

Where the Halflings Roam

A Two-Round Dungeons & Dragons® Living Greyhawk™

Regional Adventure set in Ratik

Version 1.0

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A caravan of halflings needs those skilled in battle to guard their precious supplies as they travel to Optwall, the chosen site for a new halfling settlement to be built. Simple enough, Right? Protect the goods, keep the halflings alive, and get paid. Meanwhile join the halflings on a free tour of Ratik, taking in the odd fair and perhaps even see a joust or two. How hard could it possibly be?

A two-round Regional adventure set in Ratik for characters of level 1 (APL 2).

Resources for this adventure [and the authors of those works] include *Monster Manual II* [Ed Bonny, Jeff Grubb, Skip Williams, Steve Winter] and *Races of the Wild* [Skip Williams] *Complete Warrior* [Andy Collins, David Noonan, Ed Stark]

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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To sanction an RPGA event, you must be at least a HERALD-LEVEL™ gamemaster. The person who sanctions the event is called the senior gamemaster, and is in charge of making sure the event is sanctioned before play, runs smoothly on the date sanctioned, and then reported back to the RPGA in a timely manner. The person who runs the game is called the table Dungeon Master (or usually just DM). Sometimes (and almost all the time in the cases of home events) the senior gamemaster is also the table DM. You don't have to be a HERALD-LEVEL GM to run this adventure if you are not the senior GM.

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This adventure retires from RPGA-sanctioned play on December 31, 2008.

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Players Read No Farther

If you are planning on playing this adventure, stop reading now. The rest of the information in this adventure is for the DM only. If you read farther than this section, you'll know too much about its challenges, which kills the fun. Also, if you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, reading beyond this point makes you ineligible to do so.

Preparing for Play

To get the most out of this adventure, you need copies of the following D&D rule books: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*.

Throughout this adventure, text in **bold italics** provides player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you,

including special instruction on running the adventure. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text. Full information on NPCs and monsters are given in Appendix 1. For your convenience, that appendix is split by APL.

Along with this adventure you'll find a RPGA Session Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your senior GM directly after play. You'll also find a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure Record (AR).

LIVING GREYHAWK LEVELS OF PLAY

Because players bring their own characters to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportionate to the modified average character level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To calculate the Average Party Level (APL), follow the process below:

1. Determine the character level for each of the PCs participating in the adventure. Each PC may bring one animal, plus any creatures gained from class abilities to help in combat. (PCs can bring more creatures but they cannot help in combat). If you deem that the animal bestows a significant benefit in combat add the animal's CR to the level of the PC it is accompanying for calculating APL. (Animals gained from class abilities and one standard horse, warhorse, or riding dog for a PC with Mounted Combat do not affect APL).
2. Sum the results of step 1 and divide by the number of characters playing in the adventure. Round to the nearest whole number.
3. If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the level of challenge the PCs face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience and gold a PC can gain at the end of the adventure. A player character more than three levels higher than the APL at which the adventure is played cannot participate. If a player character is more than two levels away from the APL at which the adventure is played, he suffers a 50% penalty to the amount of gold and XP gained in the adventure. This simulates the fact that either the PC was not challenged as much

as normal or relied on help by higher-level characters to reach the objectives.

LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Four or five 1st-level characters may find the challenge of an APL 2 adventure difficult. Suggest the following to these groups to help increase their chances of success:

1. Enlist a sixth player.
2. Advise characters to buy riding dogs to help protect them and fight for them.

These APL calculation rules reference version 7.0 of the *Living Greyhawk Campaign Sourcebook*. If you are playing this adventure in 2008, check the current version of the LGCS and follow any updated rules presented within.

TIME UNITS AND UPKEEP

This is a standard two-round regional adventure, set in Ratik. Characters from Ratik pay one (1) Time Unit per round, while all other characters pay two (2) Time Units per round.

Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12 gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50 gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100 gp per Time Unit. Characters that fail to pay at least Standard Upkeep will retain temporary ability damage until the next adventure, must buy new spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may suffer other in-game penalties (or possibly gain in-game benefits) as may be detailed in this adventure.

A character that does not pay for at least Standard Upkeep may also avoid the above-described penalties by living off the wild. If the character possesses four or more ranks in the Survival skill and succeeds at a DC 20 Survival check, the character will heal temporary ability damage as if he or she paid for Standard Upkeep, may refill spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may restock up to 20 arrows or bolts if the character has at least four ranks in Craft (bowmaking). The player is allowed to Take 10 on this roll.

More information about Lifestyle and Upkeep can be found in the "Lifestyle and Upkeep" section of Chapter 3 of the *Living Greyhawk Campaign Sourcebook*.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The main events in this adventure take place while the PCs are escorting a halfling caravan from Marner to Optwall. Although a relatively simple seeming escort job there is actually much going on behind the scenes than meets the eye.

Although in the past the halfling population in Ratik was not significant (small very agrarian and uninterested in politics) a rise in halfling numbers has meant that the current total halfling population outnumbers the gnomes and elves and now rivals the dwarves.

Despite this, there is currently no permanent halfling settlement. The largest concentration of halflings outside Marner itself lies in Optwall.

The population of halflings in the Optwall area received a substantial boost in 561 to 563 CY with an influx of halfling refugees from the Bone March. In 563CY the borders were closed and the refugees found themselves with no way home. Eventually other refugees stranded in Bresht and Bredivan also moved to Optwall.

The refugees in Optwall saw no need to set up permanent settlements as they mistakenly believed they were soon going home to the Bone Marsh. For this reason many of the refugee halflings are itinerant, travelling the width and breadth of Ratik, and the lands beyond, in caravans numbering 25 to 35 wagons usually drawn by Brixashulties. Such numbers allow for plenty of room when camping, while proving a formidable deterrent for marauding monsters or bandits.

It is just such a immigrant caravan that the PCs are escorting. The caravan in fact is full of supplies and materials to help build a small settlement to house a portion of the refugees stranded in Optwall.

Unbeknownst to the PCs the caravan has been personally financed by another Bonemarch expatriate, the Archbaroness Evaleigh herself. In addition to wanting to help her fellow Bonemarchers, Lady Evaleigh is also keen to strengthen her border with the Bonemarch against incursions and at the same time weaken the influence of the Optwall shadow clan. Evaleigh feels that should outright war erupt in the south, the allegiances of the Optwall clan would go to the highest bidder.

The PCs caravan is not be taking a direct route but instead is be winding its way through the Ratik hinterlands calling in at various towns and villages along the way. Most of the major towns in Ratik have a specific camping area for visiting halfling caravans. Clan Ukaloa for example (whom the PCs visit) has an area set aside for the use of the International Halfling Society at Frostcrown. Halflings also run established businesses in many larger centres. The dwarves are very fond of halfling cooking for example and a number of halflings have businesses in Orokeep, a town also noted for using halflings as security guards.

The arrival of a halfling caravan in town is a major event. Such caravans offer trading possibilities, and a chance to hire skilled craftsmen. Halfling caravans also gather much

news on their travels, opening the opportunity for exchanges of news and gossip from all over Ratik. As the PCs eventually discover, this caravan is bringing more than random news and gossip to the places it visits. Evaleigh is taking advantage of the extensive halfling network of interconnected families to deliver confidential correspondence, small magic items and funds discreetly to various contacts around Ratik.

Connected with the proposed new settlement is the fact that the halflings currently have no formal representation in Ratik.

Historically there are a number of reasons for this lack of representation. Halfling numbers were much smaller in the past. The native halflings themselves have not shown a lot of interest in "longshanks business". Traditionally the native Ratik halflings have never been over concerned with direct involvement in politics preferring more "subtle" methods of achieving their aims. In addition there has also been no clear halfling seat of power or overall recognised leader (this is where the new settlement is politically significant).

Furthermore the continuing existence and disruptive influence of the underground criminal organisations known as shadow clans has meant authorities in Ratik have never been prone to encourage a halfling involvement in politics.

The refugees were not overly concerned either as they expected to be going home. It is now clear the refugees are unlikely to ever return to the Bonemarch and must make the best of their situation as "New Ratikans". This issue has as a result recently become a cause for some discontent amongst the halfling refugees, especially the more hot headed younger radicals.

The halfling shadow clans are a unique part of Ratikan culture. Rather than one large organised front, the shadow clans are a series of separate (and often competing) organisations that each specialise in particular areas, which occasionally overlap. The shadow clan families are a closed network, usually only those born into the clan are accepted, therefore outsiders are almost never heard of in these factions. For this reason very few of the refugee halflings are involved with the clans.

The first shadow clan was founded in the Optwall region around 430 CY. Certain enterprising individuals found that during a period of poor crop seasons, it was far more profitable to 'borrow' supplies from their neighbouring towns. Those individuals found that their endeavours increased when they banded together and coordinated their efforts. However, as is inevitable with such organisations, as the collective grew in power and numbers, a power struggle emerged within the ranks which by now had begun to accept the name of the 'shadow clan'.

When the power struggle ended, the losers departed Optwall and scattered all over the Archbarony. More often than not these halflings employed the skills they had learned in Optwall to the establishment of new shadow clans. Most took care to avoid conflict with their neighbours.

Despite this, there remains to this day a significant amount of overlap between the gangs, a situation which occasionally causes friction between the short folk. This overlap was particularly prevalent in 573 CY in the city of Marner, where three separate clans had laid claim to the lucrative stevedoring market. There was only room for one.

The situation came to a head in early 584 CY. For months rumours flew around the city that a diminutive gang war might be brewing on the docks of Marner. Soon enough, dozens of halfling bodies begun turning up in the nets of the fishing boats.

The end result of this ongoing gang war was the appearance of two main competing clans, the Optwall 'originals' who as always are quite upfront and brutal in their approach and a relatively new more sophisticated Marner based clan who see a low profile and economic stability as essential to their profitability. The Marner clan are renowned for their ability to maintain acceptable relations with the local Marner Constabulary and the extent of their political influence.

With the new influx of halflings into Ratik the situation is slowly changing. The older natives (especially the clan based ones) may still be sticking to their old attitudes but the "New Ratikan" refugees are keen to make the best of their new life in what they see as a land of opportunity. However the recent increase in the population of halflings in Optwall due to the influx of Bonemarch refugees has concerned the Optwall clan who see the new arrivals as a threat to their current control over the local area.

Evaleigh is sympathetic to the refugee's plight, being originally a Bonemarch noble herself. Evaleigh's interest in supporting the new settlement is also motivated by a desire to reduce the influence of the Optwall clan in this volatile and critical part of Southern Ratik. Such a settlement has the added benefit of strengthening the defences of Optwall and hence Southern Ratik against the recently increasing orc and goblinoid raids and attacks.

A second influence in Southern Ratik has recently emerged. Evaleigh's sources have revealed that an organisation known locally as "The Black Charade" is in fact a cover for high level operatives from an as yet unknown source outside Ratik although there is some as yet unconfirmed relationship with the mysterious gnomish village of Arumagaalen and the Glowgloom elves. To date the activities of this

group have been very low key and usually beneficial to Evaleigh but she is keeping a close eye on the situation.

To complicate matters further Lord Erik Optwall is currently attempting to play "The Game of Houses" secretly allying with the Optwall shadow clan (he feels he has little choice but to compromise with them) whilst at the same time assisting Evaleigh in her plan's to undermine the Optwall clan and reduce its influence. Unfortunately he may be playing out of his league. Many feel is more suited to hunting then political intrigue. He is certainly unaware that the Optwall clan are working for an outside agent known only as the "Verdant Death" and Erik Optwall's double dealing may well backfire on him.

In an attempt to reach out to the halfling population and calm any hostilities Evaleigh has let it be known very discreetly that should a settlement be established, a definitive halfling leader found and, most importantly, a mechanism be found to ensure the shadow clans can be kept in check, then the question of halfling representation on the Ratik council may eventually at some currently unstated future time be tabled for reconsideration.

The shadow clans are aware of this development. The Optwall shadow clan see the new settlement as detrimental to their influence in the south and oppose Evaleigh's plan. The Marner shadow clan see the settlement as being to their benefit and are working discreetly to firstly assist the project and secondly ensure the first halfling representative on council is under Marner shadow clan's direct control.

The PCs at various times contact operatives of both clans as well as the Black Charade, though they are always be aware just who they are dealing with.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

PART A.

Introduction:

The PCs are in Marner and looking for work.

Encounter 1: A Half Sized Halfling

The PCs encounter a halfling child Caldairra who has been causing trouble and the PCs need to rescue her from angry nobles and merchants.

Encounter 2: A Halfling life for us

As a result of rescuing Caldairra the PCs are offered a job offer escorting a Halfling caravan.

The pay is good and the PCs get to see a bit of Ratik.

Encounter 3: A bird in your hand

The PCs escort Yon'cyrra to a mystery meeting with Wood Elves in the Whisperleaf. The next day a seemingly simple task of capturing some chordevoc chicks turns into an exercise in tree climbing.

Encounter 4: On the Road Again

The caravan moves out heading for the dwarves. The PC get to join a geography lesson for the younger halflings and learn about Northern Ratik. Someone sets the Brixia loose and spooks them. Caldairra sets off after her favourite Brixia with the PCs hot on her trail.

Encounter 5: Toad with No Manners

The PCs need to rescue Caldairra from an irate Dire Toad.

Encounter 6: Brixia Island

The PCs need to capture the runaway Brixia without harming them.

Encounter 7: A Brixia by any other name

The caravan reaches Frostcrown. The PCs serve as a guard when Yon'cyrra collects funds from the royal Gem Exchange. A druid/spymaster breaks her cover and reveals herself to the PCs. She warns of an imminent sabotage attempt by Optwall shadow clan operatives..

Encounter 8: South to Ratikhill

The caravan heads south for Ratikhill. The caravan is attacked on the way but forewarned the PCs should prevail. The children and PC's receive a geography lesson about central Ratik.

Encounter 9: The missing rod

The halflings are at Ratikhill because of a fair. The halflings are accused of stealing a magic item from the museum at the academy (the item is in fact an unusual intelligent *Rod of Wonder* of halfling origin). The Halflings have been setup by someone intending to delay the caravan. The PCs must find the real culprits and clear the halflings name.

Encounter 10: Optional Encounter - Jousting

As a reward for recovering the artefact the PCs are made guests of honour at the Marner Spring Fair and those PCs with mounted combat are invited to compete in a demonstration Tourney.

Encounter 11: Skoradinfin

The PCs accompany Yon'Cyrre on a trip to Skoradinfin for a delivery to the gnomes. They get to meet a group of young halflings and gnomes and find out more about the mysterious "Black Charade". They receive an unusual message about Lord Optwall.

Encounter 12: Lord Optwall

The PCs find themselves on a hunting expedition with Lord Erik Optwall that nearly ends in disaster.

Conclusion:

Optwall shadow clan interference averted, the refugee halflings lay the foundations of the new village. The PCs are asked to suggest a name for the village (to be submitted with the events summary).

PREPARATION FOR PLAY

Be prepared for a fair amount of box text. This module is designed as an Introduction to Ratik for new players and much of that information is passed on through the box text. Check which PCs are Halfling or speak Halfling. Note down the races of the various PC's as this is significant at various points in the adventure.

Check whether any of the PCs have played Gnomes, Badgers and Crabs. If so note down which PCs gained the favour of the gnomes and whether they have "badger hats".

Be prepared to track the success or failure of various important subcomponents of the mission. Note that failure in any one section of this adventure is not disastrous, however if at any point the party fails a total of three encounters from those listed as "mission critical" (see below) the module is finished. Not all encounters are mission critical.

The mission critical encounters are:

- Encounter 1. A half sized halfling.
- Encounter 3 Greet the Elves
- Encounter 6 Defeat the Dire Toad
- Encounter 8. Stop the Sabotage
- Encounter 9 Recover the Rod

INTRODUCTION

The adventure starts in Marner with the PCs separately looking for work as individuals. Bearing in mind the possible time constraints of a long module the preliminary roleplay material has been placed in players Handout 1.

The material in Players Handout 1 is written with players unfamiliar with the city of Marner in mind. If there is sufficient time consider using this handout as a DM Guide to role-playing the PCs search for work and have them meet up through the course of their searching. The descriptive story style introduction in Players Handout 1 is intended to be a trigger for roleplay and a fun way to give players some basic information about Marner.

Be aware that Handout 1. (if read as written rather than role-played) is a summary of PAST events for the PCs and as such the actions are described as having already occurred and thus the box text does not leave PC choices open. If you wish to use this handout as a guide to role-play it may be necessary to paraphrase the material in such a way that the PCs get choices.

Alternatively you may simply wish to paraphrase or have a PC read and paraphrase the handout as a description of recent events.

Note that many "experienced" players, even those that have played a number of Ratik adventures, may not be familiar with the precise details of Marner unless they have taken the time to read the material on the Ratik home page online.

If you have ascertained that the table consists of experienced Marner veterans and time is an issue you may simply hand around copies of Players Handout 1 for the players to peruse at their leisure and continue on with the module.

Once the material in Players Handout 1 has been dealt with allow the PCs to introduce themselves to each other, nominate what spells they have selected for the new day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals.

At this point they can then visit any specific places of potential employment they have thought of and make any purchases (The city of Marner has most PHB or DMG items that a first level PC could afford, though there may not be sufficient time to acquire specialised or unusual items that need to be scribed, specially brewed, modified or custom made. Availability is left up to the GM's discretion).

If the game is being played at a venue that qualifies PCs to purchase a dwelling/business in the Marner Foreign Quarter this may be an optimal time to do so. PCs may at this point also

join any other Ratik metaorgs for which they currently qualify.

The PCs may gather information if they wish:

- DC 5- A drunken sailor tells you he has heard that Evaleigh is preparing a grand fleet to hunt the Kraken swarm terrorising the waters down south near Fadric.
- DC 8- A young human page from the palace tells you there is a new bard ensemble from Arumagaalen who are become very popular in southern Ratik, especially amongst younger halflings and gnomes.
- DC10- A depressed half orc adventurer tells you there is not a lot of work around Marner at the moment and he is thinking of heading up to the Timberway to try his luck in the far north.
- DC 15- You talk to a cheerfully drunk dwarf from Clan Ukaloa who tells you there are concerns that the orcs in the southern Loftwood and Lofthills are on the move again and how much he looks forward to getting to "whack a couple of them".
- DC 20- A professional looking carpenter member of the Shipwright's Guild informs you discreetly that recent decisions by the Archbaroness Evaleigh have not endeared her with certain Ratik guild leaders and there are rumours of trouble brewing.
- DC 25- A tipsy maidservant from the palace flirts outrageously with any human males among you and lets it slip that Lady Evaleigh is concerned about the "Bonemarch refugee problem" in the south. (Any PCs that successfully make a DC 10 Knowledge (local - Nyronde), DC 10 Bardic Knowledge or DC 6 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check to recall that Lady Evaleigh is the daughter of the Count of Knurl and that Knurl is the last independent province of the old Bonemarch)

The combined party continues canvassing for work but, if anything, it appears there is even less work for a large group of new adventurers than individuals. The daunting prospect looms of taking on low payed labouring work at the docks, or working as a bouncer on the door of a disreputable inn in the poor sector for just a few silver coins.

Allow the players to believe they may be in for a very boring time role-playing a menial job in Marner for minimal rewards if they cannot find their PCs a good job.

ENCOUNTER 1: HALF SIZED HALFLING

Modify the following to fit in with what the PCs have decided to do.

After some discussion and a group vote you persist and cover the last few streets of the merchant's quarter before retiring back to the inn for the evening. Surely eventually luck must improve.

Have the PCs roll a DC 5 Listen check.

As your group is wandering down yet another near identical cobblestone back street there is suddenly signs of a commotion and the sounds of yelling. Turning attention towards the source of the sounds reveals a small crowd gathering at the end of the street near a crossroads.

Allow the PCs to react; they should go to investigate. If they decide not to, tell them the yelling is becoming more frantic, and it sounds like a small child is involved.

If the PCs continue to ignore the yelling improvise. They should eventually come across the sight of Caldairra being subdued by the two men. Once the PCs decide to act paraphrase the following to fit.

It seems a good idea to investigate. Moving through the crowd until it finally thins reveals the sight of a very young halfling girl being held up by the collar of her tunic by a foppish young human male dressed in a fashion popular amongst Marner young nobles.

The girl is yelling to members of the crowd for help saying 'It were not me, I did not do it', though none of the crowd are moving to assist. They seem very wary of interfering with a noble. Another human wearing simple merchant garments is standing nearby, slowly cracking his knuckles eyeing the child with a look of menace.

Allow a DC 12 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) or DC 16 Knowledge (local - Nyronde) check to recognise the garb of a minor noble wearing the colours of House Keth. On a successful check also remind the players that physically assaulting a member of the nobility (even a minor one) without reasonable excuse, on a public street may not be the best idea they ever had.

The halfling child is Caldairra. She has snuck away from her caravan and is exploring the city. Unfortunately she was passing by as the

young noble and the merchant were concluding a business deal and noticed money was missing. The two have jumped to the conclusion she is guilty because she is a halfling and are not willing to let the girl simply wander away. Read the following if there are any halflings in the party:

The girl's frightened face turns towards you as she whimpers fearfully to you in halfling, "Help me please, this human wants to beat me. I only want to go home. I promise I did not steal anything. Please help me,"

If there are no halflings in the party then read the following instead:

The girl puts her head in her tiny hands, "Don't hurt me, please, I just want to go home! It wasn't me, let me go please!" her tiny voice is full of fear.

Continue with the following:

The second man steps towards the child with a closed fist raised, "Not till you pay whelp!! Your kind will learn not to pilfer from others!" a growl in his voice.

With a noble clearly involved, most of the crowd turn away from the sight and slowly walk away. It is clear that the child will be horribly beaten unless some kind soul intervenes.

The PCs should intervene at this point. If they don't the Caldairra is beaten fiercely by the men before being handed to the watch.

If the PCs do not act then allow them a DC 5 Knowledge (local – Nyronde) check to realise that nobles are not above the law in Ratik (technically Rule of Law applies) and that even if the noble and merchant have evidence against the girl (they do not) the Noble is not the local lord and they cannot take justice into their own hands

Development: (If the PCs do not intervene) Caldairra is the PCs link to the halfling caravan and if they do not help her they need to find the caravan on their own. The halflings are then hostile (Caldairra recognises them and tells how they failed to help her) and the PCs need to move the attitude to friendly before they are offered work. In addition this counts as a critical failure for the overall mission (the PCs are allowed three critical failures). These consequences can be avoided by assisting Caldairra.

Assuming the PCs do decide to act and move forward paraphrase the following:

The two men's cold eyes turn toward you as you step forward, "Help me!" the girl cries in a shrill voice, turning her fearful face toward your group. The first man roughly shakes the girl. "What do you want?" he growls.

Should the PCs roll a sense motive they discover that Caldairra is truly scared, and the men didn't lose near as much gold as they are letting on. Caldairra has no gold on her; the men have taken what money of her own that she had, assuming she must have passed on the stolen money to an accomplice.

The merchant and the noble are both unarmed. If the PCs actually resort to violence, non-lethal or otherwise, the two of them drop Caldairra and retreat into the crowd calling loudly for the watch. The watch has already been called by concerned passers-by and turn up the next round. The PCs are be fined 20gp each for disturbing the peace.

If the PCs attempt to use lethal force, remind them out of character that killing an unarmed towns person is an evil act. Any lethal force of any type against the unarmed noble results in the **Disfavour of House Keth** and the **Unreliable** disfavour as it is seen as a dishonourable act.

Assuming that commonsense eventually prevails, the PCs can interact with the two men at this point. The men refuse to let Caldairra go with out dealing out 'justice' or being "compensated". They are convinced she is responsible because "that's the way 'her sort' are" but have no evidence at all other than she was present at the time they discovered the theft. They are very suspicious of any halflings present assuming they are accomplices.

If the PCs pass a DC 15 Diplomacy check and also agree to pay 'compensation' the men release Caldairra into the custody of the PCs. They will insist on no less than 20gp (or 25gp if there is a halfling PC present) and ask for more if they can get away with it. To take less would be the same as admitting they were lying about the amount she stole. If the PCs do not have the cash, a promise to pay suffices.

Higher diplomacy rolls do not reduce the compensation as the men need to "keep up face" in front of the crowd. Intimidate does not work at all. If the PCs intimidate, the men simply wait for the watch (who have already been called) to turn up and register a complaint with the watch about the PCs.

Use the following suggested answers to guide any conversations the PCs may have with the noble and merchant.

- What are you doing?
This whelp has stolen from us; we are merely dealing out justice, as it should be done against her kind.
- Her kind?
Little people, you can't trust them! They're always stealing and pillaging from us hard working folk. About time someone gave one of the pests a beating.
- What evidence do you have?
Who needs evidence? Her kind are always up to no good and she was standing right there when we noticed the gold was missing.
- What did she steal?
A lot of gold! Sneaky little rat, probably would've made off with more had I not caught her!
- How much gold exactly?
***"More than you've got!" he growls.
"I didn't take any gold, just let me go!"
the girl whimpers before the man roughly shakes her,***
- Why don't you let the watch handle this?
They have already been called, but a lot of good they'll do! Probably let the whelp go for a small fee! Gold that should be ours!
- Here have the gold, we'll deal with her!!
Hmph! Make sure the runt gets what's coming to her! The two men stalk off grumbling about their lost profit, before disappearing into the crowd.

Development: Once the men release Caldairra she hides behind either the PC who did the most talking or any halfling present. Once the men have gone Caldairra thanks the PCs for saving her from the 'mean men', and insist that she must return to her caravan as she is late and her parents tend to worry.

