

BLOOD IN FERELDEN



A **DRAGON AGE** ADVENTURE COLLECTION BY WALT CIECHANOWSKI, KEVIN KULP, AND TS LUIKART

DRAGON AGE™



BLOOD IN FERELDEN

THREE ADVENTURES FOR THE DRAGON AGE RPG

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Blood in Ferelden*! This book contains three full-length, ready-to-play adventures for the *Dragon Age* tabletop roleplaying game based on BioWare's *Dragon Age: Origins* video game.

In **Amber Rage** the heroes survive a surprise attack on a village fair and must journey, in the aftermath of the attack, into the Korcari Wilds to find a key ingredient to the cure for the horrible disease that the attackers brought with them.

In **Where Eagles Lair** the PCs are pressed into service tracking down the kidnapped daughter of one of Ferelden's arls in the Frostback Mountains, where the strange and savage Avvarian hillmen dwell.

Finally, in **A Fragile Web** the heroes must negotiate an entirely different manner of challenge, where almost nothing is as it seems, in dealing with a series of deadly political intrigues in Ferelden's capital city.

These three adventures are presented in a roughly appropriate order for the same group of PCs: **Amber Rage** is recommended for 1st and 2nd level heroes and **Where Eagles Lair** for 3rd and 4th level heroes. **A Fragile Web** is intended for 4th and 5th level heroes, although see the section **The Long View** on page 81 for some ideas about how that adventure can be staged so that it wraps entirely around one or more other adventures.

At the end of *Blood in Ferelden*, you'll also find three scenario seeds, each providing the basic skeleton of an adventure that you can flesh out yourself.

To use the adventures in *Blood in Ferelden* you must have a copy of the *Dragon Age RPG* Set 1. It's likely available in the same place you found this book.

Finally, be aware that only *Dragon Age* Game Masters should read the material in *Blood in Ferelden*. If you are likely to play a PC hero in any of these adventures, you should stop reading now. Learning these stories' secrets in advance will only spoil your fun.

Each of the adventures in *Blood in Ferelden* is broken down into parts and encounters to help you understand the overall outlines of the action. Each part is collection of related encounters. It begins with a broad description of the part as a whole, sometimes continues with a section describing the greater environs in which that part's encounters take place, and then presents each encounter. Each adventure's parts (as well as the encounters that make up each part) are presented in the order in which they're likely to take place.

Each encounter presents a single challenge, or collection of related challenges (such as a fight) that the PCs must deal with or overcome. Each is classified as an exploration encounter, a roleplaying encounter, or a combat

encounter. Exploration encounters challenge the PCs to use their skills and ingenuity to find things out about the world and the story, roleplaying encounters let the PCs interact with and influence the NPCs who are part of the adventure, and combat encounters involve battle between the PCs and their foes. Although it's possible to (for example) roleplay in an exploration encounter, the classification helps you know what to expect, and understand how that encounter functions in the larger story.

Each encounter has sections of text formatted in different ways to help you find the information you need right away while you're at the game table.

Every encounter begins with a short summary of the action. Next, most encounters have read-aloud text, found in grey boxes. This text is usually composed so that it can simply be read aloud to the players as that encounter begins, but it's better and more natural if you paraphrase and embellish what's written, using your own words to communicate the information.

One word of caution: While the pre-written nature of read-aloud text is helpful when encounters begin as expected, it can be at odds with what's otherwise obvious if the PCs approach a given encounter at a different time, from a different direction (either literally or figuratively), or in the company of different NPCs. A given passage of read-aloud text will still give you clues about the important pieces of information you should communicate to the players, but you'll have to tailor the specifics to match the circumstances.

After each encounter's read-aloud text is the general description of what you, the GM, need to know about the encounter and how the action may unfold in play. In most encounters, this includes specific information about tests the characters are likely to have to make. Tests are formatted like this—"a **TN 13 Willpower (Courage) test**" or "an **opposed Dexterity (Stealth) vs. Perception (Seeing) test**"—to make it easier for you to spot them in the text at a glance.

Some encounters have additional passages of read-aloud text interspersed in the general description, to be read if and when particular conditions are met. Treat these the same way as the read-aloud text that begins each encounter (save, obviously, that you only read them when the relevant conditions apply).

Some encounters include a "Questions and Answers" section. These are pairings of questions the PCs might ask with answers the various NPCs in the encounter might give. The questions and answers are presented in the first person, as those parties might ask and answer them. As with read-aloud text, though, you are encouraged to adapt the phrasing to the situation. And of course, the precise phrasing of the questions is included only to help you locate the right information. Under no circumstances should you insist that the players use these phrasings or say these particular words.



BY WALT CIECHANOWSKI

Amber Rage is an adventure for four to six characters of levels 1–2, although it is easily scalable for higher-level parties. If you run a smaller group, with only two or three players, you might want them to start this adventure at level 2 or even level 3. Your heroes should have a balanced mix of abilities to handle combat, exploration, and roleplaying encounters.

This adventure presumes that the player characters are at the beginning of their adventuring career and may even hail from Sothmere, the village where the adventure begins.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

In **Amber Rage** the PCs enjoy a village festival that has been thrown in honor of a new fort that will be built nearby. Unfortunately, the village is attacked by Chasind stalkers who have been transformed into mindless savages by a mythical disease known as the amber rage. Though the PCs are able to fend off this threat, a number of villagers (and perhaps one or more PCs) are infected with the disease. Fortunately, a local wise woman believes that she knows the recipe for a

AMBER RAGE

cure, but it requires an extremely rare herb, shadowmoss, that is only known to exist in a single grotto in the Korcari Wilds. Worse, the cure must be applied within three days or the infected forever become mindless sociopaths.

The Rager raid was precipitated by the new Blight that has appeared deep within the Korcari Wilds. This spreading Blight has infected the nearby flora and fauna and has forced some Chasind communities to move further north. As the northern Wilds become more crowded, some Chasind are starting to look to the Hinterlands for new homes.

Chasind shamans, concerned that the new fort might hinder this northward migration, organized a raiding party on the day before this adventure begins to halt its construction and wipe out nearby settlements. Since Ferelden warriors tend to be heavily armored, the Chasind coated their weapons with poison so that even a scratch could fell an armored warrior. Unfortunately, the ingredients were gathered in an area tainted by the Blight. The resulting poison created the amber rage, which infects anyone who contacts it or remains close to it for too long. The first raiding party fell to the amber rage within hours and became “ragers.”



Many of these Ragers turned on their kin while others, partially remembering their mission, continued onward through the river-ford village of Wichford to Sothmere. By the time they got there, they were mindless savages interested only in killing. While the PCs and residents of Sothmere deal with these ragers, the Chasind themselves have been putting to death the shamans responsible for the amber rage, and are currently hunting down their tainted brethren lest they eradicate the entire Chasind culture.

The PCs travel into the Korcari Wilds to find the shadowmoss, encountering many dangers along the way. While on this quest they must make a series of painful moral choices and, when they return to Sothmere, they will find that Ser Vilem, the fort commander, has set his own plans into motion to deal with the amber rage, threatening the very people that the PCs are coming to save.

Ser Vilem was unhappy with Sothmere's decision to allow its infected villagers to live and sets a plan in motion while the PCs are away. He sends a messenger to the castle of Bann Karel Dusic the closest bann in the region. Fortunately for Ser Vilem, a blackhaller (a royally appointed arbiter) currently in Bann Dusic's court owes Ser Vilem's father a favor. Ser Vilem sends a messenger to bring this blackhaller, Ser Gelda, to Sothmere in order to arbitrate in his favor and allow him to put the infected villagers to death.

In the meantime, the second wave of ragers meets the Wichford residents who are returning home from the festival in Sothmere. Having survived the harrowing attack at Sothmere, these Fereldans pepper the ragers with arrows, killing them with minimal losses on their own part.

On the third day after the initial attack, Ser Gelda arrives and holds court (her arrival occurs prior to the PCs' arrival, whether early or late in the day). She listens to the arguments of Ser Vilem and Sheriff Milo, as well as other testimony. She also observes the victims, who are now ragers. She rules in favor of Ser Vilem. Sheriff Milo pleads for mercy—his daughter is among the afflicted—and so rather than burn the victims alive, Ser Gelda allows them a quicker death by throat slitting. Just before the sentence is carried out, the PCs return.

ABOUT THE AMBER RAGE

The amber rage is a magical disease that ravaged what is now Ferelden during the First Blight. The original outbreak was believed to be a demonic experiment. The current amber rage was created when Chasind shamans, looking for a way to make their warriors more effective against armored soldiers, accidentally used herbs that had been tainted with a new Blight.

Amber rage increases an individual's raw power at the expense of his intellect; victims of the amber rage become mindless savages bent on slaughtering anyone in their path. A "rager," as an infected humanoid is called, is marked by deeply-jaundiced skin, large muscles with bulging veins, wild eyes, and foam coming from the mouth. A rager's intelligence is on par with an animal; one cannot reason with or interrogate a rager.

Ragers often attack areas familiar to them from their former lives, or continue to carry out their final "pre-rage" aims as best they can. If, for example, a Chasind was ordered to help take a fort, then after his transformation he'd still make his way to the fort, but at a less mindful pace and while attacking anyone in his way. Once he got to the fort he'd still only be interested in killing, and would stick around only long enough to attack anyone in evidence before seeking food and bloodshed elsewhere.

Ragers create others of their kind by transmitting the malady to their victims. Normally, this occurs by biting. A rager has a natural instinct to bite its victims. A rager that does so transmits the disease with a 3 SP stunt. A character can resist the amber rage, but this is nigh-impossible; it requires passing a **TN 21 Constitution (Stamina) test**. Any humanoid can become a rager. While wise ones speculate that animal ragers are possible, none have ever been seen.

An infected character's skin becomes jaundiced and he runs a light fever (-1 to all rolls). He also exudes a minor version of a full rager's odor, which can be detected with a **TN 15 Perception (Smelling) test**. Untreated, the character becomes a full-fledged rager within (3 + Constitution) hours.

The current ragers have an even more potent version of the amber rage, in the form of a liquid poison that they use to coat their weapons. A weapon coated with the amber poison is more potent than a rager's bite, infecting a victim with a stunt that costs only 1 SP. A rager can also make a poisoned weapon by coating it with its own blood. Such transmission costs 2 SP.

Fortunately, ragers have short lifespans. Due to their murderous nature, most ragers are hunted and killed within the first few days of their existence. While ragers do eat (usually raw flesh) they do not sleep nor adequately protect themselves from the elements. Even if a rager manages to avoid these hazards, his heart cannot handle his enhanced metabolism for long and explodes in 1d6+3 days. What makes ragers dangerous on a wide scale is the fact that they can spread the amber rage before they die.

The only known cure for the amber rage is a magical brew that requires shadowmoss, an extremely rare ingredient. In the past, creatures called firesprites taught the Alamarri wise ones how to cure the amber rage and provided them with shadowmoss. Human greed,

however, led many Alamarri tribes to raid the firesprite groves and steal the shadowmoss, thus also diminishing the firesprite population. Over time, both the amber rage and the shadowmoss fell into legend, and today no one remembers the exact nature of the relationship between the firesprites and the shadowmoss.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

The simplest way to get the PCs involved is to connect them to Sothmere, or the Hinterlands in general. If you are using this adventure to start a *Dragon Age* campaign then you can simply dictate that the PCs hail from Sothmere, or have relatives there. The Groundbreaking Festival provides an excuse for even well-traveled PCs to return to Sothmere.

If the PCs have no ties to the Hinterlands, then they simply happen upon the village in their travels, or are otherwise intrigued when they hear word in nearby villages about the Groundbreaking Festival. In this case, you might want to allow the PCs to spend a little more time in Sothmere before the events of **Amber Rage** begin, perhaps as much as a few days, in order to establish relationships with some of the villagers who will be infected later.

If appropriate, you may also wish to re-introduce friendly NPCs from the heroes' previous adventures at the Groundbreaking Festival.

In any case, you should ensure that the PCs have a reason to care about the fate of the infected villagers of Sothmere after the initial rager attack.

CHARACTER DEATH

Dragon Age is a dark fantasy game and player character death is always a possibility. There are a number of encounters in **Amber Rage** that present a real chance for player death. There are also encounters, however, that provide natural "jumping-in" points for replacement characters.

Unless your PCs do something drastic during the Groundbreaking Festival, the first likely occasion for PC death is the rager attack in **Part 1: Welcome to Sothmere**. Immediately thereafter, the PCs must struggle with how to keep the infected villagers safe, as well as pledge their aid to the quest. This is the perfect opportunity to introduce a new PC who has also lost a friend or relative to the amber rage.

Introducing new PCs is a bit more difficult during the quest itself, but not overly so. The world of Thedas is a dangerous place, and the lone survivor of a bandit attack or a wayward traveler will desire safety in numbers, even if the PCs aren't going in the right direction.

If you want to add an immediate motivator for a new PC, you can rule that he begins the game infected and needing the cure himself. Be careful with this approach; such a PC might have a hard time convincing the group to have him aboard without assurances.

ALLOWING THE PLAYERS TO CHOOSE

There are a number of decisions the players might make that can alter the presumed course of this adventure. This is to be expected and it's better to end **Amber Rage** prematurely than to railroad the players toward a proscribed ending. There are hard choices to be made, and the weight of those decisions will be lost if the players feel that you forced them to turn left when they wanted to turn right.

Also, what may at first seem like a premature ending to the adventure may actually just be a complication. For example, even if the PCs decide to put Sothmere's infected villagers to the sword it doesn't mean they can't still go on the quest. Even if the PCs are disinterested in higher motivations, the Sheriff (or even Ser Vilem) might offer the PCs money to undertake the quest. And there's always that second wave of ragers, if the first failed to motivate the players.

UNCOMFORTABLE COMPLICATIONS

In *Dragon Age*, not every decision leads to a happy ending. Just as the players can determine the course of the adventure through their PCs' actions, you can alter **Amber Rage** to make for an even darker game. Some additional dark twists are listed here, but be aware that if you choose to incorporate them you'll have to change some parts of the adventure (specifically, **Part 6: The Final Leg of the Journey**).

BOGDAN'S TREACHERY

Bogdan's side loses the vote about what should be done with the infected villagers of Sothmere, but not by much. It's possible that he organizes a guerrilla raid on the infected villagers' barn and burns it to the ground while the PCs are away. Whether he succeeds, and how the NPCs react, will certainly have an impact on the PCs' return. Rather than arriving to see Ser Gelda judging the infected villagers, the PCs instead may be treated to the trial of Bogdan, with the barn conspicuously missing from the landscape.

A SUCCESSFUL SECOND WAVE

As events are planned, the Wichford festival-goers wipe out the second wave of ragers. It is possible, however,

that the ragers might take a different route by crossing more difficult terrain and attack Fort Sothmere, or Sothmere village itself.

If you decide that the second wave of ragers make it to Sothmere then you'll need to decide how well the villagers were able to resist the second wave of attacks. Did any major NPCs die in this attack? Which new villagers got infected? Were the original victims released or put to the sword? Did the villagers reconsider keeping infected villagers alive now that there's a continuing threat? Did Ser Vilem insist that all uninfected villagers come to the fort?

ALL FOR NAUGHT

Old Stoyanka isn't sure whether the recipe she has for a cure will actually work. This is especially problematic if the PCs try to compromise with the shadowmoss (such as by leaving some in the cave for the firesprites, or sharing some with Ser Vilja).

You can decide that the recipe simply doesn't work at all. Either Old Stoyanka's recipe is bad, or the wise woman is killed while the PCs are on the quest. While the former choice is a bit cruel, it certainly puts the "dark" in "dark fantasy." Given the latter case, you might allow a Chasind-speaking PC to find the recipe for the cure in Old Stoyanka's home and attempt to make it himself. This would require an **advanced TN 11 Cunning (Arcane Lore) test** with a success threshold of 15. Two failures ruin the brew.

THE LOTTERY

Old Stoyanka needs the shadowmoss to brew a cure for the infected villagers. Presumably, she'll have enough to cure the villagers from the first wave as well as any infected PCs. It's up to you whether there's enough left for the infected Wulverton villagers, or a second wave of infected Sothmere villagers. If the PCs only brought some of the Shadowmoss from the grotto, then Old Stoyanka may only be able to brew enough curatives for a few of the infected. The PCs and the villagers will have to decide who lives and who dies.

PART 1

WELCOME TO SOTHMERE

The freemen of Sothmere have a hard life. Their ground is less fertile than in other parts of Ferelden, their growing season is short, and their craftsmen are few in number. In addition, Sothmere's proximity to the Korcari Wilds makes it a dangerous place to live. There are certainly easier lands to till, even for hardy South Fereldens. So why live here?

The answer is bread. The farmers of Sothmere cultivate fields of ryott, a protein-rich grain that is highly valued throughout Ferelden. Ryott is notoriously difficult to grow and the valley where Sothmere is located is one of the few areas in South Ferelden where ryott thrives.

Sothmere is nestled in a gentle valley between high hills, taking advantage of a creek that flows through it and peters out into a marsh to the southwest. (The creek extends all the way to the Sudrand River during the rainy summer season.) A temporary wooden fort built atop a high hill to the south watches over Sothmere. This wooden fort, dubbed "Fort Sothmere," is manned by a dozen soldiers and led by Ser Vilem, a brash young knight.

Sothmere has recently been affected by the planned construction of a stone fort to replace the wooden Fort Sothmere. Recently, Arl Voychek Neruda has been receiving reports that Chasind stalker raids have been increasing. Realizing that surrendering the ryott fields to the Chasind would deprive him of a valuable resource, the arl has decided to improve this military outpost. New buildings are now being constructed to house the laborers that will be needed to complete this task, and within a few months the quiet village will likely be a thriving town.

This has given the villagers of Sothmere cause for celebration and they are now hosting a Groundbreaking Festival. Visitors and entertainers have come from all over the region and pitched tents that now line the outskirts of the village. The festival has been planned as

SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

A village festival might seem out of place in a gritty dark fantasy adventure. Don't worry; the weather has conspired to give this colorful occasion a dark cast. The sky is a grey sheet of cloud with the occasional bolt of lightning. A cold drizzle sprinkles the valley and makes the festival-goers sticky and uncomfortable. Light winds also gust through the valley, chilling people in damp clothes and occasionally blowing light items to the ground.

The drizzle and foot traffic have made the ground muddy. Boots and long skirts or pants are stained at the ends, while those playing games are covered from head to toe in mud. Most villagers kick off their shoes and roll up their pants to make the best of it, but the weather is certainly dampening the festivities.



a three-day event that coincides with the start of the planting season. Each day will be filled with entertainments and feasts, with the actual groundbreaking ceremony scheduled to take place on the final day.

1. THE GROUNDBREAKING FESTIVAL

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs experience the Sothmere Groundbreaking Festival and meet some of the notable NPCs.

In spite of the grey sky having poured forth a constant, cold drizzle since morning, the Sothmere valley is in the midst of a great celebration, which appears to be centered just outside the village. The fields are covered with booths and amusements as entertainers make their way through the crowds to awe them with their performances.

Would you prefer to explore the field or the booths first?

Large booths and tables have been set up for crafts, food, and games. Entertainers of all stripes wander

through the crowds, awing them with feats of juggling, prestidigitation, music, and singing, or tempting them with games of chance or more private entertainments. Wine, mead, and ryott ale flow freely. All in all it's a festive occasion, marred only slightly by the weather (see sidebar).

Visiting PCs have trouble finding lodging, as Sothmere has no inn. Usually, a visitor can find shelter as a villager's guest, but with the festival all spare rooms have occupants. Unless the PCs have a friend or relative in Sothmere, they'll have to pitch a tent or sleep under the stars.

This encounter allows the PCs to enjoy themselves and perhaps partake in the games and merriments. A favorite game is the "darkspawn smite," in which competitors throw axes at wooden boards painted with images of darkspawn creatures. Other games include archery, dueling (with wooden blades), knife-throwing, and wrestling.

Games should be resolved as opposed tests. If the game presumes many participants, any given character must also beat TN 13 in order to win. For example, if two PCs decide to play the darkspawn smite, then they both make **TN 13 Strength (Axes) tests**. If neither of them succeeds, then a third person wins the competition. If they both succeed, then the PC with the highest success (as reflected by the dragon die's measure of success quality) wins the entire game.





In addition to competitions, the festival has a number of craft and food stalls. While spring in Sothmere is only slightly warmer than winter, craftsmen attempt to sell lighter clothes and new boots to festival-goers while cooks are eager to sell the last of their preserved foods while fresh meats are cooked from the first hunts of the season.

Entertainers also ply the festival-goers, amusing them in the hopes of receiving a few silvers for their troubles. Bards, dancers, jugglers, and illusionists (many often existing in the same entertainer) wander the fairgrounds to amuse children and adults alike. Prostitutes entice festival-goers with the offer of warmth and company out of the drizzle. Games and merriments last until nightfall, when a huge candlelight feast is served and everyone staggers back to their homes or tents to rest until morning.

There are a number of notable NPCs for the PCs to meet, many of whom have ties to the rest of the adventure. These NPCs can be encountered on the fairgrounds, and notes on how a PC might meet them are provided in the NPC descriptions in the following sections.

You can move on to the next encounter, **Ragers!**, once your players have had enough time to enjoy the festival. The rager attack can take place on any of the three festival evenings. This next scene presumes that the

SHERIFF MILO KOVIC

Burgomaster of Sothmere and loving father.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP, PERSUASION)
2	CONSTITUTION
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
3	DEXTERITY (RIDING)
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES, SPEARS)
2	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12 (7)	55	12 (14)	0 (10)

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
LONG SWORD	+6	2D6+4
TWO-HANDED SPEAR	+6	2D6+4
FIST	+3	1D3+4 (1D3+5 WITH GAUNTLET)

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Dual Strike (3 SP) and Mighty Blow.*

TALENTS: *Archery Style (Novice), Armor Training (Journeyman), Two-Hander Style (Novice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Journeyman)*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Spears.*

*DURING THE FESTIVAL SHERIFF MILO IS UNARMORED.

USE THE STATS IN PARENTHESES IF HE IS ENCOUNTERED LATER WHILE WEARING ARMOR AND CARRYING HIS SHIELD.

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY PLATE, LONG SWORD, MEDIUM SHIELD, AND TWO-HANDED SPEAR.

PCs join the congregation in the main tent for the day-ending feast, but PCs who find themselves elsewhere in the valley are still victims of the rager attack.

SHERIFF MILO KOVIC

In addition to his regional duty, Sheriff Milo is the burgomaster of Sothmere. An elderly man, Sheriff Milo's right leg was badly injured in battle and never properly healed. He walks with a limp and winces if he must use it too often. Sheriff Milo is always eager to hear about adventures and offers to purchase beer for any adventurer willing to relate a tale.

While it's painful for him to move, the Sheriff understands that he needs to be seen at this festival and can generally be encountered among the stalls, frequently stopping at any stall with an open stool where he can sit while conversing with the vendor. He can also be encountered "stalking" Ser Vilem, whom he hopes will agree to court his daughter Wanda.

WANDA KOVIC

Carefree—and eligible—young woman.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

2	COMMUNICATION
0	CONSTITUTION
1	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY (RIDING)
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION
-1	STRENGTH
2	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	33	12	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
SHORT SWORD	+2	1d6+1	-
SHORT BOW	+2	1d6+4	16/32 YARDS
DAGGER	+2	1d6	-

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Defensive Stance and Rapid Reload.*

TALENTS: *Archery Style (Novice), Armor Training (Novice), and Single Weapon Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.*

EQUIPMENT

SHORT SWORD, DAGGER, SHORT BOW, AND 20 ARROWS.

WANDA KOVIC

Wanda is Sheriff Milo's only child. The Sheriff had her late in life and Wanda is only now entering womanhood. She is attractive and her slight build belies her strong spirit, as Wanda has been taking care of Sheriff Milo since her mother died several years ago. Sheriff Milo wants to marry her off to a nobleman, specifically Ser Vilem, but Wanda quite likes life in Sothmere and has no desire to leave.

Wanda likes to dance and can be encountered joining other villagers in many of the folk dances being performed in front of bands. She's not particularly interested in Ser Vilem and may grab a PC to dance with her if she suspects that her father is considering an introduction.

OLD STOYANKA

Old Stoyanka is the wise woman of Sothmere. She is an apostate with Chasind blood in her veins. Her advanced age and the remoteness of Sothmere have left her unmolested by the Templars, who have more challenging pursuits than to track down a bent, half-crazed old woman whose "magical charms" are usually just herbal remedies. Old Stoyanka has a harsh, grating voice and is a bit hard of hearing.

OLD STOYANKA

Wise woman of Sothmere.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

2	COMMUNICATION
-1	CONSTITUTION
3	CUNNING (ARCANES LORE, HEALING, NATURAL LORE)
-1	DEXTERITY (STAVES)
6	MAGIC (ARCANES LANCE)
3	PERCEPTION
-2	STRENGTH
4	WILLPOWER (FAITH)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
9	30	9	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
ARCANES LANCE	+5	1d6+5	16 YARDS
WALKING STICK	+1	1d6-2	
DAGGER	-1	1d6-1	-

POWERS

SPELLPOWER: 16 **MANA POINTS:** 20

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Spell, Skillful Casting.*

TALENTS: *Linguistics (Old Chasind).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling, Staves.*

STAFF, DAGGER, MANY FETISHES, COPIOUS HERBS, AND STRANGE CHARMS.

During the festival Old Stoyanka is encountered leaning on her walking stick, which is little more than a badly gnarled branch, while observing a game or other amusement. If a PC crosses her path, she makes a cryptic but accurate comment about the PC, based on her observation of him.

Old Stoyanka knows many hedge rituals that aren't listed here. You should feel free to give her a few strange abilities to heighten her mystique.

OLEK THE CLOWN

Olek is a Dalish elf who travels with a small family of entertainers. He has an odd appearance for an elf: his ears are bigger than average and he has a mighty nose to match. His arms and legs seem a bit too long for his body and his hands and feet are slightly bigger than they should be. This clumsy appearance belies his dexterous nature and Olek excels at entertaining the crowd with his legerdemain. He also has sticky fingers but generally only steals items of little value.

Olek may be encountered while entertaining. He may choose a PC as an "assistant" for a particular magic trick and perhaps lift a minor item from him.

OLEK THE CLOWN

"Clumsy" Dalish entertainer.

Abilities (Focuses)			
4	Communication		
1	Constitution		
1	Cunning		
6	Dexterity (Legerdemain, Light Blades)		
1	Magic		
2	Perception		
1	Strength		
3	Willpower (Courage)		
Combat Ratings			
Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
18	30	16	0
Attacks			
Weapon	Attack Roll		Damage
Dagger	+8		1d6+2
Fist	+6		1d3+1
Powers			
Favored Stunts: <i>Defensive Stance and Pierce Armor (1 SP).</i>			
Talents: <i>Dual-Weapon Style (Novice), and Thievery (Novice).</i>			
Weapon Groups: <i>Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.</i>			
Class Powers (Rogue 1): <i>Backstab, Rogue's Armor</i>			
Equipment			
Daggers (2), Juggling Balls, Marked Cards, and Other Magic Tricks			

DIELZA THE DANCER

Exotic Dalish entertainer.

Abilities (Focuses)			
5	Communication (Performance, Seduction)		
3	Constitution		
1	Cunning		
5	Dexterity (Acrobatics)		
0	Magic		
2	Perception (Empathy)		
1	Strength		
3	Willpower (Courage)		
Combat Ratings			
Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
16	40	16	0
Attacks			
Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage	
Dagger	+5	1d6+2	
Powers			
Favored Stunts: <i>Disarm</i> .			
Talents: <i>Contacts (Novice) and Music (Journeyman)</i> .			
Weapon Groups: <i>Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves</i> .			
Class Powers (Rogue 1): <i>Backstab, Rogue's Armor</i>			
Equipment			
Dagger, Bells, and Tambourines			

BOGDAN THE BLACKSMITH

Dour blacksmith of Sothmere.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
1	COMMUNICATION (PERSUASION)		
2	CONSTITUTION		
3	CUNNING (ENGINEERING)		
1	DEXTERITY		
-2	MAGIC		
2	PERCEPTION		
2	STRENGTH (BLUDGEONS, INTIMIDATION)		
0	WILLPOWER		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	30	11	0
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL		DAMAGE
MAUL	+4		1D6+5
TWO-HANDED SWORD	+2		3D6+2
DAGGER	+2		1D6+3
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: Knock Prone and Mighty Blow.			
TALENTS: Single Weapon Style (Novice) and Two-Hander Style (Novice).			
WEAPON GROUPS: Bludgeons, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades.			
EQUIPMENT			
MAUL AND DAGGER. (BOGDAN KEEPS HIS TWO-HANDED SWORD IN HIS SHOP.)			

DIELZA THE DANCER

Dielza is a silky-voiced Dalish entertainer who performs ancient elven dances and songs. She often works in tandem with her brother Olek. Her shorter stature and more attractive appearance give the mistaken impression that she is the younger of the two. Dielza is doing her part to preserve the elven heritage and usually starts each song and dance with a quick anecdote about its history. While the South Ferelden have little use for such stories, Dielza is beautiful enough that they generally accept them as the price paid for a performance.

Dielza tends to draw a crowd and may pull in a PC to be the focus of one of her more exotic dances.

BOGDAN THE BLACKSMITH

Bogdan is the second most important man in Sothmere behind Sheriff Milo. As the village blacksmith, Bogdan ensures that the tools needed to cultivate the ryott are in good supply as well as keeping the horses that take the grain to markets properly shoed. Bogdan is a hard man who holds a long-standing grudge against Sheriff Milo for marrying Magda, whom he courted in his youth. If given enough to drink, Bogdan might let slip

SER VILEM RICHTA

Proud young knight and commander of the constructions garrison.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP)
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
3	DEXTERITY (RIDING)
-1	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
-1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
8	35	8	10

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
LONG SWORD	+6	2D6+4	-
DAGGER	+3	1D6+5	-
CROSSBOW	+3	2D6+5	30/60 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Pierce Armor.*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman), Single Weapon Style (Novice), Weapon and Shield Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Weapons, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY PLATE ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, LONG SWORD, DAGGER, CROSSBOW, AND 20 BOLTS.

FIALA

Huntress and archer.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
1	CUNNING
5	DEXTERITY (BOWS, RIDING)
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION
1	STRENGTH (CLIMBING)
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	44	14	4

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
LONG BOW	+7	1D6+6	26/52 YARDS
LONG SWORD	+5	2D6+1	-
DAGGER	+5	1D6+2	-

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Disarm and Rapid Reload.*

TALENTS: *Archery Style (Novice), Armor Training (Novice), Dual-Weapon Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY LEATHER ARMOR, LONGBOW, 20 ARROWS, LONG SWORD, AND DAGGER.

that he wouldn't mind seeing some horror befall the sheriff, as if losing his wife to disease was not enough. Bogdan treats his own wife and children with indifference.

During the festival, Bogdan hawks weapons he's made at a makeshift stall. In addition to mundane weapons and items, Bogdan may also—at your option—have one or two more expertly crafted weapons available for sale, although he expects and commands high prices for high-quality goods.

FIALA

Fiala is a hunter and an excellent archer. While she keeps her long black curls tied behind her head, Fiala has a natural beauty that shines anyway. She enjoys the wilderness but sees little beyond her usual hunting grounds in the Hinterlands.

Fiala is usually found at the archery games and calls out any bow-wielding PC to compete against her. Fiala enjoys a good challenge and offers to buy a drink to anyone who can best her.



STROM KARSGARD

Respected Dwarven merchant.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

4	COMMUNICATION (BARGAINING, PERSUASION)
2	CONSTITUTION
3	CUNNING
0	DEXTERITY
-2	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
2	STRENGTH (BLUDGEONS)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
8	28	10	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
MACE	+4	2D6+2

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone.*

TALENTS: *Contacts (Journeyman) and Single Weapon Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes, Brawling, and Bludgeons.*

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT LEATHER ARMOR AND MACE.

SER VILEM RICHTA

Ser Vilem is a young knight who has been assigned to lead Fort Sothmere during the construction of the new, stone fort. Sheriff Milo has been trying to interest Ser Vilem in courting his daughter, but Ser Vilem is actually more enamored of Fiala. If one of the PCs is an attractive woman, Ser Vilem may fall for her instead. This could cause complications after the rager attack if any of these women are infected, as Ser Vilem shows his true colors when faced with a difficult decision.

Ser Vilem can be encountered pining for Fiala (from a distance) or engaged in conversation with Sheriff Milo. Ser Vilem is not interested in losing fights so will not participate in duels unless properly goaded.

STROM KARSGARD

Strom is a dwarven merchant well-liked in the region. He always offers the finest dwarven goods at reasonable prices and is usually willing to barter for a hot meal, a good drink, and a warm bed. He dresses rather plainly for a merchant, largely because—being born in Orzammar—wearing jewels would be like adorning himself with rocks. Strom enjoys the taste of ryott and can often be seen snacking on a freshly baked roll.

Strom spends most of his time at food booths, especially those that offer ryott bread as part of the fare.

2. RAGERS!

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

Ragers attack the village and infect some of its inhabitants. The PCs help defend the villagers.

You've assembled in the largest tent with several dozen villagers for the evening feast. Sheriff Milo stands from his seat at the front table and prepares to toast the festival. He raises his mug and opens his mouth to speak, but pauses at the sound of dogs barking in the distance. He shakes his head and tries again, only to be silenced by barking dogs a second time.

That's when you start to hear screams.

Players making a **TN 13 Perception (Hearing) test** hear screams of "Stalkers! They're here!" before they react. In any case, all of the revelers scatter for safety. As they do so, some of the ragers invade the feasting area. Read the following:

An axe tears through the tent wall behind Sheriff Milo and a barbaric human with unnaturally yellow skin and bulging veins steps through to menace the elderly Sheriff. Wanda grabs the man's arm and the barbarian snarls at her before slashing her forearm with the dagger clenched in his other hand. Frightened villagers push past you, knocking into each other and scattering food and drink everywhere.

Out of the corners of your eyes you see two more jaundiced men dressed like Chasind enter the tent from either side and attack diners as they try to flee.

Will you fight, or flee?

These Chasind are different from others that the PCs may have encountered, as they are infected with amber rage. PCs making a **TN 9 Cunning (Healing) test** realize that the Chasind suffer from some affliction. PCs making a **TN 13 Perception (Smelling) test** smell something unpleasant that intensifies as the ragers get closer.

PCs who engage a rager in melee must make a **TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test** or be shaken by the acrid smell. Those who fail suffer a -1 penalty on attack rolls against the ragers in melee combat. All PCs also suffer a -1 penalty for fighting in the tent's low light.

After being slashed, Wanda collapses to the floor. If a PC examines her, a successful **TN 9 Cunning (Healing) test** reveals that she has a fever and her skin is slightly jaundiced around the knife wound. If the PC makes a **TN 15 Perception (Smelling) test** he smells a slight

variation of the acrid stench that emanates from the ragers.

The ragers' knives are coated with the mutated amber poison. Characters who examine the daggers can make a **TN 9 Perception (Seeing) test** to notice that the dagger is coated with something, likely a poison. a **TN 11 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** reveals that the poison is not of a type known within Ferelden.

Ragers ooze a yellowish blood from their wounds. A PC who has the chance to do an autopsy on the rager (after the fight, obviously) and who makes a **TN 15 Cunning (Healing) test** notices that, in addition to their blood being yellow, rager arteries and veins are unnaturally expanded. An autopsy comes with some risk, as touching rager blood can transmit the amber rage. The amber rage is contracted if the character touching the infected blood fails a **TN 11 Cunning (Healing) test**.

There are other ragers in the valley in addition to those that attacked the feasting tent. Use the following combat vignettes as appropriate, taking into account the PCs' ability to handle them. You can also create follow-up combat encounters of your own.

The festival grounds provide interesting complications to combat encounters. PCs and ragers can hop up onto tables to gain a bonus for high ground. Weapons and cutlery abound at food stalls and game areas. Lit torches on poles can make good improvised weapons. Also remember to adjust the scene for lighting. Fighting at night imposes a -2 penalty, while fighting near a torch only imposes a -1 penalty. Given that the festival was winding down, many of the torches have already burned out, or are in danger of doing so (that is, a -1 penalty in round one can easily become a -2 penalty in round two).

FRIGHTENED VILLAGERS

Initially, the frightened villagers are nearly as great a threat as the ragers. Afraid for their lives, many of the villagers, visitors, entertainers, and vendors don't care whom they must shove or trample to save themselves. Some villagers may even try to grab a PC's weapon or shield in order to use it themselves.

RAGERS

Ragers are humanoids who have been infected with the amber rage. Their skin is severely jaundiced and they have a rancid smell. Ragers operate solely by instinct. The weapons and armor listed here are for Chasind ragers.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-2	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION
-2	CUNNING
3	DEXTERITY
-2	MAGIC
0	PERCEPTION
6	STRENGTH
8	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	20	13	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BATTLE AXE	+6	2D6+6
DAGGER	+3	1D6+7
BITE	+3	1D3+6

POWERS

ODOR: Ragers exude a potent odor. Those who engage a rager in melee must pass a **TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) test** or suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls made against the ragers.

POISONOUS BITE: A rager that bites a victim may transmit the amber rage with a 3 SP stunt. An infected character quite quickly begins to exude an odor and his skin becomes jaundiced. Untreated, the character becomes a rager within (3 + Constitution) hours.

AMBER POISON: The initial wave of Chasind ragers carry poisoned weapons. A weapon coated with the amber poison is more potent than the bite, infecting a victim with a stunt that costs only 1 SP. A rager can make a poisoned weapon by coating the weapon with its own blood, for a stunt costing 2 SP.

FIGHT TO THE DEATH: Ragers may continue to act normally while they are dying. They only stop when truly dead.

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT LEATHER ARMOR, BATTLE AXE, AND SHORT SWORD.

STAY OF EXECUTION

In a gritty setting like Thedas, a player may jump to the conclusion that an infected villager is a lost cause and smite them in the heat of battle. As this would obviously pre-empt the roleplaying encounter following this one, Old Stoyanka comes to the rescue. As the PC prepares to deal the deathblow, the wise-woman hobbles over, hissing that there may be a way to cure the victim.

Old Stoyanka only offers this interjection once, and should the player disregard it she won't intervene physically. You'll need to alter the next encounter a bit to take into account that the victims were all executed during the fight. It's also possible that some unaffected villagers, such as Sheriff Milo, step in to protect a few of the infected villagers from overzealous PCs.

FRIGHTENED VILLAGERS

Revelers turned victims.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION (ANIMAL HANDLING)
2	CONSTITUTION
0	CUNNING
1	DEXTERITY (RIDING)
0	MAGIC
0	PERCEPTION
1	STRENGTH
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	20	11	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
FARMING IMPLEMENT OR HAND TOOL	+1	1D6+1
DAGGER	+3	1D6+2

EQUIPMENT

DAGGER, FARM IMPLEMENT, OR HAND TOOL.

Once a few rounds of combat have commenced, most of the villagers will have fled. Still, the occasional frightened villager could re-enter the PCs' area of focus, pursued by a rager.

DALISH TROUBLE

You see a pair of Dalish entertainers—Olek and Dielza—retreating from two ragers. Dielza crawls toward the Dalish landship with a nasty gash across her leg. Between her and the two ragers stands Olek, no longer a clown but a fierce defender, staving them off with a large knife in each hand. Still, even with his impressive display it is obvious that he is wounded and tired.

Are you willing to help?

Olek is not trying to win. He's simply trying to see his sister to safety before succumbing to his wounds.

Once the PCs take over the fighting, Olek collapses to the ground. He's exhausted and at 2 Health, but he'll survive. Any PC aiding Olek with a **TN 11 Cunning (Healing) test** learns that Olek has been poisoned. A successful **opposed Perception (Searching) vs. Dexterity (Legerdemain) test** reveals various trinkets in Olek's pockets and inside the lining of his coat. These are minor items he's taken from festival-goers. It's possible that a few of the PCs' minor possessions are also present.

STROM'S STAND

"Get away from me, you filthy barbarians! I've bested cave spiders larger than you!"

You see the dwarven merchant standing atop his wagon with his mace, swinging wildly at a jaundiced Chasind that is climbing the side of the wagon in order to get to him. The dwarf loses his balance on a particularly wide swing and falls off the other side.

Will you engage the Chasind?

Unless the PCs intercept him, the rager runs around the wagon to attack the fallen Strom. If the PCs engage the rager then Strom joins the fight after two rounds, rubbing his sore and muddy posterior.

DEVIL'S CHOICE

You hear two young children screaming for their parents. You spot them crouched beneath a wagon that has sunk into one of the muddier parts of the field. Two Chasind kneel in the mud and grasp at them, trying to pull them out from under the wagon. One of the children, a young girl, makes a break for it and scampers out the back. One of the stalkers darts after her. The young boy remains underneath, bawling as the other Chasind's hand gets closer. If you act quickly, you might just have time to save one of them.

But which one?

This is a gut-wrenching encounter, as one PC is asked to choose who lives or dies. If you wish to mitigate the consequences, present this vignette to more than one hero, or after the choice is made, Fiala's arrow or Ser Vilem's blade strikes true against the other rager before the child is torn apart.

GONE ROGUE

You see a young woman run up to a man who looks to be a trapper.

"Oskar, you made it! Thank the Maker!"

Then the hunter turns to face her and she screams. He raises his axe to smite her and you notice that his arm is yellow.

On their way to Sothmere, the ragers encountered a trapper named Oskar, who had business in the nearby village of Wulverton and was on his way to the festival. Although he escaped, a rager bit him. He succumbed to the amber rage and now fights alongside the other ragers.



Oskar's new condition is proof that the ragers can transfer their disease to others and a **TN 11 Cunning (Healing) test** confirms this. If the PCs don't succeed at this test then one of the locals does by the time the afflicted are taken to the hall in the next encounter. If you choose not to run this encounter, then an NPC, likely a soldier, is responsible for dispatching Oskar and bringing the information that the amber rage can be spread to the Sheriff and Ser Vilem's attention.

Use the rager stat block for Oskar. Aneta, the young woman, belongs to one of Sothmere's ryott farming families. She has the same stats as the **Frightened Villagers**.

FAMILIAL TIES

If any of the PCs are from Sothmere or the surrounding region and have relatives here (or if you inserted a well-liked NPC from a previous adventure), then a rager attacks the relative or friend. Give the PC a chance to save them, although by the time they can react, the rager has already bitten the relative.

FORT SOLDIERS

There are currently a dozen soldiers stationed at the Fort Sothmere and half of them are attending the festival. Three soldiers were among the first killed tonight and the remaining three are rather overzealous. PCs may find themselves arguing with a soldier to spare an infected villager's life.

FORT SOLDIERS

The Garrison of Fort Sothmere.

Abilities (Focuses)			
0	Communication		
2	Constitution (Stamina)		
0	Cunning		
2	Dexterity (Riding)		
0	Magic		
0	Perception		
3	Strength		
1	Willpower		
Combat Ratings			
Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
9	35	14	7
Attacks			
Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage	Range
Long Sword	+3	2D6+3	-
Dagger	+2	1D6+4	-
2-Handed Spear	+3	2D6+3	-
Crossbow	+2	2D6+1	30/60 yards
Powers			
Favored Stunts: <i>Mighty Blow and Skirmish.</i>			
Talents: <i>Archery Style (Novice), Armor Training (Novice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Novice).</i>			
Weapon Groups: <i>Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Spears.</i>			
Equipment			
Heavy Mail Armor, Medium Shield, Long Sword, Dagger, Two-Handed Spear, Crossbow, and 20 Bolts.			

The remaining three soldiers can also be useful allies if you think the PCs need a bit more support when engaging the ragers. The three soldiers are named Jonshee, Lazlo, and Zoran.

3. JUST TO BE SURE?

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The villagers decide what to do about their infected fellows.

Sheriff Milo takes control of the situation once the strange raiders have been killed, organizing a bonfire for the bodies and instructing everyone, both wounded and healthy, to congregate in the town hall. Most visitors instead head for their tents with the intent of moving on. It doesn't matter to them that the rain is getting heavier now or that there may be more threats outside of the valley; Sothmere is no longer safe.

Do you go to the town hall or pick up and leave?

Sheriff Milo clears one of the larger rooms in the meeting hall (which doubles as his home) to tend the wounded.

The infected villagers all have fevers. It takes no test to make an infected victim a bit more comfortable, but no level of success at Cunning (Healing) helps a PC stop or even slow the infection. Infected villagers include Wanda Kovic, Olek the Clown, Lazlo (or another soldier if Lazlo died), and perhaps one or more of the PCs' relatives.

Once she has time to examine a rager's poison, Old Stoyanka discovers that it is tainted by the amber rage. She cautions anyone against keeping any of the poison and suggests the blades be burned clean. Any PC who does keep a poisoned blade (or the poison itself) runs the risk of contracting the affliction without even touching it.

Old Stoyanka visits the wounded as well, using her Healing powers on the wounds and offering the poisoned ones a cup of a foul-smelling brew. This concoction slows the victims' transformation into ragers.

In short order, Sheriff Milo opens the meeting and discusses how to protect the village from further attacks.

AFFLICTED PCs

One or more heroes may well be poisoned. This is likely to color how that PC acts during this encounter, as well as how his companions decide to treat him. Old Stoyanka's brew staves off the effects of the poison for a time, but infected PCs are slightly jaundiced and have a hint of the acrid smell for the rest of the adventure.

Ser Vilem promises that the fort, while undermanned, will help, and that any uninfected villagers are welcome to spend the night within its walls.

Once the question of the infected villagers comes up, however, things take a nasty turn. To Sheriff Milo's horror, Ser Vilem suggests the infected villagers be put to death. Bogdan concurs. Old Stoyanka intervenes, declaring that there is a way to cure them. This breaks the discussion into two camps, those who wish to help the infected and those who wish to slay them.

The opinions of the four major NPCs are provided here so you can incorporate them into a discussion with the PCs. If the players aren't up for a debate, you have a couple of options. You can simply inform the players that, after a heated debate, either Sheriff Milo or Bogdan (as you wish) wins the argument. Alternatively, you can call on the PCs to make an **advanced, opposed TN 13 Communication (Persuasion) test** with a success threshold of 15, with each party to the test racing to the threshold and each roll eating up 30 minutes of time.

- **SHERIFF MILO:** Sheriff Milo has a personal stake in this debate, as siding with Bogdan means executing his daughter. Beyond that, Sheriff Milo has a strong personal code and wants to give the infected villagers a chance. He has faith in Old Stoyanka and knows that she would not make a proposal without a decent chance of success.
- **BOGDAN:** Bogdan has a personal stake in the debate as well; he wants to see Sheriff Milo suffer. If the Sheriff loses his daughter, he might step aside and allow Bogdan to become burgomaster of Sothmere. Bogdan is also a realist; he doesn't believe in the ramblings of the old wise woman and feels it best to protect the village now by eliminating the incurable. If popular opinion shifts to favor the Sheriff, Bogdan argues that at the very least the infected elf be killed, given elves' general worthlessness.
- **SER VILEM:** Ser Vilem is adamant that the infected villagers be killed. While he can retreat to Fort Sothmere, Ser Vilem won't receive reinforcements for at least a couple of days. The amber rage truly frightens the knight and he fears that, walls or not, the amber rage may infect him. If it weren't for the fact that Sheriff Milo outranks Ser Vilem in local matters, Ser Vilem would forgo debate and simply put the infected villagers to the sword.
- **OLD STOYANKA:** Old Stoyanka wants to save the infected villagers. She believes she can brew a cure from a recipe she recalls from old legend, and that she has most of the necessary ingredients. All that's missing is shadowmoss, which only grows in a particular hidden grotto in the mist-shrouded forest in the Korcari Wilds. It's over a day's ride from Sothmere. The afflicted must drink the brew

within three days in order for it to work. When Ser Vilem presses her, the wise woman admits the recipe might not work, as it is only a legend.

IF THE SHERIFF WINS

If the Sheriff's side wins the argument then the infected villagers have to be secured. Fort Sothmere is the obvious location, but Sheriff Milo believes that once the villagers are in Ser Vilem's possession he'll slaughter them. One of the ryott farmers, Anzhay, offers his barn, provided that someone will offer to watch over the infected villagers there. Old Stoyanka reiterates that her brew should stave off the effects of the amber rage until the shadowmoss can be collected.

Next is the question of who will gather the shadowmoss. There aren't many villagers who will risk going to the Korcari Wilds and, in any event, they're needed here. The PCs are the obvious choice. If they don't volunteer, Sheriff Milo offers a gold piece each to any takers (and this can be negotiated upwards by up to 50 more silver pieces with an **opposed Communication (Bargaining) test**. Bogdan fumes and reiterates that if the villagers are intent on going along with this mad plan, they should at least kill the infected elf.

If the PCs agree to undertake the quest Old Stoyanka promises to give them directions first thing in the morning. For now, she suggests they get some sleep and let the villagers handle their infected brethren. If a PC happens to be infected, Old Stoyanka insists he be taken to the barn for the night to keep everyone safe for the evening.

IF SER VILEM AND BOGDAN WIN

If the more brutal side wins, the infected villagers are taken outside, tied up, and run through by Ser Vilem's soldiers. Whether Sheriff Milo or any relatives make a futile stand is up to you, although, as Bogdan hoped, Sheriff Milo is so distraught that he resigns as burgo-master.

Most of the villagers wind up unhappy with their decision, especially as they watch friends and loved ones bleed to death before their eyes. Should they have to make this decision a second time, it seems likely they'll vote the other way.

Even in the aftermath of the executions, Old Stoyanka insists that the shadowmoss be collected in case there are more ragers in the area. While no longer tied to a timetable, the PCs' quest is still crucial, as there could be more attacks and more infected villagers nearly any time. Bogdan, sensing a new opportunity for leadership, now supports the quest.

Depending on when the PCs get underway, Ser Vilja (see **Part 6, 1. A Knight's Final Stand**) may beat them to the shadowmoss. In this case, the roles switch; it is the PCs who learn from the firesprites what happened,

and who must track down Ser Vilja to claim the shadowmoss for themselves.

4. AN ESCAPE

COMBAT ENCOUNTER: OPTIONAL

An infected villager succumbs to the amber rage and rampages among the innocents.

If the argument seems one-sided and you want to provide a motivating force against compassion, one or more infected villagers turn rager before tasting Old Stoyanka's brew and burst free, attacking (and perhaps slaying) other villagers before they can be subdued or killed. (Alternately, you can assume that the brew is not entirely reliable in staving off the effects of the rage.) This is also a good encounter to use if one or more of the PCs decide to help secure the infected villagers.

PART 2

INTO THE WILDS

This part of the adventure takes the PCs from Sothmere and into the Korcari Wilds. They travel over the hills of the Hinterlands and cross the Sudrand River at Wichford, where the ragers who attacked Sothmere slew all they found. Once there, the PCs must decide whether to abandon the quest to help Sothmere against a second wave of attacks or press on. Should they decide to continue, they learn a bit about what's happened in the Korcari Wilds from both friend and foe.

1. THE JOURNEY BEGINS

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs embark on a journey to find the cure for the infected villagers.

Morning greets you with a hard rain. The rising sun is just a dim haze over the valley, barely illuminating the chaos left from last night's events. Stalls are destroyed, tables are overturned, and the ground is littered with trash. Village dogs and birds pick through the refuse for discarded food.

Old Stoyanka sits by a small fire in the center of the field facing the rising sun and chants in an unfamiliar tongue. She tosses a handful of something into the fire and it explodes into a blue fireball. With a slight smile, Old Stoyanka grips her walking stick and pulls herself to her feet. Moments later, a raven caws and alights on her shoulder.



PCs making a **TN 13 Cunning (Arcane Lore) test** realize Old Stoyanka is performing an old Chasind animist ritual. (If they can speak Chasind no test is required, and they understand that she is praying to spirits for guidance.)

Sheriff Milo and a few villagers approach the PCs with provisions for the journey, including water, wine, and sandwiches. He also gives the PCs a rough map of the region. Strom is also present, thanking the PCs for their aid (if they gave it) and offering them a flameless lantern (powered by a glowstone—see the *Dragon Age RPG Set 1 Game Master's Guide*, page 40) for their quest.

Old Stoyanka walks up to the PCs with the raven still perched on her shoulder.

The ancient wise woman looks at you with one eye wide open and the other barely a squint. She offers you two small bags and a large sack. One of the small bags seems to be moving, while the other emanates a vile stench. The large sack seems to be empty.

"Follow the raven to find the grotto," she says. "This bag—" she holds up the moving one

"—contains its food. Make your camp where the raven takes you. But keep your bearings; it will lead you where you need to be, but it will not lead you back."

She then holds up the foul-smelling bag. "Once you arrive at the campsite, dump this mixture into boiling water. This will attract the firesprites. They will lead you to the shadowmoss.

Finally, she indicates the large sack. "Fill this completely with shadowmoss."

In addition to the above, the old wise woman hands each PC three salves. Each is a mixture made from various herbs and butter packed into a beaver stomach. When the stomach is pierced and the mixture spread over a wound, this salve acts as a Lesser Healing Potion (see the *Dragon Age RPG Set 1 Game Master's Guide*, page 40).

Old Stoyanka also gives each infected PC (if there are any) three vials of her anti-rage concoction. Each dose of this foul-smelling drink will—she hopes—continue to prevent an infected PC from becoming a rager for one day.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If the PCs have any sense, they should have questions. The most common ones are given here, along with Old Stoyanka's responses. Improvise as necessary.

"HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN THE RAVEN IS FINISHED LEADING US?"

You will know.

"WHAT'S IN THE MOVING BAG?"

Carion beetles. The raven must consume them alive to prolong the enchantment. One beetle each hour should be sufficient.

"WHAT IS A FIRESprite?"

Firesprites are ancient creatures from when the world was very young. They were once plentiful in the Korcari Wilds, singing songs of joy, but that time is long past. Over time many firesprites were slain. There are only a few left, and now their songs are sad. Those that remain protect the location of the shadowmoss. It is said that their songs soothe its guardian.

"HOW DO WE TELL THE FIRESprites WHAT WE NEED?"

You don't. They will tire of you and return to the grotto. Follow them there.

"WHAT GUARDS THE SHADOWMOSS?"

An ancient creature—a powerful serpent—lives in the grotto that contains the shadowmoss.

"WHAT DOES SHADOWMOSS LOOK LIKE?"

It is a mossy substance that glows a sickly green. It can only thrive where the sun cannot reach.

"HOW DO WE GATHER THE SHADOWMOSS?"

In the obvious way. Just be sure the bag is full and tightly packed. The brew may not work with a lesser amount.

"HOW MUCH TIME DO WE HAVE?"

