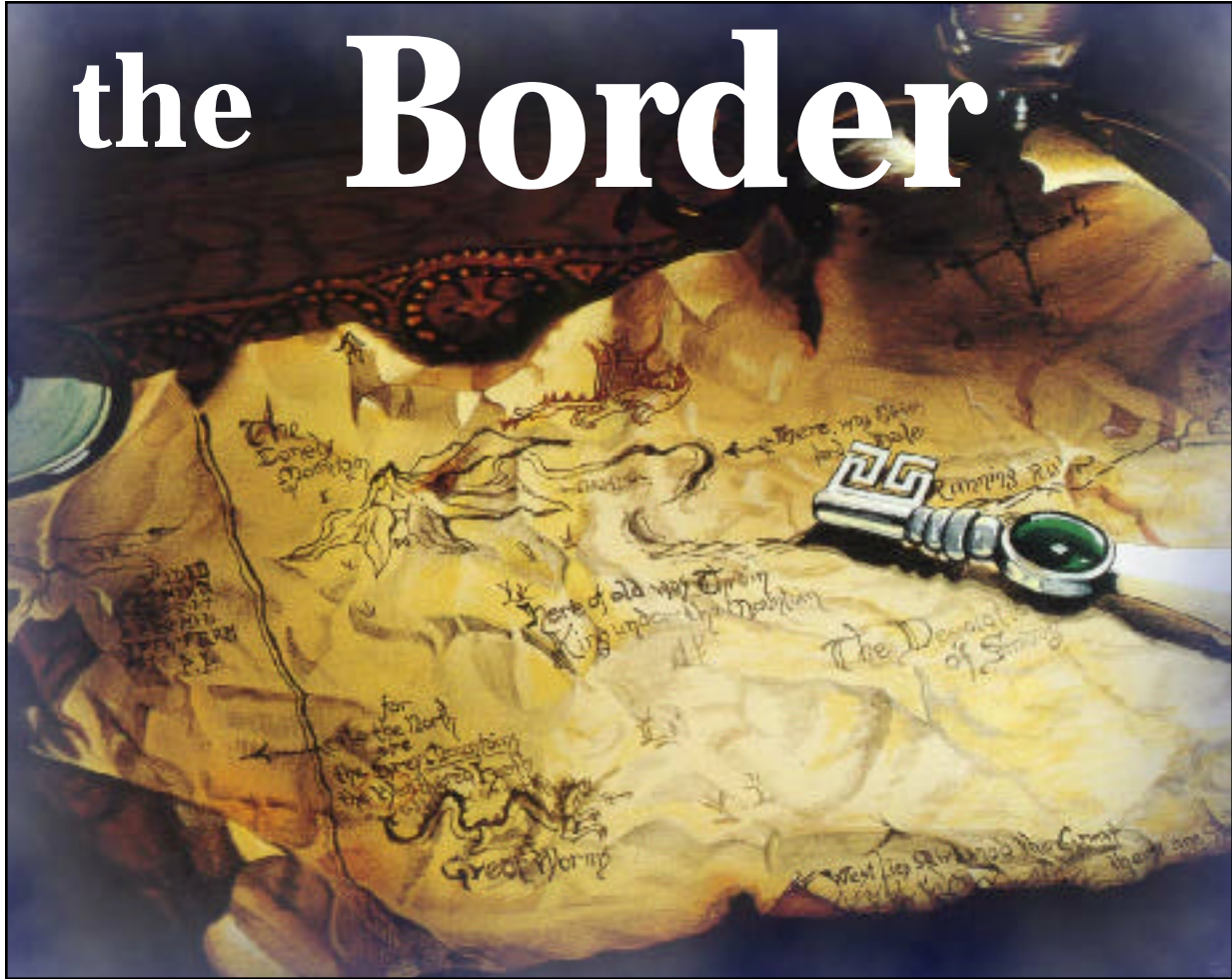


Crossing the Border



An introduction to the
Doomstones Campaign
Written by James Wallis



Introduction

One of the criticisms the *Doomstones* campaign gets is that there's no real reason for PCs to get involved with it. There's nothing driving them to investigate the clues they find or to look for the Crystals, and they don't really know what's going on or why. It's also difficult to bring in your own player characters, rather than using the pre-generated ones in the books. This brand new introduction to the campaign is designed to solve those problems in an engrossing and atmospheric adventure.

