

The Assassin's Run



Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Official Game Adventure

The Bloodstone Wars

by Michael Dobson and Douglas Niles

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INTRODUCTION

Notes for the Dungeon Master

The four-module BLOODSTONE PASS campaign series (of which this is part three) explores what is, for the authors, one of the most interesting aspects of the AD&D® game: becoming a ruler.

Although the *Dungeon Masters Guide* (DMG) provides that a character of sufficient level can build a castle, hire an army, and set himself (or herself) up as a proper medieval ruler, the rules given therein are not sufficient to allow ruling and role-playing to go together. Instead, high-level characters who become rulers are normally considered to be “retired” from adventuring. Perhaps from time to time these old warhorses in your campaign get trotted out for a particularly tough challenge, leaving their seneschals behind to administer their dominions for a while. But mostly the campaign moves on to younger, newer characters.

More often, players avoid the burdens of rulership, preferring to maintain their high-level characters as free-lance adventurers, ready to move on to the next dungeon, carrying their treasure in their backpacks, or in the saddlebags of their mount, or in a convenient magical chest that avoids the issue of encumbrance altogether.

It's been our feeling that there is a whole lot more that can be done with characters who become rulers. The BLOODSTONE PASS saga is our attempt to show that high-level AD&D® game play can be qualitatively, as well as quantitatively, different from low- and medium-level play—and just as exciting.

In the first two parts of the series, *H1, Bloodstone Pass*, and *H2, The Mines of Bloodstone*, the PCs have defeated a bandit army and learned of a secret plot

involving Orcus, Prince of the Undead. In the process, they have managed to reopen the bloodstone mines, from which the Pass took its name, thus providing the Barony of Bloodstone with a continuing stream of revenue that will lift its people out of the mire of poverty. The characters now have the opportunity to build defenses, develop economic infrastructure, and build an army to withstand the threats that are building elsewhere in the realms of Damara and Vaasa.

In *H3, The Bloodstone Wars*, the player characters must face a new challenge of rulership—military leadership in the face of superior enemy forces. A combination of role-playing challenges and BATTLESYSTEM™ game miniatures scenarios (with optional resolution for those who aren't into miniatures wargaming) deals with the storm clouds of war that even now are forming over the baronies and dukedoms of southern Damara. These conflicts inevitably lead to war with the mysterious Witch-King of Vaasa, and his chief ally, the Grandfather of Assassins, in his mountain fortress deep in the Galena Mountains.

Pregenerated characters from H1 and H2 are provided for your use (increased in level, of course) if the players do not have characters of sufficient level to handle the challenges provided here. Although these characters were used by us to balance the adventure, an experienced Dungeon Master should have no problem in making any characters of appropriate level work in this adventure. All the characters have been designed with appropriate proficiencies, using the latest rules from *Unearthed Arcana* (UA), *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* (DSG), and *Wilderness Survival Guide* (WSG). If you are not using these newer rules, ignoring them will not make a major dif-

ference. Wherever possible, we have provided options that use the newer rules and systems in the ever-expanding AD&D® game system, but those of you who use exclusively “core” rules or homemade variants should have little difficulty. The authors will be pleased to answer questions when accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope, mailed to us using the address on the back cover.

The primary authors would like to give special thanks to Ed “Elminster” Greenwood, sage of the Forgotten Realms, for allowing us to adapt his adventure setting, *The Assassin's Run*, from DRAGON® Magazine #64, as part of the lair of the Grandfather of Assassins. He reminds us that the primary Assassin's Run is located in the great city of Waterdeep, many hundreds of leagues to the west of Vaasa and Damara. Of course, more than one Assassin's Guild exists in the various countries of the Forgotten Realms, and a good set of architectural blueprints, we felt, was likely to have made the rounds.

We should also point out that the BLOODSTONE PASS saga takes place in the FORGOTTEN REALMS™ Fantasy Game Setting, new from TSR, Inc. A certain amount of retrofitting was needed to integrate this series into our new official game world, and our thanks go to Jeff Grubb, chief translator and scribe, and to the aforementioned Mr. Greenwood, whose many years of research, development, and late-night sessions with Elminster led to the creation of this wonderfully complex and detailed world.