Caldairra is happy for the PCs to come and even asks if they can walk her home, claiming she is scared, should they not suggest it themselves. Caldairra takes the PC by the hand that she hid behind, introduce herself and lead the group through the streets.

If the PCs want to take her to the watch, she insists that her mother will be worried and she must return home immediately. If the PCs take her to the watch regardless, they are thanked for their community minded actions but advised that the watch are not interested in detaining her. The

noble and merchant had withdrawn there charges once they were compensated by the PCs. In addition the evidence against her is circumstantial. The duty officer at the watch suggests that any punishment of the girl is best left up to the halfling elders and request the PCs escort her home.

ENCOUNTER 2: A HALFLING LIFE FOR US

Caldairra takes the PCs straight to her caravan where it is camped on the outskirts of Marner. Here they meet Wortessel, Caldairra's older brother; and he leads them to Yon'cyrra who is the elder for the caravan.

Walking through the gates to Marner, you see a large gathering of wagons camped a few dozen feet away. "This way! This way! We are almost there!" Caldairra smiles at your group as she leads you toward the wagons. An odd grey coloured bird flies up to her and squawks as if scolding her.

A DC 11 Knowledge (nature) check reveals the bird is a chordevoc, a nocturnal bird commonly bred by halflings for hunting and guarding.

You take only a few steps before a dog emerges from the ring of caravans and heads determinedly towards your group, "Uh, oh" Caldairra murmurs before ducking behind your group to hide.

Allow the PCs to react. The dog is no threat she is worried about a scolding from her brother who rides it.

As the dog gets closer you see a young male halfling astride its back, "Caldairra, mother has been looking for you!" the halfling rider snaps in an annoyed tone. He turns his attention to your group as Caldairra sheepishly totters over to the male halfling, "I am Wortessel, I hope my sister has not caused you any trouble."

Allow the PCs to introduce themselves and respond before continuing.

"She's always getting into some sort of trouble or another," the halfling says shaking his head, "we have more pressing matters than sorting out your mischievous pranks" he scolds Caldairra.

The PCs may enquire if they wish about the “pressing matters”. Regardless of whether the PCs pick up the obvious hook or not continue with:

Wortessel falls quiet and eyes your group steadily for a moment before he speaks again, “You wouldn’t happen to be skilled in blade would you?” his eye’s fall on your weapons where they rest at your sides.

Allow the PCs to respond before continuing. Encourage any PCs that have played in previous adventures to elaborate about past exploits or perhaps show Wortessel any masterwork weapons they carry. Wortessel looks suitably impressed by any stories of martial exploits.

A smile slowly spreads across the halflings features, “Ha! Perhaps it is fate that occurred today! For we are in need of ones with your skill, you wouldn’t be in need of a job by any chance would you?”

Allow the PCs to respond before continuing. This is clearly there one chance to gain adventuring work. Wortessel however does not answer any further questions other than to say that they seem suitable and if they talk to the “Old One” they most likely will get offered well paid work. Once they agree to talk to the “Old One” paraphrase the following:

“Follow me, you need to see the Old One, she will be pleased to see you” he grins. The halfling promptly pulls Caldairra up behind him on the dog and spurs it toward where the caravan is camped. You are lead across the field and through the organised array of wagons camped about in a loose circle.

The camp consists of about twenty-five colourful halfling sized covered camping wagons complete with doors and windows and large spoked oak wheels. Each wagon is unique, every wagon decorated in a different style to the one next to it.

The halfling directs his dog towards a slightly smaller wagon. Pulling up in front he calls out merrily, “Kinapery! I have people here to see the Old One”. After a moment or two a young extremely attractive halfling woman appears at the door to the wagon.

This is Kinapery. The PCs do not have time to speak with her before she disappears inside the wagon again.

She eyes your group silently for a moment and frowns at Caldairra before disappearing

from sight, returning a few moments later assisting an elderly halfling woman. The two take a comfortable seat on the steps to the wagon and watch your group expectantly with mild curiosity.

Allow the PCs to speak and introduce themselves and enquire about work if they wish.

“I am Yon’cyrra!” When the elderly woman speaks it is with a surprisingly strong voice. “Now, what is it I can do for you?”

If the PCs tell the story of how they rescued Caldairra:

She eyes the male halfling and the young child, “Wortessel, take your sister back to your parents, I will speak to you later Caldairra”.

Caldairra looking suitably chastened and somewhat nervous leaves with Wortessel.

The elderly woman turns her attention back to your group as Wortessel rides away, “I certainly hope young Caldairra has not caused too much trouble, we will of course compensate you for any coin she has cost you.” The woman shakes her head slowly, “Halfling children, if you don’t keep an eye on them there’s no telling what they’ll get up to. “

Yon’cyrra is a kindly women, she has a strong voice full of authority. Kinapery is her granddaughter. She keeps her promise and refunds any money the PCs paid or promised to pay the noble and merchant or any fines they incurred in the rescue. Kinapery is an extremely attractive young halfling woman, she speaks little and is never very far from her grandmother. Yon’cyrra listens carefully to the PCs before speaking.

Once the PCs broach the subject of possible work Yon’cyrra replies:

“I, indeed, do need those who are able to hold their own in battle. You see we came to Marner in order to trade and barter for building supplies for the soon to be built halfling settlement in the lands under the rule of Lord Erik Optwall. We have a long way still to go and, unfortunately, orc and bandit attacks are quite frequent. Our caravan needs more protection than what we alone can give it.

A DC 15 Knowledge (Local – NMR) check reveals that normally halfling caravans in Ratik

can protect themselves quite well. It would appear that this caravan must be carrying something special.

Yon'cyrra continues, "Therefore, if you are interested, the task I am offering you is a simple guard job. If you are as capable as you look, you will have no trouble. Of course, if you have more important matters to attend to you are free to go". The woman leans back against her wagon watching you all with gleaming light brown eyes."

At this point the PCs can ask further questions. If the PCs agree without asking questions or ask the wrong questions find a way to provide the following information anyway.

- **Where are you going?**
We will be travelling over much of Ratik. We have many stops to make between here and Optwall, our eventual resting place. The journey will take a few weeks.
- **You're building a halfling settlement?**
"Yes.." Yon'cyrra eyes you warily, "why? Are you one of those who distrust halflings? Don't halflings also deserve a place to rest?"
- **Can you compensate us for our services? (read this even if the PCs do not ask about pay)**
"Of course, we would not offer a job without pay, a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" Yon'cyrra waves a hand dismissively, "money is not an issue, we will advance you each 50gp now and another 30gp when the job is done".

Unusually for a halfling, Yon'cyrra has no interest in haggling. The fee is quite reasonable and not negotiable. A DC 10 Knowledge (Local – NMR) check reveals the offered pay is several times the going rate for this type of work. Once the PCs have agreed continue with the following,

Yon'cyrra's eyes twinkle with excitement, "Excellent! We shall leave as the first rays of the sun bring light to our journey, showing us the path we must take! You will need to return to your lodgings overnight as we are not prepared for visitors and you likely will need to collect your gear. Be back here at sunrise adventurers, for we must not be late in our departure. If you need supplies for the long journey ahead, I suggest you get them now on your way back to your accommodation, for we will not have time to stop for long once we are on our way."

As agreed Yon'cyrra advances the PCs 50 gp each (this money is part of the gold received for

the adventure and counts towards maximum gold for APL, it is not overcap) The PCs may now buy any extra provisions they might want (see above for what is available in Marner). Remind players that once an adventure starts new PCs are able to buy items like potions that a newly created PC does not normally have access to.

The elderly woman slowly rises to her feet. Kinapery carefully helps Yon'cyrra back into the shade of the wagon.

If the PCs insist on staying at the caravan and camping there overnight in order to get an early start Yon'cyrra apologises for the poor hospitality and finds them a basic campsite not far from the main caravan site. You may need to adjust some of the box text appropriately.

The PCs are free to do what they wish for the rest of the afternoon. They have accommodations at an inn in Marner and if they wish may spend a few hours attempting to gather information about Optwall and the halflings whilst shopping for provisions before returning to their inn.

- DC 5- Talking to a local merchant reveals that Optwall is well to the south of Marner, on the edge of the Loftwood forest and is one of the poorest holdings in Ratik.
- DC 10- While chatting to a tough looking man on the street you mention Optwall and he comments on how Lord Erik Optwall is renowned as a keen huntsman, and likes to see himself as a bit of an adventurer.
- DC 18- A well travelled merchant "knows for a fact" that the Archbaroness Evaleigh is trying to strengthen connections with the refugee halflings in Ratik.
- DC 20- An unhappy younger halfling mutters how the halflings are not represented on the council. Every other major race has a voice he complains, why not us.
- DC 25- A dignified woman has heard word that the Archbaroness is funding the Optwall halfling settlement personally from her own funds.
- DC 28- A slightly inebriated diplomat from the Archbaroness' castle lets it slip that a mysterious underground organisation based in Optwall seems to be trying to sabotage the plans to build a new town there.

Once they have rested overnight, allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the new day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. Continue with the following.

Walking through the gates of Marner as the first golden rays of the sun streak across the sky you can all see the caravan is bustling with activity. As you get closer, the familiar sight of Caldairra runs over excitedly to greet you. She is dragging a shaggy goat-like creature by a tethered rope. The creature has a pink scarf around its neck and looks rather young and not overly keen on being dragged about.

A DC 11 Knowledge (nature) check reveals the goat like creature is a Brixashulty. A DC 16 Knowledge (nature) check reveals Brixashulty are renowned for a tendency to butt when threatened.

“Hello! This is Curls isn’t she pretty?” The child giggles as she gets closer, gesturing to the shaggy animal. She is joined a few moments later by Wortessel, “Ah, good to see you have arrived, The Old One likes punctuality”

Allow the PCs to greet Caldairra and Wortessel if they wish before continuing:

Wortessel grins, “Come on I had better show you around then”. Wortessel turns on his heel and walks toward the rest of the halflings.

If the PCs decide to follow get a marching order for the party.

You are quickly shown the different wagons and introduced to their occupants as they are slowly pulled into a line by teams made of 2-4 of the shaggy goat-like creatures, each creature has a different coloured scarf around its neck.

Wortessel explains that they are Brixashulty, an animal specifically bred by the halflings to be beasts of burden, guard animals and for food and textile uses. He proudly claims they are as sure footed as a mule, loyal as a dog, calm as a milk cow and as tough as a badger. The colourful scarves are used to identify each animal.

The PCs may question Wortessel about the animals if they wish. Use the information in Appendix 1 as a guide. There are in excess of 100 of the animals attached to the caravan and caring for them is a significant amount of work for the halflings.

Just as Wortessel finishes his explanation, Yon’cyrra approaches your group with Kinapery at her side, “Good to

see you are ready on time” Her eyes observe you piercingly, “Wortessel to your position, you too Caldairra” she adds waving a hand towards the caravan. “We are leaving now, we do not waste time that can be spent covering the many miles ahead of us.” She looks at your group “You may assist our scouts or trailers if you wish, but your main task is to guard our supplies at all costs”

Should the PCs show an interest in assisting in scout or trailer duties, Yon’cyrra introduces them to either, Chenmel Littleleaf and Theapenel Earthstrider, the parents of Wortessel and Caldairra if they assisted Caldairra earlier, or to Uradal Suncaller and Arvokin Earthcloak if they did not assist Caldairra.

Chenmel and his handfast partner Theapenel are the scouts for the caravan. At present Theapenel doesn’t assist as much as she use to because she is caring for their infant, Lenakeppa. The scouts role is to scout ahead of the caravan looking for any trouble, wither it be tough terrain or marauding monsters.

Uradal and Arvokin are the trailers; Genarill Moonmeadow the Chief Herder often assists them. The trailers travel behind the caravan helping stragglers and catching animals that have wandered away from the caravan unnoticed. See *DM Aid 1* for full descriptions of these NPCs.

The moment Yon’cyrra finishes, a whistle pierces across the meadow. Turning your attention toward the direction of the whistle you see Brandopee Wildwhisper, the head teamster. “Everyone to their position we’re moving out!” his voice booms across the organised line of wagons. Instantly halflings young and old move to their wagons and the caravan begins moving out.

At this point the PCs should take up there chosen positions within the caravan. It takes nearly half an hour for the full caravan to exit the camping ground and make it out onto the road north. Allow the PCs a DC 15 Spot check. If any PC succeeds paraphrase the following.

After a moment or two you notice a brixashulty staring at your group, this one isn’t pulling a wagon, merely tottering beside the wagon you recognise as belonging to the Old One. It wears no scarf - instead a bell is tied around its neck securely by a piece of velvet red rope.

The brixia is actually Melikalla (a druid spymaster) in her wildshape cover identity. She

is sizing up the newest additions to the caravan - the PCs.

If the PCs asked about the animal they are directed to Genarill Moonmeadow, the Chief Herder. He merely says the creature is "the Old One's favourite brixia, it's like her pet, she calls it 'Scarlett'".

If questioned further about 'Scarlett' he says he finds the animal irritating, because of "how it is hard to keep track of when it keeps wandering off. No rope will hold it, as slippery as an eel, it kept losing its scarf as well so then the Old One gave it that silly bell, the way it is always ringing gets to you after a while, damn annoying it is".

Some PCs may find this brixashultry with the bell suspicious but they can find out little else about "Scarlett" at this stage. Melikalla is an experienced spymaster whose long term cover identity is a wild shaped Brixia. Casual observation is not going to reveal much.

Soon the odd creature is forgotten as Marner fades away behind the procession and you turn your attention to the path ahead.

This is a good time to get the party to announce their normal travelling order and enquire as to what they are carrying with them. Remind the players that medium or heavy loads result in both a movement penalty and limit maximum dexterity bonus to armor class in a similar way to that imposed by wearing medium or heavy armor.

ENCOUNTER 3: A BIRD IN YOUR HAND

Your first day out of Marner sees the caravan take a detour north east towards the Whisperleaf Woods. This ancient remnant of the great northern Timberway Forest lies very close to Marner and has never been logged. Rumours are that loggers attempting to take timber from the Whisperleaf Woods tend to meet with unpleasant accidents.

A DC 10 Knowledge (local – Nyrond) check reveals that the Whisperleaf Woods, not far north of Marner itself, is the home to the last remnants of the wood elves that formerly occupied most of the great Timberway Forest.

Around midday Brandopee calls the caravan to a halt and immediately the halflings scurry around arranging the caravans in a circle, unshackling the Brixia and efficiently establishing the makings of an organised camp.

The PCs may assist set up camp if they wish or set watches. Continue with:

Yon'cyrra signals for you to join her and Kinapery. "Time to start earning your keep adventurers," she says, "The caravan will be setting up camp here in land under the control of Lord Abram of House Cormik. Meanwhile, I will be making a short excursion into the elven controlled Whisperleaf Woods and will need an escort. The elves are no threat to us but there are still wild beasts to worry about. We should be back by nightfall."

Confirm the party marching order and have them make regular Spot and listen checks.

After a few hours travel you notice the woods becoming quite dense and progress is becoming difficult. You have the uneasy feeling you are being watched. Yon'cyrra is mounted and seems to be coping with the assistance of Kinapery but she is clearly finding the journey a strain.

If the PCs offer to assist Yon'cyrra she thanks them but say she is "not so old she cannot cope with a ride in the forest".

Suddenly Yon'cyrra calls you to a halt. "This is it" she says. As you look around you cannot see any difference between this overgrown section of the woods and any other part of the undergrowth you have struggled through all afternoon.

If the PCs think to try and Spot, allow a DC 35 Spot check to see "something out of the corner of your eye move in the undergrowth".

Yon'cyrra holds up her hand as if in greeting and speaks "Nielen sofema iltem veris zel heri iaa".

The phrase is a common elven saying. PCs that speak elven are able to translate it as "Never lament that you live in stern days." Any PCs that are actually of Elven descent also immediately realise Yon'cyrra is a Ruathan or "Elf Friend" (The phrase she spoke incorporated a sonic language dependant spell like ability that identifies her magically as a Ruathar to all elves).

Suddenly four wood elves step forward from the shadows no more than 20' from where you stand. You could swear they were not there just a moment ago. They seem amused by the slightly startled looks of you and your companions. "Greetings elf-friend" one of

them says to Yon'cyrra, they nod at Kinapery, "we have been walking with you for several hours, what brings you into our domain?" The elf looks towards your group, "... and who are these others with you?"

The phrase in elven has identified Yon'cyrra as an "elf friend" or Ruathar. She has never met these particular elves before but her instantly recognisable status as a Ruathar means they automatically trust her.

If the PCs ask, she simply states she did a "great favour" for some elves a very very long time ago (130 years ago in fact) and they honoured her with this title. She does not go into details saying now is not the time for "old stories from times best forgotten". Any elven PCs are aware that a Ruathan has a longer lifespan than normal for their race which means Yon'cyrra is a very old halfling indeed.

Part of Yon'cyrra's current mission is to discreetly deliver correspondence, small packages and in some cases money, to various contacts for the Archbaroness Evaleigh. The PCs are unaware of this second mission at this stage. This encounter is mission critical for that second mission.

Although this is not meant to be a combat encounter feel free to improvise if any of the PCs are exceptionally rude to the elves. The elves are all 8th level rangers and carry potions of invisibility. If conflict ensues the elves simply disappear and this encounter should be noted as a critical failure for the overall adventure tally. Note that if the party accrues 3 such critical failures over the course of the adventure the halflings immediately dismiss the PCs and proceed without them. The adventure is finished.

Assuming commonsense prevails and the PCs stay in the background continue with:

"These fine adventurers are just my escort in case of problems on the road, one can never be too careful. I give you my word they are trustworthy," Yon'cyrra continues, "and as for me and my granddaughter, we are simply passing on something from a mutual friend." At which point she holds out a small parcel which the elf takes with a nod.

Allow a DC 20 Spot check to notice a wax seal on the package. If any PC succeeds at spotting the seal allow (that PC only) a further DC 15 Knowledge (nobility and royalty check) to reveal the seal belongs to Archbaroness Evaleigh.

"Our thanks elf- friend and I am honoured to make your acquaintance." the elf says. He looks at your group (making particular note of any elves in the party) and says "You all

honour us greatly escorting this one here," nodding to Yon'cyrra before fading back into the shadows as quickly as he appeared.

The elves have made a note of the PCs. Any PCs that were civil to the elves are now eligible for the **Known to the Whisperleaf Elves** favour on the adventure record.

Yon'cyrra and Kinapery immediately head back in the direction you came. The encounter with the elves has made most of you more cautious and even though the trip back is uneventful it is with relief that you finally leave the Whisperleaf Wood and move into more open country.

Yon'cyrra refuses at this stage say anything about the nature of the delivery other than she has agreed to drop off a few items "as a favour for an old friend". If a mention is made of Evaleigh's seal on the package she just replies, "The Archbaroness? I find that unlikely." and refuse to discuss the matter further, making it clear it is none of the PCs business.

Upon arrival back at the caravan you find the camp a hive of activity. The caravans have been arranged loosely in a circle with a number of campfires set up in the centre. There is the tantalising aroma of much food cooking. The halflings have set up stalls around the inner circle next to the caravans and are trading energetically with what appears to be every farmer and villager within 20 miles. The customers appear mainly Oeridian though the occasional shock of blonde or reddish hair and light blue eyes reveals the occasional touch of Suel heritage even this far south.

With a DC 8 Knowledge (local – Nyronnd) , DC 10 Knowledge (history) or DC 10 Bardic Knowledge check the PCs remember that whilst the human population of Ratik is mainly Oeridian the barbarian Schnai and Fruztii tribes to the north are of Suel descent.

"We always come up this way to trade for our supplies before heading south" Yon'cyrra says, "they supply much fresher foodstuffs then we can get in Marner and usually at a fraction of the Marner price as well."

Yon'cyrra is saving a substantial amount by avoiding the combination of the Marner merchants' mark-up as well as Archbaroness Evaleigh's official tax and the additional "unofficial" tithe halflings in Marner pay to the local Marner shadow clan.

Allow the PCs to visit the market and interact with the various stallholders and customers if they wish. They may purchase Players Handbook items up to 50 gp in value as well as assorted souvenir halfling made trinkets and jewellery worth a few silver (feel free to improvise about the number and types of available trinkets). If they wish they may also spend a few hours gathering information:

DC 5 Your enquiries reveal the Cormik shipyards are the main centre of activity. The Cormik population is largely decentralized because of the irregular landscape, so there are really no other places of particular interest.

DC 10 A stout farmer's wife tells you that young Lord Aramson Cormik son of the ruling Lord Abrom Cormik has a reputation as a devil-may-care womanizer. He is, to all appearances, too concerned with fine wine and carousing to care about the welfare of his family or about politics.

DC 15 Abroms' daughter Lady Remorria Bazzik-Cormik married young to an affluent merchant family and ever since taking on her husband's name has played very little part in noble affairs.

DC 20 Rumour has it that the Archbaroness is somewhat concerned about the secession of the Barony in Cormik. Abrom is not getting any younger and neither of his children meets her approval.

Give any PCs that stated they were keeping an active watch a DC 10 Spot check to notice a group of riders approaching the market area and a DC 10 Knowledge Nobility and Royalty check or DC 15 Knowledge (local - Nyron) check to recognise the livery as that of House Cormik.

If any PC successfully notices their approach, read the following,

The riders stop discretely about 50' away from the market area and you notice Yon'cyrra and Kinapery hastily walking out to greet them. A rider dismounts and the two groups converse briefly before Yon'cyrra hands something to the rider and the two groups go their separate ways, Yon'cyrra and Kinapery heading to the wagons and the riders back the way they came.

An active DC 20 Spot check (the PCs need to request this) reveals the package is a similar size colour and shape to the one passed on to the elves. If no PC notices the riders read the following:

You suddenly become aware that whilst you were distracted by the markets, Yon'cyrra and Kinapery has gone missing and it is with relief you finally spot them re-entering the camp, Kinapery supporting Yon'cyrra who leans on her as she walks.

Yon'cyrra of course tells the PCs it is none of their business if they question her or Kinapery on where they have been.

As evening falls the market closes down for the night. As this is the PCs first evening on watch have the PCs decide whether they take turns standing watch or all just sleep. The halflings set their own watches every night. As the caravans are fully occupied by their halfling owners (and are also clearly too small for medium PCs) the PCs must camp out by one of the campfires or use their own tents or wagons should they own such things.

If the PCs stand watch have them make some Spot and Listen checks over the evening but nothing eventful happens.

The next morning allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals and then read the following:

Eventually it is morning and after a typically sumptuous halfling multiple-course cooked breakfast the caravan breaks camp and winds northwards.

The PCs have a pleasant but uneventful day as the caravan makes it way northwards. If time permits have them make occasional Spot and Listen checks but all they find is the occasional cow or distant bird.

Eventually, with evening fast approaching, Brandopee Wildwhisper calls the caravan to a halt. "We are on the edge of the great northern Timberway Forest within the bounds of House Abonhoth land," he informs you, "three of the great houses of Ratik, House Abonhoth, House Keth and House Ulthek all lie within the bounds of the Timberway. Unfortunately we do not have time this trip to enjoy the hospitality of Lord Thellon of Abonhoth so we will camp here and wait for the riders from the North to meet us."

The PCs may assist the halflings or set watches as they see fit. Make a point of asking what their party order is and where they are positioned in camp to keep them on their toes.

The halflings quickly make camp and set fires. The camp is, once again, a bustle of efficient activity. Soon the aroma of hearty halfling cooking wafts on the evening breeze and halfling children run around the camp playing amongst the brixashulty and climbing over the wagons.

Allow any PCs on watch to make DC 10 Spot checks to identify a group of riders approaching from the North. PCs that succeed on the Spot check may make a DC 10 Knowledge Nobility and Royalty or DC 15 Knowledge (local - Nyrond) check to recognise the livery of house Abonhoth.

In the twilight, approaching down the road from the north, you see several riders moving at a steady pace towards the encampment. They draw to a halt about 50' from the encampment and one raises a hand in greeting, "Long live the Archbaroness" he calls "... and greetings and salutations from my liege the Lord Thellon of Abonhoth".

The caravan is waiting for the riders in order to pass on yet another despatch from the arch baroness. If the PCs wish to buff, take defensive positions or interact in some other way at this stage they may.

Yon'cyrra, with Kinapery's assistance, steps out from the circle of wagons and raises her hand in a similar fashion, "Well met House Abonhoth, you may enter and avail yourselves of our hospitality." The riders enter the camp and are led to a fire where they are quickly served large helpings of hearty broth and fresh baked bread. Brandopee signals a couple of younger halflings who quickly lead the riders' mounts away to be watered and fed.

Allow the PCs to interact with the riders if they wish. The riders just have general information about the goings on in house Abonhoth and the Timberway. They mention they have heard some rumours about unusual events in the Timberway but do not have any specific information. If pressed they just say it may be just gossip but people are talking about "very strange" things happening in the forest to the north. Feel free to mention a Kraken. There are always rumours of Kraken in Ratik. Even inland.

Yon'cyrra disappears into her caravan for a while and emerges just as the riders are finishing their meals holding a large dispatch bag. "Deliver this with haste to your Lord for me," she says. The riders nod, take the bag

thanking the halflings for their hospitality, mount their horses and head back up the road they appeared down less than an hour before.

Nothing else of importance happens and night comes without incident. At this stage the PCs may set watches for the night if they wish. Have them make Spot and Listen checks but all they hear or see is the occasional wild animal moving about in the forest. Eventually morning arrives and soon breakfast is cooking.

You wake to the familiar aroma of bacon eggs and freshly cooked mushrooms cooking on an open fire. A mature halfling woman with black eyes and dark brown hair approaches with plates laden with food.

