

Justice
and
Noble
Valor

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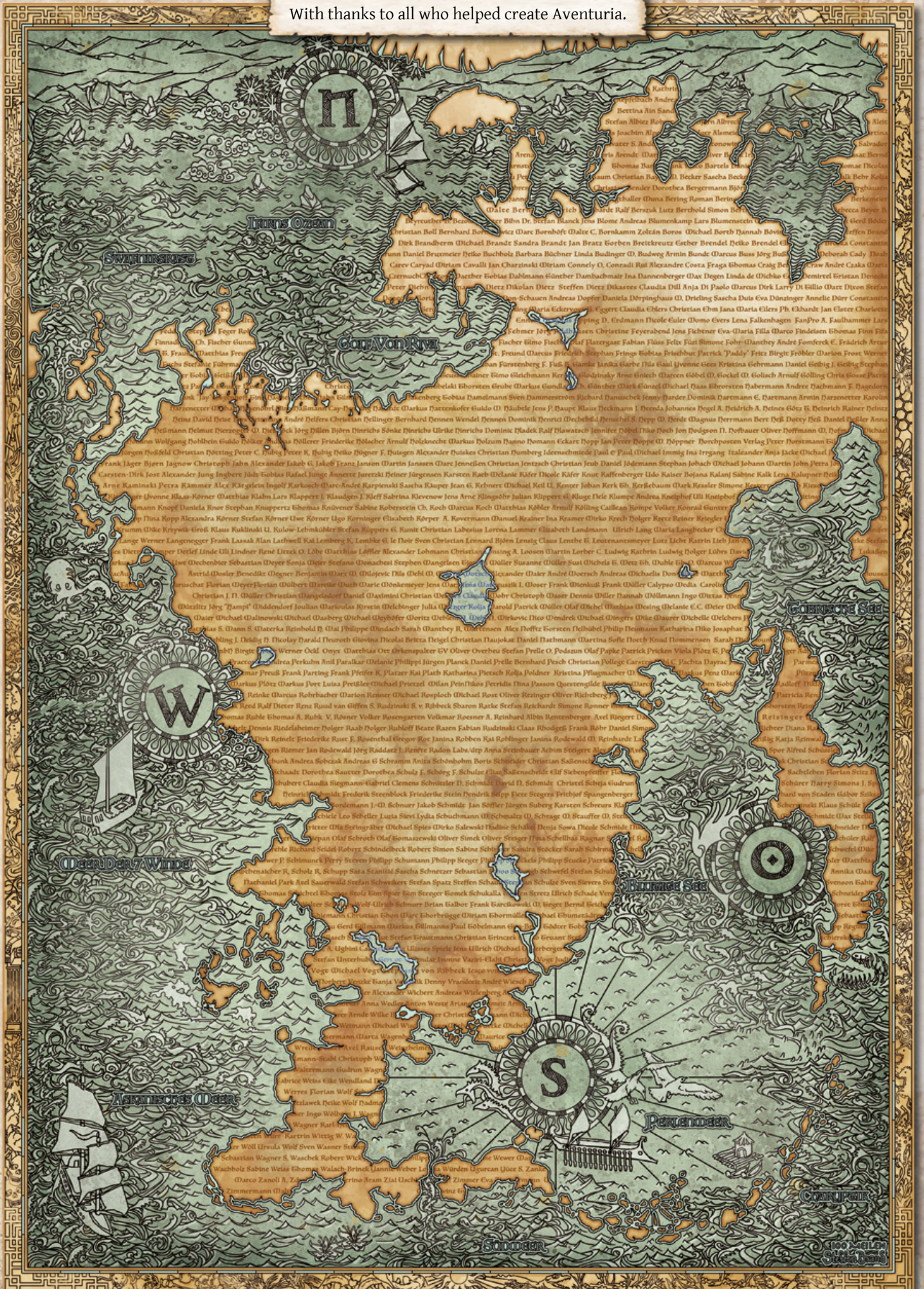


Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
The Story Thus Far.....	6
Between Light and Shadow—The Villains.....	7
I. It All Starts... At An Inn.....	8
II. Here Be Robbers.....	11
III. The Ruins of the Fortified Cloister.....	16
Epilogue.....	23



NPCs with this symbol play an important role in future official adventures. Killing or otherwise altering this NPC creates conflicts with future TDE publications.



NPCs with this symbol hold a position that is important for future official adventures, but they may be replaced with others that fulfill the same basic role (such as being mentors, antagonists, or the rescue party).



NPCs with this symbol play a role in this adventure but do not appear in future official publications. Feel free to exchange them for other NPCs with similar roles, or reuse them in your campaigns and adventures.

Note that some NPCs, such as spellcasters and Blessed Ones, possess a large number of skills, but we do not necessarily list every skill with a rating higher than 0 if it isn't immediately relevant to the scenario. Feel free to add skills and assign ratings as you see fit.



Use these ideas to make a scene easier for your heroes.



Use these ideas to make things more difficult for your heroes.

Some sections include text that is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for your players. These sections contain no GM-only information.



These sections offer helpful hints for the GM and may contain information that your heroes need to discover or deduce, bit by bit. Some information serves only as background information for the GM.

Taverns & Inns: Quality, Prices, and Beds

Taverns, inns, and the like have ratings for *Quality* (Q), *Prices* (P), and *Beds* (B). Q refers to the level of accommodations, while P modifies the standard prices for services as listed in the *Core Rules* on page 382. See the table *Quality and Prices* for an explanation of these ratings. B is simply the total number of beds available. For example, a place with a rating of (Q3/P2/B10) is an inn that is somewhat cheaper than similar establishments and offers 10 beds.

Quality and Prices

Level	Quality	Prices
1	Sorry excuse for a rat trap	Very cheap (50% of the standard price)
2	Dirty dive	Cheap (75% of the standard price)
3	Average tavern	Normal (standard price)
4	Good inn	Expensive (150% of the standard price)
5	Exquisite hotel	Very costly (200% of the standard price)
6	Luxurious accommodation	Prohibitively expensive (400% of the standard price)

For the GM

The Twelve be with you! This adventure serves as a great introduction to the rules and runs in about 4 hours, making it especially suitable for conventions and demonstration events. The heroes set out to defeat a scoundrel's forces and rescue a damsel in distress, but things are not as they seem. The finale tests the heroes' morals and sense of justice, and lives hinge upon their decisions. Welcome to the wilderness of the Dark Ridge Mountains!

Introduction

“Law and justice are two entirely different things. And nothing says they necessarily have to be connected in any way.” –A Blessed One of Phex to a novice, modern

Shield Lands, Griffonsford, Luminous Woods

The Margravate of Griffonsford and its neighboring province, the Duchy of Weiden, comprise the majority of the Middenrealm’s northern border, where the land of Empress Rohaja meets that of the orcs. A mountainous region known as the Dark Ridge (or the *Sable Ridge*, to locals) separates these two ancient enemies. Local humans refer to their homeland as the Shield of the Middenrealm, hence the label *Shield Lands*, and the troops who patrol the border region are known as the *Sable Guard*. This adventure takes place in the Luminous Woods, which extends from the foot of the Dark Ridge Mountains south through Griffonsford, a region that is home to valiant knights and frugal peasants who stand constant vigil against the encroaching darkness. The land bears the scars of innumerable clashes with orcs, and the residents’ solid faith in Praios, god of light and justice, is plain for all to see.

Griffonsford Names

If you need a name for a local NPC (such as one of the Baron’s servants or a cousin of the innkeeper), choose from the following lists.

Male Names: Gerbald, Emmeran, Genzmer, Greifwin, Raulwin, Arngrimm, or any variant of the names Peraine or Praios (such as Perainor or Praiodan)

Female Names: Yadwiga, Gertraudis, Treugunde, Heiltraudis, Trautlinde

Justice and Noble Valor is a straightforward adventure with a final twist in the form of an intriguing moral dilemma. The heroes stand between two parties, both of which have committed an injustice, and must find a good, just, and/or legal solution, depending on their goals and skills.

The Heroes

This adventure is designed for *Experienced* heroes. It is suitable for all races, cultures, and professions, but we recommend righteous heroes, or at least those with a true sense of justice.

Survival skills are useful but not mandatory. Magic-wielding heroes can shine in some scenes, but be aware that those with clairvoyance or influence spells might learn certain



facts too easily. Hints and tips for handling these situations appear throughout the book. Socially, Griffonsforders do not particularly like magic-users. If it fits your group's style, have NPCs react accordingly in the presence of magic-using heroes. Blessed Ones can add an interesting spiritual nuance. This is especially true for Blessed Ones of Rondra, who can initiate a *divine ordeal* (see *Sharp Tongues*, on page 22). Heroes who prefer adventuring in urban areas might find less of interest in this adventure, though their social skills (if any) could come in handy. Last but not least, if the heroes (or more importantly, the players) do not enjoy role playing moral dilemmas, they might miss the whole point of *Justice and Noble Valor*.

The Story Thus Far

Before her husband's unfortunate death in war, Peraidane of Altnardesfeld-Schroffenstein, the Esquire of Sunfield Manor (located in the northern part of the Barony of Beldengrove), had two children: Isella and Praiowulf. Ten years ago, after many years of mourning, Peraidane entered into a Covenant of Travia (matrimony) with Gerbald of Irmenburg, who had courted her patiently for years. Isella, the designated heir by right of primogeniture, was sent to the Northmarches to study with an old friend of the family who saw to her training as a squire. Praiowulf was enrolled in the *Warrior Academy of Sword and Shield* in the neighboring duchy of Weiden.

Two years ago, Peraidane contracted a serious winter illness and began to succumb to her fever. Gerbald wrote to his stepchildren, summoning them to be by her side. Praiowulf did not receive his letter in time, and Isella's letter was lost somewhere along the Griffon's Pass*. Peraidane died without her children by her side. Praiowulf withdrew in his sorrow and became embittered, while Isella focused her grief on her stepfather. She secretly blamed him for her mother's death, assuming mistakenly that he had committed adultery and broken her mother's heart. Isella remained in the Northmarches for her knighting ceremony, while Praiowulf stayed in Weiden. Meanwhile, Gerbald took over the management of Sunfield Manor as a reeve. He is loved by the people for his amiable nature, but he is a sad and lonely man who now seeks comfort in the arms of a commoner, the cook Ludilla.

*The Griffon's Pass starts near Griffonsford and runs through the Kosh Mountains to the Northmarches.

A few weeks ago, Isella returned to Beldengrove to claim stewardship of the fief from her stepfather. She soon discovered his affair with the cook and took it as a sign that her assumptions about his betrayal were correct. She

desires to see him punished even though she is the lawful heir of Sunfield Manor and her stepfather can do nothing to change her inheritance. Driven by her desire for revenge and inspired by rumors of a band of outlaws operating along the Dark Ridge, she concocted a sinister plan....

