

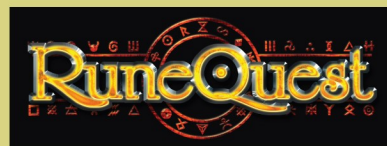


Stupor Mundi

Roleplaying in the world of Frederick II Hohenstaufen



the Hounds of Adranos



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The Hounds of Adranos

An adventure for
Stupor Mundi

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Illustrated by Dario Corallo

You will need the “RuneQuest Core Rulebook” and the “RuneQuest Companion”, or the “RuneQuest Deluxe” rulebook, in order to play this scenario. All of these books are available from Mongoose Publishing.

Ownership of the Stupor Mundi supplement, available from Alephtar Games, is recommended but not required.

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mythical background

Adranos was a fiery deity of Magna Graecia. Many scholars believe that he was in fact just another incarnation of Ephestus, as this adventure tends to confirm. In 400 BC tyrant Dyonisius I of Syracusae ordered the construction of a city on the slopes of the great Sicilian volcano, Mount Etna. The city was built near a great temple of Adranos that had been there for centuries, and so it was named after the deity, Adranon. The huge statue of the god that was in the temple, wielding a monumental spear that looked like it had a flaming tip, would guard the citizen from all dangers alike, be they eruptions or invaders.

The temple itself was guarded by a host of one thousand magnificent hounds, sacred to the god. These beasts, who were bigger and stronger than normal dogs, could discern the actual mind of all visitors, and more than once did they tear ill-intentioned guests into pieces. One peculiar behaviour that they usually showed was that of accompanying guests back home if they were too drunk to find their own way.

Summary

The adventurers are visiting the town of Adernium in Sicily, when they get involved in the mysterious disappearance of a young man with an unknown connection to the local ruler. By investigating the mystery, they discover that the poor youngster has been abducted by a daemonic hound. The adventurers must dare the underground lair of the beast in the very depths of Mount Etna, only to discover that the magical canine was in fact trying to protect the man. Once out of the dungeon, the party must confront the real threat that was attempting at the man's life in a final showdown.

Introduction

Our action takes place in Adernium, a town on the western slopes of Mount Etna, in Sicily, on a midwinter night between 1220 and 1250 AD. This small centre is what remains of the town built by Dyonisius more than 1500 years before, and is now ruled by a Norman petty noble named Wilhelm. The adventurers are on a simple mission given them by their usual employer, and must spend a night in this town on their way to the eastern coast of Sicily. They have rented a room at the local tavern, which acts also as an inn on the rare occasions when some strangers need to sleep there.

While spending their evening eating and drinking what the town has to offer, and possibly initiating a conversation with the local wenches, they notice a young man who is feasting and laughing very loudly with his friends. The

man buys them a round of drinks, too. If there is some Muslim in the party, who cannot accept the gift, the man insists that he takes at least some goat milk. No matter how loudly his friends warn him that "A Saracen is always a bandit, not worth of your generosity", he is too happy (and too drunk) to fall prey to the natives' usual distrust for Arabs.

If the adventurers inquire about the youngster's name they learn that he is Leonidas. A simple test of an appropriate Lore can tell them that it is a classical Greek name, somehow unusual for a commoner in this lowly land. The man will not tell anyone why he is so happy,

Howls and blood in the night

After some more drinking, Leonidas and friends leave the tavern and head home, staggering visibly after drinking way too much alcohol. Leonidas takes with him a huge flask of wine, drinking from it on the way home. Within a few minutes, some screams and an ominous, blood-chilling howl are heard in the night. Two villagers rush out of the tavern to see what happened. Shortly afterwards, a middle-aged woman enters the tavern and, looking at the adventurers, tells them: "You, kind travellers. You look like men-at-arms. May I beg for your help in this sorrowful night? Something went wrong, and I fear for my poor Leonidas." Of course the adventurers will accept. Just in case they ask for a reward, there is a couple of sheep worth a total of fifty silver coins for them.

The woman, who is Leonidas's mother, is named Irene, and is carrying a staff that ends with some sort of lit torch. Anyone looking at the staff and rolling below his INTx5 or his Spear skill, whichever is higher, notices that it is not a pole-mounted torch but a spade with its tip burning with an intense fire. Magical detection or an appropriate Lore test reveals that it is enchanted with a fiery spell, Fireblade. In a couple of minutes' walk the group reaches the source of all the yelling. At this point, Irene's spell ends and the spade returns normal.