You must bring the shadowmoss to me before three sunsets pass.

Once the PCs have exhausted their questions, Old Stoyanka sends them on their way.

"Good luck!" she rasps, banging her walking stick against a large rock. The raven caws and takes flight. "Follow the raven" she says, pointing a bony finger toward it. The raven flies south, circling a bit as if waiting for you.

"Indeed!" Sheriff Milo says. He drops his voice to a whisper as he steps in close. "Please... Save my daughter."

As the PCs leave, those making a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test** catch Bogdan staring at them from the front of his smithy, wearing an apron and holding a

hammer in his hand. He has a grim but satisfied expression on his face, as if happy that they're leaving. Nodding to himself, Bogdan glances up at the fort and then turns back into his smithy.

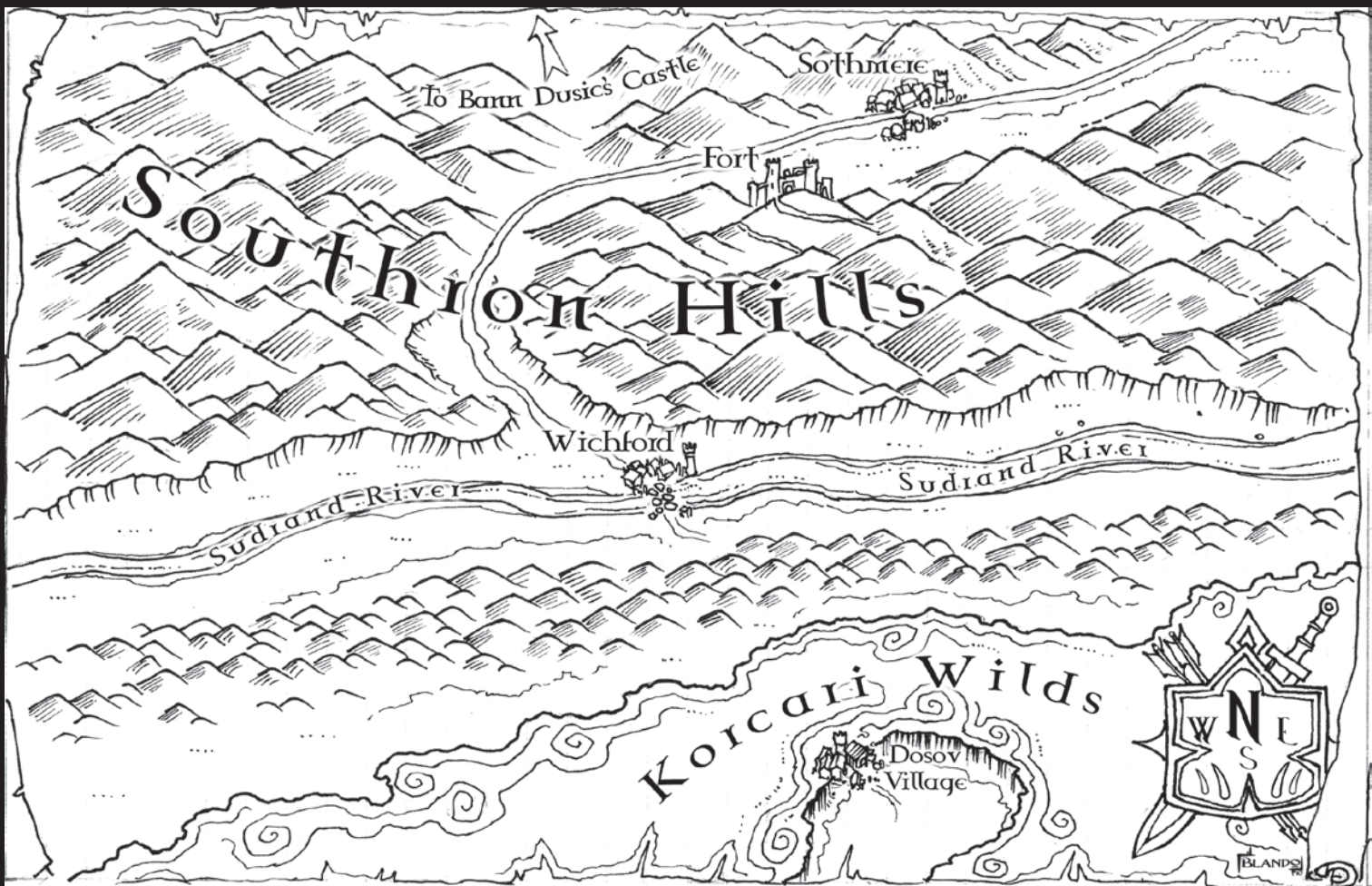
2. THE SHORTEST DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO POINTS

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs must descend a severe bluff without harming themselves or their mounts.

Sheets of rain now pound you as you crest a final hill in the dim haze of the shrouded noon sun. You can see the Sudrand River below and the Korcari Wilds beyond. Unfortunately, the hillside amounts to a steep bluff, and is littered with loose rocks half-buried in the muck.

If a PC checks the map call for a **TN 9 Cunning (Cartography) test**. With a success the PC notices that Wichford, a hamlet with a ford, lays about a half-mile upriver. It's impossible to see it from here, but riding



A ROGISH OPPORTUNITY

Thedas is a harsh world, and it's difficult to find fault with any PCs who want to take advantage of the opportunity Wichford provides to do a little "shopping." Wichford is a small hamlet, but it's also a frontier town. Hunting weapons and armor abound, and most residents have at least a few silver coins hidden away in their homes. Beyond a few easy locks, the greatest enemy in this encounter is time. The clock is ticking on the infected villagers and the PCs simply can't afford to waste the day ransacking homes.

Looting a corpse takes one minute and nets 1d6 copper pieces and in most cases a weapon. There are 20 corpses strewn about the hamlet. Looting a home requires a **TN 9 Dexterity (Lockpicking) test**, a **TN 13 Perception (Searching) test**, and 30 minutes. A house ransacked in this way nets 1d6 silver pieces multiplied by the number on the dragon die of the Perception test.

west along the ridge should bring it in sight. Unfortunately, the ridge at Wichford turns out to be as steep as it is here, so the same tests to descend are required either way.

Riding a horse down the hillside is tough. Riding a resistant horse down the steep hill requires a **TN 11 Communication (Animal Handling) test**. Then, each PC has to make an **advanced TN 15 Dexterity (Riding) test** with a success threshold of 9. Failure means that rider and horse tumble down the hill and take 1d6 points of damage for every 3 points by which the PC fell short of the success threshold (minimum 1d6). A successful **TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test** halves the damage.

Dismounting and leading a horse down the hill is a bit easier. No Communication (Animal Handling) test is necessary, but each horse and PC must make an **advanced TN 13 Dexterity (Climbing) test** with a success threshold of 9. Failure here also results in 1d6 points of damage for every 3 points short (minimum of 1d6).

PCs concerned about the return trip realize with a **TN 9 Cunning (Navigation) test** success that the horses won't be able to climb that bluff. A PC making a **TN 9 Cunning (Cartography) test** notes that the quickest alternate route is to pass Wichford and follow the river west until the valley opens up. The trip from Wichford to Sothmere takes about a day on horseback.

Whether they descend the bluff where they first encounter it or ride west to the vicinity of Wichford first, the ford at Wichford turns out to be the only decent place to cross the river. The raven won't follow them west to the ford, but remains in the same area just across the river until the heroes return. Offering the raven food brings it temporarily back to hand, but it then returns to its previous position on the other side of the river after snacking on a tasty carrion beetle or two. The PCs must cross the river at Wichford and then turn back east to reunite with the raven.

3. THE WICHFORD RUINS

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

Bloodcrows attack the PCs as they enter the hamlet of Wichford.

Ahead lies Wichford. You'd expect the hamlet to be bustling with activity as hunters and trappers from the outer edges of the Korcari Wilds use the small ferry in Wichford to travel from one bank of the Sudrand to the other. Today, though, there doesn't seem to be any activity beyond the rain feeding the puddles and a few ravens flying through the city to pick at a litter of human corpses.

Will you enter the hamlet?

Upon entering the hamlet (or with a **TN 13 Perception (Sight) test** from afar) it becomes obvious that the ferry raft is missing. When Wichford suffered its rager attack a survivor cut the raft loose in the hopes that it would stop more ragers from crossing.

The ten "ravens" in Wichford are actually bloodcrows, and they attack as the PCs enter the hamlet. A successful **TN 13 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** gives a bit of warning, beforehand, that these birds are more than they first appear. For more information on bloodcrows, see the *Dragon Age RPG Set 1 Game Master's Guide*, pages 62 and 63.

4. DAMNED IF YOU DO

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs meet a survivor of the Wichford attack.

Except for the pelting of rain against thatched roofs, the hamlet of Wichford is eerily quiet. A few scattered bodies litter the mud around the buildings, slashed by blades and picked over by the bloodcrows. Some buildings are tightly shut while others have broken shutters and doors.

BLOOD CROW

HUNGER DARKSPAWN

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
-2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
-2	CUNNING
3	DEXTERITY (BITE, STEALTH)
-2	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)
-1	STRENGTH (INTIMIDATION)
0	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
5 (FLY 20)	10	13	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+5	1D6-1

POWERS

BLOOD DRAIN STUNT: For 3 stunt points, a bloodcrow can strike and latch onto its target to drain blood from the victim. The damage from the bloodcrow's attack ignores armor.

EYE-STRIKE STUNT: For 2 stunt points, a bloodcrow can rake or peck at its target's eyes or other vulnerable spots. The target suffers a -1 penalty on all tests until the end of its next turn.

FAVORED STUNTS: Blood Drain, Eye Strike, Mighty Blow.

Will you tarry to investigate, or press on to the ford?

Call for a **TN 15 Perception (Tracking) test**. Anyone who succeeds notes that some of the footprints in the mud indicate that humanoids came through this hamlet from the river more recently than yesterday (when the fighting took place), perhaps within the last few hours.

Anyone checking the bodies and making a **TN 11 Communication (Investigation) test** realizes that the torn and dismembered corpses have been partially eaten by creatures with human-like teeth.

Call for a **TN 9 Perception (Hearing) test** from anyone passing through Wichford. Those who succeed hear the shutters of an upper story window open behind them, followed by a thump from inside the building. Josef the Cordwain lies on the second floor of his shop. His left leg is shattered from a mace blow and he has a vicious cut on his left arm. He heard the PCs arrive and wanted to warn them (the "thump" was Josef falling out of his chair). If none of the PCs make the test, Josef starts hollering for them to come see him, which requires no test.



The cordwain shop is where leather is turned into shoes and other goods. The first floor smells like leather and shoe polish. There is a trapdoor in the ceiling from which, when opened, a staircase rises to the second floor (a common feature of the Wichford two-story buildings as protection against Chasind stalkers and other creatures from the Korcari Wilds). Once the PCs pull down the staircase they hear a man's voice tell them that it's okay to come up.

The second floor is sparsely furnished and an older man leans against the wall next to the cracked-open window. Most of the color has drained from his face and one lens of his spectacles is cracked. His left pants leg has been cut off and he has bandages wrapped around a splint holding what remains of his knee. The lower part of his right shirt sleeve is drenched in blood and his skin has a jaundiced appearance. A short sword lies next to him.

"You... You could not have come from Sothmere?" He asks.

How do you respond?

Call for a **TN 15 Perception (Smelling) test**. Anyone who succeeds smells the familiar acrid stench of an infected victim.

Josef is confused. Since the Sudrand becomes impassible downriver, Josef assumes that the PCs have come from upriver, perhaps with the residents of Wichford who attended the festival. Between the long ride—Sothmere is almost a day's ride from here, if you take the road—and a likely engagement with the ragers, he doesn't understand how the PCs could have gotten to Wichford so quickly.

If asked what happened in Wichford, Josef says that the "maddened" Chasind came out of the misty forest and slaughtered a group of trappers returning from a morning hunt. Rudolf, the ferryman, cut the rope to set the raft loose, but it was still easy for the ragers to cross given the ford's shallows. There were too many of them, especially since some of Wichford's residents were away at the festival. The ragers killed everyone they came across; Josef hid upstairs in his shop.

At some point, Josef fell asleep and awoke early this morning. He came down from his second floor and went outside only to be waylaid by Hanz, Wichford's carpenter, who had become a rager since yesterday's attack. He shattered Josef's leg and would have killed him had not Karl, a dying watchman, shot Hanz with his crossbow. But as Hanz fell, he bit into Josef's arm. Josef dragged himself back to safety as he heard other new ragers—former residents of Wichford now infected with the horrible plague—stirring. After an hour or so, this group of perhaps a dozen ragers left town, heading northward in the general direction of the trail that eventually loops back east and heads for Sothmere.

While he believes the danger is past for now, Josef realizes he'll turn into one of those "yellow things" soon. Given that, and the condition of his leg, he asks one of the PCs to kill him. Josef is, in fact, on the verge of turning into a rager. The PCs could offer him some of Old Stoyanka's brew to hold off the transformation, but they have to make an **opposed Communication (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test** with him to convince him to take it. If you'd like to turn up the pressure on the PCs to make a decision, Josef completes his transformation while they dither and pounces on them with some reeking implement of his trade.

In addition to this troubling request, Josef's information that there are more ragers heading for Sothmere is also troubling. There's simply no time to double back and kill this second wave before gathering the shadow-moss without condemning the already-infected villagers. It's also pretty obvious that the PCs won't be able to take the horses back up the ridge—it's too steep—so they can't use the overland route they took when following the raven to intercept the ragers before they get to Sothmere.

Whether the PCs decide to double back or move forward is up to them. Should they choose to go back,

you'll have to decide whether the returning Wichford residents stop the ragers or, as suggested in **Uncomfortable Complications**, the second wave of ragers makes it to Sothmere.

Josef's shop can be looted just as the other Wichford homes, save that no **Dexterity (Lockpicking)** test is necessary to gain entry.

5. CROSSING THE BRIDGE

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs must cross the Sudrand River.

The ford is perhaps 50 yards across, with a few reeds jutting out of the water to indicate its shallows. The ferry once followed a rope line attached to either bank, but it's been cut, and each end trails listlessly in the current rather than forming a single length over it. Walking a horse across could prove treacherous, especially without a guide knowledgeable about the high and low points in the murky water.

How do you plan to cross the river?

Attempting to ride straight across the water is difficult; a PC must make an **advanced TN 13 Dexterity (Riding) test** with a success threshold of 12 to properly cross the water. A failure on any of these tests injures the horse for 2d6 points of damage and forces the rider to make a further **TN 13 Dexterity (Riding) test** to avoid being thrown. A thrown rider takes 2d6 points of damage and must then make an **advanced TN 13 Constitution (Swimming) test** with a success threshold of 9 to make it to the other side (his choice as to side). Each failure at swimming results in another 1d6 points of damage from hitting rocks and swallowing water. Swimming characters must keep making tests until they reach the success threshold or drown.

Alternately, one character can swim or walk across the ford (as described above) and either repair the rope or string a new one, allowing the rest of the PCs to use it to lead their horses across. A PC who searches the town can find a replacement rope of acceptable length with a **TN 11 Perception (Search) test**. Devising appropriate knotwork requires a simple **TN 7 Cunning (Engineering) test** (with a -3 penalty if the hero tries to do it while swimming).

Once a rope has been strung, players receive a +3 bonus to their **Dexterity (Riding)** and **Constitution (Swimming)** tests to cross the river.

Once the PCs cross the river they need only follow it to catch up with their raven. The rain is still pounding on them as the raven leads them into the sinister Korcari Wilds.

6. A TRAPPER'S STORY

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs encounter a trapper who tells them more about the recent strange happenings of the Korcari Wilds.

You've been riding for three hours since crossing the ford and you can see the hilly range ahead that separates you from the forest. You also see a wagon and a cooking fire where a large man dressed in furs stokes the embers beneath roasting meat. As you approach, two large dogs with grey-and-white coats bark at you.

"Bog! Ipa! Be quiet!" the man says as he sees you. "Welcome to my fire! I am happy to see friendly faces once more!"

How do you respond?

This encounter takes place about three hours' ride from the ford. The rain has subsided, although the grey sheet covering the sky suggests that this is a temporary situation.

Branik, a local trapper, has just come out of the Korcari Wilds and is taking advantage of the break in the weather to eat a meal before completing his journey to Wichford.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If the PCs accept Branik's hospitality, the raven perches on the nearest tree to wait for them. Branik offers the PCs some of his roasting meat and ryott beer. He explains that he's a trapper, as attested to by the many dead animals in his wagon. Once the PCs settle around the fire or are otherwise ready to hear his tale, Branik relates what's been going on in the northern parts of the Korcari Wilds. If the PCs tell him what happened in Wichford, Branik is deeply upset. He considered Josef a friend.

"HOW HAS THE TRAPPING BEEN?"

Too good. I've been trapping two or three times as many animals lately as I should be. The Chasind have been nervous. They aren't all stalkers, you know; most of them just want to be left alone. But some of the more aggressive clans have been moving north. Between the Chasind and the animals, it's like something deep in the Wilds is flushing them out.

"DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE AMBER RAGE?"

I know something's wrong. I passed an abandoned Chasind village this morning and saw stalkers running in the forest nearby, hunting each other. One of them even attacked me, although I pinned him to a tree trunk with my crossbow. Wild and sickly all at once, he was. His weapon was coated with some poison. I've got no room for poison in my line of work; it ruins the meat.

WOFUN HOUND

Wofun Hounds resemble taller Ferelden shepherds and have grey-white coats. While their intelligence is on par with a mabari, wofun hounds are quick-tempered and ignore commands in fights.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
1	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)
-1	CUNNING
3	DEXTERITY (BITE)
-1	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING, TRACKING)
2	STRENGTH (JUMPING)
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
16	20	13	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+5	1d6+2

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone and Skirmish.*

BRANIK THE TRAPPER

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 2 (ANIMAL HANDLING); CONSTITUTION 3 (STAMINA); CUNNING 1 (NATURAL LORE); MAGIC 0; PERCEPTION 4 (HEARING, SEEING); STRENGTH 5 (AXES, BLUDGEONS); WILLPOWER (COURAGE).



“DO YOU WISH TO COME WITH US?”

No, I think I'll go to Wichford and see if any of the Wichforders returning from Sothmere have made it back.

“ANY NEWS OF THE TRAIL AHEAD OF US?”

At some point you'll need to leave your horses behind. The marshes and swamps of the Wilds are too dangerous for riding.

“WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH OUR HORSES?”

Dosov is a Chasind village ahead that distills wildwine. It's just inside the forest in the direction you seem to be going. They are a friendly people and you should be able to strike an arrangement to stable your horses. Yell Zorya I warned you not to drink the wine!

Branik gives the heroes directions to Dosov. It seems to be close enough to the direction the raven is taking them that they'll have no trouble stopping there to stable their horses.

BRANIK THE TRAPPER

Branik is a bear of a man, tall, stout, and hairy. His long brown hair melds into his long mustache and beard, making it appear as though he has a mane. He is far more at home in the wilderness than in even the frontier

towns of Ferelden. While sociable, Branik spends long stretches of time without human companionship and that suits him just fine. Branik dresses in furs and might be mistaken for a Chasind from a distance, although his accent marks him as nominally Ferelden.

BOG AND IPA. WOFUN HOUNDS

Bog and Ipa are Branik's faithful hunting companions. While he refers to them as dogs, each is actually a dog-wolf hybrid known as a wofun hound, specially bred in the Hinterlands.

7. STALKERS
COMBAT ENCOUNTER

A band of Chasind stalkers that were following Branik intercept the PCs.

As the sun begins to sink, the rockiness of the terrain gives way to a gentle slope that leads to the outskirts of the mist-shrouded forest. A few drops of rain fall onto your traveling clothes, indicating that another storm is coming. Something seems not quite right.

CHASIND STALKER

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
0	COMMUNICATION		
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)		
1	CUNNING		
3	DEXTERITY (BOWS, LIGHT BLADES, STEALTH)		
1	MAGIC		
3	PERCEPTION (SEARCHING, SEEING, TRACKING)		
2	STRENGTH (CLIMBING)		
1	WILLPOWER (MORALE)		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	20	13 (14 WITH SHIELD)	3
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	
SHORT BOW	+5	1d6+4	
SHORT SWORD	+5	1d6+4	
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: Pierce Armor and Skirmish.			
TALENTS: Archery Style (Journeyman), Armor Training (Novice), and Scouting (Journeyman).			
WEAPON GROUPS: Bows, Brawling, and Light Blades.			
EQUIPMENT			
LIGHT LEATHER, LIGHT SHIELD, SHORT BOW, AND SHORT SWORD.			

Just because some Chasind have become ragers doesn't mean that there aren't also still bands of regular Chasind stalkers around. One such group has been following Branik's wagon tracks. They have spotted the PCs and now hide in the hills, waiting to ambush them.

Call for an **opposed Perception (Seeing) vs. Dexterity (Stealth) test**. PCs who win spot the stalkers hiding behind boulders above them and may attack normally in the first round; PCs who fail are surprised. The stalkers rain arrows on the PCs before leaping down and attacking hand-to-hand. PCs shooting at stalkers behind boulders suffer a -2 penalty for the cover.

There are two stalkers for each PC. The stalkers fight until half their number have fallen, after which the rest retreat to their horses, which are grazing out of sight about 100 yards away, protected by another Chasind stalker.

If a stalker is captured, he can be persuaded to speak with an **opposed Communication (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test**. The stalkers were all part of an organized raid into the Hinterlands. The shamans had said that the Korcari Wilds were becoming too dangerous. But these stalkers believe their shamans betrayed them. The poison the shamans crafted to aid in the raids corrupted the minds and flesh of those who used it. This group of stalkers decided to abandon the horde and return to doing what they do best. They discovered Branik's tracks and decided to overtake him. The PCs simply provided a tempting new target.

PART 3

INTO THE FOREST

During this part of the adventure the PCs enter the swampy forest and receive a little help at a Chasind village. Pressing into the forest, they encounter a few perils before arriving at the designated site and following Old Stoyank's directions to summon the firesprites.

ENVIRONS: THE MARSH

Branik's warning that horses will not be able to negotiate the marshes off the safe paths proves accurate, and the raven is not interested in following the trails in the forest. It flies over soft marshland and murky swamps, making it difficult to ride or even lead horses without wasting a lot of time.

Unless the PCs leave one of their number behind (a fitting task for a character whose player misses a session of play), they have three options. The first is to take the horses to Dosov and hope that their steeds are cared for. The second is to leave the horses somewhere to graze and hope that Chasind stalkers or other threats don't harm or steal them. Finally, the PCs could insist on taking the horses along, which leads to other problems.

For every half hour that the PCs lead or ride their horses through the marsh, each horse must make a **TN 11 Dexterity test**. On a failure, that horse suffers 1d6 damage. A PC riding a horse that takes damage must make a **TN 9 Dexterity (Riding) test** or be thrown from the horse and take 1d6 damage.

If the PCs get too frustrated, they can always double back and visit Dosov. It just takes a **TN 11 Cunning (Navigation) test** or **TN 7 Cunning (Cartography) test** to find it (assuming they learned its location from Branik).

1. DOSOV VILLAGE

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs arrive at Dosov Village and receive the hospitality afforded them.

As you enter the forest the ground becomes increasingly marshy, and you finally come to a broad reach of open swampwater being pelted with raindrops from the twilight sky. Some distance away you see a small village made of houses on stilts. Torches and lanterns bathe the village in an eerie glow as the sunlight fails. A couple of flat-bottomed boats stocked with barrels cut through the swamp, heading toward the village.

Will you approach the village?

LEGENDS OF THE FIRESPRITES

Most Chasind know stories of the "little people of the swamps," which occasionally appear to humans as tiny, glowing creatures. Some Chasind have heard of "swamp lanterns," made by imprisoning a firesprite in a portable cage or lantern. Unfortunately, no one knows what the firesprites need to have in order to survive, so many firesprites have died inside their lantern prisons.

Positioned between the Hinterlands and the rest of the Korcari Wilds, Dosov has made a profitable business of producing wildwine (which is not technically a wine, but rather, a grain alcohol) from ryott. Wildwine is much stronger than beer and is a favored beverage among the Chasind in this region. The barrels in the flat boats contain goods traded for the last supply of wildwine shipped downriver to other Chasind communities.

The village sits on stilts due to the instability of the ground, as well as for protection. The homes are connected by a series of planked walkways, from which a watchman looks out for approaching strangers. Small pens on the grounds furthest from the swamp contain animals. Assuming that the PCs aren't sneaking up to the village, the watchman calls out and asks them their business. If the PCs mention Branik and ask for Zorya, the watchman calls for her.

After a few moments a woman appears on the walkway. She is a naturally attractive woman approaching middle age, with dark, braided hair and a wide smile. She wears surprisingly little and has a large snake draped around her shoulders.

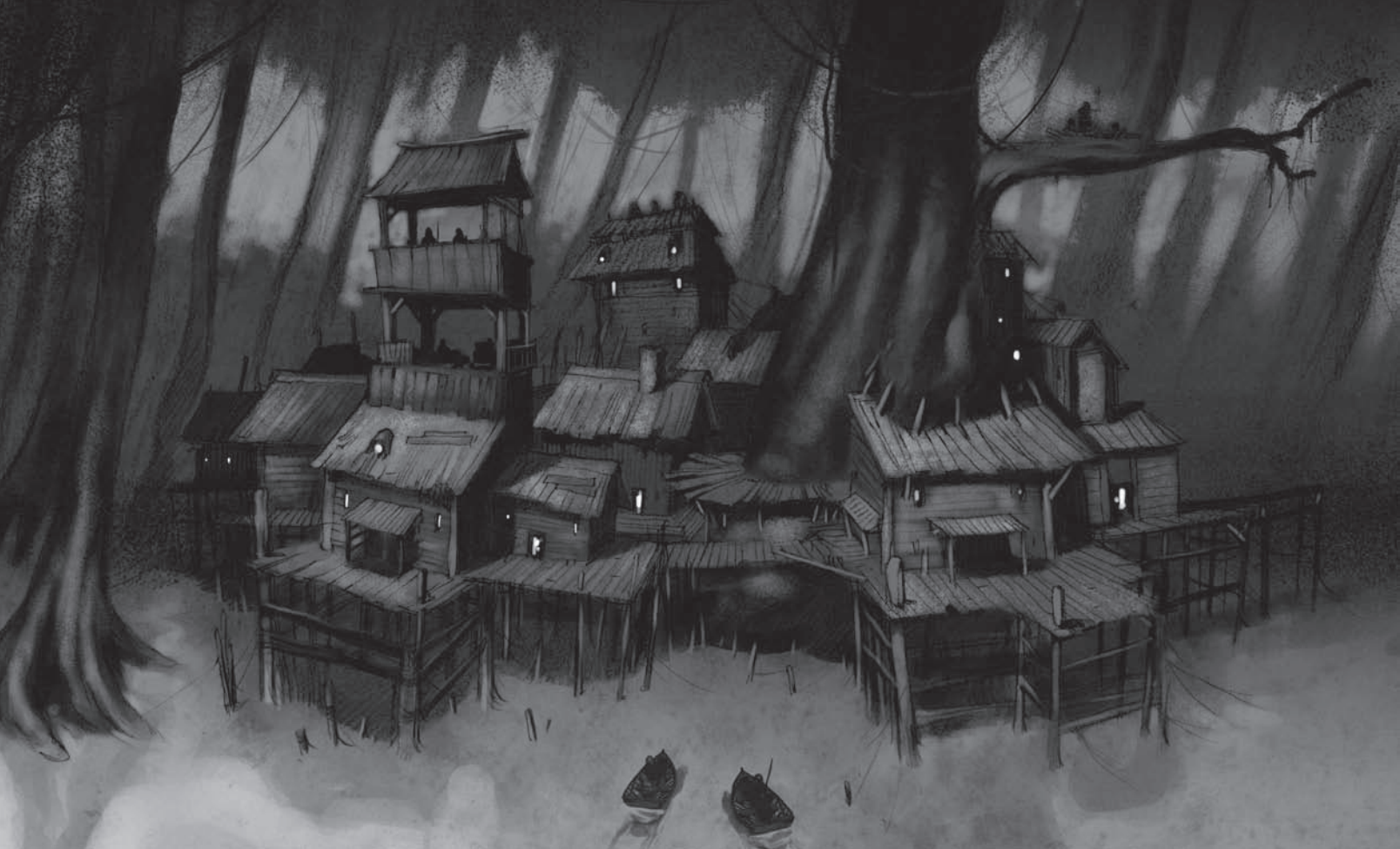
"I am Baba Zorya. Friends of Branik's, are you? What is your business in Dosov?"

How do you respond?

Should the PCs mention Branik's advice ("Tell Zorya I told you not to drink the wine!"), Zorya laughs and tells them that Branik never did manage to acquire a taste for wildwine.

If the PCs ask about the horses, Zorya invites them to her abode, rather than "discussing our business out here in the cold and rain."

At her home, Zorya sits on what might be considered a porch, an open part of her hut that faces the swamp. She sits at a small table with a ceramic bottle of wildwine and two small cups. Her snake coils in her lap and she invites one of the PCs to sit with her to "discuss business." This involves consuming a few cups of wildwine.



Zorya is perfectly willing to stable the characters' horses in return for something. As a Chasind, she deals in barter and has little use for money. She deals aggressively but fairly.

Conduct the negotiation as an **opposed, advanced Communication (Bargaining) test** with a threshold of 9. If the PC bargaining (Zorya will only negotiate with a single PC) reaches the threshold first, goods worth roughly must 60 sp must be bartered away. If Baba Zorya reaches the threshold first, this amount is more like 100 sp. Feel free to adjust these amounts if one party or the other does particularly well, or particularly poorly. You should force the PCs to discuss actual items they have for barter, rather than reducing the discussion to a game of numbers.

The wildwine complicates the negotiations. After each round of bargaining tests, everyone who is drinking (which includes but is not necessarily limited to Zorya and the negotiating PC) must make a **TN 11 Constitution (Drinking) test**. A character who fails passes out. A character who succeeds accumulates a drunkenness penalty to all further tests (including, especially, continued negotiations) based on their dragon die result:

NEGOTIATIONS WITH ZORYA

RESULT	DRUNKENNESS PENALTY
1	-3 to all tests
2-3	-2 to all tests
4-5	-1 to all tests
6	No penalty

If the PCs' negotiator passes out a replacement must step in. Zorya retains any progress toward the negotiation's success threshold, but the PC must start over from nothing. If all of the PCs' negotiators pass out, the negotiations resume when one of them wakes up. If Zorya passes out, the villagers stable the heroes' horses for free.

Penalties arising from drunkenness abate at a rate of -1 per hour, or -2 per hour in any hour where the PC can pass a **TN 15 Constitution (Drinking) test**. A passed out character can be roused with a **TN 13 Cunning (Healing) test**. This test can be attempted once per hour. If not roused, a passed-out character wakes up in 1d6 + Constitution hours. Passed-out characters come to with a -5 penalty to all tests, which wears off over time as described above.

DOSOV VILLAGERS

Restrained swamp-dwellers.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 0; CONSTITUTION 1 (DRINKING); CUNNING 0 (NATURAL LORE); DEXTERITY 0; MAGIC -1; PERCEPTION 2; STRENGTH 1; WILLPOWER 0.

BABA ZORYA

Free-spirited elder of Dosov village.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 4 (ANIMAL HANDLING, BARGAINING, LEADERSHIP, PERSUASION); CONSTITUTION 5 (DRINKING); CUNNING 2 (EVALUATION); DEXTERITY 0; MAGIC 0; PERCEPTION 3 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH 2; WILLPOWER 4 (SELF-DISCIPLINE).

Assuming that a deal is struck, Zorya summons some villagers to corral the horses. The PCs, presumably, want to be on their way.

BABA ZORYA

Zorya is the leader of Dosov Village, hence her title ("baba" means "female elder" in an old Chasind dialect). She is a free spirit, and claims that she has no husband or lover because she is married to Dosov. Approaching middle age, Zorya is very attractive. She braids her long black hair and is hardly ever seen without Sasha, her snake.

DOSOV VILLAGERS

The villagers of Dosov are Chasind and hardier, shorter, and stockier than Fereldans from the south. Most handle their liquor well thanks to their constant exposure to Dosov's main export.

2. WHEN THE RAVEN STOPS FLYING

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The raven selects the spot where the PCs must make the soup that attracts the firesprites.

As you make your way through calf-deep water in the now-darkened marsh-forest, your clothes soaked from the rain, you barely see the raven land on a lone, dead tree sticking up from a small hummock in the swamp water. The raven turns and looks at you one last time before keeling over out of the tree, dead as a stone.

This, clearly, is where you are to summon the firesprites.

The PCs must boil water and dump the foul-smelling mixture from Old Stoyanka into it. This requires gathering wood and creating a fire. (Hopefully the PCs thought to bring a kettle, although a helmet will do in a pinch.) A PC making a **TN 11 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** can scrounge up the necessary materials in 20 minutes or so.

SASHA

Sasha, a large male python, is Zorya's protective pet and companion

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-2 COMMUNICATION

2 CONSTITUTION

-1 CUNNING

4 DEXTERITY (BITE)

0 MAGIC

2 PERCEPTION (SEEING)

5 STRENGTH (CONSTRUCT)

1 WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
18	15	14	1

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+4	1d3+5

POWERS

CONSTRUCTION: With a successful bite attack, Sasha coils himself around her victim. Every round after the first attack, Sasha can automatically constrict, causing 1d3+5 damage. Sasha must then be removed with an **advanced TN 7 Strength test** with a success threshold of 10. Each test takes one round.

SCALES: Sasha's scales give her an armor rating of 1.

FAVORED STUNTS: Defensive Stance and Knock Prone.

Boiling the mixture produces a thick greenish broth that resembles pea soup, as well as a noxious gas. Anyone who wishes to avoid vomiting must make a **TN 11 Constitution (Stamina) test**.

3. THE WRONG SUMMONS

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The soup attracts an unwanted visitor before the firesprites arrive.

The PCs' presence and the scent of the soup attract a giant swamp crab before the firesprites arrive. This crustacean wants to snatch the pot and drink its contents.

Call for a **TN 11 Perception (Seeing) test** at -2 for darkness. Anyone who succeeds notices a large object moving toward the party beneath the swamp water. The next round, the massive creature emerges crawls up onto their hummock.

PCs making a **TN 11 Perception (Empathy) test** realize the crab is after the soup.

There are a number of unpleasant factors in play in this fight. All attacks and relevant tests suffer a -1 penalty for darkness (even given the fire's light). Attacks and other physical tests made while standing in swamp

GIANT SWAMP CRAB

Giant swamp crabs are about twice the size of a human. Their claws have about a 10-foot reach.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-2	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION
-1	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)
5	STRENGTH
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	40	12	8

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
CLAW	+5	2D6+5

POWERS

HARD SHELL: The swamp crab's outer shell gives it an armor rating of 8.

FAVORED STUNTS: Skirmish (especially into the swampwater, where the test penalty is -2!), Uneven Ground, and Grasping Root.

water suffer a further -2 penalty. (These penalties do not apply to the crab, of course.)

The crab can spend stunt points on behalf of the swampy environment, as well as to grab and drink the stewpot:

ENVIRONMENTAL STUNTS

SP	STUNT
1	UNEVEN GROUND: The PC stumbles on uneven ground and suffers a -1 penalty (cumulative with other environmental penalties) until he moves to a different location.
3	GRASPING ROOT: The PC stumbles over a grasping root and falls prone. Furthermore, he must make a TN 9 Strength (Might) test for each item in his hands to avoid dropping it. Finding a dropped object in the water requires a TN 13 Perception (Searching) test.
4	DINNER!: The crab grasps the stewpot in its claws, tips it over, and leaps upon it, gobbling the noxious liquid off the soft ground.
6	STUCK: As "Grasping Root," above, but the PC is also stuck in place until he makes a TN 15 Strength (Might) test to wrest himself free.

The PCs, however, also have one unusual option in this fight:

CRAB FIGHT STUNT

SP

STUNT

- 4 **SEVER CLAW:** The PC severs one of the swamp crab's claws, increasing the cost of the "Dinner!" stunt to 6 SP (for one missing claw) or making it impossible (for two missing claws). Upon losing its second claw, the crab must make a **TN 15 Willpower (Courage)** test or fall back into the dark marshes to nurse its wounds.

If the swamp crab devours the soup then the PCs' journey is basically at an end. If you're running a particularly brutal campaign the quest is over. The PCs have to return to Sothmere and deal with the repercussions. On the other hand, if you're feeling more generous, it's possible to salvage the situation by tossing the crab's stomach into the stewpot.

4. THE CALL OF THE FIRESprites

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs attract the firesprites and follow them to the grotto.

Dawn approaches. As you peer through the retreating darkness of the swamp you see a flicker of dull yellow light, followed by another, and then another. Soon a dozen lights appear, all moving closer to you. They swarm around the pot and you can see that each looks like a tiny flaxen humanoid with humming insect-like wings. The tiny creatures evaluate the pot and then, shaking their heads sadly, they fly around each other while singing a haunted melody that melds well with the raindrops pelting the swamp.

The affecting song invades your ears.

Have the characters attempt a **TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test. PCs who fail the test are overcome with grief and hopelessness. They believe the expedition is doomed, and that even if they do retrieve the shadowmoss the price will be too terrible to fathom (even though they have no idea what the price is).

PCs who try to interact with the firesprites find it frustrating. While the firesprites are curious about the PCs, they aren't particularly interested in anything the PCs have. They aren't impressed by shiny things; nor do they touch any offered food.

After a few minutes, the firesprites head back from whence they came. They continue to sing their haunted songs, so PCs can follow them with either a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing)** test or a **TN 9 Perception (Hearing)**

FIRESprite

The firesprites are an ancient, dying race of minute proportions—about four inches tall. They are humanoids with yellow skin and insect wings, and close inspection reveals that they have compound eyes, like a housefly. They also have two antennae. Firesprites don't wear clothes and their bodies emanate a musty yellow glow. In spite of their humanoid legs, firesprites don't seem to walk, instead flying everywhere. They prefer hovering to standing. They also don't seem to speak; instead they constantly sing. Their songs affect the moods of those around them; it isn't clear whether this is intentional.

Abilities (Focuses)

0	Communication
-3	Constitution
0	Cunning
6	Dexterity (Flight)
2	Magic
3	Perception
-4	Strength
2	Willpower

Combat Ratings

Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
- (Fly 20)	10	16	0

Powers

SONG: As a group, firesprites can communicate and influence an audience through song. Specific effects are described in the text.

test (it's much easier to hear them than spot them in the daylight). Each successful test allows the PCs to roll once toward an **advanced TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test with a success threshold of 9. Any PC who fails a test falls out of the pursuit. A PC who achieves the threshold arrives at the grotto (and can easily summon any of his companions who were left behind by shouting and the like). The story advances to **The Grotto**, on page 30.

The PCs must run to keep up with the firesprites. At some point during the chase, the PCs encounter **The Asphalt Pit** (see below). You might want to add a few additional hazards during the run, such as low-hanging tree branches or jutting roots, each requiring a successful **TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test to avoid taking 1d6 damage.

5. THE ASPHALT PIT

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs encounter a hidden asphalt pit while following the firesprites.

At some point during the PCs' pursuit of the firesprites, the creatures fly over a section of the swamp that hides an



asphalt pit. PCs running toward the asphalt pit can make a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing)** test to notice a large bubble burst from the water. PCs who see the air bubble can determine what it means with a **TN 13 Cunning (Natural Lore)** test, which enables them to avoid the hazard entirely.

PCs who don't see the bubble or recognize the warning run into the pit and may get trapped in the tarlike substance. PCs need to make a **TN 11 Strength (Might)** test in order to pull themselves free and get back to safety. Failure requires continued tests, once each round, with the TN increasing by 2 each round until the fourth round, when the PC is completely submerged and subject to drowning (2d6 points of damage per round).

Unaffected PCs can try to aid their sinking friends by pulling them out. This can only be safely done from a distance; a PC who wades in to grab a hand with his own also gets trapped in the asphalt pit. A PC can find a suitable branch with a **TN 9 Perception (Searching)** test. For each PC helping a trapped companion in this way, the sinking PC receives a +2 bonus to his tests to escape.

PCs who aren't trapped can navigate around the asphalt pit with little trouble by making a **TN 9 Cunning (Natural Lore)** test to find safer ground. If skirting the pit or saving their companions takes more than three rounds, the PCs must make another **TN 15 Perception (Seeing)** test or a **TN 11 Perception (Hearing)** test to re-orient themselves to the receding firesprites.

FINDING THE CURE

In this part of the adventure the PCs reach the grotto and confront the guardian serpent. After vanquishing the serpent, they discover the true nature of the shadowmoss and have a moral decision to make. Do they take the shadowmoss on the chance that it might cure the infected villagers even if it means condemning an ancient race to extinction?

1. THE GROTTO

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs find the grotto and its hidden passage to the caves where the shadowmoss and its guardian reside.

You follow the hazy amber lights for nearly an hour. At some point the rain stops, not that you're any drier for it. Finally, you press through a thick patch of swamp bushes and emerge into a grotto. The land is higher behind the grotto

and jutting rocks hang over a pool of greenish water fed from above by a sporadic waterfall. The firesprites have stopped here, flying in an erratic pattern and continuing their wailing dirge.

What will you do here?

PCs making a **TN 9 Cunning (Engineering)** test realize that the rock outcroppings are remnants of a building. Their weathered, cracked, and moss-covered state suggests an ancient structure, pre-dating the Tevinter Imperium and unlike any architectural style with which the PC is familiar.

The firesprites' song again touches the PCs' emotions, here. Any PC who fails a **TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test suddenly feels as if they know this place. It is the last outpost of an ancient, beautiful, and forgotten civilization. The firesprite song is a testament to its loss. These PCs don't understand why they know this, only that it's true. (Those who succeed in the test are unaffected.)

After a moment, the firesprites begin diving into the pool. A PC making a **TN 9 Perception (Seeing)** test realizes that no firesprite that dives re-emerges from the pool. They must be going somewhere.



The pool is about 11 feet deep and is actually an artificial pool, although its purpose is lost to history. The stone is so weathered and overgrown that the pool appears natural to casual observation. The bottom of the pool is filled with ancient statuettes that have weathered into jagged edges and sharp points. If a PC dives into the pool call for a **TN 11 Constitution (Swimming) test**. If the PC succeeds he takes no damage. Otherwise, he suffers 1d6+3 points of damage as he's cut and perhaps impaled on these hidden dangers. A PC who specifically discusses carefully entering the water makes the same test, but is only subject to 1d6 points on a failure.

PCs probing the pool with a staff, polearm, or other long object can discover this danger by making a **TN 13 Perception (Searching) test**. Heroes forewarned in this way do not need to make tests and are not in danger of sustaining damage.

It is difficult to see under the murky water, but luckily there are still firesprites entering the pool. A PC making a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test** can follow a firesprite to an underwater tunnel. A PC that fails this test can still feel his way to and through the tunnel by making a **TN 15 Perception (Searching) test**.

Once in the tunnel, the PCs swim through it. This requires an **advanced TN 9 Constitution (Swimming) test** with a success threshold of 9. For each failure the PC takes 1d6 damage from inhaling water. Those who pass the tunnel emerge in an underground cave.

2. FACING THE GUARDIAN SERPENT

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs face the guardian serpent in its home.

You break the surface of the water and find yourself in a large cavern that is dimly lit by the dull yellow light emanating from the dozens of firesprites flying about the room, now singing a more subdued melody. What seizes your immediate attention is a giant coiled snake in the corner that looks large enough to swallow you whole!

What now?

The "giant coiled snake" is actually the guardian serpent's molted skin. Anyone who makes a **TN 11 Perception (Seeing) test** realizes this from the water. If a PC climbs out of the pool to confront it then he'll automatically see it for what it is. A PC making a **TN 11 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** realizes that the molted skin means that the guardian snake must be even bigger.

The cave is about 50 feet in diameter, centered on a circular pool with a 10-foot radius. The ceiling of the cave is about 30 feet high with many large (easily walkable)

GUARDIAN SERPENT

The guardian serpent is a 40-foot-long greenish silver snake-like serpent with a prehensile body and tiny legs. It has two wicked horns on its head that it uses to gore victims before swallowing them whole.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-1	COMMUNICATION
4	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA, SWIMMING)
0	CUNNING
6	DEXTERITY (STEALTH)
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION (HEARING, TRACKING)
8	STRENGTH (CLIMBING, CONSTRICT, GORE)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
22	50	16	5

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
GORE	+10	3D6+8

POWERS

SCALES: *The guardian serpent's scales give it an armor rating of 5.*

CONSTRICT: *After a successful gore attack, the guardian serpent may automatically coil itself around its victim and constrict, suffocating him for 1d6+8 damage in each subsequent round. The serpent can constrict up to two human-sized victims at once in this way, and is free to continue goring other targets in the meantime. A constricted victim can wriggle free with an **advanced TN 11 Strength (Might) test**. Each roll requires a major action; a success threshold of 10 is required to escape. Constricted victims can also try to do other things (with the exception of charging, running, or moving), but suffer a -3 penalty to all actions, including attacking the serpent. A constricted victim has a special stunt available, "Escape the Snake." Any number of stunt points can be spent at once to this end, with each point spent contributing 1 point to the test threshold to escape the constriction.*

FAVORED STUNTS: *Skirmish (especially into the pool), Knock Prone, and Lightning Attack.*

tunnel entrance holes high on the walls, starting from about 15 feet above the floor. There are no signs of shadowmoss here.

After a few moments, the guardian serpent pokes its head out of one of the higher holes with a loud hiss and glares down at the PCs. The firesprites scatter to the walls, some of them entering the tunnels. The guardian serpent slides down the wall and attacks.

The guardian serpent fights to the death. If all of the PCs jump back into the water and retreat, the serpent follows them, although it is more concerned with ensuring they leave than with killing them. Any PC

who turns back to face the guardian serpent is attacked without mercy.

During the fight, any PC who makes a **TN 9 Perception (Hearing) test** notices that the firesprites' song has changed, becoming louder and more erratic. The firesprites seem worried and agitated.

3. THE TUNNELS

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs explore a labyrinth of tunnels, moving ever closer to the shadowmoss.

Once the guardian serpent has been vanquished, the firesprites let out a screeching wail and disappear into the tunnel mouths

The PCs must scale the walls to get to the entrance holes. The walls are steep but natural (whatever the architecture in the grotto, there seems to be none of that in here); there are jutting rocks perfect for climbing. A PC need only make a **TN 11 Strength (Climbing) test** to climb up to a hole.

Once in a tunnel, most PCs have to crawl or squat to move; only dwarves can easily walk without crouching. It's pitch black in the twisting tunnels except for the occasional dim glow of a firesprite. Even in the dark, though, a PC can make his way by touch.

Navigating the tunnels is difficult, as they wind all over. However, a PC making a **TN 11 Perception (Smelling) test** notices an unpleasant scent—identical to the one given off by the boiling soup—wafting through the tunnels. Following this scent enables the PC to find the shadowmoss cavern (see **Shadowmoss**).

4. THE PIT

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs find the remnants of past intruders.

If the heroes specify that they're taking one of the tunnels that passes the chamber labeled "The Pit" (see the map on page 30), or if they don't specify any of the tunnels in particular and you feel like they deserve a lucky break, use this encounter and read the text below. Alternately, you can skip this encounter, the fortune contained in this cave unfortunately missed by inopportune luck.

You emerge from the tunnel into a cave that is more of a pit, dropping what your poor light suggests might be as much as forty feet below you. At the bottom you can see plenty of bones

and debris, but also remnants of clothing and the faint glint of armor and weapons.

Are any of you willing to descend? And if so, how?

Descending requires a **TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test** (at -3 if the PC has no light source, -1 if he does have a light source, and +2 if he lowers himself using a rope). Anyone who fails slips and falls into the pit for 3d6 damage.

The bottom of the pit contains the bones and effects of past intruders, some ancient and some recent. Searching the pit requires a **TN 11 Perception (Searching) test** at -1 with a light source and -3 without one. A successful result's dragon die determines what's found, which includes everything on the following table up to and including the dragon die result.

PIT TREASURE	
DRAGON DIE RESULT	TREASURE FOUND
1-2	4d6 copper pieces
3	3d6 silver pieces
4	1d3 gold pieces
5	Crushed light mail armor in an ancient Tevinter design. It can be banged back into shape with a TN 11 Cunning (Engineering) test and a day's work with proper tools.
6	An ancient short sword of uncertain design that is in perfect condition in spite of its moldy scabbard. It is inlaid with forgotten runes and adds +1 to attack and damage rolls made with it.

Climbing back up out of the pit to the ledge that encircles the chamber requires the same test that was made to descend, with the same consequences of failure.

5. SHADOWMOSS

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

After discovering that the shadowmoss is the firesprites' only source of sustenance, the PCs must decide whether to let the firesprites die for the sake of the infected villagers.

You enter a large chamber with several exits. Firesprites flutter about, illuminating the room in a dull yellow glow. A sickly green glow emanating from a crusty substance lying in clumps on the floor further illuminates the room. The



smell here is overwhelming, an even more intense version of the stench from the soup you made to attract the firesprites.

Entering this room may induce nausea. PCs who fail a **TN 15 Constitution (Stamina) test** vomit and cannot force themselves to enter the room. PCs who succeed may suffer a penalty to all tests while they remain, depending on the result of their dragon die: 1-2 results in a -2 penalty, 3-4 results in a -1 penalty, and those fortunate enough to achieve 5-6 suffer no penalty.

A PC making a **TN 9 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** realizes that the shadowmoss is excrement; specifically, it's the condensed excrement of the guardian serpent. With a **TN 9 Perception (Seeing) test**, they further notice that some of the firesprites are eating the shadowmoss's luminescent outer crust.

If one or more PCs enter the cavern, the firesprites begin to sing a depressing, futile song. PCs who hear it must make a **TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test**. Those who succeed resist its effects. Those who fail suddenly understand the relationship between the guardian serpent and the firesprites, if they did not already.

The guardian serpent was more than just the protector of the firesprites's food, but also its creator. The guardian serpent itself is a magical creation of the firesprites. When it dies, one of the firesprite's young becomes the next guardian serpent. The PCs understand that there were once many colonies of firesprites, each with its own guardian serpent. Over the millennia, guardian serpents have been destroyed and the firesprites that each supported along with them. Now, only this single colony remains. The shadowmoss left over when a guardian serpent dies is the only thing that sustains the firesprites long enough for a new guardian serpent to mature. If this shadowmoss is taken away, then the PCs doom the firesprites to starvation and extinction. As before, the PCs don't understand how they know this information, only that it's true.

A PC who makes a **TN 11 Perception (Seeing) test** realizes that it'll take the entire amount in this room to fill the bag, and so the PCs must make a choice. Do they doom the firesprites to save the villagers? Do they risk taking less than all of the shadowmoss?

The firesprites don't interfere with the heroes whatever they choose, other than to sing a haunting, funereal song if the PCs collect any shadowmoss at all.

Should the players complain about this horrible choice, you might remind them that they entered the guardian serpent's lair with the intention of robbing it, and killed it while it tried to protect its home. Slaying the guardian serpent wasn't necessary; *Dragon Age* provides rules for knocking out a creature rather than killing it. The heroes face this horrible choice in part because of their own actions.

PART 5

THE JOURNEY BACK

Having collected the shadowmoss—or not—the PCs must find their way out of the Korcari Wilds and back to Sothmere. This is more difficult than the trip in, with no enchanted raven to guide them.

1. WHICH WAY?

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs must figure out how to go back the way they came.

You emerge dripping from the pool in the grotto. You're pretty certain that it must be the morning of the day after you left Sothmere, and it does seem as though the sun has perhaps risen, since the fog and haze that cover the land in a thick blanket are more green than black.

Is it a trick of your eye, or a trick of the swamp that everything looks different now than when you disappeared into the caves? Which way did you come from? Which way *is* the sun, anyway? And which of your number will you rely on to lead you back out of the Wilds?

Determining the way out of the Korcari Wilds requires an **advanced TN 13 Cunning (Navigation) test** with a success threshold of 15. Each roll represents about two hours of travel as the PCs strike out, change course, double back, and try to figure out where they are in the Maker-forsaken haze. After each roll, whether successful or not, the PCs encounter something. Since the PCs must accumulate 15 points on their dragon dice to get out of the Wilds, they'll definitely have several encounters, which are described in the sections that follow. All are optional, and it is not necessary to use them in order.

Many of these encounters involve Chasind attempts to contain the rager threat before it destroys them.

2. WOLVES IN THE FOREST

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs confront an animal that is almost myth.

As you make your way over the swampy ground you hear splashing around you. There are large wolves about, with matted brown fur tinted green from moss, mold, or Maker-knows-what. They snarl and attack!

MARSH WOLF

Marsh wolves are large wolves that have adapted to swamp life. They have wickedly sharp claws to grip loose soil and are excellent swimmers.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-1	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING, SWIMMING)
-1	CUNNING
4	DEXTERITY (BITE)
-1	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING, TRACKING)
3	STRENGTH (JUMPING)
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
17	25	14	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+6	1d6+5

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone and Mighty Blow.*

RAKING CLAWS: *A marsh wolf can follow up a successful bite attack with a rake as a special stunt costing 2 SP. Raking claws must be used against a single target with a +3 attack roll and 1d6+5 damage.*

While wolves have been hunted almost to extinction in Ferelden, a few packs still thrive in the southern Korcari Wilds. These wolves, like the Chasind, have been driven north by the growing Blight. There are two marsh wolves for each PC.

3. SPRING TRAP (OPTIONAL)

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs face a trap meant for a rager.

Through a break in the bushes you see a grove of trees nestled on a hummock. You notice the glint of an axe and part of a humanoid dressed like a Chasind stalker crouched among the foliage, waiting for something in the other direction.

What now?

What the PCs have espied is not actually a stalker, but a dummy stuffed with swamp grass. A PC who succeeds at a **TN 17 Perception (Seeing) test** realizes this. A PC who specifically asks whether the Chasind is moving receives a +3 bonus to this test.

Chasind rager-hunters designed this trap to snag ragers from most directions, and there are several spring traps set around the grove. PCs who think to look and pass a **TN 15 Dexterity (Traps) test** spot a trip wire. If a character approaches and trips a wire, then the trap hits him and a second PC close to him for 2d6 damage each. A PC who makes a **TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test** takes half damage.

There is a chance that a screaming PC may attract a Chasind rager-hunter party, effectively bringing the next encounter, **Rager-Hunters**, to the PCs. Any character harmed by a trap must make a **TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test** or cry out loudly enough that the rager-hunters hear him.

