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# THE HERON'S ROAD

**RULEBOOK**

## The Vale of Ambrel

The Count of Ambrel has never once come to his own vale. He sits in a castle far to the north, and the people of the river country know him by two things only: the face on their coins, and the toll gate waiting at every crossing.

The gates began with a map. Three years ago the Count ordered every road in the vale surveyed, so that no cart could pass untaxed, and the man who drew that map was Aldous Wren of Brackwater, the finest mapmaker in Ambrel. Since then, farms that cannot pay have been taken. Families have left the marshes and the oak woods. Some have gone into the forest, and not to hunt.

Brackwater still keeps its hours. The bell tower rings them over the market square, the Watch keeps a lantern burning above its door, and Marta Kell still fills the cups at the Drowned Bell. But the town has learned to lower its voice when the east road comes up in talk.

For a year now, the Count's toll carts have been robbed on the Old Toll Road, where it crosses the Millrace and runs into the dark of the Thornwold. The robbers call themselves the Heron's band, after the grey heron mask their leader wears. Beyond the Thornwold stand the ruins of the Abbey of Saint Wendel, and under them the red quarry of Crowstone, where no honest person goes any more.

Twelve days ago, Corin Wren, Aldous's only son, rode out to survey that road. Four days ago, his mare walked back into Brackwater alone, mud to the knees and the saddle empty.

Aldous went straight to the Watch house. Captain Ilse Dunmore heard him out without once looking up from her papers, and when he had finished she answered in the voice of a woman who has said the same words too often. "I have no riders to spare, Master Wren."

After that, the town stopped saying Corin's name. It said "the boy" instead, and said it in the past tense.

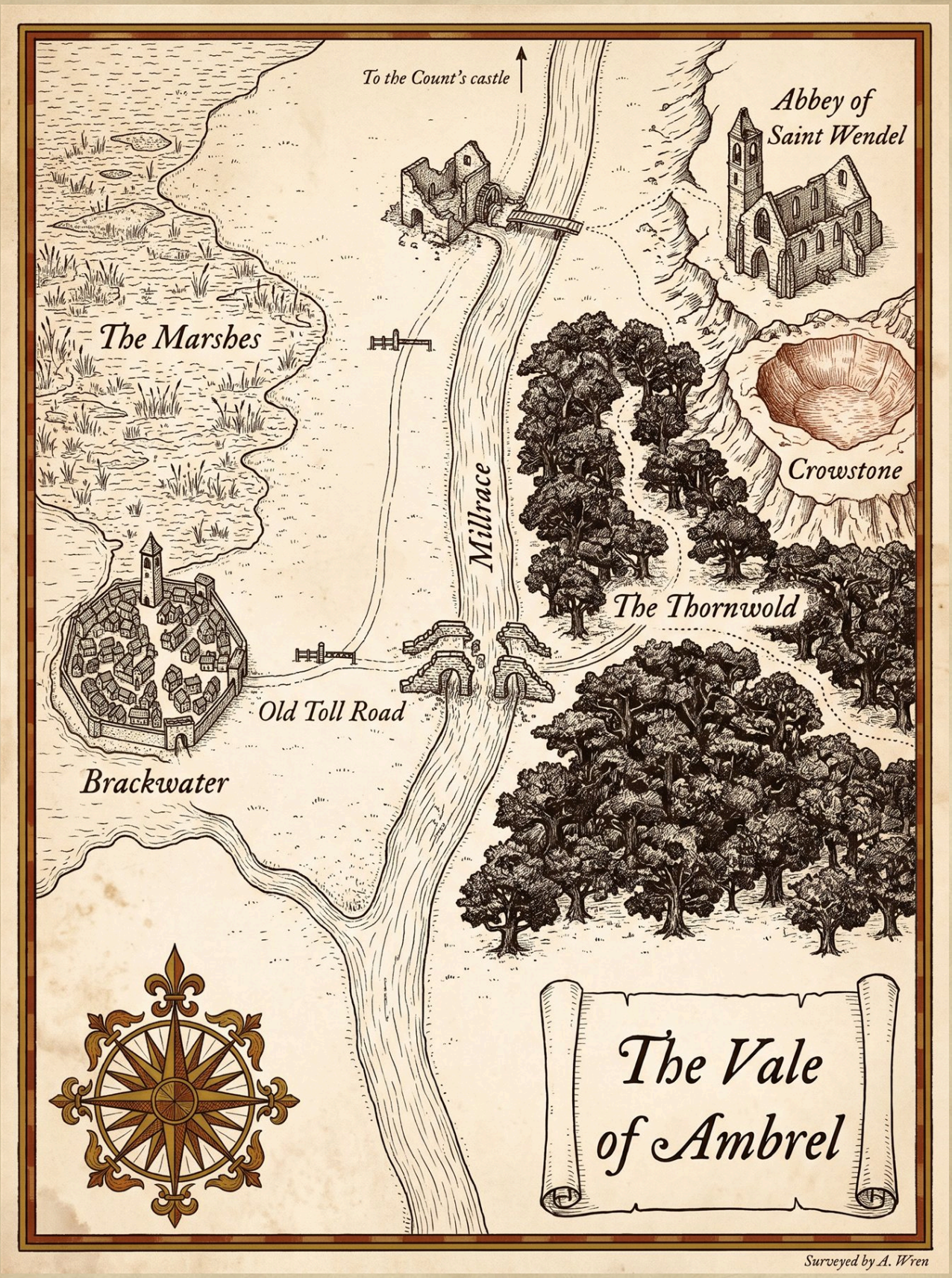
Aldous Wren did not stop. He paid a tracker from the river villages, who rode east, was gone two days, and came back with nothing to report. He paid two sellswords, who took their advance and were never seen again. He sold his brass instruments one by one, then his pony and cart, then the drawing table where Corin had learned his letters. Now, at night, he sits at the kitchen table and draws a single road, east into the Thornwold, over and over, as if enough ink might carry him down it.

