

CHAIN OF STARS: AN AD&D 2ND EDITION CAMPAIGN

Campaign Background and Act I Recap

Chain of Stars is an *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition Campaign* set in the frontier kingdom of Ulrak's March in a reimagined and homebrewed Oerth, the world of the classic Grayhawk D&D setting. Knowledge of the world of Grayhawk is not required. The deities, calendar, and cosmology have inspired by the setting, but significant liberties have been taken.

CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

At the start of the campaign and through play, the players have gradually learned details about the setting's history that have relevance in the campaign. Here is presented a summary of those historical details in rough chronological order.

THE KINGDOM OF ROVAR

Roughly a millennium ago, the lands between the Great Western Steppelands and the Icetop and Wyrmspine Mountains was claimed by the Rovari humans and united under the Kingdom of Rovar. The Rovari were devoted of many Oeridian gods and built numerous temples, shrines, and sanctuaries in their honor. The Rovari established pacts of friendship with the elves of the Silverwood to the south and the Ironroot dwarves of the Icetop Mountains to the northwest.

After centuries of prosperity, the Rovari faced invasion by hoboblin legions from the Grozrad Impirate across the Great Western Steppelands. As the war escalated, the daughter of the Rovari king launched a coup and seized the throne, but the conflict escalated into a civil war. Within a generation, the kingdom was ravaged and ruined. The elves retreated from the land altogether and the Ironroot dwarves retreated to their clanholds. Eventually, the hobgoblins, rich with plunder, fell back across the Steppelands.

THE MARCHERS OF ULRAK

Two centuries ago, refugees and deserters from war in the Dawnlands to the southeast migrated to the lands of Old Rovar and found nothing but a handful of brigands, nomads, and homesteaders amongst the ruins of the Rovari fortress and temples. The captain of a deserter mercenary company, Uthrad Ulrak, named himself Marcher King.

Ulrak's March has grown into a feudal kingdom. It is ruled from Rivenwater Castle by a Joral Ulrak, a descendant of its first king. The kingdom is divided into seven Holds, each ruled by a High Lord sworn to King Ulrak.

- High Lord Kestrel rules his Hold from Eastgate Keep
- High Lord Morek rules his Hold from Peakshadow Keep
- High Lord Whellin rules his Hold from Whitebridge Keep
- High Lord Tolvar rules his Hold from Blackwater Fortress
- High Lord Cored rules his Hold from Caster Amberwall
- High Lady Tymar rules her Hold from The Meadowmarch

A century after its founding, Ironroot dwarves still dwelling in their clanhold in the Icetop Mountains

sent a delegation to the Marcher and established a trade pact, though they remained distant and isolated.

THE FALL OF IRONHOOT CLANHOLD

For fourteen centuries, the Barrendur — or Ironroot — dwarves occupied a massive clanhold and several satellite colonies in the Icetop Mountains. In the days of the Rovari, they established an abiding friendship with the lowlander humans and even helped construct some of the humans' greatest structures. When the hobgoblins of the Grozrad Impirate attacked, the dwarves joined their human allies on the battlefield. When the coup plunged the Kingdom of Rovar into chaos and the tide of war turned, the dwarves were forced to retreat and shore up their own defenses against the hobgoblin legions. The dwarven forces were pressed, and their colonies and clanholds assaulted before the hobgoblins ultimately retreated.

The dwarves never recovered from their military losses and the lack of trade and the loss of their own colonies sent the Barrendur dwarves into a long, slow decline. They retreated from the lowest and oldest of their clanhold's halls and sealed them up against invasion from the denizens of the mountains deepest roots.

Such was life until the Marchers of Ulrak settled in the lowlands. Dwarven emissaries established trade which was funneled through the market at Blackwater Fortress, but the dwarves were wary of entering into a stronger alliance and kept the location of their clanholds — and their situation — secret.

Fifty years ago, the dwarves found their trade caravans and terrace villages attacked by orc raiders. At first, they assumed the raids were the work of a single, nomadic warband and met the raiders in force, but the dwarves discovered an unprecedented alliance of a dozen orc warbands under an unknown great warchief. The dwarves took heavy losses in the field and were soon cut off from contact with Marchers.

The orcs laid siege to the Barrendur clanhold for eighteen months, but when the orcish alliance showed no signs of collapsing due to infighting or moving on once the valley around their camps had been despoiled, King Radrakar ulen Adrakar of Barrendur chose to abandon the clanhold and retreat to an ancient and secret dwarven colony in the lowlands. Civilians were evacuated through the lower halls and ancient tunnels, though it is unclear how many survived.

King Radrakar led a final charge against the orcs with the entire remaining military might of the Barrendur dwarves. The goal was to smash through the orcish lines at high noon — when they would be most vulnerable — and then scatter into the lowlands. Meanwhile, the Kingswife and the clan's Lorekeeper escaped by an ancient path beneath the clanhold with a small escort and the clan's historical records and most prized treasures.

The evacuees were ambushed by a small force of orcs led by a masked and robed human diabolist. The clans treasures — including a multifaceted diamond of exquisite craftsmanship — were stolen and the bodies of the evacuees were dumped into an underground river.

