



THE BROTHERHOOD CAMPAIGN



ARCHIVE

SEPTEMBER 23RD, 2010 TO MARCH 6TH, 2013

This document is a scrapbook of sorts intended to commemorate the Brotherhood Campaign and to serve as a testament to the combined power of imagination and friendship. Thanks are due the cast of both players and characters, as without their minds-eye adventures and paper lives this story would never have been told.

- Joel Arakaki - Anders von Brenner
- Larry Criswell - Quintis Esheman
- Andrew Moll - Kel' Theril
- Eric Shandrow - Beaumont von Faust
- Bill Wellington - Floy Sledge Antonio de Silva Mariano Fadrilla Campos

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ANDERS VON BRENNER



BEAUMONT VON FAUST



KEL' THERIL



QUINTIS ESHAMAN



**FLOY SLEDGE ANTONIO
DE SILVA MARIANO
FADRILLA CAMPOS**



**LAURELORN
FOREST**

**SILVER
HILLS**

**THE
SALZLANDS**

**RIVER
SALZ**

**RIVER
OLDEN**

**SILVER
RIVER**

SALZENMUND

OLDENLITZ

**THE MINE
ROADS**

**WEST RIVER
ROAD**

**SOUTH
RIVER
ROAD**

**THE SALZ
ROAD**

GRAFENRICH

**SALZWOOD
FOREST**

BEECKERHOVEN

**MIDDEMHIER
ERBERAD
ROAD**

**THE FOREST
ROAD**

**FOREST OF
SHADOWS**

MARKLOWE



2 LEAGUES



SALZLANDS MAP KEY

1 – VON BRENNER ESTATE

Mostly burned and entirely abandoned, a few peasants still tend individual farms, but most have fled for fear of association.

2 – WOODSMAN'S CABIN

Long abandoned and falling into ruin.

3 – RUINED MONASTERY OF ULRICH

Long abandoned and falling into ruin, this once formidable keep and religious retreat is now over-grown and crumbling. Most of the stone has long been carted away for use elsewhere, and except for a couple of half-caved basement rooms, the ruins are open to the elements. The small ruined walls and the small bluff on which they site are still uniquely defensible, but only for those with ranged weapons and good aim.

4 – VON FAUST ESTATE

This prospering manor is busy and active. A new wooden palisade, built in the last year surrounds the main buildings and a few hired swords guard the gate. The peasants are worked hard and unjustly, but remain on the estate for the security it provides. There is also a mysterious cylindrical stone tower that rises above the other buildings. It is a new addition to the estate and frequently belches black and sulfurous smoke into the air.

5 – WEN CREEK CROSSING HAMLET

Wen Creek hamlet is little more than a collection of hovels grouped together for a false sense of security. Technically on the fringes of the von Brenner lands, only a few families remain – a stubborn and surly lot themselves.

6 – FAUST CROSSROADS HAMLET

A tiny village on the East Road at the turning to the Faust Estate. Home to only 15 people, the surrounding vineyards produce some of the best wine in Nordland. Even this specialty produce has not sheltered the village from the recent hard economic time.

7 – SALZENMUND REFUGEE CAMP

The Salzenmund war refugee camp is just that – a desperate, filthy shantytown of tents and hovels pressed close against the east walls of Salzenmund. There are more than 2000 frightened and starving refugees from Middenland, Ostland and even Hochland, squatting in the camp and falling prey to the depredations and slave-like working conditions inflicted upon them by the city authorities and guilds.

8 – MERCHANT AMBUSH SITE

Location of the Scarecrows' first intentional ambush of a merchant shipment.

9 – HAUL OUT

This is area near which the scattered party members dragged themselves from the Salz after their tragic night on the Salzenmund waterfront. It is also approximately where Ander's was discovered, half dead, by the peasant children.

10 – MARC’S RIDGE

This is a small village just north of the Salzwood. The village is surrounded by vineyards, but was mostly burned in the recent beastmen attacks.

11 – FOREST CART BRIDGE

This is a mostly disused old wooden bridge on the cart path running through the Salzwood. It was the site of first a battle during the recent beastmen raid and then the initial encounter with Herr Little and his men. It was to be the drop site for communications between Little and the Scarecrows.

12 – SILVER HILLS OUTPOST

This small, fortified outpost was recently rebuilt and serves as a reinforcement and staging area for the Prince’s operations in the Silver Hills. It is typically manned by about 30 soldiers and camp workers, and has two carronades mounted on the overlooking bluff. There is also a secret workshop in spaces below where the Prince has made a deal with Skaven crafters to rebuild and power the Ghost Armor.

13 – THE PIT

This is the site of the ancient, destroyed Warp Gate, recently rediscovered by Wendel’s researches.

14 – DARK RUINS

This is the vent above the ancient Warp Gate, surrounded by ruined towers and haunted by druichii wraiths.

15 – SKAVEN TUNNEL ENTRANCE

This is the small cave that hides the Skaven tunnel that leads to under the mercenary outpost (#12).

16 – BATTLE SITE

This is where the Crows slaughtered the patrol that was sent out to capture them after they had freed the prisoners who become the original Unmerry Men.

17 – SILVER CACHE

This is where the Crows buried most of the silver they hijacked from the ferry.

18 – PERCH

This is the abandoned fishing village where the Crows ambushed the ogre mercenaries. The villagers scattered after mercenaries killed several villagers who were unable to pay taxes.

19 – THE WITCH’S BOG

This trackless wetland has long been a favorite hunting ground for the brave and the source of frightening legends of the old witch who lives there. It is said that many enter, but only those cursed by the witch ever come out.

20 – THE DEVIL’S EYE

This ancient sink hole has been a shelter for hunters, a refuge for delinquent children, and hideout for bandits. The largest cavern is just inside the entrance, but a series of interconnected caverns, tunnels and half-flooded crawl spaces lead a considerable distance

beneath the surround hills. The sluggish waterway that created the caverns eventually dumps into Witch's bog to the south.

21 – GIDEON'S FORD

This shallow river ford is the site of an ancient ruin and a long ago battle in which invading elves defeated human defenders. The battle is refought every night at the witching hour when the Chaos moon is in the sky.

22 – THE SILVER HART

This is the coaching in at the crossroads of the Forest and Erengard-Middenheim roads.

23 – RIVER CAMP

The Unmerry Men's hill camp refuge, well away from likely hunting grounds and busy patrols

10 YARDS



GRAFENRICH

VON BRENNER LANDS

GRAFENRICH MAP KEY

- 1 – INNER COURTYARD
- 2 – GREAT TOWER
- 3 – OUTER COURTYARD
- 4 – SOUTH GATE
- 5 – MAIN KEEP GATE
- 6 – SALLY GATE
- 7 – GRAFENRICH KEEP
- 8 – COMMONER’S SQUARE
- 9 – WATCH HOUSE
- 10 – KALB’S SMITHY
- 11 – RIVER SALZ
- 12 – NORTH BASTIAN
- 13 – GOBLIN ISLAND
- 14 – THE OUTLAW AND THE MAID
- 15 – SHRINE OF TAAL
- 16 – MARKET BAZAAR
- 17 – TOWN COMMONS
- 18 – BURGHER’S LODGE
- 19 – RIVER GATE
- 20 – RIVER FORT
- 21 – TEMPLE OF ULRIC
- 22 – STATUE OF ULRIC
- 23 – TEMPLE OF MORR
- 24 – MORR’S GARDEN
- 25 – TEMPLE OF SHALLYA
- 26 – EAST BASTIAN
- 27 – MERCHANT’S QUARTER
- 28 – EAST BASTIAN
- 29 – EAST GATE
- 30 – THE BARON’S MILLS
- 31 – THE DOCKS
- 32 – OLD VON BRENNER MANOR
- 33 – VON FAUST MANOR
- 34 – VON STAUDINGER MANOR



CITY OF
SALZENMUND

100 YARDS



SALZENMUND MAP KEY

DISTRICTS AND QUARTERS

A – THE KEEP

The oldest structure in the city and the seat of the Baron's power. Sprawling and well-fortified, this walled keep is warren-like and heavily guarded.

B – OLD CITY

This is the oldest part of the city and overlooks the river from where it sits atop a pair of low hills.

C – BRIDGETON

D – MERCHANT'S QUARTER

E – HIGH TOWN

F – RIVER DISTRICT

G – THE DOCKS

H – REFUGEE CAMP

I – THE TRADES DISTRICT

J – THE MAZE

FEATURES AND LOCATIONS

1 – THE COCKEREL

2 – THE DIAMOND

3 – BEAUMONT'S WAREHOUSE

4 – KURZMAN'S MANOR

5 – COMMONS OF THE FAITHFUL

6 – THE GREEN DRAGON

7 – THE PIG AND WHISTLE

8 – THE WRETCHED HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY

9 – ELVEN MISSION

MIDDENHEIM

CITY OF THE WHITE WOLF

LOCATIONS

- PALAST DISTRICT**
1. Middenplatz
 2. Königsgarten
 3. Square of Marials
- THE GREAT PARK**
4. Bernhau Stadium
 5. The Show Boat
- GRAFSMUND-NORDGARTEN**
6. The Prospect
 7. The Graf's Repose
 8. The Harvest Goose
- ULRICSMUND**
9. Black Plague Memorial
 10. Temple of Ulric
 11. Temple of Yreina
 12. Guild of Physicians
 13. The Commission
 14. The Beggarband
- ALTMARKT-ALTQUARTIER**
15. Worshiplful Guild of Legatiles
 16. The Lost Drop
 17. Fletcher's Slaughterhouse
 18. The Bleating Herd
- SOUTHGATE-OSTWALD**
19. The Drowned Rat
 20. Pfandlicher's Pawnbroker
 21. Labourer's Hospice
 22. Dragon Ales Brewery
- NEUMARKT-EASTGATE**
23. Royal College of Music
 24. The Singing Moon
 25. The Templar's Doomfall
 26. Commission Offices
 27. Creste Rock Councils
- THE FREIBURG**
28. Temple of Sigmur
 29. The Scholar's
 30. The Red Moon
 31. Guild Of Wizards and Alchemists
 32. The Collegium Theologica
- THE WYND**
33. Chapel of Grungni
 34. Guild of Stonemasons and Architects
 35. Commission for Public Works
 36. Dwarfm Engineers' Guild
- WESTGATE-SUDGARTEN**
37. Monypark
 38. Grunpark
 39. Temple of Shal'ya
 40. Temple of Myrindia
 41. The Laughing Jackass
- MERCHANT DISTRICT**
42. Merchant's Guild
 43. Trade Commission
 44. Wolf Runner Coaches



Cartography:
Shawn Brown
Colouring and Additional Materials:
Andrew Lee



PIETER VON BRENNER, BARON OF GREFFENRICH



GUSTAVUS UNBEROGEN (OLD GUS)



HERR LITTLE



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BEASTMAN LEADER



AN UNMERRY MAN



GRIMA



LA PISTOLERA



DRUCHII WRAITH

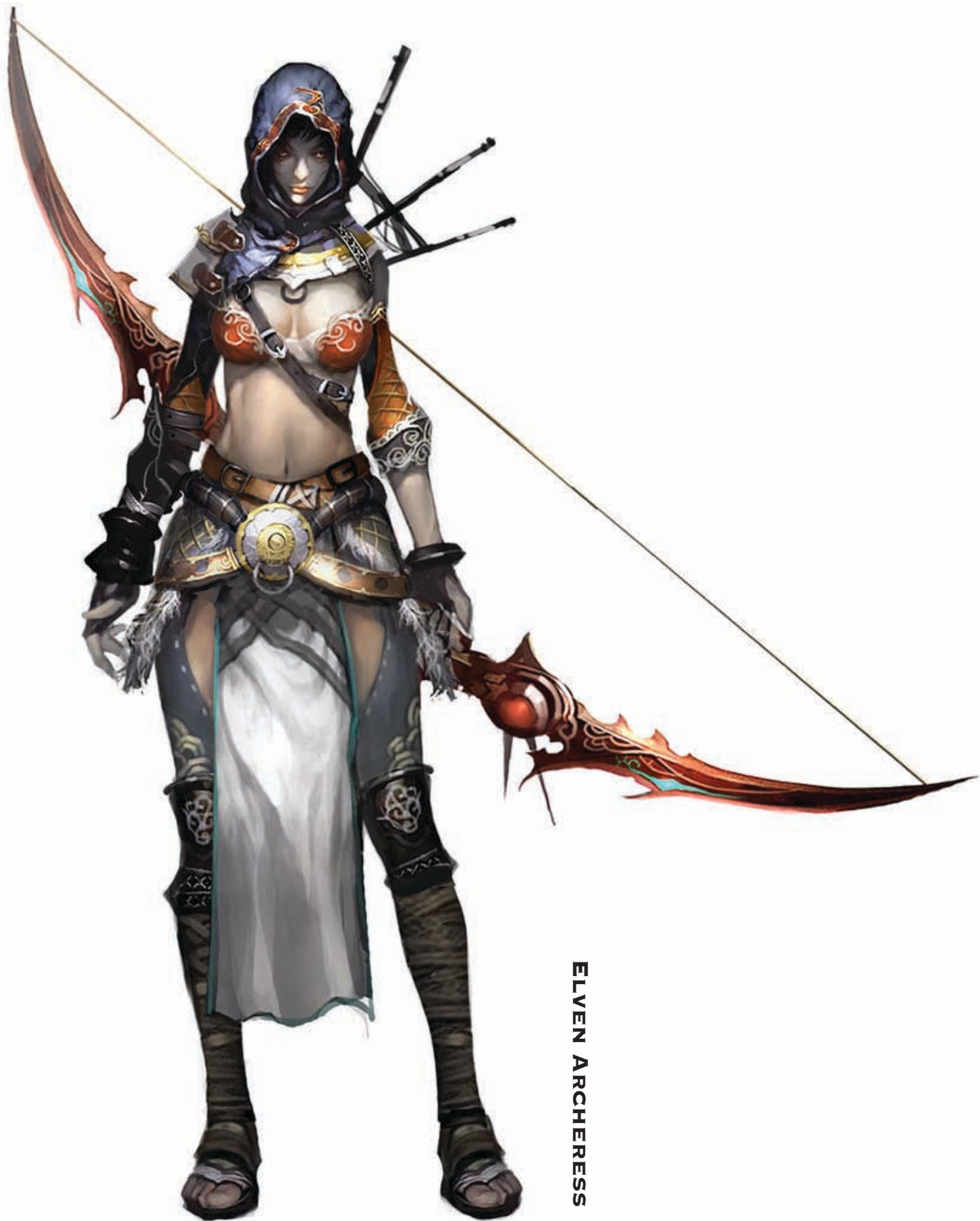


DOMINIC UN OJO, MERCENARY CAPTAIN



GHOST ARMOR

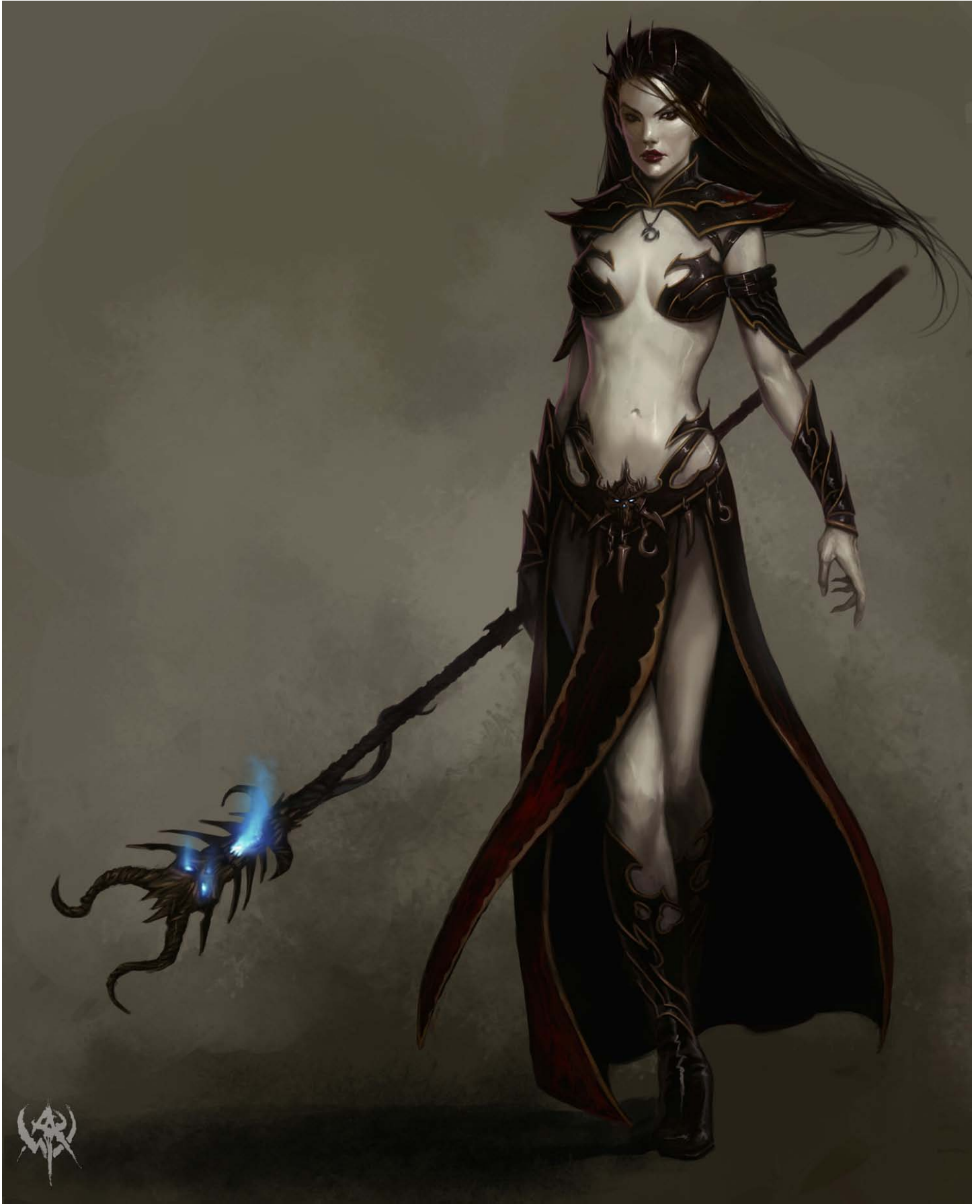




ELVEN ARCHERESS



PRINCESS ELENWE



THE WITCH QUEEN





GRIMWOLD VON FAUST, BARON OF GRAFENRICH

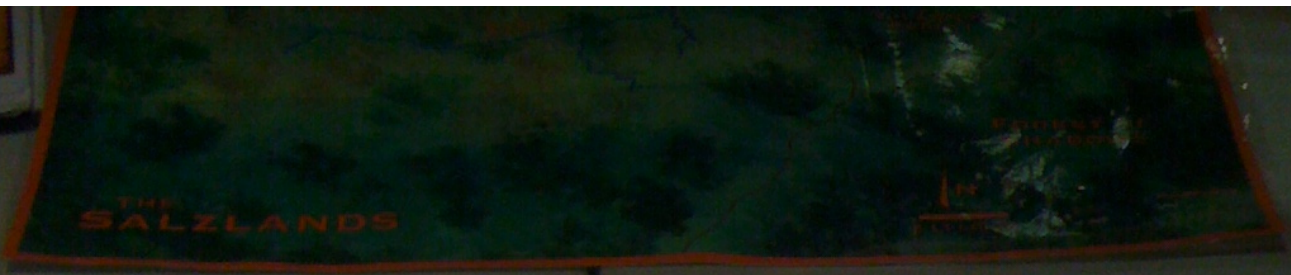


VOLMANN JAGER, BAILIFF OF SALZENMUND



THE PREDETERMINED BARON, MAGUS OF THE LORD OF CHANGE

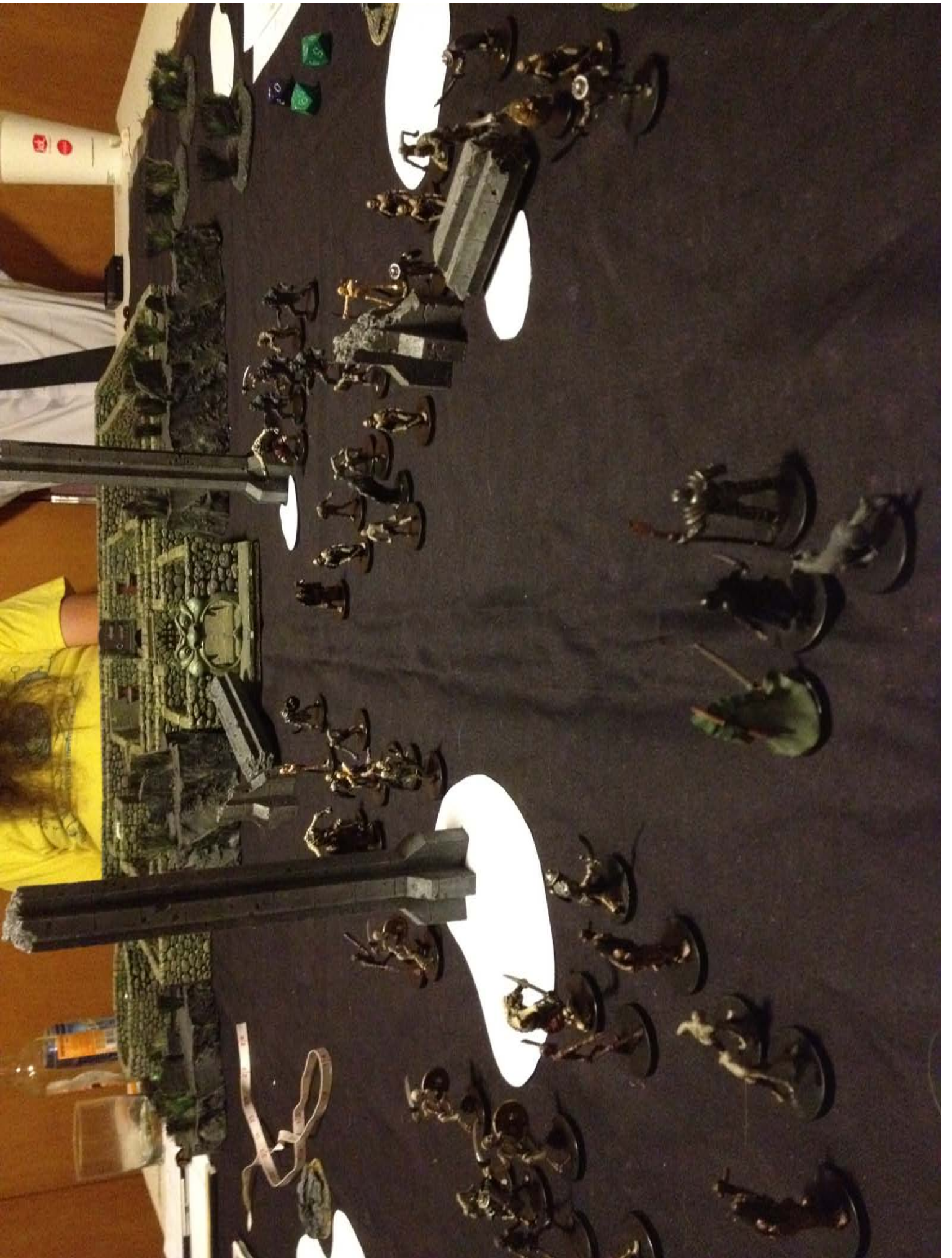


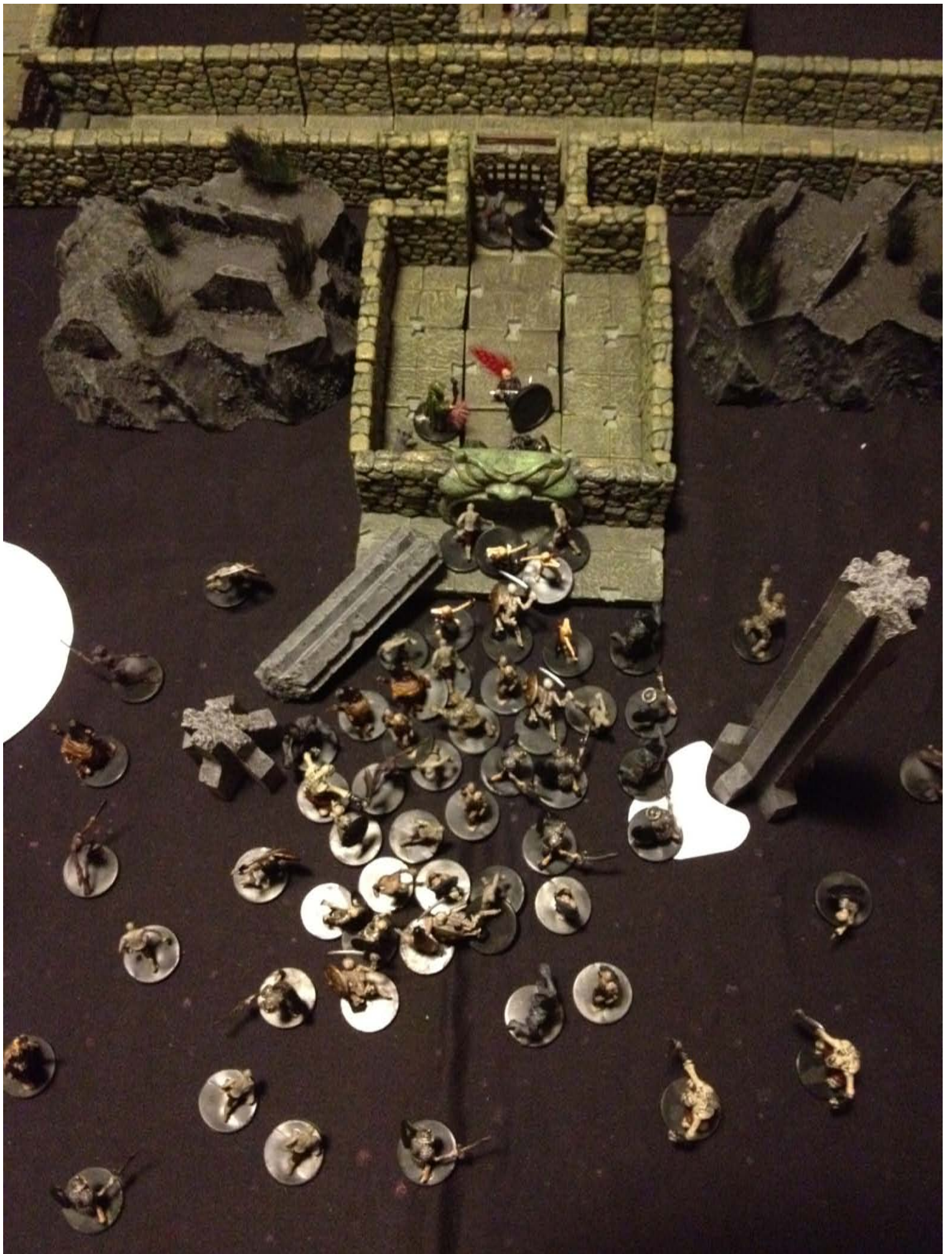


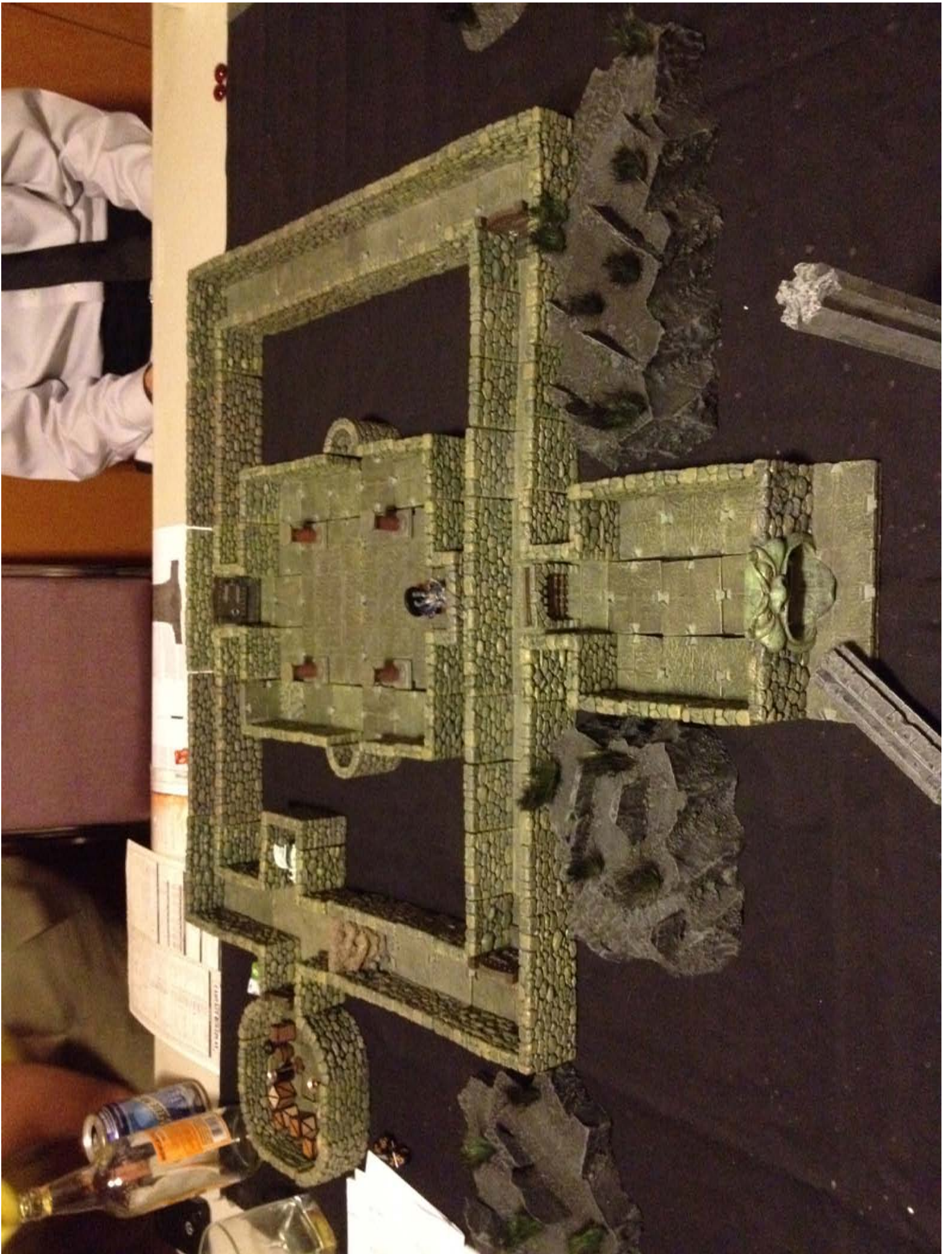


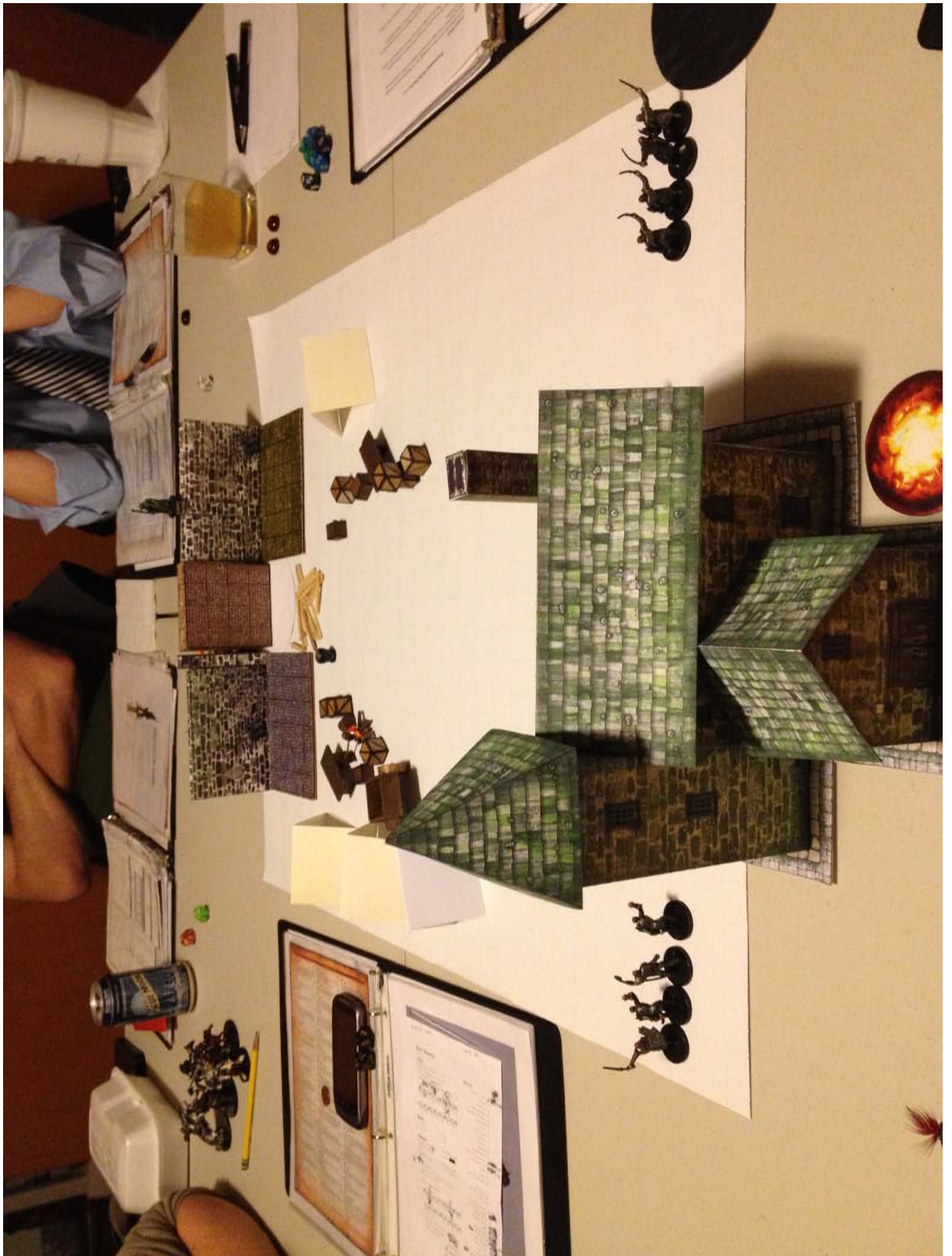


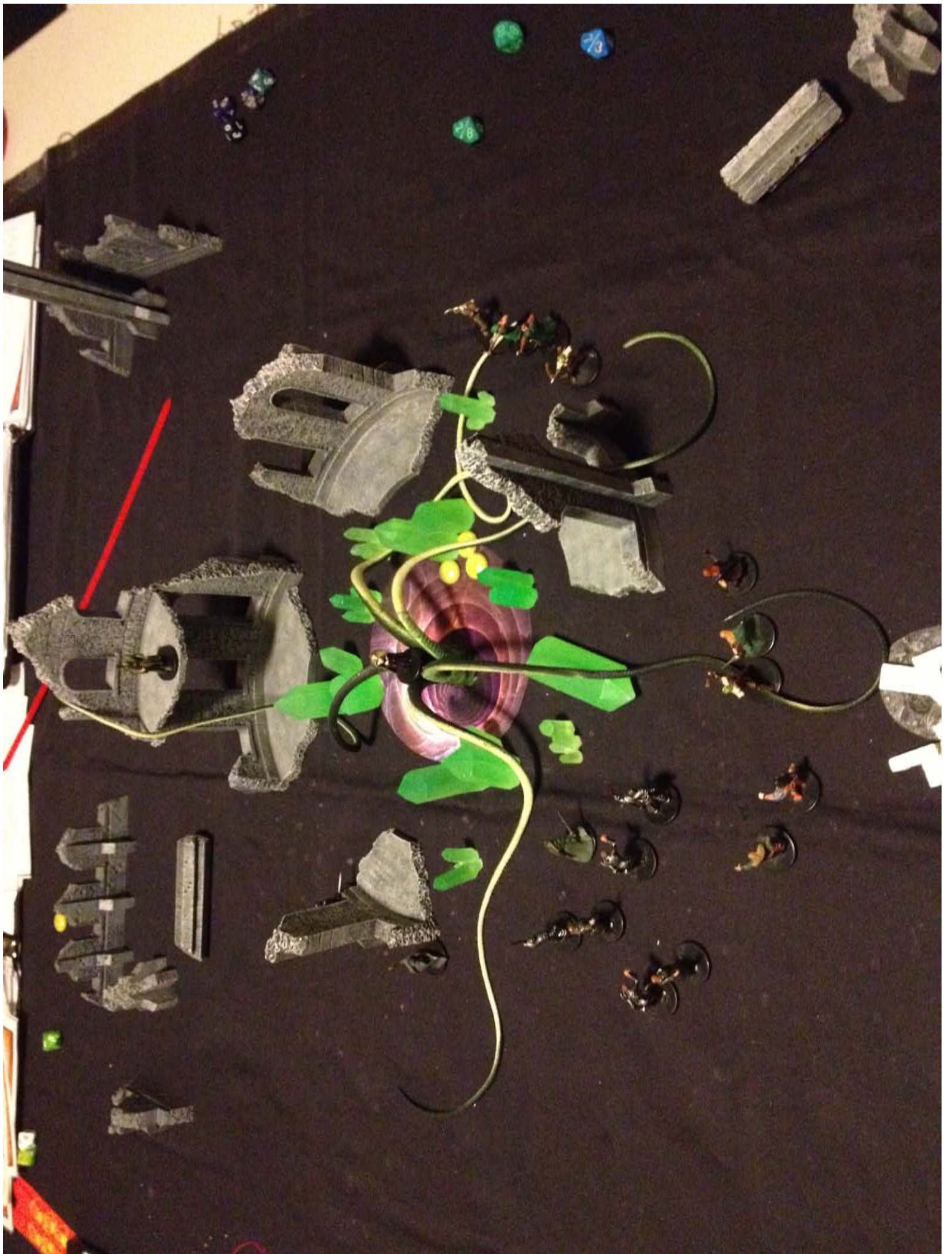


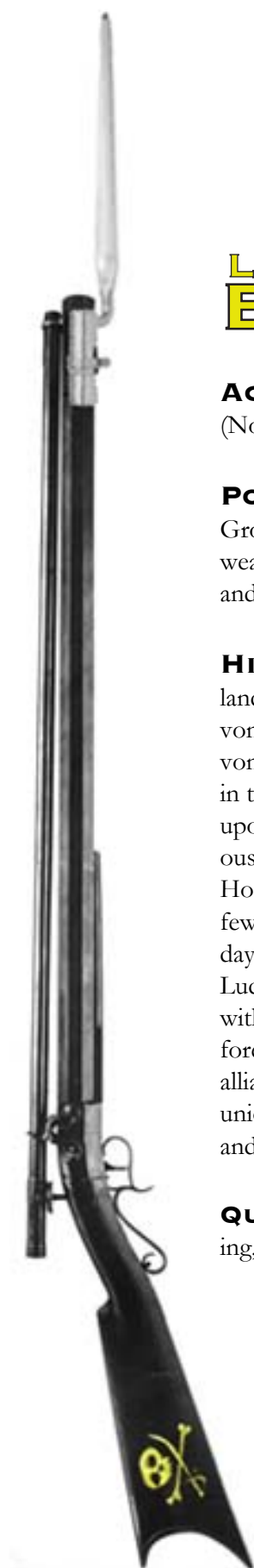












LUDENHOF'S BIESTMÖRDER

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: History
(Nordland or Hochland)

POWERS: Grants the user Specialist Weapon Group (Engineer) but only when firing the rifle. The weapon takes a half action less to reload than normal, and bestows +10 BS. +20 BS against beastmen.

