SINGULAR OMNIA

The Heron's Road

THE ROAD BOOK

A SHORT ADVENTURE FOR ONE PLAYER.

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Best played with the Board Game Narrator app: every character voiced, with music and sound.

01

The bells of Brackwater ring the evening hour as you ride in through the river gate. The first drops of rain are falling, and the wind off the marshes smells of more to come.

Under the gate lantern waits the man who hired you: Master Aldous Wren, cartographer to the Count of Ambrel. Grey-bearded and thin, ink on his fingers, a rolled map under his arm.

"You came. Good," Aldous says. "My son Corin rode out twelve days ago to survey the Old Toll Road. Four days ago his mare came home alone. Empty saddle. Mud to the knees."

He grips the map tighter.

"Everyone says it was the Heron's band. Everyone says he is dead." Aldous looks past you, east, to where the road vanishes into the dusk. "I have drawn every road in this valley. I will find my son on one of them."

Behind you, the last carts of the day rattle in over the cobbles, and the gate swings shut.

Go to **48**.

02

You make a small fire in a hollow. Gain 1 Stamina.

Near midnight, hooves thud on the track below. Riders, a dozen of them, carrying no torches. Aldous smothers the fire with his cloak.

- To creep down to the track and listen, **test DEX.** Roll the dice and add your DEX. On 1 to 3, a mount whinnies at your scent and an arrow hisses out of the dark and grazes you: lose 2 Stamina, and if your Stamina is 0, go to **30**; otherwise go to **15**. On 4 or more, go to **24**.
- To lie still in the hollow until they pass, go to **15**.

03

The pilgrims' path is green and quiet. As you walk, Aldous talks, perhaps because the silence is worse.

"His mother used to say he had my hands and her eyes," he begins. "He could draw a coastline before he could write his name. But he never drew the roads. He drew the people on them. Tinkers, shepherds, beggars at the toll gates. I told him that wasn't mapmaking."

He walks on a while.

"We quarrelled before he left," Aldous says. "About the Count's toll survey. He said my maps had become a list of whom to tax." His jaw tightens. "I called him a child."

At nightfall, far ahead, a cracked bell sways in the ruined abbey tower, ringing faintly in the wind.

- To make camp and rest, gain 2 Stamina, mark Delay, and go to **15**.
- To push on through the dark, go to **15**.

04

A woman in a grey cloak, whom the band calls Sable, steps out of the shadows and draws her sword.

"He's not yours to take back, old man," Sable says. "Go home."

- If you have the Soldiering skill, you read her stance at once: she is a lookout, not a killer. Your blade rings against hers, and her sword clatters across the floor. She flees up the stairs.
- Otherwise, **test STR.** Roll the dice and add your STR. On 1 to 3, her blade opens a cut across your ribs before she slips past you and away: lose 3 Stamina, and if your Stamina is 0, go to **30**. On 4 or more, you drive her back with a clang of steel, and she flees up the stairs.

Then, to search another passage, mark Delay. If you have 8 Delay marks, go to **19**; otherwise go to **16**. To take the well passage, go to **39**.

05

You trace the carving with a fingertip, and you know it: a lantern with three rays, the sign the Brackwater Watch cuts to tell its own people that a friend has passed this way. The cuts are clean and pale. Whoever made them came through here only days ago.

Aldous looks from the mark to you, and back again. "The Watch?" he says. "Out here?"

Mark Lantern. Then go to **32**.

06

Together, you and Aldous heave the altar stone aside. In the hollow beneath it lies a bundle wrapped in oilcloth.

Inside is a hood of grey wool. Beneath it, a mask carved from pale wood in the shape of a heron's head, with a long, cruel beak. And threaded on a cord around the mask, a woman's silver ring.

Aldous does not touch it. "That was his mother's ring," he says. "He asked to keep it, when she died."

He stares at the heron's empty eyes. "Why would he hide his mother's ring with this?" he asks.

Mark Feather. Then go to 35.

07

You fall. For a sickening moment there is nothing under you at all, and then you land hard on a heap of old stone at the bottom of the stairwell.

