

warrior fell dead to the ground. But in an instant two more sprang forward to take his place, brandishing their swords and spears wildly. It was all Ventharn could do just to catch some blows on his shield while setting others aside with his own blade, so quick and unrelenting was the onslaught.

"We must fall back, they overwhelm us!" he cried, struggling to keep his footing. "Sir Mayneld, there are too many for us!" he called over to a tall, armored knight upon horseback who bore the royal banner of Kalan's host fluttering on his lance.

"No!" bellowed the paladin. "Hold your ground! We are still Men of Wattier and Kalan's second vanguard, and no mere barbarians can hope to rout us! Fight on!"

In so saying the knight urged his steed into a furious gallop, plunging headlong into the Balar ranks, skewering some with his lance and trampling others under his charge. Seeing their leader's valiant efforts, the remaining soldiers under his command cheered and gave shouts of renewed hope. Following his reckless deed as well as his command, the Wattiersmen thrust themselves back into the stormy fray, striking out against their foes with restored boldness.

Their souls drunk with valor as if it had been wine, they descended upon their enemies with relentless determination, their wills heartened anew even though their bodies were near to exhaustion. But at the very moment the soldiers of Kalan pressed forward, their courage thus bolstered, a long, heavy-headed spear was sent arcing through the air by the powerful arm of a Balar clansman whose ample frame eclipsed the stature of his fellows. The pole-arm, soaring for the mounted form of Sir Mayneld, found its mark, splintering through the knight's wooden shield and penetrating even his steel breastplate, to bury itself in his chest. The crash of the knight's armored body to the ground could be heard over the maddening din of the battlefield.

"Sir Mayneld has fallen!" rose up from the throats of knights nearby. "Now we're all lost!"

What bold fearlessness that had risen in the hearts of Kalan's fighters moments before now crumbled to the earth, as did their bodies under the Balars' steel. Panic fell upon them, and those who were able