One dwarf, a stonemason and the son of a blacksmith, survived by the will of the dwarven god Clangeddin Silverbeard. Awakening on the shore of underground lake, he began his slow journey to the surface. Over the next few decades, the dwarf would wander the lands on the eastern side of the Icetop Mountains, well beyond the kingdom, before finally making his way into Ulrak's March, lost and desperately searching for his people.

The fate of King Radrakar and the greater dwarven host remains unknown, but at least some dwarves survived and are living in the ruins of an ancient Rovari town.

THE BANNERS ARE CALLED

It is the year 1542. More than 50 years have passed since King Radrakar's last charge and nearly a thousand since the Rovari fell. King Joral Ulrak's scouts have brought word of orcish warbands massing the western plains. When winter breaks, King Ulrak calls his banners. The High Lords of the kingdom lead their armies to Castle Rivenwater and, under the command of King Ulrak, the host marches west to the kingdom's borders in a show of force. The lesser lords and their forces are charged with keeping the king's peace and protecting the March's other borders.

The people of Ulrak's March, meanwhile, struggle against the weather. A dry autumn last year gave way to a long, early, cold winter, and the spring brought little rain to feed the soil.

THE TRAVELING SCHOLAR

Meanwhile, a scholar from Xanthil in the Dawnlands south and west of Ulrak's March, Jalaida, arrives in the kingdom. She's discovered that centuries-old religious order was excommunicated and expunged from the annals of history and she wants to know more. The Order of the Unclouded Sky was a secretive order of astrologers and oracles devoted to Celestian, the god of stars and of prophecy and their temple once lay in the borders of the Kingdom of Rovar.

Jalaida firsts visits Brightdawn Abbey in Whellin's Hold. Devoted to Pelor, the abbey was built on the remains of a Rovari monastery and it's underground vaults are full of ancient texts from the time. She searches the abbey's vaults with the help of Fourth Ordant Hamman, a devotee of Celestian, for information about the Order of the Unclouded Sky to no avail. Elder Hamman agrees to keep searching while Jalaida explores the kingdom looking for clues.

Believing the Dome of the Unclouded Sky to lie somewhere in High Lord Cored's Hold, Jalaida travels to Castle Amberwall. Unfortunately, she discovers nothing there and so heads north to the ruins of a city believed to be the ancient Rovari capital. She is driven back by dangerous creatures and fell magic, but she is rescued by an expatriate Barrendur dwarf named Tolrok ulen Toldrak. For reasons he never reveals, Tolrok agrees to travel with Jalaida.

Jalaida discovers the location of the Dome of the Unclouded Sky in the ruins. It indeed lies in Cored's Hold in the foothills of the Southwall Mountains. She and the dwarf return to Castle Amberwall but discover, along the way, that they are being tailed by a sinister-looking robed and masked human, and so they start moving in secret.

Meanwhile, Elder Hamman discovers a star map stamped with the seal of the Order of the Unclouded Eye. At first glance, the map appears to be a normal, astrological chart, but he notes that it features a constellation that doesn't exist in the sky and that several important stars are missing.

Too old to travel, Hamman entrusts a copy of the star map — he keeps the original — to a recently raised brother of Brightdawn Abbey, Evander Morek, a scion of High Lord Morek. Evander agrees to deliver the sealed scroll case to Jalaida at Castle Amberwall, her last known destination.

THE TRAVELING ELF

A high elf named Leoren has arrived in Ulrak's March. He claims to hail from an elven enclave somewhere in or beyond the Dawnlands, though he seems remarkably well versed in the current and ancient history of the lands of the March. He also carries several maps including one of the ancient Kingdom of Rovar labeled in High Elvish. Leoren says that his mission is to explore the human lands and determine whether the time is right for friendly contact between the humans and elves.

THE SWORDSWOMAN

A peasant woman named Rhesa departs her home village of Redshore in Cored's Hold. She bears an ancient sword that she fiercely insists is her rightful property despite it being engraved with the name Theodra the Swift Blade in ancient Rovari sigils.

GAME EVENTS

When gameplay begins, it is low summer in Ulrak's March. The date is Planting 11, 1542.

A CHANCE MEETING AT THE BROKEN WHEEL

Evander, Galon, Leoren, and Rhesa met by chance at a crossroads inn called The Broken Wheel in High Lord Whellin's Hold.

Evander was bound for Caster Amberwall in High Lord Cored's Hold, but he was warned off the most direct route across the ancient Redbridge over the Tumblestone Run that cuts between the two holds. The landlady warned Evander that travelers were going missing and she suspected brigands or worse were encamped in the ruins near the bridge. She suggested Evander take a much longer route into the heartland of the March and then out again.

Ovehearing this and for their own reasons, Galon, Leoren, and Rhesa offered to brave the ruins with Evander and to deal with the brigands.

THE RUINS AT REDBRIDGE

In ancient days, the Redbridge was guarded by a temple-fortress, but it has long since fallen to ruin. The party explored the ruins and ousted the goblin raiders camped there, befriendng a fey sprite named Mowanet in the process. While exploring the ruins, the party learned it had been manned by knights of the Order of the Blue Shield, a stalwart devotees of the Oeridian god of valor and courage, Heironeous. They found signs the Order had met a tragic end. It appeared the knight commander, Eadrin the True Heart, also called Justice's Blade, had betrayed his oaths. Meanwhile, they discovered skeletal remains that had been left unburied in the temple's font. In a trophy hall, the party discovered that Theodra the Swift Blade had been a member of the order as well and she had been called the Field Slayer.

