

## Part B-1: Ruins of the Sea King



**Day 1:** After spending some time in the cargo hold, as it were, Corduwin finds himself on a beach with the rest of the party, where the latter have managed to brutally slaughter an orc tied to a post stuck in the sand in the previous session. He is informed that his companions are now on a quest to retrieve a powerful magical sword they believe to be hidden somewhere to the north or northwest – as indicated by their magical compass. Our hero tries to find out where he is on the map the DM has gracefully provided him with via e-mail earlier but he is informed that his location isn't really on that map – obviously, his companions have opted to stray from the path provided by their DM once more, an unfortunate habit that always seems to govern the actions of some of them regardless of which PC they actually run in the adventure.



And so the DM procures another map, which puts the party on the coast of the Orc Lands, somewhere between Outpost 82 to the southeast and King's Ruins to the northwest. The landscape is dead, gray, and devoid of living things – as if all life has been sucked out of it. Nevertheless, the party are told that “some oases dot the land”, although it is not quite clear how they know this, for none of such are in sight at the moment. Still, they are informed that they can see a line of trees somewhere to the northwest.

Since the magical compass indicates that the sword is somewhere to the northwest, this sword is known to the party as “the Sword of the Sea King”, and the second map features a place called the “King's Ruins” to the northwest, Corduwin suggests the party start walking to said ruins and starts doing so.

Our heroes haven't gone far when loud screeching caws alert them to a flock of scruffy, raven-like birds passing



overhead. The creatures are some 3 feet long, with a wingspan of about 6 feet, and they fly in northwesterly direction until they reach the trees, make a U-turn, and start circling above the party. This prompts Lubomir to stay behind for a bit, which results in one of the birds initiating a descent and him hurrying back into the fold – which he then doesn't when Fonlon procures a bow and shoots an arrow at the creature, and then does again, and then doesn't again, all, it seems, in reaction to various remarks of the DM. It's a bit of a mess.

Anyway. Although the bard manages to hit the creature, his arrow doesn't bother it in the slightest, instead falling back to the earth, its tip now blunt.

"It's a construct," Walewein says.

"It's made of stone," Fonlon says.



"They may be spies of some kind," Corduwin says, after observing the birds and the to-ing and fro-ing for some time and concluding that the birds do not appear to be aggressive for the moment. "Maybe someone is watching from the ruins."

But the rest of the party are not very interested in what he has to say and the farcical behavior continues for a bit until our hero has had enough and starts walking again.

And so the party eventually reach the treeline they saw earlier, which turns out to be a forest as dead, gray, and drained of life as the rest of the landscape. Although they do not really need to enter the forest – it appears they can avoid it by sticking the beach – they decide to do so anyway because the King's Ruins must be somewhere in it and also because they spot what appears to be green vegetation deeper into the trees, as if the forest isn't so dead anymore over there.

Our heroes enter the forest to the loud caws of the birds overhead, which do not follow them into the trees. They soon reach the green bit and find it to be a section of forest that is very much alive – an old English mixed forest of numerous massive, ancient oaks and the lush vegetation of a temperate rainforest. They continue on their way and walk among the trees for some time until the forest turns dead again and they reach an open area with some



mountains in the distance.

"Is this on the map?," Corduwin asks.

Walewein shows him the map but there is no clearing of any kind on it.

"Strange," Corduwin says, looking around. "Why wouldn't this be on the map? It seems large enough."

He has another look at the map, another look around.

"Whoa," he suddenly realizes. "We're actually on the other side of the forest. See? That's these mountains over there. So where's these King's Ruins?"