Last night he counted what was left. Seven silver pieces, the last of the Count's survey fee: the money his son had refused to touch. He laid the coins out in a row, and they made a small, thin sound on the wood. It was enough for one more hire. It was not enough for two.

"I won't ask you to tell me he is alive," Aldous said, his voice close to breaking. "Only to ride with me, and look."

He has sent for one more companion, to ride east with him and bring Corin home. The last name on his list is yours.

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


To the Count's castle
Abbey of Saint Wendel
The Marshes
Millrace
Crowstone
The Thornwold
Old Toll Road
Brackwater
The Vale of Ambrel
Surveyed by A. Wren

# The Heron's Road: Game rules

The Heron's Road is a short adventure for one player, or a table of friends deciding together. Your goal is to find out what became of Corin Wren, and to come back alive.

You need one six-sided die, a pencil, and a scrap of paper for your adventure sheet (page 3).

## Abilities and skills

Your companion has three abilities, each a small number:

- **STR**, strength: fighting, lifting, holding on.
- **DEX**, dexterity: climbing, riding, creeping unseen.
- **WIT**, wits: noticing, persuading, working things out.

Your companion also has one skill. Some choices in the book are open only to a companion with the right skill. A skill opens doors and can give bonuses, but it never replaces a test. When an entry says "If you have the Scouting skill", and you do, you may take that choice.

- **Soldiering:** you know weapons, orders, and the people who give them.
- **Scouting:** you read tracks, move without a sound, and are at home in the wild.
- **Lore:** you read old scripts, ciphers and signs, and you know the history of the vale.

## Tests

When an entry says **test DEX** (or STR, or WIT), roll the die and add that ability. The entry tells you where each total leads. Some entries add a bonus to the roll; add it before you look.

## Stamina

Stamina is your health. When you choose your companion, write their Stamina in both places on your sheet: now and maximum. During the adventure only Stamina now changes. When an entry tells you to lose Stamina, subtract it; when you gain Stamina, add it, but never above your maximum. If your Stamina reaches 0, the entry tells you where to go.

## Delay

Time matters: every hour you spend is an hour Corin may not have. When an entry tells you to mark Delay, add a mark next to Delay. When you have 8 Delay marks, the entry tells you where to go. Choose your detours with care.

## Clues

Your adventure sheet has three clues:

- **Feather**
- **Lantern**
- **Chain**

When an entry tells you to mark a clue, add a mark next to that clue's name. Near the end of the road, the book will ask you to count the marks. What you have found decides what you find.

## Endings

There are different endings, and some of them can be reached in more than one way. When you reach one, the adventure is over. To play again, take a fresh adventure sheet and start again at entry 01. A different companion will see different things.

## Begin

Start now by reading entry 01 in the Road Book.

## Adventure sheet

You do not need to print anything. Copy this onto any scrap of paper before you start. Delay and the three clues are kept as tally marks: when an entry tells you to mark one, make one stroke next to its name. You never rub a mark out. When the book asks, count the strokes.

**Companion** _____ **Skill** _____

**STR** _____ **DEX** _____ **WIT** _____

**Stamina now** _____ **maximum** _____

**Delay** _____

**Feather** _____

**Lantern** _____

**Chain** _____

**Notes**

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