

THE SHADOW OVER DALE



An Adventure For
The Lord of the Rings™ Roleplaying Game

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THE SHADOW OVER DALE

'The Shadow Over Dale' is an adventure for *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game* set in the Third Age of Middle-earth in the years just before the War of the Ring. It begins in the lands near Dale but takes the heroes into the western reaches of Rhûn. It is meant to be a stand-alone adventure, but can also serve as a springboard for larger, more complex stories or be folded into an existing chronicle. It has been designed for a group of four to six heroes with up to three advancements each. If your party consists of fewer or more heroes, or contains heroes with fewer or more advancements, adjust this adventure's encounters, challenges, and target numbers accordingly.

SUMMARY

In the north-east of Middle-earth lies the kingdom of Dale, a bustling community of woodcrafters and tradesmen who often, of late, pause to gaze eastward with concern. For countless hordes of Easterlings, long under the domination of Sauron the Deceiver, are marshalling their strength inside the borders of Rhûn, waiting for the signal to descend upon the West.

The adventure begins with the player characters in Esgaroth (Lake-town). Someone or something has razed several outlying settlements of Dale, looting the buildings and putting everyone to death. King Brand has decreed that a scouting party must investigate the cause of the attacks and return to him with the information.

Over the course of this adventure, the heroes travel through the lands of Dale, encountering challenges along the way. After passing the easternmost fringes of Dale and moving into the far western reaches of Rhûn, they encounter a tribe of Men who at first appear to be forces of Sauron, but are, in fact, a forgotten people of mixed descent.

The heroes, initially at odds with this tribe, soon learn that these Men have also suffered attacks on their homesteads. The heroes discover that an advance Easterling force probing the borders has made these attacks, estimating the strength of the Bardings (the Men of Dale). The heroes and their allies have an opportunity to strike first, potentially delaying the Easterling onslaught and buying the Bardings more time to prepare for the coming war.

ACT I: A REQUEST FOR AID

The story begins in Esgaroth, where the heroes learn what King Brand's mission entails. It falls to you to determine, based on the PCs' backgrounds and stories, why the king has chosen them to carry out this mission and in what manner they are summoned before him.

SCENE ONE: THE MOOD IN DALE

The heroes walk through the busy streets of Esgaroth on the way to the Great Hall, where the king conducts his official business while in the city. (Although the king's capitol is in the city of Dale, his household maintains a manor in Esgaroth as well.) They note along the way that the general mood of the populace is that of uncertainty. People trade whispered comments, and the city's usual air of energetic tradesmen hawking their wares is subdued.

The PCs must make Observe (Hear) tests as they head for the Great Hall. Alternatively, a hero could stop and converse with some of the traders. Allow these heroes to make Inquire tests instead. Depending on the results, each hero has a chance to hear any or all of the following items.

TN	The Hero Hears
5	'Fine weather we're having today. Should be good for the caravan bound for Erebor.'
10	'Our king's not looking himself these days. He's worried about what's happening in the East, no question.'
15	'Another village was found destroyed the other day. I'll wager the great worms have returned, eatin' the villagers and burnin' all the homes!'

SCENE TWO: AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KING

The heroes soon arrive at the Great Hall and are asked to wait in an antechamber to King Brand's audience chamber. Allow the players to discuss the King's request, the fearful mood of people in the city, and anything else they may have heard for as long as they wish. Then, an aide enters and ushers the heroes into the audience chamber.

King Brand of Dale, grandson of King Bard (slayer of Smaug the Golden), stands near a large table covered in papers and maps. The king is a goodly man in the prime of his life and a strong leader, much respected and admired by the Bardings. He offers the heroes a warm, if weary, smile. He apologizes for the lack of a more appropriate welcome to Esgaroth and moves straight to the matter at hand.

He gestures to one of the maps. 'Eight days ago, a tradesman reported that one of my small villages far to the east had been destroyed—all the people and livestock put to the sword and all the buildings burned to the ground. No trace of who or what did this remained to be found.'