A group of villagers has already assembled on the scene. They carry torches that light the gruesome sight that stands before the adventurers' eyes, and some of them are searching the surrounding countryside.

A man named Gaius, one of Leonidas's friends, is lying dead on the ground with a deep, blood-soaked cut in his belly and an arrow impaled in his left leg. Leaning to a nearby tree is the body of a man, probably a Saracen, with his eyes and his mouth still wide open like he was still screaming. His throat has been literally torn open, and an unbelievable amount of blood stains his leather cuirass. An arabian styled open helm and a scimitar lie on the ground nearby, a clear mark of the man's pointless defence against whomever, or whatever, slaughtered him.

Searching nearby reveals nothing. The villagers are becoming nervous and mumbling that Saracen bandits are in the area. If there are Muslim PCs in the party, an Influence test could be necessary to avoid unpleasant accidents. In any case, Sir Wilhelm and several of his retainers, all mounted, appear within half an hour, and stop any violence the villagers may be attempting against the adventurers. The Baron quickly questions the peasants about what happened, and after he discovers that Leonidas is still missing, he turns to Irene and asks her: "Have you seen him?". She replies negatively, almost crying.

At this point one of the armed guys that came with Wilhelm states sarcastically "Leonidas's Islamic brothers have shown up again. They are his only real friends. Too bad poor Gaius learned it the hard way." At this point the Baron shouts "Enough, Gottfried!" and orders everything carried to his castle. If they inquire about this with some villager, the PCs learn that this young man is Wilhelm's only son.

Investigations and Discoveries

Once the Baron has left, Irene asks the adventurers to escort her home. Her hut is far away in the countryside. The adventurers might want to go to the castle, instead, to talk to Wilhelm, but Irene will tell them that it is useless, as he never admits strangers into his manor. If they insist

Irene

Village Witch, AGE 37

Characteristics

STR	7
CON	15
DEX	9
SIZ	9
INT	15
POW	17
CHA	13



Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	-/5
4-6	Left Leg	-/5
7-9	Abdomen	-/6
10-12	Chest	-/7
13-15	Right Arm	-/4
16-18	Left Arm	-/4
19-20	Head	-/5

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage	AP/HP
Spade	30%	1D6+1-1D2	2/8

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +12

Magic Points: 17

Movement: 4m

Skills: Dodge 50%, First Aid 70%, Perception 50%, Persistence 70%, Resilience 35%, Lore(Animal) 50%, Lore(Mineral) 50%, Lore(Plant) 50%, Healing 50%.

Armour: None

Runes: Γ (Fertility) 65%, Π (Fire) 90%.

Spells: Endurance, Fireblade (4), Firearrow (2), Heal 4, Ignite .

and go to the castle, they will not be let in, and the only thing they will discover, if they tip the gatekeeper generously, is that Leonidas is Wilhelm's bastard son, although Gottfried has spread the rumour that his mother conceived him lying with the devil, or with some Saracen thief, instead.

If the adventurers take the time to ask, the villagers will tell them that Irene is the village “Wise Woman”. She heals the sick and invokes good weather on the crops. And when the mountain bowels groan, she appeases the mighty volcano. Some villagers will whisper the world “witch”, especially the local priest, but no one looks scared or shows any resentment towards her. If they ask about Leonidas' father, they will learn that he is probably the Baron, although a couple of young men will tell them that Leonidas must be some devil's son.

If the adventurers escort Irene to her hut, which is ten minutes' walk from the scene, they make an interesting encounter. The party sees two figures carrying another in the dark. Irene has just started running towards the three, screaming “Leonidas!”, when the PCs hear an arrow flying in the darkness and notice that the two figures have dropped the third one on the ground and drawn something that looks suspiciously like bows. Realizing what is happening, Irene hides behind a bush and lets the adventurers do the fighting.