The rager-hunters stealthily arrive at the scene, expecting to find a rager. Whether they parley or attack depends on how the PCs act. See the next encounter for details.

4. RAGER-HUNTERS

ROLEPLAYING AND/OR COMBAT ENCOUNTER

A band of rager-hunters ambush the PCs to learn what they know.

After the Chasind realized their poison was tainted they immediately took steps to contain the amber rage. The shamans responsible were put to death and the rest of the poison destroyed. Chasind rager-hunter parties were organized to hunt down the ragers while Chasind villagers fled to purged areas.



In this encounter, a party of rager-hunters are lying low in a marshy region, waiting to ambush any ragers that cross their path. When the PCs come through, the rager-hunters lie in wait until they have the PCs surrounded, hoping to have the opportunity to interrogate these foreigners and find out what they know.

Spotting the ambush before walking into it requires an **opposed Perception (Seeing or Hearing) vs Dexterity (Stealth) test**. Roll only once for the entire party of Chasind. The rager-hunters have a +2 bonus on their roll given how long they've had to set up. There is one rager-hunter per PC.

The Chasind are more interested in interrogating the PCs than killing them. If they managed to surround the PCs before being noticed, about half of the rager-hunters appear (the rest remain in hiding) and demand that the heroes drop their weapons, although the Chasind don't consider this a necessary condition to a parley. They do point out that they only need to speak to one of the PCs, so if the others must die first, then so be it. While set in their ambush positions the Chasind rager-hunters are both supremely confident and have a significant advantage, and so add +2 to all Communication and Willpower tests while that condition persists.

Assuming negotiations rather than immediate combat, the Chasind ask questions like these:

HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANY OF THE MAD FIGHTERS?

HAVE ANY OF YOU BEEN BITTEN BY THESE MADMEN? (THIS, ASKED WITH A GREAT DEAL OF SUSPICION.)

HOW FAR HAS THE MADNESS SPREAD? EVEN TO THE NORTHERN HILLS? (BY "NORTHERN HILLS," THEY MEAN THE FERELDEN HINTERLANDS.)

Call for **opposed Communication (Bargaining, Deception, and/or Persuasion) tests** as appropriate. Alternately, you may forego tests and simply roleplay the discussion and negotiation.

The Chasind are very concerned to hear that the amber rage has spread into the Hinterlands, if the PCs reveal that it has. They're *very* interested to hear that there may be a cure, or that the heroes have a brew that staves off encroaching madness.

Once the Chasind are satisfied that they've learned all they can, they may be tempted to kill the PCs on general principles. They're doubly tempted if any of the heroes admit to either being infected or having been bitten. The PCs, of course, may manage to cut a deal of some kind, and perhaps even negotiate for information or guidance as to how to exit the Wilds. How this encounter plays out is up to you and the players.

Obviously, if the PCs notice the ambush before it is sprung combat may break out before a word is spoken. The rager-hunters are still interested in talk-

CHASIND RAGER-HUNTERS			
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
0	COMMUNICATION		
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)		
2	CUNNING (NATURAL LORE, NAVIGATION)		
3	DEXTERITY (BOWS, LIGHT BLADES, STEALTH, TRAPS)		
0	MAGIC		
3	PERCEPTION (SEARCHING, SEEING, TRACKING)		
3	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)		
1	WILLPOWER (MORALE)		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	25	13	3
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
BASTARD SWORD	+5	2D6+4	—
LONG BOW	+5	1D6+6	26/52 YARDS
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: <i>Mighty Blow and Skirmish.</i>			
TALENTS: <i>Archery Style (Journeyman), Scouting (Journeyman), and Single Weapon (Journeyman).</i>			
WEAPON GROUPS: <i>Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, Light Blades, and Spears.</i>			
EQUIPMENT			
LIGHT LEATHER ARMOR, LONG SWORD, SPEAR, LONG BOW, AND 20 ARROWS.			

ing, though, so any unspotted rager-hunters attempt to sneak-attack at least one of the PCs and hold them hostage to force the others to stop fighting. If this happens, the rager-hunters lose their +2 Communication and Willpower advantage.

5. EMPTY VILLAGE

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs are attacked by a blight owl at an abandoned village.

You approach a village of houses on stilts over the edge of a swampy lake. The village appears deserted and piles of ash smolder on its outskirts. A giant owl is perched on one of the buildings. It has black feathers and large, blood red eyes. It hoots and hisses, its beak segmenting into four parts, revealing many rows of jagged teeth inside. The hiss becomes a shriek as it leaps toward you, vicious talons extended. Roll for initiative.

This was one of the first villages overrun by ragers. There were four at first, but they claimed six victims



BLIGHT OWL

A giant owl tainted and warped by the Blight.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-1	COMMUNICATION
0	CONSTITUTION
-1	CUNNING
4	DEXTERITY (BITE)
0	MAGIC
7	PERCEPTION (SEEING)
6	STRENGTH (TALON)
3	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
6	40	17	1

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+6	2D6+6
TALON	+8	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNT: *Mighty Blow.*

HIDE: *A Blight owl has tough skin, giving it an armor rating of 1.*

KORCARI CROCODILE

Korcari crocodiles are about 10 feet long with vicious jaws. These crocodiles have acquired a taste for human flesh after feeding on unwary Chasind.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-1	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (SWIMMING)
-1	CUNNING
4	DEXTERITY (STEALTH)
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SEEING)
6	STRENGTH (BITE)
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
7	25	14	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+8	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow.*

TOUGH HIDE: *A crocodile has a tough hide that gives it an armor rating of 3.*

before they were defeated. The villagers decided to move to a safer place after burning the bodies.

A blight owl (or owls—there is one for each three PCs) has moved into the village, picking at the cooked scraps in the ash piles. The owl fights to the death. After the battle it plans to feast on fresh corpses.

6. CROCODILES

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

Crocodiles attack the PCs in the swamp.

Your path takes you through a swampier section of the Wilds. You feel uneasy here, as if you're being watched.

Call for a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test**.

The crocodiles swim and crawl toward the PCs just below the surface of the water. PCs who make the test notice the crocodiles' eyes coming toward them. If the PCs fail, then the crocodiles get close enough to attack without warning. There is one crocodile for each PC. They are hungry but not blindly so; if two or more crocodiles are defeated then the others slide back into the waters and depart to look for easier prey.

7. TRAPPED RAGER

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

A rager has fallen into a Chasind trap and has made a surprise for anyone that approaches.

You hear screams ahead. They sound human, but you don't see anyone.

There is an open pit ahead. This trap was covered with leaves and a rager fell in. One of the rager's legs was broken in the fall, and was punctured by the spikes at the bottom of the pit. The wounded rager has used his dagger to fashion small darts coated with his poison to throw at anyone who sneaks a peek down at him. From his position, the rager gets a -2 on his attack roll.

In spite of a potential surprise attack, the PCs are in no immediate danger given that the rager cannot leave the pit.

8. STALKING THE STALKERS

COMBAT AND/OR ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs learn the truth about the ragers from an unlikely source.

This is the PCs' last encounter in the Wilds. Use it after they finally meet or beat their navigation threshold.

You believe you may have finally reached the edge of the Wilds, but just as you break through the tree line you notice a lone rider galloping in your general direction. Perhaps "rider" is too strong a word; this Chasind is slumped against his horse and guides the reins with one hand. His other arm hangs limply at his side. He notices you and pulls up, shouting across the distance to your party:

"Please! You must stop them!"

This is Gyera, a Chasind rager-hunter whose small party was ambushed by two ragers. He was heavily wounded, but managed to escape while his companions were cut down. Gyera realizes that the ragers are making meals of his friends and implores the PCs to slay the ragers before they infect anyone else. A **TN 11 Cunning (Healing) test** indicates that Gyera has not contracted the amber rage himself. Gyera's stats are the same as those of the rager-hunters in **Rager-Hunters** on page 35, save that he is down to 7 Health.

Should the PCs seek out the ragers, they are only about a hundred yards away.

As you make your way through the bushes you come upon a macabre sight. Two Chasind lie dead and dismembered as two ragers cut away bits of their flesh with their blades and chomp them down with wicked teeth.

Unless surprised, the ragers immediately drop their grisly meal and attack the PCs. They have the same statistics as other ragers (see **Ragers!** on page 12) and they fight to the death.

After the fight, Gyera is willing to fill in any missing pieces of the rager puzzle (the amber rage's origin, how it is spread, and so on) for the PCs. He believes that most of the ragers south of the river have been killed. These last two took his party by surprise.

9. RETURN TO DOSOV

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs collect their horses.

If the PCs left their horses in Dosov village, they are likely to want to collect them. They discover that their mounts have been well cared for. Baba Zorya is happy to see them and is curious whether they found what they were looking for. She gifts them a bottle of wild-wine to keep them warm on the journey home.

SUSTAINING DRAMA AND VARYING BEATS ON THE JOURNEY BACK

There's a danger that the heroes' encounters after they recover the Shadowmoss (or fail to do so) will become repetitive and anti-climactic if handled without a sense for continuing the drama. Since one of the most critical questions of the scenario has already been answered—"Will the PCs get what they need?"—it becomes important to re-focus the drama on unanswered questions like "Will the PCs make it back in time?" To do that, emphasize the way that each scene of delay, each attempt to navigate, affects the heroes' eventual success or failure.

However, a related danger is that all of the swamp encounters, and even those that take place after the swamp has been left behind, will strike the same chord of delay and inconvenience. Any story that hits the same notes over and over again becomes boring by repetition, so make sure you vary the tenor—positive vs. negative—of the successive encounters you introduce while the PCs are traveling back to Sothmere.

Alternately, if the PCs lost their horses in the swamp, they may want to buy new mounts in Dosov. In that case, they must negotiate with Baba Zorya as in **Dosov Village** on page 26. If a PC wins the negotiation, riding horses cost the regular price in barter (120 sp). If Zorya wins, they cost half again as much (180 sp). Otherwise, skip this encounter.

PART 6

THE FINAL LEG

In this final part of the adventure the PCs must return to Sothmere and confront Ser Vilem, surviving an ambush and overturning a blackhaller’s decision. This may result in a trial by combat between one of the PCs and Ser Vilem. First, however, they must face another hard moral choice.

1. A KNIGHT’S FINAL STAND
ROLEPLAYING AND/OR COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs confront another party who went after the shadowmoss for the same reason they did.

As you approach the rocky hills between the forest and the Sudrand River, dark clouds once again roll over the sky. A light rain showers you as a lightning bolt reveals a lone horseman perched atop the first hill.
Do you approach?

A PC making a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing)** test (at -1 due to the rain) can make out the colors and standards of Ser Vilja Wulver. A **TN 13 Cunning (Heraldry)** test reveals that the knight wears the crest of the riverside village of Wulverton, a day’s ride to the west.

Suspicious PCs may look around to see if the knight is truly alone. Make an **opposed Perception (Seeing) vs. Dexterity (Stealth)** test between Vilja’s companions and the PCs. The PCs suffer a -1 penalty for the rain and Vilja’s companions receive a +1 bonus for having had plenty of time to prepare.

Regardless, the knight rides down the hill as if to meet the PCs, but stops short and raises his sword, holding it out and down. A PC making a **TN 9 Communication (Etiquette)** test realizes that he expects one PC to ride out to meet him. Assuming that a PC rides forth, Vilja makes his request.

The tired knight looks at you with grim determination. “With regret I must ask you to hand over the shadowmoss. If you do so willingly, then you may leave without bloodshed.”

SER VILJA WULVERTON

An honorable knight turned reluctant bandit.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
2	COMMUNICATION		
3	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)		
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)		
4	DEXTERITY (RIDING)		
0	MAGIC		
1	PERCEPTION		
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)		
2	WILLPOWER		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	39	16	7
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
LONG SWORD	+6	2D6+4	—
DAGGER	+4	1D6+5	—
CROSSBOW	+1	2D6+2	30/60 YARDS
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: Disarm and Mighty Blow.			
TALENTS: Armor Training (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Novice).			
WEAPON GROUPS: Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades.			
EQUIPMENT			
HEAVY MAIL ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, LONG SWORD, DAGGER, CROSSBOW, AND 20 BOLTS.			

If the PC asks why the knight’s companions are hiding, Ser Vilja apologizes for the deception and waves his allies out. Ser Vilja knows that it is never wise to let the Chasind stalkers know one’s true strength and he had no idea whether the PCs would respect his call to parley.

Ser Vilja Wulverton is the knight and burgomaster of Wulverton. A relatively young man, he’s already known hardship, his own father having fallen to the frequent Avvarian raids against his village.

Ragers attacked his village this morning, infected his wife and son and killed his other son. In all, ten people in Wulverton are infected. His own village wise man told him how to seek the shadowmoss, which he did. Unfortunately, when he summoned the firesprites, the vision he received during their wailing song made him understand that the shadowmoss was gone, probably forever, and that it was leaving the forest. He even saw the faces of those who took it—the PCs. He decided to intercept them before it was too late.

Ser Vilja means to save his kin or die trying. If the PCs won’t hand the shadowmoss over, he regrets that he’ll have to fight them. A PC making a **TN 9 Perception (Empathy)** test realizes that Ser Vilja is tortured over this decision. He

WULVERTON VOLUNTEERS

Wulverton has no standing militia, but most of its villagers know how to handle themselves in a fight.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING
1	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
2	STRENGTH (AXES, BLUDGEONS, OR HEAVY BLADES AS APPROPRIATE)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
9	15	13	5

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
BATTLE AXE, MACE, OR LONG SWORD	+4	2D6+2	—
CROSSBOW	+1	2D6+2	30/60 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Skirmish.*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes, Bludgeons, Bows, Brawling, and Heavy Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT MAIL ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, CROSSBOW, 20 BOLTS, AND A BATTLE AXE, MACE, OR LONG SWORD.

has always been an honorable soldier and now has been reduced by circumstance to be a common brigand.

This scene can play out in many different ways. You should roleplay these interactions, rather than reducing any of them to a test. Press each side to make choices, rather than die rolls.

Ser Vilja is assisted by Dobreela, and one Wulverton volunteer for each PC. Should Ser Vilja's determination waiver, then Dobreela or one of the volunteers might start the fight anyway.

In a fight against the PCs, Ser Vilja pulls his killing blows, but he has not instructed his companions to do the same. Each companion fights as his conscience and the PCs' behavior requires.

If the fight ends and Ser Vilja is still standing, he makes sure the PCs know they've consigned his family to death. He weeps openly.

If Ser Vilja and his men manage to overpower the PCs and take the shadowmoss, they ride for Wulverton with all speed. Overtaking Ser Vilja's party requires an **opposed Cunning (Navigation) test**.

DOBREELA THE GIFTED

Apprentice to the wise man of Wulverton.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION
0	CONSTITUTION
2	CUNNING (HEALING, NATURAL LORE)
2	DEXTERITY
4	MAGIC
0	PERCEPTION
1	STRENGTH
3	WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	23	12	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
ARCANE LANCE	—	1D6+4	16 YARDS
QUARTERSTAFF	+2	1D6+2	—

POWERS

SPELLPOWER: 14 **MANA:** 18

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Spell.*

TALENTS: *Chirurgy (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Staves.*

SPELLS: *Heal, Weakness, and Winter's Grasp (note that her armor causes one point of strain when Dobreela casts).*

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT LEATHER ARMOR, QUARTERSTAFF, DAGGER, AND WAND.

DOBREELA THE GIFTED

Dobreela is apprenticed to Maximilian, the wise man of Wulverton. She has quite a challenge; Maximilian is one of the afflicted. She is an attractive young raven-haired woman but barely more than a girl. She doesn't like this plan any more than Ser Vilja, but follows his lead (she is a bit smitten with him, in spite of the circumstances).

2. RETURN TO WICHFORD

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs return to Wichford and meet Strom, who warns them of Ser Vilem's plan.

A hard rain falls and lightning flashes as you head toward the river. You see many small lights ahead: Wichford lies ahead.

The Wichforders who were away have returned home to bury their dead and restore order. The ferry has been fixed and the local inn is open for business. In fact, Strom Karsgard happens to be staying there and is smoking a pipe on the porch as he sees the PCs.

He implores them to get out of the terrible weather and offers to pay for their meal and lodgings, as it would be ludicrous for them to press on in this weather.

If the PCs feel that time is of the essence and they want to brave the weather, then Strom still gives them the following information. It just won't be over a hearty fish stew and ryott beer.

Strom tells them that Ser Vilem sent for a blackhaller the day after the PCs left, and that the blackhaller is expected some time on the third day. Sheriff Milo seemed certain that the blackhaller would wait at least until the PCs arrived with the shadowmoss before rendering a decision, but Strom doesn't trust Ser Vilem.

3. A MESSAGE FROM SER VILEM

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

Ser Vilem hedges his bets; his loyal soldiers ambush the PCs en route to Sothmere.

The rain shows little sign of letting up as you wind your way around the Sudrand riverbank to get to the low-lying path to Sothmere. You soon see a band of armored horsemen riding toward you. They fly the colors of Arl Neruda, Ser Vilem's liege-lord.

While Ser Vilem has a blackhaller in his pocket he'd rather stack the deck further in his favor. He's created a unit out of his most loyal soldiers and assigned them to intercept the PCs if they manage to pass through Wichford. Their instructions are to kill the PCs, burn the bodies, and dispose of any shadowmoss in their possession. There is one soldier per PC.

A soldier named Kristof leads the band. He asks the PCs if they have located the shadowmoss. He tells them that they are patrolling the area for any further attacks. If asked about the second wave of ragers, Kristof informs the PCs that they never made it to Sothmere.

Suspicious PCs can make an **opposed Perception (Empathy) vs Communication (Deception) test**. If Kristof is found out, he and his men draw their swords and attack.

If the PCs aren't suspicious, the soldiers let them pass, then turn and shoot them in the back with their crossbows. They intend to run down any survivors with hooves and swords.

If this fight takes place at night, all combat tests are penalized by -3 due to the darkness and hard rain. If in the morning, then the hard rain causes only a -2 penalty.

Use the fort soldier stats from **Ragers!** on page 15. Their names are Antal, Bozek, Cheslov, Kristof, and Tivadar.

(Use only the names you need; you can also use named soldiers the PCs may have met earlier, to make this treachery sting that much more.)

4. THE REMAINS OF THE SECOND WAVE

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs discover what happened to the second wave of ragers to head north from Wichford.

Off to the side of the path you see a line of swords, four in all, stuck into the ground. On the other side of the path is a large pile of ash in which at least a dozen charred weapons are half-buried.

This is where the residents of Wichford returning from the Groundbreaking Festival met the second wave of ragers. The residents were prepared to fight and peppered the ragers with arrows as they charged. Still, they could not put down all of the ragers before they were upon them, and four Wichforders lost their lives. Their bodies were burned with the ragers, lest they spread the disease themselves.

5. TO PREVENT A BURNING

ROLEPLAYING AND/OR COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs return to Sothmere just as the infected villagers are about to be executed.

Only a couple days ago, Sothmere was the site of a festive party. Now, it is a funeral pyre; many pyres, in fact. As you approach you can see fort soldiers tying the infected villagers to poles with piles of branches at their feet. Most of the infected villagers crying or screaming. You see Bogdan offer a large dagger to Ser Vilem, who stands smugly beside a woman wearing a blackhaller's robe.

Will you allow this to stand?

As Strom told them, an arbiter has come to Sothmere and it's obvious that she's sided with Ser Vilem. The infected villagers are to be executed and their bodies burned to destroy this horrible disease. Bogdan has helpfully sharpened a blade so that the victims' throats will be cleanly slit. The wood is dry; it has been taken from winter piles and mingled with barn straw. Sheriff Milo sits on the ground, his head in his hands as he sobs. Old Stoyanka stands at a distance, her bent body leaning against her walking stick.

If the PCs have the shadowmoss, it is enough to make the blackhaller pause. Sir Vilem is against any delay in

meting out the planned “justice,” though, and makes the argument the sentence has been handed down and that’s that. It comes down to an **opposed Communication (Persuasion) test** between the PCs and Vilem. If the PCs win, Gelda is willing to allow Old Stoyanka a few hours to brew her cure in hopes it will help. If not, though, preparations for the burning continue.

As a separate matter (although it may well occur before the matter of the execution is decided), if the PCs accuse Ser Vilem of being behind an ambush against them, he haughtily demands satisfaction. Ser Gelda is in a mood to grant it. If the PCs present additional evidence, such as one of the ambushers willing to speak out against Ser Vilem, then Ser Vilem demands satisfaction from the soldier first. Simply narrate Ser Vilem easily dispatching the soldier. Alternatively, if the soldier is badly wounded, Ser Gelda allows the soldier to designate one of his PC captors as a champion.

If Ser Vilem is bested in trial by combat, the PCs get a +3 bonus to opposed Persuasion tests against Vilem, even so far as being able to make a new opposed test to convince Ser Gelda to wait until after Old Stoyanka has tried to cure the villagers before making good on the execution.

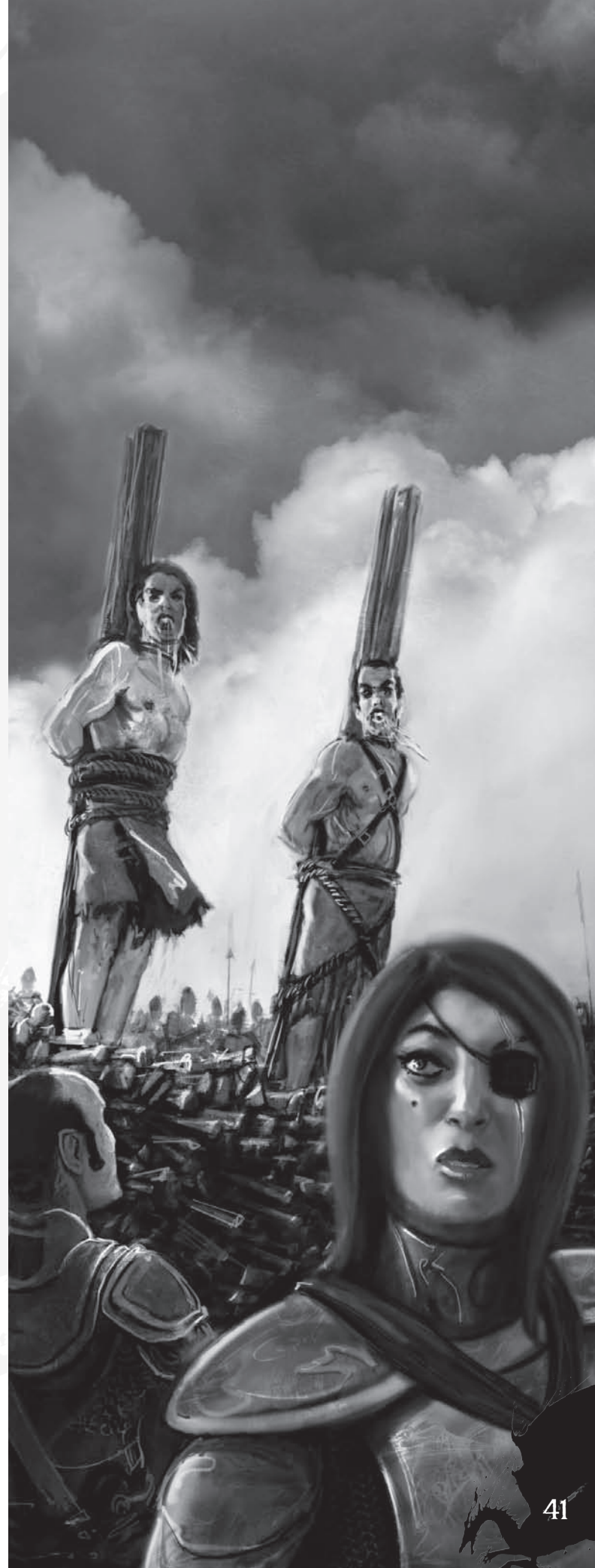
If the PCs ride in and attack, or resort to combat after negotiations break down, they’re likely to be slaughtered. Ser Vilem’s forces have been reinforced by Bann Dusic (who sent ten soldiers) and Ser Gelda’s personal guard of four. The remainder of Ser Vilem’s unit (nine minus those lost in **A Message From Ser Vilem**) are at the fort. They PCs’ only real hope if they choose this option is to rally the villagers with a **TN 15 Cunning (Persuasion) test**.

If the PCs do attack, Ser Gelda attempts to stop them with an appeal to reason. If the PCs cut her down, they commit themselves to a fight to the death and the TN for persuading the villagers to help them goes up to 17—no one wants to be involved in the death of a black-haller, no matter the circumstances.

Statistics for Ser Gelda and her guard are provided below. The bann’s reinforcements have the same statistics as Ser Vilem’s fort soldiers.

SER GELDA CERMAC

Ser Gelda is a hardened woman (the Fereldan knightly honorific “Ser” applies equally to men and women) in her mid-forties who is still attractive in spite of a wicked scar down the left side of her face from an attack that left one eye blind—a wound delivered by someone who disagreed with one of her arbitrations. She keeps this eye covered with a simple eye patch. Ordinarily, Ser Gelda is a fair arbiter and would have waited for the PCs to arrive before rendering a decision. Unfortunately, Ser Gelda owes Ser Vilem’s father a favor from long ago, and as such she has grudgingly sided with Ser Vilem, even though she has her doubts. She simply wants to repay her debt and ride away from Sothmere.



SER GELDA CERMAC

Arbiter.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

6	COMMUNICATION (PERSUASION)
2	CONSTITUTION
5	CUNNING (CULTURAL LORE, HISTORICAL LORE, MILITARY LORE, WRITING)
1	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES)
0	MAGIC
-1	PERCEPTION
2	STRENGTH (BLUDGEONS)
3	WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
8	55	11	7

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
MACE	+4	2D6+2
DAGGER	+3	1D6+3

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Defensive Stance and Disarm.*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Novice), Contacts (Journeyman), Linguistics (Novice, Read Ancient Tevene), Lore (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bludgeons, Brawling, and Light Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY MAIL ARMOR, MACE, AND DAGGER.

THE ARBITER'S GUARD

Ser Gelda's bodyguard.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
2	DEXTERITY (RIDING)
0	MAGIC
0	PERCEPTION
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
2	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
8	45	14	8

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
BASTARD SWORD	+6	2D6+5	
DAGGER	+2	1D6+5	
2 HANDED SPEAR	+4	2D6+4	
CROSSBOW	+2	2D6+1	30/60 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Skirmish.*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman), Weapon and Shield Style (Novice), Two-Hander Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT PLATE ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, BASTARD SWORD, DAGGER, TWO HANDED SPEAR, CROSSBOW, AND 20 BOLTS.

THE ARBITER'S GUARD

Ser Gelda's guardsmen are defensive fighters, more concerned with protecting the arbiter than with pressing any advantage. Only if Ser Gelda is killed do they fight without mercy, realizing that they have failed in their duty and must now salvage what honor they can in her memory.

6. THE CURE

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

Old Stoyanka brews her cure.

If the PCs managed to both return with the full quantity of shadowmoss and also prevent Ser Vilem from putting the infected villagers to death, **Amber Rage** ends thusly:

Old Stolyanka takes the sack of shadowmoss from you, opens it, and clucks at its contents, oblivious to or inured against its smell. She disappears for some hours into her home, from which prayers and incantations can be heard. When she emerges, it is with a wooden trough

and a ladle. The infected who remain have been assembled, and the wise woman approaches them with a curative that everyone hopes will cure their condition.

Whether it works is up to you. If it does, the yellowed skin of the infected starts clearing up. If not, then the infected soon descend into irrevocable madness and become ragers. In either case, a deal is a deal, and if terms were made, Sheriff Milo honors them.

If the potion cures Wanda, the PCs have a new ally in Sheriff Milo. He intends to petition the bann to appoint an appropriate PC as Ser Vilem's replacement (unless all such characters absolutely refuse to accept the position), and he's also still interested in finding Wanda a good husband. Depending upon how things work out, they may also have an ally in Ser Gelda. It's unlikely that either Ser Vilem or Bogdan will wish the PCs well, in the end, and could be a source of recurring headaches for the heroes.



BY TS. LUIKART

Love, they say, can move mountains, but whether to topple them over or raise them up is seldom mentioned. The young and passionately in love would say no obstacle cannot be surmounted, no divide cannot be crossed, and that even the vast chasm between Fereldans and Avvarians can be bridged, if you stay true to your heart. Pity that the rest of the world doesn't always share such optimism.

Where Eagles Lair is an adventure for four to six hardy characters ranging from 3rd to 4th level, who must journey high into the Frostback Mountains to retrieve the kidnapped daughter of a nobleman, or at the least ensure her father's vengeance. Along the way, they must deal extensively with the Avvarian hillspeople, who are not fond of Fereldans at the best of times, as well as the many predators of the Frostbacks, the effects of the biting cold, and the fact that Izot Wulff wasn't actually even kidnapped... at least, not at first.

Where Eagles Lair also contains a great deal of information about the Avvars, the Fereldans' bitter kinfolk who were forced into the Frostbacks centuries ago, which will be useful for both running this adventure and setting further ones in the west of Ferelden. If you have Avvarian PCs in your group, you might wish to let their players read **Appendix 1: About Avvars**, in order to know more about the culture their characters come from.

WHERE EAGLES LAIR

IT WAS ALL GOING SO WELL"

The tale behind **Where Eagles Lair** truly begins four years ago, in the midst of a warm summer that had wrapped the West Hills Arling in a gentle embrace. An arling is the Fereldan equivalent of a border county, and the arls that rule them are some of the most powerful nobles in Ferelden, eclipsed in power only by the teyrn and the king. The West Hills Arling lies to the north of Lake Calenhad and borders the Frostback Mountains, which means Arl Gallagher Wulff has spent the bulk of his life fighting Avvars nearly every winter. Arl Wulff and his family are well loved in Ferelden for both their bold nature and their many kindnesses to the people of the West Hills. That fateful year, a few days into Bloomingtide, the fifth month of the Fereldan calendar, a dwarven caravan passed through the West Hills on its way into the south of Ferelden's interior. As is always wise when traveling in Ferelden, they had hired an assortment of guards, the youngest of whom was a handsome Avvar whose full proper name was Azur Ar Brosna O Redhold.

Young Azur was afflicted with a serious case of wanderlust and so was willing to subject himself to the myriad blasphemies of the lowlanders. What Azur did not expect was to come to the rescue of a young teenage woman who was being assaulted by a pack of blight wolves. He certainly didn't anticipate the same to not only fail to thank him for his assistance, but to instead berate him for interfering. The amused Avvar solemnly apologized for failing to allow the young woman to become the blight wolves' noon meal and headed back to his caravan duties. Long before Azur had even returned to his caravan, Izot Wulff, the young woman, who was the arl's fourth child and second daughter, had decided that she would marry him one day.

Years passed, as they do, each one seeing Azur travel back and forth from the Frostbacks accompanying caravans as they moved through the West Hills Arling. It was no accident that the Avvar made a point to travel in eastbound caravans, for a certain daring young woman was not often far from his thoughts. With each passage the two met for a few all-too-brief days, until at last, Izot was old enough that Azur deemed the time had come to steal her away properly. Izot, for her part, felt she had to spend a ridiculous amount of effort convincing Azur that to simply announce to the arl of the West Hills that he—an Avvar—intended to steal his daughter in order to marry her was a very bad idea. Azur finally agreed they could tell her father a month or so after they were married. The young lovers made plans to steal and be stolen the next spring.

Azur chose a day when winter had barely loosed its grip on the Frostbacks to slip down into the West Hills and claim his bride, accompanied by two of his friends. Izot dutifully struggled for a few moments before accompanying her beloved back to his mountainous home.

Alas for love, on the journey back to Redhold Azur and Izot's plans went horribly askew. Their small party was waylaid by a dangerous pack of Avvar hunters led by the vicious Balan Ar Malad. Running into the cruel band was the worst of luck, for with the coming of spring the Avvars had been preparing to retreat to their holding in the eastern Frostbacks. Balan killed Azur's friend Sollus, and beat Azur himself senseless, stopping just short of his death only because the moment before his head was staved in, Balan's second-in-command, a far more even-tempered man named Torin, recognized Azur as the nephew of Thane Owyne of Redhold and stayed Balan's fatal blow. For her part, Izot killed one man and wounded two others in the skirmish. Rather than killing the lowlander girl, which would've normally been Balan's response, he was impressed by her fierce nature and decided to bring her along with him for future "sport." Balan and his men departed with a struggling Izot in tow, headed deep into the mountains.

STAGING

The plot of **Where Eagles Lair** requires that the PCs be traveling within the West Hills Arling in the very early spring as the adventure begins. The default assumption is that they are a well-regarded group of adventurers, or something similar such as a competent band of mercenaries or caravan guards, who would be willing to journey into the Frostbacks to retrieve Arl Wulff's kidnapped daughter, or at the least, discover her fate. Even though the arl is hard-pressed for men, he certainly wouldn't be willing to send anyone less than competent into the mountains after his beloved daughter.

Because **Where Eagles Lair** is intended for experienced characters it probably shouldn't be the first challenge your group of adventurers takes on. This is also a good idea because the more familiar your players (and their characters) are with Ferelden's culture, the more jarring the contrast they'll experience as they learn to deal with the Avvarian hillspeople. If, however, they already know about Avvars, perhaps from playing *Dragon Age: Origins*, you may consider starting them off as residents of the West Hills Arling. This might even justify lower-level characters becoming involved, as fierce loyalty to his house among the PCs may sway the arl's heart against his better judgment. A lower-level party should absolutely have at least one character with the Tracking focus.

If you are using **Where Eagles Lair** as part of a long-term campaign, it is an excellent idea to introduce a few of the PCs to the NPCs of this adventure prior to running it. If the characters already know and like Arl Wulff, or have previously met Izot, they are likely to be far more motivated than coin can compel.

The exact timing for the beginning of the story is intentionally flexible; it begins at the end of winter, a few days into spring, which generally falls within the first week or two of Guardian. The important points are that the season has just turned and Izot Wulff has been missing for only a few days.

Even though the arl and his men believe Avvars kidnapped his daughter, the arl is still willing to hire an Avvar or two for this task if any of the PCs is one. Why? Because Arl Wulff knows the Avvarian people all too well: they are a fractious and quarrelsome lot who turn on each other nearly as readily as upon outsiders. Indeed, it might just be that an Avvar is necessary to catch an Avvar in the Frostbacks.

MAKER'S BREATH, BUT IT'S COLD

The bulk of this story takes place in the Frostback Mountain range, a series of forbidding peaks on the western border of Ferelden. The dwarves of the king-

dom of Orzammar, which lies under the roots of the Frostbacks, call them the Frozen Teeth, and with good reason. The bulk of the range is forever snowcapped, with only a single route, Gherlen's Pass, considered safe for year-round travel. Travelers to the Frostbacks very early in the spring, such as the PCs, experience a constant biting chill that will not lessen until the short and brisk summer comes to the heights. They should count their blessings; winter is far worse. During this adventure, the following rules apply in the mountains:

- Whenever a non-Avvar character is forced to swiftly engage in any strenuous physical activity, such as when attacked, they must succeed at a **TN 11 Constitution (Stamina) test** against the numbing effects of the constant cold or suffer a -2 penalty to all physical tests for three rounds as they warm up. If they have at least a minute to specially prepare for the task at hand by rubbing their hands, stamping their feet, and so forth, they automatically pass the test. Avvars have a cultural +2 modifier to succeed at this test.
- Sheathed metal weapons, such as those from the Light and Heavy Blades Groups, frequently stick within their scabbards due to frost, which is one of the reasons Avvars favor axes and spears. Whenever a character has to ready their sword quickly, such as when ambushed, they have to make a **TN 11 Strength (Might) test** when they use the Ready minor action to draw their weapon free of its sheath. If they succeed their blade clears its scabbard as normal, but if they fail then it is stuck fast and they must either use another action to try again or choose a different course.
- With great plumes of visible breath constantly rising into the air and the crunch of snow underfoot, remaining unnoticed is exceedingly difficult in the Frostbacks. All Dexterity (Stealth) tests suffer a -2 penalty.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Izot Wulff, the daughter of Arl Gallagher Wulff of the West Hills Arling, has apparently been kidnapped right out of her father's home, although the circumstances surrounding her disappearance are unusual and not characteristic of a typical Avvar raid into Ferelden. The Player Characters are summoned by the arl and hired to go into the Frostback Mountains to either retrieve his daughter or discover her fate. While the arl would rather send a trusted bann or some other such agent, roving bands of darkspawn have recently been spotted in the West Hills and he has no men to spare, even for his child.

As they travel up into the cold foothills of the Frostbacks, the PCs come upon the remains of an unusual battle site from which two distinct sets of tracks lead.

On one hand is the trail of Azur, Izot's love, being dragged toward the Avvarian settlement Redhold by his friend Martain. On the other is trail of Balad's band of hunters, headed west. After an encounter with the local wildlife, the characters discover a true horror: a field of dead Avvars of all ages, slain by darkspawn.

From there the characters' decisions dictate much of what occurs. The Avvars of Redhold need assistance against the darkspawn until their bands of hunters return, although they surely don't expect lowlanders to help them. The injured Azur wishes to go after Izot, but his uncle, Thane Owyne, has other plans. If they are willing to help their cultural enemies, the PCs may just gain allies against the cruel Balan, but a wicked fight against darkspawn is in the offing first.

Balan's trail leads the PCs on a grueling slog into the high mountains where a fateful fight over a crumbling ice bridge awaits, as does the possibility of having to traverse a haunted pass that no Avvar will dare risk. If the PCs are bold, diplomatic, and cunning, they may at last bring the brutal Balan to heel and rescue Izot Wulff. If not, a cold death awaits them amidst the icy peaks of the Frozen Teeth.

MANY ROADS

Large portions of how events play out in **Where Eagles Lair** depend upon the choices that the PCs make. Whole encounters are unlikely to occur if they avoid certain paths or refuse to deal with the Avvars in any non-violent fashion. That's okay. Flexibility is truly the key here. It may be that the PCs charge up into the mountains, completely bypassing Redhold as they swiftly forge after Balan. If such is the case, they may just end up coming back down from the heights in search of Azur's fate at the newly rescued Izot's insistence.

OPTIONAL SUBPLOTS

As usual for a *Dragon Age* adventure, the following subplots can be included to complicate the main plotline as you see fit. All are entirely separate of the main story, and if you choose not to use them it will not adversely affect the adventure.

MY SISTER'S KEEPER

Izot has a number of siblings who love her, but one little brother in particular all but worships his big sister. Berchan Wulff is a few months shy of 12 years old, but for what he lacks in age, he has courage in abundance. Izot's kidnapping has left Berchan devastated, and he all but demanded his father let him go after her. The arl was torn between cuffing his youngest upside the head and hugging him close.

Berchan has been sent to the arl's winter manor with specific instructions to stay put till his father says otherwise. Several guards have been selected to keep an eye on him in rotation, as he is a clever boy. Too clever, in fact, for his guards. Berchan already has a plan worked out by which he intends to slip out of the manor and head off into the Frostbacks after his sister. When the PCs pass through, no matter how competent they may seem, nothing convinces him that they cannot use his help. But that said, Berchan is smart enough to know that if he approaches the PCs openly they would surely turn down his offer of assistance. He does make a point of introducing himself to the PCs while they are inspecting the manor grounds, though. Then, Berchan waits until the adventurers are a day ahead before setting off after them. He is a child of the West Hills and has had many skilled tutors; he easily tracks the characters into the mountains.

Berchan arrives at whatever opportune—or inopportune—moment. Perhaps, for example, an amused Thane Owyne announces to the PCs that they have a “visitor” some time after they arrive in Redhold. Or, if the PCs bypass the Avvarian settlement entirely, per-



BERCHAN WOLF

Headstrong 11-year-old son of an arl.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

ABILITIES AND FOCUSES: COMMUNICATION 0 (DECEPTION); CONSTITUTION 1, CUNNING 1 (NATURAL LORE), DEXTERITY 0, MAGIC 0, PERCEPTION 1, STRENGTH -3, WILLPOWER -2

haps Berchan rides into their camp one evening, bold as brass, a day or two before they meet up with Balan and his men. Obviously, the characters cannot lose one of the arl's children while searching for another. One thing is certain: The Avvars will under no circumstances accept responsibility for the boy. In fact, they argue that his ability to track the PCs into the wilderness should earn him a place in their hunting party! Berchan is not, in fact, a non-combatant; he is, after all, an arl's son. Unless they physically drag him down out of the Frostbacks and back to his father's manor, the party will not be rid of him until his sister is found.

If you use this subplot, you must also decide to what extent Berchan is deluded about his own capabilities. On one hand, you can decide to make him entirely impotent, in which case use the non-combatant statistics at left. This option places a higher burden on the heroes, but has the danger of becoming comical. On the other hand, you may introduce him as the proud, capable, and intensely loyal (but in-over-his-head) brother. This option has the greater potential to be wrenchingly emotional. If you choose it, Berchan uses the same statistics as Izot, found on p. 77.

WE'RE NOT ALONE

The Avvars are a famously fractious people, so much so that in their long history with Ferelden, a number of raids into the lowlands have fallen apart due to infighting between the members of various clans and their respective holds. There are presently blood feuds raging between several Avvar clans that have literally been going on for a century or more, their original causes in many cases forgotten. Even when the Avvars are aware of what started the fight, explaining to incredulous lowlanders how they've been battling another clan for decades because a misbegotten whoreson once rejected their great-great-great-grandmother tries the patience of even the most tolerant hillsman, and so they seldom bother.

Given that Avvars like to nurse their grudges, and given that one Visant Ar Norig O Stormhold prides himself on being a proper Avvar, Visant and a small hunting party of similarly minded fellows have traveled north in order to enact revenge for a wide variety of injustices they can't be bothered to recount. Visant absolutely

detests the blackguard Balan, but then again, he isn't particularly fond on anyone from the no-account clans of Redhold.

Visant and his band are a wild card that you can play if events aren't proving "interesting" enough. Visant is out for a little excitement, a chance to loot, and a share of glory. There are any number of points when the hot-blooded son of Norig and his men could show up, and they may choose to help or hinder the PCs, possibly even changing their minds during the course of the adventure.

Visant and his men have the stats of Avvarian Hunters from the *Game Master's Guide*, with Visant having a 1-point increase in Cunning and a 2-point increase in Willpower.

PART 1

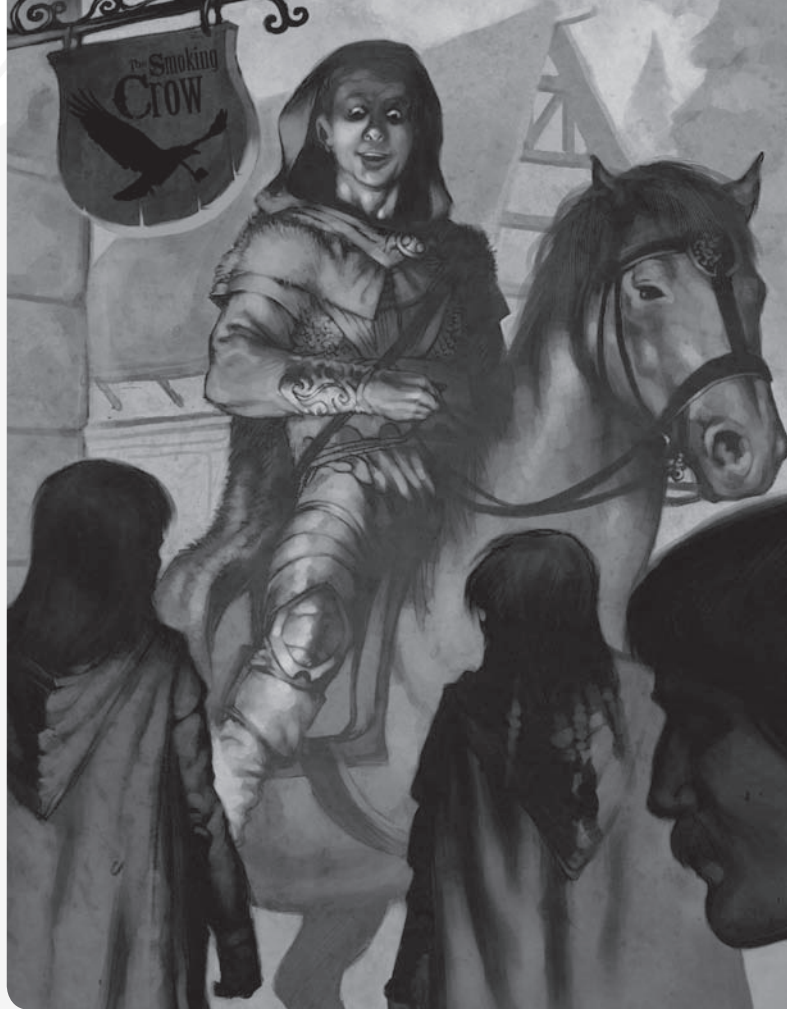
A FATHER'S HEART

The adventure begins with the PCs emerging from the Smoking Crow, a tavern in the small West Hills town of ElmrIDGE, having just finished escorting a caravan or performing some other such task. A herald sent by Arl Wulff approaches them and proceeds to escort them to the arl, who is encamped nearby. The arl hires the party to go into the Frostbacks and retrieve his daughter, or at least bring back news of her fate. After some investigation at the arl's manor, the characters head into the foothills of the Frostbacks.

ENVIRONS: ELMRIDGE IN THE WEST HILLS

In Ferelden, the West Hills Arling is thought of as the dangerous frontier, too close by far to the Avvarian hill-people and the implied threat of Orlais beyond. The land is heavily forested, with trees stretching as far as the eye can see toward the looming, snow-capped mountains in the west. The roads through the region are few and muddy, though many have permanent, deep ruts from the numerous caravan wagons passing east toward the Bannorn.

Spring has just barely come and broad ranges of the hills are still covered with a thin layer of snow. Muddy whitish piles still line the roadsides and the air is brisk. ElmrIDGE is more a staging ground than an actual town, a place travelers stay at for a brief time before moving on to wherever it is they actually intend to go. The bulk of the settlement's buildings are wood or canvas, with stone being reserved for a small and solitary chantry. Most of the establishments cater to traveling folk; taverns, stores, equipment, and weapons are in abundance. The proximity to Orzammar makes dwarf-wrought goods surprisingly easy to find for such a small town.



1. A SUMMONS IN THE SPRING

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

A herald approaches the PCs with a summons from the local arl.

You've just finished feasting at the Smoking Crow, a tavern serving the finest breakfast in the town of ElmrIDGE, a small staging ground of sorts for merchant caravans and pilgrims passing through the West Hills Arling. Over your meal, various ideas about your group's next plans were discussed. With winter barely having passed into spring, work may be scarce for the next few months.

As you talk among yourselves, a man in elegant furs barrels around a corner nearby on a horse. As he sees your group, pleased recognition crosses his face, though none of you recognize him. He dismounts and approaches your group.

"I am Odras, herald of Arl Gallagher Wulff. The arl requests your presence with all possible speed. If you are willing, I'm to bring you to him at once."

THE ARL'S HERALD

Odras, Fereldan freeman and herald of Arl Wulff for over 20 years.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 3 (ETIQUETTE, PERSUASION); CONSTITUTION -1; CUNNING 2 (HERALDRY); DEXTERITY 0; MAGIC -1; PERCEPTION 2 (SEARCHING); STRENGTH -2; WILLPOWER 1 (SELF-DISCIPLINE).

Even if the PCs have not met the arl before, as one of the most powerful nobles in Ferelden, they have certainly heard of him. Arl Wulff has a sterling reputation throughout the west of Ferelden as a valiant man who cares about his people and takes his duties seriously. Obviously, if they've had dealings with the arl in the past, they would have met Odras previously—you should adjust the encounter's introduction accordingly.

Odras is persuasive and eloquent. He is aware, in part, of what the arl wishes to speak with the PCs about but refuses to discuss it with the group in advance, saying that it is a private matter and it isn't his place to speak of it. Odras is, however, clearly upset about something; he has known Izot since her birth and knows that she is missing, her fate uncertain.

If your players are suspicious, they may wish to know if Odras is telling the truth, why he seems distressed, and how he recognized them. Allow them to make **Perception (Empathy)** or **Communication (Investigation)** tests if they wish and secretly roll a few dice of your own in pretend opposition, as there is no true contest. Odras is the herald of Arl Wulff; a **TN 7 Cunning (Heraldry) test** identifies the mountain-and-stag-antler crest of the West Hills Arling upon his doublet. There is no way to know why he is upset as he does not speak of it, though it seems evident to the PCs in retrospect if they accompany him. Odras recognized them because as a group of successful traveling adventurers, they have been described to him in the past. If that isn't an accurate description of the PCs, then the arl has been discreetly asking after likely men and they were described as probable candidates for the quest he has in mind. If asked why time is a factor, Odras notes that the arl is soon to leave the area on a pressing martial expedition.

Because of the nature of the nobility of Ferelden, the PCs are not being forcibly summoned into the arl's presence by armed guards, as would be the case in many of Thedas's other countries. The characters can certainly say they aren't interested and send Odras on his way. While he does his level best to convince them, if they truly cannot be swayed, he eventually shakes his head and rides off. So much for **Where Eagles Lair** for your group of PCs. In the late summer or early fall, they ultimately hear news from the west that Izot Wulff was kidnapped and killed in the Frostbacks, or, if you feel

like twisting the knife, maybe they hear that she was kidnapped and rescued by a daring group of adventurers who now enjoy riches and fame throughout western Ferelden.

Presuming the PCs agree to hear what the arl has to say, this encounter draws to a close as Odras brings them to the arl's encampment, just outside Elmridge.

2. THE ARL'S DILEMMA

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs are ushered into the presence of Arl Wulff, who has a hazardous proposal for them. He wishes them to journey into the Frostback Mountains and bring back his daughter, or word of her fate.

Odras leads you to a clearing south of Elmridge where a large force of men, perhaps a hundred strong, is bivouacked. There is anticipation in the air; clearly a fight is in the offing. The herald dismounts and, gesturing for you to follow him, approaches a large tent on a small hill.

The inside of the tent proves austere, the only furniture a makeshift bed and a number of simple wooden chairs set about a large table. Maps cover the canvas walls. A massive man in ornately engraved plate armor that stands at the center of it all. Piercing eyes appraise you as you enter the arl's presence, for surely this man is he.

"Greetings," rumbles the giant, "I am Gal-lagher Wulff, protector of the West Hills Arling. I— I, ahh..." He falls silent, clearly overcome with emotion. His massive hands clench and unclench. "I need your help. One of my daughters... My daughter Izot has been kidnapped. Taken into the Frostbacks by Avvars."

This encounter is a discussion of the circumstances surrounding Izot's kidnapping. Odras remains unobtrusively in the corner, occasionally filling in a detail for the distracted arl. In truth, Wulff has all but given his daughter up for dead. He is aware Avvars seldom make prisoners of lowlanders for long. From what he knows of how the Avvarians usually treat lowlander women, he almost *hopes* she is dead.

During the conversation, the arl relates the following points:

- Izot has been missing for four days.
- Izot's torn cloak was found outside of the arl's winter manor. Boot prints were found near the cloak and in a nearby snowdrift, the trail heading west.
- The arl gave orders for the site of the apparent kidnapping to remain undisturbed until his agents

ARL GALLAGHER WULFF

Lord of the West Hills Arling and grieving father.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 2 (ETIQUETTE, LEADERSHIP); CONSTITUTION 3 (DRINKING); CUNNING 2 (HISTORICAL LORE, MILITARY LORE); DEXTERITY 1 (RIDING); MAGIC -1; PERCEPTION 0; STRENGTH 5 (BLUDGEONS, HEAVY BLADE, MIGHT); WILLPOWER 3 (SELF-DISCIPLINE).

can inspect it. The arl has not seen it himself; he was already on the road when his daughter was taken.

- Avvars typically only raid in the winter. That said, spring has barely come.
- Izot turned 18 two months ago. She is a beautiful blonde girl with grey eyes. As an arl's daughter, she is combat-trained.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Arl Wulff answers the following questions in a manner similar to what is conveyed here.

"YOU MUST HAVE MANY MEN OF YOUR OWN, WHY DO YOU NEED US?"

I need every man in my service and then some. A massive force of darkspawn has been raiding the countryside, and whole villages have been put to the sword and worse. I ride against them within the hour – an arl's duty. But the father's heart within me demands that I do something. That is why you are here.

"FOR THAT MATTER, WHY US?"

Your reputations precede you. A small force can travel quickly and draw less attention from the hillsmen.

"WON'T THE AVVARS TRY TO RANSOM YOUR DAUGHTER?"

They may not know she is my daughter, as she would never tell them. If they found out that she was an arl's daughter, they would probably kill her for the glory, sacrificing her to their pagan gods. In any case, ransom isn't their way.

"WHERE DO YOU THINK SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN TAKEN?"

The Avvarian clans live in stone-walled villages they call "holds." I know of only two holds within a week's travel of my manor to the east. One is northwards, but my scouts say those savages are feuding with another hold even further to the north, and are unable to spare warriors for raiding. Closer, there lies a hold four or five days into the Frostbacks beyond the edge of the West Hills. If my daughter is to be found, my best guess is that it will be in this closest hold.

"DO YOU BELIEVE SHE IS STILL ALIVE?"

Whether she is or not, I would know what became of my daughter. If you cannot bring her back, then proof of her

"WE'VE GOT AN AVVAR RIGHT HERE"

The arl blunts his references to "heathen gods" if there is an Avvar PC in the tent. A **TN 11 Cunning (Cultural Lore) test** reveals that the god who demands Avvars fight in the winter might be Haakon Wintersbreath, the Lord of Winter and Master of Battle. Technically, he doesn't demand that Avvars fight only in the winter; rather, the Avvars do so to use the winter cold against their enemies. See **Appendix 1: About Avvars** at the end of this adventure for more details. The same test also makes it clear that Avvars absolutely will not raid into Ferelden without cover of a snowstorm, and there hasn't been one of those in weeks. All that said, the various Avvarian clans have widely different traditions, and an Avvar PC may not have any idea why some particular group of Avvars might have been willing to come into the lowlands so late in the season.

death will suffice, though her killer's head would be even more welcome.

"WE ARE MORE THAN SLIGHTLY OUTNUMBERED. AREN'T WE LIKELY TO BE SLAUGHTERED BY THE AVVARS OUT OF HAND?"

Once again, that is why a small band is best. The Avvarians only make war in the winter, something to do with their gods. Since it is now spring, they won't attack a small force out of hand, whereas a larger one would surely oblige them to fight regardless of the season. They have honor, of a sort. If you keep your wits about you, you should be able to treat with them.

"WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?"