The PCs recognise Reendalla Glittersun the caravan cook and handfast partner to head teamster Brandopee Wildwhisper. Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals.

"Eat up adventurers!", Reendalla, the caravan cook, says cheerfully as she passes you plates full of hearty delicious smelling food, "there is plenty more if you want seconds or even thirds". Looking at the huge plates piled with food one would think it impossible to eat seconds, but the food is so delicious it seems most of you cannot help going back for more.

The PCs may roleplay over breakfast, eating or not eating as they see fit. The more paranoia amongst them may set watches if they wish.

Most of you are just finishing up your second serving and some thinking about thirds when Yon'cyrra comes up to you, Kinapery at her side as usual. "Good morning to you" she says with a warm and gentle smile upon her face, "and a very fine morning it is indeed. I hope you are all in good form this morning as I have a very interesting little task for you all today".

At this point if the PCs interrupt with questions she just gives them a knowing smile and hold up a single finger implying they should wait.

She pauses, turns and calls out to Caldairra who is across the other side of the encampment feeding an unusual looking grey bird. "Caldairra, bring that daft bird over here please, and make it quick child we haven't got all day".

Allow the PCs to react. They easily spot Caldairra approaching with a hooded bird but can not make out details of the bird (which is covered) until she is much closer.

Yon'cyrra waits for Caldairra who is heading toward your group with a smoky grey bird the size of a house cat perched on a heavy leather falconer's glove that extends most of the way up Caldairra's arm. Caldairra removes a leather hood from the head of the unusual bird and you notice distinctive long bristles that resemble cat's whiskers and a pair of eyes that peer at you with a predatory expression. You get the impression if you were to threaten Caldairra in any fashion you would have an unpleasant altercation with a set of dagger sharp talons.

A DC 11 Knowledge (nature) check reveals the bird is a chordevoc, a nocturnal bird commonly bred by halflings for hunting. They are quite valuable. A DC 25 Knowledge (nature) check reveals this particular chordevoc is far tougher than normal for the species. The PCs have no way of knowing at this stage that this is Essel, the animal companion of Melikalla, (the druid spymaster disguised as a brixashulty). While Melikalla is in brixia form she has no tasks for the bird so Essel hangs around Caldairra, partly because of her obvious love for animals but it also doesn't mind the treats it often gets from the young girl.

"This is a chordevoc", Yon'cyrra says "as you may or may not be aware, they are highly valued by halflings as sporting birds. Wild chordevoc are particularly hard to come by and especially treasured and it so happens that Chenmel Littleleaf, one of our scouts, spotted a breeding pair hunting not far from here a little earlier this morning."

A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check reveals that generally Chordevocs found in the wild tend to be escaped hunting birds and to find a pair actually breeding in the wild is very unusual.

"Genuine wild chordevoc chicks from the Ratikan wilderness would make an exceptional gift to present the leaders of the Optwall refugees", she continues, "This is far too good an opportunity to pass up."

Allow the PCs to discuss the matter. If they feel the task is beneath them point out that these are traditionally hunting birds and whilst small can actually be quite dangerous. Note this encounter is not mission critical and entirely optional. The PCs can ignore or fail this encounter without

negative consequences for the overall mission (they of course miss out on rewards).

If the PCs accept paraphrase the following:

Yon'cyrra continues, "Chenmel can direct you to the area where the birds were spotted hunting and he will provide you with nets and a couple of large sacks to assist you in your capture efforts. Capture the older birds if possible but what I am really after is the chordevoc chicks, which at this time of year should be just about ready to fly. I can promise you a good reward if you return with some healthy chicks."

If the PC's enquire she advises them she is willing to pay 50% of the Marner market price for each healthy chordevoc chick brought to her (12.5 gold per chick per PC).

At this point the PC's should go in search of Chenmel. They eventually find him near his caravan washing and grooming his riding dog.

You find Chenmel with his shirt off and brush in hand grooming his riding dog outside the caravan he shares with his handfast partner, and fellow scout, Theapenel Earthstrider. A well muscled handsome middle-aged halfling, his eyes and hair are black. "Greetings adventurers" Chenmel calls out as you walk up to him. "I presume you have come to ask about those chordevoc"

Allow the PC's to reply before proceeding. Paraphrase the following to fit with the PC's questions.

Chenmel finishes brushing the dog, which is clearly enjoying itself, and grabs a towel to dry his hands. "I spotted a fine breeding pair just a few miles north of here, they must have escaped from a caravan because they are certainly not native to this part of Ratik," he says, "they were hunting for small game which implies they have a good clutch of hungry chicks back at the nest." Chenmel points to a pile of equipment laid out neatly under a tree nearby, "Here! You will need to borrow this gear."

The PCs find a 100' length of knotted silk rope with a grapple attached, 10 pitons, a climbing kit, 2 pairs of heavy elbow length protective gloves, 2 nets (only useable by small PC's as the birds are tiny), 4 tanglefoot bags, 4 empty sacks.

"The chicks will be in a high nest," Chenmel explains, "hence the climbing gear. The parents will avoid you whilst you stay earthbound but once you start to climb

towards the nest they are sure to attack you. That's when the nets and tanglefoot bags will come in handy. Just do not throw too early wait till they are close before throwing. With luck you can bring down the adult birds without injuring them."

Chenmel gives the PCs directions to where he found the birds. If any PC has track allow them to make a DC 10 Track check to find the right area. Otherwise have them wander about a bit and seem lost before reading the following.

Ahead of you is a low valley that sounds precisely like the one Chenmel described. You recognise the jagged rocky outcrop on the southern side of the river which is bubbling merrily over a series of small rapids just like the ones he told you about.

At this point have the PCs make a DC 15 Spot check to notice some high flying birds. Should they fail allow them to explore some of the landmarks and try again. If after several retries (GM discretion as to how many retries are allowed) they all continue to fail (they can take 10 if they wish) they just have to return empty handed. Otherwise on a successful check paraphrase the following:

In the distance, high above the valley, you glimpse a couple of small specks circling some low bushes near a tall solitary pine. Suddenly one of the specks plummets towards the ground before rising again and climbing slowly towards the top of the lone tree. You think you may have just found what you were looking for.

The PCs are a few minutes walk from the nest area. Allow them to make any plans and decide how they are going to approach the target area. Once they approach continue with:

It is clear that you have found the right spot. On a small stony hillock about 200' from you, in the centre of a grassy clearing, stands a single very ancient looking pine tree almost 100' tall. It is swaying in the stiff breeze. A number of fallen tree limbs lie scattered beneath the tree, presumably the result of a recent storm.

Allow the PCs to examine the tree as they approach. It is clearly quite old and has taken a bit of damage recently as evidenced by the debris scattered around the clearing.

About two thirds of the way up the tree, hidden among the leaves and branches, you can just make out a large nest made of sticks and bracken. What is clearly an adult

chordevoc perches beside it. As you watch, a second chordevoc swoops down and lands neatly beside the first and drops something into the nest.

The nest is 70ft off the ground. As Chenmel predicted the chordevoc does not attack the PCs unless they try and climb the tree. The current range to the chordevoc, should any PC decide to shoot, is 250' (taking into account the elevated position). The chordevoc have partial cover and disappear into full cover once a shot is fired. Regardless, once the PCs attempt to move closer the chordevoc hide in full cover and keep an eye on proceedings until someone begins to climb the tree.

APL 2 (EL 1)

Chordevoc (2): hp 5, 5; *Races of the Wild* 188. Appendix 1.

Tactics: The chordevoc stay out of sight until the PCs try and climb the tree. Climbing the tree means that on a successful Climb check the PC can progress up the tree at one quarter of their normal speed. A DC 15 Climb check is required to directly climb the tree. If the PCs think to lodge the grapple and rope high enough in the tree they can make a reduced DC 0 Climb check.

The PCs need both hands to climb, cannot use any type of shield and lose any dexterity bonus to AC while climbing. They cannot make attacks of opportunity while climbing. Should a PC stop climbing they must still hold on with at least one hand.

The chordevoc use fly by attacks to harass any PC that is more than 5' off the ground and hence can no longer make attacks of opportunity. Any time a PC takes damage they must make a Climb check (DC as specified above) or fall and take damage dependant on their current height. If the PCs do not think to do so, remind them they can hold an action to attack or throw a tanglefoot bag at a bird once it comes in range.

Development: The chordevoc should not present a serious danger to the PC's. They may however distract the party from the real danger the rotten tree limbs.

Once the first PC reaches the 10' mark they encounter the first rotten tree limb. This limb is easy to find with a DC 5 active Search by a climbing PC and can be avoided once found and does no damage. It merely serves to warn the PCs to watch out for the second rotten limb which occurs higher up the tree. If the PCs do not think to search once they begin to climb read the following.

Suddenly with a loud snap a massive tree limb breaks away from the tree and crashes to the ground dragging you with it and narrowly missing your companions below. You finish up sliding ignominiously to the bottom of the tree and landing on your butt with a thump to the amusement of your companions.

No damage done except to pride but this sets the scene for the second limb which is encountered when a PC passes the 30' mark. Allow appropriate circumstance bonuses to search checks and reflex saves for the second trap depending on what precautions the PCs have taken to avoid further falling limbs.

APL 2: (EL 4)

Falling Limb Trap: CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; DC 16 reflex save avoids; 30ft (3d6 fall), multiple targets (first target in each of two adjacent squares); Search DC 16; Disable Device DC 25, Market Price 1700 gp

Tactics: If the trap is triggered the PC (and possibly one other random PC if there are any other PCs within 5' of the first PC at the time) knocked backwards and falls 30' to the forest floor below the tree. Being a large rotten limb the "trap" is difficult to disable but canny PCs that detect the limb realise they can simply set it off in some safe fashion from a distance.

Development: Once this second rotten limb is surmounted the PCs are only 20' from their goal, the nest itself.

Once the PCs begin to climb again read the following:

The higher you climb the more the tree is creaking and groaning until just below the nest it has developed quite a sway moving 10' or more from side to side in the gusts of wind that are buffeting it. Just above your position is the chordevoc nest itself. If you can just work out how to get around this last tangle of limbs you will finally be able to collect any chicks and get yourself down from this tree.

Allow the PCs to make any strategies they wish to get up the last few feet. They can use ropes and grapples or just hack their way through. Any reasonable plan works. As before, it is a DC 0 Climb check if they are using the supplied rope or a DC 15 Climb check if they have decided to simply climb the tree directly.

Suddenly you are there. Right in front of you lays a large nest of sticks bracken and old feathers and peering at you quizzically with huge innocent light green eyes are six of the cutest fluffiest grey baby birds you have ever seen. Suddenly a massive gust of wind shakes the tree and you lose your footing.

Have any climbing PCs in the vicinity of the nest and not roped to the tree make a DC 25 Balance check and congratulate anyone that makes this check. For those that failed read aloud:

Your heart is in your mouth as you believe you are about to be flung out of the tree but instead you find yourself flung sideways into a tangle of limbs near the trunk. The wind seems to abate and you take the opportunity to try and capture the chicks.

Providing the PCs had the sense to bring leather gloves and a sack up with them it's a relatively straight forward matter to pick up the six chordevoc chicks and put them in the sack without injuring them. If the PCs did not bring the sack and gloves up the tree they need to fetch them or have someone climb up with them.

Once the PCs have secured the chicks (and adult birds if they managed to catch them) they should return with them to Yon'cyrra as soon as possible. If the PCs have successfully captured the chicks read the following.

You return to the caravan with your prizes. Yon'cyrra is very pleased to see the clutch, "Six healthy chicks! Well done adventurers. At the next major town, I will arrange to have your reward waiting for you. Now rest up while you can, for tomorrow we head north for Frostcrown and Orokeep.

As agreed Yon'cyrra pays each of the PCs a reward of 75 gold (12.5 gold for each chick) once they reach the dwarven town of Frostcrown.

ENCOUNTER 4: ON THE ROAD AGAIN

It is morning again. Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals.

The next section up to and including Players Handout 2 is intended mainly for players who are unfamiliar with northern Ratik and the great houses. Note that some players may have

played a lot of Ratik modules and still be unfamiliar with Northern Ratik.

As the sun's golden rays streak across the sky slowly lighting the plains of northern Ratik, the halfling caravan continues its steady procession westwards away from the coast and toward the majestic Raker Mountains and the dwelling place of the northernmost dwarven clan, House Ukaloa.

Nothing of interest happens however be sure to ask the PCs for party marching order and have them make Spot checks if they are working with the scouts. If time permits have them place themselves on the battle map just to increase the tension.

The day passes without incident, leaving plenty of time for relaxing and enjoying the majestic view of the Rakers far ahead, framed against the clear blue sky.

The caravan is moving through Cormik territory passing small holdings, farms and hamlets. If time permits role play a few small villages where the halflings stop in and sell a few items, repair a pot or two and exchange information with the locals. Generally the visit of this halfling caravan is very well received by these isolated villagers.

Just as the sun begins to settle over the Rakers to the west, Brandopee calls the caravan to a halt so that they may rest before continuing onward to clan Ukaloa the next day. Everyone sets about their appointed tasks individually without needing orders. Reendalla starts a small fire, adding juicy, plump vegetables to a pot.

Ask the PCs what they are doing. As usual they may stand guard or assist the halflings or wander off to do whatever takes their fancy.

Before long Kinapery appears and approaches your group looking a bit unsure, "Adventurers could I trouble you for a bit of assistance? It is my duty to ensure the children get their daily teachings whilst on this journey; however they are not very pleased about this arrangement and have scampered off to hide. They believe they can get out of their teachings in this manner, could you help me find them - if it is not too much to ask?"

The PCs can now decide whether to lend Kinapery a hand finding the mischievous halfling children. The children have hidden around the

camp site – though few have hidden very well. Improvise some unusual or amusing hiding places. There are about ten children in all (if the PCs have very good Spot modifiers increase this to 20 children).

If the PCs decide to help have them roll DC 11 Spot checks and for every number they get above ten, they find a child, for example, if a PC rolls a fifteen, they find five of the children. If the PCs are rather unlucky in their rolls or decline to help have Kinapery find the rest of the children.

Feel free to give descriptions for the finding of the children, for example, a child hiding under a wagon, in a barrel or up a nearby tree. Try to make it fun. Kinapery doesn't mind if the PCs refuse to help. If any PC offers to help with the teachings (for example a bard) she happily accepts.

At this point proceed to the material in DM Aid 2. This material has been designed to provide the basis of a fun role-play lesson on the politics of northern Ratik. This section is entirely optional. If you are confident the PCs are reasonably familiar with northern Ratik this material may be skimmed or skipped entirely.

On the other hand if the PCs seem particularly unfamiliar with Ratik improvise and add in extra questions and elaborate on the answers.

Once the lesson is complete continue:

With the teachings for the day done, the sun quickly sets behind the distant mountains sending the expansive plains of Ratik into darkness, the large bonfire casting dancing shadows on the ring of caravans carefully positioned around the glowing, orange flames. Halflings all around are partaking in festivities, "Come on adventurers! We may work hard but we play even harder" Wortessel laughs as he joins the group of halflings dancing around the fire.

This is an opportunity for any bards (or PCs with tumble) to role-play and perform. Have the halflings dance with the PCs energetically and applaud any particularly impressive performances by the PCs.

A group of halflings set to one side plays a light-hearted jig, and soon the air is filled with the sound of fiddles, drums and laughing voices. Ale, Meade and Rum is passed around, and even Yon'cyrra gently claps her hands along with the few halflings who are on watch and hence not dancing or playing. The night is one of festivities and happiness, and whatever your deeds, you fall asleep exhausted, yet happy.

Pick out a PC that showed a liking towards the brixas, or a PC that is obviously druid or ranger. If none of the above fit select a PC that showed more kindness to Kinapery or Yon'cyrra, than the rest of the party. Read the following to the selected PC.

You are enjoying a peaceful sleep after the exertions of the previous night when you become aware of a tugging at your tunic. Annoyed at being disturbed from your rejuvenating slumber you open your eyes to see a brixas tugging most tenaciously at the hem of your tunic, unlike the others you have previously seen, this one doesn't wear a scarf, instead a single bell is tied around its neck by a piece of red velvet rope. It is still dark but there is the barest sign of approaching sunrise on the horizon to the east.

Let the PC react. The brixas is Melikalla, a halfling spymaster/druid in wildshape. She is aware that the Optwall halflings have just released the caravan's brixas and that Caldairra has gone after them. Melikalla doesn't wish to ruin her cover so soon, which is why she has not alerted any of the other halflings who are all in their wagons. In addition, the PCs are sleeping by the remains of the bonfire and as such are easier to warn.

Melikalla persists until either the chosen PC or another follows her to where the brixas were placed in their temporary stock yard. Once the PCs get here, Melikalla walks away discreetly without attracting attention.

The PC/s immediately notice that the stock yard has been destroyed and many of the brixas are gone. Once they've seen this continue with:

A frantic cry draws your attention away from the ruined sight of the temporary stockyard. Running toward you from the camp site is a male halfling, you vaguely remember him as Chenmel, the father of Wortessel and Caldairra. Following behind him are Wortessel and a halfling woman carrying an infant, "You! Adventurers! Please help us! Caldairra is missing!" Chenmel looks at the ruined stockyard, "She is very fond of the brixas, she must have went after them!"

Allow the PCs to interact with Caldairra's parents. They tell the PCs they woke up to find Caldairra missing from her bed and came looking for assistance in finding her. Now they have discovered the Brixas were loose and immediately realise where she must have gone. They tell the PCs that Caldairra has a close

connection with the brixashulty and probably would have gone to investigate unusual sounds from the stockade that most others would have ignored.

Yon'cyrra walks over a grave expression on her face, "The missing brixas are team leaders, we cannot continue without those brixas and of course Caldairra must be returned safely, will you go? We have to mend the damage done to other parts of the caravan"

Clearly whoever set the Brixas loose knew which ones were important and would be missed. The Optwall halflings have also done some minor sabotage. Fortunately Melikalla's intervention by waking the adventurers interrupted them before too much damage was done, but the caravan halflings need to repair the damage immediately and need the PCs to recover the missing Brixas and Caldairra.

The halfling woman holding the infant turns toward you, her eyes have tears pricking at the corners of her eyes, "Please... I beg you... find my little Caldairra... find my daughter... if anything were to happen..." her voice trails off. Chenmel puts a comforting arm around his handfast partner, as the group looks at you pleadingly.

There is always the chance the PCs refuse to go after Caldairra. If this happens, Chenmel and Wortessel find her and the brixas, but it is too late. Caldairra dies, the halflings attitude changes to unfriendly, the PCs lose the experience for the toad encounter and the brixas encounter and they have to forfeit 2 extra time units for the wait while Caldairra is raised. The missing Brixashulty eventually are rounded up and the damage to the wagons repaired. Refusing to accept this mission counts as a critical failure (due to the delay that results). If the PCs have a total of three critical failures, the adventure is over for them.

Yon'cyrra looks at your group. "Bring Caldairra back to us safely, and if you find those missing brixashulties do no lethal harm to them or they will become useless to us as work animals"

Any lethal damage to the missing brixas by the PCs (even if later healed) traumatises them and makes them impossible to work with reliably. This is because the brixas have learnt to associate the PCs with the halflings and see any damage done by the PCs as coming from the halflings.

ENCOUNTER 5: TOAD WITH NO MANNERS

If any PC can Track allow them to make a DC 5 Track check to spot the path which the Brixas have escaped down. If no PC has the ability to track then Chenmel points them the right way commenting on how "he wishes he were allowed to come".

After following the brixasized hoof prints in the early morning dew, you find a small track leading into some slightly thicker brush. The track is narrow and clearly only used by some form of small animal. You are constantly brushing aside low branches and weaving around rocks and obstructions. Occasionally you even find yourself wading through water.

Give the PCs the opportunity to come up with strategies to overcome this environmental problem.

Suddenly as you round yet another turn in the winding track you find yourself entering a rough clearing. Across the clearing no more than 50' from where you now stand you spot Caldairra attempting to use a makeshift staff to fend off a sizable feral toad like creature.

A DC 14 Knowledge (nature) reveals it as a Dire Toad with a poisonous bite. DC 19 Knowledge (nature) to recall it grapples with its tongue and swallows creatures that are smaller than it whole.

The toad is only medium sized but it is much larger than her and she is having problems keeping it away. Caldairra also appears very unsteady on her feet and it seems like something is wrong with her. Blood drips from a nasty gash on her left arm as she holds the makeshift staff in front of her with both hands.

Allow the PCs a DC 10 Heal check to realise that Caldairra has been poisoned by the toad and may shortly take another d6 points of secondary constitution damage.

As you watch the creatures tongue whips out from nearly 10' away and it barely misses with its viscous lash.

The PCs must intervene immediately or the creature's next action is an attempt to grapple Caldairra with its tongue and then swallow her whole the round after that. If she is swallowed

she does not survive. This encounter is mission critical and failure may have consequences for the PCs.

Caldairra has accidentally disturbed the toad in its nest and its attitude to her is hostile. It is however indifferent to the PCs. At this early stage a DC 15 Wild Empathy check (DC 5 plus a 10 penalty for a rushed check) allows the PCs to herd the toad away from her successfully.

If the PCs are not able to make the wild empathy check and fail to come up with any other ingenuous plans to distract or drive away the toad (rushing it while waving flaming torches would drive it away for example) then they probably have to resort to combat. As both the PCs and the Toad are aware of each other there is no surprise round.

APL 2 (EL 3)

Dire Toad: medium size animal; hp 26; Appendix 1.

Tactics: Regardless of the PCs actions the Dire Toad always takes its prepared action and attempt to grapple Caldairra with its ranged tongue attack in the first round of initiative.

Caldairra is a frightened halfling child. She has a touch AC of 8 and strength of 6 (resulting in an opposed grapple of -8 against the toad's grapple of +3 when taking into account her small size and the fact she counts as frightened)

The toad probably succeeds at the grapple attempt however if the PCs attack or take any other distracting action in the first round at all it reacts by releasing Caldairra at the beginning of the second round as a free action. It instead attempts to bite and poison the most threatening PC. If the PCs do not act it attacks Caldairra again and tries another grapple, or if has already achieved a grapple it attempts to swallow Caldairra in the second round.

The toad can only grapple and swallow creatures smaller than medium. In addition, this particular toad does not attempt to grapple and swallow an enemy whilst it has more than one opponent in sight as it does not grapple while it feels threatened. If it has multiple opponents it limits its attacks to bite attacks only, relying on the bite damage and poison to protect itself.

If at any stage there is only one single small sized PC left (the others having run away, hidden or fallen unconscious) the toad changes tactics and only then begins attempting ranged tongue attacks and grapple/swallows. Remember the Dire Toad can only swallow creatures at least one size smaller than itself.

Treasure: The Dire Toad does not have any treasure.

Development: If Caldairra dies the halflings retrieve the body, call in favours and pay to have her immediately raised (as she is greatly loved by all in the caravan) however they are not pleased with the PCs for letting her face this trauma. The PCs fail the encounter and receive no XP if Caldairra dies. The caravan also does not move forward until Caldairra is raised costing the PCs 2 extra time units.

If Caldairra doesn't survive then the PCs also have to track down the brixas by themselves with a track DC (12). Any PC with the Track skill can take 10, if they choose. If no PC can Track, then they miss the encounter 'Brixa Island'. Instead Chenmel, Wortessel and Genarill find the missing brixa.

Furthermore, if Caldairra dies this encounter should be noted as a critical failure for the overall mission. Remember that if the party accrues 3 such critical failures the halflings immediately dismiss them and proceed without them and the adventure is finished.

If Caldairra is rescued the general attitude of the Halflings, upon the PCs return, changes from "friendly" to "helpful". The halflings reward the PCs with temporary loans of items and potions for use later during the adventure. Providing Caldairra was rescued, the halflings also provide any PC's who was poisoned by the toad with lesser restorations free of charge.

Caldairra is able to tell the PCs the direction she saw the brixa run in, she is rather sheepish about her rash actions but worried about the brixa. With Caldairra's assistance the PCs can follow the Brixas without needing to track.

ENCOUNTER 6: BRIXA ISLAND

The following encounter only occurs if the PCs save Caldairra or are able to track the Brixa without her.

Finally your group has located the missing brixashulty. Ahead of you lies a wide but relatively shallow creek seemingly about two feet deep. In the middle of the creek is a rocky island bare except for a single gnarled and twisted tree and four brixashulty who are staring at you and blinking with the vacant expression only sheep and goats can manage.

Allow the PCs a DC 5 Spot check to identify the four brixashulty and notice there are more brixashulty across the creek.

Judging from the scarves around their necks you can identify Munches, Curls, Buck and

Hobbles on the island along with half a dozen other, less familiar, brixashulty across the creek. It seems likely that if you capture the closest four brixashulty on the island and lead them home the other brixashulty will follow them.

The PCs need to capture the four closer "named" brixashulty. These named brixas are the missing team leaders and if the PC capture these four and lead them home the others follow.

The problem for the PC's is capturing the brixashulty intact without being butted ignominiously into the water and potentially drowning. The PCs are not permitted by the halflings to do any lethal damage to the animals. Note that this is NOT a "mission critical" mission.

Once a brixashulty is "leashed" as described below it calmly allows itself to be led away but until that occurs they resist capture. Successfully leashing a brixashulty requires a DC 10 Use Rope check to tie a suitable lasso. This must be followed by a ranged touch attack (range increment 5') to lasso the brixashulty and finally an opposed strength check to restrain the animal.

