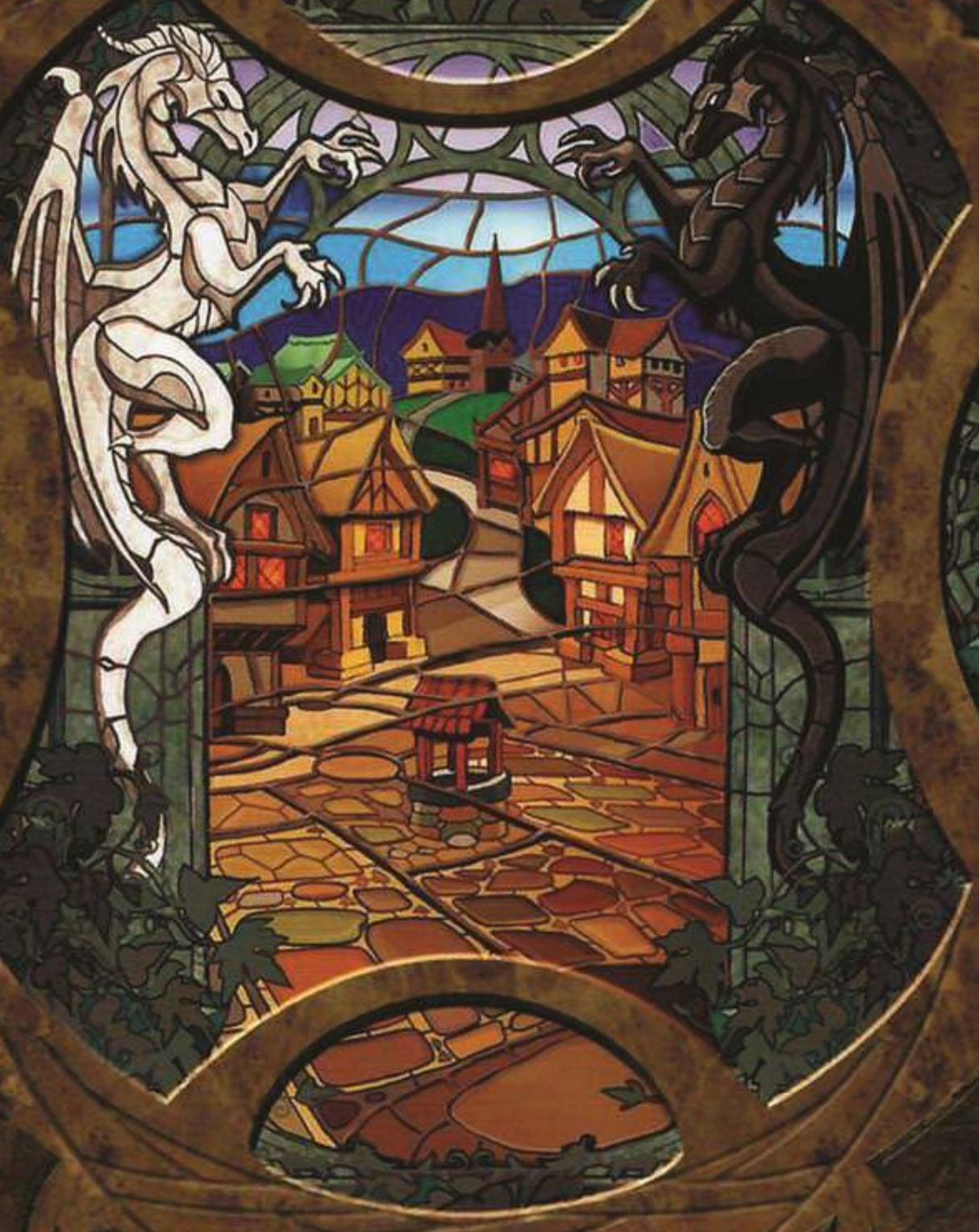
Dragonholt Village



Approximate Playtime
30 - 50 Minutes
Per Chapter

1001

Tracking Sheets

Each quest book, including this village book, has its own tracking sheet that can be found on the back cover of the book. While reading from this book, time and progress are tracked on the corresponding tracking sheet for this book.

Encounters

The entries in this book are grouped in a number of encounters. Each encounter is a short collection of related entries. Once you begin an encounter, continue reading as normal until the encounter is complete.

While reading this book, you do not exhaust your activation token when you make a decision, and requirements on options can be fulfilled by any of you.