High-level modules are inherently open-ended, because of the vast range of options available to powerful characters. It takes skill and a firm hand to run such adventures successfully, and to handle the unforeseen in the context of the evolving campaign. Good luck, and good adventuring!

What Has Gone Before...

Players whose characters adventured in H1 and H2 should be familiar with the background information that is summarized here. Players who are new to the BLOODSTONE PASS campaign need to be given the general background; it may not hurt to refresh the memory of the other players. Certain "deep background" information (about the plot of Orcus, in particular) is given for the use of the Dungeon Master only; the players will find out the truth soon enough...

For generations, the cold northern wastes of Vaasa supported a scant population of hunters, trappers, and poor farmers. These hardy souls scabbled a meagre living from the stony soil, and barely endured the long, dark winters. But that was before the coming of the Witch-King, Zhengyi, who formed the Kingdom of Vaasa and built an evil castle atop a lonely crag, from which his sinister shadow crept across the land. Some said that Zhengyi had enlisted the aid of powerful demons, or was a demon himself, and something of this must have been true, for the Kingdom of Vaasa soon raised an army of human, nonhuman, and undead warriors—far more than the poor northern lands could possibly support. And with this army, Vaasa became a power to be reckoned with in the Forgotten Realms.

In the year 1137, the Witch-King invaded the peaceful kingdom of Damara, to the south, striking without warning. In spite of the surprise of the initial attack, the Damarans were no pushovers; the war lasted for ten long, bloody years. In the summer of 1147, King Viridin of Damara faced the Witch-King's cohorts at the Ford of Goliad in what would be the final engagement of the long war. Some say it was the treachery of the King's chief lieutenant, Felix (who was rumored to be a secret member of the Guild of Assassins, in league with the enemy), who betrayed the young king to his death, and his army into utter defeat.

The Witch-King and his secret ally, the Grandfather of Assassins (whose mysterious mountain citadel is reputed to be somewhere in the Galena Mountains), moved quickly to consolidate his victory. In a single night, the most loyal and powerful nobles of Damara were slain by sword and by poison, leaving only the craven, the incompetent, and the disloyal to sue for peace.

The Witch-King took the rich northern provinces for his own, then granted a thin independence to the southern lords...as long as they paid tribute and acknowledged the Witch-King's power. This was a shrewd political move, for each petty noble conspired against the others for scraps of power and wealth, throwing the entire south into chaos. A steady stream of refugees moved into the south, searching for an ever-elusive safety and peace.

Hardship and poverty were no strangers to the Barony of Bloodstone, situated in a narrow pass that was once the major trade route through the Galena Mountains to the north and west, including Zhentil Keep and the Moonsea. Once a prosperous province of Damara, the verdant valley of the Bloodstone Pass was home to humans, dwarves, centaurs, and halflings. In addition to good farmland and the income from maintaining a leading trade route, the famous mines were one of the leading sources of the deep-green chalcidony flecked with red jasper, known as bloodstones.

But at approximately the same time as the Witch-King's ascent to power in Vaasa, a series of disasters befell the Barony of Bloodstone.

First was the loss of the mines. Human and dwarven workers, toiling deep beneath the earth, awakened a nameless evil, and death stalked the mines. In a single night, the major source of wealth vanished. Next came the dread Wolf Winter of 1137, when a poor harvest followed by a long and terrible winter caused mass starvation, and dire wolves from the Galenas preyed on whatever they could find. And then the armies of the Witch-King closed the northern pass out of the Galenas, and trade ceased.

Poverty settled in the valley, and Bloodstone ceased to communicate with the outside world.

Within months of the death of King Viridin at the Ford of Goliad, the Grandfather of Assassins reached out to organize the bandits and creatures of the Galenas into an army in league with Vaasa. They demanded tribute from Bloodstone in the form of gold, food, and finally slaves.