Above you, Aldous picks his way down the broken steps, testing each one, until he reaches your side. "Can you stand?" he asks. "Good. Slowly." He pulls you upright with surprising strength. "My son may need you whole."

Lose 2 Stamina. If your Stamina is 0, go to 30. Otherwise, go to 16.

08

You stay your hand. Around the fire, forty outlaws lower their weapons, one by one.

Father and son sit together by the embers until the stars begin to fade. You keep watch a little way off, and you hear only pieces: their names for each other, a quarrel that softens, his mother's name, once.

At dawn, Corin walks you both to the rim of the quarry. He takes a grey heron feather from his hood and tucks it into his father's coat.

"Tell them you searched, and found nothing," he says. "Tell them the Toll Road swallowed me. It's almost true."

"And you?" Aldous asks.

"I'll keep the carts honest." Corin pulls the hood up over his hair. "Somebody has to."

At the Watch house, Aldous tells Captain Dunmore that he found no trace of his son. She looks at him for a long time, and then she writes it down.

That night, Aldous burns his toll survey in his own hearth, sheet by sheet. And once a season, a grey heron feather is found on his doorstep, with no note at all.

THE END. Ending 2: The Heron's Son.

09

The cell gates hang open, their hinges rusted red. In the last cell, a chain is bolted to the wall. Its shackle is newer than the rest, and bright where it has been worn.

On the stone beside it, scratched with something sharp, are two letters: C. W. And beneath them, nine short lines.

Aldous kneels and lays his palm flat over the letters. “Nine days,” he says. “He was down here nine days in the dark, and I was drawing maps.”

Mark Chain.

Behind you, a boot scrapes on stone. Go to **04**.

10

Steel rings on steel. You turn Brannoc’s first blow, and his second, and then Corin has his father by the arm and the three of you are running through the scattering camp. Someone cuts the tether line, the mounts squeal and bolt, and in the chaos you find three saddles and ride.

Behind you, the Heron’s band does not give chase. By morning, Crowstone is empty, and the Count’s silver and the Heron are gone into the hills.

Captain Dunmore meets you at the river gate. She looks at Corin for a long time.

“You found your son, Master Wren,” she says at last. “I’ll put that in my report, just under the line where I lost six months’ work, two good informants, and the Heron.”

“Two more nights, Father,” Corin says, not meeting her eye. “Two nights, and he’d have walked straight into the Watch.”

“I only wanted you home,” Aldous answers.

“I know.” Corin’s voice is hardly a breath. “That’s what makes it so hard.”

THE END. Ending 3: The Lantern Goes Out.

11

Aldous goes down the scree in a rush of stones, shouting his son's name.

"Corin!" he cries, his voice cracking on it. "Corin!"

The camp wakes like a kicked hive. Somebody screams a warning, the tethered mounts neigh and pull at their line, and an arrow hisses past your ear.

Test DEX. Roll the dice and add your DEX.

- On 1 to 3, a club catches you across the shoulders. Lose 3 Stamina. If your Stamina is 0, go to 30. Otherwise, rough hands seize you both: go to 52.
- On 4 or more, you drag Aldous down behind a wagon. In the confusion, the two of you slip through the shadows towards the grey tent. Go to 33.

12

The door of the Drowned Bell swings open on warmth and noise. A fire blazes in the hearth, drovers laugh over their cups, and a fiddler saws at a tune nobody is dancing to. Behind the bar stands Marta Kell, the innkeeper, broad-shouldered, sleeves rolled to the elbow.

"Master Wren." Her voice drops the moment she sees him. "I heard about the mare. I'm sorry."

Aldous does not waste a breath on thanks. "He drank here the night before he left, Marta," he says. "Who with?"

Marta's eyes flick to a corner table. A big drover in a mud-brown coat sits there alone, his hat pulled low. Then she starts polishing a cup that is already clean.

- To lean close and question Marta quietly, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 1 to 4, go to 28. On 5 or more, go to 44.
- To walk straight over to the drover's table, go to 28.
- To leave the tavern, go to 17.

