

PALE RIVER

Most think that the Serpent River is the lifeblood of Barsaive. The underground rivers are the true roots of Barsaive, nourishing plants above, societies within, and kaers below even to this day. Countless Name-givers died in kaers not because of Horrors or creatures, but because a well or a riverbed they depended upon dried out. Water is more precious than gold to those who live underground.

• Earthroot •



The domed meeting hall glowed softly in the subterranean gloom. Patterns of light and shadow danced across the intricate bas-reliefs that covered its walls and arches, and played across the pale faces of the t'skrang huddled around the central table. Thin and haggard, the villagers of Shining Waters sat and waited with quiet dignity to hear the word of their *lahala*. Their desperation showed only in their silence; fear had banished the usual lively talk and laughter. No one had much heart to eat, despite the hunger that cramped their bellies. V'liskra, *lahala* of Shining Waters, looked around the table and fought back tears. She must not give way; her people must see her strong, confident, unafraid. V'liskra forced herself to take a spoonful of porridge, but could not bring herself to eat it. Carefully, she lowered the spoon and rested its handle against the side of her bowl.

The silence grew heavier, until someone broke it—old K'vrana, the first to speak as always. Folding her hands in a sign of respect, she said, “Is there any news of L'anelh, *lahala*?”

V'liskra bowed her head. “None. But we must not despair. Somehow we will find a way to bring the river back—”

“How?!” cried Dunkach'k the Raftsman, slapping his bowl of thin porridge off the table. It crashed into the wall, spilling its contents across the floor. Two children rushed to scoop up the remaining porridge, licking it greedily from their claws.

The others looked away in mingled sorrow and disgust. That their children should scabble on the ground for scraps of food like rats... it was shameful. Yet what else could be expected? They were starving. Dunkach'k clenched his hands and continued more softly, his voice

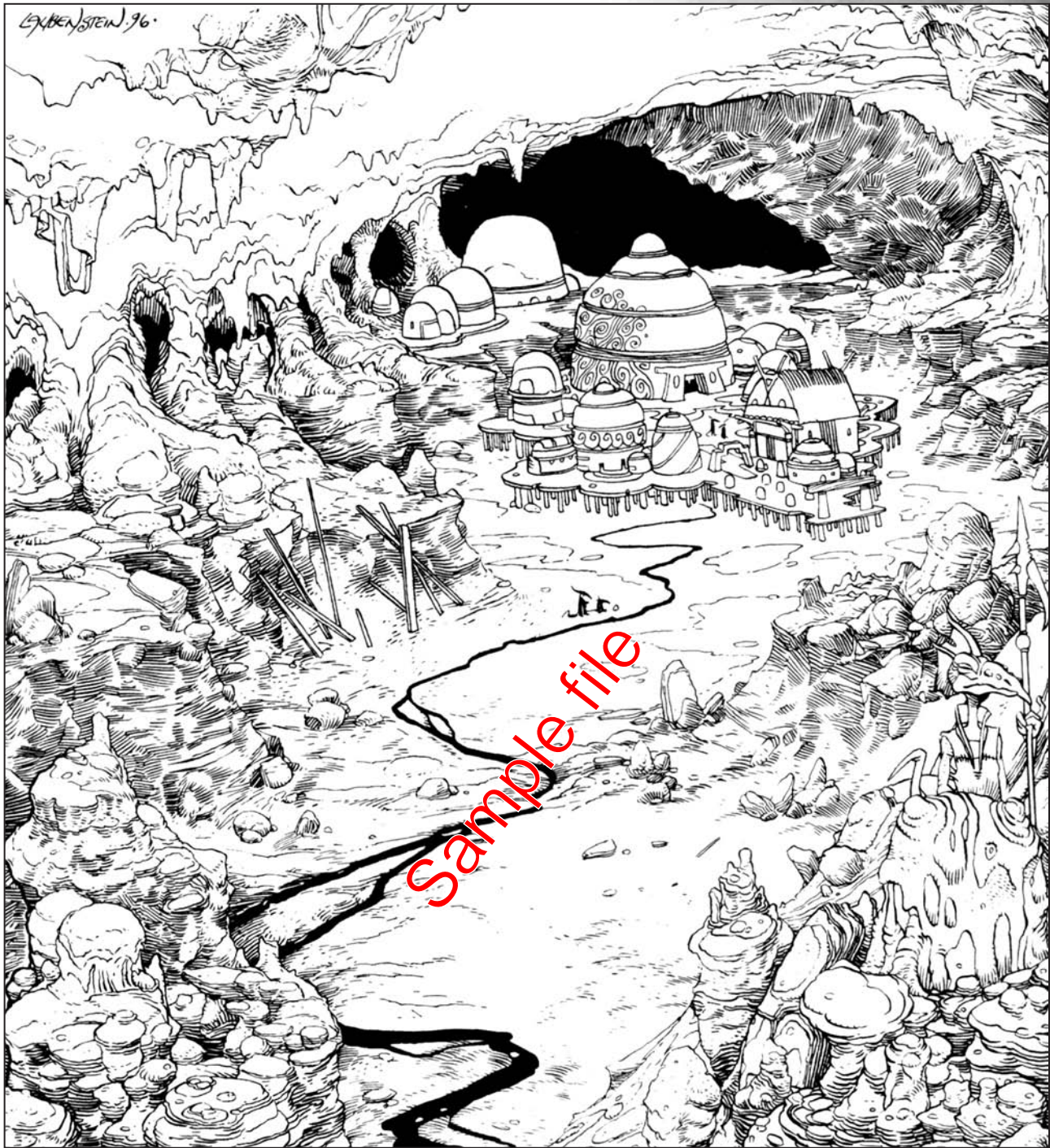
harsh with anguish. “L'anelh led our best warriors upriver days ago, and they have vanished—who is left now to find the cause of our misfortune? Who can take back our river from whatever evil spirit or monster or force has stolen it? Old men like me? Or the little ones?”