Alternatively the PC's can subdue the brixashulty with non lethal damage, trip them with bolas or use nets and tangle foot bags. Any technique that allows the PC to place a leash on the brixashulty without causing lethal damage them is acceptable.

If Caldairra is present she laughs hysterically at the PCs efforts to tame the goats particularly if any of them are butted into the creek.

APL 2 (EL 4)

Brixashulty (4): hp 15; Appendix 1.

Tactics:

The brixashulties have retreated to the island as a defensive measure and do their best to keep anyone off the island. Any time a PC steps onto the island a brixashulty attacks and if successful, attempts to use its Knockback ability to push the PC back off the island. This may be dangerous if the PC is standing near the edge of the water and is knocked unconscious. Only one brixashulty attacks any one PC at a time. The brixashulties refuse to leave the island of their own volition.

Treasure:

The brixashulties have no treasure.

Development:

This is not a critical encounter. Failure to retrieve the brixashulties does not count towards failure of the overall mission.

The PCs however only receive experience if they successfully bring back all 4 brixashulties unharmed. They are not permitted to do any lethal damage. Dealing lethal damage and healing the damage afterwards still means they lose all experience for the encounter.

ENCOUNTER 7: A BRIXA BY ANY OTHER NAME

Depending on the outcome of the earlier encounters the caravan breaks camp with a delay of one day if the PCs were successful or two full weeks if they failed. Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. Continue with the following.

With the brixia and Caldairra safely back and the campsite packed and cleaned the caravan makes its way south west to Frostcrown a large dwarven town and major trading centre, high in the Rakers Mountains within House Ukaloa lands.

The caravan at this stage has left the open farmlands and is following a dwarven made paved trading road cutting straight through a section of the southern Timberway that borders the foothills of the Rakers. The Rakers themselves loom high above. Describe the caravan moving through the forest and up into the mountains crossing high dwarven made stone bridges across steep ravines before eventually reaching the trading town of Orokeep. Be sure to confirm the PCs marching order through the forest and have them make Spot checks.

Eventually you see your destination. The town is very orderly in typical dwarven fashion and is built around a large central square. The town has several impressive large, fortified stone buildings. You are informed it also has several comfortable and well patronised inns, but the halfling caravan is camping on a large flat area on the edge of town clearly marked by signs in dwarven, halfling and common for the use of the "International Halfling Society".

A DC 10 Knowledge (geography) check, DC 10 Knowledge (local - luz) check or DC 10 Bardic knowledge check will reveal that the International halfling Society originated in Perrenland but has since spread throughout the Flanaess. The PCs are required to camp with the halflings but

Yon'cyrra gives them leave to visit the inns and market place in town. If the PCs take the opportunity to visit the town or the inns they may gather information. Note that dwarven, halfling and gnome PCs are freely accepted and can come and go as they please in Frostcrown.

Humans and elves are mistrusted and need Yon'cyrra to vouch for them unless they have personal favours or influence points with the dwarves. Half Orcs and Kobolds are viewed with extreme distrust and are only permitted in town in the company of the halflings, or the other PCs. This restriction is waived if they have personal favours or influence points with the dwarves.

Once admitted to Frostcrown the PCs are free to ask questions and gather information.

DC 5 Clan Ukaloa are rumoured to be extremely rich due to their mining exploits, which have not only revealed large caches of iron ore and gold, but also gems, especially those of a reddish colour.

DC 6 The clan is recognized for its expertise with stonework. Carvings and statues from here are valued throughout Ratik and many of its neighbours.

DC 6 Clan Chieftain Torcan Ukaloa heads the clan and is recognised as the greatest of the clan's living generals. Nowadays he concentrates on administrative duties, leaving military operations and diplomatic tasks to his ministers

DC 8 Frostcrown is renowned for the variety and quality of its drinking establishments. The Broad Axe Inn sells the best of the dwarven ales, whilst the Golden Boughs is known for its fine elven cuisine.

DC 10 The population of Frostcrown waxes and wanes with the seasons – only a few hardy souls choose to survive the winters this high in the mountains. During the warmer months almost every type of stall, shop or wagon exists where items brought from distant parts of the Flanaess can be found.

DC 12 Chief Clanwarden. Werder Ukaloa heads the Home Guard. He served for fifty years as Torcan's second in command and is experienced in commanding large numbers of troops in the field. He is known for taking strong defensive positions and forcing the enemy to break himself against the defences.

DC15 The town is heavily guarded by a number of forces including a garrison of the crown, a Stone of the Stoneguard even a small unit of Guild troops, referred to by the Crown as mercenaries, takes station during trading times.

DC 20 Frostcrown is a key financial centre in Ratik and houses a number of commodity exchanges.

Bright and early the next day your group are just finishing yet another sumptuous halfling four and a half course breakfast when Caldairra approaches with a message from Yon'cyrra stating she needs your services as an escort this morning.

Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals.

You meet up with Yon'cyrra on the edge of the camp and notice she is carrying yet another of the envelopes marked with a seal. She leads you through town asking you to wait at bottom of the steps of a particularly impressive structure, bearing the emblem of the Crown.

The building is guarded by professional looking soldiers (some human and some dwarven) dressed in the livery of the Archbaroness herself. Your enquiries reveal it is one of Ratik's most important gem exchanges.

A little later Yon'cyrra reappears and motions for you to climb the steps and join her. You notice two burly guards who are standing to one side. Slung between them, over their left shoulders, is a heavy 10' pole and swinging from the pole by ropes is a large, finely crafted and obviously heavy oaken chest bound with the Archbaroness' personal seal.

Yon'cyrra has cashed in a note of demand from Evaleigh to obtain sufficient gems and coin to finance the initial work on the new town. The substantial amount of funds (in excess of 50,000 gp) needed are locked in the chest.

Yon'cyrra looks at you all and frowns before speaking in a serious tone of voice "This chest you are escorting is slung from that long pole because it is protected with very deadly magic and it is the only safe way to move it. Do not under any circumstances let anyone touch that chest as it will most likely be the last thing on Oerth they will ever do".

The chest was a gift to Archbaroness Evaleigh from her father the Count of Knurl who had it crafted in Greyhawk City. It is protected by a very nasty automatically resetting touch triggered disintegrate trap. The command word to disable

it is only known by Evaleigh herself. Disobeying orders and interfering with the chest is an untiered encounter.

"I will demonstrate," she says before taking a heavy cloak from one of the guards and throwing it over the chest. The instant the cloak touches the chest there is a flash of green and a loud snap as the cloak is reduced to a few motes of fine dust floating in the breeze.

The PCs are not meant to interfere with the chest, and should they be foolish enough to do so and actually survive they do not receive any xp.

She looks at you to make sure you understand how serious the warning is before nodding. "Good," says Yon'cyrra in a satisfied tone, "let's move on without delay then." Without further ado she nods to the two guards and proceeds to lead the group back towards the halfling encampment via a series of quiet side streets.

Ask the PCs for a party marching order and make sure they indicate where they are in relation to the two guards and the chest. Allow them to make any contingency plans necessary to prevent anyone accidentally touching the chest. Then read the following.

About halfway back to camp, just as you are emerging from a particularly narrow alley you are startled to see a brightly coloured ball shoot past your group roll under the chest and then continue bouncing down the cobblestone street before hitting a wall some distance away and coming to a stop. About 50' behind it you see two laughing children, a boy and a girl running after the ball totally unaware of the danger the chest presents.

The PCs must prevent the two children from colliding with the chest. They have two rounds to do so. Suitable strategies include using grapple, trip, tanglefoot bags, standing in front of or even bullrushing the children so their path no longer intercepts the chest. Assuming they prevent the children contacting the chest continue with:

With disaster narrowly averted Yon'cyrra collects the runaway ball and returns it to the children warning them sternly about the dangers of playing on the street.

With the children suitably chastised the party move onwards.

You finally make it safely back to camp with your dangerous cargo intact. With relief you see the chest stowed securely in a locked caged area in the back section of Yon'cyrra's personal wagon. It is now quite late and after a quick but delicious meal you turn in for the night.

The next encounter occurs during the night. If the PCs have set watches Melikalla waits and attempts to speak to the particular PC she woke previously (when the brixas were released). If there is another PC awake at the same time as the chosen PC, Melikalla proceeds anyway, but a little more cautiously. If all PCs are asleep Melikalla carefully wakes the chosen PC. She is in her brixas form. The following assumes the PC is awake, if the PC is sleeping modify the description to fit.

The fire continues to slowly burn, crackling every so often. Around you are the outlines of darkened wagons, just outside the light of the fire, a small figure is visible.

Allow the PC in question a DC 5 Spot check. (they may even take 10 if they need). On a successful Spot check read the following:

Peering more closely, you see an unexpected sight, it is the strange brixas that woke you earlier, and perched on its back is a chordevoc. The animal continues to stare at you, with an almost expectant look upon its face.

The chordevoc is Melikalla's animal companion. Melikalla is trying to lead the one PC away. If the chosen PC goes to wake another PC, Melikalla grabs the chosen PC (using her mouth) by the tunic and tries to lead her/him away. If another PC is woken/awake, Melikalla continues as she intended, just more cautiously. The chosen PC should eventually follow Melikalla either alone or with another PC.

Melikalla prefers to speak to one or two PCs but if somehow she ends up with the entire party she still reveals herself. If she isolates one or more PCs and time permits separate the relevant players from the group and continue this encounter privately. This creates suspense amongst the players of the "sleeping" PCs and means the chosen PC has the job of recounting what occurs upon return.

The brixas hurries you along, leading you past wagons of sleeping halflings until you find yourself at the other end of the campsite behind Yon'cyrra's wagon, positioned slightly away from the rest of the camp. The

chordevoc flies to the top of the wagon as the brixas turns toward you. Suddenly its form begins to shift and move as its fur melts into what looks like skin and its horns filter into many fine strands taking on the appearance of hair, finally its front hooves sprout what appears to be fingers and its back hooves shift to feet.

A spellcraft (DC 15) reveals that the process involved is wild shape and that druids do not gain the ability to wild shape until they are substantially more experienced than the current party. Should the PCs turn hostile or try to wake the caravan, Melikalla retreats into the darkness (she is, after all, a spymaster). She is still around in her brixas form for the rest of the adventure, but she won't be wearing her bell and remains indistinguishable from the other brixashulties.

The brixas's face flattens till you find yourself looking into the features of a halfling woman, looking like an older, equally attractive, version of Kinapery. "I apologise for the startling display and the secrecy, but I must speak with you"

If other PCs are present,

"I was hoping to speak to you alone, but if you believe these people are trustworthy then I shall speak freely amongst them as well"

Allow the PCs to react. If the PC/s decide to hear her out continue with the following.

"I have been watching you carefully, and I believe you are trustworthy enough to know what is happening, and possibly help me. I am a part of an underground 'business' organisation in Marner. I was assigned to guard the procession from the Optwallians and you unfortunately are in the middle of all this"

The PC/s may interact with Melikalla now. The following questions are a guide, improvise them to fit what the PCs ask if needed. Try and pass on as much information as possible even if the PCs are not asking precisely the correct questions. A lot of this information is important, this is a point where the PC could get confused very easily:

- **Why are you speaking to us?**
"The information I have for you cannot be trusted to writing. Furthermore some of what I say may be hard for you to believe unless I appear to you in person"

- **How can we trust you?**
“Yon’cyrra is aware of my presence here, her judgement should be enough. If that is not enough to convince you, then you may dwell on the knowledge that I could have easily killed you all your first night amongst this caravan. Killing you would not make my task any easier nor have any purpose”
- **So we’ll just wake Yon’cyrra now...**
“I must ask you not to do that. The noise could wake others. Yon’cyrra, Kinapery, and now you, are the only members of this caravan that are aware of my presence. My superiors do not wish to attract any unwanted attention. Talk to her tomorrow if you must, aside from the others”
- **Underground ‘business’ organisation?**
“That is all you need to know”
- **Optwall? People from Optwall are trying to stop us? Or Why are you guarding this caravan?**
“Another ‘business’ group is attempting to stop the founding of the halfling town that is to be built in Optwall. My superiors have long believed they would try something so they sent me to investigate.
We try to keep an eye on what the Optwallians do, keep your allies close and your enemies closer, as it were. It turns out they don’t like the idea at all. Releasing the brixia and the minor damage done to the wagons were just warnings. I believe they will become more dangerous and reckless.
- **Is this illegal or something? Who are we really working for ?**
As for the legality of this task, I did not realise adventurers were so virtuous. However if you still have issues with this, it may comfort you to know Yon’cyrra is working for the Archbaroness herself.”
- **You look a lot like Kinapery...**
A look of sadness crosses her face, but it disappears almost straight away, “Yes, that would make sense; she is my daughter after all”
- **Your daughter? Then Yon’cyrra is your mother?**
She sighs tiredly, “Yes, Yon’cyrra is my mother. My connections with the leader of this caravan made it a simple decision for my superior to send me instead of another”
- **Who are your superiors?**
“That is not information I am at liberty to reveal nor do you need to know.”
- **Have you been a brixia the whole time? How did you do that?**
“Not just any brixia, one particular brixia. It’s

my cover identity. In my line of work, subtlety and discretion are necessary. I specialise in the druidic ability to change my form as well as keeping more than one alias. I can stay in my chosen form for many hours, should I need to change back I merely move to a secluded area and rest for a short time before resuming my brixia form. My training allows me to change my cover identities quickly and efficiently, but the brixia form is one I have use successfully for many years as people tend to ignore brixia and pay them little note.”

(Melikalla is a Druid 5, Rogue 3, Spy Master 2)

- **But why become a brixia almost permanently? Surely that is hard for you.**
“To be honest life as a caravan brixia is a pleasant change from some of the jobs you occasionally are given in my profession. In addition it’s a very successful cover. You will be surprised what people will openly speak of in front of what they see as a “dumb” animal, especially one that they have been around for many years.”
- **Why have you broken your cover? Just to tell us about what’s happening?**
“Let me assure you I have not done so easily, unfortunately it would appear I have no other choice. I cannot let the Optwallians succeed at what they are planning; you have no concept of how important this is, or how long we have been fighting them. It was important that you know they are psychotic and dangerous. You are not fighting normal people, they will stop at nothing, and they relish pain and torture”
- **What can you tell us about the Optwallians? What do you think they’ll try next?**
“Honestly I don’t know. They are unpredictable. The next major stop is Ratikhill. They may attempt something there as there are plenty of hired thugs around for them to exploit in a large town like that.
It is also very possible that the caravan may have problems in Loegrim territory. My information is the Archbaroness Evaleigh has made an enemy of Vionelle Glidden of the Worshipful Company of Broiders and Weavers who has a lot of influence in Loegrim. The Optwallians are bound to know this and use it to their advantage. Vionelle will relish the thought of ruining the Archbaroness’ plans and would probably stoop low enough to work with the Optwallians and smuggle in operatives for them.”

- **Surely the Lord in Optwall can do something about these people.**

He is trying. He is one of the main people behind organising this relief caravan. A strong refugee halfling township in Optwall will undermine their powerbase substantially.

- **What can we do about the Optwallians?**
“Stay alert! They could attack any time and attempt anything. Expect subterfuge. Do not ruin my cover, I should not even be speaking with you, and we will not converse again this journey”
- **What is your name? Who are you?**
Again, it is not important. If you must call me something, you may call me by my brixashulty cover name, Scarlett”
- **Yon’cyrra is working for the Archbaroness?**
“Yes, Yon’cyrra knew the Archbaroness back in the Bonemarch when she was just Lady Evaleigh, before she married Alain. They were good friends back then too. Whenever Lady Evaleigh needed a helping hand, Yon’cyrra was always happy to help, not much has changed.”

The sun is starting to rise by this point and Melikalla doesn’t want to be discovered when the wagons residents wake up. She wild-shapes back into her brixia form, asking the chosen PC to replace her bell. She returns to the rest of the brixas.

As it is now morning so allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. After breakfast the caravan prepares for the next days travel.

Once more the caravan is a flurry of activity as Brandopee Wildwhisper, organises the brixashulty into wagon teams for the day. You hear his now familiar call of “Everyone to their position we’re moving out!” and instantly halflings young and old move to their wagons and the caravan begins winding it’s way southwards.

The caravan is heading down into central Ratik. Once again it is time for one of Kinapery’s lessons. This time the lesson is about House Devonmeek and House Loegrimm.

At this point role-play the material in DM Aid 3. in a similar fashion to the first lesson. This section is entirely optional. If you are confident the PCs are reasonably familiar with central Ratik this material may be skimmed or skipped entirely.

On the other hand if the PCs seem particularly unfamiliar with central Ratik

improvise and ask extra questions and elaborate on the answers.

ENCOUNTER 8: ROAD SOUTH

With another of Kinapery’s lesson over, the caravan continues on its way. Almost a day after the surprise meeting with your somewhat unusual travelling companion, a thick plume of smoke begins to all-too-suddenly rise from the surrounding woodlands.

Allow the PCs to react. They should be aware of something being wrong. Give the PCs a DC 10 Knowledge (nature) or DC 8 Survival check to realise that the smoke is coming from more than one place and may have been deliberately lit.

Murmurs and confused whispers break out all over the caravan as the smoke blows over the convoy, creating a thick blanket of smog along the road. The murmurs of confusion grow to confused, alarmed cries.

Under cover of the smoke (which they have created as a diversion) an attempt is underway to actively sabotage the caravan by halflings from the Optwall Crew. Unknown to the PCs, these are the same halflings who released the brixia earlier. The Optwall halflings are attempting to use their Disable Device skill to disable a number of wagon wheel, hopefully blocking the narrow trail and crippling the convoy. They are focussed on their first sabotage attempt and are relatively easy to spot even with the smoke.

Allow the PCs a DC 15 Spot check or DC 15 Listen check to notice the intruders (the PCs may take 10). Failure to pass at least one of these checks means the sabotage succeeds and the Optwall halflings are able to then surprise the PCs. If the PCs succeed read the following:

Through the smoke you spot an unusual sight - a strange trio of halflings appear to be crowded around one of the wheels on a caravan.

An attractive 3’4 tall halfling woman (who appears to be the group’s leader) peers into the smoky haze, keeping a watch. She carries a long, thin rapier in her left hand and a wickedly jagged dagger in her right.

The second halfling is 3’9 and also dressed entirely in black, wearing a bandoleer of daggers across his chest. He works on the wheel with a patient,

professional air, squinting through his monocle.

The third halfling, a male, has wild blonde hair and a generally unkempt appearance. His posture is stooped and crooked, his form gaunt and rake thin. Even the slightest movement catches his attention, his green eyes darting to the source and fingers twitching excitedly. None of them have spotted you as yet.

A successful Spot or Listen above allows the PCs time to try diplomacy or attack the halflings using stealth or surprise if they desire. Due to the smoke around, vision is restricted to 30ft and foes further away than 15ft have concealment (allowing the PCs to hide and sneak up should they wish). Note however that if the PCs do not act within three rounds the wagon wheel is disabled and it requires an opposed Disable Device, Craft (carpentry) or Profession (carpenter) check to repair.

Creatures:

APL 2 (EL 4)

Sheel Brenhollow: female halfling swashbuckler 1; hp 12; Appendix 1.

Dric Brenhollow: male halfling ranger; hp 10; Appendix 1.

Wort Brenhollow: male halfling sorcerer rogue; hp 10; Appendix 1.

Tactics: The halflings, if offered a chance to converse instead of just being attacked, attempt to bribe the PCs with 100 gold pieces each (they are willing to haggle all the way up to 235 gp if the PCs successfully bargain) to walk away and leave them to their work. If their offer is accepted, the halflings recover a hidden stash of coin and give it to the PCs. So long as the PCs remain discreet, the halflings in the caravan have no reason to suspect them. If the PCs accept the bribe they gain the **Noticed by the Black Hand** favour.

If attacked, the halfling trio respond with force - each picking a target and fighting them until they drop, then moving on to the next. If at all possible the halflings attempt to capture the PCs for future questioning (even stabilising unconscious PCs) however they only do this once they are clearly winning and there is no risk to themselves.

Any halfling reduced below 3 hit points attempts to flee by the most direct route.

Treasure: The PCs can gain the following treasure by looting the halflings

APL 2: Loot: 232 gp; Coin: 3 gp; Magic: 0 gp;

If the PCs accept the bribe instead of fighting they receive

APL 2: Loot: 0 gp; Coin: up to 235 gp; Magic: 0 gp;

Development: If the PCs are captured, proceed to the captured outcome in the conclusion.

If any wagon wheels are damaged and the PCs are unable to repair it, that wagon is abandoned. Any halfling family abandoning a wagon is extremely upset at having to abandon their home. The first wagon attacked happens to belong to Caldairra's family. They are very distraught at losing their wagon and because of their young infant baby, Lenakeppa, who is only a few months old they cannot camp out. The caravan is delayed while an alternative is found and this counts as a mission critical failure.

Should the PCs investigate the source of the fire, they discover several large piles of tindertwigs (almost two score twigs) had been ignited by vials of alchemist's fire. This was clearly a deliberate diversion.

ENCOUNTER 9: THE MISSING ROD

Eventually the caravan enters the territory of house Bresht and everyone feels a little safer. The Bresht territory lies along the southern spur of the Rakers. It is far inland from the ocean and a good deal of the land is hilly. The hills around you are dotted with sheep which you are told have only recently been moved up from their Winter pastures closer to the coast.

A DC 10 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check or a DC 15 Knowledge (local – Nyronde) check reveals House Bresht is efficiently managed by the daunting Lady Abril Bresht, a serious woman who never married. House Bresht is in good relations with the other houses as all of them make good use of the wool they provide.

Continuing on to Ratikhill, home of the Ratik army and the famous wizarding academy, you eventually behold the impressive sight of Ratikhill's great wall and six stone towers guarding the entry to Ratik from Kalmar pass.

Nothing comes through Kalmar pass without passing through Ratikhill. The latter part of its name comes from the large hill the fortification is built on. The halflings set up camp now. Allow

the PCs to go about their usual routine, for example, assisting the halflings, or deciding their watches.

Late that evening the halfling camp receives a visitor. A carriage pulls up, drawn by 4 pure black horses, and you catch a glimpse as an impressive looking older figure steps out, glances casually around the campsite and then raps lightly on the door of Yon'cyrra's caravan with what appears to be an ornate staff. A short time later you see the same figure step back into the carriage which immediately heads back towards Ratikhill.

A DC 10 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check or a DC 15 Knowledge (local – Nyrond) check reveals that the figure was none other than Sir Hengon Mogotten war wizard of Ratikhill and founder of the Ratikhill academy. It is no surprise to you when a little later you are summoned to speak to Yon'cyrra.

"I have received some very disconcerting news," she says as you enter. "An artefact of some value has been stolen from the Ratikhill Academy museum."

Allow the PCs to react before continuing. Either paraphrase the following in a manner suited to the PCs reactions or relay the information to the players in the form of answers to appropriate questions.

"It seems only one item has gone missing and it is no coincidence that the item in question, The Rod of Halfling Wonders, is an item of significance to halflings. Furthermore evidence was found at the site of the crime implicating this caravan."

The stolen artefact is an intelligent rod which has been lodged with the academy museum for study as it provides an amazing research tool into the history of halflings in Ratic. There have been occasional murmurings of how it should be "returned to halfling possession" but no-one could ever agree which particular sub group of Ratic halflings, if any, can actually claim rights to the item. The evidence that implicated the caravan consisted of an embroidered bag and some tools branded with the craft seals of several of the caravans stall holders. These are items virtually anyone could have purchased at the caravans stalls but the caravan has not been in town long enough to have sold anything this trip.

Yon'cyrra continues, "Normally these artefacts are on public display and are not

heavily guarded as they are instantly recognisable and could not be easily sold for profit. In addition, even though most are magical, they are not the sort of object that could be easily used by anyone other than the rightful wielder. They all possess strong safeguards against misuse and some even have intelligence in their own right."

Again allow the PCs to react. If the PCs mention the Optwallians Yon'cyrra comments that they "may well be involved" but points out that without evidence the PCs suspicions are only hearsay and not likely to appease the authorities. Proceed with:

"My good friend Sir Hengon came straight to me immediately the theft was reported to him, I am sure you noted his arrival and quick departure. He is confident we are not really involved and has agreed to hold off reporting the incident to the Ratikhill town watch until tomorrow evening giving us 24 hours to locate the true thief and clear our name."

A DC 10 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check or Knowledge (local – Nyrond) check reveals that Sir Hengon Mogotten, the Warwizard of Ratikhill is the founder of the famous Ratikhill Academy of Wizardry and Sorcery.

Yon'cyrra continues, "Needless to say we would eventually be cleared of any involvement the evidence is clearly circumstantial but an investigation into this matter may well mean our caravan would be held up here at Ratikhill for some time severely jeopardising our overall mission."

If the caravan is held up it costs the PCs 2 time units and count towards the total of three "Critical Failures" allowed for the adventure.

If the PCs enquire about the potential delay paraphrase the following:

Yon'cyrra frowns, "Lothak Bresht himself is likely to want to lead the investigation and I am sure, as always, he will want to be very thorough. We may be delayed here for weeks before our name is eventually cleared. We are scheduled to leave Ratikhill immediately after the fair which is the day after tomorrow. I need you to find the culprits and, if possible, recover the missing Artefact as soon as possible. If and when you do retrieve the artefact or recover any evidence about the

true culprits return everything directly to me and I will summon the authorities.”

A DC 15 Knowledge (local – Nyronde) check or DC 10 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check reveals that, despite the disadvantage of being born out of wedlock and not even knowing who his father is, Lothak Bresht has goals to rise to power and prominence. Hence he takes his current role as commander of the Hill Patrol and his policing responsibilities very seriously. His mother, Lady Abril Bresht, also has great plans for her only son and the two of them make a formidable pair.