Her plan's success depended upon the help of the robbers, but she needed to find them first. To disguise her search, Isella rode out alone on several unannounced hunting trips with her most loyal friend, the Elenvinan Thoroughbred she received from her *swordfather* (the knight who oversaw her training as a squire). She eventually discovered the bandits' camp, which, as fate would have it, was hidden among the ruins of an ancient fortified cloister she had explored many times as a child. She had rehearsed the meeting many times in her head, so she approached them with promises of shimmering gold for the murder of her stepfather. However, her plan did not account for the wishes of her host, Darian of Bregelsaum-Steinhauer. He may be a robber-knight, but he is no hired killer. As he is fond of saying, he considers himself a "gentleman rogue."

Astonished by Isella's effrontery, Darian took her prisoner without further ado and set about ransoming her back to her stepfather. Isella managed to escape, but now she faces the problem of dealing with all the people who can reveal her secret plan. Exhausted from fleeing her pursuers (the bandit gang's two best trackers), Isella stumbles across the heroes and makes a fateful decision—for her, and maybe for the heroes as well.

What Happens Next

The heroes meet a young knight, Isella, at a traveler's inn called the *Four Beeches*. Isella asks them to help her deal with some robbers in an old, ruined monastery. She uses the story of her imprisonment and escape to goad the heroes into quick action, as the rogues are surely planning to disappear now that their hostage is free to spread the alarm. Isella also mentions the possibility of a reward from her father, the lord of Sunfield Manor (note that she deliberately omits the fact that he is only her stepfather). If the heroes prove reluctant, she promises them a reward from the Baron of Beldengrove, too.

The heroes have many opportunities to test their survival skills as they travel through the Luminous Woods to face the robbers. Even if they manage to ambush the robbers, the heroes will still probably learn about Isella's nefarious plan and find themselves unexpectedly caught between a rock and a hard place. Neither the brigands nor Isella are in any way innocent, but the heroes must find a solution that balances law, justice, and noble valor and serves the cause of good.

Between Light and Shadow—the Villains

The following NPCs are the nominal villains of this adventure, although things are not always as they seem....

Isella of Altnardesfeld-Schroffenstein

Summary: young knight; 21 years old; dark, brownish hair; green eyes; arrogant; cold

Titles: Honor (for being an esquire), or High Lady (for being a knight)

Motivation: Driven by revenge, Isella slowly leaves the path of righteousness. She is convinced of her stepfather's shameful adultery, but adultery is not a crime, so she must resort to other means for her vengeance. If you wish, she starts to regret her actions, either after she escapes from the bandits or when she realizes that her assumptions about her stepfather were wrong.

Agenda: Her main goal upon meeting the heroes is to cover up her murder plans and rid herself of the robbers, preferably with the help of the heroes. She intends especially to rid herself of Darian, as his word could damage her reputation the most.

Role: Isella is the employer who secretly turns out to be a villain as well. Ultimately, her fate rests in the hands of the heroes.

Background: Isella was knighted just a few months ago by her elderly swordfather, Giselher of Lichterfelde, of whom she is very fond. Under his tutelage, she became more of a bureaucrat than a true fighter (just like himself). She wears her brown hair down to her chin in a pageboy cut, and her green eyes are ever watchful. Isella loved her mother very much and has few living relatives (her father died in the wars against Borbarad the Demon Master, and her brother was sent away at a young age to study in Weiden). She regrets not being present at her mother's deathbed, and her forced absence has taken its toll. She is now convinced that her stepfather kept her away out of spite, and she holds a powerful grudge against him. She persuaded herself that his affair with Ludilla the cook contributed to her mother's sorrowful death (she does not know that their affair began *after* her mother's passing). Upon returning home, Isella seeks revenge for what she sees as her stepfather's wrongs.

Role playing tips: Take control of the situation and hurry the heroes along as much as possible. Stress the importance of finding the robbers, and point out that the heroes have a great responsibility to help destroy them. Invoke your noble status if necessary, but don't offend the heroes deliberately.

Darian of Bregelsaum-Steinhauer

Summary: Aging robber-knight; 50 years old; wears his graying hair in a Warhome-style crew cut; short but full white beard; stands straight; walks tall; soothing voice.

Isella of Altnardesfeld-Schroffenstein, Esquire of Sunfield

COU 14 SGC 12 INT 13 CHA 13

DEX 10 AGI 13 CON 13 STR 13

LP 31 AE - KP - INI 13+1D6

DO 7 SPI 1 TOU 2 MOV 7

FtP 3

Social Standing: Lesser Noble (gentry)

Advantages: Good Looks, Inspire Confidence, Noble II

Disadvantages: Negative Trait (Vengeance), Personality Flaw (Arrogance), Principles I (Knight's Honor—mild adherence)

Special Abilities: Defensive Posture, Feint I, Forceful Blow, Heraldry

Languages: Garethi III, Bosparano I

Scripts: Kuslik Signs

Combat Techniques: Brawling 10, Shields 12, Swords 12

Unarmed: AT 12 PA 6 DP 1D6 RE short

Short Sword: AT 14 PA 7 DP 1D6+2 RE short

Short Sword and Wooden Shield: AT 14 PA 8 DP 1D6+2 RE short

Wooden Shield: AT 10 PA 8 DP 1D6 RE short

PRO/ENC 0/0

Skills

Physical: *Body Control 7, Climbing 4, Feat of Strength 4, Perception 4, Riding 7, Self-Control 7, Stealth 3*

Social: *Empathy 4, Etiquette 5, Fast-Talk 7, Intimidate 4, Willpower 10*

Nature: *Orienting 4, Survival 3, Tracking 4*

Knowledge: *Law 5, Warfare 4*

Craft: *Commerce 4*

Equipment: Leather hunting garb; later, a short sword lent by the innkeeper or equipment lent by the heroes

Combat Behavior: Like any knight, Isella fights with honor and does not attack prone or unarmed opponents unless she is about to lose the battle. However, if the heroes propose a dishonorable plan to fight the bandits, she does not object.

Escape: Isella yields after losing 50% of her LP; she tries to flee if her plan is discovered.

Pain +1 at: 23 LP, 15 LP, 7 LP, and 5 LP and less

Titles: High Lord (as a knight, if the heroes still acknowledge him as such)

Motivation: Darian's foremost desire is to keep his men safe since he considers them his wards. Need and despair have driven the once honorable man into penury and robbery, but if he could, he would do almost anything to regain his honor.

Agenda: Darian prefers to gather his people and loot and flee towards the Dark Ridge, but he is also willing to capitalize on a good situation.

Darian of Bregelsaum-Steinhauer, Robber-Knight

COU 15 SGC 11 INT 14 CHA 12

DEX 11 AGI 13 CON 15 STR 15

LP 37 AE - KP - INI 13+1D6

DO 6 SPI 2 TOU 3 MOV 7

FtP 3

Social Standing: Lesser Noble (knight)**Advantages:** Increased Life Points II, Noble I**Disadvantages:** Personality Flaw (Arrogance), Principles I (Robber's honor; protect his people; chivalry even under difficult circumstances)**Special Abilities:** Combat Reflexes I, Feint I, Forceful Blow II, Heraldry, Leader, Improve Parry, Inured to Encumbrance II, Shield-Splitter**Languages:** Garethi III, Oloarkh I**Scripts:** Kuslik Signs**Combat Techniques:** Brawling 10, Shields 14, Swords 15, Daggers 10**Unarmed:** AT 11 PA 6 DP 1D6+1 RE short**Dagger:** AT 11 PA 6 DP 1D6+1 RE short**Long sword:** AT 16 PA 9 DP 1D6+4 RE medium**Wooden shield:** AT 11 PA 11 DP 1D6 RE short**Long sword and wooden shield:** AT 16 PA 11 DP 1D6+4 RE short**PRO/ENC** 6/1**Skills****Physical:** Body Control 12, Feat of Strength 8, Perception 7, Riding 14, Self-Control 8, Stealth 6**Social:** Empathy 7, Etiquette 6, Fast-Talk 4, Intimidate 7, Willpower 12**Nature:** Animal Lore 4, Orienting 4**Knowledge:** Law 4, Warfare 7**Crafts:** Commerce 2**Equipment:** Plate armor; wooden shield painted with coat of arms; long sword; destrier**Combat Behavior:** Darian fights honorably and avoids killing opponents, preferring to convince them to yield instead. He never attacks someone who is unarmed or lying prone on the ground.**Escape:** Darian does not flee if fighting alone, but does surrender after losing 75% of his LP.**Pain +1 at:** 27 LP, 18 LP, 9 LP, and 5 LP and less

Role: Opponent; Darian is more than just a villain, and may even be a kind of tragic figure. His fate rests with the heroes.

Background: He is an old-school knight whom fate has reduced to despair, something for which he was never prepared. In the Year of Fire, the Endless Ranks of the Dead devastated his home town in Darpatia, but he continued to uphold justice and fight on the side of Good. When his liege was killed by a Wildermarches warlord, he was forced once again into a life of less-than-honest deeds unworthy of a true knight. He didn't sink this

low merely to preserve his own life (as he would have gladly given his life to save his liege lord). Instead, he did it to protect his wards, those whom he had sworn to defend. Time and time again, the dark days of war forced him to make decisions that slowly pushed him over the edge into outlawry. Despite everything, he still tries to be honorable and is particularly keen to keep the two oaths he swore before his liege—to protect his liege's bastard daughter Ganshild (see page 20), and never to serve House Rabenmund, the current rulers of the Rommilysian Marches (the province formerly known as Darpatia). Darian keeps his promises despite the fact that doing so has forced him to become an outlaw and bandit. He accepts his fate and now leads a small band of robbers who operate in the foothills of the Dark Ridge, between Griffonsford and Weiden. He considers his bandit companions to be family, and he would do anything for them.

Role playing tips: Sit up straight and speak calmly, even in the direst of situations. Choose your words carefully, speaking sometimes as a knight (mostly) and sometimes as a bandit captain.

I. It All Starts... At An Inn

Read Aloud or Paraphrase

Ubiquitous dark clouds loom over the snow-clad peaks of the Dark Ridge to the northwest. Time and time again, heinous rabble pours down the slopes into the lands of the Sable Guard, as the western parts of Griffonsford and Weiden are called. Together they form the Shield Lands that watch over the inner provinces of the Middenrealm. Orcs roam these war-torn lands seemingly at will, but they aren't the only threats—robber-knights, bandits, and outlaws have made the woods at the foot of the Dark Ridge a dangerous place.

From your chair in the sunny courtyard of the Four Beeches Inn, all of these problems seem miles away. Perhaps it was the country's rugged simplicity, the pristine beauty of this untamed land, that invited you to stay and rest a little while. As you sit around a table with other travelers, exchanging news and stories while enjoying a decent lunch, the warm rays of Praios' Disk shine down on you from on high.

The Four Beeches Inn is one of a series of taverns situated along the Margrave's Way (the main road from Griffonsford to Northgrove), in the county of Hero's Stand in Weiden. This fine, u-shaped tavern building sits on the east side of the thoroughfare at the point where a minor road coming from the eastern Barony of Dergelstone crosses the Margrave's Way. The first floor is clad in quarry stone, the second in timber. A barn and stable sit on either side of the main building. A 6' defensive wall shields the buildings from the street, and the only access from Margrave's Way is through a large gate. The inn offers twelve beds, six of

them dormitory-style. For a little extra, travelers can rent one of two single or two double bedrooms.

