

Lady Moon help us! Help us all, for we are nearly out of time. -Lundybaern

After the terrible death of their mother and the unknown fate of their father, the siblings were removed from their home in Redwater. After his trial, their father Arden arranged for the Regent to take charge of his children and keep them in Westflood for a period of three years. The Regent would promise to keep them "safe" from not only Henerick's family, but from their own thirst for revenge as well.

On the morning after the full moon, and the first day of clear weather of the spring following their 3-year confinement, the siblings will begin to make their way home. On their way, they will encounter bad weather, Eclan assassins, beasts of the wild, foreign invaders, thieves, and even the forgotten darker powers of the Berian Wood. They may also befriend a Cerrak Sentinel, a boat captain, Acolytes of the Triad, and nomadic horsemen from the south. They will see the Salt Plain, the Valley River, the Pull Road, the grand Berian Wood, places like Gold Bend, Mudrim, the Spire of the Spring, and their estranged home of Redwater.

They will learn that their home has changed. All is not well in Redwater.

Will they have the opportunity to take their revenge on Henerick and his helpers?

Might they have the opportunity to truly help the people of Redwater?

Can they remain strong as their parents taught them?

And if it all goes just right, might the rightful Lord of Redwater finally take his place?

Come along. Let's find out!

Forgotten Children Part 1

An Athia Saga for 3 to 6 Players

Version: 5.00

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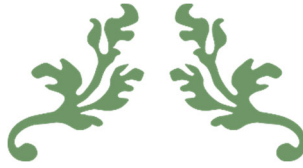
Forgotten Children

Forgotten Children

Rathman

An Athia Saga for 3 to 6 Players

Written By Jeff Rathman
(and his friends)



FORGOTTEN CHILDREN - PART ONE

AN ATHIA STORY



BY: JEFF RATHMAN AND HIS FRIENDS



FORGOTTEN CHILDREN — PART ONE

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FOREWORD

THE STORY OF THE STORY

When Wick and I began building the world of Athia to serve as background to the systems we were developing, I wasn't sure what it was going to look like. Over the course of time that changed. Today, in my mind, I know exactly what Athia looks like. I know the "world" better than I know the "game". When we began the long process of play testing, I had the opportunity to participate as a player in several games that were run by several of our friends. They were a blast! And we learned a ton. Through those stories the game systems were perfected, abused, taken to the limits, and eventually crafted into very nearly the Athia game you see today. One thing that was never quite perfect was the world I played in. That was both good and bad, for me anyway. It demonstrated that the world was malleable to be whatever any GM needed it to be. That was very good. But the image in my mind, what it was really like in Athia, hadn't been shown yet.

I shouldn't have been surprised. Only Wick and I really knew what that looked like. If I wanted everyone else to know how I saw the world of Athia, I would have to show them. That is where this started.

I knew I couldn't show the whole wide world in one game. Maybe there are some GMs out there who could, but not me. I have always considered myself to be a "small story" teller. So, I had to decide what parts of Athia I thought were important and that I really wanted to show. If I had to sum it up it would have been a list like this:

- Athia is a human world. The biggest threat is almost always your fellow man.
- House Lloar is a place where you make your own future. Many people are trying. Watch your back because someone else probably is.
- Politics are complicated in Athia.
- Just because the map shows it is under the rule of some House, doesn't mean it is civilized.
- Every coin counts.
- Traveling across Athia is no picnic.
- The Triad are a big deal, but it wasn't always that way.
- There are shadows of the time before the War of Kings and some of the monuments of House Asos are still standing.
- Bad things happen to people in Athia. Overcoming those bad things is where heroes come from.
- Who can you count on? Family, friends, and yourself. If you're lucky.

With those things in mind and having had a steady diet of things like Pillars of the Earth on my television and Eaters of the Dead on my nightstand, the story started to come.

Family ties. Succession of power. The “old ways”. With the help of my players, we told quite a story indeed.

I have never seen a game/story like this one put on paper, and I am not sure how it will translate. The first time we tried it, we invested something like 200 hours in the playing. I think back to things like the “Against the Giants” and “Drow” follow-ups: Did that take 200 hours? Maybe. Maybe more. I can’t remember. Even so, this isn’t like those classics. It is more like a script.

I am sure it will seem to be on rails as you read it, but hopefully you find that there is enough room and flexibility in it for you to make it your own. When I ran it the first time, it was less on rails. I knew the end part and the beginning part, but the in-between parts got filled in as we went. I have included all the details that we created in this document. Use them all, or use some, or use none. Make it fit your players. Make it yours.

I also attempted to do something else I have never done with a story like this. I tried to play it again, with a different, larger group of players. We hit a snag in early 2020. Damn pandemic. So, we stopped. I included everything we did cover for your reference. Hopefully, we’ll get the stars to line up again and we’ll finish. If we do, I’ll be sure to add the full account here.

You will quickly notice that a fair amount of this document is dedicated to how we played, who played, and my perspective. I hope it helps to paint the picture of the story rather than distracting you from telling yours. Don’t feel you need to do it our way. There really is no wrong way to play in Athia.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this as much as we did. Take it and show your players what this part of Athia looks like.

By the way, it is called “Part One” for a reason. The original group has tried our hand at a sequel or two. Maybe they will be good enough to print. I’ll let you know.

Jeff

THE STORY FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SCREEN

I remember a time, long, long ago, when reading through a particular Game Mastering book for Dungeons and... something or other, that I stumbled upon things like strongholds and followers. I would imagine playing a character not just through a selection of tunnels or rooms, but through a story. I imagined them starting off as a young and clueless adventurer, gaining skills and competence, and somewhere along the way doing something truly heroic. At the time I thought I knew what that was: saving the king's kidnapped child or perhaps slaying a great dragon. Though my heart was in the right place, I'd never really played a heroic game. Sure, I'd fought nearly every monster in the book, completed nearly every quest I'd set out upon, and saved everyone that needed saving. I'd just never found my characters building keeps and castles or having followers or even employees. I'd never played a real hero, someone admired by the people for the things they did.

By the time Jeff ran this game for us, I had been gaming for nearly 40 years. Though I wouldn't say I had seen everything, I had played in countless stories, adventures, epics, modules, you name it. Everything I could have ever imagined for the most compelling, irresistible, deep, and meaningful story was about to be blown out of the water. How? I'd played in so many games, run so many games - that seeing that magic unicorn of plot, character development, intrigue, and collaboration all coming together should have happened before - but it hadn't.

On this journey, this epic story of a game, we'd somehow stumbled upon every necessary ingredient to make this the best gaming experience of my entire life. I don't even know if I can put it into words, but I'll try. First, Jeff wrote up a killer "backstory" for the game, something that immediately elicited a visceral and emotional reaction. That then gave everyone a mindset right from the start. Then came the characters, and even though most of us made them up on the spot, we knew they had a deep connection and would work with a sense of teamwork that would go beyond contrived reasons. What happened next could have been for any number of reasons. Our characters, the story, the reality, and the gravity of the situation for our characters, we took it all seriously. I think the rest was just finding that indefinable connection between a player, their character, and the story. We were all in.

Jeff set us off with the tone and timbre for the game, but the characters wrote the melody. He gave us every opportunity to fill in the blanks and followed us when we added ideas and explanations to his game where perhaps there wasn't any before. We all dove head-first into the roleplaying, adding the emotion, plausibility, and uncertainty that would have come from anyone being placed in such a situation. We roleplayed everything. I don't think Jeff had imagined playing every single day of this journey, but each day on horseback, riding the wagon, setting up camp, or breaking it down to set out

for the new day, we roleplayed. We'd have entire sessions of nothing but talking, reflecting, planning, conspiring, convincing, and imagining. Jeff would write out the following day's adventure, and we wouldn't even finish out the day we were on. I remember countless times when Jeff felt unprepared for an evening's game because work that week had been demanding, but we'd all laugh and wave him off because we all knew we weren't even going to get through the stuff he'd had written out three weeks earlier. ...and we were always right.

I don't know if Jeff knows it, but he forever set the bar in my mind for what a story in Athia should or could be. In my mid-40's, I finally got to play the game I'd always wanted to play, and I will be forever grateful to Jeff for allowing me the privilege of joining him and the others on this truly wondrous journey.

I hope, in some small way, by him having written it all out, you too might get a taste of what we all experienced when we played it.

Wick

THANKS

I cannot properly express how grateful I am to my friends, the players that helped me tell this story. Thanks for giving me a place to get this stuff out of my head and into the world. Looking at Athia through your eyes has been amazing. My name is on the cover, but I know what this story became is because of what we all did together.

Kim, Liz, and Laura I am so pleased we are still telling the stories of the Three Sisters. Thank you for bringing them to life. They feel as much like friends to me as the three of you.

Brandon, thanks for joining in. Your voice and perspective have proven to be a fantastic addition.

Jeff, Brent, Jordan, Scott, Dyan, Sadie (and occasional guest stars Derrek and Mike), thanks for letting me try this again. I hope we get to see how it turns out!

And Wick. For the 200 hours of play, we must have spent twice that talking about it. I cherish those discussions. Thanks for all your ideas and assistance. I must say that without your encouragement I would have given up long ago, especially the writing. And if there was such a thing, Lundy would definitely be going into the hall of fame.

There are so many others that inspired us to make this story that I cannot possibly name them all here. I will include this quote from one of them that I shared with my players about halfway through the story:

“We give ourselves in imagination to the reality of another world. We take joy in respecting its integrity. We treasure its difference. And that lifts us up as human beings. And it’s a wonderful thing to do every week. You know I feel it’s a privilege to participate in a sacrament. And uh, don’t tell the bosses, but I’d do it for nothing.” – David Milch

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This isn't like any "canned adventure" I have ever seen. That isn't to say it is better, just different. It was written in reverse. I ran the story first and then went back and wrote it all down. This is more of a record of how we played it. The original game was done from hand-written notes and a few sketches of locations. I started with the background and a loose idea as to how the ending might play out. I knew what direction to head, and I created details to push that way. If you prefer, do the same. Let your party tell you how they want to get there. Redwater is waiting when they arrive.

The scenes contained herein were written as we needed them for the most part. It was rare that I was more than a couple of days ahead of the party progress with my preparation. That changed about halfway through when things started to get convoluted. I did eventually complete an outline of the major storylines to keep it all straight in my own head. At that time, I was suffering from not enough information. In your case, you probably will have too much. Remember the scenes were written specifically for my characters. Some will likely not be relevant to you and yours. I can't imagine every party will have somebody fall in love with E'Gil. Well maybe. Please don't feel you need to use them all.

With that said, there are a few ways you might consider approaching this story. First, you could play it off the page as written. Apply each of the scenes in the order presented. Second, you might try rearranging the scenes to a point. The order is only important as it relates to giving out information. As long as it makes sense geographically (as the players travel) and as long as the players have enough of the information by the time they get to the end, the order doesn't matter so much. Finally, you could disregard the scenes altogether. Use the beginning and the end. Read the story and what is going on apart from the party, and let your players tell the story. Extrapolating what the road to Redwater looks like should be easy using the details contained in the scenes.

I suggest reading as much of this as you can before deciding. Especially the accounts written by my players. They should give you an idea of what this story could be. Your story will be similar at best, not the same.

Ask yourself what kind of story you and your players want to explore. Use this as a blueprint to build something. Make it your own.

THE STORY

The Forgotten Children is a story of a family that was wronged by another more devious, powerful family, and how their children try to make that right. The story is set in the lands of House Lloar in an area nearing the edge of civilization. It is specifically focused on the town of Redwater, the last outpost on the Valley River, at the edge of the Berian Wood.

BACKSTORY FOR THE GM (THYLERA'S STORY)

The story of Thylera is that of a woman desperately trying to leave Redwater without giving up the title and wealth living there had afforded her.

Thylera was the second child born to Eclan, a very wealthy and successful merchant on the Valley River. She was raised in Westflood with her older brother Toreas in comfort if not privilege. She was attractive, strong willed, and not one to make an enemy of.

Her father arranged for her to marry an ambitious, charismatic soldier, Eldram. Thanks to Eldram's efforts in unifying the woodsmen of the lower Berian Valley, and with Eclan's support, he would be made the first Lord of Redwater. Thylera was pleased with her husband's new title. She would enjoy the increased status in the Regent's court. She was, however, much less pleased by Eldram's intent to relocate to Redwater to build a new keep for his soon to be growing family. Thylera gave birth to Henerick, Eldram's only son, while still in Westflood, but she and the baby would soon be brought north to Redwater.

Eclan would not live to see his grandson reach manhood nor the keep he helped to finance. Upon his death, all his fortune, including Eclan Traders, would pass to Thylera's brother Toreas. Thylera was solely dependent on Eldram from that day forward. When news of Eclan's death reached Thylera, she would leave her infant son in the care of her husband and nursemaids in Redwater as she journeyed to Westflood for her father's memorial. Thylera did not return until the following year and even then, it was against her wishes. She detested life in the north. The ways of her husband and the woodsmen couldn't compare to the courtly life of her father's house.

She used every means to convince Eldram to return to Westflood. When Henerick's behavior became an issue in his early teenage years, she insisted on taking him to Westflood to be educated there. Eldram allowed them to go, for Henerick's sake. Their time in Westflood would unfortunately not have the desired effect on the boy. In the city, he learned to manipulate and exploit poorer and weaker citizens. And, with his uncle's financial backing and Thylera's influence in court, he acted with near impunity. He became a villain.

When Thylera and Henerick would finally return to Redwater, it would immediately become clear to both that Eldram had lost his taste for being Lord. He spent much of his time hunting or exploring the forest. More and more of the profit from the timber trade and more of the policy making power was being given to the people of Redwater. There were rumors he may abdicate and name his friend and trusted man-at-arms, Arden, as his successor. Thylera would not stand for this. She immediately pressed Eldram to name Henerick instead. She would also turn to dark, more nefarious methods to change his mind.

Thylera was of Eclan's line. Tough. Ambitious. And a secret follower of the old ways. She was taught by her grandmother, who was one of the last remaining druids of the Berian Wood before the great War of Kings. She would use those teachings to manipulate the spirits of the forest to coax Eldram and others to her ideas.

With this secret advantage, it was almost easy to convince him that his only son, Henerick would be a better choice as his successor. This was the plan for a time, that Henerick would become Lord of Redwater, and Thylera and Eldram might then return to Westflood.

Henerick's inability to control himself would eventually change things. Henerick had forced himself on several of the local girls and word of it had reached Arden. He confronted Lord Eldram about his son. The incident did not go well for Arden. Eldram went so far as to have Arden removed from the keep. Thylera hoped this would contain the problem. When she asked her husband about it, Eldram turned on her. He became so angry, not even her magic could change his mind. Eldram had decided. Henerick was not fit to be Lord of Redwater.

Lord Eldram left the keep, intent on repairing his friendship with Arden.

Thylera would have to act fast. She confided in Henerick's friend and bodyguard, Fuhlgar. His attitudes were such that he might be able to handle the delicate and decisive actions to come. Eldram would have to go. And Arden too, for Henerick to get his chance at being Lord. Fuhlgar was more than happy to assist.

Things transpired quickly, and better than Thylera could have hoped. Eldram was indeed killed, and Arden was accused of murdering him. Arden's wife Orphea was also killed in a supposed attempt on Henerick's life - one less loose end.

The trial of Arden would prove to be a difficult challenge. Thylera required the help of her brother Toreas and others. The Regent himself would hear the evidence and pronounce sentence. There were missed opportunities, to be sure. The children of Arden and Orphea were allowed to leave under the protection of the Regent. Arden was found innocent of murdering Eldram but confessed to treason. Henerick was indeed

named Lord of Redwater. Thylera believed she would be able to return to Westflood in the spring if all went well.

All did not go well. Over the next three seasons, Henerick's leadership would create adversaries with the local population. The timber trade became almost paralyzed. Nearly all their income disappeared and what they did have was needed to pay for soldiers to enforce the rule of her son.

Thylera again relied on the assistance of Toreas. A massive influx of wealth was needed. Toreas could loan her some temporarily, but the best way to accomplish such an acquisition would turn out to be an arranged marriage with a very wealthy, foreign family. Toreas introduced the idea to Charon of Luria. The nobles of Luria had long wanted another tie to house Lloar. Redwater could be exactly that. And, Charon had an unmarried daughter. The wealth and martial forces of Charon might stabilize the region and Thylera could then possibly, finally, return to Westflood. And with appropriate wealth, she could remain influential in the Regent's court. Perhaps even beyond.

She had nearly forgotten the children of Arden and Orphea.

FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

The characters for your players are each a son or daughter of Arden and Orphea of Redwater (or perhaps one of their friends or associates). These siblings were raised as capable fighters, trackers, and woodsmen by Arden.

After the terrible death of their mother and the unknown fate of their father, the siblings were removed from their home in Redwater. After his trial, Arden arranged for the Regent to take charge of the children and keep them in Westflood for a period of three years. The Regent would promise to keep them "safe" from not only Henerick's family, but from their own thirst for revenge as well.

The children would be employed in various positions for the Regent: guards, retainers, soldiers, scouts, maybe one would even be a prisoner for a time.

The players should dictate what happened to each character during this time, within reason.

On the first day of clear weather of the spring following their 3-year confinement, the siblings would begin to make their way home.

This is when the game begins: ***The 16th Day of the First Cycle of Auctus, in the 65th Year of the Triad.*** The morning after the full moon.

On their way, they encounter bad weather, Eclan assassins, beasts of the wild, foreign invaders, thieves, and even the forgotten darker powers of the Berian Wood. They may

also befriend a Cerrak Sentinel, a boat captain, Acolytes of the Triad, and nomadic horsemen from the south. They see the Salt Plain, the Valley River, the Pull Road, the Berian Wood, places like Gold Bend, Mudrim, the Spire of the Spring, and their estranged home Redwater. They eventually learn that all is not well in Redwater, and that Henerick is to be married to a wealthy Lurian. They may have opportunities to take their revenge on Henerick and his helpers. They might also have opportunity to truly help the people of Redwater. They may even save the life of the Regent. And if it all goes just right, the rightful Lord of Redwater may finally take his place.

THE VILLAINS

An expert storyteller I know once told me that a story was only as good as its villain. This story has many, but at the heart of the problems facing the characters is Henerick. The Lord of Redwater is well known to the siblings. They hold him responsible for the fates of their mother and father. Henerick has the will and immediate resources to be a real problem for the characters. Although he is arguably the recognized villain of the story, encouraging him from over his shoulder is his mother Thylera - strategic, selfish, and cruel. Beyond Thylera older, forgotten powers of the Berian Wood lie in wait. Manipulating. Whispering ideas. Biding their time. Along the way are a wide selection of lesser adversaries. Some working for the villains, others simply self-interested against the progress of the characters. Most importantly, it should become clear that *time* is one of their ever-present adversaries. The statistics for all the opponents and non-player characters are included in the References at the end of this document.

MORE INFORMATION

The Setting and Background for the Players sections have additional details on the where and why of things. The "Behind the Scenes" section describes what is happening in the world around the party as they are making their way home. The accounts of the "Three Sisters" and the "Children of Redwater" can be found in the appendixes. These are the combined backgrounds and journals of the first two attempts to play this story. Hopefully they are useful in understanding what the story could look like.

SETTING UP AND WHAT TO EXPECT

“The hardest part of any project is writing the instructions for someone you don’t know.” – Adam Savage

HOW LONG?

The story isn’t very long if you boil it down, it covers about thirty days in game time, but it took a long time to play.

The first time I ran the game, we started in late March 2017. The group played for three or four hours every Wednesday, with only a few misses, until late March 2018. As I mentioned above, it was something like 200 hours. This group was very comfortable playing at a slow pace. For the most part we covered an average of only one day of game time per session until nearing the end. Each game day took several sessions once things started to come together.

For the second time running, we started in March of 2019. We planned to play every other Thursday for 4-5 hours, but the larger group made scheduling difficult. And, as I mentioned, we were forced to stop.

YOUR PLAYERS AND MY PLAYERS

When I started crafting this story, I knew who my players were going to be. I had a big advantage in the fact that one of them was Wick, the other creator of Athia. Another was Laura, his wife and editor of the Athia book. They knew as much about the game as anyone. The third player was Kim. I have played in many games with Kim over the years. She has been gaming almost as long as me. I consider her a pro. The fourth was Liz. We picked up Liz from one of our early playtest groups. We specifically selected her then because she had very little tabletop fantasy experience and therefore almost no bias. She proved to be a great tester and roleplayer. So that gave me the rare (at least in my experience) grouping of three gals and one guy. It was that mix as much as anything that fueled the idea: “What if they were all sisters?”

My second group of players gave me many new options to explore. I had completed the story once, and now had the opportunity to do it again. And I think, word had gotten around about the first game. My second collection of players had at least an idea what kind of story they were going to try to tell. The group was bigger. Six players: Sadie, Brent, Jordan, Jeff, Dyan, and Scott (Dyan’s husband). They played five siblings - four boys including a set of twins, and one girl. The sixth character was a foreigner and an acquaintance of two of the children. All but one of the players were experienced roleplayers. Sadie had been only briefly exposed to tabletop roleplaying some years before, but she is a natural. Her “fresh” eyes have been a great asset to the group. Several of the players also participated in a very (very) early playtest of Athia which gave

them a touch of background with the world. And then there is Jeff. Jeff Bull was instrumental in the rewriting of the “Book One” portion of Athia. Many of the words there are his. He helped us find the voice of Athia. So, I again had the huge advantage of a player with knowledge of Athia. Another advantage came from the game we had just completed. Brent did a great job running a game from back in the eighties (which shall be nameless). It was ridiculous and fun, but the systems of that game had many shortcomings, and I would use the memory of those problems to showcase Athia’s rules and systems. I still maintain our way is better (but I do have a significant bias). Hopefully we will get to finish the story.

Regardless of the challenges of your players, remember it is about all of you enjoying playing.

STYLE OF PLAY

My players took this story pretty seriously. This is something I am so thankful for. Each gaming group has their own style of play. I have one group that leans toward the light and more comical game and another that is more of a tactical/mechanical bunch, but my groups were serious about this story. As a result, the game was very roleplay heavy. I am not sure it has to be, but it was really fun that way. If your players are more of the “get to the action” types, this story will surely be shorter, but it may lose something. My advice: select serious players. Encourage the heavy roleplay. It is that kind of story. But, like all things Athia, make it fit you and the preferences of your group.

THE CHARACTER RESTRICTIONS FOR YOUR PLAYERS

SIBLINGS

One of the biggest restrictions your players face is the requirement for most, if not all of them, to be siblings. This is a trick I read about years ago. How do you get a group of characters to act like a team? Make them family. I have never liked the “we meet at the tavern” thing. It was never plausible enough for me. Making the players a family gives you several built-in shortcuts. They automatically have reasons to be together. They have opportunity for squabbles that most likely won’t break up the party. They will defend each other. They will listen to each other, at least for a while. And in this story, they all have some of the same goals.

In addition to the siblings, there is a great opportunity for an outsider as long as they have strong ties to one of the others. In my first game, the non-family member was more of a supporting character at first but became a much bigger part as the game went on. We kicked around the idea of having one of Arden’s retainers, a grizzled veteran, being attached as protector to the youngest. Another idea was a Brother of the church charged with keeping an eye on the siblings. There are many plausible options but keep in mind the siblings are the main focus of the story.

RACE

The second restriction for character choices relates to race. I imagine the world of Athia as predominantly human. I believe there are only three or four non-human NPCs in the story. All the characters should be human. After much discussion with my players on this subject, we were able to conjure a compelling scenario where Arden and Orphea had taken in an Orc child and raised it as their own. I think the story could certainly run with such an adjustment, but again, I see this region of Athia as human. If you do decide to go this route, I recommend saving it for a group of 5 or 6.

CLASS

The third restriction concerns their class. The children of Arden and Orphea would have been raised in the Berian Wood. They should be Warriors or Rogues. If a player has a compelling reason why one of the children should be a caster (Acolyte or Mage), it should be reserved for a larger group (again, 5 or 6). Magic is certainly present in this part of Athia, but it is a rare thing. Allow for casters sparingly.

AGE

The last restriction addresses the ages of the characters. The youngest of the siblings should be 16 at the start of the game, and the oldest should be no older than 21. The support characters, if any, can be of any age that can be explained by their concept.

CHARACTER LEVEL SPREAD (OPTIONAL)

Another test we performed with our party was to investigate the impact of having a spread of character levels. Our first goal was to mechanically represent the different ages of the siblings (the oldest being higher level). Our second goal was to see how an unbalanced level group would fare in combat. We were pleased with the results overall. It was fun to see the older, higher-level character protecting the youngest. It isn't required to play the story, but I recommend trying it. The challenges are designed for a spread from second to fourth level to start and increasing nearer the end of the story. The characters should anticipate two, three, or maybe even four opportunities to advance in level (in my first group, they advanced twice).

I would consider assigning characters in the following ratios:

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Relations</u>	<u>Levels</u>	<u>Caster?</u>
3 Characters	All Siblings	2,3,4	None
4 Characters	3 Siblings, 1 Associate	2,2,3,4	None or One
5 Characters	4 Siblings, 1 Associate	1,2,2,2,3	None or One
6 Characters	4 Siblings, 2 Associates	1,1,2,2,3,4	Up to Two

A WORD ABOUT BROTHER LUNDYBÆRR

Wick's character in the first playing of this story was Lundybærr or simply Lundy as the sisters called him. The original idea for the character was a retainer for one of the sisters. Not quite a squire, but nearly. He would set up camp, cook, take care of the animals, drive the cart, fix armor, sharpen weapons, hold the money, all that sort of thing. He would also keep track of their supplies and keep a journal of his experience. The sisters were certainly the focus of the story, but he would become a huge part. He was a devout man but was not an Acolyte - at least not in the beginning. Wick thought it would be fun to play a character that wanted to hear the Triad but hadn't yet. It was wonderful to see the growth of the character in this way and when Lundy finally did hear from Selene, it was a big deal. It fit perfectly with the religious climate in Redwater. And he did become a Brother of the church eventually. I think it is important to reiterate that many of the scenes, especially nearing the end of the story, are tailor made for this character. You should expect some reworking will be required for your characters.

Beyond his support of the sisters and his personal growth, Lundy was a huge help to me. He kept track of three big parts of the game: **The Journal, Time, and Supplies.**

THE JOURNAL

One of the tools we employed while playing this story was the Journal. Now, this idea isn't mine, but I saw it once back in the eighties and it worked so well, it stuck with me to this day. We had a character that had a squire, Mel. Mel kept a journal. Every game the player would take notes on what happened and before the next game, would parse those notes into a journal entry from Mel's point of view. At the beginning of the next game, we would always start with the reading of the previous entry. This proved to be a great tool. My players and I tend to get socially side-tracked when we get together, talking about family, work, sports, movies, etc. Getting everybody ready to start every week often had to go 'all around the world' and it started to eat a little too far into our playing time. Nobody was too bothered because we were having fun, but it was kind of a problem. The journal fixed that. We could be lost in our other conversations until the reading of Mel's journal. By the end of the reading, the players were all in, ready to go. Beyond that, it gave a single perspective that was often different from that of the players. Sometimes Mel knew nothing of what was really happening. He was, after all, just a squire. Other times, Mel might have discovered something the party didn't know, and I could deliver that information in the journal. One time, Mel got captured. We didn't have a journal reading for a couple of sessions and the party took that absence seriously too.

When I decided to do this story, I persuaded one of my players (Wick) to take on the mantle of writing the journal. It proved to be a very good decision. In addition to all the benefits I mentioned above, it would also help the players keep the story straight. As

you have no doubt noticed, there are a lot of names, places, and situations in this story. Being able to have the journal's context for things helped the players remember what was happening where, with whom, and how important it was or wasn't. And since every entry had a date, it also served as a double check of the "master calendar" for the game.

The journal also shaped the character. At the end of the story (or this part of it) we decided the journal should be an in-game publication. The account of the deeds of the characters (the Three Sisters) was shaped into a pseudo-religious text about the will of the Gods, written by the character (Lundybærr). That would fuel future stories involving the characters. It was also crucial in the creation of this public version of the story. Without the journal, you would not be reading this. Or rather what you are reading would be missing so much, it would be very different. Different and not nearly as good.

So, can you similarly persuade one of your players to do this? It is a big thing to ask. It required a lot of work away from the game in our case. It isn't a necessary component for playing the story, but it was a wonderful addition. Included in the appendixes are the tale of the "Three Sisters", as well as the "Children of Redwater". They are the two collected journals by my players. They are great reflections on the story and how it played out.

So selfishly, I hope that if you play this story, you generate a journal. And, that you might consider sharing it with us. Seeing it through the filter of you and your players would be very interesting if not satisfying for my players and me. Our contact information is at the end of this document with the other links.

TIME (CALENDAR)

In the beginning, the game is about "how long will it take us to get home?" Later, when the siblings learn of Henerick's impending wedding, that deadline should compel the party to move with even more haste. Tracking time is critical for the game. The encounters or "scenes" are laid out in relation to the calendar. I have included a "Calendar" with all the scenes charted as they were originally played. As the scenes are played, they can be checked off. The calendar, in that respect, works like a map. As each day passes, the party moves closer to home, and closer to the wedding date. The approximate location for each day is noted on the Overall Map with Dates, but you may not be on the same schedule.

Athia dates in this document are noted as follows: **Auctus 16.1c**, or the 16th day of the 1st Cycle of Auctus.

As my party moved across the Salt Plain or up the Pull Road, what day it was would tell me where they were. If the party was delayed, which did happen to us, we just moved a little further per day in the following days to catch up to where we needed to be. Again, "when" was almost more important than "where". There are a few extra days in the

calendar that aren't accounted for if you need them. In the first game, we were able to "fast forward" a couple of days before arriving at Mudrim. The players didn't mind. At that time in the story, they were anxious to get to a town. They needed supplies.

SUPPLIES

Some people cannot stand the bookkeeping aspects of tabletop games. I am not one of those people. I really like the fact that everything on the sheet is important. People in Athia are not wealthy. Every coin matters and therefore every arrow, every serving of food, every drop of water holds significance. When making a journey such as the one the party is on, supplies should be important. Short supplies add to the feel of this story.

I have included Lundy's list of supplies that Wick prepared for our first game. It is comprehensive to say the least, but it isn't excessive. Everything was needed according to Lundy. As we played, the supply list started to become a "character" of sorts. Lundy would combine the servings of ingredients into meals for the sisters. It became a familiar, entertaining thing to hear the descriptions of "what's for supper". The sisters would even get to the point where they preferred Lundy's cooking to eating in the inns and taverns along the way. Mechanically, it helped to put urgency on getting to town. Discussion starters like: "We only have enough meat for two more meals. We need to hunt or get to town." were great for adding context to the trip. Finding a dry well was a serious problem if water was short. Things like that made the game feel more plausible, more like Athia, at least to us. If you are lucky enough, like I was, to have a player that will keep good records, and make it a bigger part of the game, so much the better. It adds a ton.

However, it isn't required. I understand that tracking "How many apples and how much honey were used to make fritters last night?" if you don't enjoy it, can be a distraction. Having a total number of days of food and water will get you by. Marking one check box per person, per day works fine. As a last resort, I have included that type of list as well. Have the characters do the bookkeeping, just remind them when to check the boxes. And, if they forget too often, use things like: "the mule gets spooked and spills the water and most of the grain." Make their stuff valuable.

SETTING

The story takes place in the lands of House Lloar, more specifically in or around two locations: Redwater and Westflood.

REDWATER

Redwater is the town in which the main characters were born and raised by their loving parents, Arden and Orpheia. It is also the town where their parents became embroiled in a political struggle that would quickly end their lives in heartbreaking fashion and change the lives of their children forever.

Redwater earned its name in the time of Krullus. A terrible battle was fought near the site of the town, and the river ran red for many days after.

Redwater is situated on the banks of the Valley River at the mouth of the great Berian Valley. It has always been the winter home to the Berian woodsmen and their families. More recently, thanks to the efforts of both Lord Eldram and Arden, it has become their permanent home. It is currently under the rule of Henerick, son of Eldram, Lord of Redwater. Henerick's mother, Thylera, the Lady of Redwater is still very active in the daily affairs of the town and the surrounding lands.

The town is of vital economic value due the major export of raw timber from the Berian Wood. Great rafts of the massive trees are assembled in the Valley River just south of Redwater and floated down to the mills in Westflood when the river is high enough.

The town is surrounded by a wooden palisade of huge Berian trees. Nearly all the structures are wooden with a few exceptions. The remains of an Asos era structure has been repurposed into an inn known as The Whetstone. Its reputation for food, drink, and song reaches well beyond the local area. There is also a modest temple to the Triad made of salvaged Asos stone and large river rock.

The largest stone structure in the area is the keep of the Lord of Redwater. Positioned atop a hill several miles to the southwest, the keep has an excellent vantage over the town as well as the river and approaches from the south. The keep is of more modern construction and was built by skilled and highly paid labor. It has never been attacked by significant forces and in fact still appears newly completed. Prior to the construction of the town's palisade wall, the keep provided shelter to many of the residents of the area in times of trouble.

WESTFLOOD

The city on the western shore of the Lake of Swords, where the main characters have spent the last three years of their life in the mandatory service of Klain Whiteshield, Lord of Westflood, Regent of the Lake.

Westflood is built on the foundations of many of the ruined manors of the nobles of House Asos. Much of the stone for the walls and major structures was salvaged from the monuments, temples, and libraries of the once proud city of Orenthyr and the smaller surrounding ruined towns.

The city is a major trade hub for grain, lumber, fish, and finished goods. There are many working mills in and around Westflood, reducing the giant rafts of Berian trees into finished lumber.

Westflood has a non-typically religious population for a city of Lloar due in large part to the attitudes and personal beliefs of the Regent, Klain Whiteshield. There is a very large abbey to the Triad, The Abbey of the Lake, including a massive temple, library, and structures for housing and educating many of the faithful.

The large number of merchants, traders, artisan, and pilgrims make the population highly mixed.

The City Guard are regarded as protectors of the people and commerce of the region, and they have a reputation of little tolerance for infractions against local laws and citizens. They are one of the largest armed forces between Silarum and Caladria.

THE LANDS BETWEEN

The lands north of the Lake of Swords are known as the Salt Plain. The area was the largest irrigated crop-producing region in the known history of Athia prior to the coming of the Thyrs. When the armies of Krullus invaded the lands of King Asos, not only did they flood his great city, but they also destroyed the ancient aqueducts, canals, and cisterns of the irrigation system. They even salted the fields, ensuring the land would never again feed the nations of men.

The land is only now beginning to show signs of recovery. Wild grasses, brush, and even occasional groves of trees can be found in the hill country north of the Lake of Swords. Many of the lowlands and valleys are still stained with salt and unable to support much life, but higher ground is again home to herdsman and even an occasional farmer.

Herds of caribou, elk and larger animals are no longer uncommon.

There are two major trade routes between Redwater and Westflood: The Salt Road and the Valley River. The Salt Road is made up of stretches of old Asos road and newly constructed segments joining them together. It is the fastest route north from Westflood to Redwater. The Valley River has long been the trade highway for the region. When travelling south from Redwater to Westflood, no route is faster. Barges do still travel upriver from the Lake of Swords against the strong current using the ancient Pull Road. A construction endeavor unimaginable in the current age, the Pull Road is a series

of stone roadways, bridges, and levees, coupled with the favorable terrain on which beast of burden pull barges up the great river. Pulling a barge upriver is a slow and arduous process, but huge loads of goods can be moved using minimal manpower. Barge travel is regulated closely in the high flow season to not interfere with the downstream timber rafts from Redwater.

Both routes are dotted with small villages, homesteads, and occasional roadhouses.

Occasionally to the far west, the Dragon Spine Mountains are barely visible.

BACKGROUND FOR THE PLAYERS

The story below was written with a party of four in mind. Three sisters and a fourth acquaintance. I found that reading it as a completed story makes it easier to get through. However, in the References that accompany this publication, I have included a Microsoft Word version with the specific references removed. I have inserted words like <OLDEST> or <YOUNGEST> in place of character names, as well as <SIBLINGS> and <CHILDREN> instead of brothers or sisters or sons. With this document, you should be able to tailor the background to your group of characters. Using the Find and Replace function in Word, it should be easy to insert the names and demographics of your own group. Remember, the “Setting” section should also be given to the players.

By all means, add to it. Make it personal to the players you have. It is the setup to the story you will make together. **The most important takeaway from this section is: What happened to Arden, Orphea, and their children three years ago?**

FAMILY HISTORY (THREE SISTERS):

Ingrid, Eevi, and Signy are the three daughters of Arden and Orphea of Redwater.

Arden came to Redwater when he was in his early twenties, as part of the expedition from Westflood, led by Eldram, future Lord of the region. The purpose of the expedition was to reign in the Berian woodsmen under the Lloar banner, more specifically under the rule of the Regent of the Lake. This endeavor would ultimately be successful, and would be credited to Eldram, but all knew, including Eldram himself, that the real breakthroughs were because of the efforts of Eldram’s young lieutenant Arden.

The agreements made by Eldram (and Arden) with the Berian woodsmen would forever change Redwater. The construction of the palisade and creation of a secure town in which the woodsmen could live with their families in safety, would ultimately bring stability to the region. This stability would allow for the re-establishment of the timber trade so essential to the communities down river.

Eldram was rewarded for this success with a newly sanctioned title of Lord of Redwater as well as the accompanying wealth resulting from the opening trade route. He would eventually bring his wife Thylera and young son to live in the keep overlooking the town.

Arden was credited with opening several new paths into the Berian Wood, finding several lost settlements, and helping to manage wise harvesting of the trees around Redwater. Arden would also ultimately become good friends with his mentor Lord Eldram. The two would often take expeditions in the woods alone together, much to the displeasure of Lady Thylera.

Arden would meet Orphea at a wedding during the time of construction of the palisade wall. A local woodsmen of some fortune had a daughter marrying one of the palisade builders close to Arden, and so he was invited to attend (along with most of the town). During the typically large feast, Arden became captivated by a woman singing traditional celebratory songs. She was very gifted and very beautiful. He would later learn she was also quite smart and very strong willed. Her name was Orphea.

Orphea's family had lived in the Berian Valley for many generations. Her father a woodsman, her mother a midwife. She was an only child to older parents. She too had noticed Arden, the strong, respected man at the right hand of the new Lord.

At one point in the celebration, after much encouragement, Orphea began to sing a familiar wedding feast song. "The Legend of Ilval and Annon" is an ancient verse telling of two forbidden lovers that eventually find happiness only to end in tragedy. All at the feast were surprised, but none more than Orphea, when Arden began to sing along, trading stanzas, as though rehearsed. The two were lauded as the highlight of the feast. Arden and Orphea would be forever tied to the song and local wedding traditions.

They were married that same summer. The following year, Ingrid was born.

Eventually, Orphea took on the role of midwife, thanks to the teachings of her mother, serving Redwater and the surrounding countryside. Arden continued to explore the Berian Valley, searching for new trails, ridding areas of beast and other fowl denizens. Both had the respect of the population of Redwater and of many of the woodsmen as well.

Orphea learned to love the winter in Redwater. It was a time when her husband was home.

The family grew to include two more daughters. First Eevi followed by Signy. Orphea feared that Arden wanted a son, but he would never say so. He loved his daughters and raised them to be strong willed like their mother. He would teach them to hunt and track and survive in the wood. Always saying to Orphea, "I cannot always be here to look over them. They need to know to look after each other."

The springs would come, and Arden's duties would take him away from home. Once even taking him with Eldram on a journey to Westflood for some political meeting. They would be gone for 60 days. Ingrid has memory of her mother crying often during this time.

In the coming summers, Arden agreed to stay closer to home. Eventually suggesting that Eldram take his son Henerick on his outings instead, but there would always be at least one or two he could not refuse.

Orphea was pleased. The young family had years of stability, contentment, and happiness.

LORD ELDRAM'S DILEMMA:

In these years, Henerick would come of age. A handsome, strong, and smart young man, Henerick was given every opportunity to learn from his father and his retainers. Fencing, fighting, hunting, riding, all were taught and learned.

The trait Eldram tried most to impart to Henerick, wisdom, was the piece he refused.

He became an entitled, cruel, angry young man. Bullying the locals, stealing, using his father's title to get him out of any scrape.

Eldram would eventually press Henerick's mother to send him to her brother in Westflood to get formal education at the Abbey. She agreed and used it as an excuse to leave Redwater for a time.

When Thylera and Henerick returned, he was no better. What he seemed to have learned was ambition. And not surprisingly, lust. He now had a male attendant/bodyguard named Fuhlgar. A large man of similar ambition and morality, always with him to muscle his way out of trouble.

Thylera almost immediately began to press Eldram about arranging for Henerick to succeed him as Lord. Eldram was, at first, excited by the idea and even went so far as to inquire with the Regent about such a possibility.

It would be Arden and Orphea that would change his mind.

Orphea would eventually learn of Henerick's treatment of the local population of young, unmarried ladies when attending several of them in pregnancy. Orphea became so affected by the accounts given by the young women, she immediately told Arden and demanded something be done. Adding that she had noticed Henerick speaking with Ingrid just days before.

Arden wasn't really concerned about Ingrid. He knew she could take care of herself. But Eldram deserved to know what was happening with his son.

Eldram was less than happy to learn of it. He became enraged at Arden for overstepping their friendship. Arden was forced to make a quick apology and almost fled the keep.

It is unclear what happened over the next few days, but in the end, Lady Thylera left the keep and Eldram came to Redwater to visit with Arden and Orphea.

THE TRIP:

It had been a long time since Eldram had visited their home. It was large by Redwater standards, but nothing compared to the keep. Eldram looked around the family home with a hint of envy. He first apologized to Arden and then to Orphea, offering her his own purse filled with septems. He asked that she use them to see to the girls she was caring for. He then asked Arden if they could take one of their trips into the wood. He had been thinking of a possible solution to the issues with his son and wanted to discuss it at length. To their surprise, he invited the entire family. Arden eventually agreed and allowed the girls to come along. Orphea elected to stay to check on a pregnancy that was nearing time.

Eldram refused to let any of his retainers to accompany them on the hunt, only one cook, and one groom for the horses. They modestly outfitted themselves, hoping to live off the land as usual.

The first couple of days were spent travelling on trails all of them, even the girls knew well. Arden and Eldram debated how to correct the misdeeds of Henerick. Once they reached the deeper wood, progress was slow. They were forced to slay an Ursi. Eldram was knocked from his horse. Once it was over, he laughed loudly. Thanking Arden for saving him once again.

They stumbled upon a waterfall in the stream, almost fifty feet high. It was a perfect place to stop. After making camp, Eldram asked the girls for some time alone with their father. Not long after, they could be heard arguing. Eventually Eldram came storming into camp asking the girls strange questions, almost yelling.

“Wouldn’t you like to live in the keep? To travel to Westflood and beyond? To learn from the best teachers?”

Finally, Arden had to physically restrain him. It would all end with the two of them laughing and the girls confusedly joining in.

Once they gathered their breath, Eldram continued,

“Is it so bad Arden, what I propose? Is it such a tragedy for you and your family?”

“No, I suppose not.” Arden responded.

“Then ask me or I shall not believe you!” Eldram pressed.

Arden then smiled, drew his sword, and yelled,

“I demand Lord, that you name me successor!”

“Good. So it will be.” Eldram finally declared.

The attack that followed caught them all by surprise. Many arrows from all directions. Both Eldram and Arden struck. Eldram called to his friend to get his family to safety.

“This time I shall save you!”

Arden leapt from the falls screaming for the girls to run. Ingrid fired arrows blindly into the trees, trying desperately to hit their assailants.

“Come on you cowards!” Eldram shouted to them.

Several more arrows pierced him as he fell at the top of the waterfall. It would become quickly apparent that the arrow that struck Arden was poisoned. He would need help to escape.

The girls would spend the next five days, helping each other, dragging their seriously injured father home. When they finally arrived, they would learn that Orphea was killed in an attempt on Henerick’s life. The sisters were all wanted for conspiracy against a Lord of House Lloar. And Arden was accused of the murder of Eldram, Lord of Redwater.

THE INQUIRY:

The girls were imprisoned within the dungeon of the keep for several days. They received no word of their father and struggled to support each other through the ordeal.

They received a visit from the Curate of Redwater, Linden, an acolyte they all new well. He was very serious and measured in his account of what was happening. Their father was alive and would stand accused before Klain Whiteshield, Regent of the Lake himself, as soon as he arrived.

Lord Eldram’s body had been brought in to Redwater the day before the girls arrived in town with Arden.

Orphea was killed in their own house for attempting to kill Henerick. Henerick was badly injured. He may be blind in one eye.

Linden refused to hear any of the girl’s accounts of events, stating he was to be involved in the inquiry.

The day before the trial the sisters were taken to a different part of the keep and briefly questioned by an acolyte calling himself Lathan. He was a very serious, tall, thin, pale man. His questions were very specific, and he demanded the girls each answer with “yes” or “no” only.

DAY ONE:

The day began with introductions of the participants in the Inquiry:

The Regent, Lathan, Linden, Henerick, Lady Thylera, the girls, Arden, a few other witnesses, finally ending with Lady Thylera's brother Toreas, Henerick's uncle, who would be speaking for the Lord's family. Rilen, one of Arden's trusted guides, would be speaking for Arden's family.

Arden was placed in chains at the front of the room. The girls caught his glance several times, but they were not allowed to speak with him at all.

Many boring accounts of Lord Eldram and Arden's friendship and working relationship were given in the morning, followed by character witness including the Regent himself on behalf of Arden.

After a midday break, Lady Thylera gave an account of Arden visiting Eldram to speak of Henerick's shortcomings and unworthiness to be Lord and the argument that followed. She also testified that both she and Eldram wished greatly that Henerick be Lord one day.

Ingrid was asked to give an account of the night they were visited by Eldram.

Eevi was asked details of their trip.

Signy was asked only two yes/no questions:

"Did your father and Eldram argue on the trip?" and

"Did your father draw his sword and demand to be made successor?"

She tried to answer both with "no", but Curate Linden shook his head both times at the Regent, and the Regent asked her to answer truthfully or face the consequences. She eventually did.

Arden would give his account of the trip and the death of Eldram. Many details of which were fuzzy due to the poison still in his system. Many objections and questions were voiced from Toreas.

Another break was taken.

The room was cleared of all audience not directly involved in the inquiry. Lathan then began to pray in front of a small altar that had been hastily set up at the end of the room. Linden and one other acolyte began praying soon after.

Lathan called a visage of Eldram into being in front of the room. The image of the dead Lord was terrible to behold. He looked like a statue of himself, looking around at the those in the room as if confused.

Both Toreas and Rilen were asked to pass a single written question to Linden. Linden then asked the visage of Eldram each question aloud:

“Did you wish your son to succeed you as Lord of Redwater?”

“Yes” he responded.

“Did Arden or his daughters cause your death?”

“No” he responded.

Clearly shaken, Linden wiped his brow and nodded to the Regent.

The image of Lord Eldram then faded away.

The Regent then spoke,

“So then on the matter of murder, Arden, you are declared not guilty. In the matter of conspiracy and treason, perhaps tomorrow will show the truth. This inquiry is now excused for the night.”

Curate Linden would later inform them that the second day would be largely concerning their mother and the conspiracy. He added that the will of the Triad would also be present at the inquiry as the day before.

DAY TWO:

A few minutes before the beginning of the second day, the girls were briefly reunited with their father. Arden looked very sick but smiled as soon as he saw them. He was in chains. There were many tears but, in the end, he demanded they be strong and that they remember their mother as they knew her, not by what would be said there today.

Again, much of the first half of the day was made up of introductions and statements of the conspiracy case to deny Henerick succession to Lord of Redwater. Later were many accounts of the quality and character of Orphea.

Eventually, there would be an account of the evening in question from a local man, Artil, a respected merchant that knew the family. He told the story of how Orphea was at the Whetstone singing when Henerick and Fuhlgar arrived. Eventually, as was common on the rare occasion when Orphea was at the Whetstone, she was asked to sing the “Legend of Ilval and Annon”. She eventually agreed and was unexpectedly joined by Henerick. The crowd cheered loudly. Not long after, Orphea left. Soon after, Henerick would also leave. The story caused Arden to protest to the point of being further restrained and gagged.

Henerick would then tell a surprising tale of how he saw Orphea walking home and offered to escort her. She would accept and upon arrival at the house, ask him if he

needed one more cup of wine before heading to the keep. Henerick accepted. She then threw herself upon him and they made love in Arden's bed at her request. After sleeping for a few hours, he arose before dawn to make his usual escape before waking the woman of that particular night. He would find his father's purse on the table. He woke Orphea, demanding an explanation. She told him of his father's wishes to take care of the girls he had been with. He denied his involvement and she became enraged and attacked him with a kitchen knife. He called for help and Fuhlgar kicked in the door and ran Orphea through. He immediately sent for help and then cut off Orphea's head that she would not rise to trouble them further.

At the end of the telling, Linden, with tears in his eyes turned to the Regent and nodded.

A break was called.

Afterwards, when the girls were again called to the inquiry, there was an argument happening between Henerick's uncle, Toreas, and the tall acolyte Lathan. Toreas was demanding that he be allowed to ask the questions. Eventually the Regent denied him.

What was to happen next would haunt the dreams of the girls forever.

The room was again cleared of all audience not directly involved in the inquiry. Lathan then began to pray in front of the small alter as he had the day before. Linden began praying soon after.

Lathan called a visage of Orphea into being in front of the room. Colorless, silent, but undeniably Orphea. Her hair waved about her as though she was floating in water. She looked thin, almost ill. The injury at her neck was not bleeding, but obvious. Her eyes went immediately to Arden who was crying. She smiled.

Linden took the page he was given and asked the following question aloud,

"Did you act in defense of yourself when you attacked Henerick?"

"No" she replied, with a look of anger and pride.

Linden then asked the second question,

"Did you willingly invite Henerick into your own bed?"

The visage of Orphea immediately looked to Arden. She began to shake, eventually pulled at her hair, and looked as though screaming, her mouth wide, eyes closed tight, silently screaming.

Toreas demanded, *"Make her answer!"*

And so, she did. With streams of tears running down her colorless face.

"Yes." she said.

And she was gone. Arden had to be removed from the room, Ingrid too was restrained. Never have the sisters been as confused or saddened.

The Regent then closed the inquiry for the day.

DAY THREE:

The morning of the third day began with a visit from Linden. His hair had turned white overnight. He was, like everyone, affected by the events of the previous day. He informed the girls that their father had requested a direct audience with the Regent to discuss confessing to the accusations.

Soon, they were taken to see Arden in his cell. The Regent was leaving as they arrived.

"You have one hour." he stated as he exited.

This would be the last time the girls would see their father. They spent the time talking about how things would change and how to stay strong. There were many tears and embraces. Embraces that would have to last.

At the end of the hour, the Regent returned and gave Arden his word that the girls would be safe. Arrangements had been made to take the girls to Westflood. They would not see Redwater or their father again.

THE TIME BETWEEN:

Three years. The Regent promised Arden he would keep his daughters in Westflood under his protection for three years.

It was in Westflood that Lundybærr came to know Ingrid. In service to the Regent, he was attached to her unit in support. At first, she was simply a soldier in the City Guard, but would eventually rise to the status of White Guard, one of the Regent's personal guards. Lundybærr was fortunate enough to follow her through each of her stops along the way.

Signy too worked for the Regent. Her youth kept her from direct service, but she was trained among the Regent's own family.

Eevi was assigned to a local merchant, a wealthy one, by the name of Liutulf. She would come to lead his personal guards. Her reputation was unquestionable in her service to him.

At the end of the three years promised to the Regent, the sisters ended their service. But it worked out that he was able to keep them a bit longer. The Regent refused to allow

the sisters to leave until winter's end. When Auctus finally came, the sisters would no longer stay.

Lundybærr too was ready to see more of the world than the kitchens and tents of his service. He was released at Ingrid's request, and it was his intent to follow her to see how her family's story would end. And along the way, perhaps he would find his place in Athia.

On the 16th Day of the First Cycle of Auctus, in the 65th Year of the Triad, the sisters started their journey home.

Remember, this is a completed version of the background story. Use the editable version included with the References.

STARTING THE GAME

Once you have committed to trying this, and you have selected your players, you'll have to tell them enough to get some feedback from them. Before you get together to play the first time, if you can, tell them about being a family, and human, and warriors/rogues raised in Redwater. Tell them their family was done a terrible wrong a few years back, and it would be up to them to fix it. Give them a super quick version of the background if you want, but not too much. Determine who plays the oldest. And the youngest. Will there be a support character? Who will be keeping the journal? Have them give you names and rough concepts for their characters.

COMPLETE THE BACKGROUND

Take the information from those first discussions and plug it in to the "Find/Replace Version of the Background for the Players" document in References. Then pass it on to the players. Give them a few days before the first game if you can. The introduction is long and full of ideas, and I found that it aged well with my players. They read the background a couple of weeks before we played the first game. Having the time to digest the story a bit helped everyone figure out what their character's attitude was going to be. I think it made the personalities of the characters better or at least clearer. Come game time, we were all excited and ready to go.

CREATING CHARACTERS

Keeping all the restrictions I mentioned previously in mind, have your players create their new characters. My players elected to make their characters separately before the game. It worked out fine, but my personal preference is to do it all together. The concepts players bring tend to rearrange when everyone is discussing them together. Part of me is stuck in the "party balance" paradigm from my old days, but thankfully Athia is not that kind of system. In Athia, balance isn't needed so the restrictions this story puts on your players shouldn't inhibit their success. Help your party explore their options, especially if this is their first time playing in Athia. You know your group, do whatever works best for you and them.

ATTRIBUTES

The game was designed for characters with a starting Attribute total of +2. The additional Attribute point for being level 2 or level 4, if the characters are starting there, should be added also.

STARTING EQUIPMENT

The characters, regardless of level, should purchase equipment, armor, and weapons as though starting at first level (not to exceed 75 septems). Any

leftover money from purchasing equipment is retained by the character. Each also receives 15 septems past wages for the road (not for equipment).

The Regent provides the characters with all the items on the supply list to use as “party goods”.

In addition, each character is given a horse from the Regent’s stables, and the group receives an ox and cart for supplies. If the party is exceptionally large (6 characters) a wagon and additional ox may replace the cart. You may wish to substitute pack mules/horses in place of the cart if it fits your characters better.

THE FIRST JOURNAL ENTRY

Have the player keeping the journal prepare an entry for the first game. Or, using what you know of the party and the character that will be keeping the journal, edit one of the attached entries below as needed. One is written from the perspective of a support character and the other from one of the siblings. Hopefully they can be blueprints for a suitable beginning for your game.

FIRST EXAMPLE: AUCTUS 16.1C (LUNDYBÆRR’S JOURNAL)

I was thankful that Skjoll was willing to part with Magnus. The ox was certainly stubborn, but his strength could not be matched. For a while I was beginning to wonder if we were going to have a cart with no means to move it. With the last of the supply accounted for, I believed we were ready to head out. I had the keen suspicion that when Ingrid said, “first light”, she did not mean at the rising of Illios.

Having seen the three sisters, the previous night as they went over their plans, I could not help but wonder how much of their discussion was fueled by emotion, and how much by Tharbin’s brew.

I wondered what it was I had signed myself up for. Though Ingrid had recounted the tale of her family to me several times now, hearing the additions from her sisters made me affirm there was far more to the story than I may have initially believed.

The sky was beginning to lighten. It was time to go and hook up Magnus. I was certain the sisters would be arriving soon.

Triad watch over us-

SECOND EXAMPLE: AUCTUS 16.1C (VÉ'S LETTERS HOME)

Dear Brother Anselm,

I have no idea when I'll be able to post this letter, but it gives me some small measure of comfort to at least write it. I already miss the quiet of the abbey, and our talks. Just now, shivering under a foul-smelling blanket, I cannot express just how much I miss what has been my home for the last three years. But you were right. I have to go back to my first home. There is too much unfinished business.

Oh! You'll never believe who showed up at the gates: Vili. It turns out he's been in Silarum all this time. I have no idea what he's been up to, but he seems to have prospered. His clothing is fine (even bordering on dandy if truth be told) and he's become more confident and garrulous. It was great to see him, but something feels off. I worry that he's not being entirely genuine with us.

He brought with him a friend named Rishja: a tavern worker it seems. She's older than all of us and seems worldly and self-assured. Ekhart knows her in passing as well. Speaking of Ekhart, how he has changed. Taller, as are all of us, but he looks thin and a bit sickly. I feel badly that I didn't make more concerted efforts to see him over the last three years, but I cannot bear that guilt alone. I was not hard to find.

I think Lorelei is less ready to forgive our errant brothers for not keeping in touch. We shall see. She and Arn are much as they were when you met them, though Lorelei looks more and more like Mother every time I see her. Arn's manner reminds me of father, as well.

Which brings me back inevitably to thoughts of justice. On the first leg of our journey, we spoke at length about what each of us expects and desires when we reach Redwater. I think we all crave some manner of justice or revenge, though the precise manner of seeking it varies widely among us. The scars of what happened to our parents are apparent on us all, and the years have served only to stoke the fires of our anger.

Have the player read the entry aloud. Get everyone ready to play. Start the tradition of the journal. Set up the game for that session. Finally. On your way.

SCENES

Each scene has a corresponding date, location, conditions, and description. It should be noted that the Description portion of each scene is a detailed explanation for the GM and may or may not have information to be read directly to the players. The NPC/Creatures portion may include the names of NPC's that are summarized in the "People, Places and Things" section, with Creature stats available on the Opponent/NPC cards included with the References. Many scenes have challenges for the party to overcome, but not all of them. I have also included a short summation of what the players should take away from each scene, as well as notes on how we played the scene out.

There are over one hundred fifty scenes across some thirty days of game time. Don't expect to use them all.

AUCTUS 16.1c

The first day on the road is eventful. There are 3 Scenes to be played, 2 of them late in the day. The party should travel about six leagues or perhaps a little further. The weather is cold and breezy, but sunny. Again, clouds can be seen to the west indicating perhaps the weather may change tomorrow or perhaps overnight.

SCENE 1: LEAVING TOWN

Location: The North Gate, Westflood.

Conditions: Cold/Clear, a few clouds far to the west obscure the mountains.

Description: The characters assemble at the North Gate. On the advice of almost everyone, including the Regent, the Salt Road would be their path. It is likely the easiest and most direct passage north. The supplies are loaded and ready to leave. The morning is cold. As the party crosses the long stone bridge over the Sword River, the Regent appears at the top of the gatehouse. He raises his hand to the characters as if to wish them well on their journey. At last, they are on their way. As they reach the north bank and pull onto the Salt Road, the characters have a wonderful feeling of freedom.

NPCs/Creatures: The Regent, Klain Whiteshield; City Guards.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? The Regent is keenly aware of their leaving. Once they crossed the bridge, the siblings were free for the first time in over three years.

Notes on playing this scene: Let the players start to find their places. Remind them how pleased they are to be off. If you need a longer scene, have the Regent meet with the characters before they leave. He would encourage them to be safe and smart. You may also have NPCs from the characters time in Westflood be there to wish them well.

SCENE 2: THE CROSSING

Location: Crossing of the Salt Run Tributary Bridge. (See Map 3)

Conditions: Cold and possibly wet.

Description: Late in the afternoon, almost five leagues north of Westflood, the party comes upon the cut left by the Salt Run (River). As they approach the small canyon, it becomes immediately clear that the bridge is out and has been for some time. The old Asos Bridge is little more than the abutments on each side and a few courses of the stone piers in the water. It was a huge structure in its day but is now only a monument to a lost age. The canyon winds to the east towards the great Lake of Swords. The water flows in the canyon more than fifty feet below. There is a well-established path down the side to a fjord. The Salt Run is aptly named. The water is very salty. The banks show

various colors, mostly orange and white, where the minerals have settled out over the years. The water is not overly fast, but it is deeper than it looks.

Crossing the water will not be easy. The spring weather has brought wet snow and rain to the west and the Salt Run has risen some as a result.

The northern bank is wide and covered with willows and other stunted, gnarled bushes. There is an excellent location to make a fire, get warm, and even camp if necessary. There are no fish in this salty water. The water is not drinkable.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Crossing the stream requires each mounted character to succeed an Average Taming check. Characters that fail the Taming check are thrown from their horse into the salty water. If the character driving the cart/wagon fails their Taming check, the cart gets stuck in the middle of the stream.

Characters that end up in the water need to pass an Average Swimming check. Characters that fail the Swimming check are swept downstream and need to be rescued by the other characters.

Should the cart/wagon become stuck, the characters need to cooperate to pull/push/drag the cart out of the flowing water.

Anyone that ends up wet suffers. It is getting colder as the sun sets. Building a fire or even making camp here may be necessary.

What did we learn? The Salt Road isn't 100%. It is still winter. Being wet when it is cold sucks.

Notes on playing this scene: If characters dismount and lead their animal across, they will have to get wet and will still have to make Taming checks to coax their horses through the ridiculously frigid saltwater. Almost everyone from my game ended up in the water and as a result they made camp at the bridge site. It made a good place to set up the next scene.

SCENE 3: AMBUSHED

Location: Camp.

Conditions: Cold.

Description: After finishing their evening meal, the party is surprised by a group of assailants. While doing some mundane activity such as washing dishes, hanging wet clothes to dry, or checking the animals, the attack comes.

Unless specifically stated by the players, the characters should be resting, unlikely to be armored, and the animals are not saddled.

NPCs/Creatures: Eclan Assassins (one for each sibling).

Challenge: Survive the attack. There is one assailant for each of the siblings. One of them attacks a character doing their mundane evening task. Once that attack has begun, the others attack using bows from nearby (100' away at most). If the first attacker is slain, another charges in. If that attacker is slain, the others flee on horseback into the night. They head towards the west.

If the players forget, some or all the slain Eclan assassins come back before dawn as Sick.

What did we learn? The attackers are found to have either garb, coins, or other evidence that they are employees of the Eclan Traders (Henerick's uncle Toreas). Don't forget to deal with the dead bodies!

Notes on playing this scene: If the party has camped in the canyon of Salt Run, having the bow shots come from the bridge abutment above works well. They are close, but not too close. If the party has camped elsewhere along the road, have the attackers be obscured by darkness. If any of the assailants survive, they should be hard to follow. If the party can capture one alive, the assailant fesses up to being hired by an Eclan agent (not Toreas) to slay the siblings. A price of 50 septems was promised for each of the siblings killed. The assailant is unaware of any of the large machinations of Eclan Traders or of things to come.

AUCTUS 17.1C

There was rain over night. Not much, but enough to make tracking any surviving Eclan assassins an Extreme Survival check. The morning is cold and thin ice covers almost everything. But the sun is out, and it quickly warms up. In the afternoon, the clouds from the west finally arrive and with them cold westerly wind. It is a good day on the road. The party should travel the six or seven leagues to Sil's Farm by the end of the day.

SCENE 1: GIL THE SHEPHERD

Location: On the road.

Conditions: Sunny and breezy, but the clouds to the west are coming.

Description: At about midday, the party comes across Gil, his hound, and his herd of goats. They are grazing on a tall hill where the grass has finally recovered. Gil is a thin but tall man. He inquires if the party is responsible for taking his goats. Apparently, two were taken a couple of nights ago and he doesn't believe the hound is to blame.

NPCs/Creatures: Gil the Shepherd, dog, goats (about 30).

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Gil gives the characters a landmark to look for if they are friendly to him. Sil's farm is almost a mile west of the Salt Road. He instructs them to look for a single white stone just off the road, past the broken tree. With this, the party can find the old farmstead easily. Gil also knows the well there has good water, or at least it did last autumn.

Notes on playing this scene: Gil won't have much information other than the directions to Sil's Farm. The goats were taken by the Eclan assassins when they were waiting for the siblings to arrive. In our game, Gil was invited to join the party for their midday meal, he accepted and gifted them with some wine.

SCENE 2: SIL'S FARM

Location: About a mile west of the Salt Road. (See Map 4)

Conditions: Cold, cloudy, and windy. The weather from the west has finally arrived.

Description: The party has some difficulty finding the old farmstead, but eventually they do. Sil's Farm is no longer really that. Little more than a group of foundations, the place is but a ghost of its former self. The largest foundation, probably of the main longhouse has one section of the west wall that is almost 5 feet tall. The rest are only one or two courses of stones. What was certainly the fireplace has fallen in. The second largest was probably the barn. There were 6 buildings in total. Setting up camp inside the

largest provides some additional shelter from the wind. The well is nearby - a stone ring about 2 feet high and covered with old planks of wood.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Water from the well? It is about 30 feet down to the water level in the well. Unfortunately, there is a layer of ice several inches thick. If characters lower a bucket, it appears to be dry. The party may elect to descend into the well to break the ice, if they indeed discover that it is ice and not the dry bottom. Breaking the ice requires some effort, delivering a single blow that does 15 or more points of damage, or delivering a combined 40 points breaks the ice cap. The water beneath is cold, clear, and delicious as Gil remembered.

What did we learn? It is still winter.

Notes on playing this scene: Make the wind a problem. The party should struggle to get camp made. The wind howling all night makes resting difficult and hearing anything more than loud voices impossible.

AUCTUS 18.1c

The wind doesn't let up in the morning. There are clouds covering the sky completely. Visibility to the west is only a few miles. Snow is coming. If the party continues north, by midday, the snow arrives. It is a heavy spring storm fueled by the westerly wind. By midafternoon, the road becomes difficult to see. By sunset, the snow is deep and drifting. The party only makes it five leagues, at most.

SCENE 1: OX IN THE WELL

Location: The well, Sil's Farm. (See Map 4)

Conditions: Cold and Windy.

Description: The ox wandered some in the night. He stepped onto the plank covering the well. Being too large, when he fell in, he became stuck. If the party is unable to calm and free him, he injures himself or worse.

NPCs/Creatures: The ox.

Challenge: Get the ox out of the well. First, a Difficult Taming check is required to calm the ox. If this fails, the characters are at risk of taking damage as they attempt to free the ox.

Next, using ropes is necessary. Attaching each rope requires a character to be in close contact with the ox and if he is not calm, they take 1d8 points of damage for their trouble. Once the ropes are attached, the characters need to make an Extreme Exertion check. Cooperation is allowed for each character and fen (horse) doing the pulling. This means one die for each pulling character with Exertion, and one for each horse. It is probable that they are successful if enough ropes and help is employed.

In the process of freeing the ox, a few stones fall into the well, making a splash.

What did we learn? Keeping track of the animals is important. There is water down there after all. And possibly (but hopefully not) how many servings are there in an ox?

Notes on playing this scene: I cooked up this scene to give my party a second chance at getting some water. The crossing of the Salt Run had cost them a good portion of theirs. It was never my intention to have the ox die, but if it does, it provides a lot of tough steaks.

SCENE 2: THE SENTINEL

Location: On the road or nearby.

Conditions: Blizzard.

Description: While desperately setting up camp, the characters hear a distant horn cutting through the wind. Eventually, firelight shines through the snow and a man on a huge black horse approaches. He is a Cerrak Sentinel, a guardian of the road. His long mustache is covered in ice as is his horse's long mane and tail. He introduces himself as Olin and his horse Axim. He helps with setting up camp if he can. He also invites himself to join them for a meal if he is not invited by the characters. Olin is very much as advertised. He is older than most Sentinels. He is a man of service and duty. He takes his job very seriously, but he knows there is only so much he can do alone. Additional Sentinels will not begin to patrol the Salt Road until at least the third cycle of Auctus.

When he learns what the siblings are doing, or rather where they are going, he very strongly encourages them to follow him east to the Pull Road. The storm is bad, and the Salt Road is difficult to follow if they can find it at all. And, once the wet snow melts, it becomes an impassible quagmire. The Pull Road is completely made of stone, so mud won't be a problem.

Olin also tells of the Book Box in Gold Bend, or more specifically, the stew they serve. Their fish stew is his absolute favorite.

At some point, he also asks,

“Are you going to Redwater for the wedding?”

The wedding he refers to is Henerick's wedding. He knows few details, but he does know it is to take place on the evening when Selene is next full and that he is to marry a princess. This information is based partly on warnings given to him by his superiors and some from rumors in Gold Bend. Apparently, goods and people are moving north for the wedding starting any day now.

NPCs/Creatures: Olin the Sentinel and Axim the horse.

Challenge: Don't shoot Olin. Decide which way to go. Spotting Olin and Axim before hearing the horn is possible if a Difficult Notice check is made. It is up to the party to discover who and what Olin is. Olin does everything he can to convince the party to head east, but the players must decide.

What did we learn? Olin is here to help if he can. Going east is a better option. Henerick is getting married to a princess on the 15th day of the 2nd cycle of Auctus when Selene is full, twenty-six days from now.

Notes on playing this scene: Olin is one of my favorite NPCs. He is a simple, honorable man. I tried to make him helpful and likeable. He has a big moment later in the story. Let him join the camp if possible. Have the fire-side chat be your opportunity to drop

the wedding bomb. In my group, the characters didn't let Olin know who they were, or rather what their tie to Redwater was, just that they were going to Redwater.

BIG DECISION TIME NUMBER ONE:

This is one of the moments where you can decide to take your party on another route - one of your creation. If the party ignores Olin and continues along the Salt Road to Hargan and beyond, you will have to paint that picture. My story goes to Gold Bend. I am sure much of what occurs in Mudrim can be adapted to Hargan if you so choose and as I said before, Redwater is there waiting.

One thing: if your party does continue north, and you do create Hargan, by all means share it with us! We would love to see more of Athia through the eyes of others. Again, our contact information is at the end of this document.