HISTORY: In 2474, while on a state visit to Nordland, the then Grand Baron of Hochland, Burchard von Ludenhof, went hunting with Lord Erkenbrand von Brenner, the then Duke of Grafenrich. While deep in the Forest of Shadows the hunting party was set upon by a hoard of beastmen. Ludenhof was grievously wounded, but Brenner, picking up the Hochlander's prized long rifle proceeded to kill no fewer than twelve beastmen singlehandedly, saving the day and the Baron's life. Upon his recovery, Baron Ludenhof gifted his unique weapon to Duke Brenner with the wish that it would remain in his family forever, serving as a lasting symbol of gratitude and alliance. The Brenner family believes that the rifle's unique traits are a manifest legacy of that pitched battle and the Baron's heartfelt friendship.

QUALITIES: Best quality, Impact, Armour Piercing, no longer Unreliable.

THE WARRIOR OF MORR

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: History (Cult of Morr)

POWERS: Grants the user +10 WS and +10 BS, but as is the way with such things this power comes at a price. A price most are unwilling to pay.



HISTORY: It has long been the practice of warriors of the Old World to carry tokens, totems and charms into battle. A superstitious lot, they hope that such charms will provide protection from the swords of their enemies or give their own weapons greater strength. An iron pendant from a village wise woman, a lock of hair from a lover or an ancestral dagger, most such tokens have one thing in common – they do not work. There are however, more potent amulets, more efficacious symbols of power that actually do impart uncanny abilities on their bearers. The Warrior of Morr is just such an object.

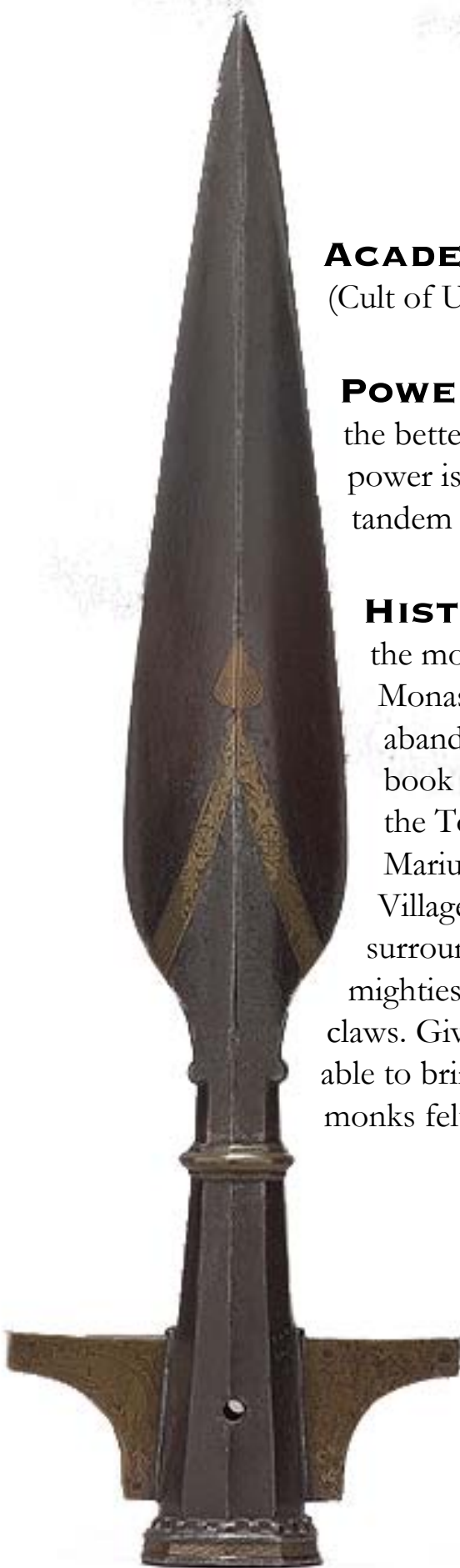
Skull charms, the preserved craniums of able warriors or powerful priests, are not wholly uncommon in the Old World. Truly magical ones are scarce however, and ones as potent as the Warrior of Morr are exceedingly rare. This one, blessed ages ago by a dying priest of the Cult of Morr from the unlikely hinterlands of Ostermark, is eerily beautiful. It has also only grown in power as it has passed from hand to hand and land to land, bearing witness to bloody battle after bloody battle. Now the skull, as if with a blood-lust of its own, seems to guide the bear's hand imparting a deadly accuracy to his weapon.

TOOTH OF THE WOLF

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard History
(Cult of Ulric)

POWERS: Allows the wielder to roll twice and use the better roll when checking for Ulric's Fury. This power is granted only when the Tooth is used in tandem with the Shield of the Faithful.

HISTORY: The history of the Tooth was lost with the moldering texts that were scattered when the Monastery of the Green Wood in Nordland was abandoned 200 years ago. In whatever forgotten book the old words lie rotting, the story goes that the Tooth was pulled from the body of Brother Marius after a fierce beastmen raid at Salzenmund Village. When the survivors found him, he was surrounded by the corpses of a dozen beastmen, the mightiest of which still clutched the spear in his dead claws. Given that only this fearsome weapon had been able to bring down the valiant priest, the remaining monks felt it fitting to inter their leader with the spear.



SHIELD OF THE FAITHFUL

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Hard History
(Cult of Ulric)

POWERS: Allows the wielder to roll his parry skill twice and use the better roll. This power is granted only when the Shield of the Faithful is used in tandem with the Tooth of the Wolf, and only if the wielder has shown his devotion to Ulric with morning prayers and a blood sacrifice of at least 1 wound.

HISTORY: The Shield of the Faithful is mentioned in only a single surviving text, one obscure hymn and is shown, along with the Tooth, on one faded tapestry still hanging in a sub-basement of the High Temple of Ulric in Middenheim.

The shield was blessed by the Ar-Ulric almost 500 years ago and was given as a gift to a Brother Marius when he left to found a monastery in what was then the wild Nordland frontier. The text, hymn and tapestry all refer to a singular event – a pitched battle against raiding beastmen – in which the Ulrican monks helped defend the village of Salzenmund and in which Brother Marius was mortally wounded.





BROTHER MARIUS' SPIRIT SYMBOL

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard
History (Cult of Ulric)

POWERS: The symbol grants one additional daily fortune point to the wearer, but should that wearer violate any Ulrican strictures, he loses all his fortune points for the remainder of that day.

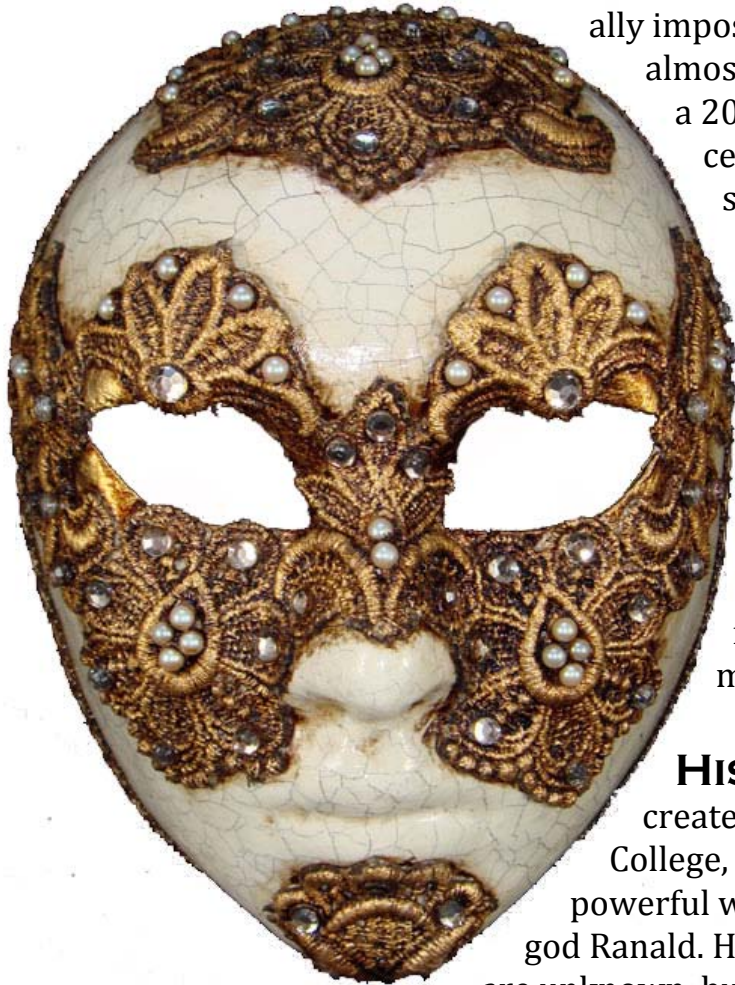
HISTORY: This crudely made pendant has been passed from one faithful devotee of Ulric to another since the founding of Middenheim. Though it was never formally enchanted by its long forgotten maker, the countless earnest blessings it has received over the centuries has imbued the artifact with a genuine aura of fortune.

This ghostly version of the amulet may be incorporeal, but it is no less potent for being so. In this strange, nether-worldly form the necklace may not be removed, shared or given away, but a loss of faith, or a dire curse will permanently dispel it's boon.

RANALD'S FACE

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Hard History
(Cult of Ranald or Grey College)

POWERS: The mask makes the wearer virtually impossible to see when cloaked in shadows - almost as if he does not exist. The wearer has a 20% bonus when making opposed Concealment Checks in the proximity of shadows or other darkness.

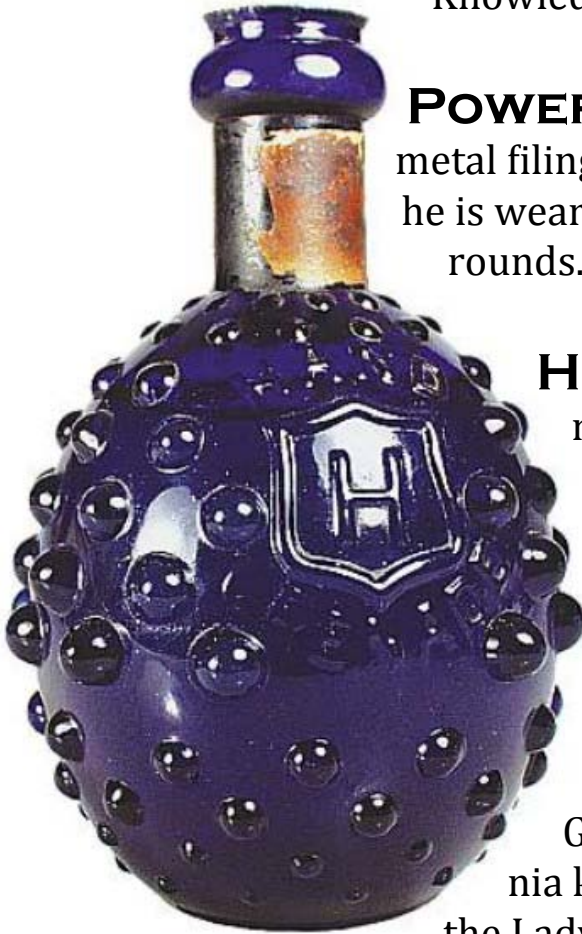


The mask's magic is powerful however, and though it makes the wearer seem not to exist, it can also make the wearer forget himself. Whenever a person puts on the mask he must succeed in an Intelligence Check or he becomes vague of mind and forgets his purpose - a condition which lasts for 1d10 minutes after removing the mask.

HISTORY: The mask was originally created by a skilled student of the Grey College, known only as Whisper. She was a powerful wizard, yet also devoted to the trickster god Ranald. Her true motivations in making the mask are unknown, but its value to followers of the god of luck, deception and all things calndestine is obvious.

HODGE'S PREMIUM BOTTLED ARMOR

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard Knowledge (Bretonnia).



POWERS: When a person sprinkles a pinch of the metal filings from this old bottle on his clothes, whatever he is wearing provides 4 magical armor points for 2d10 rounds.


HISTORY: The wares sold by most charlatans rarely live up to their claims. However, Old Hickeram Hodges of Aldorf seemed to have had the uncanny knack of acquiring genuine items of true potency - and the uncommon honesty to sell them as true talismans.

Unbeknownst to Old Hodges, this vial contains filings from the breastplate of Sir Gawain de Parravon, a uniquely humble Britannia knight and particularly blessed champion of the Lady of the Lake. The bottle contains enough metal dust for 21 uses.

ELVEN GHOST THREAD

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Difficult Knowledge (Elven Weapons).

POWERS: This glittering bowstring provides the user with 1 point of armor penetration as it seemingly makes arrows fired from the bow on which it is strung insubstantial to all but the target. Accordingly, such arrows seem to pass right through any intervening objects.



Such artifacts can be fragile however, and the Ghost Thread is no exception, If the archer rolls a 100 when using the string it snaps, releasing it's magic in a deadly flash of power and causing 2d10 wounds to the user. Fortune points may not be used to reroll the attack and armor cannot soak the damage.

HISTORY: Enchanted bowstrings are not uncommon among the elves. This rare string however, is said to be woven from the webs of giant spiders and coated in the tears of a blind elf maiden.

DARKUNDER'S SPECTACLES

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very
Hard Dwarven Rune Magic.

POWERS: These goggles allow the wearer to see in complete natural or magical darkness to a range of 30 yards. Unfortunately, when the wearer removes them, or is exposed to bright light while using them, he suffers a -20% to his WS and BS for 1d10 rounds due to light sensitivity and blurred vision.

HISTORY: Dale Darkunder was reputedly the only human ever to successfully practice dwarven rune magic. As the legend goes, his uncommonly patient dwarven master enchanted these goggles so Dale could work in the dark alongside the other apprentices. The rumors of Darkunder's eventual blindness and gibbering insanity have never been substantiated.



DUELIST'S PLUME

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Hard Knowledge (Estalia).

POWERS: As long as this gaudy quill is worn in an ostentatious way it provides the wearer with one additional half action per round. The wearer gains no additional attacks, but may split the attacks he does have between two different half actions.

Such artifacts do not offer their boons without a cost. As the wearer's physical speed increases, so does his mental speed. Though this increase offers no actual benefit it does make it harder for the user to sleep. After using the plume, the wearer must succeed in a Will Power test to calm his mind or he suffers a restless night. Accordingly, his stock of Fortune Points does not replenish for the next day.

HISTORY: Also known as the Master's Quill or The Big Gay Feather, such talismans are not unheard of among the fencing elite of Estalia. This particular plume came to the Nordlands in the possession of an Estalian mercenary, who lost it in a drunken game of chance.



DARK ITHILMAR

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard Knowledge (Naggaroth Arms).

POWERS: The individual items in this rather random collection of black scale armor may hold some low level enchantment, or it may simply be the visceral understanding that anyone wearing such vile arms is a threat.

This armor grants the benefits of ithilmar and provides +3 AP to any locations it covers. The wearer also gains the Unsettling talent, but at the cost of -10 to -30 to Fellowship - both effects due to the armor's palpably intimidating aura.

HISTORY: This stash of ancient but untarnished scale armor must have belonged to a band of elite corsairs but appears to have been left behind when the city was abandoned centuries ago. It includes a shirt, a sleeved coat, three bracers, four gauntlets, one legging and a matching pair of visored helmets.



DRUCHII ORB

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard
Druchii Magic

POWERS: This quartz orb is cold to the touch and appears to be only one part of a larger magical device. Its full purpose is impossible to divine without the complete artifact, but there is great power within it.



Though the particular abilities remain a mystery, the possessor will soon realize there is more to the sphere than a magical aura and a dim glow...

HISTORY: Giving away the specifics would be telling now, wouldn't it? And where would the fun be in that?

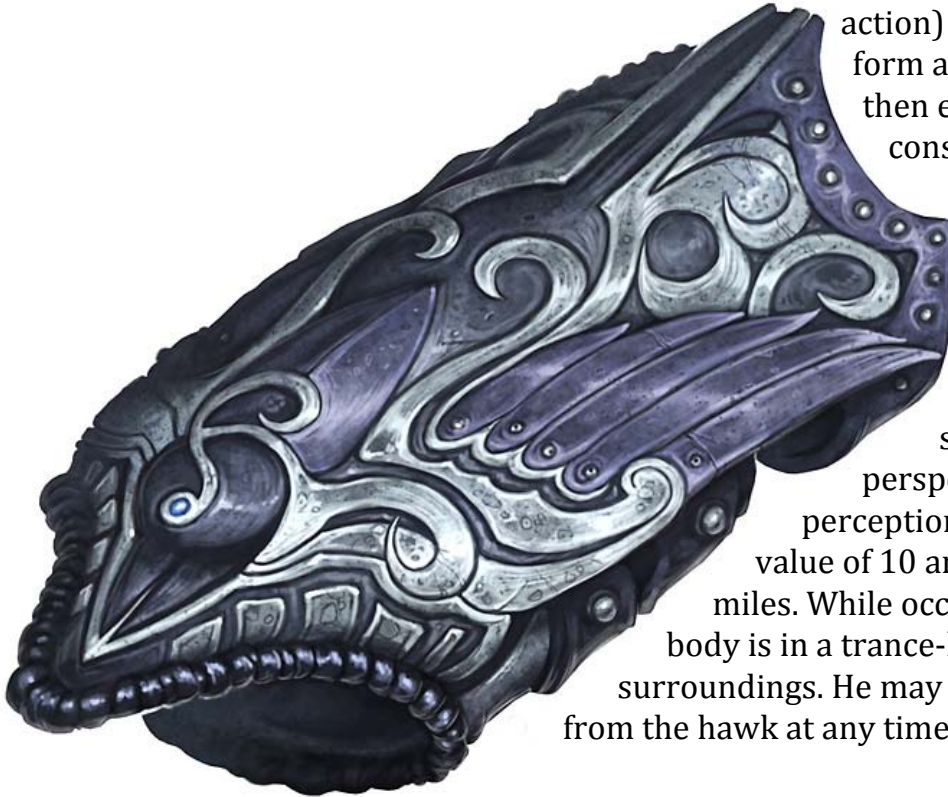
AETHYRIC FALCON

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard
History (Ulthuan)

POWERS: This elaborate falconer's bracer contains the essence of an ancient raptor spirit.

When summoned by the wearer (full action) the spirit takes semi-corporeal form and takes wing. The user may then effectively transfer his consciousness into the entity, commanding it to fly where he wills.

While occupying the spirit the user views the world only through the hawk's senses, gaining an airborne perspective and a +20 to visual perception. The bird-ghost has a move value of 10 and an effective range of 10 miles. While occupying the spirit the user's body is in a trance-like state and oblivious to his surroundings. He may however, chose to withdraw from the hawk at any time (half action).



The entity may also be used as a weapon. If the spirit is in charge range of its target the user may attack (full action) using his ballistics skill. At the command to attack, the spirit stoops at its target, blurring into a streak of light. On a successful attack the target suffers a damage 5 hit, the spirit dissipating on impact. If the attack misses, the ghost may attempt another strike on a subsequent turn.

HISTORY: The bracer is a powerful artifact. It was created by the high elf wizard Adir, an actual disciple of Teclis, over one thousand years ago. The young prodigy had a particular penchant for elaborate spirit magic and a love of falcons. The bracer was cut, limb and all, from his arm when Druchii corsairs took the ship on which he was traveling and enslaved everyone who survived the initial slaughter.

NIGHTWALKER'S COAT

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Hard History
(Sylvania).

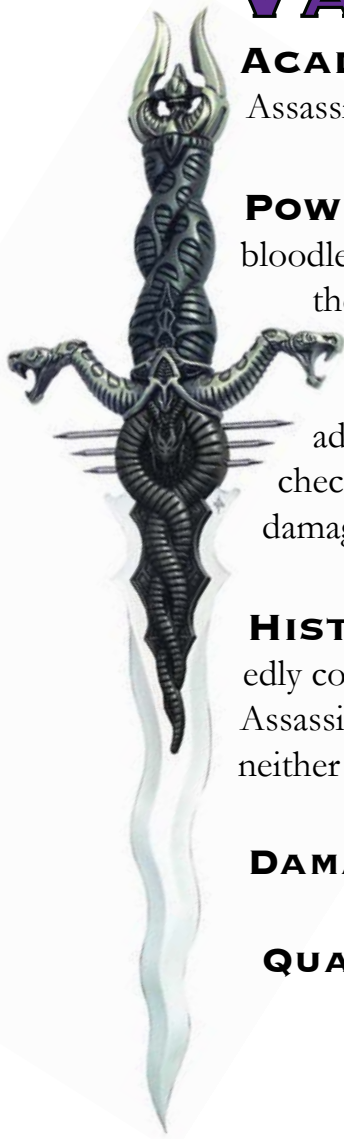
POWERS: This ancient and much battered armor is blessed. It grants the wearer not only the benefits of a chain coat, but it also protects him from

weapons that have been anointed by priests of the faith - light or dark.

This armor reduces the damage done by blessed or cursed weapons by 3 additional wounds beyond that of its given armor value. It does nothing against any of the other potential effects of blessed weapons.

HISTORY: The Old Lords of Sylvania have always taken magical precautions against the weapons of witchhunters and their ilk. As a result there are any number of talismans, charms, fetishes and other enchanted protections hidden in the dark corners of the Old World. Protections intended to ward against holy blessings - or black curses - depending upon one's perspective.





VAMPIRE'S TOOTH

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Knowledge (Tilean Assassin's Guild)

POWERS: This ornate and oversized dagger is a bloodletter's weapon. When it causes at least one wound the target bleeds uncontrollably for an additional wound every round until he makes a successful hard Toughness check. Each new wound causes additional bleeding and requires an additional check. Toughness can not be used to soak this extra damage.

HISTORY: Twelve of these weapons were supposedly commissioned over a century ago by the Tilean Assassin's Guild, but since the Guild does not exist neither do the weapons.

DAMAGE: SB-2

QUALITIES: Fast

BEAUMONT'S CLAW

This custom weapon allows Beaumont to use his right and dominant arm in battle, and though its unique construction has some advantages, it also comes with a few, inevitable disadvantages.

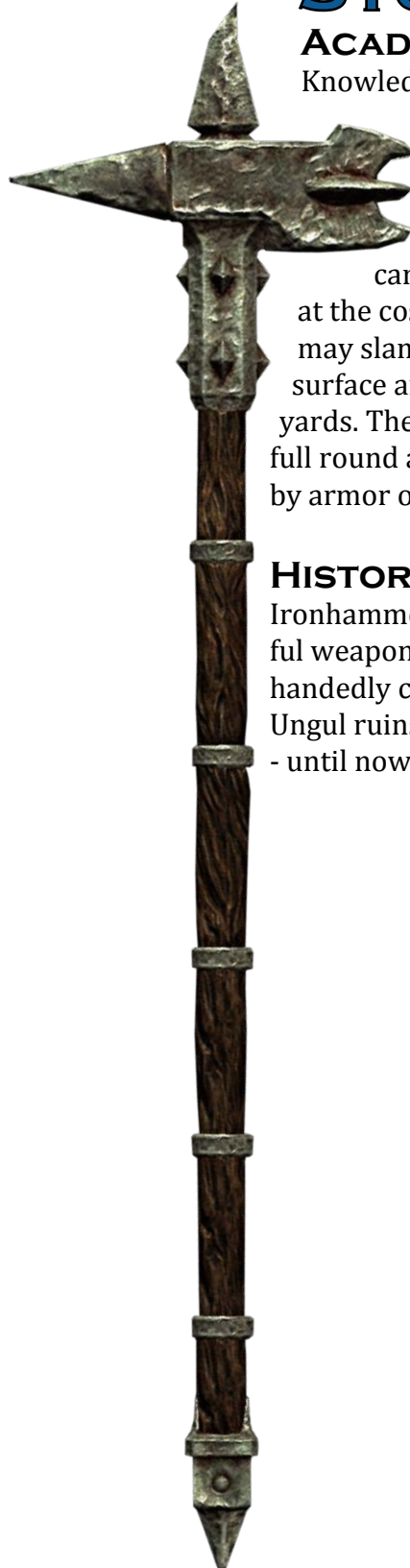


ADVANTAGES: The Claw does SB-1 damage and has the Armor Piercing (1) and Fast qualities. In addition, Beaumont gains the Strike to Injure and Menacing talents when using the weapon accordingly, and he may not be disarmed unless he is actually disarmed. Ha! Get it!

DISADVANTAGES: The weapon takes 10 rounds to strap on. Strap on! Ha! Get it! I kill me! In addition, if Eric rolls a 95+ while attacking or parrying with the Claw it comes unseated and must be reharnessed before it can be used effectively again.

STONEBREAKER

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Hard Knowledge (Dwarven Weapons).



POWERS: Stonebreaker is a potent weapon for the warrior bold enough to wield it. This hammer does SB+1 damage and carries the slow and impact qualities. In addition, at the cost of 1d10 unsoakable wounds, the wielder may slam the weapon into the ground, cracking the surface and doing 2d10 wounds to each target within 6 yards. The blow knocks all targets prone and requires a full round action. The targets' wounds may not be soaked by armor or Toughness.

HISTORY: Forged by the famed Dwarven smith Ironhammer specifically for the Quiet Knight, this powerful weapon was gifted to the Knight when he single handedly cleared the Blood Fang orcs out of the Karak Ungul ruins. This famed weapon has had no other master - until now.

HORN OF SILENCE

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE: Very Hard
Religion (Cult of Ulric)

POWERS: The Horn of Silence is one of the most powerful artifacts in the Old World and one that the few who have even heard of it believe is little more than myth.



When sounded, the horn banishes the Winds of Magic in a spectacular shockwave of arcane force that in itself is dangerous to the unwary. The Winds are held at bay at a radius of a number of miles equal to the blower's Magic characteristic, and no magic of any kind can be worked within the radius of the blast for a year and a day. The Horn itself may only be used once between a given sunrise and the next.

HISTORY: The Horn is one of those rare items that gained its powers through the manifestation of its bearer's unintentional will. The Quiet Knight, himself a mythic figure in Old World lore, was once just a dedicated warrior of Ulric with that rarest of things – a pure heart.

The legends say as a measure of his faith he took a vow of silence, promising not to speak again until he had killed 10,000 minions of Chaos. The horn became his voice in battle, his war cry, and eventually the hordes of Chaos learned to so fear its call that the sound alone would strip them of their dark powers.

The legends also say that it was the 9,999th minion of chaos who defeated him, an ancient Witch Mother who cursed him with her dying breath - cursed him with un-life until the day a worthy man with a worthy cause came seeking the Horn and defeated the Quiet Knight in single combat.

◆ *Reward* ◆

*For information leading
to the capture of the
bandits who murdered
Reiner the Black,
Underbailiff of
Grafenrich.*

*Anyone found to be
aiding these brigands will
be hung.*

*By order of Volmann Jager, Bailiff of
Salzenmund*

◆ Reward ◆

40 Gold Crowns

offered for information leading
to the capture of the

Murderers

responsible for the dishonorable
ambush and killing
of the Grand Baron's most
loyal and innocent servants.

Anyone found to be offering them aid,
will be hung.

By order of Volmann Jager, Bailiff of Salzenmund

◆ Reward ◆

200 Gold Crowns
for information leading to the
capture of the

Vile Brigands

responsible for the theft of the
Good Baron's rightful possessions and
the hinderance of his men in the
performance of their assigned duties.

Anyone found to be offering them aid,
will be hanged.

By order of Volmann Jager, Bailiff of Salzenmund

◆ *Wanted* ◆

600 Crown Reward
for

*Anders
von Brenner*

and his band of cutthroat

Deserters

from the noble

Imperial Army

*Anyone found in their association
will be hanged.*

By order of Volmann Jager, Bailiff of Salzenmund

◆ *Reward* ◆
900 Gold Crowns
for the
Death
of the
Scarecrows

*For the safety of the realm and
the honor of Nordland !*

*Anyone found associating with these
bandits will be hanged.
By order of Volmann Jager, Bailiff of Salzenmund*

◆ Reward ◆

2000 Gold Crowns

for the bloody

Heads

of the murdering monsters
known as the

Scarecrows

Anyone found associating with these
bandits will be tortured to death then used as
scarecrows themselves in the Grand Baron's
loneliest cornfield.

By order of Volmann Jager, Bailiff of Salzenmund

◆ *Reputation* ◆

Bloody Uprising 1000gc

Most Wanted 750gc

Active Support 650gc

Local Heroes 500gc

Actively Hunted 350gc

Ample Loot 250gc

Henchman 100gc

THE BROTHERHOOD

Session 1

(September 23rd, 2010)

A BAND OF BROTHERS

The bards who sing the old songs about the glory of battle obviously never went to war. They never sing about the screams of pain, the crack of live-bone, the close smell of rot. They never glorify the endless boredom broken by bouts of crushing fear. They never tout the cold and hunger, the fatigue and sickness. They never sing about the one gruesome truth. War is death. Only death. Nothing more. Nothing glorious. Nothing honorable. You know that now. You have learned this truth. You have gone to war. You are fighting Archaon and his Chaos horde...

You were part of the advance party sent north to secure the way to Lubrecht. Commander Autler promised he would follow with the full company, but they never arrived. Three days ago you were attacked by Chaos outriders, and though you tried to defend the encampment, they were too many and too strong. Your defenses fell, and your small force was overrun. The Captain ordered the retreat right before he took a spear in the throat.

You fled south through the forest, wounded and exhausted, with no supplies or even a destination. Fear drove you beyond your endurance as the horseman gave chase. They picked off the stragglers one by one until the closing forest finally stopped them and only you five remained. Now you peer from the trees at the small river valley below, cursing your luck and that of every bastard who ever called himself a soldier.

The dell below would be quite beautiful with its meandering river and stone bridge. The old priest's tower even looks quaint in the fading light. Picturesque in fact, but for the artillery craters and the trio of Chaos warriors crouched over the cook fire on the far side of the river.

The old bards never had to kill barbarians just so they could eat. They never had to kill soldiers of Chaos just so they could spend the night behind stone walls. But you are wounded, and so tired, and another hungry night in this treacherous forest would likely mean your death...

A desperate skirmish at an old stone bridge (as an consequence-free introduction to the game mechanics). Three Chaos warriors guarding the bridge put up a heinous fight, essentially killing Floy (so it would have cost a Fate Point) and almost killing Beaumont and Quintis. In the end, a sleep spell and some gang tactics put them down – just before the artillery began to rain down on the crossing...

MUSTERING OUT

After your brutal ordeal behind enemy lines, you finally crossed over into friendly territory, only to be sent back again. And again. And again. You see, once you rejoined the Empire's forces and your harrowing story became known, that bastard Commander Autler thought it would be a good idea to take advantage of your experience. He decided to make you the core of a uniquely skilled band, making special use of your uncanny ability to survive. He then sent you back across the lines to sortie, to scout, to hit-and-run and to sabotage. Supply caravans, weapons caches, food depots, powder dumps – you hit them all. And you got good at it. Very good. The regulars even gave your band a name – The Brotherhood of Ghosts. They named you partly out of admiration yes, but mostly out of a need to distance themselves from the cold and haunted look in your eyes whenever you returned to camp. They respected you, but they also feared you.

Now the war is over – sort of. And the forces of Chaos have been driven back to the north – kind of. And they say that Archaon's army has been broken – they say. And that he has fled to the Middle Mountains – right. They say the war is over and they say you are no longer soldiers.

Go home they say. Tend to your land, care for your families, your people, your villages and towns. Go home. Take your pride in a great victory with you. Take your sword and your stories. Take your wounds and your nightmares. Take your pain and your fear, take your hatred of death and your love of killing. Take the war trophies you carry over your shoulder and the war trophies you carry hacked into your body. Take your brutal skills and your deadliest weapons and go live in peace. Go home soldier, and remember the glory of war.

THE LONG ROAD HOME

The war is over and you are finally going home. The smoke has cleared, wounds have been bandaged, the dead have been buried, and the standards have all been struck. Those lucky few, those who lived, muster out and turn away from the blood-soaked fields. Their duty to the Empire done, knights ride after their liege lords, squires marching behind. Mercenaries stride away in armored ranks, already looking for their next employer. Peasant soldiers take flight like game birds, scattering in all directions, desperate to be away from the fear, the pain and the officers who send them to their deaths. You simply sling what little you own over your horse, turn its head towards the west and begin walking. You carry few supplies and little coin – just the unspoken hope that you still have a home.

You ride some, but you mostly walk. And you wish for new boots. The sun is hot, but it mostly rains this early in the spring. You mostly follow roads, but sometimes you cut cross-country, through woods and fallow fields. You come to a lot of burned bridges and ford a lot of streams. You wish for dry boots. Food is short from the start and game seems scarce, so your stomach growls. You camp on the side of the road, you camp in

the woods, and on a lucky night you find an abandoned shack or an empty barn. It keeps the rain off and you sleep better with a wall at your back.

Occasionally you see the burned-out foundations of a town, or pass fresh graves on the side of the road. You see other soldiers – walking, sometimes riding, often bandaged and limping. They seem to avoid eye contact as if refusing to acknowledge your bond means the war never really happened. And you see peasants – villagers, farmers and a lot of refugees. They not only avoid your eyes, they often flee the road or shutter their hovels in fear.

It's hard enough on the peasants when an army marches off to war. It's a living thing after all and scours the land of food as it passes. It's perhaps a greater tragedy when an army returns. Without officers and regiments the army is just as hungry, but now it becomes a thousand tiny mouths that scatter across the land with nothing to keep them from biting. When an army disbands there is little to offer the ex-soldiers for the long road home. When an army disbands the peasants hide their stores and their daughters and pray they are passed by. On the long road home good men become hungry, hungry men become desperate, and desperate men become bandits. The long road home is where the true character of a soldier, of a man, shines through...

Session 2

(about 3 weeks – started on Imperial Calendar Day 18, the first day of Spring)

The party came across a vacated military encampment camp and cut down a deserter hanging by his arms from a tree. They were, for the most part, bitter and distrustful, and sent him off on his own – without any food, weapons, or even a blanket!

The party had a quick-but-bloody skirmish with soldiers-turned-brigands at an old toll-house at the end of a long causeway across a trackless swamp. After scattering the soldiers they took on Big Jan and Little Jan – a massive, simple young man with the mind of a toddler and his pet piglet.

The group finally arrived in Frote, Quintis' hometown, but found the town long-razed and learned that Quintis' parents were dead and that his little sister Maridan had fled to Salzenmund with the refugees.

Session 3

(about a week)

The party had a collective, representative nightmare – (the result of PTSD?) – indistinct, fluid visions, strange sounds, heavy mist. After they appeared to leave Frote they found the same deserter again, hanging in the middle of a road through an empty wood, from a rope disappearing straight up into the mist overhead. They

started to cut him down, but his head simply fell off and his neck sprayed them with blood and giant maggots, which proceeded to burrow into their bodies wherever the blood landed. Though none of them really had the same dream at the same time, the episode was representative of their angst over the war and their poor treatment of the deserter. As a result, most of them earned additional insanity points.

The group then actually left Frote in reality, and after a few days travel they took shelter for the night in a burned out and abandoned inn. In the dark they were attacked by a giant mother spider and her recently hatched brood. The party's asses were kicked. Quintis found the Warrior of Morr – a potent artifact in the guise of a silver-filigreed skull. Beamont almost lost his pet monkey, Mr. Nelson, to the spiders but freed him from the webbing that entangled him, finding some elven mail on some skeletal remains in the spider's nest in the process.

The party finally arrived at the von Brenner estate. Anders rode up and declared himself to the peasants who were gathered to witness, and the soldiers who were gathered to conduct, a hanging. Upon declaring his name he was accused of being an outlaw and the soldiers were ordered to seize him.

HOMECOMING

Your steps seem to lighten as you near your destination. Anders' apparent joy at coming home is infectious. Though they are not your lands, at this time, on this day, you feel they might as well be. You are brothers after all, at least of a sort, and you have certainly earned a homecoming.

Each tree, rock and hilltop he points to draws a memory from his past. He shares them, haltingly at first, then in a flood during which he hardly draws breath. "The bridge, that orchard, this old well. We played Knights and Knaves over there, and that rock was the Emperor's throne. I rescued a hundred damsels from that tree – the one that looks like a dragon."

You find yourself just as excited, just as hopeful. You are coming home too.

You are not sure when you first notice that something is amiss. You are not sure just what gives it away, but it's almost as if someone whispers a warning in your ear. The instincts that kept you alive behind enemy lines trill and it's as if you can smell a threat on the air. Anders' words falter, then he stops speaking entirely. You are wary and your hand moves towards your weapon.

The road climbs a hill, passing out of the old forest and through spring fields that remain strangely fallow. There is winter wheat, unharvested and rotting in the mud of unplowed ground. The fruit trees you pass are budding yet have not been pruned. Then

you realize you have not seen a single sheep or heard the lowing of a single cow. These lands are empty and untended.

You crest the hill and look down into a green dell surrounded by ancient forest. It is a pastoral ideal but for the burned-out ruins of a once handsome estate. Ideal, but for the ruins, and the soldiers...and the screaming.

Session 4

Day 1 (CD 49)

In the resulting skirmish with the mercenaries the party murdered the Underbailiff of Grafenrich, Reiner the Black, and rescued Old Gus, Ander's family's gamekeeper. Six mercenaries, the executioner and a dozen peasants survived as witnesses. The only party members any of them might be able to identify are Anders (for claiming his title), Floy (the young Estalian) and Kel (for being an elf). The party fled to one of Old Gus' hideouts – an abandon woodsman's cabin – hiding their carts in the woods when the trail became too narrow to drive them further.

Session 5 (sans Bill)

Quintis won his first battle of wills with the Warrior of Morr.

Day 2 (CD 50)

The party left the cabin for the ruins of a monastery Anders and Beaumont know about deeper in the Salzwood. Here they roused a mother bear who had been using the basement as a den and were forced to fight her. Anders killed the mother and Quintis captured the cub. Plenty of meat for all – jerky anyone?

Quintis won his second contest of wills with the Warrior.

Day 3 (CD 51)

The party hung around the ruins smoking meat and planning.

Day 4 (CD 52)

Quintis and Beaumont (and Old Gus) left to retrieve their carts and found one of them missing. They split up and went searching. Beaumont ended up finding it and making some enemies among the peasants, but getting his socks darned nonetheless. Meanwhile, those back at the ruins excavated the basement cave-in and found another room. The cart hunters returned.

Day 5 (CD 53)

The other room turned out to be the monastery's catacomb. Within they found the long-turned-to-dust body of an old priest, interred with his weapons - The Tooth of the Wolf and the Shield of the Faithful. They also found a secret passage beneath the priest's slab leading to the base of the bluff.

While the tomb raiders raided, Anders and Old Gus headed out on horseback to try and start winning over the locals, starting with the family from which Beaumont and recovered his cart. Anders gave them the bloody, fly-ridden bearskin and a gold crown.

Session 6

Day 6 (CD 54) (sans Larry and Joel)

Floy, Kel and Beaumont headed for Salzenmund to get the lay of the land, to see what had changed since Beaumont was last there, to find a buyer for the bear cub, and to learn what they could about the Estalian soldiers.

