

SELLSWORDS

ARCANA GAMES





CREDITS

Design and Writing: Eugene Fasano

Editing: Craig Judd

Layout Design: Eugene Fasano

Interior Illustrators: Krist Miha, Eugene Fasano, Jack Holliday, Bruno Balixa,
Some artwork © 2015 Nicolas Boone, used with permission. All rights reserved.

© 2018 Arcana Games LLC. All rights reserved.



SELLSWORDS

Sellswords is a small campaign, comprised of three sequential adventures intended for four Characters levels 1-3. It should be played over three to five sessions. Characters should earn a level after each milestone at the end of each adventure.

Most of the materials in this book are meant for the Game Master's eyes only, as they facilitate the Players' journey through the various problems that will arise over the course of the Adventure.

The information presented in the Adventure Background is for the Game Master alone.

All italicized text is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased and shared with the Players at appropriate times.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is set loosely in the Forgotten Realms but can be easily modified to fit the setting of your choice.

With war gathering between the northern kingdoms of Damara and Narfell, much of the north is without the protection of the king's army that they have come to rely on. The Players' Characters are a group of sellswords seizing this opportunity. They have come to offer aid to the desperate and lawless villages, whether out of sympathy for their plight or a desire to squeeze what gold they can from the barren region.

Their path takes them to the ill-fated town of Harn, a small village in the north of Damara. Harn is plagued by bandit attacks that have made the roads and surrounding region unsafe. These bandits are a group of Damaran deserters, organized and supplied, they have taken up in a ruined castle not far from Harn.

If the village of Harn is going to be saved, they will need allies. The Characters must help the villagers make difficult decisions about their survival, including seeking outside aid. It will be up to them whether to enlist the support of the nearby walled town of Noringard at great cost, or turn to their uneasy neighbors, an ancient wood elf clan.

As winter's chill encroaches, tensions between the town and the bandits mount over scarce resources. Inevitably, the conflict will come to a head and the bandits will be forced to attack Harn. The town's fate rides on the will of the Characters and the choices they make.

PROLOGUE

With war gathering between Damara and Narfell, much of the north is without the protection of the king's army that they have come to rely on. You are a group of sellswords seizing this opportunity. You have come to offer aid to the desperate and lawless villages, whether out of sympathy for their plight or a desire to squeeze what gold you can from the barren region.

The Players are welcome to create their own mercenary troop with the help of the Game Master, such as the remnants of a larger, once-famed mercenary company, now decimated and disbanded.

When the Characters first come north, they are seeking employment by small towns and villages. Winter is approaching and with it will surely come orc raids or wood elf encursion, from which they will be welcome protection.

The Characters do not have to take on the roll of a mercenary company and may have other reasons for traveling north to aid the people of this village but they should work with the Game Master to create a collective backstory more compelling than a simple band of adventurers.

The Characters must want to help the Damaran villagers of the north, be it for gold or out of genuine concern. Perhaps they will begin with greedy intentions, only to grow to care about the villagers they will come to protect.



CHAPTER I: THE VILLAGE IN THE NORTH

THE NORTH ROAD

It is early autumn as you travel north. The green leaves of Damaran summer give way to oranges and golds, and dark pines. You have long since left the last high road and taken to the small ways of common folk. Dry leaves rustle beneath your feet on the hard packed earth of the road.

The foliage gives way to a dark old oak, marking a fork in the roadway. From its branches hangs a rusted iron cage. Your approach disturbs a raven, that caws and beats its wings. Suspended inside the gibbet are a pair of decayed corpses. Their skeletal arms and legs hang between the bars, their lips rotted away in unending grins beneath the sunken holes of their eyes.

A Character that inspects the corpses will notice they are wearing the red remains of Damaran uniforms. They are likely deserters.

Ahead of you, on the road, you hear the voices of several men. A woman screams.

The road is blocked by the ruins of an ox cart, one axle shattered. Lead ingots have spilled out into the dust and fallen leaves of the road. Pinned to the side of the cart is a man, his face a mask of blood from being hit, his hands nailed to the cart with iron spikes. The woman screams again. She is in the dirt of the roadway, her clothes are torn, and she is cursing and spitting at the three men around her. A gaunt-looking man with a beaky nose throws a kick at her with a heavy boot as a squash-nosed boy next to him laughs. A third man, bald, with a pockmarked face, idly shifts through the contents of the ruined cart with his spearpoint. The men wear the red of Damaran soldiers.

There are three **Damaran Deserters**.

If the Characters try to go around the scene with a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check and fail, the gaunt man will gesture for the boy to investigate the noise.

If the Characters try to speak with the deserters, they will pretend to be Damaran soldiers arresting a pair of thieves. They will tell the Characters to mind their own business. The woman in the roadway will plead for help.

If the Characters choose to fight the deserters and kill two, the third will attempt to flee. Though the men were Damaran recruits, they are not skilled soldiers.

The two cart drivers are Ala and Farron Helder, merchants on their way home to the town of Harn, not far from here. They have been on the road for weeks, and were ambushed by these three men posing as a road toll.