As soon as they see the adventurers draw real weapons instead of the farming tools they are prepared to face, the two mysterious men give up and disappear into the night. The third figure, who is moaning audibly, is still where they dropped it. When they come close to it, they notice it is an Arab-looking man. His left arm has been almost torn away, and rags of flesh are still attached to the wound, clearly showing that it was not a blade that maimed him. The man is bleeding to death, and passes away in a few rounds if no one can help him. Any adventurer that can speak some Arabic can discern what his last words are, but if no one speaks the man's language it takes an Influence check to persuade him to speak Latin. In any case his last words are “The Dog, the Hellish Dog...”

At some point, whether by examining the man's wound, or by being told what he was whispering while dying, Irene realizes what happened and screams: “No! It cannot be! The Hounds took him!” When the adventurers inquire about her thoughts, Irene refuses to explain, and just mumbles: “They must have sensed he was drunk... but he was drunk before and they never showed up... they must have sensed treachery, too! The Hounds sense treachery!”

At this point the adventurers will likely start asking questions, to which Irene gives very obscure answers. If asked who Leonidas's father is, she tells that it is Wilhelm, and adds that he has resolved to adopt his bastard son, and wants to announce it on the next day. If asked what the Hounds are, her only answer is “The Hounds of Adranos escort good people who drink too much on their way home, and slay murderers and traitors”. If asked about where they could have taken her son, she screams: “Home! They took him home!” and rushes to her hut. Unfortunately, the latter is vacant.

Gottfried

Norman Noble, age 23

Characteristics

STR	11
CON	14
SIZ	15
INT	11
POW	9
DEX	13
CHA	9



Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–3	Right Leg	3/6
4–6	Left Leg	3/6
7–9	Abdomen	5/7
10–12	Chest	5/8
13–15	Right Arm	3/6
16–18	Left Arm	3/6
19–20	Head	5/6

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage	AP/HP
Sword	60%	1D8+1D2	4/10

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +12

Move: 4m

Skills: Persistence 45%, Riding 60%.

Armour: Light Chain Mail and helm (5 AP on vitals, 3 AP on limbs).

Staring desperately at her empty hut, Irene weeps and wonders “Where did they take you, Leonidas?”. Someone sooner or later will suggest that there must be some other place that the Hounds consider “home”, and Irene mumbles “Perhaps they sensed his ancestry and took him to their home...” If someone asks for explanations, Irene admits that she and her son are the last descendants of the High Priests of Adranos, so her bloodline is directly connected to the Hounds' master. Finally, when asked where the Hounds' home might be, she replies: “The Necropolis, they must have taken him to the Necropolis. Below the Necropolis...”

Now all this should be enough to persuade the faint of heart to take their two sheep reward and head back to their beds. Irene can offer to teach them magic as a reward for visiting the necropolis, but she clearly states that they need to find “tokens from the gods” in order to use her magic. In the end, we all know that adventurers do not belong to the ranks of the faint of heart, so we may assume that in a matter of minutes the party will escort Irene to the ancient necropolis of Adranon.

The Dungeon beneath the Necropolis

What remains of the Necropolis is a bunch of mounds and some broken pillars. Untold riches lie beneath, but the adventurers do not have the time to dig them up. Instead, they will notice a big stone slab in the middle of a clearing, with something that resembles a cave mouth in the vicinity. A stench of sulphur and other disgusting aromas come from the cave entrance.

Irene leads them to the slab, around which lie a lot of bones which used to belong to sheep or chickens. Something resembling a human skull is half buried in the dust upon the slab, but if someone gets too close to it, Irene shouts: “Do not touch the stone, it is sacred!” Pointing at the bones scattered around, she says “Here I offer sacrifices to Adranos, Lord of the Mountain of Fire and once Lord of this town. The Hounds feed on the sacrifices, as they are one with Adranos. Now Jesus rules this land, so I had to allow my son's baptism. When I am no more, no one will remain to worship Adranos, and the Hounds will stay in the depths of the Mountain of Fire forever.” This could elicit some bad response from priestly player characters, especially since the skull on the stone is in fact a human skull. But this is another story.

A flask of wine is lying on the ground near the underground entrance. Some of its content has poured out and is being absorbed by the soil, but the container is still half full. Everybody can tell that it is the same flask that Leonidas was carrying when he left the tavern.