As suspected by Melikalla, the Optwall shadow clan have arranged to “setup” Yon’cyrra and the caravan in an attempt to delay them and hopefully even prevent them completing their mission. In this case they have relied on hired henchmen to do the job for them. In this case a group of somewhat inept goblin mercenaries who have taken the artefact (The Rod of Halfling Wonders) and left behind a bag containing a number of personal items easily identified as belonging to halflings from Yon’cyrra’s caravan.

“Unfortunately,” Yon’cyrra says, “we have absolutely no clues at present. There is nothing to be done tonight. I suggest you get an early night and start canvassing the few likely sources of information first thing in the morning. I suggest you start at the Ratikhill Academy or perhaps one of the inns.”

Allow the PCs to discuss their thoughts on how to proceed from here and set watches for the night if they wish to. Nothing happens overnight.

You awake to the glorious aroma of breakfast cooking and the sound of busy halflings preparing for a big market day. You all arise and start making preparations for heading into town and starting your enquiries.

Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals.

Suddenly Caldairra runs up to you with a note and silently hands it to you looking serious. “The man said this is important”, she says solemnly, “and it must be important, because he paid me real money to bring it to you.” She brandishes proudly a silver piece which she bites on to prove its authenticity.

If the PCs question Caldairra she cannot recall any details of “the man” simply that he came up to her while she was feeding the brixa and paid her a whole silver piece to deliver the note straight away which she has done and is very proud of herself.

Opening the note reveals a simple but cryptic message. “Those you seek are at the star temple – The Black Charade”.

A young halfling Ratikhill academy student has left the note. He spotted the goblins and followed them. He has arranged to send the note to the PCs because he feels “the authorities” are biased against halflings and cannot be trusted to take his information seriously. “The Black Charade”, as far as most Ratikans are aware, is simply a name taken on by disenfranchised young halflings and gnomes in Southern Ratik to describe their particular style of dress and musical preferences. There is much more to it as even the name itself suggests. Enquiries around the halfling camp do not reveal any information about the “star temple” or “The Black Charade”. The PCs need to head into town. They need to ask questions and gather information.

Heading into Ratikhill you notice business is going on as usual. It does not seem that news of the dramatic theft at the academy has made it as far as the town population yet.

Heading into Ratikhill you notice business is going on as usual. It does not seem that news of the dramatic theft at the academy has had any significant effect on the town population.

Allow the PCs to follow their own ideas and ask questions. If the PCs ask any direct questions related to the information provided in the gathered information at a specific location they get the answer listed without rolling. Otherwise they may gather information at the DC specified. Note that the caravan is camped on the opposite side of Ratikhill from the academy. The material below assumes the PCs enquire in town first and proceed on to the academy later.

General Enquiries in Ratikhill

This is general information that can be gathered on the streets of Ratikhill. The same information is also available at the Academy or the Silver Eagle and Crown.

DC 5 The Ratikhill Spring Fair is tomorrow. Its one of the big events in the Ratikhill calendar and travellers from all over Ratik will be coming.

DC 10 An off-duty barman employed at The Silver Eagle and Crown inn proudly tells you how back in 578CY, Sir Hengon Mogotten started the academy in vacant rooms above the inn. He claims the Silver Eagle and Crown is still a favoured drinking spot of Academy staff and students.

DC 12 There is to be a demonstration joust tomorrow at the fair. Entries are restricted to inexperienced squires and sponsored novice riders. It is rumoured the young and beautiful Lady Malenie Loegrimm a Paladin of the spring goddess Atroa has entered the lists.

DC 15 Upon mention of the Black Charade, you are told the beer at the Silver Eagle and Crown is particularly fine this week.

DC 20 A gnarled looking veteran from the border patrol says they are encountering more incursions from the Bonemarch in the Kalmar Pass over recent months. A DC 10 Knowledge Geography or DC 15 Knowledge (local – Nyrond) check reveals the Kalmar pass starts on the northern side of the Rakers, high in the hills of southern Ratik and winds its way through the smaller mountains before opening into the hilly lowlands of the Orc occupied Bone March.

The PCs need eventually to go to the Silver Eagle and Crown to get the additional information they need. If they do not work this out from gathering information, have an NPC suggest visiting the Silver Eagle and Crown to them.

The Silver Eagle and Crown is open for lunch and seems to be doing good business. You note quite a number of younger individuals, clearly students, indulging in a pint or two of ale and the “lunch special of the day” which seems to be some form of stew.

This is a good opportunity for the PCs to role-play tavern activities. In addition to drinking eating and talking their is also a selection of dice games available.

A variety of dice and card games seem to be in progress and a sign catches your eye, “Any individual caught mage handing the dice will be banned from this establishment for one academic year, no exceptions, even if you are the Chancellor’s favourite - The Management.”

If the PCs wish to gamble improvise a dice game. Place a maximum of 1 gp per PC on winnings. Any winnings count as overcap.

If the PCs ask any direct questions related to the information which is provided in the gather information below the patrons of the Inn happily provide the information listed without them needing to roll. Otherwise they may gather information at the DC specified for the same information:

DC 5 A slightly inebriated academy faculty member reveals to you that the in 585CY work was started on a new, permanent home of the academy, a three storey stone building not far from the northern gate of Ratikhill. The building was completed in 592CY, however plans exist to later extend it to enclose what is currently a large courtyard.

DC 8 A young female student necromancer has heard rumours of a theft from the academy and believes the dreamy young Lord Lothak Bresht, commander of the Hill Patrol, a policing force for the city surrounding Ratikhill Castle, will soon sort out the culprits and bring them to justice.

DC 10 Several of the students are aware of the “Black Charade” and tell you it is just a popular movement among the gnomes and halflings in Southern Ratik.

DC 12 Mention of the “star temple” results in an odd look from one of the students who tells you to “ask out at the academy about that”.

DC 15 The barman confides that he is pretty sure the Black Charade is the name used by a group of young activists from the Academy that meet regularly at the Silver Eagle and Crown. He says they talk about alchemy a lot and he suspects they are up to no good.

DC20 A drunken groundsman from the Ratikhill Academy of Wizardry and Sorcery says he is not surprised at the theft. Apparently the museum is normally not even locked.

Ratikhill Academy of Wizardry and Sorcery

The Academy is not large and its possible for the PCs to visit both the student quarters and faculty offices in the same trip.

DC 5 A slightly hung-over student in the student lounge tells you he has it on good authority Sir Hengon Mogotten, the academy founder, is busy working on a new spell designed specifically to

control the “hordes of Krakens” threatening Ratik.

DC 8 Apparently all students of the academy are also required to serve in the Ratik army, where they learn to use their magic to supplement the army's mundane forces. This is not always a popular duty amongst students who prefer to spend their free time (and gold) at the Silver Eagle and Crown.

DC 10 Deloril Ukakane, an accomplished Dwarven wizard and former student of the academy has arranged the construction of a celestial observatory within the mountains to the west of Ratikhill.

DC 12 Enquiries about the “Black Charade” amongst the students reveals the phenomenon seems to have first emerged in southern Ratik. When you ask whether the “Black Charade” are interested in alchemy, you are told cryptically “only if you are a bard”.

DC 15 The celestial observatory has been dubbed jokingly by some students “the star temple”. Use of the nickname for the observatory is discouraged by the faculty as it is disrespectful and dwarves can be touchy about such things.

DC 20 Mention of the Black Charade to a senior faculty members elicits raised eyebrows and the comment “Who told you about the Black Charade?” followed by a gruff “There is no Black Charade!” He refuses to say anything further.

Further enquiries at the Academy:

Once the PCs have ascertained the “star temple” is in fact the Ratikhill Academy Celestial Observatory it is a relatively simple matter to get directions to visit it. Deloril Ukakane has returned to his clan but enquiries specifically concerning the observatory reveal:

DC 5 the observatory is finished and in regular use. It is a circular stone dwarven made structure with a number of observation platforms on high towers. It is roughly an hour travel from Ratikhill Academy.

DC 10 it is unattended during daylight hours (it is not a solar observatory after all) but a number of long term studies have commenced with teams making observations and recording data several nights on most weeks.

DC 15 Some of the observation teams have reported signs of recent occupation of the observatory during the day however no damage

was done and it was assumed it was merely a sign of visitors sight seeing.

Once the PC's have found out how to get to the “star temple” allow the PCs to make any other preparations or minor purchases they wish but remind them of the need to apprehend the culprits and return with evidence by evening. The observatory is some distance from town.

Eventually the celestial observatory is in sight. Standing proud on a prominent hilltop several hundred feet away, this obviously dwarf-made structure is enclosed by a circular wall with a number of viewing towers visible at strategic position. The road you are walking up leads to a large arched gateway with iron gates. The gates are ajar.

The Optwall Shadow Clan that employed the goblins has provided them with a trap to place on the entrance to the observatory. The trap is intended to stun one or two intruders allowing them to be captured and questioned.

Fortunately for the PCs the somewhat over-complex trap was designed to catch a much smaller group and provided they have not made the tactical error of staying too close together they should be fine.

If the PCs actively search remind them that, as they are out of combat, they make take 20 on a search if they wish. The trap is magic and hence can only be found by a rogue or PC with similar trap sense.

The gap between the iron gates is exactly 5' wide and the alarm trigger is focussed on this square. The *color spray* cone is positioned to project outwards from that square (See DM aid)

Note that if the trap is triggered the closest two targets need to make will saves against the heightened unluck spells. This means they may need to roll twice and choose the worst result for the next 7 rounds including all attacks rolls, further saves, the duration of the *color spray* effects and any damage taken or dealt.

If the trap is triggered read the following:

There is an odd sound a little like rolling dice followed by a vivid cone of tastelessly clashing colours springing forth from a position above the gate.

APL 2: (EL 4)

Heightened unluck and color spray trap:
CR 5; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); multiple traps (two *unluck* spells that effect the two closest targets followed by one heightened

color spray that effects the 15' cone immediately in front of the trap); spell effect (*unluck*, 5th level wizard, DC 14 Will save negates); spell effect (heightened *color spray*, 3rd-level wizard, 2 HD or less: The creature is unconscious, blinded, and stunned for 2d4 rounds, then blinded and stunned for 1d4 rounds, and then stunned for 1 round. (Only living creatures are knocked unconscious.), 3 or 4 HD: The creature is blinded and stunned for 1d4 rounds, then stunned for 1 round, 5 or more HD: The creature is stunned for 1 round, DC 12 Will save negates); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26; Cost 2310 gp; 132 XP

Development: In the unlikely event that the trap manages to incapacitate all the PCs present at the observatory the four goblins rush out from hiding and manacle and gag the prone and unconscious PCs and then signal the Optwall shadow clan. If the entire party was present the adventure is finished. The PCs receive the captured result in the conclusion.

If even one party member manages to avoid the trap the goblins are much more circumspect as they realise they have almost no chance in an outright fight.

You notice movement in one of the observation towers on the other side of the complex. Peering over a wall about 40' away and 30' above you is a humanoid face wearing a small spiked helmet. "Go away you silly Ratik Kiniggits" it says in broken common.

The creature is a goblin. The PCs recognise it with a DC 11 Knowledge Nature check. A DC 10 Listen check detects muttering from behind the wall that reveals there are at least 3 or 4 more of them in total concealment behind the wall.

If at this stage the PCs decide to immediately attack, the goblins flee through prearranged bolt holes leaving the rod behind in the tower.

If the PCs decide discretion is the better approach they can try diplomacy. The goblins are currently merely unfriendly (rather than hostile). They are only in it for the money and are not inclined to fight the PCs if they can avoid it. For diplomacy to work, the goblin's attitude needs to be shifted to helpful. It's permissible to do this in several steps however no more than 3 diplomacy attempts are permitted.

If at any point in the negotiation the rod is mentioned, even indirectly, read the following:

Upon mention of the "Rod of Halfling Wonders" the goblin immediately replies "no thanks we already have one". At which point

the goblin draws forth an ornate looking rod several feet long, points it at your party and speaks a word of power. There is a loud bang, a colourful flash of light and a somewhat ostentatious puff of purple smoke. Suddenly the already smallish goblin before you seems to have become substantially smaller again.

A DC 11 Spellcraft check reveals that the rod has cast a *reduce person* on the already small goblin. This is not quite what the goblin intended. The noise, lightshow and smoke seem to simply be the rod showing off.

You hear what sounds like swearing in goblin accompanied by a lot of snickering and chuckling from behind the wall. The now tiny goblin pokes its head over the barricade and says "Go away, we do not wish to speak to you anymore".

The goblins do however continue to negotiate. Alternatively the PCs may intimidate the goblins or try to fight (with the same result as before, the goblins flee). The goblins are also readily open to bribes. They have only taken the rod because they were paid to do so by the Optwall shadow clan. They are quite happy to hand over the Rod together with evidence of the real culprits for any amount over 50 gp.

Development: Whatever technique the PCs use the goblins flee the scene immediately afterwards. A search (DC 15) of the viewing tower which the goblins had occupied finds the rod and a bag containing a number of items including a series of instructions to the goblins from "person's unknown" clearly exonerating the caravan from any involvement in the theft of the rod. The PCs have recovered the rod and found the evidence.

Should the PCs insist on hunting down and killing or capturing the goblins allow them to do so. They need to make a DC 20 Track check to follow the goblins. They do not receive any extra experience for the combat as the goblins are already defeated. Improvise Monster Manual goblins for this unscheduled combat encounter. If captured, the goblins have no additional information. They only repeat what was already contained in the note found with the rod.

The moment any PC approaches the rod read the following:

As you approach the rod you are startled as it speaks to you in common. "About time you got here!" it says" I thought those stupid goblins were going to damage me with all

their inane attempts to ‘activate’ me with command words and other mumbo jumbo”.

If there are any female halflings present the rod continues in halfling speaking to the female halfling PC with highest charisma:

“oooh ... you are a pretty wee halfling lassie aren’t you !!! What is your name gorgeous? You can call me Roddy!”

The rod is an intelligent artefact. If the PCs question it, they find it had the power to destroy the goblins at any point (something that should give them second thoughts about any plans to steal the item) and could also have escaped using extra-dimensional means but was wary of then lying abandoned in a ditch somewhere until someone stumbled across it. The rod had decided to wait upon eventual rescue as the more sensible plan.

The rod continues chatting away inanely flirting with any females, especially halfling females, and complaining about how long it took your party to rescue it. It does seem to have an extraordinary wealth of background knowledge about the history of halflings in Ratik although you find some of its stories just a bit far stretched.

If the PCs want to role-play the rod should be presented as having a cocky somewhat smug attitude. The rod provides a good source of accurate historical information about Ratik (especially Ratik halflings) but occasionally throws in a “real porker” of outrageous proportions just to keep the PCs on their toes. Use the information in the background section of this adventure as a good source of authentic “historical” stories. Feel free to mix in any odd outrageously over the top untrue tale involving halflings that you may care to create.

The PCs have been requested to return the rod and the evidence to Yon’cyrra. The following material assumes they follow orders (rather than attempt to steal the rod or perhaps take it directly to the Academy). Note that if they try to hide the rod or decide not to hand it over within a reasonable time it has the ability to dimension door short distances at will.

If the party does take unusual options improvise, otherwise proceed with the following:

You make it back to Ratikhill and the caravan campsite just as evening approaches. The halflings have begun cooking for the evening meal.

Allow the PCs to decide what they are doing. The rod of course attempts to flirt with any attractive halfling females in the caravan. The PCs should hand the rod over to Yon’cyrra.

Once you hand the rod and evidence over to Yon’cyrra she thanks you profusely, tells the rod to “shush and behave” when it calls her a “fine exemplar of halfling womanhood” and then signals Wortessel who throws a bag of powder on one of the campfires which suddenly billows a huge cloud of acrid red smoke. “That was the prearranged signal to alert Sir Hengon and Lord Lothak,” Yon’cyrra says, “they will have someone here shortly to collect the rod and your evidence. I am sure they will wish to speak you personally in the morning”

Once the smoke signal is sent a squad of officers from Lothak’s famous Hill Patrol are dispatched to collect it and return it to the Ratikhill Academy. They collect the rod and evidence together with a note from Yon’cyrra explaining the circumstances of its recovery and leave her a receipt.

The sergeant notes down the names of those PCs involved in the recovery and thanks them for their efforts on behalf of Lord Lothak. Once the rod has been collected paraphrase:

“Congratulations on a job well done adventurers meanwhile try and get an early night as the Ratikhill Spring Fair is on in the morrow. It is one of the reasons we are here. There will be much for you to see and do.”

At this point the PCs may make sleeping arrangements for the night ahead and set watches if they so desire.

ENCOUNTER 10: OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER - JOUSTING

A new day dawns and you wake to the now familiar routine of Rondalla piling your plates with a traditional halfling four course breakfast. With a full stomach, your party turns their attention to Ratikhill, the Spring Fair awaits!

Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. They can also make plans for what they intend to do at the fair. Once they are organised paraphrase the following:

Making your way through the grounds, it appears there is something for everyone here. From a temporary stage erected for budding bards to display their talent - or lack thereof – through to market stalls of all shapes and sizes.

Tailor the events at the fair to match the party. If there is a PC bard present willing to perform then consider having a talent quest. If there are archers have a target shooting competition. Try and make sure there is something for every PC that wishes to participate.

You see spruikers selling everything from Abonhoth Ale to Zagyg holy symbols. It appears people from all over Ratik have come to see what the occasion has to offer. Children race around excitedly with ingenious gnome made toys their faces smeared with face paint or the remnants of halfling baked sweet foods. Meanwhile their parents and other adults peruse the wide range of goods displayed on the assorted stands neatly arranged in the vicinity. You recognise many of the stall holders as members of your caravan.

This is an opportunity for the PCs to unwind and have some fun role-playing. There is plenty to do. The stalls are selling a variety of bits and pieces from weapons (PHB up to +1 quality) to garments and jewellery. Create some Ratikhill souvenirs worth a few coppers. Improvise if you need to. Try to find something for all the PCs to do - within reason.

You notice a number of students sitting over near a brightly coloured tent proudly displaying the crest of the Ratikhill Academy. They seem rather listless and unmotivated and all have a similar look and style of dress. They are all sporting dyed black straightened hair, generally with a long fringe brushed to one side of the face or over one or both eyes and wear dark button-less shirts (males and females alike) bearing unusual slogans, mainly in halfling and gnomish. Tight trousers, studded belts and old beaten up black shoes seem to complete the outfit.

If any of the PCs speak halfling or gnomish the slogans can be translated. The shirts bear unusual cryptic names such as "The Stolen Bones", "Pink Void" and "Mithral Balloon". If questioned the students reveal the names belong to "bardic ensembles" but before the PCs get a chance to question the students any further they are intercepted by Yon'cyrra and the

students take the opportunity to discreetly disappear.

Yon'cyrra approaches and asks those of you with arcane abilities or any interest in the arcane to accompany her. She leads any of the party interested inside the colourful tent where you are greeted by none other than the founder and head of the Ratikhill Academy, Sir Hengon Mogotten himself.

Allow the PCs to react and introduce themselves. Improvise a conversation about magic or the Ratikhill Academy. If the PCs enquire about the students he simply states the unusual dress seems fashionable of late, especially amongst the younger illusionists. Eventually Sir Hengon clears his throat and steps up to a small podium making it clear he is about to give a short speech. Continue by paraphrasing:

"Greetings adventurers and well met" says Sir Hengon, "I would like to thank you personally for the great service you have done our academy in recovering the stolen artefact intact. I would also like to encourage those of you with arcane interests to join the academy and am willing to put a good word in with the academic board for those of you that ask it of me."

Any PC that expresses an interest in joining the Academy (even if they currently do not qualify) receives the favour of Sir Hengon which gives them, upon eventually joining, a permanent influence point with the Academy. The PCs must commit to joining the Academy within 12 months from the date of the adventure record. If they fail to join within 12 months the favour expires.

Allow the PCs to proceed wherever they wish.

As the day wears on and afternoon arrives, you see the crowd ahead thin as people young and old clear a path for a very important looking man. It is easy from previous descriptions to recognise him as the head of the Hill patrol, Lord Lothak Bresht, He looks around for a moment scanning the crowd before spying your group and heading toward you all determinedly.

Lord Lothak Bresht is clearly heading towards the PCs but he is smiling and has a friendly demeanour and there does not appear any reason to be concerned. Ask the PCs how they are reacting before continuing:

Lord Lothak Bresht walks over and speaks to you in a formal manner. "As commander of the Hill patrol I give you my thanks for your quick action in recovering the lost artefact and providing the evidence that clears the name of the lovely Yon'cyrra and her associates."

If the PCs ask about a "reward" have him advise them that he is in no position to offer any cash remuneration, but he can offer something else, and then paraphrase the following:

He continues in a less formal fashion, "As you are no doubt aware, today is our spring fair and it is my greatest pleasure to inform you my mother, Lady Abril Bresht, as fair patron, has graciously made you our guests of honour."

As "guests of honour" the PCs are entitled to free food and drink for the remainder of the day and any PC with the "Mounted Combat" feat gains the right to compete in a demonstration Tourney. **Lord Lothak clears his throat and then announces more formally "As a consequence, those of you skilled at mounted combat are entitled to be sponsored by her ladyship in this afternoons tourney. It's only a small demonstration event with a limited number of participants but it would please her greatly if there are any amongst you who should wish to enter the lists."**

This is a rare opportunity for those PCs with the feat "mounted combat" to participate in the Ratik sport of jousting. As it is a small informal event the PCs initially get to ride against just two competitors. A successful PC may then get to ride in a third joust competing for the overall prize.

The following section is optional and it is possible to skip directly to the last paragraph of this encounter if no PC is eligible/wishes to compete in the Tourney.

If any eligible PC wishes to compete in the Tourney continue with the following (otherwise skip the entire tourney section):

The Master of the Lists stands up and speaks to the crowd, "The joust is one of the great traditions of Ratik. Nothing excites the blood of a Ratikan more than the sight of two heavily armoured knights on horseback thundering towards each other with blunted lances raised, separated from a disastrous collision by a mere flimsy rail. The thrill as they meet in the middle, clashing with such great momentum and force, that often one or both participants are knocked completely from the saddle is beyond compare."

This would be an appropriate time to pass around Players Handout 2 with the formal rules for jousting in Ratik. Allow the PCs to read the rules and make sure they are clear on what they are required to do.

The master of lists continues, "This afternoon's tourney is a small demonstration event sponsored by the most gracious Lady Abril Bresht and her intention is to give some of our local squires and younger Knights the chance to compete with others of a competence similar to themselves. We are most fortunate to have as last minute entries, sponsored by her ladyship herself, members of the adventuring party that recovered, only yesterday, the missing artefact stolen from our very own Ratikhill Academy museum."

Allow the PCs to mount the podium and role-play receiving accolades if they wish. They may even make a speech if they are so inclined.

"As a demonstration tourney there will be an elimination round where each participant will face two opponents and be ranked and receive accolades according to their success. Horses, weapons and armor will be provided if needed. Competitors succeeding in both of their elimination rounds are entitled to contend for the major prize".

The master of the lists provides the participating PCs with a loan of:

- a suitable mount (heavy warhorse for medium PCs and riding dog for small PCs)
- appropriately sized military saddle, masterwork lances, masterwork longswords, masterwork shields and masterwork armor for use in the tourney.

Participants must use the loan equipment provided not their own. These items must be returned at the end of the tournament. The master of the lists continues:

"No magic is permitted, neither in weapon nor armor, nor apparel, nor mage cast spell. Any item such as a belt that doest increase thou strength or weapons that doest wound thy opponent magically shall be lodged with the stewards for safekeeping before thee enters upon the field of contest. Bards among thee may only work their inspiration on the crowd not the competitors."

Run the tournament as per the rules in Players Handout 2.

In the elimination rounds each competing PC should meet two randomly selected NPC opponents from Appendix 1. PCs do not compete against each other in the elimination rounds.

If at the completion of the initial two rounds all PCs have been eliminated, the winner of the tournament is Lady Malenie Loegrimm.

If only a single PC defeated both opponents have them ride off against a third different NPC to decide the outright winner.

Should two or more PCs manage to defeat both their original opponents arrange a ride off between the successful PCs. Only one PC can win the overall tournament.

Should a female PC be the overall winner paraphrase the following:

As you dismount from your second round in the lists you are surprised to see none other than Lady Abril Bresht herself walk up to you. "You are a woman after my own heart and I would like to offer you the opportunity to be one of my squires and compete in further tourneys in my name."

Should a male PC be the overall winner paraphrase the following:

As you dismount from your second round in the lists you are surprised to see none other than Lord Lothak Bresht himself walk up to you. "You are a man after my own heart and I would be honoured to speak to my mother and ask her retain you as one of her squires allowing you to compete in further tourneys in her name."

Accepting a position of squire allows the PC to compete in further tournaments in other adventures. Once the tourney results are known continue with the following:

All good things must come to an end and the fair draws to a close, the local townspeople return to their homes and the halflings return to their camp. Tomorrow the caravan leaves for destinations further south but many of you have the feeling you will remember this visit to Ratikhill for some time to come.

The PCs return to their camp for the night. Those that have won at the tourney are suitably congratulated and all the PCs are plied with much food and drink by the celebrating halflings. Eventually the camp settles down for the night and those PCs still sober may set watches if they wish.

ENCOUNTER 11: SKORADINFIN

The next morning allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. Also ask what they intend to be doing during the next day's travel then paraphrase the following:

Eventually after several days on the road, stopping to trade at numerous small villages and hamlets along the way, you eventually find yourself approaching the village of Skoradinf.