Farron is dying from his wounds. He can be saved by a DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check if any of his hit points are restored, such by magic or by a potion of healing. If he is not healed, he will die before they reach the village.



THE VILLAGE OF HARN

CHARACTERS IN THE VILLAGE

Davin is the the aged leader of his village. He is proud and protective.

Kara is Davin' daughter. She is impulsive and compassionate.

Luthan is Davin' son. He is brave and honorable. He is currently missing.

Marina is an acolyte of their local deity, Eldath. She is shrewd and intuitive. Marina is Kara's lover.

There are under six score (120) villagers and perhaps two score more in the outlying farms. Two score are children. Less than two score are women. Less than one score are men. Less than one score are elders.

RETURNING THE HELDERS

The villagers will let the Characters inside the palisade gates.

If the Characters return with Ala, the villagers will be less hostile, especially if Farron has also been saved.

Kara and a small group of old villagers with spears meet them just inside the gates. The village is a cluster of sod-roofed huts on a rocky hill, built from stacked dark stones and muddy plaster and surrounded by a dilapidated palisade.

Kara has been waiting for her brother to return and is eager to ask the Characters what news they have from the road.

If Ala is alive, she praises the Characters' ability to fight.

If Farron is alive, Kara orders that he be taken to Marina.

It is not long before Davin arrives, at the head of a score of hollow-eyed villagers.

Davin is against having the Characters in his village.

Davin: "We are grateful for what you have done for us. We will share what little food we have, and shelter you for the night, but in the morning you must be on your way."

Kara will try to persuade her father that the Characters may be of help.

Davin: "When have armed men ever done us any good? They can stay the night in the lodge; in the morning, they go. My son will be returning with our militia in the morning. Best be gone before then."

He exchanges a few words with one of his spearmen, who nods. He orders the villagers to return to their homes.

After the crowd has dispersed, Kara will speak with the Characters. She will tell them that her brother was supposed to have returned by now. She will reveal that he set out with a militia of a dozen men to frighten off the bandits that have been plaguing the roads.

REACTIONS TO APPEARANCE

Human: The villagers are wary around outsiders, but quicker to warm up to them, especially if they are perceived as common folk.

Elf: They are a rare sight, and will be met with mingled fear and respect. Some may be superstitious of their reputation.

Dwarf: The villagers are friendly to dwarves, though jealous of displays of wealth. Kara and her family are reminded of their guilt (see Kara's Gold).

Half-orc: The villagers harbor a deep hatred of orcs and half orcs and see them as savages.

CHAPEL

The village chapel to the Eldath is a stacked stone structure with a shingled belltower. Inside, a bronze basin blackened with soot holds a fire that is kept lit at all times.

The acolyte Marina will use do her best to tend to wounds. She possess the Healer feat.

If Farron is alive and has already been brought to her, she will already have tended to his wounds.

She is suspicious of the Characters and will not want to deplete her resources on them. She may claim to be unable to heal them due to lack of herbs from healing Farron, or she may claim that she can only only has a few more poultices prepared. A DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that she is holding back out of mistrust.

Marina will, however, heal any Character who is grievously wounded or near death — even a bandit.

LODGE

The Lodge is a long smoky building, set in the hillside for warmth. Dice is played at its long rough tables, and villagers huddle in groups around greasy fires or on the long wooden benches. The Characters will be given bunks and offered a meager stew.

Villagers will tell tales of woe and hardship. Use these tales to create sympathy for the villagers and highlight the misdeeds of the bandits.

Most of the village's men have been taken by the Damaran army to fight at the border with Narfell.

Much of the town's grain was taken by the Damaran army marching through. This winter will be hard.

Bandits on the roads have stopped trade, and merchants no longer pass through.

The town is plagued by bandit attacks. They destroy as many crops as they steal, burning the houses and fields of those who do not turn over their harvest.

The bandits are likely Damaran deserters.

They are holed up in a ruined fortress.

Luthan, Davin's son, led some men to scare off the bandits, but hasn't returned.

There is no hope of aid from the city of Helgabal or nearby towns, due to fear of winter and war.



GREY MORNING

A messenger is sent to summon the Characters to Davin's house, where he is arguing with Kara.

Kara is pragmatic. The village needs food, and their need grows more dire by the day. She feels they must go ask Noringard for aid.

Davin is against the plan. He claims it is folly going to the other town while the bandits hold the roads.

Kara argues that he is being prideful, and would rather die than ask Noringard for aid.

Kara: "We have the means to barter — let us use them."

Davin: "There is no honor in this."

The arguing has clearly taxed his strength, as he begins to cough. She ladles him water from a wooden bowl.

Kara will offer to pay the Characters to bring wool to Noringard and return with grain. She adds, if they are sceptical about her payment, that there is gold aplenty. She tells them they will be paid on their return with the grain. With a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check, she will show them the promised gold. She removes a pouch from the cord around her neck, revealing a small pile of golden coins, glinting dully in the candlelight.

Davin: "What if they run off with our wool, what will we be left with then?"

Kara: "Father, I trust them. They hardly look like wool merchants to me, what would they do with it? Besides, we cannot eat the wool in any case. We must trade, and this is our best and only chance."