The innkeeper, *Raulwin Hullheimer* (52; lost a leg during the Siege of Griffonsford; bitter; “That was a damn bad winter, that one;” always clutches his cane, even when sitting; *Willpower* 5 (12/13/13); *SPI* 1) and his wife, *Elwene* (49; chubby red cheeks; wears a hood over her hair, which is worn in a bun; constantly wipes her hands with her apron; *Willpower* 4 (13/12/13); *SPI* 1), make a decent living running the inn. They have one maidservant, *Jette* (19; shy; daughter of Ludilla the cook; if the heroes pester her relentlessly with questions, she reveals the affair but assures them it only started after the death of Isella’s mother; *Willpower* 4 (11/12/13); *SPI* -1), and a handyman, *Sonnfried* (25; brown hair; eager but slow on the uptake; *Feat of Strength* 7 (13/13/13), *Willpower* 0 (11/12/12); *SPI* 0), who is currently working to repair barn damage caused by winter snows.

If desired, you may let the players invent the reasons their heroes traveled to the *Four Beeches*. Otherwise, incorporate the adventure wherever it fits in your campaign. Maybe the heroes are heading north on a pilgrimage to Donnerbach, or wishing to visit relatives in Gashok or Trallop. Conversely, perhaps they are heading south to Griffonsford or Garetia.

Stories of War

Raulwin likes to paint verbal pictures of his deeds during the Siege of Griffonsford in 1013 FB, especially to heroic-looking travelers. At the height of the battle, the orcs managed to punch a hole in the wall with demonic sorcery, but they all met their doom on that exact spot. The innkeeper was one of the brave defenders. He loves saying things like, “I left my leg in that breach, but those cursed orcs left even more!” His stories always emphasize the blasphemy, cruelty, and treachery of the orcs.

The Four Beeches Inn offers several local delicacies, such as Dergelstone Zwetschg (a strong brandy), Quastenbrew (beer), Eslamsbrew (beer), and Griffonhill Grumbler and Schwarzberger Praiosdroplet (both vinegar liqueurs). As is customary in many taverns in the margravate, the *Four Beeches* has a *trout box* (a wooden container filled with water and living trout that allows the inn to offer fresh fish while stocks last). Use the following sample menu as inspiration for local flavor.

Give the heroes time to get acquainted before *Isella* reaches the inn. Use Raulwin the Innkeeper’s war stories to influence the conversation and engage shy players. Mention the presence of robbers in the Luminous Woods to prime the heroes for Isella’s arrival. If appropriate, Raulwin could also mention that a band of robbers attacked an old traveling merchant by the name of Arngrimm on his way

Four Beeches Menu

Food and drinks	Price
Ale, mug	8 Kreuzers
Quastenbrew or Eslamsbrew	11 Kreuzers
Brandy, shot mug	5 Halers
Hill Dew (clear, aromatic brandy made from schnapps and snowpride onions)	
Herb tea, mug	6 Kreuzers
Darpatian table wine, mug	3 Halers
Schnapps, shot mug	2 Halers
Water, jug	2 Kreuzers
Fruit wine, mug	2 Halers
Griffonhill Grumbler (liqueur vinegar)	8 Halers
Schwarzberger Praiosdroplet (liqueur vinegar)	8 Halers
Wine, mug	7 Halers
(both red and white, often spiced with salvia, lilac, or rosemary)	
Dergelstone Zwetschg (brandy), mug	7 Halers
Dergelstone Zwetschg (wine), mug	6 Halers
Bread and Griffonsforder cottage cheese	5 Halers
(goat cheese with herbs)	
Meat dish (lamb, chicken)	8 Halers
Fish (trout)	6 Halers
Vegetable stew (cabbage, buckwheat groats)	4 Halers

through the neighboring barony of Finsterrode. He points out that the bandits must be particularly heinous because an orc travels with them. Raulwin is quite upset about the presence of bandits and adds, “Strong adventurers like yourselves aren’t afraid of a few robbers, right?”

If Raulwin’s stories alone motivate the heroes to seek out the bandits, he’ll volunteer to show them the way (as far as he can), and maybe he’ll promise them free drinks for disposing of the orc. In this case, the heroes run into Isella just as they are leaving the inn or while they are still making plans.

Damsel in Distress

Isella’s escape from the robbers did not go unnoticed. Darian sent his two best trackers (*Leuwald* and a goblin nicknamed *Rust-Hair*) after her immediately. They almost catch up to her, but once she reaches the inn, they turn tail and make their way back to the ruin in haste.

When the heroes settle into enjoying themselves and the local food at the *Four Beeches*, call for a check on *Perception (Spot)* +1. On a success, they become aware of hasty-sounding footsteps approaching the gate (the road is not visible through the inn's entrance). On a failure, the heroes don't learn about Isella until Elwine, the innkeeper's wife, yells, "My Lady!" and drops her tray of mugs in shock upon seeing Isella's wretched state. Isella rushes into the courtyard and slumps against the inner wall, gasping for breath. She keeps a wary eye on the entrance and only slowly acknowledges the presence of the innkeeper and the heroes. Taking stock of her situation, she devises a new plan quickly—one that uses the heroes to clean up her mess.

The young woman is clad in green and brown hunter's garb, her hair is tousled, and her breathing is ragged, as if she has been sprinting for miles (for her complete description, see *Between Light and Shadow*, on page 7). With a successful *Perception (Spot)* +1 check, the heroes also notice the state of her clothing (the presence of several burrs and rips seem to hint at a wild flight through the woods). Upon closer inspection, her wrists and boots appear chafed, indicating that she was most likely bound with ropes. The dagger sheath on her belt is empty.

If the heroes question Isella, she reveals the following.

- She is Isella of Altnardesfeld-Schroffenstein, daughter of the Esquire of Sunfield. The innkeepers are quick to confirm this claim (in her haste, Isella fails to mention that her stepfather is only the reeve and she is the true heir, but the innkeepers are well aware of it).
- She was abducted while out hunting yesterday by a robber-knight and his henchmen. They intended to ransom her back to her father. Isella bemoans the fact that she, a knight, chose to yield instead of fight.
- The robbers imprisoned her in the ruins of an old cloister in the woods. She escaped at dawn through a gap in the wall.
- The cloister is on the other side of the Belden creek River, about three hours away (10 miles) by the fastest route.
- She saw about half a dozen robbers, including an orc (this information spurs the innkeeper to yell and rant, reminding the heroes of the locals' hatred for orcs and their collaborators)
- The robbers know she escaped, so they will most likely flee the area out of fear of reprisal from the Baron.
- Informing the Baron would take far too long, and the villains will escape.
- She pleads for the heroes' help, offering rewards and accommodations as needed.

If the heroes doubt her words, see *Do I Believe Her?* on page 10.

5 silverthalers should be more than enough compensation for one day of work. Traveling swords (apprentices to sword masters), warriors, and Blessed Ones of Rondra might offer to help Isella in the name of honor and justice alone. Heroes with the disadvantage *Submissive to Authorities* are very likely to aid a noblewoman when asked.

Meanwhile, the innkeepers send their servant Sonnfried to inform the Baron. Raulwin asks his wife to fetch his old short sword and shield, which usually decorate the wall above the fireplace, and offers them to Isella in the hopes that they'll once again help draw the blood of an orc.

Chase the Chasers!

If the heroes search the road and the surrounding area after hearing Isella's story, call for a check on *Perception (Spot)* +1. On a success, they see two figures about 300 paces away to the west. The figures disappear quickly into the woods, but it is clear that one of them is much smaller than the other. These, it turns out, are Isella's pursuers.

If the heroes have the ability to track and move quickly, use the rules for chases (See *Core Rules*, page 349) and hustle them through the woods. Special Abilities such as *Terrain Knowledge (Woods)* or *Area Knowledge* add a +1 bonus to all *Body Control* rolls, but not when making a *Flying* test. To spice things up, simulate the chase through the underbrush by changing some of the *Body Control* checks to *Orienteering*, *Climbing*, or *Survival* rolls. Depending on the how long it takes the heroes to reach the spot where they lost sight of the strangers, they should wind up only about 50 yards behind them (for the pursuers' stats, see page 20).

If the heroes capture and question the two lurkers, the bandits admit that they were sent to recover the escaped prisoner. They remember watching as the young woman stumbled into their camp, seemingly unaware of her surroundings, but they have no knowledge of her unusual offer to their leader. They do know the ruin, however, and might disclose details if threatened.

"Do I Believe Her?"—A Word about Empathy, Clairvoyance, and Influence

The sudden appearance of Isella and her insistence on setting out quickly to apprehend the robbers is intended to motivate the heroes and distract them from asking too many questions. However, if someone smells something fishy and wants to gauge her honesty via *Empathy* or magic, call for a competitive check using *Empathy (Detect Lies)* vs. Isella's *Fast-Talk* (SR 7 (14/13/13)). In this case, Isella is the active participant. If the hero wins, consult the following table.

QL	Result
Failed roll	Isella deceives the hero
QL 1	The hero is unsure as to whether she is speaking the whole truth
QL 2	The hero doubts her honesty
QL 3	The hero is certain that she is lying about something

To substantiate suspicion by magical means, a hero might try *Gaze Into the Mind* or *Respondami*. If the former succeeds against Isella's Spirit (SPI 1), the hero gains some flashes of her imprisonment, her escape through the Luminous Woods, the ruin, the face of the robber-knight, an orc, and an image of outlaws hanging from a rope. Everything seems rushed and hurried in her mind because, to her, the robbers remain a constant liability until caught and killed. If she notices she is under a spell, she focuses her mind on memories that serve her purpose and make her appear to be the victim. If anyone mentions her stepfather during this time, her thoughts exhibit traces of anger and accusation.

The *Respondami* spell is a riskier option since society considers it very improper to cast spells upon nobles (even more so when done against their will). Even the innkeepers disapprove of such behavior and subsequently report the heroes' actions to the Baron. Nevertheless, if the spell succeeds, the heroes might learn the whole truth (depending on their QL) right away. Regardless of their choice, the band of outlaws is real, as is the reward for catching them (not to mention the treasure that the robbers might have hidden away...).

Blessed Ones can use an *Oath Blessing* to make someone talk and reveal the truth. Isella does not undergo such an examination willingly and perjures herself or tries to word her oath in such a way as to avoid revealing the whole truth. If given no other choice, she turns against the gods and tries to resist the *Oath* by sheer willpower. She cannot fight the liturgical chant *Truth* if the heroes ask the right questions.

All magical and liturgical means of forcing her to talk carry the same concern, and even suggesting their use is tantamount to accusing a noble of lying. Isella does not take these insults lightly.