You wake to the smell of freshly baked bread and the chipper voices of Mariam and Sapphire. Golden shafts of sunlight stream through the window beside your bed, and you idle for a moment before getting up, watching the dust float in the air in the morning light. With a yawn and a stre—etch, you rise from your bed and prepare yourself for the day ahead.

As you step out of your room, you see that Braxton has also just stepped into the corridor. She gives you a polite smile and nod. "Morning." You are just about to respond when Mariam comes around the corner from the direction of the common room.

"Good, you're awake! Breakfast is ready. It's a real feast!" exclaims Mariam eagerly. "Come on! It'll get cold if you just dawdle in the hall." With that, Mariam takes Braxton's hand and drags her—well, Braxton allows herself to be dragged—toward the common room.

➥ *Read entry 1042.*

1002

"Oh, yes! Celyse comes to the Swan from time to time for lunch," says Sapphire. "A very proper woman, she is. Always looking quite organized. In fact, I've seen her frazzled just once—a couple days before you arrived actually. She was going into the Chatty Archer with her cloak drawn around her. I almost didn't recognize her." Sapphire tilts her head to one side as if trying to remember something. "It's a bit odd when I think about it. Until then, I had never seen her go into either of the taverns in the village. Can't blame her. A human brew can't stand up to elven wines."

Sapphire shakes off the tangent. "I haven't seen her in a while, but if you're looking for her, I would check the library or the shrine. That's where I've seen her spend most of her time when she's not at the manor."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

1042

You descend the stairs to the sunken common room. Sapphire is setting a table with plates. Mariam ushers Braxton to the table, and they both sit. You take a seat and examine the feast that Sapphire has prepared—large yellow eggs, thick slices of brown toast, juicy ham steaks, and seasoned, pan-fried potatoes. As you are scooping food onto your plate, Sapphire returns with two large pitchers—one filled with creamy milk and the other with freshly squeezed juice.

After checking on the other patrons, Sapphire returns and sits at the table with you. "So what brings you to Dragonholt? Have you come in search of love? Or—" Sapphire gasps and glances around before leaning in close. "Are you here for revenge?"

Braxton coughs and strikes her chest with a fist, having choked on a bit of potato, and Mariam begins laughing. "The love of theatrics runs in the family, I see," mutters Braxton after a drink of milk.

Sapphire blushes lightly and looks back at you. "Forgive me. Perhaps I gossip with the neighbors a bit too much."

"Visiting an old friend."
➥ *Read entry 4026.*

"Just looking for the next adventure."
➥ *Read entry 5586.*

"Hoping to find gainful employment."
➥ *Read entry 9408.*

"If I'm lucky, I'm not the only one searching for love."
Requires empathy (skill).
➥ *Read entry 1394.*

"I seek vengeance on the man who killed my father."
Requires deception (skill) or performance (skill).
➥ *Read entry 7450.*

1057

"Oh, are you sure?" asks Mariam. "I wouldn't want to impose; you have your own business to attend to." Before you can change your mind Mariam points at a broken pile of wood and glass. "That used to be a cabinet. Could you help Braxton take it out to the cart in back?"

You work together to remove all the ruined furniture, then start tearing up the damaged floorboards with a prybar.

➥ *You each lose two stamina.*
➥ *Mark one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Eventually, Braxton reports that the cart is full. "I'll get rid of it," she says. "Be right back."

Offer to help Braxton dispose of the refuse.
➥ *Read entry 3672.*

Stay with Mariam and continue demolition.
➥ *Read entry 1675.*

1064

Your customer departs, and you consider your next move. The village green is still busy with people coming and going on this market day.

➥ *Time passes.*

Sell something else while you're here.

Requires five or less time has passed.

➥ *Read entry 4846.*

Pack up your things and leave the village green.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1087

"No, not precisely. They're not common anywhere outside of the Molten Heath, and we are all thankful for that. But there were so many dragon eggs left hidden across the realm after the Dragon Wars that feral dragons are a concern everywhere." Celyse shrugs, as if a dragon attack is as inevitable as a summer storm. "Dragonholt is unusual, though, in that there have been three dragon attacks in the last century. That is considerably more frequent than any other town or village I can think of. It makes me wonder if there's something about the place that draws them, or if perhaps all these dragons are the offspring of Dragonlord Varinex or Shaarina."

"Three dragon attacks?"

➥ *Read entry 6483.*

"Varinex and Shaarina?"