V'liskra turned to Dunkach'k. “L'anelh and the others went at my bidding, and whatever has befallen them will remain on my conscience for eternity. What would you have me do? Send more warriors into unknown danger, in the hope that they will miraculously succeed where our best have not? Shall I pound the walls and cry, hoping that the Universe will give me some answer out of pity?” The *lahala* closed her eyes and breathed deeply, struggling for composure. After a moment's silence, she spoke again. “I have failed my people,” she said, quietly and without emotion, as if pronouncing a great truth. The villagers stared mutely at the ground.

“No,” said a voice from the archway. “There is still something we can do.” The villagers turned and watched as K'skirla, a young Warrior much favored by the *lahala*, strode into the meeting hall. Never before had K'skirla challenged the word of the *lahala*; so great was her respect for V'liskra that she rarely spoke in the *lahala*'s presence. Now she stopped a few feet from the *lahala*'s chair, bowed deeply and said, “We must live somehow until we can find out what happened to the scouting parties we sent upriver. I... I think I know a way.”

V'liskra extended one hand, palm up, in the traditional gesture granting permission to speak. K'skirla bowed in acknowledgment, then looked around at her fellow villagers. “Throal has more food than they know what to do with. Much of it spoils before it can be properly stored away.”

“But we have nothing to trade!” Dunkach'k interrupted.



"Will you barter your wisdom in exchange for a few salt fish-cakes? The merchants of Throal value nothing unless they can hold it in their hands. They will laugh at you, sister."

K'skirla shook her head. "No. I... it pains me to suggest it, but... we could enter the Grand Bazaar at night. We could... take—"

V'liskra stood up, her eyes flashing pale fire. "You would make thieves of us? Have you no honor?!"

With downcast eyes, K'skirla whispered, "I want us to live. However we must."

V'liskra stared at the young t'skrang for a long moment. Then her shoulders sagged, her outraged pride draining away like water and leaving dull acceptance in its wake. "Who will go on this... expedition? Our best warriors have gone, and who is to say they will return?"

K'skirla hesitated, then looked up. "If it becomes a matter for warriors, then we have failed. I know the bazaar. I and a few others can get in and out quickly, quietly..." She trailed off, looking for some sign of encouragement. The villagers and the *lahala* stood silent, not meeting her eyes. "I'm sorry," K'skirla stammered. "But I don't see what else we can do."

After a long moment, V'liskra sighed. "Choose whom you will, K'skirla. Meet with me before you leave." The villagers stared at her, startled; V'liskra threw up her hands. "We must steal or starve. If we live, we may find a way to restore our honor. Otherwise, we have no hope." Without another word, she turned and strode out of the meeting hall.

After a moment, K'skirla followed.

Pale River is an adventure scenario designed for three to five Journeyman adepts of any Discipline, and intends to show players the dangers of entering the wilds of Barsaive.

