

**War of the
Burning Sky**

THE MAD KING'S BANQUET



A 5e Fantasy Adventure
for 7th-Level Characters

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On the Cover
V Shane presents King Steppengard in seclusion next to the shrouded throne of his wife.



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INTRODUCTION

Lying between Seaquen and Ragesia is the Kingdom of Dassen, currently neutral in the war. Ragesia has pledged to respect that neutrality if the nation's ruler, King Steppengard, gives one of Ragesia's armies safe passage to Seaquen in order to destroy it. The leaders of Seaquen know they cannot stand against the Ragesians yet, so they must convince Steppengard not to agree to the Ragesians' terms. Time is short, and in this perilous moment Seaquen looks to its most recent heroes to sway the conscience of the king.

A few days ago, King Steppengard of Dassen received a diplomatic emissary from Ragesia and agreed to let the Third Ragesian Army march through his lands under escort, with the intent of destroying Seaquen, a village on the kingdom's southern border that has never claimed allegiance to Dassen. The heroes are dispatched in response to this, on a mission to get King Steppengard to reverse his decision.

However, in the time between the heroes' departure and their arrival in the capital of Bresk, tragedy strikes. A large-scale assassination attempt kills the queen and each of the king's eighteen children, through a combination of poison and mysterious magic. Steppengard alone survives, and his most trusted advisor, a gnome wizard named Nina Glibglammer, has uncovered evidence that a member of the landed nobility was behind the plot. The heroes arrive in Bresk as paranoia and a vengeful hunger grips the populace.

It is still unclear which noble was responsible, but many suspect that a civil war looms in the near future. Coupled with the recent aggression of Ragesia, there is a sense the entire population is holding its breath and taking bets.

Welcome to the fourth adventure in the *War of the Burning Sky* campaign saga. The troubled city of Seaquen is rallying other nations in the region in an effort to stand against the fiery might of the Ragesian Empire, and more urgently to stop the Scourge, a drive by the new Ragesian empress Leska to capture or kill all spellcasters hostile to her rule.

The heroes have already saved Seaquen from one destructive plot that would have annihilated the fledgling resistance with a magically conjured hurricane. Now they face a more conventional threat: as winter's end nears, the mountain passes will thaw, and Ragesia will be able to march an army to destroy Seaquen.

But not if King Steppengard will help.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The heroes' main goal in *The Mad King's Banquet* is to retrieve military help for Seaquen either from Steppengard or one or more of his high nobility, the Council of Nine. Unbeknownst to them, Steppengard's advisor has been replaced by a trillith named Madness, who has been confusing the king's mind, driving him to acts that will destroy his nation from within. In this manner the Ragesians hope to

ENCOUNTERS, RESTING, AND LEVELS

Because this adventure was converted from an earlier edition, experience points and advancing levels do not line up. If you are following the campaign saga, we recommend advancing the PCs to level 8 after they return from securing aid for the battle for Gallo's Fend and to level 9 at the end of this adventure rather than adhering to experience points.

At several points in the adventure, the PCs have an opportunity to take a risk to help someone or solve a problem without combat. While the original adventure awarded ad-hoc experience, awarding inspiration to the PCs that contribute is one option to reward their actions instead of using experience points.

The encounters are balanced for a party of four 7th-level PCs. Each encounter has a suggestion for how to adjust the number or hit points of creatures if your party is larger or smaller than 4 PCs. NPC participation can also make encounters easier. For instance, if the heroes bring along an NPC companion, you can consider them as an extra PC for the purpose of re-balancing the encounters. When there are companion NPCs who can help in combat, allowing the players to choose an NPC who helps on initiative count 0 instead of including all the companions every round can help keep the encounters more manageable.

You can also use this technique of adjusting the encounter for a different number of PCs to make the adventure work for PCs of different levels. This adventure can be used for a party of 6th-level PCs by adjusting the encounters as if there is one fewer PC than is actually present. Similarly, this adventure could be used for a party of 8th-level PCs by adjusting the encounters as if there is one more PC than is actually present. In either case, advancing the PCs by one level when they meet Lord Gallo at Gallo's Fend will help them keep up with the increasing challenge.

ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE

The Mad King's Banquet fills a unique role in the campaign saga. If you are running an abridged version of the campaign, it can serve as the climax of the campaign, wherein the heroes secure the safety of Seaquen in a time of war. You might shuffle the events of Acts Two and Three, so that the king's madness is dealt with first, and that the battle at Gallo's Fend is actually against the advancing Ragesian army. For the adventure's conclusion, you can have whoever ends up ruling Dassen pledge to fight for the liberation of Gate Pass, and so resolve the conflict that began the campaign saga.

If you are choosing this point of the story to begin the campaign, *The Mad King's Banquet* throws the heroes immediately into a struggle of politics and warfare. The heroes might still be representatives of Seaquen, though they would not be famed for any heroic deeds yet, or they could be a contingent from Gate Pass, trying to arrange an alliance with Dassen to liberate their city from the Ragesians.

Finally, you might simply use *The Mad King's Banquet* as a stand-alone adventure for a party of 7th-level characters, transporting the events to your own setting. Dassen can easily be replaced with any small country, as long as there are enemies across the border and a natural barrier like a mountain range that Duke Gallo can defend.

arrive to find only weak, disorganized opposition. (The dreamborn trillith made their first appearance in adventure two, *The Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar*, and more information about them can be found in the *Campaign Guide*.)

The heroes travel to the capital of Bresk, seeing along the way signs of political unrest and perhaps getting on the bad side of Steppengard's military. In Bresk, they find a paranoid King Steppengard embroiled in a series of kangaroo court trials to root out treachery, and as a result he is entirely unwilling to listen to the heroes' request for aid. Others are willing to listen, however; in particular, the representatives of the three nobles who are most at risk were Ragesia to invade—Duke Gallo, Lord Dashgoban, and Lady Timor. They present an avenue for winning support.

Before they can act on this opportunity, the heroes fall afoul of the king's advisor Nina Glibglammer, actually the trillith Madness, who frames them as being part of the conspiracy to destroy the royal family. She sends an assassin to kill them and soldiers to capture them, or at the least drive them to flee north to the lands of Duke Gallo. While doing so holds the best chance for the heroes to

accomplish their mission, it also plays into the Ragesians' plans, since it implicates Gallo as the one behind the assassination attempt.

Duke Gallo thinks the heroes are a mixed blessing and wishes to ally with Seaquen, but King Steppengard musters his army to march on Gallo's Fend and exact punishment for a crime Gallo did not commit. Facing a two-fronted battle, Gallo seeks proof that Ragesia's intentions are not neutral, sending the heroes to investigate the mountain outposts which are the first defense against Ragesia. Only by retrieving evidence that the Ragesians are planning to invade can Gallo secure the aid of his two neighbors, Timor and Dashgoban, in defending against their own king.

Time is short, and if the heroes don't help, either by cutting through dangerous terrain to deliver the evidence to the nobles, or by slowing down the advancing army, the defenders of Gallo's Fend will face a grueling struggle against an overwhelming force.

The battle's resolution is not the end of the adventure, however. If Steppengard is victorious, he claims he was given new evidence exonerating Gallo, and says they must decide how to deal with the Ragesians. If he is defeated, he calls for a gathering to negotiate an ending that will not lead to more infighting. Either way, after the battle King Steppengard requests the Lords of the Eight Lands to return to Bresk for a peace banquet, and for a festival celebrating the aversion of civil war. Gallo cautiously agrees, asking the heroes to accompany him as bodyguards and an extra set of eyes.



In truth however, Steppengard no longer cares for his kingdom, and all he desires is to see his enemies destroyed as his family was destroyed. Poisoned by the trickery of Madness, Steppengard plans to slay all his nobles with a toxin that will drive them to kill each other in a fit of insane frenzy. If the heroes do not find the clues and stop Madness's scheme, Dassen will tear itself apart.

THE KINGDOM OF DASSEN

The Kingdom of Dassen lies to the south of Ragesia, and the southwest of Shahalesti, its borders defined by craggy mountains defended by hundreds of small dwarven strongholds. Dassen's people, a swarthy assortment of humans and dwarves, cherish their land, to the point that superstitious cavalrymen even put dirt in their boots so they never have to stop touching the soil of their homeland.

Originally known as the Eight Lands, when Dassen was unified fifteen years ago a ninth region was carved out, which became the holding of King Steppengard. Today Dassen is divided into nine regions, forming a loose ring around the central mountain range, the Toraest Steppes. King Steppengard rules over the eight feudal lords and ladies, as well as dozens of minor dwarven nobles who govern their own small holdings in the mountains.

There are no mighty cities in Dassen, only thousands of farms and towns growing out from the nine castles of the king and his dukes. The largest city, Bresk, is a hilly community built both above and below ground, a sprawling walled fortress on the banks of the Nasham river. Bresk is home to King Steppengard's castle. The second most prominent settlement is Gallo's Fend, a centuries-old fortress city on the northern border, which has long served to keep enemies from entering the nation.

The Council of Nine

As a country, Dassen has had trouble remaining unified. Originally an alliance of eight kings, for three centuries the nation was bound by the rule of the Book of Eight Lands, a lesser artifact that traced the lineage of each of the nobles in charge of the different lands, and kept clear who was the rightful ruler of the overall nation, by bloodlines. The book, heavily guarded by whoever was the current king, also provided magical protection to those nobles, to ensure that each ruler was free of compulsions and ensorcellment.

Five decades ago, the king was slain by the next in line, which set off a civil war that purged many bloodlines, as the nobles used the book as a sort of to-do list of who to kill to gain power. Twice Dassen stabilized, but twice more it fell again into civil war again. While it was a chaotic time, it kept the Ragesians from conquering the land, since keeping control of it would not have been worth the effort.

Fifteen years ago a new king, Steppengard, came to power. He had no siblings, and had formed alliances to keep the nation stable, but to further ensure that there would be no more wars he established the Council of Nine. All major matters of policy must be voted on by the council (often by proxy), which gathers at Steppengard's castle in Bresk. Each Lord and Lady has one vote and the King's vote counts as three. Cooperation is ensured by an agreement that the rest of the Lords will combine forces to march on a Lord who breaks faith with the Council.

The Book of Eight Lands still grants its boon to the current rulers of each of the old kingdoms, and to the king of Dassen himself, but it no longer officially dictates the line of royal ascension. Steppengard had a large family—eighteen children as of the new year—to ensure inheritance of the throne without further war.

King Steppengard

The ruler of the nation, Steppengard is an old, experienced warrior who has a reputation for preferring negotiation to combat. Steppengard would likely have been willing to listen to Seaquen's offer, were it not that the death of his family has left him grieving and slightly unhinged.

Lord Gallo

Gallo was named Duke by Steppengard as a reward for his land's service in protecting Dassen from invasion. Across the Nasham River which defines the northern border of Gallo's lands is a mountain pass called the Alydi Gap, the only easy passage between Ragesia and Dassen. Most other routes through the northern mountains are protected by the dozens of dwarven strongholds, though none are as smooth a trip as Alydi Gap, so it has fallen to Gallo's family throughout the centuries to hold back invaders. Gallo does not want to let the Ragesians through his land, and so will be the most receptive ally for Seaquen.



Lady Timor

Timor is a wizard of modest power. Her lands are protected from invasion by the Glaskeel Cliffs, a strange icy landform half a mile high that separates her territory's plateau from the lowlands of Gallo's lands. Other routes into her lands are circuitous and easily defended. Her army is instructed to allow refugees access to her lands if they brave the hardships of the treacherous passes in the Hettkonn Mountains, and the influx is considerable.

However, Timor is very frightened of the Ragesian Scourge, and so she is willing to ally with Seaquen if she thinks they have a chance of succeeding. Lady Timor and her ambassadors are also partial to offers of magical training and assistance, which Seaquen can provide. She also has a fondness for mountain climbing and studying the wildlife of the region.

If the heroes ended the forest fire in Innenotdar (see *The Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar*, the second adventure in the campaign saga) and mentioned it as they passed through Thornwood Valley or Timor's lands, her proxy in Bresk will mention the danger her lands face from Ragesian invasion. The proxy will use veiled references to it if the Ragesian delegation is nearby.

Lord Dashgoban

Dashgoban is the only dwarf among the eight lords, and he was one of the three nobles who had to sacrifice part of his family's lands to create Steppengard's holding (the other two were Lady Dene and Lord Iz). He thinks of Steppengard as a weak man, and would like to see him replaced, but he himself has no interest in ruling the whole kingdom.

Dashgoban loves history and genealogy and research on him will indicate that knowledge of those things will be helpful in gaining his support. In typical dwarven fashion, Lord Dashgoban loves good spirits and has acquired a taste for Shahalesti dandelion ale. His proxy will be interested in a trade agreement with Herlan, the proprietor of the Enchanted Draughts in Seaquen, who can supply the ale at a discount.

Lady Dene

The beautiful Lady Dene expects to profit greatly from traffic passing through her lands to and from Seaquen, but she is nervous because she has only a weak army of her own and sees Seaquen's burgeoning population as a border threat if they become an army. Her loyalty to the king is unswerving.

Lady Dene is concerned about keeping her lands beautiful and any discussion about preserving nature will ease her fears regarding Seaquen. Normal diplomatic arguments about a non-aggression pact and increased trade agreements will help.

Lord Iz

The lands of Iz are rocky and inhospitable, home to strong warriors. However, Iz is loyal to the Council of Nine, and will obey his king. If the heroes met with Lord Iz during their flight from Gate Pass, Iz's proxy will be known to them, and garnering support will be easier. Lord Iz's interests lie in physical and military prowess, so any discussions that offer Xavious Foebane's expertise and training will be well regarded.

Lord Megadon

Megadon is one of the richest nobles, controlling both coastline and access to the Nasham River. He does not believe Ragesia is a threat to him.

Much of the friction between Megadon and Seaquen is related to fishing rights. Both sides have had a long-standing feud over control of the northern portion of Gradis Reef, which is rich with tuna and grouper. A diplomatic concession from Seaquen to resolve these issues would help garner some new support.

Lady Namin

Lady Namin has ties to the Shahalesti, whose nation her lands border. She has heard rumors that agents of Lyceum attempted to kill the princess of Shahalesti and destroyed part of the Shahalesti fleet, so she is hostile to Seaquen. When the king's wife was killed, Lady Namin was already in the capital city, and she quickly began maneuvering to become the new queen.

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When the king's wife was killed, Lady Namin was already in the capital city, and she quickly begins maneuvering to become the new queen. Lady Namin is vain, and appeals to her vanity are the easiest way to garner her support. Lord Megadon's and Lord Rego's proxies will tend to follow Lady Namin's lead if the heroes can manage to flatter her enough to obtain her support. The heroes can help ease her

mind about Seaquen by revealing the real story of Ragesian treachery to her.

Lord Rego

Rego, a terrible manager of resources and the poorest of the noble lords, has suffered the most from refugees passing through his lands. Most use the Prince's Way in the open plain just south of the Churnett River and nearly all Rego's towns and villages have suffered from the depletion of the local resources.

In an effort to mask his own shortcomings, Rego loudly blames the openness of Seaquen for his troubles and has. He is actively hostile to Seaquen because of their unwillingness to help when his lands were under threat by Lsi Pu years ago and wants to see it destroyed as a way to shift the focus of his duchy's problems elsewhere. Because of his animosity, he will only be interested in a generous trade agreement with Seaquen and some form of subsidy to offset damage done to his dwindling wealth.

RAILROADING?

The material in *The Mad King's Banquet* describes just one possible course of events—the one we think is the most likely. The adventure assumes that after leaving Bresk the heroes end up with Duke Gallo, the only noble willing to work with Seaquen. If the heroes take another route—such as going to a different noble seeking shelter—they can still end up at Gallo's Fend, perhaps having gained additional allies or enemies along the way. Unless the heroes plan to abandon their mission, anyone they go to for aid will tell them that Gallo is their best hope for success.

Of course, the heroes can go completely off the

ENEMIES ON THE FLY

In Appendix A you will find stat blocks for all the foes the heroes will encounter in this adventure. You can easily take these statistics (being careful with encounter building, of course) to generate encounters for the heroes should they set off on a path the adventure does not prepare for.

For instance, if the heroes attempt to abduct King Steppengard and replace him with a double, you could have the king's guard and a mage very similar to Kelkin protecting the king's chamber, with Madness lurking in the room, manipulating his thoughts through horrible dreams.

suggested track. They might decide to ally with the mad king, pledging Seaquen's powers to help destroy Gallo if Steppengard is willing to rebuke the Ragesians. They might decide to ally with Ragesia, and could play Gallo and Steppengard against each other to drive the country closer to civil war. Or they might flee south to Seaquen to recruit allies to overthrow Steppengard directly, though given the relative sizes of the forces, that plan is likely doomed to failure.

Remember also that by this adventure, you're likely several months into the campaign. The players should be getting more into their characters and have goals of their own, though some of the initial excitement from starting a new campaign might be wearing off. When looking for ways to keep the adventure dynamic, we encourage you to play up the things your players and their characters would be interested in. The adventures in this campaign saga are all meant to be fairly modular, so if your players totally annihilate Dassen in this adventure, it won't ruin adventure five, which takes place in Ostalin, though it might paint events in a new light.

CHARACTER MOTIVATION

If the heroes saved the day in *Shelter from the Storm*, Seaquen comes to them with this mission. Otherwise, the heroes can be representatives of any group with interests in the war. In addition to seeking an alliance to protect Seaquen (or whichever place they represent), the heroes might want to try to get support for an eventual push to liberate Gate Pass from Ragesia.

The heroes almost certainly need to be involved with a group that can arrange an audience with the king, though they might simply be representatives of one of Dassen's own nobles, or they might be looking for a way to win land for themselves, to fight their way into the nobility.

ACT ONE: MESSAGE FOR THE KING

In this act the heroes are recruited on a mission for Seaquen, travel to Bresk, and have an audience with the king. They can gain the favor of other nobles, but they attract the ire of Madness, who is posing as the king's advisor. By the end of the act the heroes will likely be fleeing from Bresk, perhaps after escaping prison.

MEETING AT LYCEUM

A week after the hurricane (see *Shelter from the Storm*), the heroes are notified—either by letter or by an NPC that they trust—that their presence is desired at Headmaster Simeon's office at the Lyceum academy to discuss their next mission.

As they head across the campus to the main tower, anyone with a passive Perception of 11 or higher notices someone watching them. Among the groups of students strolling under the walkways with their instructors is a scrawny young man, no older than sixteen, with straw-colored hair and expensive clothes. He is focused on the heroes, and is distracted from his lesson about how to defend against mind control magic.

This is **Jineer Bremman** (N male human sorcerer 2), a student at Lyceum who has heard that the heroes might be headed to Dassen. Jineer is the son of Proxy Jinis, the representative of Duke Gallo at

Steppengard's court. He does not plan to approach the heroes yet, but if the heroes go talk to him, see [A Letter Home](#).

Simeon's office is on the fifth floor of the main tower of the Lyceum academy, its door guarded by four soldiers and four mages. The office fills a quarter of the tower's floor, and is furnished with several comfortable couches set up to serve as a conference area, plus a desk and numerous bookshelves for Simeon. Maps, sculptures, and weapons adorn the walls, and a broad window looks out westward over the still-devastated Seaquen harbor. **Simeon Gohanach** (LG male human diviner 13) is here on one of the couches, and next to him stands **Kiernan Stekart** (LN male dwarf abjurer 11), the head of the War Department.

On another couch is **Katrina** (CN female sorcerer 7), the opportunist who helped get the heroes into the good graces of Seaquen. She has already managed to parlay their success into an advisor position for herself. So far no one suspects that she is actually a spy for the Ragesians. If **Haddin Ja-Laffa** (NE male human wizard 9) survived the flight from Gate Pass, he might be here as well, coughing and wheezing quietly, since he is nearly as manipulative as Katrina.

Also seated is a person the heroes have not spoken to before, **Balan Bastom**. Balan is originally from Ostalin, where he was officially a noble, though he has no actual political power. Now he is serving as an advisor to Seaquen, and has been chosen as the diplomat to represent the town's interests in Dassen.

Balan enthusiastically waves them over.

"Come on and sit down," says the half-elf stranger. "I'm Balan Bastom, distantly related to the Bastom house of Ostalin. Pleasure to meet you. Simeon and I were just trying to figure out how long it had been since we'd seen a storm anywhere near as big as the one we had last week. The best we can figure was twenty-two years ago. Good job on that, by the way."

Katrina smirks. "We owe them our lives," she says. "We've got a mission for you. I've promised them that you won't disappoint us."

Simeon smiles and makes introductions, gets everyone drinks of their choice from a well-stocked cabinet, and lets some small talk take place before getting to business.

OTHER SEAQUEN MISSIONS

While the heroes are busy securing the safety of Seaquen against an army, four other groups of agents are on secret missions of their own.

One group is headed for the Monastery of Two Winds, on the border of Ostalin and Sindaire, following clues that suggest the monastery might have been involved in the hurricane plot. Another group, recruited by General Xavious, has been sent to find any evidence about the fate of the Torch of the Burning Sky. They are all very elite adventurers, and are in daily contact with Simeon. The other two groups have been sent to Shahalesti and Ostalin following other leads Simeon and Kiernan are not talking about right now.

The first two groups will eventually fail in their missions, which will be the basis for the heroes' goals in the next two adventures. That is not to say that everyone on those missions dies, however, so if the heroes have made friends or enemies in the city, one or more of those NPCs might be involved with these missions, only to show up unexpectedly later on.

The large-bodied Balan sips delicately at his ale and casts a wan smile in your direction. “I suppose you are wondering what this is all about,” he says, “and I can’t say I blame you. Have you heard the recent news out of Ragesia? They’re dispatching an army to come take care of us. As soon as the mountain passes thaw on the border between Ragesia and Dassen, we’ll have forty thousand or more soldiers headed our way. The downside of notoriety, I fear.

“Regardless, with the damage to the town, even if the entire refugee population mustered, Seaquen can’t hope to defend itself against the Ragesian army. Normally it would be a simple matter of requesting help from King Steppengard, since officially Seaquen is part of Dassen. Not like we actually pay taxes, though.” He grins.

“But the Ragesians have gone and made a non-aggression pact with the King.” Balan frowns. “We just got word this morning. An envoy from Ragesia promised that Empress Leska will not attack Dassen if their army is allowed to march through unmolested. Depending on how the weather goes, it looks like we have a month or two before our resistance is cut short.

“That’s where I, and hopefully we, come in. Simeon here has asked me to journey to Bresk and use my humble persuasive skills to convince the King to change his mind. We’ve already sent ahead a courier requesting an audience for us, so hopefully they’ll be expecting us. Now, we’re not particularly keen on officially allying with Dassen, but if we pledge our magical support to King Steppengard in this war, and play to his ego about how he is letting the Ragesians bully him, I think we have a shot.”

Simeon interrupts. “Try not to give away the town, Balan. Remember, we want to ‘offer our assistance at the king’s pleasure,’ not ‘pledge loyalty.’ We’re not joining his country, and we’re sure as hell not going to pay him taxes. We. . .”

Balan shakes his head. “I’ll try, but let’s not get too full of ourselves. We’re not a sovereign nation here. I’ll say and do whatever is necessary to make sure that all the people here are safe from the Scourge. If Steppengard won’t listen, maybe one of the other nobles will.

“Anyway,” Balan continues, “as you can probably see, I am neither a great warrior nor an experienced traveler. Ragesia already has an envoy in Bresk, so we should

expect some trouble. Simeon vouches for you fully. We need your help. I shudder to think what would happen to Lyceum if the Ragesian Scourge reaches us.”

From here on the conversation turns to the practical. Simeon can provide maps and Balan can explain the political nature of Dassen. Kiernan says little unless asked about military matters, which he has been researching for the past few weeks. Surprisingly, Katrina has as much information about the Ragesian army as Kiernan does, which she explains by saying she had a few friends in the Gate Pass resistance over the years. They all encourage the heroes to ask questions and get a clear sense of how their mission will play out.

Travel

While Seaquen was being struck by a bizarre winter hurricane, weather in Dassen and further north has been terribly cold. The temperature is already taking a downward turn in Seaquen, and it looks like it will snow within a week, even though winter should be coming to an end soon.

The Nasham River that runs north through most of Dassen has frozen, whereas the King’s Road, while normally an easy highway, is currently buried under snow and would be difficult passage. After a bit of overland travel to get out of the swamps near Seaquen, the heroes could buy a few sleds and dogs, reindeer, or horses to pull them. Balan would cover the cost of these, at Seaquen’s expense.

The heroes might mention hiring a Wayfarer to teleport them, but how to survive the “Burning Sky,” wherein teleportation causes fatal burns, still eludes the Wayfarers (and everyone else).

News of the War

Gate Pass is still a battleground: the Second Ragesian Army now controls several districts, and Shahalesti forces aid the city’s defense. Shahalesti and Ragesia also battle in the northern reaches of Shahalesti, as the Fourth Ragesian Army heads for Nacaan, capital of the northern Shahalesti state. The Ragesians apparently plan to join up their two armies after conquering Gate Pass, in order to drive for Calanis, the Shahalesti capital.

The Ragesian fleet is blockading Turinn, the capital of Sindaire, while General Magdus of the First Ragesian Army marches to take the city from inland, though his forces are split up, and he is making slow progress as he tries to get them to return to the main body. There is also word that Ostalin is

preparing to invade Sindaire, but news out of Ostalin is unreliable right now.

Getting Ready to Go

Simeon expects the heroes to leave in the morning. He encourages them to purchase whatever they'll need for the mission, pleased that the war economy is at least keeping people busy in the city. He promises to make sure any of their belongings they must leave behind are taken care of, and wishes them luck. Before they leave, he asks Balan to alert Kiernan via *sending* if anything goes horribly awry. "Good news," he says, "can wait. Bad news will refuse to."

A LETTER HOME

This encounter can happen pretty much anytime while the heroes are still in Seaquen but it is most likely to happen soon after they leave their meeting with Simeon and Balan.

Jineer, son of Duke Gallo's proxy at the Dassen royal court, has heard rumors that a mission is being planned to Dassen, and he wants the heroes to get in touch with his father, about whom he is worried. If Crystin Ja-Nafeel is with the heroes, she relates a vision about Jineer's father, telling him, "Your father will be caged by Madness." (Honestly, this is probably the most literal vision she has had so far). If Crystin is not available, Jineer simply has a feeling something has gone wrong.

Eventually Jineer approaches the heroes, if they don't talk to him first.

You meet the eyes of a skinny teenaged boy cursed with a mop of unruly blond hair. He turns a brilliant red and says, "I... I'm sorry for following you. I, uh, wanted to ask, if you're going to Bresk, you know, could you take this, this, um, letter to my father? His name is Jinis, and he's Lord Gallo's proxy to the royal court. You... um... you are going... aren't you?"

"Please, I think... I'm afraid something bad is going to happen to him. I... I can offer a few coins if you'll get this to him."

Jineer has not heard from his father for a few weeks, which is normal, since letters aren't delivered often during winter. He has, however, heard the news that Ragesia is going to march through Dassen, and he knows that Gallo will be the one the heroes will need to speak to if they want to convince the country not to acquiesce to the Ragesians' demands.

He says his father can help them. In the letter he has written about what brave heroes they were, and how they saved the town from the hurricane. He is able to pay only 10 sp.

The letter is unsealed; it expresses Jineer's worry and tells his father to trust the party. Despite his issues with speaking, Jineer writes eloquently.

THE TRIP TO BRESK

The journey from Seaquen to Vidor at the edge of the marsh will take about two days. The heroes can buy a sleigh and team of horses at half price from Leto Moore, who likely sold them overpriced boats on the way to Seaquen. A refugee bartered the sleigh and horses for some of his overpriced boats, and Leto now just wants to get rid of them.

The heroes can then travel the 120 miles to Bresk up the frozen Nasham River, at a rate of, 30 miles a day. The terrain is covered with snow. The weather during the day is cold enough to require cold weather clothing, and at night temperatures fall enough to require fires or shelter to keep warm. Anyone the heroes speak to along the way expresses that the cold is unnatural this close to spring. While the river has frozen during the occasional rare cold snap in the past, it has never done so this far south.

Late Refugees (EL 7)

As the heroes are traveling along the frozen river, after they have gone ten miles upstream, have each of them make a Wisdom (Perception) check, recording the highest result up to 30. At a distance of 100 feet, plus 10 feet per point of the highest check, the heroes notice a distant commotion off the eastern bank of the river. A large crowd of people is fleeing across the rolling, snow-covered hills, screaming in panic, pursued by a towering monstrous centipede with hotly glowing red plates along its back.

This group of refugees, recently forced out of Lord Rego's lands where they had been trying to settle, were headed to Seaquen on foot when the heavy beat of dozens of feet attracted the attention of a remorhaz. The remorhaz has pursued the people for miles, stopping only to kill or swallow those who stumble and lag behind. Though the monster is not any faster than the refugees, with its higher Constitution it can run much longer than they can with. So every few minutes it manages to kill a few stragglers, after which it runs again to catch up with the mobile buffet. At this point it has already eaten

its fill, and it is just following them for fun while the refugees are approaching the point they cannot run any more.

When the heroes first see the refugees, the number of refugees still alive is 10 + the value of the check recorded above. The refugees are exhausted and can no longer take the Dash action, limiting them to 30 feet of movement on initiative count 0. Each round the remorhaz catches up to another refugee and kills them. Reward the heroes with inspiration if they manage to rescue at least 20 refugees.

Creature

Young Remorhaz

Adjust the remorhaz's hit points up or down by 20 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

The remorhaz's gullet is already filled. So it bites a target and continues to do so until they fall to 0 hit points before it moves to the next victim. Right now the remorhaz is keeping up with its prey, but it will turn its attention from its food to its enemies if attacked by someone within 60 feet of it. Once they reach the river, the creature's weight and heat will shatter the ice, stranding or drowning most of the terrified refugees and causing the remorhaz to be restrained for its next two turns. If the heroes can kill it or delay it for a few rounds, the refugees will be able to get to safety on the far side of the river.

Aftermath

The refugees are mostly 1st-level adepts and their families, who just want to get to Seaquen. They have lost a dozen people already to this monster, but the one they blame is the Dasseni noble Lord Rego, who drove them out of his lands. After being rescued, the refugees will take some time to rest and overcome the shock of what has happened. Then, knowing nothing else to do, they'll head to Seaquen.

When the heroes eventually return to Seaquen, they will find that the refugees they saved have told the tale of their rescue, for which the heroes are greatly lauded.

Bodies in the Water

This encounter happens when the heroes are 60 miles from Bresk. Their sleigh comes to an abrupt stop and the animals pulling it cannot move any farther.

When the heroes get out to investigate they will find the sleigh is caught on an ornate loop of leather.

Further investigation reveals that the loop is actually a belt belonging to a corpse frozen in the ice. There are, in fact, three bodies frozen in the ice, all men, their features distorted. It takes only about a minute of hacking to free the bodies, since the ice here is thinner than normal.

If the bodies are freed, the heroes can see that two were killed by crossbow bolts in the back, while the third looks to have been hanged. Each has the same device somewhere on their clothing: a leopard and a serpent dancing under a sunburst. A successful DC 11 Intelligence (History) check reveals that this is the device of Lady Dene. A character who is a Dasseni or who has a background related to nobility has advantage on this check. A successful DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the ice around where the bodies lie does not match the rest of the river surface. It appears to have been melted with fire, and is covered with notably less snow.