13

The tracks lead deep into the wood, to a trampled clearing where a camp was struck in a hurry: cold ashes and snapped branches. Half buried in the leaves lies a brass surveyor's compass.

Aldous picks it up and turns it over. "So you always find your way home," he reads aloud from the lid. "I gave him this on his sixteenth birthday."

Around the ashes, the ground is churned with boot prints.

- To study the boot prints, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT, and add 2 more if you have the Scouting skill. On 1 to 4, the prints tell you nothing: go to 43. On 5 or more, go to 20.
- To press on before dark, go to 43.

14

Jory wipes his hands on his coat, then looks up and down the empty road before he speaks.

"You're the Wren boy's father," he says, lowering his voice. "The whole valley knows. Listen. I saw him, three days back, at the Millrace crossing. The Heron's people had him in the back of a wagon, his wrists in a chain." "He looked right at me, and I looked away. I'm not proud of that."

Aldous closes his eyes.

Jory presses a twist of dried apples into your hand. "For the road," he says. "And mind the Millrace. It's in flood."

Gain 1 Stamina. Mark Chain. Then go to **45**.

15

At grey dawn, the Abbey of Saint Wendel rises out of the mist: roofless walls, a broken tower, its cracked bell swinging in the wind with a low, unhappy note. An old man in a patched brown habit steps out, leaning on a stick.

"Pilgrims?" Brother Anselm says. "There have been none for forty years. Riders, yes. They come by night and go down below, into the undercroft. I don't ask them why."

- To speak with Brother Anselm, go to **50**.
- To go straight down to the undercroft, go to **35**.

16

A long vaulted hall stretches away into the dark. Fresh boot prints in the dust lead three ways.

To the left, iron gates: the monks' old punishment cells. To the right, a wooden door, with a faint glow of candlelight beneath it: the scriptorium. Straight ahead, a cold draught, and the sound of moving water: the old well passage.

"The monks cut a tunnel from the well to the quarry," Aldous says, holding his hand in the draught. "If it's still open, it will take us straight to Crowstone."

- To search the cells, go to **09**.
- To search the scriptorium, go to **31**.
- To take the well passage, go to **39**.

17

The market square of Brackwater is emptying for the night. Shutters bang closed. Three places still show a light, and any of them might know something of Corin.

"Ask where you like," Aldous says, without taking his eyes from the lit windows. "But every hour we spend in this town is an hour he spends out there."

You may visit each place below only once. Each time you visit one, mark Delay.

- To visit the Drowned Bell, go to 12.
- To visit the Watch house, go to 37.
- To search Corin's rented room above the chandler's shop, go to 29.
- When you are ready to leave Brackwater, go to 41.

18

The first to step into the firelight is a big scarred man with a heron mask pushed up on his brow: Brannoc Vey, the Heron himself. Behind him walks Corin, unbound, dressed in bandit grey, a knife at his belt. For one heartbeat his eyes meet his father's, and they beg him to keep silent.

"Corin! Thank heaven!" Aldous cries. "Corin, it's me!"

Brannoc looks slowly from the old man to the young one. "Father?" he says. "You told me you had no family, lad." He turns the word over slowly. "A father who goes asking for you all over Brackwater, who hires a stranger to follow your trail. A careful lad like you. Who else have you been talking to?"

Corin steps close to you and breathes five words. "Six months. Get him out."

Brannoc draws his sword. **Test STR or DEX,** whichever is higher. Roll the dice and add it.

- On 1 to 2, go to 30.
- On 3 or more, go to 10.

19

Somewhere along the way, the hours slipped through your fingers.

When at last you reach Crowstone, the quarry is silent. The great fire is cold ash, and the rain has washed the wagon ruts to nothing. On a flat stone at the centre of the camp, someone has left a single grey feather, weighed down with a pebble.

Aldous sits down on the stone and does not speak for a long time.

"I've drawn every road in this valley," he says at last. "And I was too slow on every one of them."