A busy evening in the taproom of The Cockrel seemed to be going nowhere when Floy and Beaumont decided to go look for some Estalian soldiers on R&R and pump them for information. Floy said that to find Estalians they should go wherever there is gambling, and Beaumont gossiped his way to the location of a floating pit fight – which had apparently found a new home in the refugee camp outside the wall.

The trio found their way to the camp and into the blood-thirsty crowd. Floy found a group of Estalians by their drunken shouts and they soon convinced him to take on the Wolfman of Kislev for the bag of coins being offered by the promoter – a local crime boss Beaumont knows as The Turk. The fight was a close thing, but Floy won (using a sword) but inadvertently killed the Wolfman.

The Turk offered him a job as the new champion, but he deferred, setting up a meeting to discuss the matter the following evening. Meanwhile, Kel, watched the bookmaker with whom he bet 20 crowns (through Beaumont) slink away, unable to cover the odds, and followed after. He confronted the sneak at sword point and recovered at least part of his winnings. Buoyed along by a drunken party of Estalians, the PCs ended up at a pub near the Keep, where the off-duty Estalians spend their coin. Floy felt like he had come home and cried. They learned that the Estalian mercenaries have been working for the Baliff of Salzenmund for just over a year. The party stumbled back to the Cockrel at dawn.

Day 7 (CD 55)

The day was spent sleeping, planning and lying low. That evening Kel went to guide the Turk to their meet. In an odd and hilarious conversation Floy refused both money and a job offered by the Turk, as well as sold him the bear cub for a low-ball price. Rightly so, Floy was worried about being beholding to the crime boss.

Day 8 (CD 56)

The party left extremely early in the morning so as to reach the Faust Estate at dawn. Floy continued on to the monastery (as Bill left for home) and Kel and Beaumont scouted alone. They approached the Estate though the woods and noticed around the manor the forest had been heavily cut. They discovered a formidable

wooden palisade had been built around the manor's main buildings, and that some kind of tall stone tower now stands within the new wall.

Upon returning to the forest where they had tied up their horses, they found them dead and the creature that tore out their throats crouched over the bodies. It's was some kind of humanoid shadow that gave them both (especially Kel) the creeps. They attacked it, it leapt into the top of a tree, then leaped down to attack them. Kel took it down and Beaumont finished it off. It popped like a soap bubble full of black smoke and vanished.

As Kel and Beaumont trudged back to the monastery on foot, they scouted Faustus' Crossroad, a local hamlet, just in time to observe a party of Estalian mercenaries with cavalry, pikemen and wolfhounds speaking to the crowd and putting up reward posters. The posters offer money for information leading to the capture of the Under-bailiff's murderers and the patrol made threats toward anyone harboring the criminals.

After the patrol left, Beaumont comes out of hiding, chides the dispersing crowd for their lack of diligence, takes down the poster and puts it in his pocket. The duo the completed their saddle carrying, blister-inducing trudge back to the hideout.

Day 9 (CD 57)

The party spent the day at the monastery sharing the tale of recent exploits and planning future ones.

Session 7

Day 10 (CD 58)

Everyone headed out for Salzenmund. Upon arriving they split up – Beaumont and Floy to contact The Turk, who quickly took advantage of their incaution and sold them out to the Bailiff's men, and Quintis and Anders to the look for Maridan in the refugee camp. Beaumont and Floy made arrangements to sell the cub to a Bretonnian river captain (Captain Henri) on the waterfront, but suspected a trap. Quintis and Anders asked around and eventually employed a young man (Eric) who promised he could find Maridan.

Upon entering the city Beaumont and Quintis noticed new wanted posters and knew they were on borrowed time. The party decided to hole up in Beaumont's old warehouse but was followed and cornered by the Bailiff's mercenaries.

Floy and Kel figured they were the most wanted and fled in a small boat they found on the dock. Quintis pushed his cart off the dock for a makeshift raft (genius!) and jumped in after it. A few turns later, Anders and Beaumont joined him, leaving their horses, and most of their worldly possessions behind in the warehouse.

The mercs rushed in and sniped them with crossbows. Anders was hit three times and killed – his body lost to the river. In pairs the survivors washed ashore and

sought shelter. Before heading back Quintis met with his boy as planned and learned that people have been disappearing from the refugee camp. Some to work as servants in the city, some – mostly men – to who knows where. None are ever seen again.

INSTINCTS

There it is. That fire in your belly. That feeling, part terror, part ecstasy. Like an old friend, it's been away too long and shows up just when you need it. Your muscles tense, your vision clears and your hearing sharpens as your weapon hand begins to itch. For two years you felt like this. Whenever you crossed into enemy territory. Whenever you were uncertain if you were the hunter or the hunted. For two years, while you helped hold back the flood of Chaos, you felt a constant thrill that utterly drained you but made you feel truly alive as well. Alive like nothing else ever has.

Now, after the deadly night on the waterfront and the bone chilling drift down the river, you climb from the frigid water. You stand shivering, watching dawn light the distant east. You know you should find a place to hide before the sun rises. You know you should find a place to hole up, recover your strength and make a plan. Your instincts scream at you. You know this but it doesn't matter. Not at this moment. You watch the sun rise and you know you should be running, going to ground. But instead you just stand there because he is dead.

He is dead. Anders. Dead. Your brother-in-arms. Your comrade. Your ally, your kin, your conscience. Your friend. Dead. Could you have protected him? Could you have saved him? Dead. What could you have done differently? Dead. After surviving two years of the worst kind of war – dead at the hands of a dirty mercenary. And for nothing – since returning to his homeland he is the only one of the Ghosts not to have raised a weapon, not to have killed someone. He was the only one without blood on his hands. Dead.

Enough. You will mourn your brother later. The fire in your belly, your hard won instincts, drive you to action. His death will not be in vain. His death will count for something. You vow to the rising sun that his death will have meaning. You use your sorrow to fuel the fire in your gut, forging the loss into a weapon. You stop thinking and give yourself over to instinct. As the sun rises and lights the day, you and your brothers disappear, like ghosts, into the shadows...

Session 8

Day 11 (CD 59)

The PCs, having crawled from the river sans Anders, began their stealthy flight back to the relative safety of the monastery, Floy and Kel in parallel with Beaumont and Quintis. Unbeknownst to the party, while they were in Salzenmund, a beastman warband launched a large raid on some local settlements, and so on the way home each pair of PCs ran afoul of raiders.

Kel and Floy came across a burning village and were forced to make a defensive stand in some old hilltop ruins as a hunting party of four Gors overtook them. They won the battle rather handily, due primarily to Kel's bow. Simultaneously, Beaumont and Quintis came across a pitched battle between Gor/Bestigor and a mercenary patrol protecting a group of peasants at a river crossing. They bested the beastmen, due primarily to Quintis's sleep spell, but Beaumont took a terrible wound. They then led the peasants, and the one surviving soldier, to the relative safety of Marc's Ridge, the mostly burned village Kel and Floy previously passed through. Kel and Floy managed to make it back to the monastery sometime after dark, but Beaumont and Quintis got lost in the dark and had to spend a bone-chilling night alone in the forest.

Day 12 (CD 60)

Beaumont and Quintis returned to the monastery about noon. The rest of the party learned about Anders' death and Gus seemed to collapse in on himself. The rest of the day was spent resting, healing and planning for the future.

Day 13 (CD 61)

More resting and healing. Kel hunted. Earnest discussion and planning went on long into the night.

Day 14 (CD 62)

Another day of resting and brooding. Around noon a fat friar – Brother Tomas – came up the path onto the monastery bluff singing away to himself. Apparently secure in the protection of his god, he was surprised but not concerned at finding a what he at first assumed was a hunting party camping in his meadow. The party of course had every suspicion that he represented some new misfortune – a spy at the very least.

Tomas was nothing but jocular and amiable, even when Floy acted as the most ungracious, foul-mouthed and belligerent sort of host. Tomas proceeded to set up his beloved bee hives as he claimed to have done here for years – “Rosemary honey don't you know! Makes the finest mead!” He then invited himself to lunch – which consisting of only bear jerky and water clearly disappointed the rotund priest.

The only sign that Tomas may be anything more than he seems came when Quintis tried to put Floy to sleep with a spell but failed to control the magical forces involved. Tomas went on guard and appeared ready with some counter of his own, and remained watchful even after the moment passed.

Session 9

Day 14 (continued)

The party asked Friar Tomas to preside over a memorial service for Anders and he graciously accepted. Beaumont and Kel prepared eulogies while Quintis collected a pile of offerings to burn on a pyre in lieu of a body. The pyre was built in the woods

nearby, a fire as lit, and the ceremony begun. Tomas spoke, then Beaumont began and during his words the party heard a strange wailing they realize was getting closer. Everyone broke for the ruins, running around to the trail (or failing to climb the bluff shortcut).

Anders ran into the ruins and between pants called out, warning that beastmen were coming. The party had only moments to position themselves before eight beastmen attacked. A pitched battle ensued during which Quintis was all but killed (Fate Point), though he did make his second daring escape by cart in as many sessions. Anders, Gus and Friar Tomas were critically wounded while Kel and Beaumont go unscathed.

When Anders finally struck down the leader, the two remaining raiders fled. The party attended to their wounds, secured the site, looted the corpses and then burned them on Ander's pyre. As they settle in for the night the group shared their stories – Anders being taken in and healed by peasants, the harrowing flight back to the monastery by the other PCs. The PCs even shared the story of the Ghosts with Friar Tomas in exchange for his assurances that he would not betray them. On the contrary, Tomas seems to feel the Ghosts may be the best hope the local peasants have to get out from under the oppression of Prince Johan and his cronies.

Session 10 (sans Larry)

Day 15 (CD 63) (01.05.11)

Brotherhood theme song (available on iTunes): Deadman's Gun – by Ashtar Command

Your hands upon

A deadman's gun and you're

Looking down the sights

Your heart is worn,

And the seams are torn

And they've given you reason to fight

And you're not gonna take what they've got to give

And you're not gonna let them take your will to live

Because they've taken enough and you've given them all you can give

And luck won't save them tonight

They've given you reason to fight

And all the storms you've been chasing

*About to rain down tonight
And all of the pain you've been facin'
About to comin' to the light*

*Your hands upon
A deadman's gun and you're looking down the sights
Your heart is worn,
And the seams are torn
And they've given you reason to fight.*

*And you're not gonna take what they've got to give
And you're not gonna let them take your will to live
Because they've taken enough and you've given them all you can give
And luck won't save them tonight
They've given you reason to fight*

*And all the storms you've been chasing
About to rain down tonight
And all of the pain you've been facin'
About to comin' to the light*

The PCs left the monastery headed for Grafenrich with the intention of gathering information, making contact with Konrad Kalb, Anders' smith friend, and finally acquiring some of the durable goods they need and something other than bear meat to eat. They split up with Brother Tomas as they approached town so as not to be seen together.

Once they identified themselves in private, Magnus Kalb (Anders' friend's smith father) received Anders' with enthusiasm, Beaumont with trepidation and Floy not at all. They made arrangements to meet with Konrad the next night and to have the Tooth of the Wolf remounted. It also turns out that Magnus has a main gouche one of the Estalian mercenaries asked him to repair, which he promises to Floy. Kel bought some arrows from the local fletcher and arranged to have Anders' old armor refit and repaired at the leather worker's. Beaumont finally found a writing kit at the booksellers and Quintis negotiated the acquisition of his grimoire through the same old man – once Quintis has the money of course.

As the party walked through the gate on their way back to the forest they passed a short column of mercenaries riding in. At their head was a bald, one-eyed,

dangerous looking man in heavy armor. Over his shoulder was slung Beistmordor – Anders' gun. Anders' seethed but wisely did nothing.

Back in the forest and near the monastery the party came across a temporary camp of refugee-outlaws. They turned out to be disenfranchised men from the surrounding baronies, lead by a tough and charismatic dwarf who goes by the unlikely name of Herr Little. He soundly trounced first Floy and then Kel in one-on-one quarter-staff fights, which ended with them both being forced off a small bridge into a shallow creek, where each received a critical wound to his pride. The party spent the night with the outlaws, sharing most of the special victuals they had just purchased.

Through the course of the night, and over a lot of dwarven moonshine, Anders' tried to convince Herr Little that the party is going to change the political landscape and that the PCs could use allies to help bring about that change. Herr Little remained unconvinced, but open to proof of the party's mettle. They parted amiably enough and the party returned to the monastery.

For an instant replay of the dunkings, please see:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw9vaNS3b0s>

Session 11

Day 16 (CD 64) (01.19.11)

Assigned one Fate Point Goal to each character:

Anders – return his father's rifle to the rightful Baron of Grafenrich

Quintis – find his sister

Beaumont – eliminate his family's claim to the Barony of Grafenrich

Kel – discover the nature of the shadow creature(s)

Floy – establish and act on a personal ambition

[Flashback]

Quintis was obliged to face down the Warrior of Morr after the battle with the beastmen. Without any fortune points he was unable to re-roll his Will test failure and the voice of the skull spoke clearly to him for the first time. Terrified, he gained an insanity point and tried to destroy the skull by smashing it against the wall. When that failed he was forced to flee the basement and was intercepted by the other PCs. He begged them to get rid of the skull. They complied by burying it in the woods.

The next morning, though in pain and exhausted from his near death the previous day, he had trouble remembering his fear of the skull and asked for it back. Floy was dead set against returning it. He demanded that the party wait 10 days before letting Quintis have it again, going so far as to throw his rapier at Beaumont who

responded in kind, almost knocking Floy out with his bola.

[session 10 actually happens here]

Jumping forward to the current moment in the story the party, back at the monastery, departed again for Grafenrich. They did some haggling and unload some of their looted goods, finally earning some coin – including substantial credit at the smith's. Floy got his main gauche and is finally able, I think, to become a duelist.

Anders bought meat and Mr. Kalb roasted it over his forge. The men ate, drank and made merry until Konrad came home. The hulking man stalked up to Anders and punched him right in the mouth, knocking him flat and screaming “Why did you leave you son of a bitch!” The party tensed, readied weapons but held. The tableau lasted a few breaths then broke.

Konrad was angry that Anders, his link to all that was good when the von Brenners governed Grafenrich, left for the War. He believed that somehow if Anders had not left, things would not have fallen apart in the Salzenlands. Irrational in his mind, true in his heart. In the end Anders was able to convince Konrad that it wasn't his fault and that he is home to set things right. Though Konrad remains suspicious of the others – especially Beaumont, whose family he has grown to loath – he seems willing to give them a chance to prove themselves and may become an ally.

[Bill forced to go home and pour buckets of water into his toilet.]

The party decided to finally follow through on their plans and become highwaymen. They picked a likely spot on the Salz Road and set up their ideal ambush at a tree shrouded stone bridge in a wet little dell. They posted up a scarecrow-like ghost in the middle of the bridge and donned simple ghost mask made from flower bags. They were forced to wait almost three days before a likely target came along, camping out under the stars. They are very used to this line of work however, having frequently lived and fought like this behind enemy lines.

On the second day a train of what seemed like prisoners can along the road, headed north to Salzenmund. They were bound hand to waste in three rows and dragged along by mercenaries on horseback. There were a total of twelve mercs guarding the train and despite their anger and frustration, the party erred on the side of caution and did not reveal themselves. The outriders cut down the scarecrow ghost on the bridge and marched on.

When a likely target did finally show up, Kel essentially took out the wagon driver, and killed one of the Estalian guards, with his bow. Beaumont entangled the second guard in his bola, knocking him from his horse and into the stream, then butchered him before he could free himself. Anders wounded the assistant driver, riding shotgun with a blunderbuss. He then speared the third mercenary with the Tooth of the Wolf for a 20 wound hit that punched right through his body, lifting him off his

horse. One of his most brutal kills ever. Quintis used his grappling hook, tied to a tree, to snag the horse harness so that the horses were dragged off the road by their own momentum, bringing the wagon along with them.

Dealing with any potential prisoners and looting the wagon will have to wait until the next game.

The wagon contained:

- 400 lbs of purified salt – approximately 80 gc worth
- 12 bolts of fine cloth – 180 gc worth
- special vintage wine – 130 gc worth
- strong box of silver ingots – approximately 275 gc worth

Session 12

Day 16 (CD 64) (continued)(02.02.11)

The party spent some time mopping up after it's first hijacking. They healed up the surprised drivers and sent them riding off with 5 crowns each by way of wages. The drivers didn't really believe they were going to be allowed to live until they were a mile away and galloping hard.

In addition to giving a horse to the drivers, the party had to put down the injured animal, leaving them with just five of the original seven animals.

They broke into the barred wagon mostly through the expedient of Floy chopping the doors off. The frightened merchant inside shot Floy in the face as Floy pulled a "Jack is a dull boy" and poked his head in through the shattered door. After stripping off his clothes so that Beaumont could use them towards his trappings Floy stabbed the merchant through the throat for "being all uppity." That was the end of the innocent fellow who was "only protecting his goods." Floy managed to pass his Will test with an 04, nonchalantly shaking off any guilt that would have otherwise added to his Insanity count.

The party packed their horses with the captured goods, left the scarecrow in the wagon seat as a sign, and set off cross-country. None too soon either, as they caught sight of a peasant traveler gawping at them from the hilltop. When the poor bugger recovered his wits he dropped his basket and took off cross-country himself.

No one having navigation, the party took a wandering and marshy course homeward and had to spend the night in the forest.

Day 17 (CD 65)

The party arrived at the monastery during the mid-morning, getting a strange reception from Gus. He acted distracted and more than a little frightened, actually opting that night to sleep in the surface ruins rather than the basement. While the

rest of the party was on watch or sleeping in the woods, Beaumont alone slept in the basement and was woken by his soldier's instincts, sensing some presence.

Day 18 (CD 66)

In the morning, the party confronted Old Gus and forced his fears out of him. He claimed that the shade of the dead priest from the catacomb was haunting the basement. Unwilling to confirm his claim by facing a night in the cellar by themselves, the party decided to ask Brother Tomas to come out and investigate. He is a priest after all.

Beaumont and Anders travelled to Grafenrich to invite Brother Tomas out to see what he could do, see if Kalb could melt down their silver, and commission some new clothes for Beaumont's trappings. Along the way they dropped 50 lbs of salt and a case of fine wine at Herr Little's bridge as a sign of good faith. At Beaumont's insistence, they also rubbed their balls with colored water.

They invited Tomas to the monastery without actually telling him what they wanted, and made arrangements with both Kalb and Mimms the dwarveness tailor – overpaying her to assure her discretion. Her discretion about exactly what remains a little unclear at this point.

Kel, Floy, Quintis and Gus took 50 lbs of salt, in 2 lb silk bags and delivered them around to the local villages, hamlets and homesteads. They avoided people where they could, but nodded discretely when they could not and moved on.

On the way back to the monastery, the salting party ran into one of the Bailiff's patrols. Rightly suspicious of armed men on the road, the mercenaries ordered them to halt and began questioning them. The patrol quickly realized that the party fit the description of at least some of the wanted bandits (an elf and an Estalian) and ordered them to drop their weapons and surrender.

Of course, instead of fleeing, or hiding, or attempting to bluff their way out, the party attacked when Kel let fly with a pair of arrows. A bloody, murderous fight ensued. Two of the soldiers (run by Eric) were killed, and the two survivors (run by Joel) subsequently decided to break off and flee. Quintis, followed by Floy made a spirited chase but were unable to catch the more skilled riders.

Everyone was back at the monastery by evening, and no one was willing to sleep in the basement.

Day 19 (CD 67)

Friar Tomas predictably arrived just in time for lunch and proceeded to eat all of the extra shares of fine quality food Kel laid out for the meal. The Friar collected and shared some of his fresh honey. Still no one quite explained to Tomas why he was

there until after dinner. After dark, Beaumont and Tomas went into the basement, Tomas still a little bemused. They moved a bench into the tomb and settled in to wait. Tomas kept falling asleep and Beaumont had to spend fortune points to stay awake.

At midnight the shade of Brother Marius appeared, eerily incorporeal and disconnected from the material. It spoke in a wailing moan of a hiss, calling for it's Tooth. It seemed to approach Tomas and Beaumont but with a confused air. Frightened and stumbling, Tomas and Beaumont only gawped in horror until the ghost faded away. Brother Tomas exclaimed, "Good Gods, that was a terrible thing! I do think I peed myself!"

Session 13

Day 20 (CD 68)(02.16.11)

In the morning Anders, Beaumont and Kel intended to go into Grafenrich to collect Beaumont's new clothes and to bring a small delivery of silver ingots to Kalb for smelting. Along the way they detoured to check on the drop point with Herr Little and in doing so they discovered another shadow creature crouched over two bodies – later proving to be Little's men. Kel shot the creature from extreme range, driving it into the woods. They found the note they had left for Little on one of the bodies and the cache of goods untouched. The small party toted the bodies away into the woods and returned to the monastery, concerned for the safety of the others.

That night most of the party, lead by Tomas, returned to the tomb to see if the spirit would reappear. The ghost did not disappoint, and despite moments of individual fear, the group's courage held. The spirit spoke again, cryptically, about his Tooth and how it can only be wielded for justice and only by the honorable. He even tried to retake his spear but his ghostly fingers could not grasp the real weapon. He appeared about to say something in response to his failure when he faded away again.

Day 21 (CD 69)

The next day Anders and Beaumont actually completed their trip to Grafenrich, turned over the silver and, as it turns out, Beaumont only had his final fitting (though it counted as the acquisition of the last of his second career trappings).

When they returned, Quintis, Kel and Beaumont immediately set out for Salzenmund. Before entering the city Quintis went to find Eric and learned the boy had discovered that Maridan may have been taken to the Keep. He then went to a messenger service and sent a boy to deliver his regards to his contact in the Order – Jekil Kurzman. He then joined Kel and Beaumont who were already at the Cockrel. He later received a message apparently decrying his insulting audacity, but that actually, secretly, magically, invited him to breakfast with Kurzman.

Beaumont talked up a drunk local who was none-to-fond of all the “damn foreign mercs” in town and gossiped with Walther, the barkeep, but learned little of apparent value. Kel had an unexpected encounter and conversation with a kinsman, an agent of the Witch Queen of Laurelor. He said that the people remained strong but that a shadowy threat of unknown nature haunted the forest borders.

Back at the monastery, Anders and Brother Tomas revisited the spirit, and this time actually sort of interacted with it. Though still cryptic, in the end the spirit had some kind of test of wills with Anders and placed the ghostly version of its holy wolf symbol around Ander’s neck. The spirit claimed a blessing or a curse depended on the bearer’s faith. Anders became a believer and Brother Tomas decided that perhaps there was room enough in his soul for faith in more than one god.

Day 22 (CD 70)

The next day Quintis was picked up in an elegant but understated coach, driven by men in elegant but understated livery, and was taken to an elegant but understated manse and lead into an elegant but understated hall where he was graciously received by an elegant but understated (and deformed) Herr Kurzman with fine manners and a generous air. During a long conversation that covered ancestry, politics, arcane study and various other topics, Quintis apparently made a pair of solemn promises for certain favors-yet-to-be-determined in exchange for Herr Kurzman’s help in acquiring his grimoire and finding Maridan. Only afterward did Quintis start to wonder what he might have gotten himself into.

Meanwhile, Kel and Beaumont went down to Beaumont’s old warf-front warehouse only to find it occupied and in operation. Gossiping the shit out of an old river beggar he learned that the name of the company using the warehouse was Holden Freighters.

The party returned, unmolested, to the monastery that afternoon and talked over the next steps in their plans.

Session 14

Day 23 (CD 71)(03.02.11) (sans Bill and Larry)

(everyone but Quintis is now in his second career)

TO THE RESCUE

You wake to the smell of hissing venison steaks and brewing chicory on the fire – Old Gus making breakfast. You rise, crawling from your ever-filthier bedroll and catch the sleepy eyes of the morning watch as they huddle over the small cook fire. Tugging on your boots and clasping a blanket to your shoulders, you step quickly towards the bushes at the back of the ruins. You relieve yourself in the shallow pit dug there, wrinkling your nose at the increasing stink of the midden.

As you empty your bladder you contemplate the sky, the morning's chill belying the bright dawn's promise of a warm and sunny day. Your piss steams in the dirty muck of the latrine as you shake twice, cinch up your britches and turn back to the fire to fill your belly. Breakfast is welcome, but you long for more than half-cooked game and a few weedy herbs pulled from the thickets.

As ever, the conversation turns to next steps. What to do? Where to go? Who to trust? How to get the gold you need to fund your efforts? How to win the loyalty of the people? The last of your steak goes down along with your spirits, and the conversation dies. You feel overwhelmed at the task you have set for yourself, and wonder at your audacity. Your little band against the might of the Prince – foolish.

A long break in the talk becomes longer still as despair weighs down each man's soul. Then the dark reverie is broken by the elf. Quietly at first, but with increasing confidence, and increasing surety.

"Brothers. Let me speak for a moment. I trust by the empty plates and your round bellies that breakfast was satisfactory? Good."

"Fucking fuck fuck!"

"Floy, let me say my piece..."

And he does. Kel speaks with passion and wisdom, and when he is finished, though the Prince's men are no less numerous, their swords no less sharp, there is a fire in your belly where moments before there were only dying embers. There is a fire and renewed hope. There might yet be a chance if...

The quiet solemnity of the moment is broken by a hoarse cry as a figure stumbles from the dark of the forest. An injured man from the look, covered in blood. You meet him halfway up the hill, weapons drawn and searching the woods for pursuers, or allies to his ruse. He stumbles and falls into Brother Tomas' arms who lowers him to the ground.

"M'lord. I'm sorry," he croaks. "We ha' no' a chance. They set...they set upon us inna night. They ki...killed some, but took mos' prisoner. They left me fer dead and 'tis a wonner I found ye. I no ken were else ta go. They... grabbed him too. Little. They have Little..."

Anders is increasingly convinced that he has incurred some kind of blessing (or perhaps a curse) from the spirit in the tomb.

During breakfast an injured and bloody man came stumbling into the monastery ruins. He name is Herrmann and his is one of Little's Men of the Greenwood, and he claimed that their camp had been attacked by the Bailiff's mercenaries in the middle of the night and most had been taken prisoner, including Herr Little. He said they had been carted off in a caged wagon towards Grafenrich.

The party packed quickly and rode off to the site of the attack – near the ruins of what Anders knows as the Old Priest’s Tower. Old Gus reminded behind to tend the wounded man with Brother Tomas. The site is just off the east road to the village and the party they found obvious signs of the camp and the ambush as well as a number of bodies and lots of blood.

The trail was easy enough for Kel to follow and they soon came to and entered Grafenrich. There was no sign of the soldiers or the wagon and no one, including Mr. Kalb knew anything about the raiding party or the prisoners.

Poking around (Anders visiting the Ulrican temple) and talking to Konrad eventually produced a reliable rumor that the soldiers and the prisoners had stopped within the keep’s bailey but had moved on towards Oldenlitz along the western road. Unfortunately the party did not learn this until well after dark. They decided to venture out nonetheless, and after bribing the bridge gate watchman with a considerable “toll,” they rode hard for the mining town.

Along the way the party was attacked by a pack of hungry wolves but made short work of the mundane but determined animals. The fight was brief, but hard on the wolves.

Arriving in Oldenlitz close to 11p all but Beaumont and Anders stayed hidden in the grassy hills outside the village. Beaumont and Anders went to the tavern in the dwarven quarter and Beaumont charmed a buxom dwarven barmaid into telling him what she knew about any prisoners passing through, despite her considerable reluctance to talk with any stranger – and a longshanks at that.

They met out back of the tavern while Anders stood guard and she slopped the hogs (and no, that is not a Beaumont euphemism for anything). She confided to him that a band of mercenaries came though earlier in the day with a load of prisoners – one of whom was Little. She said that there have been other caravans of prisoners, and that when the mercs come back headed east they never bring prisoners with them.

Because of the dangers of the dark and their spent horses the party decided to stay in the Odenlitz inn for the remainder of the night, but continued west very early in the morning.

Day 24 (CD 72)

At the first major fork in the road, at Floy’s insistence the party split up to cover more ground – he and Quintus taking the south fork and the rest of the group heading northwest. The party planned to meet back at the fork at sunset.

Several miles further west, in the heart of the arid and grassy Silver Hills, Kel, Anders and Beaumont came upon a small fort of a some kind, protected by a high

tower, a stout wall and a pair of carronades on a small bluff. As they scouted the fort they noticed it appeared to have been fairly recently rebuilt from some older ruins. They also learned that it was manned by at least 20 mercs and that the prisoners were likely to be inside – they could see the prison wagon over the wall.

They settled in to watch the fort and prepare for some sort of nighttime action, but about an hour before sunset the prison wagon left the fort with about 10 prisoners and a five-soldier escort. At dark they set off after it, but were unable to ride well enough to overtake it in the blackness. They decided to camp out along the road and await its return. Obviously the trio missed their rendezvous with Floy and Quintis.

Picking some rocky terrain from which to ambush the mercenaries, Anders walked casually up the road right towards the advancing soldiers and as he closed Kel let loose with a flight of arrows. Though it was initially touch and go, and Anders came close to falling again, and Beaumont had trouble hitting the side of a barn, a sudden manifestation Ulric's Fury on the parts of all the party members took the soldiers down in the last couple rounds. The trio also managed to capture one alive – the wagon driver. He is a surly bastard (clearly a cousin of Floy's) and did not quail at their threats, even when Anders jumped on the wagon pinning him to the ground, Kel pointed an arrow at his face and Beaumont appealed to his love for his madre.

The party recovered a crate, smashed open when the wagon overturned and containing 300 gc worth of silver ingots, and a canvas bound sculpture of strangely frightening aspect. They also looted weapons and armor from the dead and the one prisoner and recovered three horses. Unfortunately, it is likely that the remaining horses, which fled, will naturally return to the fort, inevitably alerting the soldiers to the fact that something was amiss.

Session 15

Day 25 (CD 73) (03.09.11)

Having found nothing but scrubby hills and a few scraggly sheep herders, Quintis and Floy returned to the fork where they had parted with the rest of the group. When the others did not return at sunset that night, instead of following the plan and returning to Oldenlitz, they camped and early the next morning predictably set off along the northern fork. Coming to the fort they hid and watched for several hours, learning little more than the other party members had the previous day.

Just before noon Quintis spied a flock of vultures circling away to the west, well beyond the fort. Knowing from their days on the front that this was often the sign of a recent battle, they skirted the fort and headed crosscountry, finding their bloody-handed mates.

Apparently still in a bloody-minded mood the party set another ambush for the larger patrol they were certain would come looking for the wagon and the silver. They were not disappointed and when the ten man patrol showed up they made

short work of them, taking only one of them prisoner.

After a somewhat fruitless but cooperative exchange of threats for information, the party decided to let the prisoner, Armand, go free with his promise that he would abandon his comrades and go home to Estalia. Kel even gave him a sword so he would not be unarmed in the wilderness. The grateful man, suspicious, headed south at a jog.

After looting the bodies and leaving them for the vultures, the party headed back to observe the fort. After watching for the remainder of the afternoon and evening, boredom overcame Kel and Beaumont and they started shooting arrows at the cannoneers. The cannoneers in turn fled the battlements but returned behind shield walls and proceeded to fire back – with the cannons. This drove the party to use the cover of darkness to move to a new vantage from where they again took to firing arrows – AT A FUCKING STONE FORTRESS, PROTECTED WITH CANNON!

The cannoneers once again returned fire, and an uncannily lucky ball crashed amongst the party, blasting iron and stone shrapnel in all directions. Instead of making a strategic retreat, the party again moved, but this time they cleverly interposed the fort tower between themselves and the cannon. THEN THEY STARTED FIRING ARROWS AT THE FORT AGAIN – WITHOUT EVEN TRYING TO HIDE!

A volley of crossbow bolts was returned from the top of the wall and the hail of arrows almost killed several of the already grievously wounded party. As they turned to flee into a darkened ravine a final flight caught them, one of the bolts plunging deep into Floy's back.

As Beaumont and Anders grabbed him under the arms and dragged him off into the night, Floy hoarsely whispered the dying words, "Soy madre, perdóneme..."

Session 16

(03.23.11) (Sans Joel)

The party fled into the night on foot. They sought refuge in a shallow cave a mile or two to the north of the fortress. Kel snuck off into the darkness to retrieve the horses. Beaumont and Anders identified some strange, non-human footprints forming a trail going in and out of the cave. The tracks disappeared into a low gap in a tumble of small boulders at the back of the cave. Just inside the gap there was a strange animal smell and a strange triangular symbol smeared in mud on a rock face. The party decided not to explore the hole, especially with Floy still unconscious.

Day 26 (CD 74)

Well before dawn Kel returned with the horses and the party headed north. The

party traveled to the very edge of the Laurelor, deciding to hide out for a few days, until everyone was mostly recovered. They camped, rested, hunted and healed for three days.

Day 29 (CD 77)

The party headed back to the south to see if they could discover where the prisoners were being taken. Paralleling the road west of the fort they followed the most obviously used turnings, eventually coming to the entrance of an old, abandoned-seeming mine. There were four horses tied up near the opening, but while they watched Estalian mercenaries came out of the mine, mounted up and rode off. While the party decided what to do next a large creature made of spiked armor and gouting green flames and sparks emerged from the cave and took up a sentry-like post, striding back and forth.

The party set a simple, but oversized, snare trap for what they decided must be a kind of sorcerous automaton. Floy, acting as live bait, lured it into the trap and Kel, Quintis and Anders drove the horses to pull the snare tight, yanking the creature to the ground. They dragged it around and eventually pulled it into a swampy pond hoping to douse its internal flames – but to no avail. In fact, at this point, the creature regained its feet, finally breaking free, lumbering after them and scattering the horses. Kel and Quintis hit it with arrows and magic, but seemed to do only a little damage. They then scattered as well.

Meanwhile Beaumont and Floy snuck into the mine and worked their way along the old, torch-lit tunnel. Several hundred yards in they came to a large cavern containing a mercenary encampment, various supplies and equipment and a large number of prisoner-slaves. The far wall had recently been crudely excavated, leading to a breach into another, strangely lit chamber.

As they secretly watched the camp, the rest of the party, sans Anders who was rounding up the scattered horses, came up behind them. As they arrived, two very bad things happened at once. First, Floy seemed to fly into a rage, rose from his hiding spot, drew his weapon and made as if to charge into the encampment. Second, the armored automaton, having come into the tunnel, closed from behind, bellowing a roar and preparing to attack.

Session 17

(03.31.11)

Floy begins his charge. The armored monstrosity roars. Mercenaries look up in surprise. Quintis casts. Floy collapses. Beaumont throws Floy over his shoulder, and shouts something like, "It's ok, we got everything under control," at the gawking mercs. Anders comes up behind the monster armor ready to fight. Everyone races past the creature, for a moment leaving Anders alone with the beast. He then tears off as well.

The party fled the mine, took to horse and returned to Oldenlitz to rest, regroup and figure out its next move.

Day 30 (CD 78)

The group decided to send Quintis and Beaumont to Salzenmund with their newly swollen stash of silver to finally make payment on Quintis' grimoire. The trip to the city was uneventful and they put up for the night at the Cockrel.

Day 31 (79)

Using the messenger service as a guide service, Quintis and Beaumont find Kurzmann's estate and are quickly admitted. The man appears to be more mysterious and more politically invested than was originally assumed. Quintis told him the whole story of the Brotherhood of Ghosts, and of their recent adventures at the mine. He hinted as well at the Ghosts' intentions to free the Salzlands from their oppressors. Kurzmann was very interested in the mine, asked many questions, and seemed to be making lots of mental connections. He even told Quintis that he owed him a favor for the information. Quintis and Beaumont were made his guests for the night.

32 (CD 80)

Quintis' newfound power flowed from him as soon as he took possession of his tome, and now anyone looking at him can sense that he is surrounded by a potent, slightly sinister, new essence. He is a different man, and not just for the presence of the book. His confidence, will and power have taken on new force.

Beaumont bought some new bolas and he and Quintis returned to Oldenlitz. There the party decided to buy six kegs of beer and try to either trick their way into the mines or tempt the mercenaries into inebriation so they could take them out. While the rest of the party snuck around the fortress, Beaumont and Floy drove the cart past, using one of the kegs to make nice with the guards watching the road.

Upon reaching the mine with the cart full of kegs, the party discovered that there were now three automatons on guard and a number of fieldstone barriers. Kel and Quintis hid in the darkness and the rocks, and using one of his new spells, Quintis turned the creatures against each other, causing considerable damage and confusion – even incapacitating one of the beasts. The guards called an imposing wizard out from the mine and he used some apparently magical procedure on the remaining beasts – its purpose unclear to Quintis. The pair retreated back to their hidden camp.

Day 33 (CD 81)

The next morning the party decided to try the beer gambit. When they return there were still three armored engines (a new one replacing the one damaged the

previous night) and eight mercenaries guarding the entrance. Floy and Beaumont tried their delivery gambit again, but the guards were on edge and seemed to be operating under strict orders.

They called their captain who Anders, watching from a hiding place in the rocks, recognized as the one-eyed officer who took his father's rifle. He began to question Floy who was unable to bluff his way through the conversation – but at least he did not fly into a rage and attack this time.

Despite Beaumont's best efforts, the soldiers began to edge out to surround the cart and the automatons took aggressive stances. After a tense moment, Beaumont and Quintis wheeled their horses and fled. Anders, considering calling out "El Capitan," decided better of it and took off after them.

The party spent that night at the same small camp hidden in the hills. In the wee hours Kel searched the surrounding hills for other possible entrances to the mine. He found several shafts that lead nowhere and a couple that might go deep enough to connect below. He also discovered an old hilltop ruin and sit's contemplating it from his hiding place in the dark and the rocks.

Session 18

(04.14.11)

Kel crept closer observing the ruins – crumbled columns that once might have ringed the very top of the barren hill. As he watched he noticed silhouetted movement, and with the hair rising on the back of his neck, he realized he was watching a number of the shadowy creatures he has encountered before and which dwell in his nightmares. They seemed to stalk the ruin, watchful and attentive, like predators.

He returned to the camp, perhaps a mile away and reported to the rest of the party. He also used his navigation skill to determine that the ruin is, within an accurate arrow shot, sitting just above the mercenary camp in the mine.

Day 34 (CD 82)

The party returned, cross-country, to Oldenlitz to decide what to do next and to make amends for losing the brewer's cart and donkey. Beaumont blamed the mercenaries and smoothed things over with his slick-talking and a gift of one of the "extra" horses. The barkeep was not born yesterday, but he figured a little mud and some poor grooming might hide the horse's origin.

Beaumont also went to talk with Elsa, the barmaid at the Silver Ingot, the tavern in the dwarven quarter of the village. Being a dwarf, she had spurned his previous advances as some kind of perversion. In the taproom he ran afoul of her father, who called for his axe and chased the "damn longshanks" out of his establishment.

Beaumont, of course, was not so easily dissuaded, and snuck back around and to the kitchen, tapping at the windowsill to get the girl's attention. She came warily to the back door, cleaver in hand, with at least one of the kitchen staff staring after her. She was angry and aggressive at first, but Beaumont smoothed things over in his way, and got her to admit they could be allies. She choked when he mentioned he had encountered her father, and she sent him away in a panic.

Day 35 (CD 83)

The party returned to the Monastery via the West River Road. Gus and Herrmann were happy to see them and relieved they were all still alive and at large – he had begun to worry.

Much time was spent talking about goals, plans and next steps.