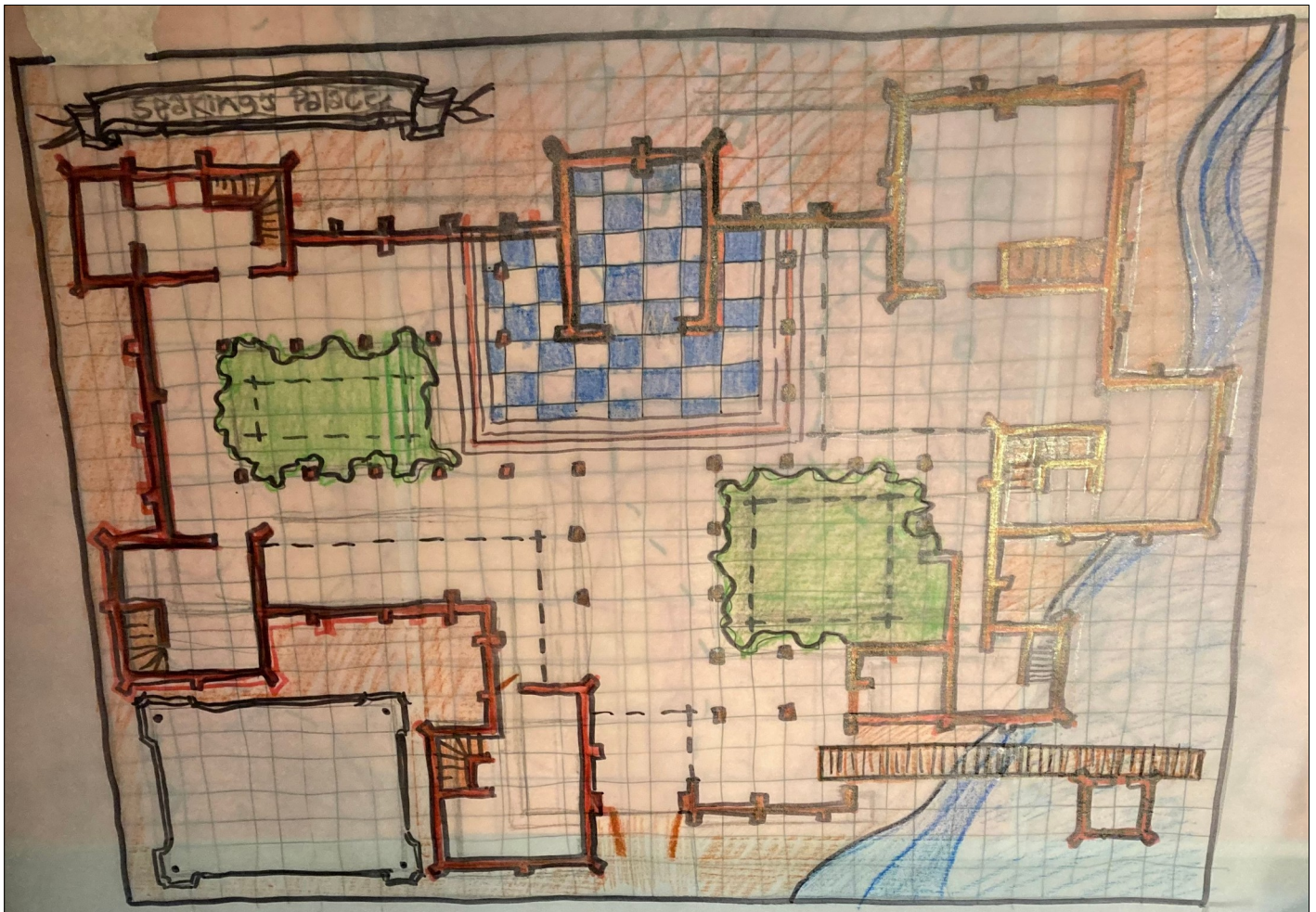
Despite the fact that he is not the brightest – in fact, he has been misinterpreting the map ever since he clapped eyes on it, most notably where its scale is concerned – it soon turns out that he is right, especially after Walewein has asked the magical compass where the sword is and it presently points south.

"So how did we miss the ruins?," Corduwin asks, perplexed. "Maybe the green bit is just called 'King's Ruins' and there's actually no ruins in it?"

"Nonsense," the ranger says. "There must be ruins. The sword is hidden in them."

It's all a bit of a mystery and the party eventually decide to head back to the green forest anyway, for it is now late in the afternoon and all agree that they'd rather spend the night in a living forest than a dead one, if only because the evil birds do not seem to be willing (or able?) to fly over the green area, which could mean that it may well provide our heroes with some protection from any aggressive inclinations the creatures might give in to under cover of the night.

