

GarthQuest 1: Shades of the Past

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Overview

This dungeon is accessed after [GarretQuest](#) is completed and the player hits level 3. Seeing that you've done him a favour and proven yourself somewhat capable by saving his idiot son, Garth has another small request to make of the PC: during the Godswar, there used to be a lupine fortress in the Foothills known as Fort Marrok. It's been thought lost for a pretty long time, buried by the landslide conjured up by the invaders, but recently River came across a lead that might prove to bear some fruit.

Garth's own stake in this is that those who used to dwell in the fort bear a distant relation to his wife — in particular, he'd like the player to retrieve the jarl's medallion of office. Why, he won't say, but presumably it has something to do with his adorable idiot son and missing wife. If the player is willing to do a little ruin-delving, River will share the tip with the player. Garth doesn't really have anything to repay the player for this service, but the medallion aside, anything the player finds is theirs to keep.

Of course, the trip isn't without its own dangers. The old fort is reputedly filled with the spirits of lupines who were buried alive in the landslide, forced to endlessly play out the last moments of their lives over and over again — the player coming in and spoiling that probably isn't going to go down well with any of the spirits.

Optionally, the player may choose to tell Garret about this endeavour. If they do, Garret will disobey his father and insist on coming with the player as a guest companion. Taking him along will also make things easier and open up more options.

Mechanically, this dungeon should provide some useful gear for players gearing up to hit the late Frostwood with its dungeons (kitsune haus, etc) or enter the winter city itself. Fights should be medium-difficult to difficult for a level 3 party, and ok for a level 4 one. Lore-wise, this little bit should help shed just the tiniest bit on insight on who Garth's wife is. This questline should eventually cumulate in the revelation of who Garth's wife is, why she left, and what she's been doing since.

Dramatis Fursonae

Jarl Galon Gunvaldsen — The commander of Fort Marrok. During the Godswar, Khor'minos and the lupines entered into a mutual defense agreement to hold their lands against the wraiths and their minions. Galon was the chieftain of one of the more major packs, and hence got the dubious honour of working with the royal engineers of the Minotaur King at the time to create an impervious fortress to guard the passes.

This was Fort Marrok. It was very impressive, a great feat of minotaur engineering, built into the cliff faces of foothills and made to withstand a long siege. It was also completely

bypassed by the wraiths' minions as they created a massive landslide, burying all the defenders alive.

Oops.

Magna Hagen — The jarl's niece, a lupine of amazonian physique. Looks suspiciously similar to what Garret might have been had he been born a girl. Might have looked like a younger version of Garth's wife. Likes to fight, and is very good at it. A bit of a traveller, but was called home by her uncle to help in the defense of the realm. Got buried alive, but maybe that isn't so bad for her; she's stuck in an endless wrestling tournament against the garrison. The player may challenge her as an optional encounter for the honour of wearing the Helm of Heroes in the upcoming battle which will never happen — which will incidentally also end the tournament at long last.

Basic Bitch Soldiers — The fort's garrison. Dead, but like everyone else, they don't know it. They'll come out of the walls and floor to harass the player as random encounters, or in scripted events. Generally have archaic styles of weapons and armour. Come in two flavours: basic bitches and 'zerkers.

As always, the dungeon can be solved through prodigious application of violence, but there are always nonviolent ways to solve the issue at hand. Being a lupine will provide additional options to the player, and both River and Garth will say as much. The ideal resolution (I.E, that which yields the most rewards) is to help the jarl realise he's dead via the use of a mirror and plenty of cunning and presence, upon which he leads the entire garrison into whatever afterlife awaits them.

Losing to the basic bitch soldiers has River drag you out and the quest fail, losing to Magna has no out of the way repercussions, and the jarl will outright kill the player on a loss.

Phat Loot

Cloak of Winter

A long, voluminous cloak, stretching all the way to one's feet. Sewn together from thick, heavy wool and trimmed with fur, it's light grey on the outside and a patchwork of colours on the inside, ranging from white to brown to dark grey.

-Accessory?

-Cold Resist.

-Some small measure of armour.

Galon's Griefmaker

Jarl Gunvaldsen's sword — a terror to behold. The double-edged, basket-hilted bastard sword bears numerous sharp teeth along its edges, guaranteeing a deep cut if the blade's swung properly. Its shaft has been fitted with a heavy pommel to allow it to be thrust like a rapier, and two large sapphires have been fitted into the crossguard. But what's most

unsettling about this weapon is the eternal blue frost that coats the blade, glittering in the light and leaving faint tendrils of mist in its wake.

A singular inscription in gold leaf winds its way about the hilt: *"To my husband with love, T."*

[Melee][Heavy][Two-Handed]

Helm of Heroes

A plumed great helm that seems to be more for show than anything else. Lupine runes have been gilded in a circle above the eye slits, and someone's tacked on a pair of small, stubby horns that clearly wasn't part of the helm's original design. Reinforced with metal bands on the inside, it feels too heavy for most people to wear comfortably in battle, but judging from where the helm would meet a gorget it's a headpiece for the stout and broad-shouldered.

Anyone donning this helm would instantly be marked as some kind of big deal, but doesn't that just mean the wearer would be that much more of a target in battle?

*Probably some kind of +leadership bonus.

Bessy Mauler

This model of crossbow has been the stuff of legends amongst lupine mercenaries for centuries. Originally adapted from those wielded by Khor'minos' shock troops, the average lupine, lacking a minotaur's raw strength, found the weapon impossible to set barehanded. They thus resorted to using a specialised lever known as a ramsfoot to span its deadly draw, which eventually became part of the crossbow proper.

Once loosed, the immense, forearm-length bolts reputedly punch through everything — armour, walls, people, trees, palisades, what have you; it's been a point of argument amongst some enthusiasts about whether the mauler can be properly classified as a siege weapon or not.

[Two-Handed][Heavy][Ranged]

-Large accuracy penalty.

-High damage and penetration.

Opening

Garth

//Require that GarretQuest be completed one way or another.

//Require that the player be level 3.

//Trigger upon entering the Frost Hound from outside at any time of day.

Stepping into the Frost Hound, you take a moment to shake the dust and snow off your feet and savour the aroma of winterstem that's beginning to fill the common room. You don't have that long to make good your entrance, though, for it's quickly interrupted by Garth calling you from the bar.

<i>"Hey, [pc.name]. A moment?"</i>

[pc.isDK

|This had better be worth your time.

|Sure. What's up?

] You make a beeline for the bar, take a seat, and plant your elbows on the countertop. All right, what's got his fur all ruffled like this?

Garth takes a couple moments to consider his answer, then pours you a drink — cheap ale — and slides it across to you. It's pretty typical, a dark brown mixture with seedy scum floating on the surface; not the best of drinks but not the worst either, sufficient to ease the stresses of daily living in the Frost Marches.

[pc.isDK

|You snort. You'd expected better. Well, you'll be magnanimous and let Garth off if his establishment is doing <i>that</i> badly.

|Well, you're not going to look a gift centaur in the mouth. There's always worse — rotgut, sewer brew... [player.bg slumrat

|seven knows the things you've drunk to ease your sorrows back when you were living in the gutter.

]

] You pick up the mug, take a sip, and look up at Garth [party.som]|as he pours out another drink for [companion1]|as he pours out drinks for [companion1] and [companion2]].

<i>"Go ahead and wet your whistle,"</i> the old wolf-man says. <i>"Think of it as a bonus for hearing me out."</i>

You take another swig of the cheap ale and motion for Garth to go on.

<i>"So you see, after that business with Westbank and my idiot son — "</i> Garth glances around to make sure Garret isn't within earshot — <i>"I've got to respect you for being willing to go after Garret and the loggers. I've got another job for you, if you're willing to take it."</i>

Since he's given you one on the house, you're obliged to at least hear him out.

<i>"You see, maybe that snowstorm wasn't all bad. Things got shaken around, things got unearthed. Things like an old lupine fortress I've been trying to find for some time now. Place dates back to the Godswar, and I've been talking to River there — "</i> he jabs a finger at a little catfolk bard-boy by the hearth — "to piece together where it might once have been.</i>

<i>"Well, it's but a couple days ago when he comes up and tells me he's got a solid lead on the fort's whereabouts, that's he's not just discovered that the snowstorm unearthed it, but he's actually managed to find the key to the place."</i>

And he wants you to go in there and... do what, again?

<i>"There's something in there that has sentimental value to my wife's side of the family. A jarl's medallion of office. That's where its bearer died — if you can get it for me, I'd be much obliged. I'd go myself, but I'm not as young as I once was."</i> He gestures down at his bad leg for emphasis.

[pc.ora lupine

|Now <i>that's</i> interesting. How would Garth's wife be related to one of the pack jarls, for the medallion of office to have sentimental value to Garth — and by extent, her? Best not to directly question Garth about that, though.

] And to be upfront here, since he knows how this works, having been a mercenary and all — what's in it for you?

Garth shrugs. <i>"I'll be honest. Me, I don't really have anything on me that could adequately pay you for what I'm asking you to do. However, the medallion aside, you're more than welcome to keep anything else you find. Place's called Fort Marrok, somewhere out in the foothills; there's almost certainly going to be plenty of danger involved from what River's told me.</i>

<i>"Well, are you up for it or not?"</i>

[party.has arona

|Arona swills down the last of her cheap ale and cracks her mug on the table over where she's sitting. <i>"Don't know about that, grey-fur. I'm not so good at digging around in old places, so the question is... are going to get to knock heads with anything interesting? What'd the catty fuckboy say about that; what sort of danger's hanging around that old ruin?"</i>

Garth shrugs. *<i>"River tells me there're spirits lingering about, ghosts, hauntings, that sort of thing. You'd have to ask him for the details, if you choose to take up the job."*</i>

Arona rolls her eyes and makes an exasperated noise. *<i>"Ghosts. Bah..."</i>*

Garth just gives her his practiced barman's shrug and takes her empty mug. *<i>"So, [pc.name]. How about it?"</i>*

]

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//Sure, you'll help Garth out.

You think about it for a moment, then give Garth a nod. Yeah, you're interested. Where do you sign up?

Garth points towards the hearth. *<i>"Like I said, River over there — he's got the details. I know this sounds awkward, but I don't really want to discuss it at length, even though I'm the one asking this favour of you."*</i>

No, it's not awkward at all. By now, you know Garth well enough to know that he's reliably evasive whenever it comes to any topic remotely related to his wife.

There's the slightest shift in Garth's expression — the lower lid of his left eye twitches, and the corner of his muzzle quirks downwards. *<i>"There's a reason old man Sanders and I don't like talking about her. People around these parts have long memories."*</i>

And you're sure it's a good one, for all this secrecy. But it can't last forever. Even if you're not supposed to know, Gwyn and Garret —

Now Garth looks absolutely sullen. *<i>"Yeah, yeah. I'll have to tell them someday. But not today, and definitely not in front of you. If you're just going to harangue me about my wife, then get your sorry ass to River over there and throw your annoying questions at him, not me."*</i>

//end, return to Frost Hound main room.

//Add River to the FH guest tabs.

//New Quest: Shades of the Past

Garth looks like he's got a job for you, a request to retrieve something important to his wife from an old lupine fort. He's asked you to inquire with **River**, a local bard staying at the Frost Hound for details; **you should be able to find River outside the inn during the day.**

[No]

//You think you'll pass on this one.

After some consideration, you eventually shake your head. No, sorry. Not interested.

Garth takes the news with his usual stoic demeanour, watching you finish the last of the cheap ale and taking your empty mugs. *"It's what it is. You've got a crazy demoness to be chasing after all, right?"*

There is that, too.

"Don't worry about it, there're enough glory-seekers passing through these parts that I'll find someone who'll bite. Thanks for hearing me out, though. If you change your mind, though, talk to the little catboy by the fire."

[pc.isChamp|Nah, you should be the one thanking him for the drink.] You stand, stretch, and wait for Garth to go back to his business at the bar before turning your back on him and leaving. What now?

//end, return to Frost Hound main room.

/Add River to the FH guest tabs.

River

//While stage 1 of GarthQuest is active, [Garth's Request] will appear in the Frost Hound's general tabs.

//{River not met:

This must be the catboy Garth asked you to speak with. Discuss Garth's request with him and ask him what he knows.

//else:

Talk to River about Garth's request. The little catboy bard certainly knows more than he lets on.

}

{//River not met:

You approach the pint-sized catfolk bard by **his usual spot at the statue**, and he tilts his head upwards to regard you. At first, you're not quite sure that he's not a child — his looks are certainly very childlike — but considering the deep tenor voice that emerges from his mouth when he speaks, he's definitely no youngling.

"Ah! A new face!"

Well, at any rate, it *is* the first time that you're approaching him. The little catboy extends a hand which you take, and his fingers are surprisingly strong.

"I'm River. River, the Singing Arrow, and it's a pleasure to see a new face around. It can get really dreary up here sometimes, especially about winter. But that's what Garth keeps me around here for — to liven things up and get people thirsty **so they head into his establishment for a pint!**"

So, he's a musician of some sort?

"Exactly. Although I do prefer the word 'bard'. It has a certain romantic feel to it, and a lot more finesse than something as bland as 'musician'. "Troubadour" is simply too flighty, and "minstrel" evokes a courtly connotation that really isn't present here. Don't you agree?"

If he wants to be called a bard, fine, he can be one.

"And you name, good [pc.mf|sir|madam]?"

[pc.name].

"Mm-hm. Mm-hmmm... mmm-mmm-mmm." River flicks his fingers in a blur and jams out a quick series of chords on his lute. "I have the feeling that we will be the best of friends, [pc.name], whether we like it or not. Garth has told me much about you — alas, I was not here in the warmth and safety of the Hound on the day of the storm, but huddling in a hole by the road. Never mind, though, for we will be seeing much of each other, I think."

If he's going to be hanging out at the Frost Hound, that's going to be a given.

"Excellent! I shall see you around — if you want to hear something from me, don't be afraid to ask!"

//set River as met. Again, future-proofing.

//River met:

River smiles as you approach him. <i>"Well, if it isn't my dear old friend [pc.name]! What can I do for you today? A song? A tale? Or maybe you're so impressed with my boyish charm and natural good looks that you just want to buy me a tall, cold glass of fresh creamy milk?"</i>

No, you're here to talk business.

The little bard-boy tortures forth a quick, dolorous chord from his lute. <i>"Business. Business, eh. Oh well, business can't be helped, inasmuch as rainy days can't be helped. What did you have in mind?"</i>

}

Well, there is the whole point of you being here talking to him in the first place. You draw up a seat next to River **on the bench**, and ask about the old lupine fortress. When you bring up the topic, the little bard-boy looks up and considers you. *"Right, so you're the one who agreed to do it for Garth. He kept on saying that you'd leap at the opportunity, but I wasn't sure whether you'd follow through. Guess I've been proven wrong."*

[pc.isDK]He'd better be happy to be; you don't like being underestimated.[You aim to surprise.] Now, what's this all about?

"You see," River says in a little sing-song voice, *"I've heard tell that the snowstorm moved things about in the Foothills. Frightful things can send earth moving and boulders rolling, and things which were once buried can be brought to light that way. Fort Marrok was one of those things... but even so, getting in would be hard without this."*

The bard reaches into his poncho, and draws out a large brass key. The lock it fits must be pretty massive — it's as thick as his forearm, and the key's head has been shaped into the likeness of a snarling wolf. Flecks of greenish corrosion dot its surface, and there're a couple of what look suspiciously like claw marks running down its length. This thing's clearly seen some violence in its time.

Now how did he get his little hands on such a thing?

"Can't reveal my sources," River replies, raising a finger to his lips. *"I make it my business to be in the know, and people won't confide in me if they knew I'd spill their names. Suffice to say that this key will open the gates to the fortress, and after the snowstorm, I know where said gates are. After all, I did say I weathered out much of **that** bit of bad weather in a hole."*

And he'll take you there?

"There's a chasm just to the west of the Black Gate to Khor'minos, the one with the bridge that spans it. Quite hard to miss, really. At its bottom lie the now-exposed gates to Fort Marrok. I'll meet you there and open the gates for you, and you can waltz right in and find that medallion old Garth wants."

And him?

"I'll be staying outside, thank you very much. I may have a bow and quiver, but I'd rather not use them unless I absolutely have to. After all, I'm just a tiny little kitten; what can I do? Now then — " he takes a large swig of cream from a **hip flask at his side**— *"I'm sure you have many questions for me, so ask away."*

[History][Medallion][Opposition][Jarl][I'm Done]

History

//Ask about Fort Marrok's history.

River smiles at the question. *<i>"Let's go back a little over a two hundred and fifty years ago, shall we? I'm sure you know all about the war which left Savarra in the current... reduced state that it's in right now. Tychris may teach of the histories which are relevant to it, but the peoples of these wilder lands prefer to tell the tales of their own past.</i>*

<i>"The Godswar was truly notable in that it marked the first time all of the various lupine packs unanimously agreed on a course of action, without need for squabbling or brokering. Not only did they agree to aid one another to resist the wraiths and their armies, but they also entered a — ahem — mutual defense agreement with the minotaur king of that time. Khor'minos would stand fast against any invaders approaching from the coast, while the lupines would guard the sparsely populated hinterlands with their numbers and knowledge of the land."</i>

River thinks a moment, closing his large, green eyes as he strums idly on his lute, creating a dolorous musical backdrop to his tale. *<i>"I'll spare you the details for another time. Suffice to say that in order to guard the passes through the foothills, the minotaurs lent their engineering genius to the building of a mighty fortress cut into the stalwart cliffs. It was a great task, but with minotaur efficiency and lupine enthusiasm applied in spades, the fortress was completed well ahead of schedule.</i>*

<i>"To say it was amazing would be quite the understatement, [pc.name]. The fortress boasted at least two wells, drawn from aquifers deep in the earth. It held quite a sizable garrison, with provisions to last a siege of months, perhaps even years. Jarl Galon Gunvaldsen, the poor bastard chosen to lead the garrison, wanted to make sure that no wraith-touched was going to cross the pass on his watch, and stocked the fortress with everything he could bring to bear; the minotaurs were equally proud of their handiwork, and helped him as much as they could. Fort Marrok was supposed to be the glorious gatekeeper of the passes, impenetrable, indomitable, unbreachable."</i>

What happened then, to wipe such a mighty bulwark from the face of Savarra?

River smiles sadly, the tune he's strumming turning even more melancholy. *<i>"Events moved quickly. A mere two months after the fortress was fully garrisoned, creatures that used to be Belharan soldiers were sighted approaching from the south, near what we know today as Harvest Valley. They massed in the foothills like ants crawling through crevices, heading for the newly constructed fortress; everyone wanted to see it put to the test.</i>*

<i>"At last, the day came. The wraiths had massed their army of sorcerers and mindless thralls at the mouth of the pass; the lupines waited within Fort Marrok to join battle. Instead of marching forward, though, the wraiths created an earthquake, triggering a massive landslide. In the dead of winter, that in turn caused a handful of avalanches..."</i>

Oh. You see.

A nod. *<i>"And that was that. Everyone and everything in Fort Marrok was buried under immense amounts of rock and snow, never to see the light of day again. With a single move, the wraiths made the lupines a non-issue in their invasion plans, and cost Khor'minos dearly in wasted time and resources. The lupines never recovered for the entire duration of the war, and with Gunvaldsen dead and buried, the jarls of the other packs held a vote of no confidence in light of his catastrophic failure. What remained of Galon Gunvaldsen's family was thrown out of their pack in disgrace once a new family was elected and raised up to the office by the remaining jarls."*

And that's the end to the story?

<i>"It is. A rather sad tale about learning about blind spots the hard way."

//return to menu.

Medallion

//What's the significance of the jarl's medallion?

[pc.ora lupine

|You know something about such symbols of office, having heard of them in your youth, but is there anything particularly special about this medallion? Sure, it represented the jarl's authority over his pack, but how did Galon's differ, if it did?

|You don't really know that much about lupine politics and customs. Is there something special about Galon's medallion that would peak Garth's interest in the object?

] The whole it-has-sentimental-value-for-my-wife thing aside, that is.

River takes a sip of cream and considers the question. *<i>"Can't rightly say. Old Garth's the stoic kind; I've been with him for a while now, and he's hard to read some days. Might as well be talking to a stone wall. Not like me, of course."*

You suppose it has some value as a piece of jewellery, but there're easier ways than that to lay one's grubby hands on gold.

<i>"There is one problem, though."

You can guess what it is, but you'll hear him out anyways.

River nods. *<i>"As the symbol of the jarl's authority, it's almost certain that he died with it about his neck. Considering that the place is crawling with vengeful ghosts, it's more than likely you'll have to put the poor bastard to rest in order to retrieve it. You might want to give some thought to that little conundrum before heading on in."*

Nothing's ever as easy as it seems, is it?

<i>"Of course not. Where would be the fun in that?"</i>

Easy for him to say; he's not the one who has to go into that place.

<i>"But I **am** the one who has to write a song about it."</i>

Fine, fine. Either way, does he know what it's supposed to look like? A good, thorough description would make your job so much easier.

<i>"If I remember my lore, it should be hanging off a thick gold chain, long enough such that the medallion itself should be above one's heart. The jarl's pack insignia should be on one side, and a wolfshead with large sapphires for eyes on the other. Look, I know you'd like to be sure, but I believe it's one of those things you'll know when you see it; there'll be no mistaking the medallion for what it is."</i>

//return to menu.

Opposition

//What kind of dangers are you likely to face in there?

River whistles and strums a discordant chord on his lute. <i>"I'm not surprised, considering the way they died. It must have been agonizing, being buried alive like that with no hope of escape; considering the numbers the jarl had amassed, they'd have suffocated long before they even began to starve. It's the ultimate in shameful straw-deaths, I'd say.</i>

<i>"Given such a fate, is it really so strange that they would continue to haunt the ruin?"</i>

No, you suppose not.

[party.has arona

|Hearing this, Arona scowls viciously. <i>"Of course, ghosts. It had to be ghosts."</i>

Now then, you didn't think a [pc.isDK|big strong girl|fearsome orc warrior] like her would have anything to fear from some spectres.

[pc.isDK|Arona reaches around and smacks you upside the back of the head with a meaty palm.]<i>"It's not about being afraid of them, you moron. It's about what they **are**. You can't bash the innards out of ghosts. You can't hack them to pieces. You can't even throttle them with your bare hands. All someone like me can do is to send for Hretha or Infrith and skulk around while hoping **they** can deal with the problem. It's fucking frustrating!"</i>

|<i>"Of course, they won't take kindly to your presence, as the restless dead are wont to do. It's likely you'll have to dispatch them."</i>

Oh, you've fought your share of stranger things in your time. There is a problem, though — aren't ghosts supposed to be incorporeal? Mundane weapons wouldn't be able to harm them, right?[pc.bg acolyte

|While you saw enough exorcisms performed during your time as an acolyte, none of them really involved slicing up the offending haunt in combat...

]

]

River considers that for a bit, stopping his playing to stroke his chin in thought. <i>"Hmm. That's technically not true. Sure, it'd be harder to put down the ghosts with steel alone, but I wouldn't say it would be completely worthless. Remember, these are spirits caught up in the last moments of their lives; they remember they're supposed to so-called die if someone runs them through with a sword. You wouldn't be able to kill them, but you could prevent them from manifesting long enough for you to escape."</i>

[party.has arona

|<i>"Hah."</i> Arona folds her arms under her ample chest. <i>"Still sounds shit to me."</i>

]

Some kind of magical weapon would be better, then?

<i>"Oh, of course. Much more effective."</i> River pauses a moment, then sighs. <i>"If only we could just happen to find such weapons of great and legendary power lying around, but alas, the gods are not with us today. Hence, if your forte lies more in the martial and you'd like to give yourself an edge, I'd suggest nipping down to Ivriiss' and see what she has in stock. There're any number of items she sells which could even the odds against such ghosts in a pinch."</i>

And magic?

<i>"Much more effective.[pc.cl whitemage] I believe you should already know a spell or two which would be rather efficient in putting them down.] As always, have a care as to what kind of magic you're throwing at them."</i>

[party.has cait

|<i>"I could help with that!"</i> Cait pipes up.

]

Isn't there some kind of way to put them all to rest? Some kind of ritual you can enact, or geas you can break?

River shrugs, his face twisting into an oh-so-catlike expression of disaffection. *"Putting the restless dead away en masse is trickier than it sounds — those things are highly circumstantial, I'm afraid, and often tied to the way they died. Given that the tales say there were as many as two thousand mustered within Fort Marrok in preparation for the wraiths' supposed siege..."*

All right, all right, you get the idea.

*"When I tried sneaking into the place, they were literally coming out of the walls and going for my throat. I wouldn't linger too long within those old hallways, if I were you. Go in, do what you need to, and get out. Folklore says that the best way to get rid of a lingering ancestor is to get him or her to realise the truth of his or her death — if you can get the jarl to realise that he's dead and should move on, that'll probably work, but I've got no idea as to **how**. You'll have to figure that one out on your own."*

//return to menu

Jarl

//What can he tell you about the jarl's history?

"A decent enough military mind, I'll grant you that," River replies after some thought. *"The tales and songs from the period regarding him differ greatly depending on whether they were composed before or after the fall of Fort Marrok; I personally find it rather interesting how public opinion can be swayed so easily. He was, I suppose, out of his element — prior to the Godswar, the most anyone in his station ever had to deal with were smaller skirmishes between the packs, since the Belharan Empire never really got that much of a foothold in the Frost Marches. In that, the jarl was a magnificent strategist. The wraiths, however, were a different matter."*

"You must understand, [pc.name], that the lupines of the time had a clear delineation between the magical and the mundane. They had their own share of runes and totems, but actual arcane magic was not seen as a warrior's art, and to use it, especially in single combat, was considered cheating. The honor code did well by their society for generations, but it left them unprepared for wraiths who had no incentive to play by their arbitrary rules and every reason to cheat."

Harsh.

"It's easy to fall into the trap of imagining that everyone is, or with a little push, could be exactly like you are," River continues in a little sing-song voice. *"It might be good to keep that in mind. The poor bastard was never really liked that much, even amongst his own."*

Why's that?