(Metagaming about reward money)

Day 36 (CD 84)

Beaumont, Quintis and Kel left for Salzenmund so Beaumont could make some contacts in hopes of learning about any plum shipments the Scarecrows could hijack. Quintis and Kel wanted to shop in the big city.

Day 37 to 42 (CD 85 to 90)

It took every minute of six days, and required many late-night meetings with questionable, and in some cases downright dangerous, characters, but Beaumont made a good start on reintegrating himself in the Salzenmund underworld. He learned the current lay of the criminal landscape, those with clout, and those who had lost it, who was hungry, who had become complacent, and who was, at least as far as he could throw them, to be trusted. He also learned two important facts. The first is that his new nemesis, The Turk, owns Holden Freighters, the company currently occupying Beaumont's warehouse. The second is that the Estalians are expecting a fat payroll shipment from the silver mines early next week, and it is supposed to be coming along the West River Road, crossing the Salz on the ferry.

Quintis purchased a supply of ingredients for his new spells, and though he had intended to look for his sister, thought better of it for fear of bringing dangerous attention her way.

Kel looked to buy the finest armor he could find, but discovered it was far more expensive than he had originally assumed.

On the last day, passing through the inner gate from the Merchants' Quarter to Bridgeton, Kel failed to keep his head down, made a comment in elvish, let someone

see his dainty boots or something, but whatever it was, he was made as a skulking elf by none other than El Capitan Un Ojo. The mercenary ordered the gate guards to seize him and then rode down on the party.

Weapons came out and there were several pitched moments as blows were struck, arrows fired and bolas thrown. Quintis struggled to cast a spell as the tense moments stretched out. The guards aimed crossbows and El Capitan warned the party to drop their weapons or be shot. Finally, in that very instant, Quintis cast his spell and a swirling blackness engulfed the guards and most of the party.

Curses and the sounds of clashing metal, stomping feet, panicking horses and firing crossbows. The party came running out of the black cloud and dashed off into the twisting alleys before the guards knew where they had gone. Recovering their horses from the nameless inn at which they had been staying, the party fled the city and returned to the monastery.

Meanwhile, back at the hideout, Floy had been trying to teach Herr Little's man to fight, though all he seemed fit to do, in fact all he wanted to do, was dig latrines. Though the results were pitiful, Floy's constant abuse and insults of the man raised Gus' ire and he challenged Floy to a duel with wooden practice swords – to teach the young braggart a lesson. Though he got a lick or two in, it took only moments for the skilled Estalian to show the old man why he was a duelist, and why he had managed to survive the war with his hide, and his big mouth, intact.

Session 19

Day 43 (CD 91)

The party spent most of the day planning how best to hijack the mercenary payroll, considering options, resources and goals. In the end it was decided that Beaumont would take the place of the ferryman, and Quintis would hide aboard as secret, magical backup.

The plan was to wait until the ferry, the silver, and the silver's greatly reduced number of guards, were all midstream. Then the hijackers would overpower the guards, cut the ferry's messenger line, and drift downstream, eventually coming ashore on the northern bank. The rest of the party would be wait there, just beyond the nearest tributary, in a genius move to cut off any kind of shoreline pursuit.

Day 44 (CD 92)

The party traveled to the river crossing and spent some time scouting out the ferry and the ferryman, with Beaumont posing as a poor tradesmen and making a crossing. He learned the ferryman's nephew was his helper and occasional replacement, and that they both lived in the ramshackle cabin just south of the ferry dock.

Day 45 (CD 93)

Early in the morning Quintis knocked on the ferryman's front door and when his nephew answered it, he barged (barged, ferry – get it?) in and put them all to sleep. Beaumont tied them up as Quintis left a bag of coins – over a year's earnings – in the kitchen cupboard.

The heist was so well-planned, and Beaumont's information so expertly gathered, and Quintis' Bewilder spell so useful, that the caper went off without a hitch. After slogging back and forth through the deep mud carrying the silver, the party planted a scarecrow in the driver's seat of the ferry-bound wagon and pushed both back out into the river. Hardly believing their luck, the group rode off with heavy bags of booty slung over their saddles.

Day 46 (CD 94)

Back at the monastery hideout the party plotted and planned and rested up. They decided to melt down the ingots, minting their own silver coins, but with a subversive twist. They decided to stamp a counterfeit Salzenmund crest on one side of honest coins, and their scarecrow's head on the opposite. The intention is that as they spend, gave away and otherwise flood the region with these coins, the silver would serve as a sign to the people that the Scarecrows are potent, generous and clearly subverting the oppressive regime.

That is, once the Scarecrows earn a reputation as the Scarecrows. At the moment, they remain the mostly unidentified perpetrators of a disparate and unconnected series of hijackings and murders.

Day 47 (CD 95)

Anders, Beaumont and Quintis went to Grafenrich for news of El Capitan Un Ojo, and so Quintis could research the muddly symbol the party had discovered in the shallow cave near the Silver Hills fort.

Quintis visited Brother Tomas at Sigmar's church as well as the priest at the temple of Ulrich. Tomas knew nothing but said he would look into the question, and the Ulrican said it seemed familiar but he could not place it. Quintis even went to the bookseller and paid to use his small library, but to no avail.

Anders and Beaumont went to the Outlaw and the Maid and started spreading around their first samples of scarecrow coins. At some point, four Estalian mercs came in, and the boys had the audacity to buy them drinks and pump them for information. They learned that Un Ojo had been in town, but had rushed north the day before to deal with "some serious problem" at the river crossing. Apparently some kind of man-hunt was underway.

The trio returned to the monastery.

Day 48 (CD 96) Late Spring

In the morning the party headed off to Silver Hills to explore the little tunnel marked by the strange little symbol. Along the way they stopped in Oldenliz so that Beaumont could see his comely little dwarven barmaid, Elsa. He unfortunately ran afoul of her brother, and as the rest of the party watched, comedy ensued as he was run off. He eventually was let in, and after some tense conversation and charming persuasion, Beaumont was able to convince the brother that his intentions were at least not dishonorable, that he was simply seeking allies.

Session 20

Day 49 (CD 97)

The intrepid freedom fighters left Oldenlitz in the morning, squabbling among themselves about whether exploring this strange little cave was in the least bit wise, or would in the least bit advance their cause. They squabbled right up until the point at which Kel's erroneous navigating brought him to the crest of a hill in full view of the small fort, of which they had already run afoul several weeks prior. Shouts and motion on the battlements made it clear they had been seen, so the party rode off in a tearing hurry. In their rush, Quintis was unhorsed and took a spill.

They made the small cave and huddled there, not in the least hidden, waiting to be challenged by a patrol from the fort. Scouting from a hilltop, Kel saw distant soldiers passing to the east and then later to the north.

Quintis, Kel and Beaumont crawled into the low tunnel in the back of the cave, discovering a much larger cavern well beyond. A broad, phosphorescent puddle covered most of the floor. Advancing cautiously they scouted the chamber, finding several branching and partially worked tunnels.

In the meantime, Floy and Anders stole away with the horses, hoping to find a less open place to hide and hopefully drawing the patrol away from the cave.

As the trio approached the back of the cave they noticed two things. Kel saw a faint, purplish light down the far tunnel as they heard a deep rumbling sigh, like the exhale of some massive creature, up a closer passage. As they tried to sneak back along the muddy floor they gave themselves away and a monstrous animal charged out of the tunnel. Fleeing, they made it to the cavern entrance, and though still furious and raging, the creature did not follow.

Kel and Beaumont crawled out of the tunnel, but Quintis instead climbed up a wall of the cavern. From there he cast a potent spell with deadly effect, killing the creature. Kel rejoined him and the two confirmed that the creature was in fact dead. The animal was a horrible, unnatural thing, a monstrous rat-man the size of a great bull. It had mangy, fetid fur with bone and muscle sticking through intentional rents

in the scared hide. The beast was chained to the wall by massive links attached to an iron collar.

They all gathered outside the cave, eventually rejoined by Floy and Anders, and decided to wait until dark, and if the patrol did not find them in that time, then they would further explore the cavern.

When darkness fell they re-entered the tunnel and discovered both that the creature had been relieved of several internal organs and that the tunnel in which it had been chained had just been caved in. The numerous fresh tracks were the same over-large, rat-like ones that had lead them into the cave in the first place. Along with the huge rat-beast and the crude tunnels, the tracks dredged legends of the mythical Skaven – the plague-ridden rat-men – up from the party's collective childhood memories.

The party proceeded down the tunnel from which emanated the purple glow, soon coming to a scavenged store room with a scone of what Quintis identified as wyrdstone, passing several smaller or blocked side passages. The tunnel eventually disgorged the party into a rough-cut, rat-man-sized room, also scoured of anything valuable and easily carried.

The chamber connected to a human-built area that eventually, after cautious exploration, proved to be the basement of the small fort. Sneaking around the party discovered a well-equipped workshop, a pile of brightly glowing, green wyrdstone crystals, an inoperative golem, a storage room, a powder room and armory, and a pit-like room of disappeared men. They also found Herr Little in a solitary cell, horribly wounded and suspicious.

They then did several things at once – rousing the prisoners, blocking the entrances and sabotaging the powder room. They initially had trouble convince the despairing and untrusting prisoners of their intent, and even then not all of them had wits enough to cooperate – one even shouting to their mercenary captors for help.

As the prisoners fled, the party pressed weapons from the armory into their hands. Kel lit the trail of powder he had laid to the spilled kegs, and Quintis wedged the door. As the powder burned, Quintis started grabbing random pieces of the golem, and angry mercenaries started bashing at the barred entrance.

As the last of the party dropped into the access tunnel and the mercenaries burst into the workshop, the makeshift fuse reached the powder kegs. The resulting explosion destroyed the workshop and killed the mercs, blowing out everything above the armory in a massive gout of flame.

The party and their filthy, wounded, starving and half-crazed ex-prisoners made it down the tunnels and out the small access cave. The prisoners, many still frightened and confused had to be calmed and organized by gentle but commanding words

from Beaumont. As a group – a ragtag and ill-equipped one to be sure – the troupe headed north towards Laurelorn, a dull orange glow topped by grey smoke marking a clear point on the hilly horizon to the south.

Session 21

Day 50 (CD 98)

A BAND OF UN-MERRY MEN

The way the bards tell their adventure stories there is always a scene in which the tale turns. A scene in which the faithful hero escapes a terrible fate by clever ruse or force of arms. A scene in which, with newfound courage tempered in the fire of recent danger, the hero makes a triumphant blow against his foe. A scene in which he kills the monster, frees the people, saves the land and marries the princess. At least that's the way the bards tell their tales...

You on the other hand, know just how full of shit those tale-telling fairy bastards really are.

As you flee through the half-light of dawn, a ragged band of prisoners straggling in your wake, you curse the bards for lying fucks. You've been through fire. You have courage. You've struck a triumphant blow! So why are you running through the fading night, exhausted, hungry and scared. You've freed some people. Where's YOUR princess?

As you uselessly urge the freed men on, you fear your voice is carrying on the still air. Even their grunts and the scuff of their feet on the trail seem loud. The sun is rising in the east, and the glow of the burning fortress to the south has faded, though you now see the smoke more clearly in the paling sky. You trudge on, half-threatening, half-begging the prisoners to move faster – driving them on mostly by force of will.

You know there are patrols about. You saw them before entering the Skaven cave. You must also assume, when the soldiers realized the explosion was not accidental, the garrison sent out even more men. You're only hope is to get outside the ring of their patrols and to stay ahead of them when you do. North to the Laurelorn. Hide out. Hunt. Heal. Then decide what to do next.

This damn hill country is hard going however, even with the brightening sky – which only makes you easier to see. The scrubby brush, the rock falls, the bluffs and dead ends, all conspire to slow you down and force you back and forth across the broken landscape. Maybe in the little vale ahead – the trees are greener and you can smell water. Maybe you can stop just long enough for the horses and men to drink. Yes, there's a stream. Maybe you can...

Oh fuck.

The party, and their new-found friends, continued their flight north. As dawn brightened and true morning began, the ragtag group of over twenty men stumbled, exhausted, into a small dale out of which flowed an inviting stream. The adrenaline driving them on had long given way to bone deep-fatigue, and only the continued haranguing of the hardened warriors kept the ex-prisoners on their feet.

As they entered the dell, hoping to rest at last and drink, the waiting mercenary patrol sprung its ambush – a line of pikeman and shielded crossbowman, archers high in the surrounding rocks and light cavalry commanding hounds. It looked desperate when Beaumont took a bolt in the first volley and went down. The Scarecrows rallied however, and routed the patrol with surprising ease. They killed most of the mercenaries, allowing four or five to escape and only losing a couple of their own charges in the fray.

After looting the bodies to arm and armor their new henchmen, the party continued north, reaching the margins of Laurelorn, both minds and bodies numb.

Day 51 - 56 (CD 99 - 105)

They spent six days resting, healing and eating their fill of horse steaks. When Beaumont was finally fighting fit, they headed to Oldenlitz to tell Elsa and the other dwarves at the Silver Hammer that Herr Little was now free.

When they arrived in the village they knew immediately that something was wrong, and by the time they had reached the Hammer they saw it was bad. The tavern was a blacked ruin, and the only dwarf left in town was a blind elder too old to have left with the others. He told the Crows that mercenaries came to the Hammer looking for “bandits.” They accused the dwarves of providing them aid and tried to arrest some of them. The rest attacked, fighting a pitched battle that left several dwarves dead or fleeing. After the mercs left, the surviving dwarves returned to honor their dead and collect supplies. They then disappeared into the Silver Hills.

Herr Little, enraged by what had happened, almost attacked Floy when the Estalian spoke his typically insensitive nonsense. After Beaumont calmed him down, Little took one of the horses and rode off into the hills after his kin.

Day 57 (CD 106)

After spending a last night hidden in the woods, the ragged parade finally returned to the monastery. The Crows spent much of the day trying to convince ex-prisoners that they could not return to their old lives until the Prince’s hold on Nordland was broken. Most heard the truth in Beaumont’s convincing oration and 13 able farmers and woodsman joined the cause. One sour villain however, and his hesitant friend, opted to leave the forest and return home – abandoning their rescuers.

Anders, Kel and Beaumont considered sneaking off and killing them to maintain secrecy and realized they would be no better than the Prince if they did that. Ultimately, Anders tried to help by offering them a bag of Scarecrow coins, but they misinterpreted his pursuit and shouts as a threat and fled.

Session 22 (sans Andrew)

Day 58 - 60 (CD 107 - 109)

THE BROTHERHOOD

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Narrator: A dim, candlelit room deep within a keep. The walls are covered in shelves of ancient tomes and folios, their upper ranks lost in the flickering shadows. Heavy tables of dark wood hold more books, scattered papers, strange objects, arcane implements and rare materials. This place is a secret. A haven for those with power. A sanctum.

Three men sit in high-backed chairs, the embers of a fire dying in the hearth behind them. A long silence is broken as one of them speaks...

Icy: Why is it only now that you bring me this news?

Rasping: I assure you Milord, it was only in the last day that the situation became...clear.

Icy: Clarity? Indeed. I am beginning to reconsider your worth Bailiff. Tell me why you now believe these attacks were the work of the same bandits...these Scarecrows?

Rasping: Yes Milord. There is little doubt. The reports of this most recent...encounter...confirmed my suspicions. It's the elven archer and the Estalian renegade. From the other attacks, and the...incident in the city...involving the Captain.

Foreign: Grrr...

Icy: And the theft of my silver – the Captain's payroll?

Rasping: Uhm. Yes Milord. The ferryman confirmed...well...he eventually confirmed... that it was the wizard. Presumably the same one the Captain let escape in the city.

Narrator: This last is spoken with a hard glance at the shadow-covered face of the mercenary. Staring at the Bailiff with a dark eye, the sellsword growls his words.

Foreign: I will gut dem myself, de fucking bastards. Many mens killed. Dey will suffer de...

Icy: Now Captain. Calm yourself. Your chance will come. My concerns are greater than a few...highwaymen. Remember who pays you, after all.

Foreign: I swear I will treck dem down myself. And you will not pay for dis. I will do dis ones for free. I will do dis ones simple for de pleasure.

- Icy: Ah, Captain. I applaud your enthusiasm, but you must restrain yourself.*
- Bailiff. Your new...men...will be here soon, yes? I understand their vanguard has already arrived. Formidable. That would be the appropriate word, wouldn't you agree?*
- Rasping: Yes Milord. Quite...formidable. In fact, I would like to repeat my concerns that their presence might contribute to the unrest it is supposed to assuage. I think tha...*
- Narrator: A cold look, icier still than the voice it accompanies, is sufficient to stop the words in the speaker's suddenly dry throat.*
- Icy: Yes. Your concern is noted. Again. I trust you will not bring it up a third time. I suggest you use the new soldiers to capture these brigands. My understanding is that they are good at this sort of thing. Predatory by nature. Anyway, it seems a useful way for them to learn the lay of the land. As they say, two birds with one stone, yes?*
- Foreign: And what would you have my men do? They are angry for bloods.*
- Icy: Ah Captain. You will continue with your orders – maintaining peace in our fair land and continuing to gather...volunteers...for the cause. The work must continue. It must continue, at all costs...*

The Crows spent three days establishing a new order at the monastery, evaluating their new henchmen, setting up watches and planning for eventualities like a rendezvous in case they were overrun and had to flee. The following practices were established:

Watches – one picket on each of the easy approaches, two on roving patrol, all with orders to retreat quietly to the monastery and report any strangers. Four hours on, four hours off.

Rendezvous – “when shit gets hairy at the monastery” the un-merry men are to scatter and meet up again at one of four locations. Which location depends on the quarter of the moon.

1st quarter – the ruins of the von Brenner estate

2nd quarter – Herr Little's bridge

3rd quarter – the old priest's tower above Marc's Ridge

4th quarter – the Devil's Eye (a sinkhole south of the Salz Road)

Day 61 (CD 110)

The party, sans Kel who stayed behind to hold the horses, decided to visit Grafenrich to check in with Kalb and see if they could hear any news about their enemies. Kalb had little to offer save confirmation of rumors about the party's recent activities. Kalb seemed particularly nervous about Anders coming to see him in broad daylight, and suggested that in the future he only come after dark.

As he walked away through town to meet up with the others, Anders heard his name called by a profoundly familiar voice. He turned to see Claudia von Staudinger, his betrothed, and her handmaiden, Gertrude. Claudia and Anders have been betrothed since childhood, and were long-time friends. Only in the last handful of years have their feelings begun to change. Now, after all his experiences, and now as an outlaw, Anders is undecided about the nature of the relationship and what he feels towards the naïve young woman.

For her part Claudia was surprised, then angry, then confused and upset. She said she had heard rumors that Anders was back but did not believe them because if he was, she knew he would have come to see her. At one point she even slapped him!

Quintis and Floy, independently, threw fuel on the fire – Quintis trying to get Anders off the street before the scene drew too much attention, and Floy simply being his usually prickish self and causing trouble. Eventually, Quintis put her to sleep and the trio made an inauspicious retreat, Anders shouting instructions to an indignant Gertie, telling her to reassure Claudia and that he would explain later.

The whole meeting did not go well. In fact, on the road to Salzenmund, Floy continued berating Anders and insulting Claudia. Anders unable to take anymore, swung on Floy using the butt of his spear. The two actually fought, swinging and stabbing at each other in genuine anger. Ander's armor and wooden weapon meant that neither was doing much damage, so Floy tried to tackle Anders with the only result being the two of them crashing to the ground from their horses. Quintis (threatening Floy with a sleep spell) and Beamont actually had to intervene to end the brawl.

After the party arrived in Salzenmund, Anders sent Claudia the following letter, in hopes of repairing some of the damage caused by his comrades.

My dear Claudia,

I must apologize from the bottom of my heart for the events of the other day. The men that were with me are my brothers in arms, and while I trust them with my life, they are not as privileged as you and I, and haven't the faintest concept of propriety. Please do not take anything they said to heart; it is nothing but the mindless squealing of beasts.

It gladdened my heart to see you the other day; after returning from fighting the forces of Chaos to encounter much chaos here at home, your shining presence is a beacon of hope. You must understand, I did not even attempt to seek you out for fear of what I would find. If I found you dead or missing like my family, it would have been more than I could bear. And if you were alive, I would bring nothing but trouble and turmoil to your life.

For I must confess, I am indeed an outlaw, wanted by those who have ruined my family. I fear that merely your knowledge of my presence may place your

life and the lives of your family in danger, so please speak of this to no one.

I am working towards righting the many wrongs that have taken place in my absence. I hope to restore the rightful order and peace to my lands, the rightful order and peace that I have spent these last few years away from you fighting for. I dream that the day will soon come when we can be together again, and I hope you feel the same. But until that day comes, please do not speak of me to anyone, and please tell Gertrude to do the same. If there is a way for you to assist me in my battle, I will ask it of you.

Until that day, I remain your faithful servant.

-Anders

The party spent the afternoon riding to Salzenmund and entered the city, each in his own way – Floy overcoming his rage and disguising himself as a mercenary, Quintis in the magical guise of a old woman, and the others with cloaks drawn up and hoods covering heads.

Anders went to the Cockerel, Floy to the mercenary bar at which he had celebrated his victory in the fighting pit, and Quintis and Beaumont to the Herr Kurzman's mansion.

Anders spent a quiet night at the inn laying low and writing to Claudia.

Floy drank too much but somehow managed to make some new friends among his countrymen without losing his cool or being discovered. In fact, he ended up posing as a recent arrival, even though no troop ship had actually come in, and he actually returned to the barracks to spend the night in the enemy's lair.

On the way to the barracks however, as he stumbled along with a band of fellow Estalians singing old songs and feeling all nostalgic for home, he and his amigos were held up by a tall woman bristling with pistols and wearing big hat and a leather mask. As she spoke with an uncanny nerve and a sardonic tone, something suddenly awoke in Floy... he suddenly cared. He suddenly had purpose. He was suddenly, and completely, in love. After they gave up all their coin, the apparition, the Pistolera, backed away into a dark alley and vanished up the side of a building, leaving a smitten Floy equal parts confused and enraptured.

While Floy was falling in love, Quintis and Beaumont shared dinner with Herr Kurzman. During the meal, Quintis caught him up on their recent activities and afterwards they talked late into the night over brandy. Kurzman showed a glint of avarice when they discussed the wyrdstone, and made it clear that he would be willing to pay a considerable sum to acquire a crystal. Beaumont also gave Kurzman the Warrior of Morr, who offered only to look after it, or sell it if Beaumont so chose. The weary soldiers accepted Kurzman's offer to spend the night, bathing and then sleeping in the finest luxury.

Day 62 (CD 111)

Waking the next morning, bleary-eyed and hungover, Floy found himself on a cot in a mercenary barracks. Surprisingly, he managed to both control his rage as well as bluff his way through breakfast and reporting to his “duties.” While making his way out of the Keep, Floy caught sight of a fearsome troop of Orge mercenaries from the East, drilling on the parade grounds, and his heart was struck cold by the threat they represented.

By mid morning, the Crows were gathered at the Cockerel, trying to decide what to do next.

Session 22 (sans Bill)

Day 63 (CD 112) (June 29, 2011)

Anders, Beaumont and Quintis decided to return to the monastery, while Floy decided to stay in Salzemund and try to find La Pistolera. Now in love, he apologized to Anders for giving him such a hard time about Claudia and told Anders he now understood. It’s not clear if Anders has really forgiven Floy yet or not.

Day 64 – 78 (CD 113 - 127)

Upon returning to the monastery hideout, the Crows discovered that the Unmerry Men had been busy settling in and modifying the ruins to better accommodate the increased number of occupants. With considerably more manpower available, and a growing certainty that their unmolested time at the monetary is growing short, the Crows decided to take the opportunity to fortify the ruins against what they assume will be an eventual, inevitable assault. Using the fallen stone, and timbers cut from the surrounding wood, they ordered their new henchmen to rebuild various walls, leaving only one viable entrance to the monastery. They also ordered the placement of field stone barricades and log spikes along the approach to the bluff top.

The modifications took all of two weeks, and now, even to the most unobservant eye, the ruins are clearly no longer abandoned – and they are considerably more defensible.

Day 118 – First day of summer.

While most of the Unmerry Men worked on the fortifications, a few scouted the region – seeing family members, meeting friends and renewing old contacts – gathering information the Crows could use to plan more hijackings and raids. The Crows wanted to keep up their momentum, score more resources, and increase the threat they represent to the authorities.

Over the course of the two weeks, they took advantage of four opportunities. The first was robbing a noble’s coach. The second was hijacking a trading barge. The third was intercepting a tax collector, and the fourth was, supposed to be, stealing Capitan un Ojo’s sword.

(These heists were played as a montage, with a five-minute timer for planning, and a single modified roll based on the dominant skill in play, followed by a roleplayed resolution, for each raid.)

The coach robbery was accomplished by blocking the road ahead of and behind the wagon

with felled trees and by intimidating threats from Anders – backed up by a band of desperate thugs armed with crossbows and pistols, and wearing scarecrow masks.

The Crows hijacked the Estalian trading barge by posing as river wardens conducting an inspection. They stole a warden boat, dressed the part, and once aboard the barge they pulled their weapons, pushed the guards overboard and took their time stealing the cargo and relieving the rich passengers of their valuables. Quintis and Beaumont's new calling card appears to be stuffing silver crow coins into any sufficiently ample cleavages. They also insulted an Estalian diplomat who challenged Anders to a duel, by ignoring the challenge, spitting on his sword and throwing him overboard. Among other valuables, they made off with several dozen cases of fine Estalian wine and spirits.

The tax heist was accomplished by the simple expedient of Kel shooting most of the Estalian guards and Beaumont threatening to kill the collector if he didn't come out of the oak-armored wagon. The Crows took the collector after they gathered money from the poor village of Marc's Ridge, in hopes that the Prince would assume the peasants had nothing left to tax. Then, dressing the collector as a scarecrow, they marched him through town and, after a lot of persuading and reassurance, managed to get the villagers to come out so they could return their valuables. They then set the collector on the road to Salzenmund, still dressed as a scarecrow.

Total take from the rash of heists:

300 crowns worth of coins, jewelery, fine goods, etc

200 crowns worth of clothes

7 horses

23 sets of armor & weapons from mercenaries (20 being delivered as new to mercenaries)

30 cases of fine Estalian wine

5 cases of fine Estalian brandy

10 cases of fine cigars

300 crowns worth of sellable goods

300 crowns worth of Estalian books

The final robbery was supposed to be more symbolic than profitable. The Crows discovered that Un Ojo had left his prized sword with Kalb the Elder to be refurbished. The initial plan was to steal it, but that was quickly replaced with the more audacious plan of assassinating the mercenary captain.

After conferring with Kalb, and plotting with Konrad to keep the town watch away, the Crows set up a bold, mid-day ambush at the smithy for the time the Capitan was supposed collect his sword. Kel waited bow ready in the loft of a nearby barn, while the others tried more or less successfully to hide in plain sight in the town commons – Quintis and Beaumont even trying their hands at gardening with some elderly townfolk.

Un Ojo came out of the keep gates lead by a war hound, and followed by an attaché and two ogre mercenaries. Kel let fly, hitting him several times as the ogres scanned vainly for the attacker and the gate guards called for help. Un Ojo jumped the low wall into the smithy just in time to be hit with a hail of shadow knives from an overpowered Quintis – a Quintis still

glowing like a small sun from the rampant energy of his failed initial casting attempt.

The force of the magical blow was uncannily powerful and Un Ojo dropped like a stone as his ogre guards finally found targets for their fury. As the party mounted their nearby horses and raced for the Eastern Gate, ogres chasing on foot, Kel slid off the roof and over the town wall to his own waiting mount.

The Crows know they struck a major blow and Quintis is quite certain that his magic was more than potent enough to kill the mercenary captain. They also know that they have struck such an audacious blow, on top of a series of stinging hits, that their little band of rebels will soon be hunted by more than a few random patrols. They know that the game has changed, the stakes are higher, and that they have now become the most wanted men in the province.

Mini Solo Session – Bill only

Meanwhile, as the rest of the Crows began executing their series of raids, Floy remained in Salzenmund for several days, trying to locate La Pistolera. It cost most of his will power to control his rage whenever he saw any mercenaries, but surprisingly he kept himself under control.

It first took him a while to make contact with Eric, the boy Quintis had been using to find his sister. Eric was cagey since Floy is Estalian, but he was also curious because he recognized Floy from the pit fight. He made Floy wait most of a day, observing him from afar for signs of a trap. When Floy finally decided to leave the refugee camp, Eric approached him. He acted skeptical when Floy asked him to contact La Pistolera for him but he said he would do what he could, and told Floy to return in two days.

Two days later, after lying low in his sketchy, river district inn, Floy returned to the refugee camp. Eric told him to give up and go back to his inn. He told him that La Pistolera was not interested in meeting him.

Floy left and wandered the city for most of the night, hoping to randomly run into the bandit woman. When he returned to his room he was surprised to find her waiting there. Floy did his best to charm her and to convince her that they shared a common cause. He tried to convince her to join forces with the Crows. She on the other hand made it clear that she was not interested in teaming up with an Estalian, but Floy couldn't help feeling that she was curious about the Crows and their objectives. She eventually left through the same window by which she had entered.

The next day Floy made his way back to the monastery where he trained the Unmerry Men in swordcraft (and held the horses) while the rest of the party executed the raids.

Session 23

Day 79 (CD 128)

The Scarecrows spent much of the day at the Monastery debating how best to vet the increasing stream of recruits flowing into the camp. The concern is that the Prince's spies could easily infiltrate and cause no end of trouble for the band. After considering and dismissing a number of plans, they decided to simply continue vetting them personally as

time allows, judging every man's character themselves, and trusting to the wisdom and loyalty of the rest of the Unmerry men to protect them from potential interlopers.

The debate was interrupted when a scraggly band of grimy men (and one woman?) walked cockily up to the ruins and simply announced themselves. They had the two roving pickets bound and cowed. They were confident, heavily armed and looked every bit the wildmen. The smallest among them stepped forward and asked who was in charge. He said his name was Ule and that his men were Scratch (the silent giant), Poe and Hex (an unrelated but indistinguishable pair) Grima (perhaps the toughest, and ugliest, woman anyone had ever seen) and a random collection of filthy savages. With every bit of seriousness, Ule makes the Crows the offer to join his gang.

After debating the relative merits of various leadership styles, martial tactics, violent tendencies and ultimate goals, Ule agreed to what he sees as an alliance, at least until the Crows realize their error and make him their boss.

As the group came to this somewhat deluded resolution, sentries reported lots of smoke in the air over a distant ridge. The Wildmen challenged the Crows to a race to see what was amiss – the Crows on horse, the Wildmen on foot. The narrow and winding trail meant that the Wildmen were actually able to keep pace with the Crows. When the group cleared the hill they saw the village of Marc's Ridge below, partly in flames, villagers yelling, crying and milling around. They had been attacked by mercenaries and the men carted off – perhaps in retaliation for the assault on the tax collector who had come through the previous week.

After a few minutes debate, in hopes of freeing the captives, the Crows set off after the mercs. The Wildmen quickly fell behind as they made the West Salz Road and the horses galloped on. The Crows caught up with the mercenaries as they watered their horses at Faust's Crossing. They scouted the scene before attacking and took the column unaware and unprepared. The fight was quick and brutal, with arrows, swords and magic all making their marks. The Crows did not survive unscathed however, with Quintis, Floy and Beaumont all taking heavy wounds from crossbow bolts and a vicious hound.

The final moments of the skirmish were anxious, but Quintis and Kel ultimately turned the fight with Pall of Shadow and deadly accurate arrows.

Session 24 (sans Larry)
Day 79 (CD 128) continued

The Crows spent some time cleaning up the mess – securing the living, looting the dead, and putting them all in the slave wagon, which Quintis locked with a spell. Just as they finished, the Wildmen showed up, panting but ready to fight, and disappointed that the fun was over.

The party left the wagon-full of living and dead mercenaries in the middle of the crossroads and returned to the monastery. They spent the rest of the night planning what to do next, and decided to scout the von Faust estate the next evening.

Day 80 (CD 129)

In the late afternoon the Crows, with a number of Unmerry men in tow, including some Wildmen and Beaumont's valet Goswin, headed cross-country to scout the estate. Upon

arriving at von Faust manor, they discovered that some kind of factory was working inside the new fortifications, and that the outside was being patrolled by several of the enchanted automatons like those at the mine in the Silver Hills.

Beaumont promised Ule he could “run the gang” if he could take out one of the golems singlehandedly. Ule happily took the challenge. He picked up a rock, ran out into the open, pitched it at the animated armor, dropped his drawers, mooned a monster and ran off screaming obscenities over his shoulder. The automatons followed, allowing the rest of the party to lob burning arrows into the compound. They managed to set something on fire behind the walls, causing considerable commotion and trouble inside the fortification.

It didn't take long for the machines to return, so the party thought better of hanging around and returned to the monastery. Ule caught up sometime later, exhausted, a little crazed and understandably intimidated by the supernatural might of what he kept calling “ghost armor” as he told and retold his story to a rapt audience of Unmerry men.

No sooner had they returned to the monastery, when a scouting party returned to the hideout in a panic. In a frantic narrative they told the Crows that two of their party – brothers from Oldenlitz – had lost their way in the Witch's Bog and had certainly been taken by the old crone. They had warned them. They had told them. Everyone knows about the old witch!

No rest for the wicked. The Crows immediately set off into the night black forest and were soon stalking through the foggy swamp. The higher ground was marked with a trail of scarecrow coins, making it clear that someone wanted the party to follow. Of the eight or ten Unmerry men who came with the Crows, only three were willing to venture into the swamp. The rest remained behind to “guard a retreat.”

When they reached the middle of the bog, they found a squat hut made of sticks and mud daubing. It sat on a wide tussock warded by a ring of what looked like skaven skulls and was surrounded by deep muck. Kel ventured inside while the rest of the party stood watch outside in the fog.

Within Kel found a rag-clad and hunched figure chanting over a small pile of embers and jamming shards of bone into the earthen floor. The figure would not respond to Kel's queries, and finally cast something onto the fire that created a great puff of smoke. As the smoke cleared, Kel found himself in the same cramped room, but with the missing brothers rather than the chanting hag. They seemed a little dazed and were not able to explain how they had gotten there.

Kel attempted to exit the hut through the raggedy door hangings, only to find himself back in the same room again. He then tried to hack his way through the wall with his sword. As he started to make progress he found himself sitting up in a darkened hut with the two brothers fast asleep on the floor. Waking one, he and the groggy brother dragged the other out of the hut, and into a troll ambush.

Two massive river trolls shambled out of the fog and darkness and attacked the party. Despite the trolls supernatural healing powers, and though Floy and Beaumont suffered significant wounds, the party made rather quick work of the foul smelling creatures. Floy even tried to “climb” one of the trolls, using his daggers as makeshift pitons – his intent

being to saw off its head. After the fight Beaumont was apparently so proud of their prowess that he hacked off one of trolls' heads as a trophy, and despite it's vomit inducing odor, decided he was going to haul it back to camp.

Session 25 (sans Joel and with Alex H. as a guest star)

Day 80 (CD 129) continued

The party immediately struck out across the foggy swamp and seemed to be clearing the edge of the bog when a trio of trolls, apparently following the odiferous trail Beaumont left as he dragged his stinking trophy through the muck, caught up with them at an old causeway and attacked. This battle was rather more pitched as the party was tired and wounded from the first encounter, and the few Unmerry men with them bolted for the shore. Only Zolan, an Araby refugee and a new recruit, stood his ground and fought. In fact, the boy was almost killed in the assault, willingly spending his blood for the Crows.

The trolls swung their tree-trunk clubs and sprayed the fighters with their fetid, acidic vomit, doing frightful amounts of damage. Floy again tried to climb one of the trolls as did Zolan - Floy falling in the mud and Zolan being knocked unconscious with a vomitous attack. Floy then tried to string a rope across the causeway in hopes of tripping one of the monsters.

Though the battle was a closer thing, the party prevailed. And despite the obvious lesson, Beaumont insisted on hacking off another trophy head since his first had distracted, and had been eaten by, one of the new attackers. The party quickly made the shore, collected their "rear guard" and returned to the camp.

Once there, word of their prowess against the monsters quickly spread, told and embellished by the men who had accompanied them. Covered in troll puke, and so fetid that even Mister Nelson would not come near the party, the exhausted rescuers tried to clean up but were soon overcome with sleep.

Day 81 (CD 130)

The next day the party was awoken early with warnings of an impending attack. As the camp rushed to take up arms and positions, Kel, Gus and Beaumont snuck off into the woods to scout, and Floy simply just marched down the main path. Everyone was relieved, and overjoyed, to discover that it was Herr Little and eleven other heavily armored, armed and angry dwarves. Shock troopers of a sort, come to join the cause.

As an afterthought of sorts, Beaumont had some of the Unmerry men cart the troll's head off to Faust's Crossing and stick it on a spike in the middle of the road to his family's estate.

Late that afternoon Brother Tomas waddled into camp fending off the pickets with only his bluster. He brought word that Konrad Kalb had been arrested. His compliance in the assault on Capitan un Ojo had apparently been discovered and he was to be hanged for "treason" in four day's time - during the upcoming Festival of Bones. Anders flew into a rage, and despite Floy's insensitivity, was calmed by his cousin and his own considerable will. Despite Brother Tomas' belief that the hanging was the bait for a trap, the party immediately began planning a rescue.

Quintis, magically disguised as an old woman, and Gus went into Grafenrich to see what information they could gather. They confirmed that the hanging was indeed part of a trap. They discovered that Konrad was being kept in the dungeon in Grafenrich keep. They learned the name of five town watchmen who could be counted on to help rescue Konrad. They heard rumors that lead them to believe Capitan Un Ojo had survived, and Quintis observed that the residue of warpstone magic was still drifting around inside the keep's bailey.

Session 26 (sans Joel)
Day 82 (CD 131) continued

The Crows decided that Quintis needed to ask Herr Kurzman for some magical help and that the party was willing to trade part of their stock of warpstone to secure it. To that end they packed up the dangerous contraband and traveled to Salzenmund that afternoon. Kel and Floy took cover in a small wood in sight of the city, watching over the wyrdstone, while Beaumont and Quintis went to negotiate with Kurzman, disguised as a rich merchant and his bodyguard.

Along the way Beaumont charged his valet Goswin to install himself in the refugee camp for the next couple weeks and learn what he could about the current circumstances. The boy seemed unusually confident as Beaumont handed him some coin and sent him off.

Herr Kurzman received his visitors graciously, though they were clearly interrupting his work, and was barely able to contain himself when he learned they had come to trade him some warpstone. He admitted that he could not pay them it's worth, but that he had a number of items that might help in their cause that he could offer in trade. Quintis immediately prevailed on this good will, asking Herr Kurzman to see if he could "buy" or otherwise hire his sister away from Salzenmund Keep. Kurzman said he would see what he could arrange.

Meanwhile, Kel and Floy had an encounter with a local shepherd boy who seemed far more curious about, rather than frightened of, the odd pair, despite Floy's best efforts to drive him off. He wanted to know if Kel was an elf and if Floy had ever killed anyone with his sword. He said his father said that elves were dirty savages and that his mother said Estalians were whore mongers. The boy seemed considerably more open minded than his parents, especially when Kel gave him a handful of Crow silver to keep his mouth shut about encountering an elf. Beside himself with excitement, the boy ran off, almost forgetting his sheep.

Some time later, Kurzman sent his man, Pauwel, along with Beaumont to collect the wyrdstone while he instructed Quintis in a couple of new spells and collected the items for his part of the trade. The exchange was made, Beaumont spent a luxurious night in the mansion while Quintis studied.