At this point Irene looks at the cave entrance and says: “I cannot go any further. This place is forbidden to me.” If asked whether the party should enter the cave, she replies: “You all worship Jesus or Allah, so Lord Adranos cannot take his revenge upon you if you defile his rest place. He will not be pleased by my sacrifices any longer if I allow you to do this, but I want my son back. This means the village has to resort to Jesus for protection, from now on.” Then she adds: “And there could be guardians below...”

The party can now enter the cave. Branches taken from the outside can provide rudimentary torches, and Irene obviously knows how to set them ablaze. The stench in

the cave is unspeakable, but the party encounters no obstacle at first. After a few meters, they enter a square room with a huge stone sarcophagus shaped as a Greek hoplite. At the far end of the room is a big stone door.

As soon as the party moves beyond the stone structure, a translucent figure rises from the sepulchre, dressed as an Achaean hero, and whispering “Dyonissssiussss, Dyonissssiussss” in a high-pitched, eerie voice. In a matter of seconds the adventurers are in melee with the spectral warrior, who wields his eldritch spear like he was Achilles himself. No matter how accurately the adventurers strike, any blows from non-magical weapons will just be blocked by his spectral shield, while the immaterial spear causes all-too-physical wounds to the adventurer bodies, piercing through shields and armour as if they did not exist.

Spectral Hoplite

Guardian of the Underworld

Characteristics

STR	-
CON	-
DEX	-
SIZ	-
INT	15
POW	14
CHA	9

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Ghostly Spear	50%	1D8

Hit Points: 14

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +24

Move: 14m

Skills: Dodge 30%, Persistence 60%.

Armour: none, but non-magic weapons are ineffective and seem to be blocked by large shield.

Traits: Dark Sight, Night Sight, Recurring.

Notes: Attack cannot be parried, only dodged, and ignores all armour.



If the adventurers understand the real nature of the guardian but do not have any combat magic with which to harm him, they still have one hope. Irene is still a few seconds from them, and they should have guessed she knows Fireblade earlier that night. She is not eager to cast this spell, as she is low on magic points and wants to save some in order to heal Leonidas when they find him, but she can enchant two weapons in order to make them deal 1D10 magical fire damage.

Once the spectral guardian is dispatched, the party can go on into the bowels of the earth. After the room the path is clearly no longer man made, and the stench of sulphur becomes stronger. The passageway becomes narrow, and the adventurers must succeed in an Easy (+40%) Athletics skill test or suffer one level of fatigue due to the difficulty of walking down and the presence of a massive amount of carbon dioxide. The torches burn out after a few minutes, but there are strange rocks in the walls that resemble burning coals and shed some light. The temperature becomes almost unbearable. At one point the leading character must make a Perception test or step on a lava puddle, taking 1d4 heat damage to a random leg, ignoring armour.

The Hound of Adranos

After half an hour's descent, the adventurers find an almost impassable area. The corridor widens, and the floor turns into semi-solidified lava. Walking upon it could be dangerous, but luckily this looks like the end of the adventurers' journey. Leonidas is lying on the ground, covered in bruises and small cuts, but with no marks of worse injuries. A huge, pitch-black canine figure, bigger and scarier than any hound the adventurers have ever seen, is trying to drag him across the lava, holding him tight but gently by his right shoulder. The Hound has an arrow protruding from one of its hind legs and a large, gaping wound on its belly is leaking big drops of blood, which evaporate into a reddish, sulphurous vapour as soon as they hit the lava surface. The hound is actually walking upon the lava pool, undisturbed by the burning substance, and after a few moments the adventurers notice that also Leonidas's skin seems to suffer little or less damage from the contact with the red-hot lava. Maybe his mother was correct when she stated that the Hounds had recognized his ancestry as their own.

As soon as the beast senses the adventurers, it leaves hold of poor Leonidas and stares at the intruders, producing a menacing growl that sounds more like it is coming from the bowels of the volcano rather than the interiors of a beast. Its eyes produce sparkles, and an unnatural reddish glow is visible deep inside its mouth. Everything in its appearance says "Hades".