The adventure begins in the Grand Bazaar of Throal and eventually leads the characters far below the kingdom to the underground rivers and caverns inhabited by the Pale Ones. This adventure assumes that the characters have been hired to guard a merchant's wares against thieves who have so far avoided all efforts at detection. The gamemaster may wish to run a mini-adventure that leads to the characters taking this job.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Pale River is presented as a series of events. Each is described for the gamemaster, who should use the information given to run each section. There is little text to be read aloud to the players, meaning the gamemaster will have to describe many of the scenes to the characters as he sees fit. Where possible the text describes the terrain and areas the characters will encounter, but much of the detail is left to the gamemaster to devise.

Each encounter contains four sections: **Setting the Stage** contains a narrative description that the gamemaster reads aloud to the players, **Themes and Images** helps the gamemaster set the mood and pacing for a particular encounter, and **Behind the Scenes** explains what is really going on in each encounter. The final section of each encounter, **Troubleshooting**, offers suggestions to help the gamemaster get the adventure back on track should things go awry.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Far beneath the kingdom of Throal flow several small underground tributaries of the Serpent River. These rivers and the natural caverns around them are home to the t'skrang known as the Pale Ones (p. 138, **Name-giver's Compendium**).

Six months ago, one of these tributaries dried to little more than a trickle, depriving a Pale Ones village of its primary source of sustenance. Though enough water still flowed through the riverbed to provide the t'skrang villagers with drinking water, it no longer supported the fish and plant life that had been their primary source of food. The virtual disappearance of the river has also left the villagers without supplies of True water, their primary trade good, in which this particular tributary was especially rich. The Pale Ones sent several scouting parties to seek the river's source and learn why the water had stopped flowing, but none returned. With its food supplies gone and no more True water to trade for food from elsewhere, the village faced a harsh choice: relocate or die out.

While seeking a new cavern in which to rebuild, one of the village's scouting parties discovered a small natural tunnel that had been filled in during the construction of the dwarf kingdom more than a thousand years earlier. On excavating the tunnel, the scouts discovered that it opened into an infrequently used side tunnel in the *ashnat* section of the Hall of Tav, very close to the entrance of Throal's Grand Bazaar. Because the scouts opened the tunnel during the night, the disturbance went unnoticed. The scouts made a quick foray into the Grand Bazaar and made off with sacks of provisions. Their fellow villagers hailed them as heroes upon their return; now that the village could take food from the Bazaar; they no longer



ON THE GRAND BAZAAR AND THE HALLS OF THROAL

The Grand Bazaar is the bustling, welcoming face of the Kingdom of Throal. Many who come to Throal go no further into the kingdom than the Bazaar, paying for lodging in Bartertown rather than venturing into the Halls. During business hours, the Bazaar is a riot of colors, smells, and sounds. At night it is ghostly and quiet, inhabited only by patrolling guards and travelers heading into the Halls of Throal.

The term “the Halls of Throal” refers to the part of the kingdom built before Throal was sealed. Its construction differs considerably from those parts of Throal built since the kingdom’s reopening. The Halls of Throal were constructed according to the architectural tastes of dwarfs, while the Inner Cities are designed to appeal to other Name-givers as well.

The nine Halls of Throal radiate out like wheel spokes from the Grand Bazaar, the mammoth foyer at the entrance to the kingdom. Three of the Halls are named after past monarchs of Throal, three after heroic founders of the kingdom, two after great playwrights, and one for Upandal, the Passion of building and construction. In order from left to right as they branch off the Grand Bazaar, the nine Halls are Tav, Thandos, Ulutur, Jothan, Concluc, Bazrata, Bodal, Garaham and Upandal.

The Halls of Throal are not literally halls, but specific networks of tunnels and chambers in the kingdom. Between each of these vast areas are several cross tunnels that connect the passageways of each Hall to another. Consisting of little more than glorified tunnels, the Halls

alternately narrow and widen as they twist their way through the mountain. The average width of a passageway is ten yards, the average height five yards. The walls, which are also the outer walls of dwellings and businesses, are often decorated with colorful mosaics—or paint, in the case of poorer Throalites.

Light crystals illuminate the entire length of the Halls of Throal, glowing in sconces every six yards or so. The floors are tiled with granite slabs. In front of wealthy homes, the granite gives way to marble tiles purchased by the inhabitants of the wealthy estates. Some ostentatious-minded people have paid for floor mosaics as well.

The poorest, most run-down areas of the Halls are the first thing the visitor sees after leaving the Grand Bazaar. These southerly areas of the kingdom, known as the *dahnat*, are a haven for beggars and others who have fallen on hard times. Though the poorest citizen of Throal is better off than many in Barsaive’s other large cities, everyone in Throal agrees that the *dahnat* are a shameful blight. The average dwelling in this area is a five-by-thirteen-yard rectangle adjoined to one of the Halls at a narrow end. These one-room dwellings may house twenty or more members of an extended family.