AUCTUS 19.1c

When morning comes, the snow is over. The sky is blue, and the sun is blinding with the new snow. The day is warm enough for the snow to start to melt. There are moments when the ox and cart struggle with mud, but not enough to stop them. Despite the terrain, following Olin's path allows the party to cover more than six leagues before making camp.

SCENE 1: THE MAMMOTH

Location: Wilderness of the Salt Plain.

Conditions: Warmer, very bright.

Description: Sometime in the afternoon, when Olin is out ahead and alone, he sounds his horn. In addition, there is the sound of another "horn," the trumpeting of a mammoth. Olin has engaged the creature, sort of. Mostly, he is trying to protect Axim. As the characters approach, they see Olin flung more than 30 feet through the air and land headfirst in the snow. Axim rears and attempts to fend off the mammoth, but he is no match. Axim meets a terrible end as he is at first skewered by the mammoth's tusk and then stomped to death. Blood is everywhere and the smell of it further enrages the big bull.

As the characters approach Olin, he looks to be in bad shape. His leg is obviously badly broken and there is blood everywhere. Upon closer examination, he is only minorly injured. His leg is a wooden prosthetic from just above the knee.

NPCs/Creatures: The Mammoth (possibly 2 if your party has 6 characters), Olin, Axim.

Challenge: Save Olin. Slay the rampaging mammoth. Any character that approaches on horseback must make an Extreme Taming check or be thrown off into the snow. The mammoth(s) fights to the death.

What did we learn? Olin has a fake leg. Mammoths are really big (mammoth in fact). Blood in the snow is disturbing. If the players choose, there is a huge amount of meat and big pieces of ivory to be harvested (see Behind the Scenes section for discussion of foraging and treasure).

Notes on playing this scene: I kept Olin out of the fight. My characters struggled a bit, but ultimately defeated the mammoth without help. If it starts to go bad, Olin might be able to help. The aftermath of Axim's death obviously affects Olin, but he handles it well. If your characters can creatively prevent Axim from dying, fine by me. I used his demise to create a bloody and urgent situation.

SCENE 2: WOLVES!

Location: The area near the dead mammoth if the party camps too close or takes too long.

Conditions: Dark and cold.

Description: Just after the sun goes down, the wind shifts. The sound of wolves in the distance eventually gets unnervingly close to the mammoth carcass. If the party takes no actions to prepare, they are surprised by a pack of hungry wolves.

NPCs/Creatures: Wolves, 1 for each member of the party.

Challenge: Survive the wolves, protect the animals.

What did we learn? The smell of so much blood travels far. Don't be too greedy.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene was one I didn't need but had just in case. If your party insists on taking the time to process the mammoth or if they camp too near, have the wolves chase them off (at least).

AUCTUS 20.1c

The weather is much improved. The sun is warm, and the snow continues to melt. As the party continues east, they eventually come to the rim of the river valley. The view is splendid. The great Valley River is obvious from their vantage and smoke from what must be Gold Bend can be seen a few leagues away. To his credit, Olin knows an excellent place to descend. Along the path down, a steady flow of discolored brine runs into the marsh below. In the valley, much less snow had fallen. Still, the path is often muddy. Travel is slow and the road is unpleasant for the cart. There are however long stretches of gravel, signs of the great river in ages past. Gold Bend is perhaps not quite what the party is hoping for.

SCENE 1: BANDITS FROM GOLD BEND

Location: The old path west of Gold Bend.

Conditions: Sunny, warmer, muddy.

Description: The people of Gold Bend are peculiar and curious. A couple of young locals have been out checking their fur traps and notice the passing of the party. If the group is at all spread out, they may become brave enough to try to steal something from the cart. One may also throw rocks as a distraction so the other can pilfer something.

NPCs/Creatures: Bandits (2).

Challenge: Protect the supplies and valuables without hurting the locals.

What did we learn? Some of the people from Gold Bend would be more at home in *Deliverance*. The attempt on the supplies could mean trouble from the townsfolk if it goes bad.

Notes on playing this scene: If Olin is nearby, he recognizes the “bandits” as young, misguided youths and runs them off. He uses the old “I know who your mother is” attack if needed. If the party kills, injures, or even humiliates them, they will cause problems in Gold Bend. It was my intent to have the party be somewhat at odds with the folk there. This scene can be played after the following scene if it fits better.

SCENE 2: ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

Location: The old path west of Gold Bend.

Conditions: Sunny, warmer, muddy.

Description: The cart eventually gets hung up coming through an area thick with bushes and stumps. It is damaged enough to require repairs and the materials available here are less than ideal. Olin may also inform the party to be careful what material they use for repairs as they get closer to Gold Bend. The folk there still venerate the river and

tree spirits of the old times. They do not look kindly on strangers chopping down trees without permission.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Repair the cart enough to get to Gold Bend.

When the wagon does get in amongst the stumps, the character driving needs to make a successful Taming check (Difficult). Success means that only a wheel has come off. Replacing the wheel temporarily requires stopping and lifting the cart. It should be up to the players how to accomplish this. A failed check results in a broken part (wheel, axel, or shaft). If the characters can find some creative way to repair the broken item, they need to make a craft check (Difficult) to repair the cart well enough to make it to Gold Bend.

What did we learn? The road is rough. The residents of Gold Bend are said to still believe in the nature spirits of old.

Notes on playing this scene: I used the cart as an excuse to stop the party at Gold Bend. I feared that the place would be so unappealing, the party would continue without stopping. Later the damaged cart would become such a problem that they would have to barter for a new one, further straining their supplies and funds. Having Olin plant the idea that the trees and the river are sacred to the folk of Gold Bend was an interesting topic for roleplayed reactions.

SCENE 3: GOLD BEND

Location: Gold Bend. (See Map 5)

Conditions: Sunny and warm. There are trees (cottonwoods mostly) that get larger as the party approaches the river. The smell of the river and smoke are strong.

Description: As the party approaches the river, the homes of Gold Bend become visible through the trees. The dilapidated buildings are all in sad shape. Some have missing doors or shutters. Occasionally broken tools or other possessions can be seen piled nearby. All are but a step above squalor. Each is situated on stilts about 6 feet high. There is evidence that the river gets high enough to nearly flood them. Almost every dwelling has a small boat tied up or lying face down on the areas now dry. As spring continues, it is likely these serve as their only means of access. As the inhabitants begin to spot the party moving through, they stop what they are doing and hide. They continue to watch from behind wood piles, though open doors and broken shutters. If Olin is with the party, he directs them to the Book Box. It consists of a trio of stone structures: the tavern, the bunkhouse, and the barn. They are situated on a large gravel bar which is separated by a slow-moving channel of the Valley River. The Pull Road passes across two

old, stone arch bridges - one at each end of the gravel bar. There are two barges tied up in the main channel of the river.

NPCs/Creatures: Residents of Gold Bend (Commoners).

Challenge: Make it to the Book Box without further offending the townsfolk. Find materials for the broken cart.

What did we learn? Gold Bend must have got its name in a previous age - it does not glitter. The residents of Gold Bend are not quick to welcome strangers. Traffic is apparently moving on the Valley River (barges).

Notes on playing this scene: Arriving in Gold Bend should be a disappointment. Characters hoping for a welcoming inn and good food won't find either. If there was a bad encounter with the residents earlier on the road, it should be even more awkward. The barges tied up near the Book Box could be a glimmer of hope that passage north on the river might be available.

SCENE 4: THE BOOK BOX I

Location: The Book Box, Gold Bend. (See Map 5)

Conditions: Warm, filled with locals, smells of fish.

Description: Hopefully, Olin's description of his favorite fare, the fish stew, has piqued the party's interest. Kaylin, the barkeep is friendly and happy to serve. A few locals keep to themselves when the party enters. In the corner near the fire, is a young girl, Ruzie, and her pet goat.

Stew, in addition to bread, porridge, ale, and wine are available. The stew is not exactly as advertised. Kaylin brings a tray of crockery bowls filled with steaming stew (one for each character). The stew is more of a lumpy, gray slime. It could not appear less appetizing.

Olin is surprised and perhaps even saddened if the characters come to dislike his favorite. He is however glad to finish off any left by the characters.

NPCs/Creatures: Inga (Owner), Kaylin (Barkeep), Ruzie and her goat, Tumed (Owner), several Commoners and eventually Olin.

Challenge: Eat some fish stew. Any character trying the stew needs to pass an Average Endurance check to keep it down. Failures might lead to characters having to excuse themselves, grabbing half-consumed drinks from a nearby table to wash it down, or more graphic displays.

What did we learn? Olin doesn't always speak the truth.

Notes on playing this scene: Rates for the items offered at the Book Box are as follows: Ale: 0.5 sp, Bread: 0.2 sp, Porridge: 0.5 sp, Wine (jug): 1 sp. The meal at the Book Box is a further disappointment. As the characters “enjoy” their meal, additional patrons begin to file in for the next scene.

SCENE 5: THE BOOK BOX II

Location: The Book Box, Gold Bend. (See Map 5)

Conditions: Warm, filled with locals, smells of fish.

Description: Three of them are workers on one of the barges tied up nearby. Svad, an Orc, immediately begins to voice his displeasure at the lack of options for food. He wants meat and presses the owners to cook the baby goat sitting with the child Ruzie. To their credit, they refuse to kill the goat. Svad approaches Ruzie and offer to buy the goat. Eventually, Ruzie begins to cry and clutch the goat close. Svad might eventually try to take the goat by force. The townsfolk get very nervous and quietly ask Svad’s companions to get him under control. It is obvious, the townsfolk have respect if not fear of the bargemen. The atmosphere is very tense and uncomfortable.

NPCs/Creatures: Olin, Inga (Owner), Kaylin (Barkeep), Ruzie and her goat, Svad the Orc, Tumed (Owner), 3 other bargemen from the “Stream Wind”, several additional Commoners.

Challenge: Prevent Svad from eating Ruzie’s goat or at the very least, prevent an altercation from straining the party’s relations with the peoples of Gold Bend.

What did we learn? Svad hates fish stew. If the party asks, the “Stream Wind” is carrying wine and ale to Redwater for Henerick’s wedding.

Notes on playing this scene: If it becomes obvious that the party has no interest in protecting Ruzie and her goat, Olin intervenes. He challenges Svad to a contest consisting of kicking each other in the shin until someone yields. Olin’s wooden leg gives him a decided advantage. Svad loses but is angry at the deception. If the party is intent on fighting, Olin should break up the fight before anyone is killed (with the help of some locals if necessary). During both plays of this scene with our groups, someone from the party offered mammoth meat in exchange for their tab, and Svad was satiated. Also, it was an opportunity for a character to sing for the patrons and earn enough to pay for dinner. It is important that the party not gain passage north on the “Stream Wind.”

SCENE 6: THE BOOK BOX III

Location: The Book Box Bunkhouse, Gold Bend. (See Map 5)

Conditions: Stuffy, filled with locals and river travelers, smells of unwashed river folk.

Description: If the characters choose, they may each rent a bed in the bunkhouse for 1 septem for the night. The accommodations are meager at best, but dry and off the ground. There are 30 beds in the bunkhouse and are nearly all occupied. The characters are forced to select bunks scattered throughout the room. If the party had a run-in with the locals, they might attempt to rob the characters as they sleep. If the characters helped Ruzie in the Book Box, she (perhaps the goat as well) wakes them with a warning scream.

NPCs/Creatures: Bandits (3), Ralak (caretaker), Ruzie, many unbathed folks.

Challenge: Get a worthwhile rest. Don't get robbed.

What did we learn? The people of Gold Bend don't like strangers, but they like their stuff.

Notes on playing this scene: The party doesn't have to stay in the bunkhouse. If they prefer, there is plenty of room near the barn on the gravel bar.

AUCTUS 21.1c

The priority of the day should be getting on the river or at least the pull road. When the party wakes, whether they stay in the bunkhouse or make camp, they find that the “Stream Wind” (including Svad) left before dawn. Olin has also left town. Inquiring with the locals reveals that Olin was used as an escort for the barge going north.

SCENE 1: OX FOR HIRE

Location: Book Box or Character’s camp, Gold Bend. (See Map 5)

Conditions: Early morning, cold, clear.

Description: As soon as the characters are awake in the morning, they are approached by an unremarkable man named Peth. Some may notice him as one of the commoners seen at the Book Box the previous day. Peth will inquire about the party’s animals mostly and their destination. He lets them know that his boss, Rynar, is in a bit of a tight spot and in need of their ox or horses to continue north. Rynar would like to speak with them and can offer compensation. If necessary, he informs them that he will be out of a job if the party doesn’t at least talk to Rynar.

Assuming the characters agree, Peth leads them to “Brot’s Keg”, the other barge tied up near the Book Box. The barge is filled with large spools of various sizes of rope bound for Redwater to be used in the harvest and recovery of trees. “Captain” Rynar is a large man that rarely exits his perch at the rear of the barge. He thanks the characters for taking time to listen to his proposal.

He explains that the “Stream Wind” had some unfortunate luck with one of their horses. It came up lame some distance south and had to be put down. He may imply Svad had no idea how to manage horses. They were able to limp into Gold Bend with a single horse. When Rynar and Peth arrived, they had already been there for two days. Because they had “priority Eclan cargo” they were able to requisition/confiscate Rynar and Peth’s single horse. They were forced to comply once Olin returned and verified Eclan’s priority. Rynar is therefore requesting the services of the party’s animals. In return, he offers “leisurely passage” upriver on the barge and care of the animals by his teamster, Peth.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth, Rynar.

Challenge: Negotiate use of the ox/horses to help “Brot’s Keg” north.

What did we learn? Svad took Peth’s horse. Rynar needs the party’s help to get north. Eclan Traders is everywhere.

Notes on playing this scene: Negotiations were short during the playing of our stories. The characters were happy to have the barge to ride going north. I had intended that the need for the barge to carry their supplies be great because their cart was broken, but

in both cases, my players found ways to repair their carts (see below). This was the first encounter with Peth, a character that becomes a recurring issue for the party. His first impression should be that of a competent teamster that loves animals but is a bit of a simpleton, or as one of my players called him, a wet blanket. The ox is a great option to pull the barge, but horses are sufficient. If the party declines Rynar's offer, they can travel north alone if they wish. The barge can catch up with them at the Bend in the River Scene.

The upcoming scenes assume the party is with the barge.

SCENE 2: FATE OF THE CART

Location: Gold Bend. (See Map 5)

Conditions: Clear morning.

Description: The cart can be repaired if the party is able to barter for the appropriate raw materials.

NPCs/Creatures: Commoners

Challenge: Repair the cart or find alternative transport for their possessions. Repairs require a Difficult Craft check. A successful repair allows the cart to make it as far as Mudrim.

What did we learn? Some characters really love their cart.

Notes on playing this scene: Again, I attempted to give the characters an opportunity to abandon the cart in Gold Bend, but they wouldn't let it go. If they are traveling with Rynar and pulling the barge, the ox is more than able to do so with the cart attached.

SCENE 3: THE PULL ROAD

Location: Along the Valley River.

Conditions: Clear spring day.

Description: The Pull Road is a series of cobblestone roadways, bridges, and levees that parallel the river. It is very different from the Salt Road. The sound of the animals on the stones takes some getting used to, but soon enough becomes almost soothing. There is plenty of room to ride in the barge should the party wish to do so. Peth can easily lead the string of animals and the barge by himself. He stops to rest the horses/ox every few hours.

NPCs/Creatures: Rynar and Peth.

Challenge: Relax, talk amongst yourselves.

What did we learn? Maybe something about the characters or their time away from Redwater. Maybe a notion of what they intend to do when they get back. Peth is good with animals but not too sharp. Rynar has done this trip many times and knows good spots to stop.

Notes on playing this scene: Peth asked my characters lots of questions that first day. One of them was always with the cart. As becomes evident, he knows more than he lets on.

SCENE 4: PREMONITIONS

Location: The Pull Road.

Conditions: Cold, clear night.

Description: If any of the characters has Favor and access to the Divination Influence, it might be possible to see the grim scene waiting for them in the morning. “The stars show a bend in the river, and death is waiting there” or some other revelation might be appropriate.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Discover what is waiting up around the bend.

What did we learn? Death is waiting at the bend.

Notes on playing this scene: In our second telling of this story, one of the characters had access to the Divination Influence and used it on occasion. If this does not fit your characters, skip it.

AUCTUS 22.1c

Travel on the river is comparatively relaxing as opposed to the recent overland cart travel. The morning is pleasant. As soon as the siblings are embracing the calm, they are forced to deal with tragedy. The fight at the scene of Olin's death is the climactic end to the day.

SCENE 1: THE BEND IN THE RIVER

Location: Bend in the Valley River near a growth of huge cottonwood trees.

Conditions: A calm, sunny, spring day.

Description: As the party approaches the site, a Difficult Notice check reveals the first sign of the encounter - the sound of strange gasps every minute or so. Otherwise, as they round the bend, hanging high from a tall cottonwood tree, is Olin. He has been shot with at least 2 arrows. He shows an occasional twitch and lets out a loud gasp every few moments. Cutting the rope from around his neck requires climbing the tree unless the players can come up with a more creative method. It should seem urgent to get him down before he dies (even though it will not help). If a character does climb the tree (via an Average Athletics or Thievery check), they get close enough to make an Average Faith check. Success indicates that Olin's spirit is no longer in his body. He is now Sick.

As the characters are dealing with Olin, 3 additional Sick attack. 2 from the underbrush and Svad (Sick) rises from the river. Svad is missing a large portion of his face from a grievous wound.

NPCs/Creatures: Sick (2+Olin), Sick orc (Svad).

Challenge: At first, cut down Olin, then slay the Sick.

What did we learn? Olin has been killed along with the bargemen from the "Stream Wind".

Notes on playing this scene: When our groups played this scene, there was a desperate attempt to save Olin. Make it seem as though the party could if they hurry. When it finally becomes evident that he cannot be saved, have the attacks occur. If Peth and Rynar are with them, Peth hides and Rynar attempts to get the barge out of danger by steering it closer or further away as needed. None of our characters were worse than battered by the end, but the Festering Wounds of the Sick proved to be a problem.

SCENE 2: OLIN'S GOODBYE

Location: Bend in the Valley River near a growth of huge cottonwood trees.

Conditions: A calm, sunny, spring day.

Description: After the trauma of the Sick, the party needs to deal with bodies, and will likely wish to see Olin off properly. Not far upriver is a small hill with a view of the river and the road. It is an excellent location for a Sentinel to watch from. There is no sign of the “Stream Wind”. The horses are gone.

It is difficult to say what injury killed Olin, the hanging or the arrows. One arrow might catch the attention of the characters. It is exceptionally large, the tip is sharpened steel almost as long as a dagger, and it has distinctive black and red fletching of some large unknown bird. An Extreme Scholar check might reveal that it is in the fashion of a Thyr's arrow. It is impossible to tell if it is genuine.

There is evidence that the horses continued upriver on the road for at least a bit should a character make a Difficult Survival check to discover it.

Not far upriver beyond the hill, Rynar knows of a good spot to stop for the night. He is anxious to do so and demands that watches be set for everyone's safety.

NPCs/Creatures: None (remains of the fight).

Challenge: See that Olin's remains are respectfully dealt with. Figure out what happened here.

What did we learn? Olin is indeed gone and there is little explanation as to how or why. The Stream Wind is missing along with the horses and cargo. Possibly someone may know about the arrow.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was sad for my players. They had become friends with Olin and were sad to see him go. One of my players followed in the traditions of their parents by singing from time to time. When they buried Olin, she sang the “Song of the Highwayman”. The list of songs by the end was long. My players also elected to wait until the next morning to bury Olin. It was heavy. My players kept the arrow for later.

AUCTUS 23.1c

There is a light rain in the night. Just enough to rinse away any light tracks from the Pull Road. The day is a bit cooler but not uncomfortable. Rynar and Peth continue to be friendly and good progress should be possible.

SCENE 1: ATTACK OF THE SWINE

Location: A section of Pull Road that is no longer touching the river.

Conditions: Cooler spring day, out of sight of Brota's Keg or Peth as appropriate.

Description: A section of the pull road is no longer touching the river. A large area of wetland vegetation, reeds, and cattails makes it impossible to see any but the smallest glimpse of the barge from the road or Peth from the barge. As it passes over, the pull-rope explodes many of the cattails, creating a cloud of fluffy seeds. Rynar yells at Peth to slow down.

The boars attack from within the reeds above the road. Peth jumps into the cart, the reeds, or any other apparent safe place. He screams alarm to Rynar and the party if any of them are not with him. The boars concentrate on the people first, the horses second, and the ox last. If necessary, keeping the animals calm takes Taming checks with Difficulty depending on the situation.

After killing the boars, the party should be able to salvage most of the meat. How they deal with it is up to them.

If the barge is run aground, it should take plenty of time and effort to dig it out and pull it back on course. Let the players be creative if this happens.

NPCs/Creatures: Boars (3 – add more if needed).

Challenge: Protect the ox, horses, Peth, and each other without running the barge aground. Get some fresh meat.

What did we learn? Peth is a coward. Pork tastes good. The road is still wild this early in the season.

Notes on playing this scene: This encounter was hard on my first group. One sibling ended up injured and they were forced to cut the barge loose before running it aground. Rynar was able to steer it to the road downstream and wait for the party to hook back up. It should be said that both of my parties defended their ox like family. Try not to have all the animals die (stranding the barge). Also, in one instance, Peth's life was saved by the characters. This caused a serious conflict for him later in the story. Don't let Peth get killed. His day will come.

SCENE 2: THE MISSING HORSE

Location: Camp along the Pull Road.

Conditions: Cold clear night.

Description: Peth steals a horse in the night. He checks the animals during the night (as he has done prior) and very quietly leads one of the character's horses west, away from the road a safe distance, before riding north. Rynar apologizes for Peth and explains that he would never again use a teamster hired by Eclan.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth.

Challenge: Figure out where the horse went and what happened to Peth.

What did we learn? Peth is quiet and a horse thief. He was an employee of Eclan Traders.

Notes on playing this scene: Peth took the most beloved and valuable horse from my party. In both cases, it would be impossible for the horse not to be recognized by the characters later. Rynar apologizes for Peth and explains that he came with the load from Eclan Traders.

AUCTUS 24.1C

The weather is improved. The day is warm, and the evening is dry. As the group moves north, the canyon rim to the west gets closer to the river.

SCENE 1: ON THE ROAD

Location: Along the Pull Road

Conditions: Calm day with some clouds.

Description: The party continues north along the river without incident. There is no sign of Peth.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Be patient.

What did we learn? Home is far away still.

Notes on playing this scene: We played no scenes for the 24th or 25th in my first group. We jumped up to dusk on the 26th. Feel free to add scenes or jump ahead as needed.

AUCTUS 25.1c

Another warm day with no rain. The rim of the canyon to the west is very close, less than a quarter mile from the road by the time the sun sets. The shadow of the rim makes the day seem shorter. Clouds cover the stars before dawn.

SCENE 1: STRANGERS TO THE WEST

Location: The Pull Road south of Mudrim.

Conditions: Warm spring day.

Description: A group of Ferox on Haalu are seen on the rim to the west. If the party approaches, one of their warriors comes down and speaks with them. He is cordial but suspicious. He asks if they have anything to trade. If the party wishes, they can trade for decorative feathers, dried meat, or animal pelts.

Should they offer the arrow taken from Olin's body, he becomes agitated and accuses them of being enemies. He flees back up the hill and his kinsmen cover him with bows and spears. They do not attack unless it is clear the party wants trouble.

NPCs/Creatures: Ferox and Haalu (size group as needed).

Challenge: Don't hassle the locals.

What did we learn? They don't like the arrow (maybe).

Notes on playing this scene: This is another scene I didn't use in the first group. My second group only saw them from afar while fighting the boars back on 23.1c.

SCENE 2: THE CART IS NEARLY DONE

Location: Camp along the Pull Road.

Conditions: Calm evening.

Description: This Scene assumes the party still has their original cart or wagon.

When the party stops for the evening, the cart encounters a problem such as a terrible creaking sound from the axle, or a newly formed crack in the trace or shaft. Perhaps the repairs from Gold Bend are not holding up. Should the party fail at repairs, the cart is staying here.

NPCs/Creatures: The cart/wagon.

Challenge: Fix the cart/wagon, at least well enough to get to Mudrim. An Easy Craft check keeps it moving.

What did we learn? The Pull Road is hard on carts.

Notes on playing this scene: Replacing the cart became a huge thing for my first group. We didn't play the scene, but it was clear their cart was done when they got to Mudrim at last.

AUCTUS 26.1c

The morning is cooler and there is a covering of clouds. By midday rain begins to fall. There are sections of the road that need repair before heavy traffic can head north. The cart/wagon does not do well. The canyon rim is now almost a cliff wall to the west. The rain causes mud to cross the road from time to time. Just south of Mudrim, there is a break in the canyon rim. A large canyon stretches to the west where there is a small tributary trickling under an old bridge in the Pull Road. By the time the party arrives at the gates of Mudrim, the rain has stopped.

Note that the scenes in Mudrim are especially tailored to my party's path. Read them to understand the feel of the places and folk in the town. More than most, they might be rearranged, modified, or eliminated all together to make the visit to Mudrim make sense for your telling of the story.

SCENE 1: MUDRIM AT LAST

Location: Toll gate at Mudrim. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Cool evening.

Description: The first sight of Mudrim comes some distance before reaching the toll gate. The hanging bridge stretches from the canyon rim to a huge pier of Berian wood poles and east to the far shore of the Valley River. At its highest point the pier holds the bridge over 50 feet above the river. The ropes holding the bridge deck are a massive, tangled web. It is adorned with lanterns at night.

Surrounding the town proper is an earthen dike over 20 feet tall topped with a wood palisade (the mud rim). The dike ties into the wall of the canyon to the west. There are two large gatehouses over a side channel allowing boats from the river to take advantage of the wall's protection. The town cannot be seen from the road other than a couple of structures on the rim of the canyon near the western bridge abutment.

The toll booth is a pair of towers separated by a massive Berian wood door. The east tower sits right upon the water. The west is protected by a massive marsh that stretches all the way to the canyon wall.

The gatekeeper questions Rynar about his load and the party about their business. If the cart is present and filled with stuff, he inquires as to the cargo. Depending on the configuration, the toll to enter ranges from .2 sp for a horse and rider to 1 sp for the ox and cart. Rynar sees to the barge fee and maybe the ox if it is pulling the boat. Once paid, the guard rings a large bronze bell to alert the town of the arrival.

If asked, the gatekeeper directs the party to local services.

Just beyond the toll booth is an old stone bridge. Going under the bridge follows a side channel that leads to town. Going over the bridge takes the Pull Road along the river, past the town to the north. There is a similar bridge at the north edge of town.

The gates are opened as the party approaches.

NPCs/Creatures: Gatekeeper, Guards (5).

Challenge: Be allowed to enter Mudrim without giving up too much information.

What did we learn? The animals can be taken to the mesa. Mudrim is way nicer than Gold Bend. Rooms can be had at the Stone Hearth. Trumbo's has food and drink.

Notes on playing this scene: See also the map of Mudrim.

SCENE 2: INSIDE THE RIM

Location: Mudrim. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Cool evening; the town is very clean; there are few people about.

Description: Inside the gate the canal widens. There are nearly a dozen barges tied up along the road. There are several lamps along the water. Rynar deftly brings the barge to an open spot and ties it up for the night. He expresses concern about the number boats in town and how long he has to wait to leave. He indicates the road climbing up the canyon to the top where the animals can be cared for and the Stone Hearth nearby. Should they wish, the party can sleep on the barge.

Getting the animals up the hill shouldn't pose a problem unless an extra challenge is needed.

Most businesses are closed save for Trumbo's and the Stone Hearth.

NPCs/Creatures: Mudrim Guards (as needed).

Challenge: Find a place to sleep. Get the animals up the hill. Find something to eat.

What did we learn? Rynar might be stuck here for a bit. Mudrim is way nicer than Gold Bend.

Notes on playing this scene: My groups were very happy to be in a town. They were also exhausted. One group set up a hasty camp across from the barge. Some slept on board. They would take their time to explore the town in the morning.

SCENE 3: THE HORSEMASTER

Location: Atop the mesa. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Cool, somewhat breezy, night.

Description: Atop the mesa is a low bunkhouse and a small barn. The Horsemaster is sitting in a chair leaning against the bunkhouse. He is wearing a leather vest with nothing under. His boots are high for such a short man. He appears to be mostly legs and vest. He immediately approaches the party. He has been drinking. He indicates that the animals can be fed and cared for. He admires the animals, especially the ox (if here). He immediately inquires about intentions to sell any of them.

"If you're going to sell them, you had better hurry."

"My sons will be here any day."

He may also ask if they are friends of the bride. If pressed, he lets them know about his son's wedding to a local bride from a "fine" family. He may also mention the barge of Henerick's bride is expected any day. He does not take any money.

"We'll settle up when you leave."

NPCs/Creatures: Horsemaster

Challenge: Get the animals seen to.

What did we learn? There is another wedding. Here. Horses are in short supply until the groom arrives. Henerick's bride is not far behind on the river.

Notes on playing this scene: My groups were nervous about leaving the animals especially since they would be allowed to roam the mesa untethered. There was a tense moment when asking about the bride because they thought that Henerick's wedding date had been moved earlier. The siblings were also careful not to be seen all together for fear of being recognized. The news that Henerick's bride would be coming via river stirred all sorts of plans.

SCENE 4: WELCOME TO THE STONE HEARTH, CHILD

Location: The Stone Hearth near the road up the mesa. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Cozy boarding house.

Description: Like several the businesses in Mudrim, Stone Hearth is a structure carved directly into the sandstone hillside. The proprietor is a middle-aged woman named Sunnifa. She is very friendly in a motherly way. She refers to anyone younger than her as "child". The front room has a short counter where Sunnifa and Powl, the "porter", are playing a dice game. There is a framed arch leading off into the hill on each side of the counter. They can offer only rooms but can direct the characters to the appropriate other merchants in town. They indicate most close at dusk, but not Trumbo's.

Should the party wish to rent a room, there are only 2 remaining. The first is a small room with a single bed which can be had for 2 septems per night. The second is larger with 2 beds, a large wooden tub, and a fireplace which can be had for 4 septems per night. The common room is full, but beds would normally cost .5 septems.

Powl offers to assist with any belongings and shows the characters to their rooms if needed. Down the earthen hall to the left is a series of 6 doors, each to an individual room of varying sizes and amenities. Down a similar hall to the right is the common room and beyond is Powl's residence.

NPCs/Creatures: Sunnifa, Powl.

Challenge: Get an affordable place to sleep.

What did we learn? Sunnifa knows of the upcoming local wedding and Henerick's wedding. She has heard rumors of Henerick's bride arriving any day and rumors of Olin's death.

Notes on playing this scene: The first night in Stone hearth should be as advertised. Cozy and restful.

SCENE 5: TRUMBO'S

Location: Trumbo's tavern at the north end of town. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Smokey tavern; smells of cooking.

Description: Trumbo's is a busy, noisy place. Local citizens, rivermen, guards, and merchants all come here for a meal and a pint. It isn't particularly large, but there should be a table for the party to sit at. They may have to move a passed-out dock worker. The folks in Trumbo's are generally of good cheer and the food looks good. Trumbo is a tall, skinny man with thinning black hair. Britt, the barmaid, is not lovely but friendly. Her missing tooth often allows a spray of spittle when she gives her obnoxious laugh. Rand, the cook, is good at his job.

Mutton, fish, and fowl are occasionally available early in the evening. By the time the party arrives, only stew and bread are left. The stew is very good, but the bowls are unique. At the bottom of each of the wooden bowls is carved the statement "Stolen from Trumbo's."

The tavern empties long before midnight.

NPCs/Creatures: Trumbo, Britt, Rand, various other Commoners.

Challenge: Get something to eat and/or drink. Sing?

What did we learn? The stew at Trumbo's is way better than the Book Box. People don't stay out too late here.

Notes on playing this scene: Let the party relax a bit. Trouble will be coming soon enough. My party was so happy to be off the road and to be eating a good meal cooked by someone other than themselves, little else mattered. Both groups elected to sing for the crowd only to later realize they might have been recognized. One character used Rand as part of their "Connections" Ability to get information and contraband.

AUCTUS 27.1c

The morning in Mudrim is foggy. The day however clears and is quite pleasant. The party should meet several key NPCs on their first full day in Mudrim.

SCENE 1: THE FUNERAL

Location: The barge or town nearby. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Early foggy morning. The sunrise creates a golden glow.

Description: At least one of the characters wakes to the sound of chanting in the distance. A single voice. As the fog begins to break up, they eventually discover it is coming from the bridge. High above the town, a small procession of people is being led by what they would assume to be a Brother of the church. When they reach the midpoint over the river, the chanting stops. After a few words from the Brother, a woman pours an urn of ashes off the side of the bridge into the water below. A few others drop flowers and other small items. They do not linger long and make their way back to town. Brother Tash may notice any of the characters watching and give a friendly wave or sign of the Triad.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Tash, a few Commoners.

Challenge: Let them say goodbye in peace.

What did we learn? The church of the Triad is present in Mudrim. The traditions of the folk here are familiar but unique to the town.

Notes on playing this scene: The presence of the Brother was important to my characters as they had an acolyte or at least a pious member or two. The grief of the folk and respect for the river reminded all of Olin's passing.

SCENE 2: REPORTS OF OLIN'S DEATH

Location: Cerrak Counting House (or another place as needed). (See Map 6)

Conditions: Calm, cool spring day.

Description: House Cerrak has a small Trust Counting House here in Mudrim under the charge of Dalibor. If the party does not pay him a visit, he seeks them out. Word of the death of Olin and the missing barge load of wine and spirits are not welcome news. He seems suspicious of the account and asks many questions.

Olin was to be the only Sentinel on the Pull Road until wood starts being rafted from Redwater. Dalibor has no desire to be without the protection of a Sentinel when the entourage of Henerick's bride arrives. They are reputed to be quite wealthy and difficult to deal with.

The party may deduce that theirs is not the first Dalibor had heard of Olin's death. If pressed, he indicates one of his stable hands overheard something at Trumbo's the previous evening.

NPCs/Creatures: Dalibor.

Challenge: Give account of Olin's demise. Remove suspicion from the siblings.

What did we learn? Dalibor is bothered by confirmation of Olin's passing. Not only because he genuinely liked Olin, but because he would be alone here when Henerick's bride and her entourage arrives. If the party seeks out Dalibor at his Counting House, they may notice the Eclan Traders has a building marked nearby.

Notes on playing this scene: In both cases my players wished to do everything they could to do the right things regarding Olin. Giving a few hints that Henerick's bride and her entourage had a reputation for wealth and wanting things their way fueled more discussions amongst my players. Neither group noticed Eclan Traders was here until later in their stay in Mudrim.

SCENE 3: SHAKING THE BRIDGE AND THE MORMERE STEED

Location: Anywhere in or around Mudrim, the Hanging Bridge. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Calm, cool spring day.

Description: The first indication comes from someone on the mesa rim. Shouting and pointing. Word, almost panic, passes through the town like wildfire. The horses were coming. Soon it would be clear, dust was rising in the east. The noise of the first few horses crossing the Hanging Bridge is startling. As the bulk of the heard crosses, it becomes almost deafening. Five hundred Fen running across the bridge is an awesome sight.

Leading them are a collection of young men on fine horses. The large, well-groomed fen are impressive. But the beautiful, huge stallion led across by the last three men strikes all who see it as unmatched. This is without doubt a Mormere Steed from the Stringers in the East. It is easy to see why they are known as the Kings of the Fen.

After the horses are on the mesa, several bargemen race up to purchase one or two to pull them north. They return disappointed. A hundred of the horses are part of the dowry promised to the bride's father. He will be allowed to choose his after the wedding. Only then will any of the others be for sale.

NPCs/Creatures: Horsemen of the South.

Challenge: Discover what the commotion is all about.

What did we learn? The horses have arrived. Mormere Steeds are indeed awesome.

Notes on playing this scene: There was a sense of relief for my characters knowing that theirs were not the only horses in town. They also were keenly interested in the horsemen.

SCENE 4: WAGONS FOR SALE

Location: Tilden's yard/workshop. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Nice, spring day, smell of freshly cut wood.

Description: On the east side of the canal is a small house with an open workshop attached. Nearby are stacks of cut wood and several salvaged wheels, barrels, and half completed wood projects. Tilden is a large man with a red beard. He would be happy to sell the party the wagon he is currently building.

Assuming the cart is still standing, Tilden takes it in trade towards the new wagon. He negotiates only so much on price and is keen to get some of Rynar's rope in the transaction. He promises the new wagon can be ready in a couple of days.

NPCs/Creatures: Tilden.

Challenge: Negotiate the purchase of a wagon to replace the cart. Contested Charisma checks might move the price.

What did we learn? Tilden drives a hard bargain.

Notes on playing this scene: The acquisition of new transportation might not be necessary. Horses will be available after the wedding and Rynar is still going north. Both of my parties were intent on getting a replacement for their shabby cart. They had to sell some things to Hob to cover the price.

SCENE 5: HOB'S

Location: Hob's trading post, the long building in the middle of town. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Musty smelling, overcrowded store.

Description: Hob's is a long building that is more of a series of piles of stuff with a roof. There is a maze of paths through the detritus that makes up the items for sale or trade. About a third of the items in the place are in decent condition. Almost nothing is new.

Hob is a short, slight man. This is handy for navigating his shop. He offers to purchase or preferably trade for almost anything. Prices should be at least 50 percent over those listed in the Athia book. Should the characters sell anything in exchange for coin, Hob can only accommodate a total outlie of 25 septems. If he agrees to buy anything worth

more, the characters have to take goods in trade or wait until the following day, when Hob can arrange additional coins from the Cerrak Counting House.

NPCs/Creatures: Hob.

Challenge: Find what you need. Get a good deal buying or selling.

What did we learn? Hob has a lot of junk.

Notes on playing this scene: I had my players make Notice checks and Charisma checks to find and negotiate purchases of items. Both of my parties visited Hob multiple times. In all instances, they found things that were useful and at least close to what they needed. All items were noticeably used. When searching for suitable clothing for a wedding, they found items that needed alteration that they were able to accomplish on their own.

SCENE 6: THUGS IN THE NIGHT

Location: The Stone Hearth. (See Map 6)

Conditions: After dark.

Description: The siblings have unknowingly been recognized by or pointed out to Akard of Eclan Traders. He has hired a couple of local dock hands to rough up one or some of them in their room.

The thugs overpower Powl and get a key to one of the character's rooms, preferably a character that is alone. They attempt to sneak in and attack. The character should be at real risk, but the noise of the fight should bring help of one sort or another before hope is lost.

The aftermath of the fight should bring town guards and the goblin retainer of the Mayor, Zuan, to take charge of the situation. Should the thugs survive and not escape, they are arrested. Powl is none the worse for wear and indicates the thugs were the instigators. Sunnifa offers the accommodations for free and apologizes profusely using the "poor child" term several times. Akard is watching from the shadows of a nearby building. The thugs, even if able, do not identify him.

If any of the thugs are killed, Zuan indicates Yaris will want a word with the siblings in the morning. He also suggests that they not try to leave town.

NPCs/Creatures: Thugs (3), Akard, Powl, Sunnifa, Zuan, Guards (as needed).

Challenge: Survive the attack. Notice Akard watching from nearby.

What did we learn? Somebody knows the siblings are here (maybe Eclan).

Notes on playing this scene: This scene assumes at least one of the siblings is staying at the Stone Hearth. It could be modified to occur at other locations or times as needed.

Water for a bath was an excellent excuse for a knock at the door. In my first group, the thugs had the misfortune of attacking the most capable warrior. Ingrid would forever be linked to violence using an iron kettle as a result of this encounter. They did notice Akard watching after but didn't learn of his tie to Eclan until later. The incident happened at the same time as the other siblings were at Trumbo's.

SCENE 7: RETURN TO TRUMBO'S AND THE INVITATIONS

Location: Trumbo's at the end of the day. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Busy, loud, crowded.

Description: Trumbo's is especially noisy this evening. It seems the horsemen have arrived to toast the groom on the eve of his nuptials. They are drinking and singing and generally carrying on. When the party arrives, they are forced to sit nearby.

At some point there should be occasion for E'Gil to buy a round for the party. Whether in apology for the noise or spilling someone's drink or perhaps trying to woo one of the characters or whatever excuse seems appropriate. E'Gil introduces himself and his brother, the groom T'Var, while sending Esben, an elf, for the drinks. When Esben returns with the refreshments for all, he passes them out without a word. E'Gil explains that he doesn't speak. Elves.

Some catalyst should bring the groups together. Whether that be music, a fight, or simply celebrating the horsemen and the party should take a liking to the siblings. Before the end of the evening, E'Gil should invite the party to attend tomorrow's wedding.

During the evening, if Zuan and the party have not yet had any interaction, a brief exchange should occur. Zuan explains that he is the steward for Yaris, the mayor of Mudrim. She has requested that he set a meeting with the siblings in the morning. He cryptically explains that it concerns their journey and intentions.

NPCs/Creatures: Trumbo, Britt, T'Var, E'Gil, Esben, other horsemen, Commoners, and Zuan.

Challenge: Become allies with T'Var, E'Gil, and Esben. Get invited to the wedding.

What did we learn? Yaris would like to speak with the siblings. Esben doesn't speak. The horsemen are good guys.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene assumes the party goes to Trumbo's for food, drink, or otherwise. When we played the scene, E'Gil and one of my characters became quite friendly. Esben too took a liking to one of the siblings. Drinking, singing, dancing.

A full-service evening at Trumbo's was had by all. E'Gil insisted that they attend the wedding and sing for the party. Again, my characters found it important to follow their parents' musical tradition. The interaction with Zuan happened with one of the characters as they were separate from the others.

I realize you cannot make your characters friends with the horsemen but do what you can. They are going to need them in the future.

AUCTUS 28.1c

Another foggy morning with a nice day to follow. On the second day in Mudrim (assuming they don't flee) the party should get some real news from home. They should also have opportunity to attend the wedding of T'Var and Maie. The big moment at the end of the day should be the arrival of the Lurian Princess.

SCENE 1: REPORTS FROM HOME

Location: Yaris' longhouse. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Quiet, uncomfortably formal, highly crafted meeting room.

Description: The characters are allowed to enter through the main doors. A guard shows them into a large hall with a massive table surrounded by benches and a tall-backed chair. At the far end are two doors each guarded by a sentry. The party has to wait an uncomfortably long time.

Zuan eventually enters, barely acknowledging the waiting characters. He begins feverishly wiping off the table at the far end and then arranges a fur on the chair. Yaris enters a moment or two later. Zuan struggles to pull out the large chair. She thanks him as she sits and asks him to get some tea. He barks at one of the sentries to fetch the tea. He takes his place on a small stool to the right of Yaris, barely being able to see over the table's edge.

Yaris bids the group good morning and asks them to sit near her end of the table. She offers tea. Zuan pours hers but the sentry serves any character wishing to have some. She introduces herself officially as the mayor of Mudrim.

She has asked the siblings here to let them know she is aware of their identity as are others in town. She knew their father Arden and knew of the unfortunate end of their mother. Yaris expresses her regret at the loss as well as admiration for Arden and his dealings with Mudrim and other surrounding towns.

She directly asks the siblings if they intend to return to Redwater and if so, what their intentions are.

Depending on their answers, Yaris may offer some information about Redwater. She certainly knows that the rafts of trees that came down river last season were sub-par - small trees and few of them. She is also aware that several merchant barges did not return before winter. No traffic has come south via the river since last autumn. There was a steady stream of folk that had left Redwater last year also. That has stopped and only a few people have arrived from the north this spring via the roads.

It is rumored that the woodsmen of Redwater have not received wages for over a year and that those that have not fled are being kept nearly as prisoners within the walls. Two

Eclan teamsters arrived from Redwater just before the winter snows, inquiring about Arden's children on behalf of Lady Thylera. Henerick is rumored to be marrying a wealthy bride in hopes of normalizing their economic problems.

Yaris concludes by advising extreme caution and wishes the siblings well on their journey. She is ultimately unable to aid them, however she does not hinder them unless they pose some negative impact on Mudrim.

NPCs/Creatures: Yaris, Zuan, town guards as needed.

Challenge: Patiently wait. Get as much information out of Yaris about home as possible.

What did we learn? People know who the siblings are. All is not well in Redwater.

Notes on playing this scene: My group got most of the information from Yaris. What they didn't, they would get from Brother Tash later in the day. It was a good opportunity to illustrate the goblin tendencies in Zuan. He is almost an annoyance to Yaris with his desire to help or make her comfortable. Goblins. My characters thought of Yaris as an ally to be called upon later should things go bad in Redwater.

SCENE 2: THE FOUND HORSE

Location: Horse pen near Yaris's longhouse. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Busy, outdoor, daytime.

Description: After leaving the meeting with Yaris, the group might notice a familiar horse tied in a nearby pen. Any inquiry leads the party to the Eclan office. The four animals in the pen supposedly belong to them and they are reserved for messenger use only.

Should the party get the authorities involved, it may take some creative way to prove the horse was stolen. Akard, the local master of Eclan Traders contends that the horse came in with their messenger and is Eclan property.

If the party gets Rynar involved, or should they persuade them in some other way, Akard backtracks and gives up that Peth is somewhere in town. Once this is revealed, Zuan (or perhaps Yaris) assures the characters that Peth will be dealt with.

NPCs/Creatures: Akard, Eclan guards, Zuan, town guards as needed.

Challenge: Discover and reacquire the horse. Learn of Peth's whereabouts.

What did we learn? Peth is here, somewhere.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene played out differently in each of my groups. In one, the horse was easily recovered and Eclan gave no information. In the other, Peth

was discovered to have given a false report to Eclan out of guilt. He was given to Dalibor to give further details on Olin, and the missing barge. He of course escaped.

SCENE 3: THE WEDDING

Location: Clearing near the East Fort on the other side of the river. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Beautiful evening. Perfect for the occasion.

Description: A large portion of the town has spent the day cooking and moving tables, tents, and other supplies to the east side of the river. There is a big crowd including Yaris, Zuan, and many other now familiar faces.

As the sun is setting, Maie is led by her father across the Hanging Bridge. She is dressed in a very fine dress with a long train. Her long hair has been braided with prairie flowers. T'Var and all the horsemen wear their leather vests and high boots. Brother Tash leads the ceremony. There is much feasting, dancing, and singing after.

Brother Tash excuses himself after sampling the food and a bit of the music. He travels across the bridge alone to return to the church. Once he is across the bridge, Maie and T'Var make offerings to the river spirits.

Eventually, E'Gil begins to sing the Legend of Ilval and Annon, as is the custom at weddings along the river. Not long after, Esben runs back across the bridge and returns leading the Mormere. T'Var gives it to Maie as a wedding gift. Together they ride east onto the prairie as is the custom of the horsemen. They spend their wedding night under the stars of Erebos and the sliver of Selene.

The festivities go on far into the night.

NPCs/Creatures: Various citizens, families, and acquaintances of the happy couple.

Challenge: Enjoy the wedding, especially the part when E'Gil starts to sing the Legend of Ilval and Annon.

What did we learn? The river spirits are still recognized. Weddings are quite the celebration for horsemen of the south and merchants of Mudrim.

Notes on playing this scene: The wedding can include whatever you wish. Vows, music, all of it. As my characters played it, the singing of the song that was so associated with their parents was uncomfortable. Should they elect to sing along with E'Gil, it is likely that many would recognize them as children of Arden and Orphea. Mostly this was an opportunity to solidify the budding friendship between the horsemen and the party.

SCENE 4: THE SHRINE OF THE CANYON

Location: Shrine of the Canyon. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Dark and cool.

Description: The Shrine is a church dating from the time just after the great war. It is carved into the side of the canyon wall, just as several other buildings in Mudrim. Inside however the structure leads to a small side canyon open to the sky. It is here the altar of the place resides. The only light in the canyon is from the sky above.

If any of the characters follow Brother Tash from the wedding, they find him here. He is pleased to show them around the carved structure. Should the moment be right, he reveals that the siblings have allies at home in Redwater.

“Approach carefully, for the road and river are being watched. Make for the Spire of the Spring. There, word by page or person shall come to you. Be assured, Selene knows your heart and feels your loss.”

The siblings know the approximate location of the Spire of the Spring. They occasionally journeyed there with their father years ago.

Brother Tash can also relate that he was a student of Brother Linden for a time. They have maintained correspondence for some years. Linden’s last letter was received before winter. It indicated that the Berian tree palisade surrounding Redwater no longer only keeps bandits and denizens of the forest out, but rather the folk there within.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Tash.

Challenge: Get the message from Tash to go the Spire of the Spring.

What did we learn? There are friends in Redwater, perhaps.

Notes on playing this scene: Because faith was a big part of both of my parties, coming to the church was inevitable. Because of Linden’s involvement with their father’s trial, my characters were not sure if Brother Tash was trying to help or hinder them. They debated long after the encounter before deciding on which way they would approach Redwater.

SCENE 5: THE LURIAN PRINCESS

Location: The wedding or anywhere along the river. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Cool evening, the horse teams pulling the great barge are heard before they are seen.

Description: The first indication is the bell of the toll gate. Not a single chime as when the party arrived, but many. Two massive braziers glow atop the unbelievably large barge. The barge has two stories above the main deck. It is over 120 feet long and 30

feet wide. Two six-horse teams of enormous fen coordinate getting it past the toll gate. A huge banner is draped over the front with a coat of arms from a noble family of Luria.

Numerous armed riders make their way toward the clearing east of Mudrim along the pull road. It appears the craft is too large to enter the canal. Two additional smaller vessels are traveling with the massive barge and follow it along the pull road until just beneath the Hanging Bridge. All three tie off and move to shore. Across the stern of the big barge are the words "Lurian Princess" in carved wooden letters.

The front of the second level of the Lurian Princess is an open deck. Standing there is an older, well-groomed man in dark enameled, custom fit armor and a red cloak. Standing nearby is a small girl of about ten years of age. After the barge strikes the edge of the stone pull road, a woman from inside begins screaming her displeasure. This goes on for some minutes. Eventually the man enters the cabin and closes the door. It only slightly reduces the volume of her complaints. The deckhands, teamsters, and soldiers don't seem to acknowledge her. The young girl appears to be focused on the sight of the Hanging Bridge. Not long after a slender woman comes to fetch the youngster back inside the barge.

They make a camp of sorts, mostly staying on the barge. They operate with military efficiency. The Lurians have arrived.

NPCs/Creatures: The Lurians.

Challenge: Identify the Lurians without incident (their time will come).

What did we learn? Henerick's bride is from Luria. Lurians are loaded. Somebody is upset.

Notes on playing this scene: If possible, have the characters heading back to town from the wedding. The Hanging Bridge is a great place to get the first glimpse of the Lurian Princess coming up the river. A successful, Average Scholar check identifies the coat of arms as Lurian. When we played the scene, it was fun to have the party think that maybe the young girl was to be Henerick's bride (disgusting as he is). Then, one of the maids came out and they thought, well maybe her? They thought to warn them of the fiend that waited upriver. They would change their minds the next morning.

AUCTUS 29.1c

The morning is again foggy, and it takes longer than usual to clear. When it does, the sky is mostly covered in clouds moving in from the west. It is cooler than the previous day. The morning is interrupted by the incident concerning the Mormere Steed. The incident should be the incentive for the siblings to leave Mudrim behind.

SCENE 1: MORMERE ACQUISITIONS

Location: The canyon rim, the bridge, or any other view of the Lurian Princess. Maie's home. (See Maps 6 and 7)

Conditions: Cool, almost cold morning.

Description: When T'Var and Maie return to Mudrim, they slowly ride across the Hanging Bridge. As they pass over the newly arrived barge, they wave at the young girl that is once again on the deck. Shouting can be heard from within the cabin. Clearly a woman is upset. She eventually comes out on the deck and hollers at the young girl to come inside. She is unattractive in every way. Loud, unkempt, and huge. She must weigh well over 300 pounds. She pauses to look at the Mormere and then beckons inside.

"Mother come see the horse!"

Along with some additional complaining from within, an older, similarly unattractive woman steps onto the deck. After barely a glance, she yells,

"You are going to catch your death out here!"

"You cannot be ill for your wedding!"

"Father! I must have that horse!"

And so, it began.

At Charon's behest, Chedomir stops the couple as they are descending the road into town from the mesa. He politely asks to buy the animal and tells them to name their price. T'Var explains that it was a gift for his bride and is not for sale. Chedomir urges him to reconsider but eventually lets them continue on their way.

The couple arrives at the house of Maie's father Ranuf. Not long after, Chedomir, and a group of Lurian soldiers also arrive at the Ranuf compound and press Ranuf for the sale of the Mormere. There is a heated argument between T'Var and Chedomir that almost comes to blood.

Charon and four more of his guards along with Akard and Dalibor arrive just as things are about to get out of hand. Ranuf greets Charon and the others explaining that the horse was a wedding gift. Akard indicates to Ranuf a deal for the horse would be a personal

favor, and he has arranged for Dalibor to match Charon's offer with an equal trust amount from House Cerrak on behalf of Eclan Traders. It comes to Chedomir dropping bags of silver septems on the ground (3) until Ranuf smiles and nods. It should be the most coinage any of the siblings has seen in one place.

Maie simply says,

"Father."

T'Var reaches out and grabs Charon. It is a mistake.

Things go very bad, very fast. Chedomir draws his sword as fast as lightning, cutting T'Var's arm off below the elbow. Guards immediately level their spears at each other. E'Gil has been watching from the canyon rim nearby. He screams and charges toward them. Esben tries to hold him back as Chedomir runs T'Var through.

A fight ensues.

Maie kneels at T'Var's body in tears. When it is clear he is gone, her glance turns to Dale, one of her father's guards.

Before any pillars of the community or foreign leaders are slain, the city guard rushes in to stop the violence. Zuan from the south and Yaris from the north. Both are accompanied by a sizeable group of guards. It is enough to dissuade the Lurians from continuing the fight. If E'Gil is alive and conscious, Esben is forced to knock him out to stop him from continuing the fight.

Yaris asks for an account of what happened. Akard and Dalibor indicate a proper deal was made for the horse. The coins are still on the ground. Charon apologizes profusely and contend that they only wanted a gift for his daughter's wedding. They were forced to defend themselves.

Yaris arrests Chedomir and anyone else that takes things too far but allows them to pay a fine and be released.

NPCs/Creatures: Ranuf, Kahlin, Dale, T'Var, Maie, Chedomir, Esben, E'Gil, Charon, Akard, Dalibor, Zuan, Yaris, Lurian soldiers (12), Mudrim Guards (20), Ranuf's men-at-arms (5), horsemen (as needed).

Challenge: Using the map of the House of Ranuf, allow the characters to intervene as they see fit. E'Gil and Esben enter as things spin out just before T'Var is slain. They leap from the canyon rim to the roof of the north building, then slide down to the ground. Characters with them wishing to do the same require a Difficult Athletics check to avoid being injured by the fall.

Characters not with E'Gil and Esben undoubtedly notice E'Gil screaming and jumping off the mesa. They can then join in from wherever they are should they wish. The violence should be serious but short lived.

The party should aid their new friends E'Gil and Esben if possible.

The Lurian soldiers and especially Chedomir are very capable fighters. They defend Charon and Akard to the death. Esben and the other horsemen do anything to prevent the death of E'Gil. Ranuf's men are only interested in Ranuf and the coins. Except for Dale - he has his attention on Maie.

The groups of Mudrim guards that accompany Zuan and Yaris should be of sufficient size to stop the fight quickly.

Any siblings in the area may make an Average Notice check to see Maie's glances at Dale. It should be clear that there is something between them.

What did we learn? Lurians think they can buy anything. Ranuf is greedy. Chedomir is not to be trifled with. The wedding between T'Var and Maie was short and suspicious.

Notes on playing this scene: This was a big, complicated scene. With 60 plus moving pieces, it seems almost ridiculous written down. There was also a real risk of the characters getting hurt, killed, jailed, or otherwise derailed by the events. The most important pieces of the incident to keep in mind are the death of T'Var and the stopping of hostilities by Yaris. In our playing of the scene, one group was right in the action. Injuries plagued them for some time after. The other had some internal strife that ultimately led to avoiding getting too far into the fight. In both versions, Yaris successfully intervened to stop the fight, thus avoiding the worst of possible outcomes. Both groups also noticed the glances shared between Dale and Maie thus giving them a suspicious outlook towards the whole wedding with T'Var.

SCENE 2: THE HORSEMEN'S GOODBYE

Location: The mesa and the Hanging Bridge. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Dusty and loud.

Description: Within an hour of the incident with the Mormere, the Horsemaster leads his men and the horses not promised to Ranuf back east across the bridge. They leave with the same speed and disturbance as when they arrived.

E'Gil sends word via Lagen to the siblings that their animals are safe above. He sends his regrets that they had such a short time and his hopes that they will meet again. Lagen adds a curse on the Lurians as well. If pressed, he might reveal that they will not be trading in Mudrim again.

E'Gil stops on the bridge and waves (or gives another appropriate gesture) to the siblings.

NPCs/Creatures: E'Gil, Lagen.

Challenge: Say goodbye to new friends.

What did we learn? The Horsemaster has had enough of Mudrim. There is no charge for the care of the animals.

Notes on playing this scene: The goodbye between E'Gil and one of the siblings from each of my groups was a long, protracted, sad, roleplaying moment. It was heavy, but the players loved it. If it makes sense, have E'Gil come and say his own goodbye.

SCENE 3: I THINK IT IS TIME THAT ALL OF YOU LEFT

Location: Yaris's longhouse. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Quiet as before, but with a group of Lurians outside.

Description: Zuan brings the siblings to Yaris for follow-up questioning regarding T'Var's death and the abrupt departure of the horsemen. Should any of the characters have been arrested, they are also brought before Yaris and allowed to pay a small fine (unless something exceptionally egregious happened).

Yaris is clearly angry at the situation. The Lurians are pressing to have Chedomir released. She indicates that she will hold him for a couple of days so the siblings can get a substantial head start towards Redwater. She will not be able to stop them from making it to the wedding.

They are interrupted by Akard. He barges in demanding that the siblings' animals be confiscated considering today's events. Yaris will however not agree and allow the characters to take their animals and go. She further emphasizes they should go before she is forced to change her mind.

She wishes them well on their journey and once again expresses sorrow for the loss of Orphea and Arden and what happened to their family.

NPCs/Creatures: Zuan, Yaris, guards, Lurians, Akard.

Challenge: Answer Yaris's questions, pay the fine, get permission to leave.

What did we learn? Yaris wants the siblings to get to Redwater before the Lurians.

Notes on playing this scene: Use this scene to get any detained characters out of trouble with the law and emphasize that the Lurians will be not far behind them. The characters should gather their things, animals, and companions and leave Mudrim.

SCENE 4: RYNAR'S GOODBYE?

Location: The dock along the canal, Brota's Keg. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Bustling with activity, barges being loaded, other captains shouting about Rynar's animals.

Description: Rynar approaches the characters and informs them he will be allowed to leave the following day. He has made a deal with a teamster that supposedly has his own horses so Eclan cannot stop him from leaving. Apparently Ranuf and Eclan hoped to purchase the remaining horses prior to the incident with the Mormere. Now they find themselves with a serious shortage of animals. Barges are waiting to leave for Redwater, and horses are not being released until the powers that be can figure out what to do next. Because of this teamster and his horses, Rynar is hopeful they will be allowed to go.

Rynar thanks them again for helping him get this far north and makes the offer to continue to travel together. He is planning on leaving as soon as possible in hopes of avoiding any further trouble with Ranuf or Akard, but he is at the mercy of the teamster and the gatekeepers.

NPCs/Creatures: Rynar.

Challenge: Say goodbye.

What did we learn? Rynar will be heading north to Redwater soon.

Notes on playing this scene: Both of my groups were intent on continuing north on their own. Should your characters wish to continue with Rynar, they might agree to wait some distance upstream. They should be in a hurry and unable to wait for Rynar's teamster.

SCENE 5: ON YOUR WAY

Location: North gatehouse, the Pull Road. (See Map 6)

Conditions: Clear day, fresher air away from the town, sounds of the river.

Description: As the party leaves town behind, the now familiar smells of smoke and the canal begin to fade. Even with a late start, they should make good progress on the road. The Pull Road is not in quite as good of condition as it was south of Mudrim. There are areas of mud and the occasional damaged section. There are no signs that animals or wagons have passed since the last rain.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Make some miles before dark. Should anyone think to look, a Difficult Survival check reveals tracks of a single person on foot. The track is distinct due to a crack in the sole of the left shoe.

What did we learn? When in town, you must take the bad with the good. Maybe someone is ahead of them on foot.

Notes on playing this scene: Both of my parties were ready to be on their way. The tracks were left by Peth fleeing Mudrim for Redwater.

AUCTUS 30.1c

It is a cool foggy morning. Camping along the river is exceptionally cold with the high humidity. The night is quite dark as Selene is absent from the sky.

SCENE 1: THE RAFT

Location: Camp along the river after dawn but before continuing on the road.

Conditions: Fog is just beginning to break, cold, quiet.

Description: Coming down the river is a raft of Berian logs bound for the mills of Westflood. On the raft are six woodsmen with long poles directing it down the river. They appear underfed and it seems that they have all they can handle with the poorly built raft. There are also a few men wearing the red tabards of Henerick's Redwater guards. They are armed with bows. It appears that they are keeping the woodsmen against their will.

The logs are very small compared to what the siblings remember of the rafts sent downstream by their father. The raft is also a fraction of the size and very poorly tied together. A woodsman may stumble or become stuck in the logs as they pass by the camp.

NPCs/Creatures: Woodsmen (6), Redwater archers (one for each sibling).

Challenge: There is a chance the characters hear the raft before they see it. An Average Notice check reveals voices growing nearer from upstream.

Unless the siblings take some action to be hidden, the archers have a chance to recognize them. If they do, they shout, "It's them!" and begin firing arrows at the camp. The raft is moving slowly but should only allow for 5 or so rounds of interaction unless the party pursues them downstream.

What did we learn? The raft being sent south for lumber is of a low standard. Henerick's men have been warned about the possible return of the siblings. The woodsmen don't appear to be doing too well.

Notes on playing this scene: My first group did not interact with the men on the raft, the second however took violent action against them. They did not however follow them downstream. Both were struck by the fact that the trees in the raft were so small and of such poor quality. All were concerned that the woodsmen looked so bad and were being forced to ride the raft by armed men.

SCENE 2: FAMILIAR TRACKS

Location: A muddy stretch of the Pull Road.

Conditions: Cool and clear.

Description: At a wide spot that is exceptionally muddy, there is evidence of a campsite of sorts. There is a pile of sticks in the rough shape of a campfire that has not been burned.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: With a successful Average Notice or Survival check, the characters discover shards of broken rock near the fire. It seems that someone thought it was flint for starting a fire. Similarly, an Average Notice or Survival check leads to more of the tracks with the crack in the sole. A Difficult Survival success indicates that the tracks are no more than 2 days old.

What did we learn? Someone cannot make fires. The person with the broken shoe is still ahead of them and continuing north.

Notes on playing this scene: Giving hints that the person ahead of them was out of their element or even incompetent caused my players to speculate that it might be Peth. It was interesting to see how their attitude towards Peth evolved and how it fueled what the character of Peth ended up being.

AUCTUS 1.2C

A cool spring day after a very chilly night. The day was without any serious challenges. The groups I played with spent much of their time debating what course of action they would be taking. As they got closer to Redwater and closer to the date of the wedding, it was still not clear what they intended to do. Use the opportunity for roleplaying as needed. Skip ahead to Otz Flat if it better suits your party.

SCENE 1: MORE LOGS

Location: Along the Pull Road near a large sand bar in the river.

Conditions: As needed.

Description: It is obvious that there are several Berian logs beached in a large sandbar in the river. It would appear the raft got too close to shallow water.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: A successful Average Notice check reveals tracks on the sandbar and areas that might have been unsuccessfully dug at to free the logs. A Difficult Survival check, if any of the characters think to look, indicates that the person with the cracked heal hid behind some tall grass or cattails nearby the road.

What did we learn? The woodsmen are doing a poor job piloting the raft.

Notes on playing this scene: This was just further reinforcement of the poor quality of the raft and its handlers.

SCENE 2: SICK (THE OTHER KIND)

Location: Along the Pull Road.

Conditions: As needed.

Description: There is an area adjacent to the road where someone had an “accident.” There is vomit amongst the familiar tracks of the person with the cracked sole.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Find the pouch nearby. A character making a successful Average Notice check discovers a discarded pouch nearby. It is far enough from the road that it had to be tossed aside deliberately. Inside is a bit of rancid meat riddled with maggots and a single silver septem stamped with the symbol of House Cerrak.

A successful Average Hermetics check reveals there are a few bits of some toxic mushrooms along with the rancid meat in the vomit. Not enough to kill them, just make them very uncomfortable.

What did we learn? Whoever that is on the road ahead is having a hard time.

Notes on playing this scene: The rather gross bit was just to reinforce the poor state of the person they were behind. They figured if it was Peth, my groups were not sad that he was hurting.

AUCTUS 2.2C

Another cool spring day after a cold night. The sight of Selene again beginning to wax is a reminder that time is running out. The wedding is to take place when she is full, and the Lurians will be coming up from behind. The siblings get their first sight of the Berian wood in the distance.

SCENE 1: FIRST SIGNS OF HOME

Location: A higher point on the Pull Road.

Conditions: After the morning fog has cleared.

Description: Far in the distance, an irregular line can be seen above the horizon. It is the first sign of the Great Berian Woodland. The tops of the older Berian trees reach over 300 feet in height. The strange growing shadow that is the Berian Wood is familiar to the siblings. It seems to any that have never seen the Berian Wood that it is much closer than it really is.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: A successful Average Notice check reveals the low spot that is the mouth of the Berian Valley. The town of Redwater is located near the mouth of that valley.

What did we learn? Redwater is getting closer, but it is still far away.

Notes on playing this scene: My first group was having a bit of a case of “are we there yet” when this scene occurred. It gave them a sense of hope and familiarity that reinvigorated them for the scenes to come.

SCENE 2: DEAD HORSE

Location: Narrow portion of the Pull Road, afternoon.

Conditions: Clouds moving in from the west, cooler.

Description: There is a small hill adjacent to the Pull Road that has created the need for a small cut. The road runs along a section of sheer earth wall reaching a height of about ten feet. There is something lying in the road. As the group gets closer, they see that it is a dead horse blocking the way.

Beneath the neck of the horse is a slain man, and a few paces further up the road is another. Both have been shot with at least three arrows. The horse has a partial harness of sorts with a rope trailing off into the water. The men are thin and wear shabby clothes like those poling the raft south.

NPCs/Creatures: Sick (2)

Challenge: Hopefully the players are familiar enough with the Sick to deal with the bodies before any attack occurs. However, should they take too long, the two bodies rise and attack.

Getting the horse out of the way takes cooperation using Exertion or Taming checks as needed unless a more creative solution is presented by the players.

An Average Hermetics check reveals the bodies are only a couple of days deceased. The horse has no sign of injury. If the party was previously attacked by the archers on the raft, they may notice that the arrows are similar.

Should anyone search the area on top of the hill above, there are familiar tracks of the person with the cracked sole.

What did we learn? Life on the road is rough, especially if you work for Henerick.

Notes on playing this scene: Neither of my groups had to fight the dead men as Sick. They speculated much of what had happened here. Eventually they continued and camped as far away from here as they could.

AUCTUS 3.2C

A cloudy, misty day. The wet conditions may warrant a Taming check or two as the wet stones of the Pull Road can be slick. The promise of a warm meal at Otz flat motivated a good pace north. The encounter that occurs should be an unexpected disappointment as well as a real test. Rynar's return is just at the right time. It could be a turning point for the party.

SCENE 1: OTZ FLAT

Location: Otz Flat. (See Map 8)

Conditions: Misty, cold, smell of smoke as the party approaches.

Description: The first sight of the small hamlet of Otz Flat is the damaged bridge. It appears to have collapsed between the west shore and the pier in the large sandbar. There are several small Berian logs beached on the sandbar.

As the party rounds the bend in the river, it becomes immediately clear that all is not well here. All the buildings have been razed to their stone foundations. There is a large pile of debris still smoldering not far from the westerly bridge abutment. As the party approaches, they notice a man standing near the pile. It is also impossible not to see the bodies within the smoldering heap.

When the man turns to see the party, he turns very slow. In his hands is an axe that may be familiar to the oldest of the siblings. It was known as Yellowtooth, the axe of Otz himself. It is large with an amber colored crystal set in the haft. As he continues to turn, it is clear that Otz too, has been a victim of whatever befell his village.

His shirt is caked in blood and there is a terrible wound across his chest. It is his face that disturbs the siblings the most. The grizzled face of the once strong man is barely recognizable. The portion from his left cheekbone to midway through his scalp is gone. His eye is missing. In its place is a glowing orange shard of light.

As he slowly speaks, his deep voice seems unnaturally loud.

"Arden. Your father. He brought us here."

"And to Redwater. For safety. For the good of all, he said."

"Once we lived where even the gods did not see us."

As he finishes, his eyes begin to brighten,

"For our lives, your lives!"

He waves his big axe, and the bodies begin to rise out of the rubble, charred and horrible. Among them are children.

If Martea appears, she approaches from the trees to the west. She too has the orange glowing eyes and terrible wounds. Her legs have been severed at the knees, but she stands as if they were not, floating above the ground at her normal height. She says nothing, only screams and attacks.

NPCs/Creatures: Adult Sick (1 for each sibling), Child Sick (3), Possessed: Otz, Martea (as needed)

Challenge: Defeat the Sick/Possessed. It takes 1 round for the Sick to climb out of the pile and begin moving toward the siblings. Note the fear for Otz (and Martea) is 3.