Part One: Leaving the Empire

To lead into 'Fire in the Mountains', the first part of the *Doomstones* campaign, the party should be somewhere in the Empire and looking for an adventure or mission. If they're experienced enough to begin the campaign (being in their second or third careers) then they should have a reputation as hard-bitten adventurers anyway.

So it is that the next time they're in a large town or city, they will become aware that someone seems to be watching them. It happens slowly, over a week or so: people – southerners – have been asking questions about them, of anyone from their family to past employers, travelling companions, guildmasters and innkeepers. The questions range from information about their origins and family, to what they're doing, what their last job paid, whether they're trustworthy and how good they are with their weapons. And from time to time they will get the feeling they're being followed.

The invitation finally comes on a piece of parchment delivered by a nervous urchin who has obviously been paid a lot to know nothing. Would the party meet at eight bells at the High Peaks tavern, where they will hear something to their advantage? The parchment is signed 'Baron Sigfrid'.

The High Peaks is more of a drinking club than a tavern, and unless they are doyens of fashion, PCs will feel under-dressed and out of place among so many well-attired and well-heeled southerners. If they ask for Baron Sigfrid a uniformed page will take them to a private room, where a short man flanked by two bodyguards is making short work of a decanter of red wine.

This short adventure is in two parts, each with a different purpose. The first part assumes that you haven't started running the *Doomstones* campaign, and is designed to get your characters into the Yetzin Valley, where most of the campaign takes place. The second part introduces some of the background to the campaign itself, and gives the adventurers a little idea of what is going on and why they should risk their lives to recover the four Crystals.

"Gentles, my honour it is to meet you. I am Baron Sigfrid Pavlovic." He doesn't get up. "A proposition of work I have. Most secret, most well-paid." He is, he explains, an emissary from Vidovdan, one of the kingdoms of the Border Princes. Maximilian, the heir to the throne, has been studying in the town in secret, but his younger brother, aided by the neighbouring Styrtia, has just usurped the throne. It is vital that the rightful heir return home at once. The problem is that the brother knows the heir's location, and has almost certainly arranged for him to be killed.

"This is your place," he says. "We know you have no axes to be ground within Border Princes. So. We will go south with a big force and a – how you say – a look-like. A false prince. We go the main way through the mountains, over the Black Fire Pass. You, with the Prince, go this way—" he reaches into his pocket for a crumpled parchment map, and unrolls it "—through the Winter Teeth Pass and down Yetzin Valley. I know that way, is good, is clear. Many Dwarfs. Come from there to Vidovdan. Meet with our force at the border, and ride to the capital.

"Money? Some now, much later. But we buy you horses, new armour, new clothes. What you want."

He agrees to pay 100 crowns each in advance, triple that amount on the safe delivery of the prince, and more still if they agree to take part in any conflict which might arise within the kingdom. He'll also provide each PC with a decent horse (but knows which PCs already have one) and



new equipment to a value of 75GC. But all through this he keeps stressing how important the mission is to the future of his country.

"Vital. Vital. You know? Is more important than—" he spreads his hands expansively "—my life. Is so vital. If you fail — but you will not — but if you fail, do not come on. Go back. Go home. Better yet, kill yourselves in shame."

The party are told they will leave at noon the following day, and are given a date and place for the rendezvous at the border: whatever seems reasonable, given their current location. The following morning dawns overcast. The party should assemble in the courtyard of a large townhouse — they have been given the address. There is a horse prepared for each of them, plus two others. They are fine, pure-blood beasts: in fact so purely bred that anyone with Animal Training or Animal Husbandry will immediately be able to tell that they are skittish and nervous by nature; and anyone without the Ride skill will have problems controlling their mount. There is also a tall man with slicked-back hair, directing servants. His air and voice are so superior that the PCs may assume that this is the man they will be escorting, but in fact it is Vaclav, the prince's manservant, who will be accompanying them on the journey.