II. Here Be Robbers

The ruin is about 10 miles from the inn as the crow flies, but most of the way is woodland, so the trip takes at least three hours. Isella did not take the shortest path to the inn since she was trying to evade her captors and wound up stumbling around mindlessly for a time. She says it was Praios' will that she chose that path and met the heroes on the Margrave's Way. She insists that they pursue her captors quickly, and she outpaces the heroes in her eagerness, if possible. Along the way, she shares the following information about the route and the ruined cloister.

- The group first needs to move northwest toward a rock formation called *Bald Emmeran*, a recognizable and visible landmark.
- From there, they turn west and head for the Dark Crown, one of the larger peaks in the Dark Ridge.
- Soon they must cross the Beldencreek, which proves troublesome because it is swollen with spring run-off from the snow on the peaks. Isella herself crossed the river at the ruins of a hamlet named *Boargrove*, which has been deserted ever since the Orc Storm. Its bridge still stands, but going there involves at least a one hour detour.
- The *ruins of the fortified cloister* sit atop a steep hill, close to the border with Finsterrode.

If time is limited or you prefer to focus on the confrontation with Darian and his henchmen, feel free to describe only the high points of the heroes' trip through the wilderness. Keeping the trip short and sweet is a good idea especially if the heroes don't have survival skills or show little interest in role playing their way through the hazards of traveling. In either case, continue with *In the Ruins of the Fortified Cloister*, below. For Isella's stats, see page 7.

Tracking the Culprits

The heroes can learn more about the robbers who were pursuing Isella by studying their tracks, and might even figure out how to cut them off by taking a different route. If this happens, the bandits at the ruins remain unaware of the heroes' approach but still believe that Isella is returning to kill them with powerful reinforcements. Alternately, the heroes may try to catch Isella's pursuers before they can reach the ruin and spread the alarm, thereby reducing the number of potential enemies for the final confrontation.



Of course, neither option turns out well if the heroes fail to track the fleeing bandits. Call for a check on *Tracking (Human Tracks)* +2 (don't forget the additional +1 bonus for applicable Terrain Knowledge). On a successful roll, the heroes learn that there are two bandits fleeing before them. One leaves deep bootprints (possibly because he's heavier), while the other person is barefoot. Some rust-red tufts of hair discovered on the path suggest that the barefoot person is a goblin.

To learn more about the fleeing individuals, the players may attempt a cumulative check with *Tracking (Human Tracks)* with a check interval of 15 minutes and a maximum of 4 rolls. Bonuses for Terrain Knowledge apply.

- 6 QL: These outlaws seem to know the area well. They are not stumbling around aimlessly.
- 10 QL: These outlaws are making a beeline for something (probably the ruins) and take detours only when the terrain forces them to do so. Interestingly, they deviated from the direct route and turned northwest at the Bald Emmeran rock formation. If asked, Isella knows that this is the direction to Boargrove, the deserted hamlet with the old bridge. Crossing the river there is safer, she explains, but the detour takes longer. Heading straight for the Dark Crown is faster, but crossing the river is certainly more difficult. The heroes may assume that the fleeing bandits know the area well and might have had a good reason for taking the detour.

Are We There Yet?

To determine who arrives at the ruins first—Isella and the heroes, or the two fleeing bandits—use the following time management system, which works like a checklist. Add up the time units spent by the heroes and compare them to the number 15 (the number of time units that the two bandits need to get to the ruined cloister). If the heroes find shortcuts and take less time, they arrive before the bandit camp can be warned. If the heroes need (almost) the same amount, they might run into the bandits on the road (or even arrive at the ruins at the same time).

If time of day is relevant (such as if the heroes decide to wait for dusk before attacking), assume that Isella chances upon the heroes at midday during lunch. Note that one time unit here is roughly equivalent to 15 minutes. All things being equal, the bandits arrive at the ruined cloister at around the fourth hour after noon.

Of course, all of this is optional. If it better suits your group's playing style, decide who arrives first by considering the heroes' actions and successes and the dramatic needs of your story.

You may need to adjudicate the number of time units the heroes use to perform certain actions. If they don't ask Isella too many questions and set off after the bandits right away, assume that they gain 0 time units during the first scene. However, if they ask lots of questions, haggle for supplies from the innkeepers, or check their equipment carefully before leaving, don't hesitate to increase their tally by 1 or 2 time units (in addition to the normal amount gained during that scene).

Scene	Time Units	The Bandits' Progress
Leaving the <i>Four Beeches</i>	0-2	
Traveling to Bald Emmeran	4-5	1-4
Traveling from Bald Emmeran to Beldencreek	4	
Fighting boars (or the like)	1-2	
Looking for an ogre	0-1	
Crossing the Beldencreek		
Alternative route	0-2	
Jumping from stone to stone	0	
Balancing on the log	1	
Finding the Ford, Close Your Eyes and Go	2	
Treating wounds	1	
Traveling from the Beldencreek to the cloister	4-5	
Traveling from Bald Emmeran to Boargrove	6	5-10
Traveling from Boargrove to the cloister	5	11-15

Finding Tracks

If they search, the heroes find some tracks on the hill at the spot where Isella came out of the woods. A successful *Tracking (Human Tracks)* +1 roll (Terrain Knowledge (Woods) adds a +1 bonus) indicates that several people stood here very recently. One of them ran down the hill towards the road while the other turned around and went back into the woods. If the heroes try to follow these tracks, see *Tracking the Culprits*.

The heroes are free to decide whether they want to concentrate on these tracks* or allow Isella to lead them to the ruins. By following Isella to the exclusion of all else, they head directly towards the river (missing the detour to Boargrove) and thus travel through the territory of a pack of boars. If desired, use the optional scene *Territorial Fight*, on page 14.

The forest seems rather tranquil at first. Light surrounds the rowan and blackthorn trees with a halo, infusing the Luminous Woods with the glow that is the source of its famous name. Cabbage and turnip fields sprout up here and there in clearings interspersed throughout the woods. Isella leads the heroes along barely-discernable trails and deer paths. The scenery changes to tall, old beeches and chestnut trees as the party plunges deeper into the woods. To the west, the terrain grows increasingly rocky and littered with stones, among which grow ferns and oddly twisted pines.

Isella urges the heroes on and never stops talking about the foul treatment she received at the hands of Darian and his men, despite being a highborn Lady. “They even have an orc with them! What kind of outlaws associate with orcs?” she exclaims, “Only one fate awaits them—the rope!” If desired, Isella’s ramblings begin to exhibit inconsistencies and contradictions.

*If using the optional time tracking system provided above, add 1 or 2 time units to the heroes’ tally whenever they stop to study the tracks of the bandits and orient themselves.

Bald Emmeran

Bald Emmeran is a lone limestone tor that rises above the treetops of the Luminous Woods. Here the broadleaf trees give way to conifers, such as red and blue spruces, surrounded by heavy underbrush. A successful *Plant Lore (Useful Plants)* roll with at least 2 QL reveals that this place must have been more densely populated in the past (old traces of lumbering efforts are visible in the area). Young trees and tall grass now cover what must once have been fields and meadows, suggesting that this place was last used for agricultural purposes about 20 years ago.

A pack of boars raises its young in the area of the tor in springtime. The bridge in Boargrove may be the safest way to cross the river, but the risk from boars is the main reason that the bandits avoid that (shorter) route. Even if the heroes do not stop every ten minutes to look for tracks, a successful *Tracking (Human Tracks)* +1 check reveals that they are still heading in the right direction, but Isella now suggests the heroes turn west towards the Dark Crown.

To Boargrove or Not to Boargrove— That Is the Question

The heroes must decide whether to head directly for the ruined cloister or take the detour toward Boargrove. Going straight to the cloister means crossing the river (a risky venture) and passing through boar territory (also a risky venture). Isella is unaware of the boars, but a successful *Animal Lore (Wild Animals)* check alerts the heroes to their presence in the area.

Should your heroes choose the shorter path, see *Beldencreek* on page 15 and the optional scene *Territorial Fight* (see below), and develop the story as you like. The shorter path is more difficult and dangerous. If your heroes opt for safety instead, see *Boargrove* on page 15. The optional scene *Twining Ogreberry* may be used with either route, and of course you are free to create additional scenes as you wish.

Optional Scene: Territorial Fight

This scene injects some more combat into the scenario—use as desired. If the heroes turn west at the Bald Emmeran, they inevitably cross the territory of a pack of boars and their young. In the presence of piglets, boars act aggressively towards any intruders. With a successful *Tracking (Animal Tracks)* check, the heroes notice swept ground, dark wisps of hair in the bushes, and bare spots on trees where the bark has been rubbed off at about knee’s height—signs that boars live nearby. The heroes can still turn around (accruing more time units, of course), if desired. If the check fails or the heroes decide to forge ahead anyway, a small pack of boars (1D3+3) ambushes them. To avoid the boars, make a competitive check of the heroes’ *Stealth (Sneak or Hide)* vs. the boars’ *Perception*. Alternatively, make a check of the boars’ *Stealth* against the heroes’ *Perception (Spot)* to see if the heroes notice the ambush in time to react.

Optional Scene: Twining Ogreberry

The heroes pass through an area that sprouts an occasional twining ogreberry plant. Its characteristically intense smell is not as distinct as when the berries ripen in high summer. At this time of year it smells only faintly of rancid grease, but this is enough to warn alert heroes that an ogre might be nearby. Heroes looking for the source of the smell risk injury from the plant’s thorny, entwined branches. Ogreberry thorns break off easily in the skin, causing inflammation and inflicting 1D3 to 1D6 DP (GM’s choice). A successful *Plant Lore* check lets the heroes avoid taking damage.

If the group enjoys more serious challenges, you may twist the situation a little further, as follows. Once the heroes realize that the source of the ogre-like smell is just a berry bush, an actual ogre rushes out of the woods and attacks the party after having smelled and tracked these tasty humans.

Twining Ogreberry

Search Difficulty: -1

Identification Difficulty: -1

Uses: none

Effect: Failing a *Plant Lore* check while studying the plant leads to cuts and skin inflammation (see above)

Cost: -

Wild Boar

Size: 3 to 4 feet long

Weight: 450 to 550 pounds

COU 15 SGC 13(a) INT 12 CHA 10

DEX 11 AGI 10 CON 15 STR 15

LP 35 AE - KP - INI 11+1D6

DE 5 SPI -2 TOU 2 MOV 10

Bite: AT 15 DP 1D6+4 RE short

Ramming: AT 13 DP 1D6+3 RE short

PRO/ENC 0/0

Actions: 1

Special Abilities: Takedown (Ramming)

Skills: *Body Control 4, Climbing 0, Feat of Strength 7, Intimidate 4, Perception 4, Self Control 4, Stealth 4, Swimming 4, Willpower 4*

Number: 1D3+3 (a sounder)

Size Category: medium

Type: Animal, non-humanoid

Loot: 100 rations meat, coat (10 silverthalers), trophy (tusks, 5 silverthalers)

Combat Behavior: Boars are aggressive when raising piglets and attack anyone within 30 feet. They use their whole body to ram opponents (SA Takedown) and then fight with their tusks. Roll 1D6: on a result of 1-2, they fight until their opponent is dead; on 3-4, they flee after 1D6 CR; on 5-6, they fight until they lose 50% of their LP.