Should the party wish to flee, the road north is blocked by a large, charred beam from one of the long houses. They may head back south, however.

What did we learn? Something bad happened here, and it has become the sibling's fault. The Possessed are terrible, powerful foes.

Notes on playing this scene: This should be a serious combat test of your party. Gauge your group's strength carefully before including Martea. My larger group was very capable and had leveled up prior to getting to Otz Flat at least once. Having the second Possessed was appropriate for them. However, my first group narrowly defeated Otz and the Sick alone. The reward of Yellowtooth was appreciated by both. If things start to go south for the siblings, Esben and Rynar might arrive early to give assistance. They didn't in our games.

SCENE 2: RYNAR'S RETURN

Location: Otz Flat or camp nearby. (See Map 8)

Conditions: Cold, wet, mist turning to rain.

Description: A familiar voice is heard coming out of the mist to the south, along with the sound of hooves on stones of the pull road. Rynar can be heard yelling,

"Now be careful! There is a bridge around the bend!"

As they come into view, it is indeed Brota's Keg being piloted by Rynar. It is being pulled by a pair of fen led by none other than Esben.

As they recognize the siblings and the state of Otz Flat, they rush to assist however they can. Esben is all smiles at seeing his friends again. Rynar too is pleased. Should the party need bandages or food, he is pleased to share.

NPCs/Creatures: Rynar, Esben.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Esben did not join E'Gil and the horsemen on their journey. If asked how Esben came to be with him, Rynar may share that he suspects the Horsemaster's son wanted to keep an eye on the Lurians in Redwater.

Notes on playing this scene: The arrival of familiar folks should be a welcome sight for the siblings. Also, with the bridge out, the barge is handy should they wish to head for the Spire of the Spring.

BIG DECISION TIME NUMBER TWO

It is at this point the players must decide if they intend to make the journey to the Spire of the Spring or not. I usually advise against splitting parties up, but I coincidentally did it in both of my groups at this point. In our first playing of the story, because one of my players was working on a new revision to the Athia rulebook, it was decided that his character would continue along the road towards Redwater with their wagon, ox, and other items while the sisters headed towards the spring. In my second attempt, similarly the person playing the character that was not a sibling started rehearsals for a play and was unable to join us for a bit. She too would continue to Redwater with their animals but without the siblings as they headed toward the spring.

I should note that it is not critical that your party makes the overland journey to the Spire, but the scenes continue as though they have. On the way to the Spire, there are some hints that tie to events in the future. There are future scenes involving Rynar that also refer to the trip to the Spire. Also note that the scenes below are written for Party 1 as though none of the siblings are included. If your party elects to go directly to Redwater, these scenes and others that follow may need some adjustment. As always, do what makes sense for you and your players.

AUCTUS 4.2C

In the morning as the fog breaks, the sky clears. It is warmer and the sun shines all day. As the siblings travel north to the confluence of the Valley River and the wilder southern Berian River, they must prepare to pare down their gear. Horses and wagons are useless in the forest. As they reach the forest and see the first Berian trees, familiar times should come to mind. Good and bad.

SCENE 1: GOODBYES

Location: Camp along the road, maybe still in Otz Flat. (See Map 8)

Conditions: Foggy morning with sun beginning to break through.

Description: The supplies have been divided and the animals have been seen to. The siblings once again board Brota's Keg to travel on the river. Rynar has agreed, although not without protest, to drop the siblings off on the east side of the river just past the confluence.

NPCs/Creatures: Rynar, Esben.

Challenge: Only take what you can carry.

What did we learn? Having boats, horses, wagons, etc. is a nice luxury.

Notes on playing this scene: Dividing the supplies was easy, but it was hard for my players to decide how much to take with them over land. In our first group, it was decided that the wagon would not travel with Rynar, but rather wait and break camp after everyone else was on their way. They wished to keep everyone separate to keep Rynar and Esben unassociated with the siblings since they left Mudrim. It was strange for everyone, especially without the weekly journal entry to start each game (Lundy traveled alone).

SCENE 2, PARTY 2: THE CROSSING

Location: Just past the confluence of the Valley and South Berian Rivers.

Conditions: Sunny, humid, the falls at the confluence are quite noisy.

Description: The approach to the confluence gets gradually noisier. The sound of the falls can be heard for a long way before actually seeing them. The fall is not especially high, perhaps only a dozen feet or so, but it is a long arch of over 300 feet across. The amount of water coming over is astounding. The air is filled with mist from the falls. The currents are tricky for a fair distance. The pull road however is notably impressive here. The stone slabs used to create the wall against the river are huge. They surely weight dozens of tons. There is a fine layer of moss on almost all of them, however the surface has been roughened to keep the footing sure. Along the way are the remnants of 5

statues. All that remains are the plinths and some of the figure's feet broke off at the ankle.

Just north of the falls, there are the first Berian trees of the forest. Even the young, thin, trees of the southern edge of the great wood look tall.

About a half mile ahead, Rynar shouts,

"This is probably as good a place as I can find."

The water is moving a bit slower here and there is a gravel area on the east shore. As he has no shortage of rope, leading the barge out over the water is not difficult for Esben and Rynar.

NPCs/Creatures: Esben, Rynar.

Challenge: Get across the river, be on your way. Say goodbye to Esben and Rynar (for now).

What did we learn? The falls are still impressive.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene was about describing the environment. I liked reminding the players that there was once a whole other people that lived here and built the road.

SCENE 3, PARTY 2: THE BERIAN WOOD

Location: The Berian Wood along the South Berian River.

Conditions: Familiar shade of the Berian trees, cool.

Description: The easiest way to make for the Spire of the Spring without getting lost in the wood is to follow the Berian river. It cuts a deep ravine with a rim that is easy to follow as it turns east. From above there would be a fine view of the valley below if there weren't so many trees. The siblings have to guess as to when to make their way north again, but they are confident they should have no trouble finding the stream that runs from the Spire.

The forest is familiar. Filled with memories both happy and sad.

NPCs/Creatures: Small creatures of the forest

Challenge: Don't get lost in the forest.

What did we learn? Little has changed in the Berian Wood itself.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene was again about the environment and the realization that is the first time any of the siblings had been in the forest since they were

with their father. There was much roleplaying by both of my groups as this fact sunk in with them.

SCENE 4, PARTY 2: FIRST REDWATER PATROL

Location: Grey Rock Overlook.

Conditions: Sunny, cool in the shade.

Description: The trees along the rim of the canyon thin in an area around a grey rock outcrop. It is a spot at least one of the siblings has been to in the past with their father. The view to the south is surprising. The line of both rivers can be seen in the distance. The overlook is quite sheer.

NPCs/Creatures: Redwater Archers (4), Redwater Traveling Guard (2), and a Sergeant.

Challenge: Don't fall off the edge. The cliff is high and falling is bad. Allow anyone that is pushed toward the edge a progressive Athletics check to avoid falling (start at easy, moving up in difficulty for each incident).

Discover the guards. If the party is being cautious, they have a chance to hear them talking. A successful Difficult Notice check negates any opportunity at surprise the guards may have had. If the party is not being cautious, the guards surprise them and attack.

Defeat the guards. The guards fight until 4 are dead, then those still alive turn and run into the forest.

Discover how the guards found them. Only the sergeant knows that Fuhlgar directed them to this very spot. The characters might find some creative way to get him to reveal this if he is still alive.

What did we learn? Redwater is looking for them with malicious intent.

Notes on playing this scene: This was the first real fight with folk from Redwater. There can be no doubt as to the attitude of Henerick.

SCENE 5, PARTY 1: THE ROAD INTO THE BERIAN WOOD

Location: The Pull Road.

Conditions: Nice spring day, cooling once entering the trees.

Description: The Berian trees are almost like a wall on the west side of the river. Upon entering the shade of the trees, the temperature drops dramatically. The trees get larger the further north the party travels. A few miles in, there are spots along the road where the roots of the great trees are beginning to shift the stones of the Pull Road.

NPCs/Creatures: Small creatures of the forest.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? The Berian Wood is impressive. It is cold in the shade.

Notes on playing this scene: This is another scene to describe the environment and conditions for Party 1.

AUCTUS 5.2C

Cool morning. Along the river, the familiar mist takes some time to break up. In the forest, progress is slow. As the sun sets, it becomes quite cold.

SCENE 1, PARTY 1: THE SCAR

Location: The Pull Road at the edge of the scar.

Conditions: Misty morning, cool

Description: As the party continues north along the pull road, the shade of the Berian trees begins to thin. Ahead there appears to be a clearing. The clearing is literally that, a large area where an uncountable number of trees have been cleared. More accurately, they have been felled. Many of them still lie where they fell into the ferns and tall grass below.

The sight is disconcerting because of the sheer number of down trees. It seems that this is now the edge of the forest, for none stand between here and the mountains far to the west. It is a dreadful waste. Most of the trees have begun to rot. Salvaging them would require hundreds of men and animals.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Someone, presumably woodsmen from Redwater have cut down so many trees that the edge of forest has been moved more than a mile. The trees lie where they fell.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was about revealing the devastation to the forest caused by Henerick.

SCENE 2, PARTY 1: THE PETRIFIED TREE

Location: Along the Pull Road, somewhere in the middle of the scar.

Conditions: Cool, cloudy.

Description: While traveling north, there is evidence in several locations that the course of the road has been altered over the years. It seems the river has receded or changed channel enough to necessitate changing the route of the roadway.

As the party is nearing a small bridge in the Pull Road at one such location, the erosion caused by the spring melt is obvious. There are enormous rills along the once small stream leading west into the felled trees. Flowing water has uncovered a large section

of a previous generation of the Pull Road. There is a large gray boulder a few dozen yards west up the old road.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Discover the petrified tree. A successful Difficult Notice check reveals the boulder to be the remains of a petrified, ancient tree.

What did we learn? The forest is old.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene was again about describing the environment. In a future chapter of this story, the petrified tree was salvaged and cut into beautiful amber and grey tiles for a new temple in Redwater. It is possible that some of the more intricate pieces could be (or would be) crafted into a ring suitable for a wedding.

SCENE 3, PARTY 1: MOTHER AND CHILDREN

Location: Along the Pull Road, somewhere in the middle of the scar.

Conditions: Cool, cloudy.

Description: The expanse west of the stone roadway continues to be very rough. Stumps and felled trees make for a very irregular landscape. The occasional bird, rabbit, or other small animal scurrying across some part of the broken terrain has caused more than a couple moments of alarm. There are hundreds of hiding places.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Mikl, Kayla.

Challenge: Discover the family. Kayla has been separated from her mother Sholl and brother Mikl. She is very afraid. As the party gets close enough, they hear her sobs on a successful Notice check. If the party discovers her, she screams and tries to flee amongst the rough terrain.

Don't kill the family. If Kayla screams, Sholl desperately tries to help her. She abandons her hiding spot and yells "Stop!" to anyone attempting to get Kayla. She has her rusty felling axe. Mikl throws stones as well.

Help the family. Successful Charisma checks may be needed to convince Sholl that the party means no harm. Any offering of food is eventually accepted.

Convince the family to return to Redwater. Once Sholl tells her story, the party may wish to persuade them to return to Redwater with them.

What did we learn? Sholl and her children are from Redwater. They snuck out of the town walls, intent on reaching Otz Flat. They were to be helped by the folk there and given directions to the location of a hidden camp of woodsmen, deep in the forest. Her

husband, Kjell, had escaped one of Henerick's work gangs some days before and was going to hide amongst the other escapees.

Sholl will have many details about the current state of things in Redwater. Lack of wages, lack of food stores, forced labor and similar problems are very familiar to her and her children. The kindness of the Brothers at the church of Redwater might also be discussed.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene reinforced the stance of Otz Flat as a sort of haven for those that escaped Redwater. Sholl's choice between searching blindly for her husband in the forest or returning to face the authorities in Redwater should provide an interesting opportunity for the party to roleplay the conversation trying to convince her one way or the other. Perhaps they will try to find a way to sneak them into town.

SCENE 4, PARTY 2: THE SECOND REDWATER PATROL

Location: Deep in the Berian Wood, some leagues north of the river gorge, at the fallen trees.

Conditions: Cold and damp.

Description: Deep in the Berian Woodland, the sounds of birds, bugs, and other creatures is omnipresent. The canopy created by the massive trees continues to keep the environment dim and cold. Strange and unfamiliar sounds occasionally can be heard in the wind, distant and long "Ooooh" sounds. There are two trees that partially fell many cycles ago (perhaps years) that coincidentally lean against the same tree. They create a large moss-covered pyramid of sorts. The area beneath them is clear and mostly dry. The space is over a hundred paces across and more than fifty feet in height.

NPCs/Creatures: Redwater Archers (one for each sibling), Redwater Traveling Guard (3), and a Sergeant.

Challenge: Discover the guards. Again, if the party is being cautious, they have a chance to hear them talking. A successful Average Notice check allows the party to overhear the following exchange:

"This is where they were seen!"

"He said they would be here."

"Yes, Fuhlgar described these fallen trees."

"Quiet you two, they will hear us!"

If the party is not being cautious, the guards surprise them and attack.

Defeat the guards. The guards fight until only 2 remain alive, then those still alive turn and run into the forest.

Discover how the guards found them. All of them know that Fuhlgar directed them to this very spot. The sergeant knows that Fuhlgar was given the information in the keep. The characters might find some creative way to get him to reveal this if he is still alive.

What did we learn? Someone knew exactly where the party was going to be. Fuhlgar received the information from someone in the keep.

Notes on playing this scene: One of my groups elected to avoid the encounter altogether. They overheard, hid, and listened to whatever they could. Another got outmatched by the guards and I had to insert the woodsmen from the next scene to intervene. The “Ooooooh!” sounds may be heard again soon.

SCENE 5, PARTY 2: NEW FRIENDS?

Location: Deep in the Berian Wood, some leagues north of the river gorge, very near the fallen trees.

Conditions: Cold and damp.

Description: As the siblings are recovering from the encounter with the guards from Redwater, they are surprised to find themselves surrounded by a group of woodsmen.

NPCs/Creatures: Woodsmen (10), Woodsman children (4), and Sten.

Challenge: Spot or hear the woodsmen. A Difficult Notice check reveals at least one of them.

Don't fight the woodsmen. Use of Charisma checks or other means may be required to convince Sten that the siblings are not enemies if the encounter with the guards from Redwater did not occur.

Join the woodsmen for the evening. The woodsmen make camp with the siblings. If the siblings explain who they are (and who they are related to), Sten recognizes their story as true. Arden's name is still respected among them. Once Sten is confident that the siblings are enemies of Henerick, he explains about the guard's ability to know where they will be. Brother Linden is using the favor of the gods to see where the woodsmen will be. Presumably he is doing the same for the siblings. Sten eventually invites the siblings to come to their “hiding place” where Brother Linden cannot see them.

What did we learn? The woodsmen are hiding from Henerick and his “seer” also. Arden's name still carries weight. Brother Linden is finding them for Henerick. The woodsmen have a way around Brother Linden's abilities.

Notes on playing this scene: As noted above, the woodsmen saved the day for one of my groups. Sten became an excellent source of information about Redwater, the plight of the woodsmen, and Henerick's ability to find them. He also used his Hermetics talent

to help with wounds sustained at the hands of the guards from Redwater. In my second group the roles were reversed as the party saved Sten and his sons from the giant attack. I moved the encounter forward on the calendar because the party was more capable in combat.

SCENE 6, PARTY 1: COLD NIGHT

Location: Along the Pull Road.

Conditions: Very cold night.

Description: The clouds break in the evening leaving a beautiful sky of Erebos' stars and the face of Selene. The temperature drops to an uncomfortably low level. Sholl and her children are wholly unprepared for the conditions as they had planned on reaching Otz Flat before nightfall.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Mikl, Kayla.

Challenge: Provide a fire and meal for Sholl, Mikl, and Kayla.

What did we learn? It still gets really cold this time of year.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was again about helping the family and learning about what is happening in Redwater. If they haven't discussed it yet, Sholl prays to Selene with her children, and shares how helpful the Brothers of the church in Redwater have been. It is important that Sholl return to Redwater for future scenes.

AUCTUS 6.2C

The morning is clear and the face of Illios makes it seem warmer than it is, if not under the trees. By afternoon, it is cloudy and raining again. Travelling in the forest should be faster with the aid of Sten and the woodsmen. Once inside their hidden camp, time and weather pass in an unfamiliar, foreign manner. Along the pull road, the party should have their first glance of the keep and eventually the palisade of Redwater before sunset, and in time to plan or adjust for their arrival in “New Town.” The wedding is only 9 days away and the Lurians have not yet arrived.

SCENE 1, PARTY 2: THE HIDDEN GROVE

Location: The Hidden Grove; camp of the woodsmen.

Conditions: Raining and cold until entering the camp, then calm and a faint smell of flowers.

Description: As the party follows Sten through the forest, they seem to be travelling in circles. They finally arrive at a series of gnarled, ancient Berian trees. Their roots have been exposed by decades of growth and erosion.

Sten leads them to a specific tree and into a huge hollow under the exposed roots. A tunnel has been excavated through the root structure and to the other side. The opening is well disguised with branches and leaves. Before entering, Sten informs the siblings that strangers are not usually welcome, but because of their family ties, they should be allowed. He advises they keep their hands clear of their weapons until he can introduce them.

Beyond the tunnel is a clearing of sorts. About twenty large Berian trees grow in an oval so close together that they might all be from the same roots. They have created a wall not unlike the palisade of Redwater, but still yet alive. There is no rain within the grove and the light from above has a violet hue as if through a canopy of flowers. Occasionally there is the faint smell of lavender in the air. It seems each woodsman and family have a small tent, lean-to, or other crude structure around the clearing.

A moment after they enter, the siblings and Sten are immediately surrounded by armed woodsmen.

NPCs/Creatures: Sten, Stina, Agner, Woodsmen (36), Woodsmen children (12)

Challenge: Don't get killed by Stina and the woodsmen. Sten tries to explain, but the siblings are asked to drop their weapons. If anyone has Yellowtooth, Stina recognizes it and question how it came to the character.

Get permission to stay. The siblings should assist Sten in relating who they are and where they are going. Stina knew Arden and knows the story. It should be unclear if she sees

them as possible allies or trouble they don't need. Stina allows them to stay as guests unless the party makes trouble.

Don't break the rules. Stina is adamant that the siblings are allowed to stay if they follow the rules. Rule number one: Stina makes the rules. Rule number two: No leaving without permission. Rule number three: Everyone fights if Redwater comes. Rule number four: Share everything you have. The siblings are asked to hand over all their gear and provisions to be shared with the group. Rule number five: Children eat first.

What did we learn? The place the woodsmen call home is odd. The life they live is barely an improvement over the yoke of Henerick. Stina doesn't mess around. Her way or no way.

Notes on playing this scene: The arrival at the camp gave my players a very uneasy feeling. Beyond the alien environment, being under the eye of Stina was uncomfortable to say the least. The ancient tree is a gateway to that world behind the world. Here the magic of Henerick's helpers cannot see easily. They are looking in the woods and this place is not there. If anyone is injured, the woodsmen should aid the character (equivalent to a successful Hermetics check allowing double recovery with a worthwhile rest).

SCENE 2, PARTY 1: NEW TOWN

Location: The south end of Redwater, outside the wall of Berian trunks. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Muddy, smelling of animals, fish, and smoke.

Description: Even in the dim light, it easy to see that the portion of Redwater outside the massive Berian trunk wall has been surrounded with a much less impressive wooden palisade. Little more than a tall fence, trees less than a hand or two in width have been arranged into a wall of sorts. A square tower and gate stand on the pull road. A short distance along the wall, a second tower and gate protect the road from the southwest, surely the west road out of Mudrim.

The tower and gate are manned by guards dressed similarly to those on the raft. They stop anyone and ask them their business in town and demand a toll.

Inside the palisade are a series of animal pens and wooden buildings including store houses, a smithy, and a long drinking hall. All have the sigil of Eclan traders prominently displayed. Along the river there are docks about half of which have boats at them.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Kayla, Mikl, Redwater Guards as needed.

Challenge: Get into town. The guards are looking for the siblings and may even question if they might have seen them on the road. They do not ask about Sholl and the children

unless the characters give them a reason to. The party needs an excuse to be there, even if it is “we’re here for the wedding.” Charisma checks or other means might be a good way to convince the guards that they are not associated with the siblings.

What did we learn? Eclan Traders is present in Redwater. They are looking for the siblings.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene assumes the siblings are not among the party. Should they all or even a couple of them try to enter via the gate, all hell breaks loose. I advise against it if you want the story to go on. With Sholl and the children as well as the new wagon, my group was not even given a second look. The difficult part should be getting them into Old Town.

SCENE 3, PARTY 1: RYNAR AND ESBEN

Location: Redwater, finally inside New Town. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Misty evening, muddy, smelling of animals, fish, and smoke.

Description: As soon as the party is past the gate, a pair of familiar faces approaches. Esben and Rynar have been expecting them and look relieved they made it in without incident. Brota’s Keg is nearby. Rynar tells of troubles with Eclan and the unloading of the cargo. He suspects they are waiting for the Lurians before they can pay for his load of rope. He also tells of the questioning at the gate by a man named Fuhlgar. It seemed like the man was expecting Rynar and knew he had passengers to Mudrim. Rynar explains that he tried to be as vague as he could, but it seemed that this Fuhlgar knew many details of the siblings.

Rynar offers to feed Sholl and the children on the barge (fish stew). Esben sees to the animals and finds a suitable place to park the wagon as none are being allowed into Old Town.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Kayla, Mikl, Esben, Rynar.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Fuhlgar and Henerick must have spies along the river.

Notes on playing this scene: The purpose of the scene was do deliver more information about the state of things in Redwater and to reconnect with Esben and Rynar.

SCENE 4, PARTY 1: OLD TOWN

Location: South Redwater Gate. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Misty evening, muddy, smelling of animals, fish, and smoke. Torches and braziers light the areas inside the walls as darkness falls.

Description: Up close the huge Berian wood trunks that make up the wall surrounding the Old Town are truly impressive. Each must measure at least six paces across. Some considerably more. The gate too, is impressive, comprised of large cut Berian timbers reinforced with iron plates and rivets. Atop the wall are more of the Redwater archers. The sergeant at the gate recognizes Sholl immediately.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Kayla, Mikl, Redwater Guards as needed.

Challenge: Get Sholl and her children past the guard. The guards at the gate question all concerned how they came to be outside the walls. The party has to have a convincing story and perhaps a successful Charisma check or even a bribe to convince the guards to be allowed to pass.

Once past the gate, Sholl's small home is not far. Once there, it is again clear they have little. She expresses her gratitude once more by offering a wooden symbol of the Triad.

What did we learn? The guards take people being outside the walls without permission very seriously.

Notes on playing this scene: Allow your players to be creative in convincing the guards to let them pass. It is important that Sholl and her children make it home for future scenes.

SCENE 5, PARTY 1: THE WHETSTONE

Location: The Whetstone. (See Map 11)

Conditions: Warm and dry inside, smells of cooking, folk in the main room appear content.

Description: The Whetstone is one of the only stone structures in Redwater. The main hall is a repurposed Asos era building. Attached to the main hall is a two-story wooden structure with several rooms that can be had for reasonable rates. The only items to eat at this hour are stew and bread. There is plenty to drink. The mead and ale of the Whetstone is of high quality.

NPCs/Creatures: Hilda, Holger, Mads, Nina, Commoners (10 or so), possibly Brother Stedden, Redwater Guards (2), and Sergeant Otto.

Challenge: Speak with the folk to learn what is happening. All should be anxious to share their story.

Avoid arrest. At some point, two guards and their sergeant enter the bar to question Holger and Hilda about any new guests. There is a moment when Mads stands up to the sergeant and Holger has to talk him down, claiming that Mads is just a "little slow" as he slips the sergeant a small pouch of coins.

Get invited to services at the church. If the party needs additional incentive, have Brother Stedden be at the Whetstone. He reveals that he fears Brother Linden is being held against his will by Henerick and that he may not be well. He should also invite the characters to services at the church the next day.

What did we learn? Possibly many things depending on who the party speaks with. Things might include lack of wages, main force of workers being kept in the keep against their will, wedding plans, Eclan's control over the roads and river, Brother Linden's absence, the church being a source of assistance to those in need, etc.

Notes on playing this scene: In my group it wasn't necessary to invite the party to the church, they wanted to go there anyway. This was mostly an opportunity to get a bed out of the weather and information about what has been going on in Redwater.

SCENE 6, PARTY 2: EXCOMMUNICATION

Location: The Hidden Grove.

Conditions: Strangely calm.

Description: The calm of the grove is interrupted by yelling, followed by the running of many of the woodsmen towards the opening. After a moment, a man with a bloody lip is led back to Stina's shelter. Along with him are two young girls, both crying. His name is Agner, and the girls are his daughters.

Agner is accused by several of the woodsmen of sneaking out into the forest. Apparently, he was trying to find the way back to Redwater but was unable to discover the trail back. He and his daughters are not happy here in the hidden vale and want to return home. They are tired of being hungry and afraid.

Stina listens to the accusations. Many of the residents argue about what is to be done.

NPCs/Creatures: Sten, Stina, Agner, Woodsmen (36), Woodsmen children (12).

Challenge: Don't make things worse. Agner's life is in the balance. The siblings are welcome to involve themselves, but if they push too hard, they might find that they too are unable to leave. Stina believes that anyone not careful when wandering the wood outside of the vale is likely to bring an attack from Redwater.

What did we learn? Stina doesn't tolerate people that break the rules, and she isn't good at sharing the rules until too late. She is becoming a bit too happy with being in charge.

Notes on playing this scene: Before anyone is actually killed, proceed with the next scene. My characters really didn't like the idea of Agner being killed for trying to leave

and got right in the middle of the argument. Before weapons were drawn, they got interrupted by the attack in the next scene.

SCENE 7, PARTY 2: BIRDS FROM THE TREES

Location: The Hidden Grove.

Conditions: Strangely calm except for the argument amongst the woodsmen.

Description: The shifting violet light from above is interrupted by a distant breeze. A few leaves fall from above. A flight of odd, frightening creatures attacks suddenly from above. They are Fuglmand, a perverse mix of a man and some huge bird covered in greenish-gold feathers. Their eyes are solid red, and they are scarred from previous hazards. The woodsmen fall quickly to panic.

NPCs/Creatures: Fuglmand (one for each sibling plus another), Sten, Stina, Agner, Woodsmen (36), Woodsmen children (12).

Challenge: Slay the Fuglmands. The Fuglmand attack from above. A successful Average Notice check by any of the siblings reveals a large feather from above (green and gold). Should the characters look up, they see disturbances in the violet light and eventually the Fuglmand attack. If any of them is slain, they have a 50% chance to rise as Sick although only their human portion is affected (they can no longer fly).

Get the woodsmen to safety. Some of the woodsmen including a few of the children may still be in the grove by the time the attack concludes. The siblings can gain favor of the woodsmen by protecting them and or getting them out.

What did we learn? There are worse things than Henerick's men in the forest.

Notes on playing this scene: The strangeness of the Fuglmands cannot be overstated. They are disturbing to look upon. The scene was intended to show that this "Hidden Grove" wasn't as safe as Stina imagined. If the fight turns against the siblings, have Sten and few of the braver woodsmen join the fight. In the end, this should be everyone's cue to leave the hidden grove behind.

AUCTUS 7.2C

The rain of the previous day makes for a cold, foggy morning. The sun eventually breaks through by midafternoon. Redwater is again strangely quiet within the walls of Old Town. Moving through the forest is slow in the damp undergrowth. The woodsmen have abandoned their camp and intend to find another group rumored to be to the north and west. They may agree to travel with the siblings for a time on their way to the spire.

SCENE 1, PARTY 1: WAKE-UP CALL

Location: The Whetstone. (See Map 11)

Conditions: Quiet, until...

Description: The comfortable sleep afforded by the soft bed at the Whetstone is interrupted abruptly when town guards begin banging loudly on the door across the hall. There is shouting as the guest within protests. He is apparently a local businessman whose house could no longer keep out the rain, hence his reason for staying at the Whetstone.

Once the guards realize the guest is not who they are looking for, they almost immediately turn to the room of Party 1.

NPCs/Creatures: Redwater Guards (as many as needed).

Challenge: Don't get arrested. The guards demand entry, kicking in the door if necessary. They are looking for a missing woodsman. They question the characters about any interactions with woodsmen in Redwater and on the journey here.

What did we learn? Unaccounted for woodsmen are a serious matter in Redwater. The guards have no problem disturbing the locals or others while completing their appointed tasks.

Notes on playing this scene: This was another scene to illustrate the situation in Redwater with the woodsmen.

SCENE 2, PARTY 1: VIOLENCE IN THE STREET

Location: Streets of Redwater near the home of Sholl. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cool, foggy morning, few citizens looking on from their windows, doors, or other well protected locations.

Description: A group of guards has dragged Sholl and her children out of her house into the street. She is being restrained by two of them as she is questioned by a large man. Her children are also held by guards. As the terrible scene plays on, townsfolk can be seen behind cracked doors and shutters.

Eventually the large man grabs Kayla and again questions Sholl. Bad things are clearly about to happen.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Kayla, Mikl, Fuhlgar, Redwater Guards (at least 10), Commoners (nearby).

Challenge: Be a witness only. Fuhlgar and the guards should seem to be a challenge way beyond the characters without all the siblings being present.

Don't get arrested or killed. Don't tip off Fuhlgar that the siblings are nearby. As things escalate, characters are likely to wish to get involved. Doing so results in a serious problem. Fuhlgar is not one to take challenges lightly, and he may recognize anyone that has traveled with the siblings.

Give aid after the incident. As soon as Fuhlgar and the guards leave, a few townsfolk and even Brother Stedden come to help. A familiar face for the family would be beneficial. Brother Stedden asks that the characters assist him in getting them to the church for attention.

What did we learn? Fuhlgar is a terrible, evil man. The people of Redwater are being treated worse than imagined.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene could very easily go very bad for the characters. It was meant to be witnessed rather than participated in. How bad things get is up to you and the tolerance of your players. The family should survive to suffer another day. Characters may not learn that the big man was indeed Fuhlgar until reaching the church.

SCENE 3, PARTY 1: THE TEMPLE OF REDWATER

Location: The Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: A bit chilly inside but warm in the small hall near the fire, smells of incense, occasionally the sound of whispered prayers.

Description: The temple is one of the oldest remaining structures in Redwater. Made from Asos era stone slabs, the main chamber is roughly circular with a slightly domed roof. Jutting to the south is an L-shaped wing, two stories high, with a tower of sorts at the crux. Because the temple rests upon the hill near the center of town, the view from the tower includes almost the entirety of Redwater and the surrounding country.

At the center of the circular hall, there is a single slab almost two feet tall from which the Brothers address the congregation. There is a series of low benches around the slab, but most of the room is open with more than enough room for people to stand. The dome of the ceiling appears to be a single large stone. So large, it is impossible to imagine how

it was lifted into place. The surface has been painted with familiar images of Illios, Erebus, and Selene.

Adjacent to the main hall is a large dining hall and attached kitchen. Not far down a connecting hallway, is a small room with several cots where Sholl and her family can be seen to.

Brother Linden invites them and the characters to stay the night in the safety of the temple.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Sholl, Kayla, Mikl, Young Brothers (bringing food, bandages, etc.), Redwater Commoners (a few partitioners that witnessed the encounter with Fuhlgar).

Challenge: Help Sholl and her family again. Get a place to stay. Brother Linden provides rooms, food, drink, and other supplies if needed. He also invites the characters to meet with his superior, Brother Fortin, the acting abbot of the temple in Brother Linden's absence (see scene below).

What did we learn? The church is indeed helping the people of Redwater. For whatever reason, Henerick's men still respect the temple and do not routinely enter here.

Notes on playing this scene: The introduction to the church in Redwater was a big deal for some of my players. Their characters would become deeply involved with the Brothers. Agreeing to stay at the temple allowed them opportunity to be "safe" for the night.

SCENE 4, PARTY 2: THIRD REDWATER PATROL

Location: Deep in the Berian wood.

Conditions: Cold and damp with occasional rays of sunlight through the trees.

Description: At some point after midday, the woodsmen take their leave of the siblings. They intend to head west towards a rumored encampment of others from Redwater. Before parting, Sten gives the siblings detailed directions on getting to the Spire of the Spring. Not far to the north, the land again begins to slope downward. The valley should lead them to a small stream that runs directly to the pool at the Spire. He also promises to pass on their story to the other woodsmen from Redwater. He stops short of offering direct help but implies that the siblings now have allies in the forest. He indicates that someone is always watching the town.

When the woodsmen move on, they disappear quickly, leaving the siblings again on their own. Strange noises are heard from the forest after the woodsmen have left – a bellowing "Ooooooh!" sound can be heard in the distance.

NPCs/Creatures: Redwater Archers (one for each sibling), Redwater Traveling Guard (3), and a Sergeant.

Challenge: Discover the guards. Again, if the party is being cautious, they have a chance to hear them talking. A successful Average Notice check allows the party to overhear them complaining about being tired of marching.

If the party is not being cautious, the guards surprise them and attack.

Defeat the guards. The guards fight until only 2 remain alive, then those still alive turn and run into the forest.

Discover how the guards found them. All of them know that Fuhlgar again directed them to this very specific location, and it was most urgent. They marched all through the night. The sergeant knows that Fuhlgar was given the information in the keep. They were not given any directions on the woodsmen, only the siblings. The characters might find some creative way to get him to reveal this if he is still alive.

What did we learn? Whoever is directing the guards from the keep cares less about the woodsmen than the siblings.

Notes on playing this scene: If the encounter happens soon enough after parting ways with the woodsmen, they might be close enough to lend a hand in the fight.

SCENE 5, PARTY 1: THE BROTHERS OF THE TRIAD

Location: Inside the Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm, safe.

Description: Brother Stedden invites the characters to the evening meal or perhaps tea after with Brother Fortin. Brother Fortin is acting as abbot while Brother Linden is away. Brother Fortin invites the characters to a private chamber to discuss who the characters are, how they came to Redwater, and how they are related to the siblings.

Fortin and Stedden choose their words carefully as the conversation begins but hope to find allies in the characters. They are anxiously awaiting the coming of the siblings and spin the conversation in that direction as soon as possible. They also explain the situation with Brother Linden when it comes up.

The Brothers are happy to talk late into the evening and if all goes well, they help plan for the arrival of the siblings.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Fortin, Young Brothers (as needed).

Challenge: Trust and be trusted. Brother Fortin is tentative at the beginning of the conversation. It is up to the players to coax information from him. Brother Stedden

might be a catalyst for progress if things stall. He was a childhood friend of the youngest of the siblings and knows all of them. He wants the siblings to return and to deliver the citizens of Redwater from their current state under Henerick's rule.

What did we learn? What has happened to Brother Linden? The story of how Brother Linden came to help Henerick is one they do volunteer once a bit of trust is established. Thylera was all too aware of the powers Linden could bring to bear with the favor of the Triad. He has been held against his will in the keep for the last ten days. He can see the siblings whereabouts using the favor of the gods. Thylera is also aware that his favor is finite and may soon be gone. The Brothers are concerned at Linden's fate should his favor run out.

The people of Redwater would welcome the siblings. The Brothers, especially Stedden, believe that the siblings are the best chance for the people of Redwater to be delivered from the tyranny of Henerick. They bring a glimpse of hope to once again live peaceful, productive, happy lives here in the lands of their parents.

The Brothers have the beginnings of a plan. When the Salt Road was clear enough to risk travel, Brother Tash was sent south with a warning and instructions for the siblings to meet at the Spire of the Spring. Brother Stedden and a few of the younger Brothers of the church have been taking turns taking food and messages there every few days. They claim to be hunting mushrooms and other delicacies of the forest.

Because the guards had been watching the river and the roads very carefully and now with Brother Linden's assistance, a secret way in to Redwater has been contemplated. Brother Stedden is aware of the outlet of the Asos-era sewage system under a portion of the docks within Old Town. He had hoped to sneak them close enough to the docks for them to swim under and enter the ancient sewer. The sewer ultimately connects to the cellar of the temple below. He suggests that the characters come with him to the Spire to meet the siblings. They will have to pose as Brothers to get past the guards at the docks.

Brother Fortin has given the siblings help against the abilities of Brother Linden. The Medallion of Curate Bendt has been left with the supplies at the Spire. If the siblings are within proximity of this holy symbol, no other divine powers can affect them.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene was complex to play. My players had some serious distrust of the Brothers of the church. They also had serious respect for the church in general. They very much wanted allies in the town. Similarly, the Brothers weren't at all sure about the characters. It should be a fun roleplaying moment going back and forth, trying to figure each other out and eventually ending up on the same side. This is the really important take away: the Brothers are on the side of the siblings.

SCENE 6, PARTY 1: ESBEN COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE

Location: Inside the Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm, safe.

Description: As the end of the evening is approaching, one of the younger Brothers interrupts the conversation to deliver a message to Brother Stedden. His reaction is one of obvious concern.

Apparently Rynar had sent word. The elf, Esben, saw what happened in the street to Sholl and her children. The incident was more than he could stand. He was so enraged, he left Redwater. He seriously injured two city guards at the dock and stole one of the long dugout canoes. Rynar thought the characters would want to know about both Esben leaving and the injured guards.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Fortin, Young Brother.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Esben is sensitive about such things. He has gone and with little regard for the guards.

Notes on playing this scene: This small scene was simply an excuse for Esben to head south to find his friends. It becomes important later if all goes per plan.

AUCTUS 8.2C

The morning is again quite foggy and cold. The sun breaks through by midday bringing much anticipated warmth. Travel on Heart's Creek towards the spring is strange until the fog lifts. In the forest, the odd noises heard in the previous days are repeated. Occasional series of loud "Ooooooh!" should be unmistakable in the deep forest. Not far from the giant's clearing, smoke is detectable. The wedding is only 7 days away.

SCENE 1, PARTY 1: ON THE RIVER

Location: The docks in the old part of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cold, foggy morning.

Description: The docks are relatively quiet in the morning fog. The boat selected by Brother Stedden is over twenty feet long. It is only a couple of feet wide and very shallow. City guards approach as soon as it is clear anyone intends to get in the boat.

Once the guards are satisfied, Stedden deftly pushes the dugout away from the dock and up the river using a long pole. He makes for the confluence with the much smaller Heart's Creek just to north of town. The fog is so thick, once in the middle of the Valley River, Redwater is no longer visible.

The creek is very peaceful and filled with the sounds of the forest. As sunlight finally cuts through the fog, the beauty of the Berian Wood reveals itself. The Spire lies several leagues upstream.

NPCs/Creatures: Redwater Guards (as needed).

Challenge: Get past the guards. Convincing the guards at the docks that the characters are Brothers of the church and that they are leaving town to hunt for special mushrooms should be a challenge. The guards are already on edge thanks to the encounter last night with the elf. A series of Charisma checks or other compelling demonstrations may be needed to get out of town.

Don't fall out of the boat. The boat is long, thin, and easy to tip. Should anyone try to stand or move in the boat, an Athletics or other appropriate check should be required to maintain control.

What did we learn? Brother Stedden can pilot the slim boat quite well.

Notes on playing this scene: In one occurrence, my characters had to produce an appropriate mushroom dish for the guards before they were convinced it was worth it to let them leave town.

SCENE 2, PARTY 2: THE GIANT

Location: Obvious clearing the Berian Wood.

Conditions: Smoky, strange sounds.

Description: In the middle of a small clearing, a huge stack of trees has been arranged almost like a pyramid. A female giant is trying to start the pile on fire and occasionally stops to yell into the air, the now familiar “Ooooooh!”

NPCs/Creatures: The Giant.

Challenge: Avoid or slay the giant. The giant attacks the siblings immediately if she detects them. Average or perhaps even Difficult Stealth checks should be required if the sibling approach too closely. She yells “You must not be here! He will not come!” and commences to pounding.

What did we learn? Some fights should be avoided. An Extreme Scholar check may reveal that the giant is trying to attract a mate with the fire and calls.

Notes on playing this scene: In the second telling, I moved this encounter up a couple of days to provide a challenge to my more capable party. Feel free to do the same. In the other less capable group, the giant was a real problem. It would have been better to flee than fight. In our review of this material, we had discussed the male giant and where he might be. If you need an additional challenge, he might be a good option. In either case, the party should receive something from their effort if they slay the giant.

SCENE 3: THE SPIRE OF THE SPRING

Location: The Spire of the Spring. (See Map 9)

Conditions: Quiet, serene.

Description: The area surrounding the Spire is vaguely familiar to the siblings. It is just as they remembered from visits with their father. Cool. Serene. Beautiful. The pool is smaller than they recall but just as picturesque. It is fed by a small waterfall, perhaps three feet high, running from the base of the massive obelisk. Made of mottled grey stone, the spire measures twenty feet in width at the base and stands at least one hundred feet high.

The ancient stone is covered with strange carvings, glyphs, runes, and other pictograms. Most are almost completely faded from years of exposure. None are familiar.

The water from beneath the stone is clear and fresh. Any containers may be easily filled.

The long dugout boat of Brother Stedden arrives around dusk from downstream.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden and perhaps Party 1.

Challenge: Find the stash left by Brother Stedden. Hanging from a leather cord on the back side of the spire is a bag of supplies left by the Brothers of the church in Redwater. It contains two meals worth of food for each sibling, a skin of water, tinder for building a fire, and the Medallion of Curate Bendt.

Get back together. If the party has been separated, this should be the opportunity to get back together.

What did we learn? The Brothers of the church in Redwater do indeed wish to help the siblings.

Stedden, one of the younger sibling's friends from childhood, became a Brother of the church. He has much to say about the situation in Redwater, but suggests that his superior, Brother Fortin, would be a better one to tell more of the story. He is just glad to see the siblings again. Perhaps some more than others.

Stedden also shares his plan to get the siblings into town without being discovered. He explains that they will use the cover of the fog and darkness to get them to the docks where the old sewer can be accessed. The sewers allow the siblings to travel beneath the town to the church out of site.

He also describes the benefits and limits of Curate Bendt's holy symbol (refer to the description in the "Treasure" section).

Notes on playing this scene: Reuniting the two parties was very satisfying for both me and my players. Sharing the "What happened?" around the campfire took a long time. Stedden was remembered by the siblings. It is important that he and the youngest sibling had some childhood connection.

AUCTUS 9.2C

The morning is again foggy, but not as cold. By midday the sun is frequently breaking through the trees. As the siblings arrive near their estranged home, the evening is cooler, and the fog again begins to build. The wedding is but six days away, and it seems the bride, her family, and the wedding party has arrived.

SCENE 1: THE WAY HOME

Location: Heart's Creek.

Conditions: Pleasant spring day.

Description: The easy float down Heart's Creek towards Redwater is a relaxing break. There is plenty of time to discuss what is to happen upon their arrival. Brother Stedden reminds all that the guards will be looking for them, even though they can no longer rely on the sight of Brother Linden. About a half a mile or so from Redwater, Stedden puts the boat to shore to wait for nightfall and hopefully fog.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Redwater Guards (as needed).

Challenge: Don't be seen crossing the river. The siblings can hang off the side of the boat as Stedden guides it across the Valley River to the docks. The water is very cold. Difficult Endurance or Swimming checks should be required to remain in the water. Failure should get the attention of a dock guard. If things start to go bad, Stedden flips the boat and begins hollering for assistance from the guards. This distraction should be enough for the siblings to get safely under the dock.

What did we learn? It is still early spring, and the river is freezing. This might be the easy part.

Stedden gives specific directions for navigating the sewers. He is confident the opening is only a foot or two under the surface of the water. Once inside the old brick drainpipe, it should rise above the water very rapidly, perhaps in less than eight paces. From there, they should pass five intersections. They are to take the right fork at each of them. Some distance past the fifth fork, they should encounter three ropes hanging from the ceiling that have been placed as a marker. Just beyond them should be the sixth intersection. Take the left branch and start to look for light from above. It should be the basement of the church.

Notes on playing this scene: My characters had no trouble with the guards. The sight of the Lurian barge and the realization that they had to enter the sewer would be challenge enough.

SCENE 2: THE LURIAN PRINCESS AGAIN

Location: The Valley River adjacent to Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Dim and foggy.

Description: From beneath the low dock, it is impossible to not notice the lanterns shining from just down river even through the evening fog. About halfway into the channel of the river, a familiar, large barge is anchored. The “Lurian Princess” and all her passengers have arrived.

From this vantage, a few other larger barges can be seen at the adjacent docks. Although none are as large as the Lurian barge, a few are similarly lavish. More than one has sentries nearby. It appears that some of the wedding guests have also arrived in Redwater.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Redwater Guards (as needed), Personal Guards (as needed).

Challenge: Remain unnoticed. Additional Stealth and/or Swimming checks may be appropriate if the characters are not being cautious.

Find the submerged sewer pipe end. The pipe is a bit deeper under the water than Stedden led the characters to believe. An Average Notice check should reveal the location.

Enter the sewer pipe. An Easy Swimming check allows anyone to dive into the pipe. Cooperation and/or ropes can be used to assist unskilled swimmers. They need only make it a dozen feet or so up the pipe before air space is present within.

What did we learn? The Lurians and some of their guests have arrived. Brother Stedden’s directions are not quite accurate.

Notes on playing this scene: Adding a bit of doubt to Stedden’s account of the sewer seemed a good idea. The disappointment among my players at the sight of the Lurian barge was undeniable.

SCENE 3: THE SEWERS

Location: Beneath Redwater. (See Maps 10 and 13)

Conditions: Beyond disgusting, dark.

Description: The hideous environment that is the sewer has several hindrances. The first and most obvious is the horrible smell. It seems it is not completely inactive after all. Moving upstream, the water level declines rapidly. The slope is steep enough that after a dozen paces, the water is below the knees, and it is not quite as bitter cold as the

river. The pipe is approximately five feet in height causing most to stoop while walking. Lastly, it is completely dark.

NPCs/Creatures: The occasional rat.

Challenge: Don't get sick. The conditions should require an Endurance check from all but the toughest of characters.

Make some light. If the characters have the means, it should be a difficult task to get light in the sewer. Seeing, however, is not immediately helpful and further reinforces the conditions in the pipe. They should be able to make their way in the dark if they are careful.

Find the way. Stedden's directions to keep to the right are indeed correct. It is up to the siblings to remember.

What did we learn? The sewer is a disgusting, uncomfortable place.

Notes on playing this scene: Making the characters hate their situation was the point of the scene (wet, cold, smelling horrid smells, and virtually blind), as well as getting them into the town without serious incident.

SCENE 4: DENIZENS OF THE SEWERS

Location: Beneath Redwater, the second intersection. (See Map 13)

Conditions: Disgusting.

Description: The ceiling at the intersection is much taller than in the pipe. The opportunity to stand and stretch is welcome indeed. As the siblings take a moment to get their bearings, they should notice a faint light from down the intersecting sewer line.

NPCs/Creatures: Sewer Sick (at least 2).

Challenge: Spot the Sick. For just a second, a glistening silhouette of one of the Sick might be seen in the light from above. An Average Notice check reveals them. If the siblings fail, the Sick have the benefit of surprise.

Defeat or flee the Sick. Although they struggle to move well in the tight, slimy environment, the Sick attack suddenly. Fighting with anything larger than light weapons must be done at disadvantage. Heavy weapons are impossible to wield in the tight quarters. Should the siblings choose to run, the Sick pursue, but very slowly due to the conditions.

What did we learn? There are things other than rats down here.

Notes on playing this scene: The light is coming from a single lantern in the sub-cellar of the Whetstone. There is an iron grate locked shut above. The characters should not be able to get the attention of anyone there.

SCENE 5: THREE ROPES

Location: Beneath Redwater, beyond the fifth intersection. (See Map 13)

Conditions: Disgusting.

Description: Despite being fooled by the occasional tree root or other hanging bit of slime, when the group arrives at the hanging ropes, there is no doubt. Each is over an inch in thickness and hang from an iron ring in the ceiling of the sewer.

As Stedden indicated, not far beyond is a perpendicular intersection. Looking off to the left, there is unmistakable light from above, several paces up the pipe. Above is an iron grate about ten feet above the floor.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (as needed).

Challenge: Get the attention of anyone from above. If anyone makes any real noise, a young Brother looks over the edge. His eyes widen, and he thanks the Triad aloud. He promises to get help.

Get out of the sewer. The Brothers assist the siblings in getting out of the sewer using rope. An Athletics check might be appropriate to make the ascent.

Get clean and fed. The Brothers have anticipated the results of the jaunt in the sewer. They bring several washtubs, water, and soap for the characters. They offer to clean clothes and possessions and provide robes to wear as well. After all are suitably clean, the Brothers provide a good, hot meal in the dining hall.

Rest. Brother Stedden promises a face-to-face meeting with Brother Fortin in the morning.

What did we learn? It is good to get out of the sewer.

Notes on playing this scene: The relief of getting out of the sewer, clean, and fed was a big deal for my characters. They were anxious to talk with Fortin, but eventually agreed to wait for morning. I gave Stedden a black eye from the guards on the docks. It seemed plausible that he was a bit over the top trying to distract them from the siblings' entrance to the sewer.

AUCTUS 10.2c

The morning is cool, but the sun shows itself early compared to the previous few days. The siblings are home for the first time in three years. The residents of Redwater see their arrival as both a good omen and a reminder of the wrongs done in the past. All wonder what might have been had Henerick not been named Lord. The day is also marked with strange, almost supernatural occurrences: a dream of lost memories to start and a strange encounter ends the day. The wedding is but 5 days away.

THE DREAM OF TEARS

The youngest of the siblings wakes in the morning with a start. They have had an unsettling dream of a forgotten, perhaps imagined childhood experience. Adjust the story to fit your characters as needed (see the handout in the References). The important takeaway should be that Stedden was there. Having just met him again after three years might have awoken this memory. Also, Linden was there, and he apparently intervened.

You are being scolded by your father Arden. You cannot remember seeing him this angry. He is shaking you and yelling so hard, he begins to cry. You cannot understand why. You cannot remember what you could have done to make him so upset. Through your own tears, you see a look on his face you barely recognize. He is not just angry, he is afraid. He picks you up and squeezes you in a long embrace. Then, more yelling.

"No one can ever know!"

"I told you not to go in there!"

"How many times?!?"

It is then that you notice Stedden is standing nearby. He must be seven, maybe eight years old. Arden suddenly slaps him across the face. Pow!

"What did you see?!?"

"Nothing! I found <HIM/HER> by the river!"

Stedden cries.

Arden grabs both you and Stedden. As he pushes you forward, you stumble down the street and around the corner, right into Brother Linden.

"What is this?"

Linden smiles, and the dream is abruptly gone.

SCENE 1: MORNING IN THE TEMPLE OF REDWATER

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm and dry with smells of fresh bread baking.

Description: The siblings awake with a start due to the vivid dream had by the youngest. Only a few short minutes later, Brother Stedden knocks on the door. He invites the group to join Brother Fortin for breakfast in the dining hall next door.

If asked about the events in the dream, he sheepishly admits he swore to Arden never to speak of it.

If asked about the siblings' possessions, he indicates they should be cleaned and ready by the time the morning meal is concluded.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (as needed).

Challenge: Get Stedden's full account of the events of the dream. Brother Stedden takes his promise to Arden seriously but does remember the day in question. Should the siblings try to intimidate or otherwise encourage him to talk using a Charisma or other appropriate Talent check, he reveals the following: On the eve of one of Lady Thylera's birthday banquets, he found the youngest sibling near the river, soaking wet and muddy. He had been fishing and was surprised when he heard them crying. He does remember the encounter with Arden. He may also reveal that Brother Linden snuck them into the keep inside a trunk. He honestly does not know much more.

What did we learn? It was not just a dream. The events did happen.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene should be a give and take between the youngest and Stedden. He should be reluctant, but it is perhaps obvious that he wants to help. In our group, it was clear that Stedden was more than happy to see the youngest sibling again.

SCENE 2: BREAKFAST WITH BROTHER FORTIN

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm dining hall, smells of breakfast.

Description: The adjacent dining hall is being cleared by the Brothers as the siblings arrive. When they see Brother Stedden and his guests, they immediately hurry to get the few remaining bits of crockery into the kitchen. Stedden asks the siblings to sit. One of the younger Brothers brings out a tray with cups for tea and Stedden pours from a steaming pitcher. The tea is strong and hot. He then asks the novice to tell Brother Fortin the guests have assembled.

Brother Fortin enters with a dramatic statement,

"Thank the Triad you are safe!"

He introduces himself as the acting Curate of the church of Redwater and asks the sibling to introduce themselves.

Stedden calls for the breakfast to be served. The younger Brothers bring out fresh bread with butter and honey, porridge, some bowls of forest berries, and more tea.

Fortin has a sip and continues.

"I regret that I have some bad news. Your friend Rynar has been arrested for aiding and transporting you on the river."

So starts the back-and-forth conversation with Brother Fortin (see additional topics below). By the end, the Brothers have returned all of the siblings' possessions that were being laundered in good condition.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Fortin, Young Brothers (as needed).

Challenge: Share information with Fortin. It is important that Fortin gain the confidence of the siblings. To gain their trust, he begins by telling them about the Medallion of Curate Bendt, the fate of Brother Linden, and what he knows of the wedding. The challenge lies in asking the right questions. This is up to you and your players.

What did we learn? Below is a list of facts that are likely to be shared during the meal with Brother Fortin.

Rynar has been arrested. If pressed on the subject, Fortin might reveal that Rynar was betrayed by his former teamster, Peth. The status of the wagon/cart, animals, and barge are unknown.

Brother Linden is being held within Henerick's keep. They are exploiting his ability to call on the favor of the Triad to see where the siblings have been and possibly where they might be. Fortin clarifies the benefits and limits of the Medallion of Curate Bendt if needed.

Fortin has met with the bride's family. His assessment of the Lurians is quite like that of the siblings. He believes them to be selfish and rude at best. He is almost afraid of the mother, Arisia. He does know most of the family and their staff by name and can explain who they all are.

More Lurians are coming. Charon is very upset that the large force of Lurians traveling over land did not arrive before the great barge landed in Redwater. There is a rumor around town that this force of Lurians is bringing the dowry to be used in part for back wages to the woodsmen of Redwater.

The Regent has been invited to the wedding and word arrived that he intends to attend. He has not yet arrived but could be in Redwater any day. Several other families of Westflood's court have arrived and more are expected.

Brother Fortin has not yet heard the details of Otz Flat and is particularly saddened to hear of it if the siblings share that part of their journey with him.

Lastly, Brother Stedden informs Fortin and the siblings that many of the townsfolk are planning on attending today's midday service. It seems that word of their arrival has gotten out and quietly spread. Fortin insists on the siblings attending. He reminds them how much the townsfolk could use some hope.

Notes on playing this scene: All parties should be interested in sharing as much information as they can. Although the siblings might be suspicious of the church and their motives, Brother Fortin genuinely wants to help in any way he can. He believes they might be able to change the harsh climate here in Redwater, thus helping his flock. The exchange was long in our game. It was a big roleplay scene where all of the characters shared stories of the trip north, what they have heard, the Lurians, even the three years in Westflood. By the end, there was mutual trust with the Brothers of the church, especially Fortin.

SCENE 3: SERVICES

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm and stuffy main hall filled with people.

Description: By the time the meeting with Brother Fortin was winding down, it was clear that people had begun to arrive for the midday services early. Brother Stedden seems quite nervous about the crowd assembling outside. Fortin instructs him to let them in to avoid a scene as much as possible. He then leads the siblings back to their room. He instructs Brother Otar to bring them to the balcony once the service has started out of sight of the congregation.

Brother Fortin begins the service to Illios, offering prayers and liturgies that are all familiar. He then speaks of things like hope and hidden strength. He speaks of the Triad revealing their will in their own time.

He then nods to the balcony. Brother Otar begins to sing a familiar song to Illios about new life, traditionally sung to commemorate a birth. It is a song the siblings heard their mother sing a hundred times in their youth. (If any of the siblings are musically inclined like their parents, this would be the moment to demonstrate it.)

It is then that the assembled folk notice the siblings. An almost audible gasp moves through the room. More than a few of them are overcome with emotion.

Once the song has ended, Artil can no longer contain his emotions. He throws himself on the floor in tears asking for the forgiveness of the siblings for his part in the trial of their father Arden.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Fortin, Young Brothers, Agathe, Artil, various Commoners (as needed).

Challenge: Respond to Artil. The characters have to decide how best to deal with their feelings on Artil. The Brothers encourage forgiveness and try to intervene if things do take a violent turn. If given the chance, Artil informs the siblings that he purchased their childhood home and although partially damaged by fire, it has remained untouched since they were last there.

Handle the strange, newfound fame. There are many familiar faces in the crowd looking to the siblings as though they might deliver them from Henerick that very minute.

Comfort Agathe. Agathe, one of Orphea's best friends is in tears. She is very happy to see the siblings and hugs them all tightly. She invites them to visit and have tea as soon as practical. She has some things that belonged to their mother.

Keep the secret. Brother Fortin asks the congregation to share what they saw here today, but to keep the sibling's whereabouts from the guards and Henerick as best they can.

What did we learn? Many are happy to see the siblings in Redwater once again. The old house is still standing, mostly.

Notes on playing this scene: One of the siblings in my group was particularly musical (like her parents) and sang as part of the service. It was then that the congregation recognized the siblings in the balcony. Many could not tell the difference between the voice of Orphea (mother) or Eevi (our character). The aftermath was something like rock stars amongst the fans. All was forgiven with Artil.

SCENE 4: NEWS OF ELKHORN

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Calm and hopeful after the congregation has all but dispersed.

Description: As two men help a third into the church, they are immediately met by a couple of the young Brothers. They call for Brother Stedden, and they all proceed down the hall.

After a few minutes, Stedden reappears and reveals that the Lurians have arrived in Elkhorn. They have killed some citizens and stolen anything of value. They should be arriving via the west road any time.

NPCs/Creatures: Men from Elkhorn (3), Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (as needed).

Challenge: Learn of the Lurian forces. The men from Elkhorn are afraid. Convincing them to say much about the Lurian forces requires a successful Charisma or other appropriate Talent Check.

What did we learn? The Lurians are close. They are well armed, supplied, and numerous.

Notes on playing this scene: The news of the large Lurian force nearby only added to the tension in my game. Elkhorn is a village about a dozen leagues west of Redwater.

SCENE 5: A PLACE AMONG BROTHERS

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Dim private chamber of Brother Fortin.

Description: Brother Fortin invites the character into his room for a private conversation. His chamber is dimly lit with a pair of small oil lamps. It is sparse but comfortable.

Fortin explains that he would be pleased if the character would consider joining the church here in Redwater. They need more competent leaders and teachers. He offers a holy symbol of tooled silver as a gift. Regardless of the answer to Fortin's request, he explains that it is a standing offer. They may join at any time in the future.

The meeting is interrupted by Brother Stedden.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Fortin.

Challenge: Make the choice: To join or not to join the Brothers.

What did we learn? The church could use some help.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene should only apply if you have an acolyte (or aspiring acolyte as in my case) in your group. Hopefully it indicates the state of the church. Although there are more than a few Brothers, the list of actual acolytes is short. It was specifically written for Lundy as being offered this opportunity was a big deal for that character.

SCENE 6: HIS GUARDS ARE LOOKING FOR US

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: A bit chilly inside but warm near the fire, smells of incense, occasionally the sound of whispered prayers.

Description: Brother Stedden approaches looking more nervous than normal. He has received word that Rynar is indeed being kept in the keep. One of the younger Brothers was allowed to see to his injuries this morning. He must have been forced to reveal that the siblings intended to travel to the Spire of the Spring.

Henerick has sent a group of his personal guard along with some Lurians to the Spire in hopes of catching up to the siblings there.

The young Brother also overheard Fuhlgar giving orders to arrest Sholl and her children, as well as those that helped them.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden.

Challenge: Decide what to do about Sholl and her children. There may be time to get them to safety.

What did we learn? Henerick does not yet know the siblings are in Redwater. The Lurians are actively involved in the search for the siblings now. Sholl and her family are once again in serious trouble.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene is mostly just a trigger to give the party an opportunity to get Sholl and the children to safety. It was also to set up Lundy to be at risk of arrest. The noose is beginning to tighten.

SCENE 7: ANIMALS, WAGONS, AND BARGES

Location: New Town Redwater near the docks. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cool spring day, dirty streets of New Town.

Description: Getting through the south gate proves to be no problem. They have not yet heard from the keep about the impending arrests. There is some activity along the docks as another barge from the south has recently arrived. It appears to be more guests for the wedding. Rynar's barge, "Brotá's Keg" is still tied up. All the rope has been off-loaded but the barge appears to be undisturbed.

In the pens nearby, the animals appear to be unharmed. The wagon has been moved inside the Eclan pen near their warehouse, apparently confiscated.

It is impossible not to see the group of Lurian cavalry ride in from the west. They stop at the dock adjacent to the huge "Lurian Princess" barge. All of them are dressed in matching armor and tabards. Their weapons look almost new. Their animals are all fitted with matching tack and decoration. More than one of them is an officer. They meet with the other Lurians on the dock and are eventually met by a small boat from the barge. They meet for some time.

NPCs/Creatures: Redwater Guards (as needed), Branimir, Kalamir, Lurian Cavalry (as needed), Lurian Soldiers (as needed), various folk (as needed).

Challenge: Discover what the Lurians are up to. If they can get close enough without arousing suspicion (how is up to you) the characters overhear that the Lurians are moving to bolster the wall guards and are restricting access in and out of Old Town.

Don't be recognized. Moving around and getting back into Old Town Redwater requires Stealth, Charisma, or other appropriate Talent checks as needed.

What did we learn? The animals, wagon, and barge are all fine. The Lurians are going to join the wall guard and restrict access to and from Old Town.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene might need to be earlier or later in the day depending on how your group elects to proceed. The scene assumes the characters are trying not to be noticed. Getting a look at the Lurian officers was an added benefit to checking on property. In our game, the characters were quite worried about the condition of their wagon and animals, specifically the dog Vali. This was good reminder for me to let my characters tell me what is important to them.

SCENE 8: WANTED

Location: Streets of Old Town Redwater near the home of Sholl. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cool spring day, mostly deserted streets.

Description: There are two groups of town guards moving towards Sholl's house. They are intent on arresting the family.

NPCs/Creatures: Sholl, Mikl, Kayla, Redwater Guards (2 groups of 4 to 6 as needed).

Challenge: Prevent the arrest of the family. One group of guards attempts to arrest the family while the other engages the characters if possible. They fight until their number is reduced by half. They then retreat to the west gate and sound the alarm.

What did we learn? Fuhlgar's orders were taken seriously. The guards are used to a lesser level of resistance. The gates are shut now.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene assumes the characters wish to intervene and prevent Sholl and the children from being taken. It is up to you whether they arrive at Sholl's house before, during, or just after the arrival of the guards. I intended for it to be a mostly balanced combat but certainly one that the characters should win. If necessary, you might consider having some of the nearby townsfolk assist should it take a bad turn. In our version, Mikl was injured, and it threw my characters into a rage. The guards paid the price.

SCENE 9: SEARCHING THE CHURCH

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Brothers running about causing confusion.

Description: A group of Henerick's personal guards arrive at the church looking for the siblings and anyone that traveled with them. They have Peth with them, not as a prisoner, but less than cooperative. Brother Fortin speaks to them first in his friendly but somewhat dramatic way, protesting the invasion of this sacred place. The sergeant apologizes but is insistent. Eventually Fortin allows them to search the church.

Stedden gives himself up admitting that he is the one that helped the siblings (sort of true). When the guards bring him to the sergeant, he looks to Peth. Peth plainly says,

"It isn't him."

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Fortin, Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (all), Sergeant of the Guard, Redwater Guards (5), Peth.

Challenge: Avoid being arrested. The temple has many places to hide. If necessary, the characters can flee back into the sewers.

What did we learn? The church is no longer off limits for the Redwater Guard. Peth is helping them.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene played out at the same time as the previous scene in our game. The characters never participated but rather heard about it after. Stedden pretended to be Lundy, going so far as to be in possession of his dog. If your group doesn't have any non-siblings, the portion of the scene with Peth might need to be omitted.

SCENE 10: WOMEN OF THE NIGHT

Location: Main Hall of the Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: A bit chilly, smells of incense, occasionally the sound of whispered prayers.

Description: While visiting the main hall to pray (or to find one of the Brothers praying) the north door opens, and the silhouette of a woman is visible in the fog outside. In a familiar voice she says,

"Their time is upon them. Keep them true, for they are children of Arden."

The woman disappears into the fog. If pursued, the glow of a lantern slowly comes into view.

"Good evening. I thought I might check on the children."

Her voice is the same or very similar, yet she claims to have no knowledge of entering the church without the lantern.

NPCs/Creatures: Agathe.

Challenge: Hear the words. Try to make sense.

What did we learn? Hard to say...

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was one of those strange encounters to fuel discussions. Was it Orpheus's spirit? Was it an avatar of Selene? Was it just Agathe? It ultimately helped my characters feel justified in their plans.

AUCTUS 11.2c

The morning fog clears, and the day turns sunny. Word of the sibling's return has certainly reached Henerick. The Old Town portion of Redwater continues to be locked down, but all are free to move around within the palisade as normal. Henerick attempts a drastic show of power late in the day. The wedding is but 4 days away.

SCENE 1: CAPTURED ALLIES

Location: The river and the dock in New Town. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cool morning, fog is clearing, noticeable uproar from the folk as the boats pass by.

Description: The siblings are made aware that Henerick's guards that were sent to the Spire of the Spring have returned. Although they didn't find the siblings there, they did find some of the woodsmen hiding in the wood. They have with them several prisoners.

As the boats drift past the Old Town docks, several of the townsfolk cry out to the prisoners. Among them are Sten and Sholl's husband Kjell. They are all tied and look as though they were not captured without putting up a fight.

The prisoners are off-loaded on the New Town docks near the Lurian boats. Fuhlgar, a group of guards, and Lurian cavalry is there to meet them. After some pushing and shoving and no shortage of yelling, Fuhlgar can be heard to shout to the Lurian officer,

"These fugitives, the boatman, and the troublesome children of the traitor will burn by day's end!"

The prisoners are taken to the keep in a wagon driven by Lurians along with Fuhlgar and Henerick's guards on horseback.

Word travels fast through Old Town that the gates are open, and all are expected to attend the public event at the keep.

NPCs/Creatures: Prisoners (Sten, Kjell, 4 others), Fuhlgar, Henerick's Bodyguards (many), Redwater Guards (many), Lurian Soldiers (as needed), Commoners (as needed).

Challenge: Don't make things worse. It should be clear that with the number of guards and Lurians, there is no chance the prisoners could be freed without serious risk of death.

What did we learn? The prisoners are to be executed in the evening. Fuhlgar expects the siblings will be also.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was to set up the execution scene later in the day. I used Sholl and other townsfolk to bombard the siblings with requests for help for the prisoners.

SCENE 2: HOME AGAIN

Location: The sibling's childhood home. (See Map 14)

Conditions: Familiar, untouched, depressing.

Description: The grounds around the sibling's childhood home look as though they continue to be cared for. Unlike some of the unoccupied buildings around Old Town, it is not overgrown. The roof has collapsed around the kitchen and there is evidence that a fire occurred.

Inside, things are unexpectedly as the siblings remember. Familiar items, even clothing, are still in place. Only the area around the kitchen has been damaged.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Home is just as the siblings left it.

Notes on playing this scene: The visit to the home of their childhood is meant to be a double-edged sword. Happy memories are all over the place and yet so is the bed Orpheus took Henerick to. The spot she lost her life is unmistakable. I used the scene to distract from the upcoming public executions and the planning of how to stop them. It was interesting to see the hope and good will that they experienced the previous day turn to doubt.

SCENE 3: TO THE KEEP

Location: The keep west of Redwater. (See Maps 15)

Conditions: Nearing sunset, light breeze on the grassy hills west of town.

Description: A few hours before sunset, the gates of Old Town Redwater are opened, and the citizens slowly begin to make the walk over the hill towards the keep.

The keep itself is a four-story structure of stone blocks. It is familiar to the siblings as Arden was partially responsible for the construction. It was the last place they saw their father alive.

The Lurian forces have made their camp on the south side of the keep. They have arranged a series of tents and animal pens. They have now assembled in long formations to the south of the incoming crowd. In the windows of the upper level, some of the recently arrived guests can be seen. On the parapet, Henerick, Thylera, Brother Linden, Charon, and others are looking down from above.

Adjacent to the stone stairs, in a makeshift pen, Henerick's guards have gathered the woodsmen that have been held within the keep. All have their hands tied. Most ominous is the series of wooden poles with Lurian soldiers piling dry wood around them.

NPCs/Creatures: Everyone.

Challenge: Stay hidden among the townsfolk. Stealth or other appropriate checks should be required assuming the siblings wish not to reveal themselves.

What did we learn? Henerick intends to burn some of his prisoners in front of his guests as a show of power.

Notes on playing this scene: In our telling of the story, the siblings were in hiding amongst the crowd. This was the setup for the scenes to come. Between Henerick's guards and the assembled Lurian forces, it was made to look as though the situation was hopeless for the prisoners. There should be enough poles for each sibling and at least 4 others.

SCENE 4: FREE PRISONERS

Location: In front of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Nearing sunset, light breeze on the grassy hills west of town.

Description: The uneasy murmuring of the crowd is interrupted by one of the keep's lesser steward's raised voice.

"Woodsmen, citizens, and distinguished guests - the honorable Henerick, Lord of Redwater."

