

A Shroud of Mystery in Gondor

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Introduction

Southern Gondor is the heart of the Dunadan Kingdom. Here lie the fertile fields which feed the armies of the Steward. Shipyards and smithies furnish the military with the tools it needs to defend the realm against its enemies. As the power of Mordor grows, pressure on the borders increases. Raids by pirates from Umbar become more frequent, and Ithilien falls deeper into shadow. It is the year 3017 of the Third Age, the year that Gollum is released from his tortures in Mordor, and the year that Gandalf learns the truth of the One Ring in the dusty libraries of Minas Tirith. Saruman has been long under the influence of Sauron, and Gondor finds no help from Rohan. Ancient evils begin to awaken as Sauron prepares for the final assault on the descendants of the hated Númenóreans. Berthand is a small village on the coast of Lebennin, around 75 miles west of Pelargir, and near the Ethir Anduin (Mouths of Anduin) on the Anduin Road. Even small rural towns such as this are not free from the growing Darkness. Two young boys have recently disappeared from the village, and the townsfolk are worried and frightened enough to send for help from Pelargir.

The Story

NOTE: Text in italics should be read to the players.

The heavy thud of raindrops smashing against the wood tiles of the inn's roof created an eerie cacophony as the gathered townspeople of Berthand debated their next course of action. Two young boys of the village were missing. They had been missing for over two days and the outlook was grim. Downcast faces revealed the widespread belief that there was little hope for the safe return of the two beloved boys, Londil and Nathyr. There were many opinions as to the fate of the two, but very little in the way of helpful facts.

On the day the boys disappeared, they had been on a fishing trip to the small creek that separates the marsh from the arable farmland closer to the village. This was a frequent jaunt for all the village children as the fish from that stream were considered especially tasteful and easier to catch. It was a day like every other, until the boys didn't show up for their evening chores and dinner. The call went out and parties of men went out in search, but with no result.

Some argued that the recent upswing in activity by their ancient enemies, the Corsairs of Umbar, had to be the explanation. Others argued that the sighting of a mysterious and frightening figure in the marshes to the west was probably the cause. No one had any real explanation and a general sense of fear had increased daily as the townsfolk floundered for answers.

It is true that there had been recent sightings of a two-masted sleek ship cruising the coasts between Berthand and Pelargir. It was definitely not a fishing vessel as the hull was too narrow and too small to be a merchant ship. It was designed for speed and little else. There had been no encounters with it as it was usually sighted at or near dusk. Most villagers assumed it was some messenger ship of the Gondorian army conveying important dispatches from Linhir or even Dol Amroth to Pelargir, home of the Gondorian Navy.

In contrast, Yolorian, a local herb mistress, and one of the most trusted individuals in the entire town, emphatically declared that the disappearances were tied to an unknown being which she had seen walking the marsh at night several weeks ago. On that night, Yolorian was running a little late on her way back home from gathering some herbs from the marsh. As she was walking on one of the various paths that crisscross the bogs, she noticed a figure standing in the middle of a pool of brackish

water some distance off of the path. The figure made an indistinguishable guttural sound and immediately began plodding toward the aged herb mistress. Frightened, Yolorian ran all the way back and informed the town elders of her encounter. Subsequent searches by armed men during the day turned up nothing and many of the townsfolk began to believe the figure was the figment of the old lady's imagination. Most now agree with her and want a systematic scouring of the marsh to turn up this figure and to discover what it has done with the boys.

Ultimately, it was decided that help from distant Pelargir would be required. Sending a messenger on the fastest horse in Berthand to request help in finding the boys, the villagers waited for relief. Two days later, a small group of riders arrived in town in the early afternoon. Lead by Tathanain, a young and ambitious Royal Investigator who sees these disappearances as the perfect opportunity to prove his worth to his superiors back in Pelargir, the group was decidedly smaller than what the villagers had expected. Accompanying Tathanain was Oranen, a master of animals and Eyandor, a man-at-arms who has been charged with Tathanian's safekeeping. Oranen had brought a trained falcon to help with the investigative work.

Quickly setting up a command center at the largest inn, The Trident, Tathanain began questioning the townsfolk for any hint or clue that might lead them in the right direction. Not surprisingly, very little is actually known about the disappearances and most everything at this point is conjecture. After a few hours of interviews with the most knowledgeable of the town's citizens, the Royal Investigators still had nothing solid to follow. They made the decision to enter the marsh at night with some volunteers and to explore the area by moonlight. Perhaps they would meet up with this mysterious figure.