<i>"Remember what I said about that delineation between the magical and mundane? Galon, the poor bastard, he became enamoured of a local white witch, a silly young thing from one of the backwater villages. Some say that she charmed him with a spell, stealing his heart with forbidden magic; other tales say that he seduced her and fucked her silly because he wanted to know how good a witch was in bed, then married the poor bitch to save face when she became too pregnant to hide it. Not that she was complaining, of course — making the jump from village witch to jarl's wife is nothing to sniff at.</i>

<i>"Either way, while the Gunvaldsen bloodline was known to be strong, the pups she bore him — a brother and sister — were truly robust; it was clear to all that they would dwarf even their father when they reached full maturity. That sort of ostentatious overgrowth, it led to rumours that the jarl's wife was wraith-touched, that her children were half-demons, that sort of nonsense talk; it's little wonder they were quickly exiled once Galon perished along with Fort Marrok. What happened to them after, the songs and histories have nothing further to say."</i>

//return to menu

I'm Done

//You've asked River all the questions you want to. Time to move on.

River looks you up and down. <i>"I'd make sure you're prepared if I were you. The ghosts will be coming at you thick, so you won't have time to rest inside, and who knows how large the place is; I didn't get much further than the entry hallway before I had to back out. I'll open the gates for you, but don't come crawling out to me because you weren't ready. If you do come out without the medallion in hand, I'll take it that you don't want to ever go back in there. I know I don't."</i>

Yes, you're sure you're done.

<i>"All right, then. Head to the ravine in the eastern foothills, just west of the gates to Khor'minos. I'll meet you at its bottom, and we can get to work."</i>

And he'll just know when you've left town?

River smiles. <i>"Same as how I managed to get my hands on the key, friend. It's my business to know things. Don't worry, I only use this power for good, not evil."</i>

Hmm...

<i>"Oh, there's one more thing."</i> River wags a finger at you. <i>"Don't tell Garth that I told you this, but you might want to let Garrett tag along on this little mission of yours. I get the feeling that he'd be quite interested."</i>

What? And get into Garth's bad books?

<i>"If I don't say anything, you don't say anything, and Garret doesn't say anything, who's to know? Seriously, though — I get the feeling that things might be different if you asked him to come along for the ride. Call it kitten's intuition. Besides, you know he'll be interested in anything that concerns his mother."</i>

And that's exactly why Garth didn't want him hearing this.

<i>"It's your call, [pc.name]. I'm only making you aware that the option exists. Whether you want to strike while the iron is hot — that's up to you, friend. With that, I bid you farewell and good luck — I'll be seeing you around."</i>

[party.has cait]

As you turn to leave, though, River pauses in his playing long enough to snap his fingers. <i>"Caitriss Zethra. A moment, if you please."</i>

Cait looks between you and the little bard-boy, then nods. <i>"Go on, [pc.name]. I'll catch up with you later."</i>

Well, if she says so. You find an empty **bench**, make yourself comfortable, and try not to appear too conspicuous as you spy on Cait out of the corner of your vision. Odd, the two of them aren't actually saying anything — instead, River has set his lute down on his lap, and is instead making a set of strange gestures at lightning speed with his nimble fingers. [pc.bg acolyte scholar]

<i>You're not completely sure, but you think... do some of the handsigns have anything to do with Mallach? You think you've come across them before, but you can't be sure in which tome...

]

As Cait looks on, the usually bubbly catgirl's face blanches, her ears droop, and her pink tail curls about her legs. She looks like she's about to say something, then thins her lips and gives River a curt nod, a new hardness in her eyes.

<i>"I understand."</i>

<i>"I'm sorry, but it is what it is."</i>

<i>"All right, then."</i> Cait tries to smile, but it doesn't go over very well. <i>"I've got to head back to [pc.name]. [pc.mf|He|She]'ll worry if I'm away for too long.

River nods, pulls his poncho up to shade his face, and goes back to playing. Within moment, Cait's back at your side, bouncing along as if nothing had ever happened.

What was that all about?

<i>"Nothing much, just some old temple stuff."</i>

If she says so.

] Well, no point sitting around here wasting time, you've got an old fort full of ghosts to clean up.

//Quest Updated: Shades of the Past

Garth has asked you to retrieve an old medallion valuable to his wife's side of the family from an old lupine fort; you've agreed to meet River the catboy bard at the bottom of the chasm in the foothills in order to effect entry into the old ruin.

Optionally, ask Garrett if he wants to come along for the ride.

//end scene.

Asking Garret Along

//Add [Fort Marrok] to Garret's main talk menu when the quest is active.

Garret eyes you over his tankard. <i>"Hey, [pc.name]. What's up? You've got that look on your face that tells me you're plotting something, and I'm not sure if I like it or not."</i>

Oh, it's something that he'll want to hear, although you're not exactly sure how he'll take to the news.

<i>"Fine, spit it out. It can't be worse than the accident my little puppy sister had when she woke up, so you're safe."</i>

You turn to look at Garth — the old wolf-man is having what he'd call a small disagreement with one of his half-drunk patrons, and seems quite preoccupied at the moment. Good, good — summarising all the salient details, you explain to Garret what his father wanted you to do, and what River had to say about all this. Garret listens to all this with a face of stone, his expression unchanging as you recount what's happened. You do notice that his usually hunched pose — he usually has to do as much to fit at a table designed for people a foot and a half shorter — becomes even more so, as if he's poised to pounce, and the grinding of his teeth becomes ever so slightly louder.

At last, he groans and rubs his forehead. <i>"Old man... what's going through your mind? I ought to be angry, but I can't get myself worked up at all. Should've expected him to keep anything remotely related to my mom from me, but I just can't help but be disappointed."</i>

You shrug. It seems like the most diplomatic thing to do.

<i>"This is the exact kind of thing which my old man used to do, digging around in old places for loot, and he doesn't want to let me in on it,"</i> Garret continues, then lets out a most

uncharacteristic short, bitter laugh. *"Or maybe he knew that you'd march right around and tell me, so he told you not to say anything knowing full well you'd disobey him. Ha! Ha!"*

So, you take it that he wants to tag along for the ride?

"Shit, yeah. If it means getting closer to figuring out what happened to my mom and were she's gone, I'm all in for it. Besides, you're getting nowhere in that place without the strongest man in Savarra by your side."

[party.has arona

"Your head's so full of it, pup, it's going to pop like a virgin's cherry," Arona says with a snicker. *"Sure, you're big, but end of the day you're just a tavernkeeper's son. Only things you've ever faced are dumb animals and drunken farmers — I don't care how many village wrestling tournaments you've won, you're still green as far as I'm concerned. There's nothing that you could do for [pc.name] here that I couldn't do at least just as well."*

To your surprise — and Arona's as well — Garret mulls this over, then nods.

"Sure, you're right, green-skin. But everyone's got to start somewhere. Either way, it's better to get broken in with someone like you to keep an eye on me than be thrown in the deep end of the river all by myself."

"Well shit, I thought you'd rise to the bait." Arona reaches over and claps Garret on the shoulder. *"You may be a hunk of stupid, but I'll grant that you're strong, and more importantly, you're willing to learn. Maybe you won't be dead weight in that old fort after all."*

[You just roll your eyes at that familiar line.

Garret gives you a small grin and smacks his right fist into his left palm. *"I wonder if you can punch the blood out of a ghost. Maybe not, but it won't be for lack of trying. And if you **can** do just that... it'll be each and every blood."*

]

Well, looks like this is going to be a thing. Does he have an alibi for explaining his absence to his father?

"Eh, shouldn't be too much of a worry. Before the whole snowstorm thing, I used to kind of disappear into the forest for a handful of days at a time, bring back meat for the menu. That, or I'll be going down to Harvest Valley to see how Anna's doing. I know my old man, so let me handle him, okay? The more people who have to get their stories straight, the more likely he's going to smell a rat somewhere."

All right, then. And the ghosts? Is he really going to punch them?

<i>"I'll nip by Sanders' before I go, see if he doesn't have anything that can help with that. Then once I'm all kitted out, I'll see about convincing River to let me follow him, so that I'll be with him when you meet up with the little guy."</i>

Hmm...

<i>"Trust me — I may be an idiot, but I'm not stupid."</i>

Okay, <i>now</i> you're worried.

Garret snorts. <i>"Maybe you should see to making your own preparations for heading out to this Fort Marrok place, don't want to be caught with your pants down. Don't worry about it, it'll be great.[party.has brint

| Right, Beef? You and I together, just beating the — whatever it is ghosts bleed out of their stuffing."</i>

Brint raises one of his huge hammer hands in the air, and the two of them smash their fists together in some mysterious, ancient ritual of universal brotherhood.

<i>"Damn right you are, Dogmeat. This is going to be amazing."</i>

All right, then. If he'll be travelling with River, you'll leave him to his own devices and expect to see him at the fort. Now, there's something else you wanted to discuss with him...

//Quest Updated: Shades of the Past:

You've convinced Garret to accompany you on the trip into Fort Marrok; not that he needed much convincing. All that's left is to meet him and River at the bottom of the chasm in the foothills when you're ready.

//Remove talk topic.

//Return to Garret's talk menu.

Actual Dungeon Stuff

Entering

//When entering node AB43, Collapsed Passage

//When this stage of the quest is active, add a [River] option in the main menu.

//[River] This looks like the place. River said he'd meet you here — he should be around somewhere... you should look for him when you're ready to go in. Are you?

<i>"Psst! Over here!"</i>

You recognise the voice at once — it's River. The little kitten bard steps out into the open, a silhouette detaching itself from the chasm wall and clambering over a boulder to get to you. Framed against what little [dayNight|sun|moon]light filters down into the river canyon, he bounces down the last few steps and stops just in front of you and the collapsed passage in the canyon wall. {/if Garret asked:

Behind him, Garret slinks out of the shadows, surprisingly well-hidden for someone seven feet tall. He's in his usual clothes and has brought a small backpack with him, but the main difference between him and his usual self are the gloves he's fashioned by wrapping leather straps around his hands. Metal studs gleam in the dim light, and you realise that they're too bright for iron or steel — that's got to be silver studded on his cestus there.

Garret notices you staring at him and grins toothily. <i>"Told you I'd find a way to punch those damned ghosts. Old man Sanders and Og'rish helped me with these; they owe me from last summer. Come on, then, let's have some fun; I've been itching to get in a good workout."</i>

Garret has temporarily joined your party for the duration of this dungeon.

}

Well, looks like everyone's here; it's time to get going.

River nods, and crosses over to the collapsed tunnel. The kitten bard-boy does a nimble frontflip onto a large pile of rubble twice his height and peers at the old stone brick wall, clearly looking for something. After about half a minute, he takes the large brass key out of his poncho, fiddles around in the darkness, and there's an audible click that echoes in the tunnel.

<i>"That should do it. The winch should be off to the side — help me with it, if you please?"</i>

Now that you're further into the tunnel, you can make out the imposing shape of a portcullis in the murky darkness. By rights, there shouldn't be any illumination away from the thin slit of

light that manages to make it to the canyon floor, but there's a eerie blue-green luminescence that pervades the air about you, giving off just enough light to see by. The portcullis is pretty old, wood slowly being consumed by dry rot and metal banding rusted, but still plenty serviceable.

<i>"Hey, [pc.name]."</i> River's nipped on down past you, and is currently struggling with a large winch by the side of the portcullis. <i>"Like I said, help me with this, would you? It wasn't stuck the last time I was here."</i>

[party.has garret

|<i>"Psh, let me handle it. If the strongest man in all of Savarra can't turn a winch, I don't think either of you have a chance."</i>

Oh boy, there he goes again. Garret stalks up to the winch, River darting out of his path, and you watch as the big brute grabs the winch's handle in both hands and starts to turn. You see Garret's muscles bulge underneath his fur and hear his breathing deepen; a loud creak of protest sounds from the mechanisms, and for a moment you wonder if the rusted handle is going to snap in Garret's hands. Then all at once, whatever resistance in the portcullis mechanism gives, and the winch turns smoothly in Garret's grasp.

<i>"Huh, interesting,"</i> River muses as he watches Garret lift the portcullis. <i>"I thought he'd have more trouble than that. Guess it just shows how reliable minotaur engineering is, to work this well after all this time."</i>

Maybe. But if he was alone the first time he came here, then how did he get inside?

A tilt of the kitten's head. <i>"I did say it wasn't stuck the first time I was here."</i>

Yeah, you guess. [pc.cunningRange 50

|There's still something that doesn't sit quite right about River's explanation, but you can't put your finger on it...

]

A loud click, and then Garret comes sauntering back towards you, dusting grit off his hands and looking very pleased with himself. <i>"All right, I've got it open! What are we standing around here for?"</i>

|You nod and take up position beside River on the winch. Yeah, the handle's as rough and rusted as one would expect; the portcullis mechanisms can't be in much better shape.

<i>"All right, heave!"</i>

It takes quite some effort, but the portcullis does gradually rise, accompanied by a series of ominous groans and creaks. After about a minute of coordinated effort, a

faint click sounds in the darkness, and the two of you step back to catch your breaths.

Phew, that was something.

<i>"Hey, it still works,"</i> River manages to gasp out as he sinks back onto a pile of gravel. <i>"Minotaur engineering is great, didn't you know? Wonder what happened between the last time and now for it to get so badly stuck, though."</i>

Right, right. You'll just have a moment to recover, then you'll be heading on right in.

]

<i>"A few last words,"</i> River cautions, holding up a finger. <i>"Like I said, I'll be waiting out here for you. Next, I know Garth said that anything you find save the medallion is yours to keep, but I wouldn't linger overlong looking for treasure if I were you. If you step out of the fort before you're done, I'm going to assume you're giving up and we're all going home. Finally, remember that fighting isn't always your only option. If you can find ways to pacify the ghosts and break the situation they're stuck in, all the better."</i>

[party.has garret

|<i>"But where would the fun be in that?"</i>

<i>"Not everyone is an idiot like you, Garret."</i>

[party.has arona

|<i>"Hate to admit it, but the pup's right,"</i> Arona chimes in. <i>"I mean, they're ghosts. Don't deny a woman what little pleasure she can wring out of this trip, will you?"</i>

River mutters something that's not quite under his breath.

]

]

All right, you understand.

<i>"If you feel you're overwhelmed, don't hesitate to beat a quick retreat. Better to come out with your life, than to die trying."</i>

You turn your gaze to the entrance that lies before you, yawning wide as it stretches to fill almost the entirety of the tunnel. Somewhere in this crumbling mess of dust and old masonry, a draft of stale air whooshes out to greet you, hitting you squarely in the face. Yeah... being buried alive and suffocating has to be a terrible way to go.

Nothing left to stall with; time to head on in and find this thing Garth wants.

//Enter room 1 of floor 1.

//Quest Updated: Shades of the Past

Now that you've entered Fort Marrok, your goal is to find and retrieve the jarl's medallion. If you leave the fortress at any point hereon, you will fail this quest.

Dungeon Overview

- Fort Marrok consists of two floors, which are divided by a locked door the player will have to bypass.
- Resting/sleeping will not be allowed, as per normal for all dungeons.
 - May be interesting to note that no time will pass when moving between rooms in the dungeon (or encountering events, for that matter). Spooky.
- The player may elect to leave at any time, but doing so will fail the quest.
- Random encounters
 - Since there is no time limit, pressure will be placed on the player in the form of random encounters.
 - Groups of 3 will emerge from the walls and floor to harass the player every so often when they move between rooms.
 - Ideally this % chance on move should start out low, but increase the longer the player goes without an encounter. However, a flat % on move will do just as well.
 - For more information, see the random encounters section.
- When the player leaves the fort, either through successfully completing the quest, retreating, or falling to the basic bitch soldiers, destroy all special key items related to the quest:
 - Silver mirror
 - Ramparts key
 - Old dented pot
 - Tarnished kettle
 - Rusty cauldron

Garret

- It is possible to recruit Garret as a guest character for the duration of this dungeon. If you've told him about his dad's request, he'll defy Garth, show up with River, and head on into Fort Marrok with you.
- Having Garret around is good not just because he can make fights easier, but also because he opens up several options that allow the player to bypass obstacles in other ways.
 - Breaking down the ramparts door becomes possible with Brint, Garret or Arona, and is an auto-succeed if you have two or more of them.
 - If allowed, he will attempt to take on Magna mano-a-mano. He'll lose and the PC doesn't get any loot, but there is interesting story and character development to be had if you let him solo her.

- If you picked up the silver mirror and choose to talk down the jarl, Garret will do it instead and will automatically succeed without the PC lupine race requirement and charisma check.
- Garret will also comment and quip on a number of events and situations in the fort.
- The most important reason for bringing Garret along, though, is story reveal on just who his missing mother is, and his reactions to learning even the tiniest smidgen of information about such.
- Garret is at level 4, with appropriate stats to be determined. He's a guest, so he has no perks. Remember the optimal level for the dungeon is 4.

Stats

Strength: ++

Agility: ++

Toughness: ++

Cunning: +

Willpower: +

Presence: N/A

Garret's Gear

- Silvered Cestus. Crushing + holy damage. Probably stats akin to a mace? Garret cannot be disarmed.
- Probably just give him a studded vest as armour and toss all his stats on there.

Garret's Moves

Frenzy. As per the existing ability, but is an at-will instead.

Pummel. As per triple threat, but melee instead.

Bloodrage. Like leech, but melee. Non-weapon. Drake mentioned that healing on leech was too strong for PC control, and I suppose I eventually want the PC to get this, so tone it down to maybe 1/2 of what it is on leech.

War Song. As per power.

Pummel

[Recharge 4][Melee]

You launch a flurry of blows at a target, striking three times at -35 accuracy for {x} damage each. If all blows connect, the target is staggered for one round.

Use:

[attacker.combatName] launch[tps|es] [attacker.combatHimselfHerself] at [target.combatName], aiming a flurry of furious blows at [target.combatHimHer]!

For each hit:

[target.combatName] [tps|is|are] struck by the rapid beatdown!

For each miss:

[target.combatName] manage[tps|s] to avoid the furious beatdown!

Stagger:

The intensity of [attacker.combatNames] martial fury leaves [target.combatName] staggered and reeling!

Bloodrage:

[Recharge 3][Melee]

You rip and tear at an enemy, reveling in their demise. This attack deals {x} damage and recovers health equal to half damage dealt.

Use:

[attacker.combatName] strike[tps|s] out at [target.combatName] bare-handed, concentrating all [attacker.combatHisHer] aggression and battle fury into a single devastating blow!

Hit:

The blow strikes true, eliciting a roar of victorious triumph from [attacker.combatName]!

Miss:

[target.combatName] manage[tps|s] to avoid the blow!

Bloodrage heal:

[attacker.combatName] [tps|is|are] invigorated by the heady rush of battle!

Random Encounters

Most of the random encounters in this dungeon are triggered by walking from square to square. They may also be triggered by scripted events.

Encounters in Fort Marrok consist of various types of ghosts, all of which have the following resistances and immunities (suggested values):

- 0.25 to blight and cold damage.
- 0.5x to penetrating, crushing.
- 1.25x to fire and storm.
- 1.5x to holy.

These are mindless undead and for obvious reasons, can't be lusted. I don't know if we should allow other types of resolve combat, I'll leave that to you to decide.

It's quite obvious that anyone with whitefire is going to have a much easier time with the dungeon, and that is fair as adequate warning is given. There is no reason why players should not have access to Caitriss, and consumables with fire and storm damage can be purchased from Ivriiss for a boost in critical fights.

For the purposes of damage calculation, the "weapons" they wield can always be assumed to deal equal amounts of cold and whatever appropriate physical damage type fifty-fifty.

They shouldn't have any drops that are unique to them, since this dungeon cannot be revisited and if they're done right, the player should not be lingering to farm them; they are meant to place constant pressure on the player. A small amount of money per mob should be fine. Their job here is to wear down the player and cause attrition the longer the player tarries, draining their resources.

This dungeon is balanced around level 4, but is accessible at level 3, so one should take note of that.

Encounters will consist of two kinds of mobs, around 4 mobs per random encounter. Keep it simple, stupid:

- Basic bitch soldiers.
 - Sword and board. Give them a breastplate or something; they should be moderately armoured. Somewhat tough.
 - Powers — rend, as per warrior.
 - Shell cracker.
 - Shield Bash.
- 'Zerkers.
 - Limited to one per group. Will always appear. Very fast and offensive.
 - Dual wield shortswords or if crazy horse is done by the time we get to this, dual light axes? No armour.
 - Bleeding cut.
 - Frenzy.
 - Dual blitz.
 - Warcry.

Encounter Text

Encounter Begins

[rand

|You're walking down the crumbling hallways when something clutches at your feet.

Thinking it a bit of debris you've gotten snagged on, you try to lift your foot up, only to

find that it's not debris that you've gotten snagged on, but a ghostly, furred hand clutching at your ankle. With a terrible howl and blast of chill air, spectral lupine soldiers erupt from the cold stone floor, dressed in the livery they bore in life and their weapons at the ready.

[party.has arona]

Arona snarls at the sight and hefts her [aronna.weapon]. *"Come on, dogs! I'll put you back in the grave where you belong!"*

]

[Passing through the ruined fortress, you hear the faint dripping of water... no, it's not water, it's too thick and slimy to be water. As you turn your head to the source of the sound, you find to your horror that whitish ectoplasm is oozing from the walls, forcing its way out from between cracks in the ancient mortar.

Perhaps aware that it's being watched, the ectoplasm now bursts forth with vigor, quickly forming into the shape of a ghostly lupine wearing tattered livery emblazoned with the symbol of two crossed swords. You have barely enough time to ready your [pc.weapon] before more specters emerge from the walls in a similar fashion, advancing upon you with grim resolve.

[party.has cait]

[Behind you, Cait whispers a terrified prayer as the apparitions close in on you, blue flames burning where their eyes should be.

]

[The air is still... very still, when there should have been a draft through the hallways. The hackles rise on the back of your neck, and you look around you as the whispers begin: slow and soft at first, but growing louder as they continue.

They are restless, and they are angry.

You whirl about and make to run, but they are already here: motes of silvery-white light coalesce in the air, rapidly forming into a circle of lupine ghosts that surround you with weapons at the ready. One of them snarls and points at you, and then all of them leap to the attack.

[party.has garret]

[Garret whirls around such that his back is pressed against yours, and smacks a fist into a palm, cracking several knuckles and waiting for the apparitions to close in. *"Don't worry, [pc.mf]brother[sister]. I've got your back."*

]

[A sudden chill crawls across your [pc.skinFurScalesNoun] in the already crisp hallway, raising your hackles. You stop cold, blink — and where there was but empty space seconds ago, there now stands a patrol of spectres, their translucent weapons readied and pointed at you.

There's nowhere to run; they've literally stepped out of thin air to surround you.
Breath catching in your throat, you draw your [pc.weapon] and make to do battle.

[party.has berwyn

|<i>"I don't know which is worse,"</i> Berwyn moans as the ghosts close in.

<i>"Tentacles, or these!"</i>

]

]

It's a fight!

In-Encounter

You're fighting some spectral lupines!

In life, they were the garrison of Fort Marrok. In death, they still are, albeit in a considerably different capacity. Colourless, translucent and shimmering with an eerie glow, the spirits of the garrisoned soldiers are clad in scraps of rotting leather and rusted scale mail, the round helmets that sit upon their heads from a bygone age. Blue fire burns in their skulls where their eyes should be, the horrible circumstances of their death perhaps having empowered these apparitions to have survived far longer than they should have.

All of them wear tattered livery over their armour, tabards emblazoned with two crossed swords, and all of them heft their spectral weapons with practiced ease as they press the attack, driven by what ungodly hatred the restless dead have for the living.

//Anything that isn't dead

[combatName] is holding the line with a maddened, undying fervor!

//Dead

There is nothing left of [combatName], with what little remains the apparition left long dissolved into nothingness.

Encounter Victory

[rand]

With a final blow, the last of the restless ghosts breaks up into a shower of silvery motes that fall to the ground before dissipating into wisps of light and fading away. Expecting another attack, you whirl about, but find nothing but silence and cold, dead stone.

Best to hurry up and make good your escape while the ghosts are still pacified. You do not want to linger overlong in this place, not when there're enemies literally coming out of the walls and floor.

[party.has cait

|Behind you, Cait makes a quick gesture with her hands and wipes cold sweat off her brow. *"Best we hurry on. I've done what I can, but they won't stay pacified for long."*

]

|The final apparition stares down the the weapon embedded in its ghostly, ethereal form, perhaps disbelieving that it's been bested. A look of absolute rage crossing its face, the ghost starts trying to claw its way up the length of the weapon, its empty eyes ablaze with ghostly blue flame —

— And dissolves into smoke with a furious howl, an eerie noise that's echoed in the cold, dead corridors by what sounds like thousands of lupine voices.

[party.has arona

|*"Movemovemove!"* Arona roars, grabbing you by the arm and hustling you away from the scene. *"The damned things are going to be swarming here in no time at all!"*

]

|A long, low sigh emanates from the last of the specters as it collapses to the ground, the ghostly flames in its eyes winking out. Within moments, it's dissolved into a thin, clear mist, one that you carefully avoid as you step past it and hurry on.

There has to be an end to this nightmare, right?

[party.has garret

|*"Gods damn it, they're literally coming out of the walls,"* Garret growls as he keeps pace with you. *"And here I was, thinking that my rugged good looks might buy us some time."*

No, but his brawn has. Who knows, if he keeps this up, the lot of you might make it out alive.

Garret just grins, and light twinkles off one of his teeth in the eerie light.

]

]

Encounter Defeat

These ghosts, their ungodly countenance, their cold, draining touch; it's too much for you to bear. That last blow sends you sprawling to the ground, and you hit your head on the masonry floor and black out.

...Time passes...

<i>"Hey. Hey. Wake up. You're waking up already, just come all the way to me, okay?"</i>

River's voice jerks you to full wakefulness, and you open your eyes to feel a terrible pounding in your skull, and see the gates of Fort Marrok looming over you. No, it definitely wasn't a nightmare, despite how much you wish it was.