Escape: When they lose 50% of their LP

Animal Lore (*Wild Animals*)

- **QL 1:** Boars are particularly dangerous during mating season or when caring for their young.
- **QL 2:** Boars are unpredictable. Sometimes they simply flee, sometimes they fight like berserkers.
- **QL 3+:** Don't underestimate boars. They are dangerous even when seriously injured and can remain active longer than expected.

+1 **Pain at:** 28 LP, 18 LP, 9 LP, and 5 LP and less

Beldencreek

Isella may or may not mention that this river, which pours down from the Dark Ridge, is swollen with melting ice water from the peaks. The heroes first hear the gurgling and rustling of the river just two hours after leaving the Four Beeches. When they finally reach the Beldencreek, they can see plainly that it is nearly overflowing with melting spring runoff. It is about 15 to 18 feet wide, fairly deep, and, worst of all, cold as ice. The heroes must find a way to cross this barrier. We describe several means to get across (see below). Your players might have other ideas, and of course, crossing by magical means may obviate the need for any of these options.

The Trunk

The trunk of a fallen copper beech can be seen lying askew over the rushing water about 60 yards upstream. Water spills over the trunk, making it difficult to cross (crossing requires a successful *Body Control (Balancing)* roll with a bonus that depends on how the heroes cross the log: +3 if they cling to the trunk and inch their way along, +1 if they try to balance and walk along the log.

On a failed check, a hero suffers damage as follows: if inching along, take 1D3 DP from minor abrasions; if balancing, take 1D3+1 DP after slipping on the wet trunk. Neither results in falling off the log.

On a botch, the hero plunges into the icy waters and suffers the consequences from a normal failure (depending upon the choice of movement) PLUS falling damage (see *Core Rules*, page 340). Also, remember that some items do not survive being submerged.

The Stepping Stones

Just a little downstream, the heroes see a number of smooth, rounded stones protruding from the waters. They are nearly always awash in water and thus quite difficult to use for crossing, but they do make it possible (this requires a successful *Body Control (Balancing)* roll). If the check fails, the hero falls into the water and suffers 1D6+2 DP but does eventually reach the far shore. On a botch, the hero falls as before but suffers 2x the damage (roll 1D6+2 and double the result) and winds up chilled and soaked to the bone.

Close Your Eyes and Go

The safest method is to look for a natural ford and wade across the river. This involves little risk (aside from water exposure to equipment), but searching for a ford takes time. Finding the ford is automatic, but even here the creek is around 5 feet deep and the current is fairly strong, making it necessary to succeed at a *Feat of Strength (Dragging & Pulling)* check with a bonus of +1. On a failure, the hero slips and sprains an ankle or else steps into a hole in the river bed, sinks below the surface momentarily, gets completely soaked (sensitive equipment might be affected), and suffers 1D3 DP. On a botch, the hero suffers double the normal amount of damage.

Boargrove

This bucolic hamlet was once home to three families, but the hordes of Sadrak Whassoï* overran the place during the Orc Storm. Few humans survived to tell the tale in Griffonsford. All that remains of Boargrove today is the charred ruins of three farmhouses and the remains of a barn that burned down around 20 years ago. Remnants of

rubble walls hint that the hamlet once maintained enclosed fields. The bridge across the Beldencreek still stands, of course, but it does not appear all that sound at first glance, and the waters that run beneath it are cold and deep.

*Sadrak Whassoi was a legendary orc warlord with the nickname “the Black Marshall.” He led an army of orcs against the Svellt League of Towns in 1010 FB in what was later known as the Third Orc Storm. The human defenders only managed to stop his advance after his army reached Gareth, the very heart of the Middenrealm. During the Fourth Orc Storm, he cut a swathe through Andergast to pillage Albernia. Sadrak was finally captured in 1026 FB and imprisoned in Havena. He died in 1027 FB while trying to escape.

Slippery, wet moss covers the bridge, which lacks one side wall (probably due to the annual torrent of water from the spring melt). The structure is safe to cross but does not appear to be very safe. A successful *Tracking (Human Tracks)* check with a bonus of 1 reveals that three individuals crossed the bridge not long ago, and later, two headed back.

III. The Ruins of the Fortified Cloister

Depending on the path they choose and the encounters they have along the way, the heroes arrive at the ruins 3 to 5 hours after leaving the Four Beeches Inn. The cloister’s shattered yet still imposing tower protrudes from the surrounding woods and is visible for miles. Isella knows that the complex used to be a monastery dedicated to Praios and Peraine. Such cloisters were once commonplace in the Margravate of Griffonsford, which was founded primarily through the support of such institutions.

A detailed plan of the ruined cloister appears in the Appendix. It includes descriptions of the ruins and the band of robbers, and discusses potential outcomes for various encounters.

Before proceeding, you should give at least one Fate Point to each player that has already spent one, to enhance their options during the final confrontation.

The Hill

The ruined cloister sits atop a steep, wooded and oddly sloping hill that rises about 60 feet above ground level at its highest. Nevertheless, only the keep is tall enough to be seen from afar, and everything else blends into the mix of trees, ferns, and other underbrush. The thick growths grant cover to anyone approaching from the woods. Naked limestone pushes up through mud and brush here and

there. An old cart path that has been partially reclaimed by Nature still loops all the way to the former monastery. The cloister sits on the eastern point of the outcropping, which runs from east to west. The western edge of the hill is particularly steep and sparsely vegetated.

If the heroes attempt to assess the hill and ruins, call for a *Warfare (Sieges)* check with a bonus of 1. A success reveals that the southern slope is the easiest and safest to climb. Also, apply half the QL from this check as a bonus for any future *Stealth* rolls to gain access to the ruins. Of course, the ruins can be assessed by other means, such as a death-defying climb to the top of a tree, or the daring flight of a witch.

If the heroes are willing to take the time to scrutinize the hill thoroughly, a successful group cumulative check against *Survival* (interval of 1 hour and a target of 10 QL) reveals the entrance to an old escape tunnel.

If the heroes make it here quickly and choose to hide outside the ruins and keep watch for a time, they might spy the two robbers who pursued Isella coming through the woods. If captured and questioned, these two can reveal the existence of the escape tunnel (though they are unaware of its exact location).

The Cart Path

An old cart path runs from the southwest to the northern slope, winding its way along the northern and western edge of the hill under the watchful eye of the keep.

The Ruins

Historical Overview

The ruin on the hill was once a fortified cloister that housed lay servants of Praios and Peraine. Settlers arrived with the Sun Legion in the 1st century before the Fall of Bosparan (bFB) to claim the land now known as Griffonsford. Heroes can recall this obscure fact with a successful *History* check at -2.

The keep was erected around 30 bFB, and the Churches soon added two chapels (the Old Chapels) which were erected one either side of the first structure. The complex reached its greatest extent in 42 bFB with the addition of new defensive structures, a wall, and several outbuildings. The Churches abandoned the cloister around 920 bFB after centuries of continuous use, due to increasing threats from orcs raiding across the Dark Ridge. Since then, the site has served occasionally as a camp for orcs or roving bands of robbers. Locals assume that anything of value must have been stolen from the ruins long ago. Harsh weather and fires sparked by lightning reduced the once proud cloister to the sad mess it is today. Rubble, dirt, and weeds lend the ruins a wild, mystical air.

Of course this site may be used as a starting point for further adventures. Secrets of long ago may still lie beneath the ruins. Perhaps the Sun Legion founded this place to hide a mystery from the coal pelts? Or perhaps the Legion itself had a dark secret?

Gatehouse and Garrison (1)

The gatehouse was once composed of two small watch towers and the adjacent garrison, which housed the Sun Legion. Today, only the western tower remains serviceable, thanks to the addition of an improvised ladder. The robbers normally post a guard here during the hours of daytime. The remains of a covered parapet walk lead off towards the main building. The garrison has gone almost completely to rack and ruin—only a few sections of the wall remains standing, silent reminders of the fort’s faded strength.

The gate itself lacks wings, making it look like a yawning mouth. A Bosparano inscription above the archway reads, “ubi lux ibi non malum – XLII AR.” Heroes with knowledge of both Bosparano II and Kusliker Signs can translate this as “There is no evil where light does shine – 42 AR.” AR in this case stands for *Anno Raulis*, referring to Raul the Great, the first Emperor of the Middenrealm (the empire did not begin using *FB* for dates until much later).

A successful *Religions (Praios)* check with a penalty of 3 reveals that these words are the motto of St. Belden Sunbeam, the mythical co-founder of the famous (and now extinct) Beldenheim family dynasty (a hero with the SA Heraldry or a suitable Area Knowledge gains a bonus of 1 on this check). The area is named after the original grove that Belden cleared by hand, and it is said that his bones now lie in the crypts of Castle Beldensrest.

Stables, Servants’ Quarters, and Workshops (2)

The buildings on the eastern side of the cloister were constructed mainly from timber, which succumbed to the ravages of time long ago. Little besides the stone walls and the forge of the smithy remain to hint at the structures’ original purposes, and there is no sign of tools or raw materials.

Well (3)

A brick well sits within walking distance of the former Servants’ Quarters. It likely possessed a wooden roof at one time, but nothing of that structure now remains. The well is filthy with leaves and debris. This suits the outlaws, as they prefer to use the well in the keep’s basement. To climb up the well from the dungeons and enter the courtyard via this route, make a *Climbing (Walls)* check.

Garden and Fields (4)

The southernmost edge of the site lies a few yards below the level of the other buildings. A ramp once provided

access to this area, which was used for growing fruit, vegetables, and grain to feed the cloister’s residents. Only a few old apple trees, peach trees, and some wild herbs have survived years of neglect and plunder. The slope on this side of the hill grows increasingly steep and ends in the remnants of an 18’ tall rubble wall. Climbing this wall on the outer side requires a *Climbing (Walls)* check with a bonus of 2. On a failure, the hero suffers 1D6 DP in the form of minor cuts and bruises. On a botch, the hero falls 9 feet and suffers falling damage (see *Core Rules*, page 340). Entering the cloister unseen in this fashion requires a successful competitive check of *Stealth* against the robbers’ *Perception* (see *The Outlaws* on page 19).

An apple tree grows conveniently close to the wall, between the gardens and the upper castle level. Heroes can use it as a means of gaining covert access (make a successful *Climbing (Walls)* check). The tree’s leaves now provide cover, adding a +2 bonus to any *Stealth* checks. This tree is also the perfect place from which to spy upon the robbers within the ruins.

The Colonnade (5)

The original *ambulatory* of the main building is all but gone. A few columns remain standing in the northern half, but there is no trace of what once served as its ceiling. Limestone floor plates line the once-covered colonnade that encircles a small courtyard of tamped dirt. At least one robber is on guard at the entrance to the residential quarters* at all times.

* The Residential Quarters, also called the *Hall*, once housed the inhabitants and included living spaces, bedrooms, the dining hall, and the kitchen.