You ride back to Brackwater together, and he pays you in full, which somehow makes it worse. The bells are ringing as you leave. You do not look back.

THE END. Ending 5: Too Late.

To try again, start again at entry 01.

20

You crouch over the churned earth. Most of the prints are heavy boots, trampled and careless. But one set is different: a young man's narrow boots, walking free at the head of the line, where a leader walks.

Aldous looks at them for a long moment, and says nothing at all.

Mark Feather, and go to **43**.

21

Brannoc Vey, the Heron, a big scarred man with a heron mask pushed up on his brow, drags a young man into the firelight by a chain. Corin's face is bruised and his blue coat torn, but he holds his head high.

"Master Wren," Brannoc says. "You've saved me the cost of a ransom letter. Your boy refuses to draw me the Watch's patrol roads. Perhaps his father will be more sensible."

"Don't give him anything, Father!" Corin shouts.

- If you have the Soldiering skill, challenge Brannoc to single combat under the old soldiers' code. **Test STR.** Roll the dice and add your STR. On 1 to 4, go to **30**. On 5 or more, go to **46**.
- To cut Corin's chain and make a dash for the tethered mounts, **test DEX.** Roll the dice and add your DEX. On 1 to 4, go to **30**. On 5 or more, go to **46**.
- To have Aldous offer Brannoc the Count's own toll map, and strike while he reads it, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 1 to 4, go to **30**. On 5 or more, go to **46**.

22

You come out under the stars on the rim of Crowstone quarry. Below lies a great bowl of red stone, and in it, the Heron's camp: a dozen fires, a ring of wagons, a line of tethered mounts, and at the centre a big tent of grey canvas. Laughter and the clatter of pots drift up on the smoke.

Aldous is breathing hard.

"He's down there," he says. "I know it." "I'm going down."

- To hold him back, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 1 to 3, he tears free of your grip: go to **11**. On 4 or more, go to **26**.
- To let him go, and follow, go to **11**.

23

Crouched low, you cross the dark ground towards the cage wagon. The sentry snores. The fire behind him crackles.

Test DEX. Roll the dice and add your DEX. Add 1 if you have the Scouting skill, and 2 more if you waited for the camp to sleep.

- On 1 to 3, a stone turns under your foot, and the sentry wakes with a shout. Go to **52**.
- On 4 or more, go to **36**.

24

You creep down through the wet bracken and lie flat above the track. The riders pass so close that you could touch a stirrup.

One of them speaks, low and flat: "The Heron's orders. The old man's to be turned back, not hurt. Not one hair on his head."

The hoofbeats fade towards the east. Aldous lets out a breath he seems to have held for a long time.

Mark Feather, and go to **15**.

25

At the heart of the camp, the great fire burns high, and the whole band has gathered round it: forty men and women.

Across the fire, the crowd parts. Figures step out into the light.

Beside you, Aldous makes a sound you will remember for the rest of your life, half a sob, half a name. “Corin.”

Now count the marks next to each clue on your adventure sheet.

- If Feather has more marks than any other clue, go to 42.
- If Lantern has more marks than any other clue, go to 18.
- If Chain has the most marks, or two clues are tied for the most, or you have no clue marks at all, go to 21.

26

You hold his arm until the shaking stops. Then the two of you lie flat on the cold rim and watch.

The camp has one cage wagon, set apart at the edge of the firelight. A big sentry in a mud-brown coat dozes beside it. The grey tent stands at the centre, with a guard at the front, but none at the back.

“Whatever you decide,” Aldous whispers, “decide it soon.”

- To creep down to the cage wagon, go to 23.
- To creep down to the back of the grey tent, go to 33.
- To wait for the camp to sleep more deeply, mark Delay twice. If you have 8 Delay marks, go to 19. Otherwise, go to 23, and add 2 to your roll there.
- To wait for dawn and follow the band when it moves on, go to 19.

27

Halfway across, the current takes your mount’s legs from under her. She whinnies in terror, and then the cold brown water closes over your head.