[party.som][[companion1.name's] sprawled out on the ground beside you, snoring away softly; it's probably best not to disturb [companion1.himher] for the moment.[companion1.name] and [companion2.name] are sprawled out on the ground beside you, as out cold as you were. Best not to disturb them for now.]

You try to sit up, and rub your head. Ow...

<i>"When you didn't come out, I got kinda worried,"</i> River says, handing you some brandy in a small cup, which you gratefully accept. <i>"So I went in after you — and good thing I did too, didn't I? If I hadn't, you'd be a lifeless husk by now."</i>

You're not going to ask how a tiny little thing like him managed to hold off all the ghosts and drag you out of there, but you're glad for it.

River shrugs. <i>"Music soothes the bestial soul — and that holds true even when said souls are supposed to have passed on. All it took was one good saga by the Iron Poet, and they were too busy listening to me to do anything else. As for you... well, dragging helps a lot when you're trying to move big, heavy things."</i>

Guess that explains why you're sore all over, then. [pc.cunningRange 50

[You may have hit your head, but River's obviously not telling you the whole truth about this. He's probably not outright lying, but he's definitely stretching his version of events. Demanding explanations of your rescuer right now doesn't seem very productive at the moment, but it might be something to note...

]

<i>"Yep. And I don't think you should be going back in there — you'd clearly bitten off more than you could chew, and I'm not going to have your blood on my head. Let's head back to the Frost Hound, okay? Garth can do without that medallion; it's not worth your life to get it for him."</i>

Ouch. Yeah, when he puts it like that, River's right. Either way, you don't feel in any shape to make another trip back into the fort.[party.som][Beside you, [companion1.name] is already stirring, and River gives [companion1.himher] the same treatment with the cup of brandy.[Beside you, [companion1.name] and [companion2.name] are already stirring, and River gives both of them the brandy treatment, passing it between the two of them.]

<i>"Come on,"</i> River urges. <i>"I'll play an inspiring tune or something, but you really oughta stand and we should get out of here before too long. It's easy to get exposed on these slopes — I don't want to have saved you from ghosts only for you to catch your death from cold."</i>

Right, right. You accept River's hand, and together [party.hasCompanions|all of]you start up and out of the canyon, making the long trudge back to the Frost Hound. The ghosts in the fortress will have to look to someone else to find their eternal rest... definitely not you, at any rate.

[party.has garret

[Garret groans, holding his head. <i>"Well, I guess that was a bust. I'll make my own way back from here, [pc.name] — thanks for giving me a chance either way. Maybe my old man's right...either way, I'll have to tell him I came back from the forest empty-handed. Kind of a tall tale, but...

]

//Set time to morning.

//Update quest: **Shades of the Past:** You weren't strong enough to complete the task Garth set out for you; good thing River managed to drag everyone out. Best to just return to the old man and admit defeat.

//Remove Garret from party, if applicable.

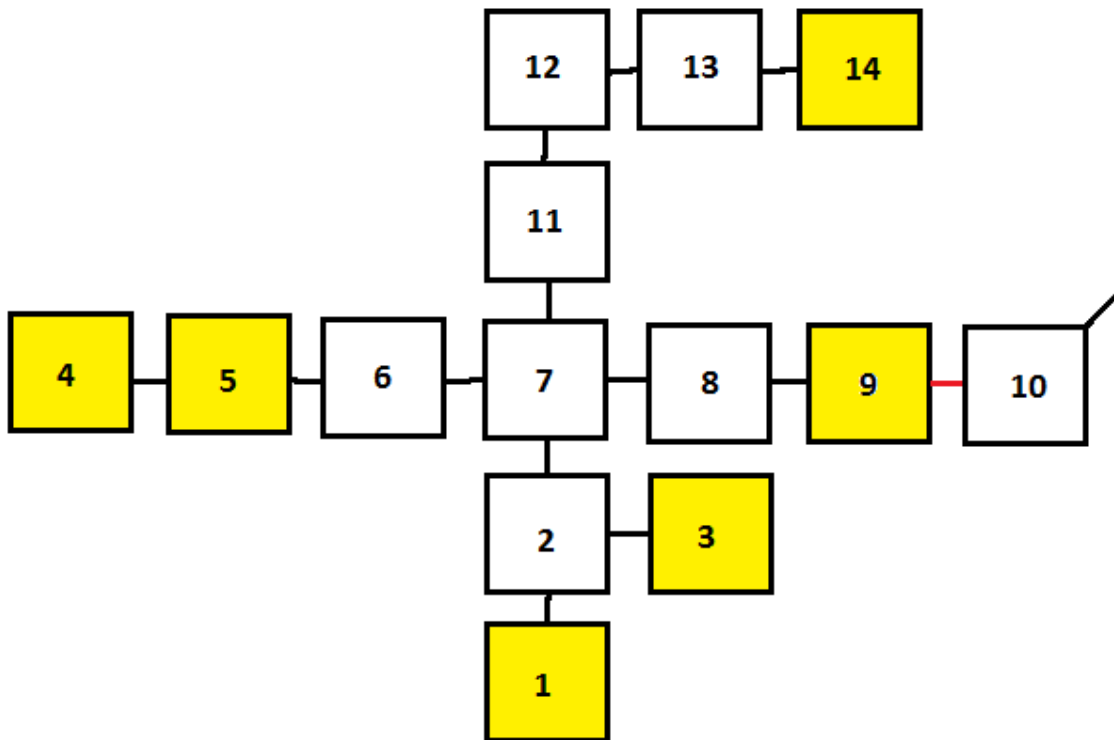
//Remove all Fort Marrok key items from inventory.

Dungeon Maps

White boxes denote no special events in the room, with just fluff. Yellow boxes denote an event or encounter. Black lines denote connections between rooms, red lines locked/blocked connections which have to be opened.

Events are directly denoted in their respective room; text for the events will be placed under the events subheading.

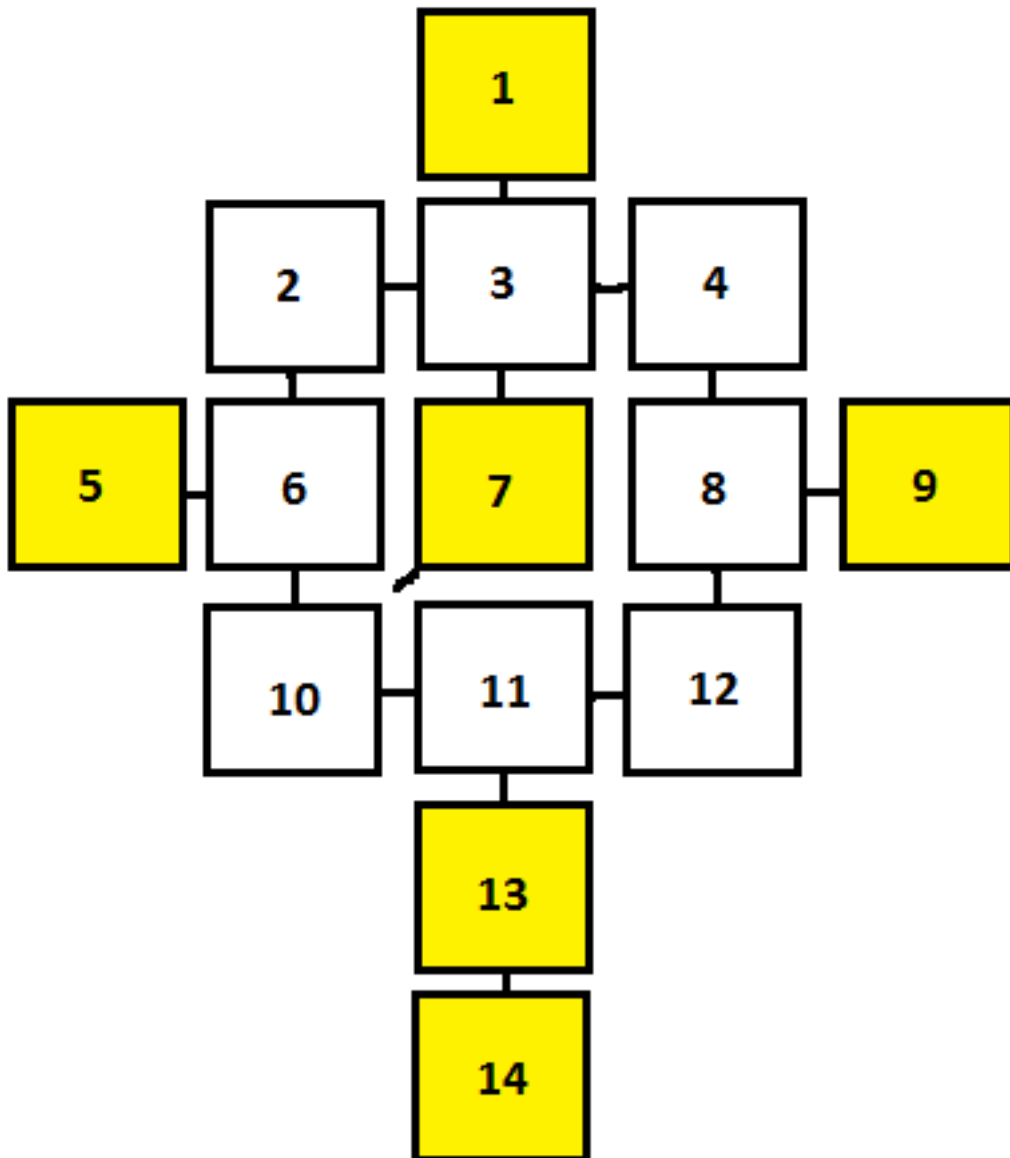
Floor 1



1. Entrance. This is where the PC starts, and may return to if they want to leave and fail the quest.
2. Entry hallway.
3. Gatekeepers' lodging. PC may read some of the books preserved by cold and dry to gain clues and some background information. Note that the key is kept in the garrison, and the feeding habits of the garrisoned troops (they don't like porridge and look forward to the huge cauldron of meat stew served up every Friday).
4. Garrison. Obtain key to unlock ramparts door (9).
 - a. Attempting to enter the garrison while they're still waiting for the meal that never comes will aggro the entire hall of ghosts and a total of sixteen enemies to attack the PC, four at a time. Due warning will be given.
6. Dusty hallway.
7. Indoor courtyard.
8. Crumbling hallway.
9. Cold hallway. Door to ramparts stairwell (10) is locked and warded. If the player has Arona, they may try to brute-force the door with a high DC. If the player has both Arona and Garret, they can brute-force the door no problem. Either way, breaking down the door will trigger two consecutive fights of 3 enemies each. The intent is to allow the PC to brute-force their way through, but make the task of getting the key far more palatable.
10. Stairwell to second floor. Leads to floor 2.
11. Dark hallway.
12. Stores, part 1.

13. Stores, part 2.
14. Kitchens. Almost everything has rotted away, save for a number of pots, porridge kettles, and cauldrons hanging over dead ashes. The PC may choose to carry one of these in his hands to the Grand Hall. Attempting to serve anything but the cauldron to the garrison will result in jeers, and the PC will have to make the trip again.

Floor 2



1. Training hall. The ghosts are having a little competition over the honour of getting to wear the Helm of Heroes in the upcoming battle, and it seems like they've reached the last round. The player may accept or decline to fight Magna Hagen (optional boss) for the helm.
2. Ramparts.
3. Ramparts.
4. Ramparts.

5. Library. Background information and lore from the books within. Small silver mirror is held in a wordlock chest.
6. Ramparts.
7. Stairwell. Leads from first floor.
8. Ramparts.
9. Watchtower east. Background information and fluff. Can get a bessy mauler here, as well as several jars of naphtha.
10. Ramparts.
11. Ramparts.
12. Ramparts.
13. Audience chamber entryway. Fountains here offer a full heal. Note figure slumped in the throne to the south.
14. Audience chamber. Jarl Gunvaldsen encounter.

Dungeon Room Descriptions

Floor 1

1.

It is ironic, perhaps, that this entrance has been unearthed in a similar fashion by which it was sealed off. Freed from an eternity of darkness from the snowstorm, piles of rubble still lie strewn here and there about the main gates both inside and out, dirt and rock and bits of ancient masonry. A strange chill sensation divides the interior of Fort Marrok from the outside world, marking the beginnings of the haunts' territory.

There are slots in the entry archway's ceiling, the portcullis raised and held in place by rusted metal latches. Several racks lie to the side of the entryway, but what's left of them and anything they might have held lies on the cracked ground, almost unrecognizable heaps of rusted decay moldering away as time gnaws on their bones.

To the north, a hallway that stretches on; to the south, little River sits in a nook just outside the fort, mightily absorbed in what you presume is composing the tale of your exploits here. You could approach him if you wanted to back out, but you know that doing so means that you'll have to go back to Garth empty-handed.

[North][Leave]

2.

Further in, the light from the canyon rapidly fades away into nothing. There were once torches on both walls to each side, but they have long since rotted away and the sconces to hold them rusted into shapeless, brownish lumps. Thankfully, the strange, eerie glow to the air persists — not immensely bright, but certainly enough for you to see a short distance comfortably. A fortunate — inasmuch as this whole situation can be fortunate — byproduct of the ruin's haunting, you suppose.

The entrance hallway is littered with alcoves and eaves towards the rear — an easily defensible bottleneck in which any invader who managed to break down the portcullis could be countered, making any advance further into the fortress truly perilous. Unsurprisingly, there's not much in the way of decoration in this hallway, only yet more in the way of aged masonry and mortar.

To the south, the gates from which you entered, to the north, the passageway widens. There's also a doorway to the east leading into a small, dark room.

[North][South][East]

3.

This room appears to be lodgings for a single person — being barely more than a glorified storeroom, there's just enough floor space for a cupboard, desk, a folding bed and a bookcase. All but the last have been consumed by dry rot — the dry and cold climate has preserved them as best as possible, but they still look like they could fall apart at a touch. A series of small rusted hooks have been hammered into the far wall, but it looks like nothing's been hung on them for ages. A small brass plaque is set beneath the hooks, dusty but still legible.

The bookcase, though, is another matter altogether. There's clearly been some kind of preservation at work here — the rune-carved wood still appears solid enough, and the books are in readable condition, however yellowed and dusty they might be. You could take a moment to look through them, if you like, but there doesn't seem to be much left for you here otherwise.

The only exit here is west and back out into the entrance hallway.

[Bookcase][Plaque][West]

4.

This large room, you can only presume, served as the barracks for the garrisoned soldiers. Passing through a high archway decorated with numerous lupine runes, you emerge into a truly cavernous chamber, propped up by rows of pillars. The metal frames of various pieces of furniture lie in neat, orderly rows, their more organic components having succumbed to the ravages of time; you can make out the remains of beds and a footlocker or two, but that's about the long and short of it.

The rest of the place is rather spartan. A number of long stone basins line one wall, but the slits in the wall which fed them have long since dried up. A number of empty pole holders and hooks suggest that portions of the barracks may have been curtained off to allow its inhabitants some measure of privacy, but beyond that the entire place appears to have been used communally.

Near the back of the hall, you spy a large set of metal hooks.

{//ramparts key obtained:

Now that you've obtained the keys that hung here, there's nothing left on the hooks but emptiness.

//else

Most of them are empty, but an old keyring hangs on one of them. It's heavily tarnished, but otherwise in serviceable condition — as is the single massive key that hangs off it. That certainly looks important, if nothing else.

}

The only exit here is the same way you came in by — east out to the great hall.

[East][Key]

5.

You're standing in the great hall of Fort Marrok, a chamber so vast your footsteps audibly echo in its eaves. The beginnings of the arched, vaulted roof are visible where they meet the high walls, but the rest of the ceiling is swathed in impenetrable darkness; tall pillars bear spikes from which banners, tapestries and other decorations might have been hung, but if any were there, they too have long since crumbled to dust.

In the middle of the room, a stage or dais of sorts, comprised of a small pyramid of steps that eventually flatten out — a focal point for any gatherings which took place here. On the north and south sides of the hall, a huge hearth to provide heat and light for the entire chamber, now cold and abandoned.

{//if ghosts appeased:

Although the cauldron you set down is empty, the restless ghosts in the hall seem to be having the time of their unlife, jabbing spectral swords into the cauldron and coming out with... well, you can only assume the white goop coating the bread is whatever the cauldron used to hold a thousand years ago. They sure seem to enjoy it, that's for sure — those not currently busying themselves with helping themselves from the cauldron have started up a bawdy drinking song, slumped on the spectral longtables and swilling themselves silly from kegs, mugs and tankards alike.

In their current distracted state, sneaking past them and into the archway in the hall's west end would be a trivial task.

//else if ghosts defeated

With the revelers' defeat at your hands — no matter how impossible it seems that you managed to pull through such odds — you're left with an empty hall, as empty and dead as it should be. Something tugs at your mind, the fleeting thought that perhaps you could have handled this better, perhaps in a way that would have been easier on both the restless ghosts and you, but well, there's not much point in crying over spilt milk now, is there?

//else

As you enter, you note rows upon rows of spectral longtables, each one easily able to seat a dozen people or more — and at each and every one of them are seated

several lupines, knife and fork in hand, clearly agitated as they wait for something — a meal, most likely — that will never be served. They drum their utensils and mutter amongst themselves, casting the occasional glance at the entry archway.

[pc.ra lupine

|As you enter, the specters give you a cursory glance but turn away after a moment, clearly too aggrieved at their lack of chow to pay you any serious attention once having registered you as a lupine. It's possible that they may have mistaken you for one of their own... in which case, it would probably be safe to cross the great hall just like that[party.som]| while [companion1.name sneaks by as their attention is focused on you| while the others sneak by as their attention is focused on you].

The question is: how sure are you of your guise?

|They don't seem to have noticed you yet, but you get the feeling that walking straight into a giant room packed full of crotchety, hungry ghosts isn't the best of ideas.

Well, what now?

]

}

The only exits here are east out into the hallway, and west further into the garrison.

#converge

[East][West][Serve]

6.

This hallway is plain and bare, but caked with dust. It covers the floor, coats the walls, and has found its way into the cracks between the mortar. Unsurprisingly, the air is musty and dead still, and you can clearly see the trail that you're leaving in the grit here.

Yeah, it's probably not a good idea to linger overlong here. Even if there weren't vengeful ghosts wandering the halls, the stale air would probably do you in. It's already getting a little hard to breathe...

The hallway stretches both east and west from here.

[East][West]

7.

This indoor quadrangle forms the heart of the old fort, a large chunk of empty space easily big enough for everyone garrisoned within to muster. By some miracle, the landslide which buried the entire place stopped at the high windows — they might be blocked by tons upon tons of dirt and rock, but the grounds are mostly clear save for several piles of rubble strewn about the floor.

The air is almost completely still; there's nary a rat or beetle to break the silence. Exits stretch out in all four cardinal directions, leaving you to decide your next move.

[North][South][East][West]

8.

The eastern hallway leading away from the fortress' heart is in a state of advanced disrepair, even moreso than the rest of the place. It appears that the wraiths' landslide truly did a number on this hallway, for some reason — half of the northern wall is buckled inward, spilling enough stone bricks and dirt to fill half the hallway's width and block any hope of an easy passage. Considering that the original hallway was wide enough for five or six people to march abreast, you can still squeeze through, but it becomes a little claustrophobic at points where the rubble is thickest.

The roof itself hasn't fared much better. The mortar is cracked, and in the dim, eerie light you spy a couple of root tips peering through the rents in the masonry. There's a distinct draft flowing down the hallway's length — where *<i>is</i>* that coming from, when you must be so deep underground? — and it nips at your [pc.skinFurScalesNoun] with sharp little teeth of frost, reminding you of the cold tomb this place has become.

You shiver and press on.

[East][West]

9.

As you forge your way further down this hallway, you notice the ambient temperature drop perceptibly, enough to send you to shivering. You're not completely sure if it's a by-product of the ruins' haunting or the result of a draft which blows in through a number of cracks in the north wall, but it certainly adds to the atmosphere of this place. Winter is coming and all that.

{//ramparts door open:

Now that you've managed to get the door to the east open, nothing stands between you and the stairwell leading to the fortress' second floor. Onwards and upwards, as they say — onwards and upwards.

//else

However, it would appear that the hallway ends here abruptly — stopped cold by a massive, metal-bound door that blocks the path to the east, still in surprisingly good condition despite how old it must be. Through a small rusted grille set in the door, you catch a peek of a stairwell on its other side.

Of course, in order to get there, you'll have to deal with the door on this end first... various possibilities come to mind, some more palatable than others.

}

[East][West][Door]

10.

This spiral stairwell leads around and up to the second level of Fort Marrok. The steps themselves don't look very trustworthy, but appearances can deceive and besides, it's not as if you've got any choice in the matter. Several of the stone flagstones are cracked, as is the central pillar; the flooring feels shaky as you put your weight on it, but at least it still holds.

Your breathing echoes about in the tall, cylindrical stairwell, the sound bouncing off the walls over and over again until they finally fade into the oppressive darkness of this cold stone tomb.

The darkness beckons.

[Up][West]

11.

For some reason, the eerie glow in this corridor is completely snuffed out, plunging you into complete and utter darkness. You're forced to carefully hug the walls to find your way around, inching along while you feel your way through the inky blackness. The masonry is not completely unpleasant to the touch, even if it is a bit dusty; you suppose that your main complaint would be that your fingertips are getting numb. It certainly beats some of the other things which could be happening to you right now.

Faint whispers sound in your hearing, seemingly but inches from your ears, but when you reach for where you think the speaker is, your fingers close in upon empty air.

Thankfully, the corridor seems to be more or less straight in a north-south direction, but it's not good to leave things to chance. Who knows what might be hidden in this darkness...

[North][South]

12.

You're standing in what appears to be part of a large storeroom. The door that connects the room to the southern hallway — well, there are indeed signs that such a thing might have existed at some point in time, considering the doorway and hinges, but it must have collapsed away long before your arrival.

The way the lupines stored perishables is interesting, to say the least. The northern and western walls are filled with arrays upon arrays of basins, a smaller one within a larger one, with some space in between. Peering into one of the outer basins reveals a slot near the rim for channeling water in, and another near the bottom for draining water out — presumably goods were stored in the inner basin and then sealed, and the outer basin circulated with ice-cold water to keep the goods chilled.

Ingenious. Not perfect, but ingenious all the same. Too bad the landslide must've cut off the channels which supplied fresh snowmelt to the basins, for all of them are bone dry.

What space which isn't occupied by the basins might have once been a gigantic cellar, judging by the huge heaps of rotted dust piled against the walls. Grain? Root vegetables? Who can tell for sure?

Two exits lie before you: the darkened hallway to the south, and another section of the stores to the east.

[South][East]

13.

This part of the stores appears to have been dedicated to more durable goods — tools, spare parts, utensils, and everyday goods of such stature. In lieu of shelves, the lupines took to carving out cubby-holes in the walls in which implements were stored.

Naturally, there's nothing substantial left of the lot — you do spot some odds and ends as you pass by — a rusted hunk of metal, what might once have been a shovel blade, the remains of a bucket, collapsed into a neat little heap. Of such little notes is built the creeping realisation of one's own mortality.

Exits from this room stretch out to the east and west.

[East][West]

14.

The kitchens of Fort Marrok. Judging by their size, feeding everyone garrisoned here three times a day (and perhaps more) with any semblance of regularity was a task worthy of the most daring of lupines; stone ovens, cold hearths, and dusty grates line the walls, caked with dust and old soot. Spits, decayed to the point where they can no longer turn, flues that now no longer lead anywhere, metal racks caked with rust.

Stacked upon each other, old pots, pans and cauldrons, some of them still lying forlornly in place over the hearths, as if something had been cooking in them before they were left to their fate.

The clear signs of the bustling activity that must have once taken place here only adds to the sense of aching hollowness that pervades the atmosphere of the empty kitchens.

The only way out from here is west, back to the stores.

[West][Hearths]

Floor 2

1.

You're standing in what's clearly a training hall of some sort. The room is mostly large and featureless, with windows set high in northern wall; of course, considering the state of the fortress, none of them have seen daylight for a long, long time. Several alcoves in the walls harbor statues of lupines in various appropriately martial poses — some wielding spears, one with a longsword, another swinging a flail menacingly — all of which have survived the years in good shape. There's a lot of dust and a few extremities have crumbled, as expected, but the glory of the pack is laid out in full before you.

There's a large, empty area in the back of the hall which might have once been used for storing training material, but there's nothing held there now but rot and old cobwebs.

{//if tournament over:

Now that the tournament is over, the mats have been cleared away and some semblance of normalcy has settled upon the training hall. The ghosts continue their drills and bouts, preparing for an enemy that will never come — or if you will, an enemy that has already come and gone. It only highlights the cruelty of the circumstances of their imprisonment, but they just seem to be having so much <i>fun</i> going through the motions. Better that than them trying to kill you, one supposes.

//else

The hall may be packed with spirits, but none of them appear aggressive towards you — in fact, most of them remain content to ignore your presence, instead focusing their attention on a circle of space that's formed in the middle of the training hall. A number of ghostly mats have been laid out on the hard stone floor, and it seems that the ghosts are having a competition or tournament of some sort — a simple one-on-one series of brawls with no holds barred.

A cheer rises from the wolves as one of the two combatants in the circle throws the other to the ground, then quickly pounces on the poor bastard, pinning the latter down on the ground, fingers grasping his windpipe.

<i>"Desist! Desist! And the round is over! Five minutes until the next!"</i>

The victor lends the defeated a hand up, and the two leave the circle laughing as if nothing had ever had happened. Two more enter, and it looks like the cycle is about to begin anew.

}

The only exit from the training hall lies south, away from the merriment and fierce competition.

[South][Tournament]

2.

The northeastern section of the ramparts corridor houses some kind of cylindrical shaft that sinks into the masonry floor and into the ground below — from where you are, you're

guessing that the bottom of the shaft would open up somewhere in the fortress' stores. There's a large screw mechanism, some gears, and a crank that looks wide enough for two or three people to comfortably stand astride and turn it together...

Knowing where the other end of this contraption probably ends up, it's not too unlikely that this is a lift of some sort, designed to bring weighty and bulky materials up to the fortress' second floor in the most expedient manner possible. It certainly beats having people carry stuff up the stairs, that's for sure.