Hound of Adranos

Canine being from the Netherworld

Characteristics

STR	11
CON	9
SIZ	14
INT	5
POW	10
DEX	15
CHA	3



Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Hind Leg	3/7
3-4	Left Hind Leg	3/7
5-7	Hind Quarters	3/3
8-10	Fore Quarters	3/10
11-13	Right Fore Leg	3/7
14-16	Left Fore Leg	3/2
17-20	Head	3/8

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage
Bite	50%	1D8+1d4

Combat Actions: 3

Strike Rank: +10

Movement: 6m

Skills: Dodge 35%, Resilience 60%.

Armour: Hide and fur (3 AP)

Traits: Fire Immunity, Dark Sight, Night Sight.

Notes: Bite does 1D3 extra fire damage if target fails a Resilience test. Wounds described in the text are included in location Hit Points.

At this point the adventurers can try and kill the beast. It is clearly wounded and wearied, but the passageway allows only two of them at a time to engage the infernal canine. However, any successful Lore (Animal) or Lore (appropriate mythology) test can tell the characters that the hound will not attack as soon as their intentions are clearly peaceful, no matter how loudly it growls. The beast will not, however, allow them to take Leonidas away until one of them has tried to cure the young man's wounds or its own. If no one of the characters has healing magic or First Aid, yanking out the impaled arrow is

enough to befriend the hellish creature. It will certainly complain about the pain and scare the hell out of the brave surgeon, but in the end it will be grateful for it. As soon as they have performed some healing, the hound stops growling and barks happily, showing teeth as long as daggers in the process, and licks the hand of the nearest character who provided his help. Unfortunately, his burning tongue causes 1 point of damage to the character if he fails a Resilience test.

There is another way to persuade the hound that the adventurers are friends. If they have marked Irene's words

and also taken the wine flask with them, one of them can now drink its entire contents. The character must succeed in a Resilience test or suffer 1d6 impairment to all his skills, but in any cases he becomes visibly drunk, and the hound is immediately aware of it. As soon as the character cleans his mouth after the last drop of wine, the beast is at his side, and begins to push him gently towards the exit. Climbing back while being "gently" accompanied by such a behemoth is not the easiest of tasks, however, and the character must make two Athletics tests at -40% or suffer 1d4 damage to a random location which is scratched by a sharp rock. This, however, leaves his companions with the time to lift Leonidas from the ground and put him on their shoulders. As soon as the hound realizes that they are in fact helping him, it lets them go on and carry him outside.

There is an interesting piece of treasure in the lava. On a small rock in the centre of the puddle there is a warmer, less glimmering rock that has a bright stone encased into it. This stone shines more brightly than the surrounding lava and emanates a faint reddish glow. Carved in it is the Greek letter Π. It takes a Perception test to notice it, with a +40% bonus if a character is actively searching in the lava. Anyone using a magic sight spell immediately notices the stone and has his INT x3% (or an appropriate magic Lore, whichever is higher) chance of identifying its nature.

The stone is a Fire Rune, and the Π stands for the Greek word for Fire, Πῦρ. It takes a brute force Athletics test to take it out of the rock with a dagger or another pointed tool, with 1D3 points of heat damage to a random leg for each failed attempt, ignoring armour. Anyone who has actually performed any form of healing on the Hound has a 40% bonus to his Persistence test to integrate this Rune.

The way up is even harder than the way down. The heat is still unbearable, and the characters must make an Athletics skill test to avoid one level of fatigue. Anyone who is wounded, harassed by the Hound, carrying Leonidas, or fumbles the roll also suffers 1D4 falling damage on a failure. Anyone who rolls a critical success can provide support to everyone else's roll.

Final confrontation

Sooner or later, the adventurers are back to the surface. The sun is now rising, and Irene is still waiting for them. As soon as she sees her son, she screams his name and rushes to his side, chanting a healing spell. Leonidas has two points of damage in all locations for being dragged by the Hound, and has been brought to 0 Hit Points in the head by a big crushing blow, but is otherwise unharmed. When the adventurers are out of the dungeon and can breathe fresh air once again, they can attempt a Resilience test in order to recover from one level of Fatigue.