A hand grabs your collar. Aldous, chest-deep in the flood, hauls you up onto the far bank, and the two of you lie there coughing and shaking.

“Safe in summer,” Aldous gasps at last. “I’ll remember that line when I redraw the map.”

Downstream, the two mounts have scrambled out on their own, wild-eyed but whole.

Lose 3 Stamina. If your Stamina is 0, go to 30. Otherwise, go to 32.

28

The drover is on his feet before you can say a word. A bench crashes over, a jug shatters on the flagstones, and the whole room turns to watch.

"Keep your nose off the Heron's road, friend," Wat growls, towering over you. "You and the old man both."

He swings a fist like a ham at your head. **Test STR.** Roll the dice and add your STR.

- On 1 to 4, the blow lands hard. Lose 2 Stamina. The drover shoves past you and is gone into the night, the door slamming behind him. Go to 17.
- On 5 or more, go to 51.

29

You climb a narrow stair, and the stiff door creaks open on a small room under the eaves. Rain taps on the roof slates.

Corin's desk is buried in maps. Aldous lifts one to the window, and the colour drains from his face. "This is my survey of the Toll Road," he says. "My lines. My hand. But look. The fords are moved. The pilgrims' path leads nowhere. Crowstone quarry is gone from the page entirely."

He sets the map down as if it might burn him.

"These are wrong, and he knew they were wrong," Aldous says. "Corin never drew a careless line in his life."

Above the desk, pinned to the beam, hangs a single grey heron feather.

Mark Feather. Then go to 17.

30

The world tilts and grows quiet. Whatever struck you down, the flood, the blade or the long cold road, you cannot get up again.

Aldous is kneeling beside you. His face swims in and out of view.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I should never have asked you to come." His hand finds yours. "I'll find him. I swear it on every map I ever drew."

You want to tell him something important, but the words will not come, and then the dark is very kind.

Whether Aldous Wren ever found his son, the valley does not say. Some say an old man still walks the Toll Road with a rolled map under his arm, asking every traveller the same question.

THE END. Ending 4: The Companion Falls.

To try again, start again at entry 01.

31

The scriptorium door opens on a small stone room lit by a single stub of candle, still warm. Someone was here only hours ago. On a sloping desk lie two sheets of paper covered in tidy columns of nonsense letters: a cipher.

"That's not his hand," Aldous murmurs, bending close. "Or is it? He always made his letters too small."

- If you have the Lore skill, go to 47.
- Otherwise, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 5 or more, go to 47. On 1 to 4, the letters stay a jumble. You fold them away, useless for now. Then, to search another passage, mark Delay: if you have 8 Delay marks, go to 19; otherwise go to 16. To take the well passage, go to 39.

32

Beyond the river rises the Thornwold: old oaks dripping, birdsong returning as the rain eases. Far off, a wolf howls, and the mounts shy and stamp.

Two ways lead on. The deep ruts of a heavy wagon turn off the road into the trees. And beside the road, Aldous has found a mossy waymarker carved with a pilgrim's staff.

"The pilgrims' path," he says, brushing the moss away with his thumb. "It leads straight to the Abbey of Saint Wendel, and the abbey stands right above Crowstone. I drew it myself, thirty years ago."

- To follow the wagon tracks, go to **13** if you have the Scouting skill. Otherwise, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 1 to 3, you lose the trail in the brambles: mark Delay, and go to **03**. On 4 or more, go to **13**.
- To take the pilgrims' path, go to **03**.

33

You slit the canvas at the back of the grey tent with your knife.

Test DEX. Roll the dice and add your DEX.

- On 1 to 3, the guard at the front hears the cloth tear and comes round the side with a torch. Go to **52**.
- On 4 or more, go to **40**.

34

You speak to her plainly, one tired professional to another, and something in her face eases. She waits until Aldous turns away. Then she leans toward you, so that only you can hear.

"If you find the boy," Captain Dunmore murmurs, "don't drag him home by the collar. Some roads are walked on purpose."

She presses something small and cold into your palm: a brass token, stamped with the lantern of the Watch.