The entire mechanism is completely inoperable at this point, rendering the whole thing moot — but even so, the knowledge that people two hundred and fifty years ago had the ingenuity to come up with such a thing is enlightening, at the very least.

From here, the passageway stretches out to the east and south.

[East][South]

3.

Opening out onto this landing, the door from the stairwell to the south creaks softly in the draft that runs down the corridor's length, sounding appropriately ominous in the eerie, eldritch light that suffuses the air. To the north, an archway flanked by two plinths which once held decorative suits of armor — you spy a badly decayed gauntlet lying at the foot of the left one, barely recognizable as such.

To the east and west, more corridor, punctuated by juts and hooks for yet more banners and tapestries. This place may have been no palace, but it seems like the lupines tried to give the fort's second floor a more human touch, for lack of a better word to describe it. Grey stone in and out every day must be terrible for morale.

You spy several doorways set into the walls, but those have been sealed off by huge chunks of fallen rubble, rendering them impassable. Guess you're not going to be able to conduct a room-by-room search.

[East][West]

4.

A section of the corridors which stretch on outward from Fort Marrok's ramparts. This northwesterly section used to have several rooms leading on out from it, but the doorways have collapsed in upon themselves and have been rendered impassable. With how broad it is, it looks like it was a commonly patrolled area, and the large mounds of rust on the walls that used to be torch sconces speak of such tales.

The corridor stretches outwards to the west and south, the darkness beckoning equally in both directions.

[West][South]

5.

You're standing in what looks to be a library or study of some sort. The frames of two ancient desks still stand, while their attendant seats have collapsed in heaps of dry rot and dusty residue. Instead of shelves, numerous rectangular recesses and cubbyholes have been cut into the walls, each one large enough to house a comfortable number of tomes. A small border of runes lines each nook, and judging by the reasonable condition of the books held within you figure they must be preservation wards or something similar. The jarl and his pack may have been a warlike people, but they certainly knew the value of a good book.

At the foot of one of the cubbyholes, a tarnished brass chest rests. {/if opened:

Now that the trap's deactivated and there's nothing left in there, it's of no further interest to you.

}

Mounted high on the wall, above the collection of tomes, a single large plaque rests:

<i>No branches, but has leaves.

No bones, but has a spine.

Many overlook its import

Yet 'tis more precious than wine.</i>

The only way out from here is east through the entry archway and back out to the ramparts corridor.

[East][Books][Chest]

6.

This section of the ramparts is distinctly damp and humid — upon closer inspection, you realize that if you stand perfectly still, you can hear the steady drip-drip-drip of water somewhere behind the walls. A small puddle has collected on the eastern side of the corridor, and you carefully step around it before making your way onward.

Surprising, perhaps, but not out of place when you think about it. Any good holdout location needs its own source of fresh water, and the wraiths' landslide must've done a number on the local water flows and table...

Pushing that thought out of your mind, you soldier on. The corridor stretches to the north and south, and there's an archway to the west that opens out into a room.

[North][South][West]

7.

The top of the stairwell. Looking down at the huge stone steps spiraling down into the void below, you have to wonder how something didn't manage to fall out from under you, or

alternatively, fall down onto you. Fort Marrok might be solidly built, but even so, time's fire is fierce and unrelenting.

Now that you're standing here, you realize that the stairwell is designed in such a way that sounds at the bottom are amplified as they travel upwards, such that each scratch and echo from the lower landing comes cleanly to your hearing. It would be useful, considering that the stairwell would be a bottleneck for any invading army...

Hm...

The only exits from here are north and out to the second floor, or back down to the first if you were so inclined.

[North][Down]

8.

This section of corridor stretching away from the eastern ramparts appears to be in better condition than most of the fort — if only marginally so. Perhaps it's because this looks to be a newer addition to the fort, compared to the rest of the place — the rock bricks that form the masonry walls are of a different size and shape, the mortar less crumbled. Presumably, the lupines hollowed out this section when they realized they needed a little more space, or realised that a single corridor joining the ramparts to the rest of the fort was quite the silly architectural decision.

After all, a hole with only one entrance is known as a trap.

Your path stretches out to the north and south, but there's also a doorway to the east that harbors some sort of room beyond it. Hmm...

[North][South][East]

9.

Like the corridor outside, this watchtower looks different in make and slightly newer than the rest of the fortress. The bricks are finer here, the walls and ground more carefully smoothed, and the entry doorway is more square than the arches which dominate the architecture of the rest of the fortress.

The remnants of weapon racks lie along one wall, the halberds within in advanced stages of decay with the handles long gone and their blades brown, formless lumps. Upon an ancient, worm-eaten table, tarnished silverware and a tankard, strewn about as if someone was interrupted in the middle of a meal. In a corner, a number of footlockers which have managed to weather the years.

Arrow slits in the walls would have once looked out upon the advance to the fortress, perhaps, but buried as they are beneath so much cold soil and dirt, the only thing they now look out upon is a cold death.

The only exit is out west to the corridor.

[Silverware][Footlockers][West]

10.

This section of the ramparts proper would have once looked over the entrance to the fortress; now, it is cold and buried. A number of grated windows are set into the wall, their shutters fallen off, the grates rusted and corroded; slits for archers to fire through lie interspersed between the windows, now rendered useless beneath the lightless earth. A number of cauldrons sit in holders, and sluices open out onto just directly over the gates; ah, the wonders of boiling oil.

No doubt this was once the center of bustling activity; now, it lies abandoned. Did the defenders panic when the fortress was buried? Did they stoically accept their fate? Did they keep hope until the last breath of air, or prefer suicide to such an ignoble death?

Perhaps there will be answers for you. Perhaps not.

The ramparts stretch away to the north and west.

[North][West]

11.

This section of the ramparts appears to be a small break area where those on guard could catch a breather and refresh themselves. Small heaps of dust lie where furniture might have once stood, and a large stone basin and accompanying fountain have been set into a wall. Bits of old earthenware lie smashed on the ground, remnants of mugs and small plates, dropped in haste.

The walls are decorated with old swords and shields — now corroded into oblivion, of course, but they look as if they were likely to be functional in their day. To the south, a set of stairs stretch out up and away into yet a third floor of the fortress — they look appropriately ominous and foreboding.

The corridor stretches out to the east and west, but there are always the stairs to consider...

[East][West][South]

12.

The southeastern corner of the ramparts is large and spacious, and the reason for such becomes readily apparent: the remains of two large ballistae lie in ruins and rot across the flagstones. There're some barred gates to the south which would presumably have let them out into the open where they could have been used, but it seems like the lupines never managed to get them into action before they were buried alive.

Now, the gates are hopelessly crushed, having buckled inwards from the sheer weight of cold earth and stone, and the siege engines will never see the light of day. The metal head of a massive harpoon lies in the rubble, perhaps a desperate attempt by the wolves to pierce their way through to freedom, but their efforts did not avail them.

There's nothing else of interest in this corner of the ramparts, and you doubt any surprises are going to happen upon you if you wait here — pleasant ones, at any rate. You could leave in either a westerly or northerly direction.

[West][North]

13.

The top of the stairs, at last. This tower — at least, it feels like a tower, with all the stone steps you've just climbed — makes up the third floor of Fort Marrok. This landing might have been carpeted once — a change from the bare stone that floors the entire fortress — but if not, there's one now.

The air up here is especially stale — not surprising, considering all the dust on the floor — and the landing is quite featureless save for two stone fountains at the base of either wall. By some miracle, these fountains are still working; although the flow of water over so many years has eroded away at the basins, it nevertheless still gushes freely, adding a faint gurgle and rush to the sepulchral silence of these halls.

Ahead of you to the south lies a large set of double doors, massive ironbound things with their wood more petrified than rotted. One of the duo has set in place thanks to its rusted hinges, but the other has given way some time over the years and has collapsed onto the floor, lending you a view into the darkness beyond, in which something — no, *someone* shifts and stirs.

[party.has cait]

"This is it," Cait murmurs behind you. *"That presence..."*

]

You are now faced with a choice: south and ahead into the darkness, or retreat north down the stairs.

[South][North][Fountain]

14.

(No description necessary. Encounter triggers upon entering, and PC leaves upon finishing encounter.)

Events by Room

Floor 1

1.

[Leave]

//Getting cold feet already?

You look at the fort, then at River. If you wanted to get out of here before getting what you came here for, then you *<i>could</i>*; there's a fine line between courage and stupidity, and it's not going to do anyone good if you throw your life away. Garth'll understand. Probably. Maybe. Hopefully.

Well. One way or the other, do you want to tell River your intentions pack up and book it out of here?

****If you leave, you will fail the quest.****

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//You've had enough of this place. Time to get out and call it quits.

You've had enough of this place. Like it or not, Garth is going to have to do without his shiny trinket this time — even your strength has limits, and you're not going to expend it all in some fool quest. You might owe Garth, but [pc.isDK]you're not exactly willing to die for him just yet.[you don't think your strength is capable of holding out for that long.]

<i>"Giving up?"*</i>* River looks up from his composition and turns one of his large ears in your direction. *<i>*"No shame in admitting that something's beyond you."*</i>*

Yeah, you're giving up. There's a fine line between determination and stupidity, after all, and you know exactly when you've crossed it.

<i>"Let's head back, then. I'd like to get out of the cold and get something hot in my stomach."*</i>*

His poncho wrapped tightly about him, River hops in front of you and begins the long trek home, away from the fortress and back towards Hawkethorne. The trip back is even more

tiring than when you came — and unsurprisingly so — but eventually the two of you make it in sight of the village gates.

[party.has garret

|<i>"Well, it's been fun,"</i> Garret mumbles, although you can tell he's more than a bit disappointed in how all this turned out. <i>"Guess it's the end of the line for me, though — I've got to make good my alibi on where I've been all this while. Don't want my old man to start smelling more of a rat than he already does."</i>

[party.has brint

|<i>"Hey, it was worth it just to see you fight,"</i> Brint says. <i>"Till next time, Dogmeat."</i>

<i>"Till next time, Beef."</i> The two bump their fists together and give each other weak grins.

]

All right, then. You'll be seeing him at the Frost Hound sometime, okay?

<i>"Yeah..."</i> Garret scratches his head sheepishly, as if unsure what to say.

<i>"Thanks for thinking of me and asking me out on this trip, okay? It means a lot to me."</i>

Before you can reply, he's disappeared into the trees and shadows.

]

Garth isn't going to be pleased about this development, is he?

<i>"No, he isn't,"</i> River replies with a wave of his hand. <i>"But he's a big boy now — he'll get over it. We can't always get what we want, after all."</i>

You stare down at the little kitten bard. Did he just refer to Garth as a "big boy"?

<i>"Slip of the tongue, don't mind me. I'm just — I mean, I guess I'll be using what verse I've cooked up for the next group of glory-seekers Garth decides to throw at the place. Come on, then, let's head on back to the Frost Hound. I'll sing something to lift your spirits."</i>

//Update quest: **Shades of the Past:** You've voluntarily beat a hasty retreat from the old fortress after realising you've gotten in over your head. Nothing left but to go back to Garth and hang your head in shame.

//Remove Garret from party, if applicable.

//Remove all Fort Marrok key items from inventory.

[No]

//Not just yet. You're not ready to give up right now.

Yeeah. If looks could kill, then the look of disapproval you can practically envision Garth giving you when you return empty-handed would be enough to put you six feet under and then some. Given the choice of that and being choked to death by vengeful spirits in a haunted ruin, you think you'll go for the latter.

Breaking your gaze away from River, you turn back to the entrance and do your best to steel yourself into heading on back in.

3.

[Bookcase]

//Examine the bookcase in more detail.

You step on up to the bookcase and pore over its contents. Its construction is a simple affair of wood and nails, but there's been some kind of preservation technique at work here in the runes running along its side, keeping it and the books within intact over the years. The shelf is dedicated to holding a number of logs, and judging by the wildly varying handwriting between the tomes, there've been a goodly number of authors who've once taken up residence in this tiny room.

Would you like to take a moment to examine the writings held within? The covers are all dusty and the pages dry and crinkly, but it doesn't feel like the books are going to fall apart in your hands.

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

Pulling a number of logs out from the bookcase, you flip them open and brush away the worst of the dust from pages and covers alike. The ink is faded and it's hard to make out the spidery writing in places, but a good number of entries are still legible.

...

Porridge again today, thick gruel of wheat and oats, with a little salt and a few sprigs of herbs to taste. I preferred it when there were a few slivers of mushrooms, too, to add that earthy edge to it, but that stopped ever since the incident a season ago. More's the pity.

They don't like it, of course. Say it's elf food, that lupines like us deserve fresh vegetables and rich meats. They also say that it rots the teeth and innards, and I'm inclined to agree. Nevertheless, I see why the jarl mandates it three times a week; it makes good use of our dried provisions in the most inoffensive manner and most importantly, it sticks to the ribs and keeps out the cold. I don't mind it so much, but you do have to be a little odd to be named gatekeeper. It's a unique position.

My only complaint is that the kitchens don't wash the kettles well enough each time they boil up the porridge... I'm tired of finding ashes in my food.

...

The jarl's family came to see him today, the first time since the pack delegations returned from Khor'minos. That the garrison does not approve of his witch of a wife is an understatement — almost everyone is making signs of the Seven behind her back. She may be a white witch, but magic doesn't belong in a place like this. The jarl's son, but a pup, wants to fight at his father's side in the battles to come. His father is not enamored of him; he thinks the child is too enthralled with the sword and not enough with statesmanship. That the child has bested many of his peers in tournaments and challenges means little on the battlefield or when settling a feud. He has charisma, but is too hare-brained to make use of it; the daughter is by far a more balanced and suited for her father's position.

...

Portcullis needed fixing again today. Nothing actually broken with it, but I slept by day and woke in the night to carry out the inspections. The chains are wearing out; not dangerously so, but enough that I'll have to commission replacements sometime. Oiled things which needed oiling, smoothed over things which needed smoothing down.

Too late to sleep, too early to rise, so I'm standing here on the ramparts and staring out into the darkness, writing this while I wait for the dawn. The patrols are passing me by, but they don't see me.

This is okay. I'm fine with the situation as it's unfolding.

...

Aedyrn has invented yet another new game to play on weekly sausage stew nights. Anyone who loses his or her bread in the stew gets five strokes of the stick, right then and there. As is with all the games played over sausage stew, they really get into it. Even the ones getting the stick joins in everyone else in laughing at their own misfortune; it's not as if they're being paddled very hard, after all. Just enough to sting.

They're all seated at the tables now, just waiting for the huge, slopping cauldrons to be brought in from the kitchens. Unfortunately, I have to watch the gate.

Nevertheless, I hear them slamming their knives and forks on the tables, chanting, asking why they're being kept waiting. Cooking for all of them is a task worthy of the greatest hero, that's for sure. As for me... well, I'll probably end up with a cold bowl of the stuff myself delivered up here.

...

So, we've word of a wraith advance. Everyone's excited to be able to face a new foe and meet them in battle. Me, I have a bad feeling about this. The wraiths are known to wield witchcraft of the kind that's practiced by the elves, the kind that involves incantations and hexes and whatnot. It's not the magic our own seers and shamans or even those of the orcs wield, nothing as benign.

I get the feeling that they're not taking this seriously, that this is another game to them. The jarl himself is dead serious and everyone pretends to be when he's around, but none of the folk here went out with him to Khor'minos and the coast. Bad things happened there, but better them than us.

... Gods forbid, they're still fighting each other up in the training halls over who gets to wear the Helm of Heroes during the big fight. I can hear them clashing and yelping all the way down here, and it's pissing me off; I need some peace and quiet. Once I'm done with this, I'll go up and put an end to this silliness. Only Magna is any kind of threat, and if anyone deserves to wear the helm in battle's press, it's the jarl's niece.

Gunvaldsen is right. We can't treat this as if we were going out to stick up another handful of no-names for their loot and a bit of breeding. These are dangerous, unknown enemies. We have to be careful.

Well, that's that. Time to go up and teach those pups the strength of age and experience.

...

And that's it. The hair on the back of your neck rises, and you quickly put back the books in their proper place. Reading more probably isn't going to help your cause here — and the further you linger, the more time in which something untoward could happen to you here.

[No]

Hmm, maybe not now. You don't really have time to do any reading in a place where angry ghosts are literally coming out of the walls, do you? Who knows what they might get up to when your attention is otherwise occupied... best to leave the histories to River, he'll sort things out.

//Converge choice

//Return to room menu

[Plaque]

//Examine the plaque.

You brush off some of the dust with your fingertips and study the carved writing on the corroded old steel plaque. Engraved upon the metal is an arch formed from what looks like intertwining branches and antlers, and on either side of it a figure, the left one barely recognizable as a bull, the other a wolf.

<i>And after Velun had erected the gate, he found it satisfactory. Yet there was one more thing to be done.

"Who shall guard my gate?" he asked of those assembled. "Who shall watch the portal that you have asked of me?"

"The shield will do so during the day," the bull replied. "We will gladly greet those who may pass through the portal, and cast out those who try to sneak by."

"The sword will do so during the night," the wolf replied. "We will repel those who try to force their way through by way of arms, and hound them back into the darkness from whence they came."

Velun heard their replies, and was pleased.</i>

Huh. Well, if there's anywhere a tale about gatekeepers should be, it's in a gatekeeper's room. You turn your attention to the plaque and back to the situation at hand.

//Return to room menu

4.

[Key]

//Grab the keyring from the hook.

//This option is only displayed if the ramparts key has not yet been taken.

Stepping up to the hook, you grab the large keyring off it and hold it up triumphantly. It's solid and heavy enough for your liking, and as an additional bonus, no ghostly horrors or deadly traps accost you when you do so.

I mean, seriously. What kind of idiot would put traps in a crowded garrison barracks? You'd have an accident before the day is out.

Either way, you now have a key to... well, somewhere. With such a big key, it's probably going to fit an equally large and imposing lock. Now, where would you find one of those?

5.

[Serve] — The ghosts appear to be waiting for dinner...

//Display only if the PC has taken either the pot, the kettle, or the cauldron from the kitchens.

As your eyes roam about the great hall, your gaze falls once more upon the dais in the middle of the room. It's quite strategically positioned to be equally distant from each longtable — no doubt in anticipation of the lines that will surely form once chow arrives.

And judging by the looks of the ghosts, they're going to be lining up very soon, chow or no chow. Considering how long they must've been trapped like this, waiting for the kitchens to be done, you can understand why.

Since you have a [potkettlecauldron] from the kitchens on you, do you want to offer it up to the hungry ghosts?

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//What's the worst that could happen?

Well, nothing for it. You can feel every ghostly eye in the hall land squarely on the back of your neck as you step forward past the longtables and towards the dais, [potkettlecauldron] in hand. The ghosts may not be material, but you can swear you hear them tapping their feet as you get ever so closer to your destination.

Or maybe it's just your nerves playing tricks on you. It's hard to tell with these things.

{//pot:

<i>"What've you got there, [pc.ra lupine][pc.mf|brother|sister][serf]? Have the kitchens finally finished their gods-to-be-damned work and finally decided to serve up their offerings?"</i>

Suddenly, the pot in your hands seems far, far heavier than it has any right to be. You feel numerous ghostly gazes moving from you to the pot, then back again in quick succession.

<i>"Is this some kind of joke?"</i> another of the ghostly lupines growls.

Um, no? It's what you picked up in the kitchens.

<i>"It's still a joke. Maybe it's not your joke, [pc.ra lupine][pc.mf|brother|sister][serf], but it's someone's joke, and I'm not finding it very funny."</i>

Um...

<i>"This thing can hold barely enough for two, and yet you expect this to be enough for all of us?"</i>

Look, look, you were only doing as you were asked to do; you're sure there'll be more along shortly -

Another growl, this time on the other end of the room. <i>"The jarl will hear of this. The kitchens have already played one trick too many — first the snails in the soup,

and now such foolery... do they expect us to fight the coming wraiths and their armies on an empty stomach?"</i>

No, no, of course not. Look, you'll just nip back to the kitchens and see if they can't come up with anything more substantial, okay?

<i>"And take that thing back with you, [pc.ra lupine|[pc.mf|brother|sister]]serf]; just having it here is an insult. Seriously, what do they think we eat like, to bring up a tiny pot for the whole garrison? Elves?"</i>

As you slink off into the darkness of the corridor, pot in hand, you reflect on the fact that what you just did was probably not amongst the best decisions you've made to date. At least you got off lightly; given the massed ghosts' sour mood, things might have been much, much worse.

//move to floor 1, room 6

//kettle:

As you pass by the longtables on the way to the dais, one of the ghosts raises her muzzle to the air and sniffs.

<i>"Is that porridge I smell? Tell me, [pc.ra lupine|[pc.mf|brother|sister]]serf], is that porridge within the kettle you carry, the kettle which had my hopes up?"</i>

Um... you look into the empty, dusty kettle. If there was ever any porridge in it, it's long since passed. Ghost food might be appropriate for sating ghosts' hunger, but it does nothing for identification to your mundane eye.

Maybe?

A look of incredulity, as pure as one can get from a translucent face and empty eyes burning with ghostly flame. <i>"MAYBE? [pc.ra lupine|[pc.mf|brother|sister]]serf], it's porridge or it isn't. Which is it?"</i>

<i>"It's porridge all right,"</i> another of the ghosts growls. <i>"I recognize the kettle. It's the damned fucking porridge again."</i>

<i>"You can't be serious. It's not even porridge night and we're being served up this... oat... glop stuff already? This is elf food! Last time I checked, the jarl was imposing rations in three days' time, not now!"</i>

<i>"And have you ever tried putting porridge on bread? That stuff's not made to be eaten, it's made to be boiled and dumped on our enemies! Works better than oil, I'm told!"</i>

Uh-oh. The ghosts drum their cutlery with increased fervor, and some of them look about ready to get up.

<i>"Serve the jarl, they said. At least you won't go hungry, they said."</i>

Uh, look, you're pretty sure there must've been some kind of mistake, and that the porridge was supposed to go somewhere else. Not to the great hall, at any rate. It's not porridge night, like they mentioned, so there must've been something amiss, yes?

More than fifteen pairs of eyes narrow at you, all at once.

<i>"That would be for the best, [pc.ra lupine][pc.mf|brother|sister][serf]. And maybe when we've actually had something to fill our bellies, maybe we'll go over to the kitchens personally and let them know what we think of their jokes."</i>

Oh, of course, of course. You take a quick step back, the kettle a leaden weight in your hands, then hurry back out into the corridor as quickly as you can. That could have gone far more poorly than it did... but how were you to know they didn't like porridge, or that it was served in kettles?

//move to floor 1, room 6

//cauldron:

Struggling with the cast-iron cauldron — not so much because of its weight, as opposed to its sheer size — you wobble your way over to the dais and plonk it down, over twenty pairs of eyes following you every step of the way.

<i>"Have a care, [pc.ra lupine][pc.mf|brother|sister][serf],"</i> one of the ghosts calls out. <i>"That stuff is precious."</i>

<i>"Aye, precious,"</i> another cuts in. <i>"So precious that we've been waiting for it all week."</i>

They've been waiting for it a much longer time than that, but there's no need to try and disabuse the ghosts of their fancies. Slowly, the ghosts in the hall stand up from the longtables and your heart misses a beat, but soon calms down as you realize they aren't threatening — but rather, more excited than anything. About half of them have knives, the others have short swords in hand, and you hurriedly step back from the cauldron as they form an orderly line that stretches away from it.

One of the ghosts sticks his muzzle right above the cauldron and takes a long, deep whiff, scenting some long-gone feast that you can't see. <i>"Now this smells good. Something that hasn't been pickled, salted, dried, cured, or smoked."</i>

<i>"Fresh meat and vegetables, gods be praised. This is probably going to be the last time we'll be tasting them before we put away the wraiths and their toadies."</i>

<i>"Won't be long, then. From what everyone who went to the coast said, they can't fight a proper battle head-on; they only forced a rout with trickery and witchcraft. We'll show them when it means to fight on our turf!"</i>

A loud cheer ripples through the hall, and when you look back to the cauldron, it's full of steaming stew, every bit as translucent and spectral and ghostly as the furniture and people in the hall. As you watch, the first lupine in line steps up to the cauldron, spears a bit of bread on the point of his sword, then chuckles and raises the morsel up high.

<i>"To victory, brothers and sisters! To victory!"</i>

The chant is soon taken up by the entire garrison, and you quietly back away as each lupine similarly dips their bread in the thick, steaming stuff.

[pc.ra lupine

|<i>"Come now, [pc.mf|brother|sister]!"</i> one of the lupines cries out, hailing you with an outstretched hand and stepping forward, spectral cloak swishing behind him. <i>"Won't you join us? You do deserve the credit for finally bringing up the feast, after all — shall you not share in the bounty too? We don't know when the jarl will take us off rations, so this'll be the last time in a while we can truly revel."</i>

You do, you really want to, but the kitchens are going to miss you if you're away for too long. No one wants to be caught slacking, right?

<i>"Psh!"</i> The ghost claps you on the shoulder, chilling you to the bone and sending your teeth chattering, although you do your best to turn it into an appropriately wolfish grin. <i>"You know full well that we're allowed to do what we want, so long as there isn't anything else to fill our time — the jarl's a fair man like that! Harsh, but fair! Screw the slave drivers in the kitchens — everyone's warranted a bit of fun now and then!"</i>

Oh, right, right. You just... need to make some deliveries for those who can't be present tonight, and then you'll be right back. Please, there's no need to wait on you.

<i>"There's no need to be a sodden coat. We'll be waiting for your return!"</i>

]

Wasting no more time, you beat a quick retreat into the shadowy eaves of the hall, waiting for the massed ghosts to forget about you as they lose themselves in their revelry. It's quite the... unique scene, all of the specters dipping bread in the stew like some kind of fondue. All of a sudden, one of their number pokes her head over the cauldron and whines — not sadly, but rather... in anticipation?

<i>"Oh no! I've lost my bread in the stew!"</i>

Almost immediately, all the garrison troops in the hall raise their fists, cheering and chanting:

<i>"The stick! The stick!"</i>

As a large wooden paddle makes its appearance from thin air and a couple of revelers start fighting over it, you guess that this is your cue to go. These are a robust people, perhaps, but perhaps a little too exuberant for you. Besides, there's still work to be done.