This is the heroes' first clue that foul things are afoot. What happened was that Lady Dene's proxy sent an escorted courier home to deliver news of the recent assassination and to ask for Lady Dene's presence at the court. But Steppengard's newly formed Talon police force suspected them as conspirators, so they chased them down and killed them.

A successful DC 8 Wisdom (Survival) check locates the tracks of a group of people who left on horseback a few hours ago, their tracks still visible despite recent snow. There is a tree on the bank of the river nearby, where the one man who surrendered was hanged. The soldiers on horseback headed upstream on the King's Road, and so will be traveling more slowly than the heroes.

Police Brutality (EL 7)

This encounter occurs twenty miles upstream of the previous encounter. The heroes are likely the only ones on the river, but there is a lot of traffic on the King's Road.

On the road beside the river is a colorful caravan of three covered wagons pulled by husky ponies. It appears the halfling caravan has been stopped by five humans riding warhorses, one of them looking like a military officer. The soldiers are rifling through the wagons and throwing items about while the officer observes, ignoring the emphatic gestures of one of the halflings.

A successful DC 11 Intelligence (History) check reveals that the humans all wear King Steppengard's symbol—a male sphinx rearing, surrounded by eight

small triangles. A character who is a Dasseni or who has a background related to nobility has advantage on this check. The halflings are merchants from Ostalin, leaving Bresk and heading home, but the soldiers are suspicious that the six halflings are spies.

As the heroes approach or pass by, they hear a woman screaming, followed by a clamor from the halflings. The soldiers have found a crawlspace under one of the wagons, and are pulling out a human woman. The halflings were helping the woman, **Hethal Bekoff**, sneak out of the country (she is a minor noble and was romantically involved with a suspected assassin). As the heroes watch, the soldiers yank the woman out of her crawlspace, and the commander draws a sword, ready to execute the woman on the spot.

The band of searchers are members of the new secret police, the Talon. Though officially tasked with protecting the crown, they're not above harassing foreigners to line their own pockets. They do truly believe that assassins are trying to flee the country, so they show no mercy.

Balan is against getting directly involved but will not stop the heroes if they wish to. If the heroes approach but don't get involved, the soldiers will decide they need to search the heroes' belongings too. If they find Jineer's letter to his father, they confiscate it and begin asking a lot of questions.

Creatures

- 4 [Steppengard soldiers](#)
[Steppengard commander](#)

Add or remove a soldier and adjust the commander's hp up or down by 20 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

Unless the heroes intervene, the commander's first action is to strike the woman down, then order his men to kill the halflings. If the heroes attack, the commander and his soldiers retaliate. The soldiers attack to kill, and the commander directs his men using his Leader Tactics to focus the soldiers on heroes that look easy to take out quickly. The halflings will not help in the battle; they hide beneath their wagons.

While the soldiers have horses, they are not trained in mounted combat, and so stay on foot. If a fight turns badly for the soldiers, one will run for his horse and try to flee to Bresk at top speed to warn his superiors. If he reaches the city, the heroes

will have a very unfriendly reception, but their diplomatic papers will keep them out of immediate trouble.

Aftermath

If the heroes talk to either the soldiers or the halfling and their refugee, they can find out that just three days earlier the king's entire family was slaughtered. His five eldest children, ranging in ages from twelve to seventeen, were at a party in which everyone was slaughtered, cut to pieces, with no sign of the assassins. Within minutes of that the King's wife and thirteen of his youngest children were killed by poison at dinner, a fate which Steppengard only managed to escape because one of his nobles came to him complaining about the Ragesian ambassador.

In every case, as the bodies were being taken away for safe-keeping, to determine if any magic could be used to save them, the hearts were extracted and burned.

The enraged king ordered soldiers to begin searching anyone who appeared at all suspicious, and set his advisor, Nina Glibglammer, to divine who was responsible for the horrible crime. Steppengard has spent the past two days in mourning, and the funeral was earlier today. Many people are trying to flee Bresk and Dassen, and the Talon are causing people to panic that they might be wrongfully accused.

BRESK, CAPITAL OF DASSEN

The walled city of Bresk rises above the hills around it, with the castle perched on a rocky protrusion called the Great Hill. It overlooks the wide river and the Toraest Steppes to the east. Much of the castle is said to be underground, as are many parts of the city, which is home to several thousand dwarves. The city itself is generally unfriendly to outsiders, and most of the *real* culture of Bresk lies underground in tunnels excavated by dwarves over the centuries. Most foreigners never delve below the surface to see the bustling markets and solemn temples, illuminated by clever skylights and mighty braziers.

Bresk

LN Conventional Small City

Government. Monarchy

Purchase Limit. 15,000 gp; **Assets.** 7,500,000 gp

Population. 10,000

Demographics. mixed (65% human, 28% dwarf, 5% orc, 1% half-orc, 1% other)

Dasseni architecture tends toward the stout and broad, and is typically adorned with various great cats, gem-patterns, and sphinx statues. People dress in multiple layers of drab clothes, clearly unaccustomed to such chill weather, though the tunnels underground are much warmer.

Traditional Dasseni religion was mostly devoted to strength and warfare, but since the unification of the nation, a sect of the cave goddess **Donhofreya** (LN lesser goddess, domains: Earth, Healing, and War) has devoted itself to healing the nation. Donhofreyan prelates have earned great respect; many serve in the army, showing an eager mixture of militarism and medicine. The Order of the Aquiline Cross is on good terms with the Donhofreya prelate.

The south gate of Bresk is open to a long, snaking column of people and beasts trying to enter the city, and a smaller, more daring line of those trying to get out. Dozens of guards watch the gate and question people as they pass, searching belongings and glaring suspiciously at foreigners. Balan's diplomatic papers get the heroes into Bresk with little in the way of questioning, as long as the heroes don't act like they're going to cause trouble.

Once inside Bresk, Balan leads them to the Golden Griffon, an inn near the castle on the westward face of the Great Hill. Balan secures a large suite on the second floor, with a main common room and a bedroom for each of them. It takes Balan a few hours to get in touch with the right people and verify that their audience is scheduled for several days later (or the next afternoon, depending on how quickly the heroes traveled). In the meantime, Balan says, he wants to get their help planning what to say. With the recent assassination, it's imperative that they don't make any missteps when speaking to the king.

When all the heroes are inside the suite, Balan uses his *stone of alarm* on the door, to help keep people from getting into the suite.

"It helps me sleep a little easier at night," he says.

Group Diplomacy

The heroes, representing Seaquen, will be speaking to the King and the proxies of the Council of Nine, except that Lord Gallo's proxy has been arrested for treason, and Lady Namin is there in person. Rather than having five people talk at once, Balan (or a similarly persuasive player character) will present their case. Other heroes can help the primary speaker's Charisma (Persuasion) checks, but only one character will be allowed to speak. So they must

DICE OR DIALOGUE?

Depending on how political your players are, their diplomacy could be resolved with dice, or it could turn into an evening of role-playing as the heroes locate the proxies, track down their friends, play tavern games and win drinking contests to earn the proxies' trust, pray at the same temples to hear the priests' opinions, and possibly seduce secrets from the proxies, all to help them plead Seaquen's case.

help through preparation beforehand.

Encourage the heroes to spend some time gathering information about the proxies before gathering back together to determine just how to present their case. By taking time prior to the actual event to prepare, a hero can help the primary speaker prepare the arguments for each of three groups: one to those proxies who are Friendly to Seaquen (Dashgoban and Timor), one to those who are Neutral (Iz and Dene), and one to those who are Hostile (Megadon, Rego, and Namin).

The heroes' decisions regarding what exactly to say can have beneficial or negative consequences. If the heroes are willing to explore the city and ask around, each hero who makes a successful DC 11 Charisma (Investigation) check reveals one of the following three pieces of information in the following order. Award any hero who obtains a piece of information or influences a proxy with inspiration.

The Issue of Succession

According to the bloodline succession detailed in the Book of Eight Lands, Lord Megadon is next in line to the throne after Steppengard, but Lady Namin wants to marry Steppengard and become queen. Everyone fears another civil war, and they want Steppengard to make a clear decision as to who will succeed him, instead of turning again to the Book. It does not particularly matter what the speaker says in this regard, but if they do not address the issue at all, it will demonstrate a severe lack of understanding of the situation, incurring disadvantage on the Charisma (Persuasion) checks with all the proxies at the audience with the king.

Glibglammer's Stance

The King's advisor Nina Glibglammer should be an ally of Seaquen, being a wizard, but recently she has opined that she views Seaquen as a threat. If the heroes and Balan plan to rely on Glibglammer to support their case, the speaker suffers disadvantage on the Charisma (Persuasion) checks to both the

Neutral and Hostile proxies at the audience with the king, since the gnome woman has already predicted such arguments, and has warned the representatives at the court not to listen to them.

The Demeanor of the Court

The heroes can learn the leanings of the various nobles, namely that Gallo, Dashgoban, and Timor are not fond of the Ragesian's non-aggression pact; that Iz and Dene are uncertain but are loyal to the king; and that Megadon, Rego, and Namin are hostile to Seaquen. Failing to find out this information incurs disadvantage on the speaker's Charisma (Persuasion) checks to the Hostile proxies at the audience with the king as the speaker directs pleas to the wrong people.

Other Influences

If the heroes go out of their way to meet or speak with one or more of the proxies the evening before the audience, they might gain some influence with that particular noble. A successful Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the proxy to open up about what would make the noble more open to

supporting Seaquen's plight. A second successful Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check convinces the proxy that Seaquen will reply favorably to their request. The DC for both checks is 10 for a Friendly noble, 15 for a Neutral noble, and 20 for a Hostile noble. If successful with both checks, the DC for the corresponding noble decreases by 5 at the audience with King Steppengard the next day. If the heroes mention that Lady Dene's servants were likely killed by Steppengard's new police, the Talon, they automatically decrease the DC for Lady Dene by 5. However bringing this up with any other Neutral or Hostile proxy, who view this as crass rumor-mongering, increases their DC at the audience with the king by 5 and ends the conversation.

Audience with the King

The next morning Balan and the heroes head to the castle and wait in a grand hall until noon, when they are ushered into the audience chamber just in time to see the end of a trial.

After navigating a variety of irritating functionaries and a warren of corridors leading deeper into the hillside, the heroes are ushered into a throne room—wide with high ceilings, its walls studded with small shaded windows and a single skylight over the throne itself, illuminating it and the space just before it in pale amber light. A crowd of dozens of people—proxies for nobles, their assistants, ambassadors, and servants all linger in the shadows, watching the spectacle.

The heroes are directed to the right side of the room, where they are positioned beside the entourage of Lady Namin. She is the only noblewoman who is personally in attendance and is dressed in mourning black, contrasting sharply with her platinum-colored hair. All the other nobles are represented by their proxies.

A pair of lavish thrones sit on the dais, the left one empty and covered with a black shroud. In the other sits an aging but still vital looking King Steppengard. His brown beard is unkempt, his clothes are wrinkled, and his crown is somewhat askew; it looks like he has not slept well in days.

In front of him is a slim man in manacles, being harangued by a gnome woman with curly hair that seems to shift from black to purple as she moves. She holds a book in her hand and stalks around the man in a circle, her voice shrill.

The woman leans close to the man and says, "You realize the king is offering you a chance to recant, confess, admit

THE BOOK OF EIGHT LANDS

Upon bringing up the Book of Eight Lands for the first time, have the heroes make Intelligence (History) checks, revealing all information up to the highest threshold reached. Dasseni and those with a background associated with nobility have advantage on the check.

DC 8. The Book of Eight Lands magically records the lineage of all the rulers of the lands of Dassen, and its text automatically records any births, marriages, deaths, or other changes in succession.

DC 11. The book is so named because the nation once consisted of eight kingdoms, though fifteen years ago Steppengard united the region and added a ninth region for himself. In the past the Book served almost as a checklist of whom to kill in order to move closer to the throne, so it inspired much civil conflict. It is no longer used to determine succession, however, by mutual agreement of the nobles.

DC 15. The Book grants special magical defenses to those who rule each of the lands of Dassen, and to their immediate families, intended to let them rule without being swayed by charms or compulsions.

DC 19. The book is an artifact, protected in the vault of King Steppengard's castle. Any human, dwarf, or half-human may ask to view the book by addressing the guards in Dwarven, stating, "I pray that my blood is worthy of Dassen."

your role in this tragedy, and ask for his mercy? You do realize that, don't you? It is no secret that Gallo has—"

The man interrupts, "Duke Gallo? His family has defended our nation since its birth—you should pay him the respect he has earned!"

"Gallo," the woman says. "He has the most to gain if the king were killed. This was clearly an attempt to frame Ragesia."

She gestures to the audience gathered in the darkened edges of the room, to a space opposite where you stand. You spot a man dressed in rich red Ragesian clothes, marked with symbols of a torch. He is guarded by an inquisitor in a heavy cloak, the white of his bear-skull mask darkened by etched runes.

"The Ragesians," the gnome continues, "who have offered to protect us in this time of war. But no, Gallo is too arrogant to accept that. Gallo must have his war. Is it not true?"

The man starts to reply, but stammers, looking confused.

The woman laughs. "Your lies have begun to confuse

even you, poor man. Please, answer my questions.

Explain to us how Duke Gallo was involved in the terrible, tragic, tyrannical attempt to break the back of our mighty kingdom."

Any spectator can tell the heroes that the gnome is Nina Glibglammer, the King's top advisor and the head of his newly commissioned police force, the Talon. They also reveal that the man in the manacles, named Relder, is the clerk to Lord Gallo's proxy, a man named Jinis, who is currently in jail for treason. Lord Gallo himself is not in Bresk.

The questioning continues for several minutes. Glibglammer closely questions Relder about where he was on the evening King Steppengard's family was killed, who Proxy Jinis saw over the previous week, and how Gallo was involved in the poisoning of Steppengard's family. The man seems confused often, like he's struggling to tell two stories. One paints him and Gallo's associates as innocent, whereas the other is a fervent, irrational babbling about poison and meetings late at night.

What has actually happened is that Nina (in reality the trillith Madness) senses that people are being swayed by the sincerity of the clerk, and is using her ability to make the man confused, then to implant a *suggestion*.

People in the audience nearby you mutter that it looks like the clerk is being mind-controlled, though they're uncertain if Nina is responsible, or if she was trying to break some previous enchantment. Just then, Nina breaks off her questioning, shakes her head, and turns to the throne, addressing the king.

"I'm convinced, Your Majesty, that this man has been charmed, and his memory altered."

Finally King Steppengard moves, straightening in his chair, looking somewhat ghoulish in the overhead light.

"Nina, thank you for your service. It worries me that someone could be using such sorcery in the seat of my nation's rule. Though I wish for nothing other than to execute this man for his part in," he draws a breath, "my family's murder, I must serve justice. Take him back to the prison. Until such time as other evidence comes to light, I cannot pass sentence on him."

Three guards come up and drag the manacled man away. The gnome woman steps to stand before the king, just beside his throne.

"I tire of trials," King Steppengard says. He waves



warily. “I will take audiences now.”

The window blinds are raised, the room brightens comfortably, and the heroes can see who has gathered. Proxies for all the nobles are in attendance, except for Lady Namin’s (here in person), and Lord Gallo’s (arrested for treason).

The heroes’ envoy from Seaquen is the first group called before the king. As the heroes come up to speak, the gathered crowd whispers excitedly. They can feel the heavy gaze of the Ragesian inquisitor on their backs. It is now time for Balan and the heroes to plead their case.

Have the players briefly reiterate all the points they wish to make (out of character, if they’re more comfortable with that), and then have the speaker make a Charisma (Persuasion) check for each of the three groups—Friendly, Neutral, and Hostile—using the modifiers determined from their actions and research the night before.

Friendly. This group contains the proxies of Lord Dashgoban and Lady Timor. If the speaker’s check beats DC 10, they become Helpful, and they will ensure that their respective superiors respond favorably to the heroes later in the adventure.

Neutral. This group contains the proxies for Lady Dene and Lord Iz. If the speaker’s check beats DC 15 they become Helpful.

Hostile. This group contains the proxies to Lord Rego and Lord Megadon, as well as Lady Namin herself. If the speaker’s check beats DC 20 they become Helpful.

Aside from helping secure aid from Timor and Dashgoban in Act Two, these results have little effect in the course of the adventure beyond [delaying the departure of Steppengard’s army](#) for Gallo’s Fend so that reinforcements have time to arrive. Also, if the heroes manage to sway any noble to Helpful, they should learn as much, realizing that they have supporters on the Council of Nine. You might even give the heroes some leeway in the Battle of Gallo’s Fend, such as by having some of the hostile soldiers serving alongside Steppengard’s own forces hesitate, retreat, or even switch sides at a pivotal moment.

After the speaker has presented their case, the crowd is murmuring with a bevy of responses, and Steppengard is leaning low to listen to the advice of Nina Glibglammer. After a moment Steppengard raises a hand for silence. He points to one of the heroes who has not been speaking, preferably a warrior.

“You,” Steppengard says. “You don’t have the silver, honeyed tongue of your companion. Tell me plainly. How many friends have you lost in this war? How many family?”

He waits for the hero’s response, likely scoffing.

“I have lost nineteen,” he says. “My wife. My children. I would have gladly lost my own life instead. Gladly! I have suffered enough for my entire country. No others shall lose their families in a fight that is not ours. If you were my subjects, I would have you executed for treason for even suggesting such a thing.”

He stands and scans the crowd. “None shall offer aid to this nest of serpents, these mages of Seaquen and their allies.”

He looks back to you, glancing briefly to the Ragesian envoy. “To you, I give three days in my city. Perhaps in that time you can use some of your poet’s tongue to persuade the Ragesians to show you mercy. I truly hope none of you will have to feel the same loss that I have, but by leaping to war you are calling such a wound down upon your house, your kin, your selves.

“Who next wishes to address their king?”

The heroes’ audience is clearly over at this point, as Steppengard goes on to listen to more mundane requests. Guards will not let the heroes get close enough to Steppengard or his advisor to speak to them.

The proxies of Timor and Dashgoban come over and speak to the heroes, encouraging them to stay in Bresk for a while, to see if the king might reconsider. They suggest that, if the heroes do leave, that they head north to speak to Duke Gallo. They don’t believe the claims about him, and suspect he might be able to convince other nobles to support Seaquen. By the charter of the Council of Nine, if six nobles disagree with the king, their decision stands (the king has three votes). The proxies promise to contact their Lord and Lady, and offer what support they can, but no one is willing to speak out against the king.

The heroes may speak with other proxies, or with Lady Namin, though she brushes them off, either rudely or apologetically, depending on whether they made her Helpful. Even if she agrees with them, she wants to stay in Steppengard’s good graces, and must maintain proper decorum.

Finally, the heroes might speak to the Ragesian Ambassador **Serrimus**, a cunning middle-aged

diplomat with an almost militaristic presence, and his bodyguard, **Torrax**, a highly experienced inquisitor who flaunts his apparent savagery, wearing little but furs and leather straps amid all the nobles.

This will likely be the heroes' first opportunity to speak to a Ragesian of any standing, so be sure to present Serrimus and Torrax as haughty and cruel. They are fanatics, loyal to the glorious destiny of their great homeland, and view mages such as those in Seaquen as mental inferiors who use the savage, sorcerous tools of elves and heretic gods, rather than the pure might of civilized Ragesia.

Serrimus offers anyone who looks receptive an opportunity to surrender themselves to Ragesia, gaining exile instead of death, if they are willing to betray Seaquen. He'll also make the offer if he thinks it will anger them, because he likes toying with foreigners. Torrax is generally silent and menacing, though if anyone gets belligerent he will grab the person with his clawed right hand, sneering from behind his rune-etched skull mask.

Any violence in the throne room is quickly put down, and even the Ragesians know not to start a fight. Eventually Balan will bore of standing around, and will suggest they leave, return to the inn, and come up with a new plan. As they depart, they notice Glibglammer watching them intently.

THE FIRST RULE OF ASSASSINATION

If the heroes seem interested in leaving the next day, these events happen the evening of the audience. Otherwise, they occur the next evening. If the heroes leave Bresk immediately they can avoid these events, though Madness will still seek to direct them northward to Gallo.

Madness wants first to silence Balan, who is too convincing and a threat to the control she has over the Council of Nine, and second to make the heroes look complicit in the assassination of the royal family, and third to connect the heroes with Duke Gallo, creating the illusion of a conspiracy.

To get the heroes moving in the direction she desires, she first compels one of the king's minstrels to bring the group a warning. Later that evening, she sends Pixis the assassin to kill Balan and scare the heroes, and arranges for soldiers to go arrest the heroes a few minutes after Pixis strikes. She expects the heroes to either flee on their own, or to be captured, in which case she can arrange

for them to escape prison and be guided to Gallo, guaranteeing that Steppengard will strike out at one of his own nobles.

Mysterious Warning

While the heroes are getting dinner or otherwise relaxing, a tall gangly man approaches them. He looks nervously over his shoulder before leaning over and whispers, "You must leave! You are in danger!"

This is **Hrumbrand** (N male human bard 4). The heroes may recognize him from their audience with the king, though there was no music that day. If the heroes think to question his story, a successful DC 19 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the man is under the influence of some enchantment, at which point a successful DC 21 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that he is under the influence of a *suggestion*.

The man avoids questions, saying that he can't be seen with them, but that people will try to kill them. If pressed he explains that the king is insane, and that he has sworn out an arrest warrant for the heroes, which amounts to an order of execution in these times. Their only chance of escape is to flee north to the lands of Duke Gallo, where Gallo can help them. If they leave tonight, Hrumbrand says, he'll have someone waiting at the north gate to let them out.

After delivering his message, Hrumbrand tries to bolt. Careful pursuit of him can discover that he returns to the castle, hands himself over to the guards, and is taken to the castle prison.

Silencing Balan (EL 8)

An assassin named Pixis enters the Golden Griffon, cases the joint, and sneaks into the heroes' suite in whatever way is most efficient. She has learned from staff which room Balan booked. Using *detect magic*, she notices a spell on the door and decides not use the front door, entering instead through the window across from the entry door to the suite. Preparing for a fight, she casts *darkvision* on herself.

Because the suite might have more or fewer rooms based on the size of the heroes' party, design the battleground appropriately. The suite's common room is at least 20 feet by 30 feet, with a large window opposite the door that leads to the rest of the inn. The side of the room nearest the window has a table and a bookshelf. Bedrooms adjoin the common room, each 10 feet by 15 feet with a bed, table, and wardrobe. There is also a restroom with plumbing and running water from a roof cistern.

Each door has a lock that requires a successful DC 19 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to unlock without the key.

Pixis sneaks in, moving silently, and opens doors one by one until she locates Balan or is detected. A hero hears Pixis moving about with a successful DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check. The heroes make a check each time she attempts to unlock a door. A sleeping hero has disadvantage on this check unless Pixis is in the same room or is trying to unlock their bedroom door.

Once Pixis locates Balan, she renders him unconscious with a few blows to the head. She then drops him out the window where he is caught by waiting soldiers, who carry him off to prison. Then she departs, her job done, though you can feel free to bring her back for later missions.

If at any point she is detected, she fights viciously, attempting to hide in the dark or with *invisibility* before striking, hoping to take out the heroes before they can swarm her. She attempts to render the heroes unconscious so they are still alive to flee to Gallo. When things start to look bad she flees as best she can and uses *disguise self* to change her appearance when she gets out of sight.

Creature

Pixis

Adjust Pixis' hit points up or down by 20 and her attack bonus up or down by 2 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

UNDER ARREST

First Wave (EL 12)

A few minutes after the heroes defeat Pixis, or when they attempt to leave the tavern, they are confronted by members of the Talon police force, come to arrest the heroes for conspiracy.

Creatures

- 4 Steppengard soldiers
- 2 Steppengard commanders
- Steppengard prelate
- Griffon

Add or remove a soldier and 1 griffon or prelate for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Second Wave (EL 14)

If the heroes do not come quietly, a fight breaks out in the street. If the heroes do not try to flee, Madness

has arranged for a second wave of overwhelming force to take them down, taking the heroes alive if possible.

Creatures

- 6 Steppengard soldiers
- 2 Steppengard commanders
- Steppengard prelate
- Griffon

Add or remove a soldier and 1 griffon or prelate for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Southern Patrol (EL 12)

Things can go many different ways in this encounter, but Madness wants the path of least resistance to guide the heroes north to Gallo, not south to Seaquen. Should the heroes head south, they will find the gate on alert, the roads crawling with soldiers and commanders, and the sky patrolled by griffons. The force should not be lethal. If the heroes insist on trying to fight their way through, let them; then have the soldiers call for reinforcements.

Creatures

- 4 Steppengard soldiers
- 2 Steppengard commanders
- 3 Griffons

Add or remove a soldier and a griffon for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Northern Pursuit (EL 10)

If they head north as Madness wants, the gate is open for them, saddled warhorses are waiting for them, and an eager-looking sergeant is waving them through and shouting good luck to them as they ride past. The horses have special cleated shoes for taking the icy river. It is 70 miles to the border of Gallo's land, which means a two-day trip if they follow the river, and then another 50 miles to Gallo's Fend. On the morning of the day after the heroes leave Bresk, they spot riders to the south, visible from three miles away as a dark blight on the snow. This patrol is pursuing them with orders to drive them northward and not catch up until they cross into Gallo's lands.

Once they do, the horses of the patrol will likely be near death, having been pushed for several hours each day, but nevertheless the heroes face a dangerous battle with their pursuers. However, a patrol from either Gallo or Dashgoban (use the same statistics either way), consisting of 1 mounted

Dashgoban Knight per hero, will join up with the heroes before Steppengard's forces get close enough to engage them. Seeing that they are outnumbered, Steppengard's forces retreat.

Creatures

- 5 **Warhorses**
- 4 **Steppengard soldiers**
 - Steppengard commander**
 - Griffon**

Add or remove a soldier and a griffon for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Aftermath

If the heroes end up anywhere other than with Duke Gallo, they will be encouraged to seek his aid. Don't push it, however, if the players want to pursue a different goal. When they do reach Duke Gallo's lands they are given an escort by a mounted patrol. News of the assassination has reached the Duke, as well as rumors that Steppengard thinks Duke Gallo was somehow responsible. A homing pigeon delivered word about the heroes to the Duke, and now he wants to speak with them, to see if they might be able to help each other.

If the heroes turn themselves over to the authorities, or if they are defeated in their escape attempt, they are taken to prison. Unless the heroes manage to pull something amazing off, it should become apparent quickly that they are not here to await a fair trial, just an excuse for execution.

CASTLE STEPPENGARD PRISON

If captured, the heroes are all rendered unconscious by repeated beatings, then divested of their gear. They are strip-searched and branded with a small mark near their left wrist, shaped like an X. A healing spell that heals at least 15 hit points, *lesser restoration*, or similar magic removes the tiny scar. Everyone is dressed in baggy gray shirts and pants.

Mages are manacled in a unique device with cuffs that keep their hands closed like a fist, and they are gagged with a device similar to a boxer's bit. It distorts speech enough to make spells with a verbal component have a 50% chance of failing, but the character can still speak clearly enough to be understood. Either device can be removed with a successful DC 19 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) or Strength check.

They are dragged into Cell F of Area 1 on the Castle Steppengard Prison map. The floors are

covered in thick straw, and parts of the floor are warmed by some sort of heating apparatus, but the prison is still around 50 degrees at all times. Balan, if he lives, is not with the group, and is instead taken to Area 5 to be tortured for information by the inquisitor Torrax. As the group slowly regains consciousness, some of them hear what sound like screams coming from the floor, mixed with a chorus of soft hisses, but those noises are gone by the time the heroes fully regain consciousness.

If the heroes aren't interested in attempting to escape on their own for some reason, have strong, prepared guards carry one of them off, chosen randomly, for torture by Torrax. Guards drag the hero into the torture chamber, pull Balan's body off the table, do something near the grate in the northeast corner, then open it and throw Balan's body down the pit. They close the grate, drag the hero to the torture table, and strap them down.

Torrax asks some questions, and when he thinks the hero is holding out he surgically removes a ligament from the prisoner's left knee, then closes the incision with *cure wounds*. This renders the hero unable to use the Dash action and halves their speed. These limitations stay in place until the hero receives a *lesser restoration* or similar spell. After a few more questions, Torrax has the hero dragged back to their cell, hoping the sight of their crippled comrade will convince the other heroes to be more cooperative. See if the heroes don't change their minds then.

Area 1: Prison Cells

Area 1 has 11 cells. The heroes are all together in cell F. Proxy **Jinis** (LG male human aristocrat) is in cell E. The king's minstrel Hrumbrand is in cell G, and is gibbering madly, as though he has lost his mind. The other cells are empty, though only recently. The area is well-lit, however, by three *continual flame* spells cast along the ceiling of the central aisle.

The guards in Area 2 come by once every hour to check on the prisoners. The guards work in four-hour shifts, before being replaced by an identical group, including a prelate with fresh spells. Meals are brought by twice a day. Holes in the floor serve as latrines, and the intense stench suggests they do not go very deep. Things appear bleak.

Proxy Jinis engages the heroes in conversation once they awaken. He explains that he was fingered almost immediately as being involved in the assassination plot, and that from time to time he



felt himself actually believing it, against his own free will, but he knows it is a lie. He suspects that Nina is responsible, or perhaps the Ragesians, or both in concert. Indeed, he has a lot of somewhat wild conspiracy theories of his own.

However, he recognizes the heroes as an avenue of escape, and he does his best to help them. He says that the only way to set things right is to get word to his lord, Duke Gallo, who can hopefully sway the other nobles to get King Steppengard away from his advisor long enough to cure him.

Jinis knows that the heroes' gear is likely being kept on this level, beyond the guard's room, in Area 3. He knows that the latrine empties into the river, and that there is a grate to the latrine in the nearby torture chamber, though he would not be surprised if some sort of trap keeps people from sneaking in or out. Perhaps most importantly, he has a pair of knives and a fork, which he managed to keep from previous meals. These can serve as pitiful weapons, or as improvised lock picks.

If the heroes mention his son Jineer, or manage to get him the letter (which would still be among their possessions in Area 3), Jinis thanks them deeply and excuses himself for a moment as he cries, happy to

know that his son is safe. From that point on he will be a loyal companion to the heroes.

Jinis will gladly participate in any plan that seems to have a chance of success, up to and including full confession in order to get out of his cell, or sacrificing his own life. Jinis, a true patriot, is quite willing to die if he thinks there's a good chance it'll help restore his country.

Area 2: Guard Room (EL 4)

Area 2 is guarded by soldiers and a prelate. Usually one naps while the others play cards. None of the guards have ranged weapons, and they only wear chain shirts with no shields (change their AC to 14).

This room is much warmer and brighter than the rest of the prison because of the large, open fire pit. The stairs lead up to barracks, but a heavy door at the top of the stairs will block the sound of combat.

The guards are a little gullible, and will fall for any of various "classic" escape tricks. If a fight does break out they do not immediately run for help, assuming they can handle the situation themselves. They would rather not let their superiors know they had failed, and won't flee until one of their number is dropped. Even at this point, the door at the top of the stairs is mysteriously locked, as Madness wants to make sure the rest of the castle guards aren't alerted.