"Show that to no one," she adds. "Unless you must."

Outside, Aldous asks what she said. You are not sure how to answer him.

Mark Lantern. Then go to **17**.

35

An iron door at the foot of the chapel creaks open on darkness and the smell of wet stone. Somewhere below, water drips, slow and steady. The stairs spiral down into the dark, and many of the steps are cracked or missing.

Halfway down, a step gives way under your boot. Stones clatter away into the blackness.

Test DEX. Roll the dice and add your DEX.

- On 1 to 3, go to 07.
- On 4 or more, you throw yourself against the wall and keep your footing. Go to 16.

36

You reach the cage unseen. It is empty.

On the straw inside lies a surveyor's measuring chain, and a sleeve torn from a blue coat. Aldous presses the sleeve to his face. "I bought him this coat," he whispers.

Mark Chain.

Then, from the centre of the camp, a voice calls everyone to the great fire. Go to 25.

37

The Watch house stands at the top of the square, a lantern carved in stone above its door. Inside, maps are pinned to every wall. They are Aldous's maps, you realise, from the way he stiffens. Behind a cluttered desk sits Captain Ilse Dunmore, a woman of forty with cropped grey hair and tired eyes.

She does not stand. "Master Wren, if this is about your son, I have no riders to spare. The Count wants every one of my people guarding his toll carts."

"Then let the Count find my son himself!" Aldous snaps.

Dunmore does not raise her voice. She does not need to.

- If you have the Soldiering skill, go to 34.
- Otherwise, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 1 to 4, she shows you the door: "Good night, Master Wren." Go to 17. On 5 or more, go to 34.

38

The Old Toll Road climbs out of the valley into grey rain. Thunder rolls along the hills. Ahead, a peddler's cart has sunk to its axles in mud. A small, round man is heaving at the wheel.

"Good day, travellers!" he calls, as cheerful as a man can be knee-deep in mud. "Or good evening, it's hard to tell in this soup. Jory Fenn, pots, pins and ribbons. I'd shake your hand, but mine is all mud."

"We have no time to spare," Aldous answers, without slowing his mount.

- To help free the cart, **test STR.** Roll the dice and add your STR. On 1 to 3, the wheel slips and wrenches your shoulder before the cart comes free: lose 1 Stamina, and go to **14**. On 4 or more, the cart lurches free at the first heave. Go to **14**.
- To ride on past, go to **45**.

39

The well passage slopes steeply down until it ends at a black pool where the tunnel has flooded. Along the left wall, a narrow ledge, slick with green slime, leads above the water towards a faint grey glimmer of night air.

"The ledge, or we swim," Aldous says, peering at the black water. "I haven't swum in thirty years."

- To edge along the ledge, **test DEX.** Roll the dice and add your DEX. On 1 to 2, you slip and crack your knee on the stone before you catch yourself: lose 2 Stamina, and if your Stamina is 0, go to **30**; otherwise go to **22**. On 3 or more, go to **22**.
- To swim through the flooded tunnel, go to **49**.
- To climb back up and ride the long way round above ground, mark Delay twice. If you have 8 Delay marks, go to **19**. Otherwise, go to **22**.

40

You slip inside. A lamp, a camp bed, and a table covered in maps: Aldous's maps, the true ones, with the Count's toll carts marked along every road in a small, neat hand.

Aldous traces a line with one finger. "His hand," he says softly. "These are his marks."

Mark Feather.

Footsteps approach, and you slip out again into the shadows near the fire. Go to **25**.

41

At the stables, a lad of about fourteen holds two saddled mounts. This is Tam, the stable boy, and he cannot keep still.

"Master Corin's mare came home with red clay up to her hocks, sir," Tam blurts out. "Red clay's only found out past the Thornwold, by the old quarry. Nobody goes out there now."

Aldous repeats the name as if tasting it. "Crowstone," he says quietly, and then again, firmly: "Crowstone. Thank you, lad."

In her stall, Corin's mare whinnies after you as you lead the mounts out. The rain is getting heavier.