Henerick steps to the edge of the parapet and gives his customary wave to the crowd below. To his left, wrapped in fine furs, is his mother Thylera. To his right, in his polished armor and black cape, is Charon of Luria. Linden is nearby leaning heavily on one of Henerick's servants. The lord eventually steps up and raises his hands.

"People of Redwater, let us welcome Charon and our Lurian guests. I ask that you treat them as my family, for in a few short days, they will be."

Charon then steps forward and in his surprisingly large voice says,

"I thank you for your hospitality, Lord Henerick. And to your mother, my thanks for sharing your home. With your permission, I should like to demonstrate how we Lurians confront such difficulties as have troubled Redwater as of late. Chedomir, if you please!"

There is a murmur in the crowd as Chedomir and a group of Lurian soldiers move from the steps of the keep towards the makeshift pen of woodsmen. Confusion begins to

spread as two more Lurians emerge from the keep along with Ruden, an Eclan representative. The Lurians carry an iron-clad box and Ruden a large tome.

Chedomir forcibly pulls the first of the prisoners from the pen. He stops him short of the first pole and says something to the man with a cruel sneer. Eventually he yells,

“Give him your name!”

The woodsman apparently complies as Ruden flips the pages of the large book. He gestures to the Lurians and one of them produces a small bag from within the iron-clad box. One of the other Lurian soldiers turns the woodsman toward him, cuts the rope binding his hands, and directs him toward the gathered crowd after planting the bag into his freed hands. Chedomir then gives the woodsman a shove as he brings the second man out of the pen.

As the woodsmen join the crowd, one by one, word passes quickly through the crowd that each has been paid all their back wages in Cerrak Septems. The reunited families, with their pay that was thought long gone, begin to cheer as each woodsman is released. Eventually the pen is empty and the crowd quite loud. After the final man is released, Chedomir climbs the steps of the keep. He turns and raises his arms toward Ruden and the soldiers with the chest as he directs them inside. The crowd cheers and he takes a sort of bow. Henerick is pleased.

NPCs/Creatures: Everyone.

Challenge: Continue to hide among the crowd. Observe. Remain calm.

What did we learn? The Lurians are picking up the tab for Henerick’s troubles. Henerick hopes this act of good will might keep the peace during the executions to come. He also hopes the crowd might turn over the siblings.

Notes on playing this scene: In the beginning the scene is about the crowd being nervous about what is going to happen. By the end, it is about the crowd and their attitude towards the Lurians. The release of the woodsmen and the spreading of the Lurian wealth should go a long way to gaining the support of the crowd. They should almost forget the poles and dry wood for a moment. My characters were preparing for the worst, ready to intervene, but the worst was yet to come.

SCENE 5: EXECUTIONS (FEAR AND IRE)

Location: In front of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Sunset, gusty breezes grow in strength as the light of Illios begins to fade and Selene begins to rise.

Description: As Chedomir is stirring the crowd, Henerick again steps to the edge of the parapet.

"I am pleased you approve of my choice of families to join with my own. I thank them for their demonstration. It would seem another sort of demonstration is needed. Fuhlgar, show them how we deal with those that would seek to harm our family."

Fuhlgar, Chedomir, and a mix of both Henerick's guards and Lurian soldiers lead another group from the keep. Among them are Rynar, Sten, and Kjell. Their condition is terrible. All are bloodied, obviously beaten, some are barely able to walk without help. Each is led to one of the wooden poles adjacent to the Lurians. The crowd is understandably uneasy. Henerick then calls out,

"Children of Arden, I know you are here! Honor your father, step forth and take your place among these traitors as he would have!"

At that moment, after a slight gesture from Charon, all the assembled Lurian cavalry step down from their mounts and draw steel in unison. The noise is terrifying. There is an audible gasp from the crowd as they realize their dire situation - nearly surrounded by armed soldiers. After a tense moment, Henerick continues,

"I say you are traitors and cowards! Fuhlgar, there are <three> empty fires. Fill them!"

Fuhlgar happily orders his men forward. There are immediately screams from the people as the soldiers push into the crowd to select folk "randomly". Agathe, Kayla, and (*other appropriate NPCs as needed*) are picked out of the crowd. As Kjell catches sight of Kayla, he thrashes and screams until the guards beat him unconscious.

Henerick's men bring lit torches from within the keep and proceed towards the pyres, awaiting the signal to ignite them. Some of the townsfolk, including some of the freed woodsmen attack Henerick's men nearest the crowd. As the violence breaks out, the crowd pushes towards the prisoners.

Perhaps a passage of the Triad is quoted above the noise (see Notes on playing this scene below):

Fear and Ire:

*Fear not said Lady Moon,
All is not lost, for violence begets violence,
Hate begets hate.
Those who seek to do harm shall always meet harm,
Blood begets blood!*

*All the more reason to fight injustice said Lord Sun,
Or to destroy our enemies said Lord Night,
No brothers! said Lady Moon,
While you seek to feud,
This endless cycle of pain and anguish,
I shall see it cease!*

*Raise my ire and be beset with inaction.
Find wisdom in reflection,
Safety in seclusion,
Gratitude in reprise.
So says the Lady!*

A hush falls over the crowd. After a moment, it is Charon that speaks.

*"Please! Enough violence!"
"My lord! Think of your betrothed!"
"Do not dishonor your union with this bloodshed!"
"Let us show your subjects mercy."*

The crowd responds favorably.

Henerick almost looks relieved as he calls for his men to hold their arms and withdraw to the keep. Lady Thylera, however, throws her goblet to the ground and storms away from the parapet. She is aware that the assembled guests in the windows of the keep might not see this "mercy" as a lordly act.

Charon orders his soldiers back into formation. They do so with complete discipline and order. It is then clear that if they had attacked with similar precision, they might have slaughtered the entire town.

NPCs/Creatures: Everyone.

Challenge: Incite the crowd to protest. Stop the executions without provoking the Lurian soldiers into attacking the townsfolk. Get away.

What did we learn? Henerick certainly wants the siblings dead. Fuhlgar is happy to make anyone suffer to accomplish his goals. The town supports the siblings under the right circumstances, even in the face of danger. Charon is uneasy with the idea of indiscriminately killing the townsfolk, at least in front of the visiting gentry from Westflood. Charon has some sway over Henerick.

Notes on playing this scene: There is one pole for each sibling, Rynar, Sten, Kjell and least one other. Things could go very wrong. It is important to keep the violence contained if any. “Fear and Ire” was a religious passage quoted by Lundy to inspire the townsfolk to rebel against the wrongful executions of the citizens pulled from the crowd. In our game, it proved to turn the tide. It was particular to Lundy, and it coincided with his first ever use of divine magic. Your players have the same opportunity to rally the townsfolk to their cause. It is up to you what that looks like. The most important thing to note is if they do nothing, the prisoners could burn to ashes. This creates a very different relationship with the siblings, the Lurians, and the townsfolk. If the siblings elect to surrender, they are each tied to a pole. In this unlikely event, or if there are none among the siblings that are religiously affiliated, Brother Fortin can be the one to quote “Fear and Ire”. The Brothers of the church move the crowd toward the prisoners and attempt to free them. Ultimately, Charon prefers to not have his soldiers attack the townspeople he just spent money gaining the favor of. Should the siblings elect to surrender themselves, Brother Stedden, Agathe, Artil, or any other sympathetic citizens intervene. Again, Henerick will not hesitate to burn them, abruptly ending the story.

SCENE 6: RETURN TO REDWATER

Location: Road west of Redwater.

Conditions: After sunset, gusty breezes grow in strength as the light of Illios continues to fade and Selene rises.

Description: The emotional crowd makes a quick trek back towards Redwater. The injured are helped by the Brothers and other concerned citizens. Kjell, especially, is hurried back to the church with his family close. On their way, many of the folk can be heard asking the siblings what they intend to do now and what they should be doing to help?

The Brothers of the church do all they can to help the injured. Kjell would live, his injuries would need time and the will of the Triad to heal, but he would live. The family was finally all under one roof.

Many other families, those of the freed woodsmen, are reunited for the first time in cycles, and most with Septems in their pockets.

NPCs/Creatures: Commoners (as needed).

Challenge: Get the injured to the church. Give the townsfolk some hope that this isn't over.

What did we learn? The citizens of Redwater are starting to look to the siblings for guidance.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene is an opportunity to show the siblings that the townsfolk are looking to them to solve the problems of this difficult time. It should also be clear that many of the folk now think of the Lurians as a welcome addition to Redwater.

SCENE 7: RYNAR'S GOODBYE

Location: The Whetstone, Old Town Redwater. (See Maps 10 and 11)

Conditions: Cold, breezy night. Warm and quiet inside the Whetstone.

Description: The siblings receive word from Rynar that he would like a word. He asks that they meet at the Whetstone tonight.

By the time the siblings arrive, the crowd at the Whetstone has all but dispersed. Rynar is sitting near the fire, his familiar shabby apron has a few new blood spots, and his left eye is blackened and swollen.

"That is all I can take. I wish all of you good luck, but I will not stay any longer. Here, drink."

Rynar raises his tankard in a goodbye toast to their health. He further explains his experience in the keep and how angry Thylera got when she learned the siblings were so close. She beat Linden for being unable to find them. He also reveals that Peth was in a cell next to him for a time.

He ultimately finishes his drink and announces his intent to retake the 'Keg' and be off before dawn.

"If anybody else wants a ride, tell them hurry up."

NPCs/Creatures: Rynar, Holger, Mads, Commoners (as needed), Redwater Guards (as needed)

Challenge: Help Rynar escape Redwater without bringing the whole guard down upon him.

What did we learn? Rynar has had enough. Thylera is very interested in the siblings. Peth was in jail.

Notes on playing this scene: In our version, Rynar took several refugees south with him. The escape took place away from the characters, so I decided it happened without any real bloodshed. Rynar knocked a guard over the head with an oar, cut the ropes, and drifted away.

AUCTUS 12.2c

The wind continues in the morning. Clouds are building in the west, and a change arrives before the day is out. Talk of yesterday's events dominate the conversations of the folk of Redwater until the unexpected word from the keep arrives moving the wedding up to this very day. The Old Town portion of Redwater continues to be locked down, but all are free to move around to prepare for the wedding. Is the wedding today, or 3 days away?

SCENE 1: WORD FROM THE KEEP

Location: Temple of Redwater; the western gate. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Warm dining hall, smells of breakfast. Cold, breezy morning.

Description: As the siblings are being served another breakfast in the church, Brother Stedden arrives with a dire look on his face. The sergeant of the Lurian Soldiers now posted there has summoned Brother Fortin to the western gate.

The western gate is now closed and although there are a few Redwater guards on the walls nearby, the towers at the gate are manned by Lurian soldiers.

Fortin is given word that Lord Henerick's wedding has been moved up to this very day. It is to take place on the top of the hill, west of town at sunset. Fortin is also given a folded bit of fabric and told Brother Linden has requested his festival vestments for the ceremony. Brothers of the church are to coordinate appropriate preparations with the "assistance" of the Lurian soldiers as supervisors.

The townsfolk are allowed to assemble at the bottom of the hill during the ceremony.

Back at the temple, Brother Fortin discovers a handwritten note within Brother Linden's sash. Brother Fortin recognizes the note is written in Linden's own hand:

"-so may Her blessings,"

"-may the face of Illios not be clouded," So I have seen.

The word "not" was smudged while the ink was still wet.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Fortin, Young Brothers (as needed), Redwater Guards (as needed), Lurian Soldiers (as needed).

Challenge: Decipher the message fragment. A successful Difficult Scholar or Faith check identifies the passage from an old ritual for matrimony.

What did we learn? Perhaps Brother Linden wishes the face of Illios to be clouded.

Notes on playing this scene: Based on the message from Brother Linden, my players planned to disrupt the rescheduled wedding using an unexpected winter storm. The siblings would disguise themselves as lesser brothers of the church to get close to Henerick and Thylera, or perhaps at least close enough to free Brother Linden. Brother Fortin would use his Favor to “Control Weather” over the area around Redwater. Brother Fortin can suggest these ideas if your players need help.

SCENE 2: RESCHEDULED WEDDING PREPARATIONS

Location: The western gate, the hill west of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Chilly, breezy day.

Description: Townsfolk do their best to prepare flowers and other decorations for the top of the hill. A Makeshift stage is assembled with an arch of twisted saplings and flowers. Considering what little time was available, the scene on the hill is more than impressive by mid-afternoon.

Back in Redwater, others prepare gifts of food and drink for the celebration after. Several carts are filled with various foodstuffs and kegs of local mead, ales, and imported wine. The Lurians alone take them to the keep, trusting none to accompany them.

NPCs/Creatures: Lurian Soldiers (as needed), Young Brothers (as needed), Commoners (as needed).

Challenge: Blend in with the Young Brothers. Appropriate talent checks should be made if anyone other than Lurians talk to the siblings while they are disguised.

What did we learn? The Lurians cannot differentiate between Brothers and siblings. The citizens of Redwater can put together a wedding in a hurry if needed. The Lurians and Henerick are willing to have the wedding without all of their guests arriving (the Regent has not yet arrived).

Notes on playing this scene: The siblings may wish to test the idea that they can pass as Brothers of the church before the actual wedding. This scene allows for exactly that.

SCENE 3: MAY THE FACE OF ILLIOS ~~NOT~~ BE CLOUDED

Location: Abandoned, two-story house in the north of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cold and windy. Soon to be worse. The house is missing shutters and a fair portion of the roof.

Description: Brother Fortin insists that he should have at least one with him for protection during his ritual. He selects a nearby, abandoned two-story house where he can call upon the will of Illios.

In the loft of the empty house, Brother Fortin can see the hill where the wedding is set to begin. Once the bride and groom have arrived, he begins his ritual. He kneels under a gap in the roof, so the last bit of Illios' light falls upon him.

It is as if the clouds began moving in before Fortin has even started. First the temperature drops. Then the wind increases. Soon flurries. It would be a bitter spring storm from the west.

By the end, the town is in chaos. More than a foot of snow has fallen, and massive drifts fill the streets. The drifts along the west wall have made opening the western gate almost impossible.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Fortin.

Challenge: Be Fortin's lookout.

What did we learn? Brother Fortin's favor with the gods is unquestionable.

Notes on playing this scene: Beyond the mechanics of "Control Weather" I had the storm blow itself out over the next few hours. I also had the apparent drain on Fortin be substantial. It was tragically important that he was less than 100% the next day.

SCENE 4: WEDDING PARTY ON THE HILL

Location: The hill west of Redwater.

Conditions: Cold and windy. Conditions deteriorate quickly and drastically.

Description: By the time folks are gathering at the bottom of the hill to witness the ceremony from below, the temperature has dropped dramatically. Many of the guests from the keep are huddling together by the time Henerick arrives. He is on horseback accompanied by a wagon in which his mother, Fuhlgar, Brother Linden, and a few of the more prominent quests are riding.

The wind is blowing seriously by the time the Lurians are making their way to the hill. There is a long procession of men and horses followed by another wagon carrying Dionysia (the bride) and her immediate family.

When the bride finally arrives near the top of the hill, she can be heard yelling over the wind and snow,

"Father, do something!"

The worst of the weather comes from the west at a frightening speed. It is immediately clear that no wedding shall be taking place in these conditions. As the townsfolk begin to break for town, the wedding party too abandons the hill.

NPCs/Creatures: Everyone, townsfolk at the bottom of the hill.

Challenge: Remain hidden among the brothers. Appropriate talent checks should be made if anyone other than the Lurians talk to the siblings while they are disguised.

Rescue Linden. Linden is helped down from the wagon by two of Henerick's guards. If the siblings try to take him in concert with the worst of the weather, they only have a few guards to contend with. Henerick and Fuhlgar are focused on protecting Thylera and Dionysia, and not looking too foolish in front of their guests. The Lurians leave everyone behind to get the bride and family back to the keep. If Thylera senses a trap, she does everything to protect Henerick and get back to the keep.

Get back to town. The weather is fierce and getting back to the church requires Taming, Survival, Endurance, or other appropriate talent checks to accomplish.

What did we learn? The weather is serious. The Lurians are serious about protecting the bride.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene became all about getting Brother Linden away from Henerick and then surviving the storm getting back to town. The stopping of the wedding was more about the sudden weather change. It was fun to describe the scene as it became more ridiculous. Veils blowing away, musicians falling down the hill, animals bolting dragging wagons with them, it got nice and chaotic in our version.

SCENE 5: LINDEN'S END

Location: The Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm and dry inside.

Description: It is clear to all that Brother Linden is near death - ravaged by a series of serious injuries and who-knows-what evils of Henerick and his mother. He looks to be at least 30 years older than he is.

A couple of the Brothers bring blankets and some hot tea. He coughs and spits as they give it to him. His eyes dart around the room to find the youngest of the siblings. His hand can barely hold from shaking as he reaches for them. He seems to struggle to focus as they approach until a wave of recognition washes over him. Tears fill his eyes as he says,

"Save your parents, child."

It would be the last words uttered by the great illuminator.

The strange statement causes the youngest sibling to fall unconscious. Brother Stedden immediately rushes to catch them. He assures everyone that they are fine, only asleep.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Linden, Brother Stedden, Brother Fortin, Younger Brothers (all).

Challenge: Try to save Brother Linden without really saving him.

What did we learn? Brother Linden is no more.

Notes on playing this scene: It was important for Brother Linden to pass on. Only Brother Fortin might have had the ability to save him, but his favor should be expended. The youngest sibling should be personally singled out for the last moment. When they awake, they remember the forgotten memory hinted at in their dream.

FORGOTTEN MEMORIES

The youngest of the siblings wakes in the morning, fully rested. They have had a similar vivid dream of the long-forgotten incident with Arden. Again, adjust the story to fit your characters as needed (see the handout in the References). The important take away should be the lost entrance to the keep. Brother Linden had somehow suppressed the memories using his favor with the gods and his passing has restored the memory.

The day is warm. The windows of your childhood home are open. Your mother is helping you and your siblings try on new clothes for the celebration of Lady Thylera's birthday. Lord Eldram pushed your father and the artisans to complete the main areas of the new keep in time for this banquet. Arden is sitting at the table complaining about the rush to finish.

He begins to describe the bedchamber of the Lord and Lady. Apparently, there is a live tree growing inside. The branches cover the bed like a forest canopy.

"Mark my words, it will bring the whole tower down. The roots already push up the tiles of the floor."

In her teasing way, your mother convinced Arden to let it go.

"If I told you I wanted something extravagant to mark the day of my birth, would you not do everything to get it for me? A crown? A dragon? Even a tree?"
"Well. Perhaps. I had better see about the preparations for the feast."

He was smiling now. Maybe you could go with him.

"Come along little one."

The keep was bustling with activity. Workers were everywhere moving tables, hanging flowers, carrying trays of cups and plates, arguing with musicians. The noise was dreadful.

Lord Eldram spots Arden from the balcony above. He waves him up. You both make your way to the overlook of the main hall. He grabs you in his customary embrace, lifting you from the floor. It seems he has been sampling the wine.

“Are you ready for this grand feast?”

“Perhaps we’ll find you a suitable spouse, eh?”

His joking ways always seemed clumsy. The stoic look on Arden’s face was enough. As he puts you down, he asks for a moment alone with your father.

“Don’t get in their way. And don’t get your clothes dirty or I’ll never hear the end from your mother.”

Running around the upper floors of the huge keep is great fun. It is so large you can barely grasp what living in a house like this would be like. You explore every one of the huge bed chambers until at last, you find it.

It is even bigger than you imagined. A real tree growing in the corner of the room. From its twisted trunk and roots, a massive bed decorated with feathers of all sizes and colors.

It is impossible for you to resist. You are soon jumping on the wide bed. With each bounce you try to grab the branches above. Finally, you catch a handful of leaves. Hanging on tightly, you slowly drop back to the bed and jump again, higher still, it is almost like flying. Again and again, until you realize you aren’t holding the branches, they are holding you. Only then do you see the eyes, glowing red, high in the branches of the tree. Fear washes over you as you try to let go. The sound of your scream surprises you, it sounds like the shriek of a raptor or maybe an owl. You close your eyes. The branches let go.

You tumble into the dark, with several bumps on the way down. When you stop, you are in complete darkness. The floor is cold and damp. When you finally muster the courage to call out, your voice is again familiar. There is no response. You wonder if you could have fallen to the cellar.

You crawl for a bit, but eventually use the wall to stand. You follow it for what seems like hours. Stopping often to call out only to hear the echoes return.

The floor transitions from stone to dirt and then eventually mud. You begin to cry, knowing the new outfit will be ruined. As you wipe the tears away, you realize that you can just make out the outline of the passage. There is light ahead. Sunlight.

The passage slopes down sharply and is filled with water. The light is coming from under the surface. It looks like river water, just clear enough to see the passage continuing down and out. You stand in the cool water up to your waist for a long time trying to muster the courage to swim to the light. You suddenly realize you are not alone. A small

turtle swims past. As you reach for it, it darts under the water and away. You are inspired to do the same.

The passage isn't long, but you feel as though you might run out of air before you get to the end. When you surface, you are near the western shore of the river. Your unexpected presence has given your friend Stedden a horrible fright. It seems he was fishing. He has fallen from his perch on a large black rock. He too is now soaked.

When he realizes who you are and how upset you are, he immediately helps you to the shore. It is afternoon. You see now that you are just south of Redwater. The keep is far to the west. You notice a large group on the road moving towards it. You are sure your mother and siblings are among them. How would you get back now?

Stedden insists he has the answer.

"We should tell Brother Linden. He'll know what to do."

Brother Linden does indeed know what to do. He immediately sends one of the younger Brothers to get Arden in the keep. As you wait for your father to arrive, Linden draws you a bath. By the time your father would be there, your clothes should be dry. Dirty, but dry.

When Arden arrives, he is furious. You cannot ever remember him in such a state. There was much screaming and threats. He would even strike young Stedden forcing Brother Linden to intercede.

Over the next hour, Linden and Arden hatched a plan to get you back into the keep without suspicion. He would sneak you into the kitchen of the keep. Brother Linden further assured your father that the events of the day would be forgotten.

True enough, you would be found in the kitchen with your friend Stedden. Apparently, there was an incident with some honey and a barrel of flour. Although your clothes were ruined, Lord Eldram implored your parents not to be too angry.

"I too have knocked a honey jar or two over in that kitchen. The pantry is dark! Now, join the feast!"

At the end of the night, all of you would ride home in Brother Linden's wagon. He insisted on praying with you and your siblings before he left. The memory was taken from that moment. Until now.

It took a long time for Arden to lose his fear of Eldram or Thylera finding out about your accidental discovery of the hidden passage in and out of the keep. He knew they would have surely done anything to keep the knowledge of its existence secret.

AUCTUS 13.2C

The morning is bright and sunny. The day is warm, and the melting snow creates rills of running water through town. It will take several days for the heavy areas to melt. The confusion of the citizens is obvious. The siblings may encounter tragedy, new locations, and old acquaintances. Although the original wedding was to be held in just two days, it is unclear when the actual wedding might occur.

SCENE 1: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Location: West side of town near the west gate. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Cool, sunny morning. Snow beginning to melt.

Description: It is easy to see the limits of last night's freak storm. There is barely any snow east of the river and beyond the keep. Along the west side of town over a foot of snow had fallen and the wind created massive drifts, especially near the wall.

Brother Stedden has been approached by several townsfolk concerned that a young family is missing. They also approached the Lurian guards that claimed to know nothing. There is a concern that perhaps Henerick's men may have taken them as they fled the wedding due to the storm. Brother Stedden approaches the siblings to ask them for assistance.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (as needed), Commoners (as needed), Sick (if needed).

Challenge: Help the townsfolk find the missing family. Brother Stedden requests that before they approach Henerick they should search outside the wall on the chance the missing folk are there. The man, woman, and small child were trapped outside the gate and did not survive the worst of the storm. They can be found under the snow.

Avoid the Sick. Should the siblings forget, the dead family may attempt to rise as Sick. Because of their condition, they are very slow.

What did we learn? There were tragic, unintended consequences to the sudden storm.

Notes on playing this scene: The impact of the scene will be fully realized in the following scene. There was much debate on who was to blame in our game. It was eventually spun into the fault of the Lurians for not opening the gate.

SCENE 2: DESPAIR

Location: The Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Cool inside, many windows are open to allow fresh air in.

Description: The bodies of the lost townsfolk have been brought to the church. Word of their fate has reached Brother Fortin and he is terribly distraught. He has become hysterical and has locked himself in his room.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Fortin, Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (as needed), Commoners (as needed).

Challenge: Console Brother Fortin. If he is left to his own devices, Fortin becomes so overwrought he attempts to throw himself off the roof of the church.

What did we learn? Brother Fortin blames himself for the death of the young family.

Notes on playing this scene: In our game, Fortin met an ugly end from the fall from the roof of the church. Brother Stedden found himself the most senior Brother of the church in Redwater. The loss of Fortin in addition to Linden, has left no senior acolyte to perform Henerick's wedding. If Brother Fortin remains alive, he should be sequestered in his quarters, and be of little if any help to the siblings.

SCENE 3: HERALD OF THE REGENT

Location: The Whetstone. (See Map 11)

Conditions: Warm and dry. Smells of good food. Muddy floor due to the melting snow.

Description: In the midst of the upheaval in the church, word that a herald from the Regent has arrived in Redwater reaches the siblings. He is currently at the Whetstone and has inquired about them.

The Whetstone has few patrons when the siblings arrive but based on the amount of mud on the floor, it looks as though a fair number have been in today. Mads is angrily mopping the back hall. The herald is unmistakable in the white enameled armor of Westflood. He interrupts his meal and introduces himself as Kostadin, herald of Klain Whiteshield, Regent of the Lake. He is familiar to all the siblings from their time in Westflood.

He explains that he has been to the keep early this morning to announce the Regent's arrival to the Lord Henerick. While there he heard several accounts of the recent events in Redwater. He further explains the specific instructions given to him by the Regent to search out the siblings. The Regent is understandably concerned about them, and he wants their account of what is happening in Redwater.

After the conversation, Kostadin takes his leave and attempts to reach the Regent before they arrive in Redwater.

NPCs/Creatures: Kostadin (Herald), Hilda, Holger, Mads, Nina, Commoners (6 or so), possibly Brother Stedden.

Challenge: Visit Kostadin at the Whetstone. Give an account of what is happening here in Redwater. It is up to the characters to describe their version of what has happened.

Learn as much as possible from Kostadin. As the conversation between them goes on, the herald reveals the following: Brother Lathan has accompanied the Regent as an advisor and intends to visit Brother Linden, his old friend. Toreas himself is traveling with the Regent, along with a sizeable group of Eclan escorts.

If the conversation continues, Kostadin also reveals that Toreas is very nervous around the Regent. The rumor among the White Guard is that three full rafts of Berian trees are owed to Westflood before the rise of the next full moon. If it cannot be delivered or like compensation be paid, the Regent can name a new Lord of Redwater, and Eclan's assets may be confiscated. It seems Toreas has vouched for Henerick in the most serious way.

What did we learn? The Regent is arriving on the 14th. In addition to the White Guards, Brother Lathan, Toreas, and his retinue are traveling with the Regent. Eclan Traders is liable for the debt of Henerick.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene was to deliver the news of the Regent's arrival as well as sharing the information about Eclan and what is owed to Westflood. My players were hesitant to give too much detail about the recent events in Redwater but gave enough to have the herald leave in a hurry to catch up with the Regent.

BIG DECISION TIME NUMBER THREE:

It is at this point the players must decide if they intend to make the journey into the keep or not. The newfound memory of the secret entrance into the tunnels below the keep hopefully cues the players to this option. My players decided that the upcoming funeral would be an excellent opportunity to get outside the town walls. There are certainly more options available. Sneaking or fighting their way out is always a possibility. The following scenes are built on the assumption that the characters use the funeral to get into the keep. If your characters have a different idea on how to proceed, it is up to you to take the important sections of the following scenes and integrate them into your own story. As always, do what makes sense for you and your players.

SCENE 4: LINDEN'S FUNERAL

Location: West of Redwater, outside the walls.

Conditions: Cool evening, melting snow, impressive sunset over the mountains far to the west.

Description: The funeral procession assembles at the church. A cart drawn by a single fen, the Brothers, and a group of townsfolk gather to see Brother Linden off. Brother

Stedden leads the group to the west gate. There the Lurian officer on duty allows the group to pass through the gates but he insists that a detachment of his soldiers to join.

Just beyond the deepest of the drifts, the Brothers have cleared a large area and assembled a large stack of wood for Linden's pyre. None from the keep have elected to attend.

Brother Stedden gives a heartfelt eulogy for Linden. It is long and focuses on his desire for the wellbeing of all the citizens of Redwater. Many of the Brothers, including Stedden, are very emotional. The assembled group is then led in a familiar religious song said to be a favorite of Brother Linden.

Stedden performs the last rights and lights the fire in a ceremonious but somewhat reluctant manner. The fire grows fast and is so large that many are forced to step back. The Brothers were careful to select a mix of wood to ensure it would burn for a long time. The assembled folk begin to walk back to town at their own pace. Some of the Brothers stay until the very last of the flames expire.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (all), Commoners (20 or 30), Lurian soldiers (at least 6).

Challenge: Get outside the walls. Getting through the gate should be easy if the siblings are disguised, hidden, or at least separated. If the siblings are not, they are detained by the guards at the gate and not allowed to exit.

Smuggle weapons and equipment outside the wall. The cart carrying Brother Linden's body is an excellent option for getting weapons outside the wall. Again, if the siblings are not in disguise, they are detained by the guards at the gate and not allowed to exit.

Slip away from the funeral. The sun is down, and it is dark by the time the fire begins to die. Everyone, including the Lurians, are fixated on the fire. Moving away should require Stealth talent checks if the character's tactics are not sound.

What did we learn? Those in the keep would rather not come out for the funeral. Many of the citizens of Redwater are similarly uncomfortable coming out due to the previous day's events. Brother Linden will be missed.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was used as the opportunity for the characters to escape the walls of the city. Saying goodbye to Brother Linden was also important for my group. It is an opportunity to describe what you think a formal funeral should be like for the Brothers in Redwater. If Brother Fortin has passed, a double funeral might be similarly accomplished. It should be easy enough to add another pyre and extend the service to include a few words about poor Fortin.

SCENE 5: REMEMBERED ENTRANCE

Location: The wetlands near the black rock, just south of Redwater; the entrance to the Lost Path. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Dark and cold, many stars accompany the almost full Selene.

Description: The reed-surrounded pool along the river is easy to spot, even from far away in the light of Selene. The black rock however proves to be a bit more of a challenge.

The hidden entrance requires entering the cold water to locate. The top of the tunnel is more than three feet below the surface.

The flooded passage seems longer than described. There is a moment when all believe the entrance is blocked.

Inside the tunnel, the air is a bit warmer. The floor is covered in slick mud for a dozen yards or more, eventually turning to dry, compacted dirt.

NPCs/Creatures: None.

Challenge: Find the black rock. The rock isn't hidden but everything is black at this hour. Use appropriate Notice or other talent checks as needed.

Find the entrance. The youngest sibling should be able to indicate approximately where the entrance is in relation to the black rock. It shouldn't be hard to find but getting in the water should be uncomfortable. The water is cold.

Enter the passage. Swimming checks should be required to make it into the passage without assistance. Using a rope or other methods allows subsequent characters to enter more easily.

Get some light. Even if the characters reach the dry passage, it is pitch black and they are wet and cold. Starting a fire requires fuel and appropriate survival talent checks.

Find the tracks. If light is produced, a series of obvious footprints are found in the mud and dirt of the floor. The tracks are fresh.

What did we learn? The water is cold. The passage is as remembered. Someone has passed this way before the siblings.

Notes on playing this scene: Making light, getting dry, and getting warm was a serious challenge for my characters. My players were excited to be in a "dungeon" setting.

Keep in mind that exploring the Lost Path can be done in almost any order. There are many additional rooms and passages that are not described here. Add whatever details or encounters you need to make it fun for your group.

SCENE 6: OILED ROOM

Location: Lost Path, north of the first dry chamber. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Dry, smell of wood and oil.

Description: The tracks lead north out of the dry chamber. The walls are earth bolstered with Berian wood planks and beams.

At the end of the passage, there is a hexagonal room five or six paces across. The smell of the oil wood treatment is stronger here. At the peak of the ceiling is an opening about two feet across.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth.

Challenge: Hear sounds of Peth trying to escape. A Difficult Notice talent check gives the characters a hint that something is ahead.

Avoid the oil trap. The planks and beams of the hexagonal room have been coated heavily in oil.

Oiled Room Trap

Rating: Extreme (18)

Damage: 4

Special Conditions: Bestows the Aflame State (1 in 4)

Effect: Bringing any flame into the room will ignite the excess oil on the walls. The resulting fireball will be brief but dramatic. All persons within the room take 4 points of damage and may be set aflame (1 in 4 chance).

Discover Peth. Peth is trying desperately to climb up and out of the room through the opening in the ceiling. He is hanging by his fingers about ten feet off the floor. He remains quiet until the trap is sprung. Spotting him should require only an Easy Notice talent check if the party brings a light source. Once the initial shock of the fire is over, he screams to be extinguished.

What did we learn? Peth is still alive.

Notes on playing this scene: The trap was not detected by my characters, however only one person entered the room and they managed to avoid the effects due to some ability benefits. Peth was the only one that suffered any ill effects.

SCENE 7: PETH, AGAIN

Location: Lost Path, Oiled Chamber. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Smoky, dry.

Description: Peth is minorly injured from the fall and flames. He begs for mercy in his best cowardly way. The room is undamaged from the flames. There is a hole in the ceiling about 2 feet square. It is open the sky above.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth.

Challenge: Get as much information from Peth as possible. Peth can describe the root filled tunnel, the iron gates of the room complexes, and the water filled rooms as he discovered them in darkness. He also reveals that he escaped a cell in the keep through a damaged wall.

It is possible that Peth reveals deeper details as described in the What is Happening Away From the Characters? section.

What did we learn? Peth was trying to escape Henerick. He has been wandering the catacombs in the dark for unknown hours. He knows a few details about the catacombs.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene assumes the trap has been triggered. Peth reluctantly shared what little information he had about the catacombs and the keep. The idea of putting Peth out of everyone's misery was tempting.

SCENE 8: MURAL AND STRANGE OFFERINGS

Location: First complex of the Lost Path. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Cool and dark.

Description: The passage ends at an open iron gate. The room beyond is constructed of stone blocks and is approximately twenty feet square. There is a similar gate to the right which is open and a gate ahead which is locked.

The adjacent chamber beyond the unlocked gate is similar in size and construction. There is another open gate across the room. The right-hand wall is dominated by a mural. A mix of carving and paint, the mural depicts a massive tree with branches outstretched like arms. The tree is surrounded by a sickly, purple halo of pigment. At the foot of the tree are many small humanoid figures all with heads like birds.

On the floor in front of the mural is a small copper bowl sitting on a rough, wooden stool.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth (if along).

Challenge: Discover Peth's tracks. Peth came through the large empty room and accidentally closed the iron gate when he passed through. The gate locked, preventing him from backtracking down the meandering earth tunnel. A successful Survival or Notice talent check results in this discovery.

Discover the offering. The specific items on the floor in front of the mural consist of a copper bowl with a measure of blood, a spotted feather, and a broken egg. A successful Scholar check reveals the feather is like those of the Fuglmand in the Hidden Grove.

Recognize the images beneath the pigment. A successful Notice or Scholar check reveals the pigment, specifically the bird heads, have been added to an existing image of normal men, presumably the woodsmen of the Berian Valley and the tree was a more normal looking Berian tree.

Recognize the carvings around the mural. The carvings, although heavily weathered, can be recognized as nearly the same as those on the Spire of the Spring by any that saw them. The meanings are similarly lost to time.

What did we learn? Strange things are afoot in the basement.

Notes on playing this scene: The discovery of the mural and offering were a big deal in our version of the story. The siblings would realize the meaning and seriousness of them long after this story was complete in a later continuation of the story. In the short term, it would be clear that someone in the keep is making offerings to something other than the Triad. My players are suspicious of eggs and feathers still!

SCENE 9: OVERGROWN TUNNEL

Location: Empty room at the entrance to the root-filled tunnel. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Root-filled, tight space.

Description: At the end of the large, stone room is an opening that has been completely overgrown with roots. It is as if the roots have spun themselves into a vortex with only a small hole in the center restricting access to what is beyond. The gap is barely big enough for a person to crawl through.

Peth is familiar with this location and indicates that beyond this restricted passage is the entrance to the keep. He explains that he was able to crawl through with difficulty. He knows that it is long but is unsure exactly what the distance might be.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth (if along).

Challenge: Traverse the passage. Characters can crawl through the gap in the passage. It is impossible to carry any conventional (fire) light source. Keeping items such as packs or items hanging on a belt should be extremely difficult.

What did we learn? Crawling down a constricted, root-filled passage is not fun.

Notes on playing this scene: The experience of making it through this area should be unpleasant and difficult.

SCENE 10: FOUNDATIONS

Location: Entry to the catacombs. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Cool, dim light from the stair, roots everywhere.

Description: Beyond the tight passage, the roots open into a stone chamber. Light spills in from up a nearby stairway. The roots, although less dense, continue around the edges of the room and some even continue up the stairs. Cracks are common and several of the stone blocks have been displaced by the roots.

Peth indicates that this is how he exited the keep.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth (if along), Fuglmand (at least two).

Challenge: Defeat the Fuglmand. Thylera's guards/pets attack the characters as they begin to climb the stair. They are moving fast but their shadows cast by the light from above prevents the characters from being surprised. The Fuglmand begin to retreat up the stair but fight to the death.

What did we learn? The bird men are guarding the stairs. The tree inside the keep has run amok.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was used to deplete the resources of the siblings before the following scenes. The party should be able to defeat Thylera's pets.

SCENE 11: FATHER'S SWORD

Location: Hidden stair to Thylera's bedroom. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Dimly lit, root-covered stone stairs.

Description: From above can be heard a familiar voice,

"Your damn pets are fighting again! I swear I shall end this!"

At the top of the stair, looking through a curtained opening, is Fuhlgar. He has a sword in his hand but is otherwise naked.

NPCs/Creatures: Fuhlgar.

Challenge: Identify the sword. Any of the siblings that get a good look at the sword in Fuhlgar's hand identify it as Arden's lost sword.

Defeat Fuhlgar. Fuhlgar does not shy away from the fight. If things go wrong, he calls out to Thylera for help but fights until the bitter end.

What did we learn? Fuhlgar has Arden's sword. Fuhlgar has a physical relationship with Thylera.

Notes on playing this scene: Fuhlgar was killed rather quickly in our version. Thylera joined the fight. Note that this and the following 2 scenes all play together as one big scene in order. It is important that Fuhlgar die here so he can reappear later in a modified form.

SCENE 12: THYLERA

Location: Thylera's bedchamber. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Dimly lit, smells of herbs and perfumes.

Description: The room is dominated by the huge Berian trunk in the corner. Roots spread across the floor of the room and up the walls on all sides. There are several braziers around the room providing the dim, amber light. A familiar female's voice screams,

"GUARDS!"

Lady Thylera stands up from what is now obviously a bed at the foot of the Berian trunk. She is dressed in a very revealing, sheer robe. There are tears in her eyes as she looks upon Fuhlgar's body.

Guards heed her call and enter from across the room.

NPCs/Creatures: Thylera, Fuhlgar (if still alive), Henerick's guards (2).

Challenge: Defeat Thylera's guards. Help comes as she screams for her guards. The two that arrive should be no real threat to the characters, just an added obstacle.

Survive Thylera's magic. Thylera uses her arcane power to put the characters (or at least some of them) to sleep. A Notice check reveals a strange distortion around her hand and perhaps a small flash of violet light as she delivers her spell. After putting most of the room to sleep, Thylera moves to attack the siblings, especially whomever delivered the killing blow to Fuhlgar.

Stay alive. The Regent arrives just in time.

What did we learn? Thylera has arcane power.

Notes on playing this scene: Tangling with Fuhlgar, Thylera, and her guards should be a serious fight. Thylera should use her arcane power to put at least some of the

characters to sleep. Admittedly, I paid no attention to the dice and allowed her to succeed for the sake of the story. I had the Regent and the White Guard arrive just in time to save the characters from Thylera. Also, in our version, one of the characters was still in the stairwell and avoided the sleep effect. He distracted Thylera enough to prevent her killing the siblings at the same moment the Regent burst into the room.

SCENE 13: THE REGENT

Location: Thylera's bedchamber. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Dimly lit, smells of herbs and perfumes.

Description: "STOP!"

Someone yells as the large door across the room swings violently open. Armed men in white enameled armor storm through the door. Among them is Ariam, captain of the White Guards and after her none other than Klain Whiteshield, the Regent of the Lake himself. Last to enter is Brother Lathan, the tall thin acolyte from the abbey in Westflood. Apparently, the additional wedding guests have arrived.

NPCs/Creatures: Thylera, Regent, Ariam, White Guards (as needed), Brother Lathan.

Challenge: Keep your cool. It may be a challenge to remember that the Regent is sympathetic to the siblings. Thylera demands all be arrested for entry into her personal bedchamber, and for the attack on herself and staff.

Don't forget the dead servants. If anyone mentions the bird-man servant in the stairway, Thylera again uses her magic to disguise them as normal guards if not have them disappear altogether.

What did we learn? The Regent has arrived.

Notes on playing this scene: The unexpected arrival of the Regent brought the protracted fight to an end.

BIG DECISION TIME NUMBER FOUR:

It is now up to you do decide if splitting the party again is a good idea. If any of your characters are acolytes or close to the church (as Lundy was in our game) it may be advantageous to have them not be immediately arrested so they might have the private conversation with Brother Lathan described below. It gives an opportunity to share information privately and to have a contact within the church for the upcoming scenes. If this option is not appropriate for your game, you need to assess several of the following scenes to determine how to proceed.

SCENE 14, PARTY 2: ARRESTED

Location: Thylera's bedchamber. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Crowded, smells of herbs and perfumes now mixed with blood.

Description: Thylera's bedchamber has filled with people very rapidly. Henerick has arrived and immediately calls for the arrest of the siblings. He is clearly disturbed by the loss of his friend, Fuhlgar. He implores the Regent to punish the siblings for the attack on his mother, his friend, and his home.

Although the Regent is aware there is certainly more to the story, he instructs Ariam to arrest the siblings. He will question all involved and determine guilt and what punishment might be appropriate. Henerick's guards are apparently reluctant to act contrary to the Regent's orders, or to tangle with Ariam or the White Guard.

Lady Thylera becomes more and more agitated, demanding that Fuhlgar's death be punished with immediate execution. Eventually Toreas grabs her violently, and she quiets. The look shared between them seems to say, "Wait. Soon the time will come." He puts a nearby robe around her and sees her out into the main hall.

Brother Lathan walks about the room quietly with his arms folded, taking in the grizzly scene and the great Berian tree.

NPCs/Creatures: Thylera, Henerick, Regent, Ariam, White Guards (as needed), Brother Lathan, Toreas, Eclan guards (as needed), Henerick's guards (as needed).

Challenge: Avoid being killed. The Regent and the White Guards do their best to prevent Henerick, his men, or the Eclan guards from simply killing the siblings. However, this assumes the siblings cooperate and allow the guards to arrest them peacefully.

Don't run. Thylera has closed the opening to the stairwell. From this side of the door, it appears like a normal, although large, wardrobe. The mechanism to open it is known only to her and Henerick. From the stairway side, the mechanism is obvious and simple.

What did we learn? Henerick is upset about Fuhlgar's death.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene played as mostly a shouting match between the siblings and Henerick's family. It was a "who did what to who" sort of thing. Accusations flew. Eventually, the Regent would order the siblings arrested and taken away unharmed. Brother Lathan asked for a private audience with Lundy.

SCENE 15, PARTY 1: BROTHER LATHAN

Location: Brother Lathan's room. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Cold and stark, lit by a single lamp.

Description: Brother Lathan closes the door behind him. His room is simple. A single lamp sits on a side table. There are a pair of chairs, a bed, and an ornately carved trunk of some black wood. He opens the trunk and removes a folded black stole. As he drapes it over his shoulders, he finally speaks,

“It seems the discord in this place has taken not only the siblings’ parents, but Brother Linden, and now Brother Fortin as well.”

“I have been informed that you might be able to explain how they met their end.”

So begins the conversation with Brother Lathan. He listens intently. His response statements are measured and brief. He genuinely is interested in all that has happened.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Lathan.

Challenge: Share information with Lathan. He stoically listens to any accounts given. He may offer that Thylera has requested that he perform the wedding ceremony. He may confirm that the Regent is concerned about the ability of the Lurians to pay Henerick’s debts. He certainly volunteers that both he and the Regent were not expecting to find such a large force of Lurian soldiers in Redwater.

Have faith. If pressed on the fate of the siblings, Lathan indicates it is up to the will of the Triad.

Take a message to the church. Brother Lathan requests that word be taken to the Brothers in Redwater that the Regent intends to visit the historic church. If the Brothers can manage it, the Regent would accept an invitation to attend a banquet following tomorrow’s services.

What did we learn? Brother Lathan and the Regent would like to see Redwater for themselves.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene between Brother Lathan and Lundy was long. They discussed things ranging from the creatures in the basement, to the death of Linden, to the fear of the townfolk. Lundy treated Lathan as though he was the highest-ranking acolyte in the region, which he was. There was much personal discussion concerning joining the church and the life of commitment it required. In the end, Lundy was allowed to leave the keep so he could deliver the message to the church in Redwater. Ariam would escort him out. At the mention of the banquet, she indicated to Lathan that she had enjoyed meals prepared by Lundy during their time together in Westflood. She used the word “superb”. He requested to see the siblings before he left.

SCENE 16, PARTY 1: TO THE DUNGEONS

Location: Dungeon cells of the keep. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Cold, dark, and foul smelling.

Description: The siblings are all searched and relieved of all but clothing. Weapons, gear, and boots/shoes have all been confiscated. All have their hands tied with ropes.

The room is cold and dark. A brazier in the hallway provides a small ray of light through the barred opening in the thick Berian door. Even here there are traces of the roots creeping between the stones of the foundation of the keep.

After the White Guards closed the door, there is another argument down the hall. Henerick, again, is demanding swift punishment for the death of Fuhlgar. It ends abruptly when the Regent arrives.

When the door finally opens again, one of the White Guards brings a lantern and a small stool. The Regent follows him in, simply nodding toward the door. The guard starts to protest, but the Regent's stern look silences him as he steps out and shuts the door.

"I feel as though I might have warned you about this very situation."

"His mother's bedroom?!?"

"Explain to me why I shouldn't turn you over to Henerick right now."

The Regent is obviously not happy, but he listens with very few interruptions.

NPCs/Creatures: Henrick's guards, White Guards, the Regent.

Challenge: Make the case to not be executed by Henerick. The siblings should tell as much of the story as necessary to convince the Regent they might be justified. Ultimately the Regent wants to believe the siblings.

Listen. The Regent may let slip that he is not at all comfortable with the number of Lurian soldiers in addition to the Eclan guards that traveled with them. He might reveal that he has sent a message back to Westflood for reinforcements.

Accept the jail cell for the moment. The Regent indicates that he will deal with the sibling's situation once the wedding is completed and there are additional friendly forces to keep the peace. If asked, he cuts the ropes from the sibling's wrists. He asks that they continue to be patient.

What did we learn? The Regent wants to keep the siblings alive. He intends to keep them here until after the wedding. He has sent word to Westflood for additional soldiers to offset the Lurian advantage.

Notes on playing this scene: The Regent is uncomfortable with the whole situation; the Lurians, Eclan, and now the siblings. He is aware it could all go against him at any minute. In our telling the Regent was not surprised by any of the information shared by the siblings except the accusation about Thylera and her use of Brother Linden. As

mentioned in the previous scene, Lundy did briefly visit the siblings before leaving for town, he left them some food and few mundane items. He noticed the Regent was questioning someone else in another cell up the hall. He assumed it was Peth. It was not.

SCENE 17, PARTY 1: RETURN TO THE TEMPLE

Location: West Gate, Temple of Redwater. (See Maps 10 and 12)

Conditions: Warm dining hall, smells of breakfast.

Description: At the west gate of Redwater, there is no sign of the Lurians. It appears that they have left the local guards to manage the walls.

At the temple, it is late enough that some of the young Brothers have begun preparing breakfast before their early morning studies. Brother Stedden is most curious about the white clad soldier.

“Where are the children?”

His choice of term gets a smirk from Ariam.

NPCs/Creatures: Ariam, Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (all).

Challenge: Tell the tales. Brother Stedden has heard rumors that the Regent has arrived. All else is new information.

Get the status of the town. Brother Stedden confirms that the Lurians have returned to the main camp at the keep or to the barge. Only local guards hold the walls and gates. There has been a lot of activity around the Eclan buildings in New Town. The citizens are waiting to hear about the wedding and if they need to prepare for festivities as originally requested by Henerick prior to the abrupt change in plans.

Calm everyone down. The news that Brother Lathan and the Regent himself will be attending services is disturbing enough. The fact that they intend to dine with the Brothers causes Stedden to grow pale and the younger Brothers to panic.

What did we learn? Lurians have returned to the keep. Only locals hold the walls and gates. The Brothers are nervous about the Regent coming to services tomorrow.

Notes on playing this scene: In our telling, Lundy was more than up to the task of taking charge of planning the banquet for the Regent. Food had become a strangely important part of our game.

SCENE 18, PARTY 2: ESCAPE

Location: Dungeon cells of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Cold, dark, and foul smelling.

Description: A large rat intermittently pokes and digs at the roots along the wall. Eventually there is a louder grinding sound as one of the blocks in the wall seems to fall away. It isn't the rat. Someone whispers,

"Help me move this. We have to hurry."

It is none other than Peth. There is a faint light from behind him. Beyond is the stairwell where the siblings originally entered the keep from below. It apparently shares the back wall of the cell.

NPCs/Creatures: Rat, Peth, Henerick's guards (as needed).

Challenge: Escape. Peth attempts to remove enough of the bricks to allow the siblings to slip through into the stairwell. Stealth and Notice checks might be appropriate as needed.

Put the pieces back. The blocks should be easy to replace. From inside the stairwell, it is now obvious how seriously the Berian roots have damaged the keep's outer wall.

Make your way back to town. Retracing the route through the Lost Path shouldn't be difficult except for the lack of a light source. Crawling through the tunnel of roots with a lit lamp or torch is still impossible. Peth is confident he can find the room where he was set ablaze, even in the dark. He intends to climb out through the ceiling.

What did we learn? Peth lived. He is not *THE* rat.

Notes on playing this scene: There was no hesitation from my characters when the opportunity arose. If you need any additional incentive to leave, Peth may offer that he heard the guards talking about how they intend to slay the siblings in their sleep while "trying to escape" at Henerick's instructions. The journey through the underground passages should take a long time. My character's elected to rest and wait for nightfall the next day to attempt to crawl out and approach town. Swimming back out the same way they entered is also an option. If by some unfortunate turn, Peth is no longer alive, the siblings should realize the infiltrating tree roots have damaged the wall and escape on their own.

AUCTUS 14.2C

The morning is bright and sunny. It is a warm day and only the deepest of the remaining snow is yet to melt. The road and streets are a bit less muddy, but there is still plenty of evidence of the storm. The confusion of the citizens lessens some as word that the wedding will go on as originally scheduled arrives. Preparations for the feast, now responsible for feeding not only the wedding party but soldiers from Luria and Eclan Traders as well, are well under way by day's end. The people of Redwater are encouraged by the visit from their Regent. All are relieved at the presence of another high-ranking acolyte among the Brothers. A conflict among some of the citizens spills over into the river as the gaudy barge meets its end and the precarious position of the Regent is affirmed. The wedding is now only one day away.

SCENE 1, PARTY 1: PREPARING A BANQUET FOR THE REGENT

Location: Temple of Redwater (See Map 12)

Conditions: Full of activity, cleaning, and cooking

Description: Most of the Brothers are working furiously to be sure the sanctuary of the temple is clean and properly adorned for the arrival of Brother Lathan. Any not helping with those duties are at work in the dining hall, rearranging furniture, and cleaning. Many of the windows have been opened to allow fresh air in (and dust out).

Brother Stedden is pacing around with a large tome, occasionally stopping to flip through pages and recite lines of liturgy. He is clearly nervous. He expresses his biggest concern.

“What ever shall we serve?”

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Young Brothers (all).

Challenge: Plan the banquet and find something “superb” to serve. Brother Stedden suggests that perhaps the townsfolk might consider donating some of the food collected for the upcoming nuptials. It is, after all, for the Regent.

What did we learn? The people of Redwater would rather feed the Regent and Brother Lathan than the wedding party or visiting soldiers.

Notes on playing this scene: Again, food had become a strangely important part of our game by the end. Collecting a pig and other superb ingredients from the townsfolk was easy. If your group is less inclined, the Brothers can accomplish the gathering and preparing of the meal.

SCENE 2, PARTY 1: SERVICES

Location: Sanctuary of the temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Crowded, smells of incense and hints of the upcoming meal.

Description: Just before the arrival of the honored guests, Ariam enters the temple. She tells Brother Stedden that citizens are welcome to join the Regent at the service, but they must leave him to his prayers afterward. The White Guards would stand near the doors. Stedden orders the doors be opened and the townsfolk begin to pour in.

A hush falls over the assembly as Brother Lathan enters. Clad all in black, he approaches Brother Stedden. They clasp hands and share a quick greeting. Lathan then motions to the door and Klain Whiteshield, Regent of the Lake, enters. His white enameled breastplate and cape are so bright, they almost hurt the eyes. The townsfolk, Lathan, and Stedden all kneel as he passes. At each door, a pair of White Guards watches over the service.

“Rise. I thank you all for allowing me to share in your worship.”

“Brother, please proceed.”

Brother Stedden does his best to perform the traditional service of sunset, honoring each of the Triad. His brow is noticeably perspiring, but he completes the liturgy without error. At the end, he blesses the assembly.

Many of the townsfolk are startled by the sound of the guards opening the doors. Younger Brothers usher the townsfolk out in near silence. When most are gone, the Regent steps to the mural of Illios and kneels in prayer. The guards then close the doors and remain.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Lathan, Young Brothers, Ariam, White Guards, Commoners (enough to fill the church).

Challenge: Find out about the siblings. As the Regent prays, Brother Lathan is available for a conversation. Brother Stedden suggests viewing the last light of Illios from the overlook. While there, he might reveal that the siblings have gone missing, and that the Regent was unsure of how things might play out here. He does make mention of the moon, Selene, as she rises.

“Even I have been moved to thoughts of lust on such nights.”

“Fitting for a wedding night? I think not.”

What did we learn? Brother Stedden delivered the service. The siblings are missing. Lathan is concerned about the choice of the full moon as an occasion to wed.

Notes on playing this scene: This scene assumes that the siblings escaped but have not yet returned to the church. In our game, Lundy spotted the sisters and Peth approaching the west gate in the twilight.

SCENE 3: REUNITED?

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm, filled with delicious smells.

Description: There is plenty of activity in the church making final preparations for the meal. Brother Stedden is busy discussing church business with Brother Lathan. The Regent is finishing his prayers.

NPCs/Creatures: Young Brothers (as needed).

Challenge: Enter the church without the guards or Regent noticing. The back stair is unwatched. A younger Brother happily takes word to whomever that the siblings have returned.

What did we learn? Everyone is in the same building again.

Notes on playing this scene: Depending on when the siblings return, it may be necessary to adjust when this scene takes place. In our version, the moment was brief, but all were relieved. The biggest problem was their missing weapons, gear, and shoes. The siblings elected to remain hidden from the Regent, at least at first. Despite their long relationship, they were not sure what his reaction to their escape might be.

SCENE 4: SUPPER WITH THE REGENT

Location: Dining hall in the temple.

Conditions: Warm, filled with delicious smells.

Description: The Regent has seated himself in the middle of the long table between Brother Stedden and Brother Lathan. The feast is exactly as all had hoped. The food is superb, and the wine gifted by the Whetstone flows. Being unusually devout, the Regent discuss the service, its origins, and who originally wrote the liturgy. He asks each of the Brothers about their choices to join the church. He seems as much at home here as in court, if not more so.

As all are enjoying their first tastes, a group of Eclan guards enter the hall rather abruptly.

“Forgive the interruption your grace.”

“We have been charged with escorting you back to the keep.”

“It seems the prisoners have escaped and Toreas and Lord Henerick are concerned for your safety.”

Ariam is immediately standing behind the Regent before he is able to set down his tankard and respond,

“I have no intention of dishonoring my gracious hosts by abandoning this superb meal.”

“We shall return after our gathering has concluded.”

“As you see, I am more than well protected.”

The White Guards around the room all stand to attention.

Not wishing to contradict the Regent, the Eclan guard bows and directs his confused companions back the way they came. The Regent apologizes to Brother Stedden and the meal continues as planned.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Lathan, Young Brothers, Ariam, White Guards, Eclan guards (as needed).

Challenge: Let the Brothers entertain Lathan and the Regent. The Regent is accustomed to the company of acolytes. He is happy to talk with the Brothers as they enjoy the feast.

Keep calm. When the Eclan guards arrive, they burst into the dining hall rather suddenly. They are not really looking for a fight, just the Regent. Ariam stands behind the Regent looking more than capable. It should be clear that the White Guard are more than a match for this group from Eclan.

Let the Regent do the talking. The Regent’s words are enough to convince the Eclan guards that he would not be leaving until he was ready.

See what is happening outside. If the siblings are keeping an eye on the Eclan guards after they exit the dining hall, they might see Holger approaching from the south.

What did we learn? Eclan guards intend to take the Regent back to the keep for his own safety. There is something bad happening in New Town.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was about delivering the meal and having the Regent stand up to the Eclan guards. According to the notes, in our version of the scene, Ariam used the word ‘superb’ no less than eight times. Lundy saw to it that the siblings got helpings of the food.

SCENE 5: FIGHTING IN NEW TOWN

Location: Temple of Redwater. (See Map 12)

Conditions: Warm, filled with delicious smells.

Description: The meal for the Regent seems to have continued without much effort after the Eclan guards take their leave.

Not long after, Holger, the proprietor of the Whetstone, enters the temple via the south door. He has a gash on his forehead and his clothes are a mess. He intends to ask the Brothers for aid with the injured.

NPCs/Creatures: Holger, Brother Stedden, Brother Lathan, Young Brothers, Ariam, White Guards.

Challenge: Intercept Holger. Holger describes an incident involving local woodsmen and some Lurian soldiers. The fighting spilled outside. A Lurian officer was compelled to order his men to drop it and return to the barge. It seems the woodsmen were not ready to stop. The fighting has spread to New Town and has turned ugly. Several citizens have been seriously injured.

Interrupt the Regent's supper. The siblings have to show themselves to the Regent in order to deliver the news of the fighting in New Town and the request for aid from the Brothers of the church. Despite his angry look upon seeing them, the Regent stands and orders Ariam to lead the group to New Town. The Brothers scramble to collect bandages, salves, and whatever else they can to help.

What did we learn? The newly freed woodsmen have finally tangled with the Lurians, and it has gone too far.

Notes on playing this scene: In our version, the siblings asked for the Regent's help. It was more important to deal with the incident in town than to address the siblings being out of the dungeon.

SCENE 6: THE DEATH OF THE LURIAN PRINCESS

Location: Along the river in New Town. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Chaotic, smoky, loud.

Description: As the characters pass through the New Town Gate, it is impossible not to notice what the real commotion is about. The Lurian Princess is ablaze. An officer and a few of the Lurian troops have begun arresting anyone nearby. The townsfolk try to resist. The few rowdy woodsmen have lined up to fight with sticks and tools they were able to find lying about.

The majority of the Lurian soldiers are in a wide formation opposite the woodsmen with weapons drawn. Behind them a handful of bowmen fire occasional arrows at woodsmen that step too close. Many of the Eclan workers throw things at the woodsmen, and shout accusations. Things are very tense.

A few of the Lurian servants try desperately to throw a few possessions from the boat to the dock before it breaks free. The boat is now beyond saving.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Lathan, Young Brothers, Ariam, White Guards, Woodsmen (12-15), Lurian Guards (20 or so), Commoners (many), other Lurians from the barge (as needed).

Challenge: Save as many of the townsfolk as possible. Injured townsfolk are scattered around the street, hiding behind wagons, barrels, and whatever they can find.

Save a Lurian? If someone is feeling heroic, perhaps a Lurian maid needs assistance escaping the burning barge. If so, it helps to calm the soldiers.

Notice the help on the way. From the west, a group of Lurian cavalry and Eclan horsemen are approaching rapidly.

What did we learn? The Lurian Princess has gone down the river for the last time.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was set up for the Regent to show his ability to lead. The death of the barge was enjoyed by the characters as it represented the “enemy” for a long time.

SCENE 7: HOLD IT RIGHT THERE

Location: Along the river in New Town. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Chaotic, smoky, loud.

Description: As the Lurian Cavalry charges up to the scene, they notice the siblings and Chedomir dismounts as he yells to his men on the ground,

“Arrest these murderers!”

The woodsmen and a few citizens immediately move to prevent the Lurian advance.

The Regent boldly strides right into the middle of them all, Ariam and his White guards around him. They look like apparitions of white among the muddy folk and black clad soldiers. His voice booms over the racket.

“Enough!”

“I command you all to stop!”

“Is not tomorrow to be a happy occasion?”

“Let us not spoil it further!”

He turns toward the woodsmen and the siblings,

“Let us come together and show these strangers the hospitality Redwater has always been known for!”

“Honor the memories of Eldram and Arden!”

“Let us pray to Lady Selene that their forgotten children shall promote peace as their fathers did long ago.”

He raises his hand to the rising, nearly full moon, Selene. All are quiet for a moment as they take in the image.

The silence is broken as the last line holding the barge snaps with a loud crack. The burning husk slowly slips down the river, around the bend, and out of sight.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Lathan, Young Brothers, Ariam, White Guards, Woodsmen (12-15), Lurian Guards (20 or so), Commoners (many), other Lurians from the barge (as needed), Lurian Cavalry (20), Chedomir.

Challenge: Help keep the fragile peace. Helping anyone that is injured is the best way to prolong the peace.

What did we learn? The Regent is still in charge.

Notes on playing this scene: Although the Regent’s statement about the children of Eldram and Arden was meant for not just the siblings but Henerick as well, he would never get the message. The Lurians would be happy to arrest the siblings, but they have no real desire to start killing the townsfolk. Again, they hope to make this a stronghold sympathetic to them if not their own territory altogether. Killing the citizens would be counter to their big goals.

SCENE 8: THE REGENT’S GOODBYE

Location: New Town of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Chaotic, smoky.

Description: The Eclan horsemen arrive as all are standing watching the barge float away. Toreas is with them. He cries out to the Regent,

“Your grace, I must insist that you return to the safety of the keep. It would certainly spoil my nephew’s wedding if the visiting Regent came to harm while under his protection.”

“There are criminals about.”

The Regent politely responds.

“I accept your gracious invitation master Toreas.”

He turns to Ariam and motions toward the siblings,

“You will see that they help the Brothers attend to the injured. All of them!”

The remaining White Guards pull a nearby wagon up and the Regent and Brother Lathan climb in with the guards. They follow Toreas and his men west toward the keep. Chedomir and the Lurians follow close behind.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Lathan, Young Brothers, Ariam, White Guards, Woodsmen (12-15), Lurian Guards (20 or so), Commoners (many), other Lurians from the barge (as needed), Lurian Cavalry (20), Chedomir, Eclan Horsemen (20), Toreas.

Challenge: Allow Toreas to speak. The exchange between Toreas and the Regent is polite but forced. The Regent knows that to decline might result in a fight he cannot yet win.

Help the injured. There are a handful of seriously injured townsfolk and one Lurian with bad burns. The Brothers suggest taking them to the church for the best possible care.

Finally get some rest. Back at the church, there are plenty of warm beds.

What did we learn? The Lurians don't really care about the barge, even though the bride and her mother surely will. The Regent is stuck in the keep now. The siblings have not been arrested.

Notes on playing this scene: Toreas was happy enough with the return of the Regent to the keep. He was not about to press for the sibling's arrest considering the Regent's command to help with the injured. On a side note, many of the servants from the barge would stay in Redwater permanently. Having them in future stories of Redwater has proven to be a nice call back to this moment.

AUCTUS 15.2C

As has been the case for the last several days, the morning is bright. There is only a hint of fog along the river. The day is even a bit warmer than yesterday. Preparations for the feast are nearing completion by midday in plenty of time to transport to the keep. In the morning, the town finds itself under lockdown. There is a visit from new friends. Tensions between the townsfolk, the Lurians, and the Eclan soldiers remain high. It is the day of the wedding. What was to be almost a festival for the town has become an event for only trusted guests. If the siblings wish to put a stop to it, now is their chance. With courage, strength, and will of the Triad, good may yet prevail.

SCENE 1: LOCKED IN

Location: West gate of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Bright morning. Quiet inside.

Description: The west gate into Redwater appears to have been abandoned by the guards sometime in the night. The usual sporadic patrols along the top of the palisade also seem to be missing. A few citizens have climbed the wall and the pointing and shouting should be cause for investigation.

From your vantage, the reason guards are no longer required is clear. There are Lurian soldiers, Eclan guards, and a few groups of personal guards all but surrounding the town. They have set themselves at intervals around Redwater, mostly focusing on the west gate. It almost looks as though the town might be under siege.

A couple of locals attempt to open the west gate and they are met with a sudden series of impacts on the back side. Three arrows are now stuck in the wood of the gate. An air of worry, if not panic, begins to move through the town.

NPCs/Creatures: Everyone.

Challenge: Prevent innocent townsfolk from being injured. Should anyone attempt to exit the gates of the town, they are fired upon by the assembled soldiers. Keeping people away from the gates may be difficult.

What did we learn? Henerick doesn't want any uninvited guests to attend the wedding.

Notes on playing this scene: The outer containment of the town is focused on the west side. New Town is filled with Eclan employees or allies. If the characters try that route, the troops reinforce those stationed there.

SCENE 2: FRIENDS FROM THE SOUTH

Location: Overlook of the temple, or the top of the wall (high up). (See Map 10)

Conditions: Bright morning. Dust and thunder over the hill to the south.

Description: A rumor of thunder and dust to the south stirs fear of another storm.

From this high vantage the siblings soon realize it is the thunder of horses. E'Gil and Esben are leading a host of horsemen from the south into view. There at least fifty mounted men and perhaps three times that many unsaddled horses.

The horsemen ride down the hill into the valley as the Eclan guards attempt to quickly form up to resist. They do not move with the efficiency and speed of the Lurians - they are too slow. They are cut off from the rest of the troops surrounding the town. The riders circle, racing nose to tail in whirlwind around them. They are almost obscured by the stirred-up earth.

They appear to be heading toward the south gate. It is likely unmanned now as well.

NPCs/Creatures: Esben, E'Gil, Lagen, 60 Horsemen, 150+ Fen, Eclan guards (as needed).

Challenge: Meet them at the south gate. As soon as it is clear they are friendly, the siblings should make their way to the south gate to let them in.

What did we learn? Your boyfriend is back. Or Esben is back. Whichever works.

Notes on playing this scene: In our story, E'Gil was romantically tied with one of the sisters. Even without the romance, the horsemen should be welcome allies for the siblings.

SCENE 3: ESBEN'S FIRST TRICK

Location: The south gate. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Bright morning. Swirling dust and the thunder of horses.

Description: As the siblings climb the tower at the south gate, they see one of the horsemen turns abruptly out of the speeding ring of horses. He is a big man. His vest barely covers his massive shoulders. He dismounts, draws a curved sword, and thrusts it into the ground in challenge to the Eclan officer nearby. After a moment, the soldier draws his own sword and plants it in the earth in acceptance of the large horseman's challenge.

The big horseman raises his huge arms. Only now does the group notice Esben. He is standing upon his saddle as his horse runs at full gallop. He draws back his bow and takes aim. As the big man's arms drop, the arrow is loosed. From Esben's bow, the shot is far. It pierces the soldier through the neck, killing him instantly. The big horseman spits on the ground and howls at the remaining soldiers as he takes up his sword, mounts his horse, and gallops back into the ring.

All are stunned. A group of Lurian soldiers is moving swiftly to aid them. Far to the west, Lurian cavalry are also riding towards the scene. The thirty or so inside the ring of spinning horses and crazed riders point weapons in all directions. Confused. Afraid. Beaten.

NPCs/Creatures: Esben, E’Gil, Lagen, 60 Horsemen, 150+ Fen, Lurians (many), Eclan guards (many).

Challenge: Do not start a big battle. The horsemen are wound up enough. Anything beyond Esben’s display stirs both forces into a fight that everyone loses.

Open the gate and let them in. Once the arrow finds its target, opening the gate shifts everyone’s focus back to the town. Once the gate is open, the horsemen lead their herd right over the New Town fence, through the south gate, and into town. They have complete control over the horses.

What did we learn? The Lurians were not in the mood to tangle with the unknown force of clearly capable horsemen. Had the cavalry arrived, it may have been a very different story.

Notes on playing this scene: Esben is hell in box text. We had a good laugh that Esben made such a shot. There were times in the past when the dice were not kind to him.

SCENE 4: THE REGENT’S HAWK

Location: The Gardens of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Warm day, smells of horses and spring flowers.

Description: The horses are led to what were formerly the Gardens of Redwater. Once beautiful, they are now little more than grass with a few scrub bushes and an occasional clump of flowers. Just behind the sibling’s childhood home, there is plenty of room and good grazing. A few of the horsemen take turns leading groups of the impressive animals down to the river to drink.