When the call for volunteers went out, very few heeded the summons. The fact that the group would be traveling into the marsh at night made all but the stoutest of men blanch. Naturally, the boys' fathers are the first to volunteer. Also joining the search is Indail, a local fur trapper and all-around outdoorsman. His knowledge of the area will be invaluable. Londil's father, Ailorin, is one of the strongest men in the entire village and is accounted the best swordsman by all. His days in the Royal Army had hardened him and taught him a good bit about fighting hand-to-hand. Nathyr's father is named Gaelindor. He is an experienced seaman who makes his living as an ocean fisherman. Years of hard work in the blazing sun have trimmed him and made his skin like leather. His knowledge of sea-craft is vast and his anger over his son's disappearance even greater.

The next day the group assembles and prepares for the journey. Not knowing how long this will take, the new adventurers stock up at the local supply store with food, tools, extra weapons and various sundries. They then trek to the border of the marsh and begin the investigation.

Enemies

There are two enemies for the investigators on this trip. First are the true culprits behind the disappearances. A small group of **Corsairs** have recently set up a spy base so that they can monitor the military traffic between Dol Amroth and Pelargir. Their orders are to count the numbers and note the units and types of any military detachments that cross through this area. To this end they have set up a watch post near the Marenth Bridge, the only way of crossing the wide and deep Marenth Stream anywhere near the coast. This is where the boys mistakenly came across two of the Umbareans as they were spying on the road. Not knowing what to do with the boys, but understanding the value of two young, healthy males in the slave markets of Umbar, the men bound the boys and took them back to their camp as captives.

This camp is a motley collection of mud and thatch huts located in a bend in the Marenth stream close to the Mouths of Anduin. Their skiff, The Windrunner, lies moored close to shore where they can launch it with speed should they be discovered. Currently, there are 9 Corsairs operating out of the

base. They are led by an experienced sea captain named Feyrun the Forlorn. He rules with an iron hand and is quick with his whip when one of his sailors steps out of line. He obtained his nickname by being the only survivor from one of Umbar's greatest galleys, which was lost in a storm off the coast of Harondor. He spent months alone on a small island eking out an existence off of bird's eggs and rainwater. Eventually he was rescued, but his many months alone had broken his spirit and he never was the same.

The Corsairs normally send around 4 of their members, frequently captained by Feyrun himself, out in the Windrunner every night to monitor the sea traffic and update maps provided to them in Umbar. Another 2 Corsairs are stationed at the watch post close to the Marenth Bridge. This leaves approximately 3 members of the group at the base during each and every night. During the day the sailors manning the Windrunner sleep and catch up on any upkeep the skiff requires while the remainder stands guard. The guards are usually inattentive as they believe that no one will find them at such a remote location.

Another and more dangerous problem is **Ungar-itan**, the undead shaman. This is the figure Yolorian saw that day in the swamp as she was hunting herbs. Ungar-itan is the remnant of a powerful sorcerer once living in these parts before the days of the coming of the Faithful. Being a servant of Sauron during the War between the Elves and Sauron in the Second Age, Ungar-itan was capable of performing the necessary rituals that would preserve his spirit within his human form for all time. However, being tied to Sauron through mystical means, Ungar-itan was rendered impotent when Sauron lost the Ruling Ring and his spirit wandered the twilight realm. Now, Sauron's growing power in Mordor has awakened Ungar-itan's spirit once more.

Roaming the marsh at night, Ungar-itan searches for prey to sate his immense hunger. He has found nothing so far that could satisfy his needs (though he will eventually find the Corsairs) and his desire to devour a living being is driving him closer and closer to the edge of the marsh. It will only be a matter of time before he ensnares some poor creature and takes them back to his lair to feed. The only way to stop this abomination from succeeding in his perverse craving is to destroy him and send his spirit into the Void. Burning his remains and destroying his tomb are the surest ways to do this.

The Adventure

As the group prepares to leave town in the early morning hours, the weather is clear and a little chilly. They must travel some 2-3 miles on the road to reach the fishing stream. Yolorian's evergreen sprig has little effect except to freshen the air up a bit. It certainly won't hurt in the close, stale air of the marsh.

As you leave town, the villagers wish you luck. Ailorin's wife Iathora comes running up to give her husband a kiss. Yolorian appears just as you're passing through the gate, and gives you each a sprig of evergreen. "It's a charm agin' th'evil thing that's there," she says, "so don't lose it or ye won't be safe."