Escaping unarmed could prove rather difficult. Encourage the heroes to improvise weapons, such as by prying out a loose brick, or snapping off a rusted bar for a makeshift club. Monks and rogues in particular should have a chance to shine. Amusingly, perhaps the most powerful class ability in this scene would be a paladin's ability to summon their mount.

Creatures

- 3 Steppengard soldiers
- Steppengard prelate

Add or remove a soldier for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Areas 3 and 4: Supply and Storage

Area 3 holds gear that belongs to prisoners, an old practice held over from more peaceful times when most prisoners were nobles expecting to be quickly released. Their gear is locked up in chests, the keys to which are carried by the prelate. Any familiars and animal companions of Medium size or smaller would be kept here in cages that open with the prelate's keys or a successful DC 15 Strength or

Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check. Larger creatures are kept elsewhere, and the heroes won't likely get a chance to retrieve them until Act Three.

Area 4 holds supplies, like blankets, pillows, food trays, wood for the fire, and so on.

Treasure

In addition to the heroes' gear, one of the chests in area 3 holds a scroll case with a scroll of *mass healing word*.

Area 5: Torture Chamber (EL 8)

Area 5 is a classic torture chamber, though somewhat small and poorly stocked. The shelves have numerous small hooks, implements of pain, and a 20-foot-long rope ladder, but the focus of the room is the table that serves as a stretching rack. Numerous blood stains lead from the table to the grate in the corner, from which an ominous chill radiates.

When the heroes reach this room, they find a horrifying sight. Balan's corpse is strapped to the rack and covered in tiny puncture wounds.

LORE OF JUTRAS

Upon seeing Jutras, have the heroes make Intelligence (History) checks, revealing all information up to the highest threshold reached. Dasseni and those with a background associated with nobility or criminals have advantage on the check.

DC 15. The hero recognizes Jutras by the crest on his rotted noble's outfit—a serpent coiling around a spear.

DC 25. The hero also recalls that Jutras was obsessed with the occult, and believed up until his execution that the bat-winged demon Ineluki was going to rescue him and reward him for his service to evil. Also, bizarrely, Jutras was horribly afraid of chickens, due to a prophecy he was once given by a drunken seer.

If the heroes claim to be here on behalf of Ineluki, Jutras desperately wants to believe his deliverance is here, so he immediately breaks off hostilities and asks what he needs to do. He is somewhat gullible, but each statement by a hero must be accompanied by a successful DC 10 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. Jutras realizes that he has been tricked on a failure.

If the heroes create an illusion of a chicken, Jutras retreats for one turn as if he has been subjected to an effect that turns undead. Even after he realizes the chicken is fake he will not come closer to it. The jailor gets Jutras to go back in his cell after a torture session by bringing along a dead chicken.

On his open torso lies a notebook, written in Orcish, detailing the various procedures used to extract which bits of information about Seaquen's population and defenses. The front inside cover of the book is signed—a gift to Torrax from another inquisitor named Guthwulf. The inscription reads, "The road of education is painful. Enjoy it." A thorough reading of the book grants the reader advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks whenever they uses torture on a subject.

It appears that Balan gave up a great deal of information when tortured, though some of it appears to be fabricated. Torrax is nowhere to be seen now, however.

Escaping the room seems a simple matter of moving the grate in the northeast corner, but forcing it requires a successful DC 21 Strength check. More likely, the heroes will notice a blood-rusted latch which can be pried open with a little effort, allowing the grate to be lifted more easily; a group of heroes with a combined Strength score of at least 20 can lift it. However, unless the heroes succeed on a DC 21 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they overlook that this latch is connected to the secret door in the northwest corner. If this connection is not deactivated with a key the prelate carries or a successful DC 21 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check, lifting the grate opens the secret door.

Behind this door, which can be noticed itself with a successful DC 21 Wisdom (Perception) check, lurks the castle's oldest prisoner, a terrible mass murderer named Jutras, who had sought the crown of Dassen fifty years ago. For his crimes, he rose as a mohrg after being hung, and the malicious executioner decided to take advantage of the monstrosity rather than destroy him.

Now Jutras serves as a unique tool of torture, since many prisoners who do not fear for their lives fear for their souls when threatened with becoming one of the undead. Jutras has come to enjoy his role of causing pain, and does not try to escape. But if his private chamber is opened, Jutras expects to feed. Typically he will terrorize a prisoner and then finish them off, dumping the body into the septic tunnel where it eventually becomes a zombie.

Creature

Jutras

For Jutras, add or remove 40 hit points, 1 use of legendary resistance, 2 to attack bonus, and 2 to AC for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

When released, Jutras squeezes into the main room and strikes targets one by one, hoping to paralyze each so he can feed. However, if he manages to grapple a foe and the grate is open, he will drag them over and drop them into the septic tunnel.

During normal weather, the refuse-filled tunnel under the prison is filled with dozens of hungry zombies, kept in check by steel grates on either end of the chamber. The fierce winter, however, has frozen them in the muck, so that now only their arms and heads reach out. The pit drops twenty feet to the surface of the ice, and the cave ceiling is ten feet high.

Zombie Pit

Every 5-foot square of the cave under the prison is filled with two or three zombies, frozen in place, waiting quietly until something they might be able to eat walks by. Each square of zombies has the statistics of a single [zombie](#). "Turned" frozen zombies cannot flee, but they do stop attacking. Destroyed ones are annihilated, their bodies shattering like ice struck with a hammer.

Because of both the zombies and the icy sewer floor, the area is difficult terrain, and a creature is attacked by 1 zombie for every 5-foot square they leave that has not been cleared of zombies. The zombies all attack on initiative count 0. There are a lot of zombies here. To keep things from dragging on, if the heroes eliminate all of the zombies within 5 feet of all the heroes in the sewer, they can then safely clear a path to the exit.

Escape

The tunnel leading northeast out of the zombie pit is blocked by a steel grate, the lock of which has rusted away. All that is required is breaking the ice to get out. Then, after three hundred feet of tunnel, the frozen stream emerges at the edge of a graveyard, a long-abandoned place outside the walls of Bresk.

Observant heroes might notice a concealed tower hidden among trees, brush, and tall obelisk-like tombstones with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check. The tower, 20 feet high and 20 feet in diameter, looks abandoned from the outside, but if the heroes get inside with a successful DC 23 Strength or Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check, the place is well-furnished with winter clothes, and looks like it has been in use recently. The windows of the tower provide good line of sight to the stream that

leads out of the castle. Normally there would be a small contingent of guards here, but Madness had them dismissed from duty for the evening.

Less than half a mile away from the graveyard is the main body of the Nasham River, still frozen, and on the far bank is a small village named Macon where the heroes might acquire mounts and meager supplies for a journey. If they escaped with Proxy Jinis, he recommends they head north to Duke Gallo.

THE ROAD TO GALLO'S FEND

Once the heroes reach Gallo's lands they are safe, and an escort of knights will lead them to Gallo's Fend. All along the way the towns the group stops at for the night are quiet, their citizens nervous, having heard rumors that Steppengard believes Duke Gallo a traitor. In addition to protecting the heroes, the knights, led by a dwarf named **Commander Hertiage**, speak to the towns' leaders and priests, telling them to prepare their people for war, and to be ready to send troops to aid Gallo's Fend.

Commander Hertiage is a sturdy dwarf who has survived many battles after being laid low, such that he is reported by his men to be the luckiest dwarf alive. He's an outspoken supporter of Gallo and of the cause of Seaquen, and he pretends that his men have asked to hear their stories, when in truth Hertiage is the one who is most curious. He suspects the heroes are the sort of tough survivors he would get along with, and in the two or three days it takes to ride to Gallo's Fend, Hertiage will likely become fast friends with any warriors among the heroes, especially experienced, tough warriors.

For his part, Hertiage has a lot of stories to tell about fighting savages and the occasional Ragesian incursion over the past few decades. He's got a feeling that a good fight is coming, and he's glad to know the heroes are on his side.

ACT TWO: GALLO'S FEND

In this act, the heroes join forces with Duke Gallo, a Dasseni noble who agrees with Seaquen that the Ragesians must be stopped. Aware that Steppengard will send his armies to overthrow him, Gallo needs to call upon the aid of his fellow nobles. At Gallo's behest, the heroes set out to find evidence that the Ragesians are truly marching for war, and not simply to destroy Seaquen. Once they have such proof, the heroes must bypass roadblocks set up by Steppengard in order to reach Gallo's two neighboring nobles, Lord Dashgoban and Lady Timor. In the climax, the heroes take part in a massive battle to defend Gallo's Fend from the army of King Steppengard.

THE SHIELD OF DASSEN

Similar to Bresk, the city of Gallo's Fend is walled, built into a rocky rise of land with a river on one side. However the defenses here are much more substantial, since this is the most obvious route of approach into Dassen from the north. Gallo and his ancestors have defended against the Ragesians and others before them for hundreds of years, watching the Alydi Gap, a low pass through the Otdar mountains broad enough for an army to march in force. Other routes through the mountains are narrower, more easily defended by the numerous independent Dwarven lords who serve Dassen faithfully, but the Aldyi Gap is Dassen's most vulnerable point, so Gallo's Fend acts as a sturdy shield.

Gallo's Fend

LG Conventional Small City

Government. Hereditary duchy

Purchase Limit. 15,000 gp; **Assets.** 5,250,000 gp

Population. 7,000

Demographics. mixed (55% human, 38% dwarf, 5% orc, 1% half-orc, 1% other)

The Nasham River here is roughly 500 feet wide, normally fed by many mountain streams, though in the fierce clutch of this late winter it remains frozen. An enemy army that reaches the bank of the river, however, will be bombarded by catapults and trebuchet fired from Gallo's castle, which is built on a 200-foot-high rise across the river. Rough cliffs prevent a direct assault. During normal weather, a small fleet of ships loaded with archers patrol the river, based in Stratendoch, the heavily defended waterfront of Gallo's Fend. During the winter, the

docks are perhaps the weakest point in the fortress city's defenses.

Cliffs 100 feet high protect the city along the line of the river, while sturdy walls 40 feet high guard from a land assault. As impregnable as Gallo's Fend is, it would be useless if it could not actually threaten an enemy army passing through. Dwarven strongholds dot the northern cliffs along the Nasham River, as well as in the surrounding hills, many of them connected by masterfully hidden tunnels which can be collapsed if compromised by an enemy force. Likewise, just south of Gallo's Fend is Wicked Hill, which hides two dozen underground outposts beneath what appears to be simple farmland. Soldiers can pass between Gallo's Fend and these outposts using a network of tunnels, riding out to harry enemy forces, or catching any army foolish enough to try to lay siege to the city in a pincer.

Though vast underground storehouses hold enough food to support Gallo's Fend against prolonged sieges, the Otharil Vale is nevertheless the breadbasket of the area. Home to many retired soldiers turned farmers, these plains have been the site of four major battles in the past two hundred years.

The last major outpost in the Fend's defenses is Markhold, a squat fortress overlooking the river. It is large enough to serve as a fallback position for the farmers of Otharil Vale, and is manned by several hundred soldiers. An army that wants to cross the river would first have to get past Markhold, passing through the line of fire of its ranged weapons.

The armies of Gallo are as skilled with large field formations as they are in defending against sieges, and have never failed to stop an army that has managed to cross the Nasham River. Invaders cannot easily run past the defenses of Gallo's Fend, and attempting to sack the city itself is suicide.

Now, however, Gallo's Fend faces an assault from behind. Enraged at new "evidence" his advisor Nina Glibglammer has uncovered, King Steppengard intends to rally his nation's armies to destroy Duke Gallo, claiming that he is a traitor who threatens the safety of their entire nation.

Gallo knows that he could hold out against a siege, even one launched by his own king, but he knows that if he were in such a position he would be unable to deploy his forces in enough strength to keep the Ragesians from entering Dassen. His plan, then, is to meet his king on the field of battle, hoping for a swift victory. His own forces are likely not enough for

this, but if he called upon his two nearest neighbors, Lord Dashgoban and Lady Timor, he would have enough men to rebuke the king, at which point he could demand surrender or peace talks. He can only pray the weather holds this unnatural chill a bit longer, or else a thaw will bring the Ragesians upon them when they are already wounded and exhausted.

Duke Gallo

As the heroes ride to Gallo's Fend they pass a small cavalry unit practicing near the road in Otharil Vale, but most of the soldiers are on foot, fairly evenly split between humans and dwarves. Guards recognize Commander Herriage and let the heroes in, at which point they are hurried toward the main castle. The city is bustling, everyone doing their best to prepare for coming battles. The heroes are met at the entrance of the castle by Duke Gallo and his retinue.

Before the heavily fortified main gate of Gallo's castle waits a group of a dozen people. Soldiers and menservants flank a tall nobleman with blonde hair turning gray. He nods to you as you approach, then steps forward to shake your hands.

"I am Michael Gallo. If what the rumors say about you are true, you are welcome in my city. It's good to know there are people out there who aren't crazy enough to actually trust the Ragesians."

He waits for introductions, making sure to point out a manservant named **Rodger**, whom he will assign to answer their questions about Gallo's Fend and tend to their needs. If the heroes have arrived with Proxy Jinis, Gallo is overjoyed to see his friend and servant.

"Follow me inside, please," Duke Gallo says. "Your mounts will be tended to, and we'll get you rooms soon enough—outside the castle, sadly. We're already pretty filled up here. But I and my commanders will want to hear everything. As you can guess, it's hard to get reliable information out of Bresk right now." The duke and his retinue turn to head into the castle, and Gallo waves for you to follow close. He pulls out a small metal case lined with cigarettes, takes one for himself, and offers the rest of you one if you'd like.

"The one thing we have heard—and maybe it's rumor, but I'm not going to risk not believing it—is that Steppengard is preparing to march his army here to

take me down. He's still my king, even if he wants me dead, but he's making a major strategic mistake.

"I've read up on how this new Ragesian empress thinks, this Leska. . . she's a tricky one. See, Coaltongue, you could rely on him to come in and conquer by force if he wanted your land, and if he made a treaty, well, he was an honorable man, even if he was a megalomaniac. But this 'Supreme Inquisitor?' She created a whole group of followers who wear masks. I think the only thing we can trust of her is that she lies.

"I tell you, by the dirt between my toes, the Ragesians aren't planning to just destroy a sweet little swamp town. They're here for Dassen too. I hope you are ready for a war."

Gallo leads the heroes to a small dining suite, where he serves drinks and fine food, and asks for the whole story until now. He says that he needs some time to think of his next move, so he asks that they let Rodger escort them to a small manor house down by the docks, where they're welcome to stay for as long as needed. He expects to send for them tomorrow morning, after he's had a chance to plan with his advisors.

He thanks them for coming, and promises that they can trust him. None of them want the Ragesians to get their way.

Around Gallo's Fend

The heroes have an evening to explore the city, though for now Rodger recommends they just get some rest, since they'll have time tomorrow to prepare for whatever lies ahead. Gallo's Fend has little in the way of entertainments this evening, though the heroes could have quite a shopping spree. Due to the immediate need for weapons and armor, such items can be sold for three-quarters of their normal value, instead of the usual half price for resales.

Gallo's Fend is clearly built to be a fortress. Even normal household windows are narrow, like arrow slits, and every child above the age of ten carries a sword or dagger. Most houses have guests these days, many of them recent refugees. Indeed, the manor house where the heroes stay is also home to five other foreigners, as well as a large staff that Gallo and Rodger both vouch for. Feel free to make some of these foreigners have a connection to the heroes' interests. Perhaps they are from Gate Pass, or are affiliated with some group the heroes are interested in.

The mood starts grim, but the food is full of strong cheese and juicy meat, and served in large portions. If the heroes make an impression this evening, perhaps by being encouraging to the frightened refugees, or by performing masterful music or acting, or simply with tales of their own adventures, word spreads, and within a few days the locals begin to recognize the heroes.

THE DUKE NEEDS A FAVOR

At dawn the next morning Gallo summons the party to the war room of his castle. If the heroes rescued Proxy Jinis, Gallo formally thanks the heroes before a gathering of his advisors, and gives them a promissory note worth 2,000 gp, which he suggests they use to prepare for their next mission. If the heroes delivered Jineer's letter to Proxy Jinis, the grateful father instead convinces Gallo to give the heroes a promissory note worth 4,000 gp.

Duke Gallo has a favor to ask of them while his servants serve a working-style breakfast.

"Here's where we stand. Steppengard is marching an army of ten thousand, taking the frozen river northward so he can avoid the normal defenses along my border. Now, ten thousand men is a laughable number, really. I have nearly that many here in the city and in the various outposts in the area, and, as I'm sure you know, you need an attacking force three times as large as the defenders to hope to take an entrenched foe. Steppengard simply can't expect to actually take the city."

"The problem is the Ragesians. The only thing holding them back is that the mountain passes haven't thawed yet. If Steppengard decides to lay siege to me, or even if he tries a frontal assault, he won't win... but he'll weaken my defenses, making it easier for the Ragesians to get in. And by last count, the Third Ragesian Army numbers something like forty thousand soldiers."

"So we need to resolve this quickly. My commanders suggest that we face the king's forces in open battle. If we can win a decisive victory, we can force a surrender, and then I can escort him back to Bresk, summon the other nobles, and convince them that we have to unite and defend ourselves against the Ragesians."

"Steppengard will be here in a little more than a week. After that, I assume we have two weeks, three at most, before the Ragesians arrive. That should be enough time to sway the Council of Nine and get the necessary

reinforcements here. Even if I lose a quarter of my men defeating Steppengard, with the aid of the rest of the kingdom we could easily hold the Gap."

"If we lose against the king, however, I suspect whoever has tricked him into thinking I'm responsible for the assassinations will also trick him into leaving the Gap undefended, so I can't risk losing this fight. Steppengard has the aid of units from three other nobles—Iz, Namin, and Megadon—and his army outnumbers my own by enough that, even though I like to think of my soldiers are the best in the land, I can't be certain we'll win without great losses."

"This is where you come in. I need to convince my neighbors, Lord Dashgoban and Lady Timor, to join



forces with me. I sent carrier pigeons requesting aid, but though I think both of them agree with me, it's likely they won't be ready to fight their own king simply because I ask them to. I need proof—proof that Ragesia has hostile intentions—with little time to find it."

"Just across the river is the Alydi Gap. The Ragesians are going to have to come down that way, and if they really are planning to attack Dassen, as I suspect, they'll have to silence the outposts I maintain along the mountain pass to keep their troop movements secret."

"I think an expeditionary force has already invaded because our *sending* spells to the furthest outpost have failed. All my spies and special forces are engaged with Steppengard's advance and sending troops to confirm my suspicions will alert the Ragesians. I need a group who can ride up the pass quickly, check on the outposts, and look for signs of Ragesian activity. Bring back the proof and then travel to Dashgoban and Timor to present the findings."

"I humbly request that you help me in this task. Can I count on you?"

If the heroes agree to go to the mountain outposts, Gallo can provide them with directions and with sturdy and fast warhorses including an extra two to bring back some of his men. Gallo expects them to leave immediately, as there is little time to spare, and can send servants to purchase anything they need for the trip (paid for with the heroes' coin) while his advisors brief them on the mission.

Gallo recommends they bring along [Commander Hertiage](#), whom the outpost soldiers will recognize. He will politely refuse to send any other soldiers as a larger group will slow itself down.

The heroes may wonder if Gallo has used *scrying* to see into the outpost. The Duke answers a bit ruefully.

"That is a good question. During Coaltongue's first campaign, we infused our lookout posts with *forbiddance* and *nondetection* wards at great cost. This kept him from casually *scrying* into our activities, but the side effect was reduced communication with our folk. That's why we placed outposts every five miles apart—a fast horse could make it to the next outpost in about thirty minutes, but this winter weather has made quick travel nearly impossible. If the Ragesians have taken the one outpost, I need all the others to stay alert right now."

Once everything is ready, Duke Gallo gives the heroes a few parting words.

"You'll need to ride fast and hard, get any news there is to be had, and, if we're lucky, we'll find the Ragesians have slipped up. I'll need you to bring back two of the forward lookouts, because Timor and Dashgoban will want to talk to them personally. If my men are dead, return with a couple Ragesians or any other evidence you can find. You aren't from around here, so you don't know how much we worry about setting off another civil war. Before they'll come to my aid, they'll need to see proof with their own eyes."

Hoofing It

If the heroes do not dally, they will be across the frozen Nasham River by 10 AM. There is an outpost every five miles up the Alydi Gap, the last one being thirty miles away, right at the border of Ragesia. The snowy mountain pass is difficult terrain, and the weather remains cold the entire day.

If the heroes hustle their horses they should be traveling 4 miles an hour, at which pace they will make it to the next outpost after 75 minutes of riding with tired horses. At each outpost the heroes must check if the outpost is safe to approach, present the orders from Duke Gallo to exchange horses, and swap out their horses. Gallo has not used *sending* to alert the outposts to the imminent arrival of the heroes to keep the Ragesians from finding out about the mission by capturing other outposts and interrogating the occupants, so the lookouts are surprised but execute the orders with urgency and get the heroes riding to the next outpost within 15 minutes.

The path is difficult to traverse safely with many of the hazards hidden by snow. On the way to each outpost, have one of the heroes make a DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check to avoid pitfalls and false routes. This check is made with advantage if Commander Hertiage is with the heroes as he has been through here before. On a failed check, have all the heroes make a DC 11 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. A hero with the Military Gate Pass connection can use their Cavalry Errant feature to help one of their companions. Each failed check causes the rider and their horse to take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from losing footing on a steep slope, being struck by falling rocks, stumbling into a small sinkhole, and so on.

The horses are bred for long-distance travel, but

TIMELINE OF STEPPENGARD'S ASSAULT

There are four different groups on the march in this act: the heroes and forces belonging to Steppengard, Dashgoban, and Timor. The timing of each group can affect the outcome of the battle at Gallo's Fend.

The heroes arrive at Gallo's Fend on Day 0. Steppengard's army is ready to march on Day 1. Travelling 15 miles per day, the army passes Pitchwood Burg on Day 4 and reaches the outskirts of Gallo's Fend on Day 7. The first attack occurs around noon on Day 8.

Delay the departure of Steppengard's army by 1 day for every noble, or their proxy, among Lady Dene, Lord Iz, Lord Megadon, Lady Namin, and Lord Rego who was made Helpful during the audience with King Steppengard. If the heroes come up with a plan to delay the king's forces, such as by burning pitch on the Nasham river, this delays the battle at Gallo's Fend by 2 days. Failing to delay Steppengard's army at all means that none of Gallo's allies will arrive in time for the battle.

It is 80 miles from Gallo's Fend to Lord Dashgoban's capital if they go through the Pitchwood or 100 miles if they travel around the forest to the east or the west. It is 120 miles from Gallo's Fend to Lady Timor's capital if they take the road, or 60 miles if they scale the Glaskeel Cliffs. It is 140 miles from Lord Dashgoban's capital to Lady Timor's capital if they take the road, or 90 miles if they go through Pitchwood and up the Glaskeel Cliffs.

Lord Dashgoban's forces require 5 days to muster and reach Gallo's Fend by travelling around the western edge of the Pitchwood to avoid Steppengard's army. Lady Timor's smaller force can travel more quickly and needs 4 days for her forces to muster and reach Gallo's Fend by taking the northern road around the cliffs. As long as they arrive the morning of the battle they can contribute.

Gallo's warhorses are bred and trained to be able to

carry an armored soldier 60 miles in a day. The Alydi Gap's terrain is difficult and treacherous, restricting travel to a maximum of 30 miles in a day, but the rest of the journey allows for the full speed. If the heroes decide to press on beyond the 60 miles they can traverse in 8 hours of travel, have them and the horses start making Constitution saving throws for the forced march. Each hour of forced march adds another 4 miles to the distance travelled. The heroes will likely have to leave their horses when they scale the Glaskeel Cliffs, requiring climbing back down the cliffs or using *fly* to retrieve their horses.

The following itinerary outlines one potentially optimal route for the heroes. The heroes set out to the Alydi Gap outpost on Day 1, reaching it by the end of the day. If they hurry, they can return to Gallo's Fend by the evening of Day 2. If they go through Pitchwood, they can exit the other side by the end of Day 3. The morning of Day 4 could then entail meeting Dashgoban so his forces would arrive by Day 9 in the morning. The heroes would then continue toward Lady Timor, convincing the citizens of Pitchwood Burg to sabotage the frozen river in the early afternoon, and reaching the northeastern edge of the Pitchwood by the end of Day 4. If they opt to scale the Glaskeel Cliffs, they can reach Timor's tower by the end of Day 5 so her forces would arrive at the end of Day 9. With Timor helping the heroes *fly* down the cliffs, they can retrieve their horses and reach Gallo's Fend by the end of Day 6 with at least a day or two to prepare for the battle.

Time is short, but if the heroes are competent and managed to sway a few of the opposing proxies at Steppengard's court, or if they have the presence of mind to slow the army's advance up the river, they should get back to Gallo's Fend with reinforcements and time to spare.

they can be overworked in the difficult terrain if their pace is not managed. As the heroes finish each leg of the journey and approach an outpost, have each of them make a DC 11 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to manage the pace of their horse, and a hero with the Military Gate Pass connection can use their Cavalry Errant feature to help one of their companions with the check. On a failure, their horse must make a Constitution saving throw. The save DC is 10 + the number of times the horse has already had to make the saving throw from being driven too hard before getting a long rest. The horse gains a level of exhaustion on a failed save. If a horse slows down because it has two levels of exhaustion, Commander Hertiage offers to take the slow horse so the heroes can continue quickly.

The heroes ride to the first five outposts, each hidden well up a cliffside, concealed behind brush, or carved out of the side of a mountain. At each outpost, the soldiers are surprised to see Commander Hertiage and report that there they have not seen any signs of Ragesians. Each fort has roughly the same garrison—a Gallo chaplain and eight Gallo soldiers. The chaplains are happy to use their 1st-level and 2nd-level spell slots to heal any injuries incurred to horses or heroes from the journey. They also always have *sending* prepared so they can alert Gallo's Fend at a moment's notice, making it strange that no message was sent if something went wrong at the furthest outpost.

They don't have much in the way of provisions, but the soldiers offer the heroes food and warm drink to

keep them strong for their mission. Time after time the heroes push their horses, spot the next outpost, ascend warily, learn that there is no danger, and then must turn back to the deep snow, the deathly cold, and the perilous paths of the frozen Alydi Gap.

Keeping up this demanding pace, the heroes will reach the final outpost after 9 hours of travel if everything goes well. Seven and a half hours of that is time actually spent on the trail. If the heroes had to slow down because a horse has two levels of exhaustion, have the heroes and their horses start making Constitution saving throws for the forced march starting at the ninth hour of actual travel after the Nasham River. The DC is 10 + 1 for each hour of travel beyond 8 in a single day, and a creature gains a level of exhaustion on a failure. The heroes will need to rest themselves and their horses after the long ride but could clear out the outpost in the first evening or early the next morning, accomplishing the mission in two days.

ALYDI GAP OUTPOST

As the heroes approach the sixth outpost, nothing looks out of place. At this point the heroes are barely ten miles from the border of Ragesia, and if they were to ride much further they would come upon the vast camp of the Third Ragesian Army, commanded by General Revulus, sprawled across the craglands of Chathus.

First, however, is the furthest outpost of the Kingdom of Dassen. Situated on a rocky spur one hundred feet high, the fortress is concealed from northern approach by a rolling ridge that rises even higher. On the southern side of the spur, switchbacks lead up a steep slope before reaching the plateau where the stone fort is constructed. From the bottom of the mountain pass it is impossible to see the condition of the fort, so the heroes will likely have to ascend the steep switchbacks to the plateau.

An advance Ragesian party is already occupying the fortress. General Revulus is not certain Leska's ploy to destabilize Dassen will work, so he has dispatched small units of infiltrators to take over the garrisons along the path. They know that the garrisons are only relieved every month or two, and that relief is even more unlikely in winter, so the infiltrators just intend to stay put until the army is ready to march. Then they will advance ahead of the army, discreetly seizing outposts one by one, hopefully letting the Third Ragesian Army reach the

southern edge of the Alydi Gap before the Dasseni forces at Gallo's Fend are ready for them.

Ragesian Forces

In total, the forces at the outpost consist of two Ragesian infiltrators, four Ragesian soldiers, the inquisitor **Crona**, and infiltration leader **Jaas**, plus the occasional presence of wyvern knight **Stonum** and his wyvern mount **Dractyl**.

If the heroes traveled at the expected pace, they likely arrive a little after sunset. Stonum and Dractyl have been responsible for delivering supplies to the infiltrators, and they only fly at night, to avoid being spotted by random travelers. If the heroes wait until midnight, the knight and his wyvern depart.

Approaching the Fort

The infiltrator lookout on the roof of the fort is disguised in Gallo livery, requiring a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice that it is a half-orc; only humans and dwarves are stationed at the outposts. The outdoor trails are covered in light snow, which does not impede movement. Off the trail the ground has thick snow, which counts as difficult terrain.

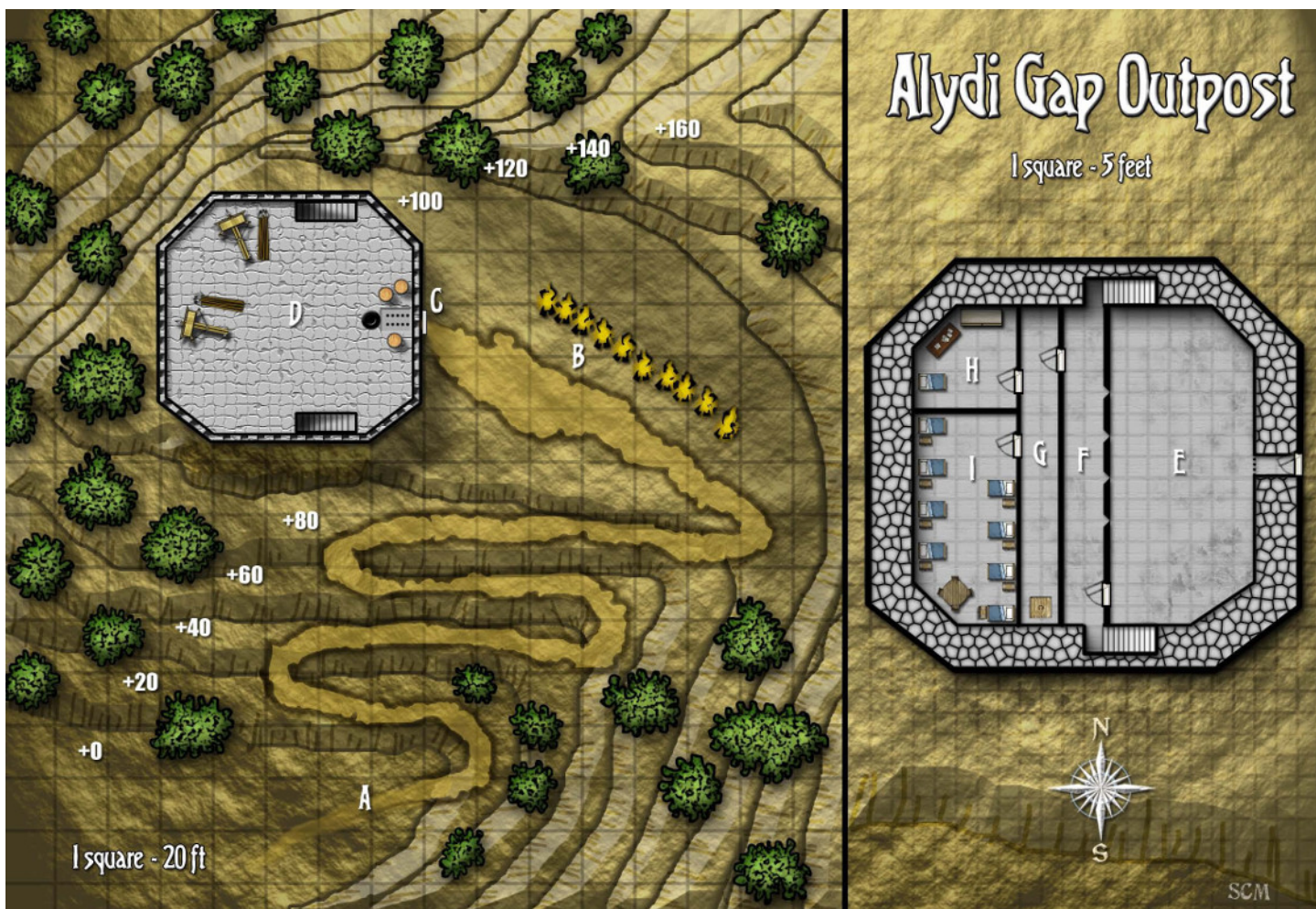
A few scattered trees offer an option for a stealthy approach, though the climb is difficult because of the snow. The heroes must succeed at a DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak up on the outpost. Even creatures with darkvision have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight at night, so the heroes instead need a successful DC 9 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak up on the outpost. Each creature must make a DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check for each 20-foot section of the climb. A creature that fails the check falls 10 feet and must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid alerting the infiltrator lookout with the noise.