Businesses also operate in the *dahnat*, many of them threadbare shops where local people spend their hard-earned coppers. Others are larger enterprises dependent on cheap labor, such as weavers’ workshops, tanneries and the like. Most employees of such establishments are women; men from the *dahnat* leave the neighborhood each morning to work elsewhere in Throal as builders or miners.

needed to leave their beloved cavern.

The scouts covered the tunnel entrance when they left the Hall of Tav, but left most of the tunnel clear so they could use it again. The Pale Ones have continued periodic raiding over the past several weeks, becoming increasingly stealthy as the merchants of the Bazaar have begun to set more guards on their wares. The t’skrang have been extremely careful to cover up any trail leading to the tunnel entrance, hoping to keep pilfering supplies until they can discover and correct whatever happened to their river.

The first few thefts provoked little reaction, but the merchants were eventually forced to take more extreme measures.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The player characters are hired by a group of merchants to protect their wares from the mysterious midnight thieves. The first three nights pass quietly; on the fourth night, the thieves return. Responding to cries and sounds of battle, the characters discover a pair of guards—one dead, the other barely conscious—as well as the body of a strange, pale t’skrang. The surviving guard tells the characters that two more pale t’skrang fled toward the Hall of Tav. The characters set off in pursuit, but cannot catch the t’skrang. In their headlong flight, however, the t’skrang were unable to conceal the entrance to their tunnel, and so the characters easily find it.

The player characters follow the tunnel and the fleeing Pale Ones until they reach the Village of Shining Waters.

The *lahala* of the village explains her people's current predicament and apologizes for the thieves' actions, then asks the characters to help the villagers discover why the river has stopped flowing. The *lahala* also wants to find out what happened to the two scouting parties who did not return from upriver.

The adventurers make the dangerous trek toward the dried-up river's source, facing attacks along the way by a pack of trained shadowmants as well as various other creatures. At the riverhead, they find a group of cave trolls who have summoned a river spirit to divert the river down a side tunnel that runs past their village. The adventurers must defeat the trolls and destroy the river spirit in fierce battle in order to return the river to its former course.

NIGHT SCAVENGERS

In this encounter, the characters are keeping watch in the Grand Bazaar when they hear the sounds of a struggle. Upon arriving at the scene of the fight, the characters find two Royal Guardsmen—one dead, the other seriously injured—and the dead body of a Pale One.

SETTING THE STAGE

During the fourth night of the character's watch, read the following aloud:

For more than two weeks now, the mysterious midnight thieves have been the talk of the Grand Bazaar. No one has spotted them entering or leaving, or has any idea what they look like. Rumors are flying thick and fast, with guesses as to the identity of the thieves ranging from spoiled rich brats in disguise to the ghosts of long-departed dwarfs who bear grudges against the thieves' victims. The Royal Guards, charged with keeping watch over the Bazaar during the evening, are too embarrassed by their failure to apprehend the lawbreakers to add much to the debate.

Still, there's no misfortune without some small profit to be had. In this case, the profit is yours—several merchants have pooled their resources to pay you to help keep watch over their goods during the long night hours. You've been at your post for three nights now ... three quiet, slow, boring nights. You've rarely earned silver this easily. Trouble is, it's getting dull. A little quiet is welcome ... but this much quiet doesn't suit a band of skilled adepts. On your fourth night of duty, you're beginning to wonder if the thieves will ever return.

Suddenly a hoarse shout and the clash of steel ring in the hushed night air. The quiet Bazaar is quiet no longer...

THEMES AND IMAGES

This encounter is full of contrasts and conflicting choices. Emphasize the difference between the Grand Bazaar's daytime bustle and the way it feels at night, with

all the stalls closed down and the normal cacophony of trading, music and chatter stilled. When the player characters first catch sight of the dead Pale One, emphasize the differences between the Pale Ones and any t'skrang in the adventuring party; call attention to the corpse's faintly luminous skin, crude weapons, and rough clothing.

BEHIND THE SCENES

As noted in the introduction, the adventure begins with the characters serving as guards in the Grand Bazaar following a series of mysterious thefts. Initial investigations have proven largely inconclusive; the raiding parties were careful to take things from a variety of stalls, sometimes even taking things they did not want in order to foil authorities attempting to establish a pattern for the thefts. If the adepts take it upon themselves to investigate further, they may discover the only pattern there is: though the thieves have taken a wide variety of foodstuffs, fishmongers seem to be the most frequent targets.

