



THE PIRATE KING

KORON
JAWS
OF DEATH



With special thanks to Allan Frewin Jones

This one is for Toby Saunders



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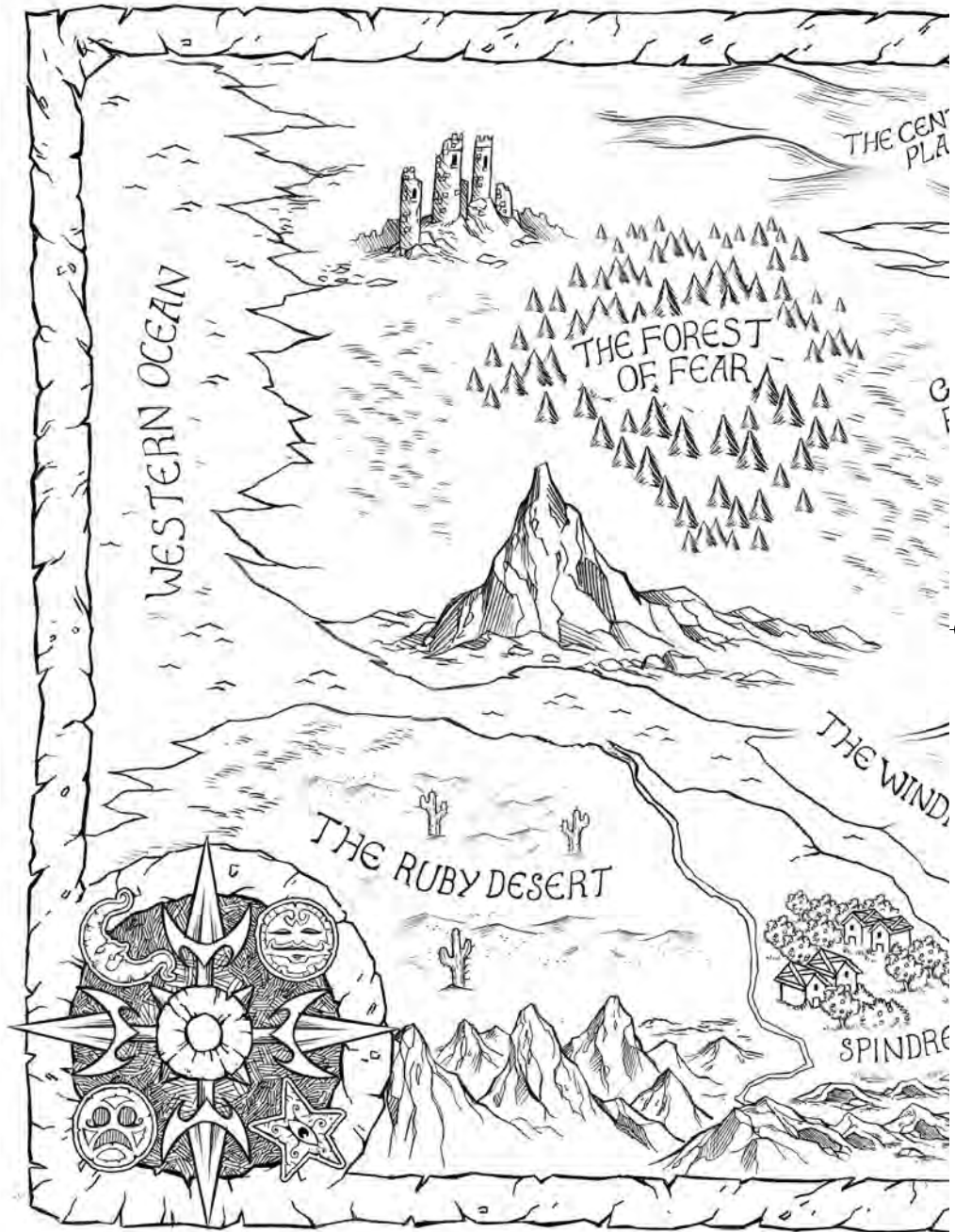