Any halfling or gnome PCs with the Ratik home region knows the following automatically as do any other PCs making a successful DC 10 Knowledge (local - Nyrond), DC 12 Knowledge (geography) or DC10 Bardic Knowledge check:

- Situated in the eastern Lofthills on the edge of the Gnomish territory, almost on Optwall, this picturesque little gnomish village is home to several hundred gnomes and a fluctuating population of almost as many halflings.
- Skoradinf is unique in Ratik in the extent to which its population is a mixture of these two smaller races.

Parties which contain kobolds may encounter some trouble with the next part of the module as Skoradinf contains a mixture of gnomish and halfling settlers. At your option, you may read or paraphrase the following to any kobolds in the group:

Yon'cyrra takes you (and any other kobolds in the group) aside for a moment. "I am afraid you may encounter some trouble during our stay here. Skoradinf is officially a gnomish settlement, although there are plenty of halflings there too. I don't want to cause any trouble, we are guests here, after all - so perhaps you should think of disguising yourself or if you like, just wait here at the caravan outside the town.

I'm sure you do not want any trouble either, and don't worry, we won't forget about you if you decide to wait here and anything important happens!"

Unless kobold PC's have a favour with Ratik Gnomes (which negates any negative effects) the reaction of most of the older gnomes is unfriendly verging on hostile. Any younger "Black Charade" gnomes attempt to be more tolerant, as they see themselves as "champions of the oppressed" although they are still very uneasy around kobolds..

If any kobolds decide to enter Skoradiffin undisguised (or fail the disguise check) run this as an improvised diplomatic encounter. It is important to stress that Yon'cyrra does not actually forbid any kobolds from entering Skoradiffin without a disguise but if they do decide to enter they are mocked and taunted by passing gnomes. You may improvise insults ranging from being called a "frog person" through to suggestions about inappropriate liaisons with dragons, but remember to tailor the reactions of the gnomes to be appropriate for the player's age and maturity level.

Yon'cyrra leaps to the defence of any insults levelled at kobold characters (as do the young gnomish and halflings "activists" around the fountain or at the inn) but that won't stop more insults coming. The gnomes do not start an actual fight, although they certainly try to taunt the kobolds into starting one. Any PCs involved in physically fighting with the gnomes receive the **Disfavour of the Gnomes** on the Adventure record.

This section of the module is not intended to visit any harm upon the PCs, but simply illustrate that in Ratik strong racial tensions persist amongst the gnomes and kobolds (as with almost everywhere on Oerth).

Once any kobold PCs announce their intentions ask the party to nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals as the caravan approaches the village. Once the PCs are organised, paraphrase the following:

Yon'cyrra requests you accompany her and a small group of halflings from the caravan into the town. Like most other predominantly gnomish towns much of Skoradiffin is built underground, although this town at least has a recognisable town square with a few conventional buildings a fountain and a number of market stalls. Quite a few of the stalls seem to bare halfling names. Yon'cyrra bids you wait in the square and asks you to keep an eye on Caldairra while she organises some accommodation and disappears into the crowd.

Allow the PCs to explore the town square markets and talk to the various stall holders. If they wish to make purchases PHB items up to 100gc are available. Improvise some novelty souvenirs worth a few silvers if the PCs ask.

Caldairra spots a group of younger halflings and gnomes (some only slightly older than Caldairra) dressed in what is now a familiar style - black straightened hair with a long

fringe over one or both eyes, dark button-less shirts, tight trousers and studded belts.

There are a number of stalls in the marketplace selling similar clothing, wide studded belts black trousers and so forth. A range of shirts are available for a few copper pieces each featuring logos like "Mithral Balloon", "Alchemical Romance", "The Stolen Bones", "Black Charade", "Slings and Posies", "Pink Void" and "Old Drizzle".

Eventually have Caldairra wander across to talk to the group of young halflings and gnomes. If the PCs decide to approach the group paraphrase the following:

As you move closer to the fountain you notice the group are all gathered around a halfling girl who is holding a tiny device of clearly gnomish construction with a stylised eye engraved on it. A slogan on the young girl's shirt stands out. "Black Charade." The device appears to be emanating music.

A DC 10 Listen check reveals the sounds of a reasonably competent bard ensemble singing a catchy song which seems to be a tale of "Gnomes, Badgers and Crabs". If the PCs pass the Listen check then paraphrase the following:

Intrigued by the device Caldairra asks "What is that?" The young halfling lass holding the device looks up at her and replies disdainfully "Why 'Gnomes Badgers and Crabs' by Alchemical Romance of course, surely you have heard it, everyone knows it". She clearly thought she was being asked to identify the song rather than the device.

If any of the PCs have played the adventure "Gnomes Badgers and Crabs" and gained the favour of the gnomes they are at this stage recognised by some of the young gnomes and halflings as the "adventurers from the song" and become minor celebrities.

If they give in to the sudden requests to don their "badger hats" from the previous adventure they acquire several admirers (generally of the opposite gender to the PC) for the rest of the stay in Skoradiffin. These new found fans follow the PCs around and pester them with requests for autographs.

If the PC is also a halfling or gnome they are subject to ceaseless questions about how the admirers might also become famous adventurers. None of the admirers are actually old enough to become adventurers in the near future.

Feel free, if the party has not played the previous adventure, to improvise some similar

questions anyway. After all the PCs are “real life” adventurers even if they are not the ones from the famous song.

The PC's may ask questions or gather information at this stage. If they ask a question directly related to the list below, the young NPC's happily provide the answer given below without any check needed. Otherwise Bardic Knowledge or Gather Information at the specified DC garners the same information.

DC 5 “Alchemical Romance” is a group of young gnome bards (and a half orc barbarian) whose musical style, which is termed “memo” because it usually contains a succinct message, has become very popular in southern Ratik.

DC 10 “The Black Charade” is a name adopted by a disparate group of disenfranchised younger halflings and gnomes to describe themselves. They are heavily influenced by the philosophy and music of the gnome ensemble “Alchemical Romance”.

DC 12 A pretty young halfling lass with strikingly large dark eyes peering out from behind her dark fringe tells you the strange musical device is an ‘eye-pod’ and it was built by Jaroo, a gnome from the nearby village of Baerlen. It is not for sale. A passer by comments that it is clearly nowhere near as good as live music and will never catch on.

DC 15 Alchemical romance originally hail from Arumagaalen a gnomish village located very close to the grey elf haven in the Glowgloom. The music of Alchemical Romance often bewails the hopelessness engendered by being born to a minority in a region like Ratik.

DC 20 The Black Charade have no official leadership as such. However some members of the Black Charade are known to be political activists lobbying for emancipation of the halflings, elves and other minority races in Ratik.

DC 25 There seems to be more to the Black Charade than meets the eye. Some suspect it is a cover for something more clandestine.

At this point Yon'cyrra returns:

Yon'cyrra returns, smiling broadly. “Friends, I've secured lodgings at The Swollen Goat,” she says, motioning for you to follow. “This way, this way...!”

The Swollen Goat is Skoradinfin's only inn and it has an unusual layout, typical of the hybrid architecture found in Skoradinfin. Above ground is the main entrance with a cloak room and a common room and on the second floor can be found accommodation for “big folks”.

This upper area is where medium sized PCs are the most comfortable. Medium PCs have been allocated room's upstairs small PC's have been allocated room's downstairs. If the PCs are unhappy with this arrangement the inn keeper is

happy for them to bunk down together in one of the larger upstairs rooms.

Down a short stairs leading off the common room, just below ground level, are the halfling and gnome accommodations as well as the kitchen area and a cosy low ceiling lounge bar with a long fireplace clearly designed for small humanoids. Medium PCs can enter the lounge bar and other lower areas but they need to stoop and are not overly comfortable.

Adjoining the lounge bar is a secondary entrance area with coat hooks and a place for shoes that provides access to the inn from the extensive tunnel system that interlinks the underground gnomish quarter of Skoradinfin.

Allow the PCs to interact with the patrons of the inn. There is a full list of patrons and the information they can provide the PCs in DM Guide 1. There is a lot of opportunities for roleplay amongst the various patrons.

Towards the end of the evening Yon'cyrra excuses herself saying, “Some important visitors have arrived late from Daberestead and Baerlen. I must speak with them. I suggest you all get an early night as we leave for Optwall in the morning.

The meeting with the Daberestead Gnomes is of course the reason why the caravan is in Skoradinfin in the first place. Allow the PCs a DC 15 Spot check to notice another of the parcels bearing Evaleigh's seal.

Paraphrase the following to either the first PC to retire to bed after Yon'cyrra leaves if the PCs all share a room, or a PC at random (try and choose a gnome or halfling PC if there are any) if they have elected to sleep in separate rooms.

An unexpected sight greets you when you finally retire to your room. A device very much like (well actually identical except a different colour) to the one that the young gnomes and halflings were listening to, is in your room sitting on a bedside table.

Allow the PCs to react. The device does not detect as evil. Casting detect magic reveals a faint illusion aura. A DC 11 Spellcraft check (once the device is operating) detects that someone is doing something rather clever involving chained multiple magic mouth spells.

The device has been left by one of Chikamelling's friends who is a member of the Black Charade. The device triggers two rounds after anyone enters the room. Once two rounds have elapsed paraphrase the following.

Suddenly the device activates. A clear but heavily disguised young voice begins

speaking, "Listen carefully for what the Black Charade reveal shall only be said the once. Optwall plays the game of houses. Those he thinks his allies, work for the Verdant Death. This message will self destruct in 5 seconds, have a nice day!"

Allow the PCs to think they are about to receive major damage, even ask for a reflex save, just to make them nervous. The device does in fact explode (internal non-magical alchemist fire trap triggered by the message finishing) but in such a way that it does not harm anything or anyone other than itself. After 5 seconds nothing remains but acrid smoke and ashes.

Allow the PCs to discuss the events. The cryptic reference to Verdant Death means nothing to the PC at this time although clearly "those he thinks his allies" is a reference to the Optwall shadow clan.

A DC 25 Bardic Knowledge check on "Verdant Death" brings to mind some very obscure rumours that a individual of that name has been connected with the Optwall Shadow Clan.

The insinuation about the Game of Houses is a warning that Lord Optwall is playing both sides, secretly allying with the Optwall shadow clan (he feels he has little choice but to compromise with them) whilst at the same time assisting Evaleigh in her plan's to undermine them and reduce shadow clan influence in the south.

Unfortunately he may be playing out of his league. He is a straightforward relatively honest man more suited to hunting or leading troops in open battle then the ongoing political intrigue, spying, blackmail and occasional assassination politely referred to as the "Game of Houses". He is totally unaware the Optwall clan are working for an outside agent known only as the "Verdant Death" and Erik Optwall's inexperienced attempts at double dealing may well see him eventually killed.

The fact that the Black Charade is aware of the Verdant Death and its dealings with the Black Hand shadow clan suggests that there is indeed more to the Black Charade than meets the eye.

If the PCs think to mention the matter to Yon'cyrra she knows nothing of the Verdant Death. She does however raise an eyebrow at the mention of the Black Charade and comment cryptically "well well ... and why would THEY dabble in the politics of this little backwater." She refuses to say any more on the matter.

The PCs may if they wish set watches for the night. Nothing else happens overnight.

ENCOUNTER 12: LORD OPTWALL

Morning breaks to the sound of cheery halfling and gnome voices, the clatter of cutlery and the aroma of breakfast cooking. It seems the cooking at the Swollen Goat is of a similar high standard to Rondalla's.

Allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. Most of the NPCs from the previous night will be either working again or calling past so if the PCs wish to question anyone about the overnight incident they are available.

About mid morning the PCs are requested to accompany Yon'cyrra back to the caravan, which is ready to head out on the next stage of the journey around midday.

Leaving Skoradinfin, the caravan is now heading towards its final destination, the location of the new township within the lands of House Optwall. The countryside the caravan is travelling through remains hilly though fertile enough. The inhabitants seem poor and the dwellings simple and basic but the locals seem happy enough with their situation.

A DC 10 Knowledge (local - Nyrond) check or DC 12 Knowledge (geography) check reveals that House Optwall largely subsists on its own and the house has minimal trade and interaction with the other houses in Ratik.

The Optwall locals are traditionally fairly content with their lot because they haven't seen much of the rest of Ratik with which to compare themselves. Their life is hard with few luxuries but they survive and there has always been enough to go around.

The recent influx of refugees from outside has however resulted in a rapid change in this situation. There is not enough resources to feed the growing population and at the same time the locals are seeing for the first time the sort of luxuries that people outside Optwall take for granted.

The caravan stops to trade but most of the local farmers and villagers cannot afford to purchase very much. Eventually Brandopee Wildwhisper calls the caravan to a halt and instructs everyone to make camp for the night. He mentions to you over the evening meal that there remains a little over a days travel to the final destination.

Allow the PCs to set watches for the night. This close to the final destination the PCs may be getting nervous so be sure to call for some Spot checks and Listen checks. Possibly add a report

of a sighting of a large animal such as a dire bear or dire wolf but it is a false alarm.

The next day allow the PCs to organise themselves, nominate what spells they have selected for the day and announce what they are doing in terms of armor, weapons and animals. Then paraphrase the following.

In the morning Yon'cyrra approaches as breakfast is being served. She passes you a note and says "My apologies for disturbing your morning meal but I received this missive from Fyngar Hillstepper early this morning."

This is an appropriate time to pass around Player's Handout 3. A DC 10 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check or DC 15 Knowledge (local – Nyrond) Check reveals that Head Gamekeeper Fyngar Hillstepper is Lord Erik's closest friend and something of a mentor, although they are close to the same age. The two spend much of their time exploring the hills and mountains to the south.

"Clearly I am far too old to indulge in hunting, I have no idea what that silly Sir Erik is thinking," says Yon'cyrra "but I feel someone should go. I have decided to volunteer you adventurers to stand in as my substitutes. What say you?"

If the party are unsure Yon'cyrra becomes firm and advises them it was not a request, she needs them to go in her stead as part of their duties. Assuming the PCs accept continue with the following:

Yon'cyrra promptly formulates a note advising Fyngar Hillstepper that she must decline Sir Erik's kind offer but will be sending a group of adventurers to take her place. A little later that morning, a message comes back from Fyngar agreeing to the revised arrangement and giving details of the hunt.

The hunt is to be held later that afternoon. Yon'cyrra requests that the PCs be her "eyes and ears" in this matter and report back to her anything unusual. The town of Optwall is only a short distance from the current caravan campsite. Allow the PCs to confirm what they intend taking on the hunt in terms of armor, weapons and animals. Proceed by paraphrasing the following:

It is only a short distance to the town of Optwall. Optwall is a disappointing town for a House Seat. Most of the residences are small

and basic. The few shops are sparsely stocked and uninviting.

If the PCs talk to any of the locals they discover the population is poor but reasonably happy with their lot. There is some disgruntlement over recent shortages but most of the locals are philosophical about it all. Any questions about the Shadow Clan are met with a blank silence followed by a polite excuse to leave. Lord Optwall himself seems to be well respected by the common folk. Eventually the PCs meet up with Lord Erik at the designated rendezvous point, an inn near the centre of town named the Optwall Arms.

Entering the Optwall Arms, it is easy to spot Lord Erik Optwall, a tall and rather handsome Oeridian man who dresses in the practical manner of an adventurer rather than a lord, although the fine material and stitching of his clothes match his title. He greets you with a well practiced bow, "I must say it's a pleasure to hunt with real adventurers rather than stuffy nobles, allow me to introduce my good friend and mentor Fyngar Hillstepper."

Fyngar is clearly an accomplished woodsman and hunter. His outfit and equipment are worn but practical and well cared for. He has about him the confident air of a professional.

Fyngar nods at your group, "Gentlemen and ladies, let us proceed with the hunt. Follow me if you please."

Fyngar leads the PCs out the back of the inn to the rear courtyard and stables where the rest of the hunting party await. Tailor the hunt to match the PCs. Some groups may suit a mounted party with hounds other parties may be better suited to a hunt on foot with ranged weapons or magic. Lord Optwall will equip the PCs with mounts, ammunition and masterwork quality bows or other weapons if they require it.

The hunt with Lord Optwall is intended to be a reasonably relaxed affair, where he and the PCs track down deer, foxes and elk in the surrounds of Optwall. This is an excellent opportunity to allow any druids, rangers, scouts or other outdoors folk to shine. If time permits choose a few game animals from the monster manual and role play a hunt with the PCs.

Although Lord Optwall is a reasonably competent tracker (Survival +4), he loves a skilled partner to hunt with and happily hands over command of the hunt to any PC he judges more skilled than he is at tracking. He is a confident man who has no need to show off or take centre stage (he gets plenty of that in his

role as lord) and simply enjoys being part of a hunt.

Lord Erik appears to be enjoying the hunt. He takes every opportunity to assure you how upset he is about the rumours and talks about how he is supporting the establishment of the town in order to undermine the shadow clan influence in Optwall.

All of this is very true. Lord Erik Optwall is indeed upset at the rumours and he is indeed supporting the new town in the hope of reducing the shadow clan influence in Optwall. What he is avoiding saying is that he has been playing both sides and has made what he felt were unavoidable compromises with the Shadow Clan in recent months.

A DC 25 Sense Motive check reveals that Lord Optwall is telling the truth but there is more to it than meets the eye. If confronted at this stage (when there is no hard evidence) he simply takes offence and refuses to discuss the matter further (the Urogalai soon turns up breaking the deadlock).

At an appropriate time, read or paraphrase the following.

A larger than normal halfling slips out of the undergrowth almost sixty feet away from you, pausing to regard you for a moment. He is truly massive - human sized or more. Dressed in a verdant green outfit decorated with intricate dragon motifs, he wears a thick green cloak and a hood which is styled in the visage of a dragon opening its maw. It partially obscures his face, giving little away aside from his gender and two glowing pinpricks of crimson light which shed a crimson illumination over his features.

Allow the PCs to make a DC 11 Knowledge (planes) check to reveal that the overly tall Halfling is fiendish. They may also make a DC 11 Knowledge (nature or arcana) check. Should they succeed, they determine that the creature is a regular Halfling, enlarged to human size by magical means.

Any halflings can be given this knowledge for free, as well as the name of the creature; an Urogalai (or 'blood of Urogalan' in halfling). Such creatures are extremely rare and may have either fiendish or celestial heritage.

Further, the PCs should also make a DC 25 Knowledge (Arcana) or a DC 25 Knowledge (local - Nyrond) check. Halfling and kobold PCs gain a +10 bonus on this roll, reducing the DC to 15. Should they succeed, they gain no vital, immediate knowledge- but should e-mail the

Ratikan triad Point of Contact to receive a special piece of bonus information (which is not contained in this module for spoiler purposes). When you are ready to proceed, read or paraphrase the following.

He does not speak immediately, instead locking Lord Optwall in a fierce stare, ignoring your group. "The Black Hands grow restless, my lord, they need..."

He does not get an opportunity to say what they need. He is interrupted by an angry Lord Erik Optwall.

"SILENCE!" Lord Optwall interrupts, his face a mixture of concern and anger, which soothes itself with practiced grace. He pauses a moment, smiling sheepishly to your group, before turning back to the stranger. He announces in a loud voice, "I'm sorry, friend, I don't know who you are - or what you're doing here... *right now*."

The fiendish halfling snarls and moves forward menacingly, weapon drawn, as Lord Optwall turns back to your group, a look of alarm suddenly crossing his face. "An Assassin! Help! Friends! Protect me!"

Allow the PCs a DC 11 Sense Motive check. If they succeed, they can infer that perhaps Lord Optwall did know this individual- but his timing was apparently poor and Lord Optwall certainly did not expect an attack. Unfortunately they do not have time to make any use of this information as, at this point, the halfling immediately attacks the group (there is no surprise round as both groups are aware of each other and the fiendish halfling's intent to attack is obvious)

APL 2 (EL 4)

Urogalai Fighter: male halfling fighter, 21 hp, Appendix 1.

Tactics: The encounter takes place when the 10' wide path through the undergrowth the party have been following traverses a clearing 200' long and 120' wide. The Urogalai emerges from the undergrowth (difficult terrain with brambles and light timber) and issues his challenge when the party reaches the centre of that clearing. There is 60' of clear terrain between him and the party, 100' of clear terrain each side and 60' of clear terrain behind the party. Everything else except the path is difficult terrain.

Although the Urogalai's prime target is Lord Optwall the PCs are in the way and he needs to deal with them first. Some distance away a

number of other halflings emerge from the bushes and engage other members of the hunting party. Lord Optwall is keen to enter the fray but is quickly intercepted and ushered away by Fyngar Hillstepper.

Lord Optwall is no coward but he is the last of his line and he is not to be risked. Hillstepper and Optwall's retainers will not allow him to become involved at this point.

Effectively the PCs are alone against the Urogalai. He fights viciously though if clearly winning he attempts to capture any surviving PCs to interrogate them. If the PCs are captured, proceed to the 'captured' conclusion. If the Urogalai is reduced to below 5 hit points he attempts to flee. If it is clear he cannot escape he surrenders.

Once the fight finishes Lord Optwall quickly returns and immediately arranges for his men to take the creature away promising to deal with him.

Treasure:

APL 2: Loot: 55 gp; Coin: 22 gp; Magic: 437 gp
+1 chain shirt, +2 ring of protection, Total 514 gp.

Development: If the PCs capture and attempt to interrogate Krall, Lord Optwall insists that his own men should deal with the creature's interrogation and punishment and will do his best to separate Krall from the PCs as quickly as possible. Should the PCs find a way to proceed with an interrogation regardless, Krall doesn't know very much. What he knows is briefly outlined below. Provide as much information as is appropriate to the PCs available time with Krall. Krall does not hide information but only answers direct questions:

- He does know Lord Optwall. Krall is a representative of the Optwall Crew (otherwise known as the Black Hands Shadow Clan) who have been actively working to prevent the foundation of the halfling settlement.
- The Black Hands were promised action to stop the new town almost a month ago but nothing has occurred. Hence, their need for action.
- The Black Hands are vicious rivals of the Marner Foxes (otherwise known as The Family). The Black Hands are the "rightful" owners of the crime syndicate in Marner city, but were evicted by the Foxes some time ago. The Black Hands have been struggling to regain control in Marner ever since and preventing the settlement from being built is just another step to that eventual goal.

- Krall is an Urogalai. In halfling, this phrase means 'Blood of Urogalan'. He doesn't quite know what it means, but he has been told that he is destined for great things.
- The Black Hands have been dormant the last few years or so and it was rumoured that infighting had finally driven the vicious crime syndicate into the ground. However, a creature known as the Verdant Death approached them recently and offered to restore them to their former glory if they would weaken the Archbaroness' power in the Ratik region. Since this coincided exactly with their goals, they eagerly welcomed their new ally into the fold. He doesn't know anything else about the Verdant Death, nor has he ever seen him/her/it.

Once the encounter is finished read the following,

As you head back to the town of Optwall, Lord Optwall turns to you, "I thank you for your assistance in this troubling situation. I feel sorry for this pitiful creature, must be insane with rage at its sad existence. That it would imply that I would have anything to do with those 'shadow clans'... Such tales belong on the lips of silly children, not for serious consumption. I would be grateful that you don't trouble Yon'cyrra with this meaningless nonsense, the poor elderly woman has had a long and arduous journey, at her age such stress cannot be good for her overall well being".

A DC 10 Sense Motive reveals that Lord Optwall clearly knew the creature. He is not actually attempting to disguise that fact but merely asking the PCs to conveniently "forget" what they saw. If confronted Lord Optwall will state that the situation in Optwall is "complex" and if rumours of connections between himself and the Black Hands circulate than the shadowclans will gain even more influence and his efforts to limit their power will be hampered..

If the PCs keep quiet about the incident they receive the **Favour of Lord Optwall**. If the PCs report Lord Optwall's suspected motives to Scarlet or Yon'cyrra they receive the **Noticed by the Marner Foxes** favour.

The PCs are free to do what they wish for the rest of their time at Optwall. When you are ready to proceed, go to the Conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Read the appropriate conclusion depending on the results the PCs achieved:

CONCLUSION A: IF THE PCS ARE SUCCESSFUL.

Preliminary work on the new settlement is already underway. Sturdy frames of House Bredivan supplied timber are being raised by burly Bredivan men at arms. Lord Krevik Bredivan has made a rare journey north from his holdings and is supervising personally. He appears to have forgotten any past grievances with Lady Evaleigh and is giving the project his full support.

If the PCs wish to talk to the men at arms they find them a jovial bunch freshly rotated out from duty at Fort Bredivan. They seem to regard the heavy lifting involved in the construction duties a bit of a lark compared to the continuous battles with gnomish incursions they faced at Fort Bredivan. They respect their lord as a strong and capable leader of men. Krevik rules fairly but with an iron hand.

A DC 12 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check or DC 10 Knowledge (local – Nyrond) check reveals the young woman with Lord Krevik is Kitavia Bredivan, Krevik's daughter. Krevik never married but had an affair with a mysterious woman who many claim was a witch or nature spirit of the Loftwood. The woman disappeared but delivered an infant daughter nine months later.

Lord Bredivan is very busy but will greet the PCs warmly and thank them for their efforts before being called away to supervise some construction if the PCs request an audience with him.

Also present for the occasion are the Lord and Lady of Fadric. Lord Brayen and Lady Shelova Fadric on first appearances make an unlikely couple. Brayen is remarkably charismatic whilst Shelova is a somewhat homely woman, possibly with some distant orc blood. Nevertheless they are a close couple, apparently almost inseparable and appear devoted to each other. Both are quiet though Lord Brayen appears more thoughtful and Lady Shelova a little introverted.