The characters are near a merchant's stall when they hear a shout and the clash of weapons splits the still night



air. Upon reaching the source of the disturbance, the characters discover the bodies of two Royal Guardsmen near a fishmonger's stall, and also the body of a strange, pale t'skrang.

When the characters investigate the scene of the fight, read the following aloud:

Two guards—Royal Guardsmen, by their uniforms—lie in pools of blood scant feet from a fishmonger's stall. A few feet beyond them lies the body of a t'skrang with oddly pale skin. A basket of salt fish lies overturned near the t'skrang corpse, its contents scattered across the ground. Next to the basket lie a pair of crudely made sacks, half filled with fish.

You run to the fallen guards to see how badly they are hurt. One is beyond help. The other is bleeding profusely from a nasty gash down one leg, but is still breathing. If you work fast, you may be able to save him. You snatch up the nearest thing that might serve as a tourniquet—a leather thong likely intended to tie up one of the sacks of fish—and slip it under the injured guard's leg. As you pull the leather taut, the guard stirs, moans and opens his eyes.

"They ran that way," he gasps and points weakly, "toward Tav. Catch them—hurry!"

The two guardsmen surprised the raiders in the act of emptying a basket of salt fish into their sacks. They dropped the fish and tried to run, but the guards gave chase and killed one of the raiding party. The t'skrang then decided to stand their ground; as the Pale Ones outnumbered the guards, the fight was soon over. After killing the guards, the Pale Ones fled toward their tunnel, getting a good head start on the player characters.

Pursuing the Raiders

Try as they might, the characters cannot catch the t'skrang before they reach the tunnel. Once in the tunnel, the raiders quickly make their way back to their village. In their haste to escape, however, they failed to adequately conceal the entrance to the tunnel.

As the characters head toward the Hall of Tav in pursuit, allow each to make a Perception (9) Test. One success allows the character to hear a faint sound coming from a small, little-used side tunnel (about 20 yards long). If the characters investigate the sound, at the end of this tunnel they find a pile of debris scattered around what looks like another small tunnel leading downward. The t'skrang have been using this second tunnel to enter the dwarf kingdom from below. As the characters approach the second tunnel, they hear the sound of the raiders' weapons banging against the rocks as they scramble toward safety.

If the characters choose to enter the tunnel in pursuit of the escaping t'skrang, go to **The Village of Shining Waters**, below. If not, the characters will likely go back to the site of the fight to learn more about what happened.

If all the characters fail their Perception Tests, they will pass by the side tunnel without noticing it, and will find no trace of the fleeing t'skrang. However, the gamemaster

can allow them to follow a trail of blood droplets or some similar type of evidence. When the characters enter the Hall of Tav, one or more of them may make a Perception (9) Test. If the test succeeds, the characters notice footprints in the dust on the floor near the entrance to the disused side tunnel.

Once the characters find the tunnels and decide to investigate them, go to **The Village of Shining Waters**, below.

Investigations

If and when the characters go back to the stall where the fight took place, they will find that a number of other guards have since arrived, along with several of the merchants who originally hired the characters. As soon as the characters return, the merchants ask about the raiders. Because the characters obviously have not caught the thieves, the merchants will ask the characters to track the raiders down.

If the characters resist this idea, one of the merchants will remind them that tracking down the thieves is part of their job, perhaps saying, "We're not just paying you to stand around and watch that our wares don't walk off by themselves. We want those thieves caught and the matter settled." If the characters still resist, the merchants reluctantly offer to pay them an additional 200 silver pieces each if they return with the thieves.

The Dead Pale One

Unless the characters are already familiar with the Pale Ones, it is very unlikely that they have met a Pale One prior to this adventure. T'skrang characters or others with an appropriate Knowledge skill can make a test against a Difficulty Number of 7. If the test succeeds, the character can identify the dead t'skrang as a Pale One.

A character who recognizes that the t'skrang is a Pale One also knows that the Pale Ones live in villages along portions of the Serpent River that run beneath many mountain ranges in Barsaive, including the Throal Mountains. This knowledge should tell the characters where to go next in order to find the raiders.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The only real problem arises in this encounter if the characters refuse to track down the t'skrang. Because the merchants currently employ the characters, they should agree to track the t'skrang without much argument.

THE VILLAGE OF SHINING WATERS

In this encounter the characters descend through the tunnel to the afflicted Pale Ones village, where they see the dried-up riverbed and meet the weakened, half-starved villagers. The *lahala* of the Village of Shining Waters, V'liskra, beseeches the characters to help her people discover why their life-giving river has dried to a trickle.