If you agree to do this thing, I will equip you and give you sturdy horses if you need them. For word of her death and the proof of her demise, I'll give you a hundred pieces of silver each. If you bring my daughter alive from those mountains, each of you will have two sovereigns and I will not soon forget such a service to my house.

The arl is unwilling to haggle; he has made his offer and it is a fairly generous one. Knowing large forces of darkspawn are roaming the countryside may motivate the group to take a holiday into the Frostbacks. If the PCs are willing, the arl shakes their hands, gravely thanking them individually. He gestures to his herald, notes that "Odras will see to you," and turns back to his maps.

If the characters need horses, Odras leads them to a camp staging area where he acquires some riding horses for them. Characters without the Dexterity (Riding) focus can ride horses, but they are incapable of doing anything fancier than hanging on and certainly cannot fight from the saddle. Odras provides sets of mountain garb if the PCs need them. Other basic gear is easily obtained in camp, along with several weeks

of trail provisions. Odras hands the character he deems to be in charge of the PCs a letter that identifies them as agents of Arl Wulff and requests that the steward of the arl's winter manor extend them every courtesy. He also passes over a rough map of the West Hills Arling along with instructions on how to find the arl's winter manor. Odras tells them to return to the manor after they leave the Frostbacks, noting that the steward will know how to get word to the arl swiftly. Then he bids them Maker's speed and sends them on their way.

If the PCs are unwilling, then just as at the end of the first encounter, this adventure passes them by. The Arl curtly dismisses them and doesn't bother to watch them go.

3. WHAT THE MANOR CAN TELL

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs investigate the grounds of the arl's winter manor and get some clues as to what may have occurred.

Three days of hard riding bring you to Arl Wulff's hall, a solid fortress on the edge of the West Hills Arling, more stone keep than winter manor. It is after dark when you arrive, but

at first light the arl's steward, a man named Konwal, personally leads you to the site where Izot was kidnapped.

The morning air is crisp and bitter cold. The Frostbacks reach up into the clouds, spanning the whole of the western horizon for as far as you can see in either direction. Konwal leads you a mere bowshot from the manor's walls to a clearing in the woods where a few small flags have been thrust into the ground, encircling a large area of churned, muddy snow.

There are a mass of overlapping boot prints and churned up mud in the flagged-off area, making it difficult to see anything particularly useful in the spot near where the cloak was found. A clever PC who decides to climb up into a tree to get a look down on the scene from above gets a +2 modifier on any applicable Perception tests.

Any character can search the site by making a **TN 15 Perception (Tracking)** test. A successful test provides information according to the result of the dragon die. An unsuccessful test means nothing can be discerned from the churned, muddy snow.

WINTER MANOR INVESTIGATION

DRAGON DIE

INFORMATION

1-2	There are many marks going nowhere throughout the area, as though someone deliberately walked about to give the impression that there were many people present. In fact, you estimate no more than three or four people made these tracks.
3-4	Someone was hauled backwards out of the clearing, boot heels dragging, but only for about ten feet or so before they were released.
5-6	Despite the evident struggle, not a single drop of blood was spilled anywhere in the clearing, nor can you find any in the surrounding area.

Any PC who specifically announces that he is searching the surrounding wooded area may make a **TN 11 Perception (Searching)** test. Success brings the character into a cluster of conifers some 20 yards removed from the flagged-off clearing, drawn by something strange: a symbol has been cut into the bark of a large pine there. (One of Azur's friends decided to pass the time they spent waiting for Izot to "wander" past by carving.) A successful **TN 11 Cunning (Cultural Lore)** test identifies the symbol as a stylized version of the sign for Korth, the Mountain Father, head of the Avvar pantheon. Searching around the conifers eventually reveals partially obscured prints hidden under branches, which may have been placed to conceal them. Characters pass-



ing a **TN 9 Perception (Tracking) test** can tell that at least three men waited, presumably concealed, within the clearing for several hours.

Konwal points out the snowdrift where the departing boot prints were found, and then partially withdraws to let the PCs inspect the scene uninterrupted, though he answers any questions they have to the best of his ability.

The snowdrift is some 30 yards away from the clearing. Characters succeeding at a **TN 13 Cunning (Cultural Lore) test** know that Avvars frequently use tree branches to wipe out their prints in the snow if they are attempting to be stealthy. However, it doesn't take an expert to tell that someone made an obvious attempt to obscure these prints, although the effort was clearly rushed, as sets in several places were only partially covered and some were missed altogether. Konwal is certain guards were patrolling nearby since the manor has been on alert since word of the darkspawn attacks, but the patrols don't come out so far.

Konwal tells the characters they are welcome to question the manor staff. They are all visibly worried about Izot and she is clearly beloved, which may allay fears the PCs may harbor about her disappearance being an inside job. Her torn cloak was found early in the morning, not long after first light eight days before. If the PCs ask to see the cloak, Konwal produces it. It is a sturdy winter garment, and the tear is ragged, suggesting that it was pulled apart rather than cut. There is no blood on it.

If the PCs think to ask whether anyone has noticed anything unusual *since* Izot's disappearance, someone hesitantly notes that the ripped cloak is indeed one of Izot's, but her *favorite* cloak—a far grander and warmer garment—is inexplicably missing. Also absent is an ornate short sword, a gift from her father, implying that Izot was armed (which was not uncommon whenever she was outside of the manor walls).

Questions about Izot's temperament give the PCs the general impression that she was a kind but spirited girl. "Very much the Arl's daughter," is the general consensus. "She has his eyes, you know."

RESOLUTION OF PART 1

By the end of Part 1, the PCs should be absolutely clear on what is expected of them: journey into the Frostbacks and retrieve Izot Wulff or news of her fate with physical proof thereof. If the so-called "adventurers" are absolutely determined not to take on this task, there isn't much you can do about it. They may argue that it is suicide to go into the Frostbacks on the slight chance that they'll find the young woman alive, and while that is a debatable point, what is not arguable is that such a quest is a noble one and there is a fair amount of lucre involved.

THE ARL'S STEWARD

Konwal, Fereldan freeman and steward of Arl Wulff.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 2 (BARGAINING, ETIQUETTE); CONSTITUTION 0; CUNNING 3 (HEALING, MUSICAL LORE); DEXTERITY 1; MAGIC -2; PERCEPTION 0; STRENGTH 1; WILLPOWER 2 (MORALE).

The characters should have learned a bit about Avvars, and know that they should be looking for a stone-walled village known as a "hold." As to the object of their quest, they are likely suspicious that all is not what it seems. There are discrepancies between what they've been told about the bold young Izot and what they've actually found. The fact that the "struggle" during her disappearance looked both staged and bloodless will certainly arouse doubt, especially since it has been made clear to them that she is capable of defending herself. The presence of Avvars out of season is also very odd.

Given that *Romeo & Juliet* is one of the most famous of all love stories, your players may well be giving one another knowing glances about the plot as **Part 1: A Father's Heart** draws to a close. That's okay—the story is about to take an unexpected turn.

If you are using the optional subplot **My Sister's Keeper**, make certain Berchan introduces himself to the PCs while they are at the manor, so that when he shows up later they know who he is.

PART 2

INTO THE FROSTBACKS

In this part, the characters journey up into the mountains where they meet the local wildlife when one of the dangerous predators indigenous to the Frostbacks decides to welcome them properly to the heights. Soon thereafter, carrion birds lead them to the site of Izot's second abduction. Two trails lead away from the scene, but both soon lead the characters to the same grisly sight: a field strewn with corpses butchered by darkspawn, not all of who have moved on...

ENVIRONS: THE FROZEN TEETH

The Frostback Mountains have had a place in Ferelden's history for untold centuries. They are the natural barrier that made both the Tevinter and the Orlesian occupations ultimately fail as well as the nearly unassailable stronghold that allows the Avvars to continue to plague their estranged kin. The dwarves of Orzammar call the Frostbacks the "Frozen Teeth" in typically cynical

dwarven fashion, because their many dangers chew up and spit out the unwary.

The heights of the Frostbacks are treeless masses of rock and year-round ice. They are frequently shrouded in cold mists and can generate snowstorms out of season, sometimes even at the height of summer. Whether wreathed in fog or easily discerned, the peaks constantly loom over travelers, continually visible above the trees.

The middle and lower slopes are heavily forested with coniferous trees: larch, fir, spruce, and a great deal of pine. Nestled among the evergreens are a few solitary broadleaves such as birch, rowan, willow, and aspen. The ground is covered with an assortment of mosses clinging to rocks and the trees themselves. Few plants other than a variety of lichens and some of the hardier mosses can grow in the soil of the forest floor, which is highly acidic.

The middle and lower slopes are frequently wet, but the water is often frozen, leaving patches of snow on the ground for eight months of most years. In late spring and through the summer, the air becomes warm and humid. The farmers among the Avvars take swift advantage of the brief planting season by moving down from their stone-walled holds and into the foothills to grow crops, which they tend in nomadic fashion as they herd their flocks of goats and keep wary of lowlanders.

Many rodent species live in the Frostbacks: marmots, hares, squirrels, and countless mice scurry about. Lynxes, foxes, weasels, and predatory birds feed on the rodents. Raptors such as eagles, owls, and hardier falcons are common, and the Avvars have a special relationship with them. Herds of elk, deer, mountain goats, and the occasional moose wander through the woods. What travelers have to really watch out for, though, are the larger predator species that do not fear men: crag wolves, wild brontos, cavern bears, red lions, and dragons.

1. LUNCH TIME

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

As the characters ride into the foothills they are attacked by one of the Frostbacks' infamous predators: a red lion.

For two days since leaving the arl's manor you've traveled steadily westward and up into the foothills of the Frostback range. There have occasionally been signs of what you believe to be your quarry—a small party of four or maybe five passed this way within the last week.

The forest is thick about you. In a day, or two at the most, you'll have to leave the horses behind. Despite the coming of spring the air is bitterly cold, and your breath swirls visibly in the afternoon air.

You've stopped to get your bearings, consider the sparse trail, and perhaps have a bite to eat. The forest is alive with birdcalls and the sounds of rodents scuttling through the underbrush. Even so, occasionally it all goes still...

A red lion, one of the Frostbacks' most dangerous natural predators, has been stalking the adventurers through the foothills, waiting for the chance to strike. It has been a long winter, so the beast is both hungry and bold, although red lions are incredibly dangerous at the best of times.

Have the PCs attempt an **opposed Perception (Hearing or Seeing) vs. Dexterity (Stealth)** test against the red lion as it slips through the underbrush a mere 20 yards downwind of them. Red lions are famous for their near-supernatural ability to move without making even a whisper of sound. The red lion gets a +9 to its roll from its Dexterity 7 and Stealth focus. While it would normally get an additional +2 due to its pelt's camouflage, it also has a -2 penalty due to the cold (review the section **Maker's Breath But It's Cold** for further details, several of which are likely to affect the PCs during this encounter). Additionally, the red lion gets a re-roll if it fails to beat the PCs, due to its Journeyman Scouting talent.

Presuming the lion wins the test (which is *very* likely) continue the encounter as if nothing bad has occurred. Start describing a boot print that the character with the best Perception has discovered, or some other such feature of the terrain they've happened upon as if that was what they were making the test for. The beast is more than clever enough to wait until the characters are distracted or scattered before attacking. If one PC leaves the group or looks otherwise vulnerable, the cunning predator strikes.

The red lion attacks at a stunning rush, seeking to swiftly break its prey's neck and drag the body off at hideous speed to feed elsewhere. If the lion won the Stealth test, the first attack is at +3 as it catches the target completely unaware, for a +12 on the Bite attack against a shieldless Defense. Roll initiative for the following round, remembering possible cold problems.

During the fight, emphasize the lion's unnatural speed. It moves at a near blur, attacking from different directions, dodging behind trees only to double back and charge out unexpectedly. The beast concentrates on bringing down its chosen prey until it has lost 30 Health, and then flees. While the lion is fighting, the horses are likely to completely panic. If they were not secured, the PCs must spend time rounding them up to prevent them from fleeing down the mountainside, possibly with one or more breaking limbs on the uneven terrain.

If the red lion managed to significantly hurt its chosen prey before being driven off, it doesn't go far. Instead, it begins stalking the group from a distance, staying far

RED LION

One of the famed predators of the Frostbacks, red lions are massive felines capable of bringing down cavern bears. They have no fear of the various tool-using species, consuming them as readily as anything else they can catch in the mountains. Red lions are usually longer than ten feet and typically weigh well over 600 pounds. Their pelts are a luxurious russet with grey-and-black striping, and are greatly prized by the dwarves of Orzammar.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
5	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
2	CUNNING
7	DEXTERITY (BITE, INITIATIVE, STEALTH)
-1	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION (SEEING, SMELLING)
6	STRENGTH (CLAWS, JUMPING)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
15	50	17	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+9	2D6+6
CLAWS	+8	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Legendary Jaws* and *Seize the Initiative*.

LEGENDARY JAWS STUNT: A red lion's bite can crush steel. As a special stunt costing 3 SP, a red lion's bite causes an additional 2d6 damage.

TALENTS: *Scouting* (Journeyman).

PELT: If a red lion is killed without significant damage to its hide (if more than half of its Health is dealt by weapons that generally bludgeon or impale rather than cutting) then its pelt can be sold for a price in the neighborhood of 30 sp to dwarf traders.

enough away that they won't spot it readily. Sometime during the night, it returns to finish what it started, creeping into camp as quietly as possible.

If the creature manages to kill its target, it drags the meat off or retreats, expecting the rest of the group to eventually leave the body behind (as Avvars would do). Otherwise, it reacts as above, following from a distance until an opportunity arises.

If the PCs manage to win the opposed test to spot the creature, they either hear its approach or catch a glimpse of the big cat slipping through the trees. This gives them a chance to prepare so that they are ready for it when it finally rushes into camp. A **TN 11 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** reveals the information in the following section on red lions, as well as the fact that they are notorious for not giving up easily.



2. TWO TRAILS DIVERGED IN A WOOD

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs discover the remains of a fight and a series of strange burials. Worse, their path splits before them with little indication of which course is the right one.

The faint trail you've been following since leaving the West Hills has come to a sudden end. Scattered about a small clearing are the remains of what looks to have been a vicious fight. The moss is still stained with blood, though you estimate a week has passed since the struggle.

There are tracks of all sorts in the mud here and what look to be several sacks split open amid the rocks.

Where do you search first?

There is a lot of information to be found in the blood-soaked clearing, but it will take time and effort to pull it all together.



First, here is a summary of what occurred on that fateful day, so you understand it correctly. The young lovers, giddy at finally being together and knowing they were a mere day and half from Redhold, were far less cautious than they should have been, and their party walked into an ambush. Balan's men caught them close to unaware and swiftly surrounded them. While Balan's hunters had the upper hand, they were unprepared for the fight which followed, having underestimated their targets' fierceness and the fighting skill of the lowlander girl, whom they had assumed was a mere "prize" from a late-season raid.

Two of Balan's men were killed and five were wounded in the fight. In turn, Balan killed Azur's young friend Sollus and beat Azur himself badly. After Balan's second, Torin, identified Azur as Thane Owyne's nephew, even the nasty-tempered Balan knew that some gesture had to be made to avoid a blood feud with Redhold. Besides, the fight had been a properly exhilarating one; all present had fought with passion—even, surprisingly enough, the lowlander girl—and Haakon Wintersbreath would be displeased if this wasn't acknowledged by Balan's treatment of the dead.

So Balan ordered a full burial ceremony to be performed on the spot, declaring that all who had fallen would be "offered to the Lady" with all due cere-

THE BLOOD-SOAKED CLEARING

DRAGON DIE

INFORMATION

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1 | There was obviously a big fight in the clearing. A group of ten or more ambushed a group of four or five. |
| 2 | At least two—probably more—were killed in the fight. Several others were wounded. |
| 3-4 | One of the members of the smaller group was either a woman or an elf. You can tell from the size and shape of the boot marks, as well as the depth of the depressions they left in the soil. |
| 5 | Two distinct groups left the area after the battle; one was headed directly west, the other west-southwest. A small group, perhaps only two or three, took shelter in the trees nearby for a night. |
| 6 | The west-heading group was the larger group, though they made a point of walking in each others' footsteps to help conceal their numbers, a common hunter's trick. One of the members of the smaller group (headed west-southwest) was clearly stumbling when he left the clearing, moving only with the support of one of his comrades. |

mony. Rather than cremate or bury valiant warriors, Avvars dismember their bodies and offer them to the carrion birds of the mountains. Not only is their flesh rendered down to small pieces for ease of consumption, their bones are powdered and placed in small leather sacks so the birds can devour all. (See **Appendix 1: About Avvars** for more details about the Avvar goddess of death, the Lady of the Skies.)

With the burial ceremony completed, Balan claimed Izot as his prize. Leaving the last member of the lovers' party, Martain, to tend the still-unconscious Azur, Balan and his men headed west, dragging a struggling Izot with them. Martain rested for a day, tending Azur as best he could, and then set out for Redhold, hauling his semiconscious and feverishly ranting friend with him.

The Avvarian air burial has obviously left a great deal of evidence in the clearing, though figuring out exactly what they are looking at could be tricky for the adventurers. The sheer amount of blood spilled in the clearing tells anyone making a successful **TN 7 Cunning (Healing) test** that multiple bodies must have been cut to pieces to leave such traces. However, those succeeding at the test also note how precise the greater amount of the stains are, being concentrated in one portion of the clearing (which is where the bodies were rendered).

3. A GRISLY DISCOVERY

COMBAT AND EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The characters discover a scene of foul slaughter: a large group of Avvarian farmers—men, women, children, and even their goats—have been butchered, their bodies left to rot. Investigation reveals that darkspawn were the culprits, and that they haven't left the area...

You smell it long before you find the source, a whiff of decay cutting through the clean mountain air. As you emerge from the treeline at the edge of a series of highland fields, you witness a field of bodies, covering the earth, stretching into the distant mist all along the hillsides for as far as you can see.

Men, women, children, and even their goats have been butchered and left to rot. Carrion birds in the dozens, rodents in the hundreds, and insects in the thousands feed on the dead. The sound of the feeding echoes along the stony reaches of the Frostbacks.

What will you do?

Inspecting the remains of the sacks reveals only that they were crudely stitched leather bags that give no indication of what they held. A **TN 13 Perception (Searching) test** reveals one still-full sack wrapped about the lower branches of a nearby tree. It contains what appears to be a grainy meal, soaked with blood. It is, of course, ground bone. A **TN 9 Perception (Searching) test** finds a stone with a slight depression in it with a round, bloodstained, and scratched rock nearby: the pestle used to grind the bone.

Avvars seldom speak of their burial practices to lowlanders. It takes a **TN 17 Cunning (Cultural Lore) test** for a non-Avvar to recall stories of “air burials” among the barbarian hillmen. If they have successfully discerned what is within the intact sack, the PCs get a +3 bonus on this test. This is one of the spots in the adventure where having an Avvar in the party makes a big difference, for an Avvar automatically realizes that one or more offerings to the Lady occurred in the clearing. Anyone aware of the practice will know that Avvars would hardly ever apply the ceremony to the corpse of a lowlander.

A **TN 11 Perception (Tracking) test** reveals much of what occurred in the clearing depending on the result of the dragon die. Consult The Blood Soaked Clearing table for results. A high number reveals whatever is listed, plus everything below it. Multiple characters can search, resulting in more information.

If all of the PCs fail their Tracking tests, they figure out only that there was a large fight and several groups left the clearing going in different directions—presumably westward—but all trails are soon lost amid the mossy undergrowth of the forest.

While they have little specific information, the characters should have an idea that the Avvar settlement Redhold is to the west-southwest of their present position. It would not be hard to conclude that the smaller of the two groups left the clearing in that village's direction.

After the characters have examined the clearing, the character with the highest Perception notices something unusual away to the west, perhaps a half-day's travel away: a massive flock of carrion birds, perhaps a hundred or more, circling on the wind.

At the end of this encounter, the PCs appear to have some choices before them, but unless they turn around and head back down the mountain, all the obvious courses lead to the next encounter, **Part 2: 3. A Grisly Discovery**. Both trails eventually pass through the bloody highland fields of the following encounter, which also lies between the characters and Redhold. But of course neither the adventurers nor their players have any idea of these facts, so make sure they decide on a course of action before moving on to the next encounter, and run it accordingly.

Casually walking among massacred men, women, and children—not to mention inspecting their bodies—is not a task to be undertaken lightly by even the stoutest of hearts. The adventurers, being made of relatively stern stuff, can start looking among the corpses for clues to what occurred here without any tests, but it takes a **TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test** to summon the resolve to start turning over the vermin-infested bodies in search of a head with blonde hair and grey eyes. A half-hour of dedicated searching reveals that Izot is not among the dead.

Casual inspection of the corpses reveals their clothes to be simple, resembling those of Fereldan freeholders, though warmer. Very few weapons of any kind are evident, though there are clearly some picks, shovels, and various other tools such as farmers would use. It is clear that many of the folk in the clearing were cut down as they ran, especially the children.

A number of different tests can determine how long the bodies have been lying on the hillside. A **TN 11 Cunning (Healing, Military Lore, or Natural Lore) test** reveals that the corpses have lain in the fields for approximately three days. Their decomposition has slowed due to the cold, making the stench far less than it might otherwise be, but the carrion feeders of the mountains are still having a field day.

A successful **TN 9 Perception (Searching) test** reveals a scene that may well send a chill up the characters' spines: not only were the poor farmers slaughtered, their cadavers were mocked. The character with the



highest dragon die result among successful Perception tests finds a rocky outcropping where a child's body has been propped up with crude spears. A goat's head has been set in place of the child's with a rictus forced onto its lips with rough stitching made of sinew. Ropes fastened about the limbs reveal the whole to be some kind of twisted marionette. Simple symbols painted in blood adorn the rocks near the scene, and there are broken weapons made of an unidentifiable tarnished metal around one of the rocks nearby. A **TN 15 Cunning (Historical Lore or Cultural Lore)** test suggests that this is something darkspawn—and not Avvars—would do.

Whether the characters figure this out is irrelevant; they're about to get a massive hint in the form of a party of genlocks, who are coming back through the area to inspect their handiwork. No test is required to hear them coming, as they aren't bothering to use stealth in any way, so secure are they in their victory and their belief that they're the only ones nearby. While genlocks detest being out during daylight—which causes them to hurry more, and pay less attention to their surroundings—they are not foolish. If the PCs have greatly altered the obvious appearance of the fields, such as by piling up the bodies, the genlocks soon notice and investigate the situation with weapons drawn.

The party can easily set up an ambush of some sort and catch the genlocks unawares. There are many places

to hide, with likely rocks and trees in abundance. Characters with iron wills can hide amid the corpses after making a **TN 11 Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test. This grants a +3 modifier to attack rolls made during the first round of combat, as the superstitious genlocks assume the dead have arisen to enact revenge on their killers.

The PCs may wish to hide entirely in the hopes that the genlocks will simply pass by. However, the characters' horses soon draw the genlocks' attention as—already nervous from the reek of the corpses—they shy away from the repugnant-smelling darkspawn and force the situation.

There are two more genlocks than PCs. They wander out of the mist at the northern, forested edge of the field into the late afternoon sun, preceded a minute or so by their deep and gravelly voices. They are exceptionally pale, even for their kind, and they've daubed their skin with bloody symbols. They are the advance scouts of a far larger group, though that is not immediately evident.

If the PCs do not attack within the first minute after the genlocks walk onto the field, one of them starts snuffling the air and muttering to its fellows. Stage an **opposed Dexterity (Stealth) vs. Perception (Smelling)** test, which the genlock rolls at +4. If it succeeds, it starts walking directly toward one of the hidden PCs, pausing occasionally to sniff at the air. The characters have one round to act before their fellow adventurer is

discovered. If the genlock fails, it goes back to looting bodies for meat with its fellows.

Once the battle has begun, the genlocks fight in pairs where possible. They throw their axes, or other things (see their special stunts, below), before drawing their battle axes and charging into melee.

The genlocks have little on them of any value and the characters should be rightfully wary of touching darkspawn. After the fight, the answer to the question of who killed the farmers is patently obvious. However, it's equally clear that the relatively small band of genlocks they just fought cannot have killed so many people on its own. An easy search in the forest to the north reveals that a large force, more than 50, marched that direction within the last week.

It takes two hours of searching dedicated to a **TN 15 Perception (Tracking) test** to find tracks leading away from the fields that are clearly not those of the darkspawn. One trail, perhaps a week old, heads westward, up further into the mountains. This is the trail of Balan and his men. Another trail, this one evincing the shuffling drag marks of one traveler helping another (Martain hauling Azur), passes through the far western end of the fields and heads off to the southwest, toward Redhold.

While one or more of the PCs are scouting for tracks, the others must make a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test**. There are still a large number of carrion feeders about, though the bulk of the birds keep away from the PCs. The exception is a small owl that a character with a successful test gets the oddest notion about. The bird is a small raptor, not much bigger than two hands placed atop one another, with bright golden-green eyes. Any character making a successful test slowly concludes that the little owl has been watching the party. A **TN 9 Cunning (Natural Lore) test** can identify it as a whippoorwill, a strictly nocturnal bird. Not only has it been up during the daylight for several hours, it hasn't been partaking in the carrion. If the PCs become hostile, such as by throwing rocks or preparing to shoot at it, the owl disappears into the trees. If, however, one or more PCs indicate that they are going to watch it for awhile, it fluffs its feathers, makes eye contact with them, and winks at the watching (and probably astonished) PC before flying off to the southwest. They'll meet him again in **Part 3: Welcome to Redhold**. If a PC asks, a successful **TN 7 Cunning (Arcane Lore) test** suggests that while there are supposedly mages who can shift shape, they aren't *supposed* to be able to get so small.

As the sun finally sets behind the Frostbacks, a steady stream of smoke becomes visible off to the southwest...

RESOLUTION OF PART 2

Part 2: Into the Frostbacks draws to a close with the PCs facing a tough decision: follow the difficult trail of

GENLOCKS			
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
0	COMMUNICATION		
2	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)		
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)		
1	DEXTERITY (BRAWLING)		
2	MAGIC		
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)		
3	STRENGTH (AXES, INTIMIDATION)		
2	WILLPOWER		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
6	22	13 (11*)	7
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	
BATTLE AXE	+5	2D6+3	
THROWING AXE	+5	1D6+4	
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: <i>Mighty Blow and Sling Gore.</i>			
SLING GORE STUNT: <i>A special 3 SP stunt for this fight. With an evil laugh, the genlock scoops up and lobs a mass of entrails, or perhaps a child's head, at a nearby target. The following round, the genlock gets a +2 bonus on attack rolls against the disgusted foe. This can only work once against any given target.</i>			
MAGIC RESISTANCE: <i>A genlock gets a +2 bonus on ability tests to resist the effects of spells and other magical attacks.</i>			
TALENTS: <i>Armor Training (Journeyman) and Weapon and Shield Style (Apprentice).</i>			
WEAPON GROUPS: <i>Axes, Brawling, and Bludgeons.</i>			
*WITHOUT SHIELD			
EQUIPMENT			
BATTLE AXE, HEAVY MAIL, MEDIUM SHIELD, AND THROWING AXE.			

a party that may or may not include their quarry west, deeper into the Frostbacks, or take the more certain but potentially dangerous course that seems to lead to Redhold, the fortress whose name Arl Wulff did not know but which he believed was the most likely place Izot would be found. If the adventurers have failed to uncover enough clues, they may not even be able to consider going directly after Balan's hunters, which may ultimately be for the best, story-wise. If they have, though, and they're determined to head west into the Frostbacks, skip directly to **Part 5: The Deadly Heights**. The PCs must leave their horses behind, as their mounts will simply not be able to traverse the densely forested, mossy, stone-littered middle slopes of the Frostbacks without inevitably breaking a leg.

Experienced adventurers should have defeated all of the foes offered by this chapter, though there may be some wounded among them. If one of the PCs has died, Redhold can serve as an excellent source for a replacement.

PART 3

WELCOME TO REDHOLD

In this part, the PCs are introduced to the Avvarian settlement of Redhold, which has suffered a great loss but remains in terrible danger. The Avvars live in a subsistence society and the brutal murder of the majority of their farmers is a loss from which the folk of Redhold may not be able to recover. However, they may not even have a chance to try, because the bulk of their hunters are still away, finishing their last winter hunts, and the darkspawn intend to finish what they started sooner rather than later.

Whether the characters can feel any sympathy for their people's traditional enemies remains to be seen.

ENVIRONS: REDHOLD

A typical Avvarian settlement of the Frostbacks, Redhold is effectively a stone fortress sitting with its back to the sheer granite sides of a mountain. Most of the buildings visible from outside the walls are made of stone, with wood only an afterthought as a construction material. The forest has been cut back a hundred yards from the high rock walls

"I'M GOING TO SNEAK IN"

During the daytime, a stealthy entrance to Redhold is completely impossible, but PCs being PCs, one or more of them may take it into their heads that they should give it a try. Since the Avvars are on edge at the moment (to say the least!) they assume that anyone who slips into their village without announcing himself is up to no good. Still, if a player insists on their character trying, make an **opposed Perception (Seeing) vs. Dexterity (Stealth) test**. The Avvarian watchmen have a +3 with their Perception and Seeing Focus, and receive a +4 bonus for the complete lack of cover on the plateau for a total of +7 to their roll. At least three lookouts' Perception rolls must be defeated to gain entry to the hold. A guard who spies an interloper immediately raises an alarm. Furthermore, since they are presently terribly frightened and expecting darkspawn, they shoot *a lot* of long-bow arrows first and don't bother to ask questions at all, until inspecting the corpse some time later.

A character who makes it to the wall undetected must make a **TN 17 Strength (Climbing) test** to scale it. Failure leaves them scraped up at the base of the wall. Success means they've slipped into Redhold unnoticed. Now what, genius?

that surround the village, leaving a hillside covered with moss and the first hints of spring flowers.

Presuming the PCs secure access and the thane's hospitality in the following encounter, they are allowed to travel about the settlement without guards. There aren't shops in the town, as such; the Avvarian culture is communal and trade is based on barter. Still, as guests of the thane, the PCs can expect their gear to be mended without charge and provisions made available to them, though supplies are scarce.

1 THE WILES OF THE THANE

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs approach Redhold and must negotiate for safe passage with the hold's leader, Thane Owyne, who knows a fair amount more than he lets on.

Following the faint traces of the trail heading west and the hints of smoke on the horizon for half a day leads you to a wide mountain plateau where the trees abruptly end some 100 yards from an imposing stone wall. The Avvarian village before you resembles a fortress. Two massive, iron-shod wooden gates block what seems to be the only way in.

What will you do?

Obviously, knowing Avvarian customs at this juncture would be very useful. An Avvar takes the test at TN 9; all others must make a **TN 13 Cunning (Cultural Lore) test** to determine the best course of action. Success means that a character properly considers that, with the slaughter of their people, the Avvars are undoubtedly on war footing, meaning that they'll be even more suspicious of outsiders than normal. Strangers should approach with weapons held out, clearly visible, at a distance. However, only a fool enters an Avvarian hold without securing an agreement of hospitality from its thane (which is the proper title of the leader of an Avvar clan). Since "clan" and "hold" are virtually synonymous among the Avvars, a clan's thane is also the hold's master. A hospitality agreement typically means that the thane regards the visitors as family, and that any injury to them would be a direct insult to him and by extension his entire clan. Failure to secure such an agreement means that members of the clan could choose to attack visitors at their whim.

It is important to know that the Avvars do not consider a bit of *friendly* brawling or a variety of other minor confrontations to test a warrior's mettle to be "attacks," per se. Characters can and should anticipate such while staying in a hold. The Avvars also allow their guests to retain small blades, such as knives and short swords, as these are

Redhold



considered little more than dinner utensils. The Avvars likewise have no interest in taking the PCs' armor.

As the characters leave the safety of the treeline, horns blow from several of the watchtowers along the wall. If the PCs are not clearly holding their weapons out, a couple of longbow shafts appear, thrumming, in the ground in front of them when they come within about 40 yards from the gates. If they are following the proper customs, on the other hand, they're allowed to enter well within bow range. As they approach, they notice a half-dozen or more archers on the walls with notched arrows watching them keenly.

As you reach a spot some 25 yards from the gates, a strong voice rings out, "That's far enough, lowlanders!" A solid man in his 50s with silvery hair held back by a metal circlet appears atop the wall near the gate. The man considers you all briefly before dryly noting, "We generally don't accept tourists till Drakonis at the earliest," to faint laughter from several of the others along the walls.

"I am Thane Owyne of Redhold. Who are you and what brings you here?"

What follows is a roleplaying negotiation between Thane Owyne and the PCs, but there is far more going on here than the characters know. Thane Owyne Ar Rainne O Redhold knows quite a bit more about the adventurers than he lets on, yet doesn't know a number of vital facts, and doubts others that he *has* been told.

Thane Owyne is the head of his clan and a shrewd man. He is a good thane and until very recently, his people had no cause to doubt his leadership, but things change. As an Avvarian thane, he is directly responsible for his people; by Avvarian customs the slaughter of the farmers was his fault. Most Fereldans—and your players, no doubt—would be hard-pressed to find fault with Owyne, for how could he have known about the dark-spawn? Nevertheless, the Avvars are a people driven by omen and superstition. According to their beliefs, a hold suffers troubles because one or more of their many gods is offended, or something is wrong with their sacred animal (see **Appendix 1: About Avvars**), and when bad times occur, it is the thane who is supposed to set things to rights.

So here we have Thane Owyne, sick with grief over the brutal murder of the majority of Redhold's farmers and their children, the bulk of whom were directly related to him by blood or marriage. The fact that he

sent three of Redhold's hunting bands out relatively late in the season is also weighing on his conscience — not that they would have been able to save the farmers, but his scouts believe that the darkspawn have not gone far, and will soon return to a hold whose warriors are away. To make matters worse, the thane's nephew, Azur, who always seemed to have a decent head on his shoulders, has gotten it into his fool skull to fall for some lowlander girl, whom he promptly lost to the vicious bastard Balan, getting himself grievously injured in the process and making him near useless for the coming fight with the darkspawn. Owyne knows, further, that there are always rivals within the clan circling, for weakness among the Avvars is seldom tolerated. The beset thane knows that if he doesn't soon reverse his fortunes by appeasing the gods, he'll be deposed.

When Avvars are deeply troubled, they seek the advice of shamans, the interpreters of their gods' will. Redhold's shaman is a wily fellow named Elorn, a devoted disciple of Imhar the Clever, an Avvarian deity known for unorthodox solutions. Elorn was able to tell his thane that one possible answer to his problems and prayers was likely to walk up to the gates of Redhold before the week was out.

This is what Owyne knows, along with how he knows it, followed by what he doesn't know:

He knows which PCs are lowlanders, as this is glaringly obvious to Avvarian eyes. He is also fairly shrewd at guessing professions, so just by studying the characters and their individual equipment, he has a fairly decent idea of which ones are warriors, rogues, and mages.

He knows they're skilled combatants given that they dispatched a genlock band that outnumbered them. He knows this because Elorn told him about it in detail.

He knows they must be on some kind of quest. This he knows by deduction. Redhold is off the beaten path; lowlander travelers simply do not randomly show up at his hold, and the PCs look neither incompetent nor lost.

He knew in advance that the PCs were coming to Redhold because Elorn told him so last night.

THANE OWYNE AR RAINNE

Thane of Redhold, whose circlet sits upon a troubled brow.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 3 (ANIMAL HANDLING, LEADERSHIP, PERSUASION); CONSTITUTION 3 (DRINKING); CUNNING 4 (HISTORICAL LORE, RELIGIOUS LORE); DEXTERITY 2 (BOWS); MAGIC -1; PERCEPTION 1; STRENGTH 2 (AXES); WILLPOWER 4 (SELF-DISCIPLINE).

He doesn't know what—or in this case, whom—the PCs are after. Azur hasn't told him who Izot is, or more importantly, who her father is. It hasn't yet occurred to the thane that the characters' appearance might be connected to his nephew's unfortunate choices of late, though that may change rapidly depending on what the characters say.

He has no idea why they are on their quest. Few among the Avvars have the ability to compel a group of competent warriors to travel so far and into such danger for something as simple as a missing girl. The fact that someone might do so for mere wealth is almost completely outside their way of thinking. Deep debts of honor, perhaps, or truly exquisite arms from the dwarves maybe, but not coins.

He doesn't know they've killed a red lion, which is an accomplishment of enormous significance to the Avvars. "Redhold" isn't named after blood; the red lion is the clan's sacred beast.

Keep Thane Owyne's motivations in mind as you role-play him. As far as he's concerned, the gods themselves have sent the PCs to help his people, not that he would expect the heathen lowlanders to accept or believe that for a second, so he certainly isn't going to mention it. But in point of fact, he also has his doubts. He has absolutely no idea why the gods would choose lowlanders to be a tool for his clan's deliverance. Although, when Imhar is involved in such matters, oddity is to be expected.

Owyne wants to let the characters into Redhold to find out more about them before he figures out a way to talk these doubtless blasphemous lowlanders into helping him win a near-hopeless fight against the darkspawn, in order to preserve his people long enough for the hold's overdue hunting bands to return.

Of immediate significance to the thane and his people is either mention of the red lion the party encountered, or actually having its pelt on one of their horses. Thane Owyne does not hesitate to ask about the circumstances surrounding it. Regardless of the PCs' explanation, all of the people of Redhold consider the party's recent brush with a red lion — whether they killed it or not — to be of great significance.

If the PCs ask after a lowlander girl with blonde hair and grey eyes, the thane instantly knows that they are interested in his nephew's missing wench. It also alerts Azur, as Martain is on the wall listening, and promptly brings the news to his friend that lowlanders are in the highlands searching for Izot.

Let the conversation flow naturally, but don't let on that the thane is seeking any decent excuse to extend his hospitality to the PCs. If the characters mention the red lion or if its pelt is seen, a great deal of murmuring occurs along the wall and the thane looks about at his people with a significantly raised brow. Having slain

the genlocks or prevented further desecration to the bodies of the farmers also immediately raises the characters in the Avvars' esteem.

Regardless, the encounter should see the negotiations settled and the PCs entering Redhold to enjoy the thane's hospitality for three days, the standard time allotted in these matters. If the characters really mess the talks up to the point that the thane cannot salvage them, he assumes Elorn was wrong and tells them to be gone. A few long shafts in the sod should encourage them to move on. Azur likely approaches the PCs at their encampment a day or two later. Skip straight to **Part 5: The Deadly Heights**. This course likely leads to the destruction of Redhold before the week is out, with other nasty repercussions for the PCs later on.

If the negotiation goes well, the encounter comes to a close with the big gates of the hold opening to usher the characters inside.

2. POTENTIAL ALLIES

ROLEPLAYING & EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs see more of Redhold and are introduced to several important individuals, including Redhold's shaman and his clever owl.

Redhold doesn't have streets — at least, not as you understand the term. Flattened mossy ground fills the spaces between solid long houses, the bulk made of stone and all scattered about at random. The thane guides you past a large central field before turning you over to one of his many relatives, citing duties elsewhere, but not before telling you he would like to speak with you again before your stay is done.

The thane turns the characters over to Lowenna, a handsome woman with auburn hair who looks to be in her late thirties. She guides them to a house near the mountain's face, telling them it is provided for their use during their stay. If anyone asks her along the way, she explains what purposes the various buildings serve, but otherwise, she speaks tersely. A **TN 13 Perception (Empathy) test** suggests that she is upset, but not at the PCs. Her brother's family lies among the slain farmers. She not only mourns their deaths, but is also distressed that the thane has not allowed the people to go and give the dead proper Avvarian burials.

If the characters determine that they aren't the cause of Lowenna's mood, they can attempt to draw her out of her bleak disposition. If they do, she's surprised and somewhat bemused that lowlanders would bother to care about her sorrows. While she doesn't reveal her mind, or exactly why she is upset, she does warm up and makes an effort to be friendlier. In point of fact,

LOWENNA AN AENOR

Avvar woman, the Thane's neice, and grieving sister.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 2 (ANIMAL HANDLING, ETIQUETTE); CONSTITUTION 1; CUNNING 2 (CULTURAL LORE, NATURAL LORE); DEXTERITY 0; MAGIC -1; PERCEPTION 1 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH 0; WILLPOWER 1 (FAITH).

Thane Owyne didn't choose Lowenna randomly as the PCs' liaison, but judged her to have the best combination of traits to appeal to the PCs. While Lowenna is certainly not a spy, the PCs would be fools to think that anything of interest they mention in her presence won't make its way to the thane's ears.

Lowenna could be a very useful ally. While she would never betray her people, she is open-minded for an Avvar. She happily explains the nuances of her culture and beliefs if asked, which could help keep the PCs out of trouble during their stay. Having lost her husband several years previously, she could also serve as a romantic interest.

After the PCs have had a chance to settle in for an hour or so, chatting with their local guide if they are so inclined, a small boy runs up and whispers hurriedly to Lowenna. She looks visibly surprised before nodding slowly and sending him off.

"It seems that Elorn wants to have a look at you. We should go quickly, it is not wise to keep a shaman waiting."

Lowenna shakes her head to any further questions, making a sideways slashing negating motion with her hand and answering only:

"I do not know what he wants. He is Redhold's shaman, a priest of the true gods." She smiles mischievously as she says this. "Come, it is not that far."

Lowenna leads the PCs to the center of the town, toward the open field the thane skirted when they first passed through the settlement. A character who successfully makes a TN13 Perception (Seeing) test along the way notes that Redhold seems empty. Many of the buildings stand vacant. Though the bitter cold of early spring has not lessened, few of the heating and cooking vents of the buildings have smoke rising from them. Even accounting for the dead farmer families, it is clear that there are not a lot of folk about.

As the characters weave between the buildings, make note of the various people the PCs *do* see: a woman

SHAMAN MEANS MAGE?

The characters may not immediately assume that a shaman can do magic. After all, Chantry priestesses can't. Once they figure it out though, a mage PC may have a serious problem dealing with an Avvar shaman due to the fact that he is certainly apostate and perhaps maleficar. This makes for good role-playing. Elorn is not maleficar, though he knows some spells that would likely terrify a faithful Circle Mage—Avvars regard the spirits of the Fade very differently than Fereldans do. The shamans of the Avvars have rites that invite spirits into their bodies for a time, but even so have no more desire to become abominations than do other mages, and so their rituals are specifically designed to force the spirits back out as well.

ELORN

The Avvar shaman of Redhold with an odd sense of humor.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION (ANIMAL HANDLING)
-1	CONSTITUTION
2	CUNNING (ARCANES LORE, HEALING, NATURAL LORE)
0	DEXTERITY
4	MAGIC (SPIRIT)
3	PERCEPTION
-2	STRENGTH
2	WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
10	30	10	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
ARCANE LANCE	+4	1d6+4	16 YARDS
HORNED STAFF	+0	1d6-1	—

POWERS

SPELLPOWER: 14 (16 FOR SPIRIT MAGIC) **MANA:** 36

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Spell and Imposing Spell.*

TALENTS: *Animal Training (Journeyman), Lore (Apprentice), and Spirit Magic (Journeyman).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Staves.*

SPELLS: *Arcane Bolt, Flame Blast, Heal, Mind Blast, and Spell Shield.*

THE LADY'S EYES: *Elorn knows a ritual that allows him to look through the eyes of any raptor within a number of miles equal to five times his Magic. He cannot command them in any way, he can simply see what they see, making a clever avian highly useful.*

EQUIPMENT

HORNED STAFF AND CLEVER OWL NAMED SISILIA.

sewing some sort of garment, a young boy herding a couple of recalcitrant goats, a man whetting a blade. The PCs should soon realize that everyone they see is almost invariably either elderly—in their sixties at least—or very young. Few look to be warriors.

As the characters reach the central field, they notice a tall circle of carved stones around what looks to be a large pit. Far more striking, though, is the man who stands beside the pit. He has a slender frame with coal black hair, and is wrapped in robes of brilliant white fur. Two curving antlers connected to some sort of bracing within his robes stretch up and over his shoulders. The antlers are covered in intricate carvings depicting heroes and battles from the Avvars' history. A small and sleepy whippet owl sits in the crook of one of the antlers and a young goat is leashed near his feet. Lowenna waves the PCs on, excusing herself to make further arrangements for their stay. The shaman grins as the characters approach.

"Welcome. As you may have already guessed, I am Elorn and the sleepy one here is Sisilia."

If any of the characters noticed the owl after their battle with the genlocks and was winked at, Elorn adds "...whom I believe you've already met," addressed to that character.

The PCs have been invited to speak with the shaman so he can gauge their spirit. No matter what his gods have told him, there is a difference between the promises of the spirit world and the reality of the material world, so he wants to determine for himself whether the PCs have the courage to stand against what he knows is coming and to discover what it will take to get the characters to stay when the time comes.

This encounter should consist of straightforward role-playing between Elorn and the PCs. Whether or not the characters mentioned their encounter with the genlocks to the other Avvars, Elorn brings it up now by casually noting that they fought well. How does he know? The same way he knew they were coming to Redhold: He has a spell that allows him to look through the eyes of raptors. Sisilia is his favorite spy because she is very smart. He doesn't spell this out, though he may imply it.

Elorn may also ask questions like these, in order to get a sense of the PCs' mettle and essence:

"WHY LEAVE YOUR COMFORTABLE LOWLANDS? ARE YOU MORE SUITED TO PERIL THAN REPOSE?"

"TELL ME OF THE CREATURES YOU HAVE BESTED, THE VILLAINS YOU HAVE DEFEATED, THE CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED."

"TELL ME THIS: HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BRAVE MAN AND A FOOL?"

If the party contains Circle magi or others with ties to the Chantry, you may wish to improvise a quick spell or ritual on Elorn's part that uses spirit magic to look into the heart of one or more of the PCs who interest him most. Elorn naturally declines to reveal anything he learns, but this apostate magic may provoke an interesting exchange, which may also provide the shaman with valuable intelligence about the characters.

At some point during the conversation, the PCs hear a distinct rumble come up from out of the pit behind the shaman. If Elorn is aware of the PCs' encounter with the red lion, he notes aloud, "Vron is angry. Perhaps he senses you slew his kin," before casually booting the young goat into the pit. Otherwise, he says, "Vron is restless today. I suppose we all are," before punting the kid. The characters hear the goat bleat fearfully, then a roar that shakes the stones about the pit, then a wet tearing sound.

Vron is Redhold's sacred animal, a savage red lion kept in a deep pit and fed live prey to keep him wild. A character making a **TN 11 Cunning (Cultural Lore)** test knows that this is a standard Avvarian practice. Sacrificing prisoners to the beast is also a standard Avvar practice. If the characters ask about the creature, Elorn's only comment is a slight smile coupled with a cryptic, "As Vron goes, so go we all."

After the conversation has run its course, Elorn thanks the PCs for coming and excuses himself. He recommends that if they like spirits—beverages, that is—the characters would do well to try the brew at a nearby longhouse that he points out.

The characters are thus left to their own devices for a time. The map shows the general layout of the hold. The longhouse Elorn pointed out is a hunter's lodge where an old alewife ladles out cups of delicious, but strong, cold ale. Everyone the PCs meet is gruffly polite, but not talkative. If the characters need any basic mending of their equipment done, there are crafters who can help them. Redhold's smith is out in a hunting party, so characters who need metal weapons repaired are out of luck.

In the evening, the hunter's lodge fills up with some of the few warriors left in town. If your PCs are feeling restless, a "friendly" brawl with the locals might be order. They are certainly willing to throw down over any number of slights, or even just to prove their worth, once the ale is flowing. Note that no one carries weapons within the hunter's lodge. It is all fisticuffs and hurled tankards. Use the standard stats for Avvarian hunters from **Part 4: The Come in the Night**.

If a fight does break out, make certain the last thing the characters can recall is sitting and drinking even more with the men they just fought, while the Avvars sing one of their many winter songs. With that, this encounter ends.



3. AZUR AR BROсна

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

Izot's injured lover sounds out the PCs for an alliance.

Though the sun shines brightly, your second day in Redhold feels as bitterly cold as the first. As you sit, drinking a warm tea Lowenna claims will stave off the chill, you hear a stifled groan as a man comes around the corner of a nearby building and heads toward you. As he approaches closer, you can see that he walks with a limp, yellow-green bruises surround his eyes, and beneath his cloak his right arm is wrapped in bandages.

"I am Azur Ar Brosna. May I speak with you?"

Presuming the PCs agree, Azur settles himself with a grunt. If Lowenna is present, he smiles and nods to her, but then jerks his head to the side. She takes the hint and gracefully withdraws.

What will Azur discuss with the PCs? That depends on what they've openly let on so far. Azur is no fool, and even if the characters have lied about why they are in the mountains or managed to somehow not discuss it, he's suspicious. Then again, unless the PCs are hope-

lessly dense, Azur's injuries are likely to make them equally wary of him.

If the PCs have been honest about the fact that they are looking for a young lowlander woman, Azur goes with the best of lies: an edited version of the truth. He tells the characters that a sadistic Avvar hunter named Balan Ar Malad and his band recently kidnapped a young woman and took her west into the Frostbacks. Azur explains that his people are unlikely to help anyone recover a kidnapped lowlander; however, as he has served as a caravan guard and is more sympathetic to lowlanders than his fellow Avvars, he is willing to guide them to Balan's lair for a fair portion of whatever reward they hope to claim.

The character who does the most speaking for the party can make an **opposed Communication (Investigation) vs. Communication (Deception) test** against Azur, who gets a +3 bonus since he is telling the truth, just omitting a few pertinent facts, for a total of +5 to his roll. If the PC wins, he knows that Azur is not being entirely truthful, though believe his offer is genuine. If Azur wins, the PCs end up with the impression that Azur is out for revenge against Balan but he doesn't care about the girl one way

or another. If the test-winning PC accuses Azur of lying, he hotly denies having lied in anything he said, challenging them to ask anyone in the village about Balan and suggesting they seek him out once they see reason. He then departs, grumbling about ungrateful lowlanders.

Azur is willing to leave Redhold as soon as the PCs are ready. He suggests all speed, since delaying will soon make some of the mountain passes nearly impossible to cross. He suggests the PCs head out without him, promising to catch up within hours. To give the PCs a chance to avoid the tragedy that will result from this, let them make **TN 11 Perception (Empathy) tests**. Success suggests that Azur seems a little too eager to leave at once, which should send them searching for the cause. Even if it doesn't, Owyne may find out that the PCs are preparing to leave and approach them with his offer (see **Part 3: 4. The Thane's Bargain**) earlier than he had otherwise planned, his hand forced.

If the PCs agree to Azur's suggested course of action they may save Izot from Balan, but Redhold is doomed to fall to the darkspawn. See the **Aftermath** section for a discussion of the possible repercussions. As for this encounter, draw it to a close and skip to **Part 5: The Deadly Heights**, with Azur leading the PCs into the highlands. If the PCs counsel patience or wish to wait the full three days, the Thane's offer to the PCs in the following encounter is likely to throw off his nephew's plans.

If the PCs have kept their purpose for being in the mountains from the Avvars, Azur attempts to flush it out. In this case, the **opposed Communication (Investigation) vs. Communication (Deception) test** has Azur trying to uncover the PCs' intentions. If he succeeds, he gets enough out of them to know they're looking for someone and asks, "You're looking for that girl, the one Balan took, aren't you?" He proceeds to lie his way into the surprised PCs' good graces, offering to lead them to her. If he fails he grows despondent and soon withdraws. He may well set off to rescue Izot on his own.

If you are using the subplot **My Sister's Keeper**, this is a good day for Berchan show up looking for the PCs.

4. THE THANE'S BARGAIN

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs meet with Thane Owyne, who bargains with them to help him save his people.

You have been invited to the thane's hall for an evening feast. His house is no more ornate than the other buildings in Redhold on the outside, but the wood of the interior is engraved with beautiful forest scenes, and some of the furniture boasts actual upholstery. The table is laden

AZUR AR BROSNA

Handsome young Avvar caravan guard and nephew of Thane Owyne of Redhold.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

2	COMMUNICATION
1	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
2	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
3	STRENGTH (AXES, CLIMBING, INTIMIDATION)
3	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	42	14 (12*)	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
LONG BOW	+2	1d6+3	26/52 YARDS
BATTLE AXE	+5	2d6+3	

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Skirmish.*

TALENTS: *Archery Style (Apprentice), Armor Training (Apprentice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Apprentice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes, Bows, Brawling, and Spears.*

*WITHOUT SHIELD

EQUIPMENT

BATTLE AXE, LIGHT LEATHER, LONG BOW, AND MEDIUM SHIELD.

with sumptuous food and considering the will with which the Avvars around you eat, you suspect it is the most they've had in some time.

As you finish your meal, Thane Owyne approaches you and asks, "Will you join me? There are matters I should like to discuss."

The time has come for the thane to make his pitch and he knows full well it had better be a good one. The end of the thane's hall is split into several rooms—a rarity among Avvar longhouses that the PCs have seen so far—and the thane leads them into one of them, a study of sorts. There is a small fire pit for heat in the center of the room, with low-slung chairs around it.

The thane has gathered every bit of information he can get on the characters from the first time Elorn's avian spies spotted them until this moment. He has had agents in town keeping an eye on Azur, so he knows his nephew has spoken to the party. Even if the characters have not yet confirmed that they are in the Frostbacks searching for the girl Azur lost, Owyne suspects it. How he frames his proposition depends on what exactly that he knows about the PCs and their purpose for being in the mountains.

The thane does not bring up Azur in relation to Izot. If the characters eventually ask, Owyne confirms that Azur has frequently traveled as a guard into the lowlands, but says little else about his nephew.

During the conversation, Owyne communicates the following points, some of which the PCs already know in part:

- A lowlander girl was recently taken west into the Frostbacks by the Avvar outcast Balan Ar Malad and his band of hunters.
- As of two days ago, the young woman was still alive and seemingly unharmed.
- Balan is, by all accounts, a vicious piece of work. He belongs to no hold and has no family that will claim him.
- Balan has retreated to his western holdings for the rest of the year, till winter comes again. Owyne states bluntly that a non-Avvar has no chance of finding where Balan lairs, and that even an Avvar would need to know exactly where to look to have a chance.
- Redhold is home to a group of hunters who have dealt with Balan before.
- With the season turning, several bands of hunters are due back at Redhold within a few days, including the ones who know where Balan lairs.

And here the thane takes a deep breath and gives the PCs his real news, along with his bargain:



"Our hunters will not return in time to save my people from what is coming. Elorn says a large force of night-gangers—darkspawn—are amassing in the lowlands near Redhold. He is never wrong. If he says they are coming, then they are coming, and soon. We have lost so many already that we barely have enough to hold the walls. I need your weapons, lowlanders. I need your courage. Stand with us. Stand for three nights against the darkness and I will send hunters to lead you straight to Balan's lair and help you retrieve the girl if that is your wish."

