

PARADIGM CONCEPTS

PRESENTS A



ADVENTURE

TO DIE ALONE

4-hour Introductory Adventure

Intro #5

Almeric is a bleeding nation full of petty Princes and Princesses. One of them, now in the twilight of his years, wants help. It's not immediately clear if he wants your help for himself, his heirs, or his town - Maren. This Prince promises rewards to those who provide aid ...But even given your special abilities, what meaningful assistance can a few travelers give over a handful of days? In Almeric, whether you stay or try to walk away, it's a good bet that trouble will find you.

A Note for Players

Heroes that are naturally meddlers and proactive will probably do better in this module than more passive personalities. While all tables should face significant combat twice (or more...), this module is primarily an investigation and the Heroes will be called upon to interact socially with lots of NPCs.

An **Introductory** adventure optimized for **3rd level** characters.

Premier Date: 10-16-2016; General Release Date: 10-27-2016

Version 2.7 03/16/2018

ARCANIS, SHATTERED EMPIRES and LIVING ARCANIS are trademarks of Paradigm Concepts, Publishing, LLC. Adventure detail is ©
Copyright 2016 Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved. Visit us on ParadigmConcepts.com

CREDITS

Author: Eric Gorman

Editor: James Vacca, Lucas Amodio

Cartographer: John Bellando

CAMPAIGN

INTRODUCTION

Campaign Staff

Team Paradigm: Henry Lopez, Nelson Rodriguez, Pedro Barrenechea, Jim Beck, and James Zwiers.

Author Liaison: Cody Bergman

Chief Editor: Joe Cirillo

5e Rules Manager: Pedro Barrenechea

Living Arcanis Liaison: Pedro Barrenechea
Running an Arcanis Adventure

When you run an Arcanis adventure you are charged with bringing the world to life. We pride ourselves on delivering a deep world where a player's actions are just as, if not more, important than their die rolls.

We ask our GMs to be familiar with the location the adventure is set in and the cultures the players may encounter. But we also understand that during convention play some GMs may be forced to run an Arcanis adventure on short notice. When cultural details come into play we will do our best to call them out in "Arcanis Cliff Notes" side bars.

Beyond that, the important job you have as a GM is to make the table as fun as possible by engaging players and drawing them into the story.

Pay close attention to the player's actions, not character's, players. Are they on their cell phone or tablet? Do they seem disengaged? Distracted? Don't be afraid to engage them or shift the spot light to their character a little.

To facilitate this, you are empowered to adjust and modify the adventure in a number of ways:

- You may make on the fly adjustments to the adventure if the players find a clever way to tackle a problem, especially when out of combat. As long as the idea is reasonable, run with it! When you must say "no" always try and say "no, but," This keeps the game moving and makes it fun for everyone,
- Don't be an adversarial GM. Some tables like to be challenged, but there is a difference between being adversarial and offering a challenge. At the same time, don't make an adventure so easy that the players become bored.
- Keep the pace going in order to keep players engaged. Switch the spot light, have them make some rolls, ask them what their character is doing. If the party is stuck, nudge them though some ability rolls or improvise some details, just keep the game going.
- During conventions and game days be aware if you are going short or long on time while running an adventure. Skip some encounters if necessary, but try and tell the entire story. Give the players closure, even if you need to fudge the numbers.
- Read-aloud text may be adjusted as you see fit, but make sure you give the players the appropriate hints and clues needed to keep the story going.

ADJUSTING ENCOUNTERS

Before you begin play you should determine the average strength of the party and compare that to the base level of the adventure. Each combat encounter has a box titled Adventure Difficulty guiding you on how to adjust the encounter to the party's power level.

These adjustments are suggestions; if a party is having an easy or hard time don't be afraid to adjust the difficulty.

To set the adventure difficulty you must first determine your tables Average Party Level.

Add up all the levels of all the characters, then divide by the number of players. Round up fractions to the nearest whole number. This is the Average Party Level

Consult the table below to set the adventure difficulty based on the APL

ADVENTURE DIFFICULTY

This adventure has been optimized for a table of 5 players playing 3rd level characters.

# of Players	APL to BL	Adventure Difficulty
3-4	Equal	Easy
3-4	Greater than	Normal
5	Less/Equal	Normal
5	Greater than	Difficult
6-7	Less/Equal	Difficult
6-7	Greater	Perilous

SPELLCASTING SERVICES

While in a settlement, town, or city, characters may visit a temple or shrine to request spell casting at the cost of a substantial donation. You may only utilize these spell casting services three times per adventure. Any spell casting provided through the story of the adventure, such as an NPC casting a spell for the party, does not count against this limit.

Shrines do not house clergy with which to attend to the needs of the faithful. Instead, one or two itinerant priests tend to the shrine and the needs of the people.

Temples and churches are larger structures attended by full staffs of the faithful, including Templars.

The following services are common to all temples, with additional options available at specific temples as noted in each adventures.

Shrines, regardless of their deity, may only provide players with *cure wounds* and *lesser restoration*.

General Spell Services

Spell	Cost
<i>Cure wounds</i> (1st level)	10 gp
<i>Lesser restoration</i>	40 gp
<i>Prayer of healing</i> (2nd level)	40 gp
<i>Greater restoration</i>	450 gp

Initiate of the Gods background/Acolyte background/divine spellcasters receive **one free spell** if it is from a church or temple of the same religious faction (Mother Church for example)

If they worship the same god as a temple but are part of another religious faction, they can get a onetime 50% discount instead.

ADVENTURE RELATED INFORMATION

This adventure takes place in the country of Almeric. Heroes will arrive in the walled town of Marengart. Marengart has a population of about 4,500 people.

TEMPLES AND SHRINES

Maren has public shrines to Hurrian, Illiir, Saluwé, and Yarris. The Shrines of Hurrian and Yaris are tended by clergy. Father Albrecht Meesner has divine casting ability at the Shrine to Yarris. None of this will likely be relevant to the adventure.

GOODS AND SERVICES

Marengart has a thriving market district where all core items are available for purchase at normal cost.

ORGANIZATIONS

The tavern the Fisherman's Rest has an understanding with "Lord Schmidt" of the Silver Chalice.

PORTALS OF ANSHAR

There are no known Portals of Anshar in Maren. There is a Portal of Anshar in Naeraanth where the action starts, and an Ansharan could attune to it, but it is otherwise not involved in the adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Roughly 40 years ago the val'Tensen family strove toward unification after 300 years of division. This could have been the beginning of a bright new age, but events have ended in tragedy. Two hideous assassinations derailed the final negotiations on who would reign as King. The followers of these two men blamed each

other. In the recriminations that followed violence broke out. In the ensuing chaos, just about every noble of consequence in the val'Tensen family eventually declared himself or herself the rightful ruler of the land. They have taken the title of prince or princess.

Each city or walled town is now ruled by a self-styled monarch answerable to no one else...and in conflict with everyone else! In the countryside anarchy and lawlessness are the norm. This conflict has endured for over a dozen years. No end is in sight.

One petty prince in this mess was Dephus val'Tensen who died in an opening skirmish. Dephus left his wife Sophia val'Tensen with two underage children, his ambitious brother named Rophus, and many dangerous neighbors. Sophia responded pragmatically and married her husband's arms-master, Sir Walder Gelbächen with what some found to be unseemly haste.

Walder is "merely human" and started out as regent for the young children...though given time he has amassed power, fathered children of his own (one a val'Tensen!) and claimed the title of Prince for himself. Many of the val'Tensen nobles are scandalized and outraged by this "preposterous claim." However, their efforts against Walder have been hamstrung by his skill on and off the battlefield. Still, Walder's position is especially precarious and one of his greatest strengths is also potentially a fatal weakness. In addition to skill at arms, Walder has the Gift and has very quietly used his sorceries to keep himself and Maren secure.

Walder was an older man when he wed, and now a dozen years later his health is failing, not least because the Gift is consuming his body. As he has come to face his death, Walder worries over who should be his heir. Many of nobles in Maren want to enhance their own position, and are indifferent to the cost to the Town. Some also nurse grudges. Walder has made many tough

choices and in some instances might even be said to have “done evil” in the course of keeping Maren secure. Such things at least are said by his detractors.

Walder knows he will need help from skilled and powerful parties if he is to pull off a bloodless transition of power. No one in his current orbit except for Milky fits that bill. This is where the Heroes should normally enter.

But though Walder is going to summon the Heroes, he won't be there to meet them or set them “on the rails.” Walder is going to be murdered before the Heroes arrive. Who is responsible for the killing varies among 4 different individuals each time the module is played, based on a fortune card reading.

The Heroes will be dumped in a small personal mess that mirrors the much larger mess that is Almeric. They will be faced with several problems they can choose to solve. Or not.

Hopefully the Heroes will consider putting several unquiet shades to rest, find out who killed Walder, and play “Princemaker.” Although it's unlikely, Heroes might also decide to throw up their hands and leave. Sailing out of Almeric is possible, but not without risking attack along the coast.

AUTHOR'S NOTE TO GMS:

It would be great if every time this module was played it ran differently for the players and the characters that are playing it.

After running a lot of tables as a GM and writing half a dozen modules for conventions I've noticed a curious thing. I never quite run a module the same way twice. Or for that matter, I never quite run modules exactly the way they are written ... even when they're my modules that I've written.

I think the reasons for that are simply the players and their characters. They always bring something to the table and try to do things that aren't quite covered in the module. In good modules there's enough information to make a decent extrapolation and “wing it.” Even in a poorly written module you still have to wing it. So it's my opinion that a good GM helps the module to “meet the players.” I always find I take a little shortcut here or linger awhile there, or even put a slightly different spin on an NPC.

In other words, players encounter my interpretation of the module; and more broadly, players encounter their GM's interpretation of the module.

That's something I wanted to play and experiment with in To Die Alone. It's a murder mystery. It's always going to be a murder mystery. But there are 12 permutations of killers/motives and fight scenes. And a little bit of trouble with the Ghosts as well. So players *are never* going to experience this module exactly the same way regardless of the GMs. Since that's going to be true, then there is also lot of room for you to “tinker” in the margins as a judge. The only real rules are making sure your players have an enjoyable experience, and portraying some of the themes of Almeric ... here I've focused on (A) the breakdown of law and order and (B) the potential of violence lurks everywhere.

So please, when you run this mod, feel free to take whatever small liberties you need to answer PC questions I haven't covered, or make the NPCs your own. Please also try to make connections between the NPCs and PCs so that they care about the fate of Maren.

One concern I've heard repeatedly from GMs in past modules with lots of NPCs is that they say they can't make that many NPCs appear as unique individuals. And that's totally okay. The players will remember the NPCs you nail. If you make someone memorable, but it's a little bit

“off” from the text of the mod that’s fine too. This module should be different each time its run. If you do nail 4-6 NPC’s, then the others probably only have to be functional.

INTRODUCTION

Key Concepts: The stage of the adventure is set as the characters receive invitations to sail to Maren.

Spring. A time for renewal. Fresh shoots and flowers push up from the bare earth. Winter is past. It's finally drying out and getting warmer.

As the condition of the roads improves, and overland trade swells, you received a letter from Maren - one of the many walled towns in Almeric. It is an appeal for aid.

Pass out **Player Handout #1**. Also pass out secret orders, EXCEPT for the secret orders from the Silver Chalice. The opportunity for those orders comes later at the Fisherman's Rest.

Information about Maren, or Walder, is not too hard to come by. If people are curious they can learn a little more by utilizing skills. It takes a **DC 13 Intelligence (History)** check to learn that the town of Maren is on the Gulf of Yaris and was formerly part of the Province of Ulfia before "unification" with other val'Tensen lands. However geographically it is closer to the Milandisian city of Yarvek than Nevanne (or other locations that were once part of the Coryani Empire). As a result, Maren has strong Milandisian influences. A **DC 17 Intelligence (History)** check reveal that there has was some smuggling between Maren and Yarvek bypassing the taxes and tariffs of Milandir and Coryan. This has dried up with economic contraction since Almeric gained independence.

The Heroes technically don't have to respond, but it's going to be a really short adventure if they stay home! Continue with:

You find the West Wind in port and make your way down the coast in a relatively small trader ship. Accommodations are crowded and modest. It's cramped on board and the food is certainly nothing special. If you're prone to seasickness, you might spend a couple of days in misery; otherwise it's not so bad.

If necessary, this is the spot for the Heroes to introduce themselves to each other. Continue with ...

The West Wind never leaves sight of land and makes many short stops along the way to trade in this town or that village. The crew starts out relaxed. When you cross into the territory of Almeric, they become more vigilant. A dedicated lookout is assigned, and she keeps a wary eye on the horizon searching for trouble.

For a country that is supposed to be trampled down into a quagmire of mud and blood, the rocky coast is strangely tranquil. Even picturesque in a stark way. You can see new growth amid high grasses and inland you can just make out green buds growing on windswept trees. But you see very very few people. Every once in a while you see the remains of an abandoned farmhouse.

Your captain's name is Yan. As you continue sailing south he waxes philosophic upon seeing a burned out barn. "You always know it's going to be miserable in Almeric, but you never know exactly how miserable it will be," he explains. "Sometimes it's a seller's market because some minor prince has a little extra money in his pocket. And he's desperate for half a dozen things he can't get locally. More often though, everyone's just broke. And if that weren't bad enough sometimes the odd band of savages somehow gets a real boat and they play at pirating."

The captain spits overboard, “Thank Yarris the sell swords down here barely know the first thing about sailing. Yeah. Almeric’s a headache. But I’ve dealt with Prince Walder before and his coin is good. When he contacted me asking for certain goods I didn’t have to think too long before I said yes.

[pauses a beat and looks at the Heroes] *“But this is the first time he’s asked for armed people to come down. You mind telling me what he wants you for?”*

Players can answer whatever they wish. Yan is a tough old salt and a little gruff. He doesn’t like (and is nervous around) dark-kin and “sorcerers.” Players might ask Yan questions about Maren, The Fisherman’s Rest, and/or Prince Walder. (They can ask him other questions but he doesn’t have much to offer that they can’t already find out from the background). If they don’t have any questions and you need to watch the clock in a convention setting, move on past the bullet points to the final bit about Walder.

- We don’t know why he wants us.

“Hmmm. Well I guess that’s not too surprising. I can’t claim to know him well. He definitely keeps his own council. But I’ve learned some things about him over the years while doing business in Maren.”

- What can you tell me about Maren?

“Lots of fishermen mean they usually get enough food even when the crops get trampled by soldiers. They keep a pier in working order. They also got a big keep called Stonecrest that they keep expanding. Stonecrest overlooks the walled town and I’ve always thought it serves as much to keep the locals in line as guard against outsiders. For Almeric I guess it’s pretty well off.”

- What is the Fisherman’s Rest?

“Maren is stable enough to get some trade, local or otherwise, so there is a watering hole that also has halfway decent rooms for rent. It’s called the Fisherman’s Rest. Usually I sleep on my ship.”

- What cargo are you carrying?

“A bit of this and a bit of that. Raw iron ingots. Tubs of dried beans and potatoes. Barrels of dried pears from Sylvania...bought those cheap with spring coming on. A few luxury items. Some small casks of brandy & glass panes for Stonecrest. A few bolts of decent cloth. Good olive oil and garum.

- What can you tell me about Odette?

“Hmmm. Never met her proper, but I seen her once. A real beauty. They say she and Walder are...real close. I kinda wonder what his wife thinks about that, but not enough to actually ask anyone. [grins] I heard Odette’s a Larissan Priestess, but whether that’s true or just meant as a bit a slander... [shrugs] I don’t know. I’d be careful around her though; they say she has the Prince’s...ear.”

- What can you tell me about Walder?

“Hmmm. Walder is a tough one to pin down. I’ve met him a couple of times. He honors his word. Seemed patient and decent enough, but I’m guessing that image has to be incomplete.

Let me tell you a story. There’s a sort of small Barrier Island that protects Maren from the elements and there used to be a fort on it. The troops there turned against Walder. Maybe because he wasn’t of the val’Tensen blood. Maybe they got paid to do it by another Prince. Anyway, they seized all the local boats and started demanding tribute from fishermen and passing merchants they could catch.”

“They didn’t last long. Prince Walder and a couple of handpicked men swam out there at night with some sort of raft loaded with enough pitch to burn the garrison down. Way I heard it he personally crept up and nailed the garrison shut before he lit it up. People say they could hear the screams back on the mainland. A few have gone out there looking for buried treasure, but the Islands supposed to be haunted now by the shades of the burned men. If you believe in that stuff. Shades or not, the ruins are real. I’ve seen them while sailing by.”

Again don’t waste a lot of time here unless the Heroes are interested. It helps paint a picture of Walder if the players get the story about the Island, the rest is somewhat less important. Continue with:

Eventually you make it into Maren in late afternoon. A pier projects out into the water. Several small vessels are tied up. They’re mostly local fishing boats. A wooden tower caps the shore end of the pier and offers protection from man made threats. The coast here is protected from natural threats by a small Island offshore that helps block the larger swells of the Gulf of Yaris.

Maren itself is inland a bit, though you can see its wooden walls clearly. The town’s walls are ... well they’re a long bowshot from the surf. A fortified stone keep or castle seems to be part of the far side of the town’s wall. It looks like there might be construction going on to expand it.

A row boat with men armed with crossbows leaves the pier and meets you as you pull in. It doesn’t take long for the representatives of the Harbor Master to sort out paperwork. The West Wind gets a pass to tie up. You get a pass to travel into town; and a writ from Prince Walder himself to bear arms and armor within his demesne.

Development: Heroes should proceed to Encounter 1.

Heroes might also chase the red herring of the burned down fort out on the barrier Island. See the DM Aid on troubleshooting the mod.

SCENE I: UNQUIET NEIGHBORS

Key Concepts: The Heroes make the exposed walk from the Pier toward the town of Maren. Along the way they are accosted by the restless shades of people who were burnt at the stake under Prince Walder’s justice.

The four hundred feet or so that separate the walled town of Maren from the pier are completely exposed. You can see plenty of bowmen on the walls watching you as you approach. They don’t move too much. Then a bell starts ringing somewhere in town. Suddenly there is a commotion. The guards are waving at you and a small gate in the wall opens. Two men at the gate are trying to yell something to you. They’re just shouting and shouting and it’s hard to make out what they’re saying. But following where they are pointing you see mists swirling up out of the ground. Ethereal figures of women are forming. The mist moves around them, almost in the images of flames.

And then you feel a cold breeze that blows in from them and passes you. It’s the kind of ill wind that raises the hair on the back of people’s necks. With its passage you also hear a hate filled whisper, “Why should you live, when we were burned? Is there no blood on your hands?”

Please initiate combat.

COMBAT

In all this combat consists of

- **Three (3) Witches of Marengart**

See Combat Appendix 1, Scene 1

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy Mode:** Remove 1 Witch
- **Difficult:** Add 1 Witch
- **Perilous:** Add 2 Witches

Tactics: The shades of the witches emerge in the crossroads and (all things being equal) move to attack Hurrianites, Illirites and spellcasters in preference to other targets. The Witches cannot engage people who make it into town or onto the pier.