At Ease Positions

If the heroes manage to sneak up on the fort, there is one infiltrator, one soldier, and Dractyl the wyvern on the roof. The inquisitor Crona is in the office in room H. Jaas, Stonum, and the remaining soldiers lounge in the barracks in room I. One infiltrator walks the length of hallway F, keeping an eye on area E through the arrow slits.

On Alert

Once the alarm is sounded, the soldier goes down from the roof, alerts everyone in the fort, and returns



to the roof after two rounds. It takes Stonum five rounds to reach the roof and mount up. The second infiltrator also heads to the roof, so there are three archers to harry the heroes' approach.

Jaas and Crona set up in hallway F behind the remaining soldiers, directing the fight and lending aid without getting in range of enemy attacks. The following area descriptions assume the fort is on alert.

Area A: Switchback Trail

The switchback trail counts as a gentle slope, but is 560 feet long from the base of the cliff to the plateau. Because of the hill's slope, characters on the switchbacks have no cover against attacks made by enemies at the top of the plateau or atop the fortress.

Area B: Torchlit Approach (EL 8)

Alongside the trail on the plateau is a line of torches, laid out 5 or 10 feet apart. They have all burned out at this point, but every other night the Ragesian soldiers light fresh torches to let the wyvern rider

who delivers their supplies spot the outpost from the air. There is no cover here, making sneaking up to the outpost nearly impossible during daylight.

If the heroes take more than 5 rounds to enter the fort after being spotted, Stonum and Dractyl take flight from the roof of the fort, circling over the plateau and switchbacks.

Creatures

[Stonum](#)
[Dractyl](#)

Adjust each creatures' hit points up or down by 40 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

Stonum spends two rounds softening his foes with crossbow fire, then has Dractyl swoop in and try to snatch a foe with the aid of its [hurling bracers](#). If his foes are ever in a nice cluster, he'll drop his [dragonbomb](#).

Area C: Fort Entrance

The entrance to the fort is a single iron door (AC 19, HP 60, damage threshold 10, resistance to piercing and slashing damage) requiring a successful DC 21 Strength check or DC 23 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to open without the key. It opens to a 10-foot-long narrow hallway. An iron portcullis with the same statistics as the door blocks entrance into area E, the shooting gallery. The portcullis provides half cover and requires a combined 38 Strength score to lift. Two creatures can squeeze into the space in front of the portcullis to lift it. **Murder holes** in the hallway's roof make this entrance perilous.

Area D: Roof (EL 7)

Short on staff, Infiltration leader Jaas has one infiltrator and one soldier on the roof at any given time. Additionally, dractyl the wyvern lounges here. However, when on alert the other infiltrator goes to the roof.

Creatures

- 2 [Ragesian infiltrators, standard](#)
[Ragesian soldier, standard](#)

Add or remove a soldier for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

The infiltrators and soldiers take potshots with their bows, the crenelations granting them three-quarters cover. If the heroes are swift, Dractyl might still be here, but he does not join the fight without his rider unless he is attacked first.

The roof of the outpost has two **ballistae**, intended to shoot down dragons, wyverns, and similar aerial creatures. The ballista cannot target creatures below the crenelations or directly above the tower. There are twenty ballista bolts for each of the weapons. If the heroes are having trouble taking out Stonum and Dractyl, encourage them to come up here. A successful DC 19 Intelligence (History) check reminds them that these outposts are particularly well-equipped for shooting dragons out of the sky.

Area E: Tower Entrance (EL 6)

The largest room of the fortress is an attacker's nightmare: a shooting gallery for bow-wielding defenders. Four arrow slits face into the room, and within four rounds of spotting the heroes, the Ragesian soldiers set up in Area F, bows trained on the entrance. The arrow slits provide three-quarters

cover for the archers.

An iron door (AC 19, HP 60, damage threshold 10, resistance to piercing and slashing damage) leads from the shooting gallery to the first hallway. It requires a successful DC 21 Strength check or DC 23 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to open without the key.

Creatures

- 3 [Ragesian soldiers, standard](#)

Add or remove a soldier for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Area F: First Hallway (EL 7)

If the heroes make it into the first hallway, the archers drop their bows, ready their shields, and draw their axes. Inquisitor Crona lends her modest antimagic abilities to try to thwart area-attack spells, and Jaas shouts up the northern staircase for the warriors on the roof to come down the southern staircase to flank the intruders. The infiltrators, in particular, will be keen to come at the heroes from behind, even being willing to leap off the roof and come in through the front entrance.

Creatures

- [Inquisitor Crona](#)
[Jaas](#)

Adjust each creatures' hit points up or down by 40 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Area G: Second Hallway

This hallway ends with a wooden trap door that leads to the basement. The basement is too crowded for fighting, and only has mundane supplies.

Area H: Chaplain's Chamber

Once the chaplain's room, the inquisitor Crona lives here now. She has a duffle bag beside her bed with more "normal-looking" clothes than what she wears when she is trying to play the role of intimidating inquisitor. On the dresser next to the bed is a printed book, propaganda published by the Ragesian Empire denouncing the various other nations and aggrandizing the destiny of Ragesia.

Area I: Barracks

The normal soldiers sleep here. In the pack of Infiltration Commander Jaas is a series of orders. These simply amount to: "Take the first outpost,

then stay put, receiving supply drops every other day. When we learn of the success or failure of Madness, our weather mage associates will break the winter over the Alydi Gap. When the thaw begins, prepare to take additional outposts.” The gear of all the original occupants has been carried away by previous wyvern knights, taken to the main army.

Aftermath

The papers with commander Jaas' orders will prove more than enough to convince Timor and Dashgoban that the Ragesians are planning an invasion. The heroes should hurry back to Gallo's Fend to prepare for the next stage of their mission.

TWO MISSIONS

When the heroes return with evidence that Leska's forces are imminently going to invade they are immediately ushered into a conference chamber at the castle. Chaplains tend to their wounds, and they are assured that grooms are at work making sure their horses are ready for another trip, if necessary.

Inside the conference chamber are Duke Gallo and an assortment of commanders and advisors, looking at a table map depicting Gallo's lands as a topographical model. They are discussing ways to slow down Steppengard's advance. A human advisor is in favor of ordering Pitchwood Burg—a small town in Dashgoban's territory on the banks of the Nasham river—to spread this year's harvest of pitch over a large section of the river and ignite it, melting the river. This would slow Steppengard's forces, but would be financially devastating for the people of Pitchwood, even if Gallo could convince them to do it. At this point Gallo turns his attention to the heroes and asks them what their news is.

Once Gallo hears the news and sees their evidence, he quickly works with the heroes to come up with a course of action on how to activate the mutual defense pacts he has with Lord Dashgoban and Lady Timor. He sees the best chance of success if the heroes can escort his proxy (Jinis if the heroes escaped with him; otherwise a man named Makhesson) first to Lord Dashgoban, then to Lady Timor, stopping along the way to convince the people of Pitchwood to melt the river. However, he'll accept any plan that sounds like it will work, and his advisors can quickly calculate how long it should take the heroes to take a given path. If the heroes do take along Gallo's proxy, the man has a +8 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks and knows proper etiquette for dealing with the Dasseni



nobility, granting him or one of the heroes advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks with Timor and Dashgoban when combined with the information the heroes have procured.

Gallo is reluctant to send traditional couriers, because Steppengard likely has Talon soldiers watching the border roads to make sure Gallo cannot get any aid against the invasion. Instead, to assure swift contact with Dashgoban, the heroes could ride through Pitchwood, shaving a day off their trip, though they would have to face the dangers of the fey pitchlings. Likewise, to quickly reach Lady Timor the heroes could scale the half-mile high Glaskeel Cliffs, bypassing the long winding roads which will no doubt be blockaded.

If the heroes do not volunteer, Gallo will ask them. If they refuse, it is very likely no aid will reach Gallo's Fend.

OTHER SOLUTIONS

If the heroes limit themselves to conventional methods, they must race time in order to get word to Lord Dashgoban and Lady Timor. However, a little creativity or magic can quickly skip over a large portion of this act.

It should still be necessary to explore the Alydi Gap outposts. The two nobles are canny enough to see through bald lies, and will not appreciate attempts to trick them. They each have good Insight skills, and with the aid of their advisors it's unlikely the heroes can deceive them at all.

Scrying may seem like an option to avoid having to ride up the Gap to get proof, but the outposts have been warded against that to discourage Ragesian spying. Once they verify the Ragesians are there, the heroes could split up, delivering the message to the two nobles more swiftly, but increasing the dangers on the road.

They might use *sending* to contact the nobles, though this alone will not get them to commit their forces unless the heroes managed to make their proxies in Bresk Friendly through diplomacy. It is, after all, hard to be persuasive with only 25 words; attempting to this imposes disadvantage on any applicable Charisma checks.

Of course, the focus of this act is the battle at Gallo's Fend, so if the heroes find a clever method to circumvent traveling and delivering messages, reward them for overcoming the challenges, and let the battle begin.

SECURING DASHGOBAN'S AID

Gallo suggests the heroes reach out to Dashgoban first. His forces should be ready to march and but need longer to arrive. The heroes can also take the western road around Pitchwood or travel along the frozen Nasham river east of Pitchwood. Both of these routes are slower, and the river has a [Steppengard blockade](#). Like the blockade on the road to Lady Timor's home, this one also has one of the four troll mercenaries. As the Talon forces ride out from the edge of the Pitchwood to stop the heroes, Snort runs out from the Pitchwood behind the heroes to cut off their escape.

Path through Pitchwood (EL 8)

Pitchwood is a dense forest of pitch pines that stretches between the Otdar mountains and the Nasham River, along the border between Lord Gallo and Lord Dashgoban's lands. Normal traffic goes around its edges, because of a tribe of fey called pitchlings who harass travelers through their woods.

A successful DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check lets the heroes know that the pitchlings are immune to

fire damage and that they only speak Sylvan. If one of the heroes' checks also meets a DC of 19, they are aware of a mild defense they can use to avoid being ambushed. If the heroes hold unlit torches as they ride through the woods, as soon as a pitchling gets within 100 feet the torches will spontaneously light. Pitchlings like to ambush, so if the heroes use this torch trick, they have an opportunity to call out and speak to the fey before a fight can begin.

The straightest path through Pitchwood is a 20-mile road, where various unfriendly folk lurk to rob, harass, or kill interlopers. The trees are thick, the road narrow and overgrown, and the shadows of the woods abuzz with eerie noises, like a mixture between giggles and thick, greasy dripping sounds. When the heroes are about 5 miles into the woods, a group of pitchlings come in for an ambush, requiring a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check from a hero in the back of the marching order to detect. If they get within 30 feet without being seen, they attack the intruders, intending to take the pretties for themselves. If they are spotted, or if the heroes use the torches trick, the pitchlings hesitate for a minute, waiting to see if the heroes talk to them before they attack.

Creatures

4 Pitchlings

Add or remove a pitchling for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

If the pitchlings manage to sneak up on the heroes, they start by unleashing *entangle* and *sleep* spells and balls of pitch. They then shout in broken Common, "Leave money and stuff! You go or we burn you!" They speak very little Common, and any Charisma checks made while speaking with them in Common are made with disadvantage. If the heroes do not comply, they try to use *produce flame* to light humanoids who are entangled or hit with pitch on fire before peppering them with spikes pulled from their backs and shot by bow. They start as Hostile, but if made Neutral they'll back off and not fight.

The plant life in Pitchwood is highly flammable, though burning areas do not spread, and small fires do not do lasting damage to the plants. Any fire damage ignites the plants, including those created by *entangle*, which burn for 1 round before smoldering out. Any creatures that start their turn in the area or enter the area for the first time on their turn take 5 (2d4) fire damage.

Development

Before or after a fight, the heroes might try to talk to the pitchlings. Clever heroes can use the pitchlings as a weapon against Steppengard. While the majority of Steppengard's forces are traveling along the frozen Nasham River, the ice is not strong enough to support his siege weapons, so they will have to travel through Pitchwood. The heroes could try to get the pitchlings to attack the siege weapons.

Because the pitchlings hate outsiders anyway, they are somewhat amenable to this idea. They can be convinced with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. A hero has advantage on this check if the pitchlings are Friendly and disadvantage if they are Hostile. The pitchlings will then harass Steppengard's forces as they deliver the siege weapons through their forest. Reward the heroes with inspiration if they get the aid of the pitchlings against Steppengard.

Castle Dashgoban

Once through the Pitchwood, only twenty miles separate the heroes from the home of Lord Dashgoban. Dashgoban's castle is built into a stone outcropping streaked with old erosion from rain so that it looks like a great monster clawed rents in the side of the rock. There is no surrounding city, just scattered farms and villages.

Dashgoban's cavalry are practicing maneuvers as the heroes arrive; if they stop to talk, they learn that the soldiers are relieved Gallo's messengers have finally arrived. The warriors of Dashgoban are eager for a fight, but their lord will not let them march until he receives a formal request.

Lord Dashgoban is a pale-haired, aging dwarf with a soft beard. He styles himself a great commander, though he admits he lacks Duke Gallo's experience. He does not like the rule of King Steppengard, but he's not a fool, and he will not send his men to war unless he can be convinced such a course of action benefits him.

If the heroes already managed to make Dashgoban's proxy at the royal court Helpful, all they have to do is show him the evidence from the Alydi Gap outpost, ask for his aid, and then share a drink with him, and the proud Lord Dashgoban will immediately order the one thousand cavalry and two thousand foot soldiers he has mustered to march to join the forces at Gallo's Fend.

Otherwise, Dashgoban's attitude matches whatever level the heroes managed to sway his proxy to. The heroes will have to attempt more diplomacy to

convince him to join the fight. They can convince him to help with a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. This check is made with disadvantage if Dashgoban is currently Hostile. Reward the heroes with inspiration if they secure Lord Dashgoban's aid quickly enough for his forces to reach Gallo's Fend before the battle.

Delaying Steppengard

The town of Pitchwood Burg lies squeezed between the southern border of the forest and the Nasham River. It is one of several towns that harvest pitch from the forest, having made loose agreements with the fey not to harm each other.

Pitchwood Burg

N Conventional Hamlet

Government. Town elder

Purchase Limit. 100 gp; **Assets.** 1,500 gp

Population. 300

Demographics. isolated (96% human, 2% dwarf, 1% halfling, 1% other)

If the heroes pass through the town, they might try to convince the townsfolk to spread their harvest of pitch on the river and ignite it when Steppengard's army is less than a day away. This will melt the ice and leave it weak for days, delaying Steppengard's arrival in Gallo's Fend by two days. However, to do so, the heroes will have to sway the town elder, **Father Albert** (N old male human cleric 4) with a successful Charisma (Persuasion) check. The check is made with disadvantage if he becomes Hostile and with advantage if he is made Friendly. If the heroes bring a letter from Lord Dashgoban giving the dwarf's blessing to the plan, Father Albert becomes Friendly.

The check starts at DC 20 since enacting the plan will cripple the town financially, and might provoke Steppengard's wrath. If the heroes offer compensation to the tune of 300 gp, the check is reduced to DC 15 since that will feed everyone in the town for a couple months, and a payment of 1,000 gp or more reduces the check to DC 10.

Alternately, if the heroes befriended the pitchlings, they might be able to convince the fey to melt the river. Doing so would likely require some test of cunning or skill, perhaps besting a pitchling in an archery competition, or in a "fire hurling" contest, where the contestants take a ball of pitch in their hands, light it, and throw it as far as possible.

Regardless of who agrees to melt the river, the agreement must be secured at least the day before

Steppengard's forces march past Pitchwood Burg for the sabotage to be carried out. Reward the heroes with inspiration if they manage to melt the river and delay Steppengard's march.

SECURING TIMOR'S AID

The heroes' journey to recruit Lady Timor to aid Lord Gallo's forces has two main options. They could take the main road, in which case they would run into a blockade of Steppengard forces, or they could attempt to scale the Glaskeel Cliffs, avoiding the road entirely and heading straight to the plateau upon which Timor's castle is built.

Steppengard Blockade (EL 10)

A force of the Talon, Steppengard's new police, watch the roads, and have specific orders to stop couriers from traveling out of Gallo's lands. If the heroes take the road, at one point they reach a bridge across one of the many gorges on the border of Lady Timor's land. The stone bridge is twenty feet wide and sixty feet long, and as the heroes reach the middle of the bridge, several soldiers ride out from a copse of trees on the far end, demanding the heroes stop and identify themselves. Meanwhile, a troll mercenary who has been lurking under the bridge climbs up and blocks off the heroes' path of retreat. Rip is one of four troll mercenaries working for Steppengard. If the heroes kill him here, he won't appear at the Battle for Gallo's Fend.

Creatures

- 2 [Steppengard soldiers](#)
- [Steppengard commander](#)
- Rip, [troll mercenary](#)

Add or remove two soldiers for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Scaling the Glaskeel Cliffs (EL 7)

The Glaskeel Cliffs form a natural border between Lady Timor's lands and Lord Gallo's. The cliffs are 2,500 feet high, with multiple small ledges that break the climb up into smaller ascents and sharp, shearing winds. Caves pock the cliffs, but these do not provide a swifter route past the obstacle of the cliffs.

Climbing is difficult on the slippery, wind-blown cliffs. Have each hero make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to represent every 500 feet of travel over an hour, falling 50 feet to a lower ledge on a

failure. Those heroes with Indomitability's boon have advantage on the check as they are able to resist the winds. A hero who succeeds at the check can give advantage to one of their companions, but to do this they have to make the check before their companion. A hero utilizing a climber's kit has any fall limited to 25 feet.

As the heroes make their first 500-foot ascent, have them each make a DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check at 400 feet, noticing signs that the area they are climbing is inhabited by some sort of brachiating creature on a success. If the heroes want to be stealthy, have them make a DC 9 group Dexterity (Stealth) check after they finish their climbing checks. A hero who failed their Strength (Athletics) check has disadvantage on this check, letting out a surprised shout as they fell. If the group fails this check, a territorial giant ape is alerted to their presence and clambers down the cliff, attacking from above.

Creatures

[Giant ape](#)

Adjust the giant ape's hit points up or down by 40 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

The high winds make maneuvering on the cliffs difficult under combat conditions. At the start of each of the heroes' turns, have them make a DC 10 Strength check. Heroes with Indomitability's boon have advantage on this check. A hero who fails this check can either have their speed reduced to 0 until the start of their next turn as they grab the cliff to avoid being swept away or push on despite the risk. A hero who pushes on anyway must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check when they start to move, falling 50 feet on a failure.

The ape starts 50 feet above the heroes by throwing rocks down at the intruders to its domain. If any heroes reach the large ledge it is standing on, it attempts to grapple them and throw them off the cliff. The high winds are in the heroes' favor if this happens as the heroes are pushed back into the cliffs, limiting their fall to 50 feet. However, the giant ape is too heavy to be pushed around or rescued by the wind. While it can maneuver around the cliffs without being checked by the wind, it will fall to its death if it is somehow knocked away from the cliffs.

Flying Up the Cliffs (EL 7)

Persistent heroes could simply fly over the cliffs. However, this assumes the party can spare a *fly* spell or other means of flight for each hero. Travel through the wind is difficult terrain for a flying creature, but a hero could Dash, traveling 600 feet per minute. The trip would take less than five minutes, though on the way up they would be tossed about by winds and would probably arrive airsick.

As the heroes reach 1000 feet, they are beset by a group of wild griffons. A favorite food source of the giant ape, they stay away from its domain but view the flying heroes as intruders. They are not defending anything in particular, so a griffon will retreat if its hit points fall below half of its maximum or more than half of the other griffons have fallen or retreated.

The heroes should only encounter the giant ape or the griffons. Use the giant ape encounter instead if only some of the heroes are flying and staying near their climbing companions. Reward the heroes with inspiration if they successfully ascend the cliffs rather than take the long way around, regardless of how they do it.

Creatures

4 Griffons

Add or remove a griffon for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Castle Timor

Lady Timor's castle is just a mile from the edge of the Glaskeel Cliffs, an easy walk on foot. Consisting of a cluster of over a dozen towers, surrounded by moats and connected by bridges, rooftops patrolled by mages trained for war, the castle of Lady Timor is easily the most magically gifted in Dassen. She styles herself as a young archmage, and lives in a tower of her own. She receives the heroes on a seventh-floor balcony, magically warmed, overlooking the snowy Glaskeel Cliffs.

Like Lord Dashgoban, Lady Timor's attitude matches whatever the heroes her proxy. Even if she does want to help, she takes her time reviewing the heroes' stories, and if they provide her with the written orders of the Ragesian infiltration commander she has them taken away by a diviner to verify they are legitimate. Providing the orders will improve her attitude toward the heroes by one step: from Hostile to Neutral or from Neutral to Friendly. If she was already Friendly, she automatically will

agree to the request for aid.

Additionally, Lady Timor has heard rumors about the heroes, and wants them to answer some of her questions. Depending on how the heroes resolved adventure two, *The Indomitable Fire Forest of Innenotdar*, Lady Timor may be somewhat irritated with the heroes. If the forest's fires ended because of the heroes' actions, she asks about their passage through the fire forest, and then laments the fact that now there is a second opening through which the Ragesians can invade Dassen. Once the Second Ragesian Army conquers Gate Pass, they will be able to simply march through the now burnt-out Innenotdar valley and emerge in the northern reaches of Timor lands. This does not incur any penalty to diplomacy with Lady Timor, but she wants them to know that their actions may have jeopardized her land and her people.

If one of the heroes makes a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she commits a division of fifty mages, an escort of eight hundred foot soldiers and two hundred cavalry, and a particularly precious elemental ally to the defense of Gallo's Fend. The hero has advantage on this check if Timor is Friendly and disadvantage if she is Hostile. Additionally, to ensure that the heroes can get back to Gallo swiftly, she has several of her mages escort them to the edge of the cliffs and cast *fly* on them, which lasts more than long enough for the heroes to return to the bottom of the cliffs.

Reward the heroes with inspiration if they secure Lady Timor's aid.

WAR PLANS

When the heroes return to Gallo's Fend, the armies of King Steppengard might already be preparing to assault the city, or might still be several days away. Regardless, most of the villagers in Otharil Vale have abandoned their homes, retreating to a tent city between Markhold and Wicked Hill. Duke Gallo welcomes any news that aid is on its way, and thanks the heroes deeply for the assistance they have lent. He promises to defend Seaquen against the Ragesians in payment for their honorable behavior.

However, there is still a battle to be won. Gallo half-jokingly says that if they leave now they'll regret not being the ones who save the day. Instead, he suggests, they should fight alongside his forces, and those of Dashgoban and Timor.

Gallo is still the ruler of his land, and while he'll

consider suggestions by the heroes, he already has his overall battle plan drawn up. He will, however, offer the heroes several choices in what allies serve with them in the coming battle.

Steppengard's Forces

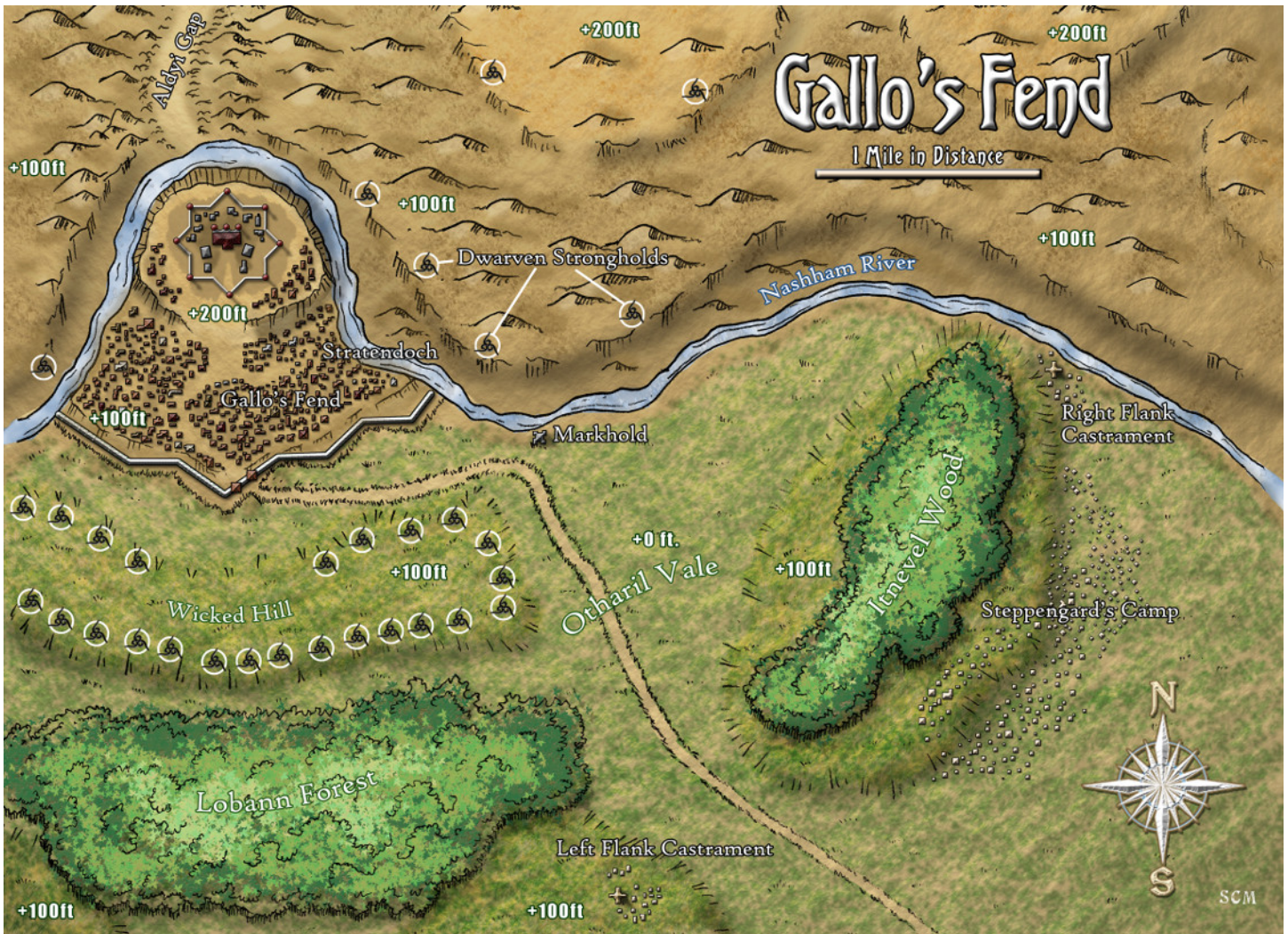
Steppengard's army is commanded by **Königsmarshal Malkan**, under the supervision of Advisor Nina Glibglammer. The war wizard **Kelkin Thravanvost**, trained in Gabal's combat techniques, will be directing the army's magical forces. King Steppengard himself remains at his castle in Bresk. Malkan commands roughly ten thousand soldiers, drawn from the lands of Steppengard, Iz, Megadon, and Namin. He also fields a variety of monstrous mercenaries. Stats for all the foes the heroes will face are presented in the Appendix, but feel free to add new types of foes if the heroes manage to defeat their foes easily and want to aid other companies of soldiers.

The Steppengard army is camped behind Itnevel

Hill, with various lookouts watching from the woods. Malkan's command tent lies in the center of the camp, and not far away is the tent of Nina Glibglammer. A representative of each of the three assisting nobles — Iz, Megadon, and Namin — stay in their own section of the camp, near their own forces.

The war mage Kelkin likes his isolation, so his tent is at the edge of the main camp, atop Itnevel hill, near the woods. Malkan was only able to convince the mage to have a small force of guards, which worries the Königsmarshal, because Kelkin's presence is critical to maintaining the allegiance of some of their units. Kelkin has under his control a beautiful charmed gynosphinx named **Nashara**, and the dozens of griffons who serve with the army do so primarily to win the female sphinx's favor. If Kelkin lost control of Nashara, there is a good chance the griffons would abandon the fight.

The two flanks of the camp are watched by two clusters of temporary earthwork fortifications. Each 100-foot-square fort has been excavated on site and has 10-foot-high walls surrounded by a 10-foot-deep



ditch. The ditches are set with sharpened wooden spikes. These help ensure that Gallo's forces will not try to flank around the hill.

Only about a quarter of Steppengard's forces can be effectively fielded at a time due to the limitations of the terrain, so during major combat the majority of the soldiers will stay in reserve.

Gallo's Forces

Duke Gallo commands ten thousand soldiers, spread throughout Gallo's Fend, many of them stationed in the hidden forts on Wicked Hill or in similar bunkers throughout Otharil Vale. If the heroes earned the aid of Lord Dashgoban, Gallo is bolstered by one thousand cavalry and two thousand infantry. If Lady Timor is sending aid as well, this adds fifty Timor war mages, eight hundred infantry, and two hundred cavalry, plus the elder xorn **Tupof Dzequifs**.

Gallo has a wide variety of siege weapons in place, allowing him to control the distance at which the battle begins. He plans to strand Steppengard's lines out in the fields of Otharil Vale, where they will be vulnerable to mass archery from Gallo's reserve units. He intends to keep only a minimal number of troops behind in the city, choosing instead to deploy the majority of his forces along a line stretching roughly a mile, just southeast of Markhold and Wicked Hill. Since his forces will be close to safe havens, it will be easy for him to swap units in and out, keeping fresh soldiers busy putting pressure on Steppengard's lines.