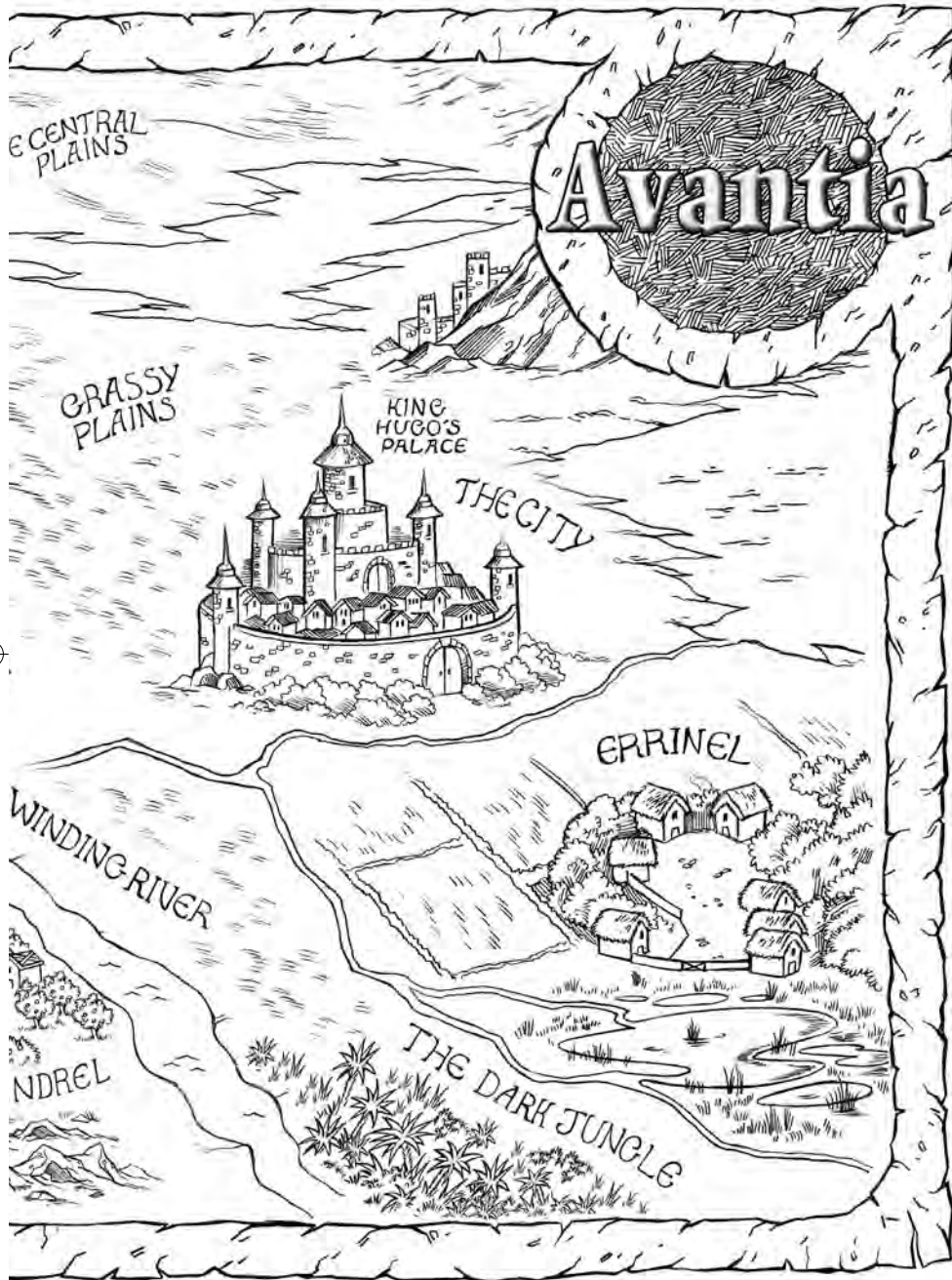
KORON JAWS OF DEATH



BY ADAM BLADE











Tremble, warriors of Avantia, for a new enemy stalks your land!