Once the group reaches the fishing stream, they will notice what are normal signs – many footprints by stream along the popular watering hole. An extremely difficult (TN 15) tracking roll will reveal two sets of tracks going downstream (presumably the boys). When the tracks reach a rocky and difficult area, they abruptly plunge into the stream, and can be picked up on the other side with a tracking roll with a TN of 10. If the characters do not make these rolls, then they will have to make a judgment call on which way to search. Eventually, though, they should find the spot at which the boys were abducted. Just inside the swamp is a small area that shows some sign of a struggle. A tracking roll with a TN of 10 should be made. A success of up to TN+5 will reveal simply that there was a struggle. A success of up to TN+10 will reveal that there were two assailants, and that all four figures left to the southwest (toward a boat hidden on the Marenth stream). A success of over TN+10 will reveal the entire story – one man approached from the northwest, and there was a struggle. Very soon after another man approached from the northwest and the struggle ended. The tracks leaving to the southwest indicate that the victims were bound and half-carried. A success of TN+15 will also reveal that there is fairly regular traffic to this spot from the northwest by some few individuals (this is the lookouts' privy).

There are signs of a struggle here. There are many tracks – and some of them are of men and obviously not the boys. The fishing gear is lying under a bush near the fishing stream. The stream gurgles merrily, but there is otherwise a hush over the swamp. The low trees sigh quietly.

If the group follows the tracks to the southwest, they will eventually come across the boat used by the sentries. It is hidden under an embankment, and will take an Observe roll of TN 15 to spot it. If it is late in the day when they find the boat, they will encounter the sentries returning from post getting ready to embark back to their camp. If, however, the group follows the northwest tracks they will come upon the sentries (unless it is late in the day, in which case they'll have to track them back to the boat from here). There is no mistaking that this spot is commonly occupied, and that it commands an excellent view of the bridge and the road back toward Berthand (and Pelargir). On a Search roll TN 15, they will notice a broken belt buckle on the ground near the spies' perch. It is obviously of Southron make, and Ailorin will recognize the style from his days campaigning down south. It is from Umbar.

From this perch you can clearly see the Marenth Bridge, and the Anduin Road can be viewed nearly back to Berthand with no obstructions. It is obvious that this post has been occupied over a fairly long period of time. As you gaze down toward the bridge, you see a lone rider riding hard to the west – a Royal Messenger passing through.

Corsair Sentries (2)

Attributes

Bearing 6 (+0), Nimbleness 8 (+1), Perception 8 (+1), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 10 (+2), Wits 7 (+0)

Reactions

Stamina +2, Swiftiness +1, Willpower +0, Wisdom +1

Skills

A.Combat: shortsword +8, R.Combat: shortbow +5, Observe:spot +5, Stealth: hide +4, Run +3

Special Abilities

none

Health: 13

After defeating the sentries (or following them), the group will have to figure out that there must be a base camp nearby, since the boat they found is small and not seaworthy. They will not all fit in the boat, so they must travel downstream on foot. They must also decide which side to travel down. If Oranen sends his falcon Jess up to have a look (before it gets dark), and he makes a Craft:hunting roll TN 15, he will be able to tell the group that there is *something* on the other side of the stream near its mouth.

If the group approaches the camp at night, there will only be three of the Corsairs present (the others are out on the Windrunner), or 5 if the sentries escaped. If the sentries have alerted the camp that someone is coming, they will be ready with bows. Remember that in the dark it is very unlikely that anyone will spot (Observe TN 25) the pit traps around the camp. On a direct approach, roll 2d6 for each character – if you roll a 4, then that character falls into a pit and takes 1d6 attacks of 1d6+2 damage. If any of the attacks do more than 6 points of damage, the character's wound will fester (Yolirian can heal this) within 1 day.

If the group approaches the camp during the day, they will see the ship, and there will be 6 Corsairs along with Captain Feyrun the Forlorn at the camp. Again, if the Corsairs are warned by fleeing sentries of the approach of the characters, they will be ready with bows. Feyrun will also make sure that the *Windrunner* is made ready to sail (taking two Corsairs away from the fight unless it gets

desperate). In order to determine if any of the characters fall into the shallow pit traps, again roll 2d6 for each character as above. They are, however, easier to spot in daylight, and the TN for the Observe roll is reduced to a 15.