Davin: "If Luthan were here—"

Kara: "He isn't, father. For all we know he is dead—"

Davin: "Enough of this. Do as you will, child, but know that many lives follow in your blind trust." Davin storms out of the room.

Kara gives the Characters a scroll and seals the wax with a silver ram's-head ring. It is a plea to the lord of Noringard to trade for food and supplies, and also asks for men to be sent to help defend the town.

KARA'S GOLD

Kara will not reveal that the gold is from a dwarf merchant the town killed. Sanzor, a travelling merchant, wished to trade grain for Kara as a slave. Drunk, Sanzor fought with Luthan. Luthan accidentally killed the merchant, burying the body in a cairn of stones outside the village. Hidden beneath the floorboards of the house is a stout chest, half filled with square and octagonal dwarvish coins — a large sum of wealth.



CHAPTER II: OATHS OF OUR FATHERS

DARK PINES

The dirt road is soon swallowed by mist and dark pines. The lowest boughs of the old trees begin well above your heads, their trunks stained black from rain and splashed with moss. The horses and the cart moves grudgingly along the sodden path. You can hear soft rain on the branches above you, and the world smells of wet earth.

FINDING THE MILITIA

You find what is left of the militia scattered by the muddy road. A cluster of broken spear shafts mark the roadside, crowned with a single, slack-jawed head. Dark shapes lie unmoving amid the ferns and trampled moss, sprouting dark arrow shafts.

A Character who wishes to examine the corpses should be drawn toward one slumped against a nearby pine trunk, his chest sprouting several shafts. This body is a Zombie, left by Gravus, the bandits' necromancer. The Zombie will attack when a Character draws near.

You approach a body, slumped against a dark pine trunk. He rests, head bowed, a cluster of arrows grow from his chest...

Investigation of the grisly scene reveals that it was an ambush. There are only ten corpses, suggesting that one or two may be missing.

The Game Master should nudge the players to continue towards Noringard rather than returning to Harn. If they do not decide to press on, you can use the smoke in the beginning of the next section to entice them further. You may also add that they are nearly to Noringard, and they would have to spend the night in the woods if they turned back now.



ROAD BLOCK

Either read the following to the entire group, or tell it to the Character with the highest Passive Perception Skill if it serves to build character.

You smell the faint scent of woodsmoke. A thin, greasy column of grey smoke rises from among the pines farther down the road.

If the Characters approach cautiously they are unnoticed.

If the Characters approach openly, the bandits will pretend to be an official road toll.

There are eight **Damaran Deserters** encamped here.

If the Characters let any of the bandits escape from their first encounter, they will be among the company here.

On a wide stretch of road there is a makeshift camp. Beyond a pair of barricades made from bound stakes are a cluster of small tents, their canvas sodden from the rain. The largest bears the faded crimson insignia of the Damaran Army.

A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal that the arrows in these soldiers' quivers match those found at the ambush site.

During the ensuing skirmish, have one of the bandits mention their leader, Mercer, to establish a name behind the Characters' enemies.

LOOTING THE CAMP

Should the Characters defeat the bandits, the small camp has some supplies.

Most of the bandits were wearing leather armor. Each carried a sword and a short bow.

Wrapped in oilskins in one of the small tents are several days' worth of rations in the form of dried, salted meat and hard bread.

The other small tent contains a low makeshift cot. On it lies a dead man, half clad in Damaran armor, half bandaged. His face is a mask of blood, and bloody rags lie about the floor of the tent. His body is scored with long, deep gashes that stain red lines through his bandages. A DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals that he was mauled by a bear.

From a tentpole in this small tent hang several bundles of drying herbs. Nearby is wineskin, containing a blood-colored potion. It is a potion of healing.

The large tent is somewhat furnished, with a low rough cot, wooden stool, and camp table.

On the table is a rolled-up scroll and a small wooden box with iron bindings. It is locked with a rusted dwarven lock. It may be opened with a DC 13 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or DC 18 Strength check.

The box contains a scattering of copper coins, as well as a small silver signet ring, the seal shaped like a ram. It is Luthan's ring.

The scroll is a crude map of the surrounding woodlands.

NORINGARD

The forest opens onto a rocky heath. At its center sits a town, ringed by squat stone walls. Above them rise plastered buildings and shingled roofs. An impressive oaken gate is set in the thick walls. On either side hang faded green banners, each bearing a single black oak tree.

CHARACTERS IN THE TOWN

Lord Fel is the leader of Noringard. He is young and sheltered. He is clearly controlled by his advisors.

Roth is a retired Damaran soldier who captains the town guard and advises the lord. He is power-hungry and opportunistic.

Igan is a priest of Ilmater who also advises the young lord. He is spineless and manipulative.

Noringard has a trade contract with the city of Helgabal, supplying it with lumber. Historically, they have done so for generations, but the war has increased the city's demand for timber. Noringard has taken to logging the old forest, after clear-cutting its usual plots. A wood elf clan is attacking the encroaching lumber camps at the border of their territory. They are protective of their forest and the Waystone at its heart.