Southern Wing (6)

This part of the cloister was the site of the Old Chapels (Chapel of Peraine to the east, Chapel of Praios to the west). The broken remnants of Praios’ Tower rise from the southernmost wall like the fangs of a hungry beast, and it is very difficult to guess the structure’s original function from the rubble. Darian and his men added a makeshift ceiling to the former Chapel of Peraine and converted it into a stable that now houses Darian’s horse, the gang’s two mules, and Isella’s Elenvinan Thoroughbred. Rubble and debris has spilled into the former gardens from a large hole in the southern wall. No roll is needed to climb this pile of debris, but an intruder risks startling the animals (successful *Animal Lore (Domesticated Animals)* check with a bonus of 3 to avoid).

Wolf rats live in a nest beneath the debris in the former Chapel of Praios. The robbers blocked up the entrance to their nest with some wooden slats. Removing these slats startles the wolf rats, ruining any chance of a stealthy approach from this direction.

Wolf Rat

Size: 1 to 2 feet long (without tail); 2 to 3 feet long (with tail); 8 to 10 inches high

Weight: 1 to 3 pounds

COU 10 **SGC** 10(a) **INT** 14 **CHA** 11

DEX 11 **AGI** 13 **CON** 6 **STR** 10(s)

LP 5 **AE** – **KP** – **INI** 12+1D6

DE 7 **SPI** 1 **TOU** 2 **MOV** 6

Bite: **AT** 10 **DP** 1D3 (+ disease*) **RE** short

PRO/ENC 0/0

Actions: 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Darksight II / Fear of Fire II

Special Abilities: Attack Weak Spot (Bite; Attack suffers -2 penalty. If successful, attack ignores PRO from clothing and armor. Natural and magical PRO apply as usual).

Skills: *Body Control* 4, *Climbing* 10, *Feat of Strength* 2, *Intimidate* 2, *Perception* 10, *Self Control* 4, *Stealth* 7, *Swimming* 6, *Willpower* 2

Number: 2D6+6 (rat colony)

Size Category: tiny

Type: Animal, non-humanoid

Loot: 1 ration meat (tough)

Combat Behavior: Wolf rats mainly flee from humans but sometimes attack from ambush, targeting exposed areas of skin.

Escape: loss of 50% LP

Animal Lore (*Wild Animals*)

- **QL 1:** Wolf rats are creatures of the Nameless One.
- **QL 2:** They usually retreat at the sight of fire.
- **QL 3+:** Their bite can transmit diseases such as lutanans.

Special Rules: *) *Disease:* Wolf rats can transmit diseases. For every 10 DP they inflict, roll 1D20: 1-16 (no disease); 17 (lutanans); 18 (swamp fever); 19-20 (black rabies). If infection occurs, make a disease check (see *Core Rules*, page 343). For more information about black rabies, see the *Aventuria Almanac*.

Fear of Fire: Upon seeing open fire of at least the size of a torch's flame, the rat flees on a 1-3 on 1D6.

Pack: When cooperating to attack a single enemy, wolf rats gain a +1 bonus per participating rat (maximum of +4).

Pain +1 at: 4 LP, 3 LP, 2 LP, and 1 LP and less

Western Wing (7)

This section once housed the Old Chapels and the chapter house. The cloister's scriptorium occupied the building's second floor. The wall between the chapter house and the new chapel of Praisos collapsed long ago, and the second floor is nearly in ruins. This is where the brigands held Isella captive. She fled toward the southern wing and escaped through the hole in the wall.

Maintenance Building (8)

The original occupants used the northeastern section of the cloister for managing and maintaining life in the monastery. These buildings held the kitchen, the larder, the baths, the laundry, and the medico's room. Broad steps still lead from the kitchen towards the courtyard and grant easy access to the well. The first floor retains its roof, and some of the second floor's woodwork still stands. Darian's men prepare their meals in the kitchen and store food in the small cellar, which can be reached via a slender ladder. The cellar contains items such as dried meat, cheese, bread, a small barrel of beer, and some old tools.

Living Quarters (9)

This former dining hall is still intact, but Darian's men now use it as sleeping and living quarters. It contains separate beds for Darian, three of his men, one woman, the goblin, and the orc. Stone stairs lead up to the building's original sleeping room, little of which remains. A very narrow gate (the original entrance to the keep) opens onto this area. A passageway that connects the dining hall to the first floor of the keep was added shortly after the keep was completed. This passage is now kept hidden behind a thick curtain.

A **guard** watches the hall's entrance at nearly all times.

The Keep (10)

The four-story keep is the oldest structure in the cloister. At 60 yards in height, its upper platform rises above the treetops and affords a magnificent view of the Dark Ridge and the Luminous Woods. The northwestern edge of the tower, from the second floor to the roof, has been scoured clean by Satinav's Horns*. A proficient climber could scale the steep rocks at the keep's base and thus reach the second floor of the cloister (*Climbing Walls* -3). Heroes capable of flight (such as witches) can ignore this check, of course.

Second floor: This is the original entrance to the keep. The third and fourth floors are empty, but the fifth floor has a small camp for the platform **guard**, who carries a short bow.

First floor: This floor houses some of the robbers' supplies as well as their loot (goods worth about 200 ducats, plus coins amounting to 50 ducats). Stone stairs lead up and down from this floor. The secret passage to the Dining Hall opens here.

Basement: The air here smells moldy and stale. This important chamber, which was dug from the living rock, is the site of one of the cloister's wells. Next to the well, some heavy boards conceal narrow stairs that lead down into the darkness. This path to the old caverns beneath the cloister served originally as an escape tunnel. Darian and his men know it could be used against them, so they keep it sealed and open it only when absolutely necessary.

*Common Aventurian saying. Satinav, the mythological Lord of Time, is usually depicted as a creature with horns.

Caverns and the Tunnel

While digging the well in the keep's basement, workers discovered a complex system of natural caverns that stretches underneath the cloister. They connected the caves to the cloister via a carved tunnel and steps that lead 20 yards down from the basement to a cave where a natural spring once fed both of the cloister's wells. The underground river changed its course long ago and the well in the courtyard has since run dry. The lightless caverns are cold and damp, and the gentle whisper of splashing water echoes from the walls. Stalagmites and stalactites have made this place into a true labyrinth, and even the softest sounds seem to bounce back from every direction.

An adjacent cave serves as an ideal home for thousands of bats. It is barely accessible to humans, and the bats' weird sonar chirps add to the eerie atmosphere. The only passable route twists up, down, right, and left through the hill, all the way to an entrance on the eastern slopes that is well hidden by bushes and a spur of rock. The route to this entrance is quite difficult to navigate and involves passing a nest of cave spiders whose webs spread out across the entire cavern floor. Anyone taking this route stumbles across the desiccated remains of wild animals (such as boars and deer), as well as one of Darian's men. The outlaws are well aware of the dangers posed by the cave spiders and use the tunnel only in desperation. To pass the spiders undetected, heroes must proceed slowly and softly. This requires a *Body Control* check. If even one hero fails, the vibrations alert the spiders, which in turn attack immediately, perhaps even with surprise (competitive check of *Stealth* against the heroes' *Perception (Spot)*).

The Outlaws

The band of robbers includes six humans (four men and two women), one goblin, and one orc. Darian, a robber-knight from the former principality of Darpatia, is their leader. He chose this place as a winter camp. On colder days, they mostly kept to themselves and refrained from robbing and plundering the surrounding area to lessen their chance of being discovered. They originally planned to cross the Dark Ridge in summer and raid along the Svellt Valley, but Isella's escape has forced them to get moving sooner. Darian sent Leuwald, a ranger known for his tracking skills, and the goblin, Rust-Hair, to find Isella. The gang is preparing to leave the ruin in case they fail, in which case they mean to flee towards the mountains and seek refuge in caves that Leuwald assured them were created to shelter people fleeing from orcs. The locals don't use the caves often, but they do keep them stocked with supplies and firewood.

Darian and another brigand spend the day packing the gang's loot and supplies while three guards (posted atop the keep, at the gatehouse, and at the entrance of the

Vampire Bat

Size: Around 2 feet long; 3 to 4 foot wingspan

Weight: 0.8 to 1 pound

COU 12 **SGC** 10 (a) **INT** 13 **CHA** 10

DEX 9 **AGI** 15 **CON** 9 **STR** 11 (s)

LP 5 **AE** - **KP** - **INI** 14+1D6

DE 8 **SPI** -2 **TOU** -1 **MOV** 13 (flying)

Bite: **AT** 10 **DP** 1D2 (+ disease*) **RE** short

PRO/ENC 0/0

Actions: 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: none

Special Abilities: Attack Weak Spot (Bite; Attack suffers -2 penalty. If successful, attack ignores PRO from clothing and armor. Natural and magical PRO apply as usual), Flying Attack (Bite), Locked Jaws (Bite; target does not suffer the state *immobilized*)

Skills: *Body Control* 5, *Feat of Strength* 1, *Flying* 12, *Intimidate* 3, *Perception*** 15, *Self Control* 7, *Stealth* 10, *Willpower* 6

Number: 1D20+10 (small colony), or 2D20+20 (large colony)

Size Category: small

Type: Animal, non-humanoid

Loot: 0.5 ration meat

Combat Behavior: Unlike other bats, vampire bats attack human-sized enemies when startled. They do not suck blood, but their bite can transmit diseases.

Escape: loss of 50% LP

Animal Lore (Wild Animals)

- **QL 1:** Vampire bats attack if targets come within 21 feet. They are afraid of fire.
- **QL 2:** They always attack weak spots, but despite their name, they don't actually suck blood.
- **QL 3+:** Their bite can transmit various types of diseases.

Special Rules: *) *Disease:* Vampire bats can transmit diseases. For every full 10 DP suffered by a hero, roll 1D20: 1-12 (no disease); 13-16 (lutas); 17-20 (rabies). If infection occurs, make a disease check (see *Core Rules*, page XXX). For more information about rabies, see the *Aventurian Bestiary*, page 126.

***) *Echolocation:* bats can perceive their surroundings in detail and navigate unerringly, even in total darkness.

Hated Blessed Ones of the Twelvgods: Vampire bats attack Blessed Ones of the Twelvgods that approach too closely, and cease attacking only when half of the bats are dead. This aggressive behavior is not triggered by Blessed Ones sworn to the Nameless One or other non-Alveranian gods.

Pain +1 at: 3 LP

Cave Spider

Size: 5 to 6 feet long; 1 to 2 feet tall

Weight: 60 to 80 pounds

COU 11 **SGC** 9(a) **INT** 14 **CHA** 8

DEX 12 **AGI** 15 **CON** 12 **STR** 14

LP 22 **AE** – **KP** – **INI** 13+2D6

DE 5 **SPI** 2 **TOU** 0 **MOV** 7

Bite: **AT** 14 **DP** 1D6+2 (+poison*) **RE** short

PRO/ENC 2/0

Actions: 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Darksight I, Exceptional Sense (Touch)

Special Abilities: Grapple

Skills: *Body Control* 12, *Climbing* 14, *Feat of Strength* 7, *Intimidate* 7, *Swimming* 2, *Perception* 12, *Self Control* 10, *Stealth* 14, *Willpower* 5

Number: 1, or 1D3+2 (spider nest)

Size category: medium

Loot: 25 rations entrails (inedible), poison (75 silverthalers)

Type: Animal, non-humanoid

Combat Behavior: Cave spiders wait until something touches their web and then attack mercilessly, chasing prey as far as 50 yards from their nest. Sometimes they leave the nest to hunt for prey. They consider anything human-sized or smaller to be prey.