Saracen bandits

Ordinary thugs

Characteristics

STR	13
CON	9
SIZ	14
INT	9
POW	9
DEX	11
CHA	8



Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	-/5
4-6	Left Leg	-/5
7-9	Abdomen	2/6
10-12	Chest	2/7
13-15	Right Arm	-/4
16-18	Left Arm	-/4
19-20	Head	-/5

Weapons

Type	Skill	Damage	AP/HP
Scimitar	50%	1D6+1+1D2	4/10
Bow	50%	1D8+1D2	

Combat Actions: 2

Strike Rank: +10

Move: 4m

Skills: Persistence 20%, Resilience 40%.

Armour: Leather cuirass (2 AP on torso).

At the moment the adventurers are beginning to feel safe, one figure steps out of the shadow of a nearby mound. It is Gottfried, in full armour, and he immediately shouts: "Ah, he is still alive! Do yourselves a favour, hand him over to me with his mother, and I shall spare your lives." If the characters draw their weapons or ask him how he is going to kill them alone, Gottfried makes a gesture and the two surviving thugs appear, half covered by bushes, their bows drawn and ready to shoot.

The attackers are some fifteen metres from the party and have plenty of cover. The adventurers are likely to be hit by a couple of arrows from each bandit before engaging them in melee. Irene has a few magic points left and will heal anyone who goes down, but only if he is really incapacitated. She will not cast Fireblade spells this time. As soon as one thug is out of the fight or he himself is wounded, Gottfried will disengage and flee. His horse is in the vicinity, so it is likely that he can escape.

If the party is about to be overcome by the attackers, or just for fun, you can have the Hound show up. The beast might have followed a drunk player character, in which case it will appear on the third round of combat, directly in the middle of the fight. If the dog has not followed the party, instead, it will show up as soon as anyone shouts the words "Treachery" or "Traitor" aloud. Have Irene do this if the adventurers do not realize it on their own.

Whatever the reason for its appearance, the Hound throws itself into the fight like an avatar of Vengeance, growling and howling like a pack of wolves. Its eyes glare like burning coals and its breath does not produce mere vapour in the cold winter morning, but real flames. Its appearance will immediately cause Gottfried's retreat, and wounded thugs might opt to surrender at its sight, only to die a heinous death in the grip of its jaws. If the beast pursues the fleeing Gottfried, he will scare the hell out of his horse, and the poor fellow will not be able to ride to safety. Unless he begs for mercy and swears to no longer attempt at his half-brother's life, he will be torn to pieces by the enraged Hound, and even in this case it takes Irene a big deal of chanting long-forgotten verses to calm the creature down.

Epilogue and rewards

If the party killed Gottfried, it will be hard for them or Irene to prove that it was not Leonidas who conspired against his half-brother, unless it was the Hound who killed him. Leonidas and his mother will be forced to flee Adernium, but they will still be grateful to the adventurers for saving the young man's life. If Gottfried is captured, instead, he swears he will accept Leonidas as his rightful brother if his father wants to adopt him. After realizing that the Hounds can sense his treachery, he will keep his word by all means.

If Gottfried managed to escape, he immediately flees to the castle. However, if anyone shouts "Traitor" or "Treachery" at the fleeing villain, his father's mansion will be mysteriously surrounded by a pack of huge, howling black dogs just before he can enter it. Gottfried must now flee his home, too, and will not be seen again for several months. Persuading the Baron that the presence of the beasts is due to his new son's ancestry and not to black magic, however, is another story.

Irene will no longer offer sacrifices to the Hounds of Adranos, as the god does not welcome her offerings any more. Stories about black dogs feasting at night on evildoers will be told in the area in the decades to come, until the cave in the necropolis collapses due to an eruption and the Hounds are never heard of any more. In any case, if the adventurers have found and integrated the Fire Rune, Irene will teach them all her Fire magic for free. She will also instruct them in Healing for free.

If Leonidas is finally adopted by the Baron, there is a reward of 150 silver coins for everyone in the party, and the adventurers have gained a powerful ally in the area, especially if Gottfried is killed or there is some chance that Leonidas becomes the next Baron after his father's demise. Leonidas will retain the power to call upon the Hounds if he is about to be betrayed, but it is possible that he does not realize it. Perhaps he needs the adventurers' help to figure it out?

Did you enjoy this adventure?

You can find more medieval adventures in "**Stupor Mundi: roleplaying in the world of Frederick II Hohenstaufen**", a complete game setting for the RuneQuest™ role-playing game. More info at:

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