//set ghosts as appeased

}

//end encounter

[No]

//Not just yet.

Having second thoughts about what you were contemplating doing, you turn back and reconsider your options. Maybe you wanted to head back to the kitchen and get something different, maybe you don't think this was the best of ideas after all, or maybe you're not prepared for what might happen once the assembled ghosts are finally served their centuries-overdue dinner.

One thing's for sure: you're not ready to ring the dinner bell. Yet, anyway.

Slowly, you slink back into the shadows of the hall's eaves and contemplate your next move.

//end encounter

[West]

{//if ghosts appeased:

With the spectral garrison busy with the demanding task of revelry, none of the ghosts pay you any mind as you slip past them, keeping to the shadows as you hug the walls of the great hall on your way to the other end. The sounds of cutlery and laughter fill the hall as you sneak through it, strangely distant although the scene is right in front of you...

[party.hascompanions

|They're so caught up that they don't even notice your little entourage tailing along behind you, so if you wander past... well, that's their own fault.

]

//Move to floor 1, room 4 no problems.

//else if pc race is lupine and presence > 50%:

Right. If you're quiet enough, maybe you can sneak by the hall's occupants unnoticed. They may be ghosts, but they were people once, and there's nothing to suggest that they've any extraordinary senses of sight even as the restless dead.

Taking a deep breath to calm your nerves, you step back and hug the wall, trying to keep to the shadows as you edge across the great hall.

<i>"Stop, [pc.mf]brother[sister]!"</i> one of the ghosts calls out, and your spine freezes. There's no doubt about it — the words are directed squarely at you.

Yes?

<i>"Stand up straight, there's no need to go slinking about like that. Use the spine that your mother gave you! Don't let it go to waste!"</i>

This sentiment is echoed by all the other soldiers in the hall, resulting in a mess of cheering, whistling, and banging of tankards on tabletops.

Right, right. Stomach in, chest out, back straight. There, that should be better, right?

<i>"**Now** you're looking like a soldier, [brothersister]! Keep your head high and your feet planted firmly on the ground!"</i> The ghost taps his muzzle a moment, then grins. <i>"And if you're heading down by the kitchens, let them know we're starving up here, all right? Can't fight wraiths on an empty stomach. We've been waiting for goodness knows how long for dinner to come..."</i>

Yeah, you've got to agree with that. They've been waiting a long time indeed.

<i>"...And it's sausage stew night, too."</i>

Sure, you'll let the kitchens know if you happen to pass by them. In the meantime, you forgot to get something, so if they don't mind...

The troops chuckle and guffaw at some joke you don't understand, but turn their attention back to each other, clearly having registered you as harmless in their minds. You have no problem passing them by and making it to the far archway[party.hascompanions], and they're so caught up that they don't even notice your little entourage tailing along behind you, so if you wander past... well, that's their own fault].

Now, time to see what lies ahead...

//move to floor 1, room 4.

#else

As you move in the direction of the western archway on the other end of the room, you feel the gazes of the massed ghosts in the hall directly on the patch of darkness you're trying to use to slip by them. Judging by the expressions on the specters' faces, they're clearly on edge, and don't seem too happy about being made to wait an eternity for their dinner — further provocation on your part probably isn't going to help your case.

Do you still press ahead, nonetheless?

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//Try and sneak past them anyway. This is almost certainly a Very Bad Idea.

It's just your nerves, you tell yourself. They haven't spotted you; it's just your imagination playing tricks on your mind, there's no need to be so bloody craven. Still, you flatten yourself against the wall a little more, tread a little more lightly...

...Which has absolutely no effect. One of the lupines at the table raises her muzzle, sniffs the air, then lets out a wordless bark as she rises from her seat and points squarely in your direction. Every specter in the room turns to follow her gaze, and you swallow hard as each and every one of the ghosts in the hall draw their weapons and make a beeline for you, clearly intent on venting their frustrations on this interloper.

[party.has arona

|<i>"Shit. Shit. Gods-be-thrice-damned SHIT!"</i> Arona's face has turned an interesting shade of pale green as she stares at the advancing ghosts, gripping her [arona.weapon] so tightly her knuckles are the same shade of colour. <i>"Can't you just fucking stay dead?!"</i>

]

[party.has garret]

Beside you, you hear Garret take a deep breath and crack his knuckles.
<i>"Fan-tas-tic. Okay, lads. They're on our right, they're on our left, they're in front of us, they're behind us. They're not getting away this time."</i>
[party.has arona]

<i>"Shut the fuck up before I beat your head in too, pup,"</i> Arona snarls.

]

]

You're fighting the entire mess hall; the only saving grace you have is that pressed up against the wall as you are, only so many of them can fight you at once.[silly] Have fun!]

//begin mess hall encounter. As stated above, 16 enemies total in groups of 4 without a chance to rest in between. If the PC is level appropriate, they ought to wipe.

//Use the below if the player actually manages to defeat the entire mess hall, at the end of combat.

Lungs heaving, you slump against a wall and catch your breath. You're not exactly sure how, but you've managed to defeat every last ghost in the great hall. Given the circumstances of their death, you almost certainly haven't laid them to rest for good, but at least they're banished for the moment and won't be troubling you for a bit.

You have to be honest with yourself: if they'd managed to swarm you, you'd probably have managed to snuff it regardless.

But done it you have, and done it is. As you watch, even the longtables and furniture are fading away, dissipating into the ether where they came from now that their owners are gone. They'll be back eventually, but you're in the clear for now.

[party.has cait

|Cait has found a corner and curled up into a little ball, the usually bubbly catgirl shuddering with her tail tucked about herself as she hugs her knees. You go over, pat her on the shoulder, and ask if she's fine.

<i>"I-I'm all right. I just need... some time to gather myself."</i>

]

One way or the other, taking a moment to recover would be ideal.

//set ghosts defeated

//end encounter.

[No]

//Back off. You're not risking taking on the entire garrison at once.

Feeling the weight of so many ghostly gazes trained on you, it seems like a good idea to back down, and you do so hurriedly. You don't have <i>that</i> much confidence in your abilities to take them on all at once.

There has to be some way to appease the restless spirits, though... maybe you should explore the rest of the fortress before returning.

}

9.

[East]

{//if door opened

With the door dealt with, there's nothing remaining to bar your path forward. You step through the open doorway, and are soon in the stairwell.

//move to floor 1, room 10.

//else

You would have gone forward, but unlike the ghosts, you aren't incorporeal and merrily go on to walk face-first into the heavy ironbound door. Ouch! That was probably not the smartest thing to do, but then if you were really smart you wouldn't be here in the first place, would you?

Either way, you'll have to deal with this door in order to head on into the stairwell beyond. The question is: how do you intend to go about it?

//end encounter

}

[Door]

//You'll have to do something about this if you want to get to the stairwell beyond.

//Only display if door is not open.

You step up to the door and consider it. Huge, reinforced, ironbound, titanic, any number of similar words would easily suffice to describe the thing that lies in front of you. Centuries of age have served to weather it down, but it still stands resolute in the face of the inevitable, putting it off as long as it can — long enough to bar your way, at the very least.

This thing looks like it'll be a monster to defeat in its own right; it certainly looks like it was placed here to hold off any invaders who might have made their way this far and buy time for those on the upper floors to prepare.

So... what now?

[Lock][Bash][Blast][Leave]

[Lock]

//See what you can do about that lock.

//if ramparts key obtained

Big lock. Big key. You look back and forth between the door and the key you pinched from the garrison barracks, and slide the latter into the former.

Click. A perfect fit. The mechanism grinds with effort, and for a moment you're worried that the key will break off in the lock, but the bars and bolts slide open and there's a click that rings down the hallway. Finally — you press your hands against the door, and give it a shove.

It still doesn't budge.

Oh, right. The hinges — they're rusted into oblivion and won't move. You didn't come this far to be stopped by a pair of rusty old hinges — gritting your teeth, you grip the handle and put your back into a mighty yank. The hinges groan and grind — oh, for some oil when you need it! — but by and large, the door shifts aside, allowing you entrance to the stairwell beyond.

Phew. You step back, take a deep breath, the air chilling your lungs, and let it out slowly. All right, time to move on and see what's ahead. If the fortress' second floor is anything like the first, you'll want to be ready for it.

//set door open
//end encounter.

//else

The lock is a massive thing, sturdy and reinforced like the rest of the door, and actually built into it as opposed to just being set into the door's material. There's not a single bit of give that you can work with, and the advanced state of deterioration it's in can have only made things worse.

[party.has etheryn

|Remembering Etheryn beside you, you ask the elf if anything can be done about the lock. She steps up, pokes and prods at it for a minute or so, then shakes her head.

<i>"I don't know what to make of this."</i>

Whatever does she mean, 'she doesn't know what to make of this'? Didn't spend twenty years straight trying to pick the lock on her cage?

<i>"This thing's centuries old, and it looks like it's of minotaur make. Even if it weren't, I'd need to examine it in more detail. Give me, say, a day, and I might be able to see what I can do about it."</i>

A day? You don't have that long when ghosts are literally coming out of the walls at you!

Etheryn folds her arms. <i>"Then I guess we'll have to find the key."</i>

]

Yep, looks like you'll have to find the key for this one if you don't want to force it open.

//end encounter

}

[Bash]

//The door might be mighty, but it's weathered with age. Since you're a warrior, you might have a chance?

//Only display if warrior.

//Check for the possible following companions: Arona, Brint, and Garret in this order. Pick in that order to fill in [bashcompanion1] and [bashcompanion2]

{//if two companions:

[bashcompanion1] and [bashcompanion2] listen intently as you outline your plan. All the three of you need to do, really, is to coordinate your movements and hit the door all at once; with so much muscle behind the three of you, the rotting old thing won't have a chance.

[bashcompanion1] takes a moment to examine the door as you're speaking, and turns to [bashcompanion2] with a brisk nod. <i>"I think [pc.name's] right. It'd be a different story if it were in good shape, but as it is right now..."</i>

<i>"Fine, fine. Let's get this over with."</i>

So, what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object? Guess there's only one way to find out! The three of you take several steps back down the hallway, leaving plenty of space to get a good running start. Pounding footsteps echo in the ancient hallways as you all break into a maddened bull rush, charging forward and slamming the door with your combined strength —

It works. With a scream of tarnished metal and shower of splinters, the massive reinforced door is torn clean off its hinges, breaking in half as the three of you explode into the stairwell. You barely have enough time to set yourselves right, though, for the noise has attracted a fair number of ghosts, all of whom look furious at the desecration of their tomb.

[party.has garret]

<i>"Out of the frying pan and into the fire,"</i> Garret mutters as he brushes dust and splinters out of his fur, readying himself as the apparitions advance. <i>"It's only going to get better from here on out, isn't it?"</i>

[party.has brint]

Brint hefts his [brint.weapon]. <i>"You and me both, Dogmeat. Let's make this a good one."</i>

]

]

//set door open

//end encounter.

//start combat with two consecutive random groups of 4 ghosts.

//else if one companion:

You quickly lay out your plan to [bashcompanion1]. All you need to do is to get some distance, build up some momentum, and hit the door together at the same time. Sure, the door itself may be reinforced, but considering how old and far gone the hinges are, they shouldn't hold if you hit it in the right spot.

[bashcompanion1] considers you a moment before giving a reluctant nod. <i>"All right, I'll give it a go."</i>

You take a few steps back, enough to give you some distance to build up speed, then aim your shoulder forward and charge straight for the door in a mighty bull rush, [bashcompanion1] by your side. A split second flashes by as the both of you close the distance, and then a powerful, solid feeling as you come into contact with the door.

[pc.strengthRange 70

|It works — kinda. The door groans and buckles inward, yet still doesn't give. While your shoulder smarts from the beating it just took, the progress is more than a little encouraging, and you step back for another go.

<i>"It's giving!"</i> [bashcompanion1] exclaims in between gasps. <i>"Let's make this one good!"</i>

Together, you hurtle yourselves at the damaged door, bracing yourselves for the impact you know will come. This time, it gives way with a mighty crash, breaking under the brunt of your assault and falling to the floor, ripped clean off its hinges. The lock's deadbolt comes tearing out of the wood with a groan, and everything comes crashing to the floor in a glorious show of force.

Ha-HA! Take that, architecture!

Unfortunately for you, the noise that you've produced in this endeavor has created quite attracted quite a bit of attention. Not the good kind, of course — you both have barely enough time to recover and ready yourselves as restless lupine ghosts claw their way out of the walls, looking pretty pissed off at your act of vandalism.

```
//set door open
//end encounter.
//start combat with two consecutive random groups of 4 ghosts.
```

[The door creaks precipitously and you feel it give a little, but the ancient wood and metal hold fast against your massive bull rush. Still a little dazed from the impact, you rub your bruised shoulder and grumble. You almost had it there... maybe if you had one more person with you...

You win, door. This time. Next time, though...

[bashcompanion1] gives you an apologetic shrug. *"Hey, we did what we could. Maybe finding the key would be a better idea?"*

```
//end encounter
```

```
]
//else
```

Try as you might, one person simply isn't enough to break down this bulwark of a door, decayed as it might be. You throw yourself at it with a few times, but it doesn't give in the slightest; all you're rewarded with for your efforts is a bruised shoulder.

Ouch... well, at least now you know that this isn't going to be viable. Perhaps if you'd brought someone brutish with you, there *might* have been a chance, but it's too late for regrets now. You'll have to find some other way of getting the door open.

```
//end encounter.
```

```
}
```

[Blast]

```
//Maybe you can blow it apart with a bit of magic...
```

```
//Only display if pc's class is black or white mage.
```

Right. Why bother with keys and locks when you can just blast this stupid thing apart with a well-placed spell? Smiling, you gather power at your fingertips, feel the beginning of the spell begin to thrum in the air, and watch expectantly -

- As the runes on the doorframe flash green, and your magic dissipates into nothingness.

Oh.

Guess you're not getting in *that* way, then. What was it River said about the wolves being distrustful of what they considered witchcraft? Either way, you'll have to find some other way to break down the door... or the key.

```
//end encounter
```

[Leave]

//Turn back for now.

Resigned, you step back from the massive door and plan your next move. There must be *<i>some</i>* way to get past this barrier; you just have to find it. If the door was never meant to be opened from this side, there wouldn't even be keyhole, would there?

Yes, yes. There's got to be a way, you just have to look around and find it, that's all.

//end encounter.

14.

[Hearths]

//Might there be something of use here?

//[Olditem] and [Newitem] are dependent on what the player is already carrying and what they wish to pick up out of the pot, the kettle, or the cauldron.

You give the assorted crockery and cookware lying over the dead hearths a look-over. They look hefty — enough that you could only carry one at a time, but if there were some reason you wanted to take one of them along with you, that would be possible — unlike the others tacked up against the walls, they're not so heavily corroded to be fused to the masonry.

That being said, would you like to take one of them along with you? Who knows why you might want to do this, but the option remains.

[Pot][Kettle][Cauldron][Leave]

[Pot]

//Pick up one of the pots.

You pick up one of the pots hanging from the spits and give it a good look-over. It looks large enough to hold a watermelon comfortably, just the right size for one person to heft around comfortably in their arms. Perhaps there was once a lid to this thing, but you can't find it, and upending the pot spills out a couple handfuls of dust but nothing else. There's some tarnish on the side, too, but nothing that makes its appearance too shabby.

Well, is this what you want to take along with you?

[Yes][No]

[Kettle]

//Make off with one of the kettles.

You step over to one of the large kettles and examine it. It's a large, cylindrical thing, tall enough to reach your waist, and stands on a tripod over a long-dead fire pit. Two handles at its sides chafe uncomfortably at your fingers when you try to heft it off its stand, flakes of rust

breaking away under the strain, and it lifts away with an audibly pained groan. On the bottom, a crust of age-old rot sits over a burnt-out bottom — looks like this kettle was left to burn with its contents.

There's a hole in the kettle's side which might have once been a spout, but as of now it's just a jagged edge which you need to be careful of, lest you cut your fingers on it. You take a few experimental steps, swing the kettle about for a bit — it's heavy, but not too unwieldy that you can't set it down quickly in case something untoward happens.

Do you want to take the kettle with you?

[Yes][No]

[Cauldron]

//Lug away one of the cauldrons.

Cautiously, you draw close to one of the cast-iron cauldrons and peer over the edge. Whatever it used to hold has long since decayed into nothingness, leaving you with an ugly mess in the cauldron's recesses. Giving the handles a tug, then another, then a third, you finally manage to break the cauldron free of the firepit; it lifts up and away with a grisly tearing sound, leaving you holding a large, unwieldy burden.

Huh. Considering it comes up to your chest, you'd have expected it to be even heavier; good thing this is empty, or else you wouldn't be able to so much as move it. You can kinda sorta lift it in short bursts, but it's much easier to just roll the thing along the ground. If the restless dead bother you on the way... well, it's not like they're going to nick the cauldron while your back is turned or anything, so you should be able to set it aside and defend yourself.

Is the cauldron what you'd like to lug around with you?

[Yes][No]

[Leave] — You'd rather not pick up anything.

Looking at the assorted old cookware, you figure that you don't need any of this trash bogging you down. You're not that desperate that you need to steal plates and dishes — and you don't even have the excuse that you're some kind of archaeologist and these need to belong in a museum.

Turning your heel on the dusty old heaps of junk, you consider your next move.

//end encounter.

//Use these responses for all the looting options.

[Yes]

//Yes! This! This is what you want!

{//if the pc has already taken something:

Grimacing, you set down your [olditem] and send it away with a push. Sure, you could've just left it out in the halls instead of lugging it all the way back here, but you don't want to attract any attention than you already have and leaving large pieces of cookware out in the middle of the hallway is bound to raise some eyebrows.

Well, time to make do with a [newitem]. Let's just hope that this is the last time you have to return here and make a swap...

//lose old item, gain new item.

//else

Time to make off with the dishes like some crazed, kleptomaniacal thief! Before you know it, you'll be lugging around fifty pounds of brooms because you have to... ha ha, not really. But you probably have your own reasons for wanting this [newitem], right?

Now that you're getting used to its weight, the [newitem] is a bit hefty, but you can still move it around. Let's just hope you don't run into too much trouble in the interim before you find a use for this...

//gain new item

}

[No]

//Having second thoughts?

On second thought, maybe you don't actually <i>need</i> this [newitem].

{//if pc already possesses an old item

Besides, you already have a [olditem], right? Right? That should serve just fine, yes?

}Ugh, the [newitem] looks like it'd be a right pain to heft around, too...yeah, you should just leave it behind and be done with it.

//end encounter

Floor 2

1.

[Tournament]

//Watch the tournament a little more closely.

Unlike the other ghosts in the fortress, these ones don't seem to mind your presence, enraptured by the ongoing bouts in the makeshift ring. One after another, lupine soldiers enter, fight each other ferociously for the whole of five minutes, then leave laughing and

clapping each other on their furry backs. There don't seem to be any kind of established rules in these bouts, either — but that's what no-holds-barred means, doesn't it? Swords, spears, bare fists, claws and teeth, fighting clean, fighting dirty, everything goes in this rough-and-tumble tournament, and yet no one seems to think any worse of the other for it. Quite a difference from your stereotypical honorable duel, that's for sure.

The fighting goes on for a few more rounds as you watch on, and you begin to wonder if there's ever going to be an end to this tournament, or if the ghosts are just trapped in the final moments of their lives — and if these were the final moments of these poor sops' lives as they waited to die from asphyxiation, then what wills they must have had, to make merry till the end.

Your musings are answered, though, when a tall lupine woman pushes the crowd aside and steps into the makeshift ring. Clearly, she's someone of importance, for the raucous cheering and yipping still as she looks around. Gracefully, she unclasps the fur-lined cloak from about her neck, folding it neatly in her hands, then undoes her leather cuirass and grins at the ensuing wolf whistles. Perhaps six and three quarters feet in height, the curvaceous amazonian wolfess basks in the adoration of the crowd, with all that she's wearing being a leather skirt and a strip of cloth that struggles to contain her huge bosom.

"Well, I'm here. A bit late thanks to my uncle demanding my attentions, but I'm finally here. I see you've been about this for quite some time — when do we get started?"

"Hey!" someone shouts from within the audience. *"You know full well that you're a shoo-in for the top of the heap, Magna. Without Malachai or your uncle about to give your tail a good whupping, no one's going to best you one-on-one."*

Upon hearing this, the wolfess just shrugs, her grin growing wider. *"All right, then. Let's make things a little more interesting **and** a little quicker, won't we? Why don't you come at me three, four at a time, and we'll see who comes out on top, eh? That should cut the chase quite a bit — Uncle says we should be saving our strength for fighting the wraiths, not each other."*

"But the Helm of Heroes —"

A dismissive wave of her hand. *"Yes, yes, I know, I know. You beat me, the winners get to fight it out amongst themselves as to who gets to wear the silly thing. You lot don't beat me, and I wear it into the fray, like always."*

"Like always," you hear one of the ghosts mutter from beside you.

"Well! Any takers?"

Magna's question is answered by a trio of overeager lupines who climb into the ring and rush her without so much as a care or thought. With a few easy twists and turns, she circles

around them, grabs the pups by their scruffs and cracks their skulls together in quick succession, then leaves them dazed and stumbling off the mats.

<i>"Okay, then!"</i> Magna cracks her knuckles. <i>"Who's up next?"</i>

Several other groups make the attempt to take down the wolfess, with as much success as the first. Her weapons of choice are her bare fists, and they're a blur as she punches, claws, and wrestles her way to the top of the heap, leading her defeated opponents off the mats in an almost motherly fashion. The farce goes on for perhaps twenty minutes in all, and Magna isn't so much as winded at the end of it all.

<i>"Who's next?"</i> she calls out to the crowd. <i>"Anyone still hasn't had a go?"</i>

[party.has arona

|<i>"Can't say I like ghosts much in general, but this one rubs me the right way."</i>
Arona is actually smiling, the first time you've seen her in good cheer since entering Fort Marrok. <i>"I don't know about you, but I'm of the mind that maybe we should take her up on her challenge."</i>

]

//MAJOR fork here if the player has brought Garret.

//Garret around

A whimper at your side draws your attention.

Garret?

His usual bravado gone, Garret is visibly cringing, ears flat against his head, eyes fixed upon the apparition in the ring. He takes a half-step back, as if to flee, and clenches and unclenches his hands several times.

<i>"I..."</i>

[party.has brint|<i>"What's wrong with you, Dogmeat? You look as if you've seen a ghost."</i>|Is something the matter?]

<i>"Nothing's wrong with me, but I..."</i> Garret steels himself, squaring his massive shoulders. <i>"I'm going to go up there, alone if need be. Don't try and stop me."</i>

[party.has brint

|Brint looks askance at you, his features creasing as he thinks. <i>"I don't know about this. On one hand, it's stupid dangerous. On the other, I get the feeling that this is something he needs to do, and alone at that..."</i>

[[party.has cait

|Cait swallows hard as she watches Garret push his way through the throng of ghosts towards the ring, elbowing and shoving as if he were in a marketplace

crowd. <i>"I... I'm not sure. This is something he needs to do alone, but it's so dangerous..."</i>

]

]

Given Garret's air of determination, there's no talking him out of this, but you could at least fight at his side. Will you do that?

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//You're not going to let a friend walk into danger by himself.

No, this is not going to happen. You're here for each other; letting Garret walk into this alone is madness. Besides, Garth would never forgive you if you let something happen to his idiot son.

<i>"I..."</i> Garret begins when you catch him by the arm, then his expression softens as he takes in your [pc.face].

He doesn't have to do this alone. You're here for him.

[party.has brint

|Brint takes Garret by his other arm. <i>"I'm here for you too, Dogmeat. Remember that, okay?"</i>

]

You don't know what's shaken Garret about all this, but whatever it is, he doesn't have to face it alone. He doesn't have to tell you what it is, you're sure that he'll do so when he feels he's ready.

<i>"...All right."</i>

Together, you make your way into the ring where Magna is waiting. The gigantic wolfess gives your little group a look, then grins and waves you forward.

<i>"New challengers! What a surprise!"</i>

Garret doesn't say anything, but takes a step forward and nods.

<i>"Well then, I shan't hold back, and neither should you! Here I come!"</i>

//start Magna encounter. Use the victory/loss blocks from when Garret is not around to account for player victory/loss.

[No]

//Let Garret be. This is clearly something he needs to do alone.

Your breath catches in your throat as you make the decision, but it has to be the right one. The way Garret is purposefully striding towards the ring, the set in his shoulders, the way his usually jovial demeanour has evaporated — there's more going on here than meets the eye. As you watch, Garret closes the last few steps to the ring, enters, and draws himself to his full height in front of the jarl's niece.

<i>"Oh my, aren't you a big one,"</i> Magna says with a chuckle as she looks up at Garret. <i>"Haven't seen you around before — you'd stand out no problem. New recruit?"</i>

Garret is silent. He looks left and right, hands clenching and unclenching; even from where you are, you can hear his teeth grinding, so silent is the training hall.

<i>"Who are you? Why do you look like my mother?"</i>

Silence. The living locks eyes with the dead.

And then Magna laughs, a huge belly laugh that sends her whole amazonian frame shaking. <i>"Ha! Ha! Your mother? She must be quite a woman; I'd like to meet her someday! I'm too young to be your mother, and even if I weren't, I haven't had any pups yet. As for who I am... they call me the dark terror in Jassira, the savage barbarian in the east..."</i>

<i>"Here, though, I'm just the jarl's niece. No fancy titles, I'm afraid. And you? It's polite to get someone's name before you pound him into the floor."</i>

<i>"I'm just a tavernkeeper's son."</i>

<i>"Pah, no need to put yourself down like that."</i> Magna throws her head back and spreads her arms in quite the melodramatic gesture. <i>"If you can beat me, you'll be someone. How about that? You're afraid, I can tell. You reek of it."</i>

Garret looks away and cracks his knuckles. <i>"Afraid? Of course I'm afraid. Would be stupid to not be afraid. But one of the last things my mom said to me was that courage isn't the absence of fear, but acting in spite of it."</i>

<i>"I'm liking your mom more and more. Time for talking's over, though — you look like you might actually put up a decent fight. Have at you!"</i>

With that, Magna lunges straight for Garret with inhuman speed, poised to plant a solid right hook on him. The spectral wolfess' maniacal grin widens as Garret sidesteps the blow and plants a fist into her chiseled abs, sparks flying from the silver studs on his cestus.