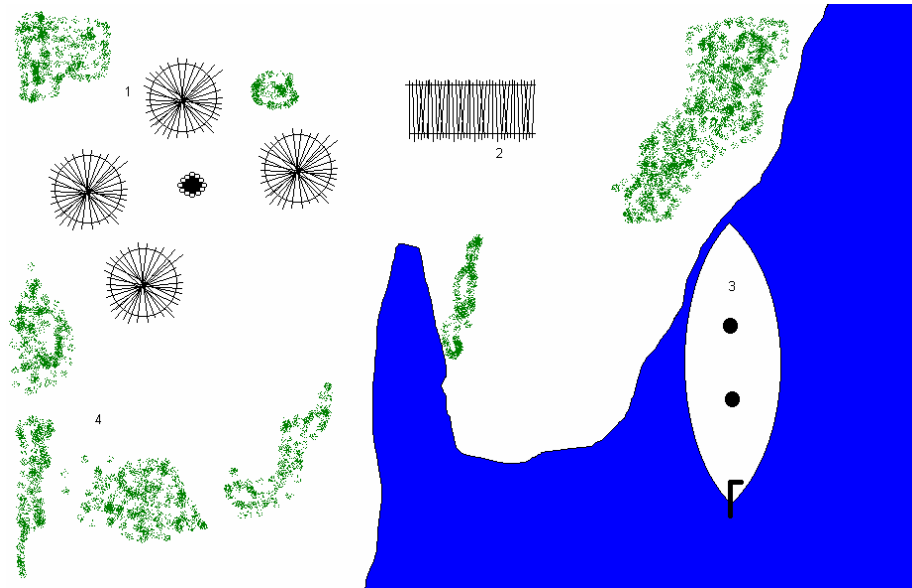
Corsair Campers (3-6)	
Attributes	
Bearing 6 (+0), Nimbleness 8 (+1), Perception 8 (+1), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 10 (+2), Wits 7 (+0)	
Reactions	
Stamina +2, Swiftess +1, Willpower +0, Wisdom +1	
Skills	
A.Combat: shortsword +8, R.Combat: shortbow +5, Observe:spot +5, Stealth: hide +4, Run +3	
Special Abilities	
Leather armor (2pts damage), small shield	
Health: 12	

Feyrun the Forlorn	
Attributes	
Bearing 10 (+2), Nimbleness 10 (+2), Perception 9 (+1), Strength 12 (+3), Vitality 11 (+2), Wits 10 (+2)	
Reactions	
Stamina +5, Swiftess +3, Willpower +3, Wisdom +2	
Skills	
A.Combat: shortsword +11, R.Combat: shortbow +6, Observe:spot +7, Inspire +5	
Special Abilities	
Leather armor (3pts damage), small shield	
Health: 14	

After the fight, presuming that the characters win, they can find the boys in the large hut, bound but not gagged. They will be ecstatic to see their fathers, and will expect (rightly) some serious punishment.

There is no real treasure in the Corsair camp, though the short sword of Feyrun the Forlorn is of good quality (+1 damage), as is his leather armor (it will absorb 3pts of damage). There is some money on the ship in the captain's strongbox as well – the equivalent of 50 silver pennies in plain unminted silver coins. Tathanain will be very interested to find written orders in the strongbox, detailing Feyrun's instructions to spy on the Anduin road and up and down the Ethir Anduin. There are also falsified papers identifying the *Windrunner* as a small merchant skiff. Testifying to this cover story is a small hold filled with low-quality bolts of cloth. There is, though, the ship itself. It is a fast and well-made boat. Gael will certainly be interested in it, but Tathanain will claim it for the Steward, and will want to take it back to Pelargir (he'll first have to summon a crew that can sail her).

As the cries of battle die down, you can hear yelling coming from inside the large hut in the Corsair camp. Ailorin and Gael immediately recognize their sons' voices, and rush to the make-shift building. The boys are inside, tied to the central support pole. As they are untied, they grip their fathers in tight embraces, and their fathers weep with joy.



1. **Huts** - these mud and thatch huts barely keep out the rain. They are used by the various Corsairs and hold little of value as most is kept on the person of each Corsair (1d6 silver pennies each, and appropriate gear). A campfire sits in the middle of the camp so the sailors can cook their fish and other animals caught in the vicinity.
2. **Big Hut** - this was originally designed as a repository for stores the group would acquire. While still serving this purpose, the abduction of the two Berthand boys has resulted in the need for a relatively secure place to hold them. The two boys are bound and gagged and lying on the floor of this hut.
3. **Windrunner** - the skiff used by the Corsairs to spy on the coast lies here during the day. There are usually one or two sailors working on it to keep it in tip-top shape. The ship is the most valuable thing in camp.
4. **Scrub** - the Corsairs have generously planted stake pits in the area around their camp. They are covered with dung to cause serious infection.