The Heroes' Role

While the focus of Gallo's plans are to hold the Line at Otharil Vale, certain other missions can make a major difference in the battle. The heroes do not have to participate in all these missions, and indeed if the party has no stealth skills they would be ill-suited for some of them. However, Duke Gallo will ask them to participate in whichever missions they feel best suited for. To aid their missions, Duke Gallo can provide them with uniforms matching the livery of Steppengard, Iz, Megadon, or Namin. If the heroes are defeated during any of these missions, their foes do their best not to kill them; they prefer captives that they can ransom back to the losers.

Siege Sabotage. The heroes destroy enemy siege weapons, which spares them some bombardment at the beginning of the battle.

Mage Assassination. The evening before the battle, the heroes attack the tent of war mage Kelkin Thravanvost, who is as dangerous as several siege

weapons.

The Line at Otharil Vale. The heroes and their fellow soldiers face wave after wave of Steppengard forces.

Coup. After the first wave of the battle of the line, Steppengard's commanders will send reinforcements out, leaving their camp only weakly defended. The heroes will sneak in through dwarven tunnels and attempt to capture or kill the enemy commanders.

TIPPING THE SCALES

There are two missions the heroes can participate in the night before the battle. Each carries risk and can be attempted any time during the night, but success will give a much greater chance of victory in the battle the next day. During the briefing for these difficult missions the heroes should be encouraged to not hold back as they will get a chance for a long rest as long as they return by 2:00 in the morning.

Siege Sabotage (EL 8+)

The evening before the battle, under the cover of darkness, Steppengard's siege weapons are lined up on Otharil Vale, just beyond two thousand feet from Gallo's battle lines, safely out of range of archers and opposing catapults, but close enough that a group of stealthy heroes might be able to sneak in and sabotage them. While simply running up to the siege weapons across a snow-covered open field would be suicidal, a group of dwarven sappers have excavated a tunnel that gets within 60 feet of the siege weapons. Four sappers can lead the heroes to the exit, and wait behind for the heroes' return. Once the heroes get back in the tunnels, or when it becomes apparent that the heroes will not be getting away, the sappers collapse the exit so they cannot be followed.

If the pitchlings agreed to harass Steppengard's forces, there are only three heavy catapults and two light ballista wagons; otherwise there are ten heavy catapults and eight light ballistae. Destroying the heavy catapults is essential, whereas destroying the ballistae helps if the heroes are planning to fly around the battlefield.

The **heavy catapults** are arrayed in a line, each 40 feet from the next, surrounded by a 5-foot ditch and a 5-foot dirt wall set with a **cheval de frise** before the wall to discourage attackers from climbing over. The **light ballistae** are mounted on wagons pulled by warhorses, so they can be wheeled close to the battle to take out flying threats if necessary.

The defense of the siege weapons will be fierce with the heroes in enemy territory. A team of **Gallo soldiers**, 1 per hero, will accompany the heroes on their raid. They will hang back 40 feet from the heroes so they do not attract the guard's notice. If the alarm is raised, they run into position to intercept the Steppengard reinforcements for as long as possible.

Creatures

Each heavy catapult is guarded by a squad consisting of the following Steppengard forces. A similar squad also guards the entire group of ballistae.

4 **Steppengard soldiers** **Steppengard commander**

Add or remove 2 soldiers for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

If any of the squads or their siege weapons fall under attack, the guards sound the alarm, which calls the attention of the other squads. Half of the soldiers, not including the commander, in each of the other squads leave their posts to respond to the more immediate threat, while the rest stay at their assigned locations. One of these additional groups of soldiers arrives on initiative count zero 1d4 rounds after the alarm and every round thereafter until reinforcements have been sent from each of the other squads.

Additionally, the entire area is patrolled by Nikkhuar, a **red dragon wyrmling**, who flies in erratic ellipses, scanning the line of siege weapons from 50 feet up in the night sky. The heroes will need a successful DC 9 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid having Nikkhuar spotting them and raising the alarm. If one of the groups of soldiers raises the alarm, the time it takes Nikkhuar to arrive depends on how many catapults are being guarded. It arrives in 1d3 rounds if only 3 catapults are present and 1d10 rounds otherwise.

The situation will go from bad to worse if the heroes linger too long after the alarm has been raised. A mounted reserve force of 1 **Steppengard knight** per PC and a **Steppengard prelate** arrive 2 minutes after the first alarm. Additional reinforcements take ten minutes or more to arrive.

There will be a lot of fighting happening “off camera” between the Gallo soldiers and the Steppengard reinforcements. To help speed this up and keep it from interfering with what the heroes

are doing, on initiative count 0 roll a d20 for each Steppengard soldier, including those just arriving on the scene. They hit a Gallo soldier when a 14 or higher is rolled on the die, and a Gallo soldier goes falls every three hits. Then roll a d20 for each of the surviving Gallo soldiers. They hit a Steppengard soldier when a 15 or higher is rolled on the die, and a Steppengard soldier falls every two hits. A 20 rolled on a d20 counts as two hits here, and the heroes can heal the Gallo soldiers at a rate of one hit per 6 hit points, or portion thereof, of healing provided.

If the heroes move beyond the first squad of defenders, the Gallo soldiers will be unable to intercept new reinforcements until they defeat all the soldiers they are already fighting. After defeating the reinforcements they are fighting, they position themselves to intercept more reinforcements or join the heroes if all the Steppengard soldiers have already arrived from the other squads. The speed of Nikkhuar and the mounted reinforcements allows them to bypass the Gallo soldiers and attack the heroes directly.

Destroying and Disabling

A hero can use their action to rig a siege engine to break when it is fired with a successful DC 19 Dexterity check, doing so in such a way that normal inspections will not reveal the sabotage. This check can be repeated, but a hero who is being watched by a hostile creature has disadvantage on the check because it will be inspected more thoroughly later. Though this damage can be repaired, it is sufficient to keep the weapon inoperable for the duration of the battle.

Alternatively, a hero can light part of a siege engine on fire by dealing fire damage to it. Up to four fires can be lit on a catapult, and a light ballista can have up to two fires. A siege engine takes 11 (2d10) fire damage for each fire on it on initiative count 0. Lighting a fire causes the alarm to be raised if it had not already, and a creature can put out one of the fires with an action.

Reward the heroes with inspiration if they destroy all of the catapults.

Mage Assassination (EL 15)

Kelkin Thravanvost, a dwarven war mage who helped the famed Gabal of Gate Pass develop some of his techniques, now serves as chief wizard of war for King Steppengard. On the day of the battle he will be a holy terror, so Gallo wants the heroes to kill him

WHY IS KELKIN A THREAT?

While a 9th-level wizard is nothing to sneeze at, he lacks enough spells to be a threat to an entire army. The answer to this mystery is that Königsmarshal Malkan has several large chests of scrolls, potions, and wands that Kelkin will use during the battle. While Malkan is willing to let Kelkin gamble with his own life by sleeping at the edge of camp, he isn't about to risk tens of thousands of Dasseni gold octets, so he keeps the chests secure at his command tent.

the evening before.

Uncomfortable around the gnome Nina Glibglammer (actually the trillith Madness), Kelkin stays in a tent at the edge of Steppengard's camp. The tent lies amid sparse woods on the southeastern edge of Itnevel Wood, five hundred feet from the rest of camp. The night before the battle, Kelkin goes to bed early. His tent is broad, 20 feet square and 15 feet high, but it merely serves to conceal the *tiny hut* Kelkin actually sleeps in. An *alarm* spell, set to sound audibly unless the password "unity" is spoken, covers the entire area inside the tent.

A guard of [Steppengard soldiers](#), one per hero, stand in a ring 20 feet from the tent. The guards all know the password, and can reveal it if intimidated or charmed. If the guards are attacked, at least one of them moves to the doorway of the tent to set off the *alarm*. In addition to the guards, Kelkin's gynosphinx guardian Nashara paces around the tent or sleeps lightly right beside the hut.

Captured and brought back as a curiosity to King Steppengard's court from a distant land, Nashara is under the effects of a long-lasting poison that has caused her to consider Kelkin to be a good and dear friend. Kelkin administers this poison every week or so. He tells her it's a helpful potion, convincing her to voluntarily succumb to its effects. Nashara wants to help Kelkin consolidate the kingdom, sure that he will help her be accepted at Lyceum once that is done.

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check will reveal that Nashara is displaying much more emotion than a normally impassive sphinx would. A hero that saw Nashara and Kelkin on the route from Innenotdar to Seaquen has advantage on the check. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that this must be from something other than magic since sphinxes are usually immune to charm magic.

Creatures

[Kelkin Thravanvost](#)
[Nashara](#)

Adjust each creatures' hit points up or down by 40 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

Nashara is the most observant of the guards. A successful DC 16 group Dexterity (Stealth) check will allow the heroes to stealthily approach the side of the tent she is on regardless of whether she is asleep or awake. On the opposite side of the tent from Nashara, the heroes only need a successful DC 5 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak up on the guards in the dark. Nashara will direct the soldiers to attack before using *dispel magic* or simply leaping into combat.

The noise of combat or the *alarm* awakens Kelkin. Having slept in his armor, he only needs one turn to gather his cloak and equipment before casting *stoneskin* on himself on his second turn. He emerges from his tent on his third turn and strides confidently into combat.

Kelkin stays behind guards if he can, using discerning attacks like *magic missile* and *flaming sphere* in close quarters but will unleash his powerful spells if the chance emerges to do so without harming his guards. He uses *charm person* on a hero who has him grappled. If cornered and out of allies, he prefers to surrender. Because of this, he acts honorably in combat, so as not to arouse the ire of people who might eventually decide between killing him and taking him prisoner. The heroes might be able to get Kelkin to surrender early by telling him that his friend Gabal fell in battle with the Ragesians. Kelkin's raven familiar stays at the main command tent, in case the commanders need to reach him with an urgent message.

If Kelkin appears to be seriously injured, Nashara will go to him and let him climb on her before she takes to the air, to fly him to safety. If the heroes are able to remove the poison from Nashara, she will immediately turn on Kelkin in a furious attempt at revenge. Her wrath also extends to the guards, but she will not die for her revenge. Once the immediate enemies are dead, she will beg the heroes for succor.

A mounted reserve force of 1 [Steppengard knight](#) per PC and a [Steppengard prelate](#) arrive one minute after the first alarm. Additional reinforcements take ten minutes or more to arrive.

This encounter has the potential to become incredibly deadly for the heroes if Kelkin arrives

before the soldiers are defeated. They will likely need to quickly eliminate the soldiers before Kelkin emerges, cure Nashara, jump Kelkin in his sleep, or convince him to surrender to be successful. If the heroes lack the means to accomplish this, you can send a group of [Gallo soldiers](#), one for every two heroes to help keep the Steppengard soldiers busy in a similar manner to the [siege sabotage](#).

THE LINE AT OTHARIL VALE

Early in the morning, drums and horns sound the approach of battle. A warm breeze blows from the south, snapping banners in a militaristic cadence, and by an hour after sunrise the armies of Gallo and Steppengard are assembled and ready for battle.

Steppengard's forces will need to march through Otharil Vale to reach Gallo's Fend. Rather than ceding that land to him, Gallo intends to confront him in a straight-up fight. Thousands of foot soldiers and cavalry, hundreds of magic-users, and scattered monstrous forces line up two thousand feet apart, awaiting the order to attack.

The heroes are assigned a line of terrain 150 feet wide that they and their allies are to hold. For ease of play, assume that no enemies who are angling to the adjacent groups of soldiers cross over to attack the heroes' division, or vice versa. The heroes will have to defeat several waves to be victorious. If they are being defeated they can retreat, and fresh forces will relieve them, but for the purpose of this encounter they will have suffered a defeat.

Commander Hertiage, who is either in charge of the unit or is assisting the heroes, suggests the heroes take the center of the line of forces. Whether they have foot-soldiers or cavalry, their unit is just large enough to fill a 150-foot-wide line with some to spare. If the unit consists of foot soldiers, Hertiage says the line should have two gaps, dividing it into three roughly equal parts, with archers set up behind a *cheval de frise* (a ring of outward-pointing spears) in the gaps. The majority of the soldiers will fight in melee, but the archers will be protected and able to target particularly dangerous foes, or aerial enemies. Any mages with good ranged attacks should also be set up in the *chevaux de frise*.

Hertiage also suggests the chaplains remain behind the battle line, and preferably should be mounted, so they can reach the injured quickly. Duke Gallo can provide warhorses for the chaplains (and for the heroes, if they ask).

Terrain and Advancing Forces

The battlefield is 150 feet wide and 2,000 feet long (heavy catapult range), though this is well beyond the scope of most battle maps for miniature combat. Since the opposing forces will approach in a steady line, it may be easiest simply to set up the enemies on the opposite side of a battle map, and to just keep a running tally of how far away they are each round, until their positions can actually be represented on the map.

The land on the vale is almost completely flat, though the heroes can set up two *chevaux de frise* wherever they desire. The heroes might also try to set up some hazards along the line they intend to defend, spending the morning or evening before digging rough ground, scattering caltrops, setting up traps, or erecting other barricades to direct the flow of enemies.

The Heroes' Squad

Gallo's forces are under the control of various high commanders, with individual commanders in charge of groups of between twenty and fifty soldiers. Gallo wants the heroes to be part of one of these groups, though he will only offer to let them command one if they possess the proper demeanor for command.



Commander Hertiage will serve alongside the heroes, and if the heroes do not want to be in charge of their division, he will be. The heroes' division has two main responsibilities: first, they are to ensure that none of Steppengard's forces get past the stretch of land roughly 150 feet wide that has been assigned to them (each division is assigned its own patch of land, forming a long line); second, they are to defeat all the forces that come at them.

If the heroes acquired no aid, their unit consists of themselves, [Commander Hertiage](#), [2 Gallo chaplains](#), [2 squads of Gallo archers](#), and [6 squads of Gallo soldiers](#).

If the heroes secured the aid of Lord Dashgoban, they can choose instead to serve with cavalry, so the 6 squads of Gallo soldiers are replaced by [3 squads of Dashgoban knights](#), plus the [rust monster Granule](#) and its human handler [Woody Rust-Wrangler](#). Woody gives commands to Granule from behind the archers. For the sake of simplicity, Granule's Rust Metal trait works on squads as well as regular creatures.

If the heroes secured the aid of Lady Timor, the general make-up of their unit doesn't change, but they can add two [Timor war mages](#) to their forces. Additionally, they can call upon Tupof Dzequifs, a [xorn](#) who has served the Timor family for many decades. Tupof spends the battle earth-gliding wherever he is needed. The heroes are given a "thumper," a one-use magic item that emits a rhythmic thrum for several rounds when struck against a solid surface. When they throw the thumper at a spot up to 100 feet away, Tupof arrives at the spot of the thumper 1d4 rounds later (roll in secret), rises up from the ground, and simply begins fighting the nearest or most imposing enemies unless he is given more specific orders. As long as he is enjoying himself and is not getting too badly hurt, Tupof will fight for a minute before someone else's call pulls him away. Of course, Tupof can also be used as an ace in the hole if you need to get the heroes out of a dangerous situation.

The heroes should be 8th level by this point, and their allies (not including the additions from Timor) are equivalent to an EL 22 encounter. Therefore, while the large number of foes they face on the line at Otharil Vale may seem overwhelming, they should be able to handle it as long as they follow Commander Hertiage's advice to use their squads to counter Steppengard's squads and not be overwhelmed by the squad's powerful attacks.

Opening Volley

Steppengard's army blares its horns, and the vast line of soldiers begins to advance at a hustle. If the heroes stay put to take advantage of stationary defenses, the enemy forces hustle at 40 feet per round for 35 rounds, traveling 1400 feet. Then they begin to run, traveling 60 feet per round for 10 rounds, traveling the remaining 600 feet.

If the heavy catapults were not all destroyed, the catapults also advance a hundred feet over ten rounds, being slowly pushed into position. A bit of spying by Madness has determined where the heroes are deployed, so she has directed one [heavy catapult](#) to focus its efforts specifically on them. That catapult fires a shot aimed at the heroes every three rounds until the Steppengard forces meet the heroes. If the catapult targets the same point where its last shot hit, the shot is fired two rounds later instead of three.

Because of the incredible distance, the operator has disadvantage on its Intelligence checks, but that will be offset with advantage if the point targeted is within 20 feet of the last point hit by a stone. If the heroes figure out that they are being specifically targeted, they might want to get away from their allies so that a stray shot does not hit the archers, chaplains, or chevaux de frise.

War-Mage Artillery (EL 19)

If the heroes have not killed Kelkin Thravanvost, once during each wave a fireball comes in from hundreds of feet away sometime during the first four rounds on initiative count 20, targeting most Gallo forces possible without endangering Steppengard forces. Each creature within the fireball must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Kelkin is riding his warhorse, escorted by Steppengard knights, a commander, a prelate, and Nashara the gynosphinx. He never comes within range for melee combat and does not linger long, preferring to strafe along the battle lines. Should the heroes make an effort to ride him down and face him, they will find Kelkin and his bodyguards relatively alone in the wasteland between the two enemy lines, but they will have abandoned their position with their portion of the line likely to be overwhelmed.

Creatures

[Kelkin Thravanvost](#)

Nashara

- 4 Steppengard knights
- Steppengard commander
- Steppengard prelate

Add or remove two knights for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

First Wave (EL 23)

The first wave of enemy forces consists of squads of steppengard soldiers, a commander, a prelate, two griffons, and Brakken, a minotaur mercenary. If Nashara was cured of her poison, she has abandoned Steppengard's army, and the griffons have left as well.

The Griffons run along the ground until they are 200 feet away, at which point they leap into the air and fly behind the heroes' lines, attacking war mages, chaplains, and archers. Brakken flies into a rage just before crashing through the front lines.

Reward the heroes with inspiration if they defeat the first wave before the second wave arrives.

Creatures

- 8 Squads of Steppengard soldiers

OVERWHELMED

Between the two waves and extra bombardment, this encounter might have too many foes to be won by simply charging in and killing everyone for some groups of heroes. If they have not taken care of Kelkin and the catapults or secured Lady Timor's help in time, make sure the heroes understand that they will either need to be creative, or they will likely have to retreat before winning a total victory. Duke Gallo is content even with a partial success.

- Steppengard commander
- Steppengard prelate
- Brakken the Blitzer

- 2 Griffons

Add or remove a griffon for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

The Steppengard commander has decent intelligence about the heroes and will plan tactics accordingly. For example, if one of the heroes is renowned for using area spells, once combat begins the commander tries to keep his squads separated by



10-foot gaps to minimize the damage they will take from area spells before they close to melee range.

The first wave does not retreat, but a few soldiers might throw down their arms and surrender if defeat is certain. About the time that this wave reaches the heroes, the second wave sets out, arriving 20 rounds later. The heroes will have little time between them to rest, and the catapult, if it survived, will start bombarding the heroes again as soon as the steppengard soldiers are removed from the field until the second wave is within 200 feet of the heroes.

Second Wave (EL 23)

This wave consists of the four troll mercenaries (Rip, Snort, Gut, and Beulah), plus squads of Steppengard knights. Any trolls the heroes killed while on their missions to Dashgoban and Timor do not appear in this battle. Reward the heroes with inspiration if they defeat the second wave.

Creatures

- 4 [Trolls](#) (Rip, Snort, Gut, and Beulah)
- 4 [Squads of Steppengard knights](#)

Adjust each troll's hit points up or down by 20 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

The second wave keeps the same pace as the first wave and reaches the heroes' line 20 rounds after the first wave strikes.

When the second wave is 300 feet away from the heroes, an invisible androsphinx flying 400 feet above the heroes unleashes a roar as he swoops past. Everyone in the heroes' division (as well as any surviving enemies from the first wave) must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw, becoming frightened on a failed save. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. The androsphinx flies up and away and will not engage in combat, but the roar will likely break the heroes' line, sending squads of soldiers fleeing back toward base just as the second wave is closing in for the kill.

The knights focus on the leaders and on those enemies still able to fight, while the troll mercenaries gleefully cut down weaker foes.

After the Second Wave

Once the heroes have defeated the second wave, it looks like there will be a lull of a few minutes before the next wave comes in. What happens next depends

on how well the heroes are doing. By this point the battle has lasted perhaps ten minutes, and before the heroes get far in preparing for the next stage, a courier bearing Duke Gallo's banner rides up, waving for the heroes to come to him. He says that the heroes' unit is being relieved by fresh forces, and asks that they follow him to Markhold, where they will meet with Duke Gallo.

When the heroes reach Markhold, they pass the medical tents where the injured are being carted in, though as is typical in a fantasy war, almost as many soldiers are heading out of the tents to rejoin the battle. Gallo is just inside the fortress of Markhold, examining a detailed map of the battle, which is still unfolding.

If the heroes have earned Gallo enough victory points to ensure victory or a truce, Gallo thanks them for their services and tells them that the battle will take a while to peter out, but the result has already been determined. It looks like they will win, or at least force a retreat by Steppengard's forces. Gallo wants to make sure the heroes are safe, so he asks that they let his own forces handle the rest of the battle.

If, however, Gallo does not have enough victory points to earn a truce, he explains that things look grim. He has a desperate plan that might turn the tide, but it could be suicidal. The group

WINNING THE BATTLE

Each of the following conditions is worth a number of victory points (VP). Duke Gallo wins a decisive victory over King Steppengard if the heroes earn at least 20 VP. A truce is called if they earn at least 10 VP, and Gallo is defeated if the heroes earned less than that.

WINNING THE BATTLE

Event	VP
Aid from Lord Dashgoban arrives by the morning of the battle	8 points
Aid from Lady Timor arrives by the morning of the battle	8 points
Capturing or killing Kelkin Thravanvost before the battle	4 points
Holding the line at Otharil Vale	4 points
Capturing or killing Königsmarshal Malkan	8 points
Defeating Madness	4 points
For each siege catapult not destroyed before the battle	-1 point (max -10)

The specifics of victory, truce, or defeat are detailed in *After the Second Wave*.

of warriors he was originally counting on to perform this mission were killed by an overwhelming rush, and he suspects that the enemy somehow divined what he was planning and knew how to cripple his plan.

The plan called for the now-deceased dwarf warriors to take a tunnel that passes under the Steppengard camp, nearby the command bunker. The warriors were to breach the surface and either kill or capture Königsmarshal Malkan, a coup that would bring the battle to a sudden halt. Now, however, Gallo has a nearly complete tunnel, but no one to lead the mission.

If the heroes agree, they will cross the frozen Nasham River, enter a fort on the northern shore, and then take a 2 mile long tunnel to the breach point. If the heroes hurry, they could reach the command bunker in half an hour.

COUP (EL 13+)

Note that this mission is very dangerous, and you should likely avoid it unless the heroes have otherwise lost the Battle for Gallo's Fend.

On the surface, a 30-foot-diameter command tent conceals Königsmarshal Malkan's actual headquarters. Worried about aerial attack, Malkan had his soldiers excavate a small bunker, 40 feet square, 20 feet below the surface, with a 10-foot-high ceiling. The tent itself has been set up to look like a command center, but Malkan generally stays in the bunker. A trap door covered by a rug conceals the stairs that lead down to the bunker, protecting the Königsmarshal from attempts to attack him in his tent. The defenses, however, make no consideration for a subterranean attack.

The 40-foot-square bunker has a wooden staircase in the northwest corner, a bed and dresser in the southwest corner, chairs and a conference table in the southeast corner, and a cheap desk covered with maps and troop deployment records in the northeast corner. Torches imbued with *continual flame* are spaced around the room at 10-foot intervals.

The tunnel the heroes use to reach the bunker is an old one, part of a decades-old defense, and is wide enough for two people to walk side by side. Scouting by a small earth elemental has allowed the sappers to find out exactly where to dig up, and the tunnels come to within 2 feet of the surface. The dwarves have set up explosive charges (magic items that unleash a shatter spell) in two places. One set of charges is for the breach point, and will collapse

the floor in the northeast corner so the heroes can get inside. The second set of charges is positioned under the northwest corner, intended to destroy the staircase so that Malkan cannot retreat.

The tunnel runs east to west under the bunker, with two side passages that lead to the staircase and the breach point. The tunnel under the staircase will be completely filled with debris when the charges go off, whereas the breach tunnel will just count as difficult terrain. The stairs leading up out of the bunker will be useless, so getting out will require a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Two dwarves with short ladders wait just outside the breach point, and when the heroes give the signal they shout the command word to detonate the charges. A deafening crack shakes the tunnel, and blinding brown dust fills the air. The dwarves then rush in and place the ladders against the walls, holding them steady so the heroes can get up in a hurry. Moving up the ladders into the bunker takes just 10 feet of movement. Roll for initiative.

Creatures

[Königsmarshal Malkan](#)

[Madness \(Incorporeal\)](#)

2 [Steppengard prelates](#)

Adjust Madness hit points up or down by 20 and uses of legendary resistance up or down by 1 and Malkan's hit points up by 40 or down by 15 for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

When the ambush is sprung, Königsmarshal Malkan and Advisor Nina Glibglammer are in the southwest corner, talking about the king's declining health and fragile mental state, which the gnome woman denies vehemently. The Steppengard prelates are in the center of the bunker and are knocked prone by the blasts. Everyone inside the bunker is surprised, giving the heroes time to enter the bunker.

The entirety of the 40-foot-square bunker is lightly obscured with a dust cloud. A 10-foot-radius area around each breach point is filled with debris and is difficult terrain. The room's furniture has been knocked askew.

The prelates stand and do their best to keep the heroes from reaching Malkan. The Königsmarshal responds quickly, taking cover behind the nearest furniture, crouching, and attacking intruders with his crossbow.

Madness, a little shaken but not actually frightened (since right now she is incorporeal),

simply moves to hide and take cover, watching from behind a bed or couch. If she is attacked, she giggles, shakes her head in disapproval, and begins using *confusion* to befuddle the heroes. After a few rounds of combat, Madness grows bored and simply glides into the wall, preferring to leave rather than reveal her true form. If the heroes think to sing the Song of Forms she flees in a panic, terrifying the guards in the tent above as her monstrous serpentine form squeezes its way out of the bunker. She is willing to let Malkan be captured, and will not put herself in harm's way for his sake.

Should the heroes manage to force her into her true form but not defeat her, rumors spread quickly among Steppengard's soldiers, and everyone becomes very wary around the gnome woman, suspicious that she is some sort of demon. If the heroes manage to discredit "Nina," instead of her it will be the Ragesian ambassador who endorses Steppengard's suicidal plan in Act Three, though Madness will still linger in the shadows.

Development

On the surface, several [Steppengard knights](#) are guarding the tent. When they hear the boom they run to the trap door; it will take three rounds from the detonation before the door in the ceiling is opened. Even then, the knights will have to drop 20 feet to get into the room. One enters on initiative count 0 at the end of the third round and every round thereafter. The camp quickly mobilizes to respond to the ambush, and thus the reinforcements do not stop coming. The heroes' only escape (short of killing several hundred soldiers one by one) is to retreat back down the tunnel. The dwarven sappers will detonate a final set of charges to seal the tunnel.

Aftermath

If the heroes are defeated, they are taken captive, but will be reunited with Duke Gallo early in Act Three, during the "peace conference," though their gear will be confiscated until then, and Gallo will not offer them knighthoods.

If the heroes manage to nab Malkan, they can retreat down the tunnels, their dwarven allies holding off pursuit and detonating the charges to make good their escape. If the heroes are losing, the dwarven sappers shout for the heroes to retreat. In either case, as the heroes are making their way down the tunnels, Madness appears before them, still incorporeal. She giggles, applauds lightly, and thanks them for the good show. She is quite pleased

that they and Duke Gallo have done such a good job killing soldiers of Dassen, and she suggests that with their experience, they might make good recruits for the Ragesians. She floats off then, telling them, "Sleep well," and vanishing into the wall.

WRAPPING UP ACT TWO

Unless the heroes managed to capture or kill Königsmarshal Malkan, the battle of the Line at Otharil Vale continues for several more hours before the losers retreat (or both sides call a truce). Steppengard's forces cease hostile action, and then two days later a courier rides out from Steppengard's camp with a message for Duke Gallo.

The precise wording depends on whether Gallo won, lost, or called a truce, but the message is that King Steppengard does not wish for more fighting. He is recalling his army, and requests (or demands, if he is victorious) that Gallo attend a peace conference in Bresk. All of the nobles will be required to attend, and here Steppengard hopes to avert a civil war, and to protect his nation. Steppengard claims that new evidence has been revealed to him, and he wants to present it publicly to all his nobles, and simultaneously establish a plan to hold off the expansionist Ragesians.

To help quell hostilities, the king is throwing a two-day festival at Bresk, and Lord Gallo and his servants are all invited. The first day will be an opportunity for recent enemies to compete casually in tournaments and reestablish friendly bonds, while the second day will be filled with parades and parties for the commoners, while the nobles discuss how to save their nation.

This is a very suspicious announcement, and Lord Gallo knows it. However, despite what the heroes may say, he has no choice but to accept. If he doesn't, the king will be able to call Gallo's patriotism into doubt, and could use it to marshal the other nobles against him. Besides, if there is any chance that the country can be united to stand against Ragesia's invasion, they must take it.

Still, Gallo is no fool. He fully expects to be betrayed. As a great show of trust, he offers a knighthood to each the heroes, and asks that they accompany him as bodyguards. If the heroes accept, they leave tomorrow.

ACT THREE: SERVED COLD

In this act, the heroes attend a peace conference, called by King Steppengard to reunite his kingdom after the recent battle, with the supposed intent of planning a defense against the Ragesians. However in truth Steppengard has completely lost his mind, and desires to destroy his kingdom, and himself with it. He plans for all the nobles to be poisoned with a toxin developed by Madness, which will drive them all into a murderous madness.

The day before the banquet, Steppengard throws a festival and tournament to distract attentions while he prepares his scheme. Informants contact the heroes and alert them to suspicious goings-on at the castle, prompting them to sneak into the castle to find evidence of what looks like an assassination attempt. Taking a hidden path into the castle's prison, the heroes discover the Ragesian inquisitor Torrax has just delivered the madness-inducing poison to agents, who will dose all the food at the banquet. The heroes rush to stop the plot, and ultimately confront King Steppengard and his trillith advisor the throne room, in a battle to defeat the king's madness.

If the heroes do not piece together the clues to stop the king's scheme, some time between the soup and the pork, the leaders of Dassen will tear each other to pieces.

THE POISONING PLOT

Steppengard is mad enough to listen when Nina suggests that he could take revenge on all those who killed his family, and he is particularly happy that the poison being used will cause the nobles to murder each other. However, the toxin has a magical mind-affecting component, which means that before it can take effect, the Eight Lands Boon must be revoked.

The Eight Lands Boon, granted by the Dasseni artifact the Book of Eight Lands, protects all the nobles and their families from mind-affecting poisons and magic as well as divination, and removing someone's name requires the approval of the Council of Nine. Destroying the book is difficult, and removing it from the castle vault is practically impossible because of various old wards, even for the king. However, the book is not powerful enough to function from another plane of existence.