Baron Tranth, fifth Baron of Bloodstone, realized he needed powerful help. But where to turn? There was no treasure with which to buy a mercenary army. He could only beg. So he sent two young villagers, Garlen and Garvin, to seek the aid of powerful adventurers.

In H1, *Bloodstone Pass*, Garlen and Garvin approached a party of brave and powerful adventurers. Although they could offer a fee of only five silver pieces per day, the adventurers agreed to help. Operating under a cloak of secrecy and aided by powerful magic, the village prepared for battle. A series of skirmishes helped whittle down the size of the bandit army in preparation for the last battle, but the cost was high. In a night of horror, a priest of Orcus conjured the dead of the Bloodstone graveyard to life, and corpses shambled the streets. But that evil, too, was defeated, and finally the power of the Grandfather of Assassins was broken.

The beautiful daughter and heiress of Baron Tranth, Lady Christine, fell in love with one of the adventurers, a brave fighter, and planned a marriage. It seemed that with powerful patrons, the Barony of Bloodstone might once again have a bright future.

In H2, *The Mines of Bloodstone*, an early winter settled in, and the villagers began to fear a repeat of the Wolf Winter. The military successes of the past few months have not solved all the problems of Bloodstone, and the adventurers are once again called into action. But as they begin to investigate the food situation, and come to grips with the problem of the dire wolves, a new night of horror descends on the village. At a home near the Abbey of St. Sollers, a peasant family has been foully massacred by worgs, and there is evidence of a vam-

pire's participation in the atrocity. And, painted on the wall in the blood of the victims, is a goat's head—the sigil of Orcus, Prince of the Undead.

All signs in the investigation lead to the long-closed bloodstone mines, and it is there the heroes go. The abandoned mine shafts are redolent with evil, and at the bottom, demons and succubi await new victims eagerly.

On defeating the demons, the heroes rescued two svirfneblin gnomes, who reveal the existence of a huge cavern city of duergar beneath the mines. Once the city was occupied by the svirfneblin, and the duergar led mean and squalid lives outside the cavern network. Over many years, the duergar preyed on the svirfneblin, but never achieved military success. Until one night, a duergar crept into the svirfneblin realm to steal food and perhaps murder a few gnomes. Sneaking through an infrequently used tunnel, he found an open mine shaft. Curious, he crawled inside, and found there a pool of mercury, glistening coldly. He felt a calling from it, a sense of implacable evil that thrilled him. He stretched out his hand, touched the mer-

cury, and was instantly transformed into a figure of transcendent horror—an avatar of Orcus, Prince of the Undead. The spirit of Orcus ravaged the city of the svirfneblin, driving them from their homes and destroying their civilization, then stalked the mineshafts and brought death to all who lived there. Then it dissipated, leaving the strange pool of mercury gleaming with an evil blue light.

The duergar were quick to exploit the destruction of the svirfneblin, and took the city for their own. Clerics of the duergar found the glowing pool, and learned its deadly secret: it was a gate to the lower planes of the Abyss, and through it Orcus might one day enter the Prime Material Plane and claim it for his own. The duergar built a huge Temple of Orcus, with the pool of mercury at its center. Guards, wards, and fiendish traps were built to keep anyone from penetrating its secrets. The svirfneblin, shattered remnants of their former glory, lurked in small caves outside the city, hoping one day to return.

Escaping through the duergar city and into the catacombs outside, the adventurers located the Gnome King, Ruggedo.

The King realized that destiny had given him an opportunity to restore his throne, and suggested that the svirfneblin military attack while the adventurers penetrated the Temple of Orcus to destroy the evil at its center.

Passing through the eight Tests of Orcus, the adventurers finally discovered the Pool of Orcus in the Dark Sanctuary at the very heart of the temple, and there managed to disrupt a ceremony of summoning at the last instant... before Orcus penetrated the Prime Material Plane!