<i>"Oof! Guess I wasn't wrong. Looks like I won't have to hold back, then!"</i>

From there, the fight erupts into a flurry of blows and more than a couple of attempted grapples and holds. Everything's moving so quickly, the two of them are but a blur; after a minute or two of this, though, it's clear that Garret isn't about to hold his ground. In terms of raw physicality, the two are evenly matched, but Garret simply doesn't have the training and experience that Magna has. He manages to get in a few more gut punches, slipping by his spectral opponent's defenses, but Magna locks him in an underarm hold and keeping him in place for a powerful straight to his jaw. Garret staggers back, clutching his muzzle, and that's all the opening Magna needs to sweep his legs out from under him and send him down to the mats. There're a few tense moments as he struggles to rise, and then collapses back down in a small cloud of dust.

The massed lupines cheer, filling the training hall with howls and yips. They shut up well enough, though, when Magna shoots them a glare and crouches down besides Garret.

Garret groans. *"Mother, I am slain."*

"Oh, stop being so dramatic," Magna says as she reaches down and tries to lift Garret by the scruff of his neck. The poor bastard is too heavy for that, and she settles for grabbing him by the arm and hauling him to his feet. *"You know, pup, where have you been all my life? Your talent's being wasted — I can tell that all you've ever fought are angry drunks and rowdy farmhands. At least here at Fort Marrok you'll get the training you need to actually improve — if you don't challenge yourself, you'll never get anywhere. I'll let Uncle know he has an uncut gem amongst his latest batch of recruits."*

"Ugh..."

"It's odd that you called me Mother... do I really look that much like your old woman?"

"She'd be older now. Quite some years..." Garret staggers to the edge of the ring, and the ghosts part to let him pass. *"But... you remind me of her, my last memory..."*

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"No. She's not dead. Just... gone."

More silence. Somewhere behind them in the distance, a spectral lupine appears with a plumed, horned helm on a cushion, yelling for Magna to come back and claim her prize, but she ignores him and continues walking Garret back to you.

"If I had a son... I wouldn't mind too much if he turned out like you. I get it, I've only known you for a handful of minutes, but I think I can say as much with certainty."

Garret quirks up a corner of his muzzle. *"I think that's one of the nicest things anyone's ever said about me, living or dead."*

"Oh, I never got your name, tavernkeeper's son..."

<i>"It's Garret."</i>

<i>"I'll remember that."</i> Magna pushes Garret into your arms, and snaps around at attention. <i>"Okay, you lot! Uncle says fun's over and to get back to work, we've got wraiths and their beasties a-coming, and he wants you in shape, not all beaten up from biting each other. Come on, chop chop! You know what to do!"</i>

And they do indeed. The wolves quickly switch from rambunctious to orderly and disciplined, quickly falling into formation in preparation for drills and training. On your part, you get poor Garret back into some semblance of shape — he's still wobbly from the beating he took, but brushes you away after he's regained his bearings.

<i>"Don't worry about me. I just need to walk it off."</i>

Is he fine?

<i>"Not in the head, I think. But we should go on. There's nothing left for us here."</i>

[party.has brint

|<i>"You know, I'll admit I'm not the smartest. But even so, I think that our good old Dogmeat over there had one of those epiphany things."</i>

It's hard not to agree with that.

]

//end encounter.

//Garret NOT around

Hmm... "Helm of Heroes", eh? You wonder what sort of thing this prize might be... and if so, whether it would be worth trying to compete in this tournament yourself. It's no fight to the death, and the ghosts here are pretty friendly as opposed to the ones prowling the corridors... would it be worth your time to match your strength against the jarl's niece to win it for yourself?

[Yes][No]

[No]

//It's not worth it. You'll be content to watch.

Given how Magna handled all those people by herself, you doubt that you'd have much of a chance against her[party.som|], even with [companion1.name] helping you], even with [companion1.name] and [companion2.name] helping you]. She's fast as she is wiry, and besides, you have a mission here; you don't want to waste your strength unnecessarily on side pursuits like these.

<i>"Any more takers? No?"</i>

The training hall is silent as the massed lupines look amongst themselves, but there're no more who move to meet Magna's challenge.

<i>"Okie-dokie. I win, then. The prize, please."</i>

Fading into view, a ghostly lupine steps into the makeshift ring, a large, solid-looking helmet in between his hands. Without further ado, Magna steps up to him, plucks the helm from his hands with a little bow — it's one of those full-faced affairs, complete with a plume in the back and horns on its sides — and plonks it on her head.

<i>"We protect what we value,"</i> Magna intones solemnly to the crowd, her voice a little muffled by the helm. <i>"To shield one's crown is to acknowledge the treasure that one's mind is, both on and off the field of battle."</i>

You get the feeling that there's some kind of ceremony or ritual going on here that you're not quite privy to, but it's over as quickly as it begun as Magna removes the helmet and gives the lot a dismissive wave.

<i>"Okay, you lot! Uncle says fun's over and to get back to work, we've got wraiths and their beasties a-coming, and he wants you in shape, not all beaten up from biting each other. Come on, chop chop! You know what to do!"</i>

And they do indeed. The wolves quickly switch from rambunctious to orderly and disciplined, quickly falling into formation in preparation for drills and training. Guess this is your cue to get out of here before someone notices that you aren't joining in — trying to remain as inconspicuous as the living can in a room full of lingering dead, you back off away from the mass and make for the door. Nothing left to see here, as they say.

[party.has arona

|Arona looks a little pensive as you leave. <i>"Can't say I'm not disappointed with your decision, [pc.name]. But..."</i>

But you'll need all the strength you can get when facing down the jarl, instead of wasting it on something like this. She should know about pacing herself, after all.

A sigh. Is it your imagination, or does Arona sound relieved? <i>"Can't say you're wrong there. I just fucking hate ghosts."</i>

]

//end encounter.

[Yes] — Have a go at it. Who knows, you might actually win.

You know what? There're several very good reasons why you shouldn't get involved in this tomfoolery — not exhausting yourself being one of them, especially when you've yet to achieve your main objective — but hey, there's a prize to be had, and you'll get to say you had a bout with ghosts! Not everyone gets to make that kind of boast truthfully, right? Faint chills prickles against your [pc.skinFurScalesNoun] as you push through the spectral throng and step into the ring to face Magna; the wolffess dusts off her thick grey-black fur, and gives you a nod.

[pc.ra lupine

|<i>"Here to try your luck, [pc.mf|brother|sister]? [pc.som]||I see you brought someone with you, too.||I see you brought plenty of backup with you, too.] I don't suppose you were waiting for me to tire out before having a go at the helm yourself, were you?"</i>

Best for last, as they say. You were just waiting for her to get warmed up so you could have a good fight!

Magna smiles at you — or more accurately, shows you her teeth. <i>"All right, then, [pc.mf|brother|sister]. Let's see you put your muscle where your mouth is!"</i>

The wolves are still giving you ample space, but their bodies are pressed tightly together as they vie to spy on this new challenger, preventing you from escaping the ring. Magna cracks her knuckles, sniffs the air, then drops down into a fighting stance before lunging at you.

It's a fight!

|<i>"You're brave to step into this ring, [pc.race]. Others wouldn't even dream of doing so."</i>

You shrug, buying a little time while you cook up a plausible lie. Well, you'd heard that this pack of lupines were amongst the best in all of Savarra; when you mentioned this to the jarl, he told you to go to the training halls and see for yourself.

Magna grins and cracks her knuckles. <i>"Indeed. I'm between travels myself — the ancestral homeland needs us all in these times, and I answered Uncle's summons. If anything, getting about in the world taught me not to underestimate lowlanders."</i> She looks around to the rest of the assembled lupines, and gives them an easy shrug. <i>"A lesson the lot of you could take heed of. That's how they get you in the end, you know. Overconfidence."</i>

The lupines say nothing, but you feel the weight of a couple hundred intent gazes on the back of your neck, and surely there must be many more on Magna. Somehow, you get the idea that there's far more at stake here than the right to wear a helmet; if you're feeling pressured, Magna must be crushed.

<i>"Is the [pc.race] even allowed to do this?"</i> someone shouts from the crowd.
<i>"The Helm of Heroes is reserved for — "</i>

<i>"I invited any and all challengers forward. This one was brave enough to offer [pc.himher]self up and rise to meet the challenge. Unless you're willing to come and take [pc.hisher] place on the mats, I think you should shut up and watch."</i>

Silence.

<i>"Right. Any other comments? None? Then let's begin."</i> Tensing her muscles, the wolfess throws you a quick salute, then lunges straight for you, fingers and knuckles ready to tear you apart. <i>"Defend yourself!"</i>

It's a fight!

#begin Magna fight

Defeated by Magna

Just as you're beginning to wonder if you've bitten off more than you can chew, your question is answered as Magna plants her knuckles straight into the side of your head and sends you reeling. The world spins, teeters, and then you're on your back atop the mats, staring up at the ceiling, your face on fire.

Ouch.

<i>"Good try,"</i> Magna says as she moves to help you up, tail wagging all the while.
<i>"But not good enough. And in the world out there, you're either good enough, or you're not."</i>

You take a few deep breaths, and push yourself upright. Standing is possible, but barely so — at this point, a stiff breeze would be enough to knock you back down onto the mats.

<i>"Feeling okay? Pretty sure I rattled about a few things in that head of yours back there."</i>

Yeah, you're fine; you just need a few moments to regain your bearings.

Magna shrugs, smiles, and then turns to the watching wolves. <i>"Well, guess I win."</i>

<i>"Again."</i>

<i>"Yes, again!"</i> the wolfess claps her hands, and the crowd parts ever so lightly to admit a ghostly lupine into the makeshift ring, bearing a heavy-looking plumed, horned helmet on a cushion. You have to admit it looks quite imposing, what with all the gleaming and being

engraved with plenty of swirly patterns. But the brunt of it, you guess, is how *solid* the thing it appears to be — most peoples' necks would be under severe strain with that thing on one's head, especially with all the adornments. *"To be honest, never quite understood the whole hullabaloo. Sure, it makes you out to be some kind of big deal, but it also makes you a big target. Let's get this over with..."*

Breathlessly, you watch as Magna holds the helm in both hands and drops her voice to a serious intonation.

"We protect what we value. To shield one's crown is to acknowledge the treasure that one's mind is, both on and off the field of battle. And now that that's out of the way, get back to work, you chumps! Playtime's over; the wraiths are going to be here in a couple of days, and we don't want to be caught with our pants down! Uncle wants you in shape, not beaten-down from playing rough with each other!"

It's interesting how the entire pack immediately switches gear from rambunctious and rowdy to smart and disciplined; the circle has broken apart in the blink of an eye and reformed into neat ranks and rows, ready to be drilled.

"I'll see you later, then." Magna grins and claps you on the back, her icy touch chilling you to the bone. *"Hope I didn't hit you too hard."*

//end encounter

Defeating Magna

With a final blow, Magna's down onto the mats — and she doesn't get up this time. Panting heavily, her muzzle split in an open-jawed smile, the black-furred wolfess stares up at the ceiling, content to lie spread-eagled on the mats as she struggles to catch her breath.

"Gods above," she mutters, then laughs raucously. *"I lost! I admit that I completely and utterly lost!"*

The spectral wolves look between her and you, burning eyes open and staring. Magna groans, then manages to lift her head off the ground and shakes her mane. *"...But why do I feel so refreshed? Do you know why that is, brothers and sisters?"*

Silence.

"I fought with all my strength. I have no regrets. That's how they get you in the end, isn't it? Overconfidence, that's how it always is." A soft sigh escapes Magna's lips, and she shakily pushes herself to her feet. *"Well, you earned it, friend. Bring forth the Helm of Heroes!"*

Fading into view, a ghostly wolf steps into the makeshift ring, a large, solid-looking helmet in between his hands. Without further ado, Magna steps up to him, plucks the helm from his

hands with a little bow — it's one of those full-faced affairs, complete with a plume in the back — and plonks it in your hands. For something that came out of the hands of a ghost, it's surprisingly solid and corporeal; just looking at it, you're pretty sure they don't make helmets in this style anymore, either.

<i>"We protect what we value,"</i> Magna intones solemnly. <i>"To shield one's crown is to acknowledge the treasure that one's mind is, both on and off the field of battle. The wraiths will be here in a few days. I hope to see the helm on the field of battle, perhaps by my side!"</i>

Perhaps.

<i>"Okay, you lot! Uncle says fun's over and to get back to work, we've got wraiths and their beasties a-coming, and he wants you in shape, not all beaten up from biting each other. Come on, chop chop! You know what to do!"</i>

And they do indeed. The lupines quickly switch from rambunctious to orderly and disciplined, quickly falling into formation in preparation for drills and training. As the mats are pulled away, Magna turns to you and clears her throat. <i>"There is one more thing, friend..."</i>

Yes?

<i>"I didn't get your name. These days, not many save Gatekeeper Malachai and Uncle can best me... it was a thing to remember. I learned a few lessons and was reminded of even more in that short space. It'd be a shame if I didn't at least get your name."</i>

It's [pc.name].

<i>"[pc.name]. It's a name I'll remember well."</i> Magna claps you on the shoulder — her touch is practically freezing — and turns to leave. <i>"Enjoy the honor while you have it; its sweetness is quick to pass."</i>

With that, Magna gathers up her cloak and disappears into the throng of wolves at training, leaving you with an awfully impressive plumed helmet in your hands and a strange sense of foreboding.

//obtain helm of heroes.

//end encounter.

Magna Hagen Fight

Magna Hagen is a more experienced and tougher Garret. She has pretty good toughness and strength. Being a ghost, she has all the elemental and lust resistances that all the other ghosts in the fort share, too. Magna's biggest threat is spike damage, especially from her pummel ability; if all three hit with a crit or two, the receiver is going to be in for a bad time. She has three actions per round.

Physical-oriented groups of three may have a little trouble with her at the expected level of 4, but if Garret is around she should be pretty go for the group.

If they have a tank to soak up Magna's hits, magic-oriented groups should do excellently. Cait needs to double-time between healing and whitefire, which will hurt Magna a LOT.

Magna's Stats:

Strength: +++

Toughness: +++

Agility: +

Willpower: ++

Cunning: +

Presence: ++

Powers:

-Pummel, as per Garret.

-Charge, as per centaurs. Does this need rewriting?

-Frenzy.

-Bloodrage, as per Garret.

-Cleave.

-Bloodlet.

Magna has no armour, but she has a hefty HP buffer. She's equipped with her claws, and cannot be disarmed.

Fight Text

You're fighting Magna Hegan!

The Jarl's niece is every bit as fearsome as she must have been in life: a big bear of a lupine woman, unarmed save for her claws and teeth. Her thick fur and long hair accentuate her muscular and bulky frame, and she's wearing nothing save for a loincloth and cloth bindings about her hefty chest. {//normal:

She's got a big grin on her face as she beckons you forward, slapping a fist against the palm of her other hand.

//HP or resolve low:

She's looking a bit winded at this point, but the fight is far from over.

}

5.

[Tomes]

//You have time to do a little reading, you suppose.

You step up to the tomes in the library and marvel at how well they've been preserved, considering their age. Selecting one of them at random, you gingerly pick it up; it doesn't quite crumble into dust in your hands, but it's obvious that cover, spine and pages alike are frail.

Slowly, you turn the pages and see what this one has to offer, a glimpse into the writer's mindset from more than two centuries ago, perhaps:

[rand

|<i>The way of the Iron Poet</i>

It is the way of some lowlanders to devote their lives to either strength of arms or to pursuits of the mind. Perhaps it may work for them, safe in their warm homes, but such is not the path we tread. To do so is to be missing one half of the whole and needlessly hobble oneself.

It is well-understood that exercising the body leads to greater invigoration of the mind; improved circulation of blood and breath to the head banishes ennui and promotes clear thinking. Straining the body leads to the development of one's will and tenacity, for the barriers to winning a bout are just as weighty in the mind as they are in the realm of the material.

Similarly, by improving one's mind, one discovers better, more efficient ways to exercise one's body. By exercising the nerve pathways that lead from eye to limb, one becomes more dexterous and faster to react to the moves of one's opponents. By reading about the past victories and losses of others, one learns from the experiences of others without needing to suffer misfortune oneself.

When a single person exercises both body and mind, their united power is greater than that of two who have trained one but neglected the other. It is such that we do not scorn books and learning, yet neither do we forget martial training: a man who only lives by the sword is a brute, while one who only lives by the pen is a fop. All warriors should be poets, and all poets should be warriors; if this burden is too much for you, then you are deserving of neither.

A lupine of any pack should be able to sing a saga, to slaughter and butcher livestock, to put thoughts to paper, to make camp in the snow. He or she should experience wonder at the dawn over the mountains, drink deeply of both clean mountain springs and fresh-brewed mead, and to defeat enemies in pitched battle. Only then can one say that life has been lived to the fullest with a variety of wholesome experiences.

Such is the way of the Iron Poet, the unbreakable tower of strength who nevertheless has the wits and spirit to move another to tears with words and writing. Such is the path the ideal lupine should tread.

The Cold

The cold is here.
Its teeth sink through my fur
And gnaw at my flesh.
The snow is here.
It blankets the mountains and valleys
Making passage impossible.

The ice is here.
It pelts down from above
Uncaring of whom it strikes or kills.

I am here.
I have lived through cold, snow and ice.
They have made me stronger.

Obedience and Discipline *By Sirius Silvereye*

What is obedience?

The simpleton will answer that it is the reverence one has for one's elders, for one's thane and jarl, for the Lore. That is not wholly incorrect, but it leaves out several vital nuances that without which lies and misinformation can be spread.

The fool will answer that it is a yoke, a chain that evil rulers use to bind their subjects and keep them in their thrall; that it should be resisted at every turn. Such sentiments are the chief tools of those who sow dissent and sedition, hoping to appeal to the greed and avarice of those who hear them. When logic is applied to this train of thought, it soon falls apart, for the very essence of obedience decries such a simple and superficial interpretation. Allow me to elaborate:

Obedience demands a person who is capable of putting others first and himself last. Putting others first demands discipline, the ability to finish a task without being distracted. Putting others first demands logic that will block the emotion that may ask one to do otherwise. Putting others first demands ethicality that makes one believe in and understand the benefits of abiding the rules of conduct.

One cannot master the world around him without first mastering oneself, and a task left unfinished is a task failed.

A wolf in service of the thane is obedient, that is to be sure. But the Thane is also obedient to the Lore, and hence also in service of his subjects. To not put others first and ask of obedience from others is wantonness, for then there are no rules or limits

to what may be commanded; to free oneself from the so-called chains of obedience that bind oneself is to invite the very disaster that such fools claim to oppose!

When obedience is realized by all within a pack, from lowest thrall to greatest thane, harmony prevails. That should be the goal of all lupines.

My exploits, volume one
By Magna Hagen

Hail, reader. I am Magna, but you know who I am by that name alone, for there is only one Magna. Uncle has asked me to pen some form of memoir, for though I am young, I have had many an adventure, and he wishes that others may learn and be inspired by my experiences.

As his niece, I am only too pleased to acquiesce.

From my youth, tournaments and duels have fallen in my favour, gaining me much fame within the pack. Hush, for these are but small glories compared to my actions later in life, although they did prepare — both good and ill — me for the first of my travels. Since I was of the jarl's family, I was well-cared for and trained as a pup, yet as his niece I had no claim to his position. Thus having few of the responsibilities which now burden my younger cousins, I was free to do as I wished; wanderlust overtook me as I tired of bouts and tournaments, and I decided to journey to put my skills to good use.

Before I left, Aunt Thyri was kind enough to make me a gift of some very solid fur-lined boots, both to prevent blisters on the road and to keep my feet dry in the rain. After hearing countless tales of aching feet from others less prepared, here lies the first lesson I wish to impart to the reader: travel of any distance requires good footwear, and if possible, a walking stick or staff! You will be glad that you have had both.

My first adventure took place when I had just left the ancestral lands and entered the plains to the south. Local farmers were complaining that thieves lurking in the forest were stealing their crop, and were willing to pay me to deal with them. I agreed to their request, but quietly resolved to extract proof of these thieves' guilt before laying my sword to them.

Following the farmers' words, I guessed when the thieves would next strike and set up a prowl. On the second night, my patience was rewarded; humans approached from afar and slipped into the fields, making off with many melons in the sacks across their shoulders. I could have stopped them there and then, but resolved to root out the entire den of thieves; following their scent, I tracked them down to their forest hideout.

Ten of them were cramped in one small shack; I was young and foolish, and my past victories had gone to my head — I roared a challenge and took them all on at once. This proved to be a mistake, for although they were no match for me, my overconfidence and their numbers led one of them to slip his knife between my ribs. Fortunately, I had slain enough of the wretches that the rest were disheartened enough to flee, and I collapsed to the ground, bleeding profusely from the grievous wound.

For a moment, I thought I was going to die there in the most ignoble fashion, laid low by a common footpad's shiv! Fortunately, hours spent disciplining my mind against pain and panic served me well as my wits came back to me, and I remembered enough of my lessons in field dressing to bind the wound with clean cloth and staunch the bleeding with the help of one of my aunt's unguents before I lost too much of my vital essence. I was still weak, but no longer in mortal danger.

The entirety of the farmers' reward was spent in the care of a proficient healer, where I recovered sufficiently over the course of a week and a half. Fortunately, no vital organs had been punctured, and I made a full recovery in time. Even though I came out no richer in coin than I had when I begun, I had learned two valuable lessons from this experience: the dangers of overconfidence, and the importance of a disciplined mind and body in the face of pain.

]

[Chest]

//This looks like it could hold something interesting...

//Only show if the chest has not been looted.

You eye the small brass chest sitting in one of the library's cubbyholes. Ornate carvings of runes cover its lid, and the sides are decorated with yet more carvings, this time of a forest scene, complete with deer and rabbits running along its length. Given the bare and spartan conditions in which most of the garrison lived in, this has to be of some import — it certainly looks like something that'd fit in a noble's abode than in a border fort, even if this is the library.

You try to pick it up, and it doesn't move. Brushing off the thick coat of dust that it's developed over the years, you quickly discover why: it's bolted to the stone bricks. Huh, so it's a permanent fixture... interesting. Guess you can't take the chest itself with you, but hopefully whatever's inside will be worth it.

Oho. Now that the dust's off, you spy several lines of words etched into the lid — likely with acid of some sort — and a large lock with numerous tumblers, each one etched with letters.

[pc.bg scholar acolyte noblescion courtesan

|You've come across these before in your past — wordlock chests, a favourite of the old Belharan nobility, meant to safeguard valuables from illiterate

[silly]players[servants]. Each of these combination locks was secured by a password, and to help the owner remember what it was, a riddle was often posed on the chest

itself. If you could solve it and thereby rotate the tumblers into the right position, the chest would unlock and allow you to claim its contents.

|

[party.has cait

|<i>"Father used to tell Calla and I about these,"</i> Cait pipes up as she studies the chest. <i>"They're wordlock chests, a favourite of the old Belharan nobility, meant to safeguard valuables from illiterate [silly|players|servants]. Each combination lock was secured by a password, and to help the owner remember what it was a riddle was often posed on the chest itself."</i>

So if you solved this thing, the lock would just pop open and you could just help yourself to anything inside.

<i>"Yep!"</i>

|Hmm, what can this all mean? It certainly seems like a thoroughly roundabout way to secure a container, but at least it isn't likely to be trapped in the bargain.

]

]

Well, what now?

[Open][Leave]

[Open]

//Open it up! What's in the box?

//The solution is "wave".

Now that the dust's cleared off the lid, you can clearly see the riddle etched on it:

<i>The moon is my father,
The sea is my mother.
I have a million brothers,
The land is my demise.</i>

AOVK

TAWS

BUAR

WEZN

HIIE

The answer is formed from one letter from each <i>column</i>. Enter your answer in the text box below.

[Leave]

//Wrong answer

You set the tumblers on the lock in the desired positions, but nothing happens. Seems like you got it wrong — at least there isn't a trap rigged to go off should someone enter the wrong answer. Maybe you should try again...

//Right answer

Something within the chest clicks, followed by a loud thump as the mechanisms within disengage. Instinctively, you step back, fearing a trap, but your fears are soon allayed as the spring-loaded lid pops open, revealing the chest's contents. Within are a few hundred electrum hawks in varying denominations, and laid against one side is a silver hand mirror partially wrapped in velvet.

[party.has arona

|Arona grins. *"Now this is something I can get behind. Won't have made the trip worth it, but at least it's not a complete loss any more."*

]

You spend the next few moments filling your pockets with the ancient, heavy coins, then turn your attention to the mirror. Sealed in the chest, it's still in good condition — this might once have belonged on a lady's dressing table, perhaps, or as part of a vanity. Clear and reflective, the finely worked decorative edge suggests it might have been an import from the heartlands. As it is right now, it might fetch a pretty penny to the right buyer, perhaps in Tychris. They sure love their glass and mirrors there, after all.

[party.has cait

|While all this has been going on, Cait has been studying the now-empty chest with all the attentiveness of an inquisitive scholar confronted with a new toy. All of a sudden, she snorts, begins to giggle, then clamps a hand over her mouth lest the noise attract more restless dead.

What's so funny?

"Look at this on the bottom. This bit."

You peer at the scrawl that you originally thought were scuff marks from someone trying to force open the chest. Yes, what about them?

"It reads 'late fines'. All this money, it's just late fines for the fortress' library. I... I don't know why, it's just funny. That there would be a library in this sort of place, perhaps, that the garrisoned soldiers would not just know how, but want to read, or that they would hold onto the things long enough for the librarian to start demanding money from them. I'm sorry. It probably doesn't make sense."

]

With your new acquisitions tucked away safely, you turn back to the rest of the library. What now?