➥ *Read entry 4106.*

1104

You follow a group of mostly children and elders to the village green, where they start preparing to receive and process the harvested crops. Runners race to and fro, carrying tools and equipment, and a number of villagers carry tables and benches from the village hall out onto the green.

If story point J1 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 7792.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 3705.*

1120 (Orchard)

Haphazard rows of apple trees sprawl west and north of the village, heavy with sweet red fruit. The trees are twisted and only somewhat tame, their older and thicker branches propped up by wooden poles or ropes. Here and there, a dangling charm, carefully placed monument, or carved message adorns the trees.

If five or less time has passed today...

➥ *Read entry 2447.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now. This encounter is complete.*

1134

A group of gnomes, mostly children, are playing a game involving kicking and throwing a leather ball. The rules seem complex, but clearly running back and forth and shrieking are important.

Play with the children and gnomes.

➥ *Read entry 6990.*

Ignore them and leave.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Follow the south road beyond the willow grove.

➥ *Read entry 1370.*

1163

You join the gnomish dancing and find yourself stepping sideways in circles, a lot. You form multiple rings of dancers, partners moving back and forth between the rings, rings collapsing toward the center or expanding out to trade positions with other rings, and a variety of more complex formations all enacted within a single measure of the rapid-paced, energetic music. The spiky-haired gnome woman calls out each maneuver in a high voice, but even so you're hard-pressed to keep up with the other dancers, all of whom seem to know what they're doing on an almost instinctual level.

"You dance quite well!" giggles one of your partners, a young man with his hair tied back by an orange bandana. "Have you spent much time on the road?" Before you can answer, the dance sweeps him away, and you can't spare the breath anyway.

Eventually the skirling, whirling music quiets, and the dance slows and comes to a halt, to much cheering and applause. You mop sweat from your brow and join in the clapping.

➥ *You each lose one stamina.*

➥ *Mark one progress in physical training and one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1185

Sapphire seems surprised, blinking as if you've just shone a bright light upon her. "Why, I suppose I've never thought about that. I'm a wanderer gnome, of course, just like Mariam. I wandered here; actually I came one year as a young girl to help with the harvest season and stayed most of a summer. But I was still young and craving a bit of adventure, so I moved on soon enough, but I visited twice more. When I decided I should put down some roots for a few years, Dragonholt was the village I could see myself in, so I hauled myself here along the forest road and, well, I've been here ever since." She looks around at the inn around her, at the fire burning in the hearth and the patrons enjoying themselves in the common room. "I don't regret it, either. I've made this place home."

➥ *Read entry 3381.*

1187

"I'm not certain what I want to do next. See the world. I want to spend a few decades exploring the library in Greyhaven. Who doesn't?" She laughs. "Some day, I hope to see some of the great libraries of Lorimor and Bagavad, too. And Isheim, and Al-Kalim, and the jungles of Zanaga..." She shakes her head and sighs. "When I put it that way, it seems inevitable I'll be back to adventuring in a century or so. Ah well. There's just so much world to see."

Ask if she hopes to find love someday.

➥ *Read entry 7777.*

Change the subject.

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

1189

Mariam and Braxton are sat at a table not far from the hearth, looking tired but happy. Braxton catches sight of you and waves you over while Mariam pours herself a too large mug of cider.

Join Mariam and Braxton.

➥ *Read entry 5155.*

Retire for the night.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1200

Gnorman throws a punch, you step aside, someone throws a broken wooden mug at the back of your head, and the next thing you know the entire tavern is a riot of fists and flying furniture. Reginald climbs on top of the bar and lays about himself with a stool. Gnorman launches himself at a woman with silver teeth and wrestles her into a headlock. Two men, one bald and wiry, the other with a thicket of grey hair, lunge at you, punching and spitting. Thelga, the bartender, lifts a stout oaken rod and comes roaring around the bar, waving it above her head.

"Enough!" she bellows. "I'm trying to run a business, here!"

➥ *You each lose three stamina.*

➥ *You each lose two additional stamina unless you have brawling (skill) or endurance (skill).*

➥ *Mark one progress in combat training.*

Eventually, you, Gnorman, and a number of other belligerent patrons, each nursing bruises and sprains, find yourselves forcibly ejected and hurled out into the streets of Dragonholt. The gnome brawler lies on his back in the mud of the street, chuckling to himself. "Ah," he says. "Haven't had a good scrap like that since Riverwatch."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1211

"N-not at all," says Sapphire. "I only just arrived a moment before you." She approaches you with a shy smile and wiggles the basket. "I've made us something to eat. Shall we set up under the stars?" You nod and carry the basket for her.