He flips to another map. 'Three days ago, I received a report from one of my patrols that a second village had been similarly destroyed. And just today,'—he holds up a dispatch, 'I received word that a third settlement likewise smoulders in the summer air.'

He looks at each of them with steel in his eyes. 'I need a scouting party to search the eastern lands of Dale for whoever is behind these attacks. This will not be an easy endeavour; there are no survivors from any of the attacks, and no evidence identifying the attackers has yet been found.' If the heroes ask the king why he cannot send his own scouts, he informs them that most of his soldiers are either fortifying other communities or guarding various trade

caravans. The forces of Dale are spread thin, so King Brand needs the heroes to fulfil this mission.

If the heroes resist taking on the mission or push for some form of reward, King Brand simply dismisses them, muttering about how many have proven unreliable in these dark days. Allow the reluctant heroes to return to whatever lives they had before arriving at Esgaroth, and encourage the players to create heroic characters who *would* be willing to undertake King Brand's mission.

If they accept the mission, they see a smile cross King Brand's face. He thanks them and suggests they travel first to Lunn Doring, the most recently destroyed village. It is their best chance for useful clues, as summer showers have washed away any evidence from the other ruined villages. If the heroes choose to pursue a different path, they're welcome to do so. Adjust the following scenes accordingly, but make sure that somehow, the heroes eventually end up at Lunn Doring.

King Brand can provide the heroes with basic gear as needed, but does not have armour, weapons, or horses to spare. The heroes have to make do with what they own or can purchase in Esgaroth prior to leaving. If the heroes ask for one, the King provides them with a map of Dale that points out several outlying communities as well as the destroyed settlements.

SCENE THREE: OVER HILLS AND THROUGH DALE

Lunn Doring lies some 150 miles south-east of Esgaroth. The terrain between the two consists predominantly of plains and low hills, which is average terrain. If the heroes are on horseback and travel an average of ten hours a day without encountering any distractions, they should reach Lunn Doring within five days. Travelling by foot takes a little longer; they'll reach the ruined town in eight to nine days barring unforeseen delays.

The following optional encounters can be used to make the travel more interesting. You could also create additional travel encounters, tailoring them to your PCs' backgrounds and specialties.

TRADESMEN: One evening, the heroes come across a small caravan of hunters making camp. The traders are Barding huntsmen, returning home after several weeks of hunting in the wild. They have perhaps forty pelts they plan to trade in Esgaroth, along with a variety of salted meats. If the heroes don't do or say anything to arouse suspicion, the traders invite them to share their camp for the night.

The traders are interested in any news the heroes have concerning Esgaroth, King Brand, and the attacks on the villages. In return, the traders mention that they have noticed animals acting strangely, as if some darkness lurked in the plains of Dale. In the morning, they break camp and make their good-byes.

ATTACK IN THE DARK: During the fourth night of travelling, the hero on watch must attempt a TN 15 Observe (Hear) test. If the hero succeeds, he hears growling in the night—wolves are nearby! He has two rounds to wake his comrades before a pack of eight black-furred wolves attacks the camp. If the heroes do not have anyone on watch, they are taken by surprise. Use the statistics for wolves on page 297 of the core rulebook.

The wolves fight until half their number are dead, the remainder fleeing into the night. After the attack, the heroes can attempt a TN 10 Survival (Plains) or related test. Anyone who succeeds realises the attack was highly unusual behaviour for wolves. It's possible that a cruel master or some form of evil sorcery forced the wolves to attack.

ACT II: THE UNLIKELIEST OF ALLIES

In this act, the heroes reach Lunn Doring. While they search the ruins, a force of Men attack and take them captive. The heroes learn that these Men are the Abrélinds, a tribe of mixed ancestry, and that they have also suffered attacks on their homes. The heroes have an opportunity to make these Men allies in the search for the raiders.