A DC 12 Knowledge (nobility and royalty check) or DC 10 Knowledge (local – Nyrond) check reveals that Shipbuilding is the driving force behind the Fadric economy. Due to past lumber

shortages, the Fadric shipbuilding industry has shifted from larger commercial boats to small, high quality, luxury vessels catering to the wealthy.

Lord Fabric is reasonably available particularly if the PCs wish to discuss matters nautical. Lord Brayen Fadric is happy to converse with them and informs them that owning a Fadric yacht is considered the ultimate status symbol.

He believes the rumours about swarms of kraken are utter nonsense but is confident one of his yachts will survive a kraken attack as well or better than any other vessel. He points out that a Fadric yacht is solidly built, exceptionally manoeuvrable and extremely fast in the water. He proudly boasts that the capabilities of a Fadric yacht are only limited by the seamanship of the crew and the daring of the captain.

If any of the PCs enquire about purchasing a Fadric yacht he advises that he would be pleased to take orders for laying the keel on a new yacht at the going price. He points out that not everyone is permitted to buy a Fadric yacht as merely having the money is insufficient. However he assures the PCs their recent efforts on behalf of the Arch Baroness are evidence enough that they are worthy to own one (though naturally they still need to raise the gold as well).

He adds in a slightly disapproving tone that "many fine and seaworthy Fadric yachts never seem to leave harbour" (being used by their landed owners as a floating place of entertainment) and that he hopes any yacht the adventurers eventually purchase at least puts to sea occasionally.

The PCs are approached by Yon'cyrra.

"Adventurers!" she says, "Congratulations on a job well done. As you no doubt are already aware your true employer the past few weeks has been none other than the Arch Baroness herself. Be assured your efforts will be remembered in the future".

The PCs are ushered at this point by Yon'cyrra to a cleared area that eventually becomes the central marketplace of the new village. Paraphrase the following:

A makeshift stage has been temporarily erected to one side of the new marketplace and an ensemble comprised of two gnomes, a halfling and a half orc are playing a catchy tune on their instruments.

The band is extremely competent. The tune sounds simple and elegant but any bards present instantly realise it is actually technically

quite complex (a DC 25 Perform check to perform it).

The base of the stage is surrounded by a large throng of young (and not so young) halflings, gnomes and the occasional medium humanoid, all dancing about flamboyantly. A group of young teen halfling and gnome girls stand immediately in front of the stage screaming excitedly bouncing around like baby badgers. It would appear this is the famed bardic ensemble from Arumagaelen you've heard so much about in recent weeks.

After another song or two the band pauses and the singer steps to the front of the stage and speaks up, "We are Alchemical Romance !!!" a young girl at the front faints happily as the singer winks at her, "and we are proud to be here to help celebrate the construction of the first halfling settlement to be built in Ratik! Now put your hands together for the new soon to be Mayor, Riliss Wildhollow!"

The young gnomes and halflings clap as more people crowd around the stage and a middle aged halfling steps to the centre, "Thank you all" he smiles down, "I am honoured to be chosen to lead this settlement into a prosperous and fulfilling future, and let there always be a place here for halflings to rest when they are weary from travel"

As he finished speaking you see the familiar sight of Yon'cyrra, Kinapery by her side, walking up the stairs a small wicker basket in her hands, "Greetings Riliss Wildhollow, I am Yon'cyrra Cobbletrail, here to present you with a token of the Arch Baroness' esteem for the work you are doing for the halflings of Ratik and the refugees from the Bonemarch" with a formal bow, the elderly woman presents the basket to the male halfling and a look of elation appears on his face, "Chordevok chicks! I've always wanted one of these! Now I have six!!!"

Riliss Wildhollow steps to the front of the stage clutching the basket tightly to his chest. "It's an immense honour to be here amongst you on this history making occasion" he says. "There seems to be only one task left for us, the naming of the town!! It is only right that all participate so I would like to announce that any one amongst you, no matter who you are, halfling or not, noble or commoner, is free to make suggestions!" As people begin shouting names at him he adds "I think it is better if you all give me your suggestions after the show."

This is an opportunity for the players to contribute to the naming of the new town. Suggestions for names may be emailed to Ratik Triad (with details of player and relevant PC names) by the GM at the completion of the mod.

With the presentation over the band start to play a familiar tune, and soon the sound of a great many halflings and gnomes singing 'Gnomes, Badgers, and Crabs' fills the area, enthusiastically but as often as not very off tune, and you all feel contented in a long arduous job, well done.

The PCs have successfully completed the mod. They may now celebrate and relax.

If they wish they can even meet the famous ensemble "Alchemical Romance". Details of the band are provided in DM guide 1. Should the PC choose to meet the band it provides a chance to throw some light on the Black Charade.

If the PCs bring up the topic of the Black Charade, Gerringle will claim that the "true" Black Charade is actually an ancient secret mystical order. He says he is not at liberty to reveal anything else about the order and that the band was first influenced by them when they undertook a mystic retreat to the glow glooms to study with the grey elves.

Favours

As they were successful, the PCs will receive the **Favour of Lady Abril Bresht**, and the **Favour of Yon'cyrra Cobbletrail**.

PCs that used lethal force against the noble in encounter 1 receive both the **Disfavour of House Keth** and the **Unreliable** disfavour.

Any PCs that were civil to the elves in encounter 3 receive the **Known to the Whisperleaf Elves**.

PCs that accepted a bribe from the Black Hand in encounter 8 receive the **Noticed by the Black Hand** favour.

Any PC that took part in the joust receives a **Joust Score**.

Any PC that expressed an interest in joining the Academy (even if they currently do not qualify) to Hengon in encounter 10 receives the **Favour of Sir Hengon Mogotten**.

Any PCs involved in physically fighting with the gnomes in encounter 11 receive the **Disfavour of the Gnomes**.

If the PCs keep quiet about the incident they receive the **Favour of Lord Optwall**. If the PCs report Lord Optwall's suspected motives to Scarlet or Yon'cyrra they receive the **Noticed by the Marner Foxes** favour.

CONCLUSION B: IF THE PCS GET THREE CRITICAL FAILURES,

Yon'cyrra silently stares at you all before speaking, "I'm afraid you do not have the skills we need. We are now delayed many weeks, and many people will not be pleased. Therefore you are dismissed from our caravan, you are no longer wanted here". With that last note you watch as the caravan continues on without you, and you are left wondering where the halflings roam now.

The PCs can keep whatever gold has been paid and whatever treasure they have found to this point. They receive experience and qualify for favours as appropriate for their achievements up to this point (see conclusion A for a summary).

CONCLUSION C: IF THE PCS ARE CAPTURED,

You have been captured by the Black Hands Shadow Clan of Optwall and interrogated. After a period of 4 arduous weeks where you fear for your very life, they finally decide you are not the threat they thought and are just inept "would be adventurers" who have no information of any value to them. You are released without any of your equipment bearing a distinct black hand branded onto your right palm.

The PCs receive the **Captured** consequence on their AR as well as any favours earned up to this point (see conclusion A). The PCs lose all equipment they were carrying at the time of capture. They retain any items not normally carried with them, and any treasure from the current adventure (it is assumed they would not have taken it with them) and lose 4 TU. They are branded with a Black Hand symbol on their right palm.

EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each character.

Encounter 1

Rescue Caldairra
APL 2

30 XP

Encounter 3

Defeat the adult chordevoc.
APL 2

30 XP

Falling tree limb.
APL2

120 XP

Encounter 5

Dire Toad
APL 2

90 XP

Encounter 6

Capture the Brixashulties.
APL 2

120 XP

Encounter 7

Save the children from the trap.
APL 2

30 XP

Encounter 8

Optwall halflings.
APL 2

120 XP

Encounter 9

Unluck and Color Spray trap
APL 2

120 XP

Encounter 12

Defeat Krall the Urogalai
APL 2

120 XP

Story Award

Objective(s) met:
APL 2

60 XP

Discretionary roleplaying award

APL 2

60 XP

Total possible experience:

APL 2

900 XP

TREASURE SUMMARY

During an adventure, characters encounter treasure, usually finding it in the possession of their foes. Every encounter that features treasure has a "treasure" section within the encounter description, giving information about the loot, coins, and magic items that make up the encounter's treasure.

The loot total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if the foes are plundered of all their earthly possessions. Looting the bodies takes at least 10 minutes per every 5 enemies, and if the characters cannot take the time to loot the bodies, they do not gain this gold. If you feel it is reasonable that characters can go back to loot the bodies, and those bodies are there (i.e., not carted off by dungeon scavengers, removed from the scene by the local watch, and so on), characters may return to retrieve loot. If the characters do not loot the body, the gold piece value for the loot is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

The coin total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if they take the coin available. A normal adventuring party can usually gather this wealth in a round or so. If for some reason, they pass up this treasure, the coin total is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

Next, the magic items are listed. Magic item treasure is the hardest to adjudicate, because they are varied and because characters may want to use them during the adventure. Many times characters must cast identify, analyze dweomer or similar spell to determine what the item does and how to activate it. Other times they may attempt to use the item blindly. If the magic item is consumable (a potion, scroll, magic bolts, etc.) and the item is used before the end of the adventure, its total is subtracted from the adventure totals below.

Once you have subtracted the value for unclaimed treasure from each encounter add it up and that is the number of gold pieces a characters total and coin value increase at the end of the adventure. Write the total in the GP Gained field of the adventure certificate.

Loot = Looted gear from enemy; Coin = Coin, Gems, Jewelry, and other valuables; Magic = Magic Items.

Encounter 2: A Halfling Life for Us

Advance from Yon'cyrra

APL 2: Loot: 0 gp; Coin: 80 gp; Magic: 0 gp;
Total 80gp.

Encounter 3:

Reward for capturing the chordevoc chicks.

APL 2: Loot: 0 gp; Coin: 75 gp; Magic: 0 gp;
Total 75gp

Encounter 8:

A: Defeat the Optwall halflings

APL 2: Loot: 232 gp; Coin: 3 gp; Magic: 0 gp;
Total 235 gp

B: Accept the bribe instead of fighting

APL 2: Loot: 0 gp; Coin: 235 gp; Magic: 0 gp;
Total 235 gp

Encounter 12:

APL 2: Loot: 55 gp; Coin: 18 gp; Magic: 437 gp
+1 chain shirt, +2 ring of protection, Total 514 gp.

Total Possible Treasure

Option A: **APL 2:** Loot: 287 gp; Coin: 176 gp;
Magic: 437 gp; Total 900 gp

Option B: **APL 2:** Loot: 55 gp; Coin: 408 gp;
Magic: 437 gp; Total 900 gp

Special

Joust Score: You have unhorsed (0) (1) (2)
(circle one) opponents at the Ratikhill Spring
Fair.

Favour of Lady Abril Bresht:

You have impressed the Lady Abril Bresht, and she offers you the position of Squire. Taking up this offer grants the character free standard life style for any adventures starting in Ratikhill or Bresht.

Favour of Yon'cyrra Cobbletrail:

You have assisted Yon'cyrra Cobbletrail a halfling elder, giving you a + 1 modifier on all charisma based checks with halflings as word of your deeds spread.

Noticed by the Black Hand:

You have accepted a bribe from the Black Hand Shadow Clan of Optwall and gained their attention, this may have future consequences.

Noticed by the Marner Foxes:

You have assisted Scarlett, a Marner Fox spy, and kept her identity a secret. You have also given her information regarding the Black Hand gaining the attention of the Marner Foxes this may have future consequences.

Favour of Sir Hengon Mogotten

If the above-mentioned PC is a member of or becomes a member (within twelve months of the date on this AR) of the *Ratikhill Academy of Wizardry and Sorcery* meta-org, they gain a permanent influence point with the Academy.

Disfavour of House Keth:

You have attacked a noble from House Keth you now have a -1 influence penalty with House Keth.

Disfavour of the Gnomes:

You have attacked the gnome villagers of Skoradinfyn and as such receive a -1 penalty with all charisma based checks with gnomes and any purchases within gnome territory costs 10% more.

Unreliable:

Your actions have shown you to be to unreliable to be trusted for a period of one calendar year from the date the adventure record was issued, all items purchased by the PC incur a 10% increase in price.

Known to the Whisperleaf elves:

Your actions in helping a 'Elf Friend' have been recognised, and any Whisperleaf elves have a friendly attitude to the PC provided the PC has a friendly attitude toward the elves.

Favour of Lord Optwall:

For remaining silent you gain an influence point with House Optwall.

Captured:

You have been captured by the Black Hands Shadow Clan of Optwall and interrogated. After a period of 4 arduous weeks (4 TU) where you fear for your very life they finally realise you have no information of any value to them. You are released without any of your equipment bearing a distinct black hand branded on your right palm.

ITEMS FOR THE ADVENTURE RECORD

Item Access

None

APPENDIX 1: APL 2

3: A BIRD IN THE HAND

CHORDEVOC

CR 1/2

Always N Tiny animal

Init +4;

Senses low-light vision; Blindsense 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +8

AC 18, touch 16, flat-footed 14
(+4 Dex, +2 size, +2 natural)

hp 5 (1 HD)

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2

Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee Talons +6 melee (1d3–1)

Space 2-1/2 ft; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -9

Special Actions

Abilities Str 9, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 5

Feats Flyby Attack, Weapon Finesse, Move Silently +6, Spot +6

Skills Hide +16, Listen +8

This sizable bird is bigger than a housecat. It has smoky gray plumage with white and black bars. Its wide but stubby beak is fringed with long bristles that resemble a cat's whiskers. The large eyes are black, rimmed with silver. The body seems very short, and the wings seem very long.

The chordevoc is a nocturnal bird bred by the halflings. Its call sounds like a soft whistle, not unlike a teakettle just coming to boil. Many people find the sound similar to the call of a screech owl, but those who have heard both know the chordevoc's call is shriller.

When left to feed on its own, a chordevoc corkscrews through the air, zigzagging and sideslipping so much that observers often have difficulty telling the bird's true flight path.

Halflings keep chordevocs primarily as guards and hunting companions, but sometimes simply as pets. Wild populations of chordevocs exist, but they are fairly rare, usually consisting of widely scattered pairs or lone individuals that have escaped or become orphaned from the halflings who raised them.

Combat

chordevocs are bred to attack, and they're well equipped for combat in spite of their miniature size and fairly low Strength scores. A chordevoc prefers to fight on the wing, swooping in to slash with its talons (it uses both as a single attack), then veering away to fly out of reach.

Blindsense (Ex): A chordevoc notices and locates creatures within 60 feet. Opponents still have total concealment against a creature with blindsense.

Skills: A chordevoc's feathers provide excellent camouflage, granting it a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks. *A chordevoc has a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Listen checks. These bonuses are lost if its blindsense is negated.

Training a Chordevoc

Chordevocs resist most attempts to tame or train them. To be trained, a chordevoc must have a friendly attitude toward the trainer. A chordevoc usually has an indifferent attitude toward a halfling, but that attitude improves to friendly if the halfling supplies the bird with treats for at least a week and other-wise treats it well. A chordevoc is hostile to most other creatures. Changing a chordevoc's attitude requires a wild empathy check, or a Diplomacy check if the character has some way to communicate with the creature (such as access to a speak with animals spell).

Training a friendly chordevoc requires a Handle Animal check. A halfling can train a chordevoc with-out penalty, but the Handle Animal DCs for any other trainer increase by 5. The time required depends on the tricks or task the chordevoc must learn, as noted in the Handle Animal skill description on pages 74–75 of the Player's Handbook.

A chordevoc egg is worth 25 gp on the open market, but eggs are seldom offered for sale. A chick is worth 150 gp. A chick is ready for training by the age of six months and can live for 150 years. Adult chordevocs are generally trained for hunting or for guarding. A fully trained chordevoc costs at least 250 gp on the open market, if it is offered for sale at all.

Chordevocs as Animal Companions

A halfling who has the animal companion class feature can choose a chordevoc as an animal companion. A nonhalfling can also have a chordevoc companion, but his effective level for the animal companion class feature must be 4th or higher, and the character's effective level for determining the chordevoc's abilities is reduced by three. For example, if a 4th-level raptoran druid has a chordevoc companion, the chordevoc has only 1st-level companion abilities.

5: TOAD MANOR

DIRE TOAD

CR 3

Always N Medium animal

Init +2;

Senses low-light vision; Listen +7, Spot +8

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13
(+2 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 26 (4 HD)

Fort +6, **Ref** +6, **Will** +6

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee bite +5 (1d4 plus poison)

Melee tongue +5 (see text)

Space 5 ft; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +3

Special Actions Poison

Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 7

Feats Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +8, Jump +10, Listen +7, Spot +8

Combat

Though dire toads are not prone to fighting, they do bite if disturbed. A dire toad's tongue attack has a range of 10 feet with no range increment.

Poison (Ex): A dire toad delivers its poison (Fortitude save DC 14) with each successful bite attack. The initial and second-ary damage is the same (1d6 points of Constitution damage).

Improved Grab (Ex): If a dire toad hits an opponent that is at least one size category smaller than itself with a bite attack or a tongue attack, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity (grapple bonus +3). If it gets a hold, it can try to swallow the opponent. Alternatively, the dire toad has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use its jaws to hold the opponent (–20 penalty on grapple check, but the dire toad is not considered grappled). In either case, each successful grapple check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals bite damage.

Swallow Whole (Ex): A dire toad can swallow a grabbed opponent that is at least one size category smaller than itself by making a successful grapple check (grapple bonus +3). Once inside the toad, the opponent takes 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage plus 1d4 points of acid damage per round from the dire toad's stomach. A successful grapple check allows the swallowed creature to climb out of the stomach and return to the toad's mouth, where another successful grapple check is needed to get free. Alternatively, a swallowed creature can try to cut its way out with either claws or a light piercing or slashing weapon. Dealing at least 10 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 13) in this way creates an opening large enough to permit escape. Once a single swallowed creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; thus, another swallowed

opponent must cut its own way out. A Medium-size dire toad's stomach can hold 2 Small or 8 Tiny or smaller opponents. **Skills:** A dire toad receives a +4 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, and Spot checks, and a +8 racial bonus on Jump checks.

8: ROAD SOUTH

SHEEL BRENHOLLOW

CR 1

Female halfling(tallfellow) swashbuckler 1

CE Small humanoid

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +2

Aura weak evil

Languages Common, Halfling

AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14

(+1 size, +3 Dex, +3 armor)

hp 12 (1 HD);

Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

Speed 20 ft. in light armor (4 squares), base movement 20 ft.;

Melee rapier +6 (1d4) or rapier +4 (1d4) and dagger +4 (1d3)

Ranged dagger +7 (1d3+1)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +1; **Grp** -2

Atk Options Two-Weapon Fighting

Combat Gear masterwork studded leather, whip, 2 x masterwork rapier, 4 x masterwork dagger, 2x smokestick, caltrops x5, tanglefoot bag, thunderstone;

Abilities Str 11, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 12

Feats Weapon Finesse, Two-Weapon Fighting

Skills Profession (bounty hunter) +4, Swim +4, Tumble +7,

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork thieves tools, a flask of elven wine, 25ft silk rope, bedroll, 3x sunrod, ink (black), 5x sheets of parchment, coin pouch (16gp).

Physical Description Dressed entirely in black, this 3'4 strikingly attractive halfling woman carries herself with a feminine yet deadly grace. A thin, pointed rapier sits comfortably in her left hand while a wickedly jagged dagger rests in her right. A thick, heavy black cloak drapes down over her shoulders, concealing her form from casual observers. A white armband is tied around her left arm. Her blue eyes carry a look of disdain and indifferent malice.

Hook "Darling, you aren't worth my time."

DRIC BRENHOLLOW

CR 1

Male halfling(tallfellow) ranger 1

CE Small humanoid

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +6, Spot +6

Aura weak evil

Languages Common, Halfling, Sylvan

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 15

(+1 size, +3 Dex, +4 armor)

hp 10 (1 HD);

Fort +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +1

Speed 20 ft. in light armor (4 squares), base movement 20 ft.;

Melee longsword +3 (1d6+1) or dagger +3 (1d3+1)
Ranged dagger +6 (1d3+1)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +1; **Grp** -2
Combat Gear masterwork chain shirt, longsword, 10x dagger, 2x smokestick, 5x caltrops, tanglefoot bag, thunderstone;
Abilities Str 13, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8
Feats Point Blank Shot
Skills Spot +6, Listen +6, Survival +4, Search +7, Profession (bounty hunter) +4, Ride +7, Tumble +5 (cc),
Possessions combat gear plus eight goblin scalps, 25ft silk rope, bedroll, 3x sunrod, ink (black), 5x sheets of parchment, coin pouch (11gp).
Physical Description Meticulously groomed and impeccably dressed, this 3'9 halfling dresses entirely in black. A red rimmed hat sits perched on his head, complimenting his thick, heavy moustache. He wears a monacle on his left eye which is attached to a long silver chain. Two bandoleers of thin, neatly arranged daggers cross over his chest and a finely crafted longsword rests comfortably at his hip. He wears a long, black cape which flows right down to his ankles. A white armband is tied around his left arm and his brown eyes regard his surroundings with a studied, professional air.
Hook "I'll get right to the point."

WORT BRENHOLLOW **CR 1**
Male halfling(tallfellow) sorcerer 1 Rogue 1
CE Small humanoid
Init +3; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4
Aura weak evil
Languages Common, Halfling, Sylvan
AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 15
(+1 size, +3 Dex, +4 armor)
hp 10 (2 HD);
Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3
Speed 20 ft. in light armor (4 squares), base movement 20 ft.;
Melee dagger -1 (1d6+1) or dagger -1 (1d3+1)
Ranged ray +5 **Space** 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +0; **Grp** -6
Atk Options Sneak Attack
Combat Gear dagger, 2x smokestick, thunderstone;
Class Spells Known (CL 1st):
1st (4/day)— burning hands, shocking grasp
0 (5/day)— acid splash, light, ray of frost, ghost sound
Abilities Str 6, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 15
Feats Point Blank Shot
Skills Concentration +5, Diplomacy +7, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Sense Motive +4 Spellcraft +5,
Possessions combat gear plus spell component pouch, two badly scorched goblin scalps, bedroll, ink (black), 5x sheets of parchment, coin pouch (11gp).
Physical Description Standing at 3'1, this male halfling has wild, blonde hair and a generally unkept appearance. His posture is stooped and crooked, his form gaunt and rake thin. Even the

slightest movement catches his attention, his green eyes darting to the source and fingers twitching excitedly.
Hook "Boom! Hehe! Spells! Death, death!"

9: JOUSTING

SQUIRE BRUCE DOREYMAN **CR 1**
Male Human Fighter 1
LN Medium Human (Oeridian)
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0
Aura none
Languages Common, Oeridian
AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13
(+2 Dex, +3 armor)
hp 11 (1 HD);
Fort +3 **Ref** +2, **Will** +0
Speed 20 ft. in hide (4 squares), base movement 30 ft.,
Melee Lance +2 (d8) or Longsword +2 (d8)
Ranged longbow +4 (d8)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +1
Combat Gear hide armor, Masterwork Lance, Masterwork Longsword, Masterwork Longbow
Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14
Feats Mounted Combat, Ride by Attack,
Skills Craft Weaponsmith +5, Handle Animal +6, Ride +6
Possessions combat gear plus weaponsmithing tools

LADY MALENIE LOEGRIMM **CR 2**
Female Human Paladin 2
LG Medium Human (Oeridian)
Init +1; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot 1
Aura moderate aura of good
Languages Common, Oeridian
AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15
(+1 Dex, +5 armor)
hp 18 (2 HD);
Fort +5 **Ref** +2, **Will** +2
Weakness
Speed 20 ft. in breastplate (4 squares), base movement 30 ft.,
Melee Lance +5 (d8+3) or Longsword +5 (d8+3)
Ranged Longbow +4 (d8)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +4
Atk Options
Special Actions Lay on Hands (2hp per day)
Combat Gear Masterwork Breastplate, Masterwork Lance, Masterwork Longsword, Masterwork Longbow
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 2nd):
1st— detect evil at will
Abilities Str 14, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12
Feats Mounted Combat, Mounted Archery

Skills Handle Animal +4, Knowledge Nobility and Royalty +2, Knowledge Religion +2, Ride +6, Sense Motive +4
Possessions combat gear plus Holy Symbol of Atroa

Smite Evil Once per day

SQUIRE NORDALL GNARLBRAAKER CR 2

Male Dwarf Fighter 2

LN Medium Dwarf

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0

Aura none

Languages Common, Dwarven, Cold Tongue

AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17

(+0 Dex, +5 armor, +2 shield)

hp 24 (2 HD);

Fort +7 **Ref** +0, **Will** +0

Speed 20 ft. in Masterwork Breastplate (4 squares), base movement 20 ft.,

Melee Lance +4 (d8+1) or Longsword +4 (d8+1)

Ranged sling +2 (d4+1)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Combat Gear Masterwork Breastplate, Masterwork Lance, Masterwork Longsword, Masterwork Heavy Shield

Abilities Str 13, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feats Mounted Combat, Ride by Attack, Power Attack

Skills Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +4, Ride +7

Possessions combat gear plus dwarven ale tankard

SQUIRE TARALEE DOREYMAN CR 1

Female Human Fighter 1

LN Medium Human (Oeridian)

Init +6; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0

Aura none

Languages Common, Oeridian

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15

(+2 Dex, +4 armor, +1 shield)

hp 11 (1 HD);

Fort +3 **Ref** +2, **Will** +0

Speed 20 ft. in hide (4 squares), base movement 30 ft.,

Melee Lance +2 (d8) or Longsword +2 (d8)

Ranged longbow +4 (d8)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +1

Combat Gear Masterwork Chain Shirt, Masterwork Buckler, Masterwork Lance, Masterwork Longsword, Masterwork Longbow

Abilities Str 11, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14

Feats Mounted Combat, Improved Initiative,

Skills Craft Armor +5, Handle Animal +6, Ride +6

Possessions combat gear plus armor crafting tools

Male Halfling Fighter 1 Rogue 2 (enlarged)

LE Medium Halfling (Extraplanar)

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot +1

Aura moderate aura of evil

Languages Common, Halfling, Infernal, Oeridian

AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 17

(+1 Dex, +5 armor, +2 deflection)

hp 24 (3 HD);

Resist cold 5, fire 5; **SR** 8

Fort +4 **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

Speed 30 ft. in chain shirt (4 squares), base movement 30 ft.