When the party reach the green forest again, Lubomir suddenly stumbles on a rock or block of stone of some sort and falls flat on his face. Mightily vexed but pretending he isn't, he gets to his feet and continues as if nothing has happened, pseudo-casually informing the DM that he starts looking for more blocks of stone. And so the party spread out, with Corduwin heading west, convinced that the ruins won't be to the east because that would put them on the beach, which the second map doesn't say they are. He doesn't get very far when someone locates a raised section in the forest floor, and then another one. Some steps?



Turns out the party actually find themselves in the very center of the ruins of the Sea King's Palace, which, over the last

century, have crumbled and become overgrown to such an extent that they can now no longer be seen.

“So how come the vegetation is much older than a hundred years?,” Corduwin wonders aloud, forgetting that the vegetation actually covering the ruins need not necessarily be as old as the surrounding forest.

But Fonlon and Walewein have already started looking for a trapdoor they believe must be somewhere in the forest floor and they actually find one after some time – and a large one at that. This ‘trapdoor’ turns out to be a large flagstone that markedly differs from the others they have uncovered in the meantime and it opens to reveal a shallow, grave-like space containing a leather case. Without a second thought, Walewein picks up the case and opens it, procuring an old parchment. He unrolls it and it turns out to be a map of the ruins – apparently not much to his surprise – which the DM now hands to him. Also on it is a text that reads something along the lines of: “... an archeologic map of how the palace used to be... (100 years ago) there is a sword!!!”

The map is quite comprehensive and it shows all of the “king’s palace” in detail, as well as that the ruins are actually located quite close to the sea – which is, in fact, only yards away. Needless to say, this only adds to the confusion of our hero – he seems to have been misreading the map once again.

**Night:** Since evening has fallen, the party decide to make camp in the ruins. Their slumber is only disturbed when Corduwin, on guard at the time, hears something rustling in the undergrowth around the camp and decides to wake the others. Instantly, Fonlon climbs into a tree, claims that he can see in the dark and starts shooting arrows at... some squirrels. Turns out an uncommonly large group of squirrels (or chipmunks) had surrounded the camp unnoticed and are presently speeding to safety – a phenomenon with which Lubomir seems to disagree, claiming that squirrels never occur in such numbers. Well, he’s a druid, so he probably knows best.

**Day 2:** At the instigation of Walewein, most of the party start looking for ‘the secret door’ the ranger is somehow certain must be there. Hours and hours of digging follow, which Corduwin uses to explore the ruined palace some more. This takes him ‘all the way’ to the beach, where he finds that only little remains of the tower in the sea and the walkway that used to lead up to it. When he returns to what used to be the central courtyard later that day, his companions inform him that they have found the secret door in the ‘library’ and that they are presently attempting to open it. This turns out to be fairly easy and a steep flight of steps leading down into the darkness below is revealed.

Our hero lights his lantern and starts down the steps, closely followed by Walewein, with the rest of the party staying behind for a bit. The steps continue some way until they end in a largish underground room some 6 ft wide and 15 ft deep, with no exits. The walls feature intricate mosaics of marine and underwater scenes and there are no obvious signs of there ever having been water in the room – remembering the Temple of the Sea Goddess, Corduwin felt he had to check.

When he and the ranger are about to enter the room, Fonlon comes running down the steps, pushes past them and charges into the room – where he loudly expresses his amazement at the beauty of the room (“Oh, how beautiful!”), says that he feels a song coming on but that he won’t sing ‘coz Ludolf has told him no too (in fact, Corduwin is told that he may thank the gods that the bard did not bring his ukulele), seamlessly joins Walewein in searching for yet another secret door they also know to be there, and instantly finds it, to utterances along the lines of: “Click, pof..., oh, ha-ha-ha!”