Play out the mistaken identity thing for as long as it's amusing, then let Baron Sigfrid enter with the Prince. Maximilian is in his mid-20s: a trifle snooty and inexperienced but down-to-earth. Characters are expected to bow or show some obsequence on meeting him, but anyone going too far (fawning, throwing themselves to the ground, etc.) will be told:

"Stop it, man. Show some self-respect." Conversely, anyone who shows no respect to his status will be treated coldly for the first few days of travel. The Prince has a southern accent not as strong as Sigfrid's, a ready wit and a disposition towards anyone also from the south. He is more student than noble. The party should like him, and over the course of the journey should get the impression that although he is a little naive at present, in a few years he will become an able, strong and fair ruler.

Prince Maximilian

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
4	30	25	4	3	8	40	1	30	55	45	35	32	36

Skills: Blather; Charm; Cryptography; Dynastic knowledge; Etiquette; Evaluate; Gamble; Heraldry; Influence; Intimidate; Public Speaking; Read/Write; Ride; Secret Sign — Noble; Seduction; Speak language — Tilean; Stewardship; Story telling; Wit;
Possessions: Sleeved mail coat (1 AP body/arms/legs); fine horse; rapier; dagger; 50 crowns; personal journal written in code

The Journey

The journey starts wherever the PCs are now, and heads out through the Empire. The time until their deadline should mean that they have to ride quite hard, and don't have time to get distracted by possible adventures or deeds of derring-do along the way. You may want to give them a few short encounters or adventures that can be solved in an hour or two, or while they're staying overnight at an inn ('On the Road' or 'ARough Night at the Three Feathers' from *Apocrypha Now*, for example).

A few incidents do occur. Before the party leaves the Empire, as they are riding through a forested area, they will be ambushed by a small group of bandits, half on horseback. There are 1-2 more bandits than party members, and although they will flee as soon as two of their number have been killed or disabled, at least one will get a chance to attack Maximilian. It should be easy to save the Prince from harm, but the incident will show that he's not good at defending himself.

Bandits

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
4	41	35	3	3	6	30	1	29	29	29	29	29	29

Skills: Ride horse; Specialist weapon — sword; Silent move rural; Strike mighty blow (50%)
Possessions: Sword or mace; horse (50%); mail shirt (25% sleeved); shield (50%); 2D10 shillings

Lost Orc Raiders

The second important incident occurs after the PCs have navigated the Winter's Teeth Pass as they follow the Trade Road south into the Yetzin Valley. Other travellers and patrons of the increasingly rare inns will have mentioned Orcs, and the words 'Bloodaxe Alliance' have been mentioned. PCs with the History skill can make a roll to recall the three paragraphs about the Alliance given on p8 of *Doomstones: Fire and Blood*.

Towards the end of the day, as they begin to look for somewhere to camp, the party come across the remains of a small village. It has been destroyed within the last 3-4 days. There are around twenty-five corpses: mostly human, but two Orcish. The humans wear peasant garb; the Orcs wear distinctive warpaint and tattoos (see *Doomstones: Wars & Death*, p42-43). Any character born in the Border Princes and with the History skill may (Int roll) identify them as Bloodaxe Alliance markings.

If the party decide to camp nearby — within half a mile — they will be disturbed in the night by three scavenging wolves. The animals are after an easy meal, and will be able to sneak into the camp if the guard(s) fail an I test. They will flee as soon as they are attacked, but waking up with a wolf's face a few inches away is something your PCs ought to experience. You can also use this incident to establish that the Prince is a heavy sleeper.

Wolves

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
9	33	0	2	2	5	30	1	-	10	10	14	14	-

Traits: Subject to *Fear* of fire

The party will probably be on their guard against Orcs the next day, but they will find no signs of the raiders. Nor the next day, although each night wolves are heard howling.

Through Winter's Teeth

The party enter the Yetzin Valley along the trade road. The going is slow for the time of year, with a lot of weather. A day later, they come



across a small encampment. Six or seven riders begin to mount up as they notice the PCs. One rides out towards them. The Prince recognises him.

“I greet you, Severin! How come you here?”
“Well met by fortune! Sigfrid sent word by crow to your friend Dalmatin. We came to ride with you.”
They embrace.