Melee Longsword +5 (d8+2)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +4

Atk Options Smite good, Sneak Attack

Combat Gear +1 Chain Shirt, Masterwork Longsword x2, Dagger x2,

Abilities Str 15, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 10

Feats Combat Reflexes, Evasion, Toughness, Quick Draw

Skills Ride +3, Climb +6, Jump +2 Swim +2

Open Lock +7 Use Rope +5

Possessions combat gear plus silver Holy Symbol of Urogalan, Ring of Protection +2 and coin pouch (228 gp)

Smite Good Once per day

12: GAME OF HOUSES

UROGALAI FIGHTER

CR 4

DM AID 1: NPC SUMMARY

Halfling Caravan NPCs:

Yon'cyrra Cobbletrail – Wise Elder

Yon'cyrra is a kind elderly woman with light brown eyes. She wears her silver-gray hair pulled back into a thick braid tied with multiple strips of leather in different colours. She is the Elder of the caravan the PCs are to guard and is swift yet fair in her judgments. Yon'cyrra is very fond of her granddaughter.

Unknown to the PCs and all but a few in the caravan, Yon'cyrra is quite ill. There is no foul play. Her elderly age is catching up with her and her spirit hasn't long left in the world. This actually makes Yon'cyrra very old in human terms as halflings commonly live past 100 and Yon'cyrra is a Ruathar adding another 50% to that lifespan.

Before she passes she only wishes to ensure the halflings of Ratik have a place to call their own. Despite her physical weakness Yon'cyrra has a strong voice full of authority and her eyes reflect an inner strength.

Unknown to every one in the caravan including the PCs, Yon'cyrra's daughter, also Kinapery's mother, is hidden amongst the brixia herd in a wildshape disguise. She is from the Marner Shadow Clan and has joined the procession by Yon'cyrra's request.

Kinapery Cobbletrail – Dancing Flower

Kinapery keeps her long, light brown hair in many plaits. Over her hair she wears a light purple scarf, to keep it out of her face. Kinapery is the granddaughter to Yoncyrra; her grandmother raised her because her father died when she was young and her mother couldn't raise her in the circumstances they live under.

Kinapery is aware of her grandmother's condition, and as a result will not wander far from her side. Kinapery acts as the herald for the caravan.

Brandopee Wildwhisper – Bold Cheese

Brandopee is a mature halfling. He has dark brown eyes and long straight black hair, with sideburns. Brandopee is the Head Teamster for the caravan, he takes his job seriously, but is a good-hearted fellow. Brandopee is the handfast partner to Reendalla

Reendalla Glittersun – Peaceful Provider

Reendalla is the handfast partner to Brandopee. She is a mature halfling with black eyes and dark brown hair. Reendalla is the cook for the caravan, she will openly lecture any PC who looks undernourished, piling their plate high at meal times and insisting they have seconds or thirds.

Chenmel Littleleaf – Handsome Lad

Chenmel is a middle-aged halfling; his eyes and hair are black. He has a cheerful personality, and loves a good story. He loves his role as the scout for the caravan and his dog. He is the father of Wortessel, Caldairra and lenakeppa, and handfast partner to Theapenel.

Theapenel Earthstrider – Proud Weaver

Theapenel is a mature women, she has light sandy brown hair and light brown eyes. She assists Chenmel in his work as the primary scout for the caravan, although she is unable to help as much as she use to because she is caring for their young infant, Lenakeppa (sweet child).

Wortessel Littleleaf – Silent Arrow

Wortessel is a young halfling barely into his adult years. He has light brown hair, which he keeps in a tight braid and brown eyes. He is careful in all his actions, thinking things through before acting. He helps his father and mother in their role on the caravan. Wortessel often picks up after Caldairra.

Caldairra Littleleaf – Curious Rascal

Caldairra has light sandy brown hair and light sparkling eyes; she keeps her hair pulled back away from her face, it is secured with an ornately carved and decorated hairpin. Caldairra is a typical halfling child; she delights in riddles and often gets into more than her fair share of trouble when trouble isn't finding her. She isn't old enough to help her family with their duties as the caravan's scouts, but readily assists her mother care for her younger sister, lenakeppa.

Melli Nimblefoot – Maiden Bard

Melli is a refugee from the Bone March. She has long brown hair and dark brown eyes. Melli wears simple clothes and sings for the rest of the caravan when they set up camp.

Melli was a slave in the Bone March though she eventually bought her freedom. Having no place to go and no possessions Melli wandered aimlessly until her path took her to Optwall, where she met Kinapery. The two are now good friends.

Uradal Suncaller – Final Shield

Uradal is a mature halfling, his silvery black hair is kept pulled back into a tight ponytail. His eyes are a light brown with flecks of green.

Uradal is one of the trailers. He and Arvokin often work with Chenmel and his family.

Arvokin Earthcloak – Fierce Fire

Arvokin is the second trailer for the caravan. He is younger than Uradal, but not lacking in experience. He prefers his light brown hair out of his face, often keeping it in a thick braid. He enjoys working along side Chenmel and his family.

Genarill Moonmeadow – Diligent Farmer

Genarill is the chief herder for the caravan. He looks after the brixashulty herd and chordevoc flocks. Genarill is a peaceful halfling who knows each animal individually. He is unaware about the presence of Yon'cyrra's daughter; he only knows that the brixia is Yon'cyrra's favorite. He will, however, mutter that he sometimes notices the absence of the brixia from the rest of the herd.

Brixashulties:**Munches-**

Munches is a young brixia. He has a green scarf around his neck and is constantly chewing on something, whether or not that something is someone's cloth or blanket is of no concern to Munches.

Curls-

Curls is still only a baby compared to the rest of the brixia herd, her long fur curls slightly at the ends. She has a pink scarf around her neck and is nearly always with Caldairra. The two are nearly impossible to part.

Buck-

Buck is just reaching his prime. A red scarf adorns his neck. Buck is at that point where anything bigger than him is a clearly challenge. He will promptly attempt to 'butt' anything he thinks he can- which is anything dumb enough to move.

Swollen Goat Patrons:**Garvannick Arumdiddle Doydoop Wanneling**

Garvannick is a portly older gnome with slightly thinning hair. His usual attire is a simple apron over his work tunic and trousers. He has a jolly attitude and is always happy to have a good yarn.

Garvannick is the barkeeper for the Swollen Goat, his wife and daughter work as bar maids. Garvannick has been working the Swollen Goat for many years and hears all sorts of rumours from the, less- than- sober, patrons that inhabit the tables late at night.

Garvannick can tell the PCs, that he has heard through the various drunks in the bar that, both shadow clans are getting more restless. There is even talk of another clan war. Garvannick feels the current lord in Optwall is a good man but is worried about his ability to maintain control if a clan war breaks out.

Weddatikkle Pokall Bingally Wanneling

Weddatikkle is a short, chubby gnome woman with short curly hair. She wears a simple dress under a clean white apron. She has a caring manner. Weddatikkle is the wife of Garvannick. She works as a barmaid and cook at the Swollen Goat, she has worked here as long as Garvannick has and fondly remembers when the two first opened the inn many years before.

Weddatikkle knows little more than Garvannick, use her to fill the PCs in on any important information they may have missed previously.

Chikamelling Sisselloop Milladin Wanneling

Chikamelling is a young gnome who works in the inn assisting her mother and father when she isn't doing her studies. Chikamelling is a typical teenage girl; she flirts with any 'cute' young males present and constantly talks of how cool Alchemical Romance is. She is the daughter of Garvannick and Weddatikkle.

Chikamelling can tell the PCs that Alchemical Romance may be playing at the construction of a new halfling town, and she is upset her parents won't let her go. You may wish to improvise a roleplay opportunity to talk this over with her parents who will allow her to attend if someone older is keeping an eye out for her.

Chikamelling's Friends

Chikamelling has a group of friends who have formed a 'fan club' for Alchemical Romance. They often hang around the Swollen Goat, making it their unofficial head quarters. They know all the rumours and stories that float around the schools and 'hip' teen hot spots.

They all basically have the same information as the group at the fountain. Feel free to role play here and have some fun.

Kalkin Quickreed

Kalkin is a halfling youth who regularly hangs around the inn with the rest of Chikamelling's friends. Kalkin is the oldest of the group and proudly proclaims he 'knows every Alchemical song and every word to them'. Kalkin copies the 'look' of the Lead Lute player, Rammackled. Kalkin secretly has a crush on Chikamelling.

Lillalee Swiftfoot

Lillalee, a halfling youth, is Chikamellings best friend. The two girls are mostly inseparable; Lillalee even sometimes works at the inn when the inn is unusually busy. Both girls think Rammackled is the cutest of the band.

Rasseggie Bookellick Mackeeloo Appereep Pooretik

Rasseggie is the youngest of Chikamellings friends. He feels a little behind the others and is always trying to show off, even though he has no special talents.

Challadoop Hilloppess Binkodip Pinkler

Challadoop believes he is the next great singer, just like his idol Gerringle. The only problem is Challadoop can't sing a note. Everyone has desperately tried to tell him about his lack of 'talent', but he won't listen. He really thinks he has a gift for singing.

Grenasheel Silverhand

Grenasheel is an older halfling. His hair has greyed and he walks with a cane. In his younger days Grenasheel was an extremely skilled rogue. He made a lot of money by stealing, lying and generally cheating his way through life. He still has his ear to the ground and often gets word of criminal plots and such. Grenasheel gladly chats with a fellow rogue, but will naturally be wary of paladins and other 'goody- goody' types.

Grenasheel will reveal, to a fellow rogue-ish type after a drink or two, that he finds it hard to believe any Lord in Optwall could be totally free of all shadow clan influence.

Alchemical Romance:

Gerringle Leagup Sinnertle Wayloop

Lead Singer... Gnome Bard

Gerringle commonly referred to as "The Way" is the leader singer of the group but also clearly the political leader. Tall for a gnome with a shock of dark hair that generally hangs over his face his deep blue eyes give the impression they are observing every detail with a perception and wisdom beyond his years.

Rammackled Mannelly Torrop Orritzie

Lead Lute... Gnome Bard

Rammackled is popular with the younger female gnomes for his boyish good looks. He is less political than the others and a brilliant musician. Generally he writes the music for the bands songs and Furkop writes the lyrics..

Furkop Silverleaf

Rhythm Lute... Halfling Marshall

Furkop is the most political of all the group. A halfling from the Bonemarch, he likes nothing better than to sit for hours discussing the social and political situation in Ratic and the Bonemarch. He dreams of starting a revolution in the Bonemarch to overthrow the occupiers. Furkop is competent as a musician but is absolutely inspired as a lyricist songwriter. He is responsible for the lyrics of many of the bands more popular songs.

Bog Yar

Drummer... Various Drums... Half Orc Barbarian

Bog Yar joined the band because, as a half orc, he related to the message in their music about the need for minorities to stand up for their rights. Although not a trained bard he has a natural sense of rhythm and says playing drums is just like whacking gnolls with a great club, but safer, and almost as much fun.

Kinapery's Lessons

With the last unhappy halfling child pouting stubbornly on the cool grass in the shade of a nearby tree, Kinapery stands up a sturdy board; a map has been carefully stuck to it and it looks strangely familiar. Kinapery picks up a stick and points it at the map, "Ratik", she says happily, "Who can tell me the capital of this land?" she peers at the children expectantly, and then frowns disapprovingly as none answer,

"Come now children! Show our guests what you know about our home" she smiles gesturing at you and your companions. Caldairra makes a face from where she sits near the front, "I'm going to be a great adventuring person, just like (insert the name of Caldairra's favourite PC) so I don't need to know all this yucky stuff".

Kinapery raises her eyebrows, a slight smile on her beautiful features, "Even the strongest of warriors needs their teachings. You" Kinapery points to (select a random PC) "Tell the children the name of the forest that covers most of northern Ratik..."

The answer is The Timberway. Kinapery will be pleased if the PC gets the question correct. If the PC gets it wrong however, Kinapery will raise her eyebrows and tell the PC to sit with the children; the PC needs to know its teachings after all. The children will find both the PC getting it wrong and Kinapery telling them to sit down very amusing and giggle. Continue to ask questions for as long as the PCs feel like role playing.

"Now, what great house controls the lands we just passed through south of here," says Kinapery. "Cormic," replies a young halfling boy with bright eyes. "Good! And what do Cormic make these days?" Kinapery asks him. He screws up his nose and says "smelly cows" to bursts of laughter from the other children.

Kinapery frowns and lets the children settle. "Ships?" asks one child. "Excellent!" says, Kinapery "Indeed ships, and we need ships, for how else would we move all the produce of Ratik, like the timber from these massive trees," she swings her arm around pointing at the nearby forest, "without ships?"

"With Bags of Holding?" asks Caldairra tentatively. Kinapery laughs. "You read far too many adventure stories Caldairra! Most ordinary Ratikans go their entire life without ever seeing a bag of holding. Besides there would not be enough bags of holding in all Ratik to move even a fraction of the timber cut in the Timberway each day."

Proceed in a similar vein with questions like those below:

Q. What three great houses lie within the Timberway?

A. House Uthek, House Keth and House Abonhoth

Q. Who lives north of the great Timberway?

A. The Schnai and the Frutzi.

Q. What race are the Schnai and Frutzi and are their lands part of Ratik?

A. They are of Suel descent and their lands are not part of the Archbarony.

Q. What is the northernmost house in all Ratik?

A. House Uthek

Q. Who is the Lord of House Uthek?

A. Lord Phelgar Uthek,

Q. Lord Phelgar is known to be interested in what two main things?

A. The welfare of his people and the welfare of the Timberway,

Q, Who is the Lord of House Keth?
A, Lord Vartuel Keth,

Caiderra whispers to the PCs "House Keth are mean, I do not like them!" Kinapery frowns at her sternly before continuing.

Q, Name the Lady of House Keth
A, Lady Katharna,

Q, Lord Vartuel Keth spent his childhood where?
A, In the court of Marner,

Q, What is the southernmost house in the Timberway?
A. House Abonhoth

Q. Who is the lord of House Abonhoth?
A. Lord Thellon Abonhoth

DM AID 3: HOUSES OF RATIK

DEVONMEEK

(This material is courtesy of the official LG Ratic website)

Devonmeek is situated far enough inland to be left out of most border skirmishes. The land controlled by this house is divided by a main river with numerous tributaries creating a very large area of fertile farmlands. Because of their relative safe location and the abundance of agricultural produce, the Devonmeek house has enjoyed considerable wealth. They have been quick to sell surplus food to towns unfortunate enough to have been sacked by humanoids in recent wars. They have been equally quick to hire out their military units to support the defense of other Noble Houses (all at very reasonable cost. of course).

Who's in Charge: Noble Triumvirate

Who's Really in Charge: The Administrator of Agriculture makes the only real decisions

Economy: Strong.

Based mainly on food crops. Wine and tobacco are also major moneymakers.

Ridderick Devonmeek (male, human). Administrator of Agriculture. A most important position since agriculture is the houses' chief resource. He is in charge of allocating land plots to subjects and determining the crop composition. Subjects (peasants) typically are allowed to keep roughly half of what they grow, and the rest is collected to be stored or sold to neighboring areas. Ridderick is utterly true to his word, but is very careful as to the exact wording of any verbal or written agreement. He is motivated by the desire to amass wealth.

Jenaia Devonmeek (female, human). Magistrate of War: theoretically in charge of making sure the army is in proper fighting trim, but in reality spends much of her time designing new uniforms and crests and motifs. Jenaia is motivated by the desire to feel important and in control.

Allovale Devonmeek (male, human) Arbitrator of Law: the laws of the region were established long ago and are enforced by the army leaving very little for the Arbitrator to do. Allovale busies himself by continuously redesigning certain "laws of etiquette." For example, it was once put into law that no subject of the region may wear both purple and orange clothing (this lasted for an entire winter). Allovale is both apathetic and unpredictable.

Places

Like most wealthy nations the Devonmeek territory boasts numerous fine taverns and inns. They also have a small museum (mostly devoted to the Devonmeek family line) and a library (filled mostly with decadent reading and little in the way of history or literature).

Relations

The Devonmeeks are considered greedy and manipulative by most of their neighbors. They view themselves as the core of Ratiks' strength (both in terms of economic and military might). Historically they have only participated in two major confrontations versus invaders and both times the sudden arrival of additional troops from house Devonmeek was a decisive factor.* The nobles are usually dressed in elaborate and expensive clothing (complete with lace and plumage). Even their army has extensive decorations and frilly garb

LOEGRIMM

(This material is courtesy of the official LG Ratic website)

Loegrimm consists of a stretch of land from mountain to coast comprised mostly of flat plains. Much of the area has been developed into non-food crops such as hemp, cotton, and flax. Textile mills and fulling mills owned by independent families are spread far and wide. Food farms and fishing exist only at a subsistence level in some villages.

Who's in Charge: Lord Merdick Loegrimm

Who's Really in Charge: Vionelle Glidden

Economy: Stable.

The merchants and guilds of House Loegrimm rely on the success of their textile trade. Most of these lands were once designated to the production of food crops at the insistence of the nobles, providing mediocre competition for House Devonmeek. But farmers started converting to other commodities because of poor revenues about twenty years ago against the edicts of the ruling house.

Prominent People

Lord Merdick Loegrimm Male human

Although Merdick is proud to represent his people on the Council of Lords, it is obvious to all concerned that he has no real power in his own lands. The guilds do as they please, content to monitor their own affairs. One of his own guards even refused to arrest a merchant who assaulted him. Merdick is a weak-willed man.

Lady Gwynden Loegrimm Female human

Merdick's wife since CY591. She is much more assertive and seeks to restore the power of House Loegrimm. In her first year her efforts have earned her: one attempted kidnapping, two assassination attempts, and a fistfight with a farmers' wife in the middle of a market. Gwynden won the fight much to the disgust of the crowd.

Vionelle Glidden (female, human). The unpredictably violent owner of a silk manufacturing guild. Lack of any other silk source has made her extremely wealthy. Once an entire caravan was burned to ashes by a raiding party. Some suspect that Vionelle arranged the attack because one of the merchants was bringing a shipment of silk from the west.

Relations

Strangely relations with the other noble houses has carried on as if nothing is amiss. The economy has been going along nicely, Merdick lacks the guts to ask for help from anyone, so the Council assumes that everything is fine in the house of Loegrimm.

PLAYER HANDOUT 1

Down and Out in Old Marner Town

The search for adventure (and work) has brought you back to Marner the capital city of all Ratik. Good lodgings are available at a cheaper inn near the river and it seems a good idea to spend your first few days casually enquiring about work while exploring the city and touring the sights.

Surprisingly for Marner the weather is clear. It's not raining, there is no snow and the weather is only bracing rather than mind numbingly cold. A Fruztii seaman once told you that Marner only had two seasons, the cold wet season and the ludicrously cold wet season. It seems he wasn't actually joking.

Enjoying the unseasonably pleasant weather, you have the opportunity to climb "The Heights", the western granite outcrop, which rises gradually from the river to a height of about 80 yards and admire the grand view. From here it can clearly be seen how the Marner River neatly divides the "better half" of the town from the polluted industrial areas, docks and the poorer quarter. The old Ratikan saying about being "Born on the wrong side of the Marner" suddenly makes a lot more sense.

Dominating the view to the east across the river is the other great granite outcrop of Marner surmounted by the sheer walls of the formidable fortress, the Bastion. The eastern outcrop is even higher than the one on which you currently stand and has almost vertical sides. As you watch you see a large pallet loaded with supplies being winched slowly up by a crane.

Earlier in the day you had tried to wangle access to the Bastion for a look around by slipping a few gold to one of the workers but you were very quickly intercepted and sent on your way by a cheerful and friendly but firmly resolute Gnomish quartermaster supervising the loading of massive barrels of alchemist fire and acid ammunition for the catapults on the summit. You imagine the disastrous explosion if one of the pallets were to drop and are somewhat relieved the care of the volatile munitions is in the hands of the veteran gnomish artillery experts from Daberestead.

The quartermaster half joking asks you if you were trying to purchase a "ride" in one of the massive catapults. Although the view as you sailed over the heads of the Marner river before plummeting back down somewhere out to sea would probably be spectacular, you politely decline his generous offer.

Behind you the Archbaroness' castle encompasses the high ground, its ten foot thick stone walls forming a near perfect circle with a diameter of about 200 yards. Several competent looking guards, wearing highly polished formal armor and holding helmets with long colourful plumes under one arm, stand in front of the gate wielding ceremonial, but none the less nasty looking, pikes.

You spend a few minutes trying to distract them waving your arms in front of them and making faces but they ignore you and just stare at a spot somewhere on the horizon. You do not even consider trying to get past them and quickly grow bored of the game and move on.

You can easily fritter away a few hours admiring the impressive if somewhat grandiose town residences established by various noble families in the area north of the castle crammed between it and the edge of the bluff. Clearly there is money to burn in this part of town but equally clearly there is no work up here for the likes of you. Eventually you head back to your meagre but affordable accommodation.

Soon enough, another day dawns in the bustling port city of Marner and you are still without any employment. Surely someone out there needs an able body adventurer for a grand quest? Yet you are still canvassing the same inns and streets that you did yesterday and the day before. Throughout your daily wanderings of the streets and inhabiting the local inns, you have found others who seek what you desire, perhaps a larger group will have more luck.

PLAYER HANDOUT 2

Jousting Rules

Summarised from Complete Warrior, pg130-131

For official competitions, no magic is to be used when fighting a joust. It is a matter of honour that knights compete on skill, not wealth. Masterwork and special materials are allowed, just no spells or magical equipment (with the easy availability of Detect Magic even the poorest knight can afford to check his opponent if they suspect cheating). Exceptions to this may occur but will be covered in the adventure text when appropriate.

There is an exception for the use of bardic music. The bard works the crowd, not the knight and rolls their Perform (and expends a bardic music attempt) against the "Influencing NPC Attitudes" table, PHB pg 72. If they achieve a Friendly result, the knight may benefit from Inspire Courage; if they achieve a Helpful result, the knight may benefit from Inspire Greatness or Inspire Heroics. The bard must be able to use the appropriate Bardic Music ability to bestow it upon their knight.

Because the jousters are running full-tilt at one another with blunted weapons, jousts function differently from mounted combat. Initiative isn't necessary; during each pass, each knight simply makes a special attack with the blunted lance, and the results of both attacks are resolved simultaneously. Each knight can also attempt to unhorse the rider (treat as a trip attack) or make a sunder attempt against the enemy's weapon or shield. Neither the trip attempt nor the sunder attempt provokes an attack of opportunity. A successful blow deals lance damage (double because the knights are both charging), but its non-lethal damage. A knight with the Ride-By Attack feat gains a +4 bonus on attack rolls during a joust.

In some versions of the joust, a knight can continue with a mace or blunted longsword (ie strike for non-lethal damage at -4 attack penalty) if he loses his lance. Such a longsword deals non-lethal damage and can make the free sunder attempt described above, but not the trip attack.

To summarise, for a formal tourney in Ratik:

1. Attack rolls are simultaneous. Knights cannot choose any special attack options (but may still use feats such as Combat Expertise or Power Attack).
2. A knight with the Ride-By Attack feat gains a +4 attack bonus.
3. A successful hit deals non-lethal damage and forces a DC 5 Ride check for taking damage while mounted.
4. A successful hit also allows the knight a free trip attack (vs Ride skill usually) or sunder attack (opposed check). The sunder still works even though lances are normally Piercing damage.
5. Resolve any special results (such as the Cavalry Charger "Unhorse" ability).
6. Knights are allowed 1 shield and 3 lances per joust. If all 3 lances are sundered, then their opponent wins by default. If both knights lose their third lance in the same pass, then the joust continues with maces (light or heavy), longswords or bastard swords (wielded in one hand only) until one knight is unhorsed (or unconscious). Draws are possible (and frequent).
7. If for religious reasons (such as clerics of Kelanan) a knight is unable to use a lance or sword, they may substitute their religious weapon, but will always strike *after* their opponent (due to the lance's reach). This requires dispensation by the Master of the Lists or the tourney's patron.

PLAYER HANDOUT 3

Most Gracious Yon'cyrra Cobbletrail,

You are cordially invited to a hunt with Lord Optwall and your presence would be greatly appreciated. The town of Optwall has recently been the victim of slander most vicious regarding the presence of so-called 'shadow clans' and Lord Optwall's involvement with such. However, he is sure that if you spend a day with him as his guest, you will see that such claims are quite spurious and false. Surely you can delay your journey by one day? If you are in agreement, simply return this letter to the messenger and we will make arrangements for the hunt.

Fyngar Hillstepper.

Chief Gamekeeper and Huntsman

House of Optwall.

(sealed with the seal of House Optwall)