The shades try to engage in melee with multiple heroes.

At first, the shades of the witches hang back and use ranged spells on heroes. They are “conservative” in their casting, generally focusing on cantrips.

When the heroes engage in melee they will try setting up flanks and overlapping attacks on the same hero with “waves” of attacks every chance they get. They absolutely do not fear “death.”

When all three Witches have lost more than half their hit points, the last witch unleashes a *hazardous trial* (which they are immune to) in the form of a wave of icy wind that chills the soul.

The Witches are intelligent and hateful; if other tactics would lead to a hero being defeated, pursue those instead.

GM’s Note:

The Witches are bound to the crossroad in this fight and can’t enter the city. Heroes that choose to flee off the map are not pursued. Heroes that cast flashy arcane magic in this

fight gain the Noticed by Ymandragore “reward” at the end of the adventure.

When the fighting ends continue with:

SCENE 2: IT’S ALL IN THE CARDS

Key Concepts: The Heroes receive a fortune reading that determines key elements of the module This encounter works best if you physically bring a deck of cards.

Heroes should go looking for the Fisherman’s rest. It’s just inside the main gate and to the left.

“Passing inside the Sea Gate you get a chance to see Maren properly. Most buildings are two stories high and made of wood though there are exceptions. The people of the town seem weathered. As they walk by they generally avoid eye contact with your group. Their plain woolen clothes have been mended many times. At least no one looks like they are starving.

The Fisherman’s Rest is off to one side almost immediately as you enter the town. There are a number of tables in the room. The bar runs along one side, with a man polishing a large pewter pitcher at one end. He nods toward you as you enter.

It’s not hard to spot Odette inside. Amid all the fishermen there is one table where a woman in a low cut Milandisian gown sits alone. A large leather book and a deck of cards sit on the table as her only company. She puts the book down and looks up as you enter.

“Ah. Please join me. The wine here is passable.”

Odette is a priestess of Larissa and a “special friend” to Walder. By prim Milandisian standards Odette is “naughty”, and in other situations perhaps a flirt, but she mostly follows the oracular aspect of the Goddess. Those expecting a Coryani temptress in “barely-there silk” are likely to find her fairly reserved.

- Odette has been quietly crying just before the heroes arrive. Heroes who ask may attempt a **DC: 15 Wisdom (Insight)** pick this up her melancholy.
- If caught and asked about it she says, ***“I hate endings is all. Still new beginnings are buried in endings. It’s the way of the world”***
- If anyone asks the book next to her is “Managing an Orchard” by Abbot Aldemerius Biriglo. If anyone looks, the book is exactly what it sounds like. Odette claims it is reading material for her upcoming journey.
- If anyone mentioned they were attacked by the “witches” she is shocked. ***“That is terrible, and a bad omen for the city. Is their activity is expanding?”*** Continue with:

“Walder has sent me on what might be a final mission for him, but before I depart he wanted me to read cards for you and explain who’s in residence at the Keep. To start we need a total of three cards placed face down in a row. Ideally the cards should be chosen by different people.”

Odette tries to defer complicated or detailed questions till after the reading.

GM’s Note:

There is a ton of box text following. My apologies to my fellow DMs!

Read this section beforehand so you can go to the right parts. You only need to use ¼ of it for each reading based on suit and number.

There are many forms of Tarot decks. Odette uses the following suits: **Coins** (diamonds. Associated element is earth), **Cups** (hearts. Element is water), **Staves** (clubs. Element is air) and **Swords** (spades. Element is fire).

Though having real cards handy adds a great deal of atmosphere they are not absolutely necessary. If cards are not available, use dice. For each card that would be drawn roll a d4 to determine the suit (1 = Coins, 2 = Cups, 3 = Staves, 4 = Swords) and a d12 to determine the card’s number (1-10 = the number rolled, while an 11 = the Queen, and a 12 = the King).

Cards should be dealt all face down in a line and then flipped over one at a time (or Dice rolled one card at a time).

“The first card is for your collective past and how it affects the present.”

“The second card is to help show you the person or people who are moving against Lord Walder.”

“The third card represents a clue to where or how you might prevail against adversity.”

“If you wish it, you may each draw a final card to offers a clue to your own greater destiny.”

THE FIRST CARD: YOUR PAST

"You have drawn the [card's number] of [suit]. Hmm. This card represents your past and how you've gotten here. [The suit] most likely refers to [see below] ..."

Coins/diamonds:

"...a desire for wealth. You are earning your own way in the world and are not the beneficiary of great inherited wealth. Or it could be you are working for a mission that deals with wealth and trade. Not too surprising since most adventurers are often desirous of greater wealth..."

Cups/Hearts:

"...you are following your own sense of purpose. In the end each person is responsible for following their heart or filling their own cup. Cups, or the Chalice as the suit is sometimes called, also refers to the healing of hurts and the rapprochement of adversaries. We can certainly use such services here."

Staves/Clubs:

"...fate. Staves are the suit of the Arcanum and their presence here suggests that other forces - Greater Forces - have touched your destiny. You must tread very carefully"

Swords/Spades:

"...a history of violence. Forgive me I do not mean to question your character but the cards say you are no stranger to violence. You are here either to prevent harm to someone or inflict it where it is needed. Poor Walder, this is his suit too."

You also drew ...[see below] ..."

Number of Players (?):

"[#]...the same number as of all of you. Your destinies are entwined. I advise you to stay together - you are meant to support each other in events that lay in the future."

Low Number (1-5):

"...low number. That suggests the tale is really just getting started. The low number suggests there is much ahead of you."

Middling Number (6-10):

"...middling number. It suggests that your beginning has landed you in the middle of someone else's tale. You'll have to be perceptive to learn what's really going on around you."

High Number (J, Q, K):

"...high number. It suggests that your path will become important to the great folk of the land. Perhaps sooner than you would like."

THE SECOND CARD:

THE ADVERSARY:

"The second card! Lord Walder knows that enemies are converging on him. This card will help inform you on which of them to focus on. You have drawn the [card's number] of [suit]. Uh oh I have a bad feeling about this card. [The suit] tells us... [see below]."

Coins/diamonds:

"...that greed stirs the heart of Walder's foe. Someone within his house has been paid money to cause him trouble. Hmm. Or perhaps is avenging an old debt. I'm sorry I wish I had better news." [Winfred is the killer, paid by Dominic val'Tensen. She poisons him]

Cups/Hearts:

"...someone, deep in their heart wishes Walder ill. I already knew that. But this heart is filled with pent up rage. Even if this person manages to hide their hatred behind a mask of friendship or indifference, in the end you will see that hatred has choked their soul. This antagonism is deeply personal. I'm sorry; I wish I had better news." [Sophia is the killer, avenging the infidelities of her husband. She kills him with a scarf]

Staves/Clubs:

“...that the invisible stirrings of pride and ambition move someone to seek the scepter of power. It fills the heart of Walder’s adversary. Staves may also mean that they will use blunt force in their efforts to harm Walder. I’m sorry; I wish I had better news.” **[Victor is the killer, using the candelabra. He plans to replace his brother as prince].**

Swords/Spades:

“...that violence is going to descend upon Walder in the near future. And you. As the suit of fire I see an old rage, poisonous and smoldering as well. This adversary is acting upon an old grudge real or imagined. I’m so sorry for such dire tidings, but the cards seem to be saying you’ll all soon be fighting for your lives. Please protect Walder if you can.” **[Rophus is the killer and used a stiletto]**”

THE THIRD CARD:

A SIGN OF THE OUTCOME:

“Alright this is the final card. It represents the outcome and perhaps a clue over where or how you might overcome adversity in your path. You drew the **[card’s number]** of **[suit]**. This card represents ...”

Coins/diamonds:

“...profits in the end. If all goes well you will be financially rewarded for your efforts. This is a very positive card for you.”

Cups/Hearts:

“...a triumph of purity and true hearts over those motivated by baser considerations. If you count yourselves as heroes this is a positive sign. For those with mercenary hearts, less so.”

Staves/Clubs:

“...the triumph of magic. Or ideas, or long range planning. I don’t know if this is a good sign for you or not. Many of these elements could just as easily be arrayed against you.”

Swords/Spades:

“...might triumphant. You know how to handle yourselves in a fight I hope. The cards say the toughest are the ones left standing.”

You drew a...”

Low Number (1-4):

“...low number. I think this is a literal reading. If there is a serious confrontation where things come to a head, most likely it is not going to happen on the roof or tower ramparts. I hope that helps you.” **[Final confrontation takes place in the wine cellar]**

Middling Number (6-10)

“...a middling number. I think this is a literal reading. If there is going to be a final confrontation with someone it will be in centrally located somehow.” **[Final confrontation takes place in the middle of the Garden Maze]**

High Number (J, Q, K)

“...a very high number. I think this is literal. If there is a serious confrontation it is not going to take place in the basement. I hope that helps you.” **[Final confrontation takes place on the rooftop]**

A GREATER DESTINY (PLAYERS MAY CHOOSE ONE MORE CARD)

“Alright. If you are interested, you may each choose to avail yourself to a final card. Such a card may illuminate some area of your future.”

You drew ...”

Coins/Diamond:

“...from the suit of wealth. Perhaps you are destined to acquire money in the near future.”

Cups/Hearts:

"...from the suit of the heart. Perhaps romance is in your future."

Staves/Clubs:

"...from the suit of magic and fate. You are destined to become involved, repeatedly, the affairs of the powerful and alter the balance of their plans."

Swords/Spades:

"...suit of conflict. I hope you can handle pain. The next year sees you as both the executor and recipient of violence."

After the reading (and any questions the Heroes have about the reading) continue with:

"That's not as clear as I might have wished, but with the time available to us it will have to do. Walder also wanted all of you to have this before you reached Stonecrest. It's a list of who is in residence. I am convinced at least one of them is actively plotting against him and is an imminent threat." [Pass the Heroes Player Handout #2.]

"If you have questions for me, ask me now. I have a boat to catch. If not, then I believe you are wanted at Stonecrest Keep."

Heroes may have lots of questions for Odette or may be content with the fortune telling. Some following answer may help guide your responses.

- Tell us about Walder

"Walder is a strong and proud man, and the only person in Almeric claiming to be a prince without being of the val'Tensen blood. A lesser man would have been overwhelmed years ago by the neighbors. But despite adversity Walder has kept this town on a relatively prosperous track. Even in winter there has been no famine here."

There is a note of pride and approval in Odette's voice if the Heroes ask for an Wisdom (Insight) check (no roll needed).

- What's your relationship with Walder?

"I've known and assisted Walder for the last 5 years as his advisor. Walder has many skills but has alienated most of his family."

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Wisdom (Insight)** skill check lets the Heroes notice that she blushes a little as she says this.

- What does Walder want with us?

"Walder hasn't fully confided in me what he wants. I know he wants help putting his affairs in order. I believe he has concerns with succession and who becomes the next Prince of Maren. I don't know who that is supposed to be. Perhaps the Prince will want you to help advise him on that issue."

- Who might have a beef with Walder?

"More names than not on that list have one or more grudges against Walder or have their own private ambition. Milky doesn't, that I know of. But he's also a mercenary. I would be very careful about trusting anyone there."

- How much are we going to get paid?

"I don't know but Walder has been very generous with me."

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Wisdom (Insight)** skill check lets the Heroes notice that she blushes a little as she says this.

- Where are you going?

Back to Sweet Savona.

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check detects determination and a firmness of

purpose. Odette doesn't elaborate on her plans there.

- What do you think is going on?

"The cards show grave danger to the Prince. And he is slowing down with age. Without help I fear he will not live out the month. He has forbidden me to look directly at how he might meet an end. He has ordered me instead to find some way to help him secure a peaceful legacy. He doesn't have many years left to him ...please do all you can to protect him."

Development: Members of the Silver Chalice secret society can gain their secret orders here by looking in the pewter pitcher.

When they are done Odette wishes the Heroes well and leaves to get on a boat bound for Savona. The Heroes should be eager to meet their host and head to Stonecrest. If the Heroes want to explore the town first, see the DM aid on troubleshooting the module.

Go to **Scene #3**.

SCENE 3: ENTERING STONECREST

Key Concepts: Players discover Walder is already dead and start to meet the people at his court.

"You make your way to Stonecrest, which is built into the far wall of the town. It is four stories tall on high ground, and has the town's bell tower. Stonecrest dwarfs the other buildings in Maren. Three men are outside; one much older and two younger. They are putting black bunting up along the main entrance and windows. The old man seems to be quietly weeping."

The old man is Tobias. Prince Walder was found dead no more than half an hour ago. Bells were rung for his death, (when the Heroes were

attacked by the witches) and his body has been placed in the Great Hall. It is only just now starting to become real to Tobias that the Prince is really dead. He doesn't notice or react to the players until they choose to speak to him.

- Who are you?

"I am Master Tobias. The Master of the Estate for Prince Walder. Or I was. Forgive me, you have come at a difficult time."

- Who has died within?

"This is a terrible day for the town. I fear our lord, Prince Walder is no longer with us. May his soul travel quietly to the Paradise of the Gods and know peace."

- What happened?

"He was in his study. I didn't see what happened, but his wife and daughter said ... he fell and hit his head on the edge of his desk. A terrible thing ... He was getting on in years... the Prince had seen almost as winters as I."

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows Tobias seems to grow thoughtful as he says this. **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight):** by the end you realize he has stopped crying and his face is composed. **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight),** Tobias has become very guarded.

- What do you think *really* happened?

"I'm not sure what you mean sir [lady]."

- We're here to meet with Prince Walder.

"Oh dear. I heard earlier in the week we would have special guests. I don't quite know what to ... well, since you are here, I should take you to see Princess Sophia. We're all a little bit in shock. But at the least you should pay your respects. If you follow me I will take you to see her. Did you know the prince?"

Tobias doesn't entirely care about the answer. He is on auto-pilot while trying to decide how to treat the heroes.

When Master Tobias leads the Heroes in continue with:

"Master Tobias leads you through the massive oak door. Large stone walls and narrow windows are excellent for fortifications but not for illuminating the interior. It is dim inside. Some light filters in from outside but just as much comes from candles and oil lamps. Inside is a pair of guards. They glance at each other and then the one on the right speaks, "I'm sorry no outside weapons are allowed in the keep. We'll be happy to store them in a locked room for you."

Heroes can simply surrender their weapons. If so, they can get them back any time they flash their writ from Walder or make a compelling argument (or deceit check). Most likely they flash their writ now. If so continue with:

With a confused glance at each other they shrug. Then they step aside to let you pass. You travel down a well-furnished hallway, past some heavy doors, and into the Main Hall.

The main hall must be intimidating to normal people. Pole arms are set in three circular patterns along the ceiling and swords and shields line the walls. It's a clear display of martial power. At the far end of the hall you see what must be Walder. An old man with sparse white hair is laid out in state surrounded by candles and flowers. Two women stand near him. A younger one seems to be comforting an older one. A few servants also move in and out. It looks like they have only just finished placing candles around the departed prince.

"Your Highness," Tobias starts, "we have ... guests. The men [and women] your Husband sent for have arrived."

The older of the two woman looks up and you can see, even in the bad light, that her eyes are red. She looks very angry for a moment. But she seems to calm herself and then greets you.

"I see. Please be welcome in my home. I will ask your indulgence and forgiveness if our hospitality is somewhat lacking at present. As you can see there has been a great tragedy today. I am not entirely myself. [pulls herself up straight and exhales] Whom do I have the honor of addressing?"

Heroes can answer as they wish.

"We are met. I am of course Princess Sophia. It is ill luck that has brought you here now. Tell me, what business did you have with my late husband? Was it vitally important or can it wait a few days?"

The Heroes will presumably answer that they don't know why they were summoned. Heroes could also invent a lie or dissemble. Sophia is not well pleased to hear any mention of Odette. Assuming that what the Heroes say isn't somehow so outrageous that she calls the guards continue with:

"This is all terrible and the timing could not be worse. I wish you had arrived sooner so that you might have talked with him. Or later after things settle back down. Still I can see you have travelled at time and expense to reach here. I would be remiss if I did not offer you rooms tonight."

A **DC: 13 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals that Princess Sophia feels obligated to offer the Heroes rooms, but it is also true that she would actually be happier if the Heroes were almost anywhere else.

The younger woman cuts in. "We can put them under the bell tower." She turns to you quickly, "Please be welcome despite these sad settings. I am High Lady Maria. If you will follow me, I'll take you to rooms where you can refresh yourselves."

It looks for a moment as if Princess Sophia might say something. Then her lips press together. She nods once and turns back to Walder's corpse. Maria grabs a lamp as she heads for stairs leading up.

Development: Clever Heroes might realize that it's odd that a noble of the house is seeing to their needs herself. Hopefully the Heroes are quick to follow Maria. It's possible that they will try to ask questions of Princess Sophia. If they are polite she'll entertain a few questions before retiring, but she'll stick to the party line: Walder hit his head on his desk, it's a great tragedy, she is emotionally wound up and hopes that Heroes will not expect much from her at present etc.

Go to **Encounter #4**.

SCENE 4: A PLEA FOR HELP

Key Concepts: High Lady Maria's goal is to persuade the characters to look into the circumstances of Prince Walder's death (hopefully with discretion), and report back to her before proceeding further.

High Lady Maria takes you upstairs to the third floor and stops in front of two rooms. It doesn't seem as if there is anyone else about, but she darts what can only be described as a nervous glance down the hallway you just travelled.

"Please. I don't want trouble. But," she lowers her voice, "I know my step-father didn't die because he hit his head on his desk. That is...unbelievable." She bites her lip. "May I speak with you in private?"

Assuming the Heroes say yes, Maria ducks into one of the rooms with them. If not, she still continues in the hallway, but thinks a little less well of the Heroes.

Continue with:

"I don't know what to do. My mother found the body in his study and alerted the guards. She declared it was an accident. But Milky must not think so. He saw to it that the study was locked up undisturbed and then gave me the keys. I don't know why he gave them to me, but he went immediately to the armory. He said he couldn't investigate and," she pauses a moment, "...and slow down the bloodbath at the same time."

"I...I don't want people getting hurt. I don't want trouble. But it's wrong that someone murdered my stepfather. Please, Prince Walder must have believed in your abilities to bring you here. Will you at last try to do something?"

High Lady Maria will not come out directly and say it, but she believes that not only was her step father who was killed, but it was a member of her family who did it as the first step toward seizing control of Maren and declaring themselves Prince or Princess. This may or may not be true based on what cards were drawn. Further Maria is scared that more of her relations, possibly including herself, may be hurt or killed in any consolidation of power.

Maria doesn't know who is to blame and hasn't thought out what to do about it. Depending on who did the deed she might tacitly support them (like if the murderer turns out to be her mother), or with the support and encouragement of the Heroes she might also oppose the murderer.

High Lady Maria should be played as someone who is smart but scarred and grabbing at the unexpected opportunity of having an armed party of "wildcards" arrive in the castle.