Long ago, Lord Fel's grandfather had struck a deal with the druid Erdan of the wood elf clan, Clan Bryn. He had agreed to leave their section of the forest untouched, if they did not raid his farms and attack his people. A peace was struck and upheld by his son, Lord Fel's father. However, when he died, the young Lord Fel was kept ignorant of this agreement by the cleric Igan who saw an opportunity to increase his wealth and power.

AUDIENCE WITH THE LORD

Upon arrival at the town gate, the Characters will soon be ushered in by the guards, each clad in a green tabard bearing a black oak. They will be escorted to a broad stone tower where they will be met by Roth, who will ask to see their trade agreement — he will recognize the seal. He will have a guard see to the cart and horses and bid the Characters leave their weapons in the guard room on the tower's lower floor.

You are escorted up a wide wooden stair, worn smooth from the passage of many boots. The stair opens to a single round room that encompasses the tower's entire level. A long oaken table sits, set for a feast. Behind it, silhouetted by the fire in a large stone hearth, are three chairs. Seated in the center is a young boy, sullen and bored-looking. To his right sits an old bald Cleric with a sharp nose, clad in the white of his order. Roth takes the seat to his left.

The cleric rises. "I am Igan, advisor to the young Lord Fel. Please, join us for dinner."

Once the scroll has been presented or the offer is otherwise made, discussion of the deal will begin. Make clear that the young lord is being handled by his advisors. The entire affair should be punctuated by Igan whispering in the boy's ear.

Igan speaks against aid. "Unfortunately we cannot sacrifice any supplies to your cause. Should our farms be attacked by wood elf raiders and the fields burn, what then? We would be without the final yield of our harvest. To that end, we cannot send men to your aid. They are spread thin enough as it is protecting our new logging camps, and their presence is doubly necessary if what you claim about these bandits is true."

Roth: "I have the town's defenses well in hand. Surely we can spare a few men to help escort you safely home with the grain, with the lord's blessing, of course."

Igan leans down and whispers to the lord behind a pale, cupped hand. The young boy nods.

Lord Fel: "I will agree to keep your shipment of wool in exchange for grain, and further agree to uphold any future transactions under similar terms, to ensure Harn with food throughout the winter — but only after the elf threat has been eliminated. Deal with that, and I'll send you what men I can spare. But be warned, my people say they've disturbed an ancient spirit that sometimes appears as a great bear, and sometimes as a man."

Roth: "Don't mind the boy — begging your pardon, my lord — but it's raiders. Same as always. Orcs or elves, pointy eared bastards trying to take what we have."

Lord Fel: "Whatever it may be, man or beast, bring me the creature's head and we have a bargain."

LOGGING CAMP

Roth will direct the Characters to a logging camp, abandoned only days ago after an attack by the elven spirit.

A small wooden mill sits at the edge of the wood, its door hanging loosely off its hinges. Huge claw gouges score the oaken beams of the door frame. The smell of rot wells out from inside and you hear the buzzing of flies.

The townsfolk were clearly too afraid of the elven spirit to recover the bodies and set them to the pyre. If a Character enters the mill to examine the corpses, they will find them destroyed, utterly mauled by some huge beast.

Around the mill are the prints of an enormous bear. A DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals that, strangely, some of the prints seem to suggest the bear walked upright, like a man.

The prints lead into the darkness of the forest.



THE WOOD ELVES

As you travel deeper into the wood, the canopy blocks all but a few of the sun's rays, leaving you in dappled twilight. The trees grow old and thick, their bases blanketed in moss. On one such oak, you see a shape, half obscured behind the growth...

You peel away the moss to reveal a face — a man, as if screaming in anguish, frozen in wood. You look up at the trunk rising before you and see that it is a wall of faces, carved like masks in the ancient trunk. Above you, from the branches, a flock of ravens caw and take to their dark beating wings.

Behind you, you hear a low, guttural growl. You turn and see a huge mountain of a beast. The bear rears on its hind legs and roars. Tusks protrude from the sides of its mouth, and its head is crowned in antlers.

A huge, bearded man with wild, tawny eyes emerges from the foliage. He gestures at you with a fist sprouting long, white claws. "Give me a reason why I should spare your lives, you who walk in my sacred wood."

If any of the Characters are visibly elven he asks this in their tongue. He also looks at them and asks:

"Why do you stand with these clanless cattle?"

Through Erdan, the Game Master must reveal there is more to the story than the Characters have been led to believe. Use Erdan's rage to allude to the bargain Noringard once held with the elves.

Erdan: "I should have known they'd send mercenaries to hunt me, traitors and oathbreakers, all. You're no different from those who sent you, driven to my forest by greed. How much gold was promised for my head?"

Erdan Bryn is a wood elf druid who has guarded this forest for generations. He is strong and wise.

Erdan is a **druid** followed by a **brown bear**.

If the Characters express desire to negotiate, Erdan will offer to take them to meet Caelynn, the leader of his clan. He will guide them to his clan's hidden village, deep in the forest.

HIDDEN VILLAGE

You walk behind the druid and his monstrous companion until the trail opens before you into a large clearing. In its center, rising from the moss, looms a monolithic black standing stone. Around it are clustered small hill-like dwellings made of sod and stone.