- To ride out at once and travel through the night, lose 1 Stamina and go to **38**.
- To sleep a few hours and ride at first light, gain 1 Stamina, mark Delay, and go to **38**.

42

The young man who steps into the firelight wears a grey hood and a heron mask of pale wood. He lifts the mask away. Corin Wren has his father's hands and his mother's eyes, and right now both are shaking.

"Lower your weapons. All of you," Corin says. "That is my father."

At his shoulder, Brannoc Vey, who led this band before him, growls low. "You swore he would never find this place."

"I moved the fords on your maps, Father." "I hid the quarry. I sent riders to turn you back. All of it to keep you away from here. The Count hangs the families of outlaws. And half this camp lost their farms to the tolls your maps made possible. I took the Heron's hood so they would answer to me, and not to their anger."

"And you never thought to tell me?" Aldous asks, hardly above a whisper.

- To stay your hand and let father and son speak, go to **08**.
- To try to seize Corin by force and drag him home, go to **30**.

43

Dusk comes early under the trees. The howling is close now, and grey shapes slip between the trunks on both sides. The mounts rear and whinny. Aldous draws his sword, an old blade he has probably not swung in twenty years.

"Stay close to me," he says, and the blade shakes in his hand. "Or rather, let me stay close to you."

- To stand and fight, **test STR.** Roll the dice and add your STR.
- To snatch up a fallen branch, light it and drive them off with fire, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT.

Whichever you chose: on 1 to 3, teeth find your arm before the pack breaks away. Lose 2 Stamina, and if your Stamina is 0, go to 30; otherwise go to 02. On 4 or more, the wolves scatter into the dark. Go to 02.

44

Marta glances around, then reaches under the bar and lays a folded letter on the wood. It is sealed with blue wax.

"He left this with me," she says, so quietly that the fiddle almost swallows it. "If his father came asking, I was to give it to him, and to nobody else."

Aldous breaks the seal. Pressed into the wax is a tiny lantern: the badge of the Brackwater Watch. He reads the letter aloud, and his voice is not steady.

"Father. Don't come looking for me. Trust me this once, the way you never could."

He folds the letter slowly and puts it inside his coat, over his heart. Marta sets two bowls of hot stew in front of you.

"Eat," she says, and it is not a suggestion. "Whatever road you're taking, you'll take it better fed."

Gain 2 Stamina. Mark Lantern. Then go to 17.

45

The road ends at the Millrace, swollen brown with rain. The old stone bridge has fallen, and the water pours through the gap. Upstream, half-hidden in willows, you can see the roof of a ruined mill and a narrow footbridge beside it.

"My map shows a ford here," Aldous says. "A safe one."

Thunder cracks overhead.

"In summer," he adds.

- To ford the river on horseback, **test DEX.** Roll the dice and add your DEX. On 1 to 3, go to 27. On 4 or more, go to 32.
- To ride upstream to the mill footbridge, mark Delay, and go to 53.

46

The clang of steel, a shout, a chain falling into the dirt. Then you are running, Corin stumbling between you and his father, and the mounts are under you, and Crowstone is a red glow falling away behind.

You ride all night. Corin sits in front of his father in the saddle, and Aldous holds him the way he must have held him as a small boy.

At sunrise, the bells of Brackwater ring out across the marsh. Captain Dunmore meets you at the river gate with twenty riders. Within the week, the Watch rides on Crowstone, and the Heron's band is scattered to the hills.

That evening, at the Drowned Bell, Marta will not take your money.

"I told Brannoc you would come," Corin says, a tired smile tugging at his split lip. "He laughed at me. I told him my father has a map of everything."

"Not of everything," Aldous answers. "Not of you." He smiles for the first time since you met him. "But I've started one."

THE END. Ending 1: The Rescue.

47

It is a simple shifted alphabet, a clerk's cipher. Letter by letter, the words come clear, and you read them aloud. "To Captain D. The silver moves at the new moon, two nights from now. The Heron trusts me. Strike then, and not before. Your lantern in the dark."