The thane stands suddenly and walks back into the shadows of the room, returning with a long, cloth-wrapped bundle.

"I have no gold, nor riches dug from the earth to offer you. I have no power in the world beyond Redhold... But I have this." The cloth falls away to reveal a beautiful long sword. As the thane holds it aloft, a silver fire ignites and flickers along the blade, throwing back the shadows of the room. "Her name is Aamor Fin. I cannot tell you what battles she has fought in, nor whence she comes. But she is old, lowlanders. Old as the bones of Korth's mountains, old as the days when our people—yours and mine—stood together as Alamarri. Stand with us again and she is yours."

The thane truly has nothing else to offer. If the PCs reject his bargain, he nods, as this is what he truly expects, and informs them that as an honorable host, he must suggest then they leave Redhold at once and flee northwest, for darkspawn scouts have already been spotted nearby. He dismisses them with a curt nod; they will never look upon him again.

If the PCs agree to stay, the thane thanks them for their courage, admitting that he doesn't know if he would be able to make the same choice if it was lowlanders asking him to defend their home, but he hopes he would. Once the PCs have sworn an oath to stay until Redhold's hunters return or three nights have passed, Owyne hands over Aamor Fin, stating, "May she serve you well."

The encounter draws to a close with the thane calling together his few remaining war leaders to discuss battle plans—either with the PCs, or as they depart.

RESOLUTION OF PART 3

If the PCs never get into Redhold, you may skip **Part 3: Welcome to Redhold** and **Part 4: They Come in the Night**. Even an attempt to enter the settlement, though, alerts Azur to the characters' presence and he can easily approach them in the forest the next day with a version of the story he uses in **Part 3: 3. Azur Ar Brosna** on page 64. You may wish to improvise an encounter in which the PCs and Azur are attacked by outlying darkspawn scouts before moving on to **Part 5: The Deadly Heights**.

That Elorn is an apostate mage may not sit well with a Circle mage PC, but you can rightfully point out that the Avvars have had shamans for centuries, which both Chantry and Circle have studiously ignored for all that time, mainly because it isn't worthwhile to do anything about it. An apostate PC might ask to train with Elorn. Elorn would be willing to teach a respectful apostate a lot of interesting lore about spirits, but would never take a non-Avvar as an apprentice shaman.

Unscrupulous PCs might be tempted to take Aamor Fin from Thane Owyne and then make a run for it later that night. This is the main reason the thane exacts an oath from them before passing over the ancient blade. If the PCs take the blade in bad faith and run for it, let them;

AAMOR FIN

Aamor Fin is a beautiful, ancient, lyrium-laced long sword of unknown providence. Her silver flame shines in darkness, but cannot ignite flammable objects and gives off no heat. Her wielder receives a bonus +2 to attack rolls and causes 2d6+4 base damage, plus Strength.

Sometimes, very softly, she sings.

Elorn and the spirit allies of Redhold curse—literally—the false heroes for their blasphemous treachery. Depending on what sort of oaths they took, appropriate curses might include wounds that cannot be healed, weapons that become impossibly heavy during critical fights, and courage that flags and unmans them at critical moments. Removing such curses should require difficult quests, such as assisting other Avvars against their enemies. In addition, after such treachery Aamor Fin fades to a dull pewter and loses all bonuses, becoming a plain long sword till appropriate penance has been carried out.

PART 4

THEY COME IN THE NIGHT

In this part, the PCs help the Avvars of Redhold defend their home against a small army of darkspawn that attacks under cover of darkness. Unbeknownst to the characters, they only have to hold on for one night until reinforcements arrive—but it is going to be a *long* night indeed.

1. PREPARING FOR HAAKON'S DANCE

EXPLORATION AND ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs have a chance to inspect Redhold's preparations for the upcoming battle, talk with the Avvars they know, and hear some early scouting reports on what is to come.

The morning sees preparations for battle throughout Redhold. A group of teens fletch long shafts alongside a pair of men sharpening arrowheads. Others reinforce shields and tighten the leather grips of spears. Among the Avvars there is a sense of muted anticipation and even excitement, rather than fear, about the upcoming battle.

What do you want to do?

This is a chance for the PCs to look around the hold with an eye to its defense, as well as an opportunity for them to make their own preparations. It serves to create anticipation for the battle to come.

The stone outer wall is made of mortared granite, heavily reinforced. A **TN 9 Cunning (Engineering or Military Lore)** test suggests that it would take a potent siege engine to breach one of the walls. Through the main gates or over the top of the wall are both far more likely means of entry into the hold.

The Avvars have lined the walkways along the wall with clusters of arrows, within ready reach of archers.

BRINGING THE FIGHT TO THE ENEMY

It isn't outside the realm of possibility that the PCs will want to leave Redhold to scout the enemy, or even inflict a bit of damage in advance of the enemy host's arrival. Given an enemy that numbers in the hundreds, this is a foolhardy course, and any Avvar who gets wind of such a plan says so without reservation.

If the players persist, use the statistics presented in **Part 4: 2. The Fight for Redhold** and don't feel too badly about killing the party for idiots if they don't turn tail and run when faced with such an overwhelming enemy in the field.

Every five paces, a massive brazier filled with wood has been secured with chain. The walkway near the top of the wall behind the parapet is about 2 yards wide and made of reinforced wood, with stone buttresses and wall-stairs along its length.

Iron rods, each with a single attached hoop to hold stands of arrows, are sunk into the ground some 15 yards inside the wall all along its length, at 10-yard intervals, to allow warriors on the ground to fire over the wall if there are enough enemies to warrant it. Barrels of water from snowmelt are gathered near the buildings closest to the wall should any fires start, but the Avvarian preference for slanted stone roofs makes it difficult for enemies to set their dwellings ablaze.

After the characters have had a chance to inspect the battle preparations, they may seek out the various Avvars they know.

Characters asking after Lowenna are directed to one of the hold's aviaries, where they find her tending a pair of russet-feathered eagles. She explains that the Avvars have long used eagles as scouts and hunting companions, not unlike Fereldans and their dogs. Numerous Avvars, including Lowenna, are skilled falconers, a talent they are taught as children. She notes that the eagles are restless. Their typical prey has fled the area around Redhold, a bad sign.

Lowenna answers any of the characters' questions that she can, though she doesn't know a great deal of Avvar fighting techniques, other than noting that non-combatants such as herself tend the wounded away from the wall. The last time Redhold was actually besieged she was only a small girl and it was a rival clan of Avvars that assaulted them.

Characters seeking Elorn will be hard-pressed to find him unless they ask Lowenna. Other Avvars simply state that they don't know where the shaman is, though they have no doubt that he prepares for the coming struggle by speaking with the gods. Lowenna tells the characters to seek him at the grand shrine, which she can describe to them.

The shrine is easy to find, being the most ornate building in Redhold and the only one with significant decoration. Carved poles covered in symbols stand at each of the shrine's corners. A worked silver bas-relief is mounted at the front of the shrine. It depicts a mas-

sive man sitting in a chiseled throne, with a large bear lounging at his feet. An armored warrior with a pair of twined axes stands to his right and a woman wrapped in a cloak of feathers that obscures all but her eyes stands to his left.

Elorn sits upon a stool, leaning against one of the shrine's pillars, a vacant expression on his face. Sisilia isn't present (she is off spying for her master). If the PCs strike up a conversation with the shaman, he answers in a distant voice. At some point he stops responding to the characters and whispers:

Oh, ho. More than just the runts. Hurlocks among them. I see no ogres though, thank you Mountain Father. Tonight, I think. Yes, tonight. Ahh, a scout returns. Who? Uraig. Good man.

Elorn snaps out of his trance and speaks clearly then, declaring that he must make some preparations before consulting with the thane. He suggests that the characters head to the thane's house as well, as there will be news that will interest them shortly.

If the characters do not seek out Elorn, word spreads around the hold after midday that a scout has returned with news about the night-gangers.

The PCs find the returned scout at Thane Owyne's longhouse along with several of the thane's war leaders, including Azur and his friend Martain. The thane welcomes the characters, offering them ale before turning to the scout Uraig, a lean man clad in leather, and asking him to repeat his tidings for the PCs' benefit. The scout touches on the following points, and clarifies if any of the characters requests him to:

- There are somewhere between a 150 and 200 night-gangers (darkspawn) encamped deep in the forest a few hours' journey to the southeast. It is difficult to tell their exact numbers due to both the terrain and the fact that they stay within the mists, beneath the densest thickets.
- Some 40 or so are big muscular ones, the rest are of the smaller, squat kind.
- They have a terrible beast with them, a vast roaring creature the scout never saw clearly.

- They don't have any heavy siege engines.
- The name "hurlocks" is supplied by one of the surrounding men in reference to the "big ones."

The only point that all the warriors present agree on is that when an attack comes, it will come in the night. The thane notes with a grim smile that Redhold presently boasts around 50 warriors, not counting the PCs. "Despite the season, Haakon will be pleased, no doubt."

If the PCs are unfamiliar with darkspawn other than genlocks, which are the most common of the darkspawn, several of the Avvars present have fought hurlocks. They all vividly remember the berserk fury of the taller darkspawn and the horrible, mortal wounds dealt by their wicked, two-handed blades.

By the end of this encounter, the PCs should have a decent idea of what is coming, and know that the odds are against them. After the battle discussions wind to a close, Thane Owyne suggests that all present get some rest before nightfall.

GENLOCKS

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
1	DEXTERITY (BRAWLING)
2	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)
3	STRENGTH (AXES, INTIMIDATION)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
6	22	13 (11*)	7

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BATTLE AXE	+5	2D6+3
THROWING AXE	+5	1D6+4

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Sling Gore.*

SLING GORE STUNT: A special 3 SP stunt for this fight. With an evil laugh, the genlock scoops up and lobs a mass of entrails, or perhaps a child's head, at a nearby target. The following round, the genlock gets a +2 bonus on attack rolls against the disgusted foe. This can only work once against any given target.

MAGIC RESISTANCE: A genlock gets a +2 bonus on ability tests to resist the effects of spells and other magical attacks.

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman) and Weapon and Shield Style (Apprentice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes, Brawling, and Bludgeons.*

*WITHOUT SHIELD

EQUIPMENT

BATTLE AXE, HEAVY MAIL, MEDIUM SHIELD, AND THROWING AXE.

2. THE FIGHT FOR REDHOLD

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs fight for their lives against a horde of darkspawn intent on overrunning Redhold and putting all to the sword.

The day's remaining hours each last an eternity. It is almost a relief when harsh horns blare from the forest, calling you to the wall at last. As twilight falls, a horde of twisted and armored forms marches out of the trees, snarling and growling.

As the sky darkens, the fell creatures begin beating their weapons against their shields, slowly at first, but more swiftly as the light fades. As night sweeps over the hold, the darkspawn roar a wordless battle cry and charge!

So begins the fight for Redhold. The darkspawn have every intention of destroying the hold within a single night. But while the genlocks are very familiar with siege tactics, the same factors that thwart Fereldans from attacking Avvar holds are at play here. The cold of the Frostbacks has made crafting siege equipment difficult, to say nothing of moving it through the densely wooded terrain.

Thus, the darkspawn army has simply brought heavy ladders with hooked ends to grip the wall's top, as well as dozens of grappling hooks with pre-knotted ropes to ease climbing.

This fight isn't truly about the Avvars of Redhold; it's about the courage and tenacity of the PCs. As you run the combat, much of the battle should fade into the background, a panorama against which the smaller melees with which the PCs are directly involved play out. Roll dice periodically and describe images that stand out from the overall fight—a genlock impaled by spears wielded by young girls, a warrior cleaved in half by a hurlock blade—but it is the PCs' actions that hold the line, or fail to.

The combat has three overall phases, each of which must be endured if the PCs or Avvars are to see the dawn. Advancing from one phase to the next involves killing enough darkspawn to move on. The kills that count are those that happen on and within the wall. Shooting arrows into the random mass of besieging darkspawn, or blasting spells into their midst, while useful in a general sense, does nothing to advance the characters to the next phase.

Several unique stunts are available to the PCs in the course of the siege:

SIEGE STUNTS

SP

STUNT

- 3 **THE LADY'S FURY:** One of the Avvars' magnificent eagles rips into the eyes of the darkspawn assaulting you. The darkspawn takes 1d6 penetrating damage and his Defense is halved (round down) against your next attack.
- 4 **TOPPLE:** You push your opponent back over the wall, hurtling him into his brethren below. He takes 2d6 penetrating damage from the fall and from smashing into his armored fellows. (Skirmish can be used to push an enemy up against the parapet, but not over it.)
- 5 **CALL THE RAIN:** With a gesture, you direct the wrath of your Avvar archer allies on the ground behind the wall. The darkspawn you are fighting is riddled with arrows, automatically killing a single humanoid opponent or perforating up to three opponents near you for 3d6 damage apiece.

The darkspawn's tactics are simple—they seek to overcome the defenders of Redhold by sheer strength of numbers. As they reach the wall, they throw up grappling hooks and ladders all along its length. The number and type of darkspawn assaulting the wall varies between the three phases as noted in the following sections.

Characters fighting around the brilliant fires along the wall have no penalties. If forced to fight away from the wall, they suffer a -2 penalty for combat at night unless they bring a torch or other light source with them. (The darkspawn do not suffer this penalty.) When the PCs attack darkspawn attempting to come over the wall, they have a +1 bonus for higher ground. Finally, remember attack bonuses for outnumbering a defender, +1 for 2 to 1, and +2 for 3 or more to 1.

PHASE 1: TESTING THE DEFENSES

In the first phase of the attack, the hurlocks hold back and see what the "runts" can do. They also take the opportunity to study the defenders and try to pick out leaders, champions, and magic-wielders. Assume that wherever the characters happen to be, 1d6+2 genlocks try climbing over the top of the wall every third round. It takes a major action to climb over the top of the wall and shield use is impossible, so they are always vulnerable for at least one round, more if they get pressed back. PCs can use a major action to throw ladders or grappling hooks back off the walls. Either requires a TN 13

HURLOCK

The heavy shock troops who besiege Redhold are particularly pale, with crude symbols painted in blood on their armor.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
1	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY (BRAWLING)
1	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES, INTIMIDATION)
3	WILLPOWER (COURAGE, MORALE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
8	30	12	8

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
GAUNTLET	+4	1d3+5	
SHORT BOW	+2	1d6+5	16/32 YARDS
2-HANDED SWORD	+6	3d6+4	

POWERS

BERSERK STRIKE: A hurlock can perform the Dual Strike stunt for 3 SP instead of the usual 4 when wielding a melee weapon.

FAVORED STUNTS: Dual Strike and Mighty Blow. Maargach's handlers also use Skirmish to force foes into the bereskarn's lethal reach.

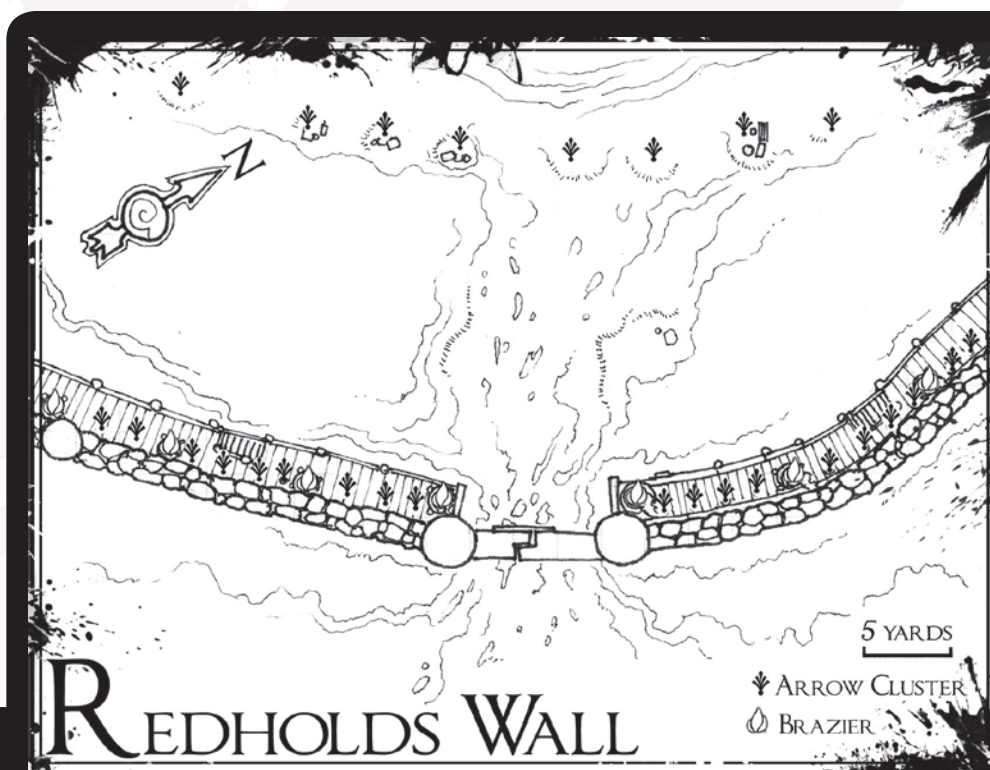
TALENTS: Armor Training (Journeyman), Two-Hander Style (Apprentice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Apprentice).

WEAPON GROUPS: Bows, Brawling, and Heavy Blades.

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT PLATE, SHORT BOW, AND TWO-HANDED SWORD.

WHERE EAGLES LAIR



Strength (Might) test. Toppling a ladder reduces the next wave of genlocks by two, tossing back a rope by one, but no amount of this activity can reduce any wave below two enemies.

As the genlocks make it over the wall, they try to gang up on individual characters. The PCs have to kill a number of genlocks equal to three times the number of PCs (so four PCs means 12 genlocks) before a retreat is sounded and the darkspawn fall back.

The characters can take a breather before the next phase.

PHASE 2: A BRUTAL ASSAULT

Less than 20 minutes after the first phase ends, the second begins as a wave of the massive, elite hurlocks charge the wall. They come over the wall near the PCs at a rate of 1d6 every two rounds. Unlike the genlocks, the hurlocks fight for several rounds—typically three—before leaping off the wall and into Redhold proper to butcher whatever non-combatants they run into. The characters are then faced with the difficult choice of staying on the wall to engage those still pouring over the wall, or hunting down those who’ve run into town. Characters can attack the hurlocks’ ladders and ropes as before, with the same target numbers and effects.

One time during this phase, if any PC is about to be killed, a blast of arcane energy blows a hurlock back-

wards off the wall. Elorn materializes out of the shadows and nods to the PC he assisted before disappearing down the wall to help elsewhere.

The PCs have to kill a number of hurlocks equal to three times the number of PCs before the attackers once more withdraw. As the hurlocks depart, the darkspawn horde draws back from the wall, retreating to the edge of the dark woods. The characters can take a breather before the final phase unless some hurlocks got past them, in which case they may be called upon to hunt down the infiltrators.

PHASE 3: ENTER MAARGACH

An hour after the second phase the characters are roused by guttural chanting from the darkspawn. The PCs can soon discern what sounds like a name being howled over and over again in two syllables: “Maaaaar...” (pause) “Gaaaach!” Then a bestial roar literally shakes the stones of Redhold.

MAARGACH THE BERESKARN

An enormous, blight-tainted bear.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-2	COMMUNICATION
8	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING, STAMINA)
-2	CUNNING
3	DEXTERITY (BITE)
-1	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION (SMELLING, TASTING, TRACKING)
8	STRENGTH (CLAWS, INTIMIDATION, MIGHT)
3	WILLPOWER (MORALE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	75	13	4

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+5	1D6+8
CLAWS	+10	2D6+8

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone (1 SP), Quick Bite, and Thunderous Bellow.*

QUICK BITE STUNT: *The bereskarn can follow a successful claw attack with a Quick Bite as a special stunt costing 2 SP. This bite attack must be taken against the same target as the original attack. Doubles on the bite attack roll does not generate more stunt points.*

THUNDEROUS BELLOW: *For 3 SP Maargach can force fear into even the sternest spirit. All who hear must make a TN10 Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline) test or be unable to attack Maargach the following round, though they can defend themselves as normal.*

TOUGH HIDE: *The bony spines of a bereskarn give the creature an AR of 4.*



WHOSE SONG IS SUNG

Some deeds are remembered long after memory of all else has faded. The courage to stand against a darkspawn horde alongside a people not one's own creates a story that lingers. Characters who survive the siege of Redhold may one day be approached by one of the legendary Grey Wardens with an offer...

Then a nightmare walks out of the darkness, a titanic blight-tainted bear, one of the infamous bereskarn. At least 15 feet long, the twisted bear-thing is covered in bone spines, and its skin sags loosely on its heavy frame. Five muscular hurlocks hold razored chains attached to its limbs, and drag/prod it toward the gates of Redhold. The rest of the darkspawn horde pulls back swiftly for obvious reasons: The characters can clearly see a genlock that doesn't move quite fast enough seized by Maargach and pulped with alarming ease.

It becomes clear that the darkspawn *did* bring a siege engine of sorts, as Maargach slams into the front gates and they groan with the impact. It takes Maargach eight rounds of continuous pounding to breach the gates of Redhold. If he is successful, the rest of the darkspawn horde pours into Redhold and the cause is lost. Arrows and spells are not enough to stop the bereskarn in time, and Maargach's very existence is of such continuous pain that he barely notices distractions like being set on fire, so it is up to the PCs to slay the beast.

Fortunately, other than Maargach's hurlock handlers, the rest of the darkspawn have pulled back to let the monster do his work. The PCs can either climb down, or have the Avvars open the gates so they can charge the beast.

Maargach's handlers are wary of him, as he hates them even more than he hates all other life, if such a thing is possible. They eschew weapons, each keeping one hand on his guide chains while smashing opponents with their gauntleted fists.

With Maargach's death, a great victory cry that shakes the night surges from the Avvars. The superstitious darkspawn fall back, convinced that the omens are against them this night. Hopefully, the PCs have all lived to fight another day.

The three phases of the night constitute a vicious battle; it is not at all unlikely that one or more PCs will fall defending Redhold. If you want to run a less fatal game, emphasize the assistance of the Avvars. If you think it will add depth to the story later on, Azur has a hand in saving one or more PCs. While the majority of the warriors are busy fighting along the wall, those below can take up bows or hurl spears. Elorn can provide more direct assistance, or perhaps his spirit allies step in and lend a hand. In the end, though, the brunt of the heroics should be left to the PCs.

3. THE HUNTERS RETURN

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

Redhold's truant warriors return at last, allowing the PCs to move on.

It has been quiet since the fall of the tainted bear and the retreat of the darkspawn. Not long after sunrise, a great hue and cry surges along the wall. Soon every Avvar is cheering wildly – the hunters have returned!

A force of Avvarian hunters at least 60 strong comes running over the plateau before the hold, returning home. A few carry large packs, while most are traveling light. Eagles swoop over the wall, settling on perches above the stone buildings of Redhold.

The hunters are led by Thane Owyne's son Treon. The returning group is composed of several different bands that gathered together in the mountains to the west instead of returning directly to the hold when scouts told them of the siege. As the hunters slip through the gates and begin circulating among their people, grief-stricken cries ring out, for this is the first they've heard of the massacre of the farming families, all of whom are friends or blood relations.

Upon hearing the tale of all that has transpired, Treon immediately asks to meet the characters. Treon is a big man and bears his father's stamp; he looks like a younger version of the thane. He visibly gives the PCs an open, frank appraisal, but there is no hostility in his gaze. "Lowlanders, if you killed that beast, I have no desire to cross blades with you now or ever."

After consulting with his father, Treon agrees to find guides for the PCs and asks how soon they wish to leave. He realizes they may wish to rest after the long night, but feels compelled to point out that if the darkspawn return in force the characters could be stuck for quite a while. The thane releases them to go, saying that they've more than lived up to their vow already and besides, Redhold's hunters have returned. If they need extra healing, Elorn offers his skills both practical and magical.

The purpose of this encounter is to get the PCs underway to Balan's lair. While the Avvars sincerely appreciate the characters' assistance, there is a clear undertone of, "Our warriors are back now, lowlanders, you should probably go..." in their conversations with the PCs.

Presuming the characters take the hint, the grateful Avvars provide them with rations and some very useful knowledge for dealing with Balan. Several of the hunters, including Treon, offer up opinions on Balan's band, the most useful tidbits including the following:

- Balan's men are a practical lot, but they fear their sadistic leader.
- Balan's second-in-command, a hunter named Torin, is a far more reasonable man and more likely to listen to reason.
- Under no circumstances can anything Balan says be trusted; he is an oath-breaker. He is also arrogant and easily angered.
- The only reasonable route to Balan's lair must take the PCs a day's journey to the northeast, to and over an ice bridge that will not be there much longer.

Treon introduces the PCs to a trio of hunters, Attus, Cathal, and Virome, who have agreed to take them to Balan's lair. Attus and Virome are quiet, sturdy sorts with dark hair. Cathal is a rangy blonde woman with a swift smile, who is slightly more talkative than her taciturn companions. All three pledge to take the characters as far as they can, agreeing to help fight if such is necessary as well. Depending on his interactions with the group, Azur may or may not volunteer at this point to come along with the party. If he doesn't leave Redhold with the group for whatever reason, he tracks them after they leave, following a few hours behind.

Attus, Cathal, and Virome have stats equivalent to a standard Avvarian Hunter.

The Avvars who the PCs have come to know say their goodbyes, promising to ask the gods to confer their blessings on the PCs, despite their shortcomings in being lowlanders. With that, it is time to move on.

RESOLUTION OF PART 4

The biggest difficulty with **Part 4: They Come in the Night** is living through it. The fight for Redhold is intentionally nasty; PCs who survive it (and their players) should have a genuine sense of accomplishment. Of course, it could go horribly wrong. Avoid reducing the number of enemies the characters have to defeat, instead throttling the rate at which they scale the wall, which should allow the PCs to gang up on them more effectively.

Maargach is obviously a terror. If the PCs are willingly going toe-to-toe with the bereskarn, but aren't quite managing to do enough damage to put him down, consider the potential for the great beast to begin fearing the PCs more than his handlers once he has taken 40 or so points of damage. In this case, he eventually goes berserk in his desire to flee from the characters, mauling one or two hurlocks in a desperate retreat from their attacks.

PART 5

THE DEADLY HEIGHTS

This part sees the PCs high into the Frostbacks, their quarry in sight at last. How the characters approach these events is highly conditional on what has occurred so far. If they headed directly west after **Part 2: 3. A Grisly Discovery**, they lack much knowledge about the situation, and can't even be certain that Izot is with the group they're tracking—or whether she's even alive. For such PCs, the first encounter is likely a huge battle (since they missed out on the one at Redhold) instead of a negotiation.

If the PCs went to Redhold, then whether they helped the Avvars or not dictates all of the following: whether Azur is with them or following after them; whether the Avvarian hunters Attus, Cathal, and Virome are guiding them or not; and what they know about Balan Ar Malad and his men.

ENVIRONS: THE ICE BRIDGE

The heights of the Frostbacks are famous for one of their recurring phenomena: ice bridges. These odd ice formations stretch between different peaks, allowing otherwise impossible travel. There are a number that occur in the same places year after year, but many are unpredictable at best. Ice bridges form in the early winter each year and crumble in the spring, falling away to smash into the valleys below.

1. THE ICE BRIDGE

ROLEPLAYING AND COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs confront Balan Ar Malad and his men along the ice bridge that leads to his lair.

You have traveled high into the Frostbacks. Here, a vast span of ice stretches out from the peak in front of you, off toward a mountain plateau some 50 yards away, across a gaping black chasm. The ice bridge shines in the springtime sun; rivulets of water drip from hundreds of icicles hanging from its underside. The ice creaks incessantly and, alarmingly, large chunks occasionally fall off.

If the characters came directly from the east, then they have followed the winding trail of Balan and his hunters, and they're about to be ambushed. If they're coming from Redhold, then most likely either Azur or the trio of Avvarian hunters is leading them. If that is the case,

they've been warned that Balan will have scouts watching the pass until the bridge crumbles, which looks to be within a day or two at most, or far quicker if something encourages it to break.

COMING DIRECTLY FROM THE EAST

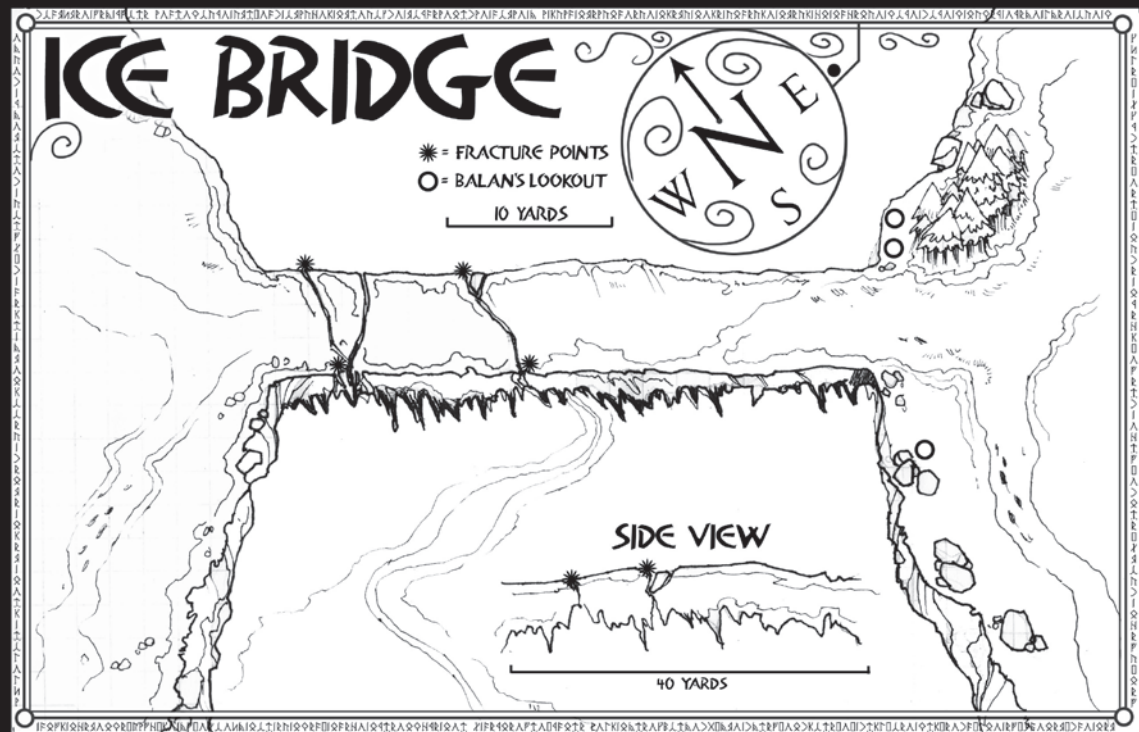
Unaware characters need to make an **opposed Perception (Seeing) vs. Dexterity (Stealth) test**, which Balan's men roll at a total of -1 (Dexterity 1, no Stealth Focus, and -2 for the cold), making it likely that the PCs will spot them. If not, Balan's men announce themselves with aimed arrows as the characters approach the ice bridge. There are three hunters hidden in the spots indicated on the map. After firing, they immediately sound a horn, calling for their fellows and their leader.

It takes four rounds (a minute) for Balan to arrive. Until he does, his men seek to keep the characters away from the bridge. Presuming the PCs don't charge forward and slaughter his men, Balan demands to know who the characters are and what they want when he arrives. If the characters have proceeded to kill his men before his arrival, he orders his men to destroy the bridge.

Talking to Balan is a matter of roleplaying, but it is all but impossible to convince him to give up the girl, as he has fallen in love with Izot. Well, "love" may not be the word, truly. Balan wants Izot to want him, so she has not been taken by force as of yet. She is on the far side of the ice bridge, out of sight, along with the bulk of Balan's men including his second, Torin. If Balan sees Azur, he laughs at him, calling out, "You bring lowlanders to finish what you cannot? Shame on you, boy."

A group that hasn't spent this adventure learning about Avvars is unlikely to bring any conversation with Balan to a "successful" conclusion, and in the end, Balan orders the bridge destroyed.

It takes four men wielding two-handed axes four rounds of chopping to crack the ice bridge to the point that it begins fracturing, after which it shatters completely over an additional two rounds. In other words, from the moment Balan orders the bridge destroyed, anyone



wishing to cross has six rounds to get from one side to the other, or they'll plummet to their death if they are still on it. Killing one or more of the axe-wielders may or may not slow the process.

Running at high speed across the slick ice bridge requires a **TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test**; failure means a round is spent sprawling on the ice. PCs can feel free to incorporate a charge action into their running if they wish to and have a target.

Balan's band consists of a number of Avvarian hunters equal to five times the number of PCs, plus himself and Torin. Several of them keep an eye on Izot at all times, as they know she is a threat. As long as Balan is alive, his men do not give in. They fear their brutal leader too much to stop fighting, no matter how dangerous the PCs seem. If the PCs bring down Balan, Torin immediately calls for a parley. He happily rids himself of the girl with little encouragement. Izot happily leaves with the PCs, especially if they mention the arl, but only after demanding her sword back from the Avvars.

If the Avvars topple the ice bridge before the PCs can get across, the following encounter presents their last chance to rescue Izot.

COMING FROM REDHOLD

If the characters have been guided to the ice bridge by the Avvars from Redhold, Cathal (or possibly Azur) has been explaining Avvarian customs while they were journeying. She suggests that one of the PCs challenge Balan to a duel. All they have to do is claim that the young woman is their kin (or the equivalent) and then insult Balan's mother or his manhood. Normally this wouldn't work given that the PCs are lowlanders, but



with what they did for Redhold and the defeat of the bereskarn, Cathal and her fellows will speak for them, forcing Balan to accept the challenge or lose serious face in front of his men.

If the PCs agree with Cathal's idea, Attus calls out their presence to the waiting hunters, demanding that Balan show himself. Again, the encounter is one for roleplaying, but in this case the stakes are different. The chosen PC must battle Balan alone. Balan demands a fight on top of the ice bridge itself. Drive the drama of this confrontation home, because such duels are rare: a life-or-death struggle at the top of the Frostbacks along a crumbling ice bridge is not an experience to be readily forgotten. Describe the combatants' steaming breath, the cracking bridge around them, the cold that freezes their sweat, the cry of a russet eagle soaring overhead to its cliff lair...

If the PCs left Redhold to its fate they are either traveling on their own, in which case things proceed as if they had come directly from the east, or they are traveling with Azur, in which case he suggests a similar stratagem to Cathal's and plays his final card: he tells the PCs that Izot is his wife, and that a claim to be fighting to retrieve her for her husband would be the truth. The duel with Balan proceeds similarly.

If the PC wins, Izot is freed. If the PC loses, the rest of the group must decide what to do. Let the fallen

PC's player control the characters' allies for the rest of the encounter. If the PCs choose to attack after losing the duel, Balan orders the ice bridge destroyed. Any Avvarians with the characters fight however the PCs wish them to, though none are willing to suicidally dive onto a crumbling ice bridge.

If the encounter ends and the characters have failed to retrieve Izot, continue to **Part 5: 2. Muirne's Pass**. Otherwise, move on to **The Aftermath**.

2. MUIRNE'S PASS

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs' last hope for retrieving Izot is to daringly travel through a haunted pass the Avvars consider cursed.

As the ice bridge crumbles away, the PCs are probably under the impression that their chances of rescuing the girl were shattered with the bridge. Normally, they would probably be right; however, there is one more way.

If the PCs came from Redhold with the trio of hunters, their Avvar guides begin a heated discussion. While clearly not happy about it, Cathal approaches the PC and offers them one last way to claim Izot if they truly

BALAN AR MALAD

The vicious leader of an Avvarian hunter band.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION (ANIMAL HANDLING)
3	CONSTITUTION (DRINKING, STAMINA)
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
2	DEXTERITY (INITIATIVE, STEALTH)
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION (SEEING, TRACKING)
4	STRENGTH (AXES, CLIMBING, MIGHT)
3	WILLPOWER (MORALE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
9	48	14 (12*)	5

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BATTLE AXE	+6	2D6+4
THROWING AXE	+7	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: Skirmish and Pierce Armor.

TALENTS: Animal Training (Journeyman), Armor Training (Apprentice), Thrown Weapons Style (Journeyman), and Weapon and Shield Style (Apprentice).

WEAPON GROUPS: Axes, Bows, Brawling, and Spears.

*WITHOUT SHIELD

EQUIPMENT

BATTLE AXE, LIGHT MAIL, MEDIUM SHIELD, AND THROWING AXES.

wish to get to her, but she states flatly that it is far more dangerous than a thousand Balans:

There is a pass, forbidden to us—to Avvars... Long ago, a priestess of the Lady of the Skies dwelled near here, tending the Lady's eagles. Blasphemous men, fallen Avvars, raped and killed her. She cursed them as she died. They haunt the pass still. If you take Muirne's Pass we cannot follow you, lowlanders, but I tell you this: If you survive that road you can walk into Balan's camp and demand what you will, and not a soul among them will lift a finger to stop you, no matter how he rages. Otherwise, the girl is lost. It would take weeks to get to Gherlen's Pass, and weeks more to return. Balan will be in Orlais by then, or far to the south.

Muirne's Pass is not far. Will you risk it?

If the PCs have been on their own so far, Azur chooses this time to make himself known, and approaches them with his own version of the above story. He relates the

SHADE

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-2	COMMUNICATION
0	CONSTITUTION
0	CUNNING
5	DEXTERITY (STEALTH)
4	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
-3	STRENGTH
4	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
15	30	15	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
DRAINING TOUCH	+5	1D6+4 PENETRATING

POWERS

DRAINING AURA: A shade can perform the special Draining Aura stunt for 4 SP. All enemies within 4 yards take 1d6 penetrating damage as the shade sucks their life essence.

DRAINING TOUCH: The touch of a shade drains the target of life energy. It inflicts 1d6 + Magic penetrating damage.

FAVORED STUNTS: Draining Aura and Lightning Attack.

INCORPOREAL: Shades are incorporeal, having a tenuous existence in the mortal world. They ignore the effects of terrain. Normally only magical attacks (spells or hits from magical weapons) can harm them, other attacks passing through their forms without effect. A character attacking a shade can perform a special stunt called Spirit Bane for 3 SP. The character then inflicts normal weapon damage but substitutes Magic for Strength. A character with Magic 2 and a long sword using the Spirit Bane stunt, for example, would inflict 2d6+2 damage.

"WHOA. WHOA I'M AN AVVAR "

If one or more of the PCs is an Avvar, Cathal explains that Avvars from Redhold slew Muirne, and that the PCs should be fine...

same tale, but in his love for Izot, fails to mention that the pass is forbidden to Avvars, and declares that he will lead them through it.

If the PCs refuse to take the haunted pass, Izot Wulff is lost to them. If Azur is present, he presses on alone—they never see him again. Depending on the choices they've made along the way, if they've never been to Redhold, you may direct them there, rearranging events so they arrive before the darkspawn and participate in the hold's defense. Otherwise, they can travel back to Arl Wulff's winter manor and leave a message that his daughter is lost. If Berchan happens to be



with them, he is inconsolable and must be dragged bodily out of the mountains.

If the PCs agree to take Muirne's Pass, it is less than an hour away. Even in the bright spring sunlight it is a dark crevasse, filled with evergreens that have betrayed their names by being a disturbing shade of grey. Light falls resentfully through rare holes between the trees' overlaced branches. The Avvars leave the PCs at the entrance to the pass, giving them instructions on how to get to Balan's camp on the far side, and informing them that they will wait a half a day for their return. Azur cannot bring himself to go into the pass if his fellow Avvars are present to witness his blasphemy.

The spirits of cursed Avvars do indeed haunt Muirne's Pass. A number of Shades equal to half the number of PCs (rounded down) attack the party midway through the pass. The dark forms appear as distorted versions of armored warriors, twisted out of human proportions in disturbing ways. They slip out of the shadows of the trees and attempt to drain off the characters' life force.

If the PCs have Aamor Fin with them, they don't have to fight at all. The second she leaves her sheath, the shades cringe away from her silvery light and slip

back into the shadows without a fight. Otherwise, the shades attack until one of them has been destroyed, and then they flee back into the surrounding shadows. They do not molest the PCs again, even when they come back through the pass, which a character making a **TN11 Cunning (Arcane Lore)** test can predict.

Balan's camp is not far away now.

3. AVVARS & SUPERSTITION

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs walk into Balan Ar Malad's camp and retrieve Izot Wulff at last.

As you walk up out of the forest, the first look-out's cry dies on his lips as he recognizes you. He averts his eyes from your party and steps away, his hands raised far above his weapons in a clear sign of submission. He points wordlessly at a copse of trees nearby.

As the PCs pass into Balan's camp, the hardened Avvars turn as pale as the surrounding snows. Most avert their eyes and several turn away. Balan gapes at the characters in horrified shock. No one says anything for a long, long moment until a tall man with an eagle on his arm, Torin, looks at the lead PC and says, "Take the girl and be gone, lowlanders."

Balan snarls in rage at his second, draws his axe, and attacks. None of his men help him; indeed, they avert their gazes. If the PCs don't manage to kill him in two rounds, Izot runs him through from behind.

None of the Avvars watch as the PCs leave with Izot in tow.

RESOLUTION OF PART 5

If the characters never went to Redhold, **Part 5: The Deadly Heights** is likely to be a big battle against forces they know little about, so use Azur to fill them in, at least in part. If they did go to Redhold, they have a lot of advantages against the challenges that await them.

If a PC loses the duel with Balan, remember that it takes a few rounds for a fallen character to die. Perhaps after Balan's fatal blow, he walks away, laughing, allowing another PC to swiftly drag the body off the ice bridge and work on first aid.

The fight against the shades can be nasty if the PCs lack magic weapons. A mage can really shine in that fight. Read the "Incorporeal" power description carefully and describe the Spirit Bane stunt to your players so they know they have a fighting chance even if they don't have Aamor Fin or other enchanted weapons.

IZOT WULFF

Bold young daughter of Arl Gallagher Wulff.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION
1	CONSTITUTION
2	CUNNING
1	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES)
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION
1	STRENGTH
4	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	33	11	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
SHORT BOW	+1	1D6+1	16/32 YARDS
SHORT SWORD	+4	1D6+3	

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Seize the Initiative*

TALENTS: *Archery Style (Apprentice), Armor Training (Apprentice), and Single Weapon (Apprentice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

IF CIRCUMSTANCES ALLOW, IZOT ARMS AND ARMORS HERSELF AS NECESSARY. HER SHORT SWORD IS AN ELEGANTLY-CRAFTED GIFT FROM HER FATHER, GRANTING A +1 BONUS TO ATTACK ROLLS.

TORIN

Second-in-command of Balan Ar Malad's band of hunters; far more even-tempered than his boss.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

2	COMMUNICATION (ANIMAL HANDLING)
2	CONSTITUTION (DRINKING, STAMINA)
2	CUNNING
1	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION (SEEING, TRACKING)
2	STRENGTH (AXES, CLIMBING)
2	WILLPOWER (MORALE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
9	35	11	5

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
BATTLE AXE	+4	2D6+2	
LONG BOW	+1	1D6+5	26/52 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Skirmish.*

TALENTS: *Animal Training (Journeyman), Armor Training (Apprentice), Unarmed Style (Apprentice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Apprentice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes, Bows, Brawling, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

BATTLE AXE, LIGHT MAIL, LONG BOW, AND MEDIUM SHIELD.

THE AFTERMATH

Reunited at last, the young lovers rush to embrace one another.

Now what? There are no set encounters for wrapping up this adventure because of the many variations that could have occurred in getting to this point. Much depends on what the PCs have done so far, and on their relationship with Azur.

If the PCs came straight from the east and managed to claim Izot, Azur suggests they go to Redhold before passing down into the West Hills. Obviously, in such a case the PCs may be suspicious of the Avvar, but it's a tricky situation because Izot wants to go with him. Clearly, the PCs will know that there was a lot more to the story than they were told. If Azur convinces the characters to journey to Redhold, you can retune **Parts 3 and 4** so the characters can experience the darkspawn siege. Instead of the thane bribing them to stay, though, you could have Izot insist, or have the darkspawn catch them unawares, forcing the issue.

If the PCs passed through Redhold but Azur convinced them to leave early, the journey back is grim indeed.

Dark fires blanket the southeast forest around Redhold; a concerned Azur soon becomes horrified as he discovers that his hold has been obliterated by the darkspawn. Perhaps one of the returning bands of Avvarian hunters catches them as they travel west, forcing the heartsick Azur to either betray his people or his intended bride.

If the PCs saved Redhold, Azur still tries to convince them to pass back by on their way to the east, though he realizes they must keep a sharp eye out for darkspawn.

In any event, Azur and Izot offer full confessions to honorable, heroic PCs asking for their help. A wise PC might note that having the nephew of a thane married to the second daughter of an arl whose arling borders the mountains is not a bad match. Indeed, Thane Owyne already thinks better of lowlanders due to the PCs' heroism, and will be considerably happier with Azur if he learns how well he has chosen his bride.

If the PCs have an antagonistic relationship with Azur, the story plays out more grimly. After all they've gone through, the characters surely intend to return Izot to the arl, whether she wants to go or not. If Azur is not an ally of the PCs, he tries to steal her away from them. If Azur is killed in front of Izot, she will not rest until she kills the PC responsible, and then herself...

ABOUT AVVARS

The majority of the Avvarian people live in subsistence conditions, with the greater part of their days spent gathering the necessities of survival with little time given over to activities without an immediate practical application. Ornamentation is rare among Avvar-made goods that aren't religious in nature. They prefer well-made items that endure the Frostbacks' extreme weather.

The Avvars have a decent relationship with the dwarven kingdom of Orzammar. The Avvars trade furs, goat milk, and free passage rights for dwarf traders (allowing them to travel over the Frostbacks in peace) in exchange for arms and armor. The dwarves regard the Avvars as a useful deterrent against both Ferelden and Orlesian ambitions.

AVVARIAN HOLDS AND MARRIAGE

Since each Avvar hold is made up of several extended family clans, Avvars often have to marry outside their hold to avoid their relatives. This is seen as a good thing, for it brings in new blood and extends the ties among Avvars. Avvar men go about securing brides by kidnapping them. This is partially arranged in advance by approaching the elders of the target clan and announcing one's intention. Failure to do so can lead to a blood feud.

Once permission has been given, a warrior is expected to prove his skill by slipping into the hold and removing his new bride. A warrior who is caught on his first try can expect a severe beating, but nothing worse. If he is caught again on the second try, though, he is likely to become lunch for the clan's sacred animal. Avvarian men may approach a lady directly if they wish to secure her agreement (or assistance), and some Avvar women make it known that they desire a specific man.

Avvars are expected to put loyalty to hold before blood. Even a kidnapped bride is expected to renounce her former ties and cleave to her new clan. Indeed, her old clan and family are forever after slightly suspicious of her, even if she was taken against her will.

AVVARIAN RELIGION

It is nearly impossible to speak of the Avvarian people without speaking of their beliefs. Faith is the vibrant cornerstone of their existence, filling their harsh lives with sacred implications, for the Avvars believe as the Alamarri once did: The gods live in all things. Wind from an unexpected direction, birds flying in unusual patterns, a sudden silence amidst the high peaks in the spring — these are nothing but chance to a lowlander, but are messages from the gods to an Avvar.

The Avvars believe without question that their gods have protected them and kept them strong, for do they not thrive despite their numerous enemies? Wise lowlanders avoid pointing out that the hillsmen have been pushed into some of the most inhospitable terrain in all of Thedas. In truth, the Avvars love the Frostbacks and would only take offense at the thought that they were "forced" into the mountains.

The Avvars have a complex pantheon, which includes both nature spirits and legendary mortals who have ascended to the heavens. This is further complicated by the fact that the pantheon varies somewhat from hold to hold, as every clan has its own sacred tales and heroes; however, all Avvars agree on the three greatest gods. These are Korth the Mountain Father, Haakon Wintersbreath, and the Lady of the Skies. Imhar the Clever and the Great Bear Sigfost are also revered in most communities.

KORTH THE MOUNTAIN FATHER

Eldest and strongest, the foundation upon which all is built, Korth is the god of mountains and caves, lord of the Frostbacks. Through the Mountain Father's benevolence, the Avvars are provided with everything they might need, though it is unwise to tempt his wrath by demanding more than one's rightful due. It is Korth who sends game to needy hunters, leads goatherds to lush fields, and approves of a hold's sacred animal. The

However the PCs manage it, when they return Izot, or proof of what's become of her, to Arl Wulff's winter manor, they find the arl waiting for them. He keeps his word and throws in one extra sovereign for each PC if you used **My Sister's Keeper** and they managed to haul Berchan through the wilderness and home

again intact. The arl is skeptical about Azur and flat-out furious if told that the Avvar was the reason Izot fell into this situation in the first place. Persuasive PCs might help the arl calm down and see the potential advantages in the marriage of one of his kin to the local Avvar clan.

ABOUT AVVARS

majority of Avvarians believe that Korth has always been; that he is as aged as the foundations of his mountains. Only in the ancient Frosthold do they sing otherwise. Their Winter Song, sung only during Wintersend, may be the oldest known to any Avvar. It tells that Korth was once a man, a hunter without peer, who led his people into the mountains when the world was young.

HAAKON WINTERSBREATH

Korth's firstborn son Haakon is the Lord of Winter, master of the twin, biting colds of ice and steel. The Wintersbreath is the god of arms and battle, for to the Avvars winter and war are near synonymous. It is cold that protects the Avvarians from their enemies, it is cold that they use as a weapon against the lowlanders when they raid from the mountains, and cold is the fear they wish to inspire in the faithless. Haakon is not simply a deity to be worshiped; he is the fearsome, icy killer young Avvars aspire to become.

THE LADY OF THE SKIES

After the mountains beneath, only the skies above are as sacred to the Avvars. The Mistress of Birds is their patroness and protector; her flocks assist the Avvars in keeping a lookout for their many foes. Birds are the agents of the Lady, bringers of omens and foretellers of woe. Deceased Avvars are "offered to the Lady" in a solemn ceremony that Fereldan scholars refer to as an "air burial." Rather than being cremated or buried, their bodies are completely dismembered and offered to the carrion birds of the mountains. Flesh, organs, and even bones are powdered so the avians can consume all that remains and carry it off to the Lady's realm. Thus, the Lady of the Skies is also the Avvars' goddess of death.

IMHAR THE CLEVER

Tales of Imhar have brought cheer to the Avvars on many a cold night, for his is the way of the trickster, and they delight in stories of his cunning. A slight man of infinite jest and vicious wit, Imhar's mockery cuts deeper than any blade. Imhar's greatest feat was arguably the single-handed rout of a mighty horde of demons after an evil seductress tricked him into facing them weaponless. He retreated, making them think that he was a coward and fleeing. When they finally caught up with him in a narrow mountain pass, Imhar's laughter defeated them by causing an avalanche.

THE GREAT BEAR SIGFOST

Wise of all the mountain spirits and so large that the Mountain Father once mistook him for one of his smaller peaks, Sigfost lounges at the foot of Korth's throne. Characters seeking wisdom can challenge Sigfost to fight for it, but the bones of the devoured and unworthy litter his vast den. Avvars hold bears to be sacred and though they sometimes hunt them, great ceremony always accompanies such efforts. All Avvars judge bereskarn to be blasphemous horrors. A very few Circle magi claim to have met Sigfost in the Fade; these are invariably open-minded magi known to get along well with people from other cultures, and none of them will discuss the experience lightly.

AVVARIAN SHAMANS

The Avvars' gods are more capricious than cruel, demanding appeasement for perceived sleights rather than wantonly casting misfortune on their people from lofty heights. When Avvars suffer, it seldom occurs to them to blame ill luck, but instead, to wonder which of the gods they have offended. If a warrior suffers a wound, he is concerned that he may have slighted Haakon. If a hunting party returns empty-handed, their only thought is to placate the Mountain Father; indeed, they will not go forth hunting once more until they have decided on how to mollify Korth—there would be no point in it, as they would surely fail again.

When forced to consider complex spiritual matters, the Avvars turn to their shamans, the lore keepers of the mountains. It is they who watch the migrations of birds seeking wisdom from the Lady, they who keep the old songs and retain the knowledge of the proper rites to honor the gods and spirits of the mountains. The majority of the Avvars' shamans are powerful mages whose traditions stretch far back beyond the foundations of the Circle of Magi. Neither the Chantry nor the Prophetess means anything to the Avvarians, and Templars are not welcome in the Frostbacks. This is wise, as many of the shamans' rituals would horrify the Chantry. Even mild rites invite spirits to speak through the casters for a time, to say nothing of some of their more powerful ceremonies. The Avvars are well aware that some spirits are reluctant to depart human hosts willingly, but they have means of dealing with such recalcitrant entities.



BY WALT CIECHANOWSKI
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A FRAGILE WEB

A Fragile Web is an adventure of intrigue and politics that takes place in Ferelden's capital city of Denerim. In it, the PCs investigate the machinations of a prominent and popular noblewoman. They eventually learn that one of her intrigues will lead to at least three murders, and must decide how to thwart her—if the danger of working against her is even worth the risk.

A Fragile Web is intended for a group of PCs of 4th-5th level, with a reasonable mix of abilities to handle the exploration, roleplaying, and combat portions of the adventure. The Communication ability is important, especially the Persuasion and Investigation focuses. Perception (Empathy) also comes in handy.

If the characters in your campaign are lower than level 4, you may need to tailor the NPC statistics and test TNs to account for your group's power level.

HOW IT BEGINS

Not every good deed is done for its own reward.

Bann Nicola Baranti has grown famous in Denerim for supporting the underdog and helping ease the burdens of common citizens. Most people in the city

love her, and her fellow banns publicly respect both her actions and the way she has managed to raise up her family from ignoble roots. In private some feel she is a bit *too* generous, but she's so widely beloved that to suggest as much out loud would bring a shower of public scorn.

The PCs meet Bann Nicola after helping some of her retainers defeat a group of insane cultists who are kidnapping children. Bann Nicola has a long-standing grudge against this cult and invites the PCs to her mansion for dinner. Impressed by the PCs' capabilities, Bann Nicola inquires as to their interest in accepting odd tasks from her in the future. Whether the PCs accept or decline to have her as their patron, she thanks them for their service against the cult and bids them well.

Not long thereafter the worried and loyal servant of a local knight approaches the PCs. The knight is being blackmailed for an act that only the servant knew about, but the servant denies having told anyone, and begs the PCs to find out what has happened. Their investigation leads the PCs to a small neighborhood chantry in Denerim known as Andraste's Ear, which is the front line in a massive intelligence-harvesting operation that leads back to Bann Nicola.