Some possibilities of give and take with characters:

- What do you want us to do?

"I don't want to borrow trouble! More trouble. Our house has seen enough trouble. But someone needs to know what really happened."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she is frightened when she says this. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she is also saying a variation of, "I'm afraid if this goes badly there will be a bloodbath in the keep and I don't want you to trigger that." (i.e. I don't want this to end like Hamlet).

- Why are you so sure it wasn't an accident?

"My step-father, Prince Walder ... he ... was a competent man. Aged, true, but he was the former arms master of Maren. Before marrying my mother and becoming Prince. Falling and hitting his head? Impossible. No, that didn't happen. He was not a bad man. To me. But not many within these walls loved him."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she is sad when she makes this admission.

- Why is the Princess/your mother saying it was an accident?

"I ... am not sure. Perhaps she wishes it was so. Or perhaps ... I don't know ... perhaps she somehow thinks it's the best that she says so..." As she finishes Maria's voice trails off.

A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** skill check causes Maria to add, "maybe she is afraid of crossing whoever killed Prince Walder.

- What's in it for us?

"I don't have access to the family's treasury, but I am not without my own personal wealth."

If pressed for a specific cash amount High Lady Maria will offer each Hero 50 gp. There are no potential guilt trips to manipulate the heroes. Maria grew up in Almeric and has

few illusions about heroism. Maria also does not forward them any money. As above.

- Who do you think did it?

"Please, I don't want to borrow trouble. Or make false accusations. But," her voice drops a little, "most of my male relatives could have done it."

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she is frightened when she says this. **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** reveals she fears for her own wellbeing. A **DC 25 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she is also saying a variation of, "I'm afraid if this goes badly there will be a bloodbath in the keep and I don't want you to trigger that." (i.e. I don't want this to end like Hamlet).

- Where do you think we should start?

"Where ever you think best." If the Heroes really look like they need to be nudged on the right track, "This key unlocks my step-father's study. Milky locked it up quickly so there is a chance nothing was disturbed. It's ... awkward, but you might also learn something from looking at his body."

- Tell us about Milky?

"Milky? He's an albino Ss'ressen. Milky worked closely with my step-father. My step-father called him his valet, but we all know he is really the assassin of his court."

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she says this matter-of-factly. Milky is a boogey-man to some people here, but he only threatened those who threatened Walder. Maria has never been a threat.

- Why did Milky give you the keys? Could he have done it?

"I don't really understand Milky very well. He doesn't exactly go out of his way to make friends with anyone. But he's stood by my step-father for more than a decade. I would be surprised if he was to blame."

- Who do you fear the most?

Requires a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion)** check. Otherwise she mumbles something about not really being sure where things stand in the castle.

Ever so softly she says, "My uncle. And perhaps Berius."

- **How do you feel about your Step-Father?**

Requires a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion)** check for more than a perfunctory "I respected him."

"I don't know. Berius always said that he hated us. I don't think that's true. But he was hard and distant. Still...there was a time right after my real father died when Uncle Rophus wanted me sent away to the Balin family. I don't have the val'Tensen bloodline. I think it's an old argument. Anyway, I was maybe 12 at the time and no one would talk to me about it directly. Not even my mother, she'd just pat my hand and tell me not to worry about it. You know, "that they would do what was best for me." I would, you know, hear snippets of whispers when I'd enter a room."

"I remember Walder came to me just before bedtime one night. He was so serious looking. I was always a little bit scared of him but all he did was ask me what I wanted... I said I wanted to stay. He nodded and patted me on the shoulder. [pause a beat] Awkwardly." Maria smiles a little bit at that then looks at you. "The whispering stopped the very next day. The matter was dropped. Just like that. I've never forgotten that."

- Give us a writ saying we are working under your authority.

"I don't want trouble. That ... Listen, with your invitation from Walder and this key I doubt that the guards at the study will

make an issue of your entry. I don't ... I don't want to be seen as ... taking sides. Please if you feel you need some kind of written authorization, then go see Milky."

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals she is very wary and scared as she says this.

Development: Some Heroes will invariably have other questions for Maria. Use the information above and in **Encounter 6** to come up with reasonable answers for them.

The Heroes don't have to accept Maria's patronage...there will be others eager to secure their services. They don't even have to stay in Maren...if Heroes want to leave at any time they can go to **Optional Encounter A: Sailing Away**.

Most Heroes should decide to meddle/ investigate.

Investigating the study leads them to **Encounter 5A**. Investigating the body leads them to **Encounter 5B**. Heroes who wish to meet with other members of the court including Milky may do so by going to **Encounter 6**.

SCENE 5: TWO SITES OF INTEREST

Key Concepts: Two locations are of interest in any investigation. The study is covered in **Part A: The Study**. Viewing the body is covered in **Part B: Walder's Corpse**. Information on people whom the Heroes want to interview is contained in **Encounter 6**.

ENCOUNTER 5A: THE STUDY

Walder's study is on the second floor. So it's a quick trip down a different flight of stairs. Moving down a dim hallway you see two guards up ahead standing at attention at either side of the door. They share a glance at each other as you approach, and one says, "Can we help you?"

The guards are somewhat reluctant to let the Heroes pass and do not have a key to open the door. They make token protests such as, “I’m not sure you are supposed to go in there.” However, this is meant as a minor impediment. Assuming the Heroes have the key, they can gain entrance. With even modest role playing no roll should be necessary. When the guards see the key they know the Heroes, at a minimum, represent a faction within the keep and that Milky has tacitly condoned their presence. These two guards are trying to keep their head down and stay out of trouble.

Walder’s study is fairly substantial. It’s maybe 20 feet long and a little more than 15 feet wide. It is illuminated by many candles, some now burning low. Very narrow windows line the back wall. Bookcases cover the wall to the left. The wall to the right is covered by maps of the surrounding areas. A large desk and several chairs dominate the other end of the room. The chair behind the desk is tipped over. On the desk there is a book and a knocked over cup. A bare sword, presumably Walder’s, lies on the floor by the desk.

Heroes will no doubt wish to look around at different areas. Some of the most likely areas:

The Bookcase:

Is fairly substantial. Walder has perhaps 100 large books in his study, a very healthy library for a modest Prince in Almeric. The Heroes should conclude the former Arms-Master either liked to read or wants others to think he’s well read. A successful DC 11 Intelligence check reveals that the shelves are organized by topic with larger sections dedicated to agriculture, astronomy, engineering, history, mathematics (some rather esoteric and of potential of use as a primer for the arcanum), and finally warfare. A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals there is a missing book from the agriculture section and a couple from the mathematics section.

The Chair:

The chair is knocked over. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** skill check can reveal that it seems unlikely that the chair would have toppled to where it is if Walder had simply gotten dizzy and stumbled. Failing the DC 15 check causes the hero(s) to infer that someone might have tipped it back that way if they stumbled and fell toward the left side of the desk. If the murder weapon was either the stiletto or the candlestick, there are also tiny traces of blood on the chair that can be seen with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check.

The Desk:

The desk is set just far enough into the room so that someone sitting at the desk could get up, stand behind the chair and look out the narrow, almost arrow slit sized, windows. There are several interesting things about the desk. First and most important is the journal. If anyone searches the desk give them **Player Handout #3**. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** skill check shows faint nicks on the right edge of the desk as if a sword has been set there many times. There is also a small “wooden disk” that the point of a sword could be rested in on the floor below the scratches. The sword was always where it could be grabbed. But currently it is on the floor, either from the desk being jostled or knocked out of the way. There is also the tipped over cup of tea. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Intelligence (Investigation)** check reveals there is some kind of residue in the tea. There has been something added to it. A **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation)** or **Alchemist Tools proficiency check** reveals it to be something similar to the drug known as Silver Foil. If the murder weapon was poison, a **DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation)** or **Alchemist Tools proficiency check** also reveals a poison like Wight Tears.

The Maps:

There are a number of maps present. Most of them are of Maren and the surrounding area. There are also several of Nevanne and of Treslau.

There is also a heavily annotated map of a walled town called Hesselburg.

Candles and illumination:

There are a lot of them. Mostly tallow around the keep, but in here they are beeswax (which produces less smoke). Anyone who asks about the lighting can notice this for free. It's a sign of modest luxury in this room. If the murder weapon was a candlestick, a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals that all the candles are in paired holders except for one on the bookcase. There are signs from spilled wax that there used to be a second candle holder there. These candle holders are large enough to be a little bulky and brass.

ENCOUNTER 5B: WALDER'S CORPSE

Working your way through several corridors and another trip on a staircase brings you back to the ground floor and the main hall. You pass a few guards and servants as you go. They look at you as you pass and a few whispers, but no one seems to be eager to get in your way.

Inside the Great Hall things are much as you left it. Candles burn. Prince Walder lays in state. However Princess Sophia has left. In her place however is a young man in elegant attire. He seems to be staring at Walder, almost blankly. Then he looks up at you as you enter and smiles, "You know I almost thought the old buzzard would live forever. Now look at him. Hmph. Not so impressive now is he? Have you seen my mother? I really need to talk with her about my upcoming coronation."

The Heroes have the dubious honor of meeting Count Berius. Berius is well pleased by the current situation. He thinks he's going to be crowned prince and everything will be easy. Berius has the potentially annoying habit of changing thoughts and topics midstream to come back to his favorite topic...himself. Heroes

will need to talk with him first if they wish to examine Walder's body.

- Who are you?

"Who are you, milord. You have to say milord when you address me."

- Who are you milord?

"I am currently Count Berius val'Tensen. But that will change when we have the coronation. Will you be here for my feast?"

- I'll call you what I like punk

"I beg your pardon! Don't you know that I'm Count Berius val'Tensen? I'm going to be the next Prince of Maren! Then you'll need to call me your highness. It's the way court works."

- May we examine your Step-Father's body?

"What do you want to see. He's dead."

Berius actually stops for a moment to poke the corpse with one finger.

"See? He's dead."

- We don't know where your mother has gone. Do you have any ideas?

"I guess maybe she's distraught. Maybe she went back to her suite. I guess I'll have to send someone to look for her there."

- What did you think about Prince Walder?

"Gods, I hated the man. I don't know why mother ever married him. Honestly, the man never listened to me and knew nothing about statecraft. But then how could he? He wasn't a val'Tensen. What could he really know about Almeric. I'll do much better."

- How do you feel about ...

[Berius doesn't like his uncle Rophus who has a "funny" smile. He thinks Milky is creepy and more of a monster than a "man." Milky needs to be run out of the castle as soon as he's crowned prince. He claims to love and be loyal

to his mother. He rarely thinks about his sister, and thinks his two other half siblings are “spoiled brats”]

Count Berius naturally assumes everyone thinks he’s wonderful. If the Heroes are sufficiently belligerent, Count Berius goes off to find guards loyal to his cause. This should be a rare event. While this gives the Heroes access to Prince Walder it also triggers **Optional Encounter B: Guards Guards!** at some point when the Heroes are moving from one place to another. I suppose it is just possible some table somewhere will decide to assassinate him. Berius fights as a Veteran Guard from stat blocks in the Appendix. No one comes in time to help him, though this also triggers **Optional Encounter B: Guards Guards!**

Getting access to the body should not be difficult for the Heroes. Count Berius doesn’t really care what happens to his stepfather’s corpse as long as he can prove that he’s dead. Also Berius isn’t the most insightful fellow, so he swallows plausible lies hook line and sinker. Berius can also be gotten rid of by encouraging him to go look for his mother Princess Sophia.

When the Heroes finally examine the body:

The late Prince Walder looks peaceful. Sparse white hair and a strong hawkish nose lend him a dignified air. He was a large man. His body is covered by a pale-yellow blanket. There seems to be a small wound on the right side of his temple.

Head wounds are tricky things. Still a **DC 11 Medicine (Wisdom)** skill check suggests that the lump on his temple is an unlikely cause of death. If a character rolls a successful **DC 13 Medicine (Wisdom)** or more they can receive more information.

- If Walder was killed by the candlestick:

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** skill check shows that there is a little blood at the back of the head. A little further probing reveals a serious injury to the back of his head that has a small bit of cloth packed underneath to staunch the bleeding. The skull seems to be fractured, from several blunt force impacts. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** skill check or **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation)** skill check shows that the wound is too narrow to be from a regular mace or club.

If the Heroes examine the body a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** check shows the right wrist is partially broken. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** or **Wisdom (Medicine)** skill check confirms that this is a defensive wound from someone who tried to defend himself.

- If Walder was killed by poison:

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** skill check shows that there is slight discoloration around the lips. Further investigation shows slight swelling around the lips and throat. If anyone checks, his eyes are bloodshot. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine)** skill check confirms that this is a sign of being drugged or poisoned.

If the Heroes examine the body a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** check shows that there are faint signs of blotchiness on both arms. A **DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Intelligence (Alchemist’s tools)** skill check reveals that the former prince was poisoned with some variant of midnight tears that was either impure or a cheaper copy/derivative.

- If Walder was killed by a scarf:

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** skill check shows that there is bruising around the throat that is just visible above the blanket. If anyone checks, his eyes bulge a little and are bloodshot. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** check or a **DC 15 Intelligence**

(Investigation) skill check confirms that he was most likely strangled. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine)** skill check reveals that the ligature marks (bruising pattern) is too regular to have been someone's hands.

If the Heroes examine the body a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** skill check shows that there is a fiber of yellow wool under a hangnail on his right thumb.

- If Walder was killed by a thin stiletto:

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Wisdom (Perception)** skill check shows that there is a little bit of blood under Walder's head. A little further investigation shows that Walder was stabbed in the neck. Cloth was packed into the wound to staunch the bleeding. A **DC 13 Intelligence (Smith's tools)** or a **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation)** skill check shows that the wound is too narrow to be from a normal dagger from Almeric (or from Milandir or the Pugio from Coryan for that matter) and was most likely caused by a slim Savonan dueling stiletto.

If Heroes ask, the angle of the wound suggests that the attacker was above and behind Walder (no roll needed).

If the Heroes investigate, there are no other wounds on the body.

Development: Heroes will likely have a good idea of how Walder was killed if they go to both of these scenes. But not who. They'll need to talk to some people. Probably Lady Maria, but others as well. The people that they can talk to are listed in **Scene 6**.

ENCOUNTER 6: A DIVIDED COURT

Key Concepts: Players start asking people what's what. There is no absolute map of the keep. Ultimately it was too difficult to plot out each and every room for what should be role-playing encounters. Players can go looking for people or locations and should be assumed to reach there going down corridors and up and down stairs.

Entries are listed alphabetically by first name of the NPC and have a note in parenthesis on where they are in Stonecrest.

The people the Heroes should interact with include ...

ALDO VAL'TENSEN

Aldo is in his rooms, on the 3rd floor; there is a guard outside the door, who lets the Heroes pass. He is basically a decent person, but not above partisan interests. He doesn't like s'sressen Heroes. Aldo has heard of the death of Walder. He's worried about what will happen next...not everyone in Maren is as restrained as Walder was. He has concerns for his life.

- Walder is dead.

*I've heard...
...Who are you? Have one of the others sent you to kill me? In the chaos, so to speak?*

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows it's meant as jest with a strong confident front. A **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows fear being concealed.

- How did you feel about Walder?

I won't lie. I wish I could have killed him on the field of battle. He and my father, Prince Dominic of Hesselburg have ten years and more of bad blood between them. Under these circumstances though I miss him. I mostly knew where I stood with Walder. Now I

wonder if there will be trouble for me tonight. I don't suppose any of you are interested in leaving and escorting me from Maren? My father would reward you.

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows a certain dry humor. Count Aldo doesn't know the characters and doesn't really want to leave with heavily armed strangers...still these are the words that leave his mouth and they reflect a deep desire to no longer be a prisoner. If the Heroes actually seem to take him up on the offer Aldo gets cold feet.

- Did you kill him?

Me? We were still dickering about the terms of my parole; I'm not even allowed to carry a real weapon except for a dagger. So - it wasn't an accident then... Someone killed the old man. Hmm. Under the circumstances I would be indebted to one of you if you loaned me a broadsword for night - in case I have to defend myself.

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows Aldo doesn't take the question seriously initially but grows more serious as he finishes speaking. If pressed Aldo will swear by Sarish he had nothing to do with the planning or murder of Walder. If asked somehow about behaving himself with the sword, he'll sarcastically reply he can hardly fight his way out of the castle alone.

- How did you come to be held here?

I was captured while leading a raid. I was getting ready to sleep in when that lizard man just materialized in my tent. Like a phantasm. I thought he was a monster come from my nightmares and he knocked me out before I could react. I woke up once when he dragged me through a stream and he knocked me out again after a brief struggle. I woke up here as a "special guest." I have no idea how that thing evaded my pickets and soldiers.

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows first embarrassment and then at the end, distaste.

- Would you consider marrying XXX?

Really? You realize I am the youngest of Dominic's sons and will not inherit on my own. Of course, I'd consider it...Prove to me this could work.

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows a certain disbelief of the Heroes offer. Still Aldo would be crazy to refuse such a windfall if it seems like it would work.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but the scarf] *"Nothing I'm afraid."* **[For the scarf]** *"It's moving out of scarf weather. Still everyone in Stonecrest owns at least one. During Shadowfast last year several people received yellow scarves from Prince Walder as a gift including Olivia, Maria, Sophia and Winifred.*

- May we see your dagger ...

[Aldo is willing to show the Heroes his dagger, a stiletto of fine Savona steel. It's the right kind of weapon to produce the wound on Walder, but Aldo has been under guard in his room the whole time. The guards outside can confirm this. No one has been to see him except the Heroes...so his dagger wasn't handed off to someone either.]

- What do you think of ...

[Aldo doesn't like Rophus who he thinks is a sociopath. He thinks he could manipulate Berius who he thinks is a twit. But his real fear is for Milky who he thinks of as a "boogey man" with virtually supernatural powers of stealth and movement. **"If he wanted too, he could be here in the room with us."** He thinks Princess Sophia is cool to cold. He isn't kept in a cell but Aldo has had restricted access to the rest of the Keep and hasn't interacted much with anyone else.]

BERIUS VAL'TENSEN

(In the Main Hall or being a pest looking for people in the hallways). [Berius just can't wait to be prince and is busy trying to set up his coronation mostly, but not totally, oblivious to the dangers that are circling. Most Heroes should probably dislike his sense of entitlement].

- Milord, may we ask you a few questions?

If you're quick. I need to find my Uncle Rophus and talk with him about taking over as commander of the military. As soon as I'm prince we're going to sort out some of our neighbors.

- Did you kill Walder?

Haven't you been paying attention? He wasn't killed. The silly fool hit his damned head.

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows Berius seems irritated by the question.

Of course, I could have killed him if it had come to that. But then there wouldn't have been a bump on the head – there'd be my sword sticking out of him now wouldn't there? Of course, my mother would never have let that go. Gods, she can go on and on sometimes. Look, was there something important? I'm busy.

- How do you feel about ...