SCENE ONE: THE RUINS OF LUNN DORING

The heroes reach the easternmost border of Dale, noting that the ground gets rougher as they near the lands of Rhûn. The weather is bright and warm, with a hint of water on the breeze—the River Running (Celduin) lies just a few miles to the south.

The heroes reach the ruins of Lunn Doring by midmorning. The town is a sobering sight. The blackened remains of buildings lie in disorganized heaps and a long line of burial mounds marks the final resting places of the town's inhabitants. The heroes sense profound sadness in the area, as if the land itself grieved over the town's fate.

The heroes will likely search the town for clues. Ask each of the heroes to attempt an Observe (Spot) or Search test. Depending on their results, each hero has a chance to discover any or all of the following.

TN	The Hero Discovers
5	An intact storage chest lies in one of the ruined homes, partially covered by ash and debris. Opening the chest reveals a bolt of homespun cloth, a bag containing 11 silver pennies, and a simple metal ring.
10	Much of the ground has been disturbed by the movements of the burial detail, but the hero does find several sets of horse tracks leading east.
15	While searching the rubble for clues, the hero hears an unnatural noise on the wind. He is not surprised when the Abrélind attack begins.

As the heroes search, a band of Abrélinds crests a low hill overlooking the town. Seeing the ruined state of Lunn Doring, they charge the heroes with an angry cry. They are dressed in simple clothing and patched-together armour, but wield well-maintained shields and weapons.

The Abrélinds close the distance and attempt to stun the heroes into submission. (See 'Stun Effects' on pages 231–2 of the core rulebook. If it proves exceedingly difficult to stun the PCs, they may also try to grab and immobilise them. See page 229 of the core rulebook, or the revised rules for grappling in *Fields of Battle: The Guide to Barbarians and Warriors*.) The heroes don't know it yet, but the Abrélinds were trading partners with the inhabitants of Lunn

Doring. They have suffered attacks on their homes, and want to capture the heroes for questioning. (They initially assume the heroes are responsible for the attack on Lunn Doring.)

Ten of these fighters initially attack, unless you believe more will be required to subdue the PCs. If the heroes make a fight of it, a second troop could arrive in 10 rounds. Observant heroes should be able to note that the Abrélinds are hitting to stun, not kill.

Whether the heroes surrender or are beaten into submission, their captors bind them, confiscate their gear and horses, and march south to their encampment on the northern shore of the River Running. The Abrélinds do not converse with the heroes during the hour-long trip, but offer water and bandages if the heroes need them.

ABRÉLINDS

RACE: Men (Middle Men: Northmen)

RACIAL ABILITIES: Adaptable (+2 Stamina), Dominion of Man, Skilled

ATTRIBUTES: Bearing 7 (± 0), Nimbleness 6 (± 0), Perception 8 (+1)*, Strength 7 (± 0), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 8 (+1)*

REACTIONS: Stamina +3*, Swiftmess +1, Willpower +1, Wisdom +2

DEFENCE: 10

ORDER: Warrior

ORDER ABILITIES: Evasion

ADVANCEMENTS: 0

SKILLS: Armed Combat: Blades (Longsword) +3, Craft: [Various] +2, Healing (Treat Wounds) +1, Inspire +1, Language: Easterling +6, Language: Westron +2, Lore/History: Rhûn (Abrélinds) +4, Observe (Spot) +3, Ranged Combat: Bows (Shortbow) +3, Ride (Horse) +2, Survival (Plains) +2, Weather-sense +1

EDGES: Wary

FLAWS: None

HEALTH: 8

GEAR: Longsword, spear, small shield, leather armour, shortbow, 20 arrows

The Abrélinds are a mixed race of Middle Man and Easterling descent all but forgotten by both the Free Peoples and the forces of Darkness. The Abrélinds are named for Abrél, the chieftain who united a handful of mixed-heritage tribes and embraced both cultures rather than suppressing one over the other. As a result, the Abrélinds exhibit a mix of Easterling and Northman influences in their mannerisms and culture.