“I thought you said this was a friendly town.”

E’Gil’s greeting begs for an explanation but before any of the siblings can begin to offer one, he hands over a leather case. It is a little more than a hand’s width across. It appears to be stained with blood. Inside is a message bearing the seal of Klain Whiteshield. E’Gil explains that it was found on a dead hawk that did not make it anywhere near Westflood.

NPCs/Creatures: E’Gil, Esben, Lagen, Horsemen (as needed), Commoners (as needed), Fen (as needed).

Challenge: Read the dispatch. Anyone with at least one rank in the Scholar talent can read the note. It is a request from the Regent for troops and support as quickly as possible. It was sent two days ago.

Get the horsemen something to eat and drink. E'Gil might be preoccupied, but he does mention that they have been riding hard and his men are hungry. The smells of cooking for the wedding feast fuel their hunger. The Whetstone and the temple would both be good choices.

What did we learn? More help isn't coming.

Notes on playing this scene: The reunion of E'Gil and Eevi was fun to play. He got to be all smooth. There was a lot more to his greeting. Reuniting with their friend Esben the elf has fewer words, but plenty of pats on the back and smiles.

SCENE 5: THE WEDDING IS ON

Location: Anywhere inside Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Midday, as needed.

Description: Brother Stedden approaches with his now customary worried look. Two wagons have arrived from the keep. Along with them was a message from Brother Lathan. The wagons were for the food and drink for the wedding guests. They had sent payment for all of it in newly minted septems. The Lurians have deep pockets indeed.

The message from Lathan had details about the itinerary of the ceremony, schedule, and location. He has chosen a very traditional and long ceremony involving a fair amount of reading, singing, and chanting. He requested that one of the Brothers, one that could sing, be sent along with the provisions. He mentions also that the ceremony will be held in the great hall as Selene rises.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden.

Challenge: Decide what will be done. It is now or never.

What did we learn? Brother Lathan will make the wedding take as long as possible. The wagons must head back to the keep soon.

Notes on playing this scene: The last few details about when and where the wedding would be held coupled with the hint that maybe Lathan was on their side helped my players finally decide what to do.

BIG DECISION TIME NUMBER FIVE:

Time is nearly up. The characters must decide what they intend to do and how they are going to pull it off. If reminders are needed here is a list:

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

1. They killed your parents.
2. You need to find out the truth about what happened to your parents.
3. If Henerick doesn't marry Dionysia, Charon will not pay Henerick's debts. Because Thylera convinced Toreas to vouch for Henerick, Eclan Traders will be seized. Henerick will no longer be Lord of Redwater.
4. Bad things are going on in that keep. Thylera and Henerick are just evil and need to go.
5. The people of Redwater are looking to the siblings to make everything in Redwater right once again. One of the siblings might be much better suited to lead Redwater.
6. The Regent is outnumbered and might be held against his will.

WHY DIDN'T YOU LIST THAT AMONG OUR ASSETS?

1. We know a way into the keep (actually, more than one).
2. The horses can cover our approach to the entrance.
3. Brother Lathan has chosen a long ceremony to buy as much time as possible.
4. E'Gil, Esben, and the horsemen from the south are on our side.
5. The woodsmen, the citizens of Redwater, and the Brothers of the church are eager to help.
6. The White Guard, the woodsmen, and the horsemen might make a big enough force to hold against the Lurians soldiers and Eclan Traders.

The remaining scenes assume that the siblings have elected to try to stop the wedding. Entry is possible through the hole in the ceiling of the oiled room in the tunnels. E'Gil, Esben, and maybe a few others accompany the siblings into the keep. The scenes also assume that once inside, the siblings intend to disrupt the wedding by any means necessary and to take their final revenge on Henerick and Thylera. There was much discussion among my players as to what that meant. Prison? Death? It was not clear. The remaining horsemen, the woodsmen, and a few citizens move to the keep once the ceremony starts to keep the Lurian soldiers' attention outside.

SCENE 6: THE WAGONS

Location: The west gate of Redwater. (See Map 10)

Conditions: Warm, late afternoon.

Description: Brother Stedden knew just who to select to assist with the wedding ceremony. Brother Otar is young, but smart, and he has a fine singing voice. The various food stuffs prepared by many of the citizens of Redwater are gathered along with an odd collection of gifts. Many of the townsfolk are afraid not to send at least some token offering for the couple. Many of the local traditions have been omitted from the wedding altogether or at the very least, kept private from the town.

The first wagon is almost filled with food. Breads, cheeses, cakes, meat pies, kegs of ales and mead - enough for a small army. The second wagon had room enough for a few passengers along with the furs, flowers, carvings, and the strangely familiar pair of yellow birds in a wicker cage. Brother Stedden and Brother Otar are happy enough to walk. The seats are saved for several important citizens that have been asked specifically to attend. A few others are allowed to walk along.

The Eclan teamsters and guards lead the wagons out of the gate. The Lurian escort falls into step alongside the procession as they make the march up the road towards the keep.

As they progress, the few remaining Lurian soldiers surrounding the town follow the group on their way to the wedding. The few remaining Eclan and personal guards appear to be entirely focused on the procession.

NPCs/Creatures: Brother Stedden, Brother Otar, Eclan guards (8), Lurian cavalry (12), Eclan teamsters (4), 2 wagons (2 Fen each), Commoners (a few VIPs invited to the wedding).

Challenge: Coordinate leading the horses out into the grassy area southwest of town. Not long after the wagon leaves the west gate, the horses should exit via the south gate, slow and calm. Because most of the guards are focused on the wagons, it shouldn't be noticed by most.

Convince the remaining guards that are on duty that the horses are allowed to be outside. Because all but a few of the Lurians and some of the Eclan troops have been slowly returning to the keep, the Lurian officer in charge is not the sharpest of their force.

If you can't talk your way past, make a fight. If necessary, the horsemen pick another fight with the guards as a distraction. As the guards are occupied, the siblings can use the horses to approach the hole into the tunnels.

What did we learn? The main force of guards is now focused on the wagons and the keep.

Notes on playing this scene: In our version, the horsemen from the south escorted the wagons out of the south gate on a meandering parade to the keep. It seemed unlikely that it would be successful in retrospect. The idea of the horses grazing near the hole into the tunnel was the original intended way in. If your players have a better way in, make it work for them.

SCENE 7: DOWN THE CHIMNEY

Location: Opening to the Oiled Room. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Warm, late afternoon.

Description: The distraction appears to be working. Moving among the herd of massive fen provides excellent cover. Some may begin to worry about them stepping in the hole if they are unable to find it quickly.

NPCs/Creatures: Esben, E'Gil, Horsemen (as needed), Fen (as needed).

Challenge: Find the hole. Locating the opening should require Notice or Survival (tracking) checks to spot it.

Descend into the tunnels without being seen. Whether due to the many horses nearby or the scuffle between the horsemen and the guards, it should be difficult for anyone to notice the siblings crawling into the hole. There should also be plenty of rope available via the horsemen.

What did we learn? The sun is moving towards the horizon.

Notes on playing this scene: Getting into the tunnels shouldn't be too easy, but it shouldn't derail the plan either. Similarly, the trek through the Lost Path should take time, but it is only the beginning of the challenge ahead.

SCENE 8: ESBEN'S SECOND TRICK

Location: Empty room at the entrance to the root-filled tunnel. (See Map 16)

Conditions: Root-filled, tight space.

Description: As expected, the opening completely overgrown with roots is undisturbed. Even with the recent travel, the gap is still barely big enough for a person to crawl through. Esben is particularly curious about the roots. He examines the opening closely.

All are surprised when he kneels and whispers something. This alone is startling as he has never made any such sound. He clasps something hanging from a braided horsehair

thong inside his vest. As he stands, he stretches out his hands. There is a crack of breaking wood, and some creaks as the roots begin to recede. Soon the stone passage is free for a short distance.

As Esben moves down the hall, the opening moves with him. E'Gil urges everyone forward. The roots closing again behind is unnerving, and for a time the group is in a twisting ball of roots.

By the time he reaches the open end of the passage under the keep, it seems clear that Esben is praying. Judging from the polished wooden pendant he holds; he is praying to Selene.

NPCs/Creatures: E'Gil, Esben, Horsemen (if along).

Challenge: Let Esben do his thing. Esben uses his divine influence to move the roots out of the way, but it only works out to a twenty-foot radius. If anyone falls behind, they become tangled in the roots.

What did we learn? Esben has the favor of Selene.

Notes on playing this scene: If anyone in the group still has the Medallion of Curate Bendt, none of this works. Esben does not deal with this well. He might become hysterical. This is another reason that Bendt's symbol is best returned to the church earlier. Esben speaking, even at a whisper was a big deal but not as impactful as the realization that he was favored by Selene.

SCENE 9: SUNSET!

Location: Stairs up into the keep. (See Maps 15 and 16)

Conditions: Cool, amber light.

Description: As the siblings make their way up the stair, they would swear the cracks in the stone have worsened since last seeing them. The amber light of the setting sun leaks through in many places. It is then they realize the sun has already set.

NPCs/Creatures: Esben, E'Gil, Horsemen (if along).

Challenge: Ascend the stair quickly and quietly. Once the characters realize the sun has set, they should know the wedding is underway.

What did we learn? Illios is down. The wedding should be started.

Notes on playing this scene: The scene was just to reinforce the urgency of the situation. The wedding has certainly started, but they should arrive in time to make a mess of it.

SCENE 10: THE BEDROOM, AGAIN

Location: Thylera's bedchamber. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Dimly lit, smells of herbs and perfumes now covering something foul.

Description: Stepping through the hidden entrance in the wardrobe into the room, the siblings see the room is much as they last saw it. There is a hint of death and decay in the air beneath the heavy perfumes of Thylera's bedchamber. The Berian tree seems to have covered even more of the room.

The bed itself is now surrounded by half-burned candles and the mattress is covered with leaves, feathers, some hair, and an unnerving amount of blood. Across the foot lays Arden's sword. It seems that it has been recently used as it too is covered in fresh blood.

NPCs/Creatures: Henerick's guard, Ariam.

Challenge: Quietly enter the room. There is a guard posted on the other side of the door. He investigates if too much noise is made.

Assess the bed. A successful Faith or Scholar check reveals that some sinister ritual was performed here.

Silence the guard. If the guard enters or if he can be surprised at his post, he raises the alarm if not silenced.

Don't hurt Ariam. The first person to enter after the guard is Ariam. If given the chance, she happily aids the siblings in their attempt to disrupt the wedding. She suggests that she make the Regent aware and enlist the other White Guards to the cause.

What did we learn? Bad things happened here. Ariam is with us.

Notes on playing this scene: This was the last chance for the siblings to gather their courage and make their move to disrupt Henerick's wedding. We had a tense moment when the door began to open only to reveal Ariam entering.

SCENE 11: THE WEDDING

Location: The great hall of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Warm, stuffy, filled with people.

Description: From the door of Thylera's room, looking toward the balcony overlooking the main hall, the sound of singing can be heard. It is the distinct voice of Brother Otar. Stedden was right to select him. As the characters move toward the edge of the upper balcony, they confirm that this side of the upper floor is nearly empty. The other side however is mostly Lurian soldiers.

Below and across the open hall on the second-floor balcony the Regent and his White Guards are looking down.

Just below and opposite the Regent is Toreas with many of his guards. At the back of the balcony are a handful of guests from Westflood's court. Curiously, all of them have their weapons.

At the back of the second-floor balcony, Lurian soldiers look down. They too have their weapons and armor, shined and dressed for the occasion.

Below is the wedding. Surrounded by a crowd of lesser nobles and their wives, mistresses, and bodyguards. No doubt supporters, or friends, of either Toreas or Thylera. Also, there is the remainder of the Lurian soldiers not on duty, Henerick's guards, servants of all groups, and the family of the bride. Arisia is impossible to miss in her huge dark red dress along with her many attendants.

At the near end of the hall, in front of the Lord's throne, an altar has been placed. Both are now covered in green cloth. Atop the altar rests the branch of a Berian tree. Thick at one end and thin with leaves at the other. It seems the twisted roots of Thylera's Berian tree have woven into the stones of this room as well.

In front of the altar stands Brother Lathan, opposite him stands Henerick in green finery with high black boots and Dionysia in a huge red and gold gown. Next to the bride stands her father Chedomir in his polished armor and black cape. To Henerick's left stands Thylera in a surprisingly simple gown.

They are all waiting for the singing to end, and the ceremony to continue.

NPCs/Creatures: Everyone.

Challenge: Interrupt the wedding. Brother Otar's singing can easily be overpowered by the voices of the siblings and perhaps E'Gil singing. Should the siblings begin the traditional Legend of Ilval and Anon, Brother Otar is startled at first, but joins the song along with Brother Stedden. The crowd murmurs in confusion but slowly come to recognize the characters on the balcony above. If this is the case, Henerick screams in anger and Dionysia curses and yells for her father to stop it.

Stop Henerick. Henerick draws his ornate sword, calls for his guards, and attempts to slay Brother Lathan. At first it may look like he intends to slay his bride. Either way he goes into a murderous rage.

Stop Thylera. Thylera too is very angry. She turns to Chedomir who is standing in the front row and gestures towards him. She then grabs the bride by her wrist and begins calling on her dark powers.

Stop Chedomir. Chedomir immediately jumps to action at Thylera's behest. He steps forward and bashes Charon in the face with his mail-clad hand. He then attempts to grab Dionysia by the other wrist. The Lurian soldiers won't know what to make of it for a beat or two.

What did we learn? Everyone is here. Thylera and Chedomir are connected in some way.

Notes on playing this scene: As soon as things go wrong, the crowd should panic. This was it in our game. People came jumping off the balcony, running down the stairs, arrows were fired, spells were cast, and horsemen crashed through the front door. It was time for Henerick to get his. It was the first leg of the epic end to our story of which Henerick and Thylera did not survive.

SCENE 12: FUHLGAR'S RETURN

Location: The great hall of the keep.

Conditions: Panic, chaos, fleeing folk.

Description: Chaos has gripped the wedding crowd. People shout while pushing and shoving to get out. At the sound of Thylera's scream, a hideous form emerges from one of the archways.

It is Fuhlgar, and yet not. His skin is a dark red, where his has skin. Parts of him are covered in black and red feathers. They are growing from his limbs. At the end of each arm, a wicked, sharp talon. And his eyes, huge, red, with slits for pupils, like those of some great lizard. His scream panics any remaining calm in the hall.

NPCs/Creatures: Fuhlgar Abomination.

Challenge: Defeat the abomination of Fuhlgar. Whatever magic or rituals Thylera used has made Fuhlgar an ever more difficult threat to defeat.

What did we learn? Fuhlgar was only *mostly* dead.

Notes on playing this scene: Measure the capabilities of your characters before throwing Fuhlgar in. There is one other difficult threat ahead.

SCENE 13: TOREAS VS. THE REGENT

Location: The great hall of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Panic, chaos, fleeing folk.

Description: Above, on the second-floor balcony, Toreas has ordered his and Henerick's men with bows to draw and fire down at the siblings.

Across from Toreas, the Regent steps to the very edge of the opposite balcony.

"You will not fire!"

"Look! The moon has risen! Selene sees us!"

"Toreas, I am sorry for your loss, however your time has expired."

"Unless payment can be made?"

Toreas glares down at Charon who can only glare back through gritted teeth. Things are not working out as planned.

All those present are quiet. The Regent continues,

"I thought not."

"I, Klain Whiteshield, Lord of Westflood and Regent of the Lake, declare Eclan Traders and all assets of Toreas and his family forfeit under the Third Treaty of House Cerrak and the council of the Kings."

"Toreas, you are under arrest."

The Eclan soldiers and guards lower their weapons as Ariam and the White Guards step to arrest a furious Toreas.

The Regent then turns and points to Charon below,

"You there! Unless you intend to wed your daughter to this criminal,"

He points to Toreas,

"No?"

"Then I say Luria has overstayed its welcome in these lands."

Charon starts to respond but is interrupted by Toreas as he yells,

"Scourge of the Forest, servant of the Old Masters, accept this offering of blood!"

He draws his sword and swings it toward Ariam. It is a mistake. Ariam spins out of his reach as she swings her own sword across his throat. The slowness of the moves and flying blood are unnerving and unnatural. Ariam's white armor is instantly red, along with several other cowering Eclan guards.

NPCs/Creatures: All that remain.

Challenge: Take a quick breath and listen.

What did we learn? Toreas is doomed.

Notes on playing this scene: This should be considered a true break in the combat, allowing recovery of Stamina and Fatigue. The death of Toreas is important as his blood along with his own words summon the Skoggvekk. The dialog assumes that Henerick and Thylera are dead or subdued. It also assumes the Regent, Ariam, Charon, and Dionysia are all alive.

SCENE 14: THE SKOGGVEKK

Location: The great hall of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Confused but hopeful.

Description: Toreas begins to fall over the rail of the balcony, but his cape is stuck. Blood runs down the wall and into the twisted roots of the Berian tree. As it does, a flash of sickening, violet-hued lightning splits the air. From it steps a twisted living tree.

It immediately grabs Ariam with terrible quickness. It tosses her across the room, sending her crashing into the throne. She doesn't move.

Brother Lathan screams,

"Your time is over! You no longer have power here!"

The thing lets out a deafening roar and swats Lathan away.

NPCs/Creatures: The Skoggvekk.

Challenge: Slay the Skoggvekk. When it is killed, the corrupt Berian tree that has been growing and slowly destroying the keep turns to dust.

What did we learn? There were some terrible things in the Berian wood.

Notes on playing this scene: The word Skoggvekk is derived from Skog (animate) and Vekk (lost), but if you look it up on some internet translator it comes up as Forest Wake or Away. I like them all. The thing is a serious instrument of the Old Masters from ages ago. It is the climactic end to the fight. If needed, Brother Lathan could deliver an Instill Death intervention to reduce the strength of the thing. All still present and able may join the fight. This is the time for all the courage, anger, and sacrifice to be spent. With the end is victory.

SCENE 15: THE LORD'S RETURN

Location: The great hall of the keep. (See Map 15)

Conditions: Bloody, ash covered aftermath.

Description: The Regent descends the stair and moves quickly to Ariam's side. A terrible price has been paid. Townsfolk and horsemen enter and try to help with the injured.

What was once the great tangle of Berian roots and branches throughout the keep has turned to ash.

As those that have survived all look about to be sure that it is indeed over, a familiar face enters from one of the archways.

Here again is Peth. He is helping someone to a nearby bench.

Filthy, and badly beaten is Arden, the father of these forgotten children. It seems the Regent shall name the new lord of Redwater after all.

NPCs/Creatures: Peth, Arden.

Challenge: None.

What did we learn? Peth lives. Arden lives.

Notes on playing this scene: If Peth is not alive, Esben might be a good choice to bring the new lord up. The scene was meant to be the end. It wasn't. We play this story still.

BEHIND THE SCENES

“The law developed out of society’s need to minimize the collateral damage of the taking of revenge.” – Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

WHAT HAPPENS IF SOMEBODY DIES?

My first response is simply, don’t die. Character death is a touchy subject for most. We all have preferences on when and even if death should be part of the game.

I generally try to play in that space between the threat of character death and characters being invincible. Because being behind the screen gives one direct control over what threatens the characters face, it is simple to tailor them to push the characters as close to their limit as possible. Sometimes things go over the line. Dice can be merciless. Players can make bad decisions. When those things happen, if the characters get miraculously saved too often, players start to change how they assess threats and make decisions. They believe they are invincible. In my opinion, this is worse than character death.

We tried to address this problem when creating the Athia rules. In Athia, the cost of bad dice, bad tactics, or bad decisions shows up long before death. We thought it was much more useful to have an injury reduce a character’s ability to function. Dealing with the nuisance of recovery can have a big impact on a story without removing the protagonists completely.

Because the characters in this story are so entwined with the plot, losing one of them would have an extremely disruptive effect. If the siblings lost one of their brothers or sisters, how would they react? How would Redwater react? What about Arden? It would make a very different story. Similarly, some of the major non-player characters would drastically change the story if they died. Think of Peth - had he died while recovering Olin’s body, how different would the story be? How many scenes would need to be completely edited or omitted? Many.

Then there is heroic death. In our game, one of the players was secretly hoping that their character would be able to sacrifice themselves to save their siblings and win the day in true heroic fashion. There were some great opportunities, but it didn’t happen. It turned out their story wasn’t over yet. Ultimately you have to decide when and if a character’s death is part of your story.

EXPERIENCE AWARDS

This story used the “Fate” experience system as described in the Advancement section of the Athia rulebook. This means that the GM chooses when the characters advance in level. In our original playing of the story, my characters gained advancement two times.

2 LEVELS OF ADVANCEMENT

If you intend for your characters to advance twice, I recommend having the first occur when they reach Mudrim. Mudrim is meant to seem like a break in the journey and a logical point for the characters to rest and resupply. The second should happen after they return to Redwater before they attempt to enter the keep. Having a few new tricks and some extra health allows for a more epic series of final scrapes.

3 LEVELS OF ADVANCEMENT

If your characters begin the game with the youngest at level one, I recommend having them level at least three times. But I would limit the highest-level character to sixth level. So, if a player begins the game with a fourth level character, they would only be allowed to advance twice.

4 LEVELS OF ADVANCEMENT

Should you wish to have 4 levels of advancement, I would again limit the highest-level character to sixth level. So, if a player begins the game with a fourth level character, they would only be allowed to advance twice. I would recommend saving this for a group of 5 or 6, since some start at first level. Keep in mind the threats at the end may prove to be too weak to challenge the party if several of them arrive at sixth level.

Good milestones for allowing advancement might be following Olin's death, Mudrim, Otz Flat, and Redwater. Use opportunities to advance as rewards for the players, or if more appropriate, to fix any weaknesses in the group. Using the "Fate" method leaves it up to you.

TREASURE

Our paradigms from the old days die hard. Athia isn't a game of treasure rewards. You could argue treasure is more valuable in the depressed economy of Athia, and it is certainly rarer. If your characters are out to get rich, this story is going to be disappointing. However, here are some of the opportunities to get valuables:

- Steal from the dead: Almost everyone has something of value. Go through their pockets.
- The mammoth tusks: They are huge chunks of Ivory.
- Sell stuff at Hobs: The pawn shop takes almost anything.
- The Giant Purse: If they pull that off, it should be worth it.
- Steal from Henerick and Thylera: While in the keep, keep some stuff.
- The Lurians: They are loaded. LOADED. Steal from them.
- Enchanted Items and Sacred Relics (see below)

YELLOWTOOTH (ENCHANTED AXE: 30):

Yellowtooth is the axe of Otz, a former woodman and keeper of the last bridge north on the Valley River. It is a bit larger than a normal felling axe with a blade for war. It has an oblong amber colored crystal set in the haft. It is considered an Enchanted Weapon with 30 points to be spent towards hit checks or damage. When the points have been expended, the amber crystal fades to a dull grey and it becomes a mundane axe.

THE MEDALLION OF CURATE BENDT (MAJOR SACRED RELIC):

Curate Bendt was a luminary in Redwater in the early days of Lord Eldram's reign. He traveled from Tarskendarin when he was already an old man at the behest of Brother Lathan. Out of fear of unknown, outside divine influences of the ancient Berian Wood, his order constructed for him a very special symbol. It is a 4" round bronze circle inlaid with silver to match the great seal of Selene in Tarskendarin's Old Cathedral.

The symbol has been constructed to duplicate a version of the 'Greater Faith' intervention with a few additions. Beyond preventing the enacting of any interventions of other gods, it further prevents interventions of even Selene unless they are enacted by the possessor of the relic. Use of the relic does not require a Faith check unless more than 10 points of favor are enacted by others in a single round. The relic recharges instantly.

This item can be terribly unbalancing. As it is one of the prized possessions of the temple in Redwater, they request it be returned once the siblings arrive there. If one of the characters somehow hangs on to the relic, it should be reduced to the normal version of the intervention, including the required Faith check.

ARDEN'S SWORD (ENCHANTED SWORD: 60):

Arden received his sword from one of his trusted friends, Rilen. It was a gift in thanks for saving the life of Rilen's young son Asheron. It is a blade from the time of the great war recovered from the remains of a fallen soldier of House Asos. It is a fine steel sword with a hilt adorned with silver wire. The heavy quillon block is adorned with a faceted blue crystal set in a silver ring. It is considered an Enchanted Weapon with 60 points to be spent towards hit checks or damage. It is a powerful item and should offer plenty of sentimental value. When the points have been expended, the blue crystal fades to a dull grey and it becomes a mundane, albeit valuable sword.

WHERE CAN WE GET SOMETHING TO EAT? OR DRINK?

As I mentioned in the “Supplies” section, food can become a problem for the characters. There are several opportunities for the players to replenish their food stores throughout the journey.

FORAGING, HUNTING, AND FISHING

The characters have the opportunity to hunt while on their journey. The Athia rulebook doesn’t have specifics for foraging other than Survival talent checks can be used. We used the following method to determine what a successful check would yield.

<u>Location/Terrain</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>	<u>Servings</u>	<u>Examples</u>
Salt Plain	1+ Coop	Difficult	2+	Rabbit, Fowl, Antelope
River Valley	1+ Coop	Average	3+	Rabbits, Squirrel, Fowl, Wild Pig
On the River	All*	Average	1+	Fish
Berian Wood	All	Easy	2+	Any

Location/Terrain: Where the party is in their journey affects what is available to forage.

Who: Only one character may be designated to forage unless otherwise noted. Cooperation is allowed per the Athia rules. When on the river, only characters with fishing equipment can fish.

Difficulty: Survival check difficulty required for success.

Servings: Servings are awarded for total check score above the target difficulty. If a character’s result from the Survival check exceeds the target difficulty, an additional serving for each number greater than the difficulty is also acquired. (A character on the Salt Plain that gets an 18 total on their Difficult Survival check would get 2 servings for the success and 3 additional servings for exceeding the difficulty by 3 (18 – 15 = 3)). If a character rolls a natural 20 on their check, add 20 servings of a large animal.

Examples: There are many varieties of animals and plants the characters may find if successful. Use whatever you feel fits the scene. The items shown in bold print would be used on a natural 20 result.

THE MAMMOTH

If the characters slay the mammoth, there is enough meat for a while. Butchering the entire beast would be a job of epic proportions. Based on what a bison would take, four people would have to spend something like 12 hours to completely do the job.

Cold smoking the meat takes 24 hours if the party can rig up an apparatus to contain the smoke and handle the meat. It also requires a ridiculous amount of firewood.

Taking a portion of the meat is no problem. If the party spends an hour harvesting some of the easier to reach, good parts, they should be able to come away with 10 servings each. How they preserve it is up to them, but keep in mind, if they do nothing, it will rot. Also, a carcass so large will certainly invite scavengers/predators (as shown in the scenes that follow the encounter with the mammoth).

FISH SOUP

The soup available at the Book Box, although highly prized by Olin, is not at all appetizing. It is foul smelling, slimy, and suspiciously grey. It does count as a modest meal. The Three Sisters were so used to the skilled cooking of Lundy that they required an Endurance check to keep it down. Feel free to use a similar check to emphasize the “adjustment to local cuisine”.

MORE FISH SOUP

Rynar has a supply of smoked fish from Westflood. He might trade it to the party or perhaps share if they are truly hungry. He often prepares it as a stew, allowing it to simmer all day on his small brazier at the rear of the barge. It is infinitely more appealing than the slime served at the Book Box but still very fishy. It does not require Endurance checks to consume. Although, if the experience at the Book Box was bad enough, consider any fish meal might require a check.

SWINE

Assuming the wild boars that attack the party on the road are killed, they should offer some salvageable meat. The fight should damage some beyond use; between falling into the river mud, being pierced in the soft belly areas, and other contaminations. Each should provide 8 servings of meat. Again, if they do not immediately cook or somehow preserve the meat, it will rot.

STOLEN FROM...

Trumbo's is an excellent source of good meals at decent prices. Most of the plates, bowls, and tankards all bear the statement “Stolen from Trumbo's”. Apparently, there was once an issue with things going missing. Their specialty is a stew made with mutton and local greens served with bread. Trumbo imports the alcoholic beverages from down river.

HOB'S

Hob's in Mudrim has everything you didn't know you needed (or probably don't). The foodstuffs on hand are mostly dry goods in medium to large quantities. Grain, beans, flour, honey, and barrels of salted fish are all available. Prices are high due to the early season. Once the pull road is running regularly, supply will increase.

SUPPLIES OF OUR ENEMIES (OLD FRIENDS)

The patrols into the Berian Wood from Redwater have been away from town for some time. Each guard should have a serving or two of dried meat, fruit, or bread.

THE FOREST HIDEOUTS

The woodsmen scattered throughout the Berian Wood are living off the land. Any food they have is precious. Convincing them to share would require an extreme need or perhaps a trade for something else they may want.

THE SPIRE STASH

Brother Stedden or his subordinates have been leaving leather satchels at the spire. The satchels contain two meals worth of food for each sibling, a skin of water, tinder for building a fire, along with other treasures.

REDWATER

Upon arriving in Redwater, the townsfolk, the patrons of the Whetstone, and the Brothers of the church are more than happy to provide. There is plenty of good will towards the siblings and those willing to prepare a meal or buy a drink will be many.

WATER

The supplies taken from Westflood to start the game include a substantial supply of water. If there is some incident that causes the party to lose that supply, it is not long before a new supply is available. On the way north, the only areas that are not good to drink would be the Salt Run, near Westflood, and any other runoff from the Salt Plain. The well at Sil's farm, although frozen on top, has good water. The snowfall encountered on the road can be melted for water. Once the party reaches the river, if they indeed go that direction, it is drinkable. Once the characters reach the Berian wood, there are numerous streams and springs. Finding water shouldn't be the characters priority.

WHAT IS HAPPENING AWAY FROM THE CHARACTERS?

LINDEN'S EYE VIEW

Brother Linden was taken to the keep by Henerick and Thylera as soon as they receive word that the children of Arden and Orpheia leave Westflood. It did take some time for word to arrive. The siblings left Mudrim by the time Brother Linden is first able to locate them. He is being forced to use his favor with Illios to find the precise location of the siblings. Because he is limited in his recovery of favor, the task cannot be completed whenever Henerick wishes. This fact coupled with his scouts being unable to use the information to capture the sibling causes fits of rage in Henerick. Linden is beaten, tortured, and given little food. He is aware of the evil plans Henerick and Thylera are

hatching but can do little to stop them. His faith and his desire to see the siblings again is all that is keeping him alive.

When the siblings arrive at the Spire of the Spring and acquire the Holy Symbol of Curate Bendt, Linden is no longer able to locate them. This further infuriates Henerick, but especially Thylera.

ECLAN TRADERS

Eclan Traders is a large trading organization that was inherited by Toreas, Henerick's uncle. They are the largest transporter of cargo north and east from the Lake of Swords. They own many boats, barges, and wagons. They employ hundreds of folks in Westflood and have outposts in every stop along the lake and both rivers.

Toreas is quietly watching and waiting for the day the siblings attempt to return to Redwater. He does not immediately consider them to be a consequential threat. He does however send word north and hires a handful of his less than savory guards to attempt to eliminate them per the wishes of Henerick and Thylera.

He is more concerned with his nephew and the upcoming wedding. He has been promised a large portion of the substantial dowry offered by the Lurians. It was in fact Toreas that put Charon and Henerick in contact. The wedding party has taken far too long to arrive. The original plan was to have the wedding last autumn, but the trip from Luria proved to be difficult. At that time, shipments of lumber from Redwater were already overdue. The Regent is threatening to act against Henerick.

Rather than let his nephew's reign end abruptly due to financial reasons, and at the behest of his sister, Toreas is pressed into a serious gamble. He agrees to a Cerrak Trust (contract) guaranteeing Henerick's lumber deliveries to Westflood against Eclan assets. The trust stipulates that the lumber or currency equivalent be paid on or before the rising of the moon on the fifteenth day of Auctus. An additional detail of the trust includes the forfeiture of Henerick's seat as Lord of Redwater. His portion of the dowry is to be used as cash in lieu of the lumber; less his administrative fee, of course.

To be certain the trust is satisfied, Toreas insists that the Regent attend Henerick's nuptials as his personal guest. He arranges for a force of Eclan guards to serve as escorts for himself, the Regent, and several select members of the Westflood court on their journey to Redwater. If the wedding fails to occur or if the Lurians fail to pay, he is prepared to take more drastic action concerning the Regent. The Eclan Trader forces sent north for the wedding consist of:

- Toreas
- 5 high-ranking officers
- 20 lesser officers

- 50 mounted soldiers
- 125 foot-soldiers
- 4 wagons with teamsters
- 12 various other supporters

In addition, Toreas convinces 8 lesser titled members of the Westflood court to accompany them. Each has a force of 20 to 30 personal guards.

PETH

Peth is a junior teamster that was hired by Eclan Traders to accompany Rynar on his way north. He is paid a special bonus, in advance, for agreeing to keep an eye out for the siblings. If he encounters them, he is supposed to report their location and details of whomever aids them to any Eclan outpost on the way north. If he is able to kill the siblings, he is promised another, larger bonus.

Peth is genuinely disappointed when he meets the siblings. He is hoping anyone else will deal with them. He likes working with Rynar and hopes to continue doing so.

Peth is a coward. Murdering the siblings is never really an option once they join Rynar. He waits as long as he dares before stealing a horse and fleeing to Mudrim. Once there, he is not treated as he expects and is chastised for letting the siblings live. Ultimately, he is not paid and is tasked with taking word north to Redwater concerning the strength and whereabouts of the siblings. He is forced to sneak out of Mudrim with no horse and no supplies.

Once arriving in Redwater, he is treated no better. He is taken to Fuhlgar who in turn arrests him for aiding the siblings. He is questioned several times and is ultimately forced into identifying Rynar.

He finally escapes his cell and wanders aimlessly in the forgotten tunnels below the keep until stumbling into the siblings again. He has no ill will towards them. And based on his experiences with Fuhlgar, Thylera, and Henerick, he has no love for the Lord of Redwater or his family. He does whatever he can to apologize for stealing the horse and betraying the siblings.

Note: Peth was an accident. He was never intended to be a major character at the time he was introduced, he just grew into one. As sometimes happens in a game, things fell into place to have him show up again and again. Players' eyes rolled at the sound of his name, and he was on the "Must Die" list for a good while. He was never trusted or liked, but he didn't go away. Interestingly, his role in the lives of my characters and their children was only beginning.

THE BROTHERS OF REDWATER

For the residents of Redwater, the Brothers of the church are an island of mercy and hope. If you asked the Primarchs in Tarskendarin, they would agree it is exactly what the church's role should be. In Brother Linden's time in Redwater, he has seen the role of the church degenerate. There was a time not so long ago that it was different. The role of the church was in support of celebration, study, and thanks.

The Brothers believe that the siblings are the best chance for the people of Redwater to be delivered from the tyranny of Henerick. They want all those in and around Redwater to once again live peaceful, productive, happy lives.

Brother Linden is marking the days until the children of Arden and Orphea return. He and his apprentices are secretly preparing to aid them while aiding the townsfolk to endure the reign of Henerick.

When word arrives from Brother Lathan that the Regent intends to allow the siblings to leave Westflood, Linden and the Brothers put plans in motion to assist them on their journey north. When Henerick removes Linden from the church most of these plans fall apart. Out of fear of what might befall Linden or any of their flock, the Brothers are restricted to do much less. They enlist the aid of a traveling acolyte, Brother Tash, to look for and warn the siblings. They then allow one their most venerated treasures to be taken into the wood for the siblings to find.

Having grown up with the siblings, Brother Stedden is very eager to help. Brother Fortin was Linden's student and is anticipated to take over the temple in Redwater one day. He is not at all connected to the siblings, but he understands how important their success is to his mentor. The staff of the temple consists of:

- Brother Linden, Acolyte of Illios (Curate of Redwater)
- Brother Fortin, Acolyte of Illios (acting Curate)
- Brother Stedden (steward of the temple)
- Brother Otar (young Brother, singer)
- Brother Bruhn (young Brother, scribe)
- 24 Young Brothers of varying ages under 16
- Brother Tash, Acolyte of Selene (former student of Linden, travelling preacher, occasional visitor)

Brother Lathan is the superior to all of the Brothers in Redwater. As Abbot of Westflood, he is responsible for all the churches in the regency.

THE HORSEMASTER'S SON AND THE ELF

After the death of T'Var, the horsemen left the lands around Mudrim and headed towards their home far to the south and east. In our version, E'Gil was haunted by thoughts of Eevi and dreams of singing and dancing with her again.

E'Gil sent Esben north with Rynar to keep an eye on the siblings and the Lurians. When things began to go bad, Esben fled Redwater to warn E'Gil of the danger facing the siblings. When he caught up with the horsemen, they were immediately compelled to ride north to help. The Horsemaster happily allowed his remaining son to ride to the aid of the siblings in their fight against the Lurians that took T'Var from him.

They elected to again cross the Hanging Bridge at Mudrim, this time taking the West Road. Not far from Mudrim, Esben stumbled upon the felled hawk of the Regent and the message that is never delivered. They rode non-stop from then on until they reached the outskirts of Redwater. It was not soon enough for E'Gil.

In addition to E'Gil and Esben, there are 60 horse and riders, with over 150 additional wild horses thundering north.

THE LURIAN PRINCESS

The Lurian Princess is an enormous barge. It has two stories of living space above the main deck. It measures almost 120 feet in length and is 30 feet wide. It was commissioned in Silarum by Charon for the sole purpose of bringing his daughter to Redwater. It is pulled by two alternating six-horse teams of massive fen. Along with it travel two small cargo barges each pulled by another two large fen. Two scouts and ten guards are always on horseback ahead and behind. A total of 36 horses travels with them. The total number of people in the entourage is 58.

- Dionysia (bride)
- Arisia (mother)
- Kendrisia (granddaughter)
- Charon (father)
- Chedomir (bodyguard)
- Guarin (steward)
- Hamon (captain of the barge)
- 8 teamsters
- 20 guards
- 2 cooks
- 4 maids
- 5 deckhands
- 5 huntsman/scouts (Lurian)

- 4 grooms
- 3 steersmen

They have plenty of supplies, weapons, and a substantial amount of Cerrak septems with them. Their journey upriver was long and there are few incidents. They arrived in Westflood on the same day the characters leave town. The stop was brief as they were behind schedule. Charon took the opportunity to attend an audience between Toreas and the Regent during which Toreas made an official invitation to the wedding on behalf of the families. Toreas also offered to escort the Regent to Redwater personally. As noted below, the Regent accepted the invitation.

Charon instructed his soldiers to wait until after the Regent left the city before continuing north via the Salt Road. He believed the route much faster and hoped to guarantee their arrival in advance of the Regent and other wedding guests.

THE LURIAN ARMY

In addition to the entourage traveling with Charon and his family, a force of maximum legal size travels overland from Silarum to Westflood. They are careful to remain just far enough off the main thoroughfares to keep out of site. They may resort to paying off or even killing those that they come across to keep them silent until after they pass. It is important to them that they not arouse the attention of the Regent.

The soldiers are all very well supplied. All their weapons are nearly new and all of them wear matching armor or uniforms. They are led by a captain Branimir and his right hand, Kalamir. They are professional, loyal soldiers focused on supporting Charon even unto death.

In hopes of arriving well before the Regent and other wedding guests, they traveled as fast as possible up the Salt Road. They found the route quite difficult and were forced to abandon several wagons along the way due to the muddy conditions. A few locals were enlisted to recover the wagons and goods upon their arrival in Elkhorn. Elkhorn was stripped of nearly all their wealth and supplies because of the visit. The Lurians arrive in Redwater after the Lurian Princess, much to the disappointment of Charon.

In addition to the Branimir and Kalamir there are:

- 8 officers
- 50 cavalry
- 95 foot-soldiers (5 died or deserted along the way)
- 2 scouts
- 6 wagons with teamsters (of the original 10)
- a farrier
- a smith

- a cook
- 20 other various supporters

THE BERIAN WOODSMEN

Over the past winter and autumn, things in Redwater become so distasteful to many of the woodsmen that they choose to flee. Until Otz and his family met their gruesome end, they assisted those that escaped and came south. They gave food and other supplies along with guidance on where and how to find the others living in the woods east of the river. To the north, the village of Kilden takes many in. Further out, even the secretive village of Skagen allows distant relatives to live among them.

The camp established by Stina to the north and east of Otz Flat is living on the edge of survival. The Berian wood provides ample game, plants, and water, but something about the strange refuge keeps the health and wellbeing of her makeshift tribe from thriving. With spring finally upon them, her subordinates are considering moving on to a new home.

THE REGENT

Klain Whiteshield genuinely dislikes Henerick. The Lord of Redwater has been nothing but a problem since his first moment in office. Missing shipments of lumber, overdue taxes, rumors of rebellion, tens of angry mothers, all of this and more causes nothing but stress for the Regent.

Conversely, he likes the siblings very much. They are a source of pride in almost all instances during their time in Westflood. Perhaps they are indeed the children he never had. The Regent respected Arden, but his desire to do right by the siblings is due to their actions, not their father's.

The Regent had hoped that the issues with Henerick would have worked themselves out last autumn. Toreas vouched for Henerick's debts and there was only the longshot of a wedding to save them. If things had gone according to plan, Henerick would have been stripped of his office, Eclan would have been acquired by the crown, and when the siblings found their way home, they would have found Redwater free of those that stole their parents.

Things did not go per plan. The wedding is on after all. The Regent decides that perhaps if he were to attend in person, he will be able to prevent any open hostility between the siblings and Henerick. When he arrives, the situation changes instantly. A large military force has made its way north without his knowledge. It is clear now. Henerick will pay his debts with Lurian coins or will perhaps hold the Regent hostage until more favorable terms can be negotiated.

The Regent sends word south requesting his full military force be sent in all haste, but the message never arrives. He is pleased to see the siblings again, but he fears their fate is sealed. Henerick will never spare them, not even if it means defying an order of the Regent. Especially if that Regent is isolated far from the bulk of his army.

The Regent was once a political force to be reckoned with. He has adeptly navigated the volatile bureaucracy that is House Lloar for many years. This incident casts doubt on his strength and judgement. Ultimately, it is the beginning of his end. He will be on the political and economic defensive for the rest of his reign.

THE OLD MASTERS (THE BAD GUYS BEHIND THE BAD GUYS -OR- THE REALLY BAD GUYS)

Long ago in the region of the Berian Wood, the Slyph created a fortress. Over many years a massive city grew up around it. The resources of the wood and the nearby mountains allowed the city to thrive. Over time, the founders became so powerful, they rivaled the divine powers of the time. Their hunger for power seemed endless. For reasons unknown, the great monument to the Slyph suddenly came to some forgotten catastrophe.

So great was the power of these god-Slyph horrors, they were able to pass to Eshelon and live on. They would eventually find ways back into the lives of the residents of the Berian Wood. Forest spirits. Masters of the Trees. Forgotten members of a lost pantheon. They disguised themselves under many premises. Unable to fully return to Athia, they began to observe. Through their worshipers they would begin to learn about the state of things in the Berian Valley and beyond. They watched. They waited.

Until some distraught woman calls out to the darkness for help. Her confused pleas to the long dead gods of her ancestors are precisely the opportunity they seek. With her help, they find their way back to Athia. They use her greed to bolster their cause. So desperate and self-indulgent, she will make any promise. She will offer any sacrifice. She will even offer her son. If this is the measure of the leaders of men, perhaps the time to return is indeed near. The Old Masters focus their attention on Redwater.

THE WEDDING (UNHINDERED)

This step-by-step breakdown of the wedding ceremony shows the order of events as they should happen if the characters do not interrupt. The moment where the interruption occurs as written in the scenes is indicated in red.

- In the Great Hall (Throne Room) of the keep
 - The tables have been removed
 - An altar has been assembled in front of Henerick's throne. Both are covered in green cloth.
 - Atop the altar is a Berian branch, thick at one end, with leaves still attached at the other
- Sunset
- Brother Lathan starts the ceremony
 - "Bless this union. Heal this troubled land."
- After about 20 minutes of ceremony, the groom and family enter
 - Thylera is wearing a somewhat plain gown
 - Henerick is dressed in green finery with high black boots
- The Regent is on the south side of the balcony with his entourage
- Toreas and the Eclan officers are on the north side of the balcony
- Lurians enter the lower hall
 - Soldiers are all impressively polished
 - Mother wears a huge burgundy gown
 - Charon wears his polished armor
 - Chedomir is at his side
- Locals and guests fill the remainder of the balcony and lower hall as Brother Otar sings
- Lathan begins the second part of the ceremony
 - "Erebos accept the Lady of the Night, embrace her beauty" and continues until the bride enters
- Dionysia enters
 - She wears a bright red and gold gown with a long train
- Brother Otar and Brother Stedden sing the Song of Selene
- Selene begins to rise

The Scenes section assumes this is the moment the characters choose to announce their arrival by interrupting with the singing of the Legend of Ilval and Anon. Brother Otar and Brother Stedden appear surprised but then join in the familiar ballad.

If the musical tie in is less important, storming in, leaping from the balcony, yelling profanity, anything to disrupt the ceremony can happen at any moment. The longer the characters wait, the more chaotic the scene becomes. If no interruption occurs:

- Charon assists Dionysia to the spot in front of the makeshift altar (throne)
- Henerick joins her, Brother Lathan says some quiet words and steps aside
- Henerick and Charon step to the altar
 - In a loud voice Charon says, “May our families be joined and forever tied to the Berian Wood.”
 - He draws his dagger and sticks it into the thick end of the Berian branch
 - Henerick repeats in an almost snarky way, “May our families be forever joined and tied to the Berian Wood.”
 - He draws his dagger and thrusts it into Charon’s chest **(this might be another good “last chance” moment for a dramatic interruption by the characters to save Charon)**
- Screams from the guests, chaos ensues. People begin to flee.
- White guards surround the Regent
- Eclan guards move to Toreas
- Chedomir immediately steps to Dionysia and grabs her by the wrist, sword drawn
 - He points at Arisia (mother) and yells “Protect her!” to the Lurian troops
- Thylera also steps to Dionysia and grabs her other wrist
 - She shares a lascivious glance with Chedomir
- Henerick directs his guards to make a path to the nearby stair
- The abomination of Fuhlgar enters and attacks Brother Lathan
- Thylera and Chedomir lead Dionysia out, Henerick follows
- Toreas orders his guards to seize the Regent
- White Guards and Eclan guards begin a serious fight on the balcony
- Branimir orders the Lurians to assist the Eclan guards to attack the Regent
- Arisia is slain by one of her disgruntled handmaidens (revenge)
- Henerick, Thylera, and Chedomir sacrifice Dionysia to the Old Masters in Thylera’s room
- The Regent is captured
- Brother Lathan is slain by Fuhlgar
- Henerick is given the “power of the Old Masters”
- **Bad guys win (probably)**

AFTERMATH

If the siblings try to pick up the pieces after this (trying to defeat the empowered Henerick, Thylera, Chedomir, Fuhlgar's abomination, all the Lurians, all the Eclan guards, all Henerick's guards, and then saving the Regent), even with the assistance of the horsemen from the south, all the woodsmen, and all the townsfolk, it should be a ridiculously monumental task to accomplish. The story was intended to end very differently, but if this is more to your taste, by all means, proceed.

THE END (THEN WHAT HAPPENS?)

“Of our elaborate plans, the end” - Jim Morrison

The reunion of Arden and the siblings was intended to be the end of the story. Simply add the obligatory “and they lived happily ever after” and you can walk away. We tried, but there were so many questions to be answered. Did the Lurians go quietly? Did Arden become the Lord of Redwater? Did E’Gil and Eevi get married? What happened to the Regent? Did Lundy become a full Brother of the church? Did Ingrid take over the White Guard? What was Thylera really up to? What was that tree-thing? And so on...

Many weeks after the game ended, we transcribed the journal into the computer and massaged a couple of bits to reflect the story as we remembered. The players read it and again became interested in those characters. What do you think happened? It was a question we all imagined answers for.

So, we did something else we’ve never tried. We picked up the story again, but five years later in Athia. Redwater was thriving, but the threats of the deep Berian Wood would come again.

And after that, twenty-five years later again! Arden’s grandchildren are making their mark on the Berian Wood.

Redwater seems to age well. If this story hasn’t been enough, run with it. Tell your own story of Redwater.

CARRY-OVER CLUES AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Here are some items that may lead to other story ideas or side paths to this one:

THE STREAM WIND

There is no sign of the Stream Wind at the bend in the river. It is possible that it passed the party in the night on the far side of the river or perhaps it has sunk. The final destiny of this barge was never answered in my stories. I like to think the cargo was off-loaded and the boat scuttled. It is possible it made it as far as Mudrim but explaining why it isn’t there when the party arrives may be difficult. I like that it reinforced the idea that bad things can happen along the river, far from town.

THE ARROW

The unusual arrow used to slay Olin is a Thyr’s arrow. It is difficult to discover if it is a well-preserved relic or a finely crafted replica. My players kept it for further investigation but didn’t learn of its origin until years later. It may be used as a reminder of what happened here years ago, or perhaps it was one of Svad’s.

OLIN'S LEG

Olin's leg is not found at the bend in the river. In my first telling of the story, one of the characters saw it float by in the river while on night watch. They didn't share the information with their siblings right away, as they were unsure it was real. It implied that whoever killed Olin and the crew of the Stream Wind had gone up-river.

THE MORMERE STEED

The Mormere that caused so much strife in Mudrim is never mentioned again in our version of the story. I like the idea that acquiring it was more about Dionysia beating Maie out of her wedding present. It was never about having the horse. I think a spirited animal like that could have very easily escaped out into the Salt Plain. I am waiting for the opportunity to introduce a line of wild fen with a Mormere bloodline wandering the far west edge of the Salt Plain in my game.

THE GIANT

The female giant was trying desperately to find a mate. The foothills to the west and the far western edge of the Berian wood was once home to many giants. The fabled warriors of King Straad were responsible for hunting them to near extinction generations before the war. The few that have begun to reclaim their homelands of old struggle to find each other. They resort to starting fires, blowing great horns, and yelling odd calls to the winds to attract any of their kind. The female giant encountered by the siblings was trying desperately to find a mate. Perhaps a large male or two is near enough and similarly lonely.

THE WOODSMEN'S HOME

The hidden grove, bathed in violet hued light between trees, is one of the places where Eshelon and Athia almost coexist. It is a gateway to Eshelon. In this version, Eshelon is a strange echo of Athia. The same but twisted. Mountains bigger, yet the same. Desert instead of forest. An impossibly deep canyon with a raging narrow river where the wide calm Valley River should run. It is a place where the Triad cannot see. It is a place where other powers are gathering their strength. Perhaps there are more places like the hidden grove in the Berian Wood.

THE SPIRE OF THE SPRING

The huge obelisk known as the Spire of the Spring is not unique. There are several spread throughout the Berian Wood. Many of them are buried or overgrown. Some are broken into scattered fragments. A few stand tall in hidden places, and most of those are forgotten. They are relics from the time of the Old Masters. The meanings of the carvings are long forgotten even to the oldest Slyph. What are they and what were they used for?

WHO ARE THOSE DEAD GUYS IN THE SEWER?

The Sick folk encountered in the sewers of Redwater were never explained in our story. Perhaps they were silenced by Fuhlgar? Or perhaps they overheard Chedomir's messages to Thylera? Whatever they did, they paid with their lives.

THE LURIANS

Charon and his supporters back in Luria had hoped the union in Redwater would give them another way into the political machine that is House Lloar. The contentious status of Luria has divided it into various factions vying for control. Some ally with House Blayth, some with Lloar, some want independence from both, but all are looking for the opportunity to decide Luria's fate.

When the remaining Lurian soldiers and family journey south from Redwater, several of them elect to stay. Many of the servants from the doomed barge have sought refuge among the citizens of Redwater. Among them, it is certain that spies were left behind. Perhaps Charon's dream of a trade route north from Redwater through the Berian Wood and over the mountains to Luria is still alive.

Family is a serious matter in Luria. Predictably, Chedomir's brothers will be seeking to avenge his death.

THE OLD MASTERS

The ancient thirst for power has not been quenched. The weakness of the inhabitants of the Berian Wood has been demonstrated. The Old Masters continue to search for the ways between Athia and Eshelon. Some claim these spaces between both worlds are also the conduits for the spirits of the dead on their way to their next life. If true, can the Old Masters discover this, and how can they turn it to their gain?

SUPPLY LISTS

“How can you have any pudding if you don’t eat your meat?” – Roger Waters

The supply lists were built for a 4-person party with 3 horses, an ox, and a cart. Adding a character and or an animal would require a 25% increase in each food/drink/feed item. If you are in doubt, err on the conservative side.

LUNDY’S LIST (FOR 4 CHARACTERS)

Supplies:

- Axe, timber
- Backpacks (4)
- Bandage Kit
- Bearskin
- Bedrolls (4)
- Blanket, winter (4)
- Bolts (crossbow) 2 score
- Chalk (3)
- Chest (large)
- Chest (small)
- Clothes (various, much from Mrs. Skjoll)
- Cups (4)
- Feed bags (4)
- Fishing gear (acquired from Deln at the river bridge)
- Flint and Steel
- Grappling Hook (stout, made by Hagni the blacksmith)
- Hatchet
- Hermetics Bag (some contents of my own collecting, hopefully adequate for this trip)
- Lantern, open flame
- Lock (was assured it is a very good one by Deln)
- Mallet
- Oil (5 pints)
- Pan (1 very large)
- Pots (1 large, 1 small)
- Prybar (also from Hagni)
- Rope (200’)
- Sack (2)
- Sledge (the one I found)

- Soap (2 bars) (I hope it is to Ingrid's liking, as the last was not.)
- Spade
- Tarp (large, oiled)
- Tent (if you can call it that, but it is large)
- Tools (various hand tools I have collected in service of Ingrid)
- Torches (12)
- Twine (a big ball, at least 200')
- Utensils (4 settings of fork, knife, and spoon)
- Utensils for cooking (various, acquired from the kitchens of the Regent, with permission)
- Waterskins (4)
- Whetstone
- Whistle (Deln made)

Food:

- Ale, common (1 butt) (from Tharbin)
- Apples (about 60)
- Beans (1 sack)
- Beets (40)
- Cabbage (6 heads)
- Carrots (50)
- Currants (1 bag)
- Feed (5 sacks) (mostly barley I believe, some oats)
- Garlic (a large bunch from Lena's garden)
- Hard Biscuits (large sack of 50 or so)
- Hard Cheese (3 wheels)
- Hardtack (large box)
- Jerky (large sack from Skjoll, very salty)
- Oats (small sack)
- Onions (20)
- Potatoes (40)
- Salt Pork (2 hind quarters, 1 shoulder)
- Spices (box of a variety of pouches)
- Water (4 kegs)
- Whisky (1 bottle) (a gift from Nelda at the Cracked Crock)

Animals:

- Magnus - a huge ox purchased from Mr. Skjoll

- Vali - my new companion hound, her keen eyes and ears would be welcome on the road
- Horses - three good ones, Ingrid selected all from the Regent's stable (final gift)
- Cart - a fair 2-wheeler, acquired from the garrison surplus

Funding:

- 4 silver and 11 copper septems

THE CHECKLIST VERSION
(Included in the References)

INGREDIENTS (Servings)	
Ale, common	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Cloudberries	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Beans	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Beets	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Cabbage	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Turnips	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Currants	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Grain	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Hard Biscuits	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Hard Cheese	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Spices	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Travel Food	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Water	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Whisky	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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MEALS	
Biscuits with Jerky Gravy	
Jerky, hard biscuits, ale, suet	
Carrot Pudding	
Carrots, hard biscuits	
Fried Beets	
Beets, cabbage, hard biscuit, suet	
Fried Pork	
Salt pork, suet	
Hash	
Salt pork, onion, potato	
Lundy Gruel	
Oats, jerky, onion	
Meat Beets	
Beets, shaved salted pork & jerky	
Meat Pie	
Jerky/salt pork, onion, carrot	
Onion Pie	
Cabbage, onion, suet, hard biscuit	
Pork Succotash	
Salt pork, beans, carrots	
Potato Dumplings	
Potatoes, oats, suet	
Fruментy (Soup)	
Powdered oats, nutmeg, water	
Pork Stew (Soup)	
Salt pork, onions, potatoes, beets	
Beer Bread (Bread)	
Ale, grain, hard biscuit	
Jumbles (Bread)	
Hard biscuits, oats, salted	
No-Knead Bread or Biscuits (Bread)	
Grain, hard biscuit	
Honey Bread (Bread/Dessert)	
Hard biscuit, honey, oats	
Potash Cake (Bread/Dessert)	
Grain, hard biscuits, molasses	
Apple Fritters (Dessert)	
Apples, hard biscuit, suet	
Currant Pudding (Dessert)	
Currants, hard biscuit, suet	

CALENDAR

“Yeah, I know. I’ve seen it all before.” -Jay May

CALENDAR (LIST OF SCENES)				
Date	Days until episode	NO.	SCENE	
	11	34		
	12	33		
	13	32		
	14	31		
	15	30		
	Full			
	16	29	1	Leaving Town
			2	The Crossing
			3	Ambushed
	17	28	1	Gil the Shepherd
			2	Sil's Farm
	18	27	1	Ox in the Well
			2	The Sentinel
	19	26	1	Mammoth
			2	Wolves
			1	Bandits from Gold Bend
			2	Roadside Assistance
			3	Gold Bend
	20	25	4	Book Box 1
			5	Book Box 2
			6	Book Box 3
			1	Ox for Hire
	21	24	2	Fate of the Cart
			3	The Pull Road
			4	Premonitions
	22	23	1	The Bend in the River
			2	Olin's Goodbye
	23	22	1	Attack of the Swine
			2	The Missing Horse
	24	21	1	On the Road
	25	20	1	Strangers to the West
			2	The Cart is Nearly Done
			1	Mudrim at Last
			2	Inside the Rim
	26	19	3	The Horsemaster
			4	Welcome to the Stone Hearth Child
			5	Trumbo's
			1	The Funeral
			2	Reports of Olin's Death
			3	The Bridge and the Moremere Steed
	27	18	4	Wagons For Sale
			5	Hob's
			6	Thugs in the Night
			7	Return to Trumbo's and the Invitations
			1	Reports from Home
			2	The Missing Horse 2
	28	17	3	The Wedding
			4	The Shrine of the Canyon
			5	The Lurian Princess
			1	Moremere Acquisitions
			2	The Horsemen's Goodbye
	29	16	3	I Think It Is Time That All Of You Left
			4	Rynar's Goodbye
			5	On Your Way
			1	The Raft
			2	Familiar Tracks
			1	More Logs
			2	Sick (the other kind)
	1	14	1	First Signs of Home
			2	Dead Horse
	2	13	1	Otz Flat
			2	Rynar's Return
			1	Goodbyes
			2.2	The Crossing
			2.3	The Berian Wood
			2.4	First Redwater Patrol
			1.5	The Road into the Berian Wood
			1.1	The Scar
			1.2	The Petrified Tree
			1.3	Mother and Children
			2.4	Second Redwater Patrol
			2.5	New Friends
			1.6	Cold Night
			1.1	The Hidden Grove
			1.2	New Town
			1.3	Rynar and Esben
			1.4	Old Town
			2.5	The Whetstone
			2.6	Excommunication
			2.7	Birds In the Trees

CALENDAR (LIST OF SCENES)									
Date	Days until wedding	NO.	SCENE						
61st Year of the Triad	Auctus	2nd Cycle	Moxing	7	8	1.1	Wake-up Call		
					1.2	Violence in the Street			
					1.3	The Temple of Redwater			
					2.4	Third Redwater Patrol			
					1.5	The Brothers of the Triad			
					1.6	Esben Couldn't Take It			
					8	7	1.1	On the River	
							2.2	The Giant	
				9	6	3	The Spire of the Spring		
						1	The Way Home		
						2	The Lurian Princess Again		
						3	The Sewers		
						4	Denizens of the Sewers		
				10	5	5	Three Ropes		
1	Morning in the Temple of Redwater								
2	Breakfast with Brother Fortin								
3	Services								
4	News of Elkhorn								
5	A Place Among Brothers								
6	His Guards are Looking For Us								
7	Animals, Wagons, and Barges								
8	Wanted								
9	Searching the Church								
11	4	10	Women of the night						
		1	Captured Allies						
		2	Home Again						
		3	To the Keep						
		4	Free Prisoners						
		5	Executions (Fear and Ire)						
		6	Return to Redwater						
12	3	7	Rynar's Goodbye						
		1	Word from the Keep						
		2	Rescheduled Wedding Preparations						
		3	May the Face of Illios Not be Clouded						
		4	Wedding Party on the Hill						
		5	Linden's End						
13	2	6	Forgotten Memories						
		1	Unintended Consequences						
		2	Despair						
		3	Herald of the Regent						
		4	Linden's Funeral						
		5	Remembered Entrance						
		6	Oiled Room						
		7	Peth, Again						
		8	Relief						
		9	Overgrown Tunnel						
		10	Foundations						
		11	Father's Sword						
		12	Thylern						
		13	The Regent						
		2.14	Arrested						
		1.15	Brother Lathan						
		1.16	To the Dungeons						
		1.17	Return to the Temple						
1.18	Escape								
14	1	1.1	Preparing a Banquet for the Regent						
		1.2	Services						
		3	Reunited?						
		4	Supper with the Regent						
		5	Fighting in Newtown						
		6	The Death of the Lurian Princess						
		7	Hold It Right There						
		8	The Regent's Goodbye						
Full	15	0	1	Locked In					
			2	Friends from the South					
			3	Esben's First Trick					
			4	The Regent's Hawk					
			5	The Wedding is On					
			6	The Wagon					
			7	The Chimney					
			8	Esben's Trick					
			9	Sunset!					
			10	The Bedroom, Again					
			11	The Wedding					
			12	Toreas vs. the Regent					
			13	The Skoggvækk					
			14	The Lords Return					
16									
17									

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS

“In real life, can such a character exist? No. Certainly not.” – Friend of Joyce
“So much the worse for real life.” – James Joyce

I am including a list of most of the people, places, and things my characters encountered or previously knew about. The list includes a few things that are specific to the “Three Sisters” but should cover most of what you might need. Having just read the list again, it is long. Please don’t feel like you must commit it to memory. I didn’t.

Note that in the References, there is a printable spreadsheet containing cards showing all the statistical information for the Opponents and NPCs.

Agathe: Friend of Orphea, midwife in Redwater.

Agner: Woodsman hiding in the Berian Wood. Father of 2 daughters.

Akard: Local manager of the Eclan Traders in Mudrim.

Anna: Student of Thylera. Worshiper of the Skoggvekk and the Old Masters.

Arden: Father of the main characters, husband to Orphea. Explorer and leader of men. Inspirational leader to the Berian Woodsmen. Lifelong friend and advisor to Lord Eldram.

Ariam: Member of the White Guard. Travels with the Regent.

Arisia: Wife of Charon. Very large and unpleasant woman. Mother of Dionysia or Luria.

Artil: Local merchant of Redwater that testified during the inquiry.

Axim: Olin’s huge black horse.

Berian Valley: The vast river valley within the Berian Wood.

Berian Woodsmen: Former Outsiders united by Eldram and Arden. Settled in Redwater.

Book Box: Inn in Gold Bend, famous for fish stew.

Branimir: Captain of the Lurian soldiers.

Britt: Barmaid at Trumbo’s. Not lovely.

Brota's Keg: Low riverboat captained by Rynar.

Brother Bruhn: Scribe of the temple in Redwater. Not yet an Acolyte.

Brother Fortin: Acolyte of Illios. Acting Curate of Redwater in Linden's absence.

Brother Lathan, Abbot of Westflood: Acolyte of Erebos. Close advisor to Regent Klain Whiteshield. Participated in the inquiry of Orphea and Arden by manifesting visages of Eldram and Orphea.

Brother Linden, Curate of Redwater: Acolyte of Selene. Spiritual guide of Redwater. His hair turned white during the questioning of Orphea.

Brother Otar: Devout Brother of Redwater. Great singer. Not yet an Acolyte.

Brother Stedden: Childhood friend of one of the younger siblings. Faithful Brother in Redwater. Not yet an Acolyte. He has some secret information forgotten by one of the characters.

Brother Tash: Travelling preacher of the Pull Road. Student of Linden. Acolyte of Selene.

Charon: Very wealthy and powerful Lurian. Tried to get Henerick and his daughter married to get Lurian influence into mainland Lloar.

Chedomir: Charon's man-at-arms.

Cracked Crock: Rough tavern in Westflood. Favored by officers of the city guard.

Daenner: Woodsman hiding in the Berian Wood.

Dale: Suitor of Maie. Retainer of Ranuf.

Dalibor: Money counter of House Cerrak in Mudrim.

Deln: Vagrant that lived under a bridge near the barracks in Westflood.

Deneth: Former head of the White Guard.

Dionysia: Daughter of Charon. Betrothed to Henerick. Very large and unpleasant woman.

Drian: Guard from Redwater. Childhood acquaintance of one of the siblings.

Drunken Maiden: Drinking song common to the Pull Road communities.

Duras: Cook at the Book Box.

Eclan Traders: Trading company of Toreas. Near monopoly of the Pull Road.

E'Gil: Second son of the Horsemaster. Warrior. Singer.

Eldram Falls: Place where Eldram was slain and Arden injured. Location of the hunt during which Eldram demanded Arden succeed him.

Eldram, Lord of Red Water: Father of Henerick, Husband to Lady Thylera. Friend and mentor to Arden. Killed near a great waterfall that now bears his name.

Elk Horn: Small village on the Salt Road. Sacked by the Lurians on their overland approach.

Esbén: Elf companion of E'Gil. Doesn't speak. Devout of Selene with Nature powers.

Fear and Ire: Prayer of Selene.

Fuglmand: Servants of the Skoggvekk, Changelings, Birdmen.

Fuhlgar: Henerick's bodyguard, friend, and advisor. Killed Orpheia.

Gil: Shepherd of the Salt Plain north of Westflood.

Gold Bend: A small, poor, village on the Pull Road north of Westflood.

Guarin: Charon's Steward.

Hagni: Blacksmith in Westflood.

Hamon: Captain of the "Lurian Princess".

Hanging Bridge: The suspension bridge across the Valley River at Mudrim. One of the furthest north of Westflood.

Heart's Creek: Cold tributary that joins the Valley River just on the north end of Redwater. It leads upstream to the Spire of the Spring.

Henerick, Lord of Red Water: Son of Eldram and Thylera. Lord of Redwater. He has a scarred face and marled eye from the incident that ended Orpheia's life.

Hilda: Maid and roomkeeper at the Whetstone.

Hob's: Trading post in Mudrim. Huge collection of used things, kind of a pawn shop type place.

Hob: Proprietor of Hob's. Short and slight. Happy to buy or sell anything.

Holger: Proprietor of the Whetstone.

Holy Symbol of Curate Bendt: Holy symbol used to thwart Linden's ability to remote view the party.

Horsemaster (B'Ren): Father of E'Gil and T'Var. Keeper of the plateau at Mudrim.

Inga: Co-owner of the Book Box in Gold Bend.

Kahlin: Steward of Ranuf.

Kalamir: Lieutenant of the Lurian soldiers.

Kayla: Young citizen of Redwater. Daughter of Kjell.

Kaylin: Barkeep of the Book Box.

Kendrisia: Granddaughter of Charon. Very young, pleasant little girl. Niece of Dionysia.

Kjell: Fugitive from Redwater accused of treason hiding in the Berian Wood. Husband to Sholl. Father of Kayla and Mikl.

Klain Whiteshield, Lord of Westflood, Regent of the Lake: Regent over the area around the Lake of Swords and west of the Valley River to the mountains. Custodian of the siblings for the last 3+ years. Very religious man.

Lagen: Largest of the horseman. Friend of E'Gil.

Lars: Woodsman in hiding the Berian Wood.

Legend of Ilval and Annon: An ancient verse telling of two forbidden lovers that eventually find happiness only to end in tragedy. Sung at many a wedding and festival by Orphea and Arden. Sung by Orphea and Henerick at the Whetstone on the night of Orphea's death.

Lena: Widow farmer from near Westflood.

Liutulf: Wealthy merchant of Westflood.

Lurian Princess: Huge Lurian Barge owned by Charon.

Lusty Barmaid: Common rowdy drinking song.

Mads: Cook and bouncer at the Whetstone.

Maie: Daughter of Ranuf. Married to E'Gil's brother T'Var briefly.

Martea: Wife of Otz.

Mikl: Young citizen of Redwater. Son of Kjell.

Mudrim: Large town on the Pull Road. Defensible due to earthen walls.

Nelda: Barmaid at the Cracked Crock.

Nina: Barmaid at the Whetstone.

Olin: Sentinel assigned to the Pull Road and Salt Plain between Mudrim and Westflood.

Orphea: Mother of the main characters, wife to Arden. Strong willed. Beautiful. Kind. Part time midwife. Famed singer at local festivals, weddings, and occasionally the Whetstone. Killed during an attempt on Henerick's life.

Otz: Patriarch of Otz Flat. Friend to the Woodsman that escaped Henerick's Redwater. Husband of Martea.

Otz Bridge: The last bridge north of Westflood on the Valley River. The eastern portion is stone, crafted by Asos masons before the great war.

Otz Flat: Small town on the Pull Road. Burned to the ground. Once home to woodsman "help network" for those that escaped Redwater under Henerick.

Peth: Teamster and "spy" for Eclan Traders.

Powl: Porter at the Stone Hearth.

Pull Road: A series of bridges, levees, and roads for pulling barges up the Valley River to Redwater.