[Berius doesn't like his uncle Rophus who has a "funny" smile...still the man knows how to fight! He thinks Milky is creepy and more of a monster than a "man." Milky needs to be run out of the castle as soon as he's crowned prince. He claims to love and be loyal to his mother. He rarely thinks about his sister, and thinks his two other step siblings are "spoiled brats"]

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but the dagger] *"Nothing I'm afraid."* [For the dagger] *"A Stiletto? Normally those are worthless weapons unless they are*

made of high grade steel. I know the lizard has one from his travels. So does our prisoner Aldo. That's all my late stepfather would let him keep. Rophus and Victor probably have one in their collections. Maybe Karch? Why do you care so much about knives? Focus man [woman]! There are important events that will have to be planned.

- I hear you have access to the herbarium?

"I shouldn't, but you should see Janos. All that simpering and handwringing. It's a little funny watching him as you wind him up. I just like to make the man squirm. If you get the chance you should try it sometime. No one ever went broke adding a little extra basil to his meals. Did I catch your names and titles?"

EUSTACE AND FRANCINE

(Near the kitchen, on a spindle, spinning wool into yarn). [Eustace and Francine know better than to go talking to strangers about the stuff in the castle. Their first line of responses is a lot of "yes mi'lords" or "I wouldn't know sirs". Eustace is a bit of a romantic dreamer. Francine is the level headed one. A **DC: 13 (Charisma) Deception, Intimidation** or **Persuasion** skill check gets them to open up a little if the Heroes role-play appropriately].

- Who do you think murdered Prince Walder?

[E] Sir (Lady), I can't even really believe he's dead. He's usually so clever, sometimes you worry some enemy is becoming threatening only you realize Prince Walder saw it coming last month and already has precautions in place. Do you think it possible he's faking it somehow?

[F] Don't be daft Eustace. Of course he's dead. (lowers voice to a whisper). Only the lizard could have beaten him in a fair fight, or ambushed him unseen. But please be quiet, it could be here listening for all I know.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but poison] *“That’s not something I would really know about sir. I’m sorry I can’t help you.”* [For poison] *“Have you thought about who has access to the Herbarium? Besides Janos and the Princess, Count Berius and Mistress Winfred sometimes access it. Count Berius loves Basil in everything. Mistress Winfred doesn’t care for Janos’ cooking and re-seasons lots of dishes. Is that helpful sir?”*

- How do you feel about ...

[The maids will say Walder was a right and proper Prince. And mean it. They might admit to disliking Milky and Rophus who they think are both more than capable of killing someone who angers them. They think the world of Princess Sophia and Winifred Balin and should refuse to help the Heroes against them under most circumstances. Eustace thinks Captain Quentin Balin is quite handsome and has something of a crush on him.]

LORD GUSTAVUS AND COUNTESS HENRIETTA

(Lord Gustavus and his sister Countess Henrietta have a suite of room in the SE corner. They are intelligent and somber. They are guarded by Sea Marshal Olivia val’Ossan who is outside their room. Before the Heroes can actually speak with the kids they have to persuade Olivia to let them in. See the OLIVIA entry).

- Do you know what happened to your father?

[The two share a look and then Gustav speaks]

“Yes we know. Someone finally found a way to kill Father.”

- Why aren’t you with your Mother?

Henrietta looks like she might cry and bites her lower lip. But Gustav looks angry. He looks right at you and answers, “If Berius is crowned Prince I don’t think she could protect us.”

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For Poison and the Stiletto] *“Nothing. Sis?”* *The Girl shakes her head. “Nothing.”* [For the Candlestick] *“Everyone carries something most of the time. Janos and Tobias carry large ones all the time.”* *Henrietta chimes in, “Now that you’ve mentioned it I think I saw that Priestess with a large candlestick. Uncle Victor had one too right before he sent me up here to the room.”*

[The kids hate Uncle Rophus and think Berius is an idiot. They love their Mom the Princess, and think Olivia is very strict. Milky and sister Maria are “Okay.” Janos sometimes gives them treats and is a favorite.]

JANOS, THE COOK

(In the kitchen, preparing food). [Think of Janos as a fat cook played by C-3PO.] He is a coward at heart and should be played for gags by the judge as he crumbles under even mild intimidation. Janos steals a little from the larder and the guilt he feels for it has morphed into fear he’s going to be blamed somehow for the death of Walder. He’s completely innocent. If it was poison, he is still innocent, but can point the finger to three people who had access to the locked stores of medicinal herbs. The poison actually didn’t come from the herb locker, but one of the people he names is guilty anyway as luck has it].

- Who do you think murdered Prince Walder?

M-m-m-murdered?!? I, uh, I thought. That is. I was told. By the Princess! That he was, uh, that he had an ... accident ... He hit his head. Right?

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows great fear on Janos’ part and that he is looking to the Heroes for cues on what they want him to say.

- Who has a motive?

Not me!!! No sir! [And Lady!] Nope! No one here more loyal... [bites knuckles] Oh gods ... they’re going to blame me aren’t they? Nobles

are ALWAYS blaming the cooks. "This goose pie is poisoned," they'll shout. But I didn't doo anything...Oh gods, Berius hates my goose pie. He'll throw me out for sure!

- There was something in Walder's tea

Uh...was that the Silver Foil? Walder took a little Silver Foil sometimes. For ... the pain in his side. But he didn't like it. He said it made him feel sluggish and tired.

- There was something ELSE in Walder's tea.

Uh...was that the Silver Foil? No I uh. I Guess not. Oh my...

- Who has access to the herbs?

I'm not sure I should say. That is ... I mean ... I do. And Princess Sophia! And Mistress Winifred. And his brother Victor for the healing herbs he sometimes uses on wounded men. And Berius, though he's not supposed to go in there, he likes extra basil and pepper on most dishes, so he sometimes goes in and out on his own. I ... I've tried to stop him.

- Blah Blah Blah (Other Murder weapons)?

"I don't really know what to say. It sounds like anyone could have one of those here in the keep."

- Did you hit Walder with a Candlestick?

"I did take this one when I had to run an errand...but surely you don't think I would have hit the prince. Don't you?!? Oh PLEASE – surely you believe me!"

There is a large candle stick, but its wooden. If Heroes ask it doesn't match any of the candle sticks from the library, has a tallow candle and is probably the wrong shape for the head-wound.

SIR KARCH VAL'TENSEN

(Pacing the halls, with three other armed men). [Sir Karch is direct and no non-sense. He's trying to quietly count noses and find out which way

the wind is blowing. He wants to make sure he's on the winning side. He also wants to avoid unnecessary violence. Likely he'll ask as many questions of the Heroes as they do him].

- Who do you think murdered Prince Walder?

Murdered? That's a very charged term. I'd be very careful saying that in front of certain people here were I you. [he lowers his voice] If the old Prince was murdered, how was it done? And what's your interest? Who are you for?

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows Sir Karch is grim and not surprised at all by what the Heroes say.

- Would you consider marrying X?

Mariage? That's strange talk coming before a funeral. I am unmarried. Under the circumstances I am unwilling to say more without speaking to the principals involved

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check suggests ambition and wariness light up in Sir Karch's eyes in equal measure.

- Who do you think should be the next Prince?

I doubt very many people are going to ask me for my opinion. I'm just one of Lord Victor's deputies. [More forcefully] I do hope things are resolved without bloodshed. I hope you have the same view.

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception)** check shows Sir Karch is giving the Heroes the hard eyeball.

- We aren't committed to any faction.

If you don't have a dog in this fight, I'll pay you to leave right now. The castle needs fewer armed people about, not more. I'm hardly a rich man but I can give each of you 10 gold right now to walk away from Stone Crest and let us sort things out.

[Hopefully no one takes him up on this, but it's a logical offer for Karch to make. If the Heroes do accept then go to Optional Encounter B]

- Blah Blah Blah. What do you think of the various residents of Maren?

I hope you'll forgive me, but right now answering that question honestly would be absurd. Don't press me to dissemble, and I will return the courtesy to you.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but the Candlestick] *"Nothing. I'd like to know the truth myself. But I'm afraid I have to take care of the living before worrying about the dead."* [For the Candlestick] *"It is dim in here. Everyone has something. Janos and Tobias sometimes carry large candlesticks. Now that you've mentioned it I saw that Priestess Xandra with a large candlestick. Maybe Lord Victor too".*

- [Can we see your dagger?]

"If you're brief."

Sir Karch does have a thin dagger of Savonan Steel, but it's a little wavy like a kris dagger and would not have made the right kind of wound.

- Blah blah blah, No thank you we're staying. (or at the end of the conversation)..

Fine. Will you at least keep your fingers crossed that this doesn't end in violence? Have you seen Captain Quentin recently? He's not in his quarters and I wish to speak with him. If you see him tell him I'm looking for him.

LADY MARIA BALIN

(Hiding up in her room). [Lady Maria is fretting. Fearful for what is to come yet hoping for a good outcome. Many things she might say are also listed in Scene 4. As the probable patron for the Heroes there is a lot of ground that you may be called on to cover].

- We've found evidence that Walder was murdered.

"I cannot say I'm surprised. Please. The thought of further conflict frightens me. Still, I would know who you think did it."

- What do you want us to do?

"What do I want? So few have ever asked that of me. I want this terrible event to not have happened. I want stability here at Maren. What can you do?"

- Why did Milky give you the keys? Could he have done it?

"I don't really understand Milky very well. He didn't exactly go out of his way to make friends with anyone. But he's stood by my step-father for more than a decade. I would be surprised if he was to blame."

- Tell us about Milky?

"Milky? He's an albino ss'ressen. Milky worked closely with my step-father. My step-father called him his valet, but we all know he was really the assassin of his court."

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals she says this matter-of-factly. Milky is a boogey-man to some people here, but he only threatened those who threatened Walder. Maria has never been a threat.

- Do you know some of your relatives are major jerks?

"Life here in Maren is better than in many other places in Almeric, but still it's been 12 hard years. Some of us have born it and the disappointments of life better than others."

A **DC: 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals embarrassment on her part.

- Who do you fear the most?

Requires a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check. Otherwise she mumbles something about not really being sure where things stand in the castle

Ever so softly she says, "My uncle. And perhaps Berius."

- Would you be willing to marry [X] and/or rule here?

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals something like stage fright. As if she's thinking 'Oh gods they really asked me that.'

"I don't want trouble. I. I would do that if it was the right thing... I don't want to make more bloodshed." Softly, "Would it work? I don't want to be a target either. What would happen with my male relatives? Some of them seek to rule."

Lady Maria never puts herself forward as a candidate, but if the Heroes put a plan to her that seems reasonable (decent chance of success and stability, no unnecessary bloodshed) she doesn't object either.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but knives & candlesticks]

"I'm sorry I can't help you. Everyone just about always carries a knife/light source. I haven't noticed anything odd in that sense." [For poison] "There are things in the herbarium that are potentially poisonous. Besides Janos and my mother ... Berius loves basil in everything and so is always pestering Janos. Mistress Winifred knows a lot about herbal lore as well, but surely, she wouldn't be involved. Is that helpful?"

- May we see your yellow scarf?

"Of course. Is it important in some way?"

Maria's scarf is free from snags.

MILKY

(In the Armory in the basement, sealed behind a heavy barred door).

Milky is trying to do one final service to a man he respected by slowing down any dash for weapons, hopefully limiting the bloodshed coming with the sorting out process. When role playing Milky don't rush his words. Take a moment to enunciate everything with a languid cadence. Milky will be intrigued by the presence of the Heroes. Milky is naturally deferential to

female ss'ressen Heroes. Everyone else runs second. As a Ghost Scale he really doesn't have anything emotionally invested in twitting elorii.

GM Note: Reading a normal ss'ressen isn't easy and Milky is far from ordinary as such all non-ss'ressen heroes suffer disadvantage on their **Wisdom (Insight)** skill checks.

- Uh, Hello? Knock Knock? Is anyone in there?

[Through the Door] *"Who iss it outside? I don't recognize your voice."*

[After the first round of hero introductions]

"Iss that everyone there?"

- We're the people Walder sent for.

"Well well well. Walder ssspoke of you coming. You picked an interesting night to arrive at Stonecrest. Better if you had come yesterday. Or tomorrow. Tell me, has anyone died yet in the succession?"

- Do you mind opening the door?

[Through the Door] *"If you give me your oath you will take no weapons from this room, nor attack me I believe I can accommodate that request."*

[Assuming the Heroes do this they can hear some shuffling around and then the sound of the bar being removed] *"Alright, please open the door slowly and avoid fast movements." Inside the doorway you see a white Ss'ressen behind a table polishing a bastard sword. Two loaded crossbows are on the table next to him. Another guard with a prominent holy symbol of Hurrian is in the room with him looking nervous. "So. Here we are. A good evening to you all." [Ss'ressen Heroes automatically realize Milky is of the Ghost Scale egg clutch]*

- I know you are Milky. Who is your friend?

"Him? He's Hans. Unless we're going to fight ignore him."

[Hans is effectively the priest of Stonecrest and has been buttonholed by Milky. The Hurrican Temple has been famous for not taking sides in the conflict in Almeric, but Hans is “just” a Templar and minds the chapel in Stonecrest. Hans nods to the Heroes but doesn’t have much to say other than he doesn’t want to see more bloodshed than necessary and so is helping Milky].

- You are polishing steel while the chaos is breaking out upstairs. What are you doing?

“Walder did want the armory cleaned and inventoried before the fighting sseason truly getss under way. I’d like to think of it as honoring the memory of talented man.”

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals a little amusement as he says this. With a **DC 20** roll revealing Milky is sizing the Heroes up. Still the Heroes should be able to guess without rolling that this isn’t nearly the whole story even if technically true]

- What did Walder want us to do?

“I had assumed that he planned on cleaning house and wanted muscle that would go away. He never exactly said sso though. It’s also possible he wanted you to arrange an accident for one of his relations. Though that is much less likely since he wouldn’t let me do it. There is also an outside chance he had something in mind that he didn’t tell me about. Maybe thosse damned sshades.”

A **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight)** suggests calmness as he says this.

- Who wouldn’t Walder let you dispose of?

“It hardly matters now.”

On a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check, he admits it was Berius...too dumb to understand the difference between prey and predator.

- Do you support anyone?

“A sword sshouldn’t choose the hand that wields it. I need to at least pretend to sstay out of the ssuccession. Though I won’t sserve someone who is clearly sself destructive. That means Berius. If he ssomehow ends up on top, I plan to leave unseen.”

A **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight)** check suggests anger at the possibility of Berius ruling.

- What do you want us to do?

“If you find out who killed the Prince I would very much like to know.”

Milky is willing to promise some kind of reward if need be, though he is vague and unspecific. If pressed Milky will say he doesn’t forget debts but also doesn’t know what resources, he will have access to after everything shakes out.

- Why did you give the keys to Lady Maria?

“There was no one else to give them to. Sshe was there and I thought sshe would be too timid to go in and disturb the evidence. When I discharged this last duty to the Prince I wanted the ability to go look at my leisure and ssee what I could ssee.”

A **DC 17 Wisdom (Insight)** check suggests surprise at the fact that Lady Maria has gotten involved enough to enlist the Heroes

- How did you capture Aldo?

“The Ghost Scale are hard to ssee when we don’t want to be sseen. The pup is not incompetent. But neither he nor his guards were ready for someone like me. It might not have mattered even if they were.”

A **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows contentment

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but the dagger] *“Is that how he was slain. Not the death he would have expected.”* [For the dagger] *“A Stiletto? How odd. I have one. So does our prisoner Aldo. Karch and Rophus also have a one, though they don’t always carry them.”*

- May we see your stiletto/Did you do it?

"Here take my stiletto. I know it's not the murder weapon. I knew Walder was worried about trouble coming with his physical deterioration but am surprised this happened. I had nothing to do with his death."

Heroes can believe what they like. Milky's stiletto is close to the right size and shape to cause the wounds. If Heroes want to spend a Fate point they can tell it's a little too short, otherwise they can live with ambiguity.

SEA MARSHAL OLIVIA VAL'OSSAN

(On the second floor, in the hallway, guarding a suite of rooms. She is loosely wearing a yellow scarf).

Fans of the author Jim Butcher might model Olivia on "Murphy," tough on the outside and a "law and order" kind of person. Olivia has bonded with the youngest of Walder's children and is grim. She assumes Rophus or Berius will seize power and imprison or kill Gustavus and Henrietta. Among her duties was keeping a maritime escape route open for Walder. She plans to use it to take the children to Gelbachen relatives in Milandir...if a ship can be readied before someone moves in force. Though she commands the marines, at the moment they are mostly outside Stonecrest.

- Why are you out in the corridor?

"The air here suits me."

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight)** check suggests a challenge to contradict her

- We'd like to speak with Gustavus & Henrietta.

"Leave a message with me. I'll relay it."

A **DC: 15: Wisdom (Persuasion)** check, along with some good role-playing works if the Heroes also offer a compelling reason why they should be allowed in to see the kids. Like finding the

murderer. Any Heroes let inside will need to leave their weapons with Olivia.

- You don't say much do you?

"I don't need any distractions right now."

A **DC: 15 Wisdom (Insight)** or **(Perception)** check shows her eyes keep sweeping the corridor as she talks to the Heroes.

- Walder was Murdered?

"No kidding. Still, plenty of people are saying he fell. Let's be frank. No one will say that about Gustav or Henrietta."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check suggests she's ready to jerk steel and go at it with the Heroes if need be.

- Do the kids know their dad was murdered?

"I haven't said anything. On the other hand, they're far from stupid. They must at least suspect."

- We're not a threat to you or the kids.

"Be nice to believe that. As long as we're all here just talking, everything is fine."

- What is a val'Ossan doing in Almeric?

"Walder brought me in 9 years ago. I'm from a minor branch of the family. I wouldn't have the chance to run things in Milandir."

- Ever have any trouble with Ymandragore?

"Let's focus on today."

A **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion)** skill check along with a second Inquiry by the Heroes elicits a response that while no Black Ships have ever pulled into port, suspicious individuals have entered Almeric through Maren. Maren lacks unlimited resources and can't afford to let the pier get destroyed in either a fight with wizards or in retaliation by a Black Ship.

- Nice scarf.

"A gift from Walder. I wanted it for the dock as evening comes on. If I had time, I'd ditch it in my room."

No signs of snags on her scarf

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but the dagger] *"Nothing I'm afraid."* [For the dagger] *"A Stiletto? No shortage of knives in the Castle. Still A stiletto is pretty specific. Aldo. Karch. Milky. Rophus. Those are only ones I've ever seen wearing one. I'd be easy to hide one though."*

DAME PAULINA SCIPIO VAL'TENSEN

(On the third floor. A Legionnaire from Nevanne stands at attention outside her door. He'll enter with Heroes unless they want to leave their weapons with him.)

Paulina is well trained as a minor member of the court of Nevanne. She absolutely doesn't take sides in the coming trouble in Maren's Court, deflecting questions with non-answers. She often pretends to be a sunny ditz, so people will underestimate her. Think Margery Tyrell from HBO's Game of Thrones.

- You are a long way from Nevanne. What are you doing here?