If the group decides to travel through the swamp at night, they should be discouraged. Encountering Ungar-itan will be difficult enough without the added problems of nighttime fighting. The travel back to Berthand will be overcast and rainy.

As the group travels north along the west side of the Marenth stream, they should notice that the wildlife has become very quiet. Oranen's falcon, Jess, will become extremely agitated, and will eventually fly off no matter how hard Oranen tries to keep her with him. As they come into a small marshy clearing, they will see Ungar-itan standing seemingly in the center of a shallow pool of brackish water.

As you begin the trek back to town, the now-overcast sky begins to rain a misty rain. The sounds of the swamp are muted, and it almost seems as if your voices echo back at you from the dreary surroundings. Soon, even the sounds of the swamp animals cannot be heard. All is quiet. As you trudge on, you come to a clearing in the marsh, at the center of which is a black, brackish pool. Standing on the pool is a figure cloaked in black, whose face you cannot see. It slowly begins moving toward you, and utters a guttural wail. It lifts its arms out, grasping toward you. Its hands are clawing bones, with long curved nails. As it lifts its head, you see a dripping, fleshy skull beneath the hood. There are small glowing spots where eyes should be. The specter approaches, and wails.

Ungar-Itan
Attributes

Bearing 11 (+2), Nimbleness 6 (+0), Perception 10 (+2), Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 12 (+3), Wits 7 (+0)

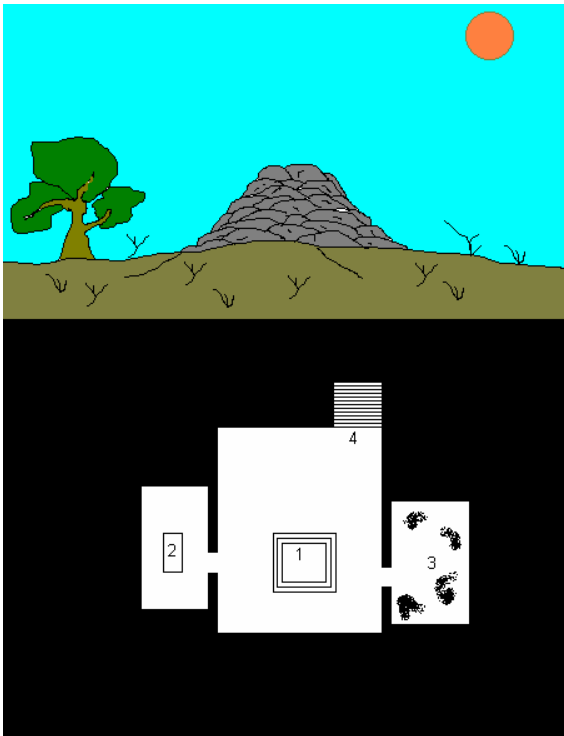
Reactions
 Stamina +3, Swiftiness +2, Willpower +2, Wisdom +2

Skills
 U.Combat: claws +10 (1d6+4 dmg), Intimidate: Fear (wail/visage) +5, Observe:spot +3

Special Abilities
ICY CLAWS: for every wound inflicted with the claws, victim loses 2 points of STR and VIT (temporarily); when either reaches zero, victim is unconscious for 2d6x10 minutes – recover 1 in each attribute every 10 minutes
SPELLS: Evoke Fear (p.178), Bladeshattering (p.175)

Health: 15

Ungar-itan will attack the person nearest him. He is unconcerned with anything but feeding on sentient beings. He requires this kind of feeding to rebuild his body so that he may be truly reborn. If Ungar-itan is wounded badly, though (e.g., if he becomes "wounded"), he will attempt to escape back to his cairn. The PCs should be able to follow him, as he is not very fast. If he does not make it, and is incapacitated before then, the PCs must burn the corpse or he will return the next night (by which time they should be back in Berthand), and will continue his hunt for flesh. If he does make it, he will heal at the rate of one wound level per hour, and will be back after the group as soon as he can be (this will be well before they make it out of the swamp). If they follow him back to the cairn, they may defeat him there. They should then destroy the tomb, at least as much as they can, after burning his remains. Of course, if they do not follow Ungar-itan there, or do not for some reason find it, they will not find the considerable treasure there.