Ralak: Keeper of the bunkhouse at the Book Box.

Rand: Cook at Trumbo's.

Ranuf: Wealthy merchant of Redwater. Hosted huge wedding for daughter (Maie). Conspired to sell Mormere Steed to Lurians.

Redwater: Town where the main characters are from located at the mouth of the great Berian Valley on the banks of the Valley River.

Reticence: Book of illuminations about Selene.

Rilen: One of Arden's old trackers. Spoke for Arden and the children during the inquiry.

Ruden: Eclan clerk residing in Redwater.

Ruzie: Young girl with goat at the Book Box.

Rynar: Riverboat captain of Brota's Keg on the Valley River and Lake of Swords.

Salt Road: Series of roads between Redwater and Westflood across the Salt Plain.

Sargent Otto: Local constable in Redwater that drinks and takes advantage of patrons of the Whetstone.

Sholl: Citizen of Redwater. Wife of Kjell. Mother of Kayla and Mikl.

Shrine of the Canyon: Temple to the Triad in Mudrim. Dug into the sandstone walls of the canyon. Hidden open canyon is the sanctuary.

Sil's Farm: Ruined Asos farm/estate near the Salt Road.

Skjoll, Mr.: Farmer and trader from the outskirts of Westflood.

Skjoll, Mrs.: Farmer's wife.

Skoggekk: Scourge of the Forest, Servant of the Old Ones.

Song of the Highwayman: Ballad romanticizing highway robbers.

Song of the River Spirit: Cautionary song for river travelers, common along the Valley River.

Spire of the Spring: Ancient obelisk in the forest. A spring of cold, clear water runs from the base into Heart's Creek, a tributary of the Valley River.

Sten: Woodsman hiding in the Berian Wood.

Stina: Leader of the woodsmen hiding in the Berian Wood.

Stone Hearth: Inn in Mudrim. Dug into the sandstone walls of the canyon.

Stream Wind: Barge carrying barrels of ale and wine north to Redwater.

Sunnifa: Owner of Stone Hearth.

Svad: Orc guard from the Stream Wind that made trouble at the Book Box.

T'Var: Oldest son of the Horsemaster. Brother of E'Gil. Friend of Esben. Killed by Lurians over the Mormere Steed.

Tharbin: Brewmaster from Westflood. The preferred supplier for the city guard.

Thylera, Lady of Redwater: Wife of Eldram. Mother to Henerick. Worshiper of the Skoggekk and the Old Masters.

Tilden: Wheelwright in Mudrim.

Toreas: Owner of Eclan Traders. Uncle of Henerick. Brother of Thylera. Spoke for Eldram and the family during the inquiry. Worshiper of the Skoggekk and the Old Masters.

Trumbo's: Tavern in Mudrim. Excellent food. The bottom of every bowl and plate has "Stolen from Trumbo's" on the face.

Trumbo: Tall, thin proprietor of Trumbo's. Thinks everyone is a thief.

Tuned: Co-owner of the Book Box.

Valley River: The longest river in the west. Runs from far in the north of the Berian Wood to Silarum.

Westflood: City on the west bank of the Lake of Swords. Home to the Regent. Place where the main characters were pressed into service for 3+ years. 200 miles south of Redwater along the Valley River.

Whetstone: Local inn of Redwater.

Yaris: Mayor of Mudrim.

Yellowtooth: Battle-axe taken from the ruins of Otz Flat.

Zuan: Goblin retainer of Yaris.

MAPS

“I didn’t want to create a world that is so foreign, you feel disconnected.”
– Denis Villeneuve

In case you didn’t know it, I am a map guy. I love them. Making, having, collecting maps is one of the things I do. However, when I started this story, I wanted to see if I could describe it to the players without a map. Just let it live in the player’s minds. It worked. For a while. Eventually I needed to know what the villages looked like. And then, where the characters were in relation to Redwater. And then, how to get through the sewers, and to the keep, and into the wedding, etc. Maps were needed. Clearly.

Most of these started as hand-drawn sketches in my GM notes. But as I am creating this for “public” consumption, I will resort to the computer.

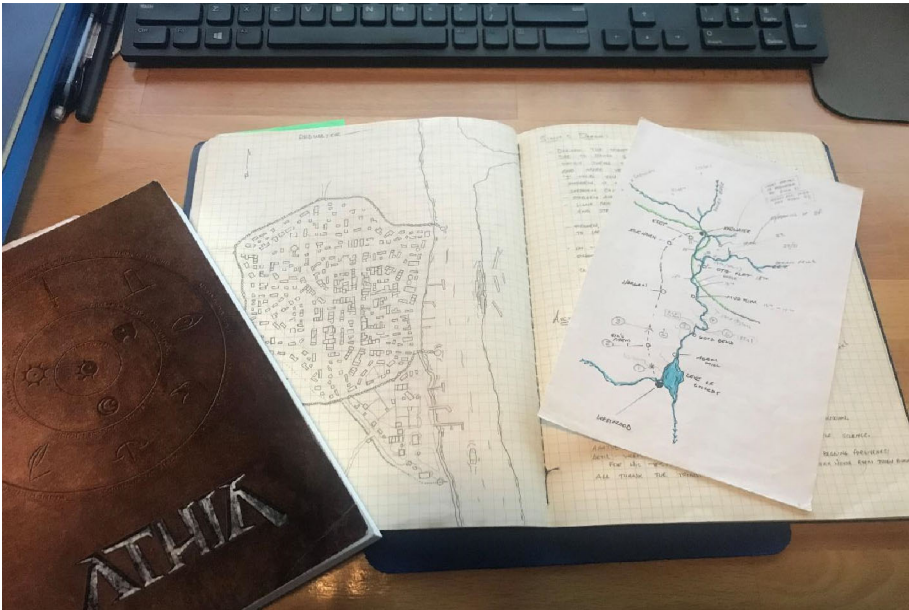


FIGURE 1: SOME OF THE NOTEBOOK

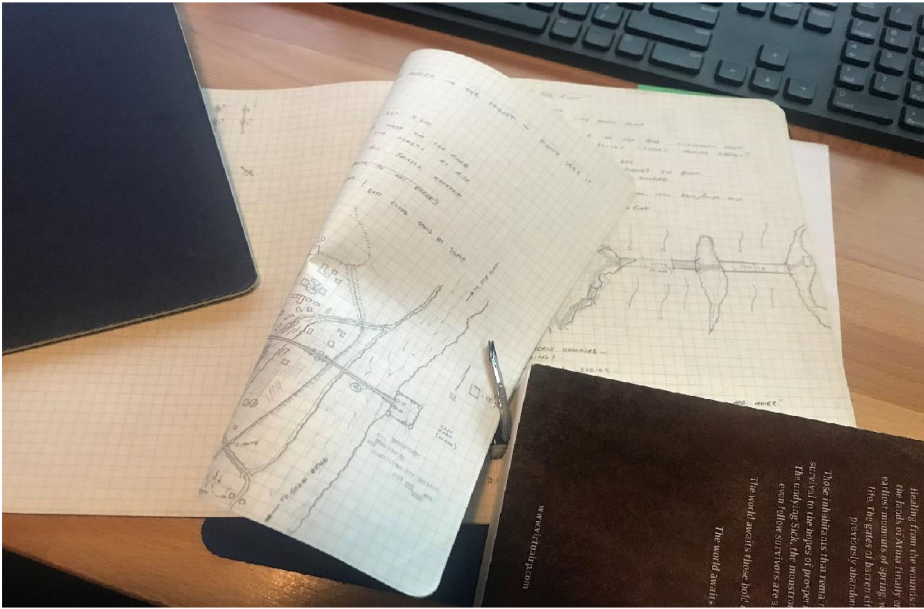
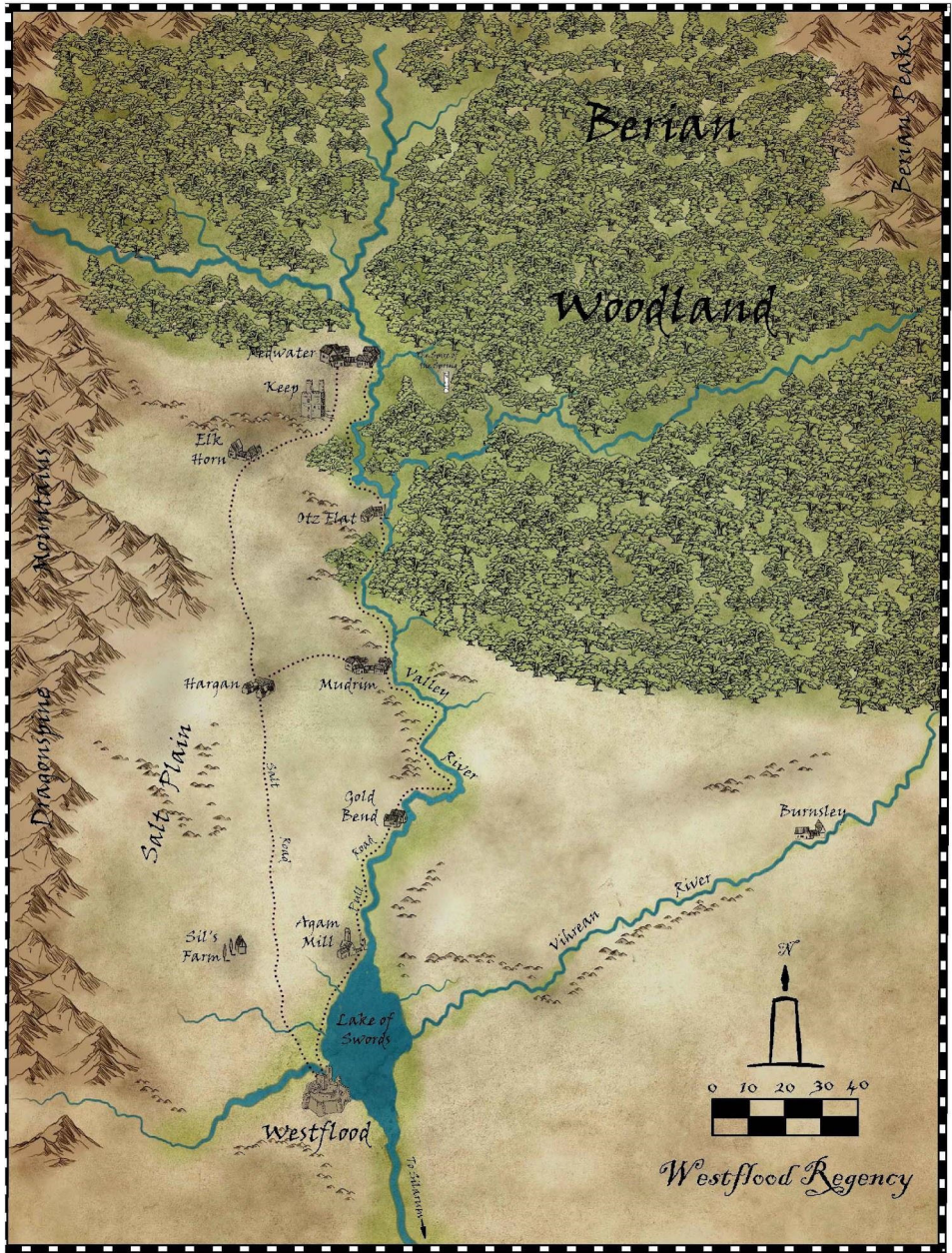


FIGURE 2: SOME MORE OF THE NOTEBOOK

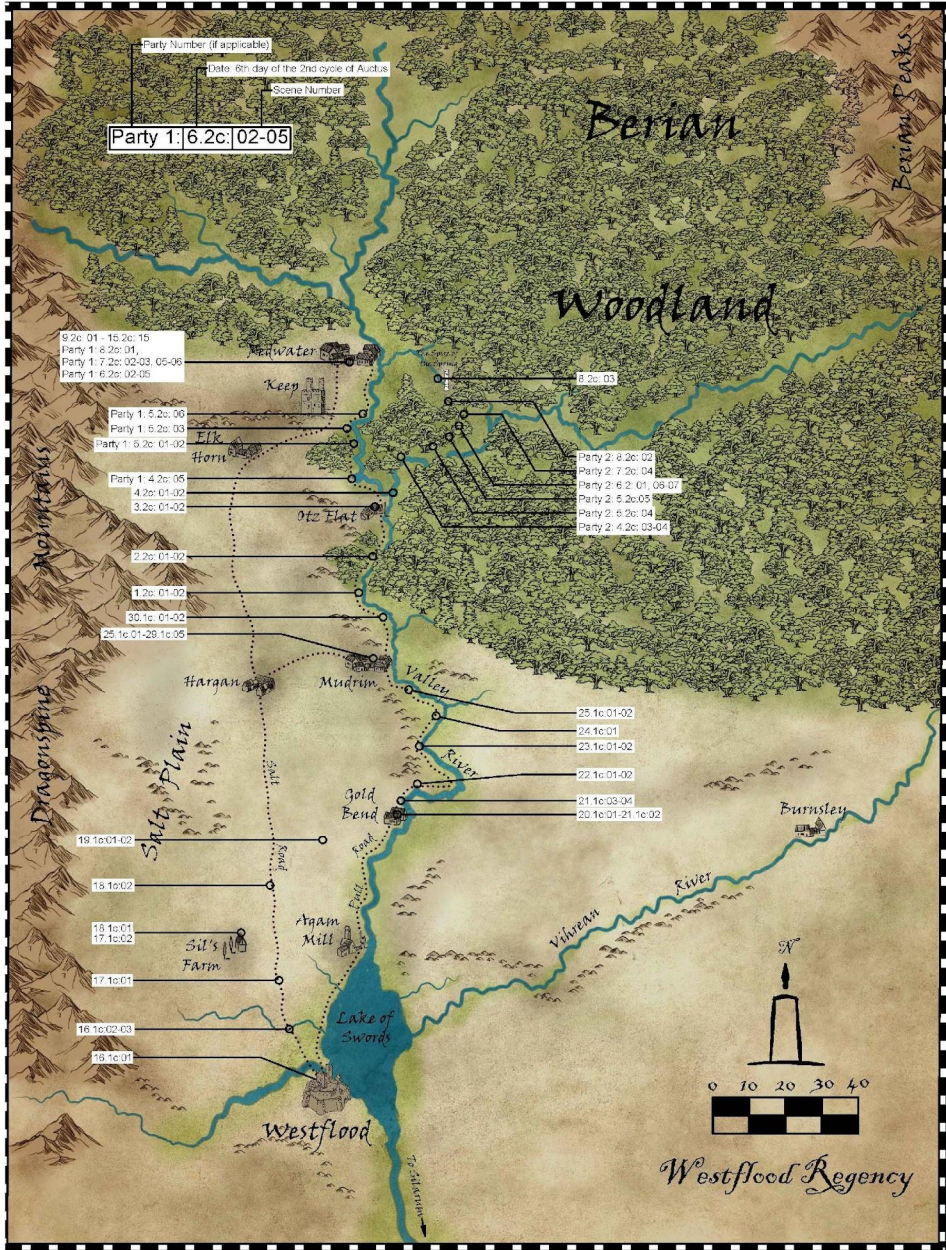
Here are the maps included:

1. Regional Map
2. Regional Map with Dates
3. Salt Run Tributary Bridge
4. Sil's Farm
5. Gold Bend
6. Mudrim
7. House of Ranuf
8. Otz Flat
9. The Spire of the Spring
10. Redwater
11. The Whetstone
12. The Temple of Redwater
13. The Sewers
14. Arden and Orphea's House
15. THE Keep
16. The Lost Path

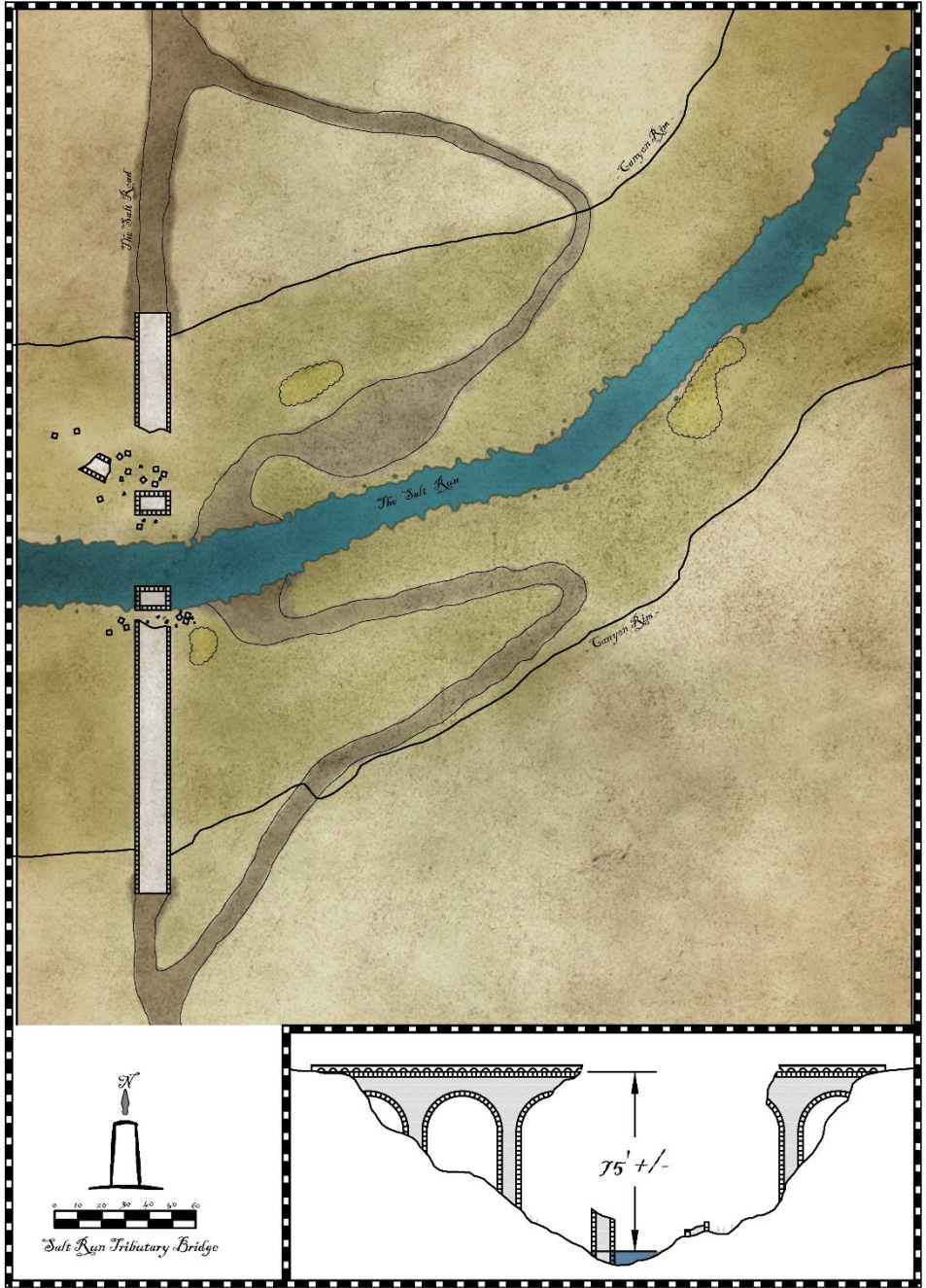
REGIONAL MAP (MAP 1)



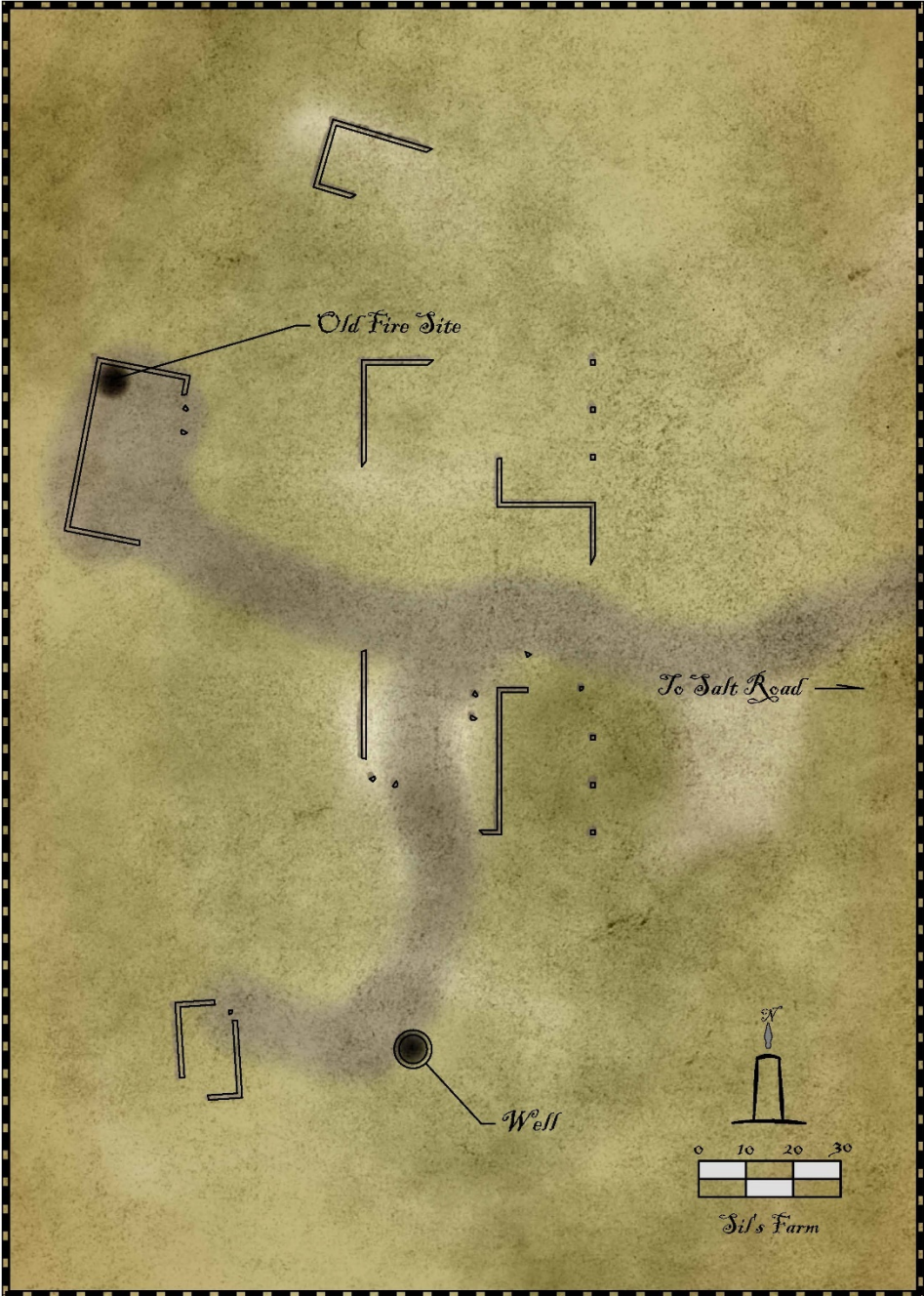
REGIONAL MAP WITH DATES (MAP 2)



SALT RUN TRIBUTARY BRIDGE (MAP 3)



SIL'S FARM (MAP 4)



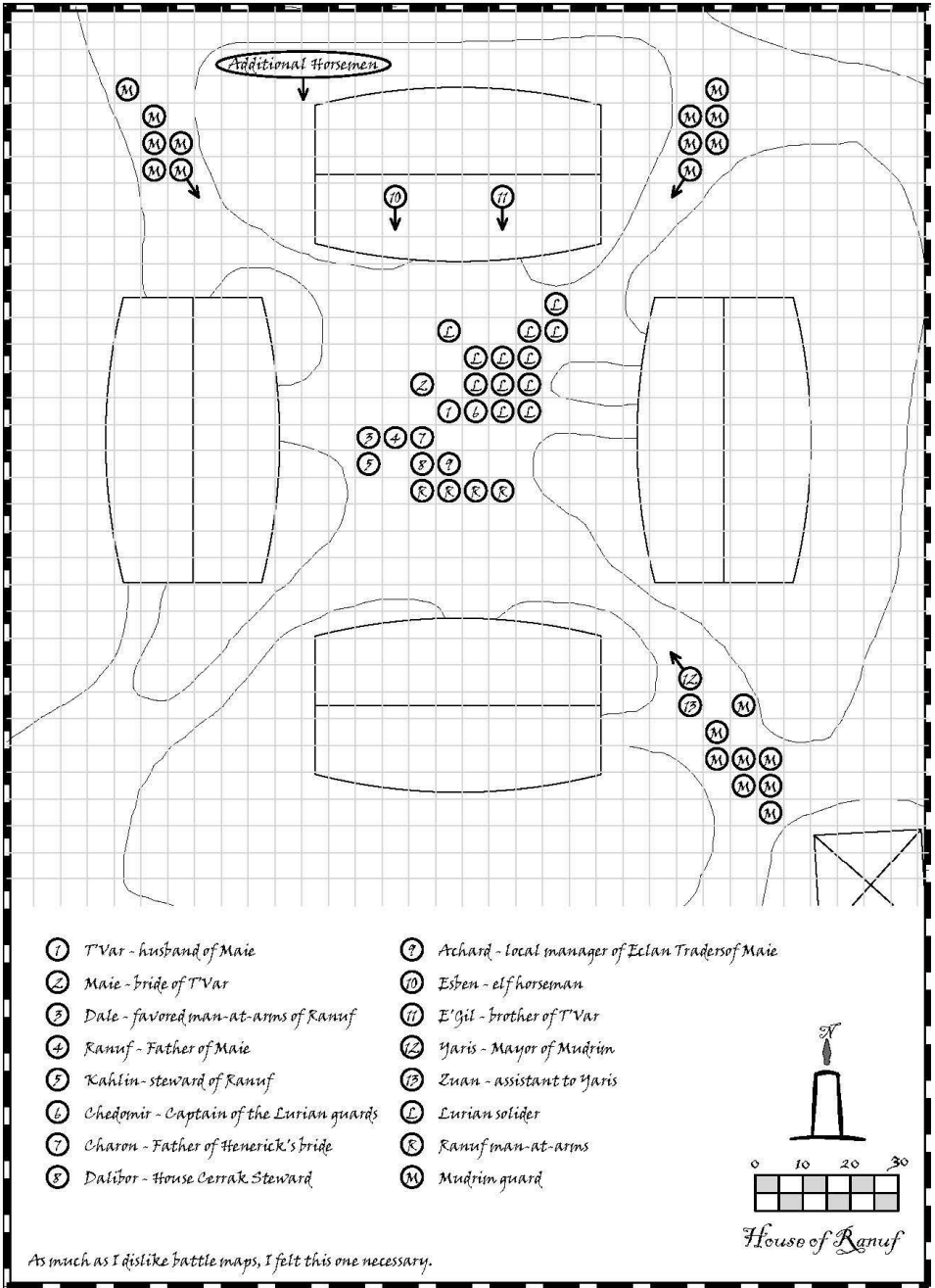
GOLD BEND (MAP 5)



MUDRIM (MAP 6)



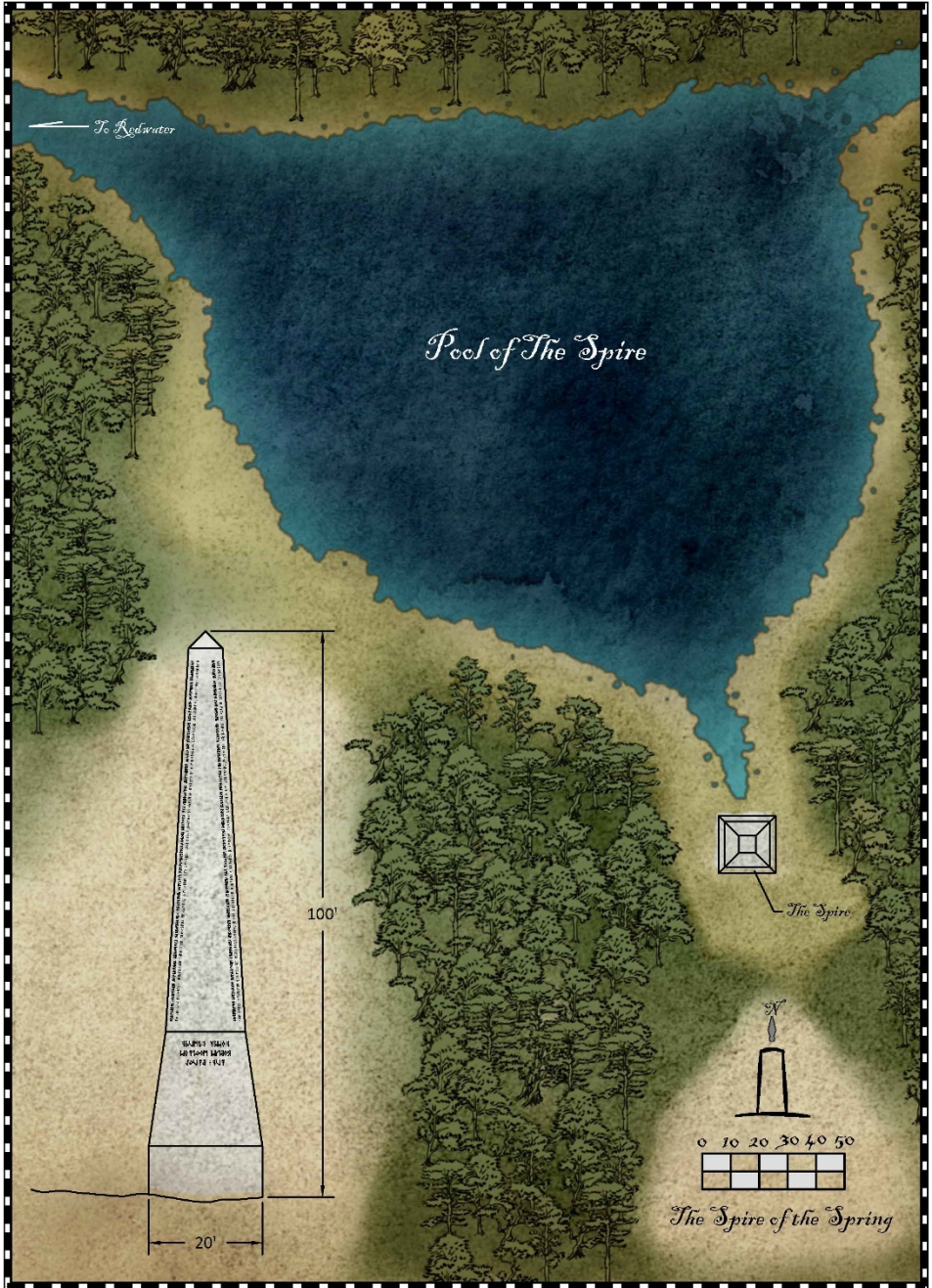
HOUSE OF RANUF (MAP 7)



OTZ FLAT (MAP 8)



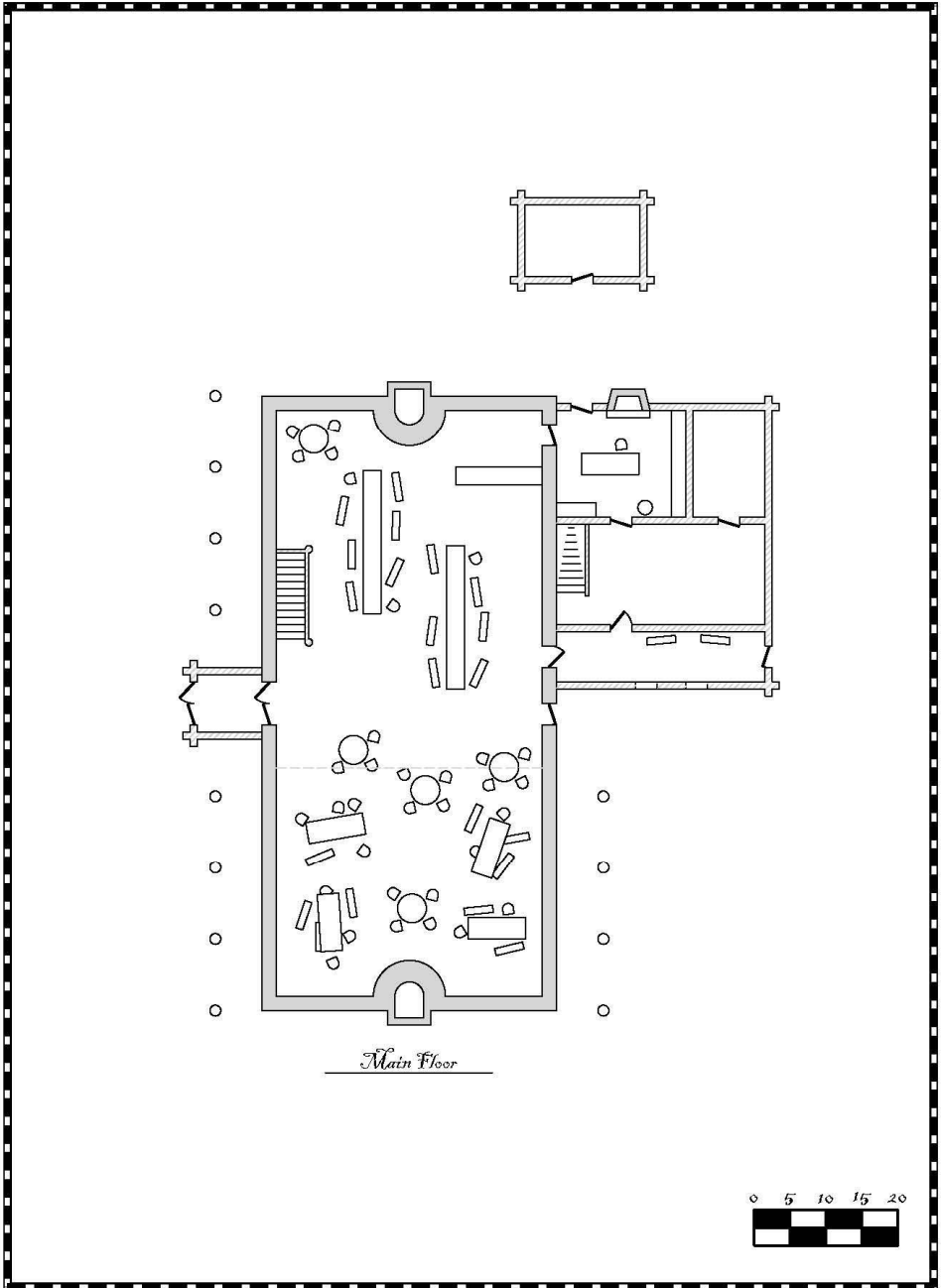
THE SPIRE OF THE SPRING (MAP 9)

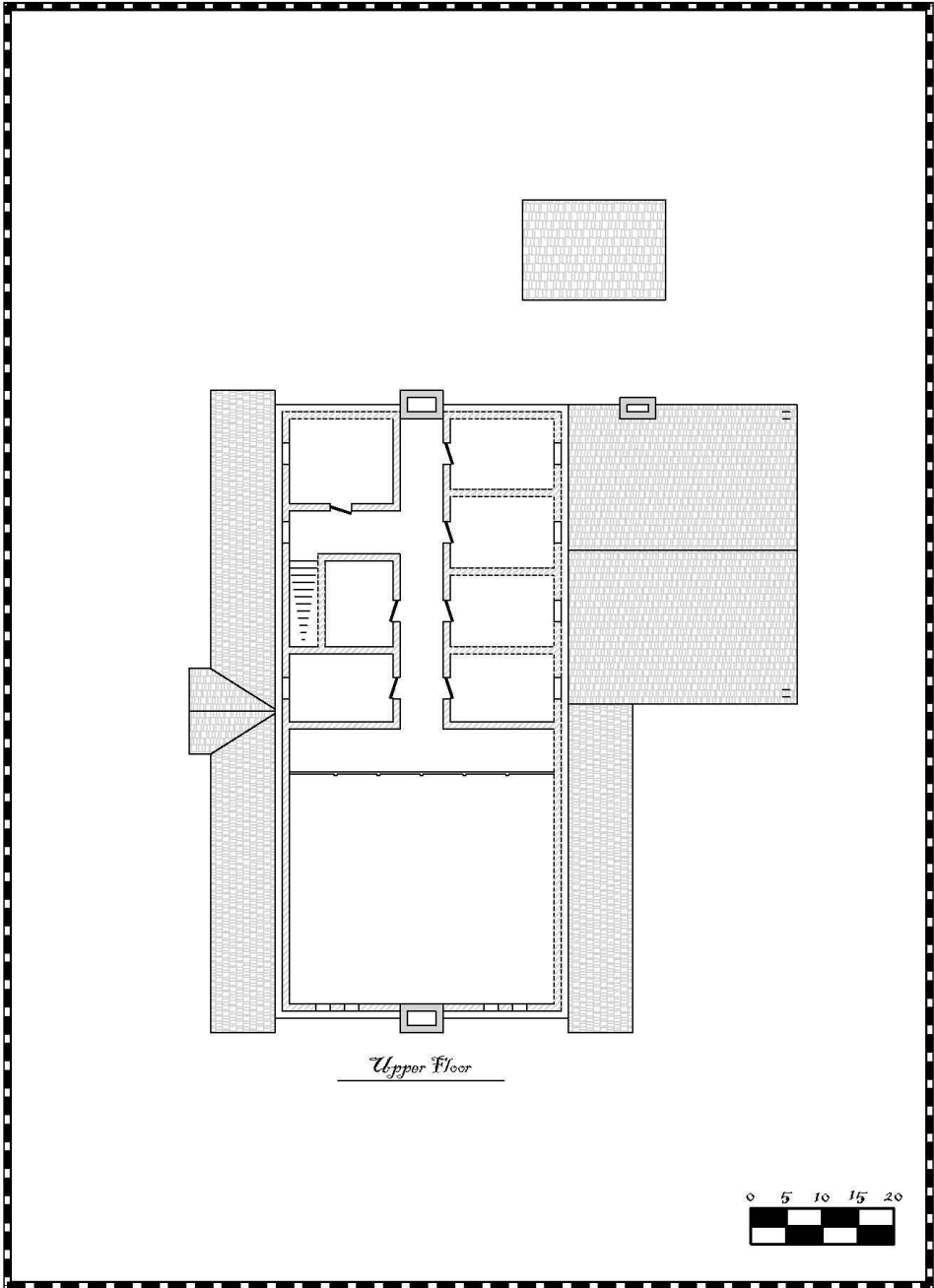


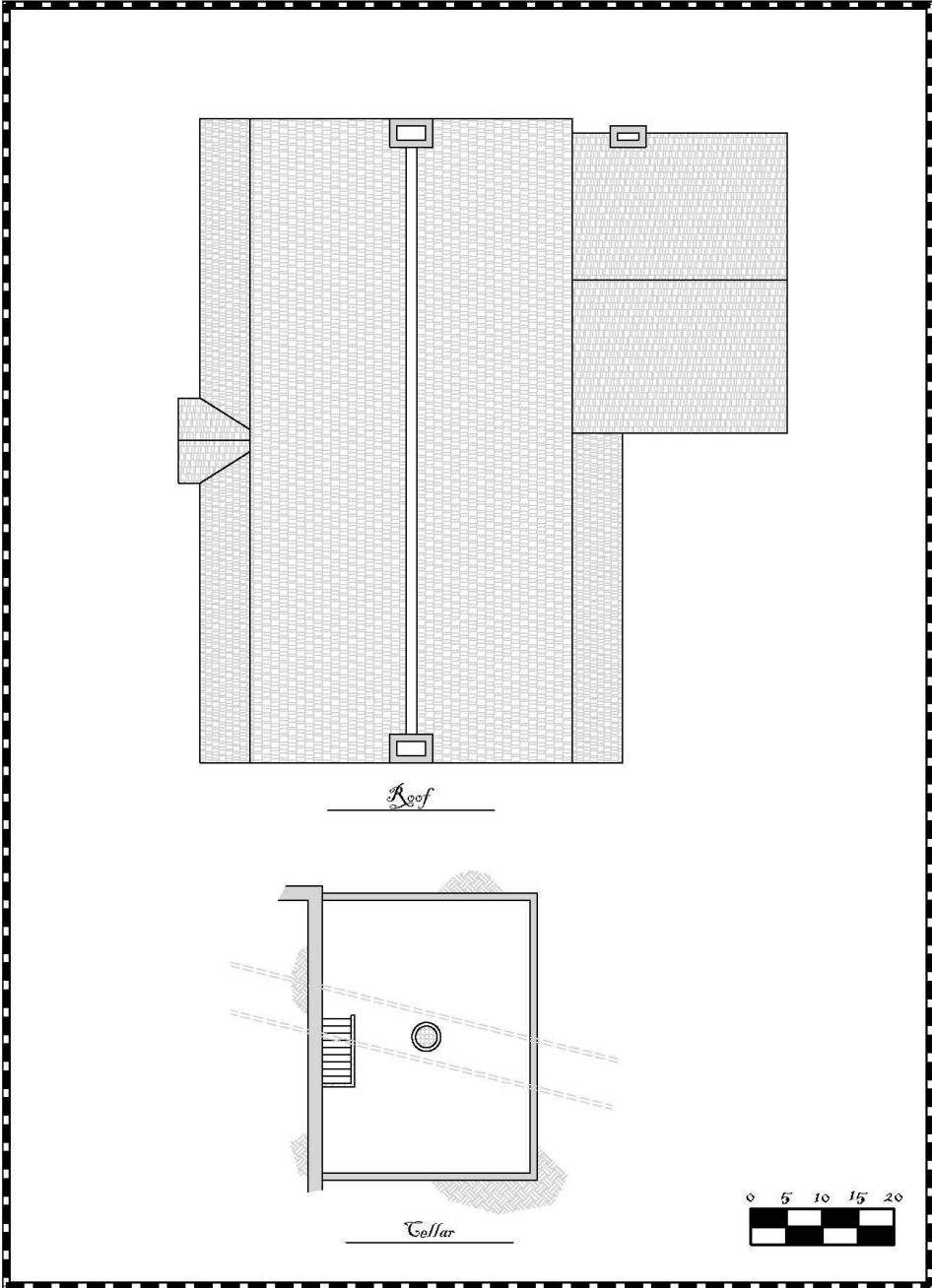
REDWATER (MAP 10)

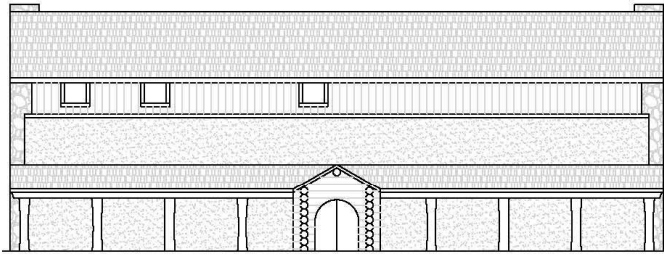


THE WHETSTONE (MAP 11)

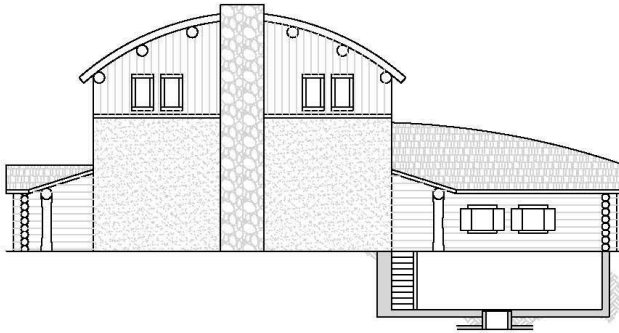




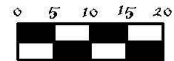




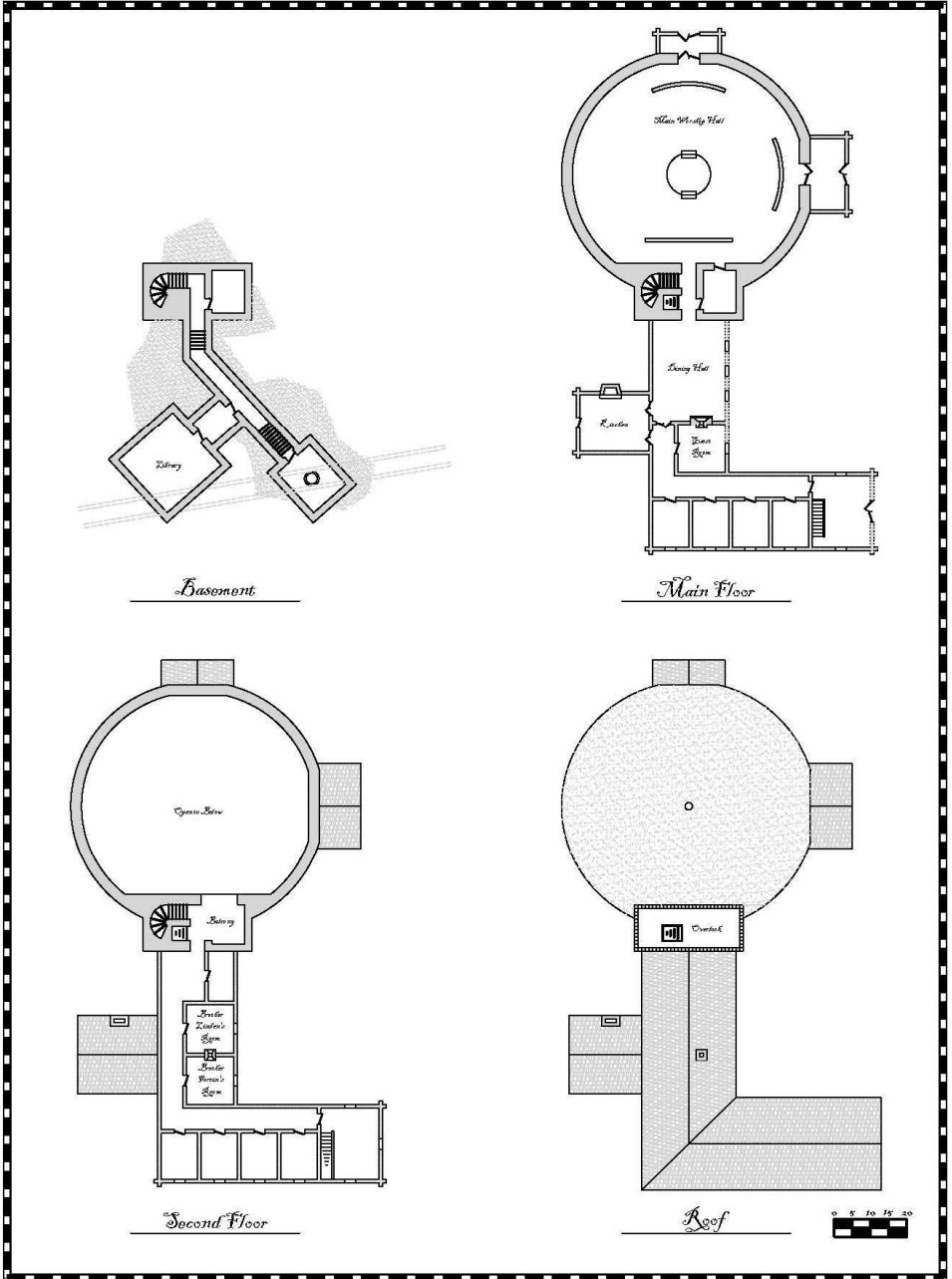
West Elevation

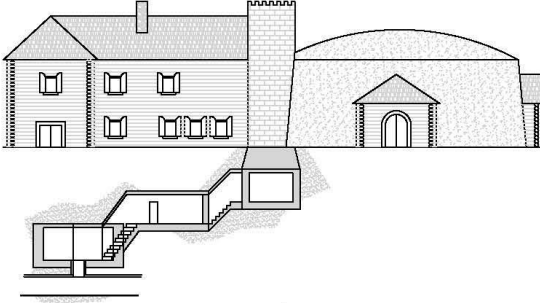


South Elevation

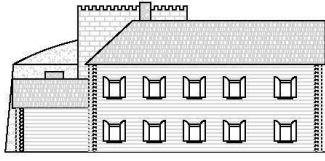


THE TEMPLE OF REDWATER (MAP 12)

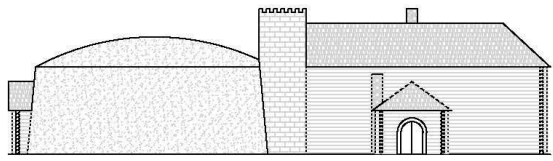




West Elevation



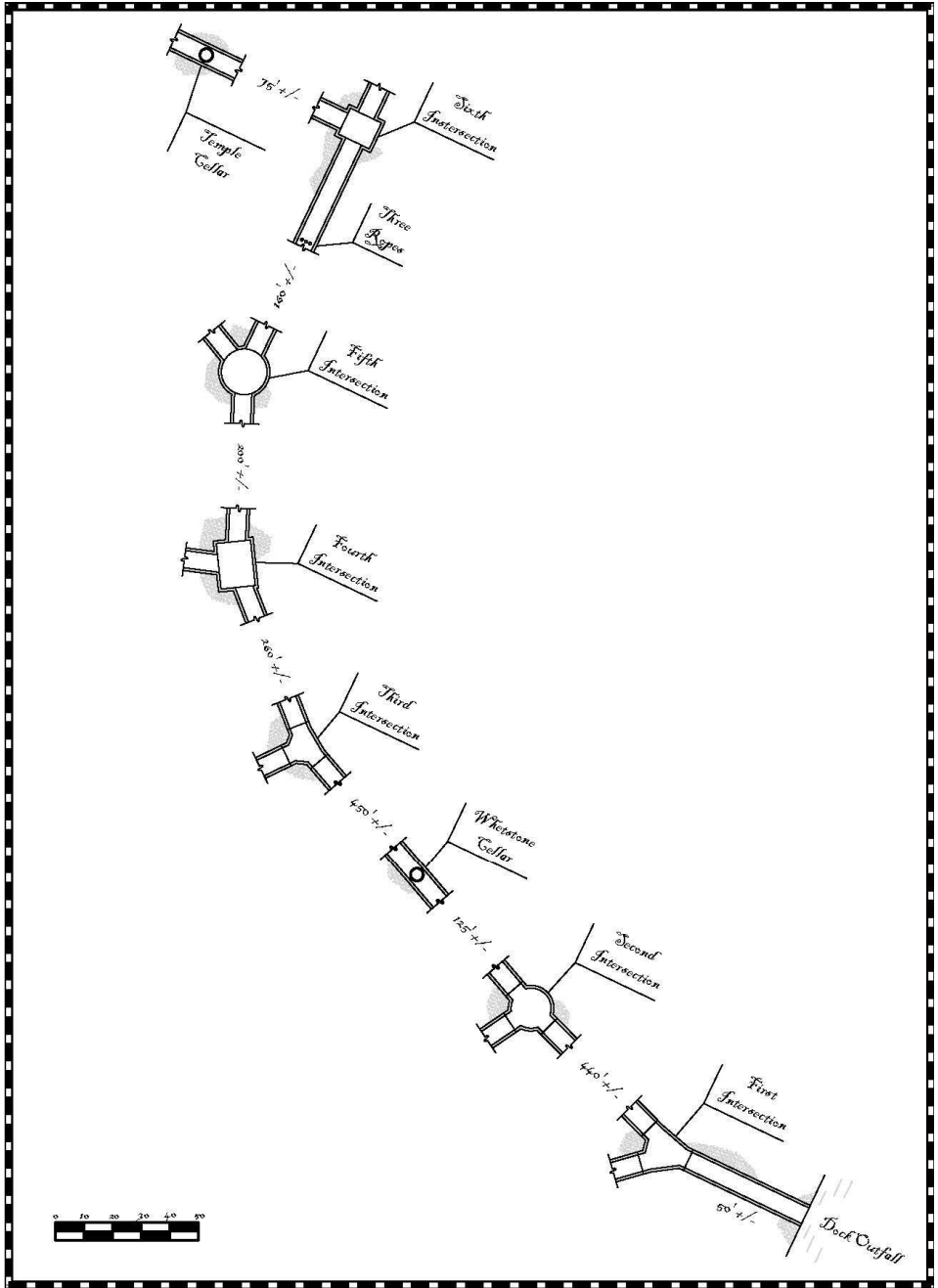
South Elevation



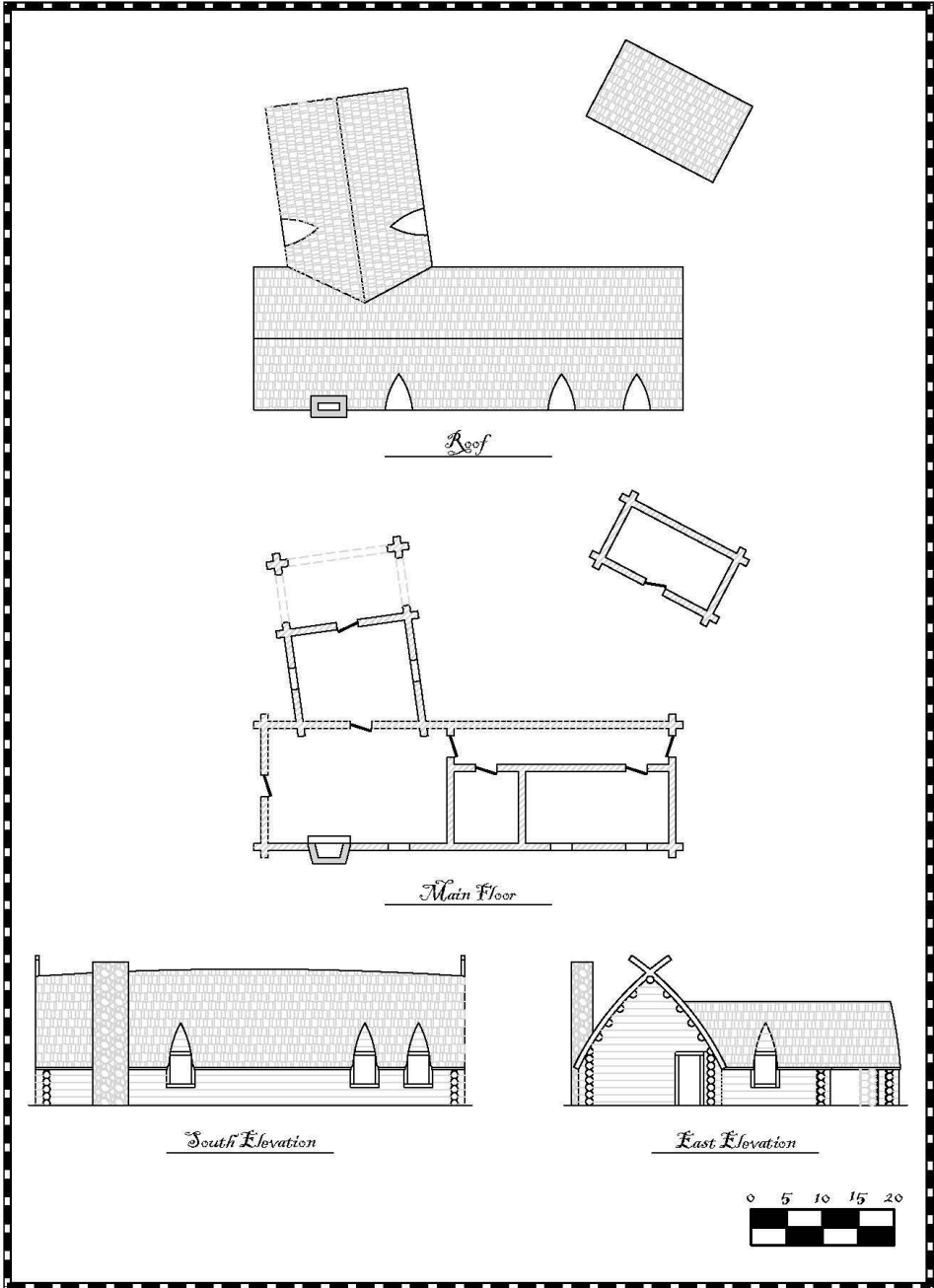
East Elevation



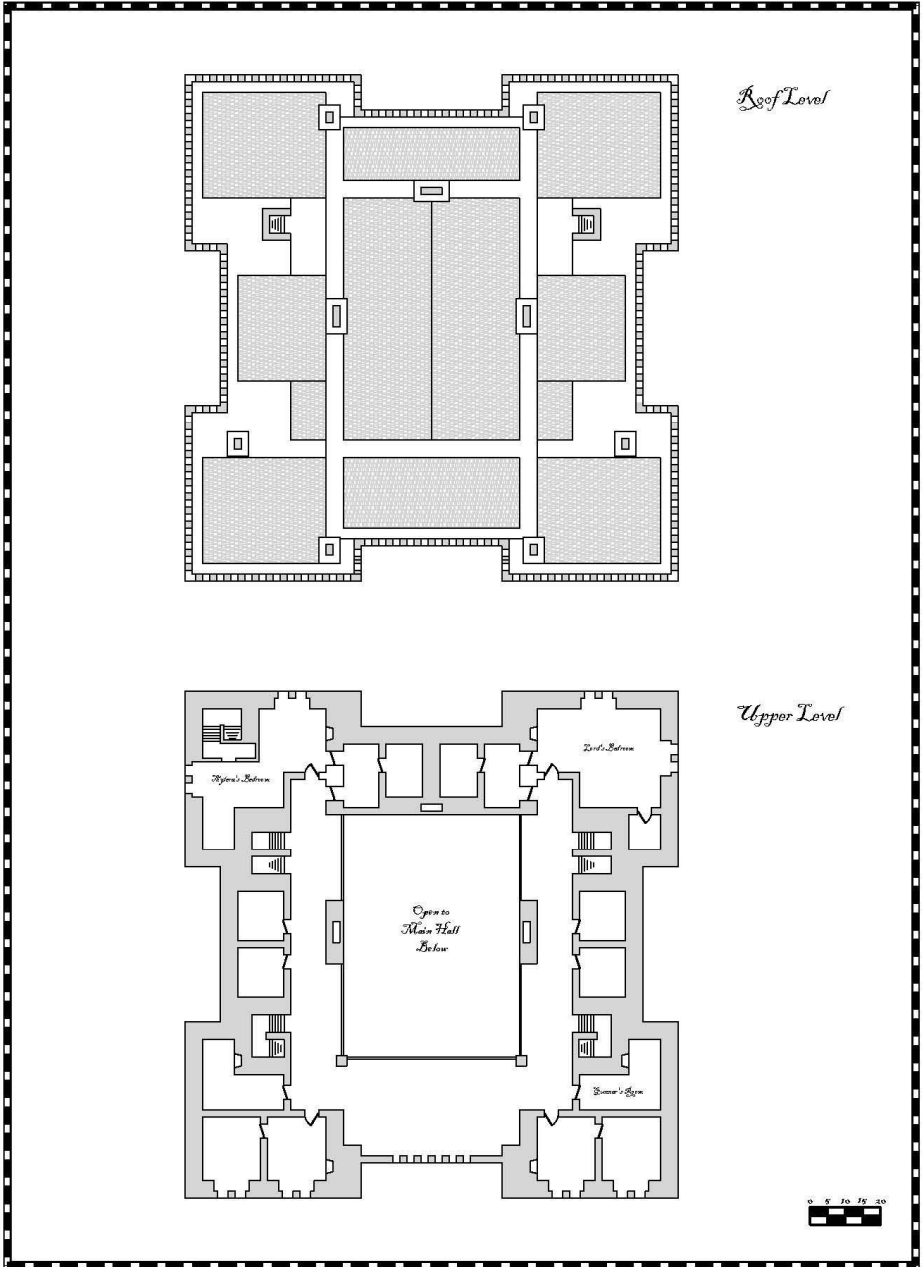
THE SEWERS (MAP 13)

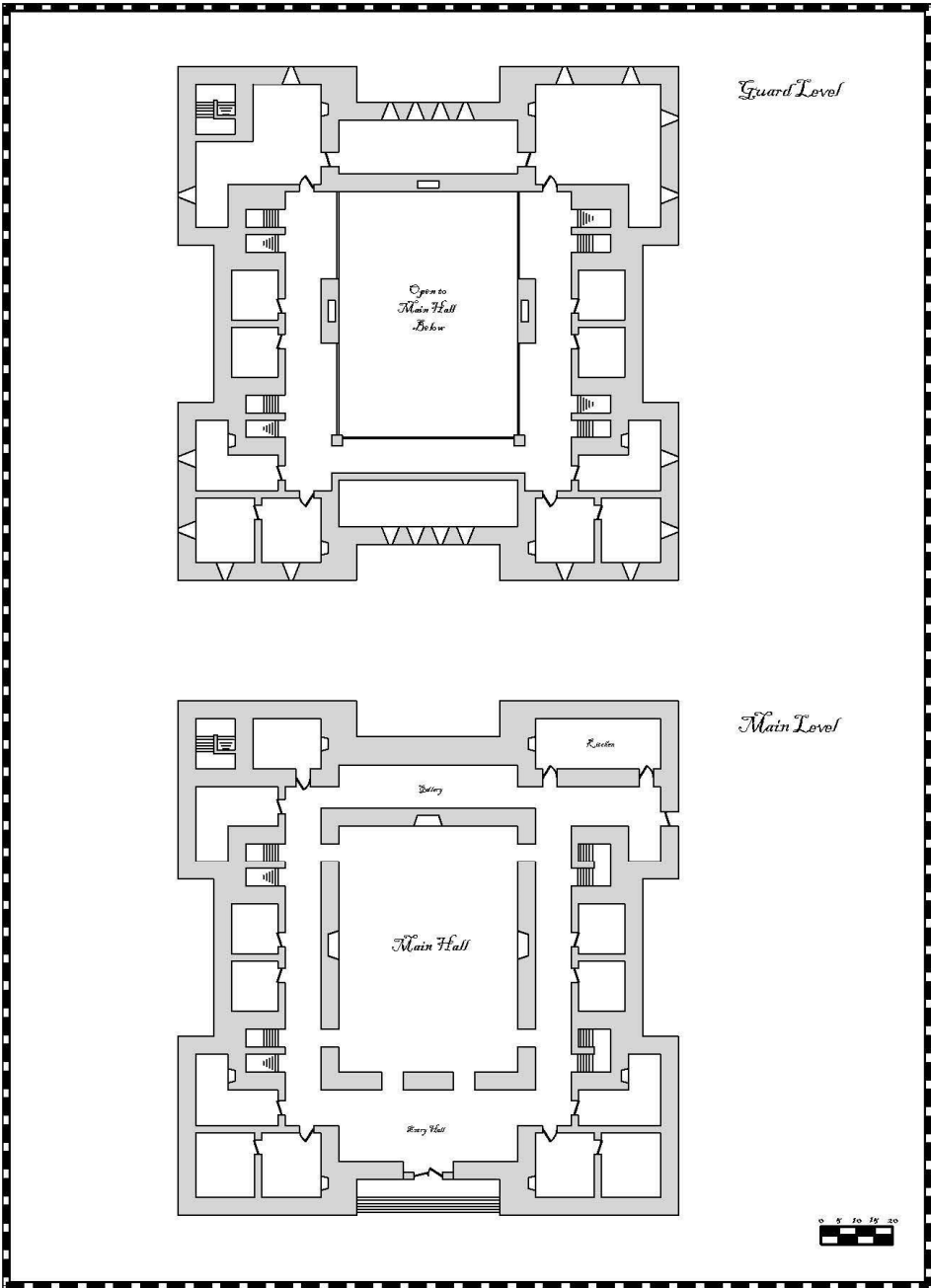


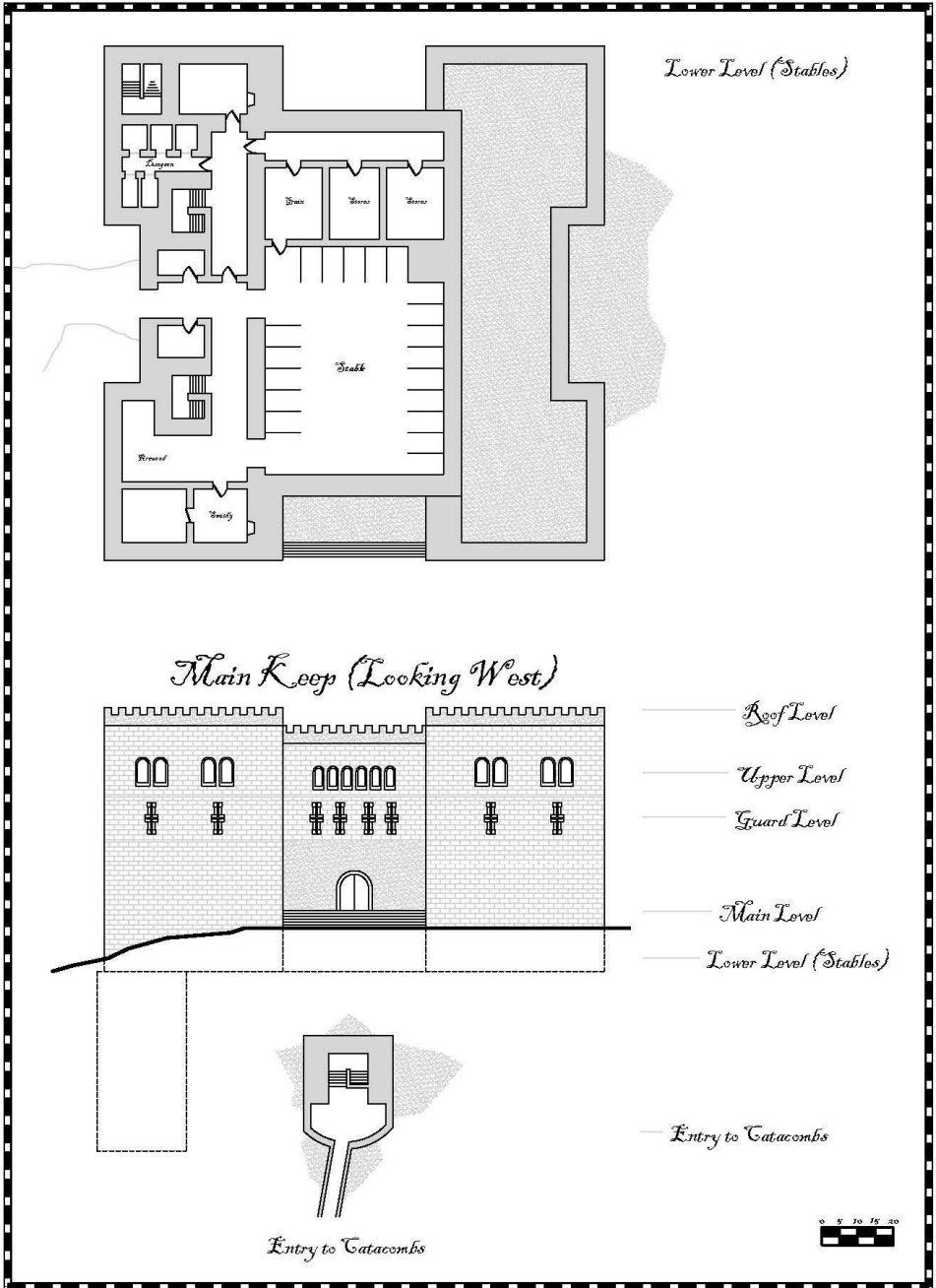
ARDEN AND ORPHEA'S HOUSE (MAP 14)



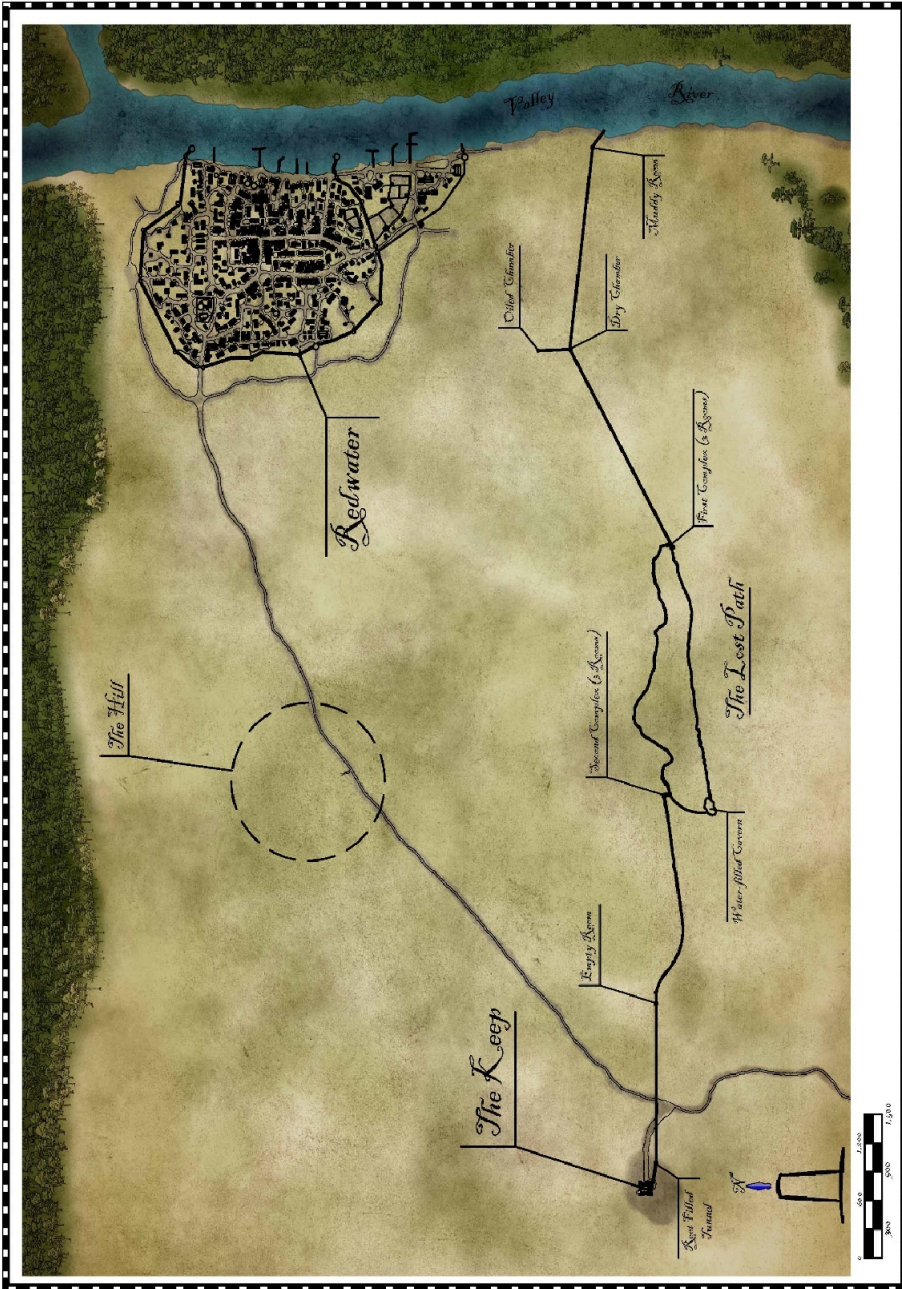
THE KEEP (MAP 15)