Now, Lubomir appears in the room out of thin air, adds the room to the map he has started to make and states that he already knows what size the room behind the secret door will be and that the secret door in it is going to be in the south wall – apparently, he has been in a lot of dungeons in his time. He turns out to be right as far as the size of the next room and the location of the exit are concerned, but the latter is not a secret door but rather a set of huge, ornate double doors featuring a carving of a male triton on the one to the right and one of a female triton on the one to the left, each obviously in some underwater environment. Slightly alarmed, Corduwin checks the room but doesn’t see any signs of flooding.

Having some experience in dungeoneering himself and fully aware of the fact that tritons are not to be trifled with, he draws his sword and takes some steps back when Walewein starts pulling at the doors... which open as if they have no weight or mass to speak of.

Beyond is another room, as wide as the last one but less deep, with a single door in the north end of the east wall. The walls feature mosaics like those in the previous room and a plain, bench-like construct sits under some pegs on the west wall. A waiting room?

Taking yet another step back when people start running to and fro again, Corduwin observes Walewein and Fonlon opening the door and discovering a room behind it, with another door in the east wall. Cupboards, sideboards, and shelving line the walls and Walewein subjects the room to a cursory inspection, concluding that it must be a storage room of sorts. When he is finished, Fonlon, who has been running from one room to another like a headless chicken, opens the door in the east wall and calls for someone to enter the room thus revealed. And so Walewein enters the room, which turns out to have two beds in it and a small chest in one corner, from which he retrieves 20 sp.

Left with nowhere to go and now fully into the dungeoneering spirit – albeit in wildly different ways – the party start looking for secret doors, which they eventually find in the south wall of the ‘waiting room’ and in the shape of a set of

double doors made to look like the wall. Being the vooroppest ever since the rules for surviving in dungeons have yet again made Corduwin to stay back until his enterprising companions have suffered the consequences of their erratic behavior, Walewein opens the doors and finds himself looking at some pillars – columns that run down the middle of a long, wide corridor stretching east and west and seem to support a ceiling lost in darkness.

“It’s a corridor with pillars,” he informs the others.

“We’re going east,” Lubomir says, looking at the map.

And so the party turn east, lighting various ancient light sources they find along the way until they end up at a corridor-wide flight of steps leading a short distance up to a raised section where a massive, carved wooden throne lies on its side. The mosaics on the walls here are of an exceptionally splendid nature – being composed of all manner of valuable metals and minerals as they are.

“That is a large throne,” Corduwin says, looking up and down the corridor but seeing no signs of violence. “I wonder what caused it to topple.”

When Walewein steps onto the raised section and manages to put the throne upright, the whole corridor suddenly shudders, as if the very bedrock itself trembles for a moment. Corduwin, still with his sword in his hand and at the bottom of the steps, takes several steps back and looks around in alarm. Trembling bedrock? What can cause bedrock to vibrate? An earthquake? The sea crashing against the walls from the outside while they are not actually bedrock but perhaps disconcertingly thin walls of stone only just managing to hold back the raging water? Indeed, he now notices that the corridor isn’t as dry as he would have liked it to be, with water dripping from the ceiling in numerous locations. However, his companions do not seem to be overly bothered by the phenomenon. First because Walewein immediately sits down on the throne, and, second because the rumbling seems to be Fonlon’s cue to suddenly charge down the corridor like an excited hare, which leads the discovery of a similar flight of steps at the other end far to the west, leading up to another raised section – this one with an exit at the back in the south wall. He also locates numerous doors in the north and south walls, which eventually prompt him to speed back to his companions at the other end.

“Many doors down there,” he breathes when he gets there. “Too many doors. I don’t like too many doors.”

“There’s doors here as well,” Walewein says, having stepped down from the throne and moved further onto the raised section.

And sure enough, there are two doors in the north wall and a single one in the east wall – this one carved to resemble the throne in the room. When the latter doesn’t appear to give an inch, Fonlon opens one of the doors in the north wall, announces the fact, and waits for someone to enter the room behind it first.