AT CASTLE AMBERWALL

The party reached Castle Amberwall on Planting 13. Though they had missed Jalaida, they found a hidden letter she'd left for Elder Hamman to find outlining her journey, studies, her companionship with the Barrendur dwarf Tolrok, and her intention to explore the foothills of the Southwall Mountains where she believed she would find the Dome of the Unclouded Sky. She also revealed that she was being followed and the party confirmed a sinister, robed figure had been asking after her just days before they arrived.

The party gained an audience with High Lord Cored's daughter and castellan of Castle Amberwall, the Dame Endira Cored. The meeting was amicable. The Dame took a liking to Rhesa and the Dame's seneschal, Dorvan, and coinkeeper, Vardis, were keen to ingratiate themselves to Leoren and Galon, clearly making inroads toward an alliance with the elven and dwarven peoples.

Dame Endira Cored gifted Rhesa suit of mail she'd trained for the knighthood in as a teenager and gave the party a pack horse, supplies, and a letter of introduction to Lord Avrel Varsh of Ironwall Keep in the southern hills. She also lent the party riding horses to speed their journey.

CROSSING CORED'S HOLD

The party made a swift but careful trek across the farmlands and plains of Cored's Hold, taking care to lay a false trail to confound anyone following them.

THE STRANGE TRAVELER

On the road, the party met and shared camp with a strange old man who called himself Ralon. He was rambling but well-informed and knew much of what was happening in the kingdom. He also told the party the story of an ancient kingdom whose people had once destroyed a sacred plant gifted to the world by the goddess of life and wilds, Ehlonna. The people were trying to make medicine to cure a terrible plague and many lives were saved, but Ehlonna was incensed. She appealed to the god of light and the law, Pholtus, to punish the kingdom, but Rao, the mediator god, intervened on the mortals' behalves and the kingdom was spared from the wrath of the gods. Ralon asked the party what they made of the story.

Ralon also mentioned his brother was also a traveler, but he was stiff-necked and temperamental and "always looking up instead of looking around."

Ralon gave the party a few cakes of honeyed waybread and skins of mead he said would "cure one of his ills," to thank the party for sharing his camp. In the morning, he was gone.

SIGNS OF DANGER

During their travels south to Ironwood Keep, the party came across several pillaged and burned-out farmsteads and encountered a small band of orc raiders marked with the Bloody Moon.

The party also aided a band of Lord Varsh's soldiers from Ironwall Keep. Their sergeant, Cybrus, explained that the orcs of the hills rarely traveled so far north, and that the Bloody Moon was unfamiliar to him. He asked the party to warn Lord Varsh while he and his men continued to patrol the lowlands.

At a small crossroads market, a maid claimed to have encountered the masked and robed stranger days prior. She said he had a thick robe, the color of wine, and a wooden mask painted with a strange symbol. He threatened her with a serrated knife of green steel for information about Jalaida and she sent him on to Ironwall Keep.

AT IRONWALL KEEP

On Planting 15, the party arrived at Ironwall Keep in the Southwall Hills. From the locals, they learned Jalaida and her dwarven ally had hired a guide to take them into the hills several days before. The guide, a former prospector for Lord Varsh named Farnor, had returned to the keep two days prior, but the party could not find him. They did find Farnor's daughter, Varanna, who took them to Farnor's rooms. There, they discovered Farnor's body. He had been brutally savaged by a clawed beast and his skin was burnt and blistered as by acid.

The party also gained an audience with Lord Avrel Varsh. He was polite, but cold and though sworn to High Lord Cored, he made no secret of his lack of faith in Dame Endira Cored. When the party told Varsh their tale, the Lord was incensed. He held that Jalaida was a treasure hunter seeking to plunder his lands and that she — and by association the party — was responsible for bringing danger and death to his stronghold.

Varanna held a similar view. She saw the party as just another group of plundering mercenaries who

didn't care what destruction followed after them, but her desire for revenge won out and she agreed to help the party find the Dome of the Unclouded Sky and, hopefully, whoever or whatever had killed her father.

Before leaving Ironwall, the party paid their respects at the temple of Ulaa, the goddess of the highlands, miners, and the gems and ore they mine. The priest warned the party about the orcs and kobolds of the highlands and, when the party told the priest of their quest, he entrusted them with a ruby-studded warhammer that had belonged to a champion of the faith, Vrador Deep-Delver, who was entombed in the temple.

INTO THE HILLS

Varanna led the party into the hills and helped them across the rugged terrain. Along the way, they encountered signs of fighting between orcs of the Shattered Skull and kobolds from the hills.

The party discovered a ransacked camp and identified it as belonging to Jalaida and Tolrok, but they found no bodies. They claimed the camp for themselves and, the next day, they entered the nearby Dome of the Unclouded Sky.

THE SCHOLAR FOUND

On Planting 18, the party entered the Dome of the Unclouded Sky.

Beneath the single-chambered, domed temple nestled in the hills, the party discovered a secret stairway to an extensive, underground complex, a marvel of stoneworking, engineering, and magic.