Wily PCs will have smelled a rat, and will smell another when Severin suggests that the PCs should return home since their job is done. Naturally, as they won’t get paid until they reach the border, they will decline this kind offer. As the journey continues south the Prince and Severin talk animatedly, discussing the state of the kingdom and forming plans. The only person not enthused is Vaclav, and he is reluctant to tell why – particularly if Severin’s men are around. If pressed, he will say that it is not a servant’s place to comment, but Severin was not among the Prince’s truest friends. Attempts to talk to Severin’s men will be met with grunts or a language they do not recognise.

Severin and his five men

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel	
Severin	4	61	43	5	4	11	60	2	40	58	54	60	45	40
Men	4	53	43	4	4	9	45	2	40	31	38	50	45	40

Skills: Consume alcohol; Disarm, Dodge Blow, gamble; Ride; Specialist weapon – sword; Specialist weapon – crossbow pistol; Street fighting; Strike Mighty Blow; Strike to Stun (Severin also has: Flee!; Lightning reflexes; Sixth sense; Strike to injure; Specialist weapon – throwing weapons)

Possessions: Sleeved mail coat and helmet (1AP, all locations); sword; crossbow pistol; 12 bolts; belt-knife; provisions; horse; deck of playing cards; evil in their hearts

As night falls the group is on the edge of a forest. A few miles away, high peaks rise into the evening sky. There is a glorious sunset. Severin – who seems to assume that he is in charge – sets guard rotas: four two-hour watches through the night, and one of his men and one PC will take each watch. He will listen to argument, but will not accept less than 50% of the watches being taken by his men. As a compromise, he suggests two PCs take the first watch, then two of his men the next. If PCs want to stay awake anyway, let them. Everyone beds down for the night; Severin’s men close together, on one side of the fire.

It’s the last watch (or the second non-PC watch) when the trouble starts. Twenty minutes in, Severin’s man – a short, wiry southerner – goes back to his sleeping roll for a wineskin. In fact he quietly wakes Severin before returning to his post. Severin, without getting up, wakes the others. It’s all done so subtly that nobody will notice unless they are specifically watching the ‘sleeping’ Southerners or can make an I roll at -35.

At a given signal the wakened troops rise up, swords in hands. An awake PC can now make an I test at +25 to notice the movement; anyone who is still asleep can make an I test at -25. Severin will go over to the sleeping prince, while his men move silently around the camp (I tests at +40 or -10 to notice this), removing the PCs’ weapons. Test for Vaclav as

well. If he wakes up, he will shout to raise the alarm – until one of the Southerners goes over and whacks him on the head with the hilt of sword to shut him up. The southern guard will distract any PC guards by pointing out into the darkness, as if he’s just heard something, and muttering something unintelligible while drawing his sword. All he’s trying to do is create enough noise to distract the PC from what’s going on behind them.

If the PCs still aren’t awake by now, they’ll miss the next bit: Severin goes over to the sleeping Prince and kneels beside him, his body blocking the PCs’ view. When he stands up a minute or so later, the fading fire-light reveals his hands are red. The Prince appears to be sleeping, but his throat has been cut.

It’s unlikely that things will go this smoothly – in fact it’s almost certain that a fight will start. Severin’s men have been briefed to do one thing: keep the PCs, particularly the spellcasters, distracted and away from Severin and the Prince. Killing is not essential, but if any PC gets too dangerous then they will be put down. Even if the Prince is woken, Severin is a much stronger and dirtier fighter than he is, and will be able to overpower and kill him in five rounds.

The point of all this is that the Prince will die. Someone will put him down, even if it’s a hired man with a throwing knife. Once that’s done, Severin will call out that fighting on is pointless – their charge is dead. If they do stop, he will introduce himself as Major Severin of the new army of Vidovdan, and thanks them for their work. Obviously they will not now be collecting their payment, but on behalf of King Vuk he extends thanks for their work, and offers them a purse of gold – which he throws onto the ground. It contains 50 crowns.