As you step over a ring of stones that mark the village's edge, you hear a rustle of leaves and turn to see a woman step from the foliage behind you, clad in green and brown leathers that make her almost invisible among the undergrowth. Her eyes are fiercely blue under a streak of black paint, above her pointed ear her hair is a bundle of plaited coils ending in wicked talons that clack as she moves. She gestures at you with a jaw-bone hatchet and says a few lilting words. Erdan grunts a reply.

Characters that understand elvish know she was asking about you, to which Erdan replied they had guests.

The woman whistles like a bird, and suddenly you see several shapes behind her lowering their bows. Men and women, clad in the same colors, step from the shadows. She spits at Erdan, and says in slow, deliberate common tongue, "You should not have brought them here, Erdan."

Caelynn is the warrior-chieftain of her clan. She is fierce and pragmatic.

Erdan asks the Characters to forgive Caelynn; she is young and headstrong. He tells them this is a sacred place and no harm will befall them here.

Caelynn and her warriors were returning from a hunt. They lay two young deer and a small boar by the Waystone and begin to prepare them for a feast. A great bonfire is lit in the lee of the stone as night begins to fall.

Erdan reveals that long ago, his people had a truce with old Lord Fel, the grandfather of the boy the Characters know. They had a bargain: that Noringard would log only young trees and stay out of the old forest. In exchange, Clan Bryn would keep to the woods and not attack the farms at their borders or the roads through their wood.

Caelynn is initially angry at Erdan for bringing the Characters to the village. She is concerned they will reveal its location to outsiders. Eventually, she sees the wisdom in Erdan's counsel for peace.

Erdan: "No peace last forever, but this one lasted for a generation. Would you not see your children live in these sacred woods as you have?"

Caelynn: "What of the harm done to our forest? There must be a price, Erdan."

Erdan: "They have already paid for that harm with blood. I will sow new trees, and they will birth more sons."

Caelynn will mention to the Characters that a pair of her scouts went missing by the ruins of the old castle in the woods.

If the Characters have offered information about the plight of Harn, Caelynn says that if their scouts — or their bodies — are returned to them as a show of good faith, they can offer bows, arrows, and food for trade. However the price she names is high — a large amount of gold, half of what Kara has promised the Characters.

Before the Characters leave, Caelynn nods at animal hides stretching by the fire and warns them that if they reveal the location of her village, they'll be next.

RETURN TO NORINGARD

If the Characters reveal the ancient agreement to Lord Fel, make it clear that the cleric Igan is the one responsible for breaking the truce, and knowledge of the pact was kept from young Lord Fel. Upon finding out the truth, the young lord should be angry and stand up for himself. He can be persuaded to uphold the old agreement.

Lord Fel: "What bargain is this?"

Igan: "My lord, let me explain—"

Lord Fel waves his hand, "Silence, cleric." He gestures to the Characters, "You, go on."

If the elves are bargained with, Lord Fel will agree to trade food for the wool. He will not send men, however, as the evlen monster still exists.

If the Characters killed Erdan and his bear instead of speaking with Caelynn and her clan, Lord Fel will agree to uphold his word, giving them food in trade and promising the support of his men when the time comes. He will also pay the Characters a small bounty for the beast's head.

The Characters' cart is now filled with sacks of grain. The horses are harnessed, brushed, and well fed.

After the Characters meet with the lord but before they leave, Roth will approach them discreetly. He offers men and arms for a high price: he wishes to be lord over Harn by marrying Kara.

"Davin' daughter — she was a girl last time I set foot in Harn, but she should be a woman now, or close enough to it. Think on it. If you accept my offer and can secure her hand in marriage to me, you will have your swords."

If Kara is told of this plan, she will accept his offer.

Kara: "Marrying that man would be sacrificing my life, but I would gladly do so to save my people."

However, if Luthan hears of this plan — and she will tell him of it if they meet — he will be entirely against it.

Luthan: "You would have us fight for our home only to hand it over to some soldier?"

THE ROAD

If the Characters killed the men blocking the road through the wood, the bandits will have dispatched a large force. Over a dozen men in Damaran cloth are garrisoned at the camp, now barricaded by hacked-down trees, their branches hewn into spikes.

The Characters may to abandon the wagon and most of their food if they wish to skirt the camp on foot. A DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check allows them to load the horses with more grain and lead them safely through the forest.



CHAPTER III: WOLVES IN THE WALLS

ESCAPED PRISONER

A weak man, half dead from hunger and exposure, stumbles to the gate of Harn. He's identified as Fino, one of the town's militia who left months ago with Luthan's company. Kara has him taken to the chapel for Marina to see to.

He says he escaped the castle through an old tunnel that leads underneath. He knows the following:

The castle is built atop old ruins.

A tunnel leads into the ruin's foundation.

Luthan is alive, as is another man from their company.

The bandits are Damaran soldiers who have deserted.

When the deserters left, they stole supplies: rations, weapons, and gear.

There are more than two score of them, and they have some horses.

They have a powerful necromancer among them.

Their leader's name is Mercer.