The PCs come to learn that Bann Nicola is obsessed with self-aggrandizement and her own popularity. For decades she has engaged in schemes that promote her and her house without the slightest concern for even a modicum of morality. The PCs discover that her current crop of schemes includes exposing a rather harmless group of Orlesian sympathizers not because they are particularly dangerous to Ferelden, but because it will help her control the prices of imports, making her wealthier while simultaneously earning her public acclaim as a protector of the realm.

In the end, the PCs learn that Bann Nicola intends to assassinate not only a bann and his daughter, but also her own grandson, in order to frame one of the Orlesian sympathizers for the crime, which will in turn allow her to manipulate local markets and deliver to the king an excuse to purge the Elven Alienage in Denerim. The PCs must weigh Bann Nicola's entirely real good works against her Machiavellian schemes, and the turmoil that would follow her fall against the stability of Denerim.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

The PCs must be in Denerim at the start of the adventure. They reason they are there doesn't matter. Their involvement in fighting the kidnappers of the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue occurs spontaneously; they literally stumble onto these villains in the midst of evil acts.

The PCs' involvement in the main, investigative portion of the adventure depends on whether they choose to investigate the suspicious goings-on at Andraste's Ear, which ultimately lead them to learn about Bann Nicola's web of plots. If they don't pursue that lead, consult the **Optional Subplots** section, which details many other intrigues with which she's involved; any of them can be used to point the PCs back to the spine of **A Fragile Web**.

THE LONG VIEW

One way—the best way, perhaps—to use **A Fragile Web** is as a metaplot spanning other adventures. The PCs may, for example, experience **Part 1: The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue**, become clients of Bann Nicola's patronage in **Part 2: A Warm Welcome**, and then go on one or many unrelated adventures at her direction, or on their own. For example, you might stage **The Dalish Curse** (the adventure from the *Dragon Age RPG Set 1 Game Master's Guide*) and its sequel, **A Bann Too Many** (packaged with the *Dragon Age RPG Game Master's Kit*) at this point, saying that Bann Nicola is the one who sends the PCs to the Ruswold Valley to aid Bann Trumhall. Bann Nicola might then send the PCs to secure a contract for ryott (a favored grain in

her orphanage kitchens) and give you the opportunity to use **Amber Rage**. In **Where Eagles Lair** Bann Nicola would welcome the gratitude of an arl, especially one with diplomatic relations with the Avvars. Eventually, as the PCs' reputation as Nicola's problem-solvers spreads, they are approached by Ser Greta's servant Andiel and **Part 3: A Betrayal of Trust** begins.

With this option, the PCs become truly embroiled in Bann Nicola's machinations. Her eventual revelation as a villain becomes an unexpected twist (and an infuriating one, given that the PCs have been helping her all this time!). The PCs' response to the situation becomes a satisfying conclusion to a low-level *Dragon Age* campaign.

REPLACEMENT PCs

In the event that a player character is killed in the course of **A Fragile Web**, there are many credible places replacement PCs can come from and many easy opportunities to insert them into the unfolding adventure. Early in the adventure, a relative of a child or parent murdered by the Stilled Tongue cultists might want pitch in to ensure that justice is done. A member of Bann Nicola's household might want to join the party to advance their own career (and, likely, to help Bann Nicola keep an eye on her new clients). Later in the adventure, a noble being blackmailed by Bann Nicola might catch wind that the PCs are moving against her and propose an alliance. Similarly, an agent of the king's justice might get a whiff of Bann Nicola's crimes and ally with the PCs in order to establish the truth. The bottom line is that while she's publicly beloved, Bann Nicola is not without enemies, and these enemies are good sources of new player characters in the event that they're needed.

BACKGROUND

A Fragile Web has a great deal going on behind the scenes. The following sections provide background information about the scenario's various factions and their intrigues, to give you a firm grounding.

HOUSE BARANTI

House Baranti has always been lead by matriarchs. Nicola's great-great-grandmother Catherine won great acclaim and wealth fighting the initial Orlesian invasion. Her prestige was such that when she settled in Denerim she was granted a sizable estate. Catherine's daughter Dralla was raised with every luxury, and it left her spoiled. By her mid-30s Dralla had become the Grand Cleric in Denerim, but she was forced out with the scandalous revelation that she hosted many lovers—often at the same time—within the chantry itself.

The Orlesians had seized Felderen's throne by now, and Revered Mother Dralla's many enemies both within

and outside the Chantry seized on the opportunity to topple their rival and destroy her family's reputation. She earned the unenviable sobriquet "the Whore of Denerim" before she was eventually assassinated by enemies who were never brought to justice.

Dralla bore a daughter out of wedlock before her death. Her daughter Nina was raised and then employed at the notorious Denerim brothel the Pearl, completing the family's social fall and confirming her mother's unfortunate nickname. Nicola was born to Nina, her father unknown, and was raised by the whores at the Pearl.

Unlike her mother, Nicola always evinced a fierce pride. Research in her youth revealed that her family still technically belonged to the Bannorn and was eligible to hold lands, even though her mother had always been told otherwise. Nicola kept this information to herself as she matured. She made it a point to meet and befriend the important people in the city, educating herself in the social graces of her betters and keeping her background as much of a secret as possible. When she was 15 years old she married one Ser Duniel, a wealthy but savagely ugly knight from the south. He died three years later of a sudden illness.

The newly wealthy Nicola set about rebuilding her family in earnest, making a name for herself as a charming hostess and canny politician. She married again, this time to the son of a bann with greater prestige but less money than herself; he lasted five years before he was

slain by bandits outside Denerim. Nicola's public wrath was stunning to behold; each and every one of the bandits was brutally hunted and executed. A popular song about her vengeance that was widely performed by the capital city's minstrels ensured public sympathy for her plight. Nicola became a folk hero, and one of the most popular and interesting nobles in the city. She publicly dedicated herself to good works within Denerim, establishing orphanages and funding new chapels in areas too poor to afford them.

Now a grandmother in her late 70s, Bann Nicola is elderly but sharp as a dagger, firmly in charge of her household and still dedicated to doing good works and helping the unfortunate. Her reputation in Denerim is nearly unassailable.

In truth, Bann Nicola is a conspirator extraordinaire, a perfectionist whose plans are laid years in advance, who considers every eventuality to block every possibility for failure. She excels in setting her enemies against each other while remaining above the fray, spinning conflicts between others into opportunities for House Baranti to carry out public acts of largesse. She is utterly without morals, but hungers for—and glories in—public love and broad acclaim. She is essentially a psychopath whose glittering madness is predicated upon ensuring that her family's good name is never sullied again.

Bann Nicola had only one son who survived childhood, Tanner. Tanner and his wife Lina were killed while rescuing people from a burning home, leaving their young son, Adric, to be raised by his grandmother. In truth, Tanner and Lina had discovered just a few of Nicola's secrets and confronted her about them, leaving her no choice but to have them killed. As always, the "tragedy" was engineered to reflect glory onto House Baranti.

Bann Nicola's death would cause chaos in Denerim. Her vast library of secrets and the blackmail it allows her to perpetrate does a great deal to stabilize the otherwise independent-minded Bannorn. (Stability, after all, is good for business.) If the leverage Bann Nicola exerts were to suddenly fall away, many banns would turn on each other to settle old scores.

THE CHANTRY OF THE STILLED TONGUE

The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue is a maniac splinter cult of the Maker's Chantry led by an insane and corrupt spirit that believes it can—through prophecy—predict which children will eventually become sinners and heretics. The cult gets its name from its response to these predictions, which is to cut out the tongues of these children. The cult's motivating spirit has had great success using its powers to warp the minds of its followers to make such evil actions seem proper and heroic.



STAGING POLITICAL ADVENTURES

An adventure focused on espionage, intrigue, and politics is different from a more traditional monster-oriented quest. A traditional adventure often has highly discrete encounter areas where monsters await the heroes. For each encounter, the monsters' goals and tactics are clear. The villain provides, first and foremost, a physical or magical challenge.

In comparison, a political adventure's villain can be physically weak while simultaneously able to direct vast power. In **A Fragile Web**, the antagonist is an elderly woman, but one who has the power to turn the entire city of Denerim against the PCs if they're foolish enough to oppose her openly. Once the PCs realize that Bann Nicola is secretly behind many of their troubles, they may want to rampage in and kill her. Although *Dragon Age* players are always free to make their own choices in whatever way they want—that's the fun of roleplaying!—it's up to you to make sure they understand the likely fallout, and realize that, for example, publicly discrediting Bann Nicola may be more effective.

As the PCs move through the encounters of **A Fragile Web**, think of Bann Nicola as the keystone in the arch of Denerim's social order; remove her and the city crumbles to the ground as damming secrets come to light about very important people who don't want their dirty laundry aired in public. No one, even Bann Nicola's enemies, wants that. Think of this adventure as a dance in which Bann Nicola carefully deploys her resources while the PCs must find some way to thwart her on her own turf, by some means other than pulling out their swords.

The players are likely to be creative in approaching the challenges arrayed against them. Be prepared to allow unusual plans. Carefully consider any idea the players come up with, thinking about how it will ripple out through the city and how Bann Nicola would react. Then, proceed accordingly.

The cult has been quashed and resurrected a half-dozen times in the past few decades as its motivating spirit finds new victims to possess. The spirit currently calls itself Mother Brianna. She answered the pleas of a young woman who was abused by her father and ignored by her mother. The spirit helped her enact vengeance against her parents and then possessed her shattered mind. Mother Brianna is forthcoming about her nature as a spirit possessing a willing mortal, but she claims to not be a demon. Instead, she claims to be one of the noble spirits that inhabit the Fade but occasionally find their way back to mortal lands. She is lying, even to herself.

Unknown to the cultists, Bann Nicola made a bargain with this spirit decades ago. When the spirit is moved to return to the world of the living, it visits the bann in her dreams. She then funds the cult's resurgence. Bann Nicola waits until public fear and outrage at the cult's crimes swell, then dispatches Baranti house guards to stamp the risen cult out. The spirit sees its relationship to Bann Nicola as a twisted competition wherein it tries to claim as many victims as possible before being stopped. The spirit finds the rivalry entertaining, and Bann Nicola recruits the best of the mute children out of her orphanages to study the Maker's teachings and become secret-takers at Andraste's Ear.

ANDRASTE'S EAR

The spiritual heart of the Dregs, a working-class neighborhood in Denerim, is a small chantry known as Andraste's Ear. After the old chapel burned down and the neighborhood went without for almost two years,

Bann Nicola funded the construction of a new chantry to serve the area. Andraste's Ear attracts no parishioners of note and receives very little funding from the greater Chantry, but it serves the Dregs as a dearly appreciated spiritual refuge.

The chantry is best known for—and receives its name from—its local tradition of “Andraste's Ear,” whereby local parishioners salve their souls on a designated day each week by unburdening themselves of all the acts of evil they have committed or know about by telling them in secret to the brothers and sisters of the chantry, who are all mute. These secrets and confessions are transcribed by the priests—since most of the parishioners in the Dregs are not literate—and placed into the locked Box of Cleansing Flame, a sacred container at the front of the chapel. It is well-known that before the next dawn the mother of the chantry burns every note unread, flinging the ash into the air, sending the secrets into the wind for only Andraste's spirit to hear. Nearly every parishioner of Andraste's Ear reports a great and spiritual happiness at the act of confession, a feeling that keeps them returning for weekly services and makes them exceptionally loyal to this pillar of the neighborhood.

Andraste's Ear is run by Mother Gabriella, a diligent and serious woman who is not herself mute but who was raised at one of the Baranti orphanages. She is assisted by three priests, also from the orphanages, who are all mute survivors of the Stilled Tongue's depraved ceremonies of years past. They all take their jobs seriously, and everyone who attends Andraste's Ear has complete and utter faith in their honesty and piety.

In reality, of course, the burned scraps are blank, and the written secrets find their way to Bann Nicola's spymasters.

The mute brothers and sisters of the chapel were selected for the role because of a propensity to follow orders and not ask questions. Even so, and while they are appreciative of the ways Bann Nicola has helped them in their unfortunate lives, they are loyal to the chantry and unaware of the betrayal of the secrets of Andraste's Ear.

Mother Gabriella is extremely pious, but was trapped long ago. While serving as a sister at a different chantry during the Orlesian occupation, she was ordered to report to her superiors the secrets of certain troublesome Fereldans—secrets that she had learned in confidence. Young and impressionable, Gabriella did as commanded. Most of those whom she betrayed, along with their families, were tortured and slain. When Gabriella's revered mother assigned her to lead a chantry in the Dregs some years later, Gabriella saw it as a sign from the Maker that she would have an opportunity to cleanse her guilty soul. But Mother Gabriella soon discovered that someone knew of her past indiscretions and expected her to continue sharing her parishioners' secrets. She is tortured by her inability to escape this situation but doesn't see a way out, and believes that on the balance she's doing more good than harm in the Dregs.

The job of gathering secrets has been made far easier at Andraste's Ear by a magical Tevinter artifact present in the chapel. This white stone statue in the shape of a cat makes people genuinely happy when they tell secrets near it. Bann Nicola paid a small fortune for the relic in her youth, but it's been worth every copper, as it keeps locals returning week after week to unwittingly feed what they know into Bann Nicola's pipeline of espionage.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE RESTORATION OF IMPERIAL RULE

Not everyone was happy with the end of Orlesian rule in Ferelden. For three-quarters of an age enterprising Orlesian nobles moved to Denerim to seek fame and fortune, and became the heart of Denerim's aristocracy. When Meghren was overthrown many of these Orlesian nobles were cut down by angry Fereldan mobs. Those who survived the purge and remained in Denerim were forced to swear fealty to King Maric. Although forced to give back their lands, most were compensated based on what King Maric felt was fair. Many of these enriched but landless Orlesians remained in Denerim and became merchants, altering their names to sound more Fereldan.

A core of these Orlesian expatriates went on to form the Society for the Restoration of Imperial Rule. While nominally dedicated to the restoration of an Orlesian king to Ferelden, in truth the Restorationists are more of a social club. Its wealthy members have comfortable lives and no wish to risk their comfort in revolution. Still, the existence of the group is technically treason, so the Restorationists are careful to remain hidden.

While most Restorationists have Fereldan names, each member selects an Orlesian name to use for secret business. Thus, Osgood the fishmonger might be known to his secret confederates as "Guillaume."

The Restorationists essentially control the merchants' guild. Recently, their concerted efforts to keep their profits high have resulted in higher street prices for imported goods. While this has little effect on commoners, nobles have recently found the prices of luxuries and bulk goods more expensive than they'd wish. Bann Nicola is especially vexed by this situation, as maintaining her espionage network is very expensive.

SER BASIL, THE BASTARD

Ser Basil is a Restorationist in his early 30s, the offspring of an elf prostitute and an Orlesian bann named Luc. When Basil was born, Bann Nicola offered to take care of the noble's impending scandal by fostering Basil into one of her orphanages.

When Basil came of age, Bann Nicola told him of his heritage and arranged for him to serve an arl in Ferelden's outlands. He soon attained knighthood.

Now a noble, Ser Basil has returned to Denerim. Bann Nicola's spymaster Crannoch secretly helped him find his way to the Restorationists. Ser Basil has proven to be a dedicated and loyal member, choosing for himself the Orlesian sobriquet "Xavier." Crannoch further ensured that Ser Basil learned that his father's lands had been given to a Fereldan bann named Gordon Curwen, after Curwen slew Ser Basil's father.

Bann Curwen has a daughter, Tanith. In the coming days, Bann Nicola will throw a grand ball to announce publicly Tanith's engagement to Adric, who is Nicola's grandson and the scion of House Baranti.

Bann Nicola has invited Ser Basil to the event, knowing that he wants to rectify his family's dishonor by convincing Bann Curwen to offer Tanith's hand to him. Ser Basil will learn at the event that Tanith has been promised to Adric instead, but Bann Nicola's machinations will take things one step further: She has hired an elven assassin to kill Bann Curwen, Tanith, and even her own grandson Adric. Her plan is that Ser Basil will discover the bodies and then be implicated by his own squire—who is secretly in Bann Nicola's employ—as having both hired the assassin (to eliminate Curwen and Adric) and killed Tanith (upon her rejection of his offer of marriage).

In addition to eliminating a troublesome grandchild, Bann Nicola hopes to throw ultimate blame for the assassination plot on the Restorationists and the city elves, inciting purges of both. The stature of her house will increase (for having brought these foul machinations to light) and she'll get more control over commerce in Denerim in the bargain. Implicating elves amounts to a handy bonus. Bann Nicola knows that the king has been looking for a good excuse to purge the Alienage, and she's sure he'll be grateful if she can provide it.

MAJOR NPCs

The following sections provide statistics and details on the major NPCs.

BANN NICOLA BARANTI

Bann Nicola Baranti is a Fereldan woman in her 70s, physically frail but exceptionally strong-willed. She is absolutely charming and projects an image tantamount to saintliness. While clearly proud, she cultivates a public sense of good humor, laughing at her own foibles, that makes her easy to like. This is an act; she invariably rages about perceived slights in private, but she never lets her public mask slip. Bann Nicola is terrified of public humiliation, and so has built a social armor of public goodwill.

Bann Nicola surrounds herself with individuals who are charming and bright (to a point), but who are not particularly inquisitive—good conversationalists who won't pry, essentially. Her servants are kindlier and more physically attractive than most in Denerim; she does not tolerate cruelty in her guards or servants, and dismisses anyone who could spoil her good reputation.

BANDO

Bando, Bann Nicola's social secretary and advisor, is a male dwarf who prefers not to discuss the reasons he left Orzammar other than to say, "A lady was involved." He is fully loyal and fully within Bann Nicola's confidence. He is precise in his words and actions, and notorious for successfully organizing social events under crushing pressures of time and ego. Anyone who wishes to speak to Bann Nicola must satisfy Bando first.

BANN NICOLA BARANTI

Charming aristocrat and cunning mastermind.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 8 (BARGAINING, DECEPTION, PERSUASION, SEDUCTION); CONSTITUTION -1; CUNNING 5 (CULTURAL LORE); DEXTERITY 0; MAGIC -1; PERCEPTION 6 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH -2; WILLPOWER 0 (COURAGE, SELF-DISCIPLINE)



ADRIC BARANTI

Adric is Bann Nicola's only grandson. An accomplished warrior, he is also a handsome and charming womanizer who enjoys the role of local celebrity.

Adric is brighter than he appears, and has figured out just enough about his grandmother's schemes to suspect she was behind his parents' deaths. He inherited his grandmother's cold ambition without her thirst for popular acclaim. Although he has not yet moved against Bann Nicola, he believes that day will come. Ruthlessly opportunistic, he won't hesitate to plunge Denerim society into chaos if need be. He can either be an ally or enemy to the PCs, depending on how they handle him.

Adric isn't thrilled with the marriage being arranged for him (not that he has bothered to meet Tanith). He's

BANDO

Bann Nicola's social secretary.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 5 (DECEPTION, ETIQUETTE, PERSUASION); CONSTITUTION 2 (STAMINA); CUNNING 3 (CULTURAL LORE, RELIGIOUS LORE); DEXTERITY 0; MAGIC -2; PERCEPTION 3 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH 2; WILLPOWER 2 (SELF-DISCIPLINE).

ADRIC BARANTI

Womanizer, heir, and dilettante.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

4	COMMUNICATION (DECEPTION, PERSUASION)
3	CONSTITUTION
2	CUNNING
4	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES, RIDING)
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
1	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
14	60	14	10

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BASTARD SWORD	+6	2D6+5
SHORT SWORD	+6	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Dual Strike and Lightning Attack.*

Class Powers (Warrior 5): *Stunt Bonus (Dual Strike 3 SP).*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman), Dual Weapon Style (Journeyman), Single Weapon Style (Novice), Thrown Weapon Style (Novice), and Unarmed Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY PLATE ARMOR, BASTARD SWORD, AND SHORT SWORD.

MARISSA

Junior spymaster and mage.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

2	COMMUNICATION (DECEPTION)
1	CONSTITUTION
3	CUNNING (ARCANE LORE, HISTORICAL LORE)
4	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES)
4	MAGIC (ARCANE LANCE)
2	PERCEPTION
0	STRENGTH
3	WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
14	36	14	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
ARCANE LANCE	+8	1D6+6	16 YARDS
SHORT SWORD	+6	1D6+2	—

POWERS

SPELLPOWER: 14 **MANA:** 36

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Pierce Armor.*

CLASS POWERS (MAGE 4): *Arcane Lance and Spell Lance.*

TALENTS: *Contacts (Journeyman), Linguistics (Novice–Orlesian), and Lore (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Staves.*

SPELLS: *Flame Blast, Glyph of Paralysis, Rock Armor, Weakness, and Winter's Grasp.*

EQUIPMENT

WAND, SHORT SWORD, AND JOURNAL OF CONFESSIONS (SEE **PART 4: 5. THE FINAL CONNECTION**).



taken to venting his displeasure by flaunting romantic conquests in front of his grandmother.

CRANNOCH

Crannoch is Bann Nicola's fanatically loyal senior spymaster. A grizzled man in his 60s, Crannoch does not appear personally in this adventure, as he is currently out of Denerim in Orzammar, handling his mistress's business. Crannoch knows about, understands, and approves of every secret scheme that Bann Nicola orchestrates.

Crannoch makes an excellent continuing nemesis for the PCs if they take down Bann Nicola. Whether his loyalty transfers to Adric in the event of Nicola's death or ouster remains to be seen.

MARISSA

Marissa is Bann Nicola's junior spymaster. Another of Bann Nicola's orphans, Marissa was raised as Crannoch's foster daughter. She is mousy but attractive, and a Circle mage. While dangerous and cunning, she is not as loyal to Bann Nicola as Crannoch is, and ultimately

offers up what she knows of Bann Nicola in exchange for her life and (if she can manage it) the safety of her lover, Lorraine, who is Ser Basil's squire.

CAPTAIN BRAEDON

Captain Braedon is the head of Bann Nicola's house guard. He's a solid man in his 40s, serious and charismatic, honorable and solid, and prone to fury when angered. Braedon is an extremely dangerous foe, and fiercely loyal to his mistress. He doesn't know about any of the bann's blackmail schemes, but it wouldn't change his outlook much if he did – the relationships among the nobility amount to strange business he's pleased not to understand or be personally involved in. On the other hand, having proof of Bann Nicola's involvement in the Stilled Tongue cult's perverse activities would rouse his fury to the point that he could probably be goaded into running his mistress through...at which point he'd likely fall on his sword for his own involvement – unwitting though it was – in House Baranti's recurring dance with the cult in Denerim.

It's conceivable that Braedon could die in **Part 1: The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue**. If that happens, the various roles he plays in later encounters fall to various other associates and hirelings of Bann Nicola.

OPTIONAL SUBPLOTS

Bann Nicola has been busy over the years, and the number of intrigues she's masterminded to make House Baranti look good defies imagination. A sampling of past plots is included below. Any of these can be brought into **A Fragile Web** as an optional subplot, with their survivors or injured parties asking the PCs for help to discover the truth about what's happened to them.

FIRE

Denerim's buildings are close-packed, and substantial fires break out from time to time. Crannoch has paid arsonists on more than one occasion to set such conflagrations, usually in slums or parts of the city owned by those whose property Bann Nicola would like to purchase. House Baranti guards are usually on hand to help control the fire and usher innocents to safety, earning glory for her family. Bann Nicola's enemies have frequently been framed for these acts of arson.

ASSASSINATION

Being important enough to be a target of assassination is quite prestigious, and from time to time Bann Nicola's spymasters engineer a fake attempt on her life. These take place in highly public areas, the better to

CAPTAIN BRAEDON

Noble head of the Baranti house guard.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP)
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
3	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES, RIDING)
-1	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
5	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
3	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	40	15	10

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
LONG SWORD	+7	2D6+5	
DAGGER	+5	1D6+6	
CROSSBOW	+1	2D6+2	30/60 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Disarm and Defensive Stance.*

CLASS POWERS (WARRIOR 4): *Stunt Bonus (Dual Strike 3 SP).*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman), Single Weapon Style (Novice), Weapon and Shield Style (Journeyman).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, Light Blades, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY PLATE ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, LONG SWORD, DAGGER, CROSSBOW, AND 20 BOLTS.

spread word of her fortuitous survival (not to mention the heroism of her bodyguards).

PLAGUE

Nearly 40 years ago, Bann Nicola's agents poisoned the wells in the Elven Alienage, then "researched" and provided a cure to the plague before more than a few hundred had perished. The older elves remain appreciative to this day for her kindness to them in their time of need. Much of the Denerim real estate owned by Bann Nicola was purchased for rock-bottom prices from city-dwellers fleeing the heinous disease.

SINKING SHIPS

Bann Nicola's agents hire saboteurs to sink trade vessels making port in Denerim's harbor during storms with some frequency. House Baranti sailors are frequently nearby to rescue the survivors, and rescued sailors are always put up in dockside Baranti property for free until they are able to get back on their feet. The most recent casualty was a ship called the *Saltdagger*, sunk to the bottom of the harbor earlier this year.

TROUBLESHOOTING PC MOTIVATIONS

Adventures like **A Fragile Web**, which focus primarily on the intrigues between characters, are different from adventures whose primary challenges are martial or physical. One of the critical differences is that often, a small decision on the PCs' part can be enough to derail your best-laid plans and send the game in an entirely unforeseen direction. This is neither good nor bad; it simply *is*. And for the *Dragon Age RPG* to function as a game where the PCs are pressed to make moral choices and live with the consequences, it *must be*.

There are at least two points in **A Fragile Web** that are particularly susceptible to the players making plot-derailing choices such as these.

The first is that the players may not be sufficiently motivated by Ser Greta's situation (or Andiel's plight) to become involved in the investigation of who is blackmailing Ser Greta. If they simply decline this mission, it can seem like a roadblock that brings the entire adventure to a standstill.

The second is that even upon discovering that Bann Nicola is involved in nefarious activities, the PCs may simply not care, coming down on the side of their own financial expediency over any moral implications of Bann Nicola's questionable acts.

Both of these problems—and similar problems that may arise both in **A Fragile Web** or elsewhere in your *Dragon Age* campaign—can be solved with either of two different general approaches.

The first approach is to simply improvise logically from the situation at hand, going as far afield from your original plans as logic and drama require. If the PCs choose not to take up the job Andiel sets before them, so what? Simply move on to the next thing, presenting them with some other adventure. If the PCs aren't worried about Bann Nicola's plans and plottings once they learn about them, so be it. That's a fine time for you to present them with a new mission to undertake on her behalf that's even more unsavory than the last. The advantage of this approach is that it plays to the strength of a tabletop roleplaying game, that anything the players can imagine can happen, whether anyone thought of it in advance or not. The disadvantage is that it can be unfulfilling for players who're used to the neat stories presented in films and novels.

The second approach is to perform triage in order to re-orient events to the planned spineplot. As GM, you simply figure out the shortest route to getting the PCs back on track and dangle that in front of them until things are once more moving in the direction you prefer. If the PCs don't care about Andiel's problem, perhaps they'd be more motivated if Ser Greta herself came to them, offering more money or some political opportunity that you know the heroesy covet. If the PCs aren't alarmed that Bann Nicola is learning privy to the secrets of the Andraste's Ear confessionals, perhaps they'll be more alarmed once they somehow learn that she's planning to have Bann Curwen killed. The advantage of this approach is that it best preserves the preparation you may have put into reading this the adventure, or creating your own. The disadvantage is that it can make the players feel like they're being manipulated, which can harm the illusion that they're the masters of their heroes' characters' fates.

Neither approach—improvisation or triage—is right for every GM, every group of players, every adventure, or every situation. Sometimes a mix of the two strategies is most appropriate when solving a problem of Player Character motivation. Simply be aware of both options, here in **A Fragile Web** as well as in your own political adventures, and use each as seems appropriate.

MONSTERS

Whenever Bann Nicola feels her public adulation is dropping she surreptitiously imports monsters from elsewhere in Thedas and has them released in the city. Her sponsored adventurers of the hour are dispatched to hunt down the creatures before too many citizens are slain. Past monsters have included giant spiders, Korrucari crocodiles, and a werewolf.

BANDITRY

Bann Nicola occasionally funds bandits who stop caravans from bringing some particular good to Denerim. She continues to provide her house's stocks of that

type of good at reasonable prices as a charity, and sends her guards out to destroy the bandits.

FEUDS AMONG NOBLES

Time and time again, Bann Nicola has found it convenient to carefully set other noble houses to fighting against each other through misinformation and whispered rumors. Inevitably, both families are weakened, and come out of the conflict looking selfish and petulant.

EXTERNAL MILITARY THREATS

Bann Nicola has funded foreign mercenaries to raid Ferelden when she feels the king has allowed the

national defenses to grow weak. While technically treasonous, she views these as acts of great patriotism, since the attacks ultimately lead to a strengthening of Ferelden's military and provide a common enemy for Fereldans to detest. Her preferred foils in such affairs are easily manipulated Orlesian hotheads.

PART 1

THE CHANTRY OF THE STILLED TONGUE

The adventure begins as the PCs are moving through Denerim's streets shortly before midnight on a misty night. Mother Brianna has sent four groups of cultists out into the city to return with kidnapped children and fresh tongues. The PCs stumble upon one such group with a kidnapped, tongueless boy in tow. After dealing with these obvious malefactors, the heroes join forces with Bann Nicola's house guard to defeat the other groups moving through the city. The PCs eventually wind up at the cultists' headquarters where they confront the cultists' insane leader.

The primary goal of these encounters is to introduce the PCs to House Baranti as friends and allies who seek to do good in the city, and to give the PCs a reason to meet Bann Nicola. It also provides a link between the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue, the Baranti orphanages, and the Andraste's Ear chantry. This will be an important set of connections for the PCs to understand later in the adventure, when they begin to suspect that House Baranti might actually be organizing and funding these cultists.

If any of the characters are from Denerim they may already know the good reputation of Bann Nicola and her house, and may even personally know some of her guardsmen.

ENVIRONS: DENERIM

Any given Fereldan city was likely once a lone fort or castle where the region's people could be gathered in case of attack. Over decades and ages, though, buildings grow up outside these fortifications as the dangers of war recede. This has been the case with Denerim. The core castle remains—and in fact, has grown into a full-fledged fortress—while the city has grown rapidly around it.

Today, most of the streets in Denerim are made of packed dirt, with only the wealthier streets being fully cobbled. Buildings have been laid down—and thus, streets and alleys formed—haphazardly, according to no common plan. At best, buildings are arranged according to their functions. Inns and taverns are found near the city's gates; trade markets are surrounded by shops, warehouses, and guild-houses; and in between them all, houses are packed practically on top of one another.

One's social standing can be measured by how close one lives to Fort Drakon, the highest edifice in Denerim. Near the fortress can be found noble estates, wide parkways, beautiful chantries, and the homes of merchant princes. Further down the hill, the Market District is the heart of Denerim's bustling trade. Denerim's Poor Quarter, near the base of the hill, has been accurately called a labyrinth, on top of being filthy from both the mud in the roads and the lack of a proper sewage system. The worst of the Poor Quarter is the Elven Alienage, which is walled off from the rest of the city.

By civilized standards Fereldan cities are anarchic, and Denerim is no exception. The Fereldan penchant for personal freedom engenders a laissez-faire attitude towards law enforcement and public behavior in general. The King's Patrol is intended more to defend the city and keep order rather than to enforce the laws, though it has expanded into the latter role, to a certain extent, over time. Even so, while the worst offenses are put down, petty crimes are often ignored and the citi-

"Denerim, the capital of Ferelden, began as an outpost of the ancient Tevinter Imperium. Its mages rose up a dark tower from the side of a mountain, a symbol of the Imperium's power. As the Imperium faded, the tower passed to the hands of the teyrns that ruled the region for a millennium. Today that tower still stands as Fort Drakon, immediately recognizable to any ship that approaches the rocky coast. The city that has sprung up around it has almost been carved out of the side of the mountain it rests on, and during the Dragon Age, its population has grown beyond the city's ability to cope. The cramped districts, joined to each other by a network of bridges, are built one almost on top of the other. The narrow streets of the Lower Docks have an almost labyrinthine quality, and the walled-off Elven Alienage is so overpopulated that several purges have been required to keep order in the last decade alone."

—From *IN PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE: THE TRAVELS OF A CHANTRY SCHOLAR*, by Brother Genitivi



The City of Denerim



Amaranthine
Ocean

Aragon River

The North Road

The West Road

zenry left to their own recourses. Commerce is largely unregulated as long as taxes are paid. Businesses such as brothels and gambling halls are not only tolerated but expected.

ENVIRONS: THE DREGS

The Dregs, in which **Part 1: The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue** takes place, is a working-class neighborhood of servants and laborers in Denerim's Poor Quarter, located west of the Market District and north of the River Drakon. Its streets are flat and flood when it rains.

The Dregs is safer than some Poor Quarter neighborhoods because the locals do their best to keep out criminals and riff-raff, to keep their children and their homes safe. In this regard, the Dregs has much in common with the Elven Alienage: Its residents know and look out for each other as long as they can do so without putting themselves in danger. Even so, it isn't uncommon for locals to make a point of traveling in groups after dark for safety's sake, or for outsiders passing through to hire armed escorts.

1. CULTISTS IN THE MIST

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs stumble into Stilled Tongue cultists carrying a fresh victim, a young boy whose tongue has been recently cut out.

It's a cool and misty night in Denerim. All but the nearest torches and lanterns are glowing blobs of light hanging in midair. The city smells like a wet dog.

In this kind of mist you can hear people approaching long before you can see them. You'd peg the half-dozen or so pairs of feet pounding toward you in the darkness as guardsmen if it weren't for the horrible gurgling.

Five people emerge from the mist. All wear off-white robes stained with blood. One carries a child's body over his shoulder.

The cultists are three men and two women. The child is eight years old, unconscious, his tongue cut out of his mouth moments before. Allow each PC to declare his immediate response and take those actions into account while the group of five stops:

When they see you, the five slow to a halt. "Go about your business, strangers," spits the burly man carrying the child. "This is the Maker's work."

NIGHT ATMOSPHERE

While the PCs are outdoors during **Part 1: The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue** they are affected by the dark misty conditions of this Denerim night. They suffer a -2 penalty on most Perception tests, as well as ranged attack rolls.

A successful **TN 9 Perception (Seeing)** test makes it clear that some awful trauma has befallen the carried boy; blood still dribbles from his mouth.

If questioned, the burly man speaks for the group while they edge around the PCs, clearly in a rush. They are in a hurry to get back to their headquarters on Cooper Street. Although not aware that they're already being pursued, they're certainly aware that pursuit will be forthcoming.

The burly man's responses to religious questions are dubious. ("We cleanse the unclean! We render that heresy unspoken which cannot be unsaid! Out of our way, lest the Maker's wrath fall on you as well!") A **TN 9 Cunning (Religious Lore)** test suggests that, doctrinally speaking, these apparent kidnappers are on shaky ground to say the least.

STILLED TONGUE CULTISTS

Misguided religious zealots.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)	
2	COMMUNICATION
1	CONSTITUTION
-1	CUNNING
3	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES)
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION
3	STRENGTH
1	WILLPOWER (COURAGE, SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	30	14	4

ATTACKS		
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
SHORT SWORD	+5	1D6+5
DAGGER	+5	1D6+4

POWERS
FAVORED STUNTS: Knock Prone (so they can flee the scene).
TALENTS: Single Weapon Style (Novice).
WEAPON GROUPS: Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.

EQUIPMENT
 LOOSE ROBE OVER HEAVY LEATHER ARMOR, DAGGER, AND SHORT SWORD. THEIR LEADER (THE ONE CARRYING THE BOY) ALSO HAS THE BOY'S TONGUE AND A SCRAP OF PAPER WITH FOUR ADDRESSES ON IT, ONE OF WHICH IS CIRCLED.



If the heroes attack the cultists they draw their weapons (and drop the boy) and fight to the death.

After the fight, a PC making a **TN 7 Cunning (Healing) test** discovers that the boy's tongue has been cut out with a knife. A heal action, or healing magic, stops his bleeding and leaves him unconscious. Additional healing magic wakes him and he immediately begins to gurgle out horrified screams.

Given an opportunity to reflect (in other words, after the fight), a PC who makes a **TN 15 Cunning (Religious Lore) test** recalls that a cult known as the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue seems to surface in Denerim every few years, no matter how effectively it was stamped out the last time. Their modus operandi—as far as the successful PC can recall—is to kidnap children and cut out their tongues, usually murdering their parents in the process. No one particularly understands the doctrine behind their actions. The most common theory is that the cult believes these children will one day speak heresies against the Maker. No one knows how the children are selected.

As the PCs are trying to figure out what to do next, more footsteps are heard coming up the street. Moments later, four men in heavy mail, carrying swords, appear out of the mist, the emblem of House Baranti emblazoned on their shields.

2. THE BARANTI GUARD

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

House Baranti guardsmen arrive and enlist the PCs' aid in tracking down other cultists.

You hear their running feet before you see them, and then four men in heavy mail, carrying swords in hand, appear out of the mist. They stop when they see the bodies, and one speaks:

"I'm Braedon, captain of Bann Nicola Baranti's house guard." He indicates the corpses of the cultists and continues: "We learned these bastards were out again tonight. We weren't fast enough to stop the first kidnapping. Thank the Maker you dealt with this one."

Braedon brandishes a piece of paper with four addresses on it, similar to the one you just found. "There are two more groups out there, and no time. Who are you people? Can you help?"

Captain Braedon's statistics are given in the **Major NPCs** section. The statistics for his rank and file guardsmen appear in this section. It requires only a **TN 7 Cunning (Heraldry) test** to correctly identify the House Baranti emblems on the guards' shields.

BARANTI GUARDSMEN

Professional soldiers in Bann Nicola's employ

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
2	DEXTERITY (BOWS)
0	MAGIC
0	PERCEPTION
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	40	14	7

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
LONG SWORD	+6	2D6+4	
DAGGER	+2	1D6+3	
CROSSBOW	+4	2D6+1	30/60 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Disarm and Skirmish.*

TALENTS: *Archery Style (Novice), Armor Training (Novice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY MAIL ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, LONG SWORD, DAGGER, CROSSBOW, AND 20 BOLTS.

A **TN 9 Perception (Empathy) test** suggests that Braedon is angry with himself, likely for having failed to stop two kidnappings.

If interrogated, Braedon explains more about his suspicion that these are cultists of the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue, and offers the basic information about the cult that the PCs may or may not have recalled based on their test in the previous encounter.

Assuming that the PCs are willing to help track down the remaining cultists, Braedon proposes a plan:

"There're two more addresses. Take the one on Tern Street. We'll take Dogget Lane, and I'll leave one of my men to see to the boy." He adds, under his breath, regarding the boy: "We came from his house. Parents murdered." He grimaces.

"If we don't see each other again tonight, look for me tomorrow at Bann Nicola Baranti's manor. There's a reward in it." Without waiting for your assent, Braedon and his men head out.

The address on Tern Street is in this same neighborhood, about five blocks away toward the river.

3. TERN STREET CULTISTS

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs arrive at a kidnapping in progress.

If the PCs didn't delay before coming to Tern Street, they arrive while the cultists are inside the house and the family is still alive. In that case, read this:

As you approach, nothing seems out of the ordinary at the Tern Street house. The house is dark inside save for a single dim light, probably from a single candle. Make a **Perception (Seeing or Hearing) test**.

Given any substantial delay, though, the heroes arrive after the girl's tongue has been cut out and after her family has been slain. If that's what happened:

As you approach the house on Tern Street, you see that the front door is hanging open and the house is dark. What do you do?

The basic timeline of events is as follows:

When the five cultists arrived here (at about the same time the PCs were talking to Braedon) a noisy entrance gave the family enough time to lock themselves in the bedroom of their small house, but it's only a matter of time before the cultists manage to break through the barricaded door.

If the PCs did not delay, they arrive as three cultists are in the front room doing their best to break open the door. One of their fellows is keeping watch in the alley behind the house to prevent any escape through the windows while the fifth—an apostate mage—prepares to hurl an arcane bolt at the door.

The dim light is not a candle, but rather, the apostate's active Spell Wisp.

CULTIST KIDNAPPING

DRAGON DIE

SPOTTED OR HEARD

1	You hear muffled shouting and screaming from inside. Sounds like someone's crying for help!
2-3	You can also hear thumping and cursing—like someone's trying to break down a door.
4-5	The light in the window doesn't flicker like a candle would. It looks like some kind of magic to you. (On a further TN 13 Cunning (Arcane Lore) test , the fact that the light is a Spell Wisp can be ascertained.)
6	You see a shadow move across a wall near an entrance to the alley that you'd guess runs behind the house. There's someone back there.

STILLED TONGUE APOSTATE

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION (DECEPTION)
0	CONSTITUTION
2	CUNNING (NATURAL LORE)
2	DEXTERITY (STAVES)
4	MAGIC (ARCANE LANCE)
1	PERCEPTION
-1	STRENGTH
3	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	25	12	4*

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
ARCANE LANCE	+6	1D6+4	16 YARDS
QUARTERSTAFF	+4	1D6	—

POWERS

SPELLPOWER: 14 MANA: 26 (18*)

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Spell.*

CLASS POWERS (MAGE 2): *Arcane Lance.*

SPELLS: *Arcane Bolt, Rock Armor, Spell Wisp, and Walking Bomb.*

TALENTS: *Chirurgy (Novice) and Lore (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Staves.*

*FROM ROCK ARMOR **AFTER SPELL WISP AND ROCK ARMOR

EQUIPMENT

QUARTERSTAFF, DAGGER, AND WAND.

Success at the **TN 11 Perception (Seeing or Hearing) test** reveals information that depends on the dragon die. If multiple PCs succeed at the Perception test, spread the information on the **Cultist Kidnapping** table, up to and including their best dragon die result among them.

The four mundane cultists have the same stats as those the heroes fought in **Part 1: 1. Cultists in the Mist**. The apostate's statistics are given below.

If they come under attack, the cultists fight back, to the death. If an audible fight breaks out between the PCs and the cultists inside the house, the back-alley cultist circles around to the front, hoping to attack the heroes from behind.

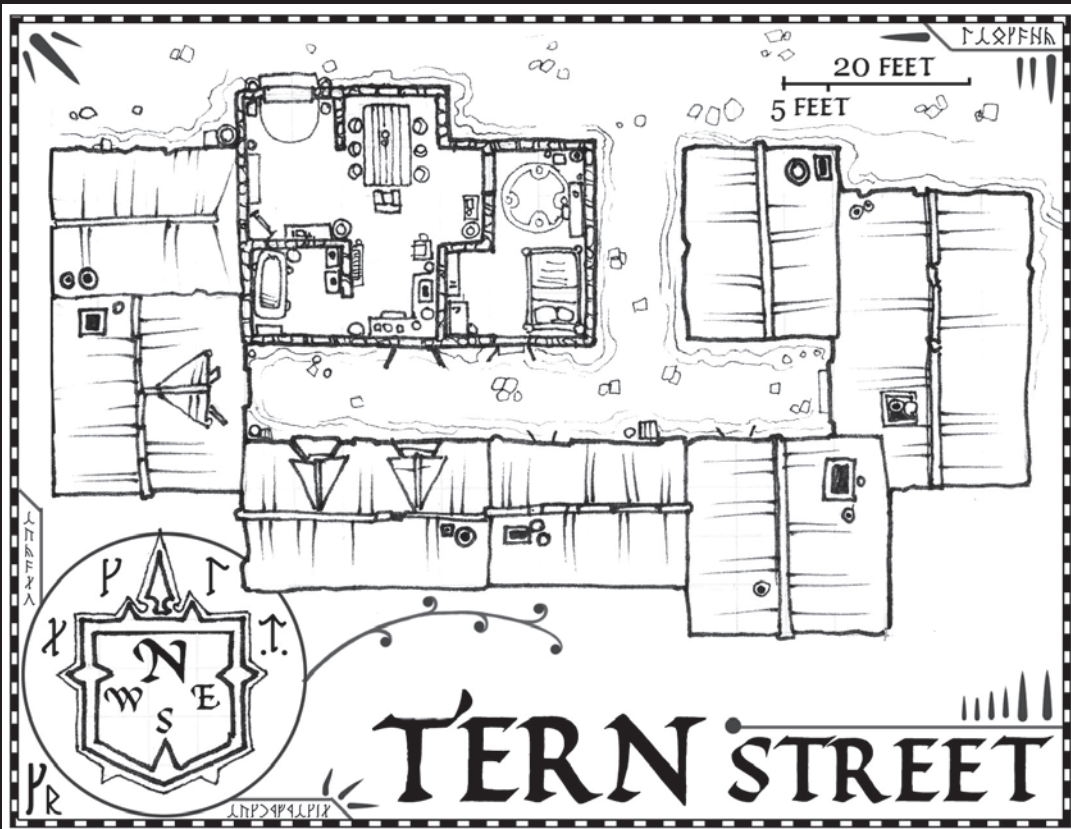
The girl targeted by the cultists is named Tessa. Neither she nor her dockworker parents, Hother and Lania, have any idea why they might have been singled out for this attack. They're a poor family of no particular distinction, and they remain inside the barricaded bedroom until killed by the cultists or coaxed forth by PCs making a **TN 11 Communication (Persuasion) test**. In the meantime, they continue screaming and shouting for help.

The apostate has a note just like the one the PCs found in the alley and Braedon had in his hand (save that the Tern Street address is circled). Here, however, there's something else scribbled on the back:

Stilled Tongues Speak No Heresy! Bring to Mother Brianna. End of Cooper Lane.

If the PCs dallied on their way to Tern Street and discover the house door hanging open, they're too late. Hother and Lania lie dead and Tessa is gone. You have two options:

- You can allow the PCs a **TN 11 Perception (Hearing) test** to catch the sound of the cultists fleeing the scene with Tessa over their shoulder; pursuit presumably ensues.
- Alternately, you can simply allow the PCs to fail. In that case, the PCs meet Bann Nicola (assuming that they go to her manor house either that night or the next day) under less



than triumphant circumstances and learn that Braedon and the pair of guardsmen he took with him to Cooper Lane still haven't been heard from.

Assuming that the PCs find the note, they're likely to follow up on the Cooper Lane clue next.

4. THE CHANTRY OF THE STILLED TONGUE

EXPLORATION AND COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs enter the Stilled Tongue chantry and confront mad Mother Brianna.

The headquarters of the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue are in an abandoned building at the end of Cooper Lane, at the northern end of the Dregs, right up against the northern city wall.

Having defeated the cultists at Dogget Lane, Braedon and the surviving Baranti guardsmen have beaten the PCs to Cooper Lane. Unfortunately for them, they were beaten unconscious and dragged upstairs to be sacrificed at the cult's convenience.

When the PCs arrive:

From the outside, the building at the end of Cooper Lane looks no different than those surrounding it. It's stone, backed right up to the wall of the city, stands two stories tall, and has but one door.

What's your plan?

The following sections describe the various chambers and rooms shown on the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue map.

ENTRY

This room, lit by flickering torches, is barely furnished. The filthy floor is covered by nearly two dozen straw pallets. Two cultists wait here in anticipation of returning kidnapers. They're a bit more combat-worthy than the cultists the heroes have fought to this point, and having just survived Braedon's attack, they've donned their armor and have their weapons in hand (which they wouldn't otherwise wear and carry

STILLED TONGUE MUSCLE

Unlike the rank-and-file sent out to slaughter parents and kidnap children, these cultists are trained warriors.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
1	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES)
-1	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (HEARING)
5	STRENGTH (AXES, CLIMBING)
2	WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	55	12	7

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
TWO-HANDED AXE	+7	3D6+5
DAGGER	+4	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Dual Strike* and *Mighty Blow*.

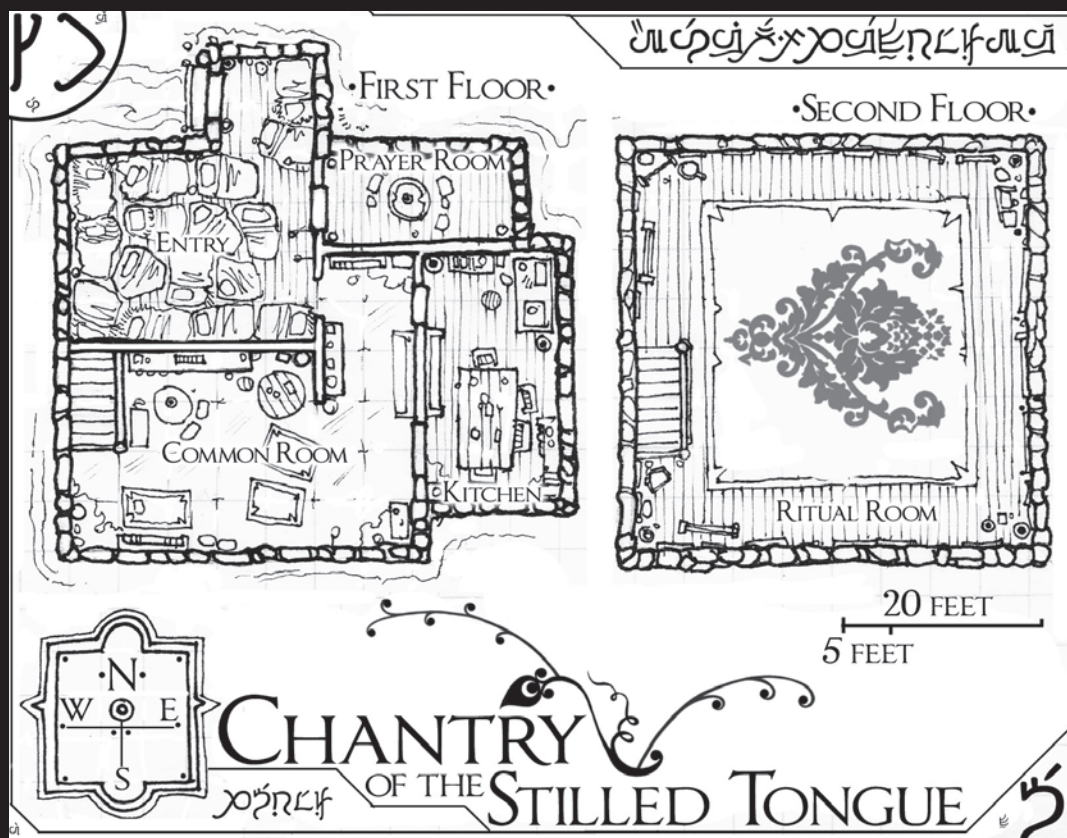
Class Powers (Warrior 5): *Stunt Bonus (Dual Strike 3 SP)*.

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman)*, *Single Weapon Style (Novice)*, and *Two-Hander Style (Journeyman)*.

WEAPON GROUPS: *Axes*, *Bludgeons*, *Brawling*, *Heavy Blades*, and *Light Blades*.

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY MAIL ARMOR, TWO-HANDED AXE, AND DAGGER.





here) just in case. Their statistics are provided on this page, at right. They fight to the death.

KITCHEN

This filthy room, lousy with insects and encrusted with glop, is used as a communal kitchen.

PRAYER ROOM

This meditation room has a bare wooden floor and is unlit. It is used by cultists to pray for wisdom; in truth, the meditation practiced here makes it easier for Mother Brianna to influence their minds. A small crystal used in meditation sits in the exact center of the room, and is worth 90 sp.

COMMON ROOM

The Stilled Tongue cultists use this dingy room to sit, talk, and pray. If the three dead cultists in the corner and the uncongealed blood on the floor are any indication, there's been a fight here recently. A **TN 11 Perception (Seeing) test** suggests that the patterns and quantity of blood originated with more combatants than just the three corpses that remain. (This is where Braedon

and his men fought the three dead cultists and the two survivors from the entry.)

RITUAL ROOM

The large upstairs room is bare of furniture, but almost fifty mirrors line the walls, reflecting the room's interior in a myriad of strange and disturbing angles. When the PCs enter:

The upper floor is a single room, bare of furniture, whose walls are lined with dozens — maybe even hundreds — of mirrors of every shape and description. In the middle of the room stands a slim, beautiful woman, slowly rotating in place, swaying back and forth, admiring her many reflections. Braedon and two other unconscious Baranti guardsmen lie at her feet. The woman turns toward you with an angelic smile on her face.

"Welcome to the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue, where the Maker's chants are sung and every blasphemy rooted out. Have you stilled the tongues of the wicked? Have you brought me my children?" Her eyes suddenly turn hard. "Where is your offering?" she demands.

MOTHER BRIANNA

An unfortunate young woman possessed by an insane spirit from the Fade.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

4	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION
4	CUNNING (DECEPTION, SEDUCTION)
3	DEXTERITY
6	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION
5	STRENGTH
4	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	60	13	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
CLAWS	+5	1D6+5

POWERS

CHARM: *Mother Brianna is supernaturally persuasive. As long as she can speak, each round she can make one **OPPOSED COMMUNICATION (SEDUCTION) vs. WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)** TEST against a single target, or one **OPPOSED COMMUNICATION (DECEPTION) vs. WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)** TEST against all targets who can hear her. She receives a further +2 bonus to the former type of test because it allows her to concentrate her power against a single victim. Every PC whom Mother Brianna beats in a Deception test may not attack her for a number of rounds equal to her test's dragon die. A PC whom she beats in a Seduction test goes even further, defending her physically from attacks for a similar number of rounds.*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Mother Brianna gets a +3 on tests to resist spells or other magical effects.*

SUPERNATURAL CLAWS: *Mother Brianna's claws do penetrating damage.*

EQUIPMENT

NONE.

If the PCs move to immediately attack, Mother Brianna (for this is she) tries to treat with them. She wants them to understand that she is a valorous spirit who does the Maker's work by rooting out the iniquitous and profane before they can sin. If pressed, she offers to depart without fighting. If they refuse, she plants her foot on Braedon's neck and offers them his life in exchange for safe conduct. Make sure you put Mother Brianna's Charm power (see her stat block, below) to the best possible use when you conduct her interactions with the heroes.

Brianna's offers to depart peaceably are legitimate, but her insanity makes it difficult for her to understand when mortals are lying to her. That is to say, it's easy for the PCs to offer her safe conduct and then ambush her, if they choose.

If the PCs kill Mother Brianna's host body, its last words are "...the Maker's will be done."

Braedon and the other guardsmen can be roused once Mother Brianna is dead or has departed, assuming she hasn't slain them. They offer hearty thanks and invite the PCs to meet Bann Nicola the next day, asking where a formal invitation can be delivered before they hurry off to make their report to the bann.