At this moment the Orcs attack. It’s not a subtle attack. War-cries start about fifty yards outside the camp, and it’s obvious that the Orcs are approaching in a pack. Severin barks a command and his men head for their horses, which are between the humans and their attackers. They barely reach them before the first Orcs are in the camp. The horses take the brunt of the charge, screaming in pain and panic.

Play out the combat as a straight fight. The Orcs simply want to kill everything and steal everything else, and will break and flee if more than 50% of their number are dead or incapacitated. Severin and his men are trying to get away, whether on their horses, the PCs’ horses or on foot. Since Orcs love attacking unguarded targets, particularly from behind, it’ll be the southerners who take most of the damage at first. If by some miracle the Prince is not dead yet, he will be killed during this attack – whether by Severin or an Orc, it’s impossible to tell.

12 Bloodaxe Orcs

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
4	33	25	3	4	7	20	1	29	29	18	29	29	18

Skills: Dodge blow; Street fighting

Possessions: Sleeveless mail shirt; helmet and shield (2 AP body/head, 1 AP elsewhere); sword or axe; dagger (I +20, D2, P -20)

After the Orcs have been killed or beaten off, and Severin and his men have either escaped or died, there is little more to do. The purse of gold lies trampled into the ground, the coins scattered in the earth. The Prince’s corpse has been kicked and slashed in the combat. Vaclav is weeping and will not respond to questions – he sees the PCs as responsible for his master’s death, since they were hired to protect him, and wants



nothing more to do with them.

So the PCs are in the Yetzin Valley with some of their horses gone, no destination, little money and not much to do, and feeling sorry for themselves. Clearly a distraction is needed.

Part Two: Prophecies and Warnings

The party will almost certainly want to get some more horses – or possibly make the best of a bad job and sell the ones they were given. Someone at the next village they come to – a reasonably well-to-do place of about 50 people, called Obren – will notice this and mention that Old Milos from Cegovin village was looking to sell (or buy) some fine horses the other day. He lives to the east, up in the foothills, only a few hours ride. He'll give them directions. If they seem reluctant to go, the yokel will offer to pay them for taking a message to 'Stefan' in the same village: information about a northbound trade caravan that will be passing through Obren within a week. Savvy PCs will sniff an employment opportunity in that news.

Some of the party, particularly the ones without mounts, may want to stay behind. That's fine. Not everyone has to undertake this part of the adventure.

Although the party will have been told that the journey to Cegovin will only take a few hours, the going seems slow or the day goes quickly, and the sun is soon low in the western sky, shadows lengthening across the path. The terrain is hilly, becoming mountainous. About half an hour before sunset the party come across a small farming community – a cluster of rough buildings too small to be a village, surrounded by a four-foot wooden fence. At one side of the village is a cliff with a river running at its foot. Workers are coming in from the fields and pastures, and sheep and cows are being led into the stockade for the night. The party are greeted and invited to stay: the farmers have heard there are Orcs around, and extra bodies to defend the community are welcome.

After sunset the farmers and their families – about twenty people in all – gather in the main hall, where the evening meal is served. It's a stew with more swedes and carrots in it than meat, served with hard bread. It's Spartan fare: clearly life in this remote spot is not easy.

As the last people are sitting down for the meal, the village matriarch – Mother Katarina, a rotund woman with silver hair, a face like tree-bark and breath that smells of walnuts – will bless the food in the name of Taal, then makes a short speech of greeting. After that, everyone tucks in.

Conversation with the villagers is normal, although they show no more learning than most rural peasants. If talk turns that way, they will show strange gaps of knowledge: they believe the current Emperor is Dieter IV (deposed almost a century ago), and have no knowledge of any events in the world that happened after 2415 – not even catastrophes or invasions.

As the meal is being tidied away, a young man runs in. "Someone's at the gate," he pants. "Came from the north. Just one, I think."

Unless a PC intervenes, the Mother Katarina and two or three young men will go to the gate and, after a few questions, will let the newcomer in. It is a Dwarf, young, tired, muddy and bloodied. He wears chainmail and carries a leather satchel, of which he is very protective. He says his name is Gnarok, that he has come from the south. He has been travelling six days, on foot, staying off the Trade Road. A band of Bloodaxe Orcs

has been following him, but he thinks he has lost them. He will not say more. He eats as if he has been starved.