➥ *Read entry 8545.*

1260 (Northern Road)

A dirt road leads away from the village, running mostly straight across the rocky plain to the north until it disappears over rolling hills that give way to more mountainous terrain in the distance.

If story point B3, B5, or U3 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 4930.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

1264

You point out that you know a pretty good apothecary in town and you're pretty sure you could get a better deal from her, and you try to haggle the strange merchant down in price. "My wares are the finest in six kingdoms!" proclaims the merchant. "You would have to travel to Al-Kalim yourself to find better."

If you have persuasion (skill) or streetwise (skill)...

➥ *Read entry 2415.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 6879.*

1320

As you turn to go, something catches your eye: a single stone, resting on a counter at the back of the brothers' stall. It glimmers in the light, and when you look at it it's almost like you cannot hear or see anything else in the world.

The elder brother sees you looking at the stone, and his face swiftly becomes grave. "It's not for sale," he says before you can ask.

"But perhaps you'd like to try one of our other fine wares?" suggests the younger brother, launching off into another bit of mercantile song and dance. You can scarcely hear him.

You are certain that you have never seen a stone like this before, and you must have it. But it is clear the brothers will not sell.

Plot to steal the stone.

➥ *Read entry 7636.*

Leave heartbroken without the stone.

Requires willpower (skill).

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1322

You retrieve a practice weapon from the rack and square up against one of the blocky training dummies. The dummy doesn't put up much of a fight, of course, but swinging the heavy training weapon around is quite the workout, and the muscles in your arms and back burn as you grunt and thwack away for a few hours.

- *You each lose two stamina.*
- *Mark one progress in combat training or one progress in physical training.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

1328

You settle down next to Penny to pay your respects. A moment later, Skala appears and sets a lit candle before you, then vanishes with his feet whispering on the shrine floor. You sit in silence, letting the absence of Penny's mother and the hole she left in their lives fill you. After a moment you realize that Penny is holding your hand and her father's, sitting there as a bridge between you.

You let the glimmering of the light and the gentle sound of the water wash over you, until you lose track of time and everything but the breathing and the heartbeat of the family next to you.

- *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

1345

You slap your coins on the grey-weathered countertop and fan them out so the fishmonger can count them more easily. She does and slides them all into a leather envelope she tucks back into her belt. "There," she says. "See how easy that was?" Then she turns and, with a grunt, rolls two sizable casks out from behind her stall to you.

You help Hetharr carry the two casks as far as the dragon statues that mark the edge of town, then set them down. "Thank you for your help," she says. "I will have to see about finding my own coins if I'm going to do any more trading with humans." She pulls the green mask from within her tunic and looks at it for a long moment. "You should have this," she says. "It's all I can do to repay you."

Before you can ask how she's going to carry both casks off to the forest on her own, three more hyrrinx emerge from the shadows of the orchard, stalking forward on silent cat feet. They nod their heads gravely to you, and then the four of them heft the heavy barrels of fish and vanish into the trees.

- *You gain the spirit mask (item M).*
- *Mark one progress in heroism and one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

1355

When the food is gone, Grisbeck retrieves a basket from beneath the table and pulls out a thick wool blanket from within it. He clears away the serving platters and dishes into the basket, then lays the blanket out a few yards away, beyond the circle of lantern light. "Will ye join me?" he asks, offering you a hand. "Come an' watch the stars."

Join him and watch the stars.

- *Mark story point D2.*
- *Read entry 8681.*

Tell him you must be going.

- *Mark story point J3.*
- *Read entry 3677.*

1362

You come upon a remarkably square volume that is labeled *A System of the World*, written with almost fanatical neatness and regularity. The author, one Gregorious Halavan, lays out a schema by which all the world, even magic, can be understood through mathematics and reason.

According to Halavan's System, everything in the world behaves according to "certain natural laws" that can be learned and understood by humans. Once the laws are understood, humans can make "useful predictions" through what he calls the "experiential process."

Halavan spends the first third of the book assuring the reader that his system is neither madness nor blasphemy and the rest laying out some mathematical explanations for the movement of the heavens. According to your best attempts to follow along with his equations, Halavan hasn't made any obvious errors.