"Why, Papa thought it would be a good experience for me to see more of Almeric before I settle down and wed. He is a High Count within the court of Nevanne. And Maren is usually a fairly stable corner."

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check suggests unhappiness under a sunny exterior as she says this

- Most val'Tensen hated Walder

"Well yes, that's somewhat true. Okay. That's actually true. Still, even though Papa said Walder's rule of Maren was bad for certain narratives, he thought I might learn about power and how a court really works here."

A **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check suggests this is a practiced answer delivered by rote.

- Walder is dead.

"Yes I've heard. Such a tragedy."

A **DC: 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check suggests she's saying what's socially expected. A **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check suggests she's trying to read the Heroes looking for clues how best to respond.

- Walder was murdered.

"Really?" A hand goes to her mouth. "Who did it? Are you sure?"

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows no real sign of surprise.

- Did you have anything to do with it?

"Me?" She giggles nervously. "Are you serious?"

A **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion)** skill check or **Charisma (Intimidation)** check gets a firm denial.

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows surprise at the question.

- Would you marry one of Walder's kids?

"Me?" She turns serious. "Which one? The younger? There would need to be an ... understanding between me and Princess Sophia. Who has talked with her?"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows alertness and interest. Her body language changes as she leans forward and looks hard at Heroes.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For everything but the scarf] *"Nothing I'm afraid. I've only been here a few weeks and barely know what's normal and expected."* [For the scarf] *"It's moving out of scarf weather. Still I was talking with Maria about her lovely Yellow Scarf just the other day. I think she said it was a gift. Many of the other women here have one including Olivia, Princess Sophia and Winifred."*

SIR QUENTIN BALIN

(On the third floor. He's not in and the Heroes don't find him until the final fight. Heroes can enter his room by picking the lock on his door with a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) proficiency check**. They can also break the door down, though servants come to look and run off. This approach triggers **Optional Encounter B: Guards Guards!**).

You enter a decent sized room. There is the expected desk, bed and foot chest. Thick carpet covers the floor. Instead of tapestries covering the walls there are number of shields with crossed swords behind them. Perhaps trophies from past battles? There are a couple of blank spots on the where one could either add additional weapons...or where weapons have been removed."

Heroes could grab a long sword if they wanted to ... or a shield.

SIR ROPHUS VAL'TENSEN

(On the first floor. If Rophus is the killer, he isn't available and the Heroes won't see him till the final encounter. Otherwise he's at his desk writing when the Heroes find him).

Rophus is the most egotistical resident of the castle with all the empty charm of a serial killer. However, unlike Berius he is grounded enough to grasp reality.

- Walder is dead.

"Yes. Things have changed rapidly. I hear he wanted to hire you. Obviously, your contractual obligations to him are nullified at this point. Are you available for taking on a new assignment?"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals Rophus is quite happy

- You want hire us?

"Yes. I could use a few more swords. I'll pay each of you 35 gold coins in either Milandisian or Coryani currency for a few days' work. One

way or the other I intend to see things settle down by week's end."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals Rophus already assumes the Heroes will say yes.

- Settled Down?

"Once I'm Prince of Maren then yes things will settle down."

- Walder was murdered.

"Of course. Pity really. He died much too quickly. A worthy revenge would have been more protracted. Well. On to the future."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals Rophus is barely paying attention to this exchange, turning back to his desk to check something.

- We're in. What do you want us to do?

"If I secure the armory it's over. Go down there and kill the lizard for me. But be careful. Milky is the most dangerous combatant in the castle. And gifted at stealth. Pin it down in one room and kill it."

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

"I couldn't care less who killed Walder. It's true I might also want the title of Prince, but they've done me a favor. I need to secure the House. The mystery can wait."

- We're out. We want nothing to do with your plans.

"Don't be hasty. I am sure if you think about it, you'll realize Maren needs a strong hand on its tiller. We have the ongoing problem of Hesselburg to the north. Anarchy to the East. Reports of piracy from the South. And who else is there? Berius? My sister? Take an hour to speak with the also-rans. I think you'll come to agree. It has to be me."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals Rophus seems fervent in his assertions. And confident. He really does think the Heroes are going to join him if they "think it through."

- What about XX as Prince/Princess?

"Don't make me laugh. That barely rates a comment."

A **DC: 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check reveals Rophus seems displeased at the suggestion and thoughtful. His expression hardens a little bit. He might add in response that Berius might as well have been dropped on his head as a child. His sister Sophia has no ambition. Maria and Victor aren't val'Tensen. The other kids are too young.

PRINCESS SOPHIA VAL'TENSEN

(On the second floor. A maid tries to keep the Heroes away saying the Princess is indisposed. If Sophia is the killer, then the maid is lying and she's not in at all. The Heroes won't find her until the final fight. Female Heroes (and only female Heroes) can enter his room by making a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Deception (Cha)** skill check. You can grant advantage to the roll to reflect women who are nobles versus (say) a filthy female gnome. They can also physically bypass the maid and break the door down. This approach triggers **Optional Encounter B: Guards Guards!**). Assuming she isn't the killer and is in:

- We are sorry to disturb you in your time of mourning?

"You'd think we would be used to the funerals by now in Almeric. Still no one of consequence has died in Maren since my first husband Dephus was killed in battle so many years ago. Speak. What is so important."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check suggests resignation.

- We think Walder was murdered

"I'm sure you're wrong. I wouldn't speak of such things."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check or Wisdom (Perception)** check shows she locks eyes with the HERO who says this. Her mouth presses into a very thin line]

- Berrius/Rophus is planning to take over as prince.

"Walder's body is barely cold. You would think if they had ANY respect for me he would wait a day or two so we could have a decent funeral."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals her eyes water a little though no tears fall.

- Hiding in here puts your children at risk.

"How many of you have children of your own? In Almeric? I'll take your parenting advice under due consideration. Was there anything else?"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals her cheeks color substantially and her eyes narrow. At this point Heroes get one more question before being asked to leave.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

"Walder fell. But if he was murdered? They may have done me a favor. Does that shock you? I couldn't care less. I am still Princess of Maren. I endured 5 years with that woman in this house. She's left hasn't she. I am done answering questions; you should go too. Good day."

Tears leak from Sophia at this point. Baring extraordinary effort from a sympathetic female hero, the interview is over.

†TOBIAS

(On the main floor overseeing funeral preparations. Tobias is melancholy that at his advanced age there is going to be bloodshed here in Maren. He had thought he'd die before the Prince).

- We think Walder was murdered

"Surely that can't be right. Princess Sophia has said otherwise."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows his face sags as he says this. With a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check, he can be persuaded to elaborate

"I am an old man. To have to see what follows at my age. It won't be pretty. When Walder took over everyone was terrified about external threats and Walder consolidated his power fairly quietly. Now no one is really worried about external threats. And too many members of the court want power for themselves.

- Who might have murdered Walder? (Requires a **DC: 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation)** skill check.)

"The obvious choices are the most ambitious and the most dangerous. Berius, Milky and Rophus. Doesn't mean any of them would have done it. Someone could also have been paid to do it by an outside Prince. If that's true you couldn't even rule me out of the list of suspects."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows his body sag and almost grow older.

- Berrius/Rophus is planning to take over as prince.

"That does not terribly surprise me. Hopefully no one will oppose him. If someone does I hope the staff can stay out of the way till it is over."

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For stiletto and candlestick] *"Nothing I'm afraid."*

[For the scarf] *"Everyone in Stonecrest owns scarves. It gets cold in winter. Colder for those of us who are older. During Shadowfast last year several people received yellow scarves from Prince Walder as a gift. All the prominent women. Olivia, Maria, Sophia and Winifred.*

[For poison] *"There is a stocked herbarium. Janos might know something about that. I'd try a few directed questions there first."*

- We want to see the Candlestick you are carrying.

"Of course. My eyes aren't what they used to be. I need the light to get around."

Too small and wooden. Obviously not the murder weapon.

LORD MARSHAL VICTOR GELBÄCHEN

(If Victor is the murderer, then the Heroes don't find him till the final scene. Otherwise he is on the main floor overseeing funeral preparations and talking to guards. Victor is grim and angry. He's always been in Walder's shadow which complicated his relationship with his brother. But now he's seen the body and knows he's been murdered, blood is thicker than water).

- We think Walder was murdered

"Keep your voices down. No need to start a panic. Have you figured out who did it?"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows concern as Victor looks around

- You don't seem surprised

"With this lot? No, I am not surprised. I suppose the Princess is hiding in her rooms? Bloody perfect."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows concern as Victor looks around

- You're the Lord Marshal, can you do something?

"That may change presently. Neither Berius nor Rophus is likely to keep me on. And doesn't everyone know it. Half the guards won't look me in the eye. If I try to do something with the people I think I can still trust, I may only make it bloodier. Still. I'd shed blood for a chance at his murderer."

A **DC: 15 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows bitterness

- Berrius/Rophus is planning to take over as prince.

"If he is responsible I'll find a way to cut off his head before his men drag me down. Let him try to rule without a head."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows Victor is looking around as he says this.

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For the scarf or poison] *"I could tell you about swords. Or crossbows. But I don't know about that. Keep looking!"*

[For the stiletto] *"I know Aldo has one. So does Milky. Maybe Rophus. I did have one but I broke the tip fighting against a stubborn soldier of Princess Gitta."*

- Do you have access to the herbarium? Did you poison your brother?

"I use several herbs there to help fight infection and swelling when guards get injured. None of which would kill someone. You're not really insinuating I poisoned my brother are you?"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows Victor is angry at this line of questioning.

WINIFRED BALIN

(If Winifred is the murderer, then the Heroes don't find her until the final scene. Otherwise she is on the third floor sewing to occupy her hands. Judges familiar with the *Wheel of Time* by Robert Jordan might portray her with the calm confidence of the Aes Sedai. If she is the murder Heroes can unlock her door with a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' tools) ability check**. Or they can break down the door, which provokes **Optional Encounter B: Guards Guards!**).

- We think Walder was murdered

Winifred looks at you coolly. "That opinion is unlikely to help the situation here. If you would like some free matronly advice, I'd say poor Prince Walder hit his head. No need to stir Victor or anyone else up."

- Don't you care about justice?

"I care a great deal about the children and poor Sophia. And in avoiding more spilled blood than is absolutely needed. Maren is in Almeric. We aren't secure enough to buy luxuries like justice. It's only during relatively

good times we can even afford to buy security."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows that is watching the Heroes very closely for their response.

- You think Victor wants to be Prince?

"No more than several other people. Victor has more sense than some but lacks Walders sense of the big picture. And is unmarried. No one well born wanted to be married to a relative of Walder's. But the example has been set for an arms master to seize control. It won't end well if he tries. If you get him stirred up with talk of murders or seizing power, he'll probably try."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows distaste as she says this. (She has some sympathies for Victor but is really worried about Maren as a whole).

- Berrius/Rophus is planning to take over as prince.

"Yes, that seems like a plausible scenario."

- Who would make a good next Prince or Princess?

"Whoever it is would need a connection to Walder for a sense of continuity. And troops that are loyal to them. The val'Tensen name, of course, would be useful. And in a best-case scenario some connection with other external powers. That would cover the basics. It would also help if they were competent and decent human beings. I hope you aren't planning something."

A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows she has real interest in the Heroes for the first time when they ask this. Despite the last thing she says, she's definitely intrigued if the Heroes have an idea that could work beyond "catching the murderer".

- Can you do something?

"No soldiers obey me. I could try to persuade Sophia to something, but much as I love her

she's a little unsteady on good days. And I don't know how many of the guards would obey her either.

I see this ending in steel and blood. Hopefully the interval of violence is brief. No, I'm afraid there is nothing direct that I can do."

- What do you know about [Murder Weapon]?

[For stiletto] *"I am sorry to my eyes a knife is a knife. I have no idea who has one. Well, certainly the Ghost Scale does. He collects weapons. I admit the idea that Milky assassinated the Prince is a frightening one. But that seems unlikely."*

[For the scarf] *"Everyone in Stonecrest owns scarves. It gets cold in winter. Colder for those of us who are older. During Shadowfast last year several people received yellow scarves from Prince Walder as a gift. All the prominent women. Olivia, Maria, Sophia and I do."*

Her scarf has no snags.

[For the Candlestick] *"Janos and Tobias were both moving around the castle at that time with large candlesticks. Though they seem like unlikely killers. I think I saw Xandra and Victor too with especially bulky ones. There could easily be others. The keep is defensible. But the natural lighting suffers for it."*

XANDRA VAL'MEHAN, ANOINTED PRIEST OF SARISH

(Xandra is up on the Fourth floor starting to pack. She doesn't take the Heroes as business opportunities or dangerous rivals and as a result her guard is mostly down. When the Heroes knock they are invited to enter).

- Walder is dead.

"Yes. A great tragedy for Maren."

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows this a perfunctory response. Xandra is packing dresses in a travel pack as she speaks.

- Are you leaving?

This tragedy for Maren is also an inconvenience for me. I came all the way from Grand Coryan to the edge of civilization. And now I will need to figure a way back home. Hopefully I can find a ship in the next couple of days."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** skill check shows more animation when talking about her problems than the tragedy of Maren

- Xandra doesn't sound like a Coryani name.

"If you must know my parents fled Canceri when I was very young. Milandir was not welcoming. Eventually we found distant kin in Grand Coryan. Where I've grown up and thrived. I promise you any children of mine will be named Scipia or Caenis or something more suitable."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check clearly shows irritation, but not at the Heroes

- Walder was murdered.

"Really? Hmm. No one is fighting in the halls yet. Are you sure? That's not a charge to throw around lightly"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows that she looks somewhat concerned as she pokes her head into the halls for a quick peek.

- You're not going to try and serve Walder's last wishes?

"Walder wanted me to make a Sarishian Oath for him. He's now dead, so I can't do that. I also have no idea what the specifics of the Oath were. He greeted me yesterday and told me that we'd wait for some special assistance to arrive till he talked of business. I take it that's you?"

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows that she looks away when she mentions that she doesn't know what the specifics of the oath were before

looking back at the Heroes. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check suggests she thought for a moment before adding the last question (she is trying to divert the Heroes from her lie).

- C'mon. Really, what did Walder want of us?

"Alright, he wanted a loyalty oath...from some people in the Castle who are now much more prominent than they were prior to Walder's accident. I don't see why I'd want to get involved. Or you"

A **DC 15 Charisma (Deception), Intimidation, or (Persuasion)** check squeezes the names Berius, Milky, Rophus, Sophia and Victor from her. The Loyalty Oath would also require obedience to Walder's named heir ... Xandra doesn't know who was going to be named heir.

- Will you craft a Sarishian Oath for us?

"You want an Oath do you? You'll shield me from violence and bring the parties to me? If it isn't something foolish, then very well. Payment will be 50 gold coins."

- Blah Blah Blah Murder Weapons?

"I am recent guest here much as yourself. I can't tell you anything about who might have used what. I can only tell you that I would look to Berius or Rophus as likely suspects."

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check shows a strong dislike for these two. If anyone asks about this, she turns the question around and asks if the Heroes have spent any time in their presence implying that the reasons for her opinions are obvious.

- We'd like to look at your Candlestick.

"Go head. It's over there. You'd think there would be a portable one in the room. Instead I had to lug that huge thing around earlier."

Though brass it doesn't match the candlesticks in the study. It's really too big to use handily as a weapon.

Development: Heroes may bounce between a lot of different people in the Castle. Presumably the Heroes conclude who is the Murder is in this scene and try to track them down. Proceed with **Scene 7**. It's also possible the Heroes skip back to **Scene 5** to revisit the crime scene or body. If they throw their hands up in the air and sail away go to **Optional Encounter A: Sailing Away**

SCENE 7: THE CONSPIRACY ACTS

Key Concepts: Players go looking for the killer, whom they haven't been able to meet yet in the castle. Heroes are given an ultimatum to leave. Combat probably ensues.

You go hunting for [xxx] but at first seem unable to find [him/her]. They are not in their rooms. Many servants and guards scurry out of your way as soon as they see you coming.

The Heroes need to come up with some way to get information from people. It could be clever. Or they could literally run an older servant down and corner him or her. No roll will be needed. Everyone is scared at this point that events are moving towards fighting. People want to avoid being at ground zero as things come to a head.

Finally, you button hole someone. Eyes wide with fear, gulping air like a fish out of water they stammer. "I thought I saw [Rophus, Sophia, Victor, Winifred] heading off with several of the guards. It looked like they were going to the [Wine Cellar, Garden Maze or Roof Top ... as determined by the card reading]."

The Heroes hurry to the area indicated. Go to the appropriate version of the following:

WINE CELLAR:

Heading down through the foundations leads to a radical change in architecture. It looks like the keep of Stonecrest rests on the foundation of a Coryani villa. There is a basement and then a sub-basement. You end up deep enough underground to be worried about some forgotten dungeon...but there are no cells down here. Instead you hear movement and low voices as you come upon a surprisingly big wine cellar.

GARDEN MAZE:

Hurrying outside you enter a formal garden under overcast and dark skies. You can hear movement and low voices coming from within the hedge maze. It sits in the center of the garden. Cultivated thorny vines and foliage block line of sight. Entering you sort through the many turns of the maze until you come close to the center where hear low conversation.

ROOF TOP/BATTLEMENTS:

You go up several small winding staircases where you have to pass single file. The stairs spiral up clockwise and the steps are of uneven heights. This would be a terrible place to do battle. Fortunately, you pass through them and emerge under a darkening overcast sky. The wind blows, and you discover you have disturbed several people who were speaking.

It is not my intention as an author for either side to ambush the other...but if the Heroes, AHEAD OF TIME, make a display of great stealth, (or magic of some kind) then as a judge you can give the Heroes surprise against the conspiracy. Then continue with:

You can see **[Rophus, Sophia, Victor, Winifred]** surrounded by armsmen. Their lips press together into a firm line at your appearance. "I had hoped to complete this process before having to turn to affairs outside the court. I suppose it's too much to hope that

I can persuade you to turn around and leave Maren to work things out on its own."

The Heroes can say pretty much whatever they want. Unless they are willing to join with this group in "cleaning house" and exiling or executing the other contenders then combat breaks out.

The one piece of conversation that should come out either before initiative is rolled or during combat is the Reason/Motive why the Killer struck at Prince Walder. This either comes out with conversation with the Heroes or while cursing them for meddling as part of an attack. The brief speech is:

[Heroes]:

Blah Blah Blah, Why did you kill Walder?

[ROPHUS, snapping]

"Damn you all and that old man! I'm by far the better swordsman! But he always had his damned wizardry to fall back on. I could have called in the Ymandrakes to deal with him, but then it wouldn't have been my revenge! No longer! The House of Maren is coming to me! As it always should have!"

[SOPHIA, in indignation]

"How DARE you! I've spent the last five years with Walder and that ... Larissan TROLLOP ... under MY roof! The embarrassment ends! The shame ends! And if you won't help me then it can END for you too!"