Escape: loss of 50% life points

Animal Lore (Wild Animals or Monsters)

- **QL 1:** Knowledge about cave spider poison.
- **QL 2:** The spider's territory extends out about 50 yards from the nest.
- **QL 3+:** Cave spiders are repelled by leechfright. They suffer a -2 attack penalty when fighting opponents covered in leechfright ointment.

Special Rules

Web: Heroes can get entangled in the spider's web. To notice a web in time, make a *Perception (Spot)* roll at -1. If the check fails, the hero becomes entangled and gains the state of *bound*. Escape requires a cumulative check against *Body Control (Squirm)* (10 QL, check interval 1 CR, 7 rolls permitted—failure means the hero cannot escape)

***Poison**) Cave spiders can inject their poison several times. The effect is cumulative.

Level: 4

Type: Weapon poison, animal venom (complex)

Resistance: Toughness

Start: 3 CR

Duration: 24 hours / -

Effect: one level of *Paralysis* / no effect

Price (Buy/Sell): 300 silverthalers / 75 silverthalers

Pain +1 at: 17 LP, 11 LP, 6 LP, and 5 LP and less

hall) keep watch. One brigand relieves them at irregular intervals. If Leuwald and Rust-Hair return before the heroes make their move, they inform Darian about their failure. He speeds up the escape plan, packing only what is absolutely necessary and warning his guards to be especially watchful.

Darian's Henchmen

Use the following stats for the band of robbers, or tweak them as desired. For example, Leuwald should have *Terrain Knowledge (Woods)* and *Area Knowledge (Woods surrounding Beldenheim)*.

Ganshild (Darian's ward)

A young woman with yellow locks. Ganshild is the bastard daughter of Darian's former liege lord, and Darian still feels bound by oath to defend and protect her. Her time spent among the robbers made an impression, though, and she now feels more sympathetic to the life of an outlaw.

Rafardeon (former acolyte)

Walks slightly hunched over. Rafardeon's very short hair marks him as a former layman. He became an acolyte in a monastery dedicated to Peraine, but did not find what he was searching for. At the point at which he knew he must choose a different path, he felt that the Twelve had abandoned him, so he sought and found a new home—with outlaws.

Leuwald (ranger)

Leuwald used to serve the Baron as a frontier-guard and ranger. After his unit was annihilated in battle, he chose to leave the Baron's service. Now he fights for Darian, a man he admires and respects.



To make things more difficult, you can add more robbers to the band and even replace one of them with a witch.



Reduce the number of robbers, take away some of their equipment, or give one or more of them an illness (see *Core Rules*, page 343).

"*Rust-Hair*" (Goblin)

Even the orc looks down on Rust-Hair, the group's misfit. Nonetheless, he follows Darian's orders to the best of his abilities, partly because he is mortally afraid of abandonment but mainly because Darian treats him with respect and always refers to him as *Juuksed*, his real name.

"*Tusk*" (Orc)

Tusk's real name is Kurog. He joined Darian's band as a *yrach*, an outcast in orc society, and earned his nickname after losing a tusk in battle. Tusk saved Darian's life during their first encounter, and the knight refrained from sending him to his doom—a surprising move, given that any other knight in Griffonsford would have dispatched the orc with relish. Tusk is easily provoked and plans to die with the name of *Tairach*, the orcs' god of death, on his lips—an honorable death for a member of his race.

Bandit

COU 14 SGC 11 INT 13 CHA 10

DEX 13 AGI 12 CON 12 STR 13

LP 30 AE - KP - INI 13+1D6

DO 6 SPI 1 TOU 1 MOV 8

Combat Techniques:

Unarmed: AT 12 PA 6 DP 1D6 RE short

Saber: AT 12 PA 6 DP 1D6+3 RE medium

Battle Axe: AT 12 PA 5 DP 1D6+4 RE medium

Short Bow: RC 11 RT 1 DP 1D6+4 RA 10/50/80

Light Crossbow: RC 11 RT 8 DP 1D6+6 RA 10/50/80

PRO/ENC: 0/0

Disadvantages: Negative Trait (Avarice)

Special Abilities: Forceful Blow I (Unarmed, Saber, Battle Axe)

Skills: *Climbing 4, Body Control 3, Empathy 4, Fast-Talk 4, Feat of Strength 5, Intimidate 5, Perception 4, Self Control 4, Stealth 6, Swimming 3, Willpower 3*

Combat Behavior: Bandits prefer ambushes and superior numbers, which intimidate victims. When those tactics fail, they attack with *Forceful Blows*. They generally follow every order given by Darian unless they believe that losing is inevitable.

Escape: depends on the bandit; flee at *Pain II*.

Pain +1 at: 23 LP, 15 LP, 6 LP, and 5 LP and less

Tusk

COU 15 SGC 10 INT 11 CHA 10

DEX 13 AGI 12 CON 14 STR 13

LP 36 AE - KP - INI 14+1D6

DO 6 SPI -1 TOU 2 MOV 8

Combat Techniques:

Unarmed: AT 12 PA 6 DP 1D6 RE short

Battle Axe: AT 12 PA 5 DP 1D6+4 RE medium

Javelin: RC 12 RT 2 DP 2D6+2 RA 5/25/40

PRO/ENC: 0/0

Advantages/Disadvantages: Darksight I, Resistant to Cold, Rugged Fighter / Negative Trait (Superstition, Bad Temper)

Special Abilities: Forceful Blow I (Unarmed, Battle Axe), Quickload (Thrown)

Skills: *Climbing 5, Body Control 4, Empathy 3, Fast-Talk 3, Feat of Strength 6, Intimidate 6, Perception 4, Self Control 5, Stealth 7, Swimming 3, Willpower 4*

Combat Behavior: (see *Bandits*)

Escape: Flees after losing 50% of his LP.

Pain +1 at: 27 LP, 16 LP, 9 LP, and 5 LP and less

Which Path Do the Heroes Choose— Praios' Light or Phex' Shadows?

The heroes have plenty of options for facing Darian and his henchmen. They could sneak into the ruins or just as easily make themselves obvious and approach under a flag of truce. Use the following suggestions when considering

Rust-Hair

COU 10 SGC 10 INT 13 CHA 13

DEX 14 AGI 15 CON 12 STR 11

LP 24 AE - KP - INI 13+1D6

DO 8 SPI -1 TOU 0 MOV 8

Combat Techniques:

Unarmed: AT 11 PA 6 DP 1D6+1 RE short

Dagger: AT 12 PA 8 DP 1D6+2 RE short

Club: AT 9 PA 3 DP 1D6+2 RE medium

PRO/ENC: 0/0

Advantages/Disadvantages: Darksight I, Exceptional Sense (Hearing), Resistant to Cold / Negative Trait (Superstitious, Curiosity)

Special Abilities: Feint I

Skills: *Climbing 5, Body Control 4, Empathy 4, Fast-Talk 3, Feat of Strength 4, Intimidate 4, Perception 7, Self Control 4, Stealth 7, Swimming 3, Willpower 1*

Combat Behavior: (see *Bandits*)

Escape: Flees after losing 50% of his LP.

Pain +1 at: 18 LP, 12 LP, 6 LP, and 5 LP and less

how to react to the heroes' plans. No matter which plan the heroes choose, Isella argues strongly for covert action.

Acting Openly

If the heroes make no effort to conceal themselves, the guards posted atop the keep and the gatehouse notice their approach and raise the alarm, notifying Darian as soon as possible. Of course he was aware that Isella might return with armed men, but he didn't expect them to arrive this quickly. He admits his surprise with a hint of respect, but nevertheless, he is prepared for this and orders his men to draw their bows and aim at the intruders. Then he asks them to halt and state their names and their business. When he spots Isella, he calls her "that bloodthirsty Esquire's daughter" and berates the heroes for being her "willing accomplices." If asked to elaborate, he does not hesitate to reveal Isella's murderous plans at this moment. Isella, on the other hand, continues to goad the heroes while reminding them not to listen to "the words of a traitor and orc-friend."

Sneaking In

There are several ways to enter the ruins unseen, but most require competitive checks of the heroes' *Stealth* (or perhaps *Climbing*) against the guards' *Perception*. It is not possible to use the cart path for a stealthy approach (much of it has been reclaimed by nature, but it is still too open to scrutiny from someone standing on top of the keep). Heroes gain a +3 bonus to *Stealth* (*Sneak or Hide*) checks if using the hill's lush vegetation and oddly shaped rock formations for cover. Note that the guard posted on top of the keep also receives a bonus (+1 to *Perception*) for the superior vantage point. If Leuwald and Rust-Hair (Isella's pursuers) have already returned and warned the robbers, every guard receives an additional +2 bonus to all competitive checks involving their *Perception*.

If the heroes succeed at sneaking into the cloister, they might try to ambush the guards (see *Core Rules*, page 237) and silence them. Isella recommends this strongly, arguing that the party must deprive the robbers of their superior numbers. She also points out that the remaining bandits (and their leader) could escape if someone raises the alarm.

If a guard catches the heroes sneaking in, a fight ensues (see *Sharp Blades*). It needn't last long, however, since Darian (or another brigand who is in-the-know) could mention Isella's murder plans and thus quickly end the fighting (see *Sharp Tongues*).

Sharp Blades

The heroes' actions and choices determine whether a fight with the robbers is inevitable, only likely, or even completely unnecessary. Use the following information about the ruined surroundings and the bandits' combat behavior to plan a thrilling finale for the adventure. Make sure non-combat-oriented heroes feel involved by devising situations where they can make use of their skills or spells. They could throw rocks from rooftops (use *Dodge* to avoid falling rocks) or provide other tactical support by using the SA Leader.

In the event of a fight, Darian takes advantage of his tactical opportunities by positioning one or two archers in strategic places (such as the keep, the roofless second floor above the kitchen, or the parapet walk) and keeps the remaining fighters close together. This way, they can make use of a good defensive position (like the entrance passage to the colonnade) and retreat quickly, if necessary. Darian fights the hero who appears to be the strongest fighter.

If it becomes obvious that the heroes are losing, Darian calls on them to lay down their weapons and desist. He doesn't want to spill more blood than is necessary and is willing to offer the heroes safe passage. Whether they trust his offer is up to them.

If Darian's men begin to lose the battle, he orders them to retreat towards the palace and tries to buy enough time for some of them to escape through the tunnel. If the heroes don't notice this escape, you can give them a clue by describing bats streaming from the caves and flying away from the keep. Heroes pursuing the fleeing bandits might stumble upon a cave spider savoring its latest dish—an unlucky outlaw who blundered into its web while trying to escape the cloister.