Day 83 (CD 132)

The pair left first thing in the morning, rejoining Floy and Kel, and the party returned to the hideout.

The items Kurzman offered in trade included two spells and a magical mask for Quintis. A

bottle of armor shavings for Beaumont. An enchanted pair of goggles for Anders. A strange bowstring for Kel and a Big Gay Red Feather™ for Floy. Each of the items has unique magical properties that compliment the individual strengths of those to whom they were given.

Day 83

Upon returning to the monastery the Crows discovered that the Unmerry men, lead by Anders, had captured an Estalian scouting party – killing one and subduing the other three. It didn't take long for Floy to stab one of them in the throat as an incentive in motivating the others to answer questions.

This was only partially successful, but when Quintis used his powers to impersonate the soldier Floy had just killed, and then as him, subsequently told the remaining two that an evil witch had trapped his soul and would do the same to them if they did not talk, the mercs became truly scared. Pushing the scam even further, Quintis, as himself again, told them that the witch was going to eat one of them to gain his power.

Playing along, Floy made them collect wood for their own cook fire from the camp wood pile. In the process, the fatter one managed to cut his bonds on the chopping axe, snag it up and charge Floy. Screaming, “not my soul,” he attacked with uncanny fury. Floy casually held him off, stabbing him in the leg in an attempt to hamstring the terrified man. The frenzied attack continued and just as Quintis tried to put the man down with a sleep spell, he connected with a furious (Ulric's Fury) blow, practically cutting Floy in two.

The Unmerry men, gathered around to watch the fun as one of their leaders picked apart the mercenary with his superior swordsmanship, stood stunned for several seconds, then swarmed the mercenary and beat him into unconsciousness. Beaumont ordered the man beheaded and the Unmerry Men complied with gruesome enthusiasm.

In the confusion, the last standing mercenary fled into the forest, but was quickly tracked down and subdued by Kel.

Enraged, aggrieved, and more than a little dismayed, the Crows, and the Unmerry Men, were shocked when Brother Tomas knelt over the gory Floy and, with only his faith in Sigmar, seemed to call the dying boy back from the very brink of death. Stunned, everyone gained a profound new respect for the monk and his god – especially Floy, who now is facing his second crisis of faith in as many weeks.

Session 27

Day 84 (CD 133) (continued)

After an afternoon of waffling over what do to next, the Scarecrows decided they would try to winnow down the Bailiff's forces by ambushing the ogre mercenaries as they marched from Salzenmund to Grafenrich.

They settled on the recently abandoned fishing village of Perch, halfway to Grafenrich along the South River Road, as the site for the attack. The Crows, the dwarves, the Wildmen and a dozen Unmerry archers set out immediately. They spent the evening prepping the ambush, essentially sleeping at their posts.

Day 85 (CD 134)

The next morning was spent sweltering in the summer heat, nervously awaiting the uncertain arrival of the ogres. It was unknown whether they had already passed or what route they would actually take. Just as the party was about to give up, the ogre outriders appeared, followed by a trio of Estalian sergeants and the rest of the formidable column.

Quintis was to signal the start of the ambush by casting his Bewilder spell on the center of the column as it passed over the causeway in the middle of the village. The ogres began crossing the bridge. Quintis cast his spell. And bloody battle ensued.

Quintis drove nine ogres to the ground where they were mobbed by the dwarves and picked off by Unmerry archers.

The ogres slaughtered Wildmen.

Arrows rained death from everywhere – Kel's foremost among them.

The ogres slaughtered dwarves.

Ander's spitted foe after foe with his long spear and relentless attacks.

The ogres did their best to slaughter the Crows.

Floy raged around the battlefield, thrusting and stabbing, unhorsing and then being unhorsed.

Beaumont held his own until a brutal attack from a mounted human merc left him gravely wounded and at risk of losing his right hand. The critical wound left him traumatized and prone to nightmares in which he is held down by shadowy figures while his living hands are feed to ravenous animals.

In the end, the savage fight was only a pyrrhic victory for the Scarecrows. Many ogres died and the rest withdrew yes, but at what cost? Half the Wildmen are dead, and Ule will likely not live out the night. A third of the dwarves were lost and half those who survived are gravely injured – Herr Little among them. Beaumont was mauled – almost killed – and only Kel and a few of the archers escaped injury. Quintis lost control of the winds of magic while casting Shadow Knives in the presence of his chest of warpstone. He held off Tzeentch's Curse, but suffered a dark magic side-effect. His right leg is now only shadow from the knee down – a true and dangerous mark of Chaos should any chance to see the mutation.

And what is the significance of the new wanted poster that Beaumont found on one of the Estalians. It identifies Anders by name – implying that the Bailiff now knows, or at least believes he knows, who leads the bandit Scarecrows.

What to do with the wounded?

Are the ogres regrouping?

What will happen when word of the ambush reaches the Bailiff?

How will the Crows keep up their band's morale in the face of such slaughter?

Does the party still have the strength to enter the Bailiff's trap and survive?

Will Konrad swing?

And what is the significance of the new wanted poster that Beaumont found on one of the Estalians. It identifies Anders by name – implying that the Bailiff now knows, or at least believes he knows, who leads the bandit Scarecrows.

Session 28 (9.21.11 - two days before the one year anniversary of the campaign)
Day 85 (CD 134) (continued)

The aftermath of the battle was hard. The killed and wounded weighed heavily on the Crows, but even heavier on their men. Morale was low and many were close to losing faith. After friends and brothers-in-arms were buried in hastily dug graves, Beaumont gathered the men together and delivered a heartfelt, but only marginal successful speech. Though scared and hurt, the company held nonetheless and returned to the monastery just at nightfall.

They arrived to find the camp, as the Crows had ordered, packed up and ready to be moved. They made the decision to head west and reestablish their hideout in the Devil's Eye, a sinkhole and cave system known to local woodsman. The Unmerry Men spent one last night at the Monastery, licking their wounds and dreading the morning.

Day 86 (CD 135)

When the woods were light enough to see, the horse train to the new encampment headed off. The Crows, taking one last look around the closest thing to a home they'd had in two years, left the monastery behind. The rescue party they took with them consisted of six dwarves, three wildmen and ten Unmerry men.

Pausing on the edge of the Salzwood, on a vantage overlooking Grafenrich, the Brotherhood debated over how best to get their various henchmen into the town and then the keep. While the debate went on, Quintis passed out scarecrow coins to the various farmers and other peasants who passed hesitantly along the road, headed to town for the Festival of Bones.

Peasants are wily creatures when it comes to sensing trouble, and a band of armed men hiding in the woods overlooking a village is an easy warning to interpret. Many simply turned around and headed back the way they had come, while others slunk by and hurried towards the town gates. Quintis offered Crow silver to the few who approached within earshot, but this seemed to confuse and concern the peasants even more.

In the end, Quintis and Beaumont went into town disguised as an old woman and her son and made contact with one of the town watchmen Gus had learned was willing to help rescue Konrad. After a couple false starts they decided to steal a boat and use it to bring the dwarves up river and to the waterfront at the west end of town. From there Beaumont and Kel lead the dwarves through the crude and filthy sewers to Beaumont's secret entrance

into the basement of his family manse.

Meanwhile, Anders, Floy, Quintis, the Unmerry Men and wildmen all entered Grafenrich in ones and twos, slowly making their ways to the keep. The plan was for them to all be inside the bailey before the hanging.

Once inside the basement, Beaumont and the dwarves quickly tied up, interrogated then gagged the servants, learning that the Baron was at the hanging. Kel set up in an upstairs bedroom with a view of the gallows over the bailey wall, and the dwarves set up to support a retreat.

Quintis scouted the bailey, assisted by his various magics. He discovered errant warp eddies in the courtyard, but was uncertain what they represented. He also learned that there were a dozen ogres already on duty in town, and that the guards along the parapets had some hidden surprise in store. As the time for the hanging neared, Anders and Floy positioned themselves at the front of the crowd, only a few steps from the gallows. Quintis used Skywalk to make his way to the roof of the keep where he had a clear view of the gallows.

The last minute plan was that Quintis would cast Pall of Darkness on the gallows, and using his new goggles, Anders would rush in and free Konrad, risking whatever the guards might throw at him. Floy was to hold off anyone storming the gallows. They would then flee the bailey, Konrad in tow, Kel, Beaumont, Quintis and the dwarves defending their retreat through streets, then through the sewers.

As it turned out, that plan had already been sent off-course at midnight the previous morning – when the Bailiff hanged Konrad.

Only since the crime spree that culminated in the attack on Capitan un Ojo had the Bailiff of Salzenmund, Jäger Volmann, gained a true appreciation for the threat offered by this hereto-fore insignificant band of robbers. Only when the peasants started calling them The Scarecrows, did Volmann begin to see the potential for a general uprising. Only when word came to him through his network of agents and informers had he learned the identity of at least one of the band – a returned soldier, the third son of the once Baron of Grafenrich, Anders von Brenner.

Volmann, who had earned every dark word of his reputation for ruthless cunning, laid a trap that even should his prey escape, would cost them dearly. He had promised that Konrad would hang as a traitor, and so he hung him early, to be certain there was no chance he might be freed, and so that the people would learn it was more dangerous to aid the bandits than to obey the authorities. Being a cautious man, and one who prefers working from a position of strength, the Bailiff armed his trap with cannon – and a quartet of the Prince's Ghost Armor golems.

As the publically announced time for the hanging arrived, Griswold von Faust, the current Baron of Grafenrich, who by tradition presides over all capitol punishments, gave the signal to proceed. The theater curtain, that to this point had surrounded the gallows, was pulled down, revealing Konrad's body and his death-blackened face. At this sign the ogre guards at each gate slammed them shut and barred them, and the Estalians on the parapets pulled the canvas covers from their cannon – which were aimed down into the courtyard.

In a booming voice the Bailiff called out for Anders von Brenner to surrender himself to justice. The Bailiff challenged him, saying that if he truly was a man of the people as he would have them believe, he should give up peacefully so that those very people would not come to harm. The tableau held for several heartbeats, until Kel's first arrow severed the rope holding up Konrad's body. As the corpse hit the ground, all hell broke loose.

First, Quintis, deciding that the rescue had now become an escape, cast his Pall not on the gallows but on the Bailiff and his retainers, effectively interrupting any orders. Second, Floy yelled some Estalian curse and charged the gallows. Next, massive armored fists, leaking foul green sparks, punched up through the ground as the golems began to pull themselves from their blinds buried beneath the very courtyard. Then, with a cry one-part grief, one part frustration and one part fury, Anders drew his sword and charged Un Ojo, who had been standing guard with his men beneath the gallows, Biestmördor in hand.

Meanwhile, the slamming gates told Beaumont that something had gone wrong, so he and his dwarven shocktroopers charged into the street and towards the nearest gate to the bailey.

How are Anders, Floy and the Unmerry men going to escape the bailey?

What kind of devastation are the cannon and the golems going to visit on the townsfolk?

What can Beaumont, Kel and the dwarves possibly do to help while locked outside the keep?

And what the hell is Floy up to?

Session 29

Day 86 (CD 135) (continued)

HINDSIGHT

Narrator: Sweat drips from the brow of the bear-like man. His padded tunic is soaked and the heavy blade he swings cuts the air with a sharp hiss. His sparring partner is driven back and back, and with a laugh of triumph the bigger man drives him to the floor. A predatory gleam escapes his eye then fades as he offers his hand, pulling the smaller man to his feet.

The sound of heavy boots and the metallic clatter of armor draw his attention to the swarthy soldier stalking across the practice yard...

Foreign: Volmann, we must talk?

Rasping: Lord Bailiff.

Foreign: Que?

Rasping: Lord Bailiff. My title. It's Lord Bailiff. You are only a captain, you are an

employee, and a foreigner. And you are apparently stupid. You are to address me as Lord Bailiff. I will not remind you again.

Foreign: [angry and barely subdued] Grrr... Sí...Lord Bailiff.

Rasping: Why do you interrupt my practice?

Foreign: Why is de traitor to be hung esta noche? He is bait for de trap?

Rasping: Hanged.

Foreign: Que?

Rasping: When referring to a person, the word is hanged.

Foreign: [confused] Hunged?

Rasping: [shaking his head] Nevermind...

Yes. He is bait. But his usefulness as a lure has been served. His value as a symbol has yet to be realized. And it could either go for us, or against us.

Foreign: ...No comprendo?

Rasping: I shall explain. Using small words.

Alive, the watchman may be rescued. This will make him a symbol of the power and threat posed by these...Scarecrow bandits. Dead, his is a symbol of our authority...the promise of retribution for those who oppose us. He has been bait, now he will be proof.

Foreign: It is imposible! Dere is no way dat de bastards will be able to rescues him from da keeps. Mi hombres will close de trap an...

Rasping: You seem to forget...Capitan...that these...bastards all but ended your life below the very walls you say your men will be defending. And were they not defending them then?

Foreign: You no can speak...!

Rasping: Oh. I can, and I am. The Prince has given be full authority to resolve the situation. Perhaps he is finally getting as tired of your incompetence as I. Either way, I am through with your meddling. I will bring these bandits to ground, and I will see them hanged.

As weapons were drawn and voices raised in anger, confused and scattered fighting broke out everywhere. The townspeople quickly panicked and ran for the gates. The Unmerry and Wild Men formed up to defend them from the ogres and the terrifying automatons clawing their way out of the ground. The mercenaries along the battlement nervously looked to the

tower for orders to fire.

Separated from each other, and by the walls of the keep, the Crows each ended up fighting alone.

Quintis continued to cast spells from the roof of the keep itself. He dropped the suspicious looking man attending the Baron, and when his Pall faded, he attacked the Bailiff, all but killing him. When the Baron brought out Claudia, apparently as leverage over Anders, an invisible Quintis Skywalked up to the tower and ruthlessly shoved the Baron over the parapet. Even when the Baron caught himself on the crenellations Quintis, giving no quarter, stomped on his hands and sent him tumbling to the ground below. He then put the frightened merc holding Claudia to sleep and shoved him over the edge, following up that brutal act by kicking the Baron's unconscious attendant off the tower as well.

Anders and Un Ojo fought as if they were the only two people in the battle, hacking at each other, vainly trying to get past each other's defenses and armor. Even with the help of his bodyguards the Capitan was unable to hold off the angry Nordlander. Anders, pulling Beistmordor from the body of a villager and using its bayoneted length as a spear, started to get the best of the Estalian. He eventually drove the mercenary back into one of the pits that had hidden one of the Ghost Armor constructs. He was about to jump into the pit to finish off the Estalian once and for all when three angry ogres came to the foreigner's defense, driving Ander's away.

Floy, still dressed as a mercenary, stood up on the gallows, apparently shouting a string of Estalian curses at, and firing his pistol into, Konrad's body. Then, seemingly convincing any onlookers of his loyalty, he ran past the ogre guards and into the base of the tower occupied by the Baron. Some moments later he emerged from the tower behind the Bailiff and his cannoneers brandishing a brace of pistols. Though Quintis had already dropped the Bailiff, Floy lifted his unconscious form and, threatening it with a pistol, called for the mercenaries to drop their weapons. Unfortunately, he found himself in an Estalian standoff with the Baron, who was at the same time threatening Claudia. As the cannoneer's seemed ready to jump him, Floy aimed one of his pistols at their kegs of powder, threatening to blow everyone into the sky. This effectively stayed their attack – but only for the moment. Though no one saw what happened next, a huge explosion rocked the top of the tower, hiding everything in fire and roiling smoke. When it cleared, the top of the tower was a blackened wreck on the verge of collapse, and the Bailiff, his men – and Floy – were nowhere to be seen.

Beaumont spent most of the battle trying to get himself and his dwarven troopers through the gates. They hacked and hewed, and Beaumont even tried to figure out how to pull them down. In the end, the villagers, swarming the gates from the inside, tore down the bar and flooded out – followed by ghost armor. Balked again by the terrifying monsters, Beaumont had a new, and more dangerous gate to pass. Eventually he attempted to charge through on horseback, and though he was unhorsed among the dwarven ghost armor fray, he managed to tumble his way into the baily – finally.

Kel dropped from his sniper's perch and ran back and forth beyond the wall, picking off mercenaries from the parapets. When the gates came down, he covered Beaumont's assault with arrow after arrow – though they seemed to have little effect on the constructs.

The Crow's men fought a delaying action, even capturing and firing off one of the Bailiff's

cannons. The ogres seemed uncertain about their role, beyond defending the gate. The ghost armor seemed to be operating under orders only to defend themselves – not attack. They seemed more intent on herding the villagers than killing them. If the ogres, or the constructs, or worse yet both forces, had made concerted attacks against the townspeople, the toll in blood would certainly have been much higher.

Almost as if they had planned it Beaumont, Anders and Quintis all converged through the remnants of the battle as Kel called the retreat and led the Crow's forces to regroup. Beaumont charged through the inner gate into the keep proper as Quintis came down the damaged tower. Anders, retreating from the ogres, followed his cousin through the gate. They were chasing the Baron of Grafenrich – chasing Beaumont's father.

Session 30

Day 86 (CD 135) (continued)

Beaumont caught sight of his father, the Baron, limping through one of the keep's main doors. Unfortunately, the doors were guarded by ogres, and as they advanced Beaumont turned and ran back out into the baily. There he met Anders and Quintis, the latter having left Claudia inside and magically assumed the guise of the good Baron von Faust himself. The faux Baron ordered the ogres and mercenaries remaining in the baily to bring him the head of Un Ojo, who still lay in the bottom of his accidental grave. The three Crows then turned and reentered the main courtyard of the keep, where they were immediately attacked by a single golem that had been stationed there in case of just such an eventuality.

The trio put up a valiant fight, with Anders doing his very best to destroy the Chaos monster. They battled it in the courtyard, then within the base of the newly ruined tower, then up the stairs and out onto the battlements. There, though battered, greatly weakened and blowing green sparks in all directions, it managed to knock Anders off the wall to the muddy ground below. Anders had succeeded however, in buying enough time for Beaumont and Quintis to get Claudia and themselves down the wall with Quintis' ever-present rope. Anders then made his retreat through the ruins of the main gate, leaving the frustrated golem tearing at the crenellations.

In the meantime, Kel, shepherding the retreating Scarecrows, did his best to get them out of the village and cover their withdrawal. His efforts saved many lives, bringing home wounded who might otherwise have been lost.

It took all the rest of this day, and most of the next, for the various Crows and their charges to make it back through the woods and to the new hideout in the Devil's Eye sinkhole, east of the Salzwood.

Day 87 (CD 136)

As they stumbled back to their new hideout, wounded, frightened and in most measureable ways defeated, the Scarecrows crawled underground, bandaged their injuries and took stock. They had lost even more good men, and those who remained were scared and discouraged – four of the original Brotherhood, sixteen Unmerry Men, four dwarves, three wildmen, Gus, Brother Tomas, Claudia and three watchmen from the village, who were now likely wanted for helping the Crows. Beaumont tried another speech to raise spirits, and though his silver tongue did not fail him, there was a hollowness and a brittle desperation to

the enthusiasm of the response.

Session 31

Day 88 - 91 (CD 137 - 140)

The Scarecrows lingered in their cave, resting, ministering to their wounded and debating the future. What next?

- Bring down the Baron
- Investigate the shadow wraiths
- Investigate and interfere with whatever is going on in the old mine
- Find Floy, or confirm that he is dead
- Free Kel from his witch's curse
- Recruit La Pistolera
- Travel to the Laurelorn Forest and seek allies among the elves
- Seek a means to destroy or neutralize the ghost armor
- Secret Claudia away somewhere safe
- Hire mercenary troops or turn those already in the Nordlands

On the second morning, Kel woke up with wet boots and breeches that were covered in bog mud and bits of swamp weed. What concerned him was that he had no recollection of how he'd gotten wet, and that he was missing another lock of hair.

After three days of resting, arguing and anxious what-ifs, the Crows decided to start by solving some of the most obvious problems - starting with the question of what to do with Ms. Claudia.

Day 92 (CD 141)

After a night of arguing and crying Claudia became resigned to the fact that Anders and crew intended to abandon her in the village of Frote. He tried to convince her it was for her own safety. She simply wanted some small gesture from Anders that he cared and some assurance he would not leave her unprotected. Neither was forthcoming.

In the early morning the Crows, Claudia, and a couple of Unmerry Men, set out for Frote. In a surreal repetition of a previous encounter, the party chose to spend the night in the same burned out inn where they had battled the mother spider and her brood. This time however, it was the much grown remnants of the brood. The creatures were terrifying and vicious, but the party actually had little trouble with the monsters.

Day 93 (CD 142)

The next afternoon the party rode into Frote, much to the apprehension of the few villagers trying to rebuild the town. It took little time to find Alexi and his grandfather. A few minutes later Big Jan, followed by the no longer so little pig Little Jan, came lumbering up all drooling smiles and dirty hugs. He was happy to see the Crows, and particularly taken with Claudia.

After an afternoon of helping with various rebuilding projects and an evening's meager feast, Anders and Claudia got into it again, and she became furious and distraught.

Day 94 (CD 143)

The next morning, Claudia was still not speaking to Anders as the party prepared to leave. They lingered just long enough for Quintis to gift a bag of coins to the old man and for Anders to make one last appeal – aided by a cheap piece of jewelry from Quintis' stash. This time he seemed to reach the hopeless girl, but did not make her any happier. As the party rode away, she came running after and waving, begging Anders to return soon.

The Scarecrows bravely spent the night in the same ruined inn again, under the logical assumption that if they'd cleaned it out the day before it was unlikely that any other creatures and taken up residence so soon. They were correct – this time.

Day 95 (CD 144)

In their continued effort to address the obvious things first, the Crows detoured to the Witch's Bog on their way back to the Devil's Eye, in hopes of learning something about the magical pall that Quintis could still see lingering around Kel. They arrived at the margins of the bog by late afternoon, and by evening would have been totally lost if not for the navigational skills of a certain elf. The spidery walking hut appeared to have returned to the same soggy hummock, and as the party approached, several things started happening at once.

The muddy ground at the bases of the spikes holding the skaven skulls began to crack and move.

Wakes forming under the surrounding swamp water moved towards the shore and the party.

Quintis started casting spells and quickly moved into the hut.

Skaven skeletons crawled from the earth beneath the skulls, donning their lost heads as they stood, rusty weapons at the ready.

And Kel, apparently overcome by the will of the witch, loosed a pair of arrows into Beaumont's back.

Though the fighters were beset by eight undead skaven and a turncoat elf, they made short work of the battle, while inside the wizard murdered the witch as she sat entranced in her spells. As the hut rose and staggered away uncontrolled on its spidery legs, Quintis fled the structure and joined the fray outside.

Unfortunately, in the heat of the battle, his concentration failed and the forces of Chaos welled up inside him, bursting out of his control. Before the stunned eyes of the party, the wizard underwent a horrible transformation. In a single, terrible instant, the human was gone and something demonic crouched in his place.

Session 32

Day 95 (CD 144) (continued)

Where Quintis's had just stood squatted a fetid, surperrating creature of Chaos – a hulking

demon with a pestilent stench, oozing sores and infected flesh – wielding a massive sword dripping with the liquid essence of disease. Though the monster was clearly a spawn of the Ruinous Powers, it was also still mind-shatteringly identifiable as Quintis – it was clear the wizard had been possessed.

Uncertain what to do, the Scarecrows scattered, but not without suffering infectious blows from the creature's plague sword and the splatter of putrid effluent ejected from the rotting orifices of its face. Though arrows from the elf, Anders, and even a bola from Beaumont, eventually brought the demon down, they were unable to banish it before it managed to infect Gerard of the Unmerry Men with plague. As the demon was drawn back to the realm of Chaos, it left Quintis' body lying unconscious in the mud, mostly dead, but for the luck of Ranald.

The Crows made a hasty retreat from the bog, but fearful of spreading plague to the rest of their men, they decided to make camp in the woods and wait out Gerard's sickness.

Day 96-98 (CD 145-147) (continued)

For two days they argued about what was the safest, wisest and most humane way to deal with the sick man. Some believed that ending his suffering was the greater kindness. Others believed that he might fight off the malady or that the gods might save him. Brother Tomas, the dying man's strongest advocate stood guard over him so that no one could "relieve the boy of his suffering." Try as he might, despite his impassioned efforts and fervent prayers, Brother Tomas was unable to save Gerard, and by the morning of the third day he was dead.

The friar burned the body and the tents in place then, disillusioned by the heartlessness of the Scarecrows' leaders, trailed a sullen procession back to the cave.

Word of the terrifying and demonic ordeal, and the horrible death of Gerard, spread quickly through the encampment, and immediately Quintis became the target of fearful stares and holy signs as everyone kept their distance.

Partly to get Quintis out of camp, and partly because the Scarecrows were seeking direction, Quintis and Beaumont left for Salzenmund to speak with Herr Kurzman. Kel and Anders stayed behind in hopes of rebuilding the Unmerry Men's morale.

Anders and Kel did their best to distract the men from their woes, worries and fears by breaking out the Estalian wine and passing it around to the last bottle. Well and truly drunk, the men's spirit's rose, at least for the night, with some of them even growing bold enough to question Lord Anders about why "you bein' a lord and all do ya' choose to live in a hole in the ground and risk yer life fer nothin'?" While Anders struggled to make them understand, no one noticed as Brother Tomas, a bag over his shoulder, quietly left the cave in the early afternoon and did not return.

Quintis and Beaumont made their way to the city, but first tracked down Goswin in the refugee camp. He was overjoyed to see them, and desperate to be away from the crime, violence and filth pervading the camp. Much to the boy's frustration, Beaumont said Goswin could join them only when they were ready to leave the city. The boy actually cried!

Entering the city, the pair soon learned that Herr Kurzman and Pauwel were away – or at

least not receiving visitors. Quintis then went to the market to purchase new spell ingredients and Beaumont acquired a room at one of the city's finer inns – The Green Dragon.

While in the well-appointed taproom, and passing himself off as a prosperous importer, Beaumont entered into a rambling conversation with a pair of merchants – one from Beeckerhoven and the other from down river at Neues Emskrank. He worked them for information about recent events in Grafenrich and what they knew about the current status of the town and the nominal Baron. He discovered that there were lots of rumors and a few refugees coming out of the town, that the baron had not been seen since and that a company of ogres was sent to garrisoning the village. They also said the locals have started calling the incident the “The Gallows Rebellion.”

As the conversation went on, one of the merchants took the opportunity to introduce Beaumont to a fellow businessman who turned out to be none other than The Turk, the one-time associate of Beaumont's who appeared to have betrayed the party to the mercenaries when they first returned to Salzenmund.

As the Turk came over to join Beaumont, Quintis came into the tap room. He and Beaumont quickly slunk away to the privy before the Turk could recognize them. Acting decisively, Quintis cast Bewilder on the fat double-dealer from behind the bathroom door. By simple luck, the spell caused him to wander randomly down the hall towards them, allowing Beaumont to pull him into the privy where Quintis put him to sleep. Without consideration or hesitation, Beaumont simply cut his throat where he lay on the floor. The two Crows then fled out the back, grabbed their horse and cart, and headed towards the southern gate.

Session 33

Day 98 (CD 147) (continued)

The boys headed out of the Old Quarter on their way out of the city, hoping they would not be stopped – Quintis posing as his old woman and Beaumont as her merchant son. As they arrived at the inner gate, they were stopped by Estalian mercs. As it was pretty clear they did not live in the quarter, the mercs were looking to shake them down for a “night tax” for opening the gate after hours. Instead of giving in and just paying, Quintis did an excellent job of bluffing that he was extremely drunk and twice as horny. He made a hilarious play for the sergeant, lifting his dress and begging for a kiss.

Just as the mercs were about to wave the pair through in disgust, a squad of ten well-armed and well-armored warriors in Gausser livery marched up from the direction of Salzenmund Keep and demanded that the gate be opened. With only halfhearted and half-muttered resistance the four mercs begrudgingly obliged. The boys drove through and the soldiers followed.

A few blocks further on, Beaumont and Quintis' route took them south as Gausser's men continued east. Rather than continue their flight from the city Beaumont convinced Quintis they should follow and see where the soldiers where going, as it was clear there was no love lost between them and the Bailiff's mercenaries. They ditched the horse and cart and followed the soldiers to the Plaza of the Broken Champion – an open city green surrounding the shattered but holy remains of an ancient statue of Ulric. Here they were stopped by pickets and discovered that the division of Gausser's Greatswords the Grand Baron had left

behind as a palace guard was apparently encamped on the green – 50 men strong.

When no real answers were forthcoming from the suspicious guards, and arrest seemed imminent, the boys retreated. Upon discovering that someone had stolen their horse and one of their cart's wheels, Beaumont and Quintis decided to spend the night at the Cockrel. At the familiar inn they learned from Walther the innkeeper that the Greatswords had apparently had some kind of falling out with the Prince who had subsequently ordered them from the Keep. It had been about two weeks since the Greatswords had been cast out, but they seem unwilling to abandon the city altogether. Walther was clear on the point that none of these shenanigans are good for business and the city's residents are wary.

Day 99 (CD 148)

In the morning Beaumont and Quintis left the city and passed through the refugee camp to collect Goswin the Younger, Beaumont's now extremely unwilling and very amateur agent. He was still fuming and convinced of Beaumont's betrayal. The trio headed south, on foot, Beaumont laying on his thickest honey as he tried to win back the boy's confidence.

After a long, literally blistering walk back to the hideout, the Crows spent the rest of that day and most of the night trying to decide what to do – not so much planning, but actually deciding what the next goal should be. Several options were considered, and discarded, and they even had the Unmerry Men pack up, then unpack, then pack up again. In the end they decided they were going to scout the Silver Hills fortress and see if they could perhaps take it out, or at least harass those that held it. The suggestion was also made that they might perhaps use it as some sort of stepping stone to assaulting the mine. However unlikely that may seem.

Day 100 (CD 149)

As they finally left the cave and marched out to the Salzenmund road, Brother Tomas came running up from the direction of the sinkhole, panting hard and half-dead from what, for him, was exceptional exertion. Between his heaving breaths he managed to get out his story. Fed up with the callus behavior of the Crows, he had gone to Salzemund to seek solace in serving the refugees in the camp as he was sometime wont to do. While at the makeshift tent-temple there he discovered that the priestesses of Shallya were tending to a recuperating Estalian with a fragmentary memory but a strong faith in Sigmar. They also said he had been brought to them by none other than "La Pistolera" herself. Intrigued, Tomas went to look in on the sleeping man and was stunned to see it was Floy!

Fearing some trick of Chaos, or even a nefarious plan by the Bailiff, the monk left the man undisturbed and made haste back to the hideout. He figured the Crows would know what to do.

Session 34

Day 100 (CD 149) (continued) (sans Joel, but with the return of Bill)

MI AMOR

"No es bueno. Here is another. So many dead. Oi, help me throw him on the cart. Yes, grab his fe...carumba... this one is still alive! De dios, he must hurt. You two there! Take this man

to the boat and give him to the Sisters. Esta terrible – those wounds. He will not even survive the journey down river.”

Oi. You there! Who is this man? What unit is he with? No? Do any of the sergeants recognize him? How strange. Let me know when he regains consciousness.

“Pistolera. Mi amor. I am...sorry. Can I be...? Am I...dead? Has Morr finally...yo estoy...”

“Quiet my son. You are badly hurt. There is no one by that name here. Be still and let the healers work. And say no more of her – it will only get you in trouble with your Capitan.”

“Yes High Priestess. He survived another night. Yes High Priestess, I have prayed for him. Yes High Priestess, I will administer the Tears. But...High Priestess...the Tears...for a...for one of them? The mercenaries...Of course High Priestess. I did not know High Priestess. For her, certainly High Priestess. Shallya’s will be done and her healing grace be given.”

“Hush. Be still. You will open your wounds. Yes, yes my son. She was here, as she has been every night since bringing you to this place. Yes, she watches over you while you sleep. I do not know what you have done to earn her favor, but it must have been something extraordinary. She is more like to shoot than minister to your kind.”

“You do, do you? Mi amor you say? Well, I bet you say that to all the girls who save you from the noose. [giggle] I bet you say that too. [giggle] Mmm. And do you kiss them all like that as well? Mmm. I would hope not...”

The Crows decided to send the Unmerry Men to a rendezvous point along the southern shore of the Silver River, where they would rejoin them after retrieving Floy. The Crows were worried about the men’s courage failing them, so Anders went along to provide some leadership and backbone.

The rest of the Crows rode off to Salzenmund. As they neared the city they decided to ditch their horses so as to make their arrival less obvious. Spying a flock of sheep they hunted around until they tracked down Little Eric, the shepherd boy Floy and Kel had encountered some weeks ago on a previous visit to the capital. He certainly remembered the elf and was happy to meet more of the Crows, especially when they offered him coin to watch their horses.

Quintis, Beaumont and Kel entered the refugee camp well aware of the desperate eyes

watching them from the surrounding squalor – some with avarice and cunning, most with hunger and fear. Guided by Brother Tomas they quickly found the large tent that serves as the camp's temple to Sigmar.

As they approached, shouted curses from inside preceded a mostly naked Estalian rolling out from under one canvas side of the tent. There was a scabby Floy, wielding a wooden stool and wearing nothing but his small clothes. Several angry refugee thugs began pouring out from under the tent flaps and stalked towards him. The party drew their weapons as Tomas started shouting for everyone to calm down and listen.

The Crows closed in as Floy exchanged some ineffective blows with a pair of thugs. Between Tomas' shouting and the sudden appearance of the heavily armed Crows, the anger quickly went out of the thugs, but a growing mob began to gather as onlookers took interest in the goings-on. As Quintis voiced his concern that someone better do something before things got bloody, Beaumont called for the mob's attention and began orating. He told the tale of the brave and selfless Scarecrows and how they were fighting for the people. And, despite Floy's Estalian heritage, Beaumont managed to convince the mob that Floy was a Crow. As the speech continued and the mob grew, so did the fear that the Crows would be found out, especially when the crowd started chanting "Scarecrows!" Scarecrows! So, as Beaumont kept their attention, the others dragged a still-confused Floy away through the camp.

When they were clear, Beaumont finished his speech and followed through the crowd. As it parted ahead of them, people slapping him on the back and shouting their support, he came face-to-face with a woman in a leather mask – La Pistolera. Treating them both with deference, the crowd parted readily as they ran after the Floy and the others.

As they rendezvoused at the edge of camp, Floy's eyes lit up and his face split in a love-struck grin as La Pistolera appeared. As she bounded forward towards them, Floy raised his arms to embrace her, but stood crestfallen and confused as she instead lunged at Quintis, wrapped her own arms around his neck and began sobbing. She just kept saying "you're alive, you're alive!" At Quintis' confusion she pulled off her mask revealing herself as Maridan, his long lost sister! Both were obviously dumbfounded and emotional at finding the other alive and in such unlikely circumstances.

The group retreated to the tent of an old Kislevite woman Maridan seemed to know where they caught up on what had happened and how they had all found themselves in this moment. The boys told their tale, each filling in details, describing all that had befallen them since going off two war two years ago. Maridan sat between Quintis and Floy, holding a hand of each and giving them both looks of love and affection. Quintis was clearly not yet sure how to deal with these new circumstances, and poor, love-struck Floy seemed at the same time giddy and embarrassed.

Then Maridan told her unlikely tale. As the party knew, she had fled the sacking of Frote and come to the refugee camp. As Quintis had also discovered, she had been taken to the Salzenmund Keep to work as a domestic servant. She eventually began sneaking food and other supplies back to the camp. After being assaulted one night and barely getting away, she took to carrying an antique pistol she had found in an old storage room. Though unloaded, it served as a remarkably effective deterrent in her clandestine activities. As time went on, her escapades became bolder, the stories about her grew, and the price on her head when up. Though she has not yet actually had to shoot anyone, she currently carries

several very loaded pistols.

Since Floy's own recollections of the past couple weeks are a little muddled, Maridan also filled the party in on what she had pieced together about how he had ended up in the refugee camp.

After the Gallows Rebellion and the associated explosion, there were so many dead and wounded that the mercenaries took the expedient of loading them on river barges and floating them down to Salzenmund. Being Estalian, and wearing a mercenary uniform, Floy was simply loaded up with the rest. Still unconscious and badly hurt, he was taken to the Temple of Shallya to be cared for by the healing nuns.

Though he eventually regained consciousness he remained mostly incoherent, and in his delirium he often called out for La Pistolera. Having allies among the nuns, Maridan soon learned of this, and as "Mary the helpful servant girl" she came to the temple to see Floy for herself. Perhaps it was the delayed effects of his prior efforts to court her. Perhaps it was the act of nursing the helpless boy back to health, or perhaps it was simply destiny, but after only a few visits, she was as smitten as he and the two were in love.

Unfortunately, as he healed, it became clear than none of the Estalian sergeants knew who he was. Maridan therefore thought it would be safer if he were to finish his recuperation elsewhere, so she arranged to have him spirited away to the refugee camp before someone remembered there was supposed to be an Estalian among the bandits plaguing the region.

Their stories finished and time pressing, the Crows were surprised to hear Maridan say she was not going with them – that she had to stay here to keep helping the refugees. She tried to get them to stay and do the same, but it was clear that each – La Pistolera and the Crows – had their own flocks to tend. They parted with hugs for Quintis and kisses for Floy and instructions to leave word at the camp temple of they needed to contact her. Then she was gone.

The party snuck out of camp and went to retrieve their horses. When they found Little Eric it was clear that in the interim he had decided that he was going to abandon the hardscrabble life of a shepherd for the adventurous one of a Scarecrow. He was broken-hearted when Quintis and Beaumont turned him down, but brightened somewhat when they offered to pay him to be a "spy," keeping track of the comings and goings around Salzenmund.

After a couple hours of riding, as they approached the sinkhole, the smell of smoke on the night air caught the party's attention. Scouting ahead, Kel found the bloody corpse of a child and spied a large fire through the trees. As they party made a stealthy approach, they discovered a band of beastmen feeding a growing bonfire around the base of a large tree. From high within the tree they could hear cries of fear and pain, and those with sharper eyes could see movement.

The Crows ambushed the beastmen and had killed half of them from range before the Chaos creatures even realized they were under attack. They made short work of the rest, and after scattering the fire, discovered seven children clinging to the very top of the tree. After coaxing the terrified kids down, they discovered that they were all orphans from the workhouse in Grafenrich – some war orphans, other's newly orphaned during the Gallows

Rebellion. They ranged in age from 6 to 12 and had made a pact to “join up with the Scarecrows and fight the Prince!” They had left Grafenrich three days ago following rumors and the road. They were filthy, starving and exhausted. The Crows coyly told them that “yes, they knew the Scarecrows” and would take the children to them.

By the time they got the children and themselves to the sinkhole most of the kids were dead on their feet. By the time they had laid them out on a pile of blankets every one was fast asleep.

Session 35

Day 101 (CD 150) (sans Joel)

The Crows were woken early by the hungry bellies and insistent questions of the Orphans. “Is there anything to eat?” “Where can I pee?” “When are we going to join up with the Scarecrows?”

Floy let slip that they were indeed the Crows and that the Orphans need look no further. The children looked at the dirty and haggard soldiers with incredulity and denial. “You ain’t them – they’s ten feet tall!” “Yeah, they gots the faces of devils!” “One o’them breathes fire and one has the fangs of a lion!” To say the least, the children were a little disappointed by the harsh reality. In fact, Red Richard rallied the Orphans to strike out on their own again, but Beaumont managed to reassure them that they party were indeed the Crows. Besides he pointed out – “Where else would you go?”