RUINED TUNNEL

Following Fino's directions you soon stumble upon the tunnel entrance — a cleft among a cluster of large dark stones, receding back into the damp earth. Through the trees you can make out the silhouette of the castle, its towers fallen into ruin. A pair of spires flanking its gateway have been repaired with timber and canvas as makeshift guard towers.

The low-ceilinged tunnel is long, and damp, and dark.

The tunnel is home to a **carrion crawler** that may be disturbed by the Character's passage.

The tunnel terminates abruptly at a stone wall, wet with mold. According to Fino's tale, there is a loose stone above your heads which can be shifted.

PRISON

Stone grinds against stone as you carefully slide the block. Only darkness can be seen above.

The secret door opens into Fino's old cell. His cell, and each of the cells along this hallway, are simple repurposed storerooms, with wooden doors bound in iron. Each door has a small barred window at eye level. The door to this cell is open a crack, and beyond it can be seen torchlight. Low voices — the other prisoners — can be heard in the hall outside.

The cell the Characters emerge from is near the back wall of this hallway. The hall is lit by a few low burning torches, and is lined with doors, some rotted and hanging from their hinges, some missing altogether. The nearest three doors contain the other prisoners.

One cell holds Sarlen and Daena, a pair of wood elf scouts. Both seem to have recently taken a bad beating. If set free, they will honor their word, if given. Though bruised, they are still both capable fighters.

Sarlen is a tall wood elf scout. His bald head and hands are tattooed with faded elvish script. He is wrathful and protective.

Daena is a lithe wood elf scout. Her hair is cropped short and she bears a small vertical scar over the corner of her mouth. She is vengeful and savage.

The other two cells hold Luthan, and Marius, one of his men. They are filthy and half-starved, but otherwise unharmed.

Luthan carries the same dark hair and eyes as his sister, but his hair is long and unkempt and his eyes sunken, though unbroken.

Marius is an older man, with white in his stubble. He is loyal and stubborn.

A single door at the end of this hall leads to the guard room. Two low male voices can be heard talking in high spirits.

GUARD ROOM

The two Damaran Deserters are drinking and playing dice at a table made from a door atop two empty wine barrels. They are armored and carry swords at their sides.

A dagger is stuck in the table by a wheel of cheese. By it are scattered some copper coins, burnished from use.

The door opposite the jail opens into the cellar. There is also a stone stair leading upwards.

CELLAR

This hallway is similar to the jail, lined with wooden doors. Behind these doors are the soldiers' provisions. They have an ample supply of grain, root vegetables, and cured meat.

Coming out of one of the doors is a serving boy. Clearly a lad of only eight or nine winters, he is no soldier. He freezes when he sees the Characters, dropping the sacks of flour he was carrying. If given the chance he will scream or run for help when his senses return to him.

Characters may steal some food, though they are limited in what they can carry. If they spend too much time here, remind them of the danger of their stay with the tools in the section below.

COURTYARD

The narrow stone stair leads up into the open air of the castle's courtyard. One of the large ruined structures in the courtyard has been repaired with stacked stones and roofed in freshly hewn wooden shingles. Trails of smoke rise from its hearths. To your other side is a stable, built from crude pine timbers bridging old ruined walls.

Several soldiers move across the courtyard, from the barracks-like building to a stone stair that presumably leads up to the ramparts.

Soon, a group of three soldiers will leave the barracks and start making their way to

the stair. They are headed for the cellar to get a barrel of wine. Use this encounter to force the Characters to hasten their work and place a definitive end on their stay in the castle. Even if these men are killed, one or more will raise the alarm.

Within minutes of the alarm, the soldiers, led by the necromancer Gravus, will form an organized group and advance through the dungeon. They will form a shield wall, with archers behind. Use this encounter to force the Characters to leave. Do not run it as strict combat, but simply as a show of force. Advance the soldiers slowly, as the few archers provide them suppressive fire.

This can also serve to remind them of Gravus, the bandit's necromancer.

You may also wish to kill Marius or have him sacrifice himself for Luthan to lend severity and desperation to the situation.

THE GATE

The main gate of the courtyard seems to be newly constructed of pine. A large bar cross the doors, resting on iron slats. A DC 18 Strength check or several Characters together can move the bar.

STABLE

Inside the stable are several horses. They are good, strong beasts. A DC 16 Wisdom check reveals that most are pack horses but a few are trained war horses. Though it would be difficult for a Character to steal one, they may try to kill or cripple the animals.

THE SPIRE

The castle's largest tower, a tapering spire, is intact, and a light emanates from the window at its peak. This is Mercer's chamber. Though a Character may be tempted to try to assassinate him, the Game Master should stress the danger in such a plan. The courtyard is crawling with men.

RAID

The Characters awaken to the clang of the village bell. Out in the fields, they hear the thundering of hooves and see dark shapes silhouetted by fires. Farmhouses are burning.

By the time the Characters arrive, a farmhouse and the granary next to it are engulfed in flames. The storehouse is already empty, its grain stolen.

In the farmhouse, they hear screams. A man is trapped under a fallen roof, and a young child lies unconscious across from him. It takes a DC 20 Strength check to move the smoldering beam pinning the man. Should the Characters struggle with the beam, he will plead for them to save his son instead.