The Abrélinds live in an isolated and little-travelled area of Middle-earth, and are content to farm their lands and trade occasionally with nearby communities in both Dale and Rhûn. Unfortunately, they are just within Easterling borders, and are often the victims of the occasional raiding party. During the War of the Ring, the Abrélinds are likely to be among the first people overrun by the Easterling onslaught.

SCENE TWO: THE FORGOTTEN TRIBE

The Abrélinds bring the heroes to their camp on the shores of the River Running. Warriors among the heroes note that the camp is fortified and run in near-military fashion; clearly these people are expecting—and are ready for—trouble to arise.

The heroes are brought to a guarded tent in the centre of the camp. They are released from their bonds and offered food and wine. A pair of guards and an Abrélind wearing chainmail soon enter the tent.

The man introduces himself in accented Westron as Arélin, son of Agrél and chieftain of the Abrélind tribes. He has a noble demeanour and comes across as intelligent and confident. He asks the heroes specific questions about themselves and their business in Lunn Doring. If the heroes protest their innocence and explain convincingly that they are not responsible for the attack, Arélin apologizes for their rough treatment and endeavours to make amends.

Arélin explains that he and his people are also victims of recent attacks, and that perhaps he and the heroes share a common goal—that of seeking out those responsible for the raids. If the heroes converse with Arélin and the others, they learn that they are not all that different from other Free Peoples. Encourage roleplaying scenes between the heroes and the Abrélinds. Assuming the heroes conduct themselves properly, they gain a new group of stalwart allies.

ACT III: THE DEFIANCE OF FREE MEN

In this act, the heroes and their new allies work together to find those responsible for the raids. They track a small scouting party of brigands to a sizable Easterling encampment and find the Abrélinds ready and willing to assist in striking a blow against them.

SCENE ONE: RECONNAISSANCE

Now that the heroes and the Abrélinds have a mutual goal (if not outright friendship) they can push to find the cause of the attacks. If the heroes don't suggest it, Arélin advocates sending several scouting parties to scour the land in search of a bandit lair or for roving bands of marauders. A different plan could work as well, but whatever the case, the heroes and the Abrélinds should now be proactive in their search for those responsible for the attacks.

Narrate the passing of a couple of days of fruitless searching before the heroes detect a travelling band of marauders. The heroes should be able to easily identify them as Easterling soldiers. It's a simple matter to track them, as they are overconfident and are not trying to hide their movements. The heroes follow them along the River Running to where it joins with the River Redwater. There, nestled between the fork of the two rivers, the heroes find a sizable Easterling encampment. If the heroes attack, capture, and question the soldiers, it is a relatively simple matter to gain the same information through interrogation.

SCENE TWO: THE BATTLE AT RIVER-FORK

The Abréinds are quick to marshal their forces against the camp, gathering some 300 combatants in the space of a couple days. The heroes can spend that time monitoring the Easterling camp, which—unless the PCs do something ill advised—remains unaware of anything occurring in the surrounding lands.

Once the Abréind troops are in place, Arélin informs the heroes that his folk are ready to battle and that he would be honoured to have the heroes fight alongside him. Any warrior or captain among the heroes may, if he desires, take command of one of the Abréind units.

Once any command assignments have been made, begin the battle, using the rules for mass combat on pages 238-41 of the core rulebook. Arélin, who leads his people, has Siegecraft (Unit Leadership) +4. The Easterlings, eager for a fight, move out of their encampment to engage the Abréind host. If you use the basic rules, the heroes start out with a +1 Winning advantage.

If you prefer the unit combat rules from the core rulebook, use the statistics below.

ABRÉLIND ARCHERS (TWO UNITS)

SIZE: 2

STRENGTH: 5 (can attack at range)

TOUGHNESS: 7

MOBILITY: 7

MORALE: 8

GEAR: Shortbows, longswords, and leather armour.