In a mess hall magically bathed in permanent twilight, the party found the bodies of Jalaida of Xanthil and her dwarven companion, Tolrok ulen Toldrak ral Barrendur. Both had been mauled and burned as Farnor had been. In his dying moments, the dwarf had drawn a symbol in a pool of his own congealed blood.

Using a magical scroll acquired at Redbridge, Evander recalled the spirit of Jalaida temporarily. From her spirit, they learned the scholar's journey was motivated by mere curiosity. She claimed she had been killed by a demon wielded by a mask concealing a demon imprisoned for ages and straining against his bonds.

Evander then finally broke the seal on the scroll case, finding a short letter from Elder Hamman and the star map the scholar had copied. He noted the strange, nonexistent constellation and the missing stars from the sky. The missing stars, he explained, were three of the Azari, a collection of stars that carried such ill fortune that Celestial scattered them so they could never share the sky. The party also noted that the symbol the dwarf had drawn in blood matched the mysterious constellation on the chart.

The party retreated to bury the scholar and her companion.

VISIONS AND GHOSTS

On Planting 19, the party returned to the Dome of the Unclouded Sky.

As they explored, the party saw visions of ghostly priests panicking and fleeing and dying. They guessed they were seeing the last minutes of the Order of the Unclouded Sky, but the visions did not show what had killed the priests and the party couldn't interact with the ghosts in any way. But one spirit seemed to be aware of them.

Several times, the party saw the ghost of a young acolyte moving furtively about the complex. It didn't interact with the party, nor they with it, but, at times, it almost seemed as if the spirit could see the

party. The party followed the spirit first to a gallery where they discovered a magical gemstone monocle that allowed its wearer to see through illusions and invisibility and then to a hidden library. Though the contents of the library had long since been burned to ash, the spirit helped them find a hidden scroll case that had survived the destruction.

The case contained a parchment with a short message written three times in three different inks, once in Rovari, once in Dwarven, and once in High Elvish. The message spoke of judgement coming down on the Order, a Plan the writer had wanted to stop, contact with the Barrendur dwarves, and even the sundering of the Order of the Blue Shield. It further spoke of the Order of the Unclouded Sky hiding gems in temple vaults across the Kingdom of Rovar that might be the key to undoing the Plan.

On the back of the letter were five drawn constellations, but they were unknown to Evander and didn't appear in the sky to anyone's knowledge.

The party also noted several reliefs displayed in a gallery. One depicted the founding of the Order's sanctuary. Another showed Celestian setting the stars in the sky. A third showed the Furies, celestial agents of Pholtus, bringing divine judgment and destruction on some ancient city.

BENEATH THE UNCLOUDED SKY

Using the Eye of Seeing and clues from the complex, the party accessed the inner sanctum of the Order of the Unclouded Sky, a vast open-air grotto with unparalleled view of now twilight sky. The polished floor of the grotto was set with glittering gems in strange constellation-like patterns. The party realized the grotto's floor was a map of the Kingdom of Rovar with the constellations marking important locations, many of which corresponded to locations on Leoren's ancient map.

The party matched the constellations on the back of the Spirit's Letter with those in the grotto and, referring to Leoren's map, concluded the Spirit had recorded the locations where the five gems had been concealed, though the party only had the translations of the High Elven names of each location to go on.

- Bravespring Sanctuary in the March's central plains
- Duskglade Sanctuary in the forests of High Lord Tolvar's Hold
- Mountainpact Meet along the Northamble River
- Serpentwater Vigil on the edge of the Losthope Marsh
- Twinspire Fortress in a highland gap between the Icetop and Wyrmscale Mountains

As dusk had fallen and the grotto seemed tranquil, the party decided to pass the night there and discuss all they had learned. But first, Galon had a story of his own to share.

GALON'S STORY

Galon told the party of the fall of Barrendur Clanhold and his part in the doomed evacuation through the Clanholds lower halls. He noted that a disguised imp had dogged the party until it was able to steal a magnificent diamond from the clan's treasures. He also noted the diabolist that accompanied the orcs wore wine-colored robes, bore a green steel dagger, and wore a mask painted with the same symbol that his clanbrother had drawn in his blood as he died. The same symbol that appeared in the sky on Elder Hamman's star map. He told of his battle with the orcs and diabolist and how he had been cast into the river and left for dead.

ACT II BEGINS

The party — still accompanied by Varanna Algar of Ironwall — must now decide what to do next. They could visit Brightdawn Abbey to speak with Elder Hamman and see what they can learn in the abbey's vaults. They could make their way to Mountainpact Meet as evidence suggests that the surviving Barrendur dwarves gathered there. The party could also use Leoren's map to make their way to any of the five locations they've identified as one of the hiding places of the mysterious gems mentioned in the Spirit's Letter. Evander has offered to analyze the star map to determine the precise times, dates, and locations it might correspond to, but he will need peace and time to do that work. Leoren has a number of books to study and an untranslated spellbook the party discovered in the ruins that he would very much like to transcribe.

Of course, the party will have to return to Ironwall Keep and Castle Amberwall in any case to retrieve their horses and the equipment and treasure they stored there. And the party could even go their separate ways for a time and arrange to meet up at a specific place on some later date.