//+300EP.
//Add silver mirror to key items.
//end encounter

[Leave]
//This isn't worth the trouble.
//Both [leave] options lead here.

You rub your temples and sigh. The riddle's right there in front of you, but its words might as well have been unscalable walls. Whatever's in the chest is going to have to stay inside until you figure this out.

//end encounter

9.

[Silverware]
//Grab the silverware off the tables.
//One-time only.

Most of the stuff in the old watchtower is useless, but at least the silverware looks like it might be of some value. It's badly tarnished, but would probably be worth something from their metal value alone, not to say what they might fetch to a collector. Whether anyone would want to eat with utensils salvaged from an ancient haunted fortress is in question, but at least the swirly engravings and wolfshead motifs would make them good decorative pieces. You might be able to get something for this.

//+300 EP.
//end encounter.

[Footlockers]
//See if there's anything worth salvaging in the footlockers.

Picking your way across the dusty skeletons lying on the cold stone floor, you half-expect angry spirits to assail you any moment for disturbing their fretful rest. Thankfully, nothing of the sort happens, and you're able to cross the room unmolested to where the footlockers lie.

[party.has cait
 |<i>"Eww,"</i> Cait mewls as she steps over a canine skull, bleached with age.

]

[party.has brint
 |<i>"No sense in being squeamish,"</i> Brint says with a snort as he brings up the rear, [brint.weapon] in hand. <i>"Supplies are supplies where you find them, and their owners aren't going to be needing them the way they are now."</i>

]

A quick search of the more intact footlockers unearths dozens of ceramic jugs filled with naphtha. The lupines must have been stockpiling these for the wraiths' assault... but most of them are cracked, their contents long escaped. Of those still intact, many of them have gone off after so many years, the flammable alchemical oil inside congealing into uselessness. Only a few still remain in usable condition, and you gather these up and put them away.

The final locker, though, holds something quite different. Reinforced and bound, it takes you some time and effort to pry open the rusted lid, but within lies a crossbow so massive and imposing that you can't help but wonder if it ought to be classified as a siege engine instead. The bowstring is long rotted, and finding a replacement that could withstand the draw would be no easy task, but the rest of the crossbow itself looks serviceable enough.

[party.has garret

|At the sight of the monstrous crossbow in your hands, Garret whistles appreciatively. *<i>"Oh hey, that's one of **those**. My old man used to tell me how they were used in his days as a mercenary, but I never thought I'd see one with my own eyes."*</i>

He knows what this make of crossbow is, then?

A nod. *<i>"It's a bessy mauler. They were made back in the days when lupines were better friends with minotaurs... or at least, the best ones were made then. We've tried to copy their engineering ever since, make our own, and while they've turned out better than what we'd manage by ourselves they still don't match up to the originals designed by the bowyers of Khor'minos. Their womenfolk have the best minds for these things."*</i>

It was designed by minotaurs? No wonder it's so massive.

<i>"The originals they were based off were even bigger. Here, let me have a hold."</i> Garret takes the crossbow from you, and places the stock against his shoulder in a mock firing position. Even though he's absolutely massive for a lupine, the weapon's size fits him like a glove. *<i>"Bessy maulers were scaled down so that lupines could actually use them. Even then, they were an ass to hold steady, but absolutely amazing when they did manage to hit anything."*</i>

[[party.has brint

|*<i>"Hey, what's that you found there?"*</i> Brint stomps over, and clasps his meaty hands together when you show it to him. *<i>"Oh. A poor replica of a minotaur crossbow."*</i>

A poor replica?

<i>"Maybe not poor by your standards, but poor by ours. It lacks the solid craftsmanship only our womenfolk can provide. We gave some to the lupines way back during the Godswar, when we were more friendly with each other..."</i>

<i>Were</i> friendly.

Brint scratches his head. <i>"Khaak. I should have paid more attention to my mother when she was trying to explain history to me. Fort Marrok was part of it, I think. The two peoples entered into an alliance to fight the wraiths, but kept on blaming the other for their defeats. After what happened here, it kind of petered out. The alliance was never formally broken, but relations soured to the point where it might as well have.</i>

<i>"Anyway, this thing here is okay, as replicas go. You might be able to use it, but it'd be hard to hit anything."</i>

[You have to wonder just what would possess the lupines to create a crossbow of this size — and no, probably none of the garrisoned soldiers would need to compensate for anything. Any bolt loosed from this thing would pack a deadly punch, but getting it to hit... well, that's another matter.

]

]

The search continues for a little while longer, but you don't manage to turn up anything else of interest. Perhaps it's time to head on.

//Gain 5x naphtha.

//Gain Bessy Mauler.

//End encounter.

13.

[Fountains]

//Take a sip from the fountains.

//Can drink for a full restore, but only once.

Gurgling merrily, the twin fountains are a sight for sore eyes in the cold, dead recesses of the buried fortress. Carved into the likenesses of snarling wolf heads, a steady stream of clear-looking water plunges from their maws into the stone basins below before being carried off by copper piping that disappears into the masonry brickwork.

Huh. What sorcery is this? How have these managed to remain operational after so long? Yet here they are, very much solid and real, and the water cools your fingers as you gingerly dip them beneath the surface. [pc.cl blackmage whitemage

|Something's off about the water, though, and as you concentrate for a moment, you realise what it is. The water's magical, and it's definitely restorative magic! You could drink from this if you wanted to reap the benefits of such.

|It looks sweet and potable enough, and if you wished to, you could slake your thirst a little before pressing on.

]

Do you wish to do so?

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//Drink from the fountains.

It's water. It's probably from a mountain spring, and everyone knows that mineral water from mountain springs is good for you, right? Right? It's got all those minerals and whatever and is supposed to have numerous health benefits; this sells for crazy amounts in places like Tychris -

- Oh, whatever. You cup your hands and wash them in the basin for a bit before scooping out some of the water and taking a sip.

Hey, now that feels good! You let out a small sigh of relief as your aches and pains dissolve away into nothingness and your mind clears.[party.som]

|Seeing you refreshed, [companion1.name] drinks greedily from the other basin, stopping only to briefly wash [companion1.hisher] face before moving on.

|Seeing that you've suffered no ill effects from the water, [companion1.name] and [companion2.name] drink greedily from the other basin, only stopping when they're sated.

]

It takes a little while for you to finally be able to tear yourself away from the healing water, but when you do, you feel much better for having had the drink, completely refreshed and ready to move on.

//full party restore

//end encounter

[No]

//Don't drink. Who knows where that water has been?

You take a second glance at the fountain, and decide against it. You've heard stories of terrible things happening when the unwary drink from mysterious fountains — endless rivers of snakes pouring forth, being turned into small, insignificant animals, that sort of thing. Besides, the water might look and smell clear, but it could very well be bad — who knows

how the landslide which buried the fortress might have changed the surrounding land's aquifers?

It takes some force of will to tear yourself away from the fountain, especially since it looks so inviting and refreshing, but that is kind of the point in trapping fountains, isn't it? To make them appear appealing so that people will drink from them?

//end encounter

[South]

Now that your eyes have adjusted to the gloom of this chamber, you're able to see something in the southern end of the hall that gives you pause even as you prepare to head on over. A figure slumped in what looks to be a throne of some sort, up against the wall... by all appearances, this looks to be the end of the line.

Are you ready?

[Yes][No]

[Yes]

//Move to floor 2, room 14.

//Begin Jarl Gunvaldsen encounter.

[No]

Being not entirely sure if you're prepared, you decide to back off for a bit, gather your nerve. No matter which turn this confrontation is going to take, you get the feeling that it'll be harrowing either way.

//end encounter

14.

Jarl Gunvaldsen Encounter

- The jarl will react differently to lupine PCs, but that's mostly fluff.
- If the player acquired the silver mirror from the library, they can attempt to parley with the jarl.
 - They can still try nevertheless if they don't have it, but it will auto-fail.
 - $\geq 50\%$ cunning or a acolyte/scholar background will reveal this fact.
 - If they don't have Garret, they'll need $\geq 70\%$ presence to successfully convince the jarl he's dead. Failure means being drawn into a fight.
 - If Garret is present, he will take over and auto-succeed. Full loot rewards, plus getting some story out of it.

- All other options inevitably lead to fighting Jarl Gunvaldsen.
 - If you lose to him, he will kill you.

Approach

//Triggered by walking south from room 13, as above.

The closer you draw to the south end of the hall, the more the temperature plummets, until you're practically shivering in your [pc.skinFurScalesNoun] as you make your way forward. Your footsteps ring hollow in the vastness of the cavernous chamber, and somewhere from above, water drips down in a steady drip-drip-drip, collecting on the old stone floor in shallow puddles.

At least the eerie glow in the air hasn't diminished any, allowing you to take in the scene as it draws into view. The stone throne is the only piece of furniture that's still physically present — everything else from the banners to the candlesticks to the carpet is ghostly and translucent, fading into view and solidifying before your very eyes as you forge your way forward.

This is it.

By and large, your footsteps aren't the only sounds in this chamber now. A faint panting, wheezing, the labored breathing of someone being smothered; the figure in the throne leans forward, doubled over in unending agony, hunched over with both hands on the pommel of a bastard sword. He leans his weight on it like an old man on his cane, the blade still in its scabbard, its point delicately balanced on the floor.

This must be the jarl, then. The muzzle sticking out from above the heavy, fur-lined cloak, the broad-shouldered stature, and most of all, the medallion hanging from his neck by a heavy gold chain, gold untarnished by the years and sapphires glinting in the eldritch light.

What do you do now? You're mere paces from the jarl at this very moment; if you're going to do something, you have the initiative. Calling yourself to arms and putting him out of his misery might be the obvious thing to do, but could there possibly be some way to break apart the false reality that's enshrouded his mind and by extent, this entire accursed fortress?

{//if cunning >= 50% or scholar or acolyte backgrounds:

It might be doable, if you had a silver mirror on you. You faintly remember hearing old wives' tales about most undead not having reflections in normal mirrors, but silver ones are apparently an exception. If the jarl could see his dead self, it might help break whatever spell's ensnared his mind.

{//if silver mirror carried:

And it just so happens you managed to acquire one, and in this place no less.

//else:

Unfortunately, you don't have one on you. Might you still want to try, though?
It's not as if you have anything to lose by making the attempt.

}

}

[Fight][Parley]

[Fight]

//Strike down the jarl. There is no other way.

[pc.ra lupine

|For a moment, the jarl looks like he's about to spring up and throttle you, but then he relaxes and sinks back into his throne.

<i>"I... I was not expecting petitioners today. Not when the wraiths are over the next hill."</i>

Petitioners? Oh. <i>Oh.</i> Your initial confusion fades quickly as you realize that because of your appearance, the jarl thinks you're one of his subjects. It doesn't really make complete sense — the way he's dressed <i>does</i> look like something you might expect from a two hundred years ago, as opposed to your current fashion sense — but then again, you suspect he isn't quite all there.

One way or another, this is a lucky break. If Galon's spirit isn't immediately inclined to kill you like you were expecting, a number of additional options open up. Hmm...

<i>"If you have business, spit it out,"</i> the jarl commands, his ears folding back.
<i>"Otherwise, stop wasting my time. We don't have much of it left, and I don't suffer fools easily."</i>

As you close the distance, the jarl's eyes widen in horror as you whip out your [pc.weapon] and bring it to bear on him. Though he looks every bit worn and haggard, the winter wolf is quick on his feet and springs out of the throne, easily evading your blow and drawing his blade in one fluid movement.

<i>"Treachery! Murder!"</i> he roars. The blue flames in his empty eye sockets blaze and writhe with the spirit's rage as Galon Gunvaldsen bares his fangs at you.
<i>"What did the wraiths promise you, to turn you against your own pack jarl?"</i>

Words from a ghost who's already dead.

The jarl says nothing in reply, but rounds in on you with his greatsword, its serrated edge glinting in the dim light with his eyes.

It's a fight!

//Begin Jarl Gunvaldsen fight

[As you close the distance to him, the specter of Galon Gunvaldsen twists his head to regard you for the first time, and his empty, flaming eyes flash in the dim light. *<i>"I smell death on the wind."</i>*

It clearly takes him a good deal of effort, but he uncurls in a flash and springs to his feet.

<i>"Wraiths!"</i> the tortured spectre roars, the scabbard falling to the floor as he draws his sword and brandishes it in the air. *<i>"Wraiths, in my keep! First that farce down by the coast, and now this — I'll slay you all if it's the last thing I do, and reclaim my honour!"</i>*

Your protestations fall on deaf ears as you narrowly duck under a mighty cleave of his blade that sings through the air. The jarl's clearly caught in the last moments of his life as he suffocated in the darkness, and there's only one way to free his soul.

It's a fight!

//Begin Jarl Gunvaldsen fight

]

[Parley]

//Attempt to tell Galon Gunvaldsen the ugly truth.

You stare up into Galon Gunvaldsen's face, draw a deep breath and square your shoulders. Yes, there's the very real chance that telling the truth might enrage the jarl's long-dead spirit into attacking, but you have to try anyway. He deserves to know as much, no matter how dangerous it might be for you; you have to try.

{//No mirror:

However, it's no use. Trapped in the veil of false reality as he is, the jarl's spirit is simply unable to hear reason; all your arguments fall on deaf ears. Angered by your prattling — or at least, what he perceives to be such — he picks up his greatsword and lurches out of the stone throne, intent on cutting you down.

It's a fight!

//else if mirror and no Garret:

You close your eyes, suck in a breath through your teeth, then hold up the silver mirror you looted in the library to Galon's visage.

The jarl eyes the mirror with naked suspicion. *<i>"What's this you have here?"</i>*

As much as you must regret to inform him of this sad news, but he is dead.

<i>"What?!"</i>

He is dead. He's been dead for the last two hundred and fifty years. The Godswar is over, the wraiths defeated at great cost. That while he and his pack were brave and noble warriors as befits any lupine, all of them are dead, and need to pass on. See here, look in the mirror! Can he deny that this is his face, his reflection?

Taking a step back, you brandish the silver mirror, holding it out at arm's length even as you allow the jarl to examine his own ghostly countenance in the dusty surface. It takes something to be able to summon up the words with as much force as you can muster, but you do your best.

He's dead, and he needs to realise that. The Godswar is over, and his ancestral lands are recovering. It's time for him to move on.

It's hard to read the jarl's expression, entranced as he is by what he sees in the mirror. His jaw is slack, his tongue hanging out from between his teeth as he pants for breath in the cold darkness of the ancient audience chamber. Slowly, almost disbelievingly, he raises a ghostly, shimmering hand to his face and touches it.

Something flashes in his eyes -

{//if presence >= 70% of max:

- And the jarl lets out a soft groan and slumps back in the throne, his sword clattering to the floor, blade as forlorn as the man. This looks like a good time to give him some space, so you step back and remain silent as Jarl Galon Gunvaldsen stares down at his ghostly hands, his fingers trembling. His breathing is even more pained than ever, and as you look on, he clenches and unclenches his fists into tight balls, thickset, furry fingers shimmering in the dim light.

<i>"I... I had thought it might happen. That when death did come... I would know. When I smelled death on the wind, I thought it came from you... but it was from myself, wasn't it?"</i>

You remain silent. At length, Galon Gunvaldsen collects himself as best as he can and raises his gaze to yours.

<i>"Tell me, [pc.race]. It has been more than two hundred years?"</i>

You remember River's tale, and nod. Thereabouts, since the Godswar.

For the first time since you've met him, the jarl looks at his surroundings and seems to notice the dilapidated state his fortress is in. For something as

simple as a mirror and a few words to have freed a ghost from the false reality he was trapped in... well, stranger things have happened.

<i>"If you are here, that means we eventually won, despite my failure..."</i>

It took much sacrifice, but the wraiths were beaten back, yes.

Galon groans again, and bends over to pick up his sword off the ground before leaning his weight on it once more. <i>"Then... why did you come here, to this place? What did you hope to achieve? Are you adventurers? Treasure hunters?"</i>

You... um, you were sent here to retrieve his medallion of office.

<i>"Ah. For the pack, no doubt. Gold does not decay with years, after all."</i> The jarl closes his eyes and thinks for a few moments. <i>"It was in front of my face all the time, but I could not see it. It's almost as if a veil had been draped over my eyes... until you forced me to face the truth. Perhaps it is... it is better this way. I would not have been allowed to remain jarl after what happened; the shame would have been too great."</i>

Silence. The fact that he might have been the last straw that broke the alliance between the packs and Khor'minos might just be too much for him to bear as he is.

<i>"Do the histories tell of my family and their fate?"</i>

You hesitate a moment, then decide that the jarl probably isn't going to shoot the messenger here. Still, you can't help but be a little hesitant when you relate River's tale to him.

<i>"I... am not surprised. Exile was the least of the fates which could have befallen them; at least, perhaps, my line still exists somewhere, and that is as much as I can ask for in my state. So, you are here for my medallion of office?"</i>

Yes. The lupines of today need it.

<i>"Then take it. It's not as if I can bring it with me, wherever it is that I'm fated to go when I pass. If it will restore some of our lost honor, then you're free to have it."</i>

The words spoken, Jarl Gunvaldsen bows his head and lifts both chain and medallion off his neck, placing them in your hands. Up close, you can see them in so much detail: the golden crossed swords with a burnished steel

border, the heavy links of the chain, the sapphires in the wolfshead's eyes...
hah, truly a wolf's adornment if there were ever one.

He is most gracious.

<i>"Grace has nothing to do with it. Regret, perhaps... and a desire to right wrongs. And since I can't take them with me, either, let me make a gift to you of my sword and cloak."</i>

With that said, the jarl grasps his blade, still in scabbard, in both hands and solemnly passes it to you. Frost swirls about the scabbard as you take the basket-hilted bastard sword in hand, and you eye the jarl as he pulls off the spectral, fur-lined cloak from about his shoulders, wondering what has kept his possessions so well-preserved after all this time. He folds the cloak up into a neat square and presses it into your hands. It's thick and warm, garb meant for winter, and even given its nature it confers a thin thread of warmth into your fingers as you close your hands in about it.

<i>"That's all I have to give to you, [pc.race],"</i> the jarl says at last, rolling his shoulders and looking about the empty audience chamber. <i>"I suppose I should be leaving, but..."</i>

But?

He looks sheepish. <i>"Could you accompany me on the way out? I shouldn't have to ask you this, but to see what has happened to my fort in the intervening years... I fear it may be a match for my nerves. It must seem craven of me to ask this of you, but -"</i>

Oh, say no more. You'd be more than happy to go ahead and help him through this. You put him in this predicament after all, didn't you? You give the jarl a nod, and fall in at his side as he staggers out of the audience chamber and down the stairs into the ramparts.

Odd. Wherever Galon Gunvaldsen passes, the spirits of his men start fading into view — lupines in ancient chainmail and livery slumped against walls, sprawled in alcoves, waiting for death. Bits of broken crockery lie on the floor amidst discarded weapons and fallen banners... it's as if the jarl himself was a torch, a beacon that allows you to see the last moments of Fort Marrok in spectral form.

<i>"Get up,"</i> he says softly to the massed lupines. <i>"Our time is over."</i>

The garrison soldiers look up at him with uncomprehending eyes. <i>"Lord, I don't understand -"</i>

"We are dead. We have been dead for a long time." He pauses, considering his words. *"We failed, but the wraiths were defeated without us. The world has passed by without us. It's time for us to go."*

The ghosts look at their Jarl, at each other, then at you. As one, realization to dawn upon them, and their shoulders droop as they bow their heads.

"Defeated warriors do not take their weapons with them to the beyond," one of them murmurs.

Galon nods. *"Do you see me with my sword? Weapon or no weapon, at last... an ending. I've failed in both my duty to lead you, and my duty to keep the pack's honour; I'll answer for both in my own time. But for now, onward and outward."*

Onward and outward indeed. The procession following the both of you is a sight to behold, a steadily growing stream of ghostly lupines limping and dragging themselves after you and the jarl. Dirty, disheveled, and dogged — but relieved in their own way, as if a huge spell that hung over their heads had been broken.

It probably had.

At last, the two of you reach the gates — now they are no longer dilapidated, but strong and gleaming, if translucent. The scent of fresh air wafts in from the canyon bottom, and the jarl closes his eyes and folds his hands for a moment, taking in the scent of freedom.

"I remember now. The men had been trying to dig for hours, days, not knowing how deeply in the earth the wraiths had entombed us. I was on my throne waiting for the end, determined to die in as dignified a fashion as I could. To never see the light again..."

It must have been harrowing.

"For me, perhaps. And for the whole of the pack." He looks back at the garrison following him, and they manage a weak, if genuine cheer.

"I owe you my eternal thanks," he says. *"And I haven't even so much as asked your name."*

It's [pc.name].

"Well met then, [pc.name], and goodbye," Jarl Gunvaldsen salutes you crisply. *"Day after day, one after the other, until we wake up and it turns out*

that's the day it all ends for you. You have to do what you can, when you can, because who knows if tomorrow is even happening?"

That sounds deep.

"It was what my father told me on his deathbed, before he had to go." The jarl looks away from you and squares his shoulders. "Make good use of my gifts, [pc.name]. May we one day meet again upon the peaks and snow."

"Thyri... I'm sorry to have kept you waiting for so long."

Without another word, he steps out into the canyon, through the gates — and the moment the jarl passes beyond the gates of his doomed fortress, he dissolves into a thousand spectral motes of glimmering radiance that, in their own time, wink out of existence. The wolves of Fort Marrok follow their lord, hundreds of specters pouring out from the gates and dissipating into nothingness, ranks upon ranks of livery-clad canines passing into the beyond until only emptiness is left, and the gates slowly revert to their old run-down state.

"Wow."

A soft tugging on your arms alerts you to River's presence. The fluffy kitten bard has finally deigned to make his presence known, stepping out from his hiding place between the rubble piles to gape at the exorcism you've just wrought.

Hey, that was something, wasn't it?

"Indeed, it was." River's attempt to remain solemn is made all the more comical by his ears and tail's constant twitching. "I mean, the sheer sight of all those spirits coming out of the fortress — just what did you do in there?"

Oh, nothing much. Just a few shenanigans involving a hand mirror and a little smooth talking, that's all.

River looks at you funny, then shakes his head and sighs. "You've got to tell me all about it on the way back, unless you want me making stuff up when I eventually do my composing. You don't want that, do you?"

Haha, of course not.

"Good, good." River peers up into your full hands and picks the jarl's medallion off the pile, giving it a long sniff and pressing his little fingers

against its heavy surface. *<i>"Dusty and old. But it's the real thing, there's no doubt about that. Garth'll have a field day with this."*</i>

You got some other things, too. Any idea about what you should do with the sword and cloak?

<i>"Don't throw it out, that would be my suggestion,"</i> he tells you.

All right, then — you'll keep them on hand. Now, you don't think there's anything left for you here; perhaps you should get going back home.

<i>"Of course!"</i> River replies as he starts off at a brisk walk. *<i>"And I want you to tell me everything that happened in there! No shirking now, got it?"*</i>

The trip back to Hawkethorne is uneventful and thankfully so; you've had enough excitement for one day. River badgers you for the whole trip, getting down as many details as you're willing to give; you're not that inclined to talk at first, but the flask of brandy he offers you does smooth out your social graces somewhat.

At length, though, the palisade walls of Hawkethorne draw into view. River gives you a nod, then steps away. *<i>"Well, this is it. I'm going to go ahead to the Frost Hound and get something to get those creative juices flowing. Maybe you'll be there shortly? Garth does want his little trinket, after all."*</i>

//end encounter.

//Add medallion to key items.

//Add Galon's Griefmaker and Cloak of Winter to items.

//Quest Updated: Shades of the Past

You've managed to talk down the Jarl's spirit and gotten him to realise he'd dead and should move on. All that's left is to return to Garth with his medallion.

//else:

- But it fades, and he rounds on you, snarling. Before you know it, a swipe from the flat of his blade has the mirror out of your hands, and it sails through the air, disappearing into the darkness before landing on the cold stone floor beyond.

The tinkling of shattered glass echoes in the audience chamber.

<i>"I'll not fall for your vile witchcraft, whelp!"</i> Gunvaldsen roars, and his sword cleaves through the air where you were standing a moment ago.

<i>"You mock... You mock me in my dying moments... I'll have none of it!"</i>

You try to reason with the enraged ghost for a few more seconds before finally being forced to admit that your attempt at parley has failed. For a moment there, you thought you had it, that Galon's mind was able to see clearly for a fraction of a second, but the fugue of undeath was simply too strong. If your words had been stronger, more forceful...

The time for talk is over. Galon Gunvaldsen is bearing down on you, face and eyes alight with the burning flames of undeath.

It's a fight!

//begin Jarl Gunvaldsen encounter

}

//else mirror and Garret:

Remembering the mirror in your possession, you draw it from your pack and start towards the jarl, but are stopped cold by a heavy, furry hand on your shoulder. Turning, you meet Garret's gaze; he looks you straight in the eye as he clears his throat, all traces of his usual joviality gone.

<i>"[pc.name]... please let me try."</i>

[pc.isDK]

Oh? He thinks he has a better chance than you do?

|

Why?

] Is he serious about this?

<i>"Damn it, [pc.name], I'm not kidding here! I said, please let me try! I think... I think I can talk some sense into the old man."</i>

You don't know about that. His arguments with Garth are well known about Hawkethorne, but even more legendary is the way neither of them budge on any issue. If he's going to do the same thing here -"</i>

<i>"I know I argue with my old man a lot, [pc.name], but this is different. I... when I was young, I got on a lot better with my mom than I did with my old man... I'm going to say it again — please let me try, okay?"</i>

You give Garret a long, hard look, which he returns. At last, you hand the silver mirror over to him; he takes it in both hands, holding it close to his chest like some kind of totem or holy symbol, then closes the last few steps until he's standing within arms length of the jarl.

<i>"Hey, old man."</i>

<i>"Old man?! You -"</i> Clutching at his chest, the jarl appears poised to snap any moment, but then the spectre looks up at Garret and the mirror in his hands and scrambles back against the throne, back and broad shoulders pressed against the stone backing.