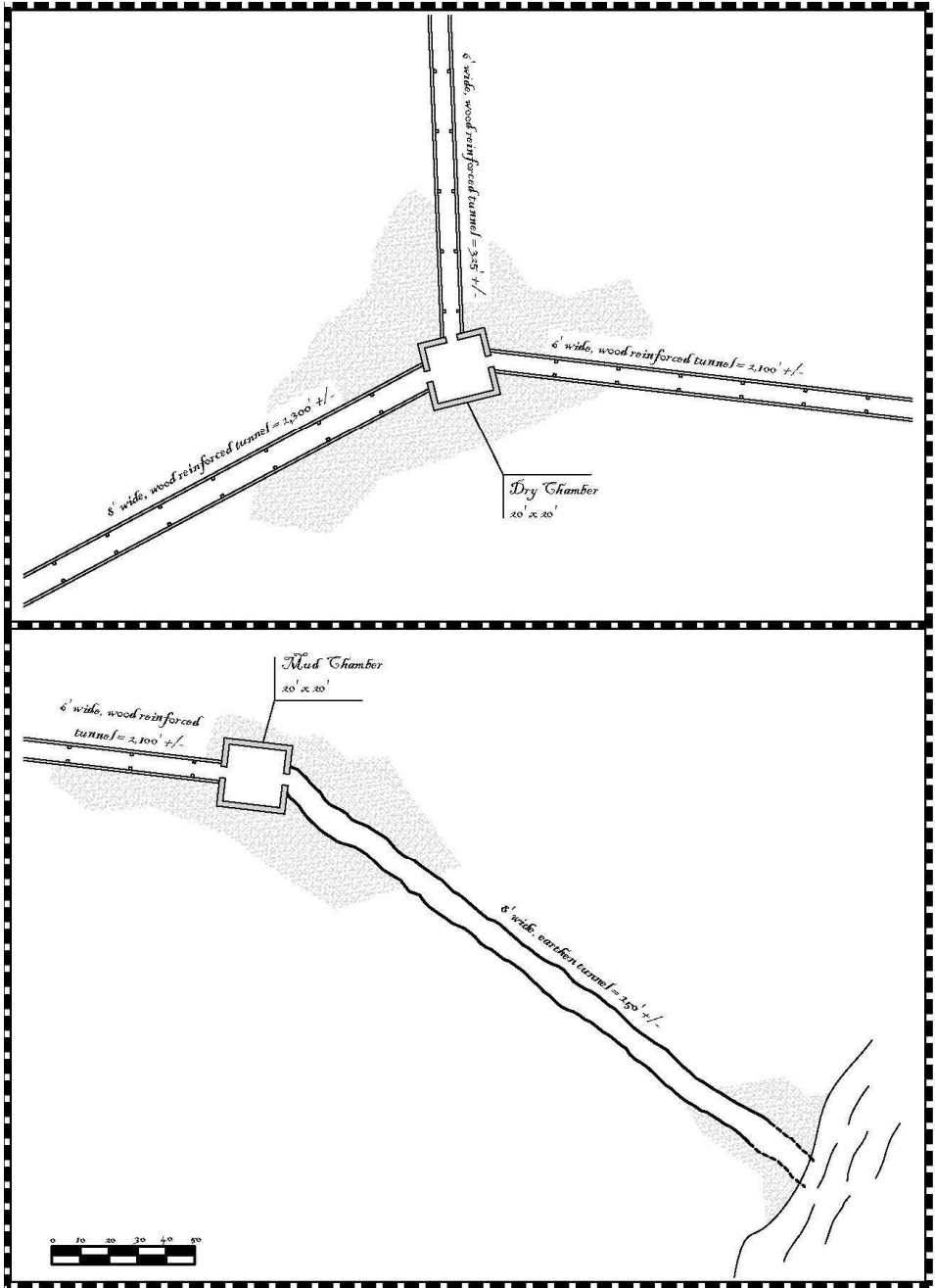


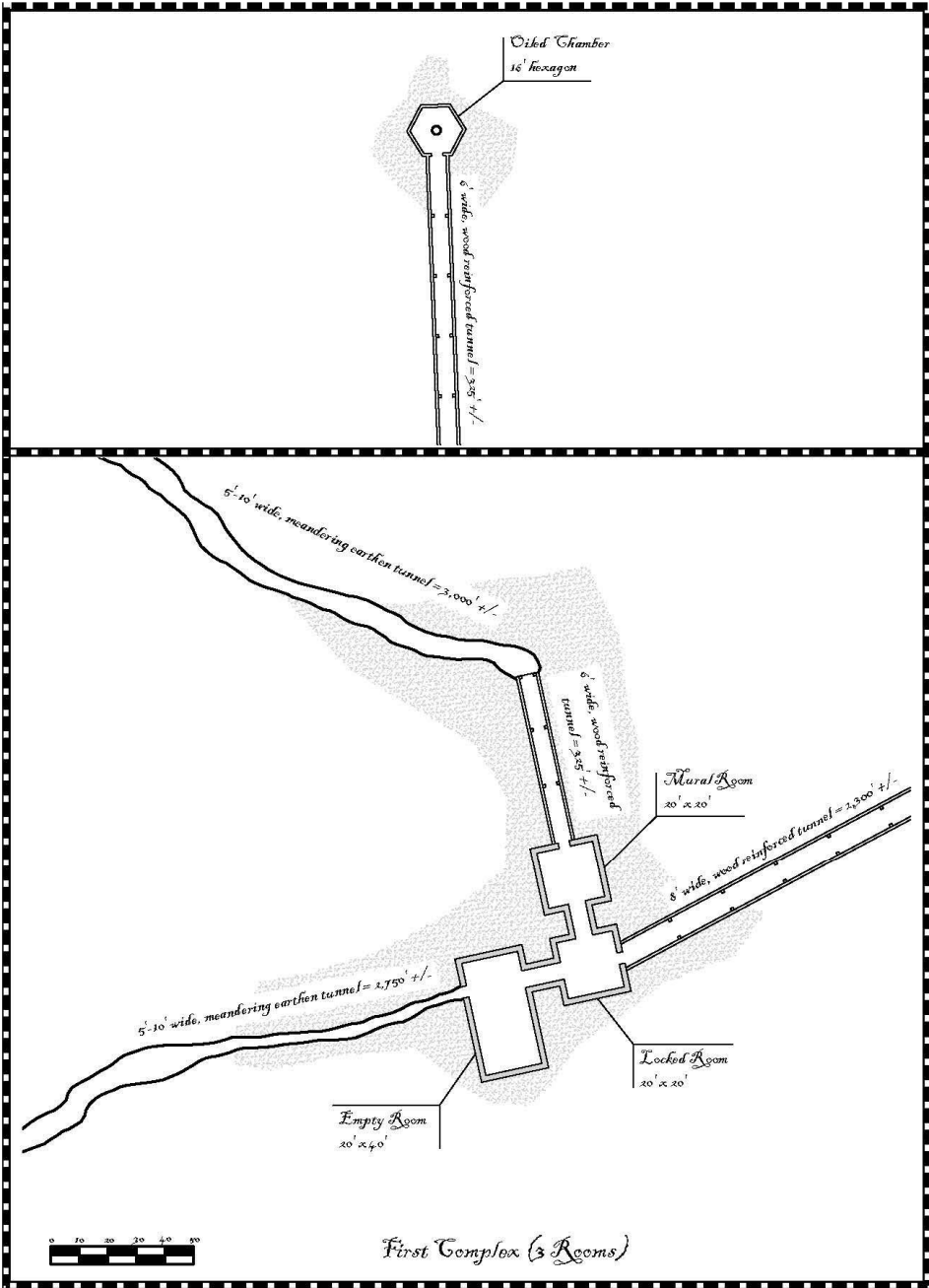


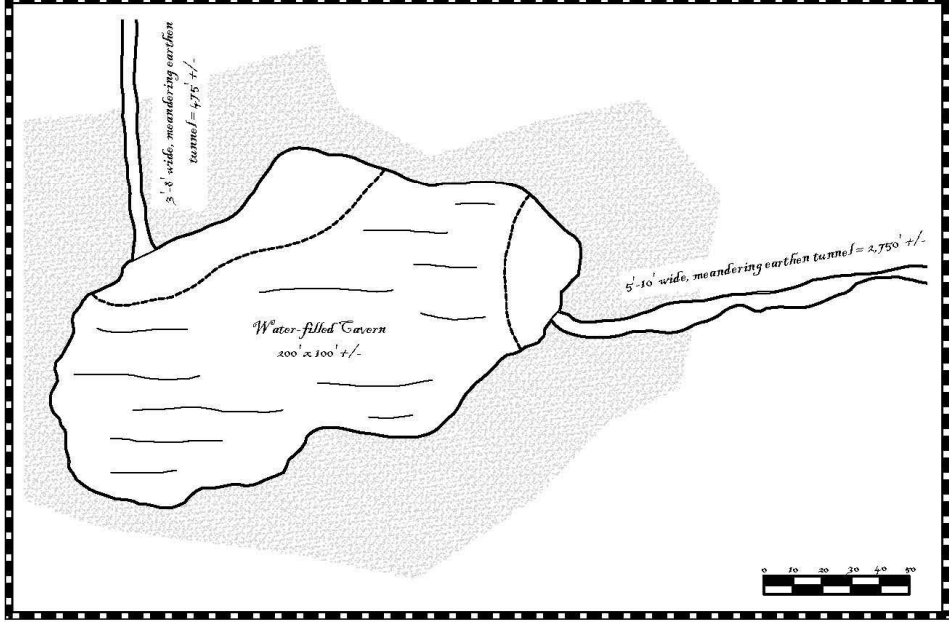
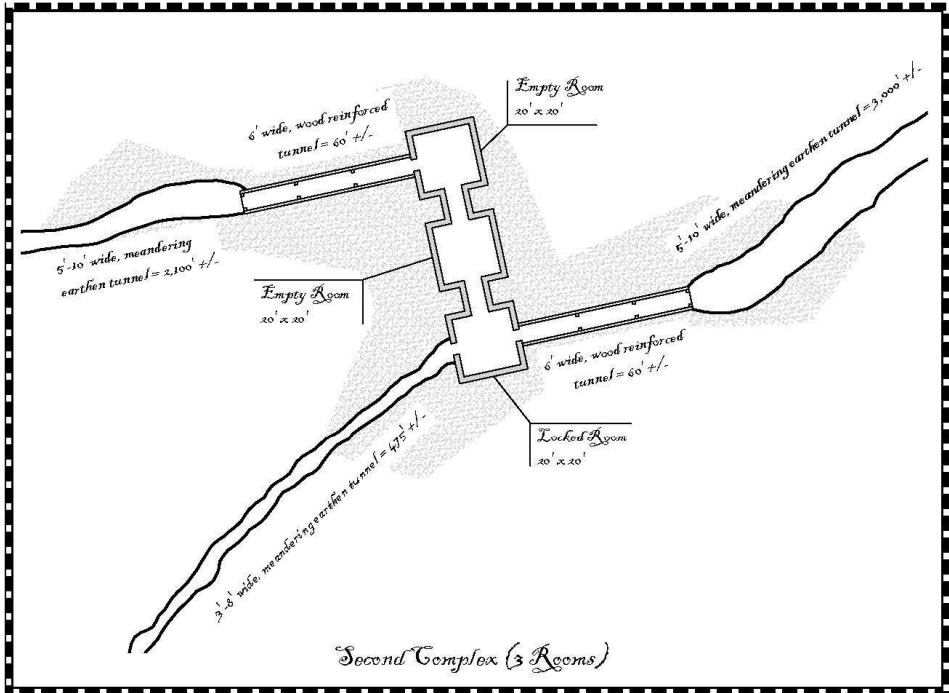


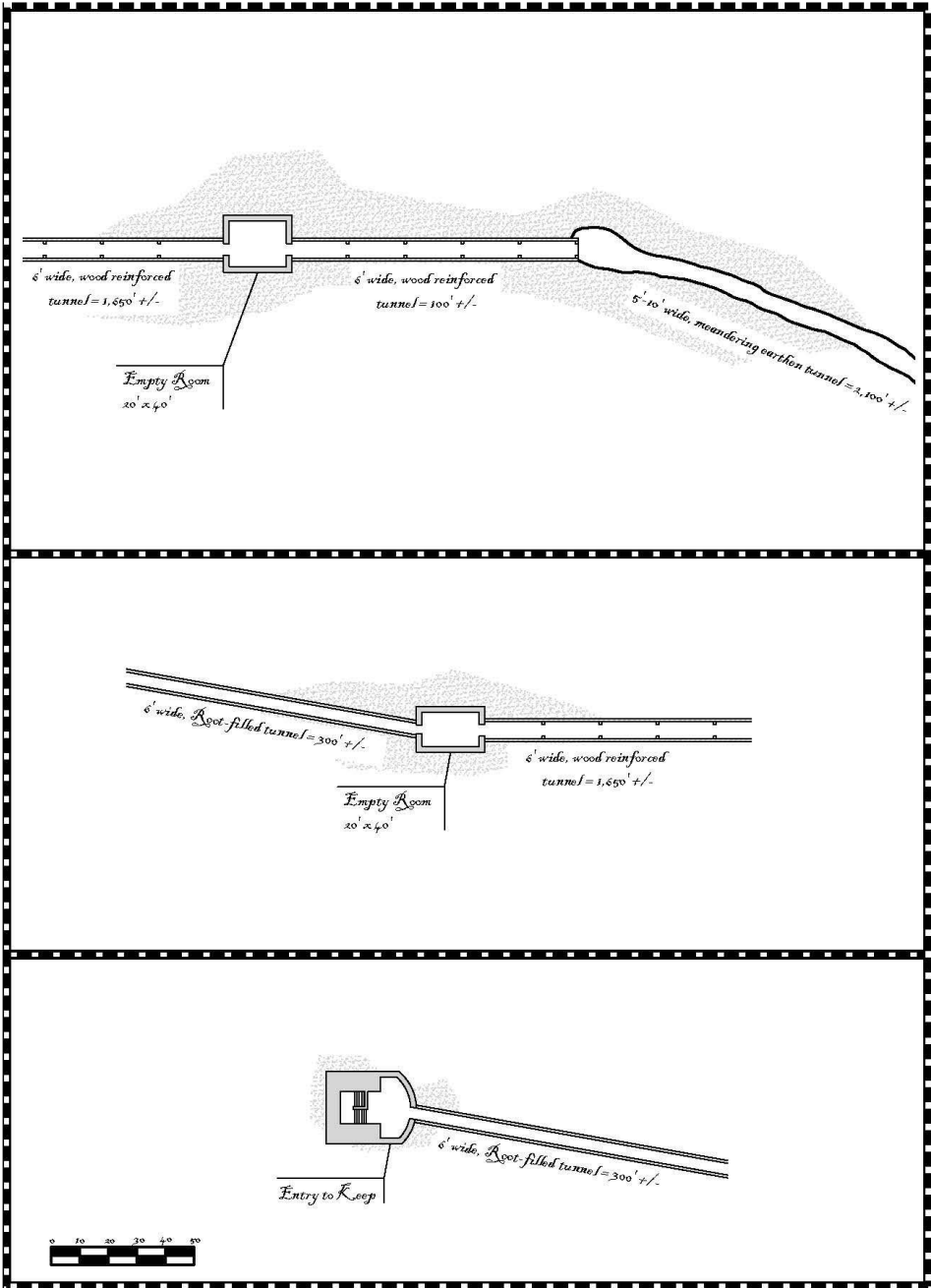
THE LOST PATH (MAP 16)











REFERENCES

“Everything on the internet is true.” – George Washington

On the Athiarp.com website, we have placed a collection of support documents for your use. Background, editable documents, opponents, maps, and the example journals are included at the following address:

<WEB ADDRESS HERE>

Here is the list of files:

1. Player Handouts
 - Setting for the Players
 - Background for the Players (find/replace version)
 - The Dream of Tears (find/replace version)
 - Forgotten Memories (find/replace version)
2. GM References
 - Opponent and NPC Cards
 - Maps – Full Size
 - Example One, Lundybærr’s Journal: The Three Sisters
 - Example Two, Vé’s Letters Home: Children of Redwater

Furthermore, should you wish to ask any questions or share any thoughts, we can be reached at the following address:

<WEB ADDRESS HERE>

AFTERWARD

“The human heart demands an adventure.” – Jordan Peterson

As I sit here reading this completed document, I am filled with many feelings. Part of me is convinced this is little more than a big, self-indulgent mess. Another part of me is proud of the accomplishment. Mostly I am thankful. As most things Athia, I am sure that if I had known the amount of effort required at the beginning, I may have elected not to try. Now at the end, I am so pleased I did. Telling this story with my friends has been one of my more rewarding experiences.

It is my sincere hope that you can take your friends on your own version of this adventure and that you derive some measure of the enjoyment that it continues to provide for us.

Thank you so much for trying.

Jeff

APPENDIX I

Children of Redwater

The Time Before

Three years. The Regent promised Arden he would keep his children in Westflood under his protection for three years.

It was in Westflood that Vé would begin his studies at the Abbey of the Lake. The experiences of his father's trial affected him deeply. Eventually, he would hear the voice of Erebos, forever changing his outlook on what happened, and what was to come.

Arn would first be made a tracker for the City Guard. He would rise quickly through the ranks and would eventually be considered for promotion to the White Guard- the Regent's personal bodyguards. He would decline the assignment to return home with his siblings.

Loralei would be a ward of the Regent, she would only cross paths with Arn and Eckart a time or two, but she saw Vé often at the Abbey. Her youth kept her from direct service, but she was trained and educated among the Regent's own family. She would eventually be allowed to roam the city alone but never for more than a few hours at a time.

Eckart was assigned to a local merchant, a wealthy one, by the name of Liutulf. He would come to lead his personal guards. He even accompanied him once when he travelled south to Silarum over a year ago. Although his reputation was unquestionable in service to Master Liutulf, when the Regent found out about the trip, Eckart was forbidden from leaving the City. Master Liutulf then released him from service. Eckart has been on his own since then.

Vili's whereabouts have been unknown the rest of the children. He contacted Vé just days before they were to leave Westflood.

At the end of the three years promised to the Regent, the siblings ended their service. But it worked out that he was able to keep them a bit longer. The Regent refused to allow them to leave until winter's end. When Auctus finally came and the snows ended, Orphea and Arden's children would no longer stay.

On the 16th Day of the First Cycle of Auctus, in the 61st Year of the Triad, they would start their journey home.

Vé's Letters Home

Auctus 16.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I have no idea when I'll be able to post this letter, but it gives me some small measure of comfort to at least write it. I already miss the quiet of the abbey, and our talks. Just now, shivering under a foul-smelling blanket, I cannot express just how much I miss what has been my home for the last three years. But you were right. I have to go back to my first home. There is too much unfinished business.

Oh! You'll never believe who showed up at the gates: Vili. It turns out he's been in Silarum all this time. I have no idea what he's been up to, but he seems to have prospered. His clothing is fine (even bordering on dandy-ish, if truth be told) and he's become more confident and garrulous. It was great to see him, but something feels off. I worry that he's not being entirely genuine with us.

He brought with him a friend named Rishja: a tavern worker it seems. She's older than all of us and seems worldly and self-assured. Ekhart knows her in passing as well. Speaking of Ekhart, how he has changed. Taller, as are all of us, but he looks thin and a bit sickly. I feel badly that I didn't make more concerted efforts to see him over the last three years, but I cannot bear that guilt alone. I was not hard to find.

I think Lorelei is less ready to forgive our errant brothers for not keeping in touch. We shall see. She and Arn are much as they were when you met them, though Lorelei looks more and more like Mother every time I see her. Arn's manner reminds me of father, as well.

Which brings me back inevitably to thoughts of Justice. On the first leg of our journey, we spoke at length about what each of us expects and desires when we reach Redwater. I think we all crave some manner of justice or revenge, though the precise manner of seeking it varies widely among us. The scars of what happened to our parents are apparent on us all, and the years have served only to stoke the fires of our anger.

All of mine were temporarily quenched in the icy brine of embarrassment and ... well, literal icy brine. When we reached the ford across the Salt Run, I steered our cart off the road and upended it. No real harm was done, and we soon repacked all our belongings. Rishja, who has more skill at tending animals than I, has taken over the driving. Much to my short-lived relief. When we took the cart across the river, a jolt from the waves tumbled me in. I wish I had taken your advice and spent more time practicing my swimming. I could blame the cold ... and Erebos' Mercy it was cold ... but the truth is I floundered. Ekhart had to grab a rope and come in after me. I do not doubt that I owe

him my life. Rishja got a fire going, and while Ekhart and I were just getting out of our wet clothes, Arn was thrown from his horse while crossing. He was never in as much danger as I, but from the cold. Now we three brothers shiver in our tent, and I feel as if I'll never be warm again.

An inauspicious start to our journey. I pray that the morrow goes more smoothly.

Auctus 17.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I hope you will forgive my poor penmanship, but I'm writing you this letter from the back of a dead man's horse. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

After our misadventures crossing the river, we sat down around the fire to discuss our plans. Though only after Vili and Rishja went for a private talk, and Lorelei disappeared around the same time. I fear there are already secrets in our midst, which saddens me. Forgive me, my thoughts are jumbled. It comes from fearing for my life.

How to describe our talk? There was too much ale drunk, and very little agreement. Ekhart believes that Henerick has Redwater on "lockdown" and subjugated to his evil will. Lorelei is worried the Lady Thylera will have turned the people against us, but even so she wants to present herself at the Keep, trusting to the protection of the Regent. Arn wants to make contact with local families first, to get the lay of the land. Rishja offered to enter the town before us. Vili worries that Henerick will just kill us all outright, and Ekhart agrees with him. I think we'll be welcomed warmly, for our parents' sake.

Hurmph. If it feels like this letter is a mishmash of conflicting opinions, then I'm accurately reflecting our conversation. The only conclusion we came to was that we need more information before we can make concrete plans. There is danger ahead of us. I think we all agree on that much.

Speaking of danger, we were ambushed in the night by guards from the Eclan Traders. Fortunately, Ekhart spotted our attackers and woke us all before it was too late. We made a good accounting of ourselves, killing six armed men with only minor wounds among us. I myself took two arrows but trust I will mend well. It's difficult to describe the skirmish. I've never been in a fight for my life before. There was that unpleasantness with those thugs, but they did not intend to kill me.

Things happened so fast. There was fire and shouting and running hither and yon. Lorelei turns out to be deadly with her crossbow. Vili stood stock still in the face of incoming arrows, aiming Mother's bow with icy calm. Ekhart was a whirling blur of action, ending with his spear stuck deep into a man's guts. And Arn. Arn was terrifying. He cleft a man in twain! Collarbone to hip. Right in half.

My own contribution was slight. I called upon Erebos and blinded our attackers, which I flatter myself helped somewhat. Though Vili does not believe I did even that. Infuriating! The only time I swung my axe was decapitating the corpses.

Forgive me, I fear I made a muddle of that recounting. We are all well and back on the road towards home. I'm sleepy, and my wounds ache, and the world seems more dangerous and antagonistic this morning than has since the trial, but we are all well.

As dawn broke, I sat on the lip of the canyon, and prayed, bidding the night and another piece of my childhood goodbye. I yearn for the solace of the temple, but deliberately, defiantly turn my face towards the rising sun. Whatever dangers the new day brings, we will face them as a family. And Erebos willing, we will master them.

Auctus 18.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

We're currently camped in a deserted farmhouse, our tent groaning under a thick layer of snow. I'm awake before the others, roused by the odor in here. However, much I may have complained about the cold in my cell back at the temple, it was certainly better than waking up to the smell of goat shit inside a tent. What on Athia does that animal eat?

So, yes, we have added a goat to our not-so-merry little band. Lorelei and Rishja traded the last of our ale for it from a friendly goatherd yesterday. Mostly, it seems, to deprive a slumbering (and no doubt hungover) Vili of his drink. The goat is named Bernard, and the stated purpose of eating her (yes her, don't ask) has quickly vanished under a flood of affection from Rishja. I suspect she will be with us all the way to Redwater.

Beyond Bernard eating part of Vili's trousers, there is little to report except what we talked about. Oh, how we talk. I grow frustrated with our incessant rehashing of past events. I yearn to learn something new; to have some form of action. But while we're on the road, there's little else that we can do, so we talk.

We discussed the Regent, who most seem to agree is a good and moral man, if not necessarily the smartest. He may have been outsmarted by Thylera and Henerick. There was some discussion of who we most want to see dead. While Ekhart and I are mostly motivated by a desire for the truth of what happened, Vili seems intent on Henerick's death, laws and consequences be damned. Lorelei wishes for Thylera's death. Arn wants to kill Fuhlgar. And I find myself lamenting the events that caused my carefree family to become so bloodthirsty.

It is to the mystery of those events that we return time and again. Why would the lord force father to draw his sword and demand to be made heir? Why would Mother invite Henerick into her bed? If not so that when put to a very narrow and specific question,

they would be forced to answer truthfully but in the most damning way possible. Vili says it's unlikely that the lord could have been controlled by an Air Mage. Was there blackmail? Threats against us children? Who was behind this confounding series of events? Who stood to gain? Henerick perhaps, but he was already heir.

My head spins and my teeth clench and I must force myself to calm down. Again, I gnaw on this bone. The gristle is long since gone, and I cannot get to the marrow of the issue. There is no profit in it, but I cannot stop myself.

One last thing. Ekhart asked me about contacting Mother's shade. I tried to be non-committal, but I suspect I was more revealing than I intended to be. You are my only confidant who knows how I've struggled with that issue. I want to speak with her, as much because I miss her, as to learn about her death. But every time I've tried Erebos has blocked my way. Either the time is not right, or it is simply not to be. I must trust in my God that there is a reason for my failures. It's all I can do.

The others waken. I will leave off here. I hope you are well. Erebos protect you.

Auctus 19.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I'm awake before the others again. The rhythms of the temple are difficult to put behind me. I relish these quiet moments. Erebos grant that the rest of the morning stays as calm and peaceful. I'd rather not have a repeat of yesterday.

After an uneventful night at the farmhouse, we were roused by the sound of our ox, Nalgene, bellowing because he'd fallen partway into the well. Both Lorelei and Rishja were slightly injured by his thrashing as they tried to help. I called upon Erebos to paralyze the beast and we were finally able to drag him out with the aid of the horses. An inauspicious start to the day, but fortunately, not a portent of further difficulties.

Except for the snow. Ugh. However eager we were to get home; I'm beginning to think we should have delayed longer. The entire morning was a slow-going slog through a foot and a half of snow. Only a bit of singing kept our spirits up. Lorelei's voice is every bit as beautiful as Mother's was.

At lunch Lorelei asked all of us brothers whether or not we had dated anyone. Vili and Ekhart were reticent and did not reveal much. But then, neither did I say anything about my brief and ultimately star-crossed dalliance with Solveig, nor the unpleasantness that followed. Arn still seems to be pining for his sweetheart from back home, Kari, I think her name is. But he hasn't corresponded with her, so who knows what will happen there.

The snow started again as we ate, and not long after we got moving again, we met up with a Cerrak Sentinel named Olin. He urged us to find a place to camp and wait out the storm and joined us for the evening. He shared wine and interesting news.

It seems that Henerick is getting married soon to a rich foreigner (from Luria, he thought). Many people will be headed to Redwater for the wedding. He also told us that there has been trouble with the men working the rafts. Extra wages have been sent in by Henerick's uncle, but even then, there have been defections. A would-be deserter was run down by armed men last year, and there are rumors of other extra-judicial killings.

It didn't take long before Olin recognized that we were all related, and from there it was a short and logical path to uncovering our identities. He had dealings with Father, and respected him, and expressed sympathy for our cause. But he also warned us to be careful. Once we pass Mudrim, we are beyond his purview, and it is best to assume the Sentinels there will be under Henerick's thumb.

Olin urged us to follow him to the pull road, as the salt road will likely be unpassable in places thanks to this Gods-cursed snow. On the morrow we will follow him to the East, with vague plans after that, perhaps to include hiring a boat. Beyond that I cannot say. It will be as Erebos wills, I suppose.

[Not in this note, but we ended with the sound of a mammoth trumpeting.]

Auctus 20.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Erebos preserve us. Our ill luck persists. Shortly after completing my last letter to you we were attacked by a mammoth. Olin had gone ahead to scout, and we heard the warning blast of his horn and the angry trumpeting of the mammoth at the same time. It was probably foolhardy, but we all rushed forward. By the time we were in sight, Olin had been thrown from his horse, and his leg was bending at a painfully unnatural angle. We readied our weapons, and Olin's horse, Axim, was crushed by the mammoth, and killed instantly.

Arn dismounted and ran right up to the mammoth, dealing severe damage, and only avoiding the same through deft use of his shield. Vili and Lorelei fired at the mammoth from a distance, while it took all the efforts of Rishja and Ekhart to keep Nalgene calm. I myself rushed to Olin's side to provide aid, pausing only to call upon Erebos' might to smite the great beast. It was the largest spell I've yet cast, and I must admit the feeling was exhilarating. (Though once again, Vili refuses to acknowledge my contribution.) Vili rushed in close to aid Arn and was struck heavily for his trouble. Then Arn smote the beast a mighty blow, disemboweling it, and just like that, it was over.

I provided what aid I could, but fortunately no one was seriously hurt. It turns out that Olin's painfully askew leg was wooden, and he'd already lost it years ago. We spent a few hours harvesting meat, fur and the tusks from the mammoth, before pushing on again. Vili harangued Arn for being too foolhardy and risking his life, and tempers were once again soothed by Lorelei's singing.

We made camp within sight of the river, with the promise of reaching Gold Bend on the morrow. We ate mammoth meat, which was tough and gamey, and not to my taste. Over the fire we talked more about our childhood and lamented that none of us ever had the opportunity to travel with Father when he went out of town. I remember that once Father went to Westflood for two whole months and Mother was very angry at him for it.

Vili continues to be ... well, Vili. He spent some minutes complaining of being cold and entreating others to build up the fire. When Rishja and Lorelei questioned his ability to do so himself, he grudgingly marched off and returned with exactly one stick. For once I was able to look past my annoyance and find some humor in his behavior. Would that that were more frequent.

It's morning now and Lorelei is giving Rishja an archery lesson, and I'm jotting down these lines to you. I'm looking forward to a warm bed in an inn tonight, though it will mean we'll be parting ways with Olin, and I've grown fond of the old curmudgeon.

Postscript: Just on the outskirts of town we ran into a quartet of scrawny young men. They hid on either side of the road and threw rocks at us. Before we could see how hungry and desperate, they must be we readied ourselves for violence. What an intimidating and warlike crew we must seem, even for ones so young, for the men ran off quickly. We left them some of the mammoth meat and went our way. I have the leisure to write more to you now because we've managed to throw the left wheel of the cart. I hope that this set-back doesn't keep me from the luxury of a hotel bed tonight. I'd make that a prayer, but I dare not bother Erebos with such trifles.

I hope you are well brother. I'll try to post my backlog of letters once I get into town. Whenever that is.

Auctus 21.1c

Gold Bend is a sad little town, made up mostly of ramshackle huts on stilts that are in such poor repair as to often seem abandoned. The one building of any significance is an Inn called the Book Box. So called, it seems, because it contains two books. Which in these parts is apparently a substantial library. The bunk room is filthy and smells worse than Brother Archibald's feet. And the fish stew that Olin talked up with such fervor is a lumpy, pasty, foul-tasting concoction that is only marginally better than Brother

Marcus's Secret Ingredient Stew. (I was always convinced that the secret ingredient was Brother Archibald's socks.)

All of this I have gleaned from a quick trip through Gold Bend just as the sun was setting, and from the testimony of my siblings. Ekhart and I stayed with the wagon all day while everyone else ventured into town in search of a replacement axle. I must say that I had a lovely day of reading, and sparse conversation, and well just quiet. It made me pine for the Abbey.

From what I heard there are two groups of bargemen here who find themselves without horses to pull their barges. One group overworked their animals, who died. The other had their horses commandeered by the Eclan Traders. Rishja sold our spare horses and a large amount of our mammoth meat to one of these groups. Which seems a judicious arrangement. We'll have more need of money than spare horses, I think. In the morning, we're hoping to board a barge for the trip up-river to Redwater, or at least as far as Mud Rim.

What else? Rishja apparently has a friend here (or at least a friend of a friend) because she seems to know someone wherever we go. And in case she was running short of friends, she befriended a young girl with a younger goat. Olin found us a new axle. He convinced two of the young men who threw rocks at us to provide one as recompense for their actions. Given the unsanitary condition of the "Inn", we're camping on a spit of land just outside of town.

Oh, one more thing. I haven't had occasion to call upon them yet, but I sense that Erebos has granted me new interventions of Divination. I am humbled by this sign of approval. However, much I am plagued by doubts, surely this indicates that at least some of my actions are pleasing to my god. I haven't yet mentioned this to anyone else. I want to be sure of my abilities before I trumpet them to the world. Erebos knows I don't want to give Villi any further reason to doubt my abilities. I'll reveal this new boon when the time is right.

I pray that you are well, and that Brother Marcus is not on kitchen rotation any time soon.

Auctus 22.1c

I am well pleased to leave the town -- though even that word feels too charitable -- of Gold Bend behind us. We are now making our way, slowly and laboriously, upriver. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Since I last wrote, we had to negotiate passage on one of the barges. The only one left after we sold our horses is called The Keg and is captained by a man named Rynar. After some negotiation we came to the agreement that we and our cargo could ride on the barge, while Nalgene pulls the barge and the empty cart

upriver. It might seem to amount to much the same thing as us proceeding up the pull road ourselves, but we have access to the knowledge and experience of Captain Rynar.

On the first day of travelling thus, Arn and Lorelei chose to ride their horses on the road. While I was engaged in prayer, Ekhart, Vili and Rishja took it into their minds to throw rocks and other debris at Arn and Lorelei. I don't know who initiated the idea, though I suspect Vili, but I was very disappointed in all three of them. Regardless, Arn and Lorelei understandably thought they were under attack. In the ensuing chaos, Ekhart, Vili and our goat, Bernard, all ended up in the water. Rishja jumped in to save Bernard. We had quite a time fishing everyone out and soothing lost tempers.

When I say there was chaos, I mean that in more ways than one. It turns out that Lorelei can cast arcane spells. It's a talent she'd been keeping hidden from all of us. When she was hit, she turned without thinking and cast a spell that caused Ekhart, Vili and Rishja to lash out at one another indiscriminately. While I'm inclined to feel that this will be a great asset to our cause, I think some others in the family are worried. I know that users of arcane magic are misunderstood and feared in some areas, but I myself believe that we are all children of the Triad. Regardless, I hope we keep this information amongst ourselves, and no one blurts it out at an inopportune time.

Last night I prayed for an omen from Erebos and lay awake scanning the stars for a sign. What came to me was that we would approach a large bend in the river, and thereafter would come Death. I have rarely sought omens and this one chilled me to the bone. This morning I shared the omen, slightly watered down so as not to overly excite my companions. After much discussion, and several alternate plans evaluated and discarded, I again asked for Erebos' guidance, and determined it would be best if we all approached the bend as one group.

We're now about an hour away from that bend, and I pray that I have misinterpreted this omen. That somehow we will avoid the death of one in our company. Or, failing that, that it will be my death that approaches. I must sign off now. I hope to be able to resume my letter soon. Whatever fate may befall us at the bend, I remain, now and forever

(When we arrive at the bend Olin is hanging from a tree, still alive, but barely so. Stopped there.)

Auctus 26.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

It is with a heavy heart that I write these lines. By the grace of Erebos, none of my family was killed, but we did indeed meet with Death at the bend in the river. There we found our friend Olin hanging by a noose from a tree. We thought at first his furtive

movements meant we had arrived in time to save his life, and Lorelei and Arn sprang into action to cut him down. Alas, he had already passed and his movement were the awakenings of the Sickness. While we fought to end that horrendous parody of life, more Sick waded out of the river. These were the crew of the other barge we met in Gold Bend. The bargemen all had large, unusual arrows sticking out of them. Some kind of ambush had clearly taken place.

Our own ambush was hard fought, and several of us were wounded. Once the battle was over, I called upon Erebos to magically heal my friends and family. It felt nice to be of some use, since I once again felt somewhat ineffectual during the battle itself.

We spent some time investigating, trying to understand what had happened. We found evidence that our erstwhile horses had been present, though no trace to where they had gone, nor any clue as to where the barge was. It's possible, though not entirely likely that it sunk in a deep part of the channel, and it certainly did not float downstream by us. The most likely thing is that whoever killed all these men took the horses and barge further upriver. We'll have to be on our guard.

We advanced further upstream before camping for the night. I apologize that this letter is short. My sorrow is great enough that I feel almost as if I haven't been fully present all day. I leave you now to go offer a prayer of thanksgiving to Erebos that my family is safe, and another for the safe passage of the souls of those who are not.

Auctus 27.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I need to keep better track of the date. These days on the barge are interminable, and I am rather amazed that this is only the ninth day of our journey. It feels as if it's taken much longer than that.

We awoke to the news that Ekhart had spotted Olin's wooden leg floating by in the night. This is confusing and may be evidence that the other barge is indeed upriver of us, but we could reach no consensus on why the leg would just now be floating past us. We also spotted some sections of the pull road where the stones had been disturbed, and some other signs of wild boars in the region.

Then began our long interminable day of river travel. To pass the time, Vili and I constructed a rudimentary chess set out of paper and other bits of flotsam. Bernard ate a bishop before Rishja tied her up, so we both played a bishop down.

The river is set in a broad valley, with a mile to the canyon wall. In the afternoon, I spotted a group of Ferox and their Haalu mounts on the Western rim of the canyon. They were too far away for any meaningful conversation, but Lorelei waved and they waved back. At this point we were attacked by a group of five wild boars.

I appreciate that Arn and Lorelei wish to ride on the pull road, but it has the effect of splitting us up when things go wrong. We find ourselves quite a distance apart and unable to immediately provide aid. Ekhart spent a good part of the encounter trying to close the distance in between firing his bow, while Vili and I were limited to missile weapons from the barge. Speaking of, I should have spent more time practicing with my sling. I managed to hit a boar a couple of times, but it felt as if I wasn't doing much damage. Though Vili did acknowledge one hit, and I'm almost ashamed at how good it felt to get some approval from him.

But enough of me. As I said, others bore the brunt of the fighting. Lorelei cast a few spells that somehow made the boars attack each other, and Arn as usual waded in with deadly effect. Lorelei's horse was killed, and somehow Vili managed to get butted in the rear by Bernard while loosing an arrow. Peth, our not so intrepid teamster, abandoned Nalgene and dove into the back of the cart, hiding his head under his arms and shaking like a leaf until it was all over.

In the end it could have been much worse. None of us were seriously injured, and it seems we provided entertaining sport for the Ferox. We butchered the pigs and took what meat we could. This in addition to the mammoth meat, which is starting to go bad, should bolster our rations somewhat.

Again, we moved upriver further until we found a good spot to camp. We had a quiet night around the campfire, and as soon as I finish this letter, I'm going to pray to Erebos to grant me better vision while I mount my watch.

I pray you are well.

Auctus 28.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Well, today's events more than make up for the boredom of the last three days. Mud Rim is a large town with an earthen palisade and a huge suspension bridge that crosses the canyon. There's a lively tavern called Trumbo's, an inn called the Stone Hearth where baths are available (a great relief to both Vili and Lorelei), a disused shrine to the Triad and a giant ramshackle trading store / pawnshop called Hob's.

A berthing fee for the barge had been pre-arranged, but Arn and I had to see to (and pay for) stabling the animals. Vili and Lorelei ran off to the inn to secure rooms and bathe. Ekhart went looking for a wheelwright to fix the cart, and Rishja went to Trumbo's.

The town was abuzz with wedding fever. Not only is Henerick's bride to be expected to come through any day now on a presumably sumptuous wedding barge, but there's a local wedding planned for tomorrow. The local horse trader is coming into town with a

new batch of horses to trade, and his son is marrying the daughter of one of the richest men in town. It promises to be quite a spectacle.

I'm looking forward to a bath tonight.

I hope you are well.

Auctus 29.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Our eventful day continued on the same course. Soon after Arn and I had settled our horses at the livery, a great herd of horses came thundering into town. The horse trader and his men (who seem to eschew shirts for some unknown reason) brought hundreds of horses across the bridge. We went down into town and met up with the rest of the family (and Rishja) at Trumbo's.

Ekhart was quite concerned with our being discovered by the Eclan Traders, who have an office in Mudrim. He wants us to trade away any saddle and tack that might be traceable to the horses we inherited from those ruffians who attacked us. This soon led us into a wider discussion, and a new plan. We're going to sell off a lot of our most cumbersome equipment and make sure we have enough horses for all of us. That way we can split off from the pull road a few days before reaching Redwater and enter town in smaller groups so as to decrease the chances of being identified immediately. We put together a list of things to do, things to sell and things to buy to prepare ourselves for this new plan.

While Ekhart and I went to Hob's to start trading, apparently Rishja and Lorelei befriended some of the horse trader's men. I wasn't there to witness it, but it seems Lorelei brought some unwanted attention to herself (at least the rest of us didn't want the attention) by engaging in a duet with the groom-to-be's brother. And she and Rishja were invited to attend the wedding. Oh, and Arn met the mayor of Mudrim. For a group ostensibly trying to keep a low profile, we're making a lot of new friends.

Eventually we all met up again in Hob's. Ekhart and I had traded in the mammoth tusks and acquired all of what we'll need for the rest of the journey. Rishja found a dress to wear to the wedding. So, a successful shopping trip, it seems.

We're all bedding down in the hotel for the night, except Rishja, who is off running one more errand of some sort, it seems. Tomorrow is the wedding, and hopefully we'll be able to finish our business and depart for Redwater. I rather long for a boring day on the river.

I hope you're well.

Auctus 30.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

After my last letter, unable to sleep, I went to visit the shrine to the Triad in town. There I met a travelling acolyte by the name of Brother Tash. He had, as have so many others, recognized us for who we are. He brought a message from Redwater that we still have friends there, though we are already being watched by those who wish us ill. He advised that we should not enter Redwater by road or river, but should first go to the Spire of the Spring where we will find either friends or a message. Some of my siblings were suspicious of Tash's motives, but I'm inclined to trust him.

But later that night we got a reminder that we are indeed in danger. Lorelei was attacked in bed by two would-be assassins. Fortunately, she awoke before they could strike and her spells and screams brought us all running. Except Vili. The ensuing melee was short, and sadly left us with no living attacker to interrogate. The resulting brouhaha brought the mayor, and she scolded us for not being more careful, while apologizing that this had happened in her town.

What else? We did more preparing for the rest of the trip. We sold the cart and cashed in the note we got for selling the horses. We went to inquire about buying new horses, and while we have arranged with some friendly horse traders to take care of that tomorrow, we weren't able to complete the transaction. The father of the bride gets first pick as part of the dowry; it seems. I also called on Erebos' grace to beautify the groom and most of our party. That had an outsize impact on most people's opinion of my abilities. Vili even drunkenly apologized for every doubting me. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Oh, and Rishja found Peth and recovered Lorelei's horse. It seems that Peth had been hired by Eclan Traders to spy on us but gave a false report because he felt bad about stealing our horse. She had him arrested by House Cerrak.

We attended the wedding, which was a lovely affair. There was much drinking and dancing afterwards, and I even took part in some of both. I enjoyed myself more than I thought I would. Ekhart spoke to the mayor again and arranged some kind of signal to send back down the river after we arrive in Redwater. Just before retiring for the evening, we caught sight of the Lurian princess's barge. It was pulled by a dozen horses and seemed plenty opulent. And I think I saw Lorelei kissing one of the horse traders. I'm keeping that bit of information from Arn, just in case he feels too protective. I expect nothing will come of it. Tomorrow we're going to buy horses and be back on our way. At least I hope so. This town has already brought enough excitement for me. It all makes me miss the quiet of the abbey.

I hope you're well.

Auctus 1.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Ah, family. I often wonder if Vili and I somehow split personality traits in the womb, because we approach situations from such different perspectives. Last night Vili wanted money to go bribe guards so that he could free Peth, or at least talk to him. I think Vili may have intended to kill Peth, though that was never stated outright. I of course refused to give him any money. Vili and Arn went off with the apparent intention of sneaking into the jail. I never got the full story, but they did not succeed. Instead, they spent some time talking to guards, and then went off to go drinking. Crisis averted from my perspective.

Somewhere in all this, Arn and Ekhart expressed concern that Lorelei might not know enough about sex to avoid getting pregnant if she continues to spend time with that horseman. E'Gil, I think his name is. I'm not entirely sure I understood my brothers' concerns exactly. The whole topic made Arn at least profoundly uncomfortable. After letting him twist in the wind for a bit, I volunteered to have "the talk" with Lorelei. Which, when the time came was decidedly anticlimactic. Lorelei is well-informed and quite worldly for her age. In fact, I think she was mostly annoyed with Arn and Ekhart that they would think so little of her. In the end it felt like a bonding moment for Lorelei and me, so I'm glad, in a back-handed sort of way, that it happened.

Ah, family.

The day ended with Lorelei asking me to lead the family in a prayer of Thanksgiving to Erebos. I was quite nervous, but believe I acquitted myself well enough. And I'm very glad that someone is expressing some interest in my faith. I must play the situation with a deft hand. I of course believe that faith and piety would improve their lives, but I must avoid being boorish or overbearing. We shall see.

The next morning tragedy struck the town. The Lurian princess, one Dionysia, took a great liking to the Moremere horse that T'Var gave to May as a wedding gift. Dionysia's father, Charon, attempted to buy the horse. Even watching from atop the mesa, we could see how arrogant and rude he was as he dropped bag after bag of silver at the bride's father's feet. Each side had a small group of armed retainers, and tempers ran high. Then some shoving, then suddenly T'Var was run through by a sword. E'Gil, and his elven friend, Esben, leapt off the top of the mesa onto the roofs of the buildings below. Ekhart and I followed. Yes, I know this was a foolhardy act, and I'm beyond lucky that I escaped with only a few scrapes and bruises. All I can say was that in the moment, I wanted to reach T'Var's side as quickly as possible, in the hopes that I could save his life. Alas, I was too late.

Ekhart punched E'Gil in an effort to prevent him from rushing to his own death. The skirmish between the horsemen and the Lurian guards was short and resulted in two more deaths amongst the horsemen. But soon enough calmer heads prevailed and both sides backed off. When the mayor and town guard arrived, all parties played down the conflict and I don't believe that anyone will be arrested, much less charged.

The sale of the horse went through, with likely over a thousand silver changing hands. And there was a strange look between May and one of her father's guards. What the import of it might be, I cannot say.

All told the event has left me feeling sad and deflated. Such senseless loss of life because of the strident whims of a spoiled princess. Pride and arrogance created a situation where violence was all but inevitable. It makes me want to despair. In such times, I must put my trust in Erebos and the basic goodness of human nature. I pray that they will prevail in our own tribulations to come.

I pray also that you are well,

Auctus 2.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

After the needless death of T'Var, the horsemen seemed to be interested in nothing but leaving town as soon as possible. Lorelei spent some time attempting to comfort E'Gil, and I like to believe her kindness brought him some succor. But their goodbyes were hurried, for his father would brook no delays. It was a mark of E'Gil's concern for Lorelei that in the midst of all the preparations he honored his promise to sell us the horses we need. Though somehow, he forgot to wait for me to arrive with the money. If we ever see them again, I'll have to make that right.

With the dust of the horse herd still hanging in the air, we decided to make our own departure as quickly as possible. The mayor had ordered the gates shut and that no one would be allowed to leave. Apparently the Lurians had run their horses to near death getting their monstrous barge up the river, and since the horsemen left behind only the bride's dowry, they demanded that no one be allowed to leave. Fortunately for us, Arn was able to speak with the mayor and convince her that we be allowed to leave. (During this conversation, he overheard that a prisoner, possibly Peth, escaped from the Cerrak Counting House.) There was a nervous moment as we went through the gates when Charon realized that some horses were leaving, but fortunately he was too late. We pressed on with all haste.

We camped for the night, and I rather missed the big yurt. Our bedrolls were adequate, but only just barely, and there's still sharp chill in the air.

Vili has taken to espousing his new-found faith in Erebos. I know I should be pleased, but he is so ostentatious about it, and I cannot help but doubt his sincerity. I cannot work out his motive for faking conversion, but something feels off. Ugh. How is it that we're twins and yet so different?

Today while going upriver, we started to see logs coming down. They were stripped of branches, so they'd obviously been deliberately felled. But they were sent down one by one, unlike the great barges that were created in our father's day. And the trees themselves were small. Then, after a few hours there came a raft. Again, the logs were small, and again unlike in Father's day, the raft had passengers. There were several woodsmen who seemed to be prisoners of six armed guards. All of us were concerned about being recognized and tried to look unobtrusive.

All except for Vili. He somehow got it into his head that if we attacked the guards the woodsmen would rise up and help us. So, without saying a word, he started firing arrows. Despite our shock and anger, we all sprang into action. Arn and Vili fired arrows, Lorelei and I used our magics to blind and paralyze the guards, and Ekhart was almost hit by a spear and fell into the river. We killed four of the guards without any injuries to ourselves, but by then the raft had been carried downriver beyond our reach.

So now, when those guards reach Mudrim, the jig will well and truly be up. We cannot outrun a messenger on a fast horse. Henerick already knows that we're coming, but with this act, we've declared open warfare. Any chance of a peaceful entry into Redwater is now gone, in my opinion.

I must admit that in my rage, I punched Vili. It's not something I'm proud of, but I also cannot say that I wouldn't do it again.

I pray that Erebos protects you, but more selfishly and more fervently, I pray that he protects my family.

Be well.,

Auctus 3.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Two days have passed since I last wrote. Few events have occurred, but my mind has been heavy.

I attempted to use clairvoyance to look in on Father. I saw nothing. I do not think that spell failed, but I do not know if this means that Father is alive or dead.

We, as a family, finally sat down and had it out. It turns out we were not all on the same page about how much danger we're walking into. I, for one was more on the end

of the continuum where I thought we might be able to come into Redwater and not be immediately murdered. I had clung to the idea that there would be sufficient repercussions for Henerick that he would feel somehow constrained.

Vili and Ekhart, on the other hand, had already considered us to be in a state of war. Vili in particular seems to consider anyone who wears Henerick's uniform to be an enemy. This is a point of some contention with Arn, who, understandably to my mind, feels some guards may not completely agree with the actions of their employer.

The discussion continued on for some hours, but in the end, I think we all settled that we should consider ourselves at war. No one representing Henerick's authority is to be trusted. We did extract a promise from all parties that we should not make unprovoked attacks on guards without at least two of us agreeing to do so. There is also a short list of people who can be attacked without provocation. Or, more accurately, who have already provoked us beyond our ability to stand.

I shifted my stance considerably after this conversation -- and apologized to Vili for striking him -- but I must say I'm still not completely comfortable with our bellicose footing. I worry that innocents may be harmed by our actions.

To wit, since we had the skirmish with the guards on the raft, I've felt an absence of Erebos' presence. I paralyzed a man who then fell into the river and drowned. Since then when I have prayed to Erebos I do not feel his favor in the same way I have in the past. Have I sinned? Have I strayed from the correct path? Am I walking into a situation where it will become ever harder for me to live my faith as Erebos demands of me? I fear that the answer to all these questions are yes, but I do not actually know.

We are now within sight of the Berian Woods. Whatever form it may take, a reckoning is coming. I pray to Erebos that we may find justice without losing our souls in the process.

I hope that you are well,

PS Vili cut his hair. Is that really how I look?

Auctus 4.2

Dear Brother Anselm:

There is evil in the Sickness, and evil done by those afflicted by it. But I fear that the evil that men do to each other will always exceed it. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We travelled for most of the day with nothing notable happening. We did find a dead horse, slain by arrows. It had no saddle, but I cannot say for certain whether it had a rider, or if so, what happened to the rider.

We also spent some time discussing what we would do once we reached Otz Flat, where the last bridge across the river is. The plan is to have Rishja stay with Rynar so that she can tend to Nalgene the rest of the way into Redwater. The rest of us will meet up with her in town at some point, or at least find a way to get a message to her.

Of course, all this was before we came to Otz Flat, and found the evidence of the evil that men do. The entire town was razed, burned to the ground, and half the bridge was collapsed. In the center of town was a large bonfire, still smoldering, that held several human remains, some of them children.

As we tried to absorb what we were seeing, and understand what had caused it, we were set upon by the Sick. There were four Sick, three of them children, and two Possessed, being Mr. Otz and his wife. Though I'd never seen Possessed before, the descriptions I read of them in Porfirio's Book of Fantastical Beasts made them unmistakable. Mr. Otz had part of his skull missing, yet a glowing eye somehow floated in the space left behind, while Mrs. Otz, missing both her legs, floated bodily above the ground.

The battle that followed was taxing. I feel I gave a good accounting of myself, as Wither caused the creatures no end of difficulty and even caused some damage. But as usual Arn dealt massive wounds. Lorelei threw fire and set our weapons alight, and Eckhart's spear was a blurred whirlwind of threat. Vili was pursued away from the town by one of the Sick, which he dispatched with his bow. But the fighting was hard, and few of us escaped damage. Especially when Mrs. Otz used magic to wound us all. I called upon Erebos' healing in combat for the first time ever and was gratified with the results.

In the end we were victorious, and Arn has added Mr. Otz's magical axe, Yellowtooth to his arsenal. We are all weary, though I was able to heal everyone's wounds. All of this has left me with little favor left, and I continue to feel an absence of approbation from our god. It has left me feeling lost and heartsick.

Contributing to that feeling is the realization that this whole massacre was likely precipitated by the upcoming wedding. The enormous barge that the Lurians are dragging upriver is too tall to have fit below the bridge at Otz Flat. The inevitable conclusion I must come to is that Henerick knocked down the bridge so that his wife-to-be could ride all the way into Redwater in comfort. And the villagers either rebelled at the idea or were slaughtered in cold blood for reasons that will forever elude me.

We are encamped in the one remaining structure that still stands on the east bank of the river. Tomorrow we must figure out how to get the horses across the river before we make our way to the Spire of the Spring. I pray that we can go a single day without encountering further evidence of evil, but I am not feeling hopeful.

I pray that you are well,

Auctus 5.2

Dear Brother Anselm:

I know it's only been a day, but for some reason it feels as if it's been quite some time since I last wrote to you. In truth, not much has occurred, though just my impulse to say that worries me. I do not wish to become so inured to violence that it becomes a matter of little note. But again, I am getting ahead of myself.

After passing the night in the ruins of Otz Flat, we parted ways with our intrepid barge captain, Rynar. The helper he picked up in Mudrim will help him the rest of the way in to Redwater. The fellow seems amiable enough, but for some reason his name refuses to stick in my mind. He's an unremarkable man, most notable for the striking red shirt he insists on wearing. Sadly, we were also forced to part with our horses, and our trusty ox Nalgene.

After a hearty breakfast we struck out to the east. The morning was uneventful if wearying. My feet have been pampered by days of being carried by a barge, a cart or a horse. We stopped at midday and built a fire and ate lunch.

Shortly after, as we continued to the east, we heard voices ahead of us. There was an argument, and the phrase "He said they were going to be right here." was distinctly audible. Out of an abundance of caution, we readied ourselves for violence. We sent Arn and Ekhart ahead, with the plan for them to draw any attackers back into an ambush. Our prudence was well-considered, for as soon as the strangers caught sight of my brothers they yelled out "There they are! Get them!" and attacked.

Our attackers were five men in Redwater livery, the leader of whom was known to us from our childhoods. I won't bore you with the details of every cut and thrust, but suffice to say that our plan worked well, and we quickly incapacitated two and killed three. The only thing worth noting is that Lorelei and I should probably coordinate our tactics some. We managed to both blind the same man simultaneously. I will admit to feeling some gratification that I was at least able to blind two others at the same time. I will try to remember to speak to her about it tonight.

On searching the guards, we found a note on the sergeant with a rudimentary map pointing to our current location with the legend "you will find them here". By this point, many people must know of our intention to return to Redwater. But moreover, at least one who wishes us ill knows that we are going to the Spire of the Spring. I pray that Brother Tash has not betrayed us. If his mysterious meeting at the Spire turns out to be a trap, we may be in serious trouble.

I believe that our prisoners will wake soon, and we have many questions for them. I will write more later.

May Erebos protect you.

Auctus 6.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I never thought to find myself interrogating prisoners, but that's what we did for most of this afternoon. After our fight with the guards from Redwater, we had custody of two of them. Once they woke, we learned that their names were Vilmar and Sgt Jonas. I had maintained my spell of blindness on them, and Lorelei cast a spell that made them feel chilled to the bone. I hope that our actions were not immoral. I can say that no lasting harm came to either of them while they were in our control. I know the same would not be true if the situations were reversed.

Sgt. Jonas was stubborn and refused to help us in any way, but Vilmar was much more forthcoming. In particular after Vili told the tale of our parents' betrayal from our perspective. It seems clear that the residents of Redwater, and the guards in particular, have been fed lies about what happened to our family. From what Vilmar said some, if not most, believe that we are in the wrong, and are returning intending to overthrow Henerick's rule. On the latter point at least, they may be correct.

The troop of guards that we bested in combat were sent by Fuhlgar. He said he was told by "the old man" where we would be. This "old man" could not be Brother Tash, as there is no way he could have travelled to Redwater ahead of us. It might be Brother Linden. I remain uncertain as to his allegiances. He seemed a good man while we were growing up, but he did participate in Father's trial, and the questioning of Mother's shade. I cannot say if he was a willing participant or no. But at this point speculation is likely bootless.

We also learned that there are at least sixty guards in Redwater, that the resumption of payments to the townsfolk is contingent on the dowry of the Lurian princess and it seems that the townsfolk are firmly under the boot of Henerick. Whether or not this has created a reservoir of unrest in the populace remains to be seen.

In the end, we freed our prisoners and spent what little remained of the afternoon getting away from the scene of the ambush before making camp. I do not doubt that Henerick will send more men with orders to murder us. The prospect of those encounters makes me heart-sick and weary. Must the path towards Justice always be paved with blood? Is there not a better way? I fervently pray that we may find it. Be well, Brother

Auctus 7.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Well, now I've seen a giant. We'd heard a weird, low "ooh" sound in the night, and it grew stronger as we travelled through the day. It eventually was accompanied by the smell of smoke, as of wet leaves. By this point, we could also hear cries of "No, no, no. He will not come." We were cautious about approaching, so I asked Erebos for an omen, and he told me that proceeding would result in a good outcome. Thus emboldened, we proceeded.

In a clearing we found a female giant, and a badly injured man. Vili approached with a white flag, and Lorelei sang a lullaby in an attempt to calm the clearly distraught giantess. Our efforts were in vain, for she immediately attacked Lorelei with a huge club. Praise Erebos that she survived, but her entire left side looks like one huge bruise. Battle being joined, I called upon the power of Erebos to drain away half the giant's life, and Arn and Ekhart laid on such savage blows that she was quickly dispatched. Unsure if giants are affected by the Sickness, we decapitated the body to be safe. According to Rishja, the giantess was likely attempting to attract a mate.

The wounded man turned out to be a woodsman named Sten. His two children, Lars and Edvin (about four and five years old) were starving and approached the smell of smoke in hopes of finding some food or someone willing to share food. They had been living with a band of outcasts in the forests. He referred to them only as "Stina and her people". Apparently, they are a group of people from Redwater, Otz Flat, or those that have lived in the forest for years. They have a hidden stronghold with an entrance through a hollow tree. There they live what may be a mean existence, preferring it to living under Henerick's boot.

We fed Sten and his children and took them with us as we travelled for the rest of the day. We are now camped between two trees, to get as much shelter as we can from a pouring rain. It was a day of new experiences. I wonder what tomorrow will bring.

I pray that you are well, Brother.

(Not in this letter, but I pray to see auras, and around midnight, see three human figures coming from the west.)

APPENDIX II

The Three Sisters (The Palimpsest of this Book)

What follows is an accounting of the first time I journeyed with Ingrid and her sisters Eevi and Signy. As I look back it seems a lifetime ago- perhaps it has been. Much of this telling is what I myself witnessed and the rest I am certain is true, as it is from the accounts of my companions. Some was pieced together from the words of many that were there to see how this tale began, including the three sisters, Lord Arden, Brother Lathan, Agathe of Redwater, and myself. There is much to this tale that I did not see, and for this I am both saddened and thankful- for every triumph there was tragedy.

I ask that you, remember that my part in it was small enough. This is the story of the three sisters and their transition from youth to adulthood. It is also the tale of a family, done a terrible wrong and their journey to right it again. It is a story of this place, the valley, the river, the wood, the town, and we that lived there. It is a story of friendship, family, and love. Most of all, it is a story of faith. The will of the Triad is a mystery to most, but I am blessed to know that these sisters' lives were tied to it. I give thanks to Selene, Lady Moon, that this was not to be the last tale of the sisters to be told.

*Written by: Brother Lundybærr
Messus 24.c3, 65th year of the Triad
Abbey of the Lake, Westflood*

The Time Before

Three years. The Regent promised Arden he would keep his daughters in Westflood under his protection for three years.

It was in Westflood that I, Lundybærr, came to know Ingrid. In service to the Regent, I was attached to her unit in support. At first, simply a soldier in the City Guard, she would eventually rise to the status of one of the White Guard- the Regent's personal guards. I was fortunate enough to follow her through each of her stops along the way.

Signy too worked for the Regent, our paths would only cross a time or two. Her youth kept her from direct service, but she was trained among the Regent's own family.

Eevi was assigned to a local merchant, a wealthy one, by the name of Liutulf. She would come to lead his personal guards. Her reputation was unquestionable in her service to him.

At the end of the three years promised to the Regent, the sisters ended their service. But it worked out that he was able to keep them a bit longer. The Regent refused to allow

the sisters to leave until winter's end. When Auctus finally came, the sisters would no longer stay.

I too was ready to see more of the world than the kitchens and tents of his service. I was released at Ingrid's request, and it was my intent to follow her to see how her family's story would end. And along the way, perhaps I would find my place in Athia

The Beginning

From here forward, this account is my own. I attempted to make entries in my log each day, I was not always successful. I think first, it is important to say that we did try to be prepared for what lay ahead

Auctus 16.1c

I was thankful that Mr. Skjoll was willing to part with Magnus. The ox might have been a stubborn ass, but his strength could not be matched. For a while I was beginning to wonder if we were going to have a cart with no means to move it. With the last of the supply accounted for, I believed we were ready to head out. I had the keen suspicion that when Ingrid said, "first light", she did not mean at the rising of Illios.

Having seen the three sisters, the previous night as they went over their plans, I could not help but wonder how much of their discussion was fueled by emotion, and how much by Tharbin's brew.

I wondered what it was I had signed myself up for. Though Ingrid had recounted the tale of her family to me several times now, hearing the additions from her sisters made me affirm there was far more to the story than I may have initially believed.

The sky was beginning to lighten. I would go hook up Magnus to be ready. I was certain the sisters would be arriving soon.

Triad watch over us-

Auctus 17.1c

Something happened. Perhaps I should rephrase- Yesterday we had an auspicious start to our journey. Setting out for Sil's Farm, our travels were intersected by a river void of bridge. Making an attempt to ford the river put all three of my companions into its icy clutches. When first Eevi fell headlong into the water, Signy was quick to chastise her. But, when she herself attempted the crossing, her horse reared, sending her into the deepest part of the water. She was quickly swept downstream. Ingrid spurred her steed into the icy water and leapt into the stream in an attempt to rescue Signy. As both she and I struggled after Signy, Ingrid would reach her first. By now, Eevi had not only reached the far shore, she had regained control of her horse.

Perhaps by providence we each arrived across the river. Sadly, this wasn't to be the end of our plight. A volley of arrows struck the cart and nearby ground. Above us, atop the ruins of the old bridge abutment, three assailants were nocking another flight. While I attempted to find cover for Signy, the other sisters thwarted the ambush. In the aftermath, the source of the attack was clear. None other than Toreas, Henerick's uncle himself was behind it. Our attackers were found to wear the garb of his personal guard. Unfortunately, one of them did escape on a horse, fast to the west. It was difficult for Ingrid not to pursue, but our situation was near dire. All three of them were wet and dangerously cold. Signy especially. Her face was frighteningly blue when I covered her near the fire, and I feared the worst.

The morning brought a real surprise when she, near frozen the night before, awoke no worse for wear and with barely more than prayers to account for it.

Triad be praised!

Auctus 18.1c

We awoke to a frosty spring morning. After breaking camp, the sisters spotted more tracks of riders, spies, or whomever they might have been. We had to move on, and in doing so, soon ran into a shepherd. He seemed a decent fellow, calling himself Gil. He had lost 2 goats in the night, and he believed it was not the failing of his faithful hound. He inquired as to our destination, which I was hesitant to give. When I did share that we were bound for Sill's Farm, he seemed to know of it, at least. The sisters made promises to avenge his losses should they come across the thieves. We passed on as the winds picked up.

We arrived at Sill's Farm late in the day. Surely, we would have missed it, were not all four of us looking for the landmarks we were given by Gil. I began setting camp in one of the old foundations as the sisters explored the ruined farmstead. They reported the well dry and winds worsening. We bed down at the dry farm, hoping for a blessing at the next rise of Illios.

The morning brought new challenges indeed. Magnus had fallen in the well, putting all of us in a panic. Thankfully with assistance of the horses, we were able to free the great ox from the old well. In doing so, Ingrid discovered the well was indeed not dry. It was capped with a thick layer of ice, but not so thick to prevent her from breaking away enough to replenish our supply. I realize that Hargan is still four days distant. Weather is blowing in- snow and fog. And now, Vali has run off.

Triad help us.

Auctus 19.1c

It was a man on a horse. Admittedly, I wasn't sure this was a good sign. Having already run across a group intent on doing us harm, my sincere hope was this figure was not the first of who knows how many. It was the sound of his horn that told me all what I needed to know. A baggot horn has but one home, and to have been met by a Sentinel of House Cerrak was very welcome on this, such a snowy eve. After our brief introductions we welcomed him into camp. Under the warmth of the tent, he introduced himself as Olin, his horse, Axim.

Olin brings news and warning. With the damp of the snow, the road would soon turn to an impassible quagmire and Olin's experience in this country suggests we would be better served heading east towards Gold Bend. Perhaps passage on the great Valley River will be available, or at least the firm stone of the Pull Road.

Olin told us of Lord Henerick's intent on being married on the night of the full moon, less than 30 days hence. It was impossible not to notice the flicker of ideas in the eyes of my companions. I can only imagine what notions they are cultivating. We bedded down and provided our guest food and a warm spot near the fire. Eevi's voice was enchanting.

In the morning there is fresh snow, well over two hands. We packed up, and with our new escort, head east. As if the slick mud and snow were not enough, the sounding of the Cornohorn brought warning of a mammoth stampede.

Triad save us!

Auctus 20.1c

By the gods the mammoth was fast upon Olin. The sisters rode out to assist in the scuffle but hadn't reached the old Sentinel before he was thrown from his mighty steed. I took Magnus to higher ground, and kept Vali close at my side. The beast was relentless, its cries terrible to the ears. I was not long before the snows were painted red with blood. The war-maidens eventually slew the mammoth. After the carnage was over, Olin was feared lost- buried headfirst in the deep snows. Add to that, our horses had run off and sadly, the great warhorse, Axim, was slain. To everyone's surprise, Olin was spared. His leg appeared badly broken, but by the time I could tend to it, we discovered it to be a wooden replacement.

Signy helped me to collect the horses and upon our return, Eevi had harvested the mammoth's tusk. With the hour late, we made camp not far away from the scene, tended to wounds, and again let Eevi's divine voice lull us to sleep.

In the morning, we broke camp with an interesting conversation of Signy and marriage. One day, even she will find the man who fills her heart.