[VICTOR, coldly]

"My brother stepped from the periphery and seized power here in Maren when the opportunity presented itself. And he left me in his shadow. Whatever I owed him I paid for over the years with my service. I've paid my dues. His health was already failing. His time was over. Now my time has come and I'm seizing power. Nothing more. Nothing less. I'm a far better choice than Berius and if need be I can face down Rophus. Stand down."

[WINIFRED, pretending to reason]

“Walder ended up with too many external enemies. It’s this or be invaded. Be reasonable. Henrietta, with firm guidance, will eventually make a fine val’Tensen Princess.”

If Heroes ask a **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals that Winifred looks away when she utters this bald lie. If vanquished or killed Heroes discover correspondence with Prince Dominic promising to advance her nephew Drake in his court in exchange for eliminating Walder.

Please initiate combat.

COMBAT

In all this combat consists of

- **Four (4) armed servants**
- **Four (4) veterans of Maren**
- **One (1) murderer**
 - **Fighter: Rophus or Sophia**
 - **Mage: Victor or Winifred**

See Combat Appendix 2, Scene 7

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy Mode:** Remove 2 veterans
- **Difficult:** Add 2 armed servants and 1 veteran of Maren
- **Perilous:** Add 2 armed servants, 2 veterans of Maren and 1 murderer

Development: Heroes should emerge victorious. After the Heroes deal with the conspiracy no one else in the Castle is really going to want to go directly head to head with them. The other factions will attempt to lay low till the Heroes leave. Go to **Encounter 8**.

It’s just possible that somewhere a table will throw in with the conspirators. Run an impromptu encounter where the Heroes are sent to take out either Rophus or Victor. Use double the stats from **Optional Encounter B: Guards Guards!!!** plus the stats for the murder (fighter).

If the Heroes are somehow all defeated, go to **Conclusion: It Ends Badly for You.**

SCENE 8: PRINCE MAKERS

Key Concepts: No one else in the castle is interested in directly challenging the party’s might. The Heroes have a chance to parlay this moment of power into the coronation and succession of the ruler(s) of their choice. For good or ill.

As the last of your adversaries fall there is a brief moment of silence filled only with the sound of your own breathing. Perhaps the remains guards in the keep could overwhelm you with numbers, but they are relatively scattered and disorganized. It would seem, at the moment that you are the greatest concentration of force within the Castle. The question is, what are you are going to do now?

Where the Heroes go from here is somewhat free form. Heroes can just sail away if they want. If there is time in the slot go to **Optional Encounter A**. But hopefully if the Heroes come this far they are invested in a decent future for Maren. They need to put a ruler (or married couple) on the throne. How much time is left in the slot will help govern how much role playing should be put into this. At home you should let the Heroes sort things out at their own pace. In a convention setting it is okay to give some nudges if time is running low. There is no one “right” solution.

The Heroes shouldn’t be explicitly told this, but Maren needs 3 things for a chance to thrive.

ONE: Maren needs a leader who can navigate the battlefield, because Almeric being Almeric, the walled town will face external challenges. The people who are experienced in leading

troops are: Aldo, Olivia, Victor, Karch and Quentin.

TWO: Maren needs legitimacy and a sense of continuation; otherwise internal dissatisfaction develops. Maria, Henrietta, Gustavus and Victor fulfil this requirement. (Technically Berius, Rophus and Sophia would too. But given their personalities, despite initial acceptance, they can be counted on to eventually cause everything to run off the rails in time).

THREE: There needs to be a val'Tensen ruler (or co-ruler) lest there be even more trouble with the neighbors.

No one individual fulfills all three requirements for a chance at prosperity. But there are several couples that could work. If there is time in the slot let the Heroes role play a bit with their choices. Some might be more eager to be part of the next rulers, (Aldo, Paulina, & Quentin). Others less so (Olivia for example really isn't interested).

FINALLY, the issue of Princess Sophia & Berius comes up. If she survives the module she is the current Princess; but she isn't well suited to rule and in some tables will be a murderess. She either needs to step down and swear a Sarishan Oath of allegiance to the new rulers or go into exile. If Sophia is the murderess she won't swear the oath, otherwise she swears if one of her children is the next ruler. Berius won't swear an oath to "usurpers" and either needs to be executed, imprisoned or sent into exile. Maria and Sophia are against his execution or imprisonment.

If the Heroes jump through all these hoops to create a stable outcome go to **Conclusion: A Chance for Prosperity**. Other key NPC's will also swear oaths if demanded of them

If the Heroes come up with a solution that is missing one or more of the necessary elements go to **Conclusion: A Truce for Now**. Other key

NPC's will not swear oaths and leave or go into exile.

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER A: SAILING AWAY

Key Concepts: Heroes decide it's not their problem and wait on board the West Wind to sail. They're attacked by pirates or Ymandrakes on the way back north.

You decide that either this is just not your problem or that the perceivable rewards are not worth your effort here. You leave Stonecrest and return to the docks to wait the sailing of the West Wind in two days' time. The first day passes without incident. Captain Yan is surprised to see you, but eager to hear the latest scuttlebutt from Stonecrest now that the Prince is dead. "Who is going to succeed him, do you know?"

Yan is not eager to get directly involved and congratulates the Heroes on showing "**some rare common sense in keeping your heads down.**" After the Heroes role-play their answer continue with

The second day, just as you are leaving the docks there is some kind of commotion with most of the Marines rushing to Stonecrest en masse. Captain Yan mutters under his breath, "What a mess. We're getting out of here just in time."

Your hoist sails and get out before trouble comes to the dock. And sail away. Your return journey is just like the one that brought you to Almeric, but perhaps a little less exciting since you've now seen this stretch of coast before. It's the same drill as before. A lookout keeps watch for trouble.

But late in the day a fog rolls in from the Gulf of Yaris and your Captain starts cursing under his breath. "Damn unseasonable. I don't like the looks of it, I don't at all."

But there's not much you can do. The wind has died down to almost nothing and the whole coast gets blanketed in white. You can't see more than 20' clearly. And no more than 40' poorly. A claustrophobic hour goes by with the Captain periodically shushing everyone to listen for the surf. To make sure that you aren't drifting towards shore. Then he cocks his head to one side, "Did anyone else hear that?"

Another ship looms out of the fog and shouts emerge as people start swinging over and onto the West Wind. It seems you're not getting out of Almeric quite yet...

Please initiate combat.

COMBAT

In all this combat consists of

- **Four (4) scallywags**
- **Four (4) pirates**

If the any of the characters were casting arcane spells in public add the following

- **1 Harvester (CR 2)**

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy:** Remove one scallywag
- **Difficult:** Add one scallywag
- **Perilous:** Add one scallywag and one pirate

Tactics: The scallywags hang back and shoot across the ships with their crossbows until someone goes over there to deal with them. The pirates then jump the gap at the front of the ships and lays into the first people they meet.

If the Heroes have attracted the attention of the Harvesters then this isn't a case of pirates, but instead is an attempted abduction. The poor

Heroes who triggered the event is the primary target of the Harvester and boarding party. If they can knock that Hero unconscious they try to drag them away.

The Ymandrake spellcaster tries to disable the target or otherwise nukes clusters of Heroes.

Development: Heroes should emerge victorious. If everyone is somehow defeated, then they're either killed by pirates and dumped over the side or taken to Ymandragore as slaves. Either way it's time to create a new character. Try not to let this happen.

After the Heroes deal with the combat they can loot the enemy ship. There are 5 captives that are grateful for their freedom, explaining that they were either taken by pirates or by Ymandrake slavers scouring the coast of Almeric. Heroes gather a reward from them and a share of plunder worth a total of 50gp

Conclude with **Conclusion: Sailing Home.**

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER B: GUARDS! GUARDS!

Key Concepts: Heroes anger people who have guards who are loyal to them. The Heroes get ambushed as they are moving down a corridor.

There are lots of people in the keep of Stonecrest besides the main people of the court. Servants bustle. Groups of guards warily eye each other. And you. But they all hurry to get out of your way as you walk by.

Except this time. Two guards stand blocking the hallway you were walking down. Their mouths are firm. "We have a message to deliver to you from one who is in power. Your presence is no longer welcome."

The players have a moment to make some kind of response then continue with.

As steel gets drawn more guards emerge from side doors. "For what it's worth, if you survive the beating we'll put you back on a ship."

Please initiate combat.

COMBAT

In all this combat consists of

- **6 veterans of Maren**

See Combat Appendix 2, Scene 7

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy Mode:** Remove one veteran of Maren
- **Difficult:** Add one veteran of Maren
- **Perilous:** Add two veterans of Maren

Tactics: The guards accost the Heroes in a 10' wide corridor with several closed doors on the side that potentially enter into 20'x40' room. Two guards come in the front and two come in from behind.

The guards demand the Heroes leave the castle immediately or draw steel and attack if the Heroes have killed someone (like Berius). The guards have high morale but may surrender when proven to be out classed if their lives are spared.

Development: Heroes should emerge victorious. If everyone is somehow defeated, then they're taken by the guards and put on a boat back to Milandir. **Go to Conclusion: Sailing Home** and modify the text as appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS & ENDINGS

There are four main ways that the module can end. Pick the right ending and adjust if necessary for the unusual or unanticipated events of your

table. There is also a separate piece to read if the Heroes permanently free the shades.

CONCLUSION: A CHANCE FOR PROSPERITY

You do your best to find a stable ruler for Maren. At the very least you have found someone who can command Maren's forces in battle, someone who provides some continuity with the past, and the val'Tensen name. Maybe Maren has a chance to prosper even within Almeric.

The betrothal and coronation takes place two days later after a flurry of chaos to organize everything and of course you are guests of honor. Most smile, certainly to your face, but it's a safe bet that not everyone in the audience is as happy as they are pretending to be. Still, the threat of all out fighting seems to have ended, at least for the moment. You can't promise an end to future challenges, but you've secured the safe passage of Maren's court through a moment of crisis.

[NPCs name/s] greet you in their first official audience. "We have a great deal to thank you for. As does Stonecrest and the town as a whole. Things might have become much more unpleasant but for your timely assistance. Please, how might we show our gratitude to you? In addition to our thanks and fond wishes you will also leave here with a tangible material reward to remember us by. Even though the town has only modest wealth I believe we can safely fill your purses with silver or send you off with a special piece of castle forged steel. As best pleases each of you."

"And we will hope to share your friendship in the years to come. Safe sailing to you! And good fortune in all your future endeavors."

See also **Conclusion: For Some a Final Peace** if applicable.

CONCLUSION: A TRUCE FOR NOW

You do your best to find a stable ruler for Maren. You have not been totally blessed with good choices to pick from. Still, one can only do their best and hope.

The [betrothal and] coronation takes place two days later after a flurry of chaos to organize everything and of course you are guests of honor. Most smile, but it's a safe bet that not everyone in the audience is as happy as they are pretending to be. It's also a good bet the next regime in Maren will have to watch its back carefully as several powerful people go into exile, voluntarily or at sword point.

[NPC's] greet you in their first official audience. "There is a great deal to thank you for. Which brings us to finding a suitable reward for your exemplary service. Depending on your desires or needs we would be proud to either fill your purses with silver or send you off with pieces of castle-forged steel. And of course should you ever come this way again in the future, Maren looks forward to entertaining you.

Safe travels to you in your future endeavors!"

See also **Conclusion: For Some a Final Peace** if applicable.

CONCLUSION: SAILING HOME

You don't come across any further difficulties on the sail home. The boat is even more crowded with the captives you've rescued, but your pockets are heavy with extra silver coins as your share of the liberated booty.

When the West Wind pulls into Naeraanth you find that plenty of news is filtering north from the new season of fighting in Almeric. Maren is just one town of many that gets mentioned.

From what you can hear, if you listen, there was a three-way war between Berius, Rophus and Olivia who represented the younger children. Olivia is dead but the younger

children escaped the keep. Count Aldo was also accidentally or purposefully been killed in the fighting and now Maren is being assaulted by his father Prince Dominic from Hesselburg. It's a mess and will probably be years before everything gets sorted out.

Thank the Gods you didn't get sucked in. The best thing about Almeric from your perspective? You can leave it behind you.

See also **Conclusion: For Some a Final Peace** if applicable.

THE END

ADVENTURE REWARDS

After the adventure, fill out an Adventure Chronicle for each player. Note the experience gained, the treasure reward received, any favors or boons received and any other pertinent information. Hand it to the player before signing so that they can add in any gold or fame they spent during the adventure and make any choices required on the Chronicle. Once the player is done, sign the Chronicle.

EXPERIENCE REWARDS

Arcanis adventures do not necessarily reward experience points for winning combats. Instead Arcanis adventures reward experience for achieving particular tasks or reaching important story points.

Story point

Total Exp Award.

300 Exp

FOUND ITEMS

Players may keep any item without an Item Certificate that they find during the adventure. Remember that carrying a flintlock without the right to do so is a crime.

When a player keeps an item, the item's sale value is removed from the shared treasure

reward the party splits at the end of the adventure. If the amount removed is greater than a player's share of the coin, the player in question must make up the difference or the other players can chip in from their shares.

The number and distribution of items found in a Living Arcanis adventure is always calculated using the base level of the adventure and a table of 5 players. Even if the party goes through the adventure at a higher difficulty and fights more enemies, any items beyond what is listed here are unsalvageable, lost or confiscated. This helps the Campaign Staff have a better grasp on campaign economy.

SCENE 7

The Heroes are not allowed to keep any of the gear from the murderer or their guards. It is kept by the new ruler(s) of Marengart.

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER A

- Scimitar (8) – 25 gp each
- Leather armor (8) – 25 gp each
- Light crossbow (8) – 10 gp each

Total for Optional Encounter A – 480 gp

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER B

The Heroes are not allowed to keep any gear from the guards. That would be theft and being incarcerated would be detrimental to their murder investigation.

FAME

Arcanis is filled with secret societies and powerful organizations that constantly scream and maneuver behind the scenes. Players may be part of these organizations or even attract the attention of organizations they are not part of, for good or ill.

Task, Achievement	
Laerestri or Mourners of Silence if all ruling parties are human	Members Only +1 Fame

Mother Church of Coryan or Milandir Achieve either A Chance for Prosperity or A Truce for Now as the conclusion.	Clerics or Holy Champions +1 Fame
Nation of Almeric This reward comes from Conclusion: A Chance for Prosperity.	Anyone +1 Fame

STORY AWARDS

INDIVIDUAL STORY REWARDS

The new ruler(s) of Marengart give each Hero either 100gp or an item as described below.

Castle Forged Steel: In lieu of a cash reward the smiths of Maren create an item for you. The smith knows his craft, and the castle forged item has 10 extra hit points. You receive one of the regional weapons and armor from the Kingdom of Milandir (except plate):

Item Chosen: _____

Total Cost of item: _____

NOTICE OF THE HARVESTERS

This only pertains to characters who cast Arcane magic, every time during the adventure an arcane caster casts spells in a public place or within sight of common people there is a chance that they had been spotted by a harvester or a harvester informant.

Unless the caster goes out of their way to hide such spell casting, news of their abilities will, eventually, reach the ears of the “wrong” people.

If the hero was open about their spell casting in public or failed two consecutive attempts to disguise it, they get 1 point of harvester notice.

COMBAT APPENDIX 1

SCENE 1

In all this combat consists of

- **Three (3) Witches of Marengart**

Tactics: The shades of the witches emerge in the crossroads and (all things being equal) move to attack Hurrianites, Illirites and spellcasters in preference to other targets. The Witches cannot engage people who make it into town or onto the pier.

The shades try to engage in melee with multiple Heroes.

At first, the shades of the witches hang back and use ranged spells on heroes. They are “conservative” in their casting, generally focusing on cantrips.

When the Heroes engage in melee they will try setting up flanks and overlapping attacks on the same Hero with “waves” of attacks every chance they get. They absolutely do not fear “death.”

When all three Witches have lost more than half their hit points, the last witch unleashes a *hazardous trial* (which they are immune to) in the form of a wave of icy wind that chills the soul.

The Witches are intelligent and hateful; if other tactics would lead to a hero being defeated, pursue those instead.

HAZARDOUS TRIAL

2nd level evocation

Casting time: 1 action

Range: Self (60-foot radius)

Duration: Instantaneous

This spell radiates a wave of icy cold, exploding outward from the caster’s location.

Each creature within the 60 ft. radius must make a Dexterity saving throw versus the spell’s DC. A creature takes 2d6 cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Any creature who fails their save also has their speed reduced by 10 feet.

At higher levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above the 2nd.

WITCHES OF MARENGART

Medium undead (shade)

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d8+6)

Speed: fly 40 ft.

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

Damage Resistances: acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities: necrotic, poison

Damage Vulnerabilities: radiant

Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses: Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 11

Languages low Coryani (common)

Challenge 2 (200 XP)

SPECIAL TRAITS

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the witch has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom(Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Incorporeal Movement. The witch can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10 force damage if it ends its turn inside an object).

Spellcasting. The witch’s spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13; +5 to hit with spell attacks).

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, eldritch blast, ray of frost*
 1st level (4 slots): *charm person, hellish rebuke, protection from evil and good*
 2nd level (3 slots): *ray of enfeeblement, hazardous trial* (see below)

ACTIONS

Spectral Claws – Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (2d6+2) necrotic damage.

COMBAT APPENDIX 2

SCENE 7

In all this combat consists of

- **Four (4) armed servants**
- **Four (4) veterans of Maren**
- **One (1) murderer**
 - **Fighter: Rophus or Sophia**
 - **Mage: Victor or Winifred**

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy Mode:** Remove 2 veterans
- **Difficult:** Add 2 armed servants and 1 veteran of Maren
- **Perilous:** Add 2 armed servants, 2 veterans of Maren and 1 murderer

Tactics: The servants hang back and shoot arrows into melee with their short bows. The veterans gang up to gain advantage, maximizing their ability to bring the hurt to people.

The murderer deals with whoever seems to be causing the most trouble.

ARMED SERVANT

Medium humanoid (human)

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 13 (2d8+4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	14	15	10	11	11
(+0)	(+2)	(+2)	(+0)	(+0)	(+0)

Skills Perception +2

Senses: passive Perception 12

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

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

Shortbow – *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

VETERANS OF MAREN

Medium humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 14 (ring mail)

Hit Points 18 (3d8+6)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills: Intimidation +3, Perception +3

Senses: Passive Perception 13

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

ACTIONS

Long Sword– *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+3) slashing damage or if wielded two handed 8 (1d10+3)

Shortbow – *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage

MURDERER (FIGHTER)

Medium humanoid (human or val)

Armor Class 18 (plate armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d8+18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18	14	17	10	12	12
(+4)	(+2)	(+3)	(+0)	(+1)	(+1)

Skills Intimidation +5, Perception +3

Senses Passive Perception 13

Languages Low Coryan (Common)

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The villain makes two attacks with his greatsword.

Greatsword – *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) slashing damage.