[party.has arona]

<i>"Well, ain't that something,"</i> Arona mutters, a bitter chuckle punctuating her words. <i>"Ghosts afraid of the living. Next thing I know, I'll come across a man biting a dog."</i>

]

<i>"H-how?"</i> Galon Gunvaldsen is staring with burning eyes wide — not at the mirror, but at Garret himself. <i>"Who are you?"</i>

<i>"My name's Garret. I'm just a tavernkeeper's son. And I'm here -"</i> he brandishes the silver mirror in front of the jarl's ghostly face — <i>"to tell you that you've been dead a long while."</i>

<i>"I... no. Thyri said the blade would be able to tell,"</i> Galon chokes out between gasping breaths. The jarl seems to be struggling with something inside him, perhaps fighting the fog that undeath has placed upon his mind.

Slowly, Garret lowers the mirror. <i>"Tell what?"</i>

<i>"Blood. It'll be able to tell. That's what she told me when she made it..."</i> A hiss of steel, an outpouring of icy mist, but it's a slow, deliberate motion, not a fast one to kill. He holds out the clearly magical ice-encrusted blade, offers its tip to Garret. <i>"Cut yourself on the blade, whoever you are."</i>

Garret considers this for what feels like forever, then nods and flicks his wrist over the point. He's almost nonchalant in his movements, lazy even, and you see blood spread over his fur from the opened vein in his wrist, welling up and dripping onto the jarl's bastard sword. Like a sponge drinking in water, so is Garret's blood absorbed into the magical blade, leaving nary a speck behind.

And then -

In the distance, a bell rings. Not that it matters that there isn't a bell for miles around this deep underground — the sound is travelling towards you until it fills the entire audience chamber, a deep, sonorous sound that you feel through your feet and sends dust drifting down from the eaves of the high chamber.

<i>Bong.</i>

Almost at once, multitudes of spectral lupines erupt from the walls around you and you instinctively reach for your [pc.weapon], but they don't close in to attack. Instead, they simply stand at attention, forming orderly ranks, their eyes fixed on their lord as his sword clatters to the floor.

As one, they kneel.

And like the turning of the pages of a book, there is a new clarity in Galon Gunvaldsen's face, the flames in his empty eye sockets dancing away as if he is looking upon the world for the first time.

<i>"I'm so sorry,"</i> he says at last. <i>"I'm dead, aren't I? And all my men in the bargain?"</i>

<i>"Sorry for what, old man? You've never wronged me."</i>

<i>"It's my fault,"</i> Galon manages to choke out in between wheezes. The once-mighty lupine jarl looks so much more older and bent when he's trying to stifle tears. <i>"If I'd known what was coming... if I hadn't listened to their counsel... you'd have had a much better life, even perhaps be pack jarl yourself."</i>

Garret snorts, steam billowing from his nose. <i>"Don't be stupid, old man, and stop blaming yourself for everything. If you'd done just that, my mom would never have met my old man, and then neither my sister nor I would exist. And I've have you know that I like existing, and intend to continue doing so. Bad things happen, but you've got to roll with the punches and make something of it."</i>

<i>"I'm not a jarl or thane, and I know I'm not fit to be. The packs have gotten on just fine for the last couple hundred years. I'm just a tavernkeeper's son, that's all. If I'm going to become rich, famous and noble, I'm doing it under my own power."</i>

Galon doesn't say anything, just continues looking down at the ground, unable to meet Garret's eyes.

<i>"Oh, and I'm also the strongest man in all of Savarra."</i>

That sets off the old jarl. Half-laughing, half-crying, Galon lunges out of his throne and wraps his arms around Garret in a huge embrace, burning blue tears spilling from his empty eye sockets and fizzling out on the floor. The spectre's chill touch must be absolutely freezing, but Garret finds it in himself to return his ancestor's hug.

<i>"Strongest man in all of Savarra... that sounds like something Magna would say. Thyri, oh Thyri... I am so glad you lived, and our children too."</i>

<i>"Well,"</i> Garret says after a very long few seconds as he disentangles himself from Galon's arms, <i>"what now?"</i>

<i>"I pass on what I have to you. I rally my men and lead them into the beyond. Then... then I'll see if I can't find my wife."</i>

<i>"Your wife."</i>

Galon smiles. <i>"Yes. Probably... your great-great-great-great grandmother? Maybe off by a generation or two?"</i>

<i>"All right, you have fun doing that."</i> Looking around him, Garret takes in all the spectral soldiers kneeling before him and the throne, and rubs the back of his head sheepishly. <i>"So, this passing on what you have thing... how do you do it?"</i>

<i>"I'll keep this simple. My cloak."</i> The jarl unclasps the heavy fur cloak from himself, and drapes it over Garret's shoulders. <i>"My sword."</i> He picks it up from the floor, and hands it lengthwise to Garret. <i>"And finally, my symbol of office."</i>

Sensing something's required of him, Garret drops to one knee in front of the jarl, who in turn lifts the heavy gold medallion off himself and places it over Garret's bowed head.

<i>"Arise."</i>

Garret does just that, and as he does, the massed lupines in the hall raise their halberds and erupt in a massive hubaloo. Howling, screaming, cheering, thumping their chests as Garret fingers the medallion about his neck, his expression strangely mixed.

<i>"And now, I think it's time for me to go. For us to go."</i>

And indeed it is, faint wisps and motes of light are already rising from Galon's translucent form, dissolving in the air. Already, the eldritch glow that's illuminated your trip through the fortress is starting to fade, forcing you to take a torch from your pack and light it as darkness closes in. One by one, the spectral soldiers of fade away, rapidly winking out of existence until only the living remain in the now pitch-black audience chamber.

[party.has brint]

Grinning, Brint stomps up and gives Garret a mighty slap on the back.

<i>"Looks like you're a king now, Dogmeat. What's your first edict going to be?"</i>

<i>"I don't know about that."</i> Garret's voice is strangely quiet. <i>"I don't feel like a king. Probably because I haven't got what it takes to be one. Yet."</i>

<i>"Oh, you'll get there someday."</i>

]

Wordlessly, Garret removes cloak and medallion alike, folding the former into a neat square and piling everything on top. The fur about his left wrist is still matted with blood, but at least the bleeding's long stopped.

[party.has cait]

It's now that Cait finally finds her voice, having been entranced by this whole scene unfolding before her eyes. She hurries over to Garret, picking at his arm. <i>"Um, want me to take a look at that?"</i>

<i>"It's just a flesh wound, I'll be fine. Besides, it would feel wrong to have this heal so quickly. I'm almost hoping it'll scar."</i>

]

<i>"I think,"</i> he declares after a little bit, <i>"we should probably be going."</i>

No one's in the mood to argue with that, and together you make your way out of Fort Marrok. Without the ghosts about, the place is peaceful, perhaps even serene, perhaps finally laid to rest and ready to be buried forever. River greets you at the gates, hopping off his perch on a pile of rubble and scampering over to you.

<i>"Did you — oh, my. What a haul. Mind if I examine the medallion?"</i>

Garret slowly removes the medallion from about his neck and hands it, chain and all, to River. The little kitten bard bends under its weight, but quickly rights himself and gives it a sniff.

<i>"Yeah, this looks like the real thing all right. Garth'll be pretty pleased to have this in his hands."</i>

<i>"It really wasn't necessary."</i>

River arches an eyebrow. <i>"Pardon?"</i>

<i>"I think I know why my old man wanted this thing, and I learned more coming here than I'd even get from an old piece of shiny metal."</i> Garret grinds his teeth thoughtfully. <i>"Come on, let's go home."</i>

The walk back to Hawkethorne through the foothills is uneventful, and before long you catch sight of the village's palisade walls. Garret stops just short, then sighs and wraps everything up in the jarl's cloak.

<i>"[pc.name], why don't you have this? I've got no use for it."</i>

[pc.isDK|Well, if he wants to give away his birthright, you're not going to say no.|Is he sure? This is his birthright, after all.] You're not sure you were privy to everything that transpired between him and the jarl, but...

Garret stuffs the bundle into your hands and folds his arms. *"Take it. Like I was saying earlier, I'm no ruler, I'm not fit to rule, and I sure don't give a damn about politics. Besides, my old man would start asking inconvenient questions if I kept them, and I don't want that."*

Seems like Garret's not taking no for an answer, for he's already striding away from you, practically dragging River along the road into town. *"Right, kitten — now I need you to help me concoct a believable alibi for why I was gone..."*

//end encounter.

//Add medallion to key items.

//Add Galon's Griefmaker and Cloak of Winter to items.

//Update quest: Shades of the Past

As unbelievable as it might be, Garret managed to talk down the Jarl's spirit and convince the specter to hand over his possessions. All that's left is to return to Garth with the jarl's medallion.

}

Fighting the Jarl

- Galon Gunvaldsen should be a slightly hard fight for a group of 3 level 4 characters. If you have Garret with you, there should be a bit less pressure.
- Because he's a spooky bork, he has all the elemental resistances/weaknesses thereof.
- Basic attack deals cold + penetrating damage.
- He has **three** actions per round.
- Stats:
 - Strength +++
 - Toughness +++
 - Agility ++
 - Willpower +
 - Cunning +
 - Presence ++
- Abilities:
 - Chill Touch - basic weapon attack. Maybe +X attack power? Has chance to cause frigid based on physical resistance.
 - Cleave — as per warrior ability
 - Some kind of disarming attack. Going to have to make one up.
 - Cold Snap, as per Hethia.
 - Steady Strike
 - Duelist's stance

- Winter's howl. Heavy storm and cold damage against all enemies on the field. Only uses if there's someone who's frigid. 1/2 damage if you make a physical resistance check. [Recharge 1][Melee]
- Ultimately, as before, physical-based groups should have more trouble with him. Magic-based ones less so, but then they will be squishy to his attacks.
- The main trick to defeating the Jarl here is to prevent everyone from being frozen. This is vital because otherwise he will decimate the party with Winter's Howl. Disarm can remove his ability to use some of his attacks and give the pc's party a breather. Fire, storm and holy damage, especially in the form of spells, are great. Remedies to quickly deal with anyone who has been frozen is a great help.

Ability Text

Chill Touch

You strike with your weapon, imbuing it with icy power. On a hit, targets must make a physical resistance test or be rendered frigid for 2 turns.

[Melee][Weapon][At-Will]

Use:

[attacker.combatName] strike[tps|s] out at [target.combatName], [attacker.hisHer] weapon laced with gleaming frost!

Hit:

The icy blow strikes true!

Miss:

The attack misses!

Frigid applied:

The blow sucks the warmth out of [target.combatName] and chills [target.combatHimHer] to the bone, leaving [target.combatHimHer] shivering and frigid!

Winter's Howl

You scream with the winds of winter, bringing down its wrath upon all who would face you. All enemies take heavy storm and cold damage; on a successful physical resistance test, this damage is halved.

[Melee][Recharge 1]

Use:

[attacker.combatName] throw[tps|s] [attacker.combatHisHer] head back and howl[tps|s] to the skies! The sound reverberates in the air, coalescing into a torrent of biting winds aimed at [attacker.combatNames] foes to shatter the frozen!

Hit:

[target.combatName] is buffeted by the chill winds!

Disarm:

You attempt to divest a foe of their weapon. On a hit, you render them disarmed for 2 rounds. Some foes that fight with their teeth, fists or natural weapons cannot be disarmed.

[Melee][Weapon][Recharge 4]

Use:

[attacker.combatName] dive[tps|s] at [target.combatName] with a flourish, aiming to relieve [target.combatHimHer] of [target.combatHisHer] weapon!

Hit:

The maneuver strikes true! [attacker.weapon] clashes against [target.weapon], sending it flying out of [target.combatNames] grasp!

Miss:

However, [target.combatName] see[tps|s] the feint coming and pull[tps|s] away at the last moment, causing [attacker.combatName] to miss.

Immune:

Unfortunately, [target.combatName] cannot be disarmed as [target.heShe] do[tps|es] not wield a weapon!

In-Combat Text

You're facing Jarl Galon Gunvaldsen!

Some might call him old, others might say he's in the prime of his life. But there's no doubting the combat experience this grey-white lupine has that's earned him the moniker "the Winter Wolf". Wearing a drab surcoat over a chainmail shirt and skirts, an insignia of two crossed swords emblazoned on the former, the jarl moves with grace and purpose as his enchanted greatsword sings through the air, icy mist in its wake. Broad-shouldered and thickset, he definitely has the muscle to put power behind his strikes, and where his eyes once were, the flames of undeath burn.

It's time to put this ghost to rest.

//All instances:

The jarl fights with the resilience of undeath; you can't tell if he's wounded, tiring, or if specters like him can even feel such things.

Combat Victory

//Use this if the PC defeats Jarl Gunvaldsen in combat.

The final blow lands, knocking the mighty lupine jarl off-balance and sending him to his knees as he tries to regain his footing. Sword point-down, its tip buried in the ancient mortar between the flagstones, he leans his weight on the crossguard and slowly levers himself upright again. It's clear that he's spent almost all of his strength fighting you and has no chance of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, yet is determined to fight you to the bitter end.

He sure is one tenacious ghost.

You're not about to leave anything to chance — while Gunvaldsen is busy with righting himself, you dash forward and kick his blade out from under him. The mighty bastard sword flies from his hands with a loud clatter, skidding across the cold stone ground, and you watch as Galon collapses face down on the floor, panting and heaving, each breath pained and drawn out.

<i>"Thyri... Thyri... the wraiths... rouse our children..."</i> Gunvaldsen's ghostly claws scrabble on the stones, gurgling noises rising from his throat, each breath coming harder than the last. He seems to have forgotten you completely now, fixated on something that you can't see, and raises his chin just high enough off the ground to peer with sightless eyes at the empty space beyond your feet. Grimly, you realize that you're viewing the last few moments of the jarl's life, the despairing exertions of a man facing an ignoble straw death.

At last, though, it's over. Galon lets out a soft, whining sigh, twitches, and is still. Before your eyes, the translucent essence of the specter begins to dissolve away, motes of pale white light rising into the air as it gradually fades into nothingness. For a moment, the jarl's sword and medallion remain suspended in the air, hanging on nothing, then they clatter onto the flagstones with a ringing sound that echoes throughout the entire audience hall.

Ringringringringring...

Like a great collective sigh, the ringing radiates outwards from the buried tower, and the ghostly exhalation reverberates through stone and air alike.

Ringringringringring...

A sense of emptiness, and then a sense of lingering peace. Was Galon's determination, his force of will, his memories the only things that kept his men lingering in the mortal realm with him? You look back at the entrance that you came into the hall by, but there are no ghostly guards sprinting up the stairs or phasing through the walls to accost you for the murder of their lord.

[party.has cait]

<i>"He's gone,"</i> Cait says, leaning on her staff and heaving a sigh of relief. The catgirl looks more than a little shaken by the violent exorcism that you've just

performed, clutching her [cait.weapon] until her knuckles are white. *"I felt him pass."*

She did, too?

Cait says nothing, but bows her head and begins murmuring a small prayer for the recently departed.

]

With that done, you kneel and pick the jarl's medallion of office off the floor. It's formed in the shape of a circle of solid gold with a tarnished steel boundary, crossed swords on one side and a wolfshead with gleaming sapphire eyes on the other, and is adequately weighty and cold in your hand as you examine it in the dim light.

Guess the stories are right: you can't take it with you. Next things next: the jarl's bastard sword. It's heavier than it looks, and a little unwieldy in your hands, but feels like it could make a good weapon with a little practice.

[party.has arona]

Peering at the weapon, Arona makes a little thoughtful noise in the back of her throat. *"Little too fancy for my tastes. Pretty good blade, though. Some might say a magic weapon's cheating, but I say I'll be taking every edge I can get when my life's on the line."*

]

And that seems to settle that. With Gunvaldsen's ghost gone, even the eerie glow in the air is slowly fading away, dimming ever so slightly by the moment. Retracing your steps isn't hard when there aren't any restless dead coming out of the walls at you, and before too long you're down the stairs and out through the gates. The scent of fresh air hits you you step out into the canyon, and River peers out at you from his perch atop the rubble pile as he sees you emerge from the gates.

"Thought you were never going to come out," he says. *"Frankly, I was half-considering heading in myself and seeing if something had happened to you."*

Well, that won't be necessary.

He nods. *"Did you get it?"*

You hold out the medallion, and River steps forward to take it out of your hands. The little cat bard inspects it a moment, then raises it to his nose and gives it a sniff. He closes his eyes, murmurs to himself, then sighs contentedly and hands it back to you. *"Yep, it smells like Gunvaldsen all right. This is the real deal."*

Just how *does* River know what the jarl smells like?

<i>"So... you want to tell me what happened back in there? Looking at how worn out you are, chances are it'd make a good story."</i>

Oh, it would indeed, it would. But it's a long one — you'll spill the beans on the way back.

<i>"Well, I've been getting pretty hungry sitting around here waiting for you to show your face; let's get back to Hawkethorne before I expire from starvation. Oh, and don't you forget to tell me the story now, and the whole story at that. You wouldn't want me to start making stuff up to fill in the blanks, would you?"</i>

Knowing him? Maaaybe...

<i>"Ha!"</i>

The walk back to Hawkethorne is uneventful; the harpies must be having an off day today. By and large, the village's palisade walls loom into view, and River gives you a small nod.

<i>"Guess this is where I get off. It's been a nice field trip with you lot — don't forget to see Garth and hand him the medallion, okay?"</i> With that, River scampers off towards the gates, leaving you in the blink of an eye.

[party.has garret]

<i>"Hmm."</i>

You turn, and realise that it's the first time that Garret has said anything since you struck down the jarl. For someone who's usually gregarious and jovial as all-out... yeah. Is he okay?

Garret waves off your concern. <i>"I'm fine, I'm fine. Still stings a bit, but I've lost more blood than that and lived. No, I'm just... thinking."</i>

A hawk for his thoughts?

<i>"I... I just..."</i> His eyes cross for a moment as the gears turn in his head.

<i>"Originally, I wanted to come along for answers. I don't know what my mom did that got her thrown onto the Long Walk... and it's bad enough that my own old man won't say anything about the matter. But today... I left that Fort Marrok place with more questions than I came in with.</i>

<i>"I don't know, [pc.name]. Maybe I should've tried talking to the jarl instead, but I didn't. Maybe I was scared of him; maybe I was scared of the answers he might give me. I... it's no good regretting it, I'll never know, and it's my own fault. I'll just have to live with that.</i>

<i>"Well, either way I've got to head back, think up an excuse for coming home this early that my old man will buy. Fat chance of that. See you around, [pc.name]. Stay in one piece, okay?"</i>

With that, he's gone, hurrying after River through the village gates.

//end encounter.

//Add medallion to key items.

//Add Galon's Griefmaker to items.

//Quest Updated: Shades of the Past:

The deed is done, the Jarl's ghost is vanquished. Return to Garth with the jarl's medallion.

]

Combat Loss

Closing in, the ghostly Jarl brandishes his blade and swings. You're too slow to react, and the great strike sends your [pc.weapon] clattering on the ground and out of reach.

A small-minded man will want to gloat and make his victim squirm. A good man will kill you without another word. The Jarl's greatsword pierces your breast, and its blade of icy steel chills the life from your body.

Your life and your adventure end here.

Endings

Quest Failed

//When talking to Garth about [Medallion] after having failed the quest.

<i>"Well?"</i> Garth asks when you broach the subject. <i>"I take it you didn't succeed, because you'd have the medallion if you did, right?"</i>

Well... in not so many terms... um... yes. There were simply too many ghosts for you to deal with. If not for River, you might never have come out of the fortress at all, let alone in one piece.

<i>"Oh well. River tells me that when Fort Marrok went down, the garrison housed within was about two thousand strong. There's no shame in admitting that you were defeated, going against those odds — there'll be other glory seekers in good time to get that medallion for me. Best to just be thankful that you escaped with your life."</i> He sets down the glass he was wiping, and pours out a large mug of honey mead before [party.som]setting it out in front of you|pouring another for [companion1.name]]pouring two more for

[companion1.name] and [companion2.name]]. <i>"It's as much my fault for having too much confidence in your abilities too soon."</i>

[pc.isDK|Hey, what's that supposed to mean?|It's hard to argue with that, given the facts.]

<i>"Don't fret about it too much; enjoy your drink and think of this as a setback to be overcome. I'll have something else for you in the future, if you're willing."</i>

//end encounter

//Quest Failed: Shades of the Past

You've returned to Garth empty-handed. He's told you not to worry about it, but the sting of failure still lingers.

Quest Successful

//When talking to Garth about [Medallion] while having it in key items.

<i>"You got it?"</i>

Sure do. You take the medallion out of your pack and plonk it down on the bartop, chain and all; the sight raises a few appreciative whistles from some of the other patrons. This is it, yes?

Upon seeing the medallion, Garth swallows hard and sets down the glass in his hand. Picking up the medallion by its chain, he fingers it for a bit, then passes it from palm to palm as if testing its weight. You could be wrong, but you're pretty sure he's having a moment here and — are those <i>tears</i> in his big blue eyes?

<i>"Sorry,"</i> Garth says as he realises you're staring at him, then wipes his eyes with the back of a hand. <i>"I got something in my eye."</i>

Sure he did. Is he satisfied it's the real thing?

<i>"It is."</i>

Well, hope it was worth the trouble you went to in order to pry it off the ghostly jarl's neck.

<i>"It is. Trust me, it is. You have no idea how much this means to me."</i> Garth pours out a large mug of honey mead before [party.som|setting it out in front of you|pouring another for [companion1.name]|pouring two more for [companion1.name] and [companion2.name]]. <i>"Come, a drink on the house. It's the least I can do for you."</i>

If he wants to do more, he can start by explaining what this has to do with his wife, and why he won't tell Gwyn and Garret about their mother.

A long, rueful sigh. <i>"Fine, I owe you as much. Take a seat and get comfortable.</i>

<i>"This symbol on the medallion, that's the banner my wife was flying the first day I joined up with her company. How do you think she got to be leader of one?"</i>

By fighting, clawing, and beating her way to the top, you presume.

<i>"Oh, that's not to say she didn't do plenty of that. But she also claimed to be descended from some supposedly dead lineage of the packs or somesuch. Back in the day, I could never tell when she was being serious, and when she wasn't — like Garret, my wife loved to make ludicrous boasts. She said she flew the insignia of that dead house on her banners, and all I thought of it at the time was that it was simply good advertising. But then as the years went by, I began to wonder-"</i>

And after she left, he began to search.

Garth nods, a barely perceptible dip of his head. <i>"I'd try to pry tales of the Gunvaldsen line from people who passed through the Frost Hound. So many false leads and pointless rumours — it's one of the reasons I keep River around, to sort through these for me. Then one day he comes up and tells me that Fort Marrok didn't just exist, but he'd gotten his hands on the key as well."</i>

All right, that explains that. You take a deep swig of mead and motion for Garth to continue. Why won't he tell Gwyn and Garret the truth about their mother?

<i>"Gwyn... she already hates her mother and doesn't want anything to do with her. I don't want to bring it up lest I break her heart again. And Garret..."</i> Garth closes his eyes.

<i>"The choice my wife made wasn't an easy one. If I told him outright, it would poison him against her forever. I don't want that. But if he works to find the truth by himself, when he gets to that point, if he ever does, when he catches up with her... I'm hoping he'll be wise enough to understand why she had to do what she did, even if he doesn't agree with it."</i>

That sounds like a cop-out.

<i>"It does, but it's the truth. And no, I'm not going to tell you, because you'll just march straight up and spill it to Garret. Them's the breaks. Did you find anything good while in there to make the trip worth your time?"</i>

Could have. Doesn't have to be.

<i>"Playing coy, eh? Well, I owe you as much."</i>

He'd better, since you risked your neck to bring him a memento of his wife.

<i>"Look, I'm not saying that I'm not grateful. Let me pour you another drink, eh?"</i>

You spend the remainder of the day — and night — entertaining yourself at Garth's expense, recounting the tale of your adventure in the haunted fortress with Garth and anyone who'll listen. {*//if garret was asked:*

Of course, you leave out the bits about Garret coming along with you. Wouldn't do if Garth heard about it.

} River's even composed a little tune about your exploits by now, and has the entire common room cheering and clapping at his music. It's well past midnight by the time you crawl into bed, stuffed and drunk, and are asleep before your head hits the pillow.

//auto sleep.

//add well fed for 24 hours.

//give a mead buff.

//Quest Completed: Shades of the Past

You've returned the Jarl's Medallion to Garth. All is well with the world...for now.

//Remove Jarl's medallion.

Epilogue

//At least two days after GarthQuest ends successfully.

//Trigger when PC is heading up to bed in the Frost Hound.

Ah, another day well and done. You're about to turn in for the day, heading up the stairs to your room on the Frost Hound's second floor when you hear voices coming from one of the guest rooms. The doorway is open, so you can hear them well enough — it's Garth and Garret, presumably doing some housekeeping on the empty rooms.

<i>"Old man... that medallion you passed me the other day..."</i>

<i>"I hope you understand what it means. You know more about the truth than your sister does, but it's because you earned it all yourself."</i>

<i>"Then you shouldn't be so quick to try and shove the Frost Hound off on me. Look, old man, I know what you're trying to do here and I'm not saying that I don't appreciate it, but I take too much after Mom to be content with sitting down without at least getting that wanderlust out of my system."</i>

A snort. *<i>"Then understand, son, that someday I've got to let go of you. Until then, my job is to train you for the day that you'll no longer need me, and I get the feeling that day is coming up pretty soon. My only hope is that you won't go and get yourself killed the moment you break your leash."</i>*

<i>"And you know full well what I'm going to do."</i>

<i>"I can't stop you from going after your mother, Garret. I don't believe she's dead — she's too wilful for that. But you'd better know what to do when you finally find her."</i>

"I damn well know what I'm going to do when I finally find Mom, old man."

"Are you sure?"

Silence hangs in the air for split second.

"I gave you the medallion for a reason, Garret. Think about what you want to do, not just go for or against something just because I'm headed in the opposite direction."

"...I'll think about it."

"You do that, son."

Their voices fade as father and son set about changing the mattresses on the beds, and you slip by on to your own room without too much trouble. Now *that* was an interesting conversation...

//head on to bed sleep in Frost Hound as per normal.