WAR AND FAMINE

The raid suggests that an attack is imminent. The bandits are either retaliating for the incursion on their garrison or are running low on supplies. Either way, this raid was the prelude to a final conflict.

Davin and Kara argue over whether or not they should evacuate the few outlying farms and bring the villagers inside the walls. Davin wishes to let them fend for themselves, while Kara feels they must be brought inside what meagre defenses the town has.

Davin, whose health is decaying rapidly, argues from his bed for leaving the farmers outside the walls. He says they won't want to leave their homes and abandon their farms.

Davin: "They are like me and my fathers, they built their homes with their own hands, ploughed the rocky fields. If they abandon that... what is there to fight for?"

Kara: "Father, if we leave them outside, they will be slaughtered. Their homes can be rebuilt, crops resown. But if we don't evacuate the farms, and soon..."

Luthan: "There's merit in what father says. As much as I don't like the idea of leaving any of our people to those brutes, if it comes to a siege, we simply don't have the provisions for that many mouths. Even if we were to winter without an attack, many would die."

Ultimately, Luthan and Kara abdicate the decision to the Characters, trusting them with the town's defense.

Aid

If the Characters send a messenger to Noringard, Roth will come to village's defense with a handful of guards and a small cart with swords and shields before the attack. If the Characters killed Erdan and his bear, Roth will be there on his lord's orders. If not, he will insist on marrying Kara then and there. If Luthan has been saved, Roth will try to kill him during the coming battle.

If the Characters go to the wood elves for aid, Caelynn says it is not her fight. Her people are no common mercenaries and she will not send them to their death for gold. She lets you address her warriors and honors each one's choice. If the players rescued the elf scouts, they step forward, as well as Erdan and the bear.

DEFENDING THE TOWN

In uneasy calm, a day passes, and then another, each carrying with it the mounting silence before a storm.

It will be almost a full month before the final attack. The Players should describe what their Characters do during this time and how they prepare, such as fortifying the town's defenses and training the villagers to fight. There are over a score of villagers willing and able to fight.

Whatever the Characters do, have them interact with relevant named non-player Characters, and develop these relationships. For example, they might train the villagers with Luthan or Leon, and one of the men they teach might be Helder, if they saved him in the first chapter. Perhaps they are tending to the sick and hungry with Kara or

dalena, spending time among the wood elves, or even in Noringard.

It is up to the Characters if they convince the villagers to fight, or if they send them away as refugees at the mercy of Noringard and keep only a small fighting force to meet the bandits. They may have other plans entirely.

Though it is not the supported path, the Characters may wish to lead their small force through the hidden tunnels to confront the bandits in their own den. If you wish to remove this option, the bandits have caved in the tunnel, having discovered it after their prisoners escaped.

If the Game Master wishes to split this chapter into two sessions of play, this is an ideal time to do so.

BEFORE THE ATTACK

It is cold winter when the rider comes. You assemble atop the wall with the others, your breath frosting the air as you look out over the spikes of the wooden palisade. A lone horseman, his beast's hooves pounding the frosted moor, rides up to the village.

The lone horseman will stop a distance away from the gates, and will call out to speak with the leader of the village.

Messenger: "I speak for my leader, Mercer. Surrender to our forces and we will leave your village untouched. My master's wish is the same as yours: we only seek grain to survive the winter. Open your gates to us and we will only take half of what you have and leave your people unharmed."

Should the Characters be foolish enough to take the bargain, the bandits will use the opportunity to launch their attack.

Whether they accept or decline the offer, the messenger tells them he will return the next day, either to collect the grain or take it by force, whatever they choose.

A group of villagers wants to flee for the woods and make it to Noringard. The decision should fall to the Characters whether they let them flee or force them to remain.

Kara calls for the women and children to barricade themselves inside the chapel, and Marina leads them.

Ask the Players how their Characters plan on defending the town, where they will allocate their fighters, how they will construct last-minute fortifications or lay traps. It is important to reference their preparations in the coming battle.

Luthan cautions that the bandits may attack during the night, and a watch is kept.

GOLD AND GUILT

If the Players have found the gold and taken it, Kara will confess on the eve of battle, saying she can't ask them to die for nothing — she believes the bandits have taken the gold, and she releases the Characters from their contract.

THE BATTLE

Come grey morning, it begins to snow. Large, slow flakes fall on the walls and roofs, and out on the shields and shoulders of the men in the field. Two dozen men have assembled on the heath; before their ranks rides a lone man on horseback.

He calls out to the ramparts, "I am Mercer, leader of my company. I have given you a choice: surrender, or be destroyed. What say you?"

If any villagers are outside the walls, either those left to fend for themselves or some of those who fled to Noringard, the bandits will have captured two: an old man and a young girl.

If the Characters surrendered, Mercer will demand their grain, escorted by their leaders, be brought outside the walls. If the Characters delay in meeting his demands, or do not surrender, he will execute first one, then the other, of the hostages.