Shortbow – *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

MURDERER (MAGE)

Medium humanoid (human or val)

Armor Class 12 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	14	10	18	13	13
(+0)	(+2)	(+0)	(+4)	(+1)	(+1)

Skills: Arcana +6, Perception +3

Senses Passive Perception 13

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. The villain's spell casting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14; +6 to hit with spell attacks).

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, minor illusion, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *color spray, mage armor, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow, hold person, misty step*

3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, slow*

ACTIONS

Dagger – *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

COMBAT APPENDIX 3

OPTIONAL A

In all this combat consists of

- **Four (4) scallywags**
- **Four (4) pirates**

If the any of the characters were casting arcane spells in public add the following

- **1 Harvester (CR 2)**

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy:** Remove one scallywag
- **Difficult:** Add one scallywag
- **Perilous:** Add one scallywag and one pirate

Tactics: The scallywags hang back and shoot across the ships with their crossbows until someone goes over there to deal with them. The pirates then jump the gap at the front of the ships and lays into the first people they meet.

If the Heroes have attracted the attention of the Harvesters then this isn't a case of pirates, but instead is an attempted abduction. The poor Heroes who triggered the event is the primary target of the Harvester and boarding party. If they can knock that Hero unconscious they try to drag them away.

The Ymandrake spell caster tries to disable the target or otherwise nukes clusters of Heroes.

SCALLYWAG

Medium humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 13 (2d8+4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +2, Intimidation +2

Senses: passive Perception 10

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

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

Crossbow, light – *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+2) piercing damage. (10 bolts)

PIRATE (THUG)

Medium humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15	11	14	10	10	11
(+2)	(+0)	(+2)	(+0)	(+0)	(+0)

Skills: Athletics +2, Intimidation +2

Senses: Passive Perception 10

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics: The pirate has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the pirate's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The pirate makes two melee attacks.

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

Crossbow, light – *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) piercing damage. (10 bolts)

HARVESTER

JOURNEYMAN "ORDAINER"

Medium humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 12 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	14	10	18	13	13
(+0)	(+2)	(+0)	(+4)	(+1)	(+1)

Skills: Arcana +6, Perception +3

Senses: Passive Perception 13

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Arcane Precision. Ordainers add their casting ability bonus to spell damage when casting single target spells.

Spellcasting. The Ordainer's spell casting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14; +6 to hit with spell attacks).

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, dancing lights, fire bolt*
1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, sleep*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, mirror image, misty step*
3rd level (2 slots): *counterspell, lightning bolt*

ACTIONS

Fire Bolt – *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10+4) force damage.

Staff – *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage.

REACTION

Absorbed Magic - As a reaction the Ordainer may absorb one spell directed at them, gaining a spell level slot equal to the level the spell directed at them as cast at. The Ordainers cannot absorb area effect spells, only spells directly targeting them. Once the Ordainer uses this ability he cannot do so again until completing a short rest.

COMBAT APPENDIX 2

OPTIONAL B

In all this combat consists of

- **6 veterans of Maren**

Adventure Difficulty

- **Easy Mode:** Remove one veteran of Maren
- **Difficult:** Add one veteran of Maren
- **Perilous:** Add two veterans of Maren

Tactics: The guards accost the Heroes in a 10' wide corridor with several closed doors on the side that potentially enter into 20'x30' room. Two guards come in the front and two come in from behind.

The guards demand the Heroes leave the castle immediately or draw steel and attack if the Heroes have killed someone (like Berius). The guards have high morale but may surrender when proven to be out classed if their lives are spared.

VETERANS OF MAREN

Medium humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 14 (ring mail)

Hit Points 18 (3d8+6)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills: Intimidation +2, Perception +3

Senses: Passive Perception 13

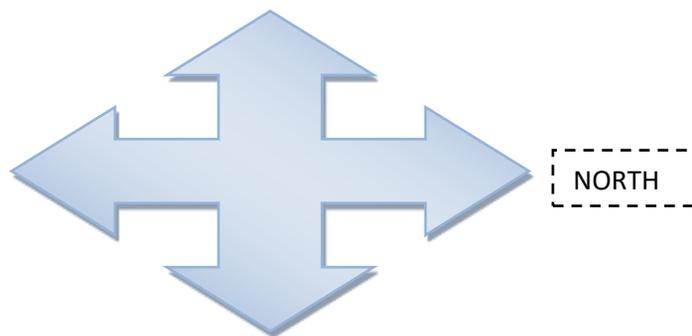
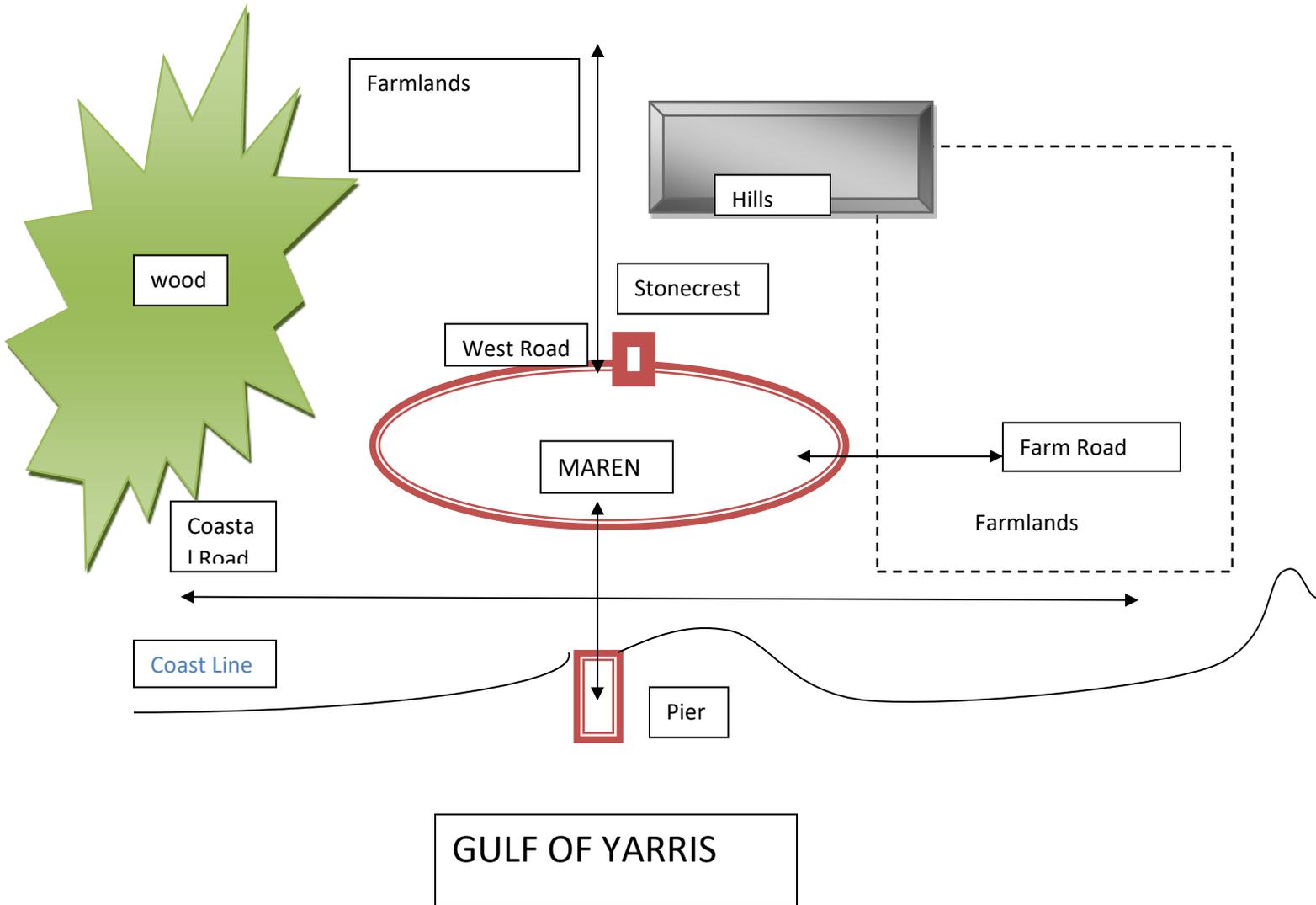
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

ACTIONS

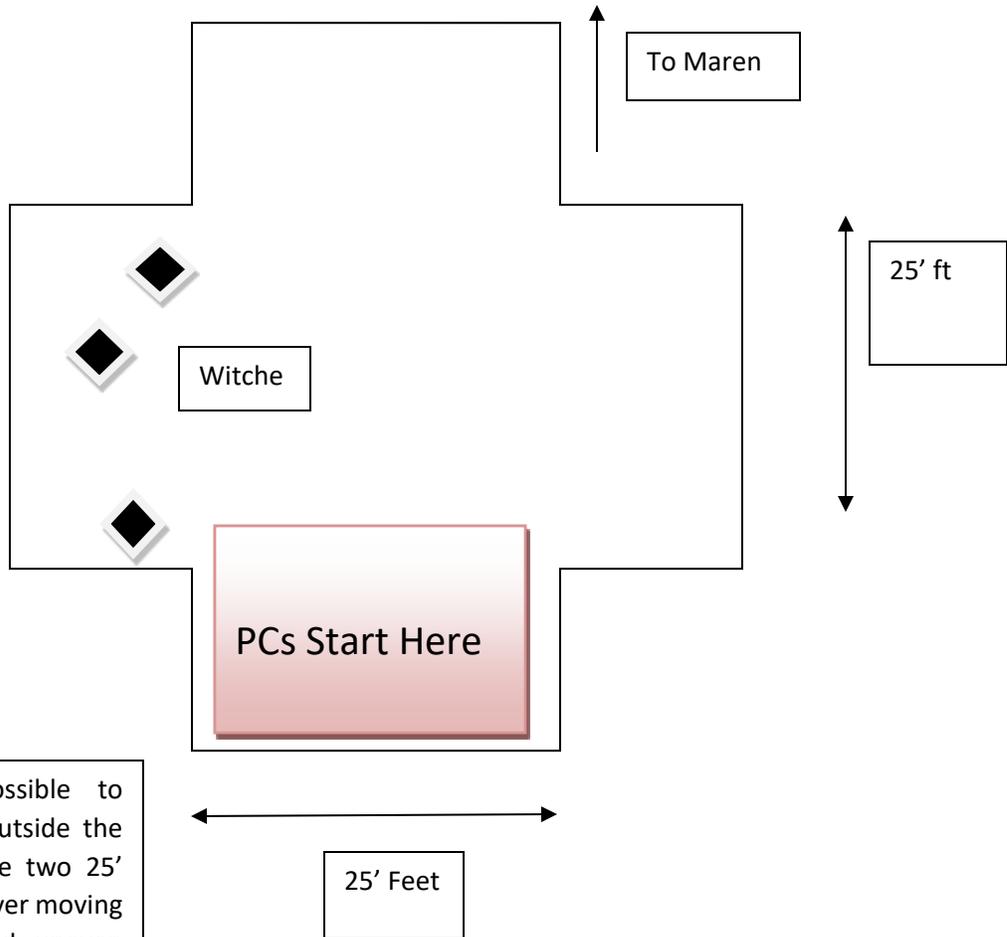
Long Sword— *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+3) slashing damage or if wielded two handed 8 (1d10+3)

Shortbow — *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage

MAP #1 MAREN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS



MAP 2 – THE CROSSROADS BATTLE



It's perfectly possible to move and fight outside the intersection of the two 25' wide roads. However moving in the weeds and uneven terrain reduces movement by 1/2 for each move action that passes through those squares.

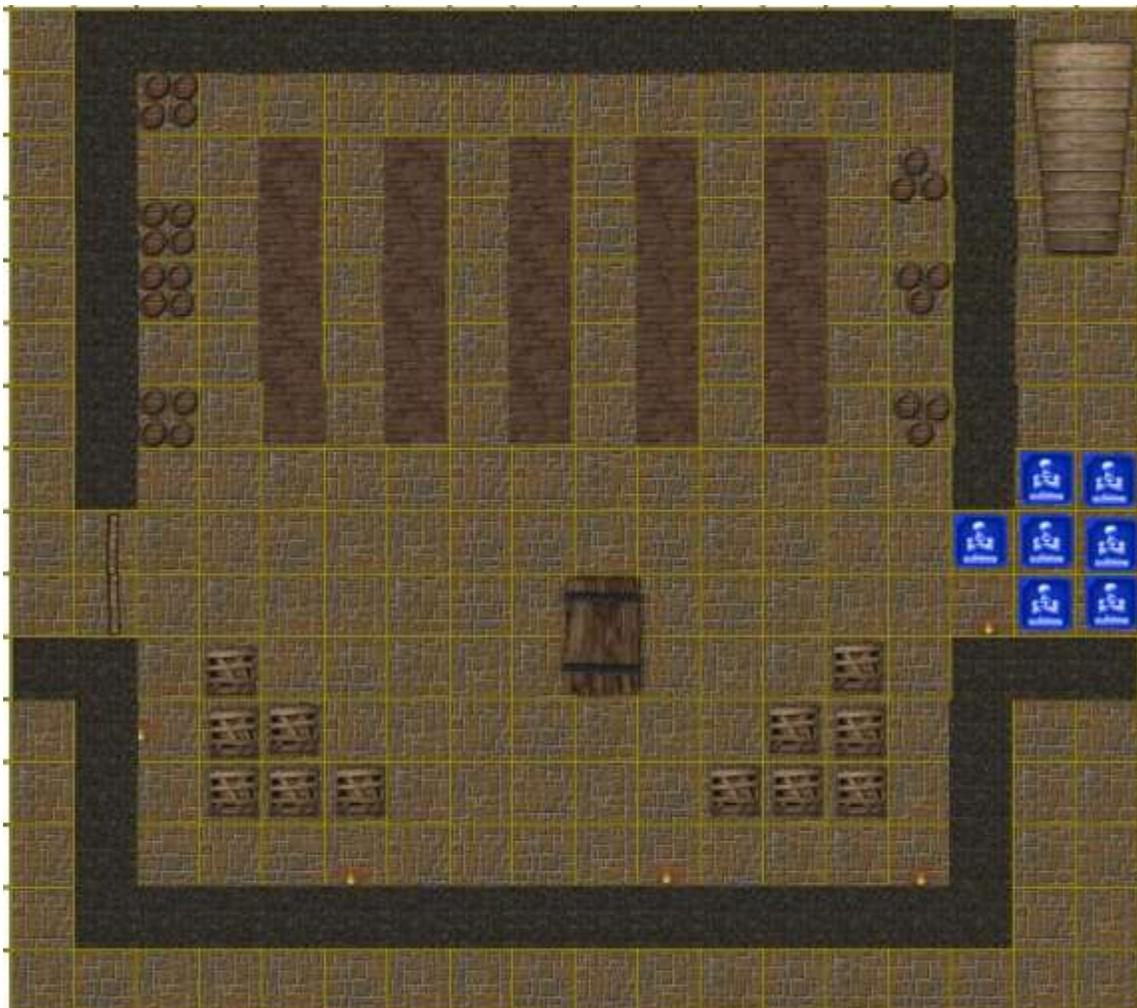
MAP #3A: THE FINAL (BASEMENT) BATTLE

The tables, crates and barrels are all under 5' tall, jumping up on one is a **DC: 10 Strength (Athletics)** skill check.

It's possible to attack people through the 5 wine racks, but someone on the other side has cover.

Barrels can be kicked over or rolled at an opponent with a **DC: 15 Strength (Athletics)** check. If successful, the victim needs to make their own Athletic or Acrobatic check with a DC equal to the roll used to send a barrel at them. A barrel deals 1d10 (5) damage and knocks the target prone if they failed their Athletics or Acrobatics check.

At **DC: 20 Strength (Athletics)** check can topple the 5 wine racks. Anyone underneath is automatically knocked prone and takes (10) 2d10 bludgeoning damage. It takes an action to crawl out.



MAP #3B THE FINAL (GARDEN) BATTLE

The hedges provide concealment against opponents anyone directly on the other sides and total concealment for all other opponents. Pushing through/climbing over is difficult but possible. It takes an action and a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics)** skill check to cross from one side to the other.

There is 1 tree in this section of the garden. Climbing it requires a successful **DC 10 Strength (Athletics)** skill check, which rises to **DC 15** if they only have one hand free. Once in the tree the PC can see over the first obscuring hedge wall.

Standing in the fountain is possible, but when first stepping into one of the squares anyone doing so must make a **DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check balance check or slip and fall prone.

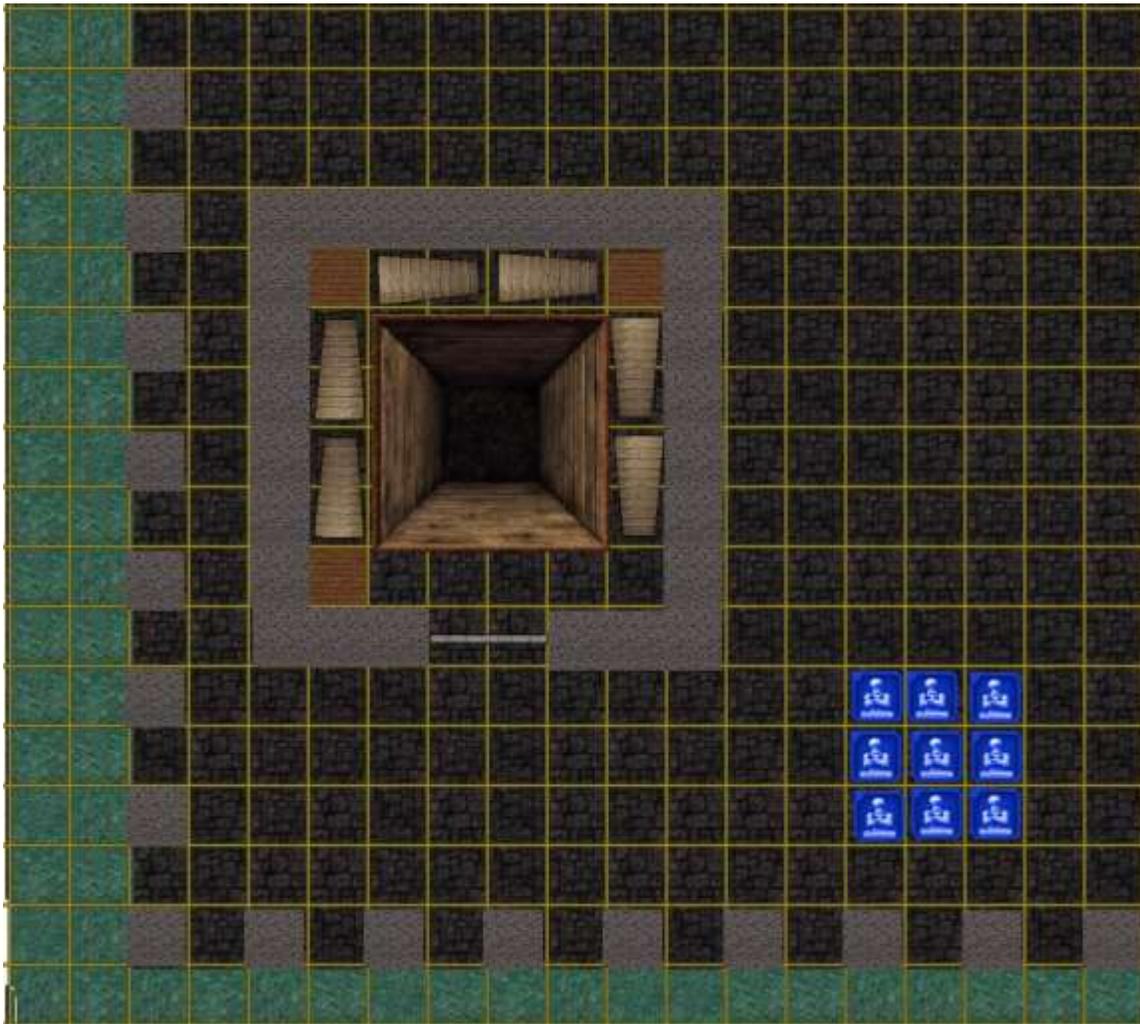


MAP #3C THE FINAL (ROOFTOP) BATTLE

The bell tower rises another 30 feet, and the central shaft descends through the keep. By using the stairs (considered difficult terrain) the heroes gain access to the roof from a different location and discover the conspirators around the Bell tower. The tanks (Red) move up to engage while archers (orange) and spell casters potentially play ring-around-the-rosie, moving to keep the tower between them and the heroes.