- *Mark one progress in academic study.*
- *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.

Requires seven or less time has passed.

- *Read entry 6719.*

Leave the library.

- *This encounter is complete.*

1370

The road, if a wagon track that is simply two ruts running through the grass can be called that, runs south out of Dragonholt and marches past the mill, visible in the distance as a leaning stone tower. Beyond the mill, hills pile atop one another, purpling with distance as they reach toward the sky.

Head to the mine to the south.

Requires story point B1 is marked.

- *This encounter is complete. Read entry 1009 in the "Sliver of Silver" quest book.*

Return to the village.

- *This encounter is complete.*

1388

As she stands to go, Celyse leans in and grabs your arm. "I think it's possible that Kyric will try something at the ball tonight. Regina will have her guards there, but your presence would be more than welcome. I know I can count on you." Then she slips out of the Swan and into the summer sun beyond.

If story point A6 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 1397.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 5791.*

1390

When you show Theodore the trinket you found in Eventide Forest, his story trails off and dies in his throat. "My word," he says, taking it from you with trembling hands. He peers down at the wooden badger, seeming to see it more with his fingers than with his watery eyes. "This is the very one. I gave this to Ursula when we were both so very young." A smile spreads slowly across his face, crinkling his wrinkles like a withered apple. "It didn't have these letters carved into it then, though. 'T' and 'U.' Theodore and Ursula. You found this at the Tree of Tales?" Hand trembling, he reaches inside his sawdust-covered woolen coat and withdraws a letter, stiff and dry and crinkling with age and sealed with a dollop of red wax.

"I think the spirit of the Tree of Tales is telling me that it's finally time. Why else would you bring this talisman into my hands? She must have carved in our initials and placed it there herself." He looks down at the letter, smoothing it on the countertop in front of him. "Oh, but I still can't bear to face her. I feel like such a fool, letting it go so long." He holds out the letter, his voice wavering. "Do you think you might...deliver this to her for me? She shouldn't be hard to find. She's run the Countess Inn since her husband died."

➥ *You lose the wooden trinket (item).*
➥ *You gain the love letter (item C).*
➥ *Mark story point O3.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1393

You lay out some old and worn items of your personal adventuring kit, things that you plan to replace soon or no longer need. Unsurprisingly, the selection draws little attention, and the people who do stop by seem more interested in chatting about your adventures than in buying anything. Eventually, though, you do manage to sell a few choice items for a modest gain.

➥ *You gain 10 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

1394

You chuckle to yourself and shake your head. "It's no bother at all, Sapphie. And if I'm lucky, I'm not the only one in Dragonholt searching for love." You flash the innkeeper a smile.

Sapphire's cheeks flush, and she glances away, suddenly stricken by shyness. You notice Mariam grin slyly, and Braxton pretends she hasn't heard anything.

The bells on the front door jingle, signaling someone entering the inn. Sapphire stands. "E-excuse me," she says with a slight stutter and hurries off to welcome the new patron.

Mariam nudges you with an elbow. "Hey now, what are your intentions with my aunt?" she says with a wide grin, and you think you see Braxton blush faintly.

➥ *Mark story point X6.*
➥ *Read entry 2994.*

1397

As you finish your breakfast, Mariam and Braxton come storming into the Swan. "Aunt Sapphire!" bellows Mariam, creating quite a large noise for such a small woman. Sapphire emerges from the kitchen, snorts, and staggers backward with the force of her guffaws.

Braxton glimmers in the light streaming through the door, covered head to toe in sparkling dust. As she moves, it seems that a nimbus of light surrounds her. She raises one arm, which sparkles, and brushes at the clinging dust with an air of curiosity.

"It's not funny," fumes Mariam. "Braxton can't be a guard like this! No one will take her seriously."

"It is a little funny," admits Braxton, waving her hand and watching the shimmering light flare and die.

"Won't it wash off?" asks Sapphire, struggling back to her feet through waves of giggles.

"Well, yes," says Mariam. "But that's not the point!" She wheels and paces anxiously in the entryway. "It will wash off easily enough, but I'll also have to clean up the floor and the walls and the door!" she mutters to herself. "And on the morning of a market day that no one told me about, no less! I need to hurry and open the shop!" With that, she stomps out.

"It goes without saying," says Braxton, half out the door, "that our revenge will be absolute." Then she tilts her head slightly and smiles a broad tusky grin. "Have a lovely day."