Aldous takes the paper from you and reads it twice. "Your lantern in the dark," he whispers. "What is he mixed up in? What has my son become?"

Mark Lantern.

Then, to search another passage, mark Delay. If you have 8 Delay marks, go to 19; otherwise go to 16. To take the well passage, go to 39.

48

You look at the old man, at the map trembling a little under his arm, and you think about what he is asking. One young man, somewhere in a valley of toll gates and robbers, twelve days gone. Others have taken Aldous Wren's silver and ridden east, and not one has come back with a word. This is not a job. It is a long walk in the rain towards bad news.

And yet. You have walked into worse with less. Whatever brought you to Brackwater tonight, you have a gift of your own, and used well, it may be all that stands between this man and the worst day of his life. The only question is which gift is yours.

Choose your companion. Copy the numbers and the skill onto your adventure sheet, and write the Stamina shown both as Stamina now and as your maximum.

Blair Marsh, the old sergeant. A veteran of the river wars, broad and grey and patient, who fought for three lords and now fights for whoever pays on time. Skill: Soldiering.

STR 3	DEX 1	WIT 1	Stamina 8

Rook Callan, the tracker. A former poacher from the Thornwold, quick, quiet and hard to see, who knows every deer path and every badger's sett in the vale. Skill: Scouting.

STR 1	DEX 3	WIT 1	Stamina 7

Quinn Ashby, the scribe. Once a clerk in the Count's own archive, dismissed for reading what was never meant to be read, and now a writer of letters and reader of old documents for anyone who can pay. Sharp-eyed and sharper-tongued. Skill: Lore.

STR 1	DEX 1	WIT 3	Stamina 6

After choosing your companion, go to 17.

49

You wade in, and the cold steals the breath from your chest. Halfway along, the roof dips down to the water, and there is nothing to do but fill your lungs and go under, pulling Aldous after you through the black.

- If your Stamina is 3 or less, the cold takes the last of your strength. Go to 30.
- Otherwise, you burst up into the night air, gasping, on the far side. Lose 3 Stamina. If your Stamina is 0, go to 30. Otherwise, go to 22.

50

Brother Anselm shares black bread and thin broth by his fire. Gain 1 Stamina.

"A young man came here alone, a week ago, in the dead of night," the old monk says. "He knelt in the chapel and wept. Then he asked me to bless something, and he hid it beneath the altar stone. I didn't ask what it was."

He looks at Aldous's hands, stained with ink.

"He had your hands, I think," Anselm adds gently. "Mind the undercroft stairs, both of you. Half of them fell in the winter frost."

- To search beneath the altar stone, go to 06.
- To go down to the undercroft, go to 35.

51

You catch his arm and pin him face down across the counter. Wat gasps the words out against the wood: "The boy's in irons, where the crows nest. Ask the Heron for him, if you want to join him."

Then he twists free, and is gone into the rain before anyone can stop him.

Mark Chain, and go to 17.

52

Rough hands strip your weapons and twist your arms behind your back. You and Aldous are marched through the camp while the band comes out to stare and laugh.

The big drover in the mud-brown coat walks beside you, grinning.

"Tavern talk travels faster than you do, friend," Wat says. "We've known you were coming since Brackwater."

Somebody cuffs you across the head for good measure. Lose 1 Stamina. If your Stamina is 0, go to 30. Otherwise, you are dragged into the light of the great fire. Go to 25.

53

The mill door hangs from one hinge, and it creaks back and forth in the wind. You are leading the mounts onto the footbridge when an arrow thuds into the post beside your hand. A figure in a grey cloak breaks from the willows and runs off into the rain.

"A sentry," Aldous says, drawing his cloak tight. "They know we are coming."

On the mill door, beneath the moss, someone has carved a small, fresh mark: a lantern with three rays.

- If you have the Lore or Soldiering skill, go to **05**.
- Otherwise, **test WIT.** Roll the dice and add your WIT. On 1 to 4, the mark means nothing to you: go to **32**. On 5 or more, go to **05**.

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