Walewein does so and finds the room to contain a selection of fancy porcelain and two small glasses of exceptionally fine crystal, which, unfortunately, leads to yet another episode of what has become a rather regrettable habit of late, when various PCs start running to and fro, yell and scream at each other, and engage in other misplaced acts in complete disregard of the dangers of the dungeon and, perhaps more importantly, rather blatantly disrespecting the effort the DM has put into the evening. To make a story rather too long very short, the bard and the ranger take one of the glasses each and start toasting each other with water before the latter speeds off to collect the small chest from the servants’ quarters and starts stuffing it with the porcelain when he returns, stating that he is “a greedy ranger”.

Anyway. When the entertainment is over, the party turn their attention to the door that won’t move.

“It won’t budge,” the ranger says, after he has tried it again and presently looking reproachfully at Corduwin from across the table. “We’ll have to ram it down together.”

“Doesn’t work that way,” the latter says. “What’s your Strength?”

“Well, it is **not** what it used to be,” the ranger says.

“Ah, yes, sorry about that,” Corduwin says, smiling apologetically. “Well, what do you expect when you **die and go to Hades!** Anyway... do you have a number in brackets behind the Open Doors score on your sheet?”

When he doesn’t and Corduwin turns out to be the only one who has, it falls to our hero to break down the door himself. So he gets to his feet where he has been sitting with his head in his hands near the secret doors to the waiting room, moves down the corridor to the raised section and hurls himself against the door, which only gives about an inch ... and then the bedrock trembles again. Holding his breath and only releasing it again when the corridor doesn’t collapse or flood, he informs his companions that there was at least some movement in the door this time, as if something keeping it closed yielded for a moment. Indeed, he is now informed that he has managed to get the door slightly ajar and Walewein presently shines a lantern through the opening – stepping back quickly when its light is reflected back at him in an alarming and above all blinding fashion.

When some more pushing against the door doesn’t lead to it opening and some more shining lights through the opening keeps resulting in something exceptionally bright and shimmering reflecting them back, the party can only conclude that something is holding the door closed, sort of, that the door can be made to move if sufficient force is applied, sort of, and that something in the room reflects any light shone into it back to blind the one doing so. WTL? A mirror? A light-reflecting force field that only yields in an erratic fashion or when certain unknown conditions are met? Eventually, when Corduwin also shines his lantern through the opening and ends up touching the door in the process, it suddenly opens to about halfway with ease. He still ends up temporarily blinded by the glaring thing behind it, though,

and some more experiments with light eventually lead to the notion that there is something behind the door that is about as high as a man, covered in silver-blue scales, perhaps shaped like a serpent or serpentine body, and that the sound of something breathing slowly comes from within the room.  
A dragon? Surely not?

Pausing their efforts for a moment in light of their discovery, the party discuss what could be behind the door. But they cannot reach a definite conclusion and then Fonlon announces he looks into the room using the door as cover, is told to make a saving throw, fails, and slumps to the floor. He is dragged to safety and found to be fast asleep. Now even less sure as to what to do, the party hesitate some more until Corduwin, annoyed that no one seems to be able to get a clear picture of what is in the room other than “maybe some (part of?) a snake-like thing reflecting light in a blinding fashion”, takes a deep breath and steps into the room, shield raised and sword at the ready. He is told that a huge lower jaw with feelers or fins of some sort passes right in front of him – and immediately takes several steps back. WTL? A huge naga? Some huge marine snake but then out of the water? A serpentine dragon? All manner of serpentine creatures pass before his mind’s eye but he can only conclude that he has never seen anything like it, that it seems to have a strong aversion to light, and that it all but fills the entire room. He informs his companions of what he saw.  
“So now what?,” he wonders. “It is obviously some sort of huge creature. A guardian? Is it trapped in there?”  
“*Kapotslopen die bende!*,” Ludolf comes suddenly.  
Indeed. He doesn’t say much, this mage, but what he does say is invariably proof of his rather unpleasant outlook on things.