After some debate, the decision was made to take the children along – at least for the time being. One – Berwie – even claimed to have an uncle among the Unmerry men, so it seemed like uniting them was a good idea.

As the party passed the Silver Hart – the coaching inn at the crossroads of the Forest and Erengard-Middenheim roads – they happened upon a mercenary patrol that was just leaving. At first casually passing on, they returned after the soldiers moved on north, to see what they could learn from those at the inn.

They entered and Quintis purchased stew and bread for the Orphans. If their standing as the Crows had been disappointing, this veritable feast went a long way towards making them heroes again in the hungry children’s hearts – “There’s meat in it! Real meat!”

Beaumont pumped the innkeeper for news on Grafenrich and what the patrol had been looking for. At first the man was a bit of a braggart, as if he had personal insight that it would only be a matter of a short time before these bandits – these Scarecrows – were captured, and that this was a good thing. As the keep started to take stock of the details of the party’s appearance however – the elf, the Estalian, the black-bearded solider, and a possible wizard – he soon realized who he was actually talking too. Not being entirely stupid, his tune quickly changed, and he began to speak of the “heroes of the people” and the “noble freedom fighters” battling “tyranny and oppression,” all the while stuttering and unable to meet Beaumont’s eyes.

The party did learn some things of value from the innkeeper. The Baron was supposedly still alive, though staying in the Keep and moving only under heavy guard. There were ogres garrisoning the village and searching the countryside in addition to the redoubled Estalian

patrols. They also learned that a number of townsfolk had left, fearing that the deaths of the Gallows Rebellion were only a beginning. Of Capitan un Ojo, the innkeeper had no news.

The Crows and their new charges spent the rest of the afternoon and a good part of the night reaching their rendezvous with the Unmerry Men, but upon arrival discovered what, at first glance, appeared to be an abandoned camp. A cart, scattered horses, dropped weapons and equipment among matted grass and tracks leading nowhere. The strangeness of the vanished men gave the ancient ruins surrounding the camp a sinister air.

Confused, frustrated and worried, the party slept lightly and with ample guard. At the witching hour the eerie sound of a not-so-distant drum woke the few sleepers. Strange ephemeral figures seemed to appear in the drifting mists, glowing with their own wan light. Ghostly battlements, indistinct and wavering, coalesced before their eyes. As they watched, some in fear, others in wonder, all with supernatural trepidation, the Battle of Gideon's Ford was fought again, in the midnight moonlight 500 years after the original bloodshed.

In the confusion and horror of the ghost battle, Floy and Red Richard failed to resist the spectral call-to-arms and joined the ranks of spirits, becoming shade-like themselves. The rest of the Crows, running to and fro, trying to find purchase in a mad situation, spied members of the Unmerry Men – Anders among them – among the ghostly ranks as echoes of battle horns sounded across the swampy verge. As they blew, elven spirits flowed up from the river and the battle was joined. Spectral carnage ensued and the dead died again.

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, the spirits returned to the mist from which they had formed, and it was again a quiet and moon-bright summer night. Floy, Anders, Richard and the others were gone.

Day 102 (CD 151)

The remaining Crows spent the day calming the terrified orphans and debating what to do, and how they might save their men. By nightfall they had little in the way of a plan, and as midnight came again and the ghost battle resumed, they still had no clear intent.

In desperation, Kel ran into the fray, avoiding the chill touch of the undead where he could, and clutched at Anders's form. Almost as if by some elemental force of will, Kel was able to apparently pull Anders back through the barrier between the mortal world and the Realm of Morr, drawing him back into the land of the living. Moments later, the battle faded to mist for the second time.

Day 103 (CD 152)

After moving the camp half a mile upstream, and now with a plan in mind, Quintis, Beaumont and Kel readied themselves for the terrors of flailing among the spectral dead and set themselves to the surreal task of pulling ghosts back into the world. When the fearful task was done, they had returned twelve of their men to the living – Floy and Richard among them.

Day 104 (CD 153)

After a seeming incongruous day spent dozing in the summer sun, the Crows set themselves the same task that night, and rescued another ten men.

Day 105 (CD 154)

After another day recovering from their strange toils, the Crows succeeded in rescuing the rest of their men. They then fled the haunting, but not before Kel attempted to rescue one of the ancient human ghosts – much to his terror and regret. With an exceptional force of will, Kel manage to put the shade into the primal world, but only to watch it's wounded body bleed, fester, rot and turn to dust in his arms, all in the blink of an eye. The true spirits are far beyond the reach of mortal hands.

Day 106 (CD 155)

The experiences of the past several days had strange effects on everyone, each touched in his own way, though most of the men retain no clear memories of their time in the realm of ghosts.

The Crows, finally again at full strength after so many weeks, forded the Silver River on horseback and headed north to scout. They skirted the fortress and made their way to the cave entrance that led into the Skaven tunnels through which they had originally entered the fort, seemingly so long ago. There they discovered the passage to the fortress intentionally blocked, and that the tunnel once guarded by the rotting monstrosity, still chained within the cavern, lead to other entrances hidden in the countryside.

Session 36

Day 107 (CD 156)

The Scarecrows spent the rest of the morning debating what to do next, ultimately deciding to investigate the ruins atop the nearby hill where Kel sighted some of the shadowy wraiths seemingly so long ago. They discovered the hill, the largest in the area, was crowned with a ring of ancient stone spires, the upper slopes devoid of any vegetation – as if even the hardiest of living things could not tolerate the aura of the place.

Set in the crest of the hill, among the spires, was a seemingly bottomless well – a dark pit ten feet across and lined with carved stonework akin to that of the spires – any runes or images long worn away by time and the elements. Some members of the party could hear faint noises from within, as if from a great depth. The sound of rock on rock? Kel's uncanny sense of direction also suggested that the hilltop stood above the old mine they had scouted months ago.

As they scouted, someone spied a distant dust trail in the direction of the fort. The Crows realized they had been seen and that a patrol had been dispatched to hunt them. They mounted their horses and huddled together in the ravine under one of Quintis' illusions – an image of scrub, rocks and dirt. The trick worked and as the patrol first passed up the hill and then down and away they saw nothing. The fact that the party was able to restrain its habit of ambushing patrols boded well for the success of future subterfuges.

That night the Crows returned to the well, this time with ropes. Against the contrast of darkness they could see a diffuse greenish glow apparently at the bottom of the well. Securing the line around a broken spire Beaumont felt some eldritch power flow into him as he touched the old stone, but was able to shake off the sensation. Like bait on a hook, the other Crows lowered Quintis down the hole.

The rope was not long enough to reach the bottom lip of the well, but he got close enough to

see that the hole actually opened into a vast cavern – the walls of which he could not see from where he hung. Directly below him however, was the crumbling ruin of some sort of building – a kind of tower or temple – around the base of which stood large clusters of glowing green crystals. Could it really be such vast deposit of warpstone? Quintis could also see shackled workmen watched by mercenary guards as they labored below, clearing away rubble and using it to repair the building.

After hauling Quintis back to the surface the party hurried off into the dark to a dirt camp in the hills and an uneasy rest.

Session 37

Day 108-109 (CD 157-158)

A hard two day cross country ride brought the Scarecrows to the Salzenmund Trader's District, and more specifically, the notorious hive of scum and villainy known as the Maze. From here Floy headed over the bridge and into the Merchant's Quarter hoping to buy new weapons and to find Maridan. The rest of the Crows chose to enter a dive of an unnamed tavern in hopes of hearing some gossip.

They learned that the Baron of Grafenrich was alive and heavily guarded, that Capitan un Ojo was alive, if not entirely well, and on the rampage, and that the unrest that had followed in the wake of the Gallows Rebellion seemed, mayhaps, to be spreading to Salzenmund. After having their fill of news and piss-like beer, they were confronted by local thugs who took issue with the presence of an elf. Violence ensued and soon there was no more issue.

When the group subsequently retired to an equally questionable inn – but one with stout and bar-able doors – Quintis faded into the shadows and headed to Kurzman's manor house across the river. There he was patiently received by Pauwel, who, not wishing to wake the Master, gave him food and a room for the night.

Day 110 (CD 159)

The following morning he was received by Kurzman where he updated his mysterious benefactor on the recent exploits of the Crows. He also learned that Kurzman had been away in Middenhiem researching a means to neutralize the Chaos automatons. Among some less likely options he told Quintis of a potent artifact – The Horn of Silence – which, reliable documents claim, could dispel the Winds of Magic. The rub is that Kurzman, for reasons he did not disclose, is unwelcome in Middenhiem's Grand Temple of the Eternal Flame, where supposedly the location of the Horn might be researched. He suggested that Quintis seek out a Sir Gordon and a man he called only The Librarian, offering a letter of introduction for the former. Quintis thanked him and spent the rest of the midday shopping for spell components in the Merchant's Quarter.

After a night at the Pig and Whistle Floy also spent some time shopping – looking for high quality replacements for his lost weapons. After several fruitless hours, he finally ended up striking a deal with a pushy dwarf for simple but fine, custom-made arms, which will supposedly be ready in three weeks.

As he concluded his business and headed off to meet the rest of the crew, Floy was surprised but pleased to see Maridan approaching through the crowd. However, when she

stepped up, slapped him, called him a “cheating bastard” and said she, “never wanted to see him again,” he was dumbfounded. She left him standing there with his jaw hanging open, and by the time he rallied to follow, she had disappeared in a crowded alley.

The party then rendezvoused at the Bridge and passed out of the south gate, intent on returning to the Unmerry encampment.

Session 38

As they party left Salzenmund and rode though the surrounding crop and pastureland they encountered a flock of sheep grazing across the road. As luck would have it, this was the flock tended by the precocious young shepherd boy turned “Crow spy,” Little Eric.

As the Crows wended their way through the flock a large and heavily armed patrol crested the rise ahead and the two groups gawped at each other as they slowly realized who they were facing. The patrol was heavily armed and armored, and it was clear they had specific training and orders. Outriders, crossbowman and houndsmen – dogs and riders to pin down and kill, archers to attack from distance.

The patrol was similar to one the party encountered weeks ago when they freed the original Unmerry Men from the Silver Hills fortress, and in the end it seemed to fill its specific intention. Though the patrol was ultimately defeated, with Floy riding down and slaughtering the few survivors, the battle was a close thing, and the Crows suffered serious casualties. Everyone was wounded. Quintis and Beaumont quite grievously, and Kel would have died had it not been for the luck of the elves (fate point). As it was, his horrible injuries nearly cost him his arm, and will certainly leave lasting pain and telling scars.

As they hurried to bandage themselves up and be away before anyone from the city could ride out to investigate, Quintis, with the Anders’ help, piled all of the bodies and weapons into a large symbol of Morr and their coincidental namesake – a crow. Mostly because they did not dare to waste time arguing with him the Crows also finally allowed Little Eric to “join up” and come with them. Quickly realizing his flock would slow them down too much, they slaughtered a couple and dragged a single living one along for Beaumont to abuse with his monkey.

Bleeding, exhausted, and in one case unconscious and tied onto his saddle, the party returned to the Devil’s Eye well after dark, only to discover a party of sorts going on in the cave and a dangerous lack of security. Uli and his small band had apparently recruited some of his fellow Kislevite refugees and they were celebrating. Catching the men off guard dampened some of their spirits, but not completely, and the party continued until late while a wizened old babushka tended to the wounded elf – trying to save his arm.

Day 111 (CD 160) – Aubentag, 27 Sommerzeit

After waking up with his arm around a hung over Uli, Beaumont made a speech to the men both praising their bravery and loyalty but also admonishing them for being reckless. His message was understood and the party spent the remainder of the day tending to their wounds and resting.

That night a stunningly beautiful Strigany woman, apparently one of Uli’s new recruits,

approached Beaumont – Madam Zostra. She plied him with phrases like, “you are clearly brave leader of deez men,” and “I ‘ave secret you like to see,” and, “I am beautiful woman, no?” Her violet eyes and husky accent hooked him by his nethers and he willingly followed her outside and into her gaudily decorated wagon. Here, clearly expecting a carnal reward, he was instead rewarded with carnage. With some kind of hedge magic she trapped his will in her crystal ball. Then she stood and stepped behind him, saying, “I told you I have secret to share.” Then she leaned down and whispered in his ear, “deh Prince vill give me great reward for killink you.” Then, drawing a dagger she slit his throat!

Day 112 (CD 161)

Beaumont being such a randy bastard, his cousin didn’t think to worry about him until fairly late the next morning. Going out to the wagon he discovered Beaumont a near corpse (fate point) laying in a pool of his own blood. The wagon had been stripped of valuables and one of the guards reported having seen “the Strigany woman ride off three hours ago.” Quintis and Floy gave chase but she had a long lead and then Quintis’ horse came up lame.

Questions remained. Who was she? Uli or his people could not vouch for her. She had joined up with some of them a week or two previously, as they traveled to “join up with the Crows”. Where was she headed? Salzenmund and the Prince? Had he sent her, or was she working simply for the proffered reward? Would she tell the Prince where they were? How long could they chance to stay? How had she stolen Beaumont’s will?

Anders carefully laid Beaumont next to the elf and the old babushka had two direly wounded patients to tend.

Day 113-114 (CD 162-163)

The Crows remained in the cave for two more days, resting and trying to recover their strength. Both Kel and Beaumont both gazed into the Kingdom of Morr, but in the end began to recover from their wounds. The Crows then ordered Uli to take his men to a new hideout as they themselves planned to return to the Silver Hills camp as soon as they were fit to ride.

Session 39

Day 115 (CD 164)

The morning began with Beaumont realizing that his damaged voice will likely never improve, despite him being on the mend (failed Toughness roll = -10% Fellowship + Menacing talent).

As the Crows and their men begin breaking the temporary camp Ule had reestablished in the Devil’s Eye, a shout from the entrance drew their attention. The severed head of one of the band’s guards came tumbling down the rocks and splashed into the water below the opening. As the men realized what they were looking at an Estalian voice called for the outlaws to “come out without their weapons and live.” It was Un Ojo. Lady Zostra had given away their hideout.

As one, the Unmerry men grabbed only what they could carry and made a break for the tunnel escape route, a still-wounded Kel and Beaumont leading the way. Anders and Floy

hurried the men along and took up rear-guard positions.

When the tunnels eventually opened into a larger, partially flooded cavern, the wounded Crows lead most of the men through the cave while Anders and Floy set up a defensive position. When the mercenaries first began to enter the Eye, Quintis used his magics to cloak himself in shadow. He waited until the pursuing mercenaries had entered the tunnels and followed. When the mercs reached the end of the cavern they were caught between Floy, Anders and the Unmerry archers in front of them, and a virtually invisible Quintis behind. A Quintis who apparently had a lot of hate and violence built up in his darkening soul.

Over the course of the ensuing underground skirmish, Anders, Floy and the archers accounted for a dozen mercenaries – killed or wounded. Quintis killed nine single handedly, seriously injured half a dozen more, and drove most of the rest half mad with fear of his “Chaos powers,” causing them to retreat in disarray.

As the party subsequently tried to cross and exit the caverns they discovered that there was some ravenous form of swamp eel living in the cave pools and had to half-fight, half-chum their way through the caves to safety.

Day 116-123 (CD 165-172)

Once clear of the tunnels, the party quickly fled the Witch’s Bog into which they had exited, and sought a well-hidden, safe and defensible refuge deep in the Greenwood. Kel found an exceptional campsite and the party settled in for a much-needed week of rest and healing.

Session 40

INTO THE WOOD

There’s a line from an old Nordlander nursery rhyme. “If into the Elven Wood you go, your face again you’ll never show.” Like most such singsong stories, children chant these words with ironic innocence.

There’s an old bard’s tune called “Laurelorn O’ Forlorn.” Its origin is long forgotten and the most tragic lines are rarely sung, but it’s still one of the darkest tunes ever played in the North.

Local woodsmen have their own hand-me-down wisdom. “If you go into the Laurelorn, you’re mad. If you leave the trail, you’re dead. If you’re still alive after dark, may the gods take mercy on your soul.”

There was an edict made long ago by an earlier Grand Baron of the Nordlands. It details a treaty with the wood elves of the Laurelorn, strictly limiting human settlement in the forest to east of the River Demst. This treaty is strictly enforced. By someone. Just ask the residents of Schlaghugel. If any of them are ever found again...

The elves have a saying. “Usir bahu Ahuil anii.” Roughly translated it means, “Enter the Forest and die.”

Day 124-126 (CD 173 – 175)

The bedraggled but rested party set out for the main band's Silver Hills camp. They trudged mostly cross-country to avoid patrols and curious eyes. Despite marching from sun up to sun down both days the rough terrain slowed their progress. At one point, when approaching a forest trail in the southern Green Wood, Kel's keen senses allowed them to avoid a small mercenary patrol. On the morning of the third day, the party passed the ruins at Gideon's Ford and soon after arrived at the camp, to the sound of explosions!

Day 127 – 131 (CD 176-180)

The explosions turned out to be dwarven mortars Herr Little had somehow scavenged from his days in the artillery. He was drilling the Unmerry Men in the basics, but unfortunately they were almost out of powder.

The party ultimately spent five days at camp, resting, reconnecting, organizing and planning. They used much of the silver Gus and his gang had recovered from the cache to make a large payout to the men. This raised spirits considerably and helped reestablish loyalties. Beaumont accompanied the payday with another of his patented speeches and left the men cheering despite the news that the Crows were headed off on some "secret mission" to the "foul elven forest."

Instead of leaving one man in charge of the Unmerry Men the Crows decided to go with individual strengths and form three groups with three different goals. Gus was to keep the non-combatants safe at this camp and support the others when they needed refuge. Herr Little was to lead his dwarves, and a few of the more experienced warriors in raids against the Prince and his mercenaries. Ule was to lead his band of highwaymen hunting along the...highways...in search of more coin for the cause. This arrangement seemed to at least satisfy, if not actually please, everyone.

As the party readied to depart Little Eric approached Anders and asked him to write a letter to his ma. Little Eric had been badly shaken by the recent violence in the cave and was rethinking his dreams of adventure. However, he didn't want his mother to think he'd died a coward so asked Anders to tell her he was going to do as Beaumont ordered and travel to the "haunted" elven wood, even if it meant his death. In the end Beaumont let him off the hook, telling Eric he needed to stay behind and help protect the camp. The nine year-old's relief was profound.

Day 132 – 133 (CD 181-182)

The Crows departed early in the morning, setting out on foot with a heavily loaded packhorse. They crossed the river at Gideon's Ford and spent the rest of this day and the next trudging overland to the northwest, across the dry and rugged Silver Hills. They camped the second night in the shadow of the Laurelorn Forest – all but Kel feeling an ominous presence, as if the forest itself were watching.

Day 124 – 129 (CD 183-188)

Entering the forest was like entering another world, and for all but Kel it was an ominous, threatening one. The massive and countless trees, the dim and filtered light, the dark underbrush, odd sounds and unknown animal tracks. They were all strange, all oppressive. And there was something else, like a chill breath on the back of one's neck, or a half-heard whisper in the dark – a sense of awareness, a sense that forest itself did not want them there.

The passage to the Demst was an arduous hike, sometimes following game trails, sometimes cross-county, sometimes following stranger paths that only Kel seemed able to find. And find the way he did, navigating with an almost preternatural sense of direction in the strange, arboreal surroundings.

At one point during their travels they came across the tracks of what appeared to be a beastman hunting party and at Kel's urging decided to pursue them. Tracking them for a day they had to stall the hunt when night fell. The crafty beastmen, somehow sensing they were being followed, double backed on the party and attacked while they slept. The fight was brief and bloody and it is clear that the Crows have become such deadly warriors that beastmen should now fear them.

More days of trudging, foraging as they went, brought them to the banks of the River Demst where they turned north looking for a ford. More than a day later they came to an obvious crossing and passed out of the human lands and into the heart of the Laurelorn. The far side of the ford was ominously marked by almost a dozen corpses of giant spiders spiked deliberately to tree trunks along the bank.

Early the next morning, as the party moved deeper into the wood, they came to a sun dappled, cathedral-like opening under the canopy, dominated by a single massive tree of fantastic proportions. At the base of the tree stood a lone creature that one moment took the form of a beautiful woman and the next a willowy, flowering tree.

The forest spirit seemed unafraid of the five heavily armed men and in fact approached them with what could only be interpreted as blithe disdain. In an inhuman voice that sounded more like wind blown leaves than living speech she told them that she had "decided to let them pass" for she was "amazed at their audacity" and looking forward to "seeing the fate they would suffer when the Witch Queen found them." She then simply stepped into the trunk of the massive tree and vanished.

Day 130 – 131 (CD 189- 190)

The party trekked for two more days through the dark wood, never quite shaking the feeling of being watched. Midmorning on the second day the Crows came across a swampy lowland that appeared to have formed among the ruins of an ancient white marble city. Before they'd had any time to explore the ruins the party heard the hunting calls of beastmen amidst the fallen buildings.

They waded into the swamp towards the calls, eventually finding a band of monsters assaulting a lone stone tower apparently being defended by elves who were trapped within. The Crows charged into the beastmen's flank, first raining arrows on the frenzied, unsuspecting horde, then cutting into them in bloody melee. The fight was pitched and

gruesome and punctuated by a massive fireball cast from inside the tower. The Crows came through with only minor injuries, slaughtering all but a few beastmen who broke and fled.

As the party approached the tower, Kel in the lead, a stunningly beautiful archeress stepped out from behind the battered, rusted metal door. In husky elven words she said, "thank you Brother for your assistance," then raising her bow to aim at Kel's chest she added, "what folly brings you to my forest?"

Session 41

Day 132 – 135 (CD 191- 193)

Tense moments, some hurried explanation and the fact that the Crows did just help save the elves from the beastmen lead the stunning warrior woman to lower her bow and thank the party for helping them. After Kel's explanation of their presence and some silent consideration, the woman, offered to take them to the Witch Queen if they would agree to help protect her charge in the meantime.

Her name is Eponia and she and her men were given the task of guiding and protecting a scholar from Ulthuan, an elven princess named Elenwe. She was in search of lost knowledge about the ancient lay lines through which the powers of magic flow – lore lost even to the elven masters. Elenwe's researches had lead her to believe that this swamped city might hold clues to these secrets. Unfortunately, the place is apparently taboo and by coming here Eponia and her band risk punishment.

Eponia speaks good but heavily accented Reikspeil, but most of her band have only a clumsy, broken use of the language. Accordingly, Kel and Quintis are the only Crows who can speak fluently with the elves.

As Kel soon discovered, Elenwe is a strange young elf and a potent sorceress. On the second day of their guard duty, he entered the tower they had secured – apparently also the focus of the girl's research – looking for Eponia. Instead he encountered an obliviously naked Elenwe who immediately enlisted him as a porter and lantern holder. He followed her into the flooded bowels of the tower where she proceeded to wade into the water to apparently continue her translation of the ancient bas relief carved into the inner surfaces of the tower. She worked until she began to shiver, enthusiastically blabbering on about the significance of what she was learning – oblivious to Kel's questions and potential arousal. Upon leaving the water she dried and warmed in an impressive bath of living flame – surprising and impressing Kel. After this encounter, he happily kept his distance from both the tower and the Princess.

Day 136 – 139 (CD 194- 197)

The Crows and their new elven traveling companions left the ruins and spent three long days marching through the forest. The way somehow seemed more obvious, the forest less ominous, and the animals almost friendly – due in all likelihood to the presence of the elves.

During the hike the Princess kept up an almost continual monologue about her research, speaking to no one in particular – just anyone who happened to be walking nearby. Her Reikspeil turned out to be excellent.

Kel made a few attempts to draw out Eponia – trying to learn about her and the current state of affairs in the elven lands. To his dismay at one point she referred to the Witch Queen as her mother, which could obviously prove problematic – for everyone.

On the final day of the journey, Eponia began to act strangely – hesitant and distracted – paying almost too much attention to the forest around her and less to her traveling companions. Had the party been more observant the Crows may have avoided the trap.

As the circle of dryads began to close on the party the fairy ring of brightly colored toadstools into which they had unsuspectingly trudded began to burst, mushroom by mushroom, blowing glittering spores into the air and into the Crows faces. Anders and Beaumont succumbed to the sleeping magic instantly, while Floy and Quintis tried to fight back. Ultimately, the dryads proved too many and too strong, grappling with the Crows and forcing them into the spore clouds. Kel, unaffected by the magic, was quickly grabbed and held by the tree spirits, and all the fight went out of him as he saw the kithband warriors ghost from the trees, bows at the ready. The Queen’s Guard had captured them.

Day 140 (CD 198)

Kel was marched at arrow-point into the impressive yet decaying ruins of an ancient white marble city, now overgrown by trees, vines and other plants. It might be better to describe the place not so much as overgrown but organically reinforced by the forest itself – trees growing around and holding up fragile towers, root systems strengthening foundations and vines holding together crumbling stone. A once great city standing only by a strange and enchanted botanical will.

Kel was taken into the dark, cool halls of a vast structure and given a room, food, new clothing and other amenities appropriate for a respected, albeit well-guarded, guest. He cleaned up and ate, and then sat waiting to be beckoned by his hosts.

The rest of the Crows awoke groggy and damp (and in Quintis’ case, bound) at the bottom of an ancient, well-like cellar with crumbling walls and into which tree roots and vines had invaded. Anders climbed up the strangely convenient vines and looked out through the bar-like roots that sealed them in. The cellar was in the midst of the forest city and was well-guarded. In an unlikely change of pace for the Crows, they sat quietly in their cell in hopes of currying favor by good behavior. At some point a basket of food was lowered down to them and they ate heartily.

The rest of the day and a chilly night passed for both Kel and his imprisoned friends.

Day 141 (CD 199)

The next morning Kel was escorted deep into the sprawling ruin and brought before the Evergreen Thrown. The Queen came in, more an entity than an elf, so palpable were her presence and power. Only her daughter, who would not meet Kel’s eyes, a few guards and a handful of counselors were present – a strangely barren court.

The Queen sat staring at Kel for some time, then spoke only briefly. She asked him who he was and why he dared violate high law by bringing outsiders into the Forest? Kel’s words

were honest, but she seemed unmoved by his answers. She dismissed him suddenly and he was returned to his rooms.

The rest of the Crows simply sat in their cell.

Day 142 (CD 200)

Early the next morning guards brought the Crows to rooms in the same wing as Kel's, where they were instructed to wash and dress in the clean clothes provided. Later that morning they were all brought before the Queen. This time the court was packed with onlookers – elven nobles, courtiers, advisors, officials, guards. All were strangely hushed and intent, and it was clear everyone was waiting to hear the Queen pronounce punishment.

She was brief, reserved and harsh. She said the old laws were inviolate. She said there was a treaty. She said great taboos had been broken. She said there was only one possible punishment and she sentenced them all to death. So declaring, she left the hall and the Crows were returned to their rooms – Beaumont's angered retort, or earnest plea, dying on his lips as they were lead away.

Surprisingly, the Crows did not try to escape or take any other desperate action – they seemed to somehow know the story was not over. That night the Queen herself appeared unannounced and unnoticed in Kel's room. He stood, taken aback, while she spoke. She had known of his father. Of his claims about the "grey wraiths." She knew what they were and from where they came. "The Black City," she said. She also said that she knew of the threat in the east – that she had divined the new rise of Chaos in the lands of the Northmen. She knew it threated the Forest and the elves. She also said that the wood elves would offer alliance and warriors for the cause, but for a price.

First she needed help dealing with the wraiths. She explained there was a curse upon the Black City and a great taboo kept her people at bay. She promised that if the Crows would travel there and deal with the evil that dwelt in the place they would have their alliance.

She said there was a price to pay and politics to play. She said if the Crows "did not fear death," that she would help against the Prince and his Chaos threat. She told Kel he would have to trust her and that his friends would have to trust him.

Day 143 (CD 201)

The next morning the party was paraded through the city to the edge of the forest where they were stripped to their breaches in front of a throng of expectant elves – many of whom seemed disturbingly aroused by whatever was coming. The Queen and her retinue (including Eponia dressed in hunting leathers) arrived, and several huntsmen emerged from the woods lead by half a dozen slavering dire wolves on leather leashes.

With no preamble the Queen repeated the essence of the sentence, much to the apparent satisfaction of the onlookers. As a guard, one of Eponia's men, cut their bonds he leaned close and whispered "RUN!" After a heartbeat, the party bolted for the woods, Quintis cursing the elves to Chaos over his shoulder as they ran.

A mad, painful and unarmed race through the forest ensued. As the branches slashed and

cut at them, and their breathing turned short and painful, they heard what they had all dreaded – the hunting howls of wolves. For most of an hour they raced on – fear-driven speed giving way to raw endurance, giving way to blind and stumbling survival instinct.

Then, just as the Crows' bodies were giving out and they were becoming separated, the wolves closed. Just as the party expected jaws to tear at their throats, a sharp musical note rang out. The howling stopped and the wolves raced ahead into a clearing – a clearing occupied by an elven encampment.

As the party stumbled into the glade and fell to their knees retching, Eponia stepped up, hardly winded, to reassure the Crows they were safe. "Come" she said. "I will explain." And, a wolf padding at her side with tongue lolling, she entered the camp. When they could eventually stand, the party followed.

Session 42

After their wounds were bound, their clothes, armor and gear returned and food brought, the archeress explained the situation.

The ancient taboo against elves entering the Black City was real and inviolate. Therefore the Witch Queen offered a secret arrangement. In exchange for not executing them, and if they entered the Black City and dealt with what they found there, the Queen promised them an alliance. She had divined the threat of Chaos growing in the east, and knows the Forest could not protect the elves. She would send the Crows help.

And, as it turned out, that help was to be the Queen's own daughter. In accompanying the Ulthuan princess to the sunken ruins, she and her kithband had broken a law, violating another of the people's many taboos. They had summarily been banished for a year-and-a-day, and with nowhere else to go, should Kel and his humans succeed in their new quest, the band was intentionally offered as that promised ally.

Day 144-148 (CD 202-206)

The Black City lies on the coast and so the party and their kithband rescuers would travel north to the shore and then the Crows would continue west until they came to their destination. The trip was uneventful – with 45 elven warriors accompanying them through their own forest it was perhaps the safest days the party had spent in months. During this time they built relationships with their elven "hosts" – each in his own way. Kel paid most of his attention to Eponia. Beaumont trained his monkey, who in turn enchanted the elves. Anders practiced elven. Floy, after initially being thought a halfwit, traded swordsmen's tricks. Quintis on the other hand was given a respectful physical and social distance – the elves having no faith in a human's ability to control the winds of magic.

Day 149-150 (CD 207-208)

Upon reaching the sea Kel was struck dumb with the ocean's majesty. Having never seen it before, he was overwhelmed by its daunting, endless beauty.

The entire band turned west, and on the evening of the second day hiking along the rugged, windy shore, the elves made camp. Clearly nervous and increasingly wary since reaching

the sea, they would go no further. Eponia said the Black City was half a day to the west and that her band would wait until the new moon – just over two weeks. From here, the Crows would be on their own.

Day 151 (CD 209)

The Crows continued hiking, but slowly, with lots of advance scouting. The pace cost them an extra half day, and they were forced to make camp below a high headland. That night, in the distance, they could hear wolves howling – their elven companions' lupine allies.

Day 152 (CD 210)

Before noon the Crows crested another in the endless series of tall headlands and there below them was what could only be the Black City. From this high vantage they could see the black stone structure rising from the mud of a vast tidal flat.

It was as if some strange enemy had built an enigmatic fortress on a black mountainside, and some vindictive god had come along, ripped it up, stone roots and all, and dropped it here near the shore. It was black, but clearly more keep than city. The mass of stone on which it crouched was half-sunk in the mud of the flat, and the keep itself was half-crumbled into ruin. The whole structure canted a little to the east, as if listing in the mud, and the whole eastern quarter of the fortress seemed even more broken, hanging at an even steeper angle.

Leading out to the structure, pointing like a broken, bony finger, was a narrow, half-sunk causeway, apparently made of stone fragments scavenged from the dark ruin. Its far end rose in a talus slope of rubble to reach the keep's high, cliff-like southern edge.

Crossing the causeway proved treacherous going with the sharp-edge and slippery rocks, encrusted with barnacles and seaweed. And just past the midpoint, as if they knew their prey was at its greatest disadvantage, the monsters attacked.

Diving out of the pale sun, what the Crow's had originally taken for fish-eagles roosting in the keep's broken towers, turned out to be winged beasts, more of legend than of life. Harpies, with horrible screeching and vicious talons, swooped out of the sky with a strange kind of focused fury.

Unfortunately for them, the archers and the wizard could not seem to miss, and before they had made three passes, and before any could flee, the Crows had dropped the entire flight. Even Beaumont's ardor for their strangely comely human features was cooled by their ghastly and monstrous parts.

As they climbed the rubble slope at the end of causeway and scrambled over the broken wall they got their first close look at the ruin. Almost nothing was standing whole and the piles of debris turned the close-packed structures and sub-buildings into a warren of dark holes, shadows and hidden places.

Moving towards the center of the ruins the party came across a massive fissure that apparently cut across the whole structure, a huge crack in the very foundation on which the fortress stood. As the Crows made their way across it over a convenient bridge of rubble,

they were beset by a truly terrifying monster – the largest and most deadly creature they had ever fought. A hydra crawled up out of the crevasse and attacked!

With a rain of arrows and befuddle spells they managed to kill the beast quickly, but not before it had knocked poor brave Floy unconscious and most of the way to death. And before the party could catch it's breath, let alone tend to Floy's wounds, the dead monster's mate came out of the fissure seeking vengeance. The Crows made even shorter work of her.

Battered, and in Floy's case, near death, the party decided to hole up in some defensible ruin to heal, and from which they could more systematically explore the fortress as they searched out this great elven evil. For evil there must be. Everyone, especially Kel, could feel the cold oppression of the place, could feel the ominous, ancient, watchful pall the marked the dark rubble, oozing from the shadowed and hidden places below. And Quintis was quite certain that the evil they seek, the horror they have come to find, must lie beneath the black, ephemeral whirlpool of necromantic magic swirling slowly above the center of the fortress – above the rubble-filled pit in the middle of the Black City.

Session 43 (Sans Joel)

Day 152-156 (CD 215)

The Crows hardly questioned the wisdom of holing up in such a dismal, defiled and dangerous place, but perhaps two years behind the lines in Chaos territory hardened them to such ominous conditions. Five days of healing up found Floy ready for action but the party harassed by harpies dropping rubble from on high and haunted by infrequent glimpses of what they believed to be the same shadowy wraiths they had first encountered months ago.

They did benefit however, from the time spent exploring the ruins. In addition to learning that the fortress was likely Dark Elf in origin, they discovered a pair of mysterious items of considerable power and some random but fine Druchii weapons and armor.

The first item was a plain quartz orb that nonetheless radiates potent magic. Quintis subsequently learned that it is just a part of some greater artifact and seems to have the power to connect him to an arrogant and cantankerous old man who calls himself "The Lord High Sorcerer," and appears to be a 700 year old Druchii wizard. Whether he is wholly mad or exceptionally devious has yet to be determined, and though he is potentially quite dangerous he also seems a useful source of information. It was through him that the party learned that the Black City is in fact a black ark – a kind of Druchii fortress ship – once known as the Red Queen's Misery.

The second item was a bracer – untouched by the ages – that Kel took from the arm of a long-decayed corpse lying in state in one of the deeper chambers. Made of black leather and blued metal, and covered in a bird motif, Quintis was surprised by its potency. As yet no one knows what powers it may possess.

The arms and armor were clearly of Druchii design and required only a little careful cleaning to restore their lethally beautiful appearance. Though not magical in any real sense, their designs not only make them uniquely effective but lend the bearer an air of menace he might not otherwise possess.

Day 157 (CD 216)

On their sixth day in the Black City, the party finally decided to enter the tunnel Quintis believed led to the source of the necromantic whirlpool. The tunnel turned out to be a tubular spiral, the surface of which was entirely covered in bas relief – worn away along the floor by centuries of passing feet.

The tunnel opened into a catacomb of sorts – a domed chamber with a great well open to surging seawater far below. Thirteen deep alcoves were cut into the stone of the walls, bounding the circular ledge formed by the well. In most of the alcoves, the strangely mummified corpses of what were clearly once Druchii corsair lords hung in rusting gibbets bolted to the walls. Though long dead they gave the party an ominous sense it was being watched.

As the party made its way into the chamber Kel suddenly stumbled and fell to the ground, apparently unconscious. Torn between concern and the fear brought on by their surroundings the others hesitated uncertain, and only Anders rushed forward to help his fallen comrade. Kel recovered quickly, but seemed dazed and contentious afterwards.

YOU ARE POSSESSED...

If you are reading this, Kel has been possessed by the ancient spirit of the dark elf corsair commander once known as Mordrith the Bloody – a potent, vengeful and certainly insane pirate ghost. Mad though he may be, his designs are greater than the immediate gratification of his wrath. He intends to lead the spirits of his wraith captains to new lives in the bodies of your unsuspecting elven allies.

This close to their vile phylactery, any elf really has no hope of avoiding possession. That is why the Black City has been a great taboo for so long. Now that he has control of your mind and body, he plans on using the rest of the Crows to bring the phylactery back to the elven encampment so that the rest of his wraiths may also steal true physical forms.

What the ghost can do...

Mordrith controls Kel's body's thoughts and actions. He has just enough access to Kel's memories that he can fake his way along, posing as you, even with the rest of the Crows. I expect you to use your excellent roleplaying prowess to play Mordrith, through Kel, in a convincing and deliberately cunning way, doing everything you can to make his terrible plan succeed. This means you will happily deceive, fight and even kill Kel's brothers to protect the phylactery and achieve your goal.

Mordrith is not Kel however, and his arrogant and mad dark elf personality will inevitably show through. Andrew may therefore use his discretion in playing his new dual character, allowing some un-Kel-like behaviors to sow suspicion among Kel's friends. If for some reason Mordrith's plan is irrevocably foiled, as by the destruction of the phylactery, he will fly into a dread rage, seeking immediate vengeance on whoever is responsible for his failure.

In life Mordrith was an infamous corsair. Accordingly, while possessed by his spirit, Kel's body gains +20 to his WS and +10 to his BS, and may use the Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Injure, and Strike to Stun talents. In addition, he gains the Menacing and Unsettling talents as well as the Sail, Command and Intimidate skills, each with two levels of specialization. Being undead, the spirit is also immune to Fear and Terror and anything that affects emotions or the mind.

What Kel can do...

Once per day, Kel, whose consciousness is riding along and aware in the back of his own mind, may attempt a Will test. If he is successful he can reclaim his body for 24 hours. This test is made at a penalty or bonus that is inversely proportional to the proximity of the phylactery: <1 mile -30, <2miles - 20, <3 miles -10, <4 miles +0, <5 miles +10 and so forth until distance makes the roll moot.

The Phylactery...

The phylactery is the stone, metal and bone plinth-like object in the center of the catacomb. It is not large, and a couple of strong people can probably manage to carry the whole thing. The only part Mordrith needs however, is the collection of strangely formed bones. Working them free and stuffing them into a bag will even suffice, but you must take care not to break any of the ancient and fragile skeleton. There are 13 individual bones and for each bone broken or lost one of Mordrith's ghost captains is destroyed.

And no – destroying the bones will not free Kel. Mordrith occupied the skull, but is now free of his magical tomb and alive again in his elf host. Nice try Andrew...

Suspended in the middle of the well, on a narrow finger of stone, there stood a gruesome artifact – a metal disk embossed with the real bones of a strangely formed, four-armed skeleton. It was clear to Quintis that this was the source of the necromantic magic and as he studied it he began to believe it was some sort of ancient phylactery.