One group of ranged combatants could enter the Bell Tower and shoot out the door at Heroes.

The most dangerous possibility is falling. The roof is roughly 40 feet above the ground. Because of the crenellations, someone who would be pushed off the roof can choose to fall prone as a reaction instead of fall to the ground.



MAP #4 NAVAL COMBAT

The Heroes start on the ship to the left. The attackers start on the ship to the right. Minion attackers, and any Ymandrake spell casters, fire ranged weapons at the PCs. The other warriors leap across and look for more prisoners.

Hopping across from forecastle to forecastle is a **DC 11 Strength (Athletics)** check which can be made as part of any move. Leaping from the deck to the forecastle is a lot harder at a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** skill check. A failed check means the character is across but prone. Failure by 8 (or more) deposits the character in the ocean (hope they can swim). There are plenty of lines around and can be tossed down into the water as a bonus action. Someone trying to climb out need to make a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** as an action.

Cages represent holding cells for prisoners. There are people in them currently and they are vanquished/killed if heroes target the squares they occupy indiscriminately...



PLAYERS HANDOUT 1

The following letter reached you either at your home or in your travels. It is addressed to you by name.

My Dear [Insert PC's Name]

Have you ever contemplated growing old? Probably not. I admit I haven't given it much thought until recently. I focused instead on the issues of the day. In Almeric that is polite speech for the whole process of us trying to kill each other. Issues of the day. We really mean soldiers. Logistics. Assassins. Politics . . . Power.

One benefit from focusing on the issues of the day is that I am still here and alive at the twilight of my life. Plenty of my contemporaries are not. The last thirteen years have not been kind to us. However, having reached this point, where my body begins to fail me, I am forced to confront new issues I have not prepared for. Regrets. Disappointments. Failures. And especially, several difficult relationships.

I do not have much longer in this world. Rather than spend my last months executing old plots, I wish to ameliorate what ills I can and secure a future for Maren that is less wretched and squalid than that of Almeric as a whole. Not all of my court will be pleased. I don't doubt that some salivate anticipating my demise. They will have their own plans. Even surrounded by my kin, I might as well be alone.

Pox on that. You would think Maren the center of the world for the angst wasted on our local concerns. You should be disinterested in our petty rivalries. Able to perceive and execute decisions for "the greater good!" Assuming anyone can even recognize what that is. My companion Odette has looked deeply into her cards and made suggestions about what kinds of people I need to call upon if I am to bend fate toward a better future. From what I hear, you fit her descriptions nicely.

Even if you do not place as much faith in Lady Fortuna as I do, I am sure you would agree it is advantageous to have strong and clever people by your side in any season. If you will help me, then find a ship called the West Wind which will be waiting for you in Naraenth. Sail south to me and meet Odette at the Fisherman's Rest. She will orient you on the local situation. I can be a generous patron. I will see that you are rewarded for the services you render in proportion to the rendering. Come to me. Come!

Prince Walder Tensen-Gelbächen

[Attached is the impressive looking wax seal of the Prince of Maren.]

PLAYER HANDOUT 2

Odette of Savona has given you this list of the people. It includes everyone present at Stonecrest, the Main Keep of Maren. She has strongly implied that not all residents are “benign” but has resisted actually pointing the finger at anyone, deferring to any future judgments by Prince Walder.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>CONNECTION to WALDER TENSEN- GELBÄCHEN</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
Prince Walder Tensen-Gelbächen	Your Patron	Age 67
Princess Sophia val’Tensen	Wife of Walder. Mother of Maria, Berius, Henrietta & Gustavus	Age 46
(Dephus val’Tensen)	Former prince of Marengart. Former husband to Sophia.	Deceased
Sir Rophus val’Tensen	Brother to Dephus val’Tensen. Uncle to Maria & Berius	Age 60
High Lady Maria Balin	Eldest stepdaughter of Walder. Daughter of Sophia and Dephus	Age 24
Count Berius val’Tensen	Step-son of Walder. Son of Sophia and Dephus	Age 20
Countess Henrietta val’Tensen	Daughter of Walder & Sophia. Half Sister to Maria & Berius.	Age 11
Lord Gustavus Gelbächen	Son of Walder & Sophia. Half brother to Maria & Berius	Age 10
Milky	Albino Ss’ressen. Officially Walder’s ... “Valet”	Age ???
Dame Paulina Scipio val’Tensen	Fostered daughter of High Count Pulus Gnaeus val’Tensen of Nevane	Age 17
Count Aldo val’Tensen	“Honored Guest” & son of Prince Dominic val’Tensen of Hesselburg	Age 19
Templar Hans	Guardian of the private shrine, acting religious official	Age 27
Sea Marshal Olivia val’Ossan	Responsible for Coastal defenses. Commands Marines	Age 31
Various Marines		
Lord Marshal Victor Gelbächen	Youngest Brother to Walder. Commander of the Maren Guards	Age 50
Sir Karch val’Tensen	Captain in the Maren Guards under Victor	Age 23
Sir Quentin Balin	Captain in the Maren Guards under Victor	Age 31
Various Guards		
Janos	Head of the Kitchens	Age 39
Master Tobias “the Old Man”	Master of the Estate, effectively head of the domestic staff	Age 71
Other Footmen & Staff		
Winifred Balin	Friend of Sophia, former Governess to Maria & Berius, leads maids	Age 42
Eustace	Maid under Winifred	
Francine	Maid under Winifred	
Other Domestic Staff		
Priestess Xandra val’Mehan	Invited Guest. Arrived yesterday. Anointed Priest of Sarish	Age 29

PLAYER HANDOUT 3: WALDER TENSEN-GELBÄCHEN'S JOURNAL

TYPICAL EXCERPTS ON WALDER'S FAMILY:

(1) . . . my "beloved" brother-in law Rophus. If you and Berius had ever joined causes I would have fallen from my position by now. Gods bless your ego; and may they help the citizens of Maren if you ever claw your way to the top. . . It would have been much better if I had just killed you when you challenged my right to marry Sophia. Sometimes I dream it's not too late to correct that oversight. Idiot!

(2) . . . why am I saddled with Berius? Sophia, it's for my love for you alone that's kept me from arranging a "hunting accident." He came to me again arguing for launching an attack on Hesselburg. Damned ego. He'll throw away everything I've built up for that whore called "Glory!" Or he wants me killed in battle. That would be clever. . . No, too clever for him. The child just expects everything to fall into his lap. Alone in Almeric, the dumb pup doesn't know what war really looks like.

(3) . . . Maria. So dutiful. But quiet. What am I to do with you? I would do well by you if I only knew what you really wanted. Almost I could name you heir. But do you have the reserves of steel it would take? Your uncle would move against you. Your brother too? When the knives come out would you just bleed and die uselessly? And of course your bloodline is no better than mine. Perhaps if wedded to someone to serve as your champion? . . . But who? And do you want that? Again, what do you want in this life?

(4) My own children. Gustav I see so much potential in you. . . Sophia. Damn you, none of this private plotting would be necessary if I trusted you to rule firmly on your own. I am alone in this. Do I ask so much? Still, if you could fend off the others, would you have ever married me? Perhaps not.

SOME EXCERPTS ON NEIGHBORS:

(1) . . . Damn the Ymandrakes. And the val'Tensen. I hope they all burn in the Cauldron. . .

(2) . . . the val'Tensen will never accept me and Dominic is the worst. Why am I saddled with such neighbors? They can't do anything about me. Now. At the moment. But years can change things. That Milky captured Aldo is a boon. As long as I hold his son hostage, Dominic is neutralized. . . too bad for Aldo. He seems like a decent man. He must take after his mother's side. Somehow I'll have to marry the family advantageously so my heir is not so handicapped. But there are so few viable candidates. . .

(3)... Olivia says the representative of the Isle was back. They want to move in and out from my dock - I can't possibly say no directly. Do they suspect I have the Gift or is this just terrible luck? I've tried so hard my whole life to be careful. Do I give up on the dock all together? It would be relatively easy to fake it being destroyed by a rival. But then, they don't show any interest in coming into the town. . . and the dock represents a lifeline to trade and a sane future for Maren. I have to protect it from the insanity ripping apart the interior. And trade will help me hold off Dominic and the others over the long term. There must be a way to get rid of the Harvesters and still keep it. . .

SOME EXCERPTS ON SUCCESSION:

. . . the best solution I can hope for is a union of this house with one more powerful. If Dame Paulina would agree to wed Gustavus, then over the long haul we might achieve the best of all possible outcomes. But the short term - *SUCH RISK!* Who would command in battle? With their age difference would she treat him well? If Milky could be persuaded to serve Gustav he might hold the local wolves at bay for a time through fear. But if pushed, would fear turn to hatred? Dangerous! Too dangerous? Should I find a safer way? Is there a safer way? What's best for Maren? I alone am navigating these deep waters.

AN EXCERPT ON THE "WITCHES":

. . . It's done. I don't know how I should feel for working with someone like Cassilda. There are fell stories about this "Woman in Red." Then again it was a fell thing I've had done. If the girls shades are trapped at the crossroads as intended, then the Ymandrakes may suddenly find my dock a lot less attractive. I can only pray it works out. If my prayers are still fit to be heard. What a terrible price for them to have paid. I've seen the sisters sometimes at the edge of my reflection in the mirror. It appears I will be haunted too. Do they understand the depth of my crime against them? I should feel more ashamed.

AN EXCERPT OF WALDER'S DECLINING HEALTH...

The pain in my side worsens and it seems my appetite is failing me. Eating has become a repugnant task. I have consulted with three physicians now. None of them have been useful. Nor the rites of the church. Apparently there is no cure for my infirmities, short of the Isle. A journey I will not take. While I still have my strength I must put my affairs in order - before the wolves scent my weakness. I have heard of an herb called silver foil that eases nausea. I will have to procure some. It may buy me time to find outside help.

THE LAST EXCERPT...

I've decided what to do with your book, Aldemerius. "Managing an Orchard." How droll. I've probably been a fool for housing the works of "the Mad Abbott of Rell." But I have enough stains upon my honor, without also cheating history. Honestly I doubt your scribblings about the Fourteenth Imperial House are right, but I never burned it. It pains me to send away Odette - my last comfort - and I will again be alone. No one here knows what a palimpsest is or would see past the covers. That might keep them safe but it might also bring Maren trouble in time. Better to give it to the Dovitoni in Savona. Aldemerius, I raise a glass of tea to your memory. I still grapple with thorny issues on your behalf. I'm sure you'd like that. Put in a good word for me with The Judgment of Nier. My position is weakening. Soon my enemies will draw their knives and make their opening moves. In their shoes, I know I would.

SECRET ORDERS

Recognized “**Priests & Holy Champions**” of the Mother Church (excluding the Temple of Hurrian). And a message for **val’Tensen** characters

<p>What troubled times we live in. We hear you may be travelling to Almeric. It is troubled there too.</p> <p>Religious issues are unsettled in Almeric; it can barely be said to be within either the Mother Church or the Milandisian Orthodox Church. We believe it would be desirable for organized faith in Almeric to be strengthened – and for the people of Almeric to stay within the auspices of the Mother Church. The integration of former Milandisians might be of great help in eventually opening a dialogue with their Primarch and King to the ends of reunification and reconciliation. At present the city of Nevanne is our best hope for this region.</p> <p><u>GOAL:</u> If the chance comes please support Nevanne’s interests.</p>	<p>A val’Tensen courtier approaches you in Naeraanth:</p> <p>“It has come to my attention that the usurper of Maren has written to you recently. By all means go to that poor town. But I urge you, look for a way to depose or destabilize that foul bandit who poses as a prince. Maren suffers under the rule of a pretender, and the fact that he is not of val’Tensen blood makes politics even more unstable. Find a way if you can to support a true heir of the family, so stability and prosperity may ultimately return. The favor Prince Dominic shows to his friends is no small thing.”</p> <p>-Arch Baroness Janetta val’Tensen</p> <p>In the service of Prince Dominic val’Tensen (she flashes a large expensive signet ring of the Prince)</p> <p>GOAL: Put a val’Tensen of the Throne of Maren</p>
<p>What troubled times we live in. We hear you may be travelling to Almeric. It is troubled there too.</p> <p>Religious issues are unsettled in Almeric; it can barely be said to be within either the Mother Church or the Milandisian Orthodox Church. We believe it would be desirable for organized faith in Almeric to be strengthened – and for the people of Almeric to stay within the auspices of the Mother Church. The integration of former Milandisians might be of great help in eventually opening a dialogue with their Primarch and King to the ends of reunification and reconciliation. At present the city of Nevanne is our best hope for this region.</p> <p><u>GOAL:</u> If the chance comes please support Nevanne’s interests.</p>	<p>A val’Tensen courtier approaches you in Naeraanth:</p> <p>“It has come to my attention that the usurper of Maren has written to you recently. By all means go to that poor town. But I urge you, look for a way to depose or destabilize that foul bandit who poses as a prince. Maren suffers under the rule of a pretender, and the fact that he is not of val’Tensen blood makes politics even more unstable. Find a way if you can to support a true heir of the family, so stability and prosperity may ultimately return. The favor Prince Dominic shows to his friends is no small thing.”</p> <p>-Arch Baroness Janetta val’Tensen</p> <p>In the service of Prince Dominic val’Tensen (she flashes a large expensive signet ring of the Prince)</p> <p>GOAL: Put a val’Tensen of the Throne of Maren</p>

SECRET ORDERS

Laerestri and Mourners in Silence

<p>We hear that there is a city state in Almeric called Maren and that it is ruled by a pragmatic human rather than by the val'Tensens. This is an interesting development. And it should be given discreet support. Anything that undermines the rule of the val can only help us come a day of reckoning. Perhaps other city states will follow.</p> <p>It has been learned by us that you will be invited to meddle in Maren by its prince. Do what you can there to ensure that humans continue to rule in that city.</p>	<p>We hear that there is a city state in Almeric called Maren and that it is ruled by a pragmatic human rather than by the val'Tensens. This is an interesting development. And it should be given discreet support. Rulers should be chosen for their enlightenment, skill, and commitment to the people. Not because their ancient bloodlines link them to power structures of corrupt churches and outmoded beliefs.</p> <p>It has been learned by us that you will be invited to meddle in Maren by its prince. Do what you can there to ensure that humans continue to rule in that city.</p>
<p>We hear that there is a city state in Almeric called Maren and that it is ruled by a pragmatic human rather than by the val'Tensens. This is an interesting development. And it should be given discreet support. Anything that undermines the rule of the val can only help us come a day of reckoning. Perhaps other city states will follow.</p> <p>It has been learned by us that you will be invited to meddle in Maren by its prince. Do what you can there to ensure that humans continue to rule in that city.</p>	<p>We hear that there is a city state in Almeric called Maren and that it is ruled by a pragmatic human rather than by the val'Tensens. This is an interesting development. And it should be given discreet support. Rulers should be chosen for their enlightenment, skill, and commitment to the people. Not because their ancient bloodlines link them to power structures of corrupt churches and outmoded beliefs.</p> <p>It has been learned by us that you will be invited to meddle in Maren by its prince. Do what you can there to ensure that humans continue to rule in that city.</p>

GM AID #1: QUESTIONS FROM PLAYTESTERS:

- **What do I say if the PCs ask a question that isn't covered?**
Probably going to happen to you at some point. Either the NPC doesn't know or you make something plausible up and run with it..
- **How many troops are there in Stonecrest?**
50 real soldiers at any given time plus some servants who would take up arms. Half of them want to keep their heads down and avoid picking a loser in the coming succession crisis. The remaining 25 are divided between multiple factions. This is out of maybe 400 permanent soldiers...not quite 10% of the town's population. There are maybe another 150 guards and Marines keeping order in the city. The rest is out on patrol in the countryside. If things don't get resolved quickly then its worse when fighting breaks out.
- **Why do the NPCs care who the PCs choose to rule Maren?**
In the short term they care because the PCs beat the tar out of one of the toughest factions and no one wants to mess with them. Even if they win they'll be weakened and potentially pulled down by someone else. Better to wait till the PCs leave. In the long term the NPCs don't care who the PCs choose to rule. If the PCs don't pick winners then it's safe to say their rule is cut short soon after the PCs leave.
- **Why do the PCs care who rules Maren?**
Hopefully the PCs either want to help continue a pocket of stability, or like the power of choosing. But if they don't, they certainly don't have to. Assume Rophus claws his way to the top if the PCs refuse to intervene. Eventually this leads to conflict with his young nephew and niece and fighting breaks out between his loyal troops and the Marines under Olivia.
- **What should I do if the PCs go to the Island? Try to explore the Town?**
Run the Witches encounter on the Island and modify the boxed text. They still "flee" after 30 minutes of fighting. The PCs can hear distant bells in the city.

If the PCs try to explore the town it's not that exciting. 4,500 people cram behind the walls because it's not safe to live in the countryside. Farmers get up before dawn to go tend fields and return home after dusk. Lots of people own chickens in the city. Not much in the way of livestock, which means no horses to pull plows. Fish is a big part of the town diet. It's a struggle to feed everyone, but under Walder's management no one has starved. There are some craftsmen who sell goods, but no armor or weapons to the public. Nothing fancy or expensive here either.
- **Who brought Walder his tea?**

Well if Winifred is the killer then obviously she did it...but I wouldn't give that away unless the PCs are stuck. Janos might name a couple of people including Winifred who have been in and out of the kitchen that day. If Winifred is not the killer then it doesn't really matter. It could be Janos, Winifred, Sophia or part of the help. I personally like role-playing the cringing Janos so I'd lean towards him.