Madness' simple plan is for the Ragesian Ambassador Serrimus to enter the vault—this right is accorded to any human or dwarf—so that he may

check his ancestry. Once inside, the ambassador hides the book inside a rope trick and leaves an extended silent image of the book in its place. The ambassador will concentrate on the illusion for the full twenty minutes, making certain it lasts that long, by which time the poison plot will be unstoppable. The *rope trick* will end, and the book will appear simply to have fallen off its stand.

While the book is hidden in the *rope trick*, the entirety of the Dasseni nobility will be vulnerable to the effects of the Red Madness poison. Every dish of the multi-course banquet will have several doses of the sweet poison, enough to ensure that everyone, eventually, succumbs.

RETURNING TO BRESK

Gallo leaves his retainers to see to the Fend in the aftermath of the battle, and brings along the heroes and forty men as an armed escort. They follow a half day behind Steppengard's retreating army, and reach Bresk in three days.

If Gallo lost the battle, instead Gallo is taken into custody, though he is allowed to have the heroes accompany him still as bodyguards, as this is a political arrest, intended mostly to keep Gallo from running. The three-day trip back to Bresk is calm and uneventful. Unless the heroes talk to

AREN'T WE DONE?

After saving Gallo's Fend, the heroes may think they're done, that they have secured Dassen's aid and that they're ready to head back, triumphantly, to Seaquen. If they are planning to hurry up and return to Seaquen, emphasize to them that a few things need to be finalized, to make sure the diplomatic niceties are taken care of. You might even present Act Three as merely denouement, implying that nothing dramatic will happen, but that the heroes are expected to go along to represent Seaquen and to collect their rewards.

As with all parts of the adventure, however, if the heroes decide to leave, it's their choice. They can learn a few days later that all the nobles of Dassen killed each other, and that the nation has descended into civil war. That chaos, at least, should slow the Ragesian advance for a little while, but there is nothing else to be done in Dassen. Lyceum will be looking for alternate solutions, which include sending the heroes on the trail for the Torch of the Burning Sky, which is the focus of adventures five through seven.

someone else first, no one in Steppengard’s army does anything more than give them a glance every now and then.

Parade of the Victors

When Duke Gallo and the heroes reach Bresk, they are ushered into a hastily arranged parade. Banners fly from rooftops, drums beat out a military cadence, and fresh soil has been spread along the army’s path—this is to reward their return by letting them walk proudly upon the earth of their homeland.

If the heroes successfully defended Gallo’s Fend, Gallo’s troops enter the city first, greeted by nervous but hopeful citizens lining the streets. Word has spread that Gallo will force the king to end his witch-hunts, and that peace will be returning to Dassen.

If the heroes lost, instead they are paraded along in the middle of Steppengard’s forces, shown off as prisoners of war. The crowd is still nervous, but they cheer because they expect Gallo will be executed, and that things will quiet down afterward.

If the two sides called a truce, Steppengard’s forces march first, and then Gallo’s. Both are greeted by cautious cheers, since people really have no idea what this means, but they know they’re supposed to cheer returning armies.

Regardless of the circumstances, Duke Gallo reminds the heroes to maintain proper decorum. After an hour-long march, the parade reaches the courtyard of Castle Steppengard. Trumpeters blare victorious tunes and children throw flowers, and a line of the other seven nobles stand ready to greet Gallo’s arrival. Various retainers and guards surround the courtyard, and in a shadowed corner stand the Ragesian ambassador and inquisitor Torrax. King Steppengard (possibly with Nina) stands in front of the nobles, and he steps forward as Gallo and the heroes approach.

King Steppengard looks healthier than you last saw him, more restrained perhaps, as if he is contrite over a great mistake. He offers a hand to Gallo, then turns to address the gathered crowd. The music comes to an end.

“My people,” begins Steppengard, “recent times have been dark for our country. From tragedy that befell my house to recent rumors of sedition, no one can say that these have been good days. But I am here to tell you, better days are ahead! I have invited all of Dassen’s Lords and Ladies here to Bresk, so that the petty squabbling may be brought to an end, and that we may forge a new,

brighter future together.”

“Duke Gallo, long-respected defender of the gates of Dassen, I commend you for your brave and steady heart. Though we disagreed, and though our swords crossed because of it, I know now that you acted with only love for your homeland. I have called you and your fellow Lords and Ladies here to bring an end to our struggle. There is news, both to relieve heavy shoulders and to chill marrow, but because of heroes like you, Duke Gallo, and the brave warriors who attend you, our nation will survive.”

“I welcome you into my house, and offer you, as I have with all the other nobles, a chance to have your champions compete in the Tournament of Unity. Tomorrow there will be games to cheer the heart of our subjects, and in the evening we shall speak of unpleasant but necessary matters. Thieves and tricksters lurk at our borders, I now know, and it will fall to all of us, not as Eight Lands but allied as one nation, to defeat them.”

The crowd applauds, and Gallo, still shaking his king’s hand, leans forward and speaks so that you can barely hear him.

“You are talking about the Ragesians, right?”

Steppengard simply maintains his smile as if he has not heard.

Attempts to magically determine whether the king is lying fail because he recently drank a potion of *glibness*. A hero can see through his bluff with a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check, but they learn only that the king is hiding something, and they detect no immediate hostile intent.

If the heroes were captured in Act Two, they are unceremoniously handed over to Duke Gallo’s custody after the king’s speech. Likewise, if their familiars or animal companions were taken captive in Act One, they are returned now.

All the Lords and Ladies and their envoys are welcome to stay in any inn, tavern, or manor in the city, at no charge. If the heroes want, they could even convince the Castellan to give them lodging in the castle itself with a successful DC 23 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Otherwise, Gallo finds a friendly minor dwarf aristocrat who lends him his manor for a few days—a lavishly furnished house with twenty rooms, all equipped with warm, running water.

Lady Timor and Lord Dashgoban visit the evening of Gallo’s arrival, and will discuss the situation, share their misgivings, and either commiserate

on their failure or celebrate their victory at Gallo's Fend.

TOURNAMENT OF UNITY

The schedule for the next day has various tournament games from sunrise to sunset, and then a banquet in the evening. The nobles are expected to attend the tournament, and are welcome to bring aids to the banquet. Gallo wants the heroes to come with him to both events. The heroes have become celebrities, and if they do well in the tournament it will bolster support for him when he is negotiating with Steppengard and the other nobles. Also, he would like the heroes close in case someone tries something treacherous.

Additionally, if the heroes were not captured in Act One (and thus did not have a chance to rescue Proxy Jinis), Gallo has a special request. He knows that his proxy was arrested for suspected treason, and when he asked about the man's status, he was simply told that Jinis would be returned to him after the banquet. Gallo suspects that Jinis might know something, and so he wants the heroes to try to locate his proxy.

Gallo hopes that he might yet have allies on Steppengard's staff, and thus someone at the tournament who has news of Proxy Jinis. Gallo himself will be too closely watched, but the heroes might be easier to approach.

The heroes have a day to do as they please. Try to make sure, however, that they are at the castle by sunset, so they can attend the banquet. Some sources of information can help the heroes figure out what Steppengard is planning, but for the sake of drama don't have them speak to the heroes until it is near time for the banquet. While it is perfectly fine for the heroes to find out about the plan and avert it well in advance, the climax will be much more dramatic if they find out at the last possible moment, and have to hurry to save the day.

The Tournament Grounds

A broad field outside the walls of Bresk has been set up with warm tents, scattered stages, and broad wooden bleachers, and dozens of games and tournaments have been announced. Servants of the various nobles are competing, as are a scattering of locals, desperate refugees who were too poor to finish the trip to Seaquen, and would-be heroes who want to claim glory in the coming battles. Because of the short time span and inhospitable weather, less

than a thousand people actually attend the festival, and only two score are actually competing, but for Bresk this is quite an event.

There are several major competitions with a single prize being awarded for each, plus various minor festival games. In addition to the games, the heroes might take in a mock sword fight between a pair of masochistic dwarves, watch a short play put on by a Wayfarer with no hands named Budger and his one-thumbed goblin assistant Lucky, sample various festival food and drinks, dance on a public stage with half-elf exotic dancers from Ostalin, or listen to a musician playing an accordion. This last event takes on a sinister air if Steppengard's men killed the heroes' associate Balan, since the performer purchased Balan's old accordion.

If the heroes cause any trouble, the local guards are not equipped to stop them easily, so they simply threaten to get Steppengard's royal guards (Steppengard knights and several prelates), and try to talk down the heroes, saying that fighting will reflect poorly on their liege, Lord Gallo.

Dasseni Idol

"Do you sing?" asks a dwarf with a curled blonde beard. "Perform at all? Can you make a fool of yourself? The nobles need entertainment, and the king's coffers are open to pay you to show off your talents."

A dwarf named **Bleur Himage** wanders the festival with a thick shoulder bag full of certificates providing people with permission to perform for the nobles during the intermissions between jousts. All he asks is a brief demonstration of some talent requiring a successful DC 10 ability check, after which he pushes a certificate into the person's hand and tells them when and where to be. Charisma (Performance) would be the most common ability check used, but Bleur will accept more original talents within reason.

Their performance at the jousting intermission is an easy opportunity for the heroes to use their skills to make some money, earning gp equal to how much their ability check beats a DC of 10. Additionally, any performer who makes a successful DC 19 ability check gets called back to perform before the final joust. With a huge crowd in attendance, each of the performers has a chance to earn the favor of the crowd.

Other than the heroes, the best performance is a stirring oratory by Königsmarshal Malkan about the

first eight kings of the Eight Lands with a Charisma (Performance) check of 22. If Malkan is not present (if, for example, he's dead), Duke Gallo is the leader, demonstrating his surprising skill at comedy. He talks to random people in the audience and various competitors in the joust, making sarcastic and satirical jabs at himself and his fellow nobles, but he makes sure to save a series of biting insults for the Ragesians with a Charisma (Performance) check of 20.

If any of the heroes beat those checks, they win the cheers of the audience, and King Steppengard stands, as does Lady Dene, and together they reward the winner with a deed to a 20-acre plot of land, located in the woods of Lady Dene's lands. Lady Dene personally thanks the hero for their performance, and whispers discreetly that she is glad to know that Seaquen will be safe from the Ragesians now.

Freshness Guaranteed

Walking through the crowded streets, you notice that the festival workers aren't the only ones making a profit during the celebrations. A number of food vendors line the streets, hawking exotic and tasty treats to the delight of the people, who probably get such fare only rarely.

One such food cart doesn't seem to be doing so well, however. You notice one man holding a plate with an exquisite-looking cut of steak on it, talking to the cook, a halfling standing on a step-ladder, who grows more and more upset as the conversation continues. Finally, in a rage the cook knocks the food out of the man's hands, dashing the finely prepared meal to the ground.

"Bah!" he roars, "As though you, an eater of gruel, would understand the finer aspects of the culinary arts?! Take your money and begone!"

Throwing a few coins in the man's face, the cook sends the man running, shouting curses at him until he's gone. With his victim out of sight, the unhappy chef returns to his cart and looks around grumpily.

Noticing your gaze upon him, he glares at you and demands, "What?"

The angry chef is, in fact, the head cook for King Steppengard, **Randas Slabovalles**. He had just begun to prepare for the banquet that the king was going to be throwing when he was rudely informed by several guards that the king would be bringing in several "specialists" for the banquet for the visiting

nobles, and that the head cook and his staff were to work at the festival until then. Naturally, Randas is deeply insulted that any "specialist" cooks were brought in to cook for an important state dinner, and he has been taking his displeasure out on any customers he receives.

Randas' food cart is ridiculously over-equipped, with ingredients for gourmet meals, not simple festival fare. The cheapest meal he will cook costs 5 gp per person: a black bean tortilla soup that is probably the tastiest thing the heroes have ever eaten. If the heroes are willing to wait ten minutes while Randas cooks something for them, he will angrily mutter about how unfairly he is being treated, and how he was not meant to serve food to swine.

The heroes can try to calm him down, and though he is snappy all he really wants is some validation and respect. If the heroes are kind to him, he starts a conversation with them, mentioning that he regularly cooks for His Majesty the King, but that for some reason he has been temporarily suspended, replaced by outside help.

Soon after the heroes get the chef to open up, however, a man dressed as one of King Steppengard's royal guards approaches and tells them to move along. He has been ordered to make sure the chef doesn't talk too much, and if it comes to it he will attempt to drag the halfling away forcibly. Even if the heroes don't provoke a fight, eventually some of the other lesser cooks—who have also been assigned to the tournament—hear what happened, and they come to the heroes to complain. None of them suspect the truth, however.

Even if the heroes don't cause a scene, the next time they walk past this stall, it is being closed down by a pair of city guards, and Randas is nowhere to be seen. The guards were simply told to report here and take the cart away, and don't know what's going on.

Informant

You are passing a crowd of festival-goers when suddenly one of their number steps from his crowd into the middle of your group. A dark-haired dwarf in nondescript clothes, the stranger keeps his head down and hisses, "Try not to look at me. I've got to warn you about tonight. If any of the king's guards see me, it will ruin everything."

"I'm a guard at the castle. Strange things are going on, people being reassigned and moved, and I think it's

so we don't see what the king is planning. I normally watch a weak point in the castle's backside. There's a hidden watchpost in an old graveyard on the shores of the Nasham, because the castle's sewers let out there. Normally the outflow is gated off, but we've got to make sure people don't sneak in."

"A couple of weeks ago I got reassigned to the royal vault. I checked around, and nobody has replaced me. So last night I snuck back to see what was up. I mean, the hind end of the castle is just plain exposed to the world now, and if anyone thought to they could just up and sneak in."

"What I saw there makes no sense. A group of priests were waiting at the entrance of the sewer, and they met up with bunch of men who unloaded a sleigh filled with casks, like they were delivering wine or something. The priests took the casks, paid the men, and then, damndest thing, the priests went into the sewers. They weren't picking up drinks for the banquet, I'll bet you that."

"There is something foul, and not just the frozen flow in the sewer. I told you where I was reassigned—the royal vault? Well I was relieved tonight, told to take the day off and enjoy the festival. Far as I can tell, nobody's replacing me tonight either."

"Now maybe I'm crazy, but I know you don't stand well with the king, so I thought you might want to know this. Don't tell anyone we talked."

Another group of revelers are coming close, and the dwarf slips away, not looking back.

The informant is **Burnomn Valder**, one of the guards for Steppengard's castle. If the heroes try to talk to him he does his best to get away before anyone sees him. He doesn't have much else to say, and most things the heroes could ask him they could find out from other people just as easily.

Burnomn witnessed a trio of Steppengard's prelates purchasing ingredients for the poison that will be used at the banquet tonight. The prelates then entered the sewers, cast hide from undead, and brought the casks to Inquisitor Torrax, who completed the poison recipe.

If the heroes do cause a scene, Burnomn tries to run, which may attract Steppengard's guards. If Burnomn is caught or the heroes mention what he said to Steppengard's people, the entrance to the prison is much more heavily guarded, and visibly so, to discourage investigation.

Jousting

The biggest attraction of the festival is a field the length of a city block, surrounded by bleachers and wooden guard rails, near which numerous warriors in plate armor wait beside horses. Magic-users wait at ready to ensure the lances these jousters wield will only inflict nonlethal blows, and healers stand ready just in case something goes awry. Nearby, a parallel area caters to more casual jousters. Men in leather armor, with flexible wooden poles mount up on nags, and do not have the benefit of magical protection.

Both sets of jousts seem to be attracting a great deal of betting, and one entire section of the bleachers has been cordoned off so the nobles can watch comfortably. Duke Gallo spots you and nods his head toward the registration booth.

If the heroes would be interested in jousting, they should visit the joust early in the day to be placed in the tournament bracket. The commoners joust has five rounds, with none of the jousters any more skilled than a **Steppengard soldier**. The entry fee is 5 gp, and the prize is 100 gp and a seat at the king's banquet this evening. If the heroes do not get involved, the winner is **Ben Roots**.

The main joust has four rounds with sixteen contestants (including any heroes). The fan favorite is **Silvia Cossala**, a knight jousting on behalf of Lady Namin. Should one or more heroes compete, they must face the foes listed below. The entry fee is 100 gp.

Magic cast upon all the jousters causes the damage they deal to be nonlethal, and clerics

NOTORIETY AND TAUNTING

One possible way to motivate the heroes to participate in festival games is to play on their pride. Several times during the day, hecklers loyal to the "lovely and patriotic Lady Namin" will pick the heroes out of the crowd and begin to taunt them, citing their support of the "treacherous cur Gallo." The hecklers suggest that the heroes are cowards if they don't compete.

While the heroes may initially think that Lady Namin is trying to harass them or ruin their names, the truth is far less insidious. Lady Namin knows the heroes are fairly popular with the commoners, and she wants to increase her own name by having her subjects triumph over them. Every little bit helps toward her goal of convincing the king to marry her.

are present to heal any wounds. Magic items are allowed, but no jousting may receive any spells to enhance their prowess except those they cast. Each round takes one hour, so jousting have some time to heal up on their own between bouts.

Round One

Quincy Fellthuf (Steppengard soldier), from the lands of Lord Rego, is the hero's first opponent. The heroes and Quincy may remember each other from the heroes' travels from Innenotdar to Seaquen. If there are two heroes competing, the second hero faces a soldier from Bresk named **Wodbart Erfis** (Steppengard soldier).

Round Two

The hero next competes against **Grim Morgensen** (Steppengard soldier), a rough-shaven refugee from Ragesia with a bent leg that looks like an old wound healed poorly. If there are two heroes competing, the first hero instead faces **Zwergenkarsh Hectonoff** (Dashgoban knight) while the second faces Grim Morgensen.

Round Three

Jereth Buchaven (Steppengard knight), a soldier of Steppengard, is the hero's opponent for the third round. If a second hero is competing, they face **Silvia Cossala** in this round.

Round Four

Silvia Cossala, or the hero who beat her, is the hero's final opponent.

A round consists of several clashes. When the gamekeeper calls for both opponents to charge, both will ride forward and attack on the same initiative. Each jousting makes a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to line up their approach, gaining advantage on their attack roll on a success. As the jousting meet in the middle, they each simultaneously make a single attack with their lances, dealing nonlethal damage on a hit. If both jousting hit each other, they make a contested Strength (Athletics) check to try to stay on their horse, with the loser falling, and both riders fall in the case of a tie. If only one jousting hits with their attack, they have advantage on this check and do not fall if they lose or tie.

A jousting scores a point when their opponent falls during a clash and they do not. A jousting wins a round if they have two points after the first two clashes or are in the lead after any subsequent clash.

They can also win if their opponent falls unconscious from damage and they do not. While the jousting may receive healing after a round is complete, they may not receive healing between clashes unless both fall unconscious from damage in the same clash. In that case, both are allowed to receive healing from their teams before they proceed with the next clash.

The winner of the joust receives as a prize an *ewhisperer charm*, a purse of 500 gp, and any one suit of standard barding with a +1 enhancement bonus (such as +1 full plate barding or +1 chain shirt barding, but not +1 mithral breastplate barding).

Horseshoes

As you pass through the crowded streets, you notice one of the impromptu games that has sprung up during the festival. Off in an alley, several people have pounded a small iron rod into the road. Two men stand over a dozen feet away from it, and take turns throwing metal horseshoes at it, trying to land them around the rod. As the last horseshoes are thrown, one person looks up at they notice you.

Characters playing the game stand 15 feet from the pole and must make a DC 10 Dexterity check. Players get three throws each. There is no prize for this game, but the man who owns the horseshoes offers to buy drinks for people who play with him, with the result that eventually everyone's skill goes down, but their fun goes up.

Shell Game

You can't help but notice part of the crowd that is unusually silent, huddled around a booth. Stepping closer, you notice that they are observing the man behind the booth slide three upside-down drinking cups around the booth counter in a dizzying array, before finally sliding them into a row. He looks at a young man across from him expectantly, and after a moment's notice, the youth picks the center cup. Clucking his tongue, the man raises it, revealing that it has nothing underneath. Cursing, the young man walks away as the people around him laugh good-naturedly.

"Who's next?" calls the man behind the counter. "Place a coin on the counter, and if you can find it after I'm done hiding it, you'll win double your money back! I

tell you this game is so easy I once lost a week's winnings to a blind man. You, sir, you have both your eyes. Why not try your luck?"

If the heroes take up the challenge, they must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to locate the coin. A creature that gets less than 10 on the check is tricked into picking the wrong cup.

If someone wins twice in a row, the worker decides to cheat if they play a third time and agree to go for double or nothing. This time the worker palms the coin as he moves the cups, removing it from the counter entirely. A successful DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check during the third game sees through the ruse. If caught, the worker plays off his cheating with a smile, producing the coin behind the ear of a beautiful woman he keeps nearby, joking that he was just giving them a hard time.

Spell Dueling

While spellcasters don't have the same tradition of magical duels in Dassen as do the students at Lyceum, because of the heroes' presence, a group of eight mages announce a small competition to see if any of them can stand up against the "famous spell duelists of Lyceum." A crowd of interested townsfolk and awed children assemble to watch the magic at work.

The rules of spelldueling are fairly straightforward. The battle occurs in a 30-foot radius, marked off by the spell *duelist's etiquette*. A judge outside the area tells the duelists when to start, and the duel is resolved like a normal combat, albeit a usually nonlethal one. A mage loses if they fall down twice, if three of their spells are countered or disrupted, if they leave the arena ring, or if they fail to cast a spell for three consecutive rounds.

Test of Strength

As you walk through the crowd, you notice several people crowded around a man with a large hammer over his shoulder. Standing by him is a large vertical board with a groove running up the center, with a bell perched at the top. At the bottom of the contraption is a small metal weight at the bottom of the groove, sitting on a small platform, laid lopsided over a level, making the other end of the platform stick upward.

Twirling the hammer, the man calls out, "Come one, come all, and test your might in this competition of

strength and prowess! Who among you has the muscular fortitude necessary to swing this mighty mallet hard enough to ring the bell? Provide pure proof of your power to your friends and lady friends for only one gold piece!"

Heroes who take up this challenge use the provided maul to make an attack roll against a tiny target with AC 7. Although it does not actually harm the device, the amount of damage the hero inflicts determines how high the weight rises. A blow that deals 15 points of damage rings the bell.

A representative of Lady Namin is here to challenge the party. **Sting Watchall** (Atk +6, 1d12 + 4 damage) is a burly man who has served in Lady Namin's military for years, though has seldom seen combat. He enjoys heckling the heroes, but could be swayed to like them, since he is a little envious of the fact that they have seen so much actual combat.

If Sting and a hero both ring the bell, the game's director suggests they continue until one of them fails.

The Magic is Gone

Wandering through the crowded streets of the festival, you suddenly notice several flashes of light accompanied by loud crackles. Turning, you see a collection of parents and children gasping happily over a series of small fireworks that just finished putting on a show for them. A man in a fake beard and rather gaudy wizard's robes, complete with pointy hat, takes a bow as the show apparently comes to an end.

"Thank you aww tho mut'th," he lisps. "Whitbang'th Fabulouth Fia'wo'kth will have anotha' thowing tonight. Pleathe tell you' fwiendth all abouddit!" Smiling as the crowd begins to disperse, Whizbang gathers his supplies as they depart. Once they're gone he sighs and shakes his head, then looks to you.

"Pardon me, folks," he says without a lisp, "do you know some place to get a nice drink?"

If the heroes get to talking with "Whizbang," of "Whizbang's Fabulous Fireworks," they find he's actually **Zacharr Phillip**, who doesn't waste much time on small talk before he starts complaining that he might have to cancel the rest of his shows for the day. All five of the alchemists from whom he normally buys his supplies have closed down shop for the past three days. Apparently they are all working on something at the king's castle, and he's just used up the last of his fun incendiaries.

Zacharr needs smokesticks, thunderstones, and tindertwigs for his show later. If the heroes happen to have any, he has 20 gp to spend for them, but he promises to pay them back for anything they can provide. “And besides,” he says, “think of the children!”

If the heroes agree, he thanks them profusely, saying they’re his saviors. Just as they’re about to part ways, Zacharr spins and asks if the heroes happen to have any vials of antitoxin. He always buys some before major festivals because he’s found they cure hangovers.

Whether the heroes help him or not, “Whizbang” says he hopes they have a “whiz-bang” of an evening, and he tells them, quite somberly, not to drink and play with explosives at the same time. Then he waves a jaunty farewell.

Tournament’s End

The final joust takes place at three in the afternoon, after which the winner is expected to ride at the front of a parade through the streets of Bresk. The parade will end after an hour, and the sun will set at six in the evening. If one of the heroes wins, Gallo comes to them in the few minutes it takes for the parade to assemble.

Gallo says that Steppengard is not acting suspiciously at all, such that he’s starting to wonder if he was just being paranoid himself. He asks what if anything the heroes have learned. If they warn Gallo that the chef has been replaced and that alchemists have been called in, Gallo suspects that the king might be trying to poison him, or someone else. At this, Gallo smiles.

“It’s an old tradition,” Gallo says. “When I was growing up my father always had the family exchange plates after we were served but before we ate. It’s sort of like when you toast and try to slosh some of your mead into your enemy’s cup, so any poison gets shared. I’ll ask to do that. If my King is trying to kill me, he’ll hesitate.”

“Just in case, I’ll get one of my chaplains to ward me against poison. They won’t have enough magic to completely protect you as well, but I think they can delay the onset of any poison, just in case you’re targets too.”

As to the possible tampering with the Book of Eight Lands, that could signal that Steppengard is planning some sort of coup, and wants to destroy the book so that no one will be able to back a claim to the throne to oppose him.

However, right now they just have innuendo,

rumors, and theories. Circumstantial evidence is not enough for Gallo to act on. Rather than wait for Steppengard to make a mistake, Gallo asks the heroes to look into the situation. He wants them to sneak into the castle to find out what is going on, particularly for hints of some sort of poisoning plot, and to check on the safety of the Book of Eight Lands. Plus, if the fate of Proxy Jinis is still unknown, he wants them to try to rescue him.

Gallo can provide a rough copy of the castle map, though it will be up to the heroes on how to get inside. The castle’s normal entrances will of course be watched, and decades of defenses have been developed to ruin normal magical attempts at stealth (such as random archways set to sound an *alarm* if the person passing through isn’t visibly displaying an appropriate badge, guards benefitting from *see invisibility*, and so on). However, the informant who approached the heroes has given them a hint on how to get inside. The graveyard watch post he mentioned is the same place that the heroes would have emerged from in Act One if they escaped from prison. The heroes can take that route into the castle’s prison, and if their informant wasn’t trying to trick them, they should be able to get in without being seen.

Assuming the heroes report all this to Gallo, he is protected at dinner with *protection from poison*, and if the heroes want they could be protected by the spell as well before they set off to check out the secret entrance to the castle.

If the heroes are oblivious to all the clues planted during the tournament, you can skip directly to [The Dinner](#).

BREAKING INTO PRISON

The locations here match those of the prison detailed in Act One, except that the heroes may already have been here once, and will be passing through in the opposite direction from that assumed in Act One.

The Graveyard (EL 9)

Bresk has several graveyards. The one you seek is old and seldom used, lying a short distance outside the city walls on the banks of the Nasham River. Surrounded with a rusted iron fence, the place is clearly in a state of disrepair. Lichen grows unchecked over gravestones, some of which have toppled over in their neglect. Dead trees sway slowly, covered in a glaze of snow and ice. The sky

is thick with clouds, and the air on the ground is thick with the cold, subtle stench of frozen excrement: yet another type of death.

The heroes may be returning here, but even if this is their first time, it should be easy for them to locate the icy ditch that flows out of the sewer tunnel. The tunnel extends 300 feet before reaching a steel grate, the lock to which has rusted away.

Beyond the grate, low groans and hisses sound (unless the heroes already destroyed the frozen zombies in this area when they escaped from the prison in Act One). Beast companions will not go into the tunnel and will be nervous and skittish in the graveyard.

Before the heroes reach the grate, however, they hear a horrified voice wailing behind them. Gliding out of the wall is a spectral figure shrouded in ashen gray robes, its face flickering between the silent horrified screams of a half dozen different people. If any of the heroes' allies have been captured and not rescued by this point, such as Balan, they see his face here, wailing mutely.

This is a tragedy, an undead monster created by Inquisitor Torrax in a dark ritual that included the sacrifice of many people whom Steppengard had arrested on suspicion of treason. The tragedy blocks the heroes' retreat from the tunnel, and it tries to drive them into the zombie pit.

Creature

Greater Tragedy

For the tragedy, add or remove 20 hp, 1 AC, and 1 use of legendary resistance for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Zombie Pit

Every 5-foot square of the cave under the prison is filled with two or three zombies, frozen in place, waiting quietly until something they might be able to eat walks by. Each square of zombies has the statistics of a single [zombie](#). "Turned" frozen zombies cannot flee, but they do stop attacking. Destroyed ones are annihilated, their bodies shattering like ice struck with a hammer.

Because of both the zombies and the icy sewer floor, the area is difficult terrain, and a creature is attacked by 1 zombie for every 5-foot square they leave that has not been cleared of zombies. The zombies all attack on initiative count 0. There are a lot of zombies here. To keep things from dragging

on, if the heroes eliminate all of the zombies within 5 feet of all the heroes in the sewer, they can then safely clear a path to the exit. If the heroes came through here previously, a safe path through the zombies might already exist.

Area 5: Torture Chamber

Getting into this room requires a successful DC 21 Strength check to break open and lift the grate that is 10 feet off the ground. More likely, the heroes will notice a blood-rusted latch which can be pried open with a little effort, allowing the grate to be lifted more easily; a group of heroes with a combined Strength score of at least 20 can then lift it. However, unless the heroes succeed on a DC 21 Intelligence (Investigation) check, they overlook that this latch is connected to the secret door in the northwest corner. The secret door that releases Jutras is opened if this connection is not deactivated with a successful DC 21 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check.

If the heroes tipped off Steppengard's guards that they might be trying to approach, an *alarm* spell fills this room, and the door to the hallway is unlocked so that the guards in Area 2 are ready to respond. Otherwise, the door is locked. If the heroes were



not imprisoned in Act One, they find either Balan or Proxy Jinis here, pinned up and tortured, as in Act One, but now days dead.

Creature

If Jutras was not destroyed earlier, it is waiting in its secret chamber.

Jutras

For Jutras, add or remove 40 hit points, 1 use of legendary resistance, 2 to attack bonus, and 2 to AC for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Area 4: Supply

This room's contents have been pushed to the wall, and alchemy tables have been set up. Torrax crafted the poison here; a notebook on a counter is open to the recipe for Red Madness. The effects, as described, are confusion, leading to eventual rage and murderous violence. A hero who makes a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes that this poison would have no effect on anyone protected by the Book of Eight Lands.

Area 3: Storage

This room is still simply a storage chamber.

Area 2: Guard Room (EL 7-13)

If the heroes have not tipped anyone off, this room is unguarded, since there are no prisoners to watch. Instead, Ambassador Serrimus and Inquisitor Torrax lounge here, enjoying a job well done and waiting for news that the nobility of Dassen has destroyed itself. They plan to retreat out the sewer if something goes amiss, or to destroy the evidence with a nice *wall of fire* if they are successful.