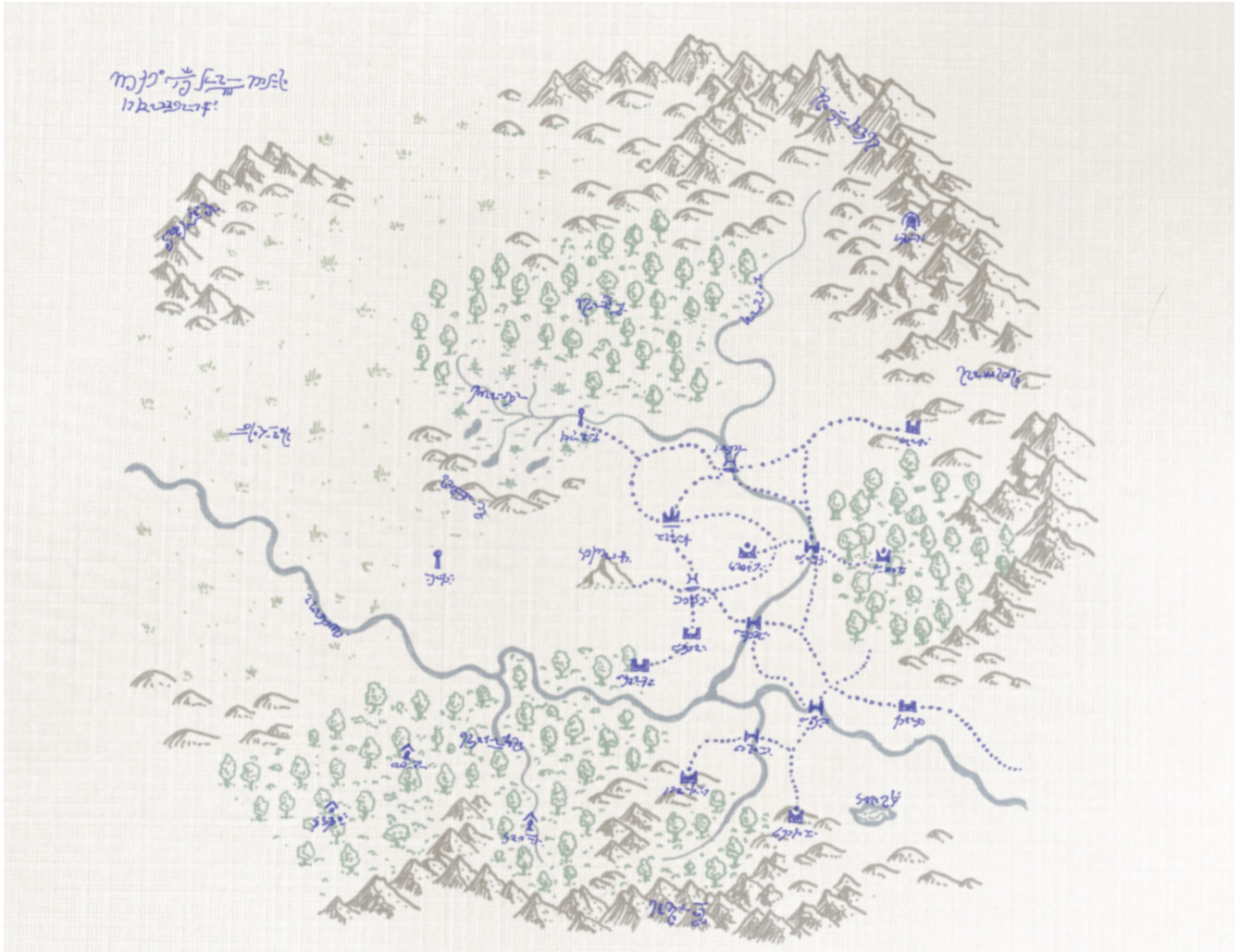


Illustration 1: Leoren's Map of the Kingdom of Rovar

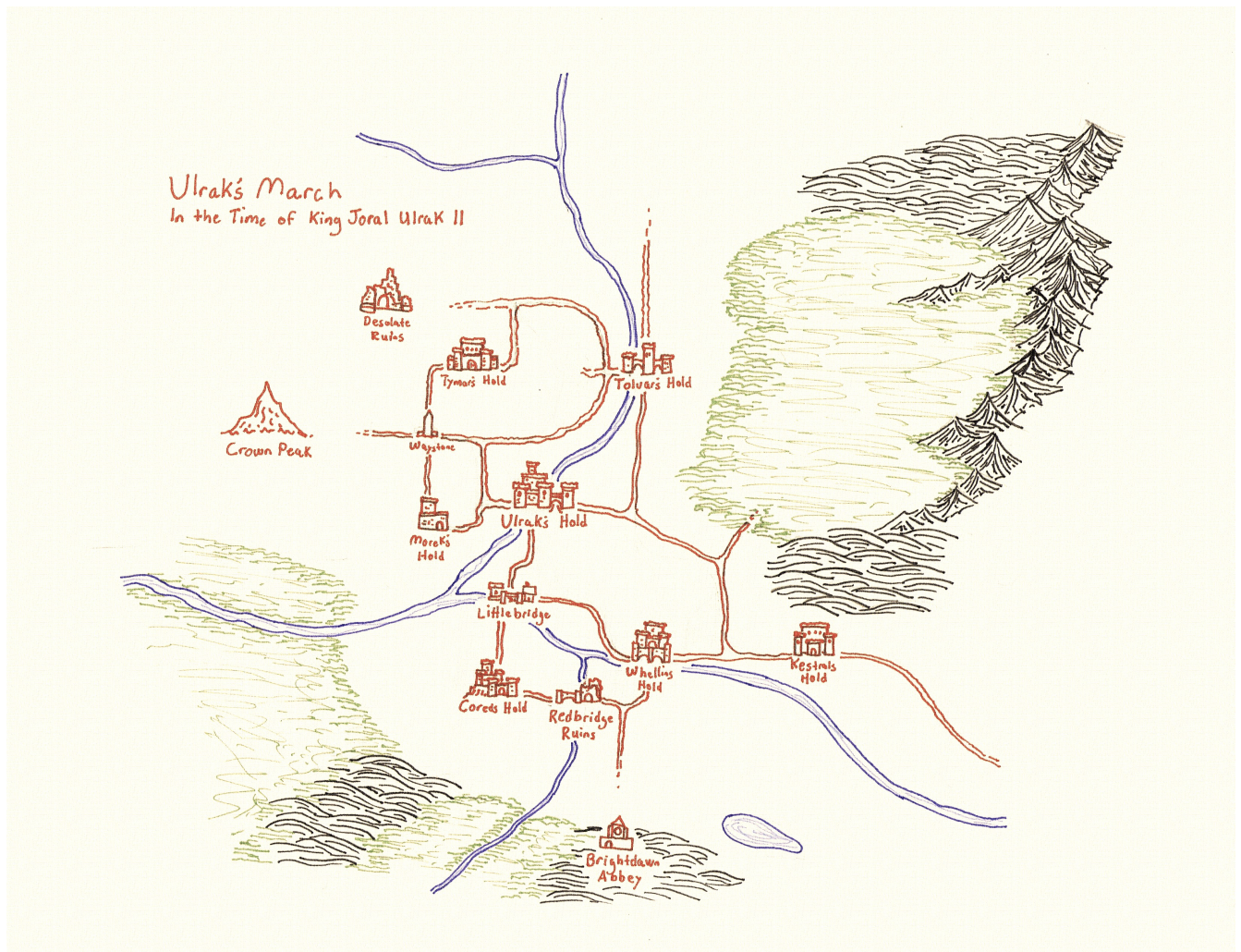


Illustration 2: A Simplified Map of Ulراك's March