The villagers, meanwhile, gather in a semicircle around the main hearth, and invite the PCs and the dwarf to join them. As the semicircle is complete the matriarch rises to tell the story of the community's origins: of Empire peasants forced from their fields by a tyrannical landowner, and how they travelled south seeking a place of their own, until they found this site and built their homes here. It is a story that the villagers have clearly heard many times. Then another villager stands and tells another story, which any character with Story Telling will recognise as a version of the traditional folk-tale of the Worm of Lempberg. Then another sings a song, and a fourth recites a bawdy poem which is actually quite good.

There is a pause after this, and several eyes are turned to the PCs – obviously guests are expected to provide some kind of entertainment as well. If any is brave enough to sing, perform or tell a story, test against any relevant skills for their success and the audience's reaction in the usual way, although anything too scary will send the children running to hide behind their mothers' skirts. If no PC volunteers their skills, the villagers will give them shifty looks, and there will be murmurs about 'ungrateful northern scum'.

Once the PCs have finished their party pieces, or the villagers have finished theirs, the dwarf stands up. In a voice that is gruff and halting, he tells the following story.

Gnarok's Tale

"I don't know what the stones are, only what I've heard from the others. We Dwarfs made them thousands of years ago, four of them, here in the Yetzin Valley. Some called them Doom Stones. I don't know why, or whose doom, or what they were for, because they say the records of those times are lost. But whatever they were made for, it can't have been a good thing, because them as made them decided to split them up so they could never be joined. Mayhap they were too powerful, too strong. But one went north, one stayed here, one was given to the Elves – who lost it – he spits on the floor – and I don't know about the fourth.

"But the stones as went away know their way home. Years ago, some engineers brought one of the stones to Loremaster Hadrin. They'd had it from a human bandit, who'd had it off the Elves.

"Weeks back, Hadrin saw that another of the stones was coming back here, and he knew it was with the Bloodaxe Alliance. He 'd been learning all he could about the stones, but if the old Dwarfs thought it was best that the stones be apart, then Hadrin wasn't going to say he knew better. Two in the valley was bad enough; three would be worse, and three stones held by Bloodaxe Orcs – Hadrin would stop that, or die trying.

"The leaders disagreed. They'd never studied the stones like Hadrin had. So Hadrin gave one stone to a mage he trusted, Yazeran, and took his books and his followers, and his son, and left. Even if the Orcs got the stones, he reckoned, without the learning he had, they'd not know how to use them.

"But the Orcs were cunning, and found him. He and his followers fought hard, but were beaten back into some caves, where the Orcs laid siege to them. So he sent out a messenger, his son, to find the



mage and get his help. Because the stones must not fall to the Orcs.”

He pauses. “Before the messenger left, Hadrin told him that the books said there was a prophecy that only humans, Elves and Dwarfs together could stop the Orcs getting the stones, and save the valley. That it was their destiny.” There is a silence. He looks around awkwardly, and after a moment says, “The messenger is me. Gnarok, son of Hadrin. I ask your protection and help in rescuing the stones from Chaos.”

He goes silent. The silence persists. Finally Mother Katarina rises. “We are farmers,” she says, “but we pledge you our help. Tomorrow, who will go north with Gnarok?”

If the PCs do not volunteer, three young men will, and Katarina nods her approval. Then she thanks everyone for the words they have spoken or sung, and instructs people to go to bed – tomorrow they bring the sheep down from the high pasture, and must start early. The PCs and the Dwarf may sleep in the main hall. The farmers have their own guard roster and PCs may take a place on it if they wish – they will be woken when it’s their turn.

Cold Light of Day

The PCs will not be woken by the farmers, or by an Orcish attack, but by sunlight. Somehow they are sleeping in the cold open air. Around them lie the stone ruins of a circular building, the diameter of the meeting hall. Moss covers the stones, and thick grass covers the ground. There is no sign of a fire, or an attack, or anyone else.