Serrimus drums his fingers idly on the side of his chair while he composes a sending to their contact, Inquisitor Guthwulf. He has two options:

“Guthwulf, good news in Dassen. Nobility (almost) annihilated (except x, y, z). Lyceum agents (dead/escaped). Check Innenotdar valley. Rumors of new safe passage. Reply with retrieval location.”

“Guthwulf, bad news in Dassen. Plan stopped by (x). (We are suspected./No one suspects us.) Further instructions? Also, check Innenotdar valley. Rumors of new safe passage.”

Meanwhile, Torrax smokes a pipe under his inquisitor mask and reads a hand-bound book of humorous prisoner confessions coerced through torture. If caught off guard he is chuckling when the door is opened to this chamber, and his pipe drops out of his mouth as he realizes he is about to be attacked.

If the heroes tipped off Steppengard's men, Torrax instead waits pensively beside the stairs, while four Steppengard knights wait to attack intruders. Serrimus is waiting outside the door at the top of the stairs, and will flee if the fight sounds bad. If the heroes also set off the *alarm*, Torrax takes a minute to use *conjure elemental* to call forth a [fire elemental](#) and sends it toward the heroes before following himself.

Creatures

[Serrimus](#)

[Inquisitor Torrax](#)

3 [Steppengard knights](#)

If only Torrax and Serrimus are present, then for Torrax add or subtract 20 hp and 2 AC for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs. Otherwise add or remove a knight for each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs.

Tactics

If the knights are present, they are loyal to Torrax, having betrayed their country for Ragesian coin. They follow the inquisitor's orders. The knights form a phalanx in front of the inquisitor. If the heroes trip the *alarm*, then the knights wait until Torrax summons the fire elemental. It leads the way down the hallway, followed by the knights and then Torrax.

Torrax enjoys the smell of burning flesh, and so likes to trap his foes behind a *wall of fire* and will try to send a wall down the hallway if the heroes surprise him and Serrimus. He is fairly straightforward in combat, using his offensive spells rapidly with a frightening smile, before resorting to using his claw. If a hero sends a powerful spell his way, he will attempt to use Overmaster on it.

Aftermath

If the heroes interrogate any of the knights, they suspect someone is getting poisoned, but they haven't asked any questions. They also heard Torrax speaking with the king's gnomish advisor about the Book of Eight Lands, about which they likewise asked no questions. Torrax and Serrimus, being

fanatically devoted to Ragesia, are hard to break if captured.

Area 1: Prison Cells

The cells are empty save one. The single prisoner is barely recognizable, having been badly beaten, but as his eyes widen in shock, the heroes realize it is Randas, the chef from the festival. Randas explains he was dragged here by the king’s guards shortly after the heroes met him. Torrax interrogated and tortured him briefly, but mentioned something about turning him into an undead, but “not having enough ingredients to be worth the spell.”

In classic villain fashion, the inquisitor made a point to taunt the halfling by explaining that the people he would normally be serving were going to be poisoned this evening. Having no combat ability, Randas just asks to be let free. If pressed, he is willing to go try to warn someone.

THE DINNER

The banquet hall is laid out as follows:

Area 1: Main Hall

The banquet hall has three tables for the nobles and six for their entourages. The central table seats Steppengard, Lady Namin, and Duke Gallo. The two tables flanking him each seat three nobles. A Gallo chaplain and the king’s chief defender, the Blade of the Kingsguard, stand behind the king. The rest of the tables are crowded with assistants and bodyguards. Advisor Nina Glibglammer lurks in the northeast corner.

The walls are covered in elaborate tapestries depicting the eight lands of Dassen, four on the east wall, four on the west. The north wall is devoted to King Steppengard and the great battles he fought to unite the kingdom.

Area 2: Stage

A group of actors perform on this stage, but they leave before dinner.

Area 3: Actors’ Dressing Rooms

The desks here are full of make-up and costumes hang on racks, but the actors are already gone by the time the meal is served.



Area 4: Men's Privy

A secret door, requiring a successful DC 19 Intelligence (Investigation) check to locate, can be opened by standing on the toilet seat and pressing a button in the ceiling. The secret passage leads into the throne room.

Areas 5, 6: Women's, Servant's Privies

These areas have no special features.

Area 7: Throne Room

A permanent *hallow* spell including *freedom of movement* fills a 60-foot radius centered on the thrones.

Area 8: Kitchen

It's too late for the heroes to stop the poison being applied to the food, but they might be able to stop the food being served if they get here quickly enough. The cooks and servers won't put up any kind of fight, especially if the heroes brandish weapons and act belligerent, but they can also be convinced that something suspicious is going on without the heroes having to resort to intimidation or threats.

Area 9: Stairs

These lead to barracks, servants quarters, and the prison.

The Poisoned Banquet

Events at dinner unfold as follows unless the heroes interrupt.

Before dinner, drinks are served, mostly wine and mead, and Duke Gallo invokes an old tradition wherein everyone exchanges dishes with a neighbor of their choice. Steppengard smiles cunningly at this, but obliges. People drink, and a ten-minute comedy play lightens moods.

After the play, the soup course is served, and again everyone shuffles dishes around, with some bemusement. Idle conversation lasts a few minutes, and then servants bring in boar's head and other pork dishes, which again get shuffled around, to no small degree of amusement. People continue to eat.

After this, King Steppengard stands, asks that the doors be closed, and then toasts. He suggests that Duke Gallo start the discussion, since he seems to know the most about what is going on with Ragesia.



Gallo says that his king had mentioned he would present new evidence, since as of right now Gallo is officially charged with assassination. He is about to go on when he notices that some of his fellow nobles are staring off into space blankly and giggling. Just then, for no apparent reason, Lady Timor grabs a steak knife and stabs Lord Dashgoban sitting next to her. At this moment, madness breaks out.

Steppengard, already insane, is unaffected by the poison, as is Duke Gallo, because he had a cleric cast *protection from poison* on him. Neither are Madness, the Kingsguard, Gallo's chaplain, or any of the other bodyguards affected, because none of them eat the tainted food. But all the other people dining around the room begin to fall victim to the

effects of the poison. Most are simply disoriented or panicked, but some lash out violently, attacking randomly. Because persons under the effect of confusion always counterattack, the banquet hall quickly erupts in a massive brawl.

Steppengard begins to laugh, and he pulls out his flail from behind his chair, then attacks Duke Gallo. Once he has killed Gallo, he and his bodyguard retreat to the restroom and take the secret door to the throne room, leaving the nobles behind to kill each other. Steppengard sits on his throne, and does not move, even when his horrified castle guards find him and kill him.

Saving the Day

The timeline of this encounter depends on how swiftly the heroes have broken into the castle, but unless the players are keeping close track of time, assume that by the time they defeat Torrax they are only minutes away from the beginning of the banquet.

The door to the rest of the castle is unlocked, but getting where they need to be to stop the plot will be difficult. The majority of the castle is amazingly unguarded, but a secure ring of checkpoints surrounds the king wherever he goes. The banquet hall and throne room are only three flights of stairs above the prison and less than fifty feet down the hall, but the stairs and hallway are guarded by a dozen [Steppengard soldiers](#) and two [Steppengard prelates](#), and it would be nearly impossible to even get within shouting distance of the king and other nobles.

Of course, fighting isn't the only option. If the heroes explain that they are part of Duke Gallo's retinue and can convincingly explain why they were some place they weren't supposed to be, the guards may let them through. The truth, elaborate and contrived though it sounds, is worrisome enough that some of the guards will rush into the banquet to keep anyone from eating, just to be safe.

Invisibility could work, though paths are crowded. Teleportation, though painful, would bypass guard checkpoints, though the sound of fiery explosions would alert the guards, forcing the heroes to rush before they were taken down.

Reaching the royal vault to check on the safety of the Book of Eight Lands is much simpler, requiring traversing only one flight of stairs, a long hallway filled with busy castle servants, and the vault doors, which currently have only one guard, ordered to let people in after only a cursory check. If the heroes

can present evidence to that guard that the Book has been tampered with (or if they simply charm him), he can grease the wheels and get the guards to let the heroes into the banquet, though under scrutiny.

Somewhat cruelly, if the heroes simply find the *rope trick* and get the Book out, its protections will again extend to the nobility, who will be safe from the poison. Their retinues will still be poisoned, however, and while some deaths will result, this will provide clear evidence of a plot.

Finally, if the heroes can get to the kitchen they can check the food for poison. Only a few of the cooks, who have fallen prey to Madness's suggestions, are responsible for the unknowing application of the poison. However, getting to the kitchen still requires getting past the guards.

Reactions

If the heroes don't get within earshot of the banquet hall before the insane brawl breaks out, the guards do their best to knock out nobles without killing them, but Madness uses her magic to confuse the guards. The best the heroes can do in this case is defeat Madness, then try to knock everyone out in order to mitigate the damage.

If the heroes create a ruckus before reaching the banquet hall, Duke Gallo hears something going on outside and asks to find out what has happened; he gets outside the banquet hall and demands the guards stop attacking his bodyguards. If the heroes do get into the banquet hall, the nobles want to know what's going on before they eat.

When Steppengard hears the heroes' accusations, he snaps. Unable to hold back his hatred anymore, he screams:

"I, poison? True vile is the poison clutching my heart, damning my blood. My blood is Dassen's blood! You slew my wife, my bright children. You cut my line of blood, and so I your king, and so I your homeland, shall die as well. This land I created. This land I kill!"

The King, now beyond all reason, grabs his flail from behind his chair and knocks over the table, angling to attack the heroes. His bodyguard, the Blade of the Kingsguard, loyally follows him. If Madness is present, she applauds, giggles wildly, and assumes her monstrous, serpentine form.

Creatures

[King Steppengard](#)
[Kingsguard](#)

Madness (Corporeal)

For each PC in a party larger or smaller than 4 PCs, add or remove 20 hit points and 1 use of legendary resistance for Madness and 20 hit points and 1 AC for Steppengard and the kingsguard.

The following creatures are part of the chaos in the room but are not the heroes' foes.

Lord Michael Gallo

Gallo chaplain

Lord Dashgoban

Lady Timor

Dene, Iz, Megadon, Namin, Rego (Dasseni nobles)

7 Dasseni bodyguards

Tactics

Madness is playing for keeps here, holding nothing back as she attempts to salvage what's left of her plan. She blocks the doorway with her body, and her first action is to use confusion, trying to catch as many people as possible before lashing out at the heroes, hoping to engulf them as the rest of the room kills each other.

Those nobles who aren't affected by Madness flee as best they can, ordering their bodyguards to protect them. Most of the bodyguards balk, however,



at the presence of Madness. People running past her get bitten and poisoned with attacks of opportunity, causing some of them to return to the battle in confusion.

King Steppengard is not flummoxed, however. He starts screaming orders to the dozen of his soldiers in the hall to kill anyone who leaves the banquet hall, an order they reluctantly obey. Their morale for this fight is weak, however, and if Gallo makes it into the hallway he orders them to attack Madness, and to try to subdue the king.

Steppengard and his bodyguard stride around the room, chasing after nobles with a lion's ferocity. He doesn't rush, and he triumphantly savors each death, no matter who caused it, but he particularly exults in the deaths of Lady Namin, who thought she could replace his wife, and Duke Gallo, whom he still believes responsible for his family's death. While the king is not an immediate threat to the heroes, if he manages to kill all the nobles, Dassen will fall into chaos.

If Steppengard's bodyguard is reduced to 0 hit points, his *Blade of the Kingsguard* casts *heal* on him. If Steppengard falls unconscious or is killed, Madness laughs in celebration, then moves over the king and tears his body apart so he cannot be raised from the dead, requiring 1 hit on the king after he dies. Madness will not retreat, even if the heroes use the Song of Forms.

If Madness is defeated but isn't trapped by the Song of Forms, her body collapses and she screams apparently from many mouths, then vanishes, a wave of maddening images washing across all present but fading just as quickly. If Madness is truly slain, her boon is passed to some of the heroes.

With Madness's defeat, the king wavers, his insane determination shaken. He is stunned for a minute, during which time his guards knock him down, disarm him, and tie him up. At the end of this time he begins to weep, realizing what he has done. If Madness was defeated previously in the adventure, the king fights until he's dropped.

CONCLUSION

PASSING THE CROWN

If Steppengard lives, after a few minutes, the king's subjects gather around and cautiously untie their liege. If the king was killed but could be brought back with *raise dead*, this scene happens instead in the castle's Chapel of the Aquiline Cross.

Slowly climbing to his feet, Steppengard looks around at the shocked faces of wounded and frightened subjects. His face is sunken with horror and disbelief. One of his aides hands him his crown, which was knocked away in the battle. He does not put it on, but instead holds it before him like he doesn't know what he's looking at.

"What have I done?" he whispers softly. "I let that... that *creature* control me, tie me into a knot with my own grief."

The king puts his face in his hands, and seems to give in to despair. For a long moment everyone is still, waiting to see what will happen next. Then slowly, as though bearing an enormous weight, the king manages to straighten up, and looks at you and Duke Gallo.

"I fear I wronged you most of all. I nearly destroyed our nation, but you saved it."

He looks to his crown, then raises his hand to throw it away.

If the heroes move to stop Steppengard, this convinces the king to stay in control of his nation until it is safe. Otherwise, the king renounces his throne, and in the coming hours the other nobles will decide that Lord Iz should become the next king, since he is eldest, has the most central territory, and is in general least hated.

If instead Steppengard dies irretrievably, one of the surviving nobles (Lady Namin, preferably) picks up the king's crown in the aftermath and offers it to Duke Gallo. Gallo takes it, then, like Steppengard would have, considers throwing it away unless the heroes stop him.

Either way, the surviving Dasseni nobles owe the heroes a great debt. Gallo reminds the heroes that, in this time of danger, asking for money is tacky and will hurt the war effort, but if they insist, the royal coffers can provide 1,000 gp to each of the heroes.

If the heroes do not ask for a reward, Lord Megadon surprises everyone by suggesting they be offered minor land holdings, which he is willing to cede some of his own acreage to accomplish. He explains that the heroes placed Dassen before

Seaquen by deed and believes Dassen's best hope may be to ally with the "troublesome fishermen." As an act of good faith, Megadon will take the disputed fishing grounds off the table in any diplomatic negotiations until after the war. The king or the prime minister, pleased with Megadon's tempering, grants the holdings to be placed along the Nasham River in Megadon's territory but the other nobles must either transfer some of their land to Megadon or pay a fee to him as if the land was sold. Later in the campaign saga, the heroes might marry or succeed their way into position as one of the Council of Nine.

If all of the nobles are slain, the heroes have failed, and they likely end up dead, though some of them may have escaped. Dassen is a lost cause, and in future adventures the safety of Seaquen will not be a foregone conclusion.

AFTERMATH

The Third Ragesian Army will be arriving within two weeks, barely enough time for the survivors to arrange a defense. No matter what state Dassen is in, it is clear to all that Ragesia was responsible for the attempt to destroy Dassen, so Dassen is officially at war with Ragesia.

If the heroes were successful in their mission, their allies in Seaquen decide there's little more they can help with, and call for them to return to Seaquen, to prepare for a new mission. If instead they failed, their superiors decide to send other agents who might fare better than the heroes, and likewise call the heroes back for their next mission.

The trip back to Seaquen is an easier affair than the original travel. An escort, friendly or at least formal, leads the heroes back to Vidor from Bresk. Once in sight of the village, the escort turns back, leaving the heroes alone.

The weather is growing warmer, and spring is arriving quickly. The Nasham River thaws, though snow still covers the ground. If nothing else, the actual land of Dassen, the soil which is most sacred to its people, is visible again. This is an omen that life still has a chance to prosper.

APPENDIX A: MONSTERS AND NPCs

BALAN BASTOM

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Cha +5

Skills Deception +5, History +4, Insight +3, Intimidation +7, Persuasion +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Orc, Terran

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Special Equipment. Balan possesses a *stone of alarm*, an accordion, a set of fine clothes, and a pouch containing 150 pp and 300 gp for bribes.

Fey Ancestry. Balan has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Bardic Inspiration (3 per Short or Long Rest). Balan can use a bonus action to choose one creature other than himself within 60 feet of him who can hear him. That creature gains one Bardic Inspiration die, a d8.

Once within the next 10 minutes, the creature can roll the die and add the number rolled to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw it makes. The creature can wait until after it rolls the d20 before deciding to use the Bardic Inspiration die, but must decide before the GM says whether the roll succeeds or fails. Once the Bardic Inspiration die is rolled, it is lost. A creature can have only one Bardic Inspiration die at a time.

Spellcasting. Balan is a 6th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). He has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *mending*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *comprehend languages*, *cure wounds*, *disguise self*, *silent image*, *sleep*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*

3rd level (3 slots): *tongues*, *sending*

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

BRAKKEN THE BLITZER

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d10 + 18)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +5

Skills Athletics +8, Intimidation +2, Investigation +1, Perception +3

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing while raging

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Charge. If Brakken moves at least 10 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 9 (2d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away and knocked prone.

Labyrinthine Recall. Brakken can perfectly recall any path it has traveled.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, Brakken can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Persistent Rage (2/Day). Brakken can enter a rage as a bonus action. While raging, it has advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws. Its rage lasts until Brakken chooses to end it or is knocked unconscious.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Brakken makes two attacks: one with his gore and one with his greatsword.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6 + 5) slashing damage, or 21 (4d6 + 7) slashing damage while raging.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage, or 16 (2d8 + 7) slashing damage while raging.

COMMANDER HERTIAGE

Medium humanoid (dwarf), neutral

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +4, Con +4

Skills Animal Handling +1, Intimidation +4, Performance +4, Persuasion +4

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Special Equipment. Hertiage possesses a *potion of healing* and a flask of alchemist's fire.

Dwarven Resilience. Hertiage has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Advanced Tactics. Hertiage has advantage on initiative rolls.

Leader Tactics (2/Day). Hertiage may use a bonus action to execute one of the following Leader Tactics. He chooses up to two allies within 30 feet, which may include himself, to receive the benefit.

Maneuver Leader. The chosen allies may use their reaction to move up to their speed while either taking the Disengage action, making a single weapon attack, or casting a cantrip with a casting time of one action.

Stalwart Leader. Hertiage makes a Charisma (Performance) check. His chosen allies gain temporary hit points equal to the result.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Hertiage fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Hertiage makes two attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Tall for a dwarf, **Commander Hertiage** wears dull plate armor and a helmet with a red phoenix flaring its wings outward on the back. He has trimmed his russet beard short enough that you can see an old white scar on his throat—an arrow wound that probably should have killed him.

DASHGOBAN KNIGHT

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)

Skills Animal Handling +2, History +3, Intimidation +1

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The knight makes two attacks with a melee weapon.

Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) piercing damage.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.

DASSENI BODYGUARD

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (−1)

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Special Equipment. The bodyguard possesses a *ring of warding bond (warden)*. If it is within 60 feet of the noble it is protecting, the bodyguard takes the same amount of damage as the noble.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

DASSENI NOBLE*Medium humanoid (human), neutral good***Armor Class** 11 (*warding bond*)**Hit Points** 21 (6d8 – 6)**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	10 (+0)	9 (–1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +0, Dex +1, Con +0, Int +1, Wis +2, Cha +2**Skills** Deception +3, Insight +3, Performance +3, Persuasion +3**Damage Resistances** all**Senses** passive Perception 11**Languages** Common, Dwarvish, Orc, Terran**Challenge** 0 (10 XP)**Special Equipment.** The noble possesses a *ring of warding bond (warded)*. While it is more than 60 feet from its bodyguard, it loses the benefits of *warding bond*.**Eight Lands Boon.** As long as it is touching soil from Dassen, the noble is protected by *mind blank*.**ACTIONS****Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.**DRACTYL***Large dragon, unaligned***Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)**Hit Points** 110 (13d10 + 39)**Speed** 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	5 (–3)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Skills Perception +4**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14**Languages** —**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)**Special Equipment.** Dractyl possesses *hurling bracers*.**ACTIONS****Multiattack.** Dractyl makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its stinger. While flying, it can use its claws in place of one other attack.**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.**Stinger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.**FIRE ELEMENTAL***Large elemental, neutral***Armor Class** 13**Hit Points** 102 (12d10 + 36)**Speed** 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons**Damage Immunities** fire, poison**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10**Languages** Ignan**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)**Fire Form.** The elemental can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. A creature that touches the elemental or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage. In addition, the elemental can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 5 (1d10) fire damage and catches fire; until someone takes an action to douse the fire, the creature takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.**Illumination.** The elemental sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light in an additional 30 feet.**Water Susceptibility.** For every 5 feet the elemental moves in water, or for every gallon of water splashed on it, it takes 1 cold damage.**ACTIONS****Multiattack.** The elemental makes two touch attacks.**Touch.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

GALLO CHAPLAIN

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 18 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +2

Skills Medicine +5, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. The chaplain is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *mending*, *sacred flame*, *spare the dying*

1st level (4 slots): *bless*, *create or destroy water*, *cure wounds*, *detect magic*, *detect poison and disease*, *sanctuary*

2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration*

3rd level (3 slots): *magic circle*, *protection from energy*, *sending*

4th level (1 slots):

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

GALLO SOLDIER

Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. The dwarf has advantage on saving throws against poison.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The soldier makes two melee attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Bohemian Earspoon. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.

GIANT APE

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 157 (15d12 + 60)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (–2)	12 (+1)	7 (–2)

Skills Athletics +9, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ape makes two fist attacks.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 50/100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (7d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

GREATER TRAGEDY

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (–2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The tragedy can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Turn Resistance. The tragedy has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the tragedy fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The tragedy makes two life drain attacks.

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The tragedy can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The tragedy regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The tragedy moves up to its speed.

Face from the Past. The tragedy targets a creature it can see within 60 feet. The creature must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the tragedy forms a psychic link to the creature's mind and finds the memory of a deceased friend or loved one, and its face appears on the tragedy for 1 minute. While the face is displayed, the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls against the tragedy, and the tragedy has advantage on saving throws caused by the creature. The creature may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, breaking the psychic link and causing the face to disappear from the tragedy on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the tragedy's Face from the Past for the next 24 hours.

Life Drain (Costs 2 Actions). The tragedy makes one life drain attack.

A shadowy, incorporeal creature swoops toward you, rotted skeletal hands reaching out from an ashen shrouds. Twisting, roiling faces of countless people mutely screaming at their tragic end push up from within the **tragedy's** form.

GRIFFON

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 30 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	2 (−4)	13 (+1)	8 (−1)

Skills Perception +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Keen Sight. The griffon has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The griffon makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

INQUISITOR CRONA

Medium humanoid (orc), lawful evil

Armor Class 11 (hide armor)

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	8 (−1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Special Equipment. Crona possesses an inquisitor mask.

Aggressive. As a bonus action, Crona can move up to her speed toward a hostile creature that she can see.

Focused Casting. Crona has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

Spellcasting. Crona is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, produce flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, burning hands, command, comprehend languages, create or destroy water, cure wounds, detect magic*

2nd level (3 slots): *scorching ray, shatter, silence*

ACTIONS

Hand Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Rebuke Magic (1/Rest). Crona casts *dispel magic* without using a spell slot. This cannot be countered by *cancel* or *counterspell*.

REACTIONS

Reactive Rebuke. Crona uses her Rebuke Magic to instead cast *counterspell* without using a spell slot. This cannot be countered by *cancel* or *counterspell*.

Crona is a hulking, hairy, orc woman, covered with rough hide armor and numerous magical charms strapped to cords, and wearing a jaggedly curved claw on her right hand. This inquisitor has an eerily beautiful mask, half obsidian and half ivory, with slots only for the eyes and the bottom of her mouth.

INQUISITOR TORRAX

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 12 (+1 hide armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +3

Skills Intimidation +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Torrax possesses an inquisitor mask.

Focused Casting. Torrax has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

Spellcasting. Torrax is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *produce flame, resistance, sacred flame,*

spare the dying, thaumaturgy

1st level (4 slots): *bane, bless, burning hands, command, comprehend languages, healing word*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, scorching ray, silence, shatter*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, create food and water, dispel magic, fear, fireball, protection from energy, sending*

4th level (3 slots): *fire shield, wall of fire*

5th level (1 slot): *conjure elemental (fire only), flame strike, wall of stone*

ACTIONS

Hand Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) fire damage.

Rebuke Magic (2/Rest). Torrax casts *dispel magic* without using a spell slot. This cannot be countered by *cancel* or *counterspell*.

REACTIONS

Reactive Rebuke. Torrax uses his Rebuke Magic to instead cast *counterspell* without using a spell slot. This cannot be countered by *cancel* or *counterspell*.

Overmaster. When Torrax sees a creature within 60 feet of him cast a spell, he can use his Rebuke Magic to take over control of the spell. He makes a Wisdom ability check contested by the target's spellcasting ability check. If he succeeds, he redirects the spell to valid targets of his choice within range of the caster.

Proudly savage, this half-orc wears nothing but furs, leather cords, and a menacing bear skull mask etched with runes.

Torrax's only weapon is a clawed bronze gauntlet, but the air around him feels heavy with danger.

JAAS

Medium humanoid (half-orc), lawful neutral

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +4

Skills Animal Handling +1, Intimidation +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Special Equipment. Jaas possesses two *potions of healing*.
Relentless (1/Rest). If Jaas takes 14 damage or less that would reduce him to 0 hit points, he is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Jaas makes three attacks.
Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.
Shortbow. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. Jaas adds 2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, Jaas must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

JUTRAS

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 115 (10d8 + 70)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Wis +3
Skills Athletics +8, Perception +3, Stealth +7
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Turning Defiance. Jutras has advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.
Fate Worse than Death. A creature that dies while paralyzed by Jutras rises 1 minute later as a zombie under Jutras' control. Jutras can have no more than twelve zombies under its control at 1 time.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Jutras fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Jutras makes three attacks: one with its tongue and two slam attacks.
Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Tongue. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Jutras can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Jutras regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.
Move. Jutras moves up to its speed.
Slam (Costs 2 Actions). Jutras makes a slam attack.
Entrails. The sinewy intestines in Jutras' chest cavity explode outward toward a Medium or smaller creature within 5 feet. The creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained. Only one creature can be grappled by Jutras' entrails at any time.

Though executed 50 years ago, Jutras' heinous crimes caused him to arise after his execution as a creature more terrifying than death itself. His body has sloughed away until only his skeleton and a writhing mass of intestines, connected to a long, worm-like tongue remain.

KELKIN THRAVANVOST

Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 13 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +8
Damage Resistances poison
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Giant, Orc, Sphinx
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Kelkin possesses a *potion of healing* and a cloak with a permanent glamer to make it look tough and impenetrable. His spellbook contains his prepared spells as well as *arcane lock*, *blink*, *continual flame*, *enlarge/reduce*, *find familiar*, *grease*, *identify*, *hold person*, *locate object*, *protection from energy*, *rope trick*, *stoneskin*, *tiny hut*, *wall of stone*, and three pages of mnemonic enhancers, which Kelkin transcribed before he realized how utterly useless they were.

Focused Casting. Kelkin has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

War Mage Artillery. When Kelkin casts a spell that does damage, the spell's range is doubled.

Student of War (1/Day). Kelkin can focus the power of a spell to enhance its power. He uses the Ready action to cast a spell of level 1 to 8 with a casting time of an action and releases it using his reaction immediately before his next turn starts. The spell's effects are calculated as if he had cast the spell one level higher than he used. If the spell causes at least three creatures to make a saving throw, they have disadvantage on the saving throw.

Spellcasting. Kelkin is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, fire bolt, light, shocking grasp*
 1st level (4 slots): *alarm, charm person, detect magic, magic missile, shield*
 2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, hold person, shatter*
 3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, fireball*
 4th level (3 slots): *stoneskin, wall of fire*
 5th level (1 slot): *cloudkill, cone of cold*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

A magnificent silver mantle hangs over this middle-aged dwarf's shoulders, and a gleaming silver skullcap rests on his head. **Kelkin Thravanvost's** black beard is woven with coins bearing the faces of seven generations of kings. His silver-trimmed black cloak looks stiff, like it is made of stone.

KING STEPPENGARD

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 19 (plate, *warding bond*)

Hit Points 45 (10d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +0, Con +3, Int +3, Wis +2, Cha +2

Skills Deception +3, History +4, Insight +3, Intimidation +3, Persuasion +3, Survival +3

Damage Resistances all



Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Giant, Infernal, Orc, Sphinx, Terran

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Special Equipment. Steppengard possesses *gauntlets of ogre power* and a *ring of warding bond (warded)*. His bodyguard, the leader of the kingsguard, has the corresponding *ring of warding bond (warden)*. While he is more than 60 feet from his bodyguard, he loses the benefits of *warding bond*.

Eight Lands Boon. As long as he is touching soil from Dassen, King Steppengard is protected by *mind blank*.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Steppengard makes two attacks with his flail.

+1 Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Though no longer the young warrior who united eight kingdoms into a single country, **King Steppengard** still has a lion's strength. Tall, brown-haired, with a short-cropped beard, the ruler of Dassen stands tense with restrained scorn. Weakness, however, seems to grip the king's mind, and his eyes look uncertain, his gaze unfocused.

KINGSGUARD

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 68 (8d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	8 (−1)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)

Saving Throws Str +4, Con +6

Skills Intimidation +1

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Special Equipment. The kingsguard possesses the *Blade of the Kingsguard* and a *ring of warding bond (warden)*. If it is within 60 feet of King Steppengard, it takes the same amount of damage as the King Steppengard.

Hold the Line. The kingsguard may make an opportunity attack against a creature that enters its reach.

Prevent Retreat. If the kingsguard hits a creature with an opportunity attack, the creature's speed is reduced to 0.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The kingsguard makes two attacks.

Blade of the Kingsguard. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

KÖNIGSMARSHAL MALKAN

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 15 (+1 chain shirt)

Hit Points 54 (12d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (−3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str −1, Con +2

Skills Animal Handling +3, Deception +7, History +4,

Insight +3, Intimidation +7, Performance +7

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Orc

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Special Equipment. Malkan possesses a *potion of healing* and a *fimbulwinter charm*.

Advanced Tactics. Malkan has advantage on initiative.

Inspire Sacrifice (1/Rest). When Malkan is targeted by an attack or by a spell or effect that requires a Dexterity Saving throw, an ally within 5 feet of him may use their reaction to interpose their body between him and the attack or effect, granting him 3/4 cover and the following effects. This decision is made by the ally before the attack roll or saving throw is made.

Attacks. Malkan gains a +5 bonus to AC for the attack. If the attack roll would hit his original AC of 15 but misses his boosted AC of 20, the attack hits his ally instead.

Saving Throws. Malkan gains a +5 bonus to his Dexterity saving throw. His ally must also make a Dexterity saving throw against the same spell or effect and has disadvantage on the roll.

Leader Tactics (5/Day). Malkan may use a bonus action to execute one of the following Leader Tactics. He chooses up to two allies within 30 feet, which may include himself, to receive the benefit.

Iron-Willed Leader. Malkan helps his chosen allies break free of one mind-affecting effect. He makes a Charisma (Performance) check. If his check beats the DC of the saving throw, his chosen allies break free of the effect as if they had succeeded with their saving throw.

Maneuver Leader. The chosen allies may use their reaction to move up to their speed while either taking the Disengage action, making a single weapon attack, or casting a cantrip with a casting time of one action.