I am Sanpao, the Pirate King of Makai! My ship brings me to your shores to claim an ancient magic more powerful than any you've encountered before. No one can stand in my way, especially not that pathetic boy, Tom, or his friends. Even Aduro cannot help you this time. My pirate band will pillage and burn without mercy, and my Beasts will be more than a match for any hero in Avantia.



Pirates! Batten down the hatches and raise the sails. We come to conquer and destroy!

Sanpao, the Pirate King





PROLOGUE



Abraham stepped slowly towards the skittish mare. “There now, Blizzard,” he whispered.

The white horse watched him nervously, her eyes rolling, the breath snorting from her nostrils.

Abraham paused, leaning on his staff. He had been working on the Plains as a horse whisperer since boyhood – but this magnificent mare was his most troublesome adversary yet. He could see she had a powerful spirit.

“So, you threw your last rider,” he murmured. “And every rider before him, I’ll warrant. And you broke down a fence to escape.” He clicked his tongue. “That will never do.”

The horse bared her teeth, stamping the ground as if she was on the brink of bolting.

“I’ll do you no harm,” Abraham said, moving forwards again. He was almost upon her now. He reached out an open hand.

Her head dipped and she sniffed his palm, her eyes softening. Abraham came in close, stroking her muscular neck. He lifted the trailing reins.

“That wasn’t so bad, was it?” he whispered, getting on to her back. “I’ll have you back in the village in no time.”

A shadow loomed over them and

Abraham heard a dreadful snarl. The horse's head jerked up, a sharp light igniting in her eyes. She reared on her hind legs, hooves kicking the air, throwing Abraham off. He got up and grabbed her reins, struggling to control her.

He turned and his blood froze as he stared up at a gigantic Beast leaping towards them. It was like a tiger – black as midnight with slashes of blood-red fur across its body – but it was at least three times the size of any tiger he had ever seen.

The great Beast came crashing down a few paces away. Scythe-like claws raked the ground. The fur bristled at the Beast's neck as it drew back its black lips to reveal teeth like daggers. Thick drool dripped from the points of its teeth – hissing

and smoking as it scorched the grass.

But even as Abraham tried to understand what he was seeing, his eyes were drawn upwards in horror. Arching high above the monster's back was a thick scorpion-like tail, scaly and tipped with a vicious sting



that dripped green poison.

Abraham scrambled back, not daring to look away. The creature padded forwards, moving slowly, its muscular body rippling. Abraham heard Blizzard snorting and blowing behind him.

The monstrous cat's eyes bored into Abraham. He could hear its harsh breath rasping in its throat, as though its lungs were great bellows.

The Beast roared, jaws gaping. Its stinking breath blasted into Abraham's face. It pounced, rearing high above them and coming down with its claws spread wide and its dripping fangs bared.

Abraham dived aside with a cry of terror. The edge of one massive paw struck him on the shoulder, knocking him to the ground. He watched

helplessly as the Beast's claws raked across Blizzard's back, ripping through the flesh. The horse shrieked in pain as she stumbled away.

Abraham staggered to his feet, beating at the tiger-Beast's flanks with his staff. The monster turned, as quick and lithe as any cat, and before Abraham could move, the staff was gripped between its jaws.

Snap! The staff splintered, and now the monster's eyes turned to Abraham.

But even as the Beast's jaws widened to tear apart his body, he saw Blizzard turn her back to the great cat and lash out with her powerful hind legs. The Beast yowled in anger and pain, twisting to face the horse, its sting rising, and pulsing with poison.



“Run!” shouted Abraham. “Run for your life!”

Blizzard whinnied and pounded across the grasslands. With a shivering snarl, the Beast went leaping after her, its high tail lashing.

Abraham gasped for breath as he watched the two creatures race away. He doubted that even such a horse as Blizzard could outrun the fearsome Beast.

Then, a curious whirling, churning sound made him stare upwards. His mouth gaped in astonishment.

“It cannot be!” he gasped.