The man on horseback gestures to his men, and their ranks part. They drag forward an old man and, by his side, a young girl, her tear-stained cheeks flushed from the cold. They were among those [who you left outside the walls] or [who you bid flee for Noringard]. They are forced to kneel. With slow deliberation, the rider dismounts and strides over to the captives. He unsheathes one of his short swords, raises it high, the blade glinting dully under the grey sky. He brings it down on the old man's neck. Blood spatters the snow. He steps behind the young girl, and looks up at the ramparts. His eyes meet yours. He brings down the blade.

Luthan tells Kara to get to the chapel with the others. Kara says she has to go convince her father to come with her; he won't leave his home.

BATTLE AS BACKDROP

The battle should become a backdrop to the actions of the Characters.

It is important to reference all the elements players choices have brought to bear, be they named Characters, defenses laid, or allies won.

The Players may wish their Characters to pursue specific goals during the battle. It is possible they may have different priorities, and they should be encouraged to pursue them. If the Characters are split from one another, follow their actions in parallel rather than addressing each in its entirety, moving between scenes of action and lending inertia to the battle as a whole.

In painting this backdrop, make the situation seem dire. Every turn of the battle should serve to escalate the tension and severity of the conflict.

BATTLE OBJECTIVES

Commanding and leading the armed villagers.

Moving through town after the breach, saving who they can.

Hunting down Gravus, a cult fanatic.

Dueling the leader, Mercer, a bandit captain.

DEFENSE OF THE GATE

The bandits will make an attack at the gate with most of their men. Though the numbers are roughly even on both sides, make it clear that these are trained and equipped soldiers. They charge in formation, the villagers' arrows glancing off their raised shields. They have a crude battering ram and will use it to break through the main gate.

Describe the efficacy of their crossbow salvo. Kill a named villager, such as Farron if he was saved in the beginning. You could also choose to wound Luthan with a crossbow bolt to the shoulder.

THE VILLAGE OVERRUN

Once the gate falls, a group of bandits will charge the entrance. In actuality, they are Zombies, created from corpses of the bandits the Characters have killed, still clad in their armor. Their charge will be followed by a group of cavalry, half a dozen men on horseback. If the horses have been killed, these men will scale the back wall instead.

A group of half a dozen men charges the breach. Arrows find their mark as they charge blindly towards the shattered gate. As they draw close, you see their faces, and you recognize them — though pale and bloated, you know them. They are the faces of men you've killed...

...You look up at the sound of horses and yelling men. From the treeline burst half a dozen mounted soldiers bearing torches, riding hard for the breach in the gate. They pour through, throwing their burning brands onto thatched roofs, slashing with their swords. Men follow in behind them, and the wall is lost.

Make the Characters choose to fight by seeing non-player Characters in peril.

Luthan is cornered by a pair of bandits (if Roth has married Kara, replace the bandits with him and one of his men).

A bandit is kicking down the chapel door, while two more tie a rope around Marina's neck and throw it over a bough of the oak outside the chapel.

A rider on horseback throws a torch on Davin' house atop the hill. The Character remembers Kara is still inside, trying to get her father.

THE BATTLE'S END

The battle should culminate in the Characters battling Mercer and Gravus. They should be together if the Characters are, or fought in parallel if the Characters are divided. Depending on the situation, the soldiers or zombies around them should either take an active role or fade into the background, battling villagers and other allies.

EPILOGUE

Davin dies, either perishing in the fire or shortly after the battle, knowing that his village is saved. The remaining villagers gather around him as he proclaims Kara as the leader in his stead.

Kara, and Marina, if saved, will tend to the wounded as best she can. A great bonfire will burn in the village square that night, too large for the chapel's small pyreyard.

Kara makes good her promise and, if it is still hers to give, rewards the Characters with all of the dwarven gold, summing to even more than was promised.

If Roth was summoned to aid the village and survived the battle, he will either leave with his men, or remain if he married Kara, unfurling Noringard's banners over the gateway.

If Erdan and his warriors aided in the battle, they will pay their respects before vanishing into the forest.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

If the Players wish to continue exploring the world of Blood and Bone, it is between them and the Game Master to see where the road takes them next.

The Characters travel east, towards the mountains and the warfront with Narfell. Perhaps there is a royal bounty of Mercer' head. Their deeds may curry favor with the king's army, earning them employment as an official auxiliary company.

Lord Fel sends word that he needs a contingent of guards to protect his lumber shipment to the city of Helgabal.

To the north lie many other small villages facing hardship. They are in dire need of hired swords willing to defend them from orcs' winter raids.



APPENDIX

MONSTERS

BANDIT CAPTAIN (MM 344)

BROWN BEAR (MM 319)

CARRION CRAWLER (MM 37)

CULT FANATIC (MM 345)

DRUID (MM 346)

ZOMBIE (MM 315)

VARIANT RULE OPTIONS

GRITTY REALISM

A Short Rest is 8 hours. A Long Rest is 7 days.

SLOW HEALING

Characters don't automatically regain hit points after a long rest. They may spend Hit Dice as with a short rest.

WOUND CARE

Hit Dice cannot be spent after a long or short rest until the character's wounds have been treated by a Healer's Kit charge or medicine check of 10.

DAMARAN DESERTER

Medium, neutral evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) damage.

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