The party debated what to do and frustrated with the delay an uncommonly rash Kel began prying the bones from the disk and putting them in his pack. The debate continued ineffectually as Kel worked and Floy, convinced this was all a bad idea, started back up to the surface.

As Kel finished collecting the bones the Crows suddenly became aware that silent shadows – Kel's wraith's – stood at the openings to each of the catacomb's alcoves. With no warning the shadows attacked. Though it soon became clear that only magic or enchanted weapons could harm the ghosts, Anders and Quintis made sort work of the fleeting spirits. Both Anders and Quintis were wounded – Quintis critically so.

After the battle the party quickly retreated to the surface where Kel continued to be oddly contentious. Floy, still frightened and now angry, acting on some instinct he did not even try to explain, drew his sword and attacked first Kel and then his bag of bones. During a short exchange of blows Floy managed to smash a number of the bones, but the Kel, despite Floy's new helmet, managed to brain the Estalian, stunning him to the ground.

As the rest of the party stood gaping indecisively Kel turned and ran for the cover of the surrounding ruins.

Session 43

Day 157 (CD 216) (continued)

But, he didn't get very far. The party caught up to him and began to debate the fate of the bones.

Kel gave Quintis one of the skeletal hands so he could study it, but another scuffle quickly followed during which Kel made another break for it. Anders darted after him, tackling him from behind. One after the other most of the party members piled on top of, or otherwise tried to subdue, him. Anders wrestled, Beaumont tried his bola, Floy stabbed once or twice and Quintis cast sleep and befuddle spells. Though they were variously effective, Kel was ultimately able to struggle free as the wizard discovered his spells were useless.

The elf led the rest of the party a merry chase of it through the ruins, and even though they knew he was likely headed for the causeway, his greater speed left them far behind. As they reached the crumbling walls of the fortress they could see Kel in the distance, halfway along the breakwater.

With clever use of his skywalk and pall of darkness spells Quintis was able to catch up with Kel and slow him down long enough for the others to join them. When the darkness lifted however, Kel was left standing with a drawn arrow, threatening the party. Bolas, spells and arrows flew and when the action stopped Quintis was down and dying – two of Kel's arrows in his chest (Fate Point). Anders rushed to his aid while the rest of the Crows subdued the manic elf who now only seemed confused and heartbroken over what he had done to Quintis.

Beaumont, Anders and Floy dragged both Quintis and Kel the rest of the way to shore and made a simple camp. They tended to Quintis, who lay mostly unconscious, and tied Kel to a stout shrub, where he mostly belabored hurting the wizard.

Day 158 (CD 217)

The next day the party continued debating what to do with the bones. Kel wanted to keep them. Floy wanted to destroy them. Quintis wanted to study them. And Beaumont alternately want to exploit them and carry them in his pants. Still in significant pain and barely walking wounded, Quintis skywalked back to the ruins and collected the hand he had inadvertently left behind the previous day.

At this point the party was mostly ignoring Kel and in the end decided to destroy the bones. Anders took them from the bag, smashing them on the rocks one at a time. When he had finished, Kel shuddered and a sudden change came over him – as if another kind of dark pall had been lifted. Quintis confirmed through witch sight that the aethyric vapors which had been emanating from the bones had dispersed that whatever necromantic magic had been present was gone.

The party had also returned Kel's magical bracer to him, and at some point, as he moved around and gestured, he noticed that if he held up his arm just so strange light would appear around it. Experimenting, he discovered the light would coalesce into a kind of aethyric bird of prey – a falcon made of shards of light as if it were made of pale stained glass come to life.

With a thought the falcon flew into the air. At the same time, Kel's head lolled forward and he stood as if in a trance. The magical creature flew in a rising spiral, Kel sensing the world

as if he were the bird. After some flying about, but also only with a thought, the falcon stooped at Floy, turning into a streak of racing light in the last part of the dive. It smashed into his chest, knocking him onto his back and mostly killing him with the magical impact.

The party stood or laid around as the case may be, all stunned, but none more so than Floy.

Session 44

Day 159-160 (CD 218-219)

The Crows spent the next two days camping in the dunes, licking their wounds and glaring at each other. Though no further blows were stuck the animosity and distrust hung about like the campfire smoke.

The first day of Autumn passed unremarked, the coming chill of winter kept at bay by the warm sea breeze.

Day 161 (CD 220)

The party returned to the elven encampment. Upon their arrival, it took some doing to first convince the elves that they had in fact dealt with the threat that had been hiding in the Black City, and second, that they had not been somehow corrupted by it's taint. Even then, most of the warriors kept eyes on the party and hands on their weapons. In the end, Eponia's trust in the Crows calmed her men and she vowed to fulfill her mother's promise and travel as allies to the human lands.

Day 162 - 183 (CD 221 - 242)

In the company of the elves the journey home was easy and almost pleasant. The paths seemed to go just where the travelers wished and over easy ground. The forest provided both shelter and forage and game seemed to simply drop at their feet. They might have been on a casual stroll through an arbor garden, but then that's how it goes when traveling with two score elves in the heart of their homewood.

Day 184 - 186 (CD 243-245)

The company arrived at the Silver Hills campsite only to find it long abandoned, but soon Goswin and Johan came out of hiding and told them they had been watching for them and that Old Gus had moved the camp to an island down river. It seemed that many of the Unmerry Men had given them up for dead and that as their resources dwindled so had their morale, their courage and their willingness to carry on the fight. With the leaves turning and winter well on it's way, many had left and many more were on the verge of doing so.

Joining them there the Crows found a new camp and a great deal of skepticism about their new "allies." The humans were extremely wary and the elves disdainful. The elves encamped apart, on the eastern end of the island, and it became clear that integrating the groups would difficult at best. The Crows felt lucky that at least the dwarves were still away harassing the enemy.

While at the camp the party learned that Grand Baron Gausser's body had arrived home

from the front and been buried. They learned that Peiter, Ander's older brother, had returned with the liege men and that Prince Johan had been crowned Grand Baron. They also learned that Ule had lost a leg, and in so doing had contrived to end up married to Grima, his homely, but seemingly devoted bride.

The Crows left instructions for Gus to recall all the dwarves and the wildmen and made plans to visit Salzenmund to consult Herr Kurzman and see what was going on in the city for themselves. Beaumont made a motivational speech commanding the men to take heart, keep the faith and carry on. However, fatigue, fear and the chill in the air seemed to cool their enthusiasm and spirit.

Day 187-188 (CD 246-247)

Unwilling to leave the elves at the camp untended the party headed for the Greenwood and their old monastery hideout. They took all of two days in reaching it as they worked to sneak a large band of elves through the region. The elven scouts encountered a roving patrol and eliminated it before the Crows even knew it had been sighted.

Day 189 (CD 248)

Leaving Kel and the elves at the monastery, the rest of the crows left early the next morning for Salzenmund. Arriving at the city they discovered gates guarded by Ghost Armor as well as mercenaries. When they managed, through various guises, to make their way into the city, they split up and in doing so quickly learned many things.

They learned that the automatons were now openly patrolling the city and there were many more mercenaries to be seen. Quintis and Beaumont found that Kurzman's house had been burned to the ground – though Quintis did discover a sign that indicated he may have survived the blaze. Anders learned that the mood of the city was dark and the people fearful and oppressed. He also discovered that Gausser's Greatswords were gone.

Later, at the Cockerel, Beaumont learned that that the Greatswords had been formally disbanded by the new Grand Baron but that the remnants were rumored to be hiding in the Greenwood. He also learned that La Pistolera had finally been caught and now hung gibbeted in the main square of the Merchant's Quarter.

Coincidentally, while wandering the streets and singing his love song in hopes of finding her himself, Floy stumbled upon the gibbet and noticed the condemned stir weakly at the sound of his ballad. Discretion being the better part of valor, Floy actually hid so he could scout the situation.

Shortly after hiding, he saw the guard changed and an automaton join the watch. Almost at the same time all hell broke loose as Anders charged the machine and Quintis, attempting to cast a spell first loosed every fastener on his person and then burst into flame. As if the burning wizard, now inverted in a rain barrel, was the signal to attack, Beaumont and Floy both charged the human guards and a pitched battle began.

Session 45

Day 189 (CD 248) (continued)

The battle did not take long. Between Quintis' spells and Anders' spear the automaton fell

surprisingly easily while Floy and Beaumont quickly took out the human guards. As the Crows lowered the gibbet and freed the barely conscious Maridan, the sound of marching feet and the heavy clang of ghost armor alerted them that reinforcements were coming. As a column of mercs and two automatons entered the square the party caught up Maridan and ran off, deeper into the city.

Using a variety of skills, spells and ruses the party was able to throw off pursuit. They reached the river well ahead of the soldiers. Stealing a small boat Beaumont made a poor show of rowing them into the darkness and ultimately downriver to safety.

Many miles downstream they came ashore at a bend in the river which Anders recognized from his fateful escape months ago. As Floy stubbornly carried the unconscious Maridan Anders found the farmstead of the Hartrad family – the peasants who had taken him in and nursed him back to life when he had washed ashore, grievously wounded and without his memory. Once again the family took them in and helped tend to Maridan’s torture wounds.

Day 190 (CD 249)

The Crows ended up spending a second night with the Hartrads, and Anders paid them generously for their help and, more notably, their discretion.

In the meantime, Kel and the elven scouts discovered that the Greatswords were camped in the Greenwood, a league northeast of the monastery. Kel deliberately walked into the camp and asked to be taken to the company’s leader – a grizzled but formidable warrior by the name of Commander Reikert Drauwulf.

After the inevitable sizing-up, and the not so subtle exchange of threats, Kel proposed that the Greatswords join he and his comrades in their opposition to the new Grand Baron. Though initially skeptical and more than a little incredulous, the Commander’s attitude changed dramatically when Kel mentioned that Anders von Brenner was one of his comrades and the ostensible leader of the renegades. The Commander asked for a parley with Lord Anders - insistently so.

Kel returned the monastery.

Day 191 (CD 250)

As the elven camp awoke, Kel noticed Eponia and a quiet elven woman named Athelia exchange a sensuous kiss as they exited the basement ruins.

The rest of the Crows spent most of the day returning to the Salzwood and the monastery, their progress slow because of the wounded Mari and their need to travel unseen. Upon their return, Kel reported his encounter with Commander Drauwulf and the Crows immediately set off for the Greatsword’s camp.

It seemed as though the party was expected, entering first the camp and then the Commander’s tent. He and his officers immediately stepped forward, kneeled before Anders and presented their swords, claiming their allegiance with simple but heartfelt oaths. As Drauwulf stood he said under his breath “all that remains is the Crossing of the Swords ceremony.”

As it turned out, the Crossing of the Swords is a long-standing tradition through which the Greatswords loyalty is won by a duel between the company's commander and the Grand Baron – a duel not to first blood, but to submission. In the end it was hardly fair. Drauwulf is an experienced soldier, but an aging one, in full plate and wielding a heavy sword. Conversely, Anders is a young, strong, practiced fighter, armed with both enchanted spear and shield, and blessed by Ulric himself.

The fight was quick and decisive. Anders easily won the contest and the certain loyalty of Drauwulf and his men. Even as his squire bandaged the bloody Commander, as one the company bent the knee and swore it's oath of fealty. An unexpected and unlikely outcome, yet a potentially critical turn of events for the Scarecrows.

Session 46

Day 192-194 (CD 251-253)

The Crows decided to march the Greatswords and the elves back to the Silver Hills camp and consolidate their forces. Again using various skills, spells and ruses, the party managed to move their small army cross country without giving away it's presence – though at the cost of taking, and now having to manage, a dozen prisoners. Throughout the march the Greatswords treated Anders as the rightful Grand Baron and a body of six personal were assigned to protect him day and night.

Day 195-199 (CD 254-258)

After reaching the camp, and upending things yet again by this time adding the Greatswords to the band, the Crows spent several days talking with their leaders and planning. The topics included next steps, long term goals, supplies, training, recruitment, targets and perhaps most pressing – the coming winter.

In the end, several decisions were made. First, Gus would find a new and more secure winter camp for the Unmerry Men. Second, the Greatswords would join them and exchange training – martial skills for those of the woodsmen. Third, the elves would go into the Drakwald and hunt beastmen – to keep the monsters on the run, to utilize the forest's food resources, and to be out of the way when the dwarves returned. Fourth, the Crows would go to Middenheim and see what they could learn of the Horn of Silence. They know that whatever is to be done must be accomplished in the next two months or will have to wait until spring. Assuming they survive the cold of winter.

Day 200 (CD 259)

First the elves left and then the Unmerry Men began to break camp. As the men pulled up stakes yet again, the Crows mounted up and headed for the Middenheim Road taking Maridan and a pair of Greatsword bodyguards – Osric and Odmar – with them. A long day of riding brought them to the familiar, burned out, spider-infested ruin of the old coaching inn. They searched it carefully for any signs of infestation then made camp for the night.

The next afternoon, not far from Frote, the party was ambushed by an uncommonly large beastman warband. Though heavily outnumbered, the Crows made short work of the band, killing most and driving the few survivors to flight. Standing on the bloody battlefield the

Crows could not help but wonder. Frote is not far away. Had the beastmen been there already. Or were they headed there? Why so many? And were did they get such good, human made weapons?

Session 47

Day 200 (CD 259) (continued)

As the party approached Frote they became aware of scouts pacing them in the woods. Not beastmen, but what turned out to be human youths dressed and painted in forest greens and browns and carrying bows. They moved well, staying covered, observant and ready to shoot.

As the Crows approached the village center they saw that a small, crude palisade had been constructed, using some of the original buildings as parts of the walls. As they approached, the villagers made an orderly retreat into the defenses.

They were challenged from the makeshift battlements and when the gates were eventually opened a slim figure in patchwork armor confronted them – backed up by a number of similarly armed figures, the painted archers and a massive Big Jan, full-grown pig in tow. As it turned out, their challenger was Claudia – a very different Claudia. She seemed self-assured, focused and capable. Though not officially the leader, everyone seemed to defer to her – her suggestions treated more like orders.

After being allowed into the palisade, the party was fed and sat in parley with Claudia. She seemed rather nonchalant about her current roll – practical and deliberate. She had seen some needs, had some ideas, made some suggestions and here she was (three months later), the ostensible commander of Frote's defenses.

At points during the rest of the evening the party members were variously engaged. Quintis and Maridan visited their parents' graves and wandered around the village. It was a surprisingly emotional experience. Floy made himself scarce and Kel was mobbed by curious children who had never seen a "savage" before. Beaumont, Goswin, Odmar and Osric all loitered around outside while Anders and Claudia talked. In her own words, Claudia has "put away childish things" and found a purpose.

Day 201 (CD 254)

The party departed Frote the next morning, Claudia giving Anders a letter and asking him to deliver it to her parents.

The rest of the journey to Middenheim was characterized by the increasingly abundant signs of the recent city siege. Scavenged farms, burned villages, refugee camps and shallow graves. It was also clear in the sprawling camp that surrounded the base of the Fauschlag that the flood of displaced peasants was taking as great a toll on the city as on the spirits of the people.

Once inside the over-crowded city, the destruction and suffering as even more evident. Packed and filthy streets, buildings destroyed by siege weapons and fires, homeless families, urchin children, outrageous prices for everything, and everywhere soldiers, warriors and mercenaries – now with no purpose and no money. It's possible that Middenheim in some ways is even worse off now than during the siege. At least then it was

clear who the enemy was.

The party took unlikely lodging in The Blazing Hearth, a halfling-run and halfling-sized inn in the Altquarter. They only had a few human-sized rooms, but the food is some of the best in the city. And despite the scarcity and gouging market prices, somehow the proprietor, Silas Greenhill, is still able to set a generous table.

Session 48

Day 202 (CD 256)

Anders and Beaumont made an early morning trip to the Temple of Ulric seeking some sense of the place and perhaps some blessings for their weapons. After making a modest donation Beaumont arranged to have his chopper anointed. He was told he could pick it up the next day.

Floy and Meridan, knowing their futures are dangerous and uncertain, decided to get married. Meridan went off to the Temple of Sigmar, at Floy's insistence, to make arrangements for a small ceremony the next morning. Floy wandered the market looking for a meaningful (but inexpensive) wedding present. An engraved dagger?

While returning to the Blazing Hearth, Floy observed a band of well-armed warriors interrogating a number of people and carrying off a shrouded but bloody body. Their insignia marked them as members of the elite Knight's Panther – the Ulrican templars. The crowd they left behind seemed subdued yet anxious.

Quintis spent the day at the Wizard's Guild talking with the guild master, Sir Gerald, about all the goings-on in the Salzlands - leaving out only the name of the major players and the excursion to the elven lands and the Black City. Quintis asked about Kurzman, but Gerald only knows that the strange wizard is missing - likely having perished when his home burned.

Quintis asked about the Horn of Silence and was told if there was truth in the legend it would be found in a tome called the Canticle of the Quiet Knight, which Gerald has heard resides in the Great Library at the Temple of Ulric. Gerald told Quintis he would need to speak to the Librarian, but that the Librarian was unlikely to grant access to the library without a compelling reason.

Quintis also asked about having his arm healed and learned that perhaps his only hope was Shallya's Tears – a rare and divine substance that can only be earned through great service to one of Shallya's temples.

Kel spent much of the day in the library of the Collegia Theologica, researching the orb the party found in the Black City. With the help of a couple of low level scholars, he learned the sphere may be part of a larger magical device called an Uriculum – an unreliable machine for communicating, and perhaps casting magic, over great distances.

That night, after everyone had returned to the Blazing Hearth and was eating a surprisingly well-found and delicious meal, Anders, of all the Crows, noticed a suspicious man wrapped in a gray cloak and hood unabashedly watching them from a corner table. When Anders rose, approached his table and sat down, the man, clearly surprised, uttered, "You see me?"

and then hastily got up and left the inn.

Day 203 (CD 257)

Early in the morning Anders and Kel shook Quintis awake with claims of “a major problem at the Temple of Sigmar”, the “need to hurry,” and “Maridan needs help.” Barely dressed and still half asleep they arrived just in time for Quintis to attend his sister’s marriage ceremony – just in time and awake enough to realize Floy was becoming a member of his family.

Strangely reserved through the ceremony and much of the wedding feast that followed, Quintis made a touching toast to the health and fortune of his sister and his new brother-in-law. He also used the opportunity presented in pouring the toast to slip a powerful dose of apothecary’s purgative into the Crows’ drinks. Kel, Beaumont and Anders fought over the privy for the most of the rest of the day. Floy, unaffected but otherwise hopelessly drunk, spent the rest of the day, and that night, mostly unconscious in his wedding bed.

Day 204 (CD 258)

In the morning Kel returned to the library to see what else he could learn about the Uriculum. Quintis went back to the Guild to continue researching the Horn. Anders and Beaumont returned to the temple to retrieve Beaumont’s chopper.

As Anders and Beaumont made their way back to the Blazing Hearth, they realized they were being followed by at least two weary thugs. Doubling back through the crowd they managed to capture one of them. They made short work of interrogating him and it turned out he worked for someone called The Man in Gray.

Session 49 (Sans Larry)

Anders and Beaumont returned to the Blazing Hearth where they found the newlyweds had finally surfaced and come down to lunch. The boys tied the now frantic minion to a halfling-sized chair and began to question him so forcefully that it drove customers out of the Hearth – Silas eventually demanding they take their “business” to a back room.

Ehrwig, as his named turned out to be, broke quickly and his panic soon turned to dignity-free sobbing. He spilled his guts, claiming he worked for The Man in Grey who he described as a “vile demon.” He said crossing The Man would lead to “a fate worse than death,” and he begged the Crows to protect him. Floy promised that nothing would happen to him if he cooperated, and the conviction with which the Estalian said this seem to calm the poor wretch.

As it turned out, Ehrwig was supposed to meet The Man at midnight in the ruins of Fleischer’s Slaughterhouse – a place destroyed by Hellcannon fire during The Siege, and now seemingly permanently warped by the taint of Chaos. Of course, the Crows decided it was good idea to crash this meeting.

At about 11 o’clock, knowing it was likely a trap, the party climbed over the makshift barricades that were clearly meant to keep things in rather than out and snuck into the ruins. As they approached the massive impact crater, they began to notice strange plant growths, odd smells and unsettling sounds all around them. Kel scouted through his “falcon”

and identified large rat-like creatures scrambling among the ruins and at least one cloaked, man-like figure among the debris.

Despite their efforts to sneak through the ruins, the party was observed and a signal rocket shot into the air, triggering the inevitable ambush. The fighting was brief but fierce.

Kel rained death with his bow, stabbed a gunman in the face and destroyed a horrifically mutated vine.

Anders struggled to find targets in the dark, but did manage to pin one unfortunate goon to the ground with his spear.

Floy stabbed a panicking Erhwig through the throat and took off through the ruins after Maridan who was intent on flanking the attackers. At one point he threw his body onto that of his wounded ladylove to shield her from an enemy blunderbuss, taking the shot himself. In the end he crouched at her feet reloading her pistols while she fired with the flame and fury of a demon.

Beaumont was punched through the arm by a devastating rifle shot and almost killed. He may even now still lose the hand.

As the last of the attackers fell or fled, a strange man all in gray simply appeared in the middle of the ruins and exclaimed aloud, "I will not underestimate you next time," and then vanished. Strangely, only some of the party saw or heard him.

As the Crows tended their wounded and searched the bodies of those killed, they realized they had been exposed to the tainted contagion lingering in the blighted area and now each ran the risk of suffering some horrid mutation.

Session 50 (Sans Bill)

Day 205-210 (CD 259-264)

The next few days were spent tending to Beaumont's arm, and the various lesser wounds the party suffered. They were also witness to Mr. Nelson's horrific transformation.

Beaumont lay in his upstairs room at the Blazing Hearth, going in and out of consciousness as the rot, and it's attendant fever, began to take hold. In the end, the other Crows had no other choice but to bring in a surgeon. Dr. Johannson, an arrogant and insufferable young man, turned out to be an able saw-bones and removed Beaumont's hand from the wrist quite - handily. The surgery was gruesome, and the herbs Johannson brewed for the patient hardly curbed the pain at all. Field surgery was a common experience for the Crows however, and they hardly winced as they held Beaumont down and the doctor went to work. The searing pain and deadly fever eventually subsided, and after a few days, Beaumont was even able to sit up and eat meals in the common room, the stump of his arm a tender bundle of bandages.

As the party waited for Beaumont to heal, Anders returned to the Temple of Ulrich and talked up a young scholarly acolyte - Brother Urnst. He managed to convince the boy of his prowess as a warrior and of the genuine blessing placed on him by the ghost of Brother

Marius.

Anders asked about access to the library, and the scholar professed his willingness to oblige, but made it clear that his low rank prohibited him from granting the privilege. He reiterated that only those laymen who provide great service to the church were allowed access. Anders convinced him of his willingness and ability to do so and Urnst promised to convey his request to the powers that be.

At the same time, Quintis went to the Temple of Shallya in hopes of being given access to the near fabled Tears of Shallya. He hoped that the magical cure could restore his withered arm. He was told that only after doing some great service for the Church would be granted such a boon.

The day after the operation the party realized that the trauma of Beaumont's surgery had apparently frightened off Mr. Nelson and they were unable to find him anywhere. The next day, amidst a bit of a household uproar, the inn's stable boys reported they had "seen a monster" in the stable and Anders and Quintis went to investigate. They quickly discovered a horrible consequence of their trip into the blighted area around the hell cannon crater. Mr. Nelson had been transformed into a creature of chaos – a monkey-torsoed, boar-bodied, mini-centaur, with tusks.

The poor creature was frightened out of its wits and it took care, and considerable restraint, to subdue it without killing it. Ultimately, Quintis put it to sleep and they stuffed it in a grain sack. After returning it to Beaumont and arguing over the fate of the tainted creature, the other Crows washed their hands of the whole affair and made it clear that any consequences of letting the creature survive would be on Beaumont's head.

Session 51

Day 211 (CD 265)

Anders returned to the temple bringing the rest of the Crows along with him where it turned out Urnst had been true to his word. Another acolyte met them and conveyed them deep into the temple to the study of Father Eberhardt, a bent and withered old priest whose wits remained every bit as sharp as his tongue.

After sizing up the Crows he offered them a deal – access to the temple's library in exchange for hunting down someone, or something, that had been murdering one local Middenheimer every night for weeks. This killer had been striking randomly, but, as it turned out, all around the Temple of Ulric. People were afraid to leave their homes and were starting to fear their god had abandoned them. The Knight's Panther had been investigating but had so far been unable to discover the culprit. Eberhardt did not exactly admit it, but he seemed concerned that someone from the church might be involved and so had been looking for outsiders who might have the skills and motivation to help. He saw the Crows as just such outsiders.

The Crows immediately set to work identifying the extent of the killer's hunting ground and Quintis soon realized that all of the attacks were near access points to the city's extensive and ancient, dwarven-built sewers. Part of the investigation included Floy attempting to interrogate those living near where he had previously seen the Knight's carrying away a

body prior to his wedding. This was only as productive as Floy's sympathetic and understanding approach allowed.

They party eventually picked a likely area near the southern end of The Great Park for a probable attack and spent the night skulking in the shadows and lying in wait.

Day 212 (CD 266)

The night proved cold, wet and uneventful as they huddled shivering in the chill winter rain. A troop of passing Knight's Templar led them back towards the temple and the site of the latest murder – an old man killed in an alley. After the Knights dispersed the few onlookers and carted off the mutilated body, the Crows searched for signs of the attacker, quickly finding where something had come out of, and returned to, the sewers.

Wasting no time, the Crows pried up the disturbed grate over a flooding, semi-clogged sewer hole and plunged down after what they presumed was the killer. Due to the torrential rain, a slurry of water, garbage and animal and human waste flowed down the tunnels in a cascade of liquid filth, preventing the party from tracking their quarry by any conventional means. Using witchsight however, Quintis was able to lead them after a faint residue of Chaos energy – a trail which grew stronger the farther into the tunnels the Crows crawled.

The party delved deeper and deeper, sometimes walking, sometimes crawling, in the frigid sewage as the track passed from main tunnel to side passage to vertical shaft. The only illumination was a single torch and Quintis' light spell. Quickly chilled and disgusted to the bone, their way became a nightmarish slog as dead things washed against and living things slithered past them in the flood. Rats the size of dogs, corpses that were perhaps once human, and many, many things, sounds and smells less identifiable, shared their miserable march.

After what seemed like days of wet and stinking struggle, but what was likely only an hour, the party came to a large chamber too vast to be illuminated, even with Quintis' magic. Numerous tunnels, shafts and vents converged here, periodically discharging filthy streams into the bottomless sump in the middle of the room. Here, the endless flood of rain diluted sewage flowed together and washed with great sucking sounds into the greater depths below the ancient city.

Quintis cast a simple spell and a flock of dancing lights leapt into the air, illuminating perhaps a third of the room. As he moved them about revealing the extent of this literal hell hole, a massive and terrifying shape emerged from the sump, a Chaos demon that had clearly been lying in wait for those foolish enough to follow it into it's lair. Dripping sewage the creature floated into the air and lurched toward Anders. As it charged it drew an impossibly large and unlikely sword of bone from it's impossibly large and unlikely mouth and attacked with a deafening screech.

The fight was surprisingly short. The demon exchanged blows with Anders. Beaumont, still suffering from his amputation tried his bolas. Floy tried to leap on the monster's back only to fall into the filth ten feet below. Kel shot it with arrow after arrow and Quintis won a battle of wills with the creature, allowing him to hit it with his deadliest spell. Maridan, and Odmarr, terrified by the creature's aspect initially fled in fear before recovering their wits and returning to the fight.

Despite its vicious attack the Crow's combined onslaught was the greater and the demon fell after less than a minute of battle. As it dropped into a heap atop a stunned Floy, it suddenly lost its monstrous form revealing its human nature – and the fact that the now very dead man had been a priest of Ulric.

Session 52 (Sans Andrew)

Day 212 (CD 266) (continued)

As the party helped Floy out of the sump and hauled the dead priest out of the muck, they were again suddenly ambushed – this time by The Man in Gray and his henchman. The attackers had apparently followed the Crows into the sewers and hoped to capitalize on the damage the demon had wrought on the party before being killed.

The Man in Gray turned out to be some sort of undead abomination, incredibly durable and immune to some of Quinti's most potent magic. His arcane ability to shield himself from sight might have been dangerous to lesser men, but the Crows had long been inured to the will of the darker powers. Even his henchmen's firearms, though still a threat, were rendered much less reliable by the sodden environment.

The skirmish was short, and even less of a battle than the fight with the demon. In the end, it took only a few blows and a little magic to down the creature and when he fell his men, at least those still standing, fled. As he expired his body quickly crumbled away leaving only a pile of clothes, armor and weapons in a mound of bone dust.

Wounded and reeling from two battles, the party gathered up the body of the priest, wrapped it in the Man in Gray's cloak, and made their wet and slippery way upstream through the filth and runoff of the sewers, dragging, shoving, lifting and tugging the body through the maze of tunnels and passages. The trip was grueling and felt endless.

Finally emerging from the foul tunnels the Crows were a miserable, rank and shit-covered band of exhausted soldiers. Pausing only to rinse off the worst of the filth under a broken rainspout, the party headed to the Temple to report to Father Eberhardt. Returning to the side entrance they were ushered to what appeared to be a funerary room where the dead were prepared for interment.

Refusing to leave the body, their acolyte guide went and brought the ancient and bowed Eberhardt to them. He did not seem surprised that an Ulrican priest had been involved, but he did seem to shrink in on himself some – discouragement to his old and brittle bones. He thanked the Crows, reminded them of their promise of discretion, and told them he would send word to the Librarian that they should be granted access.

The Crows took their leave and returned the Blazing Hearth, stopping to buy all new replacement clothes along the way. Kel was surprisingly upset at having to wear clothing cut for humans. They cleaned up in stages, leaving the worst of the filth outside in the stable yard and eventually, after several baths, removed all but the faintest wiff of poo from their persons.

Day 213 (CD 267)

The Crows returned to the Temple of Ulric early the next day and were lead directly to the library deep in the bowels of the ancient building. They were allowed into the vast and heavily guarded chamber without question and introduced to a withered and rotting human covered in seeping bandages and a heavy cloak. Apparently the Librarian, he was attended by a dozen assistants who crawled among the endless shelves, copied countless tomes, and took notes from a seemingly limitless number of books, scrolls and folios.

The party was lead to a large table to which a pair of assistants brought an ancient, heavy book with brass-bound pages and filled with the handwritten text of an ancient chronicler – it was the Canticle of the Quiet Knight. Quintis spent hours studying the book and various additional references the assistants brought at his request. The rest of the party sat bored and sleepy while the wizard poured over the words, making notes and mumbling to himself. By the end Quintis was exhausted and, almost incoherent from fatigue, he had to be lead by the hand from the Temple and back to the Hearth where he collapsed into the sleep of the dead.

Day 214 - 219 (CD 268 - 273)

Quintis had discovered that the Horn of Silence had apparently been interred with the Quiet Knight in his tomb in the Valley of the Barrows beyond the pass guarded by the Brass Keep, an ancient dwarven fortress in the Middle Mountains – a fortress abandoned by its recent human masters and now rumored to be the refuge of Archeon of Chaos and the remnants of his army.

The Crows wasted no time starting preparations for their expedition into the mountains, acquiring pack mules, food, winter clothing, and other supplies. By the time they were prepared to leave, they had spent all but their last few small coins. Considering the distance and their assurances they would return in a month, they dispatched Maridan and Odmarr to the Nordlands to warn Old Gus that the Crows would not be back for several more weeks.

As quickly and deliberately as they prepared, the party lingered a few extra days so that Beaumont's arm could heal enough for him to be fitted with a strange weapon commissioned from a local weapon smith and fashioned from the last of the Druchii short swords the party still possessed. The result was crude but formidable claw-like weapon that had to be strapped to Beaumont's crippled stump.

Day 220 - 222 (CD 274 - 276)

The party left Middenheim early in the morning and drove themselves and their mounts hard as they headed east into the Middle Mountains. As they traveled they saw sign after sign of the ravages the region had suffered during the Storm of Chaos and the siege of the city. As the road climbed into the foothills they seemed to leave the devastation behind, but the rain quickly became snow and the wind turned frigid. When the party reached the town of Sokh where it hoped to find a warm inn and reprovision, they found only a razed town and no signs of life. Unsurprised and unmoved, the Crows rode on.

Day 223 (CD 277)

About mid morning of the fourth day out of Middenhiem the party came upon a deep gorge

through which flowed a raging torrent. The chasm was spanned by a once-elegant arch of dwarven cut stone that had long ago fallen into disrepair. Instincts alerted, Kel sent his magical falcon into the air to scout the area, discovering only a small party of orc scouts to the south and a surprising number of what appeared to be caves dotting the region.

Unsurprisingly, as the party crossed the bridge, they were ambushed by a pair of clever, for giants anyway, hill giants, one of whom tried to soften them up by throwing boulders and the other of which charged, swinging a tree-sized club made of...er...a tree. Devastating spear thrusts took out the boulder-thrower and clever use of magic frustrated the club-bearer while Kel rained arrows on him and Floy dodge around his legs stabbing at his vitals.

Ultimately maneuvered over the edge by Quintis' illusions, the poor giant bastard tried to take Floy with him but failed to grapple the Estalian, lost his hold and fell to his death 300 feet below.

Session 53

Day 224-226 (CD 278-280)

THE BARROW

Such was the glory of his faith
that the dead broke before him,
and now stand watch,
that none may corrupt
what remains.

- excerpt from the Canticle of the Quiet Knight

The snow blows sideways and bites, chilling you to the bone. The narrow, climbing track is hard to follow, the drifting white making it harder still. The distance, not great as a real crow flies, is made far greater for Crows that must walk. The rugged terrain and the growing need for stealth conspire to turn a journey of one day into three as fatigue settles into your bones.

Since dawn, across a shallow valley, what can only be the Brass Keep has been visible through the blowing snow. The dull sheen of its ramparts glows in the rare moments when the low clouds break. The fortress is bleak and threatening but shows no signs of occupation. Nonetheless, you continue to pick your way along hidden tracks, doing your best to stay concealed from unseen lookouts or roving patrols.

The Keep squats in the midst of the high pass to the valley beyond – the valley the wizard claims is your destination. What would otherwise be an hour's hike becomes a day-long drudge along snow-covered goat paths and through steep-sided ravines in hopes of circumventing watchful eyes. Your hands throb from the cold and bleed from scrambling over the sharp black stone.

Now, as you crest a frost-covered rock fall, the Keep obscured by distance and falling snow, you look down into the Valley of the Barrows and wonder that there is anything worth risking your life for in this desolate place. The vale floor is a windswept plain of black talus, scree and random boulders. Ancient burial mounds march down the length of the valley in irregular, mismatched ranks. Assaulted by ages of wind and water, all have eroded, some now barely rising above the snowdrifts that surround them.

At the far end, perhaps a mile away, broken pylons of stone mark a larger mound – a grander barrow, but younger than the rest. You don't need the wizard to tell you this is your destination. There is something compelling about the tomb, a haunting sense of dormant forces – a fixed place in the cosmos around which other worlds turn.

Day 227 (CD 281)

The Crows climbed down out of a high defile onto the floor of the Valley of the Barrow, the blowing snow hiding not only the Brass Keep but most of the surrounding vale as well. As they began trudging across the stony plain dim figures appeared in the white haze, as if rising up from the snow drifted ground itself. With no warning a horde of undead warriors lurched out of the snow and swarmed towards the party. Desiccated and freeze-dried, the dead were girded in the arms of lost ages – as if the heroes of the past had sworn to defend this valley beyond death.

Quintis shouted for the Crows to run for the tomb, Floy charged into the swarm, Beaumont, Anders and Odric formed a defensive line, and Kel began raining arrows from behind. Despite the overwhelming numbers the battle would have been a slaughter if the frozen, brittle monsters had been alive rather than already dead. With spear, arrow, claw, sword and spells the party ground them into bone dust and forced their way through the swarm towards the grand barrow.

Despite his uncanny speed and lethal blade, Floy soon found himself overwhelmed. Even with Quintis' magic bolts dropping monsters all around the Estalian, they surged over Floy, bearing him down under their dead weight. Leaving him for dead (Fate Point) the swarm stumbled off in search of other prey, leaving Quintis to drag an unconscious Floy from under a pile of the doubly dead.

Anders, Beaumont, Odric and Kel, now wielding his sword, continued to cut through the surging horde like farmers through wheat. Using his Skywalk spell, Quintis lifted Floy to the top of a ruined pylon and from there started casting shadow knives – catching the undead in a meat grinder of blades and magic. Unfortunately, his reckless use of power caused Quintis' good arm to seize up and his will to wane, greatly reducing his effectiveness and survivability.

Cutting a bone-dust path through the swarming monsters the fighters ran for the barrow entrance. Now unable to lift or carry Floy, Quintis kicked him off the top of the pylon and ran for the barrow himself. Kel, elven curses streaming from his mouth, ran back, hefted Floy and raced after the others.

Crowding into the entrance, Odmar and Anders held the swarm at the entrance while the others worked at lifting the ancient and heavy portcullis inside. Quintis cast a strange new spell by which his own shadow detached itself and snuck away to explore the interior.

Beaumont, unable to lift the gate with only one hand, switched places with his cousin, who, in a feat of incredible strength wrenched the portcullis up and over his head, holding it high until the others dove to safety. As the horde poured through the entrance, Anders dropped the gate on the first of them as he dove through himself. As it slammed down and the party barred the portal.

After using his shadow to ascertain no immediate threat and locate an entombed warrior and a pile of treasure deep within the barrow, Quintis called a halt for some much needed rest and recovery. While he and Floy rested the other warriors took turns guarding the portcullis, chopping the limbs off any hapless creature that reached through the gate.

Day 228 (CD 282)

A long night later, they began to explore the ancient tomb. A cave-in prevented them from going down the left-hand passage and Quintis' paranoia kept them from simply wandering down the right. Witchsight and careful observation convinced the party there was something magically amiss with the hall, and ultimately, the party realized that illusion magic was making what was in fact a vertical shaft appear to be simply a harmless horizontal hall.

Rigging ropes with improvised pitons made from broken weapons taken from the undead guardians, the Crows arranged lines to lower an unhinged door to the bottom of the shaft in preparation for their own descent.

Session 53

Once down, the party hesitantly explored the lower hallway. As they came upon two long-dead corpses their surroundings suddenly changed without warning and they found themselves in a small, square, door-less room the width of the original corridor. Jammed in the small space they scabbled and searched for a way out. As they looked in vain Anders began to wonder if, like the vertical shaft, the room was some sort of illusion. As he voiced the thought the room vanished and the party stood as it had before in the dark corridor.

The Scarecrows then approached the large tomb Quintis' shadow had revealed contained the remains of the Quiet Knight. Kel, Beaumont and Anders slowly entered and approached the plinth, creeping along the room's wall. As they passed a small fountain embedded in the wall water began to flow into the basin – as well as into a matching fountain across the room. The water soon started to overflow the basins, dribble along the floor between the flagstones and pool in the middle of the room.

As Anders approached the interred corpse he was surprised by its remarkable appearance – dressed in the most glorious gilt armor, it looked perfectly preserved, the imagination's image of the perfect holy warrior, untouched by the ages. To the hand however, it was as hard and as cold as frozen glass.