Sweeping down from the high heavens, its sails billowing and its flag cracking in the wind, was a flying ship!





CHAPTER ONE

THE ENCHANTED
WIZARD

Two days had passed since Tom and Elenna had encountered the Pirate King Sanpao and defeated the sea Beast he had set upon them. It had been a fierce battle with a wily and treacherous foe, and Tom worried that worse was to come.

They were riding through the northern reaches of the Forest of

Fear, making for the Grassy Plains and the next stage of their Quest. The air was stifling under the thick branches, and eerie noises came drifting out of the gloomy shadows.

“I wish Silver were with us,” said Elenna.

Tom nodded solemnly, knowing how hard it must be for her to be without her noble wolf companion. “We’ve both lost someone,” he said, thinking of his mother, who was also trapped in Tavana. “The only way to free them is to find the Tree of Being.”

“That won’t be easy,” Elenna said angrily. “Not without Aduro.”

She was right. The Good Wizard who’d been their friend and guide over so many past Quests was now in thrall to the Pirate King. And Tom’s

valiant father, Taladon, could not come to their aid either: he lay injured in King Hugo's castle.

Tom's hand moved to his waist, reminding him of something else he had lost. Aduro had stolen his jewelled belt from him and given it to Sanpao, and now the Pirate King controlled the powers of the coloured jewels.

Aduro had used his magic to place a sash of raw animal hide around Tom's waist. Tom had tried to take it off, but it was impossible. Tucked into the sash was a claw that had floated up to him from the Water Beast, Balisk.

"We're on our own," Tom muttered darkly. "Or *almost* on our own. At least we have one thing to guide us."

"The map," Elenna agreed. "Does it



still show the Tree of Being on the Grassy Plains?”

Tom took the scroll of bark from Storm’s saddlebag and unrolled it carefully, revealing the finely etched map of Avantia on its surface. A tiny engraved symbol showed that the Tree was still there – but for how long?

The mystical Tree had the power to open portals into other worlds. But it could also move for its own protection, vanishing in an instant into the ground and sprouting up again elsewhere in the Kingdom. It had looked thin and sickly when they had first seen it, but with Balisk defeated, Tom had noticed that the tree seemed a little stronger.

Their Quest was made more urgent and dangerous by the fact that



Sanpao was also seeking the Tree for his own evil purposes. The Pirate King had already damaged it – tearing away one of its branches to use as a mast for his great galleon. If he had control over the entire Tree, Tom knew that his wickedness would have no limits. He would be powerful enough to take over any kingdom he wished – maybe all of them.

“Tom! Look!” Elenna’s voice broke into his thoughts. He followed her pointing finger. A pool of eerie blue light was forming among the trees ahead of them.

Tom reined Storm to a halt, sensing dark magic.

His eyes narrowed as the blur of light writhed and twisted and became a vision of their old friend Aduro, staring out at them from his chamber

in King Hugo's castle. Tom shivered to see the cruel smile curling Aduro's lip.

"How is your Quest going, my friends?" he asked mockingly.

Tom felt Elenna's hand on his arm, quietly reminding him that Aduro was under an evil spell. Tom knew that the Good Wizard had a true heart, but it was still hard to see him like this.

"It's going very well, thank you," Tom said in a firm voice. "We will never let Sanpao take the Tree of Being. And we will not rest until my mother and Silver are brought safely home!" He raised his chin defiantly. "Tell that to your pirate master!"

Aduro gave a grating laugh. "Foolish boy," he cackled. "Do you not know that King Sanpao is more



mighty than any foe you have faced before? You'll never see your mother or that mangy wolf again!"

Tom's anger took over. "I'll never

give up!” he shouted, plucking Balisk’s claw from his sash and hurling it at the vision. The image dissolved and the claw scythed through the blur of blue light, cutting leaves from the forest trees as it went.

Then, to Tom’s astonishment, the



claw curved through the air and came spinning back at him.

He heard Elenna's voice crying out in fear. "Tom! Be careful!"

The claw hissed as it sliced towards his face.