With the rupture of the ceremony, Orcus retreated into the Abyss, and the duergar were routed from the city. The grateful King Ruggedo swore a treaty of eternal friendship, and the mines of Bloodstone were restored.

And it was thus that Baron Tranth offered the hand of his daughter, Lady Christine, in marriage, and on the first day of spring, a great wedding was held. And as a dowry, Baron Tranth gave the barony itself to his new son-in-law, retiring to become an adviser to the realm.

Yet the dark cloud of Vaasa still hangs over all the provinces of Damara, and it is clear that this battle has not yet ended...



PROLOGUE

Set-Up #1: On the Road Again...

Use this section if you have not played the earlier modules in this series.

In order to set up the adventure for new characters, you must arrange for them to visit the ex-Kingdom of Damara. Summarize the history of the Vaasan War and Damara's defeat, emphasizing the chaos in the southern provinces. The roads are choked with refugees, giving you lots of opportunities to have a refugee tell the PCs about events in the region. Plant a rumor or two about the amazing bloodstone mines in the Galena Mountains, and suggest that great wealth might be obtained there. Or have them learn about Bloodstone Pass and realize that there might be opportunities for military

command and heroism. That should be enough to get most adventuring parties on the right track. Be creative—most groups are just looking for an excuse to go adventuring.

If you are starting a new campaign with this adventure, your players can either create their own 17th-level characters, or use the pregenerated characters provided in the appendix. The characters would naturally know the history of the war, if not necessarily that of Bloodstone Pass, and might even be refugees. Arrange to introduce the characters to one another, then off you go!

To get characters from the southern provinces of Damara to Bloodstone Pass,

they must go into the Galena Mountains. Module H1 has a route map and some encounters; alternatively, REF3, *The Book of Lairs*, and REF4, *The Book of Lairs II*, contain many short adventures that can be placed along the route. No map is necessary.

Once in the village, the PCs can stay at the Inn of the Clowns, and Stephan the Innkeeper (always on the lookout for brave adventurers to join the forces of Bloodstone) can tell them about recent events in Bloodstone and introduce them to the Baron. They will be hired as caravan leaders, and go directly to Chapter One.

Set-Up #2: Bloodstone Redux

If you are continuing the campaign begun in H1 and H2, use this set-up.

If the PCs did not manage to keep Orcus from entering the Prime Material Plane, or were not able to defeat him if he did, they must somehow defeat his Prime Material presence in order to continue the saga. Of course, destroying Orcus' Prime Material presence does not defeat the true Orcus in the Abyss, but it does slow him down a little... Once Orcus emerges, the duergar in the mines form an army, and begin invading the surface world. Orcus remains in the caverns below, directing the forces from his temple. Don't give the PCs any breaks—Orcus is one of the worst opponents any party can possibly face. If they succeed, the duergar are routed and the situation begins as laid out in Chapter One. If not, then the adventure is over before it starts.

On the other hand, if Orcus never entered the Prime Material, or was defeated by the PCs, the duergar were defeated and the svirfneblin reinstated as the lawful rulers of that section of the Underdark, as provided in the previous section. The PCs returned to Bloodstone to cheering crowds, and the Baron offered to his daughter's hand in marriage to the PC fighter with the highest charisma (subject to the player's consent and proper attitude).

With Orcus defeated, the terrible winter seemed to subside, and although a certain amount of rationing was necessary to make the meagre food stocks last, the villagers survived the winter. The threat of the dire wolves subsided, and hunters were able to bring fresh meat to the people.

And on the first day of spring, a lovely and sunny day, the wedding of Lady Christine to a PC took place, following which came the Baron's surprise announcement that he was stepping down in favor of his son-in-law. Official titles were provided to all the PCs—Court Wizard, Master of the Hunt, Bard Laureate (don't let anyone feel left out).

About six months have passed since the end of H2; enough time for characters who earned enough experience points to train for level advancement. The mines are back in full swing, and a steadily-increasing supply of bloodstones is building up. Role-play everyday life in Bloodstone Pass until you feel ennui is setting in, then move quickly into Chapter One.