Strike Leader. Malkan coordinates the attacks of his chosen allies against a creature. Until the start of his next turn, his chosen allies make attack rolls with advantage against the creature, and the creature has disadvantage on saving throws against spells or features from his chosen allies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Malkan makes two attacks with his light crossbow.

Golden Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d8 − 2) bludgeoning damage.

+1 Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) cold damage, and Malkin takes 1 cold damage.

Saddled astride a beautiful young warhorse in chain barding, this weathered old man looks out upon the battlefield with a

relaxed, knowing nod. **Königsmarshal Malkan** is dressed in a heavy winter uniform with no apparent armor. He holds an ornate crossbow and wears a golden flail, his badge of office, at his hip.

LADY TIMOR

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 12 (*warding bond*)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +0, Dex +2, Con +3, Int +4, Wis +1, Cha +2

Skills Arcana +5, Insight +2, Persuasion +3

Damage Resistances all

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Terran

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Special Equipment. Timor possesses a *ring of warding bond (warded)*. While she is more than 60 feet from her bodyguard, she loses the benefits of *warding bond*. Her spellbook contains her prepared spells as well as arcane lock, clairvoyance, continual flame, enlarge/reduce, identify, magic missile, protection from energy, and sleep.

Eight Lands Boon. As long as she is touching soil from Dassen, Lady Timor is protected by *mind blank*.

Energy Substitution. When Timor casts a spell that does fire damage, it does cold damage instead.

Spellcasting. Timor is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, message, prestidigitation, ray of frost*
 1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, charm person, shield, stand the heat*

2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, see invisibility*

3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, fireball*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

LORD DASHGOBAN

Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12 (chain shirt, *warding bond*)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +0, Dex -1, Con +2, Int +3, Wis +1, Cha +2

Skills Deception +3, History +4, Insight +2, Persuasion +3

Damage Resistances all

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Giant, Orc

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Special Equipment. Dashgoban possesses a *ring of warding bond (warded)*. While he is more than 60 feet from his bodyguard, he loses the benefits of *warding bond*.

Eight Lands Boon. As long as he is touching soil from Dassen, Lord Dashgoban is protected by *mind blank*.

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage.

LORD MICHAEL GALLO

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 11 (*warding bond*)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +0, Dex +1, Con +2, Int +3, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Deception +5, History +4, Insight +3, Performance +5, Persuasion +5

Damage Resistances all

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Orc, Terran

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Special Equipment. Gallo possesses a *ring of warding bond* (warded). His bodyguard, a trusted Gallo chaplain, has the corresponding *ring of warding bond* (warden). While he is more than 60 feet from his bodyguard, he loses the benefits of *warding bond*.

Eight Lands Boon. As long as he is touching soil from Dassen, Gallo is protected by *mind blank*.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Gallo makes two attacks: one with his shortsword and one with his dagger.

Shortsword. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

MADNESS (CORPOREAL)

Large aberration (trillith), neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	6 (−2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +1

Skills Deception +8, Persuasion +8

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Creature of Dreams. Madness does not sleep, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Death Boon. If Madness dies while embodied by the Song of Forms or a similar effect, her boon is revoked from all creatures. It is then granted to the 2 nearest heroes within 150 feet of Madness that have the fewest boons from trillith.

Rejuvenation. If Madness dies while she is trapped by the Song of Forms or similar magic, her corpse remains even after the magic ends. Alternately, if Madness is destroyed and all the damage is caused by psychic damage, the trillith's spirit is obliterated. In this case, no creature gains the benefits of Madness's boon.

Otherwise, when Madness dies, she reforms 1d6 days later.

Maddening Spirit. Madness has advantage on saving throws

against mind-affecting spells and effects from a creature. Whenever she is successful on one of these saving throws or a creature uses *true seeing* to see her true form, the creature must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, becoming affected by the *confusion* spell on a failed save.

Amorphous Form. Madness moves in nonlinear dimensions. She can fill the space of a Huge creature, even though her body is simply one Large viper. She appears multiple times within that space, resembling a coiling mass of serpents with multiple heads.

As part of her movement, Madness can change the size of the space she takes up from Large to Huge or vice versa. She spends most of the time while corporeal taking up a Huge space.

Multiplanar. Madness exists partially in multiple places at once. Creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against her, and she has advantage on Dexterity saving throws and attack rolls.

Creatures who are under the influence of *confusion* or a form of madness do not have disadvantage on their attack rolls, and Madness does not have advantage on attack rolls against them. With their grip on reality loosened, such creatures are able to see the underlying impossible form of Madness and strike where she is appearing next.

Innate Spellcasting. Madness' spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). When she uses *mislead*, she smiles a wide grin, and then her body dissolves into tiny illusory serpents that writhe on the ground and flee, though her smile remains in place for the duration. She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *suggestion*

3/day each: *confusion*, *dream*, *mislead*, *phantasmal killer*

Focused Casting. Madness has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Madness fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Madness makes four bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature within Madness' space. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) poison damage. If the target does not have any form of madness, it must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, becoming poisoned for 1d4 days on a failed save. While poisoned, the target gains a random long-term madness.

Grant Boon. Madness touches a creature and grants it her boon. The creature gains the Maddening Spirit trait. Madness can grant her boon to only 2 creatures at any time,

and she can revoke the boon from one or more creatures at any time.

REACTIONS

Become Incorporeal. Any time Madness is not affected by the Song of Forms or a similar effect, she can leave her embodied form and become incorporeal again. Switch to her Incorporeal stat block, keeping her hit points and available uses of legendary resistance, legendary actions, and innate spellcasting the same.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Madness can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Madness regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Madness moves up to her speed.

Bite Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Madness makes a bite attack.

Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions). Madness casts a spell from her list of innate spells.

The body of the grinning gnome woman slowly fades away as a massive coiling form materializes where she once stood. Her smile is the last part of her to vanish, just as the monstrous form snaps its multiple viper jaws. Before you slithers a roiling swarm of serpents, each bigger around than a man's torso. Venom glistens on their fangs, and light reflects across their scales, like the interior of the swarm is impossibly deep. You look upon it, and you know its name is **Madness**.

MADNESS (INCORPOREAL)

Large aberration (trillith), neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	6 (−2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +1

Skills Deception +8, Persuasion +8

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Creature of Dreams. Madness does not sleep, and magic

can't put her to sleep.

Incorporeal Movement. Madness can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Rejuvenation. If Madness dies while she is trapped by the Song of Forms or similar magic, her corpse remains even after the magic ends. Alternately, if Madness is destroyed and all the damage is caused by psychic damage, the trillith's spirit is obliterated. In this case, no creature gains the benefits of Madness's boon.

Otherwise, when Madness dies, she reforms 1d6 days later.

Maddening Spirit. Madness has advantage on saving throws against mind-affecting spells and effects from a creature.

Whenever she is successful on one of these saving throws or a creature uses *true seeing* to see her true form, the creature must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, becoming affected by the *confusion* spell on a failed save.

Amorphous Form. Madness moves in nonlinear dimensions. She can fill the space of a Huge creature, even though her body is simply one Large viper. She appears multiple times within that space, resembling a coiling mass of serpents with multiple heads.

As part of her movement, Madness can change the size of the space she takes up from Large to Huge or vice versa. She spends most of the time while incorporeal taking up a Large space.

Multiplanar. Madness exists partially in multiple places at once. Creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against her, and she has advantage on Dexterity saving throws.

Creatures who can see Madness' true form and are either under the influence of *confusion* or a form of madness do not have disadvantage on their attack rolls. With their grip on reality loosened, such creatures are able to see the underlying impossible form of Madness and strike where she is appearing next.

Project Image. Madness assumes the appearance of a creepy, dark-haired, gnome woman. Her true form is only visible to creatures with truesight.

Innate Spellcasting. Madness' spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). When she uses *mislead*, she smiles a wide grin, and then her body dissolves into tiny illusory serpents that writhe on the ground and flee, though her smile remains in place for the duration. She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *suggestion*

3/day each: *confusion*, *dream*, *mislead*, *phantasmal killer*

Focused Casting. Kelkin has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Madness fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Embody. Madness can animate nearby objects in order to create a corporeal form for herself which closely resembles her monstrous appearance. While embodied, Madness becomes corporeal. Switch to her Corporeal stat block, keeping her hit points and available uses of legendary resistance, legendary actions, and innate spellcasting the same.

If Madness is affected by the Song of Forms or similar magic, she spontaneously embodies and cannot leave her corporeal body until she is no longer under its effect.

Endow. Madness grants her power to any living creature within 30 feet. She vanishes, effectively absorbed by the creature. At any time of her choosing or when the creature dies, Madness reappears within 30 feet of the creature, unharmed by the ordeal. While it is endowed, the creature gains Madness' Maddening Spirit trait.

While endowing a creature, Madness can't be targeted by any attack, spell, or other effect, except those that cause mind-affecting effects or deal psychic damage and can be driven out with *remove curse* or a similar effect.

Grant Boon. Madness touches a creature and grants it her boon. The creature gains the Maddening Spirit trait. Madness can grant her boon to only 2 creatures at any time, and she can revoke the boon from one or more creatures at any time.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Madness can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Madness regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Madness moves up to her speed.

Embody. Madness embodies into her corporeal form.

Endow. Madness endows a willing creature within 30 feet.

Madness appears as the gnome woman Nina Glibglammer. In this form, she has curly hair that seems to shift between black and purple in the light and speaks with a shrill voice.

NASHARA

Large monstrosity, lawful neutral

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 105 (14d10 + 28)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Skills Arcana +9, History +9, Perception +6, Religion +6

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities frightened

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Sphinx

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Inscrutable. Nashara is immune to any effect that would sense her emotions or read her thoughts, as well as any divination spell that she refuses. Wisdom (Insight) checks made to ascertain her intentions or sincerity have disadvantage.

Magic Weapons. Nashara's weapon attacks are magical.

Spellcasting. Nashara is a 6th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She requires no material components to cast her spells. She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *identify*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *darkness*, *locate object*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, *tongues*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Nashara makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Nashara can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Nashara regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Claw Attack. Nashara makes one claw attack.

Teleport (Costs 2 Actions). Nashara magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.

Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions). Nashara casts a spell from her list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

PITCHLING

Medium fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +7, Survival +4

Damage Vulnerabilities cold

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Sylvan

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The pitchling's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *minor illusion*, *produce flame*, *speak with plants*

3/day each: *entangle*

1/day each: *sleep*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The pitchling makes two bow spike attacks.

Bow Spike. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Ball of Pitch. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target has a ball of pitch stuck to it. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Dexterity check, removing the pitch on a success. Because of the stickiness of the pitch, the creature has disadvantage on the check.

If the target takes fire damage before the pitch is removed, it is on fire and takes 5 (2d4) fire damage at the start of each of its turns (initiative count 0 for objects). A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Dexterity check, extinguishing the fire on a success. The pitch burns away after it has dealt fire damage to the creature 10 times.

This slender fey steps nimbly through the forest, naked except for a coating of black pitch smeared across its body. It carries a jagged longbow, but no arrows, though rows of long, sharp spines stick out from their backs. As the **pitchling** trains its bow on you, it snaps a spine off from its shoulder and nocks it like an arrow.

PIXIS

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Athletics +3, Investigation +7, Perception +8, Stealth +9, Thieves' Tools +9

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Cunning Action. Pixis can take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action as a bonus action.

Evasion. If Pixis is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Pixis deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of an ally of Pixis that isn't incapacitated and Pixis doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Spellcasting. Pixis is an 8th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights*, *mage hand*, *chill touch*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *disguise self*, *silent image*, *sleep*

2nd level (2 slots): *darkvision*, *invisibility*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Pixis makes two attacks with her daggers.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker that Pixis can see hits her with an attack, she halves the attack's damage against her.

RAGESIAN INFILTRATOR, STANDARD

Medium humanoid (half-orc), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Int +1

Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +7, Intimidation +1, Perception +4, Stealth +6, Thieves' Tools +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Relentless (1/Rest). If the infiltrator takes 7 damage or less that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Pack Tactics. The infiltrator has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the infiltrator's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The infiltrator deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon Attack and has advantage on the Attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the infiltrator that isn't incapacitated and the infiltrator doesn't have disadvantage on the Attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The infiltrator makes two shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

RAGESIAN SOLDIER, STANDARD

Medium humanoid (half-orc), lawful neutral

Armor Class 19 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Skills Animal Handling +1, Intimidation +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The soldier makes two attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one

target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

RED DRAGON WYRMLING

Medium dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +5, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 10 Ft., darkvision 60 Ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

RUST MONSTER

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Iron Scent. The rust monster can pinpoint, by scent, the location of ferrous metal within 30 feet of it.

Rust Metal. Any nonmagical weapon made of metal that hits the rust monster corrodes. After dealing damage, the

weapon takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to -5, the weapon is destroyed. Non magical ammunition made of metal that hits the rust monster is destroyed after dealing damage.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Antennae. The rust monster corrodes a nonmagical ferrous metal object it can see within 5 feet of it. If the object isn't being worn or carried, the touch destroys a 1-foot cube of it. If the object is being worn or carried by a creature, the creature can make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the rust monster's touch.

If the object touched is either metal armor or a metal shield being worn or carried, its takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers. Armor reduced to an AC of 10 or a shield that drops to a +0 bonus is destroyed. If the object touched is a held metal weapon, it rusts as described in the Rust Metal trait.

SERRIMUS

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 31 (7d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +1, Cha +3

Skills Deception +3, Insight +3, Performance +3, Persuasion +3

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Orc, Terran

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Spellcasting. Serrimus is a 3rd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, dancing lights, message, prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, detect magic, silent image*

2nd level (2 slots): *rope trick*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

SILVIA COSSALA

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 21 (+1 plate, shield)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +4

Skills Animal Handling +2, History +3, Intimidation +1

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Superior Horsemanship. Silvia has advantage on Animal Handling checks for riding a horse.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Silvia makes two attacks.

+1 Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) piercing damage.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.

A statuesque blonde female knight sneers a taunt in your direction, holding her gauntlet in a posture that you suspect would be a vulgar hand gesture if it had more articulation.

Silvia Cossala's hair is short, and behind her shoulders she wears a mantle of bull horns.

SQUAD OF DASHGOBAN KNIGHTS

Gargantuan squad of Medium humanoids (human) on Large beasts, lawful neutral

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 100 (8d20 + 16)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Animal Handling +2, History +3, Intimidation +1

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, slashing, piercing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Squad. The squad can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the squad can move through any opening large enough for a Large beast. The squad can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points, and it has advantage on saving throws if the area affected does not cover at least half of the squad's space.

If the knights dismount, they are a Huge squad of Medium humanoids with a speed of 30 feet and can move through any space large enough for a Medium humanoid. They then cannot use their lances attack.

ACTIONS

Lances. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 52 (8d12) piercing damage, or 26 (4d12) piercing damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

Battleaxes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the squad's space. *Hit:* 36 (8d8) slashing damage, or 18 (4d8) slashing damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

SQUAD OF GALLO ARCHERS

Huge squad of Medium humanoids (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 51 (6d12 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +3

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Squad. The squad can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the squad can move through any opening large enough for a Medium humanoid. The squad can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points, and it has advantage on saving throws if the area affected does not cover at least half of the squad's space.

ACTIONS

Shortswords. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the squad's space. *Hit:* 28 (8d6) piercing damage, or 14 (4d6) piercing damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

Longbow Volley. The squad launches a volley of arrows at a

point within 600 feet. Any creature in a 5-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the squad has half of its hit points or fewer, a creature in the area instead takes 18 (4d8) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Creatures have advantage on the saving throw if they are in the squad's space or if the point is more than 150 feet away from the squad.

SQUAD OF GALLO SOLDIERS

Huge squad of Medium humanoids (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 76 (8d12 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances poison; bludgeoning, slashing, piercing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled,

paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. The squad has advantage on saving throws against poison.

ACTIONS

Squad. The squad can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the squad can move through any opening large enough for a Medium humanoid. The squad can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points, and it has advantage on saving throws if the area affected does not cover at least half of the squad's space.

ACTIONS

Flails. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the squad's space. *Hit:* 36 (8d8) bludgeoning damage, or 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

Bohemian Earspoons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 40 (16d4) piercing damage, or 20 (8d4) piercing damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer. The squad has disadvantage when attacking a target within its space.

SQUAD OF STEPPENGARD KNIGHTS

Gargantuan squad of Medium humanoids (human) on Large beasts, lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 112 (9d20 + 18)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Animal Handling +2, History +3, Intimidation +1

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, slashing, piercing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Squad. The squad can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the squad can move through any opening large enough for a Large beast. The squad can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points, and it has advantage on saving throws if the area affected does not cover at least half of the squad's space.

If the knights dismount, they are a Huge squad of Medium humanoids with a speed of 30 feet and can move through any space large enough for a Medium humanoid. They then cannot use their lances attack.

ACTIONS

Lances. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 52 (8d12) piercing damage, or 26 (4d12) piercing damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

Battleaxes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the squad's space. *Hit:* 36 (8d8) bludgeoning damage, or 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

SQUAD OF STEPPENGARD SOLDIERS

Huge squad of Medium humanoids (human), neutral

Armor Class 19 (splint, shield)

Hit Points 59 (7d12 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, slashing, piercing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled,

paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Squad. The squad can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the squad can move through any opening large enough for a Medium humanoid. The squad can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points, and it has advantage on saving throws if the area affected does not cover at least half of the squad's space.

ACTIONS

Flails. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the squad's space. *Hit:* 36 (8d8) bludgeoning damage, or 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage if the squad has half of its hit points or fewer.

STEPPENGARD COMMANDER

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 71 (13d8 + 13)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +3

Skills Animal Handling +1, Intimidation +4, Performance +4, Persuasion +4

Senses passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Special Equipment. The commander possesses 2 *potions of healing* and a flask of acid.

Leader Tactics (2/Day). The commander may use a bonus action to execute the following Leader Tactic. It chooses up to two allies within 30 feet, which may include itself, to receive the benefit.

Manuever Leader. The chosen allies may use their reaction to move up to their speed while either taking the Disengage action, making a single weapon attack, or casting a cantrip with a casting time of one action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The commander makes two attacks.

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

STEPPENGARD KNIGHT

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Animal Handling +2, History +3, Intimidation +1
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The knight makes two attacks with a melee weapon.

Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) piercing damage.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.

STEPPENGARD PRELATE

Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (half plate, shield)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +0

Skills Medicine +5

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. The prelate is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13). It has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *sacred flame*, *spare the dying*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bless*, *command*, *create or destroy water*,

cure wounds, *detect magic*, *detect poison and disease*

2nd level (3 slots): *calm emotions*, *lesser restoration*, *silence*

3rd level (3 slots): *protection from energy*

4th level (1 slots):

ACTIONS

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

STEPPENGARD SOLDIER

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 19 (splint, shield)
Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Animal Handling +3

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The soldier makes two attacks.

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

STONUM

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +3, Con +4

Skills Animal Handling +2, History +3, Intimidation +1

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Draconic, Orc

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Special Equipment. Stonum possesses a dragonbomb.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Stonum makes two attacks with his shortsword or light crossbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

TIMOR WAR MAGE

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Skills Arcana +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Orc

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Special Equipment. The war mage's spellbook contains its prepared spells as well as *color spray*, *continual flame*, *identify*, *protection from energy*, *see invisibility*, *sleep*, *sleet storm*.

Spellcasting. The war mage is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *message*, *ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *grease*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere*, *invisibility*, *web*

3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic*, *fireball*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

TROLL

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 84 (8d10 + 40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	7 (−2)	9 (−1)	7 (−2)

Skills Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Giant

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Regeneration. The troll regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The troll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

WARHORSE

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 19 (3d10 + 3)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (−4)	12 (+1)	7 (−2)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Trampling Charge. If the horse moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a hooves attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the horse can make another attack with its hooves against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

YOUNG REMORHAZ

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 144 (17d10 + 51)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	4 (−3)	10 (+0)	5 (−3)

Damage Immunities cold, fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive

Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Heated Body. A creature that touches the remorhaz or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (4d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the remorhaz can't bite another target.

Swallow. The remorhaz makes one bite attack against a Medium or smaller creature it is grappling. If the attack hits, that creature takes the bite's damage and is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the remorhaz, and it takes 14 (4d6) acid damage at the start of each of the remorhaz's turns.

If the remorhaz takes 20 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the remorhaz must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the remorhaz. If the remorhaz dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 10 feet of movement, exiting prone.

XORN

Medium elemental, neutral

Armor Class 1 (natural armor)

Hit Points 73 (7d8 + 42)

Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantite

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive

Perception 16

Languages Terran

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Earth Glide. The xorn can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the xorn doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Stone Camouflage. The xorn has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in rocky terrain.

Treasure Sense. The xorn can pinpoint, by scent, the location of precious metals and stones, such as coins and gems, within 60 feet of it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The xorn makes three claw attacks and one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

ZOMBIE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (−2)	16 (+3)	3 (−4)	6 (−2)	5 (−3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

APPENDIX B: ITEMS AND TRAPS

ADVENTURING GEAR

Dragonbomb. This weapon is dropped by wyvern riders, functioning as a grenade-like weapon. Because the weapon simply drops, the rider makes a DC 10 Intelligence check (disadvantage over 20 feet of altitude), hitting the intended target on a success and missing in a random direction by 1d10 feet per 10 feet of altitude on a failure.

Alchemist's fire coats everything within 10 feet of the impact point dealing 3d4 fire damage at the start of a creature's turn (initiative count 0 for objects). A creature can end this damage by using its action to make a DC 10 Dexterity check to extinguish the flames. The alchemicals typically last long enough to set fire to flammable objects. It also creates a deafening boom, and all creatures in a 10-foot-radius are affected by the thunderstone.

A dragonbomb consists of little more than a compilation of existing alchemicals. It has 10 flasks of oil, 4 flasks of alchemist's fire, and a thunderstone in a clay shell that shatters on impact. A DC 15 Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies) check can create one if all the listed components above are available.

Red Madness (Ingested Poison). A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned, the creature moves up to its speed toward the nearest living creature and attacks it until it is dead. It can use its reaction to attack a creature within its reach that has damaged it, and it uses its reaction to attack a creature at the first opportunity.

ADVENTURING GEAR

Item	Cost	Weight
Dragonbomb	300 gp	20 lb.
Red Madness	500 gp	—

MAGIC ITEMS

Blade of the Kingsguard

Greatsword, rare (requires attunement by a Dasseni)

You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon.

Sentience. The *Blade of the Kingsguard* is a sentient lawful neutral weapon with an Intelligence of 4, a Wisdom of 14, and a Charisma of 4. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. The weapon communicates telepathically with its user through feelings of emotion rather than words.

Personality. The *Blade of the Kingsguard's* purpose is to make sure you are able to keep defending the king of Dassen. If you are at 0 hit points and within 60 feet of the sword, it casts *heal* on you as a reaction. It cannot cast the spell again until the next dawn.

The Book of Eight Lands

Wondrous item, artifact

An aged book lies in the vaults of Steppengard's Castle in Bresk; it magically tracks the complete genealogy of the king of Dassen and the lords of the eight lands of Dassen. This book, the *Book of Eight Lands*, displays the name of the king and each of the lords of the eight lands, and provides a boon to each of those people, as well as their spouses and their children with those spouses. As long as they are touching soil from Dassen and on the same plane as the book, each such affected noble is protected as if by *mind blank*, rendering them immune to all attempts to detect, influence, or read their emotions or thoughts; most commonly, this requirement is met by wearing a small bag of soil underneath one's clothing. The beneficiaries of the book's boon can choose to lower it willingly.

According to the book, there is no line of succession after King Steppengard (all of his heirs are slain in one fell swoop before the events of adventure four). New names may be recorded in the book manually, but this requires the approval of all of the current lords of the eight lands.

The *Book of Eight Lands* has no market value. Apart from being an artifact, it is priceless in Dassen and worthless elsewhere.

Eowhisperer Charm

Wondrous item, uncommon

This ornate shawl fits over a horse's mane and ears, allowing it to understand Common but not speak. If it wears it long enough, it eventually begins to exhibit signs of an uncanny intelligence.

Fimbulwinter Charm

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This silvery cord is threaded with several sapphire-studded, silver rings. You can use an action to wrap this around the handle of a weapon. When you hit with an attack using the wrapped weapon, it deals an extra 1d6 cold damage, but you also take 1 cold

damage.

Hurling Bracers

Wondrous item, rare

These bracers can be activated as a bonus action or as a reaction. Until the end of your next turn, you are considered to be one size class larger for the purposes of wielding heavy weapons and your weight capacity for Strength-based tasks such as lifting, pulling, or pushing. During this time, you also have advantage when you use Strength in a contested ability check, such as a shove or grapple, against another creature that is your size or smaller.

Inquisitor Mask

Mask, uncommon

Inquisitors always have a mask, whether they are simple devices or more powerfully enchanted items. Male inquisitors favor masks carved to resemble (or actually made from) bear skulls, while female inquisitors prefer ones that look more like heavily-decorated masquerade masks.

This mask alters your voice to be more menacing and feral, granting advantage on Charisma (Intimidation), and it serves as a holy symbol and spellcasting focus if you receive your cleric powers from your devotion to Leska.

Potion of Healing

Potion, rarity varies

You regain hit points when you drink this potion. The number of hit points depends on the potion's rarity, as shown in the Potions of Healing table. Whatever its potency, the potion's red liquid glimmers when agitated.

POTIONS OF HEALING

Potion of . . .	Rarity	HP Regained
Healing	Common	2d4 + 2
Greater healing	Uncommon	4d4 + 4

Ring of Warding Bond

Ring, rare (requires attunement)

This platinum ring is one half of a matched set that has a permanent *warding bond* enchantment. You can only be attuned to one of the rings in the set. While both rings are attuned and within 60 feet of each other, the rings have the following bonuses if the wielder of the *Warden* has more than 0 hit points.

Warded. You gain a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws and have resistance to all damage.

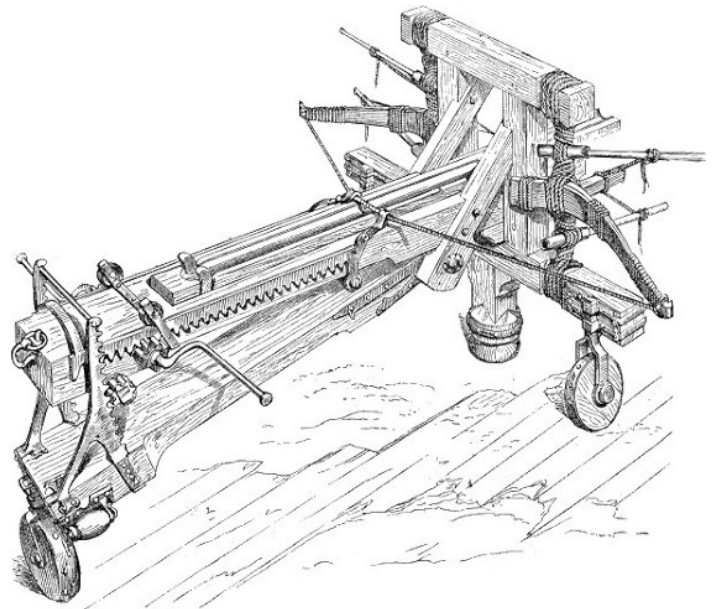
Warden. Whenever the wielder of the *Warded* takes damage, you take the same amount of damage.

Stone of Alarm

Wondrous item, rare

This bell-shaped stone is 1 inch tall. You can cast the *alarm* spell from the stone. The stone can't be used this way again until the next dawn.

SIEGE EQUIPMENT



Ballista

Large object

Armor Class: 15

Hit Points: 50 (damage threshold 5)

Damage Immunities: poison, psychic

The ballista is a huge crossbow that fires spear-like projectiles. Before it can be fired, it must be loaded and then aimed. Loading, aiming, and firing the ballista each take an action.

To fire the ballista, the shooter makes an intelligence check against the target's AC. The shooter has advantage if the target has not moved since the ballista was aimed. Rolling a 1 or 20 is a miss or critical hit, respectively.

Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* range 120/360 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

Cheval de Frise

Large object

Armor Class: 15

Hit Points: 50

Damage Immunities: poison, psychic

A cheval de frise is a line, curve, box, or arrowhead-shaped row of outward pointed spears, usually 6 feet tall and deep and up to 30 feet across. A Medium or larger creature that enters the cheval de frise's space for the first time on a turn must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A Large or larger creature has disadvantage on the saving throw.

Heavy Catapult

Huge object

Armor Class: 15

Hit Points: 100 (damage threshold 5)

Damage Immunities: poison, psychic

The heavy catapult is a huge wooden device that launches projectiles, often a large stone, in a high arc. Before it can be fired, it must be loaded and then aimed. It takes four actions to load the weapon, four to aim it, and one to fire it. The aiming stage can be skipped if the shooter is targeting the same location that was hit by the last stone and the catapult has not been moved.

To fire the catapult, the shooter must make a successful DC 15 intelligence check to hit a point between 100 feet and 2,000 feet away. The targeted point is chosen after the fourth aiming action, and the shooter has advantage on the check if the targeted point is within 20 feet of where the last stone landed, but the shooter has disadvantage on the check if the point is over 400 feet away. On a failed check, the stone lands (10 x the amount the check was missed by) feet away from the targeted point in a random direction.

Creatures within 5 feet of the point where the stone lands must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Objects that are not worn or carried take double the amount of damage rolled.

Light Ballista

Medium object

Armor Class: 15

Hit Points: 25

Damage Immunities: poison, psychic

The light ballista is a large crossbow that is mounted on a cart-drawn turret and fires spear-like projectiles. Before it can be fired, it must be loaded. Loading and firing the light ballista each take an action.

The light ballista is used as a ranged martial weapon that can fire at a target in a 360-foot cone in front of it. The cart can be aimed in a new direction with two actions from Small or Medium creatures or one action from a Large or larger creature. The shooter has advantage on the attack if the target is within a 120-foot cone in front of the light ballista.

Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* range 120/360 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) piercing damage.

TRAPS

Murder Holes Trap

Simple trap (level 4)

Above a guarded entrance hallway are murder holes: slots through which barrels of deadly iron shot can be dropped. A creature on the roof above can use an action to load a connected barrel with the shot.

Trigger. A creature on the roof above the murder holes can use an action to throw a lever, opening a door on the bottom of the barrel and dumping the shot through the holes on any creatures below.

Effect. Each creature in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Countermeasures. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices several 2-inch holes in the ceiling. A creature can use an action to plug the holes with wadded cloths with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check, but they must be able to reach the ceiling 15 feet off the ground.

Using a light to illuminate one of the holes allows a creature to see the opening mechanism on the barrel. A creature can then use *arcane lock* to prevent the slots from opening.

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Gather Allies

While Seaquen recovers from an unnatural natural disaster, the heroes undertake a quest to find allies in the nearby nation of Dassen before Ragesia's army arrives.

But the heroes discover strange tidings surrounding Dassen's King Steppengard. What afflicts the king, and is Duke Gallo truly conspiring against him? Seaquen's survival depends on unraveling the mystery.

Just what kind of feast can the heroes expect when they sit down to the mad king's banquet?