1. **Main chamber** - this chamber houses an ancient altar in the middle of the room. It is covered in lichen and the floor is under 6 inches of swamp water. The walls are made of stones pieced together. There are two doors of rusted iron to either side. Both are slightly open, and will completely fall apart if disturbed. The age of this crypt has proven to be too much for the old decorations on the altar and wall and they can barely be seen at all behind large patches of slimy growth.
2. **Ungar-itan’s Burial chamber** - a large sarcophagus of cut stone is the centerpiece of this room. It lies open and the stone lid is leaning against the sarcophagus. Ungar-itan’s mortal body remained here for thousands of years in a magically preserved state, awaiting the call to serve his Dark Lord once again. Now the call has been answered.
3. **Treasure Room** - this room once housed elaborate wooden chests, but these have decayed into rubbish long ago. Three small piles of gold lie on the floor beneath the water. There are also some magical items that Ungar-itan thought he could use in his undead existence. The coins are an ancient mint, and might return more than their face value (80 gold pieces) if sold to the proper collector (perhaps 150 gold pieces in Pelargir or Minas Tirith). The magic items are:

- a. A small ceremonial copper dagger (1d6+2) carved with demonic faces which causes each wound given by it to bleed for d10 rounds (delivering 1 point of damage per round). The dagger is ensorcelled, and will give the bearer one corruption point once it is used.
- b. A stone, engraved with runes, which allows the bearer to re-roll (once) any failed Stamina test caused by spell casting. The runes are of an unknown language. The stone will give the bearer two corruption

points once it is used (give the bearer the choice, saying something to the effect of, "as you feel yourself tiring from the casting of your spell, a strange dark strength seems to be emanating from the runic stone – do you wish to tap this strength?")

- c. The Eye of Naggoth, a crystal marble with a strange red spot. This crystal will allow the user to discern the single greatest fear of a person. It is as "Reading the Heart," except that it only reveals the fear, has no requisites to cast, and has a Weariness TN of 7. Each use of the Eye will give the user one corruption point.
4. **Stairs to Entrance** - these primitive stone stairs lead up to the entrance to the crypt. Unlike many crypts, this one is entered from above as opposed to walking in at ground level. The remnants of a corroded and broken metal door lie scattered at the top of a large stack of stones. These stones provide the necessary foundation for the crypt to survive the marshy environment. The height of the stones was once very great, but it is slowly sinking into the swamp and is now less than 10 feet. Climbing up the cairn to the roof will reveal the opening. Ungar-itan opened it himself the day of his re-awakening as he left his home of the past 3,000 years.

CONCLUSION

If the group has defeated Ungar-Itan and the Corsairs, the rest of the trip home will be uneventful. Jess will be waiting for Oranen outside of the swamp, and will immediately fly to his arm once he exits the trees (this may cause some temporary consternation among the members of the group – it will be startling). If Ungar-Itan was not ultimately defeated, and his body was not burned, then he will be back to haunt the swamp within a few weeks. He will eventually find his way to Berthand, and will have plenty of victims to rebuild himself with. If Feyrun escaped, then Tathanain will obviously not have the passel of information that he needs to vault him immediately into the important cases of the Royal Investigators. It is also possible, though unlikely, that the boys will either not have survived, or will have been taken away with Feyrun when the Corsairs were attacked. This is the worst possible scenario, and should be avoided if at all possible.

As you ride back into Berthand with the missing boys in tow, there is an immediate gathering of folks, all wanting to celebrate and to hear the entire story from beginning to end. Old ones will nod sagely, young ones will be insistent on detail, and mothers and fathers will attempt to keep their children at hand. Yolirian begins preparing to heal those who need it, all the while cackling happily because people will believe her story now. There will be a celebration this night at The Trident!

Tathanain, Oranen, and Eyandor will stay for a day or two, and then return to Pelargir. Tathanain is very pleased with the outcome, and will want to get back to Pelargir to tell the story. In a rare show of socialization, Indail will join the celebration that night at The Trident, though he won't be telling stories. Gaelindor's wife will come out of the house, and will nearly incessantly hug her boy Nathyr (who will soon be groaning about it). Gaelindor himself is nothing but happy. Despite black glances from the guard captain Mabenir, Ailorin will several times be nominated to take his post that night. Ailorin is just happy to have his family back together, and will be one of the last to leave the celebration, having told his version of the story several times to the same people.

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