ABRÉLIND WARRIORS (SIX UNITS)

SIZE: 5

STRENGTH: 6

TOUGHNESS: 7

MOBILITY: 7

MORALE: 11

GEAR: Longswords, small shields, and leather armour.

EASTERLING ARCHERS (ONE UNIT)

SIZE: 2

STRENGTH: 5 (can attack at range)

TOUGHNESS: 6

MOBILITY: 6

MORALE: 8

GEAR: Battle axes, shortbows, and scale mail.

EASTERLING WARRIORS (FIVE UNITS)

SIZE: 4

STRENGTH: 6

TOUGHNESS: 8

MOBILITY: 6

MORALE: 10

GEAR: Battle axes, large shields, and scale mail.

You can also use the new mass combat rules in the *Helm's Deep* sourcebook to adjudicate the battle. In that case, this is a skirmish scale combat on Plains terrain. Use the abstract battle resolution mechanics; the terrain is not varied enough to warrant the tactical method. The Easterlings having the advantage of being Entrenched but the disadvantage of having their Escape Blocked by the rivers. The Easterlings also count as leaderless, as their commanders have gone off to report the results of their raids to their masters. The Abrélinde are Noble-led; Arélin has Rank 1 for those purposes. The battle sheets are as follows.

ABRÉLIND BATTLE SHEET

*Scale: Skirmish**Total Army Size: 34**Leader: Arélin*

<u>Formation</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>Me</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>Mo</u>	<u>Special</u>
Light Archers	4	8	10	8	10	6	10	—
Light Infantry	30	8	6	9	9	6	8	—

EASTERLING BATTLE SHEET

*Scale: Skirmish**Total Army Size: 22**Leader: Leaderless*

<u>Formation</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>Me</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>Mo</u>	<u>Special</u>
Light Archers	2	6	8	6	8	5	10	—
Medium Infantry	20	6	4	9	10	5	6	—

With slightly superior numbers, the heroes and their allies should carry the day. Try to give each hero a moment in the spotlight, as he or she rallies troops, engages the enemy, or otherwise gets involved in the battle. If the Easterlings lose more than two-thirds of their force, the remainder break and run. Should the heroes and their allies somehow lose the battle, the remaining Abrélinde retreat to their homes while the heroes must escape and return to King Brand with dire news.

CONCLUSION

With a victory over the Easterling army and the threat of invasion stymied for now, it's time for the heroes and their allies to make their good-byes and return home. The heroes need

to return to Esgaroth and report to King Brand, while the Abrélinds need to return to their settlements to prepare for the inevitable counterattack.

The Abrélinds are more than willing to split the spoils of victory. The Easterling camp contains a wide variety of weapons, armour, food, clothing, and other sundry supplies. There is only so much the heroes can take with them, however, so if they try to load up on gear, enforce the penalties for encumbrance. A large quantity of copper and silver pennies—no doubt looted from the raided settlements—is also found. Arélin takes only 20 percent of the money and asks the heroes to return the remainder to King Brand, as it is the Bardings who have suffered the greater losses.

At this point, it's up to you to determine where to go next with the story. Is this the first chapter of a longer chronicle detailing an extended military campaign in the north-east? Or is it simply a one-shot for your group of heroes as they wander Middle-earth in search of adventure?

REWARDS

In addition to successfully navigating the various scene goals, the players should receive experience for the primary objective of finding the root of the attacks and telling King Brand as well as the secondary objectives of arriving safely in Lunn Doring, befriendng the Abrélinds, and defeating the Easterlings in battle. Furthermore, if the heroes return all the money recovered from the Easterling camp, award each hero another 100 experience points. None of the heroes receive this bonus if any of the recovered money is spent or kept.

Finally, each hero who returns to Esgaroth to report to King Brand receives one point of Renown for being part of the scouting party delivering the news that could save the entirety of Dale from invasion and destruction.