

At this point, the PCs have finished their rigorous training with a mentor in the community, and have been trained in the basic arts of their combat specialization. Because this is such a small community, only martial characters are allowed, as there are not resources to train arcane ones. Their mentor has put in a good word with the mayor of the town, and after allowing them a few nights to celebrate to completion of their training, he calls them to the town hall.

When they arrive read:

The servants usher you into a small crowded room full of maps, bookcases, and devices that appear to have no discernible function. Within it all sits the mayor at his desk, looking tired and worn, his head balding. He seems smaller and thinner than he did when you saw him at his last speech. He turns to you, nods, and gestures for you to sit down across from him.

The mayor tells the PCs that he has been hearing about a lot of undead encounters recently, one where a high priest walked into his church the day after his death and sat at the altar as he normally did, but never got up until another priest was summoned to banish him. He was reburied in a sealed tomb. Another where a criminal, hung on the gallows for murdering a bartender, returned to un-life as the executioner cut him down and tried to strangle him. Various reports of undead sightings have come to him, some more believable than others, but they have taken a toll on the atmosphere of the town.

“I sent word to the mayor of the next town, and he wrote back that he was experiencing the same problems. I was hoping that this might be an isolated incident, but it seems that other areas are experiencing this too.” He sighs and shrugs, his face worn. “My re-election is in a few weeks, and if I don't do something about this problem, people will not be happy with me. That's why I asked you here.” He nods, and continues. “I would like you to help me discover the source of this problem. But I do not think that it here lies here in town.

“You see, if this were an isolated incident, it possibly could be a cult causing this return of the dead. But because leaders of other communities are having similar issues, it may be something larger. I was very concerned about this, so a month ago, I sent a message to the sage Arashak in his tower on the foothills of Mount Thorin. He has long studied necromantic energy, with the aim of finding how to stop the dead from rising. I thought he could help us.”

“But the first messenger I sent didn't return. His family prompted me to make a search of the area, and we found his body in a gully in Aristarme Wood. By his tracks, it looked like he had been pursued and running for his life when he fell down the pit. He didn't have a chance, as he fell headfirst and landing on rocks many feet down. It was a costly enterprise, and the family have been unhappy with me ever since, believing that I am to blame since I sent him out on his journey.”

The mayor sits in silence for a moment or two before continuing. “After that, I sent a body of the town guards with the next messenger. They were good men, skilled at fighting, and I had faith that they could protect him.” He looks straight at you for a moment, his eyelids sagging in tiredness.

“They never returned. It has been two months since they set out, and although I would never admit it to their families, I don't think they are coming back. So now you see why I would like to hire you. I will pay you handsomely to be the bodyguard for my next messenger. Will you work for me?”

He looks at you pleadingly.

The Mayor is willing to pay the PCs

If they agree to the job:

“Good!” The Mayor gives a relieved sigh and reaches out to shake your hands. “I will pay for you to

stay at the Briar Inn tonight, where the messenger will meet you tomorrow. I cannot thank you enough. Good night. Oh, and I almost forgot.” He hands you a map that shows, in painstaking detail, the path from Dale, through Aristarme woods and to the tower of Arashak. It also shows all the inns and stopping points along the way. He stands up, and it is clear that the meeting is over. The servants escort you out.

The PCs are staying the night at the Briar Inn, one of the town's best inns. It is run by Dor Hussak, a middle-aged dwarf, and his son, who works as a bartender. While there, they see two travelers who are casting fearful looks at the other patrons. If they interact with them, the travelers say that they are merchants who traveled to Dale in search of good deals, but found only fear and paranoia. They say that they are leaving in the morning.

The PCs have a good night's rest. In the morning, the mayor comes again and they are introduced to the messenger, a nervous looking man named Ronald Nalf. He tells them to protect the messenger with their life, which seems to calm Ronald down a bit. Then he departs, and the PCs set out with Ronald on their journey to the tower of Arashak.

After about a day of walking, as the night begins to close in, they enter the forest of Aristarme. It is even darker in here because of the tall, imposing trees which block out the light. Thorns catch on their clothes. Strange noises, snuffling and snorting, can be heard off the trail, and occasionally something large can be heard moving through the trees a way off. Play up the tension, make them scared. Then, as the sun is just a sliver of red on the horizon, and the first inn is about a half-mile off, they see three figures coming down the road towards them.

Twisted Travelers

Encounter Level Difficulty: Standard (225 XP)

2 PCs

Party Level 1

Setup

Three weary travelers stumble down the road towards you, stumbling and shaking. In the twilight, you can just about make out that one has the helmet of a town guard. As they get closer however, it becomes clear that something is wrong. One man's neck is at an odd angle, and they make no noise as they approach you. As they come within a few feet, the one with the helmet looks up at you, revealing hollow, sightless eyes, bones visible under parchment skin and a gaping, slack jaw. The zombies lunge.

This encounter includes the following:

2 Zombie (Level 1)

1 Decrepit Skeleton

2 Zombie (Level 1)	Level 1 Brute
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Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 100 each
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1 Decrepit Skeleton	Level 1 Minion
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Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 25
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Tactics

The three care nothing for their own survival, and attempt to close the distance quickly so that they can

pummell the PCs with their fists, but the skeleton attempts to stay out of the fight and pepper its enemies with an ancient crossbow. They will not flee, even in the face of superior numbers.

Aftermath

If the PCs met and spoke with the travelers at the inn: The zombies are the two travelers the PCs met in the Briar Inn, who said that they could not wait to get away from Dale, as all the zombie stories were creeping them out. It looks like they spoke too soon. The other is a half-rotted skeleton wearing a ragged Town Guard uniform and dented armor.

DC 15 Insight: This was one of the guards from the earlier escort. He appears to have been dead for quite some time.

The messenger, Ronald, has been quite terrified by this fight and wants to move on to the next inn along the way. If the PCs decide to stay or go back, a hideous howl emerges from the forest far behind them, followed by answering howls, getting closer. Ronald runs screaming down the trail, and hopefully the PCs follow him.

Blackwood Inn

When the players arrive at the Blackwood Inn, they are tired and terrified of imagined terrors lurking in the forest. A dull light shines from the inn's windows, and several people can be seen moving around inside. When they go to knock on the door, a fearful eye peers through a crack and an old lady whispers

“Adam?”

When it is revealed that the PCs are not her husband Adam,