

turned and ran for their lives, while others who could not escape were cut down in their attempts to flee.

*... a war of conquest ...*

"It is the hunger for glory and vane arrogance of one man that has brought the Wattiersmen here from across the sea, and nothing else. That man is Sir Kalan of Harckelort. He is a high-born noble, a lord and a lord's son. He is also a formidable knight, a great man-at-arms, but I say to you that he is a madman and a tyrant.

"His only desire is to bring renown to his name, and it's by conquering this land that he hopes to win that glory. His army is filled with freebladers, fools, and blackhearts whom he gathered to his standard with promises of honor and wealth . . . while others came to repay debts to his family. Such is it with my beloved Ventharn, whose grandfather owed his life to Sir Kalan's sire.

*... a clash of steel against steel, flesh against flesh, and culture against culture ...*

The Wattiersmen were approaching at a steady, even pace—the morning sun glinting off the polished metal of their armor and weapons. Brightly-colored banners rippled on the ends of their lances and swordstaves, many bearing the emblems of old and noble houses while others displayed those of famed knights and men-at-arms. But also there was evidence that spoke of long and hard journeying; cloth and leather were marred with copious stains, both of mud and dirt, as well as many others of a rusty-red hue.

In all, the army was composed of perhaps seven score warriors, at the head of which rode two men. He who was foremost was fair of hair and face, clean-shaven, sitting straight and upright upon his mount. From his shoulders hung a hoodless cloak of deep, sea blue. This was Sir Kalan of Harckelort. Kalan the Bold. Kalan the Fearless. Kalan the Invader. The other man—who was riding a little further back from his lord—was older and possessed a large, thick, bear-like frame, with a