Some experiments with variations on the above idiom – “*Kapotdoodmaken!*” – follow until Corduwin says that he’s not going to kill a living creature without good reason and most certainly not when he doesn’t even know what it is. Walewein disagrees, arguing that he wants the Sword of the Sea King, that the creature is obviously the guardian of said sword, and that it is therefore there to be killed. Torn between role-playing his alignment and the fact that he seems to have ended up in a dungeon of old-school proportions, Corduwin doesn’t really know what to say to this.  
“Maybe we should talk to it?,” Walewein suggests.  
Although Corduwin doesn’t believe much in talking to snakes – he cannot believe it will be a dragon at this level – Walewein steps through the door, says something inaudible, fails his saving throw, and sags to the floor, fast asleep. More trembling of the bedrock follows as Corduwin steps into the room to pull his companion out of the room. And now, in the light of the lantern dropped by the ranger, he gets his first clear view of the creature: it is a huge, serpentine monster, perhaps 15 yards long and with a body as thick as a man is tall, with silver-blue scales and a large, draconic head with a toothy maw. He is informed that it is a sea wyvern – something he has never heard of and otherwise finds hard to reconcile with what he sees – and that it is in its lair. He pulls Walewein out of the room and is told that the sea wyvern doesn’t appear to be aggressive, being “a creature of the Sea King” as it is and therefore of a friendly disposition rather than a monstrosity evil one.  
However, the sea wyvern is now attempting to open the door, and our hero, not doubting that the creature may well still attack if it would decide that it is threatened in some way, immediately tries to close the door, in which he succeeds when he rolls a “2”. Again the bedrock trembles, now more violently than ever.  
Holding his breath again, our hero drags the ranger to where Fonlon is still asleep, to find that the latter is just waking up.

All remains quite for a while as the party wait for Walewein to wake from his slumber. When the ranger eventually wakes up, he and Fonlon speed toward the door Corduwin hastily closed earlier – and open it, stating that they will free the creature.  
Instantly, the sea wyvern emerges head first. Unprepared, Corduwin draws his sword but it is for nothing – the sea wyvern has its eyes fixed on the lit torch held by Walewein and starts following the ranger as he retreats down the corridor, its slithering body wreaking havoc among the various other sources of light in the corridor until it gets to the double secret doors, passes through them and disappears to the surface. Nobody follows it to see where it goes, especially since several players are now getting ready to end the session because it is past their bedtime.

And so the session ends, but not after the DM suddenly reveals much of the legend of the Sea King. Not actually wanting to write all of it down because why?, the chronicler has only written down that Viledel the Sailor saved his people and took them to the archipelago, where he taught them to live in harmony with the animals that lived there and became known as the Sea King because of it. He ended up residing in a life-giving palace and eventually vanished without anyone knowing what became of him. At some point before this, he did compel the alchemist twins Grendel and Beowulf to use their art for good, but this doesn’t seem to have ended well when the brothers drifted apart and Beowulf left for the Orc Lands, leaving the introverted Grendel behind.



## Addendum

When this report was made, the DM unexpectedly sent the chronicler a file detailing the background of the campaign, of which his PC knew nothing at all, largely because he wasn't part of the party yet in the early stages of the adventure and has spent other parts of it in the cargo hold – as it were. When asked about this, the DM informed him that the other PCs are all well aware of the story but that it remains to be seen whether they have chosen to pay any attention to it. Therefore, he added, Melisana has told him the history of the archipelago during one of the many late-night conversations he has had with her at the campfire.

He is also informed that, as a Fighter, the story of Grendel and Beowulf, the strong duo that is the Twin Alchemist Brothers, may well be what stuck out for him the most in the stories about the Sea King; that the brothers together constituted something that can perhaps best be compared to Ouroboros, the yin and the yang, the body and the soul – capable of “developing anything” together; that, after the death of the Sea King, the brothers have engaged in a number of extravagant experiments at the instigation and behest of the Trade Lords – “unnatural dreams they were...”; that the Sea Goddess “restored the balance with destruction” and that the brothers have become separated ever since, their own equilibrium disrupted; that Grendel “imploded, got lost in his own autistic, steampunk brain” and that he currently mumbles about in the Sea King's Water Temple; that Beowulf has disappeared without a trace and that the wildest rumors and tall tales are now told about him in dockyard taverns, ranging from that he has been swallowed up by monsters of the deep sea to that he has ended up as drunkard in Odok; but that all stories about him “are extremely physical...”