A locked chest on the far side of the room contains what funds the cult possesses. A **TN 13 Dexterity (Lock Picking) test** or **TN 15 Strength (Might) test** are sufficient get the thing open. Inside is a small pouch containing 1 gp and 55 sp, another pouch containing 113 cp, three flasks containing lesser healing potions, and two flasks containing lesser lyrium potions.

PART 2

A WARM WELCOME

After hearing about the PCs' endeavors against the Stilled Tongue cultists, Bann Nicola wants to meet them, to discern whether they are a threat or a potential ally. She is certain that she has left no clues linking her with the cult, but her longevity is testament to the fact that it's better to be safe than sorry.

ENVIRONS: BARANTI MANOR HOUSE

Bann Nicola lives in her Denerim manor house; a competent steward sees to the needs of the farmers and craftsmen under her theoretical protection in the greater Bannorn.

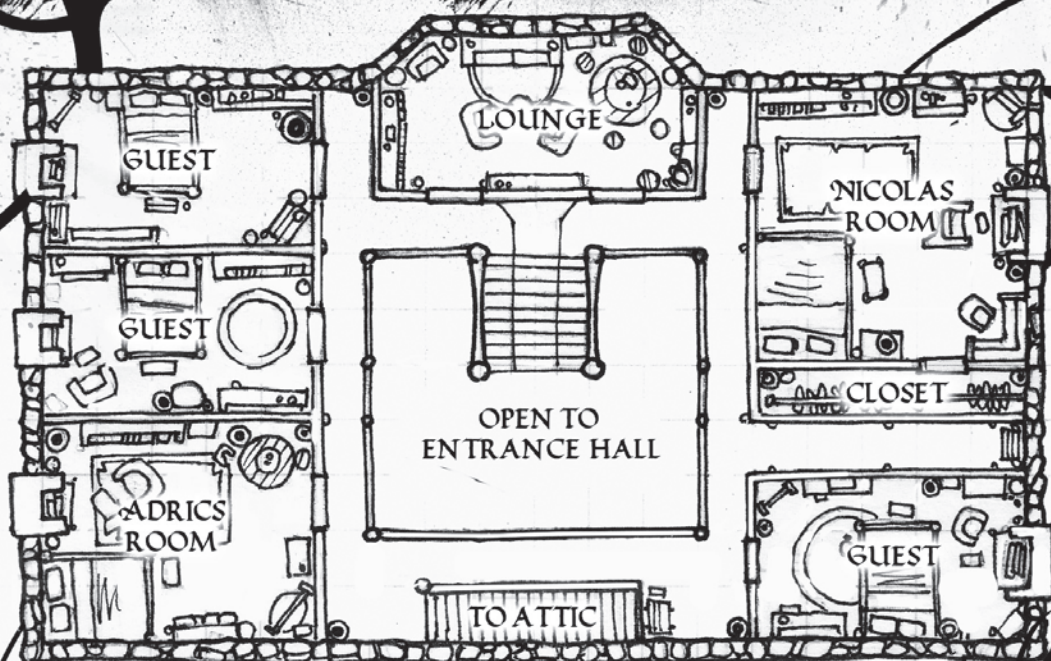
Bann Nicola sees her home as a showcase for her class and sophistication. She's keenly aware that some of Denerim's upper crust might consider her family to be social upstarts, so she overcompensates, striving to decorate with taste, creating an imposing home that reminds visitors of her status and wealth.

The house is situated near the royal palace in Denerim. Its grounds are surrounded by an eight-foot-high stone wall with an ornate iron gate. A guard barracks, stable, and garden house (for the gardener and his supplies) also sit on the property.

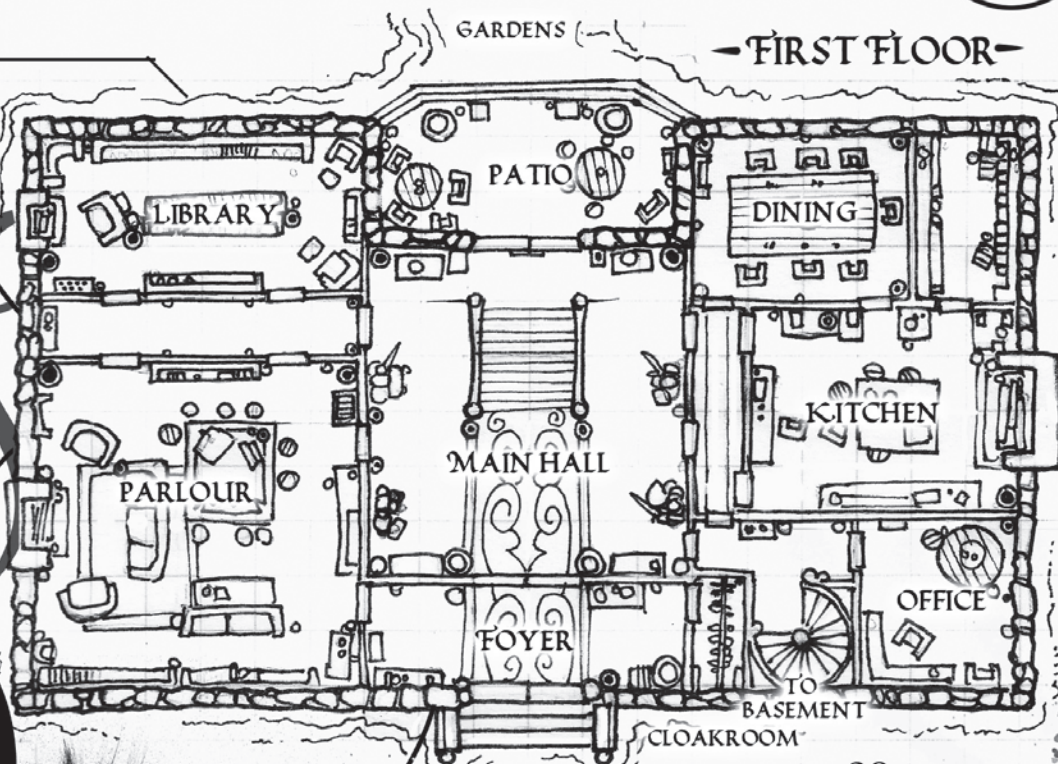
The main manor house consists of four floors. The basement (not mapped) is where the servants live and perform menial tasks. There are two outside entrances to the basement in the front and back of the house, and an interior staircase allows servants to ascend and descend to and from the main floor. The other unmapped area is the attic, which is used for storage.

The two main floors of the manor are mapped (see p. below) and largely self-explanatory. Guest rooms are large and can be sub-divided with heavy curtains, which also helps capture the heat from the fireplaces.

BARANTI MANOR



- SECOND FLOOR -



- FIRST FLOOR -

20 FEET
5 FEET

BLANDO
TIO

Bann Nicola prefers to sit in the library unless entertaining. Adric generally entertains his guests in his bedroom. Bando is everywhere all at once, a whirlwind force of household organization.

Unless staying with Bann Nicola, PCs arouse suspicion if they wander off the main floor.

1. A FORMAL INVITATION

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs are formally invited to dine with Bann Nicola.

You are going through your morning routine when there is a knock on your door. You open it on a well-dressed, short-haired woman who carries herself deferentially.

“Good morning, milord(s), I am Sheila, a servant to Bann Nicola Baranti. May I present an invitation to dine at Baranti Manor this evening, in honor of your service to Denerim?”

She extends a fine parchment invitation, sealed with wax.

The invitation is straightforward, hand-written in a fine hand.

Sheila would like to return to her mistress with news of whether the heroes are accepting the invitation, so she deferentially – and indirectly, if possible – suggests that the PCs should tell her whether they plan to come before she leaves.

If she judges it proper based on the PCs’ attitudes and appearance, Sheila politely offers – on the bann’s behalf, of course – the services of a fine local tailor to assemble appropriate dinner outfits. She doesn’t press if they refuse or seem uninterested, but the offer is genuine. She provides to any who wish it the address of a tailor who provides clothing of quality in just a few hours time, with the bill sent to Bann Nicola. (At your discretion, the PCs may be pointed to either Ragnar Traken’s shop, or that of his rival Kenzie, as a complete coincidence. See **Part 5: 2. The Clothier.**)

Before departing, Sheila asks if the PCs require a coach to collect them in the evening, which she sees is sent if they do.

If the PCs seek information about Bann Nicola’s reputation from whatever sources, a **TN 11 Cunning (Investigation) test** reveals that Bann Nicola is a woman of stature known to personally reward those who act heroically in service of Ferelden and its capital city. Although some people consider Bann Nicola a snob despite lowly origins, most locals have a high opinion of her due to the good works she sponsors.

2. DINNER WITH THE BANN

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

Bann Nicola thanks the heroes for their service to Denerim, and may offer to become their patron.

Baranti Manor is a beautiful mansion with manicured gardens just a stone’s throw from Drakon Castle. While the building’s stone architecture marks it as one of the oldest mansions in the city, you can see that many recent improvements have also been made. It is certainly one of the most elegant buildings on the street.

When the PCs arrive at Bann Nicola’s mansion, they are treated as heroes regardless of their appearance. Braedon greets them at the door and ushers them up the grand staircase to a lounge on the second floor whose windows overlook Bann Nicola’s impressive gardens.

Bann Nicola enters the lounge and welcomes the heroes just a few moments later, offering them drinks and other refreshments. She’s genuinely appreciative of their role in helping her guardsmen fight the cultists, and truly interested in hearing their story of those events as well as about their backgrounds and histories in general.

If the PCs don’t already know it, she shares a little background on the Chantry of the Stilled Tongue: how they reappear from time to time, and how she’s made it a personal goal to wipe them out. She commiserates over the sad fate of the poor children whom the cult has orphaned and rendered mute, mentioning her charitable orphanages and the priestly training she has provided for past victims of the cult.

Captain Braedon, Bando, and Adric join the bann and the PCs for dinner, which is served on the first floor. Adric is accompanied by a companion, Yolanda, the perky young daughter of a Denerim merchant of whom Bann Nicola is dismissive. Bann Nicola surmises (correctly) that Adric is simply trying to get a rise out of his grandmother given his impending engagement.

Dinner is an excellent opportunity for the PCs to get to know the important NPCs of **A Fragile Web**.

- Braedon is a bit sullen if Mother Brianna got away on his account.
- Bando occasionally (but always in conversational lulls) asks Bann Nicola questions regarding the upcoming grand ball. With a **TN 9 Perception (Empathy) test**, it is clear that these preparations have the bulk of his attention at the moment.
- Adric is deferential to his grandmother, but a PC who makes an **opposed Perception**

BANN NICOLA'S PATRONAGE

If the PCs accept Bann Nicola's offer to sponsor their activities, they find that the common bills they incur in Denerim are quickly and efficiently taken care of. Her patronage opens doors nearly wherever the PCs go, which is especially helpful for elves.

Further, the bann's minstrels circulate gossip so that all in Denerim eventually become aware that her house is associated with the PCs and their heroism. News of whatever successes the PCs achieve (especially if you insert additional adventures between **Part 2: A Warm Welcome** and **Part 3: A Betrayal of Trust**) spread quickly around Denerim, building the heroes' reputation (and, by extension, Bann Nicola's reputation) with stunning speed. Conversely, the PCs are summoned and taken to task for any failures or embarrassments—especially public failures—with equal swiftness. Bann Nicola's chief concern, after all, is her good reputation.

(Empathy) vs. Communication (Deception) test realizes that he's humoring her, and that there's an undercurrent of annoyance—perhaps even anger—in the things he says to and about her.

- Yolanda is well schooled and well mannered, but her head is vacant of original thought.

Bann Nicola makes sure to mention some of the good works she's done for the city, although Bando is also coached to bring up these subjects so the bann isn't constantly in the position of appearing vain by talking about herself. In addition to the orphanages, it probably comes up that Nicola was at the forefront of stabilizing Denerim in the aftermath of the rebellion against the Orlesians, has helped establish chantries and distribute food in the Poor Quarter, and is beloved in the Elven Alienage for past kindnesses to the elves. If asked how she can afford all these charities and still live a life of luxury, Bann Nicola notes that her example is infectious among Denerim's other banns, who also willingly contribute to her charitable works. (In reality, she compels their various financial sponsorships with blackmail.)

As a polite hostess (and because a large part of her motivation in organizing the dinner is to gather intelligence), Bann Nicola asks lots of questions of the PCs. What have they accomplished? What are their hopes and dreams? What brings them to Denerim? Would they put their lives on the line for a belief or a cause? How do they feel about helping fight the petty crime that seems to always fills Denerim's streets?

Bann Nicola invites any noble PCs to her grand ball. Others might also receive invitations, if their status or backgrounds would accrue glory to her by their presence.

At the end of a superb meal of expensive wine, roast chicken, and spiced nug (a docile pig-rabbit from the deep roads near Orzammar), Bann Nicola effusively thanks the PCs one final time.

If her interactions with the PCs warrant it, she ends the evening by proposing that she would be honored to sponsor their adventuring activities on an ongoing basis. In exchange for seeing that their bills for lodging, stabling, food, drink, and reasonable equipage are paid, she would offer them certain missions that fall outside the capabilities of her rank-and-file guardsmen. (And by "offer," she clearly means that she would expect them to take on these tasks without otherwise being paid for them.) See **Bann Nicola's Patronage** for additional information.

Whether the PCs accept or decline, Bann Nicola remains friendly, wanting them to think of her as an ally in any case. Even if the PCs turn her down, gossip spreads that the heroes acted in Bann Nicola's interest by helping defeat the cult, and the PCs briefly find that even strangers in Denerim's taverns buy them drinks and thank them.

PART 3

A BETRAYAL OF TRUST

Once the word gets out that the PCs are heroes, and associated with Bann Nicola, they are approached by a woman named Andiel, who is a servant of a Fereldan knight called Ser Greta. Andiel has a problem with her employer that she hopes the PCs can quietly solve. The PCs' investigations lead them to the chantry in the Dregs known as Andraste's Ear, and they eventually learn that it's a front for some kind of organized espionage. Further investigation leads them back to Bann Nicola.

There is no direct causal connection between the activities of **Part 1: The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue** and **Part 2: A Warm Welcome** on one hand, and the action that begins with **Part 3: A Betrayal of Trust** on the other hand. Although you can proceed directly from the former to the latter, the scenario is not harmed—and may actually work better, depending on how clever your players are—if unrelated adventures transpire between them. These could be adventures of your own devising, set in Denerim or outside it. You could insert **Amber Rage** or **Where Eagles Lair** here, or build up any of the adventure seeds presented in this book.

SER GRETA AND BANN NICOLA

Ser Greta is a loyal Fereldan who once had a romantic affair with a noble. This noble turned out to be an Orlesian spy who attempted to assassinate Teryn Logain. Although

the spy was slain in the assassination attempt and no one (other than Ser Greta's servant Andiel) ever learned of his affair with Ser Greta, Ser Greta has carried a crushing burden of guilt ever since. To salve her conscience, she goes out of her way to stand as a sentinel against Orlesian influences in Ferelden. This obviously puts her at odds with the Restorationists, and she has recently spent considerable time investigating their activities in Denerim. She believes she has located the nexus of their local activity in the shop of popular clothier Ragnar Trakan.

Ser Greta is completely incorrect in her suspicions about the role of Ragnar's shop, but Ser Greta's investigations are a problem for Bann Nicola, even so. If Ser Greta goes public with her suspicions about the Restorationists before Bann Nicola's plans come to fruition, then Bann Nicola will lose the credit for outing the society. Thus, Bann Nicola hopes to hold Ser Greta at bay until after her grand ball, at which point she'll actively recruit the knight to help her guardsmen root out the Orlesian traitors from their various hiding places (not to mention browbeat them into acquiescing to her economic demands).

1. THE WORRIED SERVANT

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

A worried servant comes to the PCs for help.

Set this scene in whatever location in Denerim makes the most sense; it can happen literally anywhere. (Although, if the PCs are staying at Bann Nicola's manor house while in the city, Andiel looks for an opportunity outside those walls.)

An elderly woman approaches you. She wears the plain clothes of a servant for a low-ranking person of means, perhaps a knight or merchant. Her eyes are downcast, her body language distressed.

"Please, good souls. I beg to speak a private word with you."

Once removed to some location of relative privacy, Andiel explains that she is the personal maid for a female knight named Ser Greta. Some years ago, Ser Greta had an ill-considered affair with an Orlesian named Philippe who turned out (quite unbeknownst to Ser Greta) to be a spy and assassin. Philippe was slain by Teryn Logain himself in a failed assassination attempt. In the years since, Ser Greta has been especially dedicated to defending Ferelden from Orlesian infiltrators.

Only Greta, Philippe, and Andiel knew of Greta and Philippe's scandalous and embarrassing liaison. Nevertheless, last week Ser Greta received an anonymous note informing her that her indiscretion was known, and that she must stop recent pursuits of "the Orlesian

society," lest Teryn Logain be informed of her complicity in the assassination attempt.

Ser Greta is furious with her servant, whom she assumes somehow allowed this information to slip. Andiel offers her life savings (267 sp, which she heartbreakingly begins to count out for them on the spot) for the PCs' assistance in clearing her name with her employer.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"WHY IS SER GRETA SO WORRIED ABOUT HER AFFAIR BECOMING PUBLIC?"

Ser Greta fears that her reputation would be ruined if it were known that she was involved with a man who tried to assassinate the king's advisor.

"IS IT POSSIBLE THAT SER GRETA OR PHILIPPE TOLD SOMEONE OF THEIR AFFAIR?"

I'm absolutely certain that Ser Greta told no one, she's so ashamed. I suppose it's possible that Philippe told someone, given that Orlesian spies are involved. I'm no expert in intrigues.

"DID YOU EVER TELL ANYONE SER GRETA'S SECRET?"

No!

(But, on a moment's reflection:)

Well... many months after the fact, years ago, I whispered it – out of guilt at my own involvement! – to the mute brother at the chapel of Andraste's Ear where I make my weekly confession to the Maker. And I'm not ashamed to admit that get-



ATTACKED...BY THUGS

Part 3: A Betrayal of Trust and **Part 4: Connecting the Dots** have a lot of exploration and roleplaying encounters, at the expense of opportunities for combat. Groups that prefer a lot of action may find their sword arms itching.

Given that Denerim is a dangerous place and that the PCs will be spending a fair amount of time in the neighborhoods of the Poor Quarter, feel free to spice things up with random street crime if need be. This isn't as arbitrary as it might seem; criminals often look for victims among those who're new to a given place (as PCs visiting from greater Ferelden might appear).

You can use the Fereldan Brigand stat block for common muggers and thieves (see the *Dragon Age Set 1 Game Master's Guide*, page 30).

CONFRONTING SER GRETA

The PCs may confront Ser Greta in spite of Andiel's pleas to the contrary. Such a meeting is described in **Part 5: 1. Meeting Ser Greta**. If Ser Greta learns, in whatever way, that Andiel has let Ser Greta's secret slip again (to the heroes), Ser Greta dismisses Andiel from her service.

ting it off my chest made me feel better. My confessions there always do.

"WEEKLY CONFESSION? WHERE IS THIS CHAPEL?"

I live in the Dregs. For more than a decade I've spoken the chant at Andraste's Ear. It's a local custom that the mute brothers and sisters there hear the confessions of their parishioners every week. As far as I'm concerned, the Chantry would do well to spread the custom across Ferelden. Ask any man or woman who lives in the Dregs and fears the Maker, if you like. A confession at Andraste's Ear purges your soul of woe, it does.

"COULD THE BROTHER WHO HEARD YOUR CONFESSION HAVE BETRAYED YOU?"

I wouldn't believe that in a dozen lifetimes.

"CAN WE TALK TO SER GRETA ABOUT THIS?"

Please don't! She's already furious. Even if you pretend that I didn't hire you, and haven't told you her secret, she won't believe it. I'll be dismissed for certain, and a pauper before long.

2. ANDRASTE'S EAR

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs investigate the Dregs's unusual chantry.

Andraste's Ear is a small chantry surrounded—protectively, almost—by the run-down homes and buildings of the Dregs. The chapel is small compared to nearly every other Chantry edifice you've ever seen, but Andraste's Ear is clean and clearly well cared for.

Stepping inside, you see that the chantry is vacant save for a few souls praying in the pews. The silence is complete. As your eyes adjust, you notice three priests you didn't see right away—two sisters and one brother of the faith—diligently cleaning various areas of the chapel.

The chantry building is T-shaped. In the nave (the long center section), pews in orderly ranks face a statue of Andraste, posed passively, her head slightly tipped as if listening. Bookshelves line the side walls, although they bear few tomes or scrolls given that the population of the Dregs is largely illiterate. Six confessional booths, each with two doors (one for a brother or sister, the other for a parishioner) are found in the eastern transept. At the end of that transept a statuette in the shape of a cat sits atop a rather plain pedestal. A **TN 11 Cunning (Historical Lore)** test dates it to the days of the Tevinter in Ferelden. A **TN 11 Cunning (Religious Lore)** test confirms that it's a strange decoration for a house of the Maker. A **TN 13 Cunning (Evaluation)** test suggests that it might be the most valuable object in the whole building, and probably worth more than 5 gold sovereigns. The opposite transept is blocked by a wall and door; a **TN 9 Cunning (Cultural Lore)** test suggests that the chantry's mother probably has an office beyond it.

By tradition, only those incapable of speech may act as confessors at Andraste's Ear. Although symbolic, it seems meaningful to the parishioners of the Dregs that the brothers and sisters can never repeat secrets meant only for Andraste's ears.

The three mute brothers and sisters are cleaning the chantry when the PCs arrive. They are not inquisitive, and allow the PCs to poke around without interruption unless they do something outrageous or destructive. Nevertheless, each is willing to respond to any questions put to them, writing out answers to queries that cannot be answered with a gesture or a nod on parchments they carry for the purpose. Any of them can point the PCs to Mother Gabriella, the religious leader here.

The local parishioners at prayer can communicate or confirm the same general information about Andraste's Ear that's presented in the **Questions and Answers** section of the previous encounter.

Note that critical information about the chantry is contained in the **Andraste's Ear** background section on page 83; make sure to re-familiarize yourself with it before you run this encounter and the next.

THE MUTE CONFESSORS

The brothers and sisters of Andraste's Ear—Graham, Anna, and Serena—are all victims of the Stilled Tongue cult, and each was raised in one of Bann Nicola's orphanages. All are literate. To those meeting them for the first time, they seem oddly docile.

3. MOTHER GABRIELLA

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs learn the truth about the confessions made at Andraste's Ear.

You enter a modest office where a pleasant-looking woman, advancing in years, wears the robes of a Chantry mother and sits behind a rather fancy desk.

"Why has the Maker brought you here today?" she asks.

Mother Gabriella is welcoming, happy to chat, and more than willing to explain the unusual customs of Andraste's Ear. (Make sure you review the **Andraste's Ear** background section on page 83). She lies to protect her secret, of course. Lacking the moral certitude to break free of her situation, she has come to terms with the fact that it makes a mockery of her faith. She simply burns her blank scraps of paper every week and prays that her sins won't condemn her to an eternity of misery in the Fade.

Her turpitude aside, Mother Gabriella is fundamentally a good person, and the route to discovering the truth

THE MUTE CONFESSORS

Silent Brothers and Sisters of the faith.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

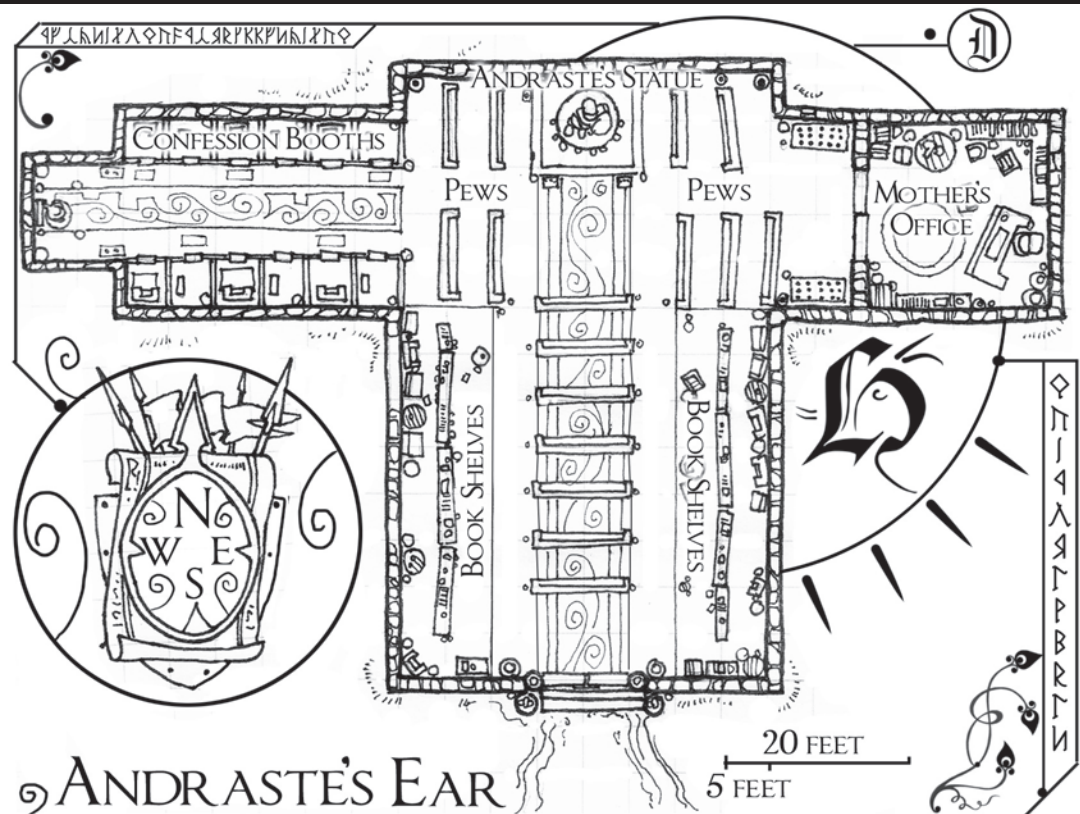
COMMUNICATION 2; CONSTITUTION 1; CUNNING 3 (RELIGIOUS LORE, RESEARCH); DEXTERITY 1; MAGIC 0; PERCEPTION 2 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH 0; WILLPOWER 3.

is to convince her that her transgressions of the confessional's secrecy are leading to concrete evils—the blackmailing of Ser Greta, for one—that can be stopped if she cooperates. Ideally, she's ultimately convinced by impassioned roleplaying between her and the PCs. If the players seem reluctant to dig in and really try to convince her, tip them off that there's more to learn by allowing a **TN 13 Perception (Empathy)** test to learn from her body language that there's something she's not telling them, something she's ashamed of.

If it comes to it, boil the situation down to an **advanced, opposed Communication (Persuade) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test with a threshold of 10, where the stakes are the truth of the matter. Even if the PCs ultimately succeed, measure out the Mother's revelations among tearful rationalizations and long-winded justifications.

Ironically, the influence of the Tevinter cat makes Mother Gabriella feel good the moment she finally tells the truth.

If the PCs learn the truth, Mother Gabriella is gravely concerned about what they plan to do with their knowl-





edge, and tries to convince them that they should not take any rash action that would undo all the good that her chapel is able to do on a daily basis for the hard-working commoners who live in the Dregs.

If the PCs destroy or steal the Tevinter statue, the congregants are shocked that they no longer feel the same rush of well-being and peace when they confess their secrets. The community here ultimately falls into chaos and confusion, with many coming to believe that Andraste has turned her gaze from the Dregs. The neighborhood is visibly worse for it in the weeks that follow, and Mother Gabriella eventually takes her own life.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The answers provided below assume the PCs have used enough leverage or made a successful test to persuade Mother Gabriella to tell them the truth about what goes on at Andraste's Ear.

"HAVE YOU BEEN SHARING YOUR PARISHIONERS' CONFESSIONS?"

I'm ashamed to admit it – so ashamed – but...yes. Yes. The confessional parchments I burn are blank. I gather the real confessions for someone else.

"WHO DO YOU COLLECT THE CONFESSIONS FOR? WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THEM?"

I don't know where they go. I honestly don't. I follow the same routine every week: I gather all the slips and put them

MOTHER GABRIELLA

Remorseful superintendent of Andraste's Ear.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 4 (PERSUASION); CONSTITUTION 1 (STAMINA); CUNNING 2 (RELIGIOUS LORE); DEXTERITY 2; MAGIC 1; PERCEPTION 3; STRENGTH -2; WILLPOWER 2 (FAITH).

in a small rosewood box at the end of the weekly day of confession. I put the box in a barrel in the alley behind the chantry. The box is always empty by first light.

"WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?"

I received a message years ago that...that...past sins would be revealed if I didn't cooperate. That I might be murdered if my crimes were revealed.

In the years before the Dragon Age, when I was a young mother, I served the Maker in a chantry where many of the nobles who resisted the Orlesian occupation prayed, and where they met to plot their...activities. The Orlesians made me think it was my duty to tell them what happened in these meetings. What the banns of the resistance said, what they plotted. I posed as one sympathetic to their cause, but I funneled their secrets to the puppet king's spies.

My compliance sowed the seeds of torture...of death...and not just for the banns. For their families. Their children. How can I allow those crimes to come to light, now?

"WHY WOULD ANYONE CARE ABOUT THE SECRETS OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THE DREGS?"

I don't know. Perhaps because a poor chantry is an easy target. Perhaps because I was already compromised. Perhaps because the servants to the mighty actually know more than the aristocracy.

(All of these reasons are true, incidentally.)

"WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND THE TEVINTER CAT STATUETTE?"

It was a gift from the chapel's benefactor, Bann Nicola Baranti. She built and maintains our chantry.

MOTHER GABRIELLA

Mother Gabriella is a solemn, serious woman. She hopes to be made a reverend mother before too many more years pass, but her small church receives little recognition or notice from the greater Chantry. In her heart, she suspects the Maker may be punishing her for betraying her parishioners' trust. Nevertheless, she treats her responsibilities seriously and considers herself lucky to have found a place in life. Each night she confesses her sins and secrets to Andraste and the Maker, and is filled with corresponding happiness. It helps salve her guilt for passing on the secrets, and helps her believe that she is ultimately doing the Maker's will.

PART 4

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Every confession made in Andraste’s Ear, from the trivial to the jaw-dropping, is collected each week from the barrel in the back alleyway by a courier named Hodin, who delivers them to an elven fruit vendor named Shayda, who in turn gives them to a servant of Bann Nicola’s junior spymaster, Marissa.

In **Part 4: Connecting the Dots**, the PCs investigate and surveil their way up this chain, following the current week’s delivery, which likely leads to a confrontation with Marissa.

You should decide, based on what seems like appropriate pacing, how many days it will be between the time the PCs learn from Mother Gabriella that the confessions are re-routed each week and the next confession day. A short interval will press the PCs to take quick action; a longer delay will allow them more opportunities to plan. If in doubt, opt for a shorter span than a longer one.

1. SPOTTING THE COURIER

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs spot Hodin collecting the confessions and follow him to the Market District.

After a long wait, you finally see a disheveled man make his way into the alley. There’s an uneasiness in his step, as if he’s had too much to drink. He wanders toward the barrel.

If the PCs are hidden, call for an **opposed Dexterity (Stealth) vs. Perception (Seeing) test**. Hodin suffers a –2 penalty, having spent the night on drink and prostitutes.

If the PCs allow Hodin to perform his task, he upends the contents of the rosewood box into a leather satchel, dumps the box back into the barrel, takes a moment to relieve himself against the back wall of the chantry, and then ambles unsteadily toward the Market District.

If the PCs confront Hodin, he draws his sword to defend himself, but doesn’t run. He knows that fleeing won’t do any good in the long run, given that the messages’ drop-spot has been discovered.

Hodin is far more afraid of his employer than he is of the PCs, and receives a +3 bonus on tests to trick, intimidate, or persuade him to reveal anything about where he delivers the messages or how he gets paid. In the event that the PCs succeed in spite of this bonus, all Hodin knows is that:

HODIN

A pale-skinned layabout with a remarkable lack of curiosity, a trait heartily encouraged by the substantial pay he receives weekly for a laughably simple task.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
1	COMMUNICATION (SEDUCTION)		
2	CONSTITUTION		
1	CUNNING		
-1	DEXTERITY (RIDING)		
0	MAGIC		
3	PERCEPTION		
2	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)		
1	WILLPOWER		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
9	36	9	0
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL		DAMAGE
LONG SWORD	+4		2D6+2
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: <i>Pierce Armor.</i>			
TALENTS: <i>Single Weapon Style (Novice).</i>			
WEAPON GROUPS: <i>Brawling and Heavy Blades.</i>			
EQUIPMENT			
LONG SWORD AND LEATHER SATCHEL.			

CONFRONTING BANN NICOLA

After learning the secrets of Andraste’s Ear, the PCs may choose to either tell Bann Nicola what they know, or confront her with half-founded suspicions of her involvement in any number of crimes.

If they simply reveal the situation at Andraste’s Ear to her she praises them for their smart thinking, promises to take over the investigation, and sends them on an unrelated quest (of your invention) to the Fereldan Hinterlands where – with any luck – they’ll die fighting some horrible demon. She sends assassins after them, to give them an additional kick in death’s general direction.

If they accuse her of being involved in wrongdoings she dismisses their accusations out of hand, confident that she’s kept herself at arm’s length from the crimes. She has the PCs thrown into the street, and they discover that their names are slandered up and down the hills of Denerim in the days and weeks that follow. Hodin (see **Part 4: 1. Spotting the Courier**) dies in a random act of street violence the next day to further obscure any connection between Bann Nicola and Andraste’s Ear.

SHAYDA

A city elf with short hair who genuinely cares about her people and uses the money paid by her mysterious benefactor to improve their lot.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION (BARGAINING)
1	CONSTITUTION
2	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SEEING)
0	STRENGTH
1	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
14	30	12	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
DAGGER	+2	1d6+1

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone and Skirmish.*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Light Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

DAGGER AND APPLE CART.

- He delivers the messages to an elf who sells fruit in the Market District. He doesn't know her name.
- Three days after he delivers the messages each week, a loaf of fresh bread is delivered to his doorstep with his payment baked inside.

Hodin inherited this job from his deceased father, has no idea who ultimately employs him, and doesn't want to know.

2. AN APPLE A WEEK

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

Hodin drops the confession parchments with an elven costermonger.

If the PCs confront Hodin instead of following him, skip this encounter.

You follow the man who took the parchments through the dawn's early light to the Market District. Even at this hour, the district is bustling as fishermen and farmers stock their stalls. The man walks straight for the cart of an elven apple-seller just on her way out of the district's central square. Without looking at her he takes an apple, drops the satchel, and ambles away without paying for the fruit.

As he moves away, the woman picks up the satchel and stuffs it into the shelf underneath the cart. She's about to take up the pushbar again when four unkempt young men step up to the cart. One asks the elf a question and reaches out to stroke her hair. She shakes her head and shrugs her head away from his touch.

"We're not taking no for an answer today," one of the other men says, loud enough for you to hear him clearly, and the four grab her. No passerby apparently cares to intervene as the four drag her into a nearby alley.

The costermonger is Shayda, an elven woman who sells apples in the Elven Alienage.

The four men are simple hooligans who slept in an alley last night, and, feeling moved to inflict themselves on someone, find Shayda a tempting target. Local prejudice leads passersby to ignore crimes against elves, and unless the PCs intervene, Shayda is in for a terrible experience. Clearly, this is a moral test for the heroes.

If human male PCs enter the alley, the men indelicately offer them the opportunity to join their rape. Human women may or may not be openly attacked depending on whether they look like they can defend themselves. Elves and dwarves are attacked with lethal force out of hand. Shayda fights in her own defense only once it



looks like the PCs are going to beat the four men.

A **TN 11 Cunning (Cultural Lore)** test suggests that killing Fereldan men in defense of an elf is against the king's law.

If rescued, Shayda is profoundly grateful. She laments that she has nothing but apples to offer the PCs in thanks. If questioned about the messages, Shayda lowers her head:

"When I moved to the city, I was offered this job by a man I haven't seen since. It pays ten silvers a week and all I have to do is deliver a pouch. I use most of the money to help the other elves."

If the PCs continue to question her about the specifics of her delivery, she reveals that someone meets her on the way to the Alienage each week and offers to buy seven apples for ten silver pieces. This is almost always the same man, who dresses as a household servant. Along with the apples, Shayda turns over the pouch.

Shayda is willing to let the PCs follow her to watch the hand-off, but insists they stay hidden, or at least remain separate from her as she rolls her cart downhill toward the Alienage.

If the PCs leave Shayda to the four men she emerges from the alley some time later, bruised and weeping, and pushes her cart downhill toward the Alienage through hot tears.

3. THE FINAL CONNECTION

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

Shayda hands over the satchel to the spy-master's servant.

A Fereldan man dressed in the simple clothing of a household servant walks up to the apple cart just as it is about to pass through the gate into the Alienage. He and the elf exchange a few words, and seven apples and the satchel are exchanged for a small pouch that looks to contain coin. The two of them part ways, the servant heading back uphill toward the better districts of the city.

The man is Roger, the servant who tends (and lives at) the house where Marissa also lives and does the work of research and intrigue assigned to her by Bann Nicola via Crannoch. The house is in the southwestern part of the city. Roger doesn't head straight there, but instead makes several stops for other foodstuffs on the way. (He doesn't receive any other unusual deliveries over the course of his other errands, however.) It requires an **opposed Dex-**

MARKET THUGS			
Scum of the earth.			
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
0	COMMUNICATION (PERSUASION)		
2	CONSTITUTION		
0	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)		
2	DEXTERITY (RIDING)		
1	MAGIC		
0	PERCEPTION		
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)		
2	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)		
COMBAT RATINGS			
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	48	12	0
ATTACKS			
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	
FIST	+2	1d3+4	
LONG SWORD	+6	2d6+4	
POWERS			
FAVORED STUNTS: <i>Disarm and Mighty Blow.</i>			
TALENTS: <i>Armor Training (Novice), Dual Weapon Style (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice), and Unarmed Style (Novice).</i>			
WEAPON GROUPS: <i>Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades.</i>			
EQUIPMENT			
LONG SWORD.			

terity (Stealth) vs. Perception (Seeing) test to follow Roger without his notice. If Roger notices that he's being shadowed, he attempts to lose his pursuers without letting on that he knows he's being followed. If he can't lose the PCs, he ultimately heads for the house forewarned that there's something unusual going on.

If the PCs accost Roger, he protests ignorance of anything and everything, claiming that he saw the satchel and offered to buy it from the elf, who agreed and sold it to him. He feigns annoyance to "discover" that it's full of paper (although in no event will he allow the PCs to have or see the parchments).

One way or the other, Roger eventually returns to the house where Marissa is waiting.

The servant takes a meandering path to a house in the northeastern section of the city. The house itself is nondescript, almost hidden, accessible only through a small alley.

You see what looks to be a Mabari war dog chomping on a large bone in the alley. The dog briefly looks up at the servant as he passes inside the house, then goes back to chewing on the bone.

AREN'T WE ALL ON THE SAME TEAM?

If the PCs suspect that Bann Nicola is behind the scheme at Andraste's Ear, and if they have also accepted her patronage, they may simply announce their allegiance to the bann to Roger and expect to be admitted to the spyhouse.

Although Bann Nicola would never share Crannoch or Marissa's identities with the heroes, it's possible that a silver-tongue PC might be able to confuse or fast-talk Roger and Marissa into sharing more than they ought to with them. In that case, **Part 4: 5. The Junior Spymaster** becomes a race for the PCs to find out as much as they can before Marissa realizes that they're working against her and clams up.

RIPPER

Roger's loyal and tenacious pet, a bit stronger than the average Mabari.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
3	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)
0	CUNNING
5	DEXTERITY (BITE)
-3	MAGIC
4	PERCEPTION (SMELLING, TRACKING)
4	STRENGTH (JUMPING)
3	WILLPOWER (MORALE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
18	28	15	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+7	1D6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone and Mighty Blow.*

If the PCs approach the door to the house, the dog—Ripper—stands up and snarls at them. If they ignore this warning, he gives a full-fledged bark, finally attacking them if they persist in their approach. Ripper is trained not to accept treats from strangers.

Inside the house, at Ripper's warning, Marissa begins gathering her things so she can quickly flee the house via an underground tunnel if need be. If Roger was accosted or knows he was followed and Marissa is thus forewarned, Marissa flees immediately when Ripper starts barking.

If Ripper continues to growl or bark, Roger emerges from the house with a loaded crossbow in hand. He orders Ripper to calm down, inquires what the PCs want, and does his best to satisfy their curiosity and send them on their way. Under no circumstances does he allow them to enter the house.

If Roger comes to the conclusion that Marissa should flee he loudly uses the phrase "down Trampstead Lane" in conversation with the PCs. (She's listening in, and knows this signal.) A **TN 15 Cunning (Cultural**

ROGER, THE SPYMASTER'S SERVANT

An older man who enjoys a comfortable life tending to Marissa's needs. He's aware of the broad outlines of his work on behalf of Bann Nicola and is devoted to the task, honestly believing that Denerim is better for her presence.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

4	COMMUNICATION (DECEPTION, ETIQUETTE, PERSUASION)
1	CONSTITUTION
3	CUNNING (CULTURAL LORE)
2	DEXTERITY (BOWS)
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION
1	STRENGTH
3	WILLPOWER (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	21	12	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
CROSSBOW	+4	2D6+3	30/60 YARDS
MAUL	+1	1D6+4	
DAGGER	+2	1D6+2	—

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Rapid Reload and Lightning Attack.*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bludgeons, Bows, Brawling, and Light Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

CROSSBOW, 20 BOLTS, MAUL, AND DAGGER.

Lore) test alerts an observant PC that there's no such street in Denerim.

Even if he can't get rid of the PCs, Roger buys as much time as he can for Marissa to escape. It takes her four rounds from the time she decides to flee to bundle up her things and reach the trapdoor in the house's basement, or two rounds if she was forewarned.

If the PCs manage to make it to the basement before Marissa can get through the trapdoor, she prepares to fight unless (or until) it's clear that she's going to be

THE JOURNAL OF CONFESSIONS

One of Marissa's chief tasks for Crannoch is receiving the confessional slips from Andraste's Ear and then recording, analyzing, and cross-referencing the information they contain into a series of journals of confession. The confessional scraps themselves are burned in the spyhouse's fireplace as Marissa finishes with them. In this way, each month or so, a new volume of secrets is produced, which is given over to Crannoch, and Marissa begins a fresh journal.

If the PCs come into possession of Marissa's current journal, a **TN 11 Cunning (Research) test** identifies it for what it is (although much additional time and many additional tests are necessary to assemble any kind of organized glimpse of the whole tapestry of the Dregs's secrets). This treasure could be of great use to less-than-scrupulous PCs, and likewise contains all manner of adventure seeds for your campaign.

overwhelmed. Then, skip directly to **Part 4: 5. The Junior Spymaster.**

If the PCs try to wait out Roger and Marissa, watching the place until someone leaves, they're in for a long wait. Marissa doesn't go out much and Roger's just been shopping, so it will be 24 hours or more until anything even remotely interesting happens. Use your judgement, your knowledge of what the various NPCs want and are trying to accomplish, and improvise.

THE SPYHOUSE

The spyhouse is a small home Crannoch purchased long ago. It is a simple affair, only used by Marissa and Roger. Decades ago, Crannoch pretended to be a smuggler and arranged to use a warehouse near the docks for contraband; he used this cover to construct an underground tunnel between the spyhouse hide-out and the warehouse. Bann Nicola has been active in constructing a sewer system in this neighborhood as a public work, enabling her to ensure that the tunnel remained unmolested.

KITCHEN 1

Contains the usual assortment of cooking implements, as well as food purchased this morning and the day before. A blanket in one corner is Ripper's sleeping spot. A wooden staircase leads to the second floor and another staircase beneath it leads to the basement.

SERVANT'S ROOM 2

This is Roger's bedroom, containing a small bed against one wall and a desk and chair against the other. Roger has few belongings but is paid well for his services: he has 3 sovereigns and 45 silvers stashed in a hidden compartment of his desk. It takes a **TN 15 Perception (Searching) test** to find the compartment. If the dragon die is 5 or better, the searcher also finds the trap that protects it. Defeating the trap requires a **TN 15 Dexterity (Traps) test**. Opening the compartment without defeating the trap releases a spray of poison that does 4d6 penetrating damage and halves

the victim's movement speed for an hour. However, a fast-reacting PC can mitigate this damage with a **TN 13 Dexterity (Initiative) test**; if successful, the damage is reduced by 1d6 for every 2 points on the dragon die, and the target's movement speed is not affected.

PARLOR 3

The main room of the house, which would normally be used for living space and entertaining guests, here acts as an office, dominated by a large wooden table covered in books and papers. Bookcases containing books on a wide variety of topics line the walls. This is where Marissa spends most of her time, gathering and processing intelligence for Crannoch.

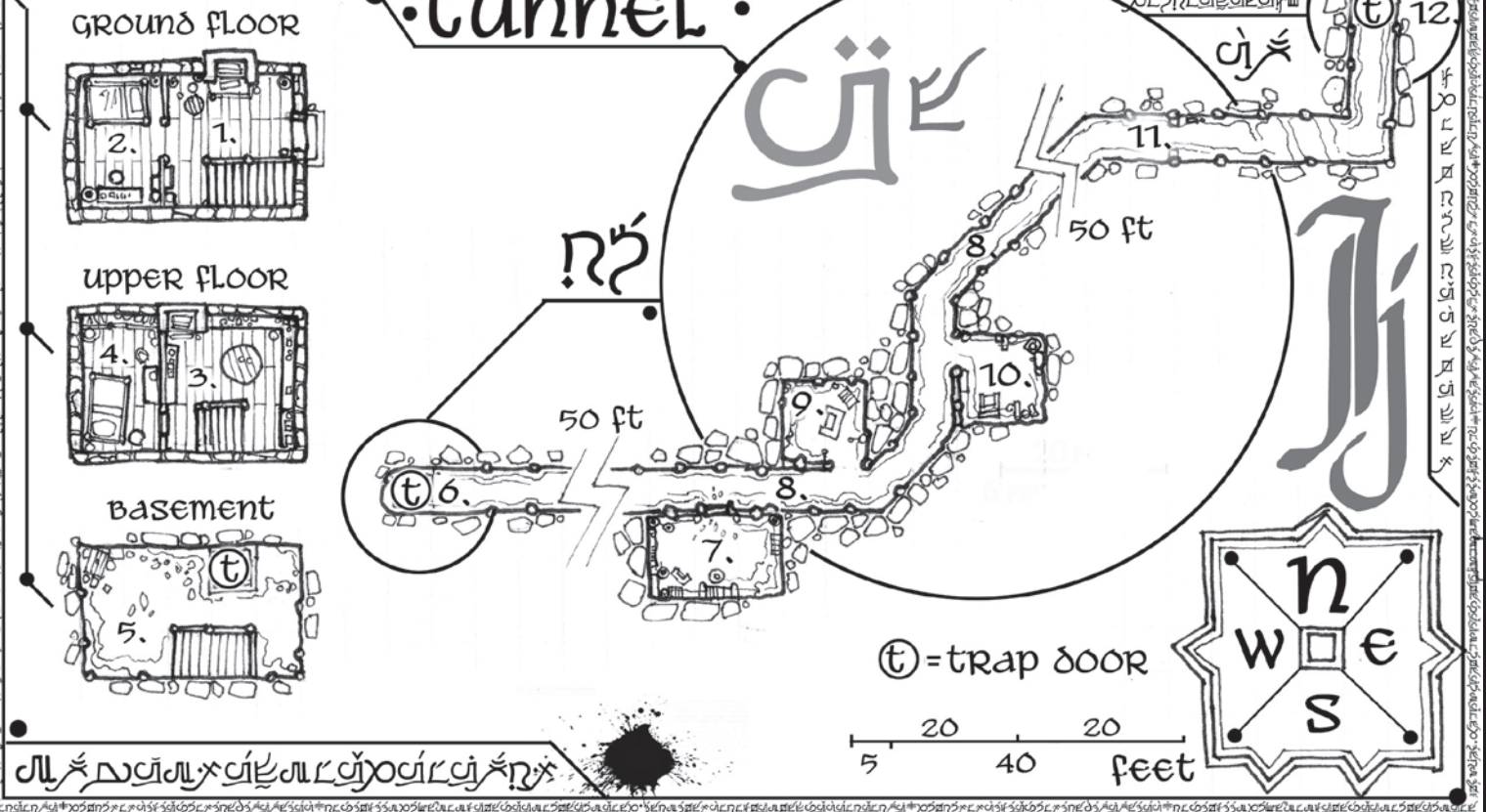
If Marissa escapes without the PCs becoming aware of her presence, a **TN 13 Perception (Searching) test** here makes it clear that this place is obviously a spyhole of some kind, but a follow-up **TN 15 Cunning (Investigation) test** suggests that there's a marked lack of the kind of damning and sensitive information they might suspect to find in such a place. This is, of course, because Marissa has taken with her the rather weighty tome—the journal of confessions—into which she transcribes all of her information of note. (If Marissa didn't get away, both the journal and the satchel of confessional parchments are still on the table.)

MARISSA'S BEDROOM 4

This room contains a large bed, a nightstand with a candlestick holder, a dresser with a mirror, and a closet. A PC who makes a **TN 11 Cunning (Investigation) test** notices that the clothing hung in the closet and folded in the chest are of two sizes. The other set of clothing belongs to Lorraine, Ser Basil's squire; she and Marissa are lovers.

A **TN 15 Perception (Searching) test** may reveal that one of the cloaks in the closet is magical; a further **TN 11 Cunning (Arcane Lore) test** identifies it as a spider-silk cloak (see the *Dragon Age RPG Set 1 Game Master's Guide*, page 40). If Marissa has enough time to make a clean escape, however, she takes this valuable item with her.

Spyhouse and underground tunnel.



There is a footlocker beneath the bed. It's unlocked, but a glyph is painted on the inside. Anyone who opens the locker without first speaking the word "open" in Ancient Tevene activates the glyph, which releases a shade that attacks for five rounds those attempting to burgle the footlocker's contents, at which time the shade returns to the glyph and the chest snaps shut. If the chest is re-opened, the shade springs forth again, returned to full Health. The shade's statistics can be found in the *Dragon Age RPG Set 1 Game Master's Guide*, page 35. If the shade is killed, the glyph's magic is dispelled with it.

Inside the footlocker is a leather case filled with 6 sovereigns, a pouch containing 200 silvers, a neat row of four lesser lyrium potions, and a handmaiden's necklace and other assorted jewelry worth 4 sovereigns in total.

BASEMENT 5

The basement doubles as a pantry and wine cellar. There are several barrels in one corner, one of which is empty and covers the trapdoor. If Marissa has fled, then this barrel is pushed aside, revealing the closed trapdoor.

4. RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

EXPLORATION AND COMBAT ENCOUNTER

In this encounter the PCs chase Marissa through the underground tunnel between the spyhouse and warehouse in hopes of catching her before she escapes out the warehouse exit and disappears into the city. The tunnel is seeded with traps designed to slow down intruders, but some of these depend on Marissa being able to set them. If she was rushed in her escape, she may not have had time to set all—or any—of them.

TRAPDOOR SURPRISE 6

The underside of the basement trapdoor has a magical glyph painted on it. Any PC who opens the trapdoor (which is not locked) triggers the glyph, which erupts into a fireball that engulfs the room and sets the timbers ablaze. Anyone in the room takes 4d6 penetrating damage, with a **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test vs. **Marissa's 14 spellpower** halving the damage.

If Marissa was actively pursued when she descended through the trapdoor, she did not set this trap and the trapdoor is safe to open.

ISN'T THE TUNNEL EVIDENCE AGAINST BANN NICOLA?

After having run the gauntlet and perhaps seen the contents of the underground chambers, the heroes may feel that they have enough evidence to move openly against Bann Nicola. If they do so, they discover that there is precisely no solid evidence linking the bann's household to the spyhouse, tunnel, and warehouse. What's more, several reliable witnesses step forward with evidence that Marissa and Roger have been in the employ of Orlesian agents for many years. The pair of them are killed in a back alley by "loyal Fereldans" outraged by this treachery against the king.

WHISPERING CIRCLE ROOM 7

This is the room where Bann Nicola divines the locations of Mother Brianna's victims. A large painted map of Denerim takes up most of the floor. Before it, a small magical summoning circle is painted, with a brazier hanging above it. An aspergillum stained red with dried blood and a jar of pickled tongues are stored on a shelf. A PC making a **TN 15 Cunning (Investigation) or Perception (Searching) test** notices blood sprinkled on the map at the four houses where the Stilled Tongue cultists struck in **Part 1: The Chantry of the Stilled Tongue**.

GLYPHS OF PARALYSIS 8

There is a glyph of paralysis on the floor in each of these locations, intended to prevent those imprisoned in the cell (location 9, below) from escaping should they momentarily break free of their captors. These glyphs are permanent, and so are active no matter how little time Marissa had, but can be neutralized by speaking the command word "pass" in Ancient Tevene. Their spellpower is 16.

CELL 9

This largish room, where nearly a dozen sets of arm- and leg-irons are embedded in the stone walls, is used to hold people whom Bann Nicola or Crannoch wish to interrogate. Its great door hangs open, given that the room is currently empty.

TORTURE CHAMBER 10

This room is filled with implements of torture. A small stove can be used to heat them when necessary. It appears that the stove hasn't been used for a week or more.

GATE 11

A heavy iron portcullis built into the tunnel's ceiling here is held up here by a rope tied off to an iron peg in the wall on the warehouse side of the gate. It takes almost no time at all for Marissa to release the portcullis, which crashes down behind her, so the PCs find that it has been lowered no matter how little time Marissa had to make good her escape. To raise the exceedingly heavy portcullis requires an **advanced TN 15 Strength**

(Might) test with a success threshold of 10. There is room for up to three heroes to lift together.

WAREHOUSE TRAPDOOR 12

This door opens into the "smuggler's section" of the warehouse, a long room that runs the length of the building and whose door is hidden from the other side. Once Marissa is through the trapdoor she topples a heavy sack of flour on top of it, kept handy for precisely this purpose. It takes a **TN 13 Strength (Might) test** to push the trapdoor open in this case.

5. THE JUNIOR SPYMASTER

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

This encounter takes place whenever the PCs capture Marissa, whether in the spyhouse, the tunnel, the warehouse, or the streets of Denerim. Given the variety of possible circumstances for this encounter, it is not herein described.

