaven, determine if there is any death cult activity in the area and, if so, to stamp it out and bring back the Rod of Ruin.

Major Quest: 400 XP/Player for destroying the cult. Additionally, once the cult is destroyed and their plan stopped, Marla has promised 250gp for returning the Rod of Ruin to her.

Spoilers

This campaign will make extensive use of published adventures. Although many of them will undergo modification to tie them into a coherent story, you could reveal many plot twists and encounter details by carelessly reading the wrong material. Please let me know if you have or intend to read any modules or Dungeon Magazine articles, and I'll steer you away from any spoilers.