## Realms of the Sea King (Transcript)

Viledel the Seaman, that's what he was called, the man who saved a fleeing people with his ship in a distant past. The myths and legends speak of a grim journey across the sea, of how Viledel remained at the wheel unperturbed at all times, committed to his task, of the hardships suffered by the refugees – hunger, thirst, calms, sea monsters, illness, and death.

When the ship got lost in a storm and all seemed lost, Viledel saw a light and kept faith. And this light was the Sea Goddess, who guided the ship to safer waters and brought it to a beautiful, unknown archipelago, a group of islands lush and abundant with flora and fauna, magical landscapes, fertile grounds, and a temperate climate. Here, the refugees were allowed to build a new life for themselves, on condition that each would live and act in harmony with the archipelago and that anything in it that would be misused for personal gain would be swallowed up by the sea.

Making solemn promises, the people agreed to the conditions and, filled with a new elan, spread out over the unspoiled islands around the Sea of Circles, with Shipwreck Island as its center. Everywhere ports, cities, and fields sprang up, temples to the Sea Goddess were built, and modest palaces for Viledel, for he was elected Sea King. The people were happy, worked hard, and further improved themselves in trade, science, or crafts, all in harmony with the archipelago as promised. And so they provided themselves with all necessary comforts, created a true paradise. Viledel the Sea King married and a son was born to the couple, the Sea Prince.

But then, shortly after this, the rumors began. First in the ports, where sailors spoke of strange ships in the West, primitive rafts piloted by large, bulky creatures; others would, on payment of a glass of rum, speak of large groups of tree trunks in the water and crawling with small creatures armed to the teeth. For years, these were only rumors, until the orcs and goblins were seen on an island in the West and the Sea King ordered the construction of a fleet and had fortresses and watch towers built on the islands to the South and West.

And so, what started out as a couple of orcs on a raft and goblins on tree trunks turned into an outright war. The armies and sailors of the Sea King were organized and trained well, and both men and ships were armed with ingenious instruments of war developed by the Sea King's most illustrious scientists: the Twin Alchemist Brothers, Grendel and Beowulf.

Initially, the orcs and goblins had no answer to all of this science and the Archipelago remained safe for years. But still the hordes kept coming and the Western Ocean and western archipelago turned into a full-on war-zone. When the Sea Prince, by now of an age that he could fight, was killed by eleven orc arrows in one of the naval battles, the Sea King was inconsolable and he buried his son in a secret crypt.

After this, the Sea King was seen in public less and less, spending his days lost in thought at the grave of his son, which forced the regents, admirals, and trade guilds to take it upon themselves to rule the archipelago themselves. And so, after the Sea King died at a very venerable age – and as such are wont to – the harmony that characterized life in the archipelago came to an end when the various regents and trade guilds turned on each other and the War of Regents began.

The war effectively tore the archipelago apart as trade stopped and the islands were isolated from each other. Armies and admirals allied themselves with whomever paid the most, fighting to protect fleets and ports. Here and there, a rare unit continued to stand its ground against the orcs and goblins under the banner of the Sea King but it wasn't enough and some islands fell to the humanoid hordes.

The Sea Goddess was furious. She destroyed large edifices and constructs, rich supplies, and the results of the unnatural experiments of the Twin Alchemist Brothers. The once united, harmonious archipelago fell apart and ended up a collection of islands that now fended only for themselves, although some new alliances were made. Many of the islands ended up inhabited once again and were taken over by mysterious flora and fauna.

You, the party, hail from the Isle of Grain in the southwest of the archipelago. This island is both very fertile and rich in commodities, such as iron. Among the rocks and lush forests, fields of grain stretch all over the island, dotted with small villages home to craftsmen and yearly festivals. The inhabitants are hardworking and happy and, each year, bountiful harvests yield enough wheat, millet, and rye for the entire archipelago.

Still subject to the rule of law, the island remains well protected. A highly valued *alting*, a well-organized militia, and a fleet of dauntless fishermen have proven their worth in disputes and against pirates, orcs, and goblins. Even the War of Regents has had but little influence on the strong sense of community that defines the folk of the island, each of which plays his part despite the many differences between them.