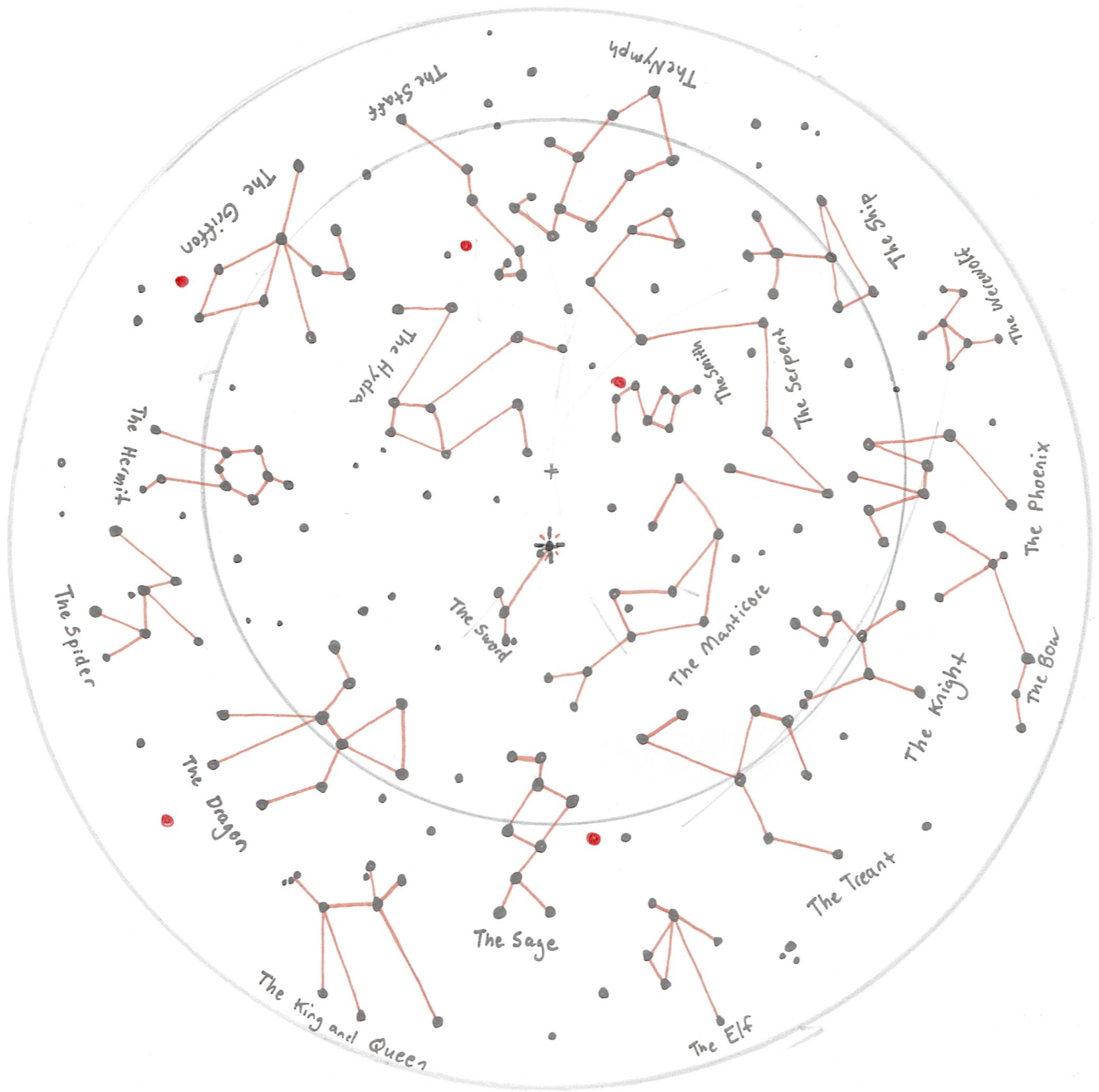


Illustration 3: A Complete Chart of the Stars in the Sky

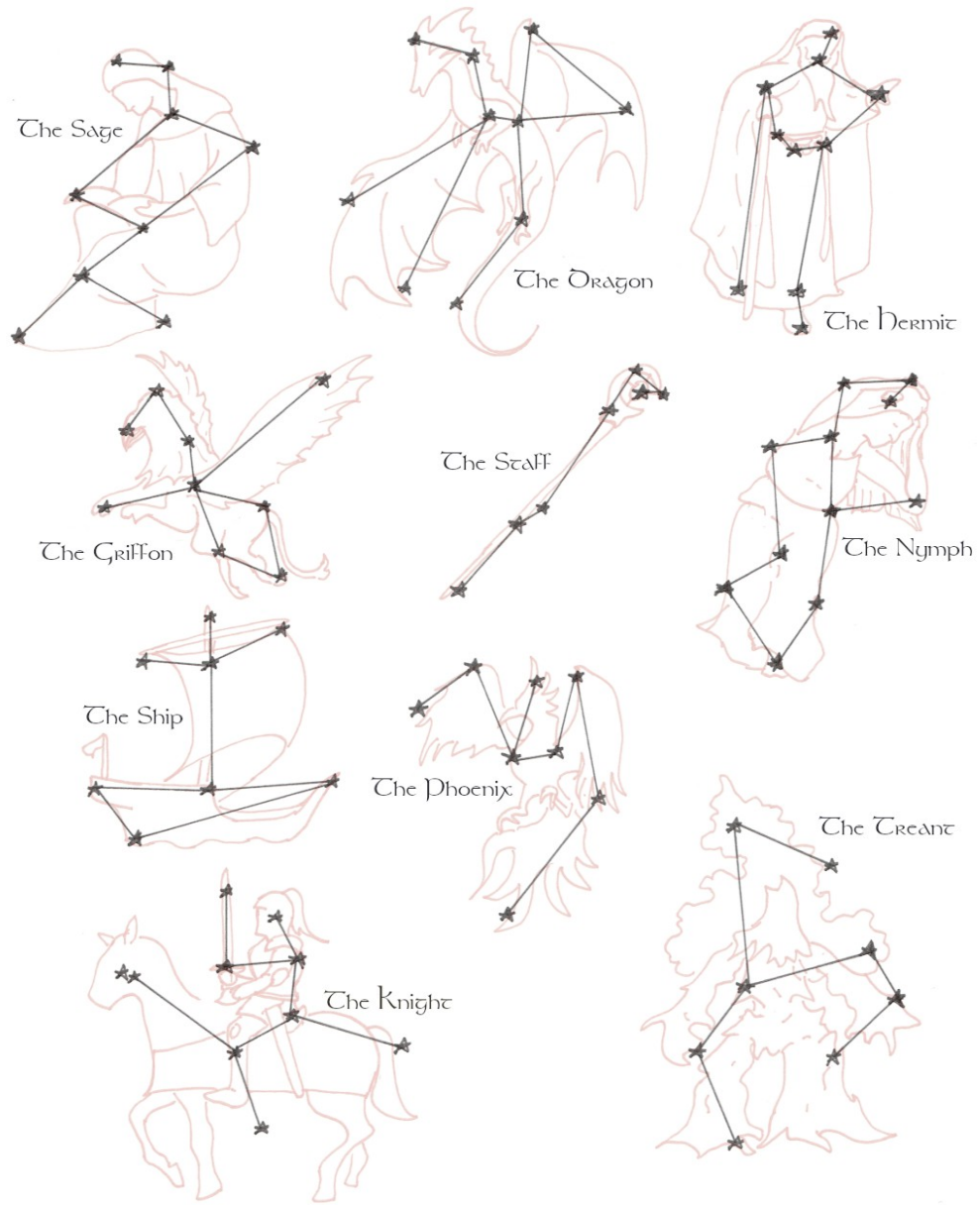


Illustration 4: The Constellations of the Zodiac



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Inscription

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Theodra Swift Blade

Illustration 5: Rhesa's Sword



Illustration 6: The Symbol in Blood

Judgement comes.