Olin rode ahead on Eevi's horse, Ingrid and Signy in tow. The road had been beaten by weather and as if the hidden void's tossing of Eevi from the cart was not enough, the appearance of a man with crazed eyes, spying us from the trees was even more disturbing.

Triad watch over us!

I am never surprised by how the gods test us. Within a few miles of Gold Bend, a hollow in the road nearly swallowed a wheel of the cart. Then, the left shaft of the of the cart splintered as Magnus attempted to navigate the narrows between the trees. While with Eevi, we spoke of Redwater, and it was readily apparent she is worried that home will be but a shadow of its former self.

After a bit of effort, the wagon repaired, we arrived in Gold Bend to find our companions had moved on to the Book Box, a local tavern of some repute. Catching up with Olin, he clarified Ingrid and Signy made their way across the bridge and that he would be making his way to the Book Box later in the evening. After a bit more discussion, Eevi and I head there ourselves, only to interrupt an exchange between Ingrid and the barkeep Kaylin. Room and board for the sisters had been secured in exchange for a portion of our mammoth meat. Turns out the meat was for an orc who was otherwise prepared to skewer an unfortunate local lad. In the end, and to spite the help nearly burning the meat, the orc and his crew seemed sated- no doubt influenced by Eevi's always offered voice.

Wanting to safeguard the cart, I made camp for myself near Olin's post and prayed tomorrow I might rummage up some wood for repairs.

Watch over us Triad.

Auctus 21.1c

I have often considered that as the gods are real, so too are their interests in man. As such I found no reasonable way to deny fate. It would seem that whatever plans we may have had to reach Redwater, our chosen path was not to be. Weather sent us east of our road, and now roads have given way to rivers. Though north be our destination, it seems the gods themselves have their own ideas as to how we should get there. I wonder if perhaps they do not wish us there at all.

Olin caught up with me after I had my camp set up. He warned me not to fell any trees near the village. The folk here still ascribe to the old ways- tree spirits and worse. Even now the gods remind me of the darkness so many of our kin still live within.

The next morning, Ingrid, Signy and I set out to procure some suitable lumber to repair the damaged cart. Sadly, we found one barge gone and the second casting off. It seems our only option is a "captain" Rynar. Our search was interrupted by the sounding of Olin's

horn. The ivory has been stolen and worse, Eevi injured. One thief lay dead- perhaps the sole evidence of the god's hand. Ingrid, Signy, and Olin set out to speak with the townsfolk just as Rynar paid us a visit. He wished to buy Magnus but would settle for having him pull his barge with us aboard. We hastily moved away from an angered town.

Perhaps the gods are testing us?

Magnus took well to the barge, although the hard-cobbled road would be hard on the great ox's hooves. I would do my best to look after our prized beast. I also got the chance to spend time with barge's teamster, Peth. He was an interesting fellow and certainly had questions of his own about us and our capabilities. He revealed that there was a shortage of horses on the river this early in the season, but he could only speculate on the reason. I did not care for his lascivious glances toward my companions, but I had no doubt they could handle any of his misguided advances.

The river was quiet and the although the going was smooth, it was slow. We rested Magnus around midday. I would become rather fond of these periodic rests while I faced the likelihood, I would be doing a considerable amount of walking.

I find it hard to pen what happened next. What first appeared as one horrible tragedy soon cascaded into a torrent of chaos. Olin, pierced by many arrows and hanging by the neck from a great cottonwood, gasped and jerked as if clinging desperately to life. I rushed to his aid, screaming for the sisters. I only succeeded in leading them into a trap. Sick everywhere. What we would eventually learn was the crew of one of the earlier barges were walking dead, set upon us. The battle was but a blur, but suffice it to say, my three companions made short work of the sick while I clambered up a tree to safety.

Worst of all, Olin was not fighting for his life, rather his body struggled to be free to feast on the living. We cut Olin free only after ending his struggle. I have seen many men die-warriors welcomed death, evil men deserved death, this was different. Never shall I forget the sight of his body floating in the calm river- leg missing, the broken arrows, the blood, the anguish on his face, the sadness on the face of Signy and in my heart.

I realize I pray often, and perhaps the noise of my continued offerings is easily dismissed, but for this man, this good and altruistic man, may my prayers be heard. Triad take him and let him rest his weary form until Athia has need once more of his noble soul.

We took him from the river and buried him on a rise overlooking the road and river. Many tears were shed, but none of us spoke as Eevi sent him on with the Song of the Highwayman.

Triad restore me.

Auctus 22.1c

Following our encounter with the sick both Peth and Rynar offered their condolences. Additionally, Peth apologized for his earlier behavior towards the sisters. It was clear that both of them realized just how capable these sisters were. I suspected relations going forward would be more respectful.

It was getting late, and the sisters seemed against having Peth and myself sleep ashore without one of them looking over us. Eevi came ashore. Seeing that Peth's growing admiration for the sisters didn't put him into any "ungentlemanly" circumstances, I set my bed between his and Eevi's.

The night passed quietly save for Signy catching sight of what she swears was Olin's leg floating by. It was a clear reminder that up ahead there may be more unwanted encounters with whatever befell our friend and the earlier barge.

We pressed on in the morning after finding our cart now in need of oiling. The road had been tough on the old cart and as we traveled, we found a section of the road in makeshift repair. Passing through the reeds along the bank, Eevi rode ahead. Her voice called out-movement. It was too late. Bursting through the reeds was the largest boar I have seen.

Gods be with us.

Attacked! Set upon by a sunder of boar, Eevi squared off against the largest of the beasts while the rest of us dealt with the remainder erupting from the reeds. With my most sincere of thanks, Signy raced to my rescue, and just in time as Magnus was about to flee and I risked running the barge aground. I yelled for her to cut the bow rope and her quick response set the barge and our one-ton animal free. Peth, Eevi, and Ingrid went for the free rope of the barge and Signy, and I ran after Magnus. With the blessings of divine providence, we were each successful. Better still, in dispatching the angry hogs, our supply was now bolstered.

With Signy's help, we get the meat salted. Working with her is a welcome calm after such chaos. Though Rynar is clearly worried by our continued delays, he understands our need to tend to his only means of security.

Auctus 26.1c

The next three days passed with the blessings of the gods. Erebus kept us safe each night, Illios blessed us with clear and warm skies, and Selene kept the winds and waters calm.

Now as we neared Mud Rim, I prayed for an opportunity to resupply.

At some point in the early morning, I realized we are short a horse. Soon after came the realization that Peth too, was missing. Of all of the horses to have taken, he had to

borrow Ingrid's. I was not looking forward to waking her and starting her day with this less than desirable report. I finished making breakfast in hopes a good meal would lessen the sting. As I expected, Ingrid questioned Rynar who seemed to know as much about Peth and the horse as I.

The sisters took a look about while I made sure to take care of a long ignored and large stack of laundry. Alas, they found little trace of Peth, only tracks leading straight into the river. We decided to move on. Breaking camp, we all had hopes of reaching Mud Rim soon.

After a few hours travel, we reached the next town, sizable, and with an amazing feature. A high bridge from the far east shore reached over the town wall and beyond to the canyon rim. Here we split from the barge, and the thinned into groups of two. Ingrid and I saw about the animals while Signy and Eevi looked for lodgings. Ingrid and I were directed to the high mesa west of the town proper where we met the town's Horsemaster. Though we talked of boarding, we learn of a wedding, in two days, but thankfully a local one. However, we were told that the Redwater bride's barge is at most three days behind us.

Gods stay the sister's hands when she passes by.

Auctus 27.1c

Ingrid and I returned to the barge, having discussed both supplies and which route to take from Mud Rim. Upon our return, we found Signy and Eevi still absent. Seeing Ingrid was perturbed by this, I thought it best to offer myself as a means to discern their whereabouts.

I made my way to Trumbo's and arrived to find Eevi signing to yet another captive audience, and Signy at a nearby table, beset with suitors. Who can blame them... Eevi motioned for me to leave and only later do I learn that she didn't intend to shoo me away, rather she was looking for an opportunity for the three of us to return to the barge. The two of them explained that they had met the mayor, a woman named Yaris, while at the inn. They told her of Olin, explaining his murder and by her learning, hoped she might pass word back to Westflood and the Sentinels.

We made our way back to Ingrid, and by my own selfish interest, took the long way past the Shrine of the Canyon. Though I hardly know how to pen what it was I saw, I found it breathtaking.

The following morning, I awoke to what must have been some sending-off ceremony atop the high bridge. I was affected by their grief and by their affection for the river.

After all are woke and fed, we made for Tilden's. There we traded the cart for a yet-to-be assembled wagon. We now needed to come up with 30 septems and 300 feet of good

rope- hopefully from Rynar's cargo. It was a good deal, and the wagon should be ready by the end of the next day. We returned then to the barge to inform Ingrid, but our attention was stolen by the Horsemaster atop the mesa, leading none other than a Mormere Steed!

Selene tells us that thing happen for a reason- she watches over us to learn our interests and struggles and when the moment is right, she presents us with a choice. She tests us, and through the chaos of life learns who among us is deserving of another attempt in this great world.

Though I am reluctant to accept, each of the sisters contributed to pay for the wagon. I feared I have both taxed them for the security and protection they provided and now with request of funds for equipment ruined under my care. They are truly magnificent women, and I hope one day I might be able to repay their generosity.

We are visited in the morning by a man named Dalibor. A representative of House Cerrak, he questioned the sisters for some time in regard to Olin and his unfortunate end. Having sated his curiosity, we then set out to collect supply- and wardrobe, for there was a wedding to attend. Ingrid would inquire if 300 feet of rope can be squeezed from Rynar.

I made trades a Hob's, offloading the leather for grain and flour. I also traded the plumb seeds to Rand at Trumbo's for garlic and salt pork. Additionally, he agrees to share one his recipes. I would be anxious for an opportunity to make it my own. From there I went off to meet Rand's sister, I purchased 8 fresh loaves.

As I stepped back out into the street, I caught sight of none other than Ingrid's horse. I found it unharmed and tied in a nearby stable. This may have been my test- or perhaps rather it was Ingrid's. Peth may be there. Would there be more to be learned or maybe another death to force our quick departure from the good people of Mud Rim? May our minds remain clear, our temptation tempered, and our will true!

Having located Ginger, Ingrid's horse, I made my way to the nearby Eclan Traders to see if I couldn't learn of the fate of the rider. They knew little, or rather they shared little. Their shared looks gave me pause. I thought it best to keep details vague. I quickly returned to the barge to stow our wares. I was then accompanied back to Hob's to collect the remainder of our supply. When we arrived there, I noticed what I can only assume to be the mayor and escorts making their way to the Eclan Traders.

With everything collected and accounted for, Eevi and Signy asked if I might make some adjustments to a pair of dresses, they somehow dug up from the horde of miscellanea that was Hob's. I did admit, with only a bit of tailoring, the dresses would be fine for them. Doing this was a pleasure.

As the day finally wound down, I got dinner made and Ginger up to the Horsemaster. Upon my return, I found people and guards all surrounding the entrance to the inn. The drama on everyone's face should have been indication enough- knowing that the sisters were intent on utilizing the inn for a chance at a bath. Two things became readily apparent with a bit of a look-about and a conversation or two with the gathered crowd. Ingrid had killed two people, and none other than Akard of Eclan Traders was lurking in the shadows with a watchful eye on the events at the inn.

Auctus 28.1c

I made my way back to the barge after confirming that Ingrid was indeed safe. Knowing the younger sisters shouldn't arrive at the wedding empty handed, I set upon baking a fresh batch of cinnamon apple fritters. Eevi set out to check up on her sister and while she is gone, Signy and I again talked of faith. She made the comment that she couldn't be someone of faith such as I was. At first, I couldn't help but deny I was any kind of person of real faith. But what sticks with me still is what she may have been alluding to- that maybe my devotion to the Triad was something that she herself admired. Triad forgive my pride, being admired by Signy, pleased me.

Ingrid doesn't return until the following morning, touting her room having been offered free of charge and proudly admitting having taken the lives of her would-be assailants. The rest and bath have done her good- I denied it was the slaying of them who would wrong her.

Having agreed to stay with "captain" Rynar, we acquired our 300 feet of rope and we paid Tilden the remainder of what was owed. With the wagon finally in our possession, we had only the wedding yet to keep us from our journey.

Eevi and Signy prepared themselves for the event. Eevi looked marvelous in her dress and is pleased with the gifts I prepared for them, but I suspect a gift of song will also be offered. As I braid her hair, I suggested the ballad of Ilval and Anon, as it is a tradition along the river. Her reaction surprises me still. Suffice it to say, I touched on an uncomfortable subject. Fortunately, Signy then appeared and saved us from the awkward moment. The sight of her in the dress had also surprised me. The small details, which I will not share here, would certainly stay with me long beyond that wedding. With Selene's blessing, I too braided her hair, and added a few flowers I had found near the river. Fit for the fanciest river valley wedding, they made their way to the ceremony.

It wasn't long before Ingrid attempted to convince me to attend. I worried about Ingrid- how she seemed to shutter herself from having any fun in front of her sisters. From afar, we watched the procession over the bridge, and listen to the distant revelry.

As I watched the Acolyte make his way across the great bridge, I could not help but wonder what it must be like to speak to the gods themselves. What does one ask and

not risk being selfish or needy? And for that matter, how does one ask the gods to make their wishes reality? I wonder what my own requests might be- peace for Ingrid? happiness for all of them? fulfillment for myself? I was struck that the Acolyte was not honored by the ceremony- that he was left avoiding the festivities of the newlyweds and their families to return to an otherwise empty town.

Ingrid and I brought the wagon around and instantly, I was compelled to begin figuring out how best to load and organize our things. With just Ingrid and myself to feed, a simple meal of fried fresh fish, hot baked bread, and spiced beans would have to suffice. Ingrid explained the arrangement with Rynar, but I could not help expressing my desire to make Magnus and the wagon my priority. I had a duty to these sisters, and in spite of Ingrid's or Rynar's desires, I would put that first. Promises had been made, and I would not deny what I owed them. More than that, I had become quite fond of Ingrid and her sisters. I decided then, I would not let them down.

I got camp ready for Eevi and Signy's return- turned down bedrolls and made impromptu pillows. Upon their return, the oldest and youngest harassed Eevi for not throwing herself at E'Gil's feet (apparently the brother of the bridegroom and son to the Horsemaster). I excused myself for risk of saying something beyond my role.

I do however overhear discussion of another conversation between Signy and the mayor. It seemed that word had reached the ear of Yaris from Redwater implying Henerick was less than ideal as a leader of his lands. She went on to report that Redwater was nearing dire straits but with no explanation as to why. Mayor Yaris did also instruct the sisters not to cause any other trouble while in Mud Rim. I felt our impending departure could not have been more timely.

Then before turning in for the night, the 'Lurian Princess' arrived. Countless horses, a three-story barge with escort crafts, and many men draped in mail appeared from the darkness. All of them under the banner of a noble house of Luria. Though I questioned myself, I could not help but worry that what I was seeing was not only Henerick's bride-to-be, but the better part of a very wealthy noble's security force.

I wandered out to have a better look and instead had another chance encounter:

"Approach carefully, for the road and river are being watched. Make for the Spire of the Spring. There, word by message or voice shall come to the sisters. Be assured, Selene knows their heart and feels their loss."

This was said to me by none other than Brother Tash, Acolyte of Selene, and student of Linden of Redwater.

He also shared that the palisades of Redwater no longer kept the outsiders and bandits out, but rather kept the woodsmen in. He too assured me that this newly arrived bride-to-be was aware of and looking for the 'Three Sisters of Redwater'.

Auctus 29.1c

I warned Ingrid and while I set out early to collect Magnus and the horses, she explained to her sister what I passed to her. While on the mesa overlooking Mud Rim, I saw Lurian guards attempting to strong-arm the acquisition of the recently gifted Mormere. Eevi, Signy, E'Gil and Esben diffused the matter, but only for a time.

While making preparations for an early departure, each of us caught sight of Akard, and a Lurian I would soon learn was called Charon, and their escorts carrying an overtly large purse, as they made their way to the estate of the bride's father (Ranuf). The sisters all decided to casually investigate. I finished packing and anxiously awaited in the wagon. Then came the scream- quickly followed by the sight of E'Gil and Esben leaping from the rim of the mesa down the roof of a nearby barn and down. Was it selfish to pray the sisters were not involved?

Triad protect them!

Erebos tells us to act on our instincts. He teaches that our impulses are divine, and actions birthed by them are our most pure. I believe Eevi acted on those instincts, following her divine impulses towards her predestined fate. I prayed that her fate would be greater than an early death before reaching home.

By the time I reached the Ranuf household, both Eevi and Ingrid are surrounded by Lurian swords and spears. It took the presence of mayor Yaris herself to diffuse the situation. With weapons drawn and blood spilled, Ingrid ordered the sisters back to the wagon. Wounded and bested, the three of them returned. The tale they related of the death of T'Var, wed less than a day, filled me with sadness and no small measure of dread. If these Lurians were willing to commit such brazen murder over a horse, no matter how special, I fear what they would do to my companions.

I looked to Eevi and found her far less than fit to travel. I made her a bed in the back of the wagon and hoped it might keep her comfortable enough. I tied Eevi's horse to the back of the wagon as Ingrid emphatically explained that the time to leave Mud Rim had come. It felt to me like we were leaving with our tails between our legs as we departed.

As we made our way out to the Pull Road, I caught my first glimpse of what must have been the princess. That was until she was slapped upside her head by a woman I could only describe as behemoth. The gargantuan woman was repulsive in every way- not just her appearance mind you, but her disposition as well. Her curses would have been more at home in the back hall at the Crock back in Westflood. My attention was soon back on

the road, but I would be haunted by the sight of that monstrosity of a barge and the even more monstrous "princess".

Triad be merciful!

Auctus 30.1c

They looked up to her. Ingrid, I mean. I could see it on their faces. Even as we distanced ourselves from Mud Rim and our escort Rynar. I saw it in her eyes- the commitment, the sacrifice. As much as I saw her protective bearing, I sensed too, a dark martyrdom. I feared she sought to shoulder this burden of righting wrongs herself, and it was because of that I felt there had been no greater time for the sisters to come together than at that time.

North, along the river, we ate on the road for lunch. I prepared a blackened breadfish with fried onions, and a whisky-currant bread pudding for dessert. It felt good being on our own again. In the night, I was surprised that Vali had let a racoon onto the wagon. At my call she scared it off before tracking it down and making an example of it to any other greedy scavengers nearby.

In the morning, I smoked the racoon and the fish from Mud Rim. I also stitched up Eevi's shirt. Before I finished, we caught sight of a raft of trees, we assumed from Redwater. We found it manned by sickly bargemen stayed at arrow-point by several armed men. No horses. No ropes. Just polemen and the Valley River. We soon spied two scouts-mounted guards wearing Redwater garb. Needless to say, it offered no comfort to the sisters.

While we stopped for Ingrid to hunt ducks on the nearby lowlands, none other than Rynar's barge appeared and then teamed by Esben the elf. Not one for conversation, he did smile as they approached. I was thankful it was not Peth leading the horses.

Triad be praised.

Auctus 1.2c

We turned in not long after Esben and Rynar arrived. The sisters set watches and I was certain Esben was on the lookout as well. When I awoke, I was pleased to find that I had plenty of time to prepare breakfast in peace.

The day passed in relative quiet, the rhythm of Magnus and wagon was pleasant enough. Eevi seemed to be doing better. She joined me on the seat for a time, before feeling motion sick and lying down again. I convinced myself that it was not my conversation that forced her back to her bed in the wagon.

Ingrid found recent tracks along one section of muddy road. A familiar looking heal print. It would appear, they were not far ahead.

Sometime in the afternoon, we spotted several Berian logs beached on a sandbar. Ingrid cursed the inexperienced raft-men. She was certain the logs were more than a season old. Curious.

The evening is cool and again, the sisters shared watches.

Auctus 2.2c

After breakfast we broke camp and headed northward. Not long after, we got our first glimpse of the trees of the Berian Wood in the distance. We saw them again and again, at every rise of the road. It was soon clear to me how large they must be and how far away they still remained.

Near midday we came upon a grizzly sight. Two men and a horse had been killed recently. The men looked as though they had missed several meals. The horse too, was thin. Nearby we found a partial raft of Berian logs beached at the near shore. I wondered if the two men we saw on horseback following the raft, were not as they seemed. The girls did their best to investigate what transpired there, but all they could determine was the traveler with the pronounced boot heel was still ahead of us and may have witnessed this tragedy.

We settled that evening and enjoyed an herb stuffed carp, caught by Signy, as well as mashed ale beans, and boiled currant pudding. It was then that Eevi gifted me with a wooden plate and spoon with my initial carved into it- just as I had done for the three of them. It was a most generous and thoughtful gift. And, most unexpected. Through all of our trials, these simple gifts, remained a priority for her. I was overwhelmed. I would have to do something special for the sisters.

Auctus 3.2c

Breakfast was hot cakes and apple compote. Enjoyed, I think, by all. The morning was foggy and dim. Soon the fog gave way to rain. We pressed on.

Not long into our day's travel we smelled smoke. I correctly assumed it came from Otz Flat, but I had imagined a warm stove or fire pit of the welcoming inn. As we approached, the scene is quite the opposite. One span of what must have been a long bridge had been collapsed. Rounding the bend, we saw the terrible sight of a burning pile of bodies- two figures standing near them. As we got closer, they turned, and their dead faces and glowing eyes betrayed their intentions. The closest of the two, a man I believe, uttered in a low voice:

"Your father brought us here. For safety he said. Once we lived where not even the gods could see us. And now for their lives, you shall give yours."

Dearest Triad please help us!

It was a terrible sight to behold. Anger, sadness, and death all in this sickened wretch. With some difficulty, the sisters gave all of them peace at last.

Otz Flat is no more. In a winter or two, there would be no trace at all, save the stone abutment for the now ruined bridge. Ingrid found an axe among the bodies, a large but strangely light war axe. It was somehow familiar to her, but she could not remember why. Perhaps from the time of her father's dealings the this now ruined place. As I examined it, I discovered etching beneath the soot and dirt- "Yellowtooth" it said. Sure enough, a heavily worn, almost smooth, amber-yellow resonance crystal was affixed to it also. This was indeed a special find. Ingrid hinted at a future use for it...

Having reached the point where the wagon can no longer travel where the sisters must, Ingrid explained that she and her sisters would head off on their own from here. While I'm made camp, Signy managed to catch two perch. I blackened them up with a bit of cabbage, along with a healthy mug of ale, and a sweet treat of candied beets. It would be our last evening together for a spell. I tried to savor every bit of it.

After the sisters finally retired for the night, I prepared a pack for each of them during my watch. Food, warm clothes, rope, a few tools, as much as I could think of. If they were to be without my immediate support, they would at least be supplied.

I prayed Triad, be with them.

Auctus 4.2c

The night passed uneventfully, and in the morning, I had another look at Ingrid's wounds. Having found fresh herbs the night before, I tried once more to remedy her festering injury.

We packed up camp, and with the best of wishes, set out on our separate paths. I made sure the wagon was secure, and with a whip of the rains, Magnus, the horses, Vali, and I were off.

I did not stop for lunch, and for dinner I made Vali and myself the simplest of meals. I decided to bed down under the wagon.

My thoughts for most of that day were of the sister's safety. As I laid there near the river, I thought of each of them in turn. I thought of the look on Ingrid's face, just before a fight was about to start- proud, brave, and confident, and her laugh when things almost go bad. I thought of the calm Eevi's song brought me when Olin passed. But I thought most of Signy...

I struggled to think back to the days before I met them all at the North Gate in Westflood. It seemed longer than the 20 days it had been. Whatever I expected from this journey, I was thankful for what it had become.

Again, I prayed- thanks be to the Triad and wherever they were, watch over them.

Auctus 5.2c

It was a cool night without the brazier and heavy tent to keep out the elements. The night remained quiet though, and much as I finished the night before, I began the day with a long prayer and meditation to the Triad.

I took the morning to ensure the horses were well. I checked their shoes, gave them a bit of bath at the river's edge, and fed them a good helping of oats. Magnus seemed no worse for wear and with camp collected, in record time, I pressed on.

Late in the day, halfway between lunch and stopping to make camp, I reached the edge of the great Berian Wood at last. To my surprise, I found a large swath leveled. Trees felled, but not limbed. It had been clear cut, but not processed- an odd site. As I passed through the scar, I am struck by the history of the place. No less than four generations of pull road could be found, it was like stepping back to the time before the coming of the Thyr, to the time of my ancestors. The trees were hundreds of winters old, their lines showed that they had survived more fires than I could count. Older than the age of Kings, predating even the coming of men, maybe older yet. The undergrowth had receded without the once-thick canopy. After some distance, I crossed the old high-water line of the ancient river. It appeared to me that the Berian Valley was once a much larger and wilder place. The tangle of giant roots and stumps made the scar not easily traversed, but I was compelled to explore a bit when Magnus stopped next to rest. The spring thaw had cut deep rills along the scar exposing a great ancient boulder, or so I believed. The stone was in fact, the skeleton of a Berian tree, perhaps from the time of the first. Petrified by the ages, undeniably a long-forgotten tree. The dark grey and amber lines, now stone, told a forgotten history. Was it here when Selene showed her face the first time? Was it here long before that? It was a simple encounter in this ancient land, the land of these sisters, and me, that I would not soon forget.

Further on, I was startled by the sound of a sobbing child. Upon finding the lass, she gave away her mother and brother hiding among the felled trees. They were hungry and more than a little scared. After some convincing, they allowed me to share with them the warmth of my fire and bounty of my supply. Over dinner we began a conversation that reached deep into the night. The woman, Sholl, her son Mikl, and her daughter Kayla had been attempting to reach Otz Flat.

After explaining matters to her of the state of Otz Flat, and she having related the desperation they faced in Redwater, I presented Sholl with a regrettable choice. She was looking for her husband who escaped Redwater's forced labor to join a camp of like woodsmen. He had left some nights ago and she was to meet with sympathetic souls in Otz Flat who would direct her to the woodsman camp. Her choices were to search

aimlessly in the deep Berian Wood on her own for her husband Kjell, or return with me to Redwater where hopefully, further whereabouts of the camp might be learned. She elected to take the night to consider my offer.

Triad grant them rest.

Auctus 6.2c

I awoke extra early to prepare a hearty breakfast for my guests. Bacon, fraze, cinnamon-oat fritters, and hot pork hash are much enjoyed by the children, and I believe by their mother as well.

Sholl reluctantly agreed to return to Redwater with me. After breaking camp, I made the family comfortable in the wagon with the bear skin for the ride home.

It was dusk by the time we reached Redwater, or what is some new part of the town. A new, shoddy palisade had been set up outside the great perimeter of Berian tree walls. Also, a large drinking hall, store houses, smithy, and a few animal pens had been hastily constructed by the good people of Eclan Traders.

Rynar was there, awaiting the use of a wagon to offload his rope. The guards and deckhands seemed less than motivated to assist him. Apparently, there were no wagons allowed into old Redwater. So, with a few discussions with the owner of the drinking hall and Rynar, I found means to secure our wagon and animals. I was confident Magnus would be fine, but I was concerned that our good horses might be too tempting to the locals.

I escorted Sholl and her children to their home, after doing our best to allay the guard's suspicions as to why she was outside of the 'oldtown' walls. Inside old Redwater I saw what must have been a sliver of its former self. Women and children outnumbered men at least three to one. This was certainly not the place described to me by Ingrid so many times.

As the hour was then late, I found my way to the local inn- the Whetstone. I was pleased and surprised to find the atmosphere there up-beat. However, the pleasantness was abruptly interrupted when two guards arrived to make their appointed rounds. I got a meal, a room, and inquired as to where I might resupply. I found myself questioned by several of the locals, and having broken the ice for conversation, had an opportunity to learn for myself a great deal of the recent comings and goings of Redwater and its people.

It seemed strange to sleep indoors. I found myself beside my rented bed, kneeling in prayer. I again asked each of the Triad to look after the sisters. I was consumed with a feeling of worry. I prayed again and again-

Triad watch over them.

Auctus 7.2c

I was awakened before the dawn of Illios by the kicking in of my rented door. Local guards were apparently looking for a missing woodsman. I decided to gather my things and after grabbing a half loaf for breakfast, exited the inn.

Though I had planned on checking in on the animals, my plans were usurped by screams from beyond a gathered crowd. A group of men had pulled Sholl from her home. They had pressed her as to why she had gone missing days earlier, and then asked where her husband was.

I can barely put into words, the events which followed. Fuhlgar, a name I had heard before from the lips of the sisters, had arrived and in a further attempt to get Sholl to reveal her husband's whereabouts, threatened her with Kayla, her daughter. I sensed the worst and could already feel myself praying for help. As the guards held Sholl and Mikl captive as audience, Fuhlgar raped the young girl.

I was powerless, pleading with the crowd and the gods for someone to stop this madness. I was beside myself but more shocking still was learning that this bestial behavior here was now the norm. In the aftermath, I tended to the family as best I could. With a brave smile, Sholl assured me she and her daughter would overcome this.

Needing guidance, I visited the temple. There I met Brother Fortin- Linden's right-hand Acolyte. Though we talked of a great number of things, it took some time before I felt we had reached a point of mutual trust. It was then Fortin invited me to a more private location, so we might continue our dialog. I informed him of all that had led me to his church- Mud Rim, Otz Flat, the groups involved, the sisters and our journey, even Peth. He explained the events at Redwater, Linden, the woodsmen, guards, and the sanctuary the Triad had afforded the townsfolk.

Brother Fortin offered me a room for the evening. It was meager but comfortable. That night he conveyed to me a plan for me to gather the sisters and get them into Redwater with a minimum of risk of discovery. I was confident the church could help the sisters, and the town, and perhaps me too.

Triad grant me peace.

Auctus 8.2c

In the morning I found myself especially rested. Surprisingly so. Even after so late a night filled with words and a day filled with trauma, I was more than ready to get on with the day.

Brother Fortin and Brother Stedden got me ready for our journey. I was dressed as one of the faithful. I thought it awkward at first but was not too surprised to find it

comfortable. Supplied and ready, we made our way to the wall. Upon reaching the northern most gate, we were accosted by the guard. They did not fully believe our ruse of fetching mushrooms to feed the poor. We were challenged to cook breakfast for them as proof of our story. Thankfully I had packed some herbs to flavor their pot. The guards were satisfied with the meal, and after this delay they cared little of our passing.

We then made our way to the river, finding the pole-boats waiting as planned. They were long narrow craft with a dangerously shallow draft. It took me a bit to get the feel for the river. We traveled a fair distance before turning up a side channel towards the Spire. Brother Stedden's seemed to finally relax some once we turned up the mostly hidden tributary. The forest was amazing to behold. More amazing still, we stumbled across the sisters themselves! Triad be praised! They were safe and joined by an unfamiliar face.

All thanks to the Triad!

Auctus 9.2c

By the gods, they were safe and returned to me. Praise the Triad that they led us to them. I feared my haste to tell the sisters all that I have learned confused them. In desperation, I tried my best to calmly explain myself. It was only when I mentioned the hundred and fifty or more Lurian soldiers on the way to Redwater that they were given pause. I explained as much as I could, as quickly as I could. I imparted my experiences in Redwater- meeting Brother Fortin and the general state of things in their former home. As much as I attempted to prompt and immediate return for them, I nearly overlooked their account of their own journey.

Thankfully they had the symbol- Curate Bendt's artifact was safely in their hands, praise the gods. I was left to further explain how it would serve to protect the sister's secrecy, only to find them questioning whether or not Linden should be trusted.

We eventually made our return towards Redwater, intending on taking the spillway into the sewers beneath the town. As we approached from the north, we were disappointed to find the "Lurian Princess", the obscene barge, had beaten us to the docks.

Triad grant us strength.

Auctus 10.2c

After some last-minute debate, we settled on the spillway as the best chance at clandestine entry into Redwater. The sisters eased their way into the cold river and made their way to the forgotten spillway and then the tunnels below the town. It took more time for Brother Stedden and me to get through the gate and back to the church than I would have liked. The sisters were waiting beneath the lower hall by the time we arrived. When they emerged, I was almost beside myself seeing what... wastes they had to endure

in the sewers below. Once in the church, I did manage to finally get them clean. I set out for an evening of laundry while the sisters got a worthwhile rest.

Up early again the next morning, I was offered access to the kitchen and larder of the church. I baked a few peppered venison pies with turnips and cabbage for my companions. The sisters slept as late as their stomachs would allow. Signy related details of an odd dream. I am pleased to be near them again. As if he knew we were speaking of him, Brother Stedden appeared with porridge for the sisters. I invited him in and almost immediately, Signy began to question him about an incident from their childhood when he found her near the river, wet as though nearly drowned. He remembered little but did recall how angry Arden (her father) was. He further related that he was told never to speak of it. He recalled little more than Signy wore a fine dress for Lady Thylera's party and Linden snuck her into the keep in a chest. We were then interrupted by Brother Fortin. He brought news that Rynar had been arrested for transporting and aiding the sisters. Worse yet, he was betrayed by his former employee, Peth.

After much discussion, the sisters decided that Eevi would sing for the midday service. They would also investigate if anyone in town might be capable of looking into Signy's memories for additional details. It would be my duty to look to Rynar's situation and the status of our wagon and animals.

Fortin again met with the sisters, where they made final plans for the service. We were again interrupted by Brother Stedden when he informed us that Rynar had been taken to the keep, the wagon had been confiscated, and Vali had been hurt and run off. With the service about to begin, I resigned myself to looking for Vali once the ceremony concluded.

Brother Fortin led the congregation, but when cued, Eevi's voice took command of the room. Never in my life have I heard such a song. I am torn between tears and laughter, awe and excitement. It was as though the divine were speaking through her, and I was prompted by providence that not only would things be better, but that I too might play a part. The congregation arose from its knees, wiped away tears, and were met with the very visage of hope as the daughters of Arden and Orphea stepped out among them at last. They were surrounded immediately with amazed faces, outstretched hands, and smiles of relief. Embraces were shared, all are welcomed, and the sisters were gifted many tales of their parents and home.

Importantly, they learned that the approaching Lurian forces had taken Elk Horn and had also slain or otherwise driven out the folk there. They were told that on the barge, more than 20 fighting men are housed. It was then we first learned the names of those we would face: Dionysia- the bride to be, Arisia- mother of the bride, and Kendrisia- granddaughter were all living on the top of the barge. Charon- the father, Guarin- his steward, and Chedomir- his man-at-arms, kept residence near the front. With them too

were many servants, retainers, and the soldiers. They alone would be a challenging opponent, to say nothing of Henerick, his family and their allies.

After, I made a quick lunch for the sisters, taking an opportunity or two to share some of my learnings with the Brothers of the kitchen. We settled on a wild sage hen stew with peppercorn potatoes, dumplings, carrots, and wild mushrooms (Stedden and I could not have returned without them). I accompanied it with a fresh loaf of bread.

We ate, but amidst our meal Fortin asked for me. In private conversation within his chambers, he offered me a place as a Brother of the church. With his offer, a holy symbol of silver, to show his sincerity. I explained my obligation to the sisters and that I was truly humbled and honored by his gesture. He assured me the offer would remain open until I was free of my charge. The impact on me of such an offer did not truly show itself until much later. Many hours have I thought on the moment since. The will of Triad never ceases to amaze.

Brother Stedden arrived, looking more nervous than usual. He informed us that Henerick had sent a contingent of his personal guard to the Spire of the Spring in hopes of catching the sisters there. It was then I remembered Vali. I set out to find her. Ingrid asked that I keep an eye north toward the confluence in hopes of spotting the woodsmen she awaited. I collected Vali from the makeshift barn in Magnus' pen. She was afraid and injured but happy to be found. Magnus it seemed, would let none near his injured companion. He and the horses appeared to be safe and in good health at that moment.

On my return, I witnessed 20 heavily armed cavalry enter 'New Town', all Lurian, and five of them adorned as officers. I returned quickly and reported my findings. Only moments after, we were warned that town guards were coming- to collect me and the family I aided.

Triad protect them.

We raced to lady Sholl's home and spot eight of Henerick's guards making their way towards it from several different locations. In a desperate attempt to get the family to safety, the sisters stepped up to thwart the guards, while I attempted to escort the family out. To my surprise, not only were we met by the guards, but one struck Mikl. I could barely contain my anger and lashed out in unbridled emotion at the offenders. Thankfully the sisters proved more than a match for the guards, and I was able to get the family to the temple.

The Brothers took the injured boy in and hurried him off for rituals and prayers of healing. I found myself wracked with guilt and could barely look the family in the eye as they somehow felt the need to thank me for what it was I had brought upon them. I prayed with all my heart that the Triad would see fit to forward whatever boons might come my way to them.

I instead resolved to make it up to the family, the Brothers, and even the sisters by making a worthwhile meal. I prepared cyser glazed roast duck with mashed turnips and onions, fresh baked bread, and lemon-honey tarts to finish out the meal. With all fed, I slipped away to the sanctuary for some much-needed meditation and piety.

Late in the evening there appeared the lady Agathe. She was alone, and seemingly come from nowhere. She said to me-

“Their time is upon them. Keep them true, for they are Arden’s daughters.”

She then stepped away, through the great doorway, into the fog. As I contemplated her words, I was compelled to go after her. She had disappeared into the cold. As I stood there looking out into the quiet nighttime streets, a warm light slowly divided the fog from the south. It was again Agathe, this time bearing a lantern. She greeted me with a smile and when I asked her about what she told me, she was puzzled. She had no memory of what I had witnessed at all.

Triad grant me understanding.

Auctus 11.2c

In the morning, I made apple fritters with honey glaze. I was even privileged to make a second batch at Signy’s request, that time with fresh pears. To have brought her joy, no matter how small, pleased me beyond word.

When I delivered them to her, she explained to me that her sisters had left us in private so that she might kiss me- or rather Ingrid and Eevi thought that we should kiss. I immediately asked myself if I had made any advances or other dishonorable suggestions, no matter how slight, to seed these ideas. I feel I am unable to reveal the breadth of my introspection here. Suffice it say, it remains my wish that Signy is spared from any discomfort from my or her sisters’ ideas. I felt shame that Ingrid, most of all, might think I could take advantage of Signy so.

Our moment was interrupted by more unfortunate news. Lord Henerick’s boats had returned with six prisoners captured in the woodland to the east, presumed from the spot Ingrid was to meet them. We are instructed to inform all to attend the execution of the traitors at the keep at sundown.

The sisters continued their preparing of plans. Amidst them, they made their way back to their childhood home. It was difficult for me to imagine them in this house of Arden and Orpheia, now abandoned and cold. I feared the sisters, like the town, would fall to despair. It had been just a day since my companions revealed themselves to the folk of Redwater, yet today, the hope that all shared then, was no longer with us.

The better part of the day passed, and we were compelled to join the large procession toward the keep. Line upon line of Lurian soldiers flanked the front of the great stone gatehouse. Along the parapet, many of the newly arrived quests watched from above. Most of them were of the aristocracy of Westflood, friends of Henerick's uncle, no doubt. Directly above the great gate was Henerick himself along with his mother, Thylera. I could see Linden was with them, leaning heavily on one of the keep guards. To their left stood Charon, and Guarin beside him. Below, standing proudly, was the evil Fuhlgar and his close, personal soldiers. Chedomir too, was with them.

As the dastardly spectacle began to unfold, the gate was opened. From within, woodsmen began to emerge. As they pass the gate, Chedomir and a man dressed in Eclan garb, handed each of them their long overdue wages- in septems. The event startled the crowd, especially seeing the debt paid with Lurian coin. The woodsmen had been held captive for some time and now, in front of the upper-class audience, Henerick's show of their release, along with coin wages, had the desired effect. Once the last was paid, the next act began. The prisoners, accused traitors, were paraded from within. Rynar, Sten (a man identified by Ingrid as a friend), Kjell (Sholl's husband), and four others are brought out in chains. Their condition was terrible, bloodied, obviously beaten, several barely even able to walk. The seven were spread out in front of ten long pole stakes, each with a stove wood pile at its base. It was then that Henerick called out-

"Daughters of Arden, I know you are here! You shall step forth and take your place among these other traitors!"

At that moment, the assembled cavalry stepped down and all of the soldiers drew steel. The noise was terrifying. Again, there were gasps from the crowd as they shifted about, now unable to flee. I prayed to the Lady Moon herself that somehow the drama should play out without such heinous loss of life.

Selene save us!

Henerick continued after his invitation yielded no prize-

"I say you are traitors and cowards! Fuhlgar, there are three empty fires. Fill them!"

It was then that this beast and his soldiers began to push into the crowd, grabbing at random, or so I thought. Agathe and Kayla are marched out against their will towards the other prisoners. And then came Peth. He too struggled as the soldiers beat him down and forced him forward. It was then that Kjell caught sight of his daughter Kayla. His screams would haunt me, as did the site of the guard snapping his leg. The crowd was on the edge of panic.

I had shut my eyes tight. I remember Eevi's voice calling out Henerick for the tyrant and fool-leader he was, but alas to no avail. I remember praying Selene's 'Fear and Ire'

prayer. I fear I did so in such a manner as to draw Lord Henerick's attention upon myself. I warned him, for I knew in my heart that Selene herself watched over these sisters, and to dare spite them would be to stand in the way of Lady Moon herself. I also remember the stymied look on Fuhlgar's face when threatened with the Lady's ire. And then, he was gone. It was then I heard Her voice. Never would I be the same. Never...

Fear and Ire-

*Fear not said Lady Moon,
All is not lost, for violence begets violence,
Hate begets hate.
Those who seek to do harm shall always meet harm,
Blood begets blood!*

*All the more reason to fight injustice said Lord Sun,
Or to destroy our enemies said Lord Night,
No brothers! said Lady Moon,
While you seek to feud,
This endless cycle of pain and anguish,
I shall see it cease!*

*Raise my ire and be beset with inaction.
Find wisdom in reflection,
Safety in Seclusion,
Gratitude in reprise.
So says the Lady!*

A hush fell over all who were there. Only Charon dared to speak after a time. He said something about "enough violence" and "think of your good people". I believe he feared he would have to order his Lurian guards to slay the entire assembled town if things escalated further. As the crowd was allowed to part, the three cross sisters were revealed- both a threat to the Lord and yet hope for his people. This and the disappearance of Fuhlgar shook them all and they retreated into the keep.

Henerick would later attempt to paint the release of the prisoners as mercy, but I believe it was fear- fear of the sisters, and fear of Lady Moon, that ended the horrible event.

We returned to Redwater with the townsfolk. And upon reaching the temple, a ceremony was begun. I would be ordained as a Brother of the temple.

I shall not burden my telling of this story with the details of the rituals I would participate in that night, but I am told, Brother Bruhn kept an excellent account.

Following the ceremony, Ingrid spoke to all those assembled there. I cannot remember her words, so lost in meditation was I, but those gathered were filled with hope and now too with purpose.

Thanks be to Selene.

The sisters decided to pay Rynar a visit at the Whetstone. I could feel their discomfort near me. They felt too cautious to ask for my company, but I would come along. Rynar was set on departing Redwater and none could blame him. In clandestine fashion, he planned to return to his barge, cut the lines, and slip away down river. Without any means or desire to stop him, we all wished him the best. From there we went to Agathe's both to check on her and to again attempt to find another path to Signy's memories, though she pointed us only to Linden. She did however inquire if the sisters had ever crossed paths with Rilen in days past and had they perhaps retrieved their father's sword. The sisters had not. I felt then that it was a deliberate question, strange for the moment. Ingrid had only ever spoken of him once, in her telling of the trial of Arden, when the sisters were forced to leave Redwater. I recall he was a trusted friend of Arden.

We returned to the temple to check upon the injured woodsmen. Kayla was home with her brother, mother, and now father Kjell. His injuries would need time to heal with the blessings of the Triad, he would live. Peth, it seemed, had again slipped away, as there was no word of him at any of our visits.

Finally, we parted company for rest and for me, prayers of thanks.

Selene be praised, Selene be praised, indeed.

Auctus 12.2c

I arose early to begin breakfast for the sisters and my Brothers. I was met by Brother Fortin who seemed quite affected by my sudden connection with Lady Moon. I too am astonished, and humbled, but I was busy with plenty of work as I see everyone is fed. The opportunity to prepare a meal was a welcome calm after the previous day's activity. The calm was again interrupted by Brother Stedden. He reported that Fortin was summoned to the Gate by the Lurians now posted there. When the sisters learned of this, they immediately armed themselves and chased after Brother Fortin, up the street. They caught him just as he finished his conversation with the Lurian officer. Fortin calmed the sisters, but only for a time. He reported the timeline for the wedding had been moved up- it was to happen that very day!

Lady Moon be merciful!

It was then I hatched the idea that perhaps one of the sisters should consider marrying Henerick. Remove the threat through peace, if only for a time. I soon after shared this plan with the three of them- it was not well received. For a long time, we discussed

possibilities and ideas about what to do. For a long time, the unknowns and shortcomings in what we had the ability to have done became more and more apparent. Ultimately, we separated with little in the way of plans. The sisters made for Agathe's while I caught up with Fortin. It prompted a fortuitous decision as he had just received word from Linden. He had been passed a note with the partial stanza of an old ritual for matrimony:

"-so may Her blessings,"

"may the face of Illios not be clouded," -So I have seen.

The note was indeed in Linden's hand. The word "not" was smudged. Fortin and I then formulated a new plan- a storm. There would be no ceremony if "Illios was clouded" by a late spring storm! Brother Fortin's connection with Illios would allow him to cause such an event, for a time. We informed the sisters that we might, under the guise of clergy, get close to Henerick, or Thylera, or perhaps at least Linden. We too considered taking on the garb of keep guards in order that we might have gained entrance there. With our daring plan in place, we waited as our enemies prepared for an impromptu ceremony- one we hoped to interrupt.

We wished each other good luck and went our separate ways. The sisters in disguise, made their way to the site of the ceremony in the company of several townsfolk and my Brothers. Fortin and I made our way to an abandoned house with a second floor and a view of the hill to the west of Redwater. As time for the wedding approached, Brother Fortin did indeed call in a spring storm. To say that his prayers had been answered would be a gross understatement. A late spring blizzard the likes of which I had never seen blew in from the west. Temperatures quickly dropped, and the wind howled. Soon the clouds and then snow would follow, the icy wind pitched the town into chaos. I watched from the high window of the house and prayed for the success of the sister's efforts. It was only moments until anything more than a few strides beyond could be seen outside in the blizzard.

It was the first time I had been so close to an Acolyte of such power. Seeing it firsthand filled me with emotion- awe, fear, amazement, pride, many things. Tirelessly he prayed, and I tried to accompany him, stopping myself only to reopen shutters that had blown shut in an effort to keep the face of Illios on him, even if obscured. His efforts seemed to last for only a few tens of minutes, yet the valley, hills, and Redwater were blanketed with snow as if days of weather had transpired. When he finally collapsed, he was near frozen. Not knowing what else to do, I wrapped him in his robes and helped him back to the temple. In my heart, I knew Illios' gift had made the difference.

Illios be praised!

Back at the temple, the sisters had returned, and Brother Linden was with them. The wedding has indeed been stopped. We were rushed to the kitchen to Linden's side.

Sadness clutched me when I saw him up close. Clearly, he was near death, and all of us panicked as we debated what to do. Linden reached out to Signy in that moment. With fear in her eyes, she allowed him to pull her close-

“Save your parents, child.”

They would be the last words of the great illuminator. He was dead, but for a moment I felt Her presence. I took the burden of securing his final rest- Fortin and Stedden had not the heart. For this I could not blame them- Linden’s passing was difficult for all to witness. Several of my saddened Brothers took him to be prepared for funeration and the rest of us began to prepare the evening meal.

When I finally caught up to the sisters, I offer them a braised rabbit stew and fresh bread. Apparently, Signy could then fully remember the night she was found in the river. Selene be praised, Linden’s final act had been blessed. Signy now knew how she had escaped the keep through Thylera’s chambers. Ingrid then ordered everyone to bed. We would finalize our plan to utilize this new information in the morning.

Triad grant us rest.

Auctus13.2c

We all, me included, slept late. The sisters were set upon sneaking into the keep via Signy’s newly remembered path. I express my desire to accompany them to assist, but Ingrid would not hear of it. To my surprise, both Eevi and Signy argued in favor of my coming along and reluctantly, Ingrid eventually agreed.

While preparing for our approach to the keep, I took time to pray. I asked Selene to look after the sisters in what had to be one of their most daring endeavors. Although I had made them a hearty late breakfast of eggs, goosehash, biscuits, gravy and hot apple cider, my efforts to prepare were quietly sidelined. The blizzard had come at a cost. Jynce, Tyra, and their young baby had perished in the cold.

Brother Fortin was overcome with despair. The loss of his teacher and then hearing the news of these deaths at what he believed was his own hand was too much for him to bear. He leapt from the roof in an effort to end his own suffering, perhaps as punishment for his actions.

I asked Eevi once how old she was when she first took a life. She was 17 when watched the life ebb from another, by her own hand. I could not help but think that what she witnessed and I what I saw in Fortin’s eye was altogether different. The was something more there- first a look that was not his own, then the pleading look of deepest regret. What greater evil could there be in the world than forcing one to take their own life? I was convinced that what steered Linden, too steered Fortin and as I knelt with him there in the snow, I vowed to bring all that I had to bear against it.

All of it was a painful reminder of the ripples our actions had and would cause on the people of this town. Selene would indeed help us, guide us, and keep our endeavors within our bounds, so that the wishes of the sisters and needs of the good people of Redwater might be in harmony. But it was up to us to hear Her.

I was left having to address the Brothers in the temple, to redirect their hopelessness and focus them on their greatest duty, to tend to the good folk of Redwater.

Soon after I caught up with Eevi, and as was her usual custom, she handed me a piece of wood as she carved at one herself. I admit, I found the task relaxing- choosing to apply a skill I have for manipulating wood rather than thinking about attempting to thwart that about which I have more questions than answers. The knife set to work in my hands, and without thought, nearly as if a meditation, I carved. Before long I held three figures, all joining hands in a circle, the three daughters of Arden. Signy and Ingrid would join us soon after.

We were visited by a Herald of the Regent of the Lake. Along with the Regent's arrival, we learned that Brother Lathan is traveling with him. A servant of Erebos, I thought perhaps he was to perform the ceremony now that Linden was no longer among us. Also, with the Regent would be Toreas, and according to the herald, a sizeable escort of Eclan Traders. It was told to us that Eclan owed the Regent 3 full rafts of Berian timber before the end of Auctus. If the deliveries could not be made or similar financial compensation could not be presented, the Regent had the right to name a new Lord of Redwater. Eclan Traders too, was leveraged against this transaction. It seemed there was much more risked on this wedding than we realized.

As I assisted in the plans for Linden and Fortin's funeral, we decided to use it as cover to leave the walls of the town. From there we intended to find Signy's tunnel. Time was not on our side, and with the Regent arriving tomorrow, we had no choice but act on whatever plan we had- find the tunnel, make our entrance to the keep, slay Henerick and his mother. That was the extent of the plan. I now admit, I prayed that Selene might put Fuhlgar too, in our path.

We hid our arms with the recently departed and slipped out of the city as part of the congregation. Brother Stedden did a fine job of leading the funeration and the others pass the sisters gear to them before lighting the pyres. We stepped into the darkness beyond the glow and quickly made our way south in search of the hidden tunnel entrance.

It was not long before Signy found the notched stone from her memory. With some difficulty, we entered the cold river, pressing through reeds until the depression is located. I held my breath until it seemed my lungs would burst. The underwater passage was longer than I expected. When I again felt air on my face, I regret I was not quiet about breathing. Fortunately, none were there to hear me save my companions. We found

footprints- someone had entered before us. The condition of the tunnel improved the further in we went. Soon we reached an intersection and decide to follow the tracks of our predecessor.

As we approached the chamber ahead, sounds of activity could be heard. Brining our flame into the chamber had an unexpected and terrible result. Oil that had coated the walls of the room exploded in a blinding hot flash. We were scattered. As my eyes adjusted, a familiar but charred form fell from the ceiling to my feet.

It was Peth! Ingrid was upon him immediately, hoisting him to his feet and then bashing his head against the nearby wall. She demanded answers and quickly learned that Peth had been arrested at the Whetstone soon after we had been there asking about him. He had been trying to escape ever since. Apparently, the keep was in such poor condition, it afforded him a way out of the dungeon and into the catacombs. I tended to his burns, mostly his leg. Ingrid reluctantly insisted that Peth had no choice but to travel with us back to the keep. She made no mention of how we came to be there.

After a series of long passages, iron gates, and empty chambers, we entered a place that was not empty. Not at all. There was a mural painted on the wall of a giant tree with branches outstretched like arms. The tree was surrounded by a purple aura and small people with heads of birds. It had an ugly, unholy feel. On the floor in front of the mural were several broken eggshells in small pools of blood. The room was old. Closer scrutiny revealed to me the worn relief of woodsman working in what I assumed to be the Berian Wood beneath the newer mural.

Beyond, we continued until reaching a completely overgrown passage. It was as if tree root had spun themselves in a great vortex to close access to what lie beyond. The gap was barely big enough for Signy to crawl through. The passage was familiar to Peth. We forced our way through, one after another. Crawling, slithering as a snake, it took ages to reach the other end. When we did reach beyond the roots, we found ourselves in a small chamber. I appeared to be the foundation of a tower. A spiral stair led up on the opposite side of the room. The roots had indeed taken a toll on the keep, displaced stones and huge cracks were common.

Not far up the steps, we were attacked! Our assailants were horrifying creatures of nightmares- half man, half bird. Abominations from old times, the beast were frightening to behold. The cramped stair proved to be a very difficult spot for a fight. I am thankful still that Ingrid was able to save me from becoming supper for one of them. The slaying was not quiet, and from above us came a voice. Looking down from the archway above stood Fuhlgar, bare, save a longsword. I would soon learn the sisters recognized it instantly as that of their father. I don't think I had ever before prayed for a man's death, but for all things there is a first time. The room at the top of the tower was overcome

with the great wood that then grew within. The walls, floor, and ceiling were all a tangle of a living Berian tree.

The sisters charged in and quickly although not easily, dispatch the evil Fuhlgar. They then were engaged by guards that too were bested before Thylera arrived. She stood up from what I then could see was a bed grown into the trunk of the great tree. As she raised her hand, I glimpsed wisps of distortion at her fingertips. Magic! Arcane magic of the worst kind. The room fell to sleep. I was only spared the effect due to my distance and to be sure, will of Selene. Rapidly, more guards arrived and seized the sisters. As Thylera backhands Ingrid, cursing her for slaying her lover, I elected to enter the chamber and demanded that she stop.

To my surprise at almost the same moment, a door opposite me burst open and none other than Klain Whiteshield, Regent of the Lake, stepped in. Along with him, White Guards and Brother Lathan. In the moments after, through much chaos, a wave of excuses was brought forth and a symphony of lies was concocted. I quickly slipped back and collected one of the half-bird creatures in order to present it to the Regent and Lathan. As I did, there were more malicious wisps from the hand of Thylera.

The sisters were taken to the dungeons, and I was instructed to follow Brother Lathan. In a very direct and brief conversation with the tall Acolyte, he inquired if I intended to perform the ceremony in light of the recent passing of our Brothers in Redwater. Instead of offering my answer, I instead revealed to him all of our intentions. After a much longer discussion, I too offered my suspicions concerning Lady Thylera and her true capabilities. He then excused himself and left me alone on his balcony. Only then did it occur to me that I was in the presence of the single most powerful and respected holy man in the entire region. I am thankful still that I realized this only after my insubordinate behavior.

From my temporary perch, I heard much going on in the keep. The bride, is seemed, did not want to be wed at all. Both Henerick and Thylera lamented the loss of Fuhlgar. I shall not say I was delighted by this, but I was not saddened. Not at all.

Eventually, I was joined by Lathan again. Ariam, a White Guard, was with him along with several others. I recognized Ariam immediately, having had her in camp with Ingrid on several occasions. She recalled me also, an unexpected surprise, but a most welcome one under the circumstances.

We descended to the dungeons where I was permitted to meet with the sisters. I tried as best I could to tend to their injuries. They were unsure what to do, but I told them to stick together, and I reminded them that Lady Moon would watch over them. I left what food I still had with me to them and said my goodbyes. As I left the hallway to their cell, I caught a glimpse of the Regent in one of the side rooms. I would later learn that he too would speak to the sisters.

I was released to return to the temple which I immediately did, as Brother Stedden had mentioned that the Regent wished to take services there that next morning. As I arrived, Brother Stedden explained that all of the Lurians had moved to the keep leaving only local men to guard the walls.

It was late. I was short on time. I had a banquet to cook, prayers to say, and a Regent to council.

Lady Moon help us! Help us all, for we are nearly out of time.

Auctus 14.2c

I contemplated- what does one prepare for a regent? I took a quick inventory of what was on hand in the kitchens. I then summoned three of my Brothers to help with the preparation. Fortunately, some of the townfolk had come through with a pig, some cabbages and a bushel of apples for the wedding feast. I did not believe the ceremony would miss them.

I decided to go with pork Lormare stew, using some red wine, coriander, caraway, and roasted garlic. To go with it, I prepared some pickled cabbage, some garlic roasted turnips to tie in with the stew, and some sweet quince bread to go along with them.

I was torn on dessert, initially I thought of a honey rice porridge with currants, but since Ariam was to be with him, I felt almost obliged to make apple fritters. With the fresh apples, it was the better choice.

As I cooked, I was left wondering about the sisters. Soon I found myself in prayer to the Lady Moon asking Her to look after them. I hoped perhaps after the Regent left, I might see about what was happening at the keep. I also wondered if Ariam might assist me at getting in.

There was a good deal of unrest in the temple that day. Brothers were squabbling, and I too could feel the tensions of Redwater's fate spilling over into our everyday activities.

Preparations for the banquet took most of the day but were near complete when the Regent and his entourage arrived. He would pray for a long while in the temple, accompanied by Lathan and watched silently by his guards, Ariam among them. At the end of their worship, Brother Lathan left the Regent to his final, silent meditations. I was able to have a few words with him. He explained that even the Regent was concerned as to how things would play out here. I wondered if perhaps even the Regent's position was becoming unstable. The Regent then appeared. He wished to complete his prayers with the starry cloak of Erebos above. I showed them to the observation perch on the roof. As the sunset was fading, I spotted three women and a small man approaching the west gate from over the hill. I made no mention of it, but I knew the sisters would soon have

to explain their escape the Regent himself. I left him there to complete his prayers in peace.

I met with the sisters when they arrived. I was most surprised to find Peth with them. Peth! I could hardly believe it- still alive. The meeting was brief, for I had a meal to serve.

The Regent and Lathan were pleased at the invitation to dine with us, no doubt Ariam spoke well of my cooking. I first served the Lormare roast and watched in anticipation as the Regent samples the dish. It was received with great acclaim, and I counted no less than eight occasions of Ariam calling the meal "superb".

The meal was interrupted by a group of Eclan soldiers with intents of returning the Regent to the keep. They feigned fear of his security- Ariam was not pleased. The Regent directed them away saying he had no intention of dishonoring his host by abandoning the meal. He insisted he would return after the evening's festivities were concluded.

Not but a few moments after serving my apple fritters, we were again interrupted by word of fighting on the south side of town. The Regent and his White Guard insisted on investigating. We accompanied them through Redwater's streets to the edge of the 'Old Town' gate. There we discovered what the commotion was about- the "Lurian Princess" was ablaze. The few remaining Lurian troops had begun accusing folk and attempting arrests. The townsfolk were resisting. The Regent himself addressed the crowd from the back of a wagon. His ability to inspire calm was impressive. He then quickly began to have the townsfolk ushered back into 'Old Town'. I was clear that the Lurians were relieved at the quick end to the fight. There was little to be done about the barge. As the dock lines burned through, the burning wreck floated down the river, around the bend, and out of site. I remembered thinking how surprised Rynar would be should it stay afloat long enough to meet him.

It was then the Eclan soldiers again appeared- this time insisting the Regent return with them. He agrees but asks the sisters to remain behind and assist with the wounded. The Eclan officer had no stomach to counter the orders of the Regent. I then fetched Magnus and the wagon, we loaded several injured citizens into the back and made for the temple. There the wounded are cared for, and we all eventually turn in. Tomorrow was to be an important day.

The will of the Triad be done.

Auctus 15.2c

We awoke the next morning to Redwater surrounded by Lurian soldiers and cavalry, bolstered with the entire Eclan Traders contingent and several troops of personal guards, no doubt friends of Toreas. As the citizens of Redwater began to climb the walls to look out, an air of worry, if not panic swept quickly through the town. It appeared that we

were under siege, and far from the keep where wedding preparations were undoubtedly well underway.

Several tried to open the gates but were threatened immediately with close flights of arrows and shouts of caution. The sisters were not pleased, Ingrid was furious. We climbed to the roof of the temple to observe our situation better. It looked nearly hopeless, but Lady Moon is an ally of hope. The sound of thunder was heard from the south. We soon realized it was the thunder of horses! E'Gil led a host of southern cavalymen into view.

Selene be praised!

The horseman rode down the hill into the valley as the Lurians attempted to form up to resist. The riders circled, racing nose to tail in whirlwind before a great man rode out and dismounted. He drew a curved sword thrust it into the ground in challenge to the Lurian officer nearby. After a moment, the Lurian drew his sword and planted it in the earth in acceptance of the large horseman's challenge.

An arrow was loosed. From Esben's bow atop the gate tower, a single shot sailed far through the air and hit the Lurian through the neck. It was a message, and clearly understood as the Lurians were torn between facing the horsemen or those of us on the wall, confidence then bolstered by the elf's arrow.

As the riders move towards the gate, the Lurians gave a wide path free of resistance for the moment. Eevi was eagerly reunited with E'Gil. I overheard some of his words-

"I thought you said your home was a friendly town."

"I have thought of nothing other than this moment since Esben's return."

"I dreamt again of singing with you."

"Tell me you are well."

It was then I thought it appropriate to put my attention elsewhere, but I was pleased to see her happiness. Triad forgive me, but I liked this horseman. The large warrior that challenged the Lurians is introduced as Lagen. Ingrid saluted his bravery.

A few of us made our way back to the temple where I was passed a sealed message. It was to be delivered by the Regent's personal hawk. It was a request for aid- for troops and support, post haste. The hawk had not survived to make the appointed journey. It appeared the fate of the Regent had fallen to us as well. As I shared this information with others, we also learned that wagons were on the way to the west gate from the keep. The wagons' purpose was to gather the arranged food for the wedding feast. Ingrid ordered the gates open, and that the food be release so long as the promised payment was present. It was, again in Lurian septems.

One of the servants with the wagons delivered to me a message from Brother Lathan. I was informed of the ceremony itinerary, schedule, and location. Lathan also requested one of the Brothers from the temple be sent along with the provisions. Lathan had selected an old and particularly long traditional service for the marriage. There would be many litanies to be sung, and Stedden knew exactly who should be sent- Brother Otar.

It was then that Signy entered. I took the opportunity to pull her aside. Of all three of them, Signy had been the most consistent in her intentions since our journey began. I believed that her focus was exactly what the sisters needed. I implored her to try to convince her sisters that now was the time to act. Our opportunity was about to pass. Selene willing, she would speak to Ingrid and Eevi.

The sisters decide that Stedden and Otar shall attend the wedding, and an escort of horsemen, our newfound allies, should escort them and the wagons back to the keep. The sisters and I intended to hide within the wagons, along with six others. We would pass near the chimney and enter the tunnels below as the wagons made their way toward their destination, hopefully without being noticed. From within, we would bring this saga to an end, finally.

Fortunately, the start of their plan went as intended. We entered the tunnels through the small opening in the ceiling of the oiled room. We passed through the labyrinth of forgotten passages until we finally reached the tunnel filled with the stifling roots. All there were astounded by what happened then- Esben stepped to the tiny opening, knelt down and whispered something. This alone was startling, but as he stood and stretched out his hands, the roots began to recede. We all followed closely as the brambles withdrew, Esben moved steadily forward, providing easy passage through what we had anticipated to be a serious obstacle. I was beside myself in awe. He was praying! Praying to Selene! I then began to understand how he could influence the trees so. Truly the will of Lady Moon was with us.

In the chamber beyond, we were reminded of the damage done to the tower by the spreading of the trees. Through the cracks in the walls above, we saw that Illios had set. The wedding would be under way! We climbed the stair with all haste, bursting into Thylera's room at the top. There were no guards to be found, but there was evidence of some horrible ritual having been performed- blood, feathers, hair, candles. I could not imagine what evil had been done.

At the door, Eevi could hear Brother Otar singing verses from the wedding. We feared we might be too late. We hastily and quietly prepared to burst through into the keep. The sisters silently opened the door and grabbed the guard posted outside from his feet. Thankfully, Otar's voice drowned out the sound of Ingrid knocking him unconscious. I quickly closed the door, but someone on the other side was already testing the lock, I attempted to shoulder the push from beyond but failed. Praise the Triad it was Ariam!

Her white enameled armor polished and adorned for the ceremony. Ingrid immediately explained herself and our presence. Ariam was pleased to assist in any way she could. If the wedding was to be stopped, it needed to be quick. They all choose their spots to make our assault. Almost as an afterthought, Ingrid asked me what I was going to do and after a moment I smiled at her and told her not worry. I knew exactly what I must do.

We slipped into the hall beyond and used the crowd and side chambers to get to our positions. From my vantage, I was able to watch as the unbelievably large bride, dressed all in red and gold, made her way toward the makeshift altar and Brother Lathan.

From that moment, things began to blur. Otar was interrupted by another voice, a voice familiar to many of those there, Henerick in particular. It was the voice Orphea, or rather her middle daughter Eevi. The haunting stanzas of the Legend of Ilval and Anon caused the desired effect on those present. E’Gil too joined the singing, as Arden with Orphea, now he would trade verses with Eevi. As long as I live, I would never forget the sound. I saw Ingrid leap from the balcony, I am sure she screamed her battle cry, but I did not hear it. Not far from me Esben’s bow fired, and Signy’s too from across the way.

The details are clouded to me still save one- my prayer. I glimpsed the face of Selene, rising over the Great Berian Wood through the balcony to the east. With all the will inside me, I prayed to the Lady Moon. I fixed my gaze upon Thylera. I was gripping my holy symbol so tightly; I could feel blood running down my wrist. I could see the book in my memory, the one I had found while waiting for Master Deneth at the house of the Regent so many years ago. It sat atop a stand on a table, near the great doors where I was asked to wait. “Reticence” it said at the top of the page. I began to recite those words from my memory, Charge J, Verse Four and as I did, I begged Selene to quiet this mage, she who had so many times abused those I loved, silence her now, for this must end! Let her words fail her, her lips lull, and the calm of your silence befall her, she will have no power here!

As I prayed again and again, I hardly noticed the bloodshed around me, the appearance of the abominated Fuhlgar, or the death of Henerick and his witch mother.

It was done. FINISHED!

Or was it? Ingrid laid on the dais near death, her sisters were with her. The crowd was in chaos but for one moment the crowd fell silent as Lurians along the balcony stepped to the edge and drew. The Regent too, stepped to the edge of the balcony and spoke:

“You will not fire! Lady Moon has risen! Your time has expired, and our contract is broken. Unless payment can be made?”

“Toreas, I am sorry for your loss. I must now as Lord of Westflood and Regent of the Lake, declare all assets of Eclan Traders as well as those of your family are now forfeit under the Third Treaty of House Cerrak and the Council of the Kings. Arrest him!”

Ariam was happy to oblige, quickly putting her sword to his chest.

“You there, Charon, unless you intend to wed your daughter to this criminal, Luria has overstayed its welcome in Redwater.”

Charon began to speak but was cut short by Toreas’ booming voice.

“Scourge of the forest, servant of the old masters, accept this sacrifice of blood!”

He began to swing his ornate blade at Ariam. It was his last mistake. She spun deftly and brought her own sword across his throat, her white armor now red with blood.

The slowness of the blood flying across the room was unnerving, but when it finally ran down the wall and onto the branches of the corrupted Berian tree, there was a flash as if lightning, but with a sickening violet hue. The sound is deafening as the creature steps forth from the crack, 20 feet high or more, a horrific, living tree! It grabbed Ariam and threw her across the room, she crashed into the wall, not moving.

Brother Lathan alone stood before it shouting-

“Your time is past! You no longer have any power here!”

The darkness of Erebos sealed the crack and the beast began to wither screaming in agony, but far from death. Lathan too was swatted away as if a gnat, crashing into the alter.

Fear and exhaustion overcame me.

I am not sure how my companions did it, but again they saved me. Indeed, they saved us all. The creature was slain, and in death all evidence of the tree in the keep had turned to ashes.

As soon as I came to, I rushed to the sisters, trying desperately to bind their injuries. They would live, by Selene’s will they all would live. They had to live, for a reunion was at hand.

By the grace of the Triad, and with the assistance of none other than Peth, Arden was brought up from the dungeon. Badly abused, but alive to see his daughters again. It seemed Regent Whiteshield would name his new Lord after all.

Many tears and smiles and embraces were shared. I was filled with emotion- pride, happiness, relief, most of all thanks.

I soon stepped away from the sisters- my sisters, and their father. I exited and walked to the top of the high hill between the keep and Redwater. Beneath the stars and black of Erebos I would bask in the glow of the Lady Moon Selene. It was by her will they were alive- a debt I would spend my life repaying, gladly.

It was many hours before Stedden found me. Apparently, the sisters were worried. I could see he understood my tears. He smiled, took my hand and helped me to my feet.

“All thanks to Lady Moon” Was all he could say.

We walked back to the keep together in silence, all the while looking on the face of Selene.