When captured, Marissa realizes that she is doomed no matter what happens. If she doesn't cooperate with the PCs, they'll kill or ruin her. If she does cooperate, Bann Nicola will eventually figure out that she was a weak link and kill or ruin her. Her best hope, she decides, is to do whatever she can to be free from the heroes so she can take the first ship out of Denerim and never look back. Depending on what the PCs do, she likely decides that answering their questions as accurately as possible will be the best expedient. That, therefore, is what she does.

The only additional motivation at play is Marissa's love for Lorraine. Marissa is already worried that Lorraine may be in danger based on what Marissa knows about Bann Nicola's plot. Thus, Marissa quietly hopes that Bann Nicola's plot doesn't succeed.

While Marissa is willing to give up her knowledge for her freedom, she's opines that it's folly of the highest order for the PCs to try to bring down Bann Nicola. Bann Nicola knows too many secrets, and has brokered too many deals over four decades, to fall. Even her death would throw the city into chaos, as the banns whose ambitions she holds in check through blackmail would finally act openly against one another. Furthermore—and perhaps more importantly—Bann

Nicola has created and fostered a great many worthwhile projects and charities in the city. In the end, as far as Marissa is concerned, her good outweighs her bad and her death would dissolve both, given that Adric is unlikely to continue his grandmother's philanthropies once he controls House Baranti.

If freed, Marissa is never seen in Denerim again.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Marissa answers questions truthfully, but she doesn't offer additional information unless it's necessary to secure her freedom. She's not afraid of death; that will find her either way.

"TELL US ABOUT BANN NICOLA'S PLAN."

Bann Nicola is hosting a grand ball. She has invited banns and arls from all over Ferelden. At the ball, she'll stage an event that implicates the Restorationists in a treasonous plot. I don't know the details, except that Ser Basil is somehow involved, the plan will somehow give Bann Nicola influence with the Merchants' Guild, and part of the blame will fall on the city elves and give the king a reason to purge the Alienage.

"WHO ARE THE RESTORATIONISTS?"

The Society for the Restoration of Imperial Rule. They're a group of Denerim merchants who trace their lineage to the Orlesian aristocracy that once ruled Ferelden. They theoretically want to restore an Orlesian ruler to Ferelden, but we've discovered they're more a social club than anything. They control the Merchant's Guild, and they've been inflating local prices for certain goods recently. Bann Nicola wants to break their economic control.

"WHY DO YOU CARE WHETHER BANN NICOLA'S PLAN SUCCEEDS?"

There is...someone...who I care about involved. She's not very important in the grand scheme of things, but Bann Nicola would certainly sacrifice her to bring her plans to fruition.

(If pressed, Marissa reveals that it's Lorraine, Ser Basil's squire, and begs the PCs to ensure her safety.)

"HOW IS BANN NICOLA RELATED TO ANDRASTE'S EAR?"

Bann Nicola paid for the chantry to be built. She knew about Mother Gabriella's Orlesian indiscretions and used that knowledge as leverage to secure her cooperation in stealing the confessional secrets.

"WHY IS BANN NICOLA INTERESTED IN THE CONFESSIONAL SECRETS?"

They are a steady stream of information she can use to manipulate half the city.

"ARE YOU BANN NICOLA'S SPYMASTER?"

I am an apprentice of her true spymaster. I won't name him, and it doesn't matter — he's not in Denerim right now.

(If pressed: His name is Crannoch. He knows all of Bann Nicola's secrets, as far as I know. He's completely loyal, completely dedicated, completely her creature. If she dies, he'll ensure Denerim plunges into chaos.)

"HOW IS BANN NICOLA CONNECTED TO THE STILLED TONGUE CULT?"

Bann Nicola struck a deal with the spirit that controls the cult decades ago. From time to time, as years pass, the bann allows the spirit to feed on the children of Denerim as long as some of them wind up in her orphanages. When things have gone on long enough, Bann Nicola uses the map room to hunt down the cult and banish the spirit until it comes time to start the cycle again.

"YOUR LIBRARY IS SUSPICIOUSLY BARE OF SECRETS. WHERE DO YOU STORE YOUR TRUE RECORDS?"

There is a secret vault beneath Bann Nicola's house where everything is kept, so the bann can have easy access. It's located beneath her office.

(This isn't true, but Marissa doesn't know that. She was told the "truth" about the vault as a test of her loyalty. See **Part 5: 3. Crannoch's Trap.**)

PART 5

TYING THREADS

Part 5: Tying Threads isn't designed for you to run encounter-by-encounter. Rather, it is a collection of three encounters that allow the PCs to investigate loose ends, if they wish, before Bann Nicola's grand ball takes place:

- If the PCs visit Ser Greta, use **1. Meeting Ser Greta**.
- Visiting Ser Greta may lead to further investigation of the Restorationists in **2. The Clothier**.
- Finally, the PCs may attempt to investigate the hidden library at Bann Nicola's mansion, which is described in **3. Crannoch's Trap**.

If the heroes don't elect to follow up on any of these leads (or haven't learned enough to do so), skip ahead to **Part 6: The Grand Finale**.

The PCs may try to interview Ser Basil after learning about his involvement from Marissa. Their attempts to track him down are futile; they eventually learn that he is currently traveling outside Denerim. He returns just in time to attend the grand ball.

Depending on how long it's been since she's heard from them, Andiel may check up with the PCs in this time frame to see how their investigation is coming.

1. MEETING SER GRETA

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs meet with Ser Greta, perhaps learning about the Restorationists.

Ser Greta lives in a modest house not far from the Dregs, where Andiel also lives and works; this information is easy to come by, either by inquiring of Andiel or making a **TN 11 Communication (Investigation) test**.

If the PCs speak to Ser Greta about her onetime lover from Orlais, Ser Greta's natural suspicion—given the events of recent days—is to suspect that Andiel has let her secret slip again. The PCs must make an **opposed Communication (Deception) vs. Perception (Empathy) test** to convince Ser Greta otherwise, if they wish to do so. If Ser Greta does come to believe that Andiel told the PCs of her embarrassing liaison, she dismisses Andiel from her service.

If questioned about the Restorationists, Ser Greta is forthright that she is interested in their activities. Regardless of what the PCs do or don't claim to know about Ser Greta's history, she is strident about her loyalty to the king of Ferelden, and emphatic that any steadfast Fereldan would be interested in exposing the activities of Orlesian spies in Denerim.

In order to spill what she knows, Ser Greta must be persuaded. This requires—at the very least—a compelling reason for her to cooperate and an **opposed Communication (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test**.

What, then, does Ser Greta know?

What Ser Greta *thinks* she knows is that an elven spy from Orlais has been in regular contact with the Restorationists in Denerim in recent months. Although this elf does travel back and forth between Orlais and Denerim frequently, he is, in actuality, the agent of a Denerim clothier who pays the elf for reports of what garments are currently fashionable in Orlais. The clothier pays well for this timely information in order to maintain his business selling couture to the nobility of Denerim who favor such garments. Many of these clients happen to be Restorationists, which is the source of Ser Greta's

incorrect conclusion about the “nefarious triumvirate” of elf, clothier, and Restorationists.

Ser Greta's narrative goes something like this:

I have kept my eye on the merchants over the years. Many of them originally came from Orlais, you know. I learn about some crooked deal or business practice from time to time, but I let them go. Why expose myself to reveal such minor crimes?

But a few months ago, I noticed that a certain elf who works on an Orlesian trade ship always stops in at a particular clothier in the Market District. And what's more, a few of the more suspicious merchants flock to the shop soon after each of the elf's visits. I am certain that important information is being exchanged, but ... but I have yet to prove anything.

At your discretion, it may take another opposed test, or more vigorous coercion, to convince Ser Greta to provide the name of the clothier (Ragnar Traken) and the names of the few of the merchants who visit him whom Ser Greta believes are Restorationists. Virtually all of the latter group are high-ranking members of the Merchants' Guild, are actually Restorationists, and are among the circled names in the ledger on Bando's desk (see **Scene 3: Crannoch's Trap**). Ser Greta does not know the name of the elf, but does know that his ship, the *Sea Rose*, recently left port and is not expected to return for more than a week.

Ser Greta cannot be persuaded, in any event, to act against Bann Nicola. Although she has no idea who's blackmailing her, she assumes—correctly—that any bold action on her part that's even remotely connected with the Restorationists will ruin her.

2. THE CLOTHIER

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs meet Ragnar Traken, clothier extraordinaire and possibly learn of his connection to Adric.

Ragnar's shop is on the east edge of the Market District, not far from the merchant houses of Denerim. As you approach the disarmingly plain storefront, a well-dressed man and what looks to be his bodyguard exit the building. A well-dressed dwarf follows them out, exchanging some final pleasantries as the noble enters his carriage and commands the driver take him home. The dwarf, you gather from their conversation, is Ragnar.

SER GRETA

A minor noble of modest means who lives off rents she collects from a pair of wharves her family owns in Denerim. She is unmarried, and has no children.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 3 (LEADERSHIP); CONSTITUTION 2; CUNNING 2 (CULTURAL LORE, HERALDRY); DEXTERITY 1 (RIDING); MAGIC 0; PERCEPTION 2 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH 1; WILLPOWER 3 (COURAGE).

IF SER GRETA IS WRONG. WHY DOES BANN NICOLA CARE?

Bann Nicola learned, through her various networks, that Ser Greta was investigating the elf-clothier-Restorationist triumvirate. Although Bann Nicola doesn't (yet) know whether Ser Greta's suspicions are correct (since Crannoch is out of town, the investigation of some intelligence has had to wait), Bann Nicola can't very have Ser Greta exposing *any* Restorationist plots or plans—even if they turn out to be untrue—before her grand ball. Therefore, Bann Nicola acted right away to make Ser Greta leave the matter alone.

Ragnar's shop is roughly divided into three parts: a showroom, a dressing room, and a workshop. Stairs in the workshop lead up to Ragnar's living quarters and down to the basement. Two armed men are on hand to ensure Ragnar's safety. They live in the basement. Use the statistics for Captain Braedon; Ragnar hires only the best.

Ragnar warmly welcomes anyone who enters his shop, offering warm spiced wine (always brewing in the workshop) and suggesting Nevarran coats, or perhaps something with a Tevinter flair.

If it becomes obvious that the PCs are looking for information, Ragnar deflects accusations and implications. He claims (truthfully) that he's simply a merchant with a very lucrative business. If the PCs threaten violence, his bodyguards throw them out.

If the PCs succeed in an **opposed Communication (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) test**, they can learn the broad outlines of the true situation from him:

- Ragnar is the premier clothier of Denerim's merchant families. Recently, however, he's received a serious challenge from a rival clothier, Kenzie, whose shop can be found further down the district. Kenzie stole quite a bit of business from Ragnar last year when he introduced an Antivan hat that became all the rage.
- To ensure such a thing would never happen again, Ragnar hired Zek, a city elf, to go to Orlais, where

fashion trends originate, and to report on them to Ragnar, giving him a jump on the competition.

- When Ragnar receives a new fashion tip, he immediately shares it with his merchant clients to ensure that they flock to him, so they can be among the first to purchase some new and fashionable item.

Some—many, perhaps—of Ragnar's clients are, in fact, Restorationists, but there's no connection between he and they save that he happens to provide a product that they appreciate. At the end of the day, there is no espionage here and Ser Greta has merely jumped to the wrong conclusion.

3. CRANNOCH'S TRAP

EXPLORATION AND COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs enter the secret vault at Bann Nicola's manor.

For decades, Bann Nicola and Crannoch have used the myth of a secret vault beneath Nicola's office as both a loyalty test for allies and a trap for enemies, leaking information about its existence and location to ensnare the untrustworthy. The PCs most likely learn of the vault from Marissa, who genuinely believes it to exist.

If the heroes decided to try to gain entry to the vault, the first problem is getting into Bann Nicola's office. Bann Nicola, Crannoch, and Bando are the only three who have keys, and the door is always kept locked when the room is unoccupied. Opening the door requires either a **TN 15 Dexterity (Lock Picking) test** or a **TN 15 Strength (Might) test**. The latter approach obviously makes a great deal more noise than the former.

Currently, the office is cluttered with grand ball planning. Bando has been writing and rewriting a seating chart and has made many notes on the proper forms of address for those on the guest list. There is also a stack of invitations to a luncheon celebrating the engagement of one Lady Tanith Curwen to Ser Adric. Anyone who makes a **TN 11 Cunning (Cultural Lore or Heraldry) test** is pretty sure that no such engagement has, to date, been announced. It seems clear that it must be some part of the grand ball.

RAGNAR TRAKEN

Ragnar Traken is a surface dwarf with an eye for fashion. His flamboyant, boisterous style and speech entertain his clientele and his knowledge of current fashion trends makes his shop very popular. Ragnar is always impeccably dressed, has thinning hair, and wears a goatee.

ABILITIES & FOCUSES

COMMUNICATION 4 (BARGAINING, DECEPTION, ETIQUETTE, PERSUASION); CONSTITUTION 3 (DRINKING, STAMINA); CUNNING 2 (CULTURAL LORE, ENGINEERING, EVALUATION); DEXTERITY 1; MAGIC 0; PERCEPTION 3 (EMPATHY); STRENGTH 2; WILLPOWER 3 (SELF-DISCIPLINE).

There is one more interesting clue here. Bando has a ledger of records on his desk that tracks household expenses. A cursory review of the book reveals that prices for certain imports have been rising of late, with excuses penciled in from various merchants. Further, certain merchants' names have been circled. These are merchants known to Bann Nicola to be Restorationists. A PC making a **TN 15 Cunning (Investigation) test** realizes that Bando is trying to determine which merchants can be influenced to lower their prices and which simply need to be cleared out of Bann Nicola's way.

Upon searching for some entrance to the secret vault, PCs making a **TN 13 Perception (Searching) test** discover a trapdoor beneath a rug in the southwest corner of the room. The trapdoor opens on a short drop to a wooden staircase that leads down into a basement (which is separate and deeper than the main basement given over to the housing and activities of the household servants).

The middle portion of the staircase has been rigged to fall apart under any significant weight. A PC can get to a point about ten feet above the floor below — just able to see rows of bookshelves and two standing suits of heavy plate armor — before it collapses.

On a **TN 17 Dexterity (Traps) test**, the PC hears telltale creaking and leaps back just in time to avoid triggering the collapse. Otherwise, the trap is sprung and the PC falls as the staircase collapses, suffering 2d6 points of penetrating damage, which is halved if the PC can make a **TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test** to arrest his swift descent.

The trap is designed for solitary thieves. If a second PC was closely following the first, he must make a **TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test** to avoid falling, with the same consequences as his fellow if he fails. If there were no close followers, no other heroes must test to avoid falling.

PCs who want to jump down into the vault after the trap is sprung must simply make a **TN 9 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test**. Even if they fail, they take only 1d6 points of penetrating damage.

A cursory check of the bookshelves confirms that the PCs have been duped: each and every book is full only of blank pages. But PCs in the vault have a more immediate problem, as well: The two suits of armor animate and attack anyone who enters the vault and fails to recite a code phrase in Ancient Tevene. They attack until destroyed, but cannot ascend the stairs.

It takes a **TN 13 Strength (Climbing) test** to climb up out of the vault. Appropriate climbing equipment or help from those still in the office above gives a bonus of up to +3 (depending on the equipment or circumstances) to such rolls.

ANIMATED ARMOR

Heavy plate armor of dwarven make, purchased long ago from an Orlesian noble in Denerim.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

-4	COMMUNICATION
6	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
-2	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY
2	MAGIC
0	PERCEPTION
5	STRENGTH (MIGHT, HEAVY BLADES)
5	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
5	70	12	10

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
TWO-HANDED SWORD	+7	3D6+5
GAUNTLET	+2	1D3+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Knock Prone and Mighty Blow.*

SPELL INVULNERABILITIES: *Lacking bodies of flesh and blood, these suits of armor are simply immune to the effects of spells that would require them to test their Willpower or Magic in resistance. They are also unaffected by Walking Bomb.*

EQUIPMENT

HEAVY PLATE ARMOR AND TWO-HANDED SWORD.

Of key concern are both noise and time: Neither a collapsing staircase nor a fight with animated armor are particularly quiet activities, even in a stone sub-basement. The PCs have 1d6+2 rounds after the first loud noise before someone comes to investigate, and only 1d6 rounds after that before the house guards arrive in force (assuming that the first investigator is not stopped from summoning them).

PART 6

THE GRAND FINALE

The final part of **A Fragile Web** is the big event: Bann Nicola's grand ball. Depending on how the PCs have progressed thus far, they might be honored guests or unwelcome gatecrashers. In any event, they have to decide whether they'll allow Bann Nicola's plans to go forward at the expense of those who'll be harmed, or whether they'll try to stop her and live with the attendant dangers and fallout.

RUNNING THE GRAND BALL

Part 6: The Grand Finale is divided into roughly sequential encounters, but much of its unfolding depends on the PCs' actions. Don't be afraid to alter the encounters, add new ones, or toss others out altogether if the heroes go in different directions. What's important is that you have a good grasp of the intrigue and make sure that events play out according to the various actors' underlying motivations. The goal is to give the players a satisfying and sensible conclusion to the overall adventure, not force them to play out each encounter as written.

The grand ball begins at twilight. The guest list is impressive. While the king and queen aren't present, many knights, banns, and even a few visiting arls are in attendance. A few wealthy or influential commoners are also present, as are—of course—the servants, squires, and attendants of those guests with the means to employ them.

The sections that follow present an overview of what the most important NPCs are up to as the grand ball unfolds.

BANN NICOLA

Bann Nicola spends the vast majority of her time at the ball mingling with guests in the parlor. She relies on Bando to keep the ball running. If Bando goes missing due to the PCs' actions, Bann Nicola realizes he's missing within at most five or ten minutes.

If things begin to go wrong, it's conceivable that Bann Nicola will call off the assassination for the time being, to avoid undue attention to a situation spinning out of control. She simply calls quietly for Rivka, speaks a prearranged code phrase, and everything is put on hold.

ADRIC

Adric plays his assigned role, but is obviously unhappy about it until he actually *sees* Tanith and realizes how good-looking she is. At that point, he's smitten.

If alerted to Ser Basil's intentions, Adric may challenge him to a duel. If he does, Bann Nicola attempts to avert the event.

CAPTAIN BRAEDON

Captain Braedon serves as Bann Nicola's escort for the evening. The presence of so many important nobles makes him nervous; he spends most of the evening checking with his guards and ensuring that the manor is secure.

Braedon is horrified and embarrassed if there are deaths, and throws himself into making things right (which Bann Nicola is counting on). However, if Brae-

don learns too much, his essentially honorable nature makes him an unpredictable wild card.

BANDO

Bando spends the ball announcing guests and ensuring that the wine flows, the cold buffet is full, and the musicians continue to play. He is constantly in motion, running between the kitchen and the parlor.

THE GUESTS

Most noble guests remain in the parlor, although the occasional knot of conversation spills into the main hall or gardens. (The library and office are kept locked during the ball.)

The Curwens and Ser Basil remain in the parlor until **Part 6: 5. The Plot in Motion**.

THE GUESTS' SERVANTS

Servants of the noble guests remain in the foyer, out of sight but easily accessible to their masters. Lorraine remains among them until needed for her part in **Part 6: 5. The Plot in Motion**. Generally, only Bann Nicola's servants have the run of the house.

RIVKA, THE ASSASSIN

Rivka joined the household staff a few days ago and spends most of the ball acting like a regular servant, running drinks to guests and refilling the buffet. Rivka goes on with this until **Part 6: 5. The Plot in Motion**.

If the PCs think to investigate recently hired servants, they can discover with a **TN 13 Cunning (Investigation) test** that five such servants (one of whom is Rivka) were hired by Bando in the last two weeks, in anticipation of the grand ball's needs.

HESTER

Hester is a trusted servant in Bann Nicola's employ, and the bann's insurance policy should Lorraine for some reason not perform her part. Should Lorraine not rush to Captain Braedon with her false tale after Ser Basil goes upstairs to discover the bodies of Bann Curwen, Tanith, and Adric, then Hester does so instead. Only Bann Nicola, Crannoch, and Bando know that Lorraine has a backup. Other than having this duty, Hester acts during the ball as would any of the other servants in Bann Nicola's employ.

THE ASSASSINATION PLOT

Be sure you have read and understand the outlines of Bann Nicola's plan as described in the section **Ser Basil, the Bastard** on page 84. The outlines of the action—assuming that the plot goes off as intended, which it may well not—are as follows.

RECURRING ROLES

The grand ball is an excellent opportunity for you to reintroduce nobles from previous adventures, such as Bann Karel Dusic, Ser Gelda, and Ser Vilem from **Amber Rage**, or Arl Gallagher Wulff, his daughter Izot, and her Avar husband Azur from **Where Eagles Lair**. If Ser Gelda is present, the PCs might even consider enlisting the blackhaller to aid their cause.

At some point during the party, Ser Basil has strong words with Bann Curwen in the parlor (see **2. Sins of Fathers**). Bann Nicola ensures that word of this confrontation spreads among the guests, embellishing (falsely) that Ser Basil threatened the bann with physical harm if Basil did not receive Tanith's hand in marriage.

Later on, Bann Nicola sends Bann Curwen, Tanith, and Adric up to the second-floor lounge to make final arrangements before the public announcement of Tanith and Adric's engagement. She promises to join them shortly.

When Curwen, Tanith, and Adric arrive upstairs, Rivka poisons them, and they die. Rivka cuts Tanith's throat before stealing out of the room.

A message is passed to Ser Basil, ostensibly from Tanith, asking him to meet her in the second floor lounge right away. Basil heads immediately upstairs. Lorraine follows.

Ser Basil bursts into the lounge and discovers the three dead bodies.

Lorraine screams from the second floor, runs downstairs, and intercepts Captain Braedon, who happens to be escorting Bann Nicola up to the lounge at that moment.

Lorraine tells Braedon, between gasps, that she saw Ser Basil exchange words with a shady elf, and then saw Basil enter the lounge, draw his dagger, and demand that Tanith marry him. It was then that Lorraine saw that Bann Curwen and Adric were already dead. ("Poisoned by that elf, I'm sure of it!") Lorraine reports that Tanith refused Basil's demand, and that Ser Basil slit her throat in anger.

Although Ser Basil obviously denies the whole of Lorraine's story, additional evidence has been planted to corroborate Lorraine's story: a bloody dagger belonging to Ser Basil, which Lorraine stole some days ago and handed over to Marissa. This has been planted under a couch in the lounge, there for anyone who looks to discover in the wake of the assassinations.

If all goes according to plan, Captain Braedon seizes Basil and turns him over to the king's authorities. A blackhaller in debt to Bann Nicola interrogates Ser Basil in the following hours and "discovers" that all of this was part of a Restorationist plot hatched in cooperation with certain city elves.

Basil is hung in the morning. The king assigns Bann Nicola to investigate and purge the Restorationists

(which gives her the leverage she wants in Merchants' Guild), while other banns are given a charter to purge the Elven Alienage.

That is, that's what happens if all goes according to plan.

1. WELCOME TO THE GRAND BALL

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs attend the grand ball at Baranti Manor.

Coaches arrive at Baranti Manor, dropping off their noble passengers. Bann Nicola's servants help them through the spitting rain and into the foyer. As they enter the parlor, Bando announces them expertly to the assemblage.

Bann Nicola's parlor is resplendent with a roaring fire, quintet of fine musicians, and an impeccable cold buffet that unrolls across a half-dozen fine tables. Servants bustle constantly to refill and redecorate its fine plates and dishes, while others of their number circulate exotic spirits and fine wines among the nobility.

Bann Nicola greets each guest personally. Her exquisite, dark green gown is staggering in its opulence, very nearly rendering invisible the impeccably dressed Captain Braedon, who is her escort for the evening.

Depending on how and why the PCs are present, they may either receive the same treatment as other honored guests or be forced to keep a low profile.

Captain Braedon keeps his guardsmen nearby, but discreetly so. Most are stationed in the main hall.

If the PCs are guests, allow them to mingle, especially if they recognize some of the guests. If your future adventures involve noble NPCs, this is a fine time to introduce them.

PCs who mingle with the intention of gaining information should make a **TN 13 Communication (Investigation) test**. Those who succeed learn information from the following table, up to and including the result of their dragon die. If multiple PCs succeed at such tests,

spread the information among them. If your future adventures involve information that might be learned at a social gathering such as this, sprinkle those clues here as well.

GRAND BALL CLUES

DRAGON DIE	INFORMATION LEARNED
1–2	There have been many complaints recently about the spiraling prices of imported goods in Denerim. (The PC who learns this is cornered by a frustrated noble who can do nothing but complain bitterly about how it has been disastrous for his fortunes.)
3–4	Rumor has it that Tanith Curwen, the daughter of Bann Gordon Curwen, will be engaged this evening. There is wild speculation—some of it even correct—about to whom she will be engaged; each PC hears something different.
5–6	The king has been looking for an excuse to control the population of city elves in Denerim lately. (The PC who learns this hears it from a noble who is either vehemently in favor of this, or violently opposed to it.)

Bann Curwen and Tanith arrive about half an hour into the grand ball. If the PCs have reason to pay more attention to them than any other guests, you may wish to introduce them with this:

Bann Gordon Curwen escorts his daughter into the parlor after Bando's expert introduction. Although an imposing figure, the old bann has the stiff walk of an old soldier. Tanith is striking, a beautiful young flower with long, curly red hair and a stunning gown that hugs her willowy curves.

A PC who makes a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing or Empathy) test** notices a palpable change in Adric's demeanor at Tanith's entrance. Whereas before her arrival he was sullen and dour, he transforms in a heartbeat into a breezy, agreeable young man. He rushes across the room, almost beating his grandmother to greet the pair.

Ser Basil is one of the last guests to arrive. Any PC who pays attention notices that he asks Tanith to dance with him. With a **TN 15 Perception (Empathy) test**, even a PC who is not paying attention notices that Ser Basil keeps a close eye on Tanith over the course of the evening no matter where the two of them happen to be.

2. SINS OF FATHERS

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs overhear a heated exchange between Bann Curwen and Ser Basil.

While the PCs are mingling, call for a **TN 13 Perception (Hearing) test** among all those who are in the parlor. PCs who succeed overhear the following exchange between Bann Curwen and Ser Basil:

The venom in the man's voice commands your attention: *"By all rights, your lands should be mine!"* Out of the corner of your eye—as discretion requires—you see a man you recognize as Ser Basil leaning into an exchange with Bann Gordon Curwen. Basil continues: *"I demand that you rectify this crime by offering me Tanith's hand, so I may regain what rightfully belongs to me!"*

"You would speak to me of rights?" Bann Curwen retorts. "Your father's lands were stolen, given to him illegitimately, by an illegitimate king. Although I suppose *legitimacy* is no great concern of yours!"

Basil seethes, his face turning red, his hands clenching in fists. After a tense moment of angry silence, he turns and marches away.

After this exchange, the rumors start.

Any mingling PC who makes a **TN 13 Communication (Investigation) test** realizes that the facts of the story are changing as it's retold around the ball, with Ser Basil's part in the exchange sounding more and more menacing with each retelling until most guests have come to believe that Ser Basil threatened Bann Curwen with direct and physical violence in the immediate future.

It takes a deliberate effort, as well as a **TN 17 Communication (Investigation) test**, to trace the escalations in the tale to Bann Nicola herself.

What's clear to everyone is that many guests are starting to feel uncomfortable about Ser Basil.

3. CONFRONTING BANDO

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs pump Bando for information.

If the PCs believe that Bando has useful knowledge, they may take an opportunity during the ball to isolate him and force him to talk. (If they don't, you should obviously skip this encounter.)

Bando is constantly in motion during the party, passing in and out of various rooms around the manor. It is relatively simple for one or more of the PCs to catch him

alone at some point and force him to some even more secluded corner. Bando is no combatant; if threatened with violence he complies immediately with any and all physical demands.

Getting Bando to talk is a different story. The PCs might try any number of tactics, such as bargaining, persuasion, intimidation, or even seduction. These require an **advanced, opposed Communication (Bargaining, Persuasion, or Seduction) or Strength (Intimidation) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test with a success threshold of 10. Each test takes as much as ten minutes of back-and-forth—negotiation, wheedling, wheeling-and-dealing—and Bando receives a +3 bonus to his rolls to represent his deep loyalty to Bann Nicola. The PCs have their work cut out for them, although if they ultimately succeed, Bann Nicola's plot is laid bare to them, since Bando knows everything.

The PCs can learn useful information from Bando short of the whole kit and caboodle, though. Each time they meet with success in an opposed test (short of the advanced test's master threshold, that is), Bando accidentally lets one of the following bits of information slip:

- Bann Nicola intends to break the merchants' hold on the ports.
- Bann Nicola is somehow using Tanith Curwen to further her goals.
- There will be an assassination, and it will implicate the Restorationists.
- The assassination will also result in a purge of the Elven Alienage.

Keep in mind that Bando and Bann Nicola are in frequent contact during the ball. If Bando disappears for any significant period of time, he's inquired after, with Braedon's guardsmen dispatched to search for him if he doesn't turn up within a few minutes.

4. INTERVIEWING LORRAINE

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs confront Lorraine about tonight's events.

If the PCs learned from Marissa about Lorraine's involvement, they may want to speak with her.

Lorraine is difficult to isolate, as she spends the ball in a room crammed with other servants, retainers, and squires. If the PCs come up with a clever plan to do so, she can be convinced to speak freely with an **opposed Communication (Persuade) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test. If the PCs manage to use their knowledge of the love between Marissa and Lorraine to strengthen their attempts, they receive a +2 bonus to their roll. If Marissa has reason to be concerned about her physical safety, the PCs receive a further +1 bonus.

LORRAINE

An attractive young woman with hair cut short in a martial style. Lorraine was initially persuaded to betray Ser Basil by Bann Nicola's coin. She fell in love with her handler Marissa—and Marissa with her—in the natural fashion. The longer these deceptions have continued the more conflicted Lorraine has become. This has manifested in a morose demeanor of late.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
2	CUNNING
5	DEXTERITY (RIDING, STAVES)
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION
1	STRENGTH
4	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	40	16	5

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE	RANGE
MORNINGSTAR	+7	1D6+4	-
DAGGER	+5	1D6+2	-
CROSSBOW	+5	2D6+3	30/60 YARDS

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow and Pierce Armor.*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Novice), Single Weapon Style (Novice), and Weapon and Shield Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.*

EQUIPMENT

LIGHT MAIL ARMOR, MEDIUM SHIELD, MORNINGSTAR, DAGGER, CROSSBOW, AND 20 BOLTS.

If the PCs succeed in their test, Lorraine reveals what she knows about the intrigue: That she's to follow Ser Basil upstairs when he goes there, and that when the time is right—she's not sure exactly what that means, but has the idea that it will involve dead bodies—she's to run and find Captain Braedon, and then loudly convey the (false) tale of what she's just seen. While Lorraine suspects there is more to the plot than she knows, she has allowed her love for Marissa to cloud her judgment. Ultimately, she believes she is serving Ferelden by helping root out the Restorationists.

If prodded for more information than that ("Is there anything else we should know?"), she also remembers that she turned over one of Ser Basil's daggers to Marissa a few days ago, when asked to do so.

Lorraine believes that when all has been said and done, Bann Nicola will exonerate her of any wrongdoing and offer her a position with House Baranti. If she comes to

suspect that's not going to happen (and, in point of fact, it isn't), or if she learns that Marissa has left Denerim, she leaves the grand ball immediately, never to be seen again.

5. THE PLOT IN MOTION

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

Bann Nicola's plan comes to fruition (unless the PCs stop it!).

After another round of dancing, you notice Bann Nicola speaking with Bann Curwen. Adric and Tanith, fresh from a dance, join them.

After a few moments of conversation, Bann Nicola gestures in the direction of the grand staircase in the main hall. The other three—Curwen, Adric, and Tanith—head that way, conversing gaily as they go, while Bann Nicola turns warmly to speak with another guest who's been waiting patiently for her attention.

Make a **PERCEPTION (SEEING)** test.

Any PC who makes the **TN 13 Perception (Seeing)** test notices the briefest of eye contact between Bann Nicola

and Rivka just as Bann Nicola turns away from Curwen, Tanith, and Adric. Anyone thus alerted sees Rivka turn to carry a decanter of wine on a silver platter up the grand stairs, following the other three.

Unless stopped from doing so, Rivka enters the lounge after Bann Curwen, Tanith, and Adric, and poisons them. They die in just a few rounds without making any noise or commotion that can be heard above the musicians, who've coincidentally just begun a rather spirited number. Rivka slices Tanith's throat according to the plan before stealing out one of the lounge's windows, sneaking through the gardens and over the manor wall, and disappearing into the city.

If the PCs intercept Rivka, she attempts to salvage the plot if she can or, failing that, tries to escape. If the PCs try to convince her to finger Bann Nicola, call for an **opposed Communication (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline)** test, but don't bother to keep track of Rivka's roll. Regardless of the result, Rivka feigns willingness to go along with the PCs, but when the time comes for any kind of public confession, she

RIVKA THE ASSASSIN

An experienced elven assassin, currently disguised as a Baranti household servant.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

4	COMMUNICATION (DECEPTION, DISGUISE)
2	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)
4	CUNNING
6	DEXTERITY (INITIATIVE, LIGHT BLADES, STEALTH)
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION
3	STRENGTH
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
18	55	16	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
DAGGER	+8	1d6+4

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Disarm and Pierce Armor.*

Class Powers (Rogue 5): *Backstab, Bluff, Rogue's Armor, and Stunt Bonus (Pierce Armor for 1 SP).*

TALENTS: *Scouting (Journeyman), Thievery (Journeyman), Single Weapon Style (Novice), and Unarmed Style (Novice).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.*

EQUIPMENT

DAGGER.

SER BASIL

A ruggedly good-looking young knight whose scars make him seem authentic, rather than disfigured. He believes he's destined for greatness, and comes off as arrogant.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

2	COMMUNICATION (PERSUASION)
2	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
3	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
3	DEXTERITY (LIGHT BLADES, RIDING)
1	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
5	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	60	13	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BASTARD SWORD	+7	2d6+6
DAGGER	+5	1d6+6

POWERS

FAVORED STUNTS: *Defensive Stance and Mighty Blow.*

TALENTS: *Armor Training (Journeyman), Dual Weapon Style (Journeyman), and Weapon and Shield Style (Journeyman).*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, Light Blades, and Spears.*

EQUIPMENT

BASTARD SWORD AND DAGGER. (IN A COMBAT SITUATION HE'D WEAR HEAVY PLATE ARMOR AND CARRY A MEDIUM SHIELD, BUT THESE STATISTICS REFLECT HIM AS HE ATTENDS THE BALL.)

implicates Ser Basil instead, more or less according to the original plan.

PCs who are still downstairs may make a **TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test** to notice Bando handing a message to a servant and whispering in his ear. The message shortly makes its way to Ser Basil, who reads the note and immediately heads for the main stairs.

Given a further **TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test**, the PCs notice that Lorraine, who has been keeping an eye on her master, sees this and follows him. (If the PCs are explicitly keeping an eye on Lorraine, no test is needed to notice this. If Lorraine has left the ball, Hester is the one who follows Ser Basil.)

If the PCs have still not intervened, Bann Nicola and Captain Braedon begin to ascend the grand staircase just as Ser Basil arrives at the lounge. Lorraine's scream rings out just a moment later, precisely as the musicians finish their number. Lorraine descends the stairs, relates her tale to Braedon, and chaos erupts. (Or, again, if Lorraine is no longer present, Hester plays the role of witness.)

Captain Braedon calls for guardsmen and rushes upstairs to apprehend a confused and hysterical Ser Basil. The bloody dagger is found momentarily. If Lorraine is present, she identifies it as Basil's. The wheels of justice turn.

Obviously, the PCs' actions could cause any of a thousand variations on Bann Nicola's plan. Whatever the PCs decide to do, keep the various actors' motivations in mind, remember that this is the thrilling climax of the adventure, and don't be boring.

AFTERMATH

The loose ends of "A Fragile Web" can be tied up in a multitude of ways, depending on what the PCs do, and what they have done.

If Bann Nicola succeeds in the broad outlines of her plot, she terrorizes Denerim's merchant families over a period of weeks while the king turns his loyal banns loose on the Elven Alienage, which burns for days. Sometime in this period, Lorraine is discovered to have hung herself, presumably due to some guilt, regret, or horror at what she witnessed. In reality, Rivka (or some other assassin) has been dispatched to tie up Bann Nicola's loose ends.

If the PCs kill Bann Nicola or influence someone else to kill her, Adric takes her place as the leader of House Baranti and Denerim's nobility plunges into a period of chaos as her stabilizing influence disappears. House Baranti's various public works come to an end, and the city is worse off for their lack.

If Bann Curwen survives and learns that he has the PCs to thank, they've made a steadfast ally. If Tanith learns the same, she becomes infatuated with the handsomest PC hero — likely to Adric's frustration.



If Bann Nicola's network of espionage comes apart to the extent that her agents stop picking up the confessional slips that Mother Gabriella puts in the back-alley barrel each week, the mother quietly thanks the Maker and begins burning the real confessional slips each week, leaving no one the wiser. She never reveals her secret to anyone.

Perhaps the best results come about if Bann Nicola is publicly discredited with evidence she can't dispute or make to disappear. In that event, although Adric still inherits the house's wealth (because the king strips Nicola of her titles), her secret knowledge doesn't go away. And although relative peace prevails in Denerim — for the time being — the PCs have made an exceptionally dangerous adversary, not only of Bann Nicola, but also of the wily and ingenious spymaster Crannoch. Their plots of vengeance should provide fuel for many future adventures.

Although less broadly important than what happens to Bann Nicola, the PCs must eventually tell Andriel something. If she learns that her confessions were used against her employer, she never goes near Andraste's Ear again, going so far as to move out of the neighborhood. Given her loyalty to her employer, her relationship with Ser Greta is repaired over time. She may even recommend the PCs to Ser Greta in the future, in the event that Ser Greta ever needs capable allies in her ongoing crusade to thwart Orlesian influence in Denerim.

APPENDIX: ADVENTURE SEEDS

THE SOUND SLEEP OF THE INNOCENT

BY JEFF TIDBALL

One night as the characters sleep soundly in the inn of a small city somewhere in Ferelden, their slumber is interrupted by a gang of attackers sent to kill them in the night.

The heroes' immediate and obvious challenge is to fight off the assault. But in the wake of the attack, the PCs must also figure out who tried to have them killed, and why. And perhaps most importantly, what they have to do to make sure it doesn't happen again. Because whatever crimes the PCs may have committed in the past—real or imagined, mild or grievous—they have nothing to do with the attack that begins this adventure.

This adventure seed consists primarily of background information that describes the backstory that led to the attack and the parties involved. The adventure, then, should arise organically from the motivations of the parties and the way the battle plays out—who lives and who dies.

BACKSTORY

Bandits have plagued the main road north of the city recently. They're a relatively small group, but their attacks have become bolder and more violent as they've perfected their tactics.

A few days ago, the bandits attacked the merchant wagon of a well-liked family—a father, mother, teenage daughter, and young son—who travel a regional circuit selling wooden toys. The bandits killed the father when he tried to stop them from raping the mother and daughter. The violence escalated and they wound up slaying the entire family.

Unknown to the bandits, the attack was witnessed by an apostate mage. This mage wasn't brave enough to confront the villains, but used his magic after they had gone to save the young boy's life.

The mage intended to simply drop the boy with the local sheriff and avoid further entanglements, but when he arrived in town, he discovered that the sheriff was away, not expected back for several days. He tried to

leave the boy with the local innkeeper, but unknown to him, this was the worst thing he could have done.

The innkeeper is in league with the bandits; he feeds them information about good targets in return for a cut of the spoils. Business has been bad, and this is the only way he's been able to maintain his business.

The innkeeper figured that a young boy's testimony about the bandits' identities could be manipulated or discounted, but wasn't so sure about the mage. After feigning sympathy and listening to the mage's tale, the innkeeper "revealed" that in a lucky coincidence, a group of outsiders matching the mage's description of the bandits had taken rooms in the inn that very night!

With the sheriff out of town and no standing force of guards, the innkeeper volunteered to round up a group of local men, paying them from his own pocket if need be, to apprehend the sleeping "bandits." He left the boy in the mage's increasingly nervous company to round up such men.

Naturally, the innkeeper rode straight to the bandits' camp and brought them back to the city under cover of darkness, casting them—for the mage's benefit—as the posse he had raised.

The bandits were more than willing to participate in a fight that would eliminate the witness to their deeds (for they intended to make sure the apostate mage died, "tragically," in the fight against the PCs) as well as provide convenient scapegoats for their past acts of banditry.

THE FIGHT

The attacking force consists of one bandit for each PC. They should be tailored to match the PCs' fighting abilities. There is also a single local man of good reputation (but not particularly great intelligence) recruited by the innkeeper and fed the same lies that were told to the mage, so the sheriff will have a trusted local face to question about the fight upon his return. Finally, the band includes the apostate mage, told by the innkeeper that he must provide the group with a positive identification of the "bandits."

The PCs are awakened, ideally, by precautions of their own design set in place to prevent exactly this kind of attack. If the PCs don't take such precautions, they're awakened, instead, when the none-too-bright local recruit drops his sword while the attackers are sneaking up on their room.

The bandits' plan is to kill all of the PCs and knife the apostate in the back while keeping the local sap confused enough that he'll simply verify the innkeeper's version of events when the time comes. (Ideally, they hope he'll be knocked out the window or bludgeoned unconscious early in the fight, circumstances they're

perfectly prepared to help along.) The bandits have also brought along one of the slain family's wooden toys to plant among the PCs' gear, to cement their guilt.

The bandits—cowards by nature—do not fight to the death.

AFTER THE ATTACK

What happens after the attack depends on two factors: who lived and who died, and what the PCs decide to do. As GM, you will have to improvise—there's no way around it—depending on how these two unpredictable factors turn out.

Two lists, provided below, will aid you. The first is a list of what each actor in this drama wants. The second is a list of interesting things that might happen while the PCs pursue answers. If the pace of play ever slows, just search the latter list for the most appropriate event to get things moving again.

WHAT THEY WANT

Here are the motivations and priorities of the NPCs, assuming, of course, they survive the attack.

THE INNKEEPER

The innkeeper wants to preserve his reputation and his business. He'd also like to preserve the bandits' criminal enterprise, because (a) they can implicate him if he turns on them, and (b) he needs his part of their proceeds to prop up the inn. When the attack on the PCs goes south, he tries to pin things that can't be ascribed to coincidence on the mage (blaming him, for example, for giving him bad descriptions of the bandits).

THE MAGE

If the apostate mage survives the attack, his highest priority is to escape the area before the Templars pursuing him turn up.

THE BOY

The boy wants his family back. Since that's not going to happen, he'll take any gesture of humanity or goodwill that he can get. He doesn't remember the attack clearly, couldn't identify the bandits to save his life, and is wide open to manipulation by any and all of the various self-interested parties.

THE BANDITS

The bandits want to avoid further encounters, get back to their camp, and get on with the business of enriching themselves by ambushing the weak. Of course, they can't very well have the PCs hunting them, so they'll ally with the innkeeper as necessary in order to keep local events on an even keel. However, if it comes to it,

they'd rather move on to other hunting grounds than get into another dangerous melee or become embroiled with the local sheriff or freemen.

THE PATSY

Strong and well-liked but not particularly bright, this genial mooncalf wants to preserve—and perhaps enhance—his reputation. He's willing to be convinced that things happened differently than he actually remembers them if the new story is plausible and paints him heroically.

THE SHERIFF

When he returns, the sheriff wants to get to the bottom of things. He'd be thrilled if the investigation also rid him of the north road bandits.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN

The following sections describe events that could transpire if things slow down and you want to kick the action forward.

THE SHERIFF RETURNS

Although not expected for several days, the sheriff could return unexpectedly, his journey cut short by any number of unpredictable factors.

A SECOND ATTACK

If the PCs are proving troublesome and the innkeeper and bandits think they can get away with it, they might try a second attack to clear the heroes out of their way once and for all.

THE CHANTRY STEPS IN

Chantry Templars have been tracking the apostate mage. Even if the apostate slips out of town, the Chantry might take an interest in the ambush on the PCs since their quarry apparently took part.

THE PCS ARE DETAINED

If the situation becomes too confusing, the local freemen may decide to simply detain the PCs until the sheriff returns. The locals don't want to do anything irreversible, like meting out justice on their own. They just want to preserve the situation for the rightful authorities.

THE BOY GOES MUTE

The young boy's last few days have been well and truly awful. He'll literally be scarred forever, but his psychological trauma could also manifest physically in delayed muteness, which would render attempts to understand his already confusing testimony that much more difficult.

RESOLUTION

The adventure's ultimate resolution depends a great deal on how much satisfaction the PCs require. As long as they want to continue searching for answers, the adventure continues, with the various villains continuing to act in their own self-interest.

On the other hand, if the heroes simply want to move on to move profitable enterprises, the bandits are unlikely to pursue them out of town. In that case, though, keep this cast of antagonists in your bag of tricks for future use. If the PCs travel back through town, you'll have ready-made villains for future conflicts.

ALL IS THEFT

BY DAVID HILL

This adventure is a light mystery and morality play set in Denerim, in which the Player Characters learn about a spree of robberies, investigate three crimes, and ultimately confront those responsible. In the end, they must make a choice about how to deal with a group of criminals whose motives are purely held, if both inadvisable and strange.

The three investigations can be brief, or crafted into longer mini-adventures, depending on the characters, their resources, and your interest as GM. They can be presented in any order, and since any of them can give the PCs enough clues to at least haphazardly pursue the culprits, even a more action-oriented group should have a reasonable chance at overall success.

WORK FOR HIRE

Three merchants in Denerim have suffered robberies of late: a smith, a dealer in preserved foods, and a seller of building materials. These were not small robberies; all three merchants lost large volumes of product. Each had been independently looking to hire agents to recover their wares, but having learned of each other's misfortunes, they're now collaborating to hire investigators. Their offer is potentially quite lucrative: 10% of the value of the goods recovered.

LIFTED ARMS

The first crime scene is the smith's workshop. The smith is particularly disturbed by the theft because he slept through the night it happened, and his bed is just upstairs from the shop. The thieves stole dozens of items, and moving that volume of metal without waking him should have been impossible. And that's where things get fishy: With a little investigation, the PCs find a faint purplish-gray powder around the smith's bed. With a little knowledge, study, or consultation, they realize it's the product of a rare plant that causes sleep. It doesn't grow in Ferelden natively.

Ultimately, there's only one merchant in Denerim who deals in rare poisons, and he doesn't advertise. With a shakedown or bribe, the merchant reveals that the purchaser of the drug in question wore a distinctive slender black cloak with a faint shimmer, like coal. Magically inclined characters might identify this as a sign of blood magic.

DRY GOODS

The second scene is at the preserved foods dealer. He deals in pickled fish, dried fruits, and similar travel-friendly foods. He's no small-time businessman, and manages caravans that deliver goods all over Thedas. In an established campaign, the party probably knows him.

The oddity with this robbery is that while the dealer's goods are openly available for purchase at places of little security all over Denerim—he operates stands, stalls, and storefronts all over the city—the thief chose to steal from the storehouse where not only are a smaller portion of his products stashed, but there is better security. He's confident that the culprit was his storehouse guard, who hasn't been seen since the crime.

The PCs can find the guard's family relatively easily. His wife and child aren't particularly interested in speaking, but the wife can be persuaded with a bit of coin. Her tale is that her husband told her he'd be gone for a while, out of town, but that when he returned, he'd come bearing wealth that would change their meager lives for the better. He couldn't tell her how long he'd be gone. Given an effort at kindness to her, the daughter might eventually reveal that she happened to spot an elf outside their house, waiting for her father, on the night when the PCs know the robbery took place. The two of them left together; that was the last night the guard was seen in town.

If the party deals with the wife particularly compassionately, she might confide that she doesn't trust her husband much, these days. She says he's been speaking openly against the king in recent weeks.

BUILDING THE CASE

The last crime scene is a lumberyard that was robbed of enough material to build a number of solid homes. The business owner reports that a number of his workers have been missing since the theft.

Upon asking around, the characters can learn that several heavy wagons were seen near the yard on the night of the thefts. Further questions, further afield, may reveal that these same wagons left the city in the middle of the night, heading west.

A few hours down that road, there are signs that heavy wagons left the main road, heading into the woods. The ruts made by their wheels end abruptly in a clearing near a deep ravine where there's a large circle of dead underbrush burned into the ground.

Through their own knowledge, research, or investigations, the PCs can learn that the burned circle suggests the casting of a traveling ritual capable of transporting a group, turning it into a bloody mist that can travel on the wind.

JUSTICE

The clues lead to a fortified camp in the woods, on the far side of the ravine. The camp is built of the stolen lumber and other building materials, which have been made into a makeshift fortress. About 40 men live here, and a few women and children, all bearing and wearing goods stolen from the smith. They have large stockpiles of the stolen foodstuffs.

These malcontents are led by an elf who wears the black cloak previously described. He neither confirms nor denies any accusations the PCs level at him, nor offers either explanation or excuses. He behaves civilly, but has no love for the Fereldan king or power structures.

The elf's ultimate goals should be determined based on the needs of the long-term campaign, but revolve, generally, around forming an independent political power base in Ferelden. His motives might fall anywhere on from wanting a haven for enlightenment that stands apart from the more brutish Fereldan aesthetic, to seeking the overthrow of the nation of Ferelden.

The elf and his followers clearly will not survive a confrontation with the armed might of Denerim, so they take what steps they can to convince the PCs to remain quiet about their presence. Bribery is one clear possibility. If pressed, and assuming that they can't recruit the PCs to their cause, they're willing to match the merchants' offer of 10% of the value of the stolen goods. If bribery fails, the elf makes it clear that he and his followers are willing to die to protect their settlement, and that if the PCs attack the place, or bring the force of the king's law to attack it, then the PCs will be directly responsible for the deaths not only of those present, but the resulting hardship that will befall their families.

Whatever set of decisions they make, the PCs will have the opportunity to make long-term allies of either three powerful merchants, or the elf's commune.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF SISTER STONE

BY FILAMENA YOUNG

A ranking member of the Chantry needs able escorts on an important Chantry matter. Simply put, a young priest is about to make a special pilgrimage to a village on the edge of the Korcari Wilds. It's some kind of mercy mission, but the Chantry is vague on the details. The characters are told that all they need to know is that it is their

job to escort the pilgrim along her path and keep her safe. The pay is fair, and as such, hard to turn down.

But along the way, a series of strange events leads locals to believe the pilgrim is a bona fide saint, spreading miracles wherever she goes. The characters may have their doubts, as the pilgrim clearly has no magical abilities and most of the odd happenings could be explained away mundanely. Even so, the rumors spread, and a local arl hears the stories and decries heresy.

The characters must avoid the arl's men while finishing the pilgrim's work, which now draws supporters and attackers alike. The characters must ultimately choose between turning their charge over to the arl, or forcing her to abandon her pilgrimage.

HIRED

A Chantry Templar, a man of good standing and great reputation, approaches the characters. He's looking to hire them for a mission he cannot handle himself. He needs them to meet a priest in Denerim and escort her, cross-country, to the edge of the wilds.

MIRACLE OF THE FERTILE HARRIDAN

As soon as their party starts out, the characters begin to hear rumors about Sister Stone, the pilgrim in their company. A merchant tells them a story about an older woman desperate to have a son despite the death of her husband. After praying to the Maker with Sister Stone, the harridan became pregnant and nine months later bore not one, but two healthy boys. Local women say that Sister Stone's intercession with the Maker can make any woman fertile.

WHERE THE WATER RUNS FRESH

While passing the River Drakon, Sister Stone requests the characters call on a farming community she has visited with in the past. They're in dire straits, claiming an apostate has cursed the part of the river from which they irrigate their crops, which now kills even the fish that live there. The characters must handle the apostate. In the meantime, Sister Stone prays by the river. When the characters return, they find the river once again running clean. The locals call it a miracle. Sister Stone says it's merely the Maker's work.

THE FIELD OF LIARS

Following the West Road, Sister Stone stops several times to aid the sick. She takes her time in each case, leaving the characters the opportunity to explore and adventure while they wait on her, if they wish. The Sister has now drawn the attention of Arl Broxton, the protector of these lands, and he has sent spies to observe her for

signs that she practices magic. One cloudy afternoon, the pilgrim stops in the middle of the road along a field, saying that she has heard a noise of many men. After a moment, the clouds part and a great gust of warm wind blows the nearby grain nearly flat, revealing a group of armed men who serve the arl approaching. The men lay down their arms, calling the exposure of their ambush the Maker's work and converting to her cause.

A GIFT OF DOVES

The pilgrim and the PCs arrive at a small town with a large Chantry house. Diseased rats have beset the local area, despoiling the food stores and making the children ill. Sister Stone meets privately with the Reverend Mother. When she emerges, she looks tired, and a bit sad. The next day, among pomp and ceremony, the Sister performs a miracle, telling the townspeople that the Maker has already reached out to them and that they should open their rat traps. When they do, doves fly from the traps. Few who witnessed the releasing of the doves doubt the authenticity of the event, and yet the characters can't shake the idea that it may have been an elaborate ruse staged by the local church.

THE THWARTED POWER

The characters begin to hear that the arl is demanding Sister Stone appear before him to be tried as a witch and an apostate—no matter what the Chantry says. The sister ignores these demands, continuing on her pilgrimage undeterred, until the arl's men round up 50

men, women, and children who believe she is divine, accuses them of crimes against the Chantry, and promises to put one of them to death each day she fails to appear. Sister Stone places the obvious choice into the PCs hands. She is clearly fearful for her life and ministry, but has no wish to see innocents die. The characters are free to act as they are moved by turning her over to the arl, concealing her, spiriting her out of the area, staging a rescue of the hostages, or whatever seems best. Certain of these choices could serve as the seed of an entire series of adventures.

THE BREAKING OF BONDS

If the Sister winds up facing the arl, whether is captured or turned over, her final miracle transpires. As the Sister is taken into custody, her bonds will not hold—and in fact, the shackles of the 50 prisoners fall away as well, and cannot be re-fastened. The arl dismisses this as a trick of sympathetic guards. After all, his soldiers have failed him before where the Sister is concerned. In the end, the arl demands Sister Stone be put to death. When he steps forward to strike the fatal blow himself, his sword will not pierce her (but then, he's an old man with a shaking hand...). Before he can ready himself for a second strike, the Sister takes in a deep breath, cries out sweetly to the Maker, and falls dead of no apparent cause. Witnesses call it her final miracle—ascension to the Maker without pain of death—but there are still many unanswered questions. No doubt that characters will be asked about them for the rest of their lives as living witnesses to the pilgrimage of Sister Stone.