I can do no more but put pen to paper. I have failed to sway my brothers from the Plan. I joined the delegation to the Halls of Iron's Root but could not get a moment alone to plead with Terredrek though he was so affronted to learn the truth I could not have swayed him. I went to the Paladins of the Blue Shield. They were breaking already under the kingdom's strife and this broke them. When The Invincible made His will known, The True Heart cast down his sword and the Swift Blade left her post. And Judgment fell upon them. Only the Swift Blade may have escaped and then only for a time. I know not.

Judgment comes.

It comes too late. The Plan is in motion. The gems are already in flight to their final resting places to be hidden away under the guardianship of the unwitting faithful who will never know what is concealed in their vaults.

Judgment comes.

This is my final act. I can do nothing now but leave the key to undoing the Plan. If it be the Will of the Gods, this will be found. I pray it is. If mine own soul must be set to wander for a thousand years to guide someone here, let it be so.

Seek the gems in their stone skins. Unmake them. Undo what we have done.

Illustration 8: The Spirit's Letter Translated

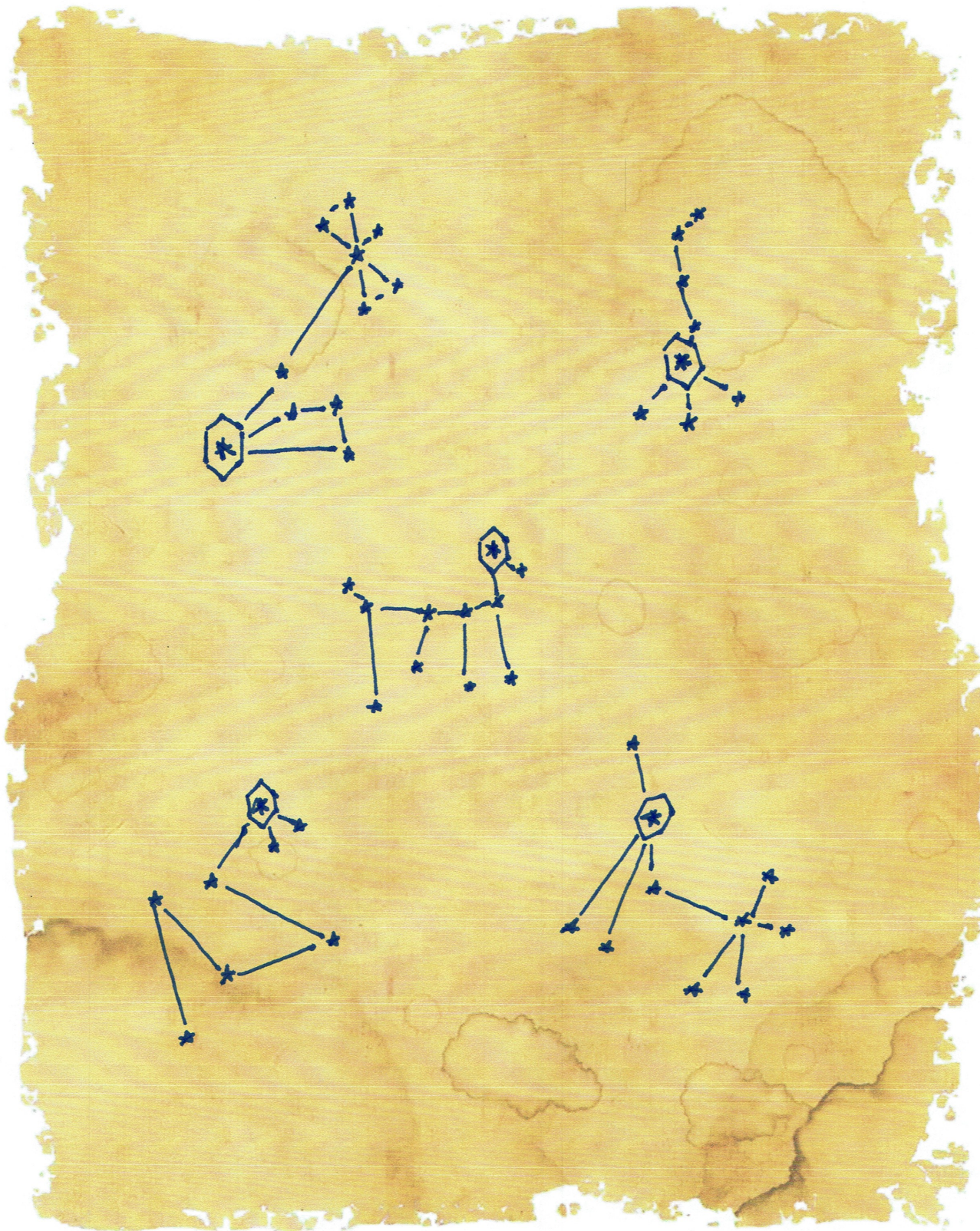


Illustration 9: The Oberse of the Spirt's Letter