If desired, the heroes may take every robber prisoner and present them to the Esquire, or to the Baron of Beldengrove, for ransom or reward.

Sharp Tongues

When Isella's murder plot is finally unveiled, the heroes (technically her accomplices) find themselves in a difficult

situation. Who is lying and who is telling the truth? The heroes must decide whom to trust.

Isella urges them to disregard this traitor's word and put the bandits to the sword, like they deserve. She denies that she tried to hire killers to assassinate her father and even tries to fight off a HOLY OATH by means of her *Willpower*. She is keenly aware that she would face death by beheading if the truth behind these accusations became known. To gain insights into Isella's troubles, make a competitive check of *Empathy (Discern Motivation)* against Isella's *Fast Talk*, but keep in mind that this skill is not a lie detector—it only helps the heroes understand her better). Only a critical success allows a hero to see through her lies straight away. Clairvoyance and influence magic are other possibilities, but results obtained by such means are not admissible in court. In any case, only nobles can pronounce judgment on other nobles (for more information, see *Do I Believe Her?*).

Darian admits to being an outlaw but warns the heroes that he and his men will not go down without a fight. They consider themselves *honest rogues*, not *ruthless killers* like that *noble brat* (referring to Isella) and those who follow her. He's a man of his word and unafraid to swear by Rondra (or, being a Darpatian, by Travia) that his account of Isella's plans is completely true. Even if the heroes believe him, they should remember that he is guilty of highway robbery, abducting a noble, collaborating with the enemy (which a court of law would call “shaking the very foundations of Prais-given order”), and perhaps even *murder*.

He values the lives of his men over his own. If necessary, he submits to a god's judgement, such as Rondra's Ordeal, and will fight to the death, if need be, provided that his troop is spared and given safe conduct out of the region. He also promises to stay away from the margravate for at least “a year and a day.” An ordeal is highly risky for him, given his many punishable deeds, but he considers Isella's crime to be worse in the eyes of the gods and thus has hopes of winning.

Isella, however, does not react well to the idea of holding an ordeal and argues that Darian is more experienced and better equipped, the latter of which can be mitigated if one of the heroes offers her a weapon or suit of armor. If a hero volunteers to act as her champion, and she considers the hero to be at least something of a match for the aged robber-knight, she agrees readily. However, if her champion loses, she tries to flee. If events lead to an ordeal, keep the players involved by letting them roll for Darian and/or Isella.

Escape

If Darian, Isella, or any of the bandits escape or otherwise leave the area, they head northwest towards the Dark

Rondra's Ordeals and God's Judgements

Rondra's Ordeal is another name for a *god's judgement*, a special trial by combat fought mainly to contest a ruling in a court of law. God's judgements also share certain aspects with duels of honor, a la Casanova or the Three Musketeers, but there are important differences. For example, duels of honor mainly require only that the participants demonstrate enough courage to face each other. Also, winning a duel of honor is considered far less significant than emerging victorious from a god's judgement.

Participants in a god's judgement must fight either to *first blood*, *second blood*, or *third blood*. Rules-wise, first blood means fighting until one person suffers an injury that draws a measurable amount of blood. Second blood means that both combatants fight until one either surrenders or collapses due to exhaustion or incapacitating wounds (*Pain Lvl 4*). Third blood means to *the death*. Also, prior to committing to a god's judgement, both participants must agree on certain conditions such as degree (first, second, or third blood) and what victory signifies (the winner's claim is legal, the winner speaks the truth, and so on).

Worshippers of the Twelvegods believe that the god or goddess judges these combats personally, and participants try their best to fight a god's judgement with honor. Beings who do not worship the Twelvegods are usually ineligible to participate, but a non-believer may fight after swearing an *exception*, that is, if they demonstrate that their belief system has a parallel. For example, the warrior culture of orcs recognizes the religious import of trials by combat. In a Rondra's Ordeal between a human and an orc, the human would pray for Rondra's aid while the orc would pray for aid from Brazoragh.

The sanctity of a god's judgement extends to fairness, and a trial between a renowned swordsman and an untrained peasant would be considered dishonorable in the extreme (unless the swordsman agreed to fight blindfolded or with a similar hindrance). Fairness can also be established through the equitable distribution of weapons and armor, for example. If both participants use swords, but one is known to possess much better skill, the trial by combat cannot proceed unless both parties make an effort to balance the contest. For instance, the more skilled fighter might choose to wield a different weapon or fight the trial without the benefit of armor—anything that puts the more skilled fighter at an acceptable disadvantage.

Ridge in the hopes of reaching the Svellt Valley by summer (in which case the heroes might meet Darian, Isella, or the bandits again some day...).

Epilogue

The resolution of this adventure is quite open and depends almost entirely on the heroes' choices and their method of enforcement. As conciliators, they could make Darian promise to leave the margravate for good and encourage Isella to come clean with her stepfather and perhaps even acknowledge her error and forgive him. Or they could enforce the law and arrange a trial before the Baron, who then condemns every delinquent to death. In this case, he condemns Darian and Isella for slanderous behavior, insubordination, shaking the foundations of order, and plotting to murder nobles. They meet the executioner's sword while the other bandits hang. Depending on how well the heroes plead for some of them, however, the Baron might mete out lesser sentences, such as corporal punishment, pillory, a *ban* (loss of all rights, colloquially known as "being free as a bird"), the undertaking of a pious quest of penance, or serving the Baron as an indentured fighter for a year and a day.

Optional Scene: The Baron of Beldengrove

As an optional scene, you can make use of Baron Cordoran of Beldengrove to further drive home the theme of this adventure. A gentleman turned robber-knight, he proclaimed himself Baron during the dark days of the civil war in the former Darpatian lands called the Wildermarches. He's no stranger to corruption. If you want the heroes to stumble upon an even bigger scheme and find that yet another pillar of society is not as morally upright as he seems, have them discover that the Baron has a secret pact with Darian, who collects tolls in his employ, albeit without mentioning the Baron's name. In return, the Baron turns a blind eye to his robberies. This way, the heroes can learn a bitter truth—namely, that law and justice aren't always the same thing.

At Sunfield Manor, *Gerbald von Irmenburg* (mid-50s; neatly-trimmed beard; small frame; amiable nature) finds it hard to believe the accusations against his stepdaughter. In his mind, Isella is all that remains of his beloved wife, and he would gladly forgive her if the chance arose. He is even willing to end his affair with Ludilla to win his stepdaughter's love, even though his heart would break all over again. Isella's reaction is up to you. Perhaps these events purge her of her hatred, or maybe she learns that she was wrong about her stepfather and thanks Darian for refusing to commit the assassination. On the other hand, maybe her stubbornness and unwillingness to yield transform her into a recurring villainess.

If Isella is dead, Gerbald's reaction depends on the heroes' report. If the heroes return Isella's body to Sunfield and don't mention the conspiracy, the Baron displays obvious grief but gives them a small reward for their troubles (5 silverthalers). If the heroes reveal Isella's murder plot

to the Baron, he first refuses to believe them but then collapses to the ground in sorrow.

Reward for the Heroes' Efforts

Give the heroes 15 to 20 AP each for surviving the adventure. Depending on the outcome, they might receive

an additional reward from Isella, split up the robbers' loot (GM's choice), or collect the Baron's reward for catching the bandits (50 ducats, plus an additional 25 ducats if they give the loot to the Baron or another authority, such as the Church of Praios). If they visit the Baron directly for any reason, see *Optional Scene: The Baron of Beldengrove*, above.





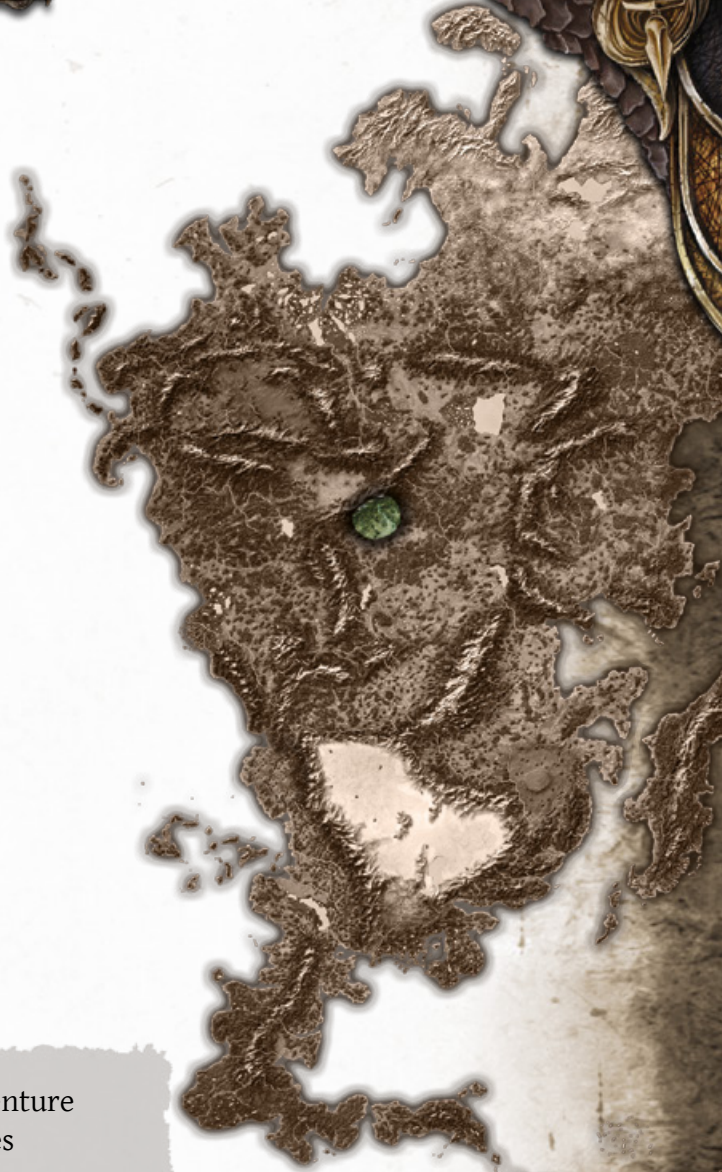
THE RUINS



Justice and Noble Valor

by Nikolai Hoch

Additional material by Philipp Neitzel



A TDE group adventure
for 3–5 heroes

Genre: Wilderness Adventure; bandit hunt with some surprising twists

Prerequisites: Heroes with a sense of justice, good survival skills, and a willingness to help a lady in distress

Location: Woods in the shadow of the Dark Ridge Mountains, Barony of Beldengrove, Griffonsford

Date: Springtime, 1036 FB or later

Complexity (Players/GM): low/low

Suggested Hero Experience Level: *Experienced*

Useful Skills

Nature	◆	◆	◆	◆
Social	◆	◆	◆	◆
Combat	◆	◆	◆	◆
Living History	◆	◆	◆	◆



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