PCs who search the area will find the ruins of two or three buildings: the ones large enough or important enough to be built with stone (the shrine, the matriarch’s cottage, part of the granary). All have been destroyed. There is no sign of the stockade. A fir tree at least fifty years old grows on the far side of what was the meeting hall. The village was ruined a long time ago – a century at least.

Anyone who peers over the cliff will see, halfway down it, a small skeleton. This is Gnarok, as described on p14 of *Doomstones: Fire & Blood*. He still has his leather satchel, with the ivory scrollcase and Handout 1 in it.

The PCs will find it impossible to puzzle out the mystery, and will decide to push on or head back. If they push on, in an hour or so they find the village of Cegovin, where they will be welcomed by Old Milos, who is happy to buy or sell as many horses as the PCs want to trade, at a fair price (**WFRP** p296 or *GM Screen*). He knows a little about the ruin: his grandfather told him it had been destroyed by Bloodaxe Orcs about a hundred years ago. It was a night attack and everybody was killed. He knows no more than that, except that it’s said the Bloodaxe Alliance is moving again, which means everyone in the valley is in danger. He knows nothing about any ‘doom stones’.

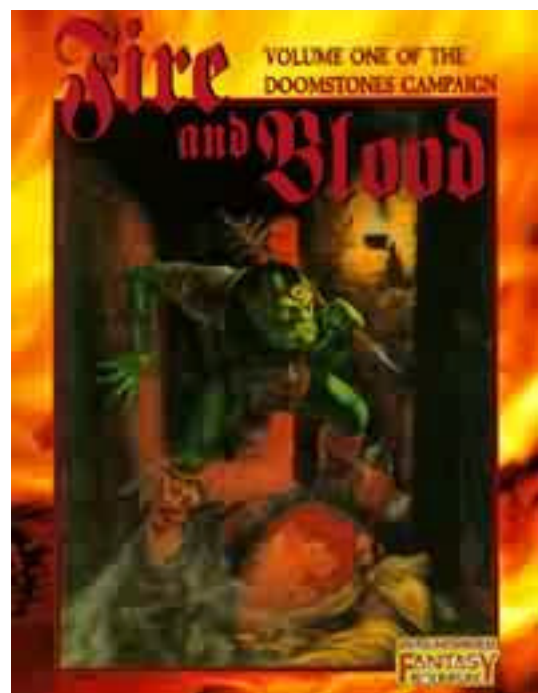
WHEN THE PCS TRAVEL BACK TO OBREN, WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE VISITED CEGOVIN, THE RETURN JOURNEY TAKES ABOUT THE SAME TIME, AND THEY ARRIVE AS DUSK IS FALLING. HOWEVER, ANY STORIES THEY TELL ABOUT SPENDING A NIGHT IN A VILLAGE THAT WASN’T THERE WHEN

THEY WOKE WILL BE TREATED WITH DISBELIEF BY THE VILLAGERS – AND ANY COMPANIONS THEY LEFT BEHIND – BECAUSE THEY HAVE ARRIVED BACK ON THE SAME DAY THAT THEY SET OUT. THERE WAS NO NIGHT, SO THEY COULDN’T HAVE SPENT IT IN THE RUINED VILLAGE. IF THEY PRESS THE POINT AND INSIST THAT THEY DID, SOME VILLAGERS MAY BECOME ABUSIVE: “THINK YOU CAN COME HERE WITH YOUR EMPIRE AIRS AND YOUR CITY GRACES AND FOOL US WITH A STUPID TALE OF THE OLD SETTLEMENT? WE MAY BE COUNTRY FOLK BUT WE’RE NOT SO GREEN AS WE’RE BROCCOLI-COLOURED OUT HERE. SAVE YOUR FOOLERY FOR A FEAST-DAY, AND BE OFF WITH YOU!”

The map from Gnarok’s satchel is a different matter. Only one man in the village – the wise man, who doubles as priest and healer – has enough learning to understand it. He tells the party that it indicates a waterfall at the head of the Yetzin Valley, and gives them enough directions to find their way there.

Onwards!

From here, the adventure segues into the first part of *Doomstones 1: Fire and Blood*. The PCs have all the information they need to find the site of Hadrin’s last stand – and, now, a reason to get involved and some hints about what’s to come. The Crystals await!



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