Without warning, three shapes rose from the pooling water, the silvery liquid itself forming the figures. The shapes resolved into perfect simulacra of Beaumont, Kel and Anders and then interposed themselves between each of the Crows and the Quiet Knight's body. As the figures moved, the party heard them say, but as if spoken in their own heads, "Surrender to the beast within."

Each move the Crows made the water figures mirrored, including dripping blood when Anders intentionally cut himself on the blade of his spear. And each time anyone moved, they heard the mantra-like phrase in their heads. Apprehensive, the party was unwilling to strike the first blow, even when Floy charged into the room and shouted for Kell to “shoot it” as his own simulacra formed. They seemed to fear that whatever they did to the water figures might immediately be done unto themselves.

Struck with inspiration, Anders approached his mirror image and as he heard it say “Surrender to the beast within,” he lowered his weapons and lay them on the floor, bowing as he did so. His opposite number did the same and cascaded back into a puddle. It did not take long for the rest of the party to follow suit with their own figures and the water to return to puddle form.

Rearming themselves the party was shocked to notice that the figure of the Quiet Knight was now, without warning and without anyone noticing, standing on the floor at the foot of the plinth on which it had previously been resting. With a long handled warhammer held at the ready, the Knight called out in a forceful voice, “Prove your worth!” and moved to engage Anders.

Sensing the one-on-one challenge Anders engaged and the fight began. Twice the Knight seemed to fall, mortally wounded, and twice the party was surprised to see him suddenly standing ready to continue the fight. Swinging the hammer in high arching blows he slammed it into the ground, seemingly blasting the life out of Anders, who eventually fell under the onslaught.

Instead of killing him however, the Knight immediately kneeled and laid hands on the wounded noble. As his vitality seemed to pass into Anders, healing him, the Knight spoke softly, “Finally, a worthy man to take my burden and send me to my rest. Thank you...” So saying, the Knight seemed to shrink in on himself and toppled to the floor, a desiccated skeleton wrapped in crumbling sinew and wearing only rusted armor and rotted cloth. The golden, gem-encrusted horn he had appeared to have at his belt was gone.

Day 229 (CD 283)

Increasingly desperate to find the horn, the party moved toward the treasure room Quintis had located with his shadow, even as the wizard again examined it with this remote minion. Fearful of the large, horned gargoyle statue in the alcove across from the treasure room might do in this illusion infested tomb, the party blocked it's view of them by placing yet another unhinged door across the mouth of its niche. As a further precaution, Quintis spend a great deal of magical energy blasting the statue into three large, and countless small, pieces.

As the first of the party entered the treasure chamber the remains the gargoyle came to life and ineffectually tried to attack the party. Even without hind quarters or an attached head this proved surprisingly intimidating, but caused no harm. The party carefully searched the chamber, discovering four horns of different designs and a long trumpet. It did not take Quintis long to decide that the magic of the horns was too suspiciously similar for any of them to be the true artifact.

It was Floy who first became curious about the asymmetrical horns on the broken-but-still-snapping head of the statue. With his newly acquired hammer, Anders smashed the head to pieces leaving a simple, rune-covered war horn laying in the rubble. As the party gawked at it and began to debate how to use it, two things happened. First, they noticed that the great pile of treasure was quickly reverting to the various-sized pebbles, stones and boulders of which it was actually comprised. Second, unsettling noises from back up the corridor warned them that something was coming.

As they charged up the corridor Quintis' marsh lights revealed that the horde of undead had broken through the gate above, overrun Odric and presumably thrown themselves down the tunnel shaft in pursuit, unintentionally making a pile of corpse those that followed could climb down. Wedged two by two in the corridor, fighting a pitched battle, hopelessly outnumbered and even attacked by an undead Odric, Anders decided to blow the horn – but nothing happened. He tossed it back down the hall to Quintis who raised it to his lips and blew – and the world went white.

When the party regained it's feet, shaken and strangely jittery, the undead had collapsed, inanimate. All of them. The Scarecrows spent most of an hour clearing the tunnel of dried corpses so they could climb to the upper level. When they got there, and made their cautious way over the piles of skeletons and out into the pre-dawn light, they were stunned by the effect of the Horn. Even the uninitiated among them could tell that something was different, strange, odd. The world seemed somehow less. The magic was...gone.

Exhausted, wounded, drained, disoriented and half-starved, the Crows gawked at each other and their surroundings. The sky was turning pink in the east and the very first rays of the sun were just giving the upper battlements of the Brass Keep a ruddy glow. They also illuminated the countless flying creatures wheeling over the fortress and the dark gray smoke pouring from inside.

Session 54

Day 229 (CD 283) (continued)

Not wanting to be caught out in the open, and sensing that whatever was going on in the Brass Keep might pose a threat, the Scarecrows used the last of the early morning gray as cover and made their way out of the valley. They retraced their path through the hidden defiles that brought them and began working their out of the mountains. Hurt, cold, exhausted and essentially out of food, they moved slowly, fatigue, the need to hunt, and the fear of being spotted, turning hours into days.

Day 230 (CD 284)

In the mid morning, after a breakfast of marmot, the party came across what must have been the boundary of the Horn's effect – a vast, domed curtain of magical potential, visible only to Quintis and kept at bay by some invisible force. As they passed the barrier Quintis could feel his powers return and “see” the reforming auras of the party's enchanted items – all but Ander's Spirit Symbol. The persistent blessing appears to have been permanently dispelled by the power of the Horn.

After a meager lunch of raw marmot and snowmelt, Kel sensed the fast approach of some

unknown creatures. Thinking fast, Quintis cast an illusion that made it appear as if the bottom of the ravine in which the party was crouching was in fact empty – and not a moment too soon. Black leathery wings propelled a swirling murmur of tiny demonlings down the ravine, right over the heads of the breathless Crows, then back again – Quintis having the good sense to keep the illusion in place after the first pass. Scouts – or something worse – from the Brass Keep?

Day 231 - 234 (CD 285 - 288)

Slowly, and by hidden ways and sheer grueling stubbornness, the party came down out of the mountains into comparatively warmer fall weather and better hunting grounds. Their pace, energy and resolve all increasing as they made their way through the Middenheim countryside. Ravaged by the Chaos forces that had laid siege to the city as they scoured it clean for resources and slaves, the party decided to avoid any settlements and stay clear of anyone they encountered. Not that this was difficult as just the sight of their wild-eyes and heavy armaments was enough to drive off even the bravest peasant.

Day 235 (CD 289)

Eventually the party made the Middenheim-Erengard Road and soon reached Forte' where they discovered that Maridan and Odmar had indeed passed through nine days ago. They also learned that three days later, Claudia rode north with several of her men, headed for Grafenrich.

Day 236 – 239 (CD 290 – 293)

Thirty-four days after originally leaving for Middenheim, the party returned to the Salzlands. Accompanied by Eponia's warband – the scouts of which had picked them up as they followed the road - they camped near the von Brenner estate and sent out runners to find the Unmerry Men's camp.

While encamped, Kel scouted the Salzwood Forest with his Athyric Falcon, noting only the few villages, a couple of woodsmen and a small group of bandits camped out in the trees. When the elven scouts returned and reported that they had found the remnants of the human camp deep in the Silver Hills, the Crows realized they were tired of walking and decided to relieve the bandits of their horses. The only thing worth noting about the encounter was how the party essentially walked into their camp without horses and walked out again with horses a moment later – a testament to how potent the Crows have become since they themselves were only bandits scabbling a living from the forest.

Day 240 (CD 294)

After riding cross-country with a small elven escort the party came to the abandoned camp. There were clear signs of fighting and a few bodies left to rot into the turf. There were also three dead trussed bodily to tall posts - hung to die of exposure and left as a clear message to any survivors who might return. The carrion birds had done so much damage to them that identification was...problematic. One was short and missing his right leg from the knee down – and old wound. Uli? Another was old and gray, but had lost so much of his face that it was hard to be sure. Old Gus?

While Floy used a discarded sword to dig shallow graves the rest of the party cut down the bodies and looked for clues to where the survivors may have gone. Beaumont, looking around in the cave-like overhangs that defined the camp discovered some cryptic symbols carved into a cave wall.

1st quarter – the ruins of the von Brenner estate

2nd quarter – Herr Little's bridge

3rd quarter – the old priest's tower above Marc's Ridge

4th quarter – the Devil's Eye

It was the old rendezvous plan in case the Unmerry Men were flushed from one of their camps.

Mannslieb has begun to wane and is in it's 3rd quarter and winter is coming.

Session 55 (sans Bill)

Day 241 (CD 295)

The next day the Crows rode off cross-country, making for the ruins of the priest's tower on the hill above the village of Marc's Ridge. There they encountered Little Eric the shepherd boy who gave the recent news and led them triumphantly into town. It turns out that half of the Unmerry Men were hiding in plain sight there in the village while the rest were camping in the surrounding woods as a sort of combination picket line and armed reserve.

The Crows were relieved to discover that Old Gus was in fact still among the living and still leading the band. From him they learned a number of other things in short order. First, they learned the Hills camp had been betrayed from within and attacked by the Pretender's mercenaries. Second they learned the Greatswords and Herr Little's dwarves were besieged in Grafenrich, also by the mercenaries. Third, they discovered from Pauwel, who was patiently awaiting their return here in the village, that Herr Kurzman was alive, was hiding out in Beeckerhoven and had important news for the them.

Despite being road weary the party decided to split up and press on – Beaumont, Quintis and Pauwel (on his mule) to see Kurzman in Beeckerhoven, Kel, Anders, 12 Unmerry Men and two dozen elves to scout the situation in Grafenrich.

Upon arriving in Beecherhoven, Quintis and Beaumont found Herr Kurzman ensconced in The Dapper Jack, the least undesirable of the three fortified inns to be had in this rough and tumble lumber town. He was more than pleased to see the Crows and quickly confided in them that he had learned that the Pretender was trying to repair some kind of ancient device that Wendel von Brenner had discovered in the old mines. A door, or arcane gate of sorts, that his source claimed von Gausser believes opens to the realm of Chaos. After a hurried meal and exchange of horses, Quintis and Beaumont rode back through the cold dark night hoping to rejoin the scouting party near Grafenrich.

Just as they joined the forest road not far from where it passes out of the forest above Grafenrich, Anders and company encountered a mounted mercenary patrol. As the riders charged, Anders used Stonebreaker to unhorse them and kill several, birthing a new legend about the powers of the Scarecrows as a group of Unmerry archers looks on in stunned wonder.

Upon arriving in the wooded hills overlooking the town, Anders, Kel and their scouts discovered that Grafenrich was indeed besieged. There were about 200 mercenaries and a dozen automatons guarding the three gates and riding patrols along the walls. From the craters and exact perimeters, it was obvious the dwarven artillery had been keeping the besieging army at arm's length.

Session 56 (sans Bill)

Day 242 (CD 296)

As dawn broke over the besieged town, the Crows decided to make an aggressive charge at the southern gate. They planned to use the Horn and Ander's new hammer in a deceptive and destructive ploy to both punch through any defensive lines and make it seem as though the hammer, not the Horn, was the source of the strange new power the Crows were wielding. The plan was for Quintis to watch from hiding and blow the Horn when Anders signaled by striking the ground with the hammer.

The scouting party, now apparently a fast assault company, worked its way south west of the village, staying out of sight beyond the low hills. Quintis and a handful of guards hid in a copse of trees as the rest of the band advanced. Unfortunately, they were soon spied by a patrol of outriders who tore off to warn the entrenched mercenaries of the impending attack from behind their siege lines.

As a result, the Crows and company met a well-prepared line of cavalry and archers about a quarter of a mile from the town gate. As Anders swung his hammer into the ground to break up the charge, Quintis blew the Horn, flattening everyone and driving all magic out of Grafenrich. Horses screamed and crashed to the ground, spilling or even crushing their riders. Soldiers were blown over and began preying in earnest for protection from evil as they scrambled for dropped weapons. And around the three village gates, blinding, earth-shattering explosions shook the very air as all 12 automatons erupted in gouts of actinic green light and purple flame.

The Crows and their Unmerry, elven horde slashed their way through any staggering soldiers foolish enough to get in their way and rushed the gates. They raced past glowing craters and the burning, corrupted slag surrounding the purple, smoldering holes. As they approached the gates they were recognized and hailed inside well before the scattered besiegers could make any kind of effective pursuit.

Once inside, and after heartfelt greetings and back slappings all around, the Crows, Herrs Drauwulf and Little, and Eponia retreated into the keep to talk strategy and plan the breaking of the siege. They also sent a messenger with extra horses to collect Quintis – who by plan was on his way back to Marc's Ridge – Floy and Maridan from the village and bring them back to Grafenrich where they were likely to be needed.

Session 57

Day 243 (CD 297)

Upon returning to Grafenrich Quintis, Floy and the messenger Lem, attempted but failed to locate Beaumont's secret waterfront tunnel entrance. After drawing attention to themselves by alerting a few of the civilian guards actually inside the town walls, a mercenary patrol

gave chase. The trio ended up taking to a boat, and despite spinning round and round on one oar, they managed to make it past the earnest patrol that had also taken to the water.

After climbing ashore, they decided to camp out in the woods in hope that daylight would bring other opportunities. Unfortunately, their sleep was cut short when a blunderbuss-wielding patrol captured and bound them, and began marching them back to their camp.

In the meantime, the rest of the Crows, learning of a skirmish that had occurred beyond the wall, near the tunnel entrance, snuck out to investigate. As luck would have it, they came across the very patrol that had captured their comrades, and in typical Crow style, they slaughtered the patrol and freed their allies. Taking the patrol's horses as their own, the party wasted no time departing for the Silver Hills and the mine.

That night they camped near Gideon's Ford, the site of the strange ghost battle they had fought night after night – nights that now seemed so very long ago.

Day 244 (CD 298)

Well before dawn they were across the river and into the hills, headed for the environs of the prison mine. Well within range, but still a league away, Quintis blew the horn. The party was treated to a stunning display of gouting, magical flame and thunderous, ground shaking tremors. The column of green light that erupted from the ancient chimney shot into the dawn sky, seemingly touching the clouds and threatening the setting Chaos moon itself. They were also rewarded, when their flash-blinded eyes recovered, with flames and smoke to the south, indicating that the fort was also burning.

A hard ride back to Grafenrich brought them to the town by the late afternoon. As they approached the village, they were gratified to see that the mercenary besiegers had decamped in an obvious hurry, leaving non-essential equipment and stores behind. As they entered the gates, it seemed like every soldier, militiaman, irregular, peasant and resident of the town had gathered to welcome them.

A spontaneous chant went up, "Scarecrows. Scarecrows. Scarecrows." By the end, perhaps 500 people, dwarves and elves were pressed in a ring around the party, pumping their weapons into the air and chanting. As the Crows began to dismount, a ripple went through the crowd and the chant changed almost without missing a beat, "Baron. Baron. Baron." In ones and twos, then like wind-blown reeds, the surrounding horde went down on their knees and grew silent.

In the sudden hush Anders stood in his stirrups and in a hesitant voice that grew stronger went on, he said...

*"I want you all to take a moment and look around you. Please. (*pause to allow glances*) Did you ever think you would see this sort of gathering?"*

*I left our lands and journeyed far away, to protect my homeland from chaos and evil. At the front, I met many others who had done the same, and as a result, (*gesture at each*) an Elf, a wizard, my dear cousin Beaumont, and yes, even an Estalian, became my brothers. They accompanied me home, only to find that the chaos we fought so*

hard against at the front had somehow found its way here, thanks to the evil Pretender. My brothers, at great personal sacrifice, have remained with me to continue to fight against chaos for the sake of our land, and they deserve to be recognized.

*And look around you! (*gesture at each group*) Elves, here in Graffenrich! Dwarves, here in Graffenrich! The famous Greatswords, here in Graffenrich! All three great races...working together...united. Every one of them has sacrificed much in being here today...(*direct towards them*) for they know that the chaos we fight against threatens not only Graffenrich, not only the Salzlands...but the entire world. I am especially grateful to (*nod at each*) Eponia, Herr Little, Commander Drauwulf, and Old Gus as well, for their leadership, and most importantly, their faith in my brothers and I. (*addressing them directly*) Lesser individuals may have lost faith in our long absence, but you all were greater than that, and stayed the course in our absence, and I am forever grateful.*

*But my greatest thanks is to you, people of Graffenrich. You are my kinsfolk and countrymen, and it pains me to see our lands corrupted with the chaos that I left to protect us from. Thank you for not losing hope, and for stepping up in the hour of need to join the fight against chaos. (*slight bow*)*

Some of you may have seen the green flash in the west this morning. We have dealt a mighty blow to the Pretender for the moment, and as you can see, his soldiers are no longer outside our walls. And even though the Pretender's darkness and chaos still covers the land...today...here in Graffenrich...you are all witnesses to the first ray of dawn shining through that darkness. A new day is coming."

At the completion of his speech, a thundering roar rose up from the crowd and the Crows were wafted into the Keep on a tide of good will and hope - the will of the people well and truly driving them on.

After a much-needed rest through the evening, Kel and an elven patrol made their way through the dark of night to the von Faust estate to see what they could see. Upon arriving they spied two craters pocking the ground on the west side of the walled manor, and noted a third automaton standing inert nearby. Four other armored monsters trundled about the south and east faces of the palisade.

Session 58

Day 245 (CD 299)

The crows, with Little Eric and a couple of Great Swords headed for the von Faust estate. Upon arriving they found the grounds much like Kel and his scouts had described them from the night before, save that eight automatons stood in a long row east of the palisade. Quintis and Floy took up position in the scrub a few hundred yards away, and the rest of the party approached the gate.

As they came within 100 yards four of the automatons took up position in front of the main gate. As they came within 50 yards the gates began to open, and Lord Griswold von Faust strode out, elegant cloak and finery bright in the cool air, but with a strange headdress covering his scalp and the right side of his face.

His lack of surprise at the sight of his son made it clear that the rumors about the exploits of the Crows and Beaumont's involvement had reached him. His haughty, brittle words made it clear that his opinion of his son's worth had not changed, but that maybe there was now a little fear where none gnawed before. Anger too as he offered only insults, accusations, and cutting words of loathing. Beaumont's own words were cold and honest blades that severed him once and for all from his family, defying all the evil they had perpetrated on the Nordlands. As his father turned and began to stride away, half in disgust and half in fear, Beaumont knew it was over.

At Beaumont's signal, Anders swung his hammer, and at that sign Quintis blew The Horn. As before, the world shook in a thunderous silence and the automatons, von Faust, and the factory within the wall, all exploded in actinic eruptions of purple and green flame. In moments, the compound was in flames and guards, servants, peasants and slaves were fleeing through both the main and back gates. As Anders slaughtered any mercs fleeing out the back, Beaumont, the Greatswords and Floy captured any who fled out the front.

Beaumont then removed his father's head from his body and strode through the main gate looking for the rest of his family. Once inside, he watched as people fled and his childhood home burned. When his mother and then Reichel stumbled out of the burning house he confronted them, taken aback at their confusion and incredulity.

Slaughtering his bother, Beaumont knocked his mother mostly senseless, bound her and threw her into the back of a wagon the party was filling with supplies. In doing so, Beaumont noticed the scales along the nape of his mother's neck, and expecting similar, decided to look under his father's strange veil. Apparently inured to all things Chaos, he remained unmoved when he discovered a dozen and more milky, weeping eyes staring back at him from the side of his father's head.

As the party culled and loaded supplies, they debated about what to do with the Estalian prisoners. In frustration and anger, Floy stabbed two of them through their throats before the rest of the party intervened. Ultimately it was decided to strip them, bind them together and send them marching off as a message of sorts to Salzenmund.

Day 246 - 253 (CD 300 - 307)

Upon returning to Granfenrich things began to move apace. Beaumont installed his mother as a prisoner in a locked tower room, leaving her tied to a chair from which she was to contemplate her sins and her dead husband's head. In turn, Anders installed Beaumont in the keep's main hall as the new and rightful Baron of Grafenrich, leaving him forever chained to a chair from which he was to dispense governance for the town and justice for the growing collection of collaborators and Estalians in the Keep's dungeon.

Perhaps letting his anger and pain color that justice, Beaumont's rulings were quick and harsh, falling very short of mercy. His decision to execute all the Estalians captured in the town met with cheers from some and fears from others, but it was not his orders that lead

the townspeople to hang the Estalian bodies above the gates for the crows – it was the people’s own terrible and bloody rage. In perhaps his most enlightened decision, he appointed Claudia as the new bailiff of Grafenrich, which Herr Little as her under bailiff.

Shortly after their return to town, the Crows sent a number of intentionally random and unremarkable townsfolk and peasants to Salzenmund to gather what news they could of goings-on in the city. They sent them with an escort of elves and Unmerry men but with instructions to split up and enter the city in ones and twos once they neared the capital.

In the meantime, the roving elven scouting parties returned news of a large force of mercenaries and supply wagons headed west along the West River Road towards and the Pretender’s ancient gate.

After most of a week had passed, messengers from Salzenmund began to return, reporting near chaos in the capital – the Estalians in first ordered then hasty retreat, fighting in the streets, gangs claiming neighborhoods, looting, the city guard useless and holed up in the Keep, revenge killings, fires – the city in desperate need of protection and leadership.

Then, as bad news was piled on worse, Quintis woke one morning to discover that The Horn was missing – somehow, by someone, stolen in the night.

Session 59

Day 254 (CD 308)

The four other Crows hastily ordered a search of the Keep, looking for Floy, who, for various reasons, they believed had taken the Horn. Unable to find him, their ire was nonetheless quelled when they discovered the Horn on the breakfast table, sitting on the tattered emblem from an Estalian mercenary’s tabard. Confused by Floy’s actions and abrupt departure the Crows made ready for the march on Salzenmund.

With the Greatswords and Eponia’s kithband behind them, the party set out for the city with a small wagon train of supplies in tow. They made a formidable force and no one made any effort to impede their progress. By early evening the small army approached the city where black smoke hanging in the air and the scattered remnants of the refugee’s shantytown heralded trouble within.

As the Swords marched column by column through the open and damaged gate the elves moved stealthily along, almost as outriders, bows at the ready for any trouble. The show of obvious force cleared the streets and kept any troublemakers at bay. It was clear, even to the unfamiliar eye that the order in the city had all but broken down. Damaged buildings, missing doors, broken windows, blackened timbers all gave evidence of looting and violence. Improvised barricades and frightened civilian watchmen protected some areas while others seemed to have been sacrificed to gangs of thugs and squatters.

As the Crows and their soldiers reached the inner wall surrounding Bridgeton, a more considerable and well-manned barricade protected the closed gate. After casting challenges back and forth and Anders identifying himself as the 7th Grand Baron in as many days, the party was confronted by a very old and cantankerous man known as von Heket – a wealthy noble vaguely known to Anders and Beaumont. During the resulting parlay, with the assistance of von Heket’s stunning daughter Raven, the party learned that the Pretender

had held the city and that the Bailiff and his remaining men were holed up in the Great Keep. Anders managed to convince the old man to allow them passage with the reassurance they would not conscript or otherwise harm von Heket's militia or the people under his ostensible protection. Under the suspicious eyes of von Heket and his volunteers, the party and the soldiers passed through the relatively calm and untouched neighborhoods of Bridgeton and through the gate into the Old City.

The Old City appeared to have suffered greatly from the wrath of angry townsfolk and roving gangs. Perhaps the wealth of its residents attracted looters, or perhaps it was deserved vengeance for turning blind eyes from the malfeasance of the Prince. The march through the Old City was tense as shouts, curses, stones and even a few poorly aimed arrows struck from the gathering shadows. Drauwulf kept his men in order however, and the elves held their strange reserve – this was not the time to hold the desperate townspeople accountable for a few slights and minor injuries.

As they marched up the steep causeway to the main gate of the Salzenmund Keep, Anders was hailed from the battlements. After declaring himself and claiming the title of Grand Baron, there was a short pause, followed by the thunderous report of mortar fire sounding from beyond the walls. The Crows and their followers broke and ran for cover among the deserted mansions skirting the foot of the bluff as the slow and unlucky fell to the fiery rain. A dozen elves and Greatswords did not make it to safety.

While the rest of the Crows and their allies were pinned down, Quintis cloaked himself in shadows and Skywalked to the roof of the Keep. From here he befuddled the officers and chanced to see one of the mortar's explode. After the defenders retreated to cannon emplacements across the baily, near the main entrance to the Keep, Quintis cast an illusion on the gates making it appear as though the Greatswords were charging through them. In response, the defenders fired at the gate, effectively shattering the once sturdy doors.

Then Quintis changed the illusion, making it appear as though the gates still held. Under the cloak of this lie, the Crows and their soldiers crept to the gate, pulled open its ruined valves, and charged the cannons. The first fired wide, but the second sent a ball to explode among a rank of elven archers, killing half a dozen of the loyal warriors. Despite the cannon fire, and covering crossbow fire from the ramparts, the Crows made short work of the last defenders and quickly cleared the baily.

Dismounting a cannon and slinging it from heavy ropes, the Greatswords used it to batter down the stout doors guarding the entrance to the Keep itself. As the freedom fighters charged in, reckless with rage, they poured into the main hall and were brought up short by a deadly tableau. Standing before them was Bailiff Jager and his men. Among and around them stood stove-in powder kegs, piles of grapeshot and bags of musket balls, nails, tools and even silverware. Most held burning torches, lanterns or candles, looks of desperation in their eyes.

With a half-mad grimace, Bailiff Jager said "Gentlemen, let's talk..."

Session 60

Day 254 (CD 308) (continued)

The last word left the Bailiff's mouth as one of Kel's arrows entered his eye. Lunging

forward, the elf hoped to catch Jager's torch as it fell from his now dead hand. He missed, and turning once, end-for-end, it struck the ground and ignited the spilled powder at his feet in an instant, blinding flash.

The explosion killed half of those in the room (Fate Points all around) and variously injured the rest. Flagstones shattered and rafters burned, buckled and cracked. A hundred years in the future, those living in this old Keep would still point to the scattered grape and musket shot imbedded deep in the thick, blackened beams and wonder at the old and unlikely tales. Concussion, blunt trauma, shrapnel, and burns, the dead, whole and in scattered, bloody pieces, littered the room – smeared across the floor, on the walls, hanging from the rafters and balcony railings. No one could even hear at first, and if not permanently deafened, their ears rang for days afterwards.

Day 255-262 (CD 309-316)

Attending to the groaning wounded and the gruesome dead was a nightmare of pain and gore, but by morning other responsibilities were calling for attention. Word spread that the explosion at the Keep had left a new heir in charge and by noon an endless train of those seeking aid, refuge, guidance and demanding reparations had already begun to form at the new Baron's doorstep. Over the next days the Crows and their minions were more than busy reestablishing order and addressing the pressing needs of a desperate populace. In this effort, Hecket, his daughter and his minions proved valuable, but the small army of remaining Greatswords and elven archers proved the deciding force.

One of the first things the Crows did was to search out Ander's brother Wendel, who they ultimately found in a sort of well-appointed dungeon below the keep, attended by a filthy, tongue-less servant known only as the Keeper, and the long-desiccated corpse of his and Ander's father. Wendel himself had become a horror of Chaos, presumably from exposure to wyrdstone, made all the more unspeakable by his complete lack of awareness about his own vile state. Wendel was a corpulent mass of liquid flesh permanently ensconced in an iron tub that kept his fluid tissue from pooling onto, and draining away between, the flagstones. No one asked the purpose of the slime-encrusted spigot low on the side of the metal tub.

Wendel's face – a few lumps, fever-bright eyes and a small pink mouth, barely discernable in the trembling surface of his form – was almost gleeful in his joy at seeing Anders and his curiosity about recent events. It soon became clear the tainted, demented creature had suffered a terrible break from the reality of the world, and truly believed his research at the "excavation" was helping to restore the Nordland and her people to greatness. Anders, his first instinct to kill the foul monster, could, in the end, only back away in abject pity and disgust as the servant began to chew up bites of food and press the resulting mash into Wendel's eager, chortling mouth.

Day 263-264 (CD 317-318)

After a week, realizing that his duties as Grand Baron would only continue to demand all his attention, and there would never be a good time to leave, Anders and the Crows decided to take only a handful of Greatswords and elves and finally go to confront the Pretender at the excavation. They stopped in Grafenrich to see how the recovery progressed and the next morning took the road through Oldenlitz to the old fort. Finding it mostly burned and entirely abandoned they headed cross-country to the ruins of the Chaos well. As they

approached the ruins, they suffered increasingly frequent, but seemingly random attacks from Estalian mercenaries, but Estalians clearly tainted by the Ruinous Powers. Fast, aggressive, and oblivious to threat and pain, these monstrous soldiers were more loose-skinned homunculi than men, driven to maniacal killing rather than tactical fighting – their bodies all but bursting with rot-blackened gore when punctured by sword or arrow. The closer to the well the party moved, the more frequent and intense the attacks became.

After taking a gun emplacement and spiking the cannon, the party approached the well, fighting off fleshy mercenaries all the while, losing several Swords and elves in the skirmishing. Though darkness obscured whatever lay within, Quintis could feel dark magic emanating from below – dhar – the magic of Chaos. Though not enough to power the Horn, or his more challenging spells, Quintis could tell that if he was willing to truck with black magic, he could channel here, even inside the supposedly windless effect of the artifact.

Fighting their way back down the hill and to the entrance of the mine, the party destroyed more tainted mercenaries and spiked another pair of guns. As they stood before the dark opening of the mine entrance, everyone, not just the wizard, could feel the black contamination of raw Chaos drifting from the tunnel.

Session 61

(March 3rd, 2013)

Day 264 (CD 318) (continued)

Regardless of the foreboding sense of dread pouring from the mine, the Crows headed inside with nary a pause – their skeptical and rather apprehensive escort following behind. The raging monsters the party had been fighting off seemed unable, or perhaps unwilling to follow them inside. No one spoke aloud about what they thought such creatures feared enough it kept them out.

The dark and winding mine tunnel was unchanged from the first time the party had seen it, but for the handful of rotting bodies Quintis' marsh lights revealed. As the force reached the chamber where the mercenaries had been camped it became clear that the soldiers had not all succumbed to the taint at once and that many had died fighting each other – or the monsters some of them had become. The chamber was ransacked and abandoned - or at least it seemed.

As Floy moved alone, as usual, into the large room following Quintis' lights, a massive, horrifying shape lumbered out of the darkness and attacked. Once a man, or men to be more precise, this huge creature was a Chaos tainted amalgam of many different mercenaries, hammered together by some demented flesh-smith to make a greater monster. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of the creature was the fact that the party recognized Un Ojo as the core being underneath the mass of limbs and muscle that formed the horror. The feral light in the creature's single eye was undoubtedly that of the brutal Estalian capitán.

The first exchange of blows went badly for Floy as the massive creature slammed through his defenses, but the party soon gained the upper hand, with help from the elven archers. A single shadow knife from Quintis finished Un Ojo as it ruptured his bloated flesh which exploded in a burst of black blood. The tainted mass toppled forward, pinning Floy to the ground in a gout of clotted gore.

After extricating the unfortunate Floy from under the bloody mass, the party proceeded through the entrance to an adjacent chamber, assessable up a ramp mine tailings, through which a dull green and purple glow shown. Beyond, a vast cavern filled with ancient but freshly shattered ruins lay bathed in both the dim light of a large ring of dying wyrdstone and the radiant pool of coruscating light it surrounded. High above, the opening of the Chaos well the party had recently re-explored shone a wan autumn gray.

Could it be the lost Chaos gate that Kurzman had warned them about? Could it have been the effect of the Horn that left it this shattered ruin? It seemed more than damaged – it seemed broken, non-functional. Yet, there was Chaos magic emanating from it – like heat from inside a sealed oven – enough for Quintis to power his spells should he choose to risk dark magic. Did the gate still work? Could one pass to the realm of Chaos, or return again afterward? Perhaps it was now only a one way trip for it seemed likely that that hosts of the Ruinous Powers would otherwise have already poured through in support of von Gausser's great plan.

As the Greatswords covered Anders, and the elven archers spread out to cover the cavern, Quintis and Floy moved forward to examine the pool of light. After a few tense moments of exploration, Floy called out something about what they were looking for being on the other side, and leapt into the pool. He appeared to hang there for just a moment, seemingly buoyed by the light itself, then vanished below the thickly rippling surface of the otherworldly glow.

Stunned, (though really, after all this time and all his shenanigans they shouldn't have been) the rest of the Crows stood gawking at Floy's impulsive folly. But, in the same moment another goeey ripple heralded the rise of something from below the surface, and as they watched a man, dressed in the frightful accouterments of a magus of Chaos rose from the pool to stand amidst it's glow. Anders and Beaumont, and perhaps a Greatsword or two, the only ones ever to have met him, recognized the Pretender, Johan von Gausser.

Bald now, arcane symbols of Chaos emblazoned on his skin, and an insane and bottomless gleam in his eye, von Gausser began to speak, "You meddling bandits have defied my Master's great plan..." and as he did so, Beaumont chucked his spinning bola at the tainted cultist. With a strange sideways slide he deftly dodged the weapon while continuing to speak, "...and for this blasphemy I shall flense your souls from your bones and gift them to the Lord of Change myself."

As his words echoed around the chamber, Gausser lunged upward from the pool and it became clear just how completely his devotion to Lord Tzeentch had corrupted him. As his body rose from the light it became certain that Gausser was no longer human – even in form. A large black mass, a corpulent body of undulating flesh and thick writhing tentacles upon which his torso rode like some nightmare centaur, erupted from the pool and the full terror of the Pretender's transformation become apparent.

And so began the climactic battle in the Crow's war to free the Nordlands. The madly waving limbs of the Chaos horror smashed into ground, ruins and bodies alike in frenzied attacks. Flailing limbs grappled and tore at the warriors, tossing them across the chamber and even into the pool of light from which the creature swarmed. Yet, as men and elves alike began to die, their blades and arrows began to take a gory toll – tentacles were burst and

severed in pulpy, corpulent wounds, the monster's fury increasing even as it was cut to pieces. With a trashing roar the Chosen of Tzeentch convulsed and collapsed below the glowing surface of the gate.

The sudden silence was broken only by the panting of the fighters and the moans of the wounded. As the rest of the remaining Crows began to attend to the wounded, Quintis divested himself of everything but his robe and the Horn, and without a word he stepped into the pool and vanished.

In the same instant Quintis found himself standing at the edge of the same pool, but in the midst of a dark and frozen waste, surrounded by ancient, monolithic structures no human mind was ever meant to perceive. Quintis however, his mind inured to such terrors by a lifetime of staring into the Void, shuddered only once and bent to his task. Floy lay catatonic at the pool's edge, and grabbing him by the collar the wizard stepped back into the light, dragging his hapless bother-in-law along. Then, as he felt the unseen forces of Chaos sense his presence, he raised the Horn to his lips and blew.

Years later, after reading every arcane treatise on the subject he could discover, visits to all the great libraries of the Empire and consultations with mages of every color, Quintis could still never quite understand how he and Floy reversed their journey. Was it the Horn? Was there some kind of magical rebound as the Chaos end of the gate was destroyed? Was it a simple act of will? Of Fate (or Fate Points)? However it was managed, with nary a sound, and only a dimming as the pool of light winked out, Quintis and Floy appeared, laying on the ground were an instant before the gate had stood.

The Pretender was defeated, the gate was gone and the wyrdstone extinguished. The Nordlands were finally safe from his black reign and imminent threat of Chaos invasion, and the Scarecrows finally free, a year overdue, to return home.

A YEAR AND A DAY

A year and a day. It's what the bards always say in the old stories – the length of the princess' banishment, the time it took the witch to brew her potion, the duration of the old hermit's dying curse. A year and a day. In some ways it's no time at all – the wink of an eye in the life of a mountain and but a heartbeat in the age of the Empire. In other ways it's more than time enough – the time from one harvest to the next, the duration of the first vows of a young monk, and the traditional naming day for a toddling child.

A year and a day. For the Nordlands it has proven time enough to begin healing the wounds of the Pretendership, and rebuilding the lives, towns and trust of those who survived. Trust in the new Grand Baron and his Court of Crows as some call it – his warrior advisors who helped oust the Tainted Prince and restore peace in the Salzlands. Time enough for the Scarecrows to begin to settle into their own new lives and begin to believe in their own futures.

A year and a day has been time enough for Anders von Brenner to restore a semblance of

order to the Barony, take the oaths of his once skeptical liegemen and prove to the people of the Nordlands that he is serious about restoring the honor of his title. It has been time enough to court the beautiful Raven von Hecket and marry her in a grand celebration that marked the first anniversary of his coronation. It's been time enough for him to grow a little fatter on the throne than he did while on the run, and as the third son of a minor lord he has settled well into life as the youngest Grand Baron in the last three hundred years. Quickly becoming known as Anders the Just, he rules with a strong hand but unexpected wisdom – and only the occasional loan of a little guile from his cousin.

A year and a day has been time enough for Beaumont von Faust to win over his unlikely bailiff, make an honest woman of her and father a son, who even now wails away in the nursery. Though he grumbles and denies it, claiming to miss the old days, Beaumont too has quickly taken to life as a savvy ruler. Though Beaumont the Greedy's constant conspiring to bring greater wealth to his lands has earned him a less flattering sobriquet than that of his Lord Cousin, his people are learning that what's good for Grafenrich is good for them, and the town's rebuilding and new growth have gone apace. As always, Beaumont depends on plenty of guile, and only sometimes the occasional draught of integrity pressed upon him by his cousin.

A year and a day has been time enough for Quintis Esheman to settle into his role as High Vizier to Grand Baron Anders, and to establish the suitably mysterious air of the man behind the power. It has been time enough for him to take over most of the Great Keep's north tower as both his private quarters and his well-appointed workshop – the strictly off limits laboratory where he conducts his arcane experiments and where Anders hopes the crazy wizard's spells are well out of range of the rest of the castle. It has also been time enough for Quintis' foul-tasting potions to restore his arm if not yet time enough for it to grow to full size – the damn stubby thing still itches terribly. Now, if he could only figure out how to relieve himself of the withered remains of the original limb.

A year and a day has been time enough for Kel' Theril to be given titles and responsibility by both Lord Anders and the Witch Queen herself, to serve as High Legate – the master ambassador charged with creating a meaningful peace between his forest kin and the Nordlander humans. Trusted with broad powers of negotiation and treaty, the taciturn elf is fast becoming an honored advisor in both the human and elven courts – despite his still generally unexplained return from the dead. Though their escapades across the Nordlands made Eponia and Kel close allies they remain only friends, and Kel takes full advantage of his newfound prestige among the more amorous maidens of the Forest.

A year and a day has been time enough for Maridan's first pregnancy to bear Floy Sledge not one, two or even three children but four squalling babes who have given the poor Estalian a whole new sense of what is terrifying. (What was that Uncle Quintis once said in a drunken moment about some fertility potion?) It has also been time enough for Floy to establish himself in his appointed office as Bailiff of Salzenmund and to begin proving to the realm that an Estalian can be an honorable and fair lawbringer. The year also saw a well-to-do Estalian couple with a large traveling retinue come to the city – apparently following the long and winding trail of their estranged and errant son. Word of the Nordland's Estalian bailiff had reached their agents, and when the report reached them, the aging couple wasted no time in sailing north and taking a barge upriver to Salzenmund. The initially chill and awkward reunion soon thawed as the quartet of grandbabies won over their grandparents as the contrite couple begged Floy's forgiveness for their past transgressions. Huddling

around the fire in their winter-dank Nordland castle quarters, Maridan is increasingly preoccupied with the fact she is now apparently heiress to a sprawling villa in warm and sunny Estalia.