Sapphire sighs and wipes tears from her eyes, having finally calmed her laughter. "Last night was so much fun, I completely forgot that today is a special market day in honor of the Three Lords' Ball. I'll have to send Jasper out to fetch some vegetables and mushrooms."

You gather your things and head out to face your day.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1398

"Oh, you've done plenty already to help us," says Mariam. "I wouldn't want to impose." She looks down at the gaping holes in her floor and the exposed beams propping up her walls. "But if you have nothing better to do, we should be back at work here in a couple hours."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1400 (Fairfax Manor)

The manor house is a sprawling structure of grey stone, its facade covered with dark green ivy. The east wing of the manor is older than the rest, its tall narrow windows doubling as arrow slits and its roof marked by crenellations. An arching stair leads to the main door on the ground floor.

If four or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The manor house is not accepting visitors at this time. This encounter is complete.*

1401 (Fairfax Manor — Day One)

You step into the grand hall of the manor, which is lit only by the sun shining through the high windows. A human serving girl sits at a long table, polishing silver.

If story point V6 is marked but I6 is not…

➥ *Read entry 4283.*

If neither story point S8 nor V6 are marked…

➥ *Read entry 9072.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The manor house is not accepting visitors at this time. This encounter is complete.*

1402 (Fairfax Manor — Day Two)

The main hall is rather dark, lit only by the sunlight forcing its way through the clouds above. No one seems to be around, so you announce your presence and wait. Soon a door opens and a servant passes through.

If story point I6 is marked…

➥ *The manor house is not accepting visitors at this time. This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 4283.*

1403 (Fairfax Manor — Day Three)

You don't even make it through the front door before Tymothi is upon you, pitching his voice low but fierce. "What are you doing here?" he asks. "The household is in an uproar over Phillip's disappearance. You must go straight to the forest and find him!" With that, he slams the door shut.

➥ *The manor house is not accepting visitors at this time. This encounter is complete.*

1404 (Fairfax Manor — Day Four)

The manor house seems deathly quiet compared to the hubbub of the market in the village. After a moment, Tymothi walks through the great hall, carrying a pewter cup. He pauses when he sees you and gestures to the staircase to your left. "Miss Celyse is in the salon, if you're looking to visit." Then, with a bow, he vanishes into his office-cum-library.

Join Celyse in the salon.

➥ *Read entry 4255.*

Leave the manor.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1405 (Fairfax Manor — Day Five)

The serving girl, Mathilda, answers the door and ushers you into the great hall. She peers through the door behind you, shakes her head, and closes the door. "Too many gnomes," she murmurs, then gestures to the garden. "Miss Celyse is in the garden, if you'd like to see her," she says.

Join Celyse in the garden.

➥ *Read entry 9839.*

Leave the manor.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1406 (Fairfax Manor — Day Six)

The house seems quieter than usual, but the serving girl Mathilda greets you promptly at the door. "Her ladyship is away," she says, "but Miss Celyse is in the salon if you'd like to join her."

Join Celyse in the salon.

➥ *Read entry 9864.*

Leave the manor.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1407 (Fairfax Manor — Day Seven)

You hear a great commotion from within the manor's hall as you approach and find the door hanging ajar. Clearly, the manor staff is hard at work preparing for tonight's ball.

If three or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 6949.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The manor house is not accepting visitors at this time. This encounter is complete.*

1459

Grisbeck hands you a warm meat pie, rich and tangy with garlic. "Will ye be at Mariam an' Braxton's wedding later?" he asks as you eat. "I'm closin' down the shop to attend. 'tis at the willow grove, of course." Then he chases you over to an open table and turns his attention to the next customer, yet another gnome.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1477

"Mariam, are you well?" asks Braxton, shifting her chair a little to look at the gnome more carefully.

Mariam takes a deep breath, then turns to Braxton, hopping out of her chair. "This was supposed to happen at the picnic," she says.

"What was?" asks Braxton.

"This," says Mariam, taking one of Braxton's hands in both of hers. "Braxton, when we met I didn't have any idea how much you'd… I didn't know that we'd…" She takes a deep breath and tries again. "I'm a wanderer gnome. 'Home' means something different to us, but I think it means something different to you, too. To me, 'home' means you, Braxton. Wherever I go, whatever I do with my life from now on, I want you in it." Mariam lifts their joined hands, looking up into Braxton's tear-filled eyes. "Dame Braxton of Harmon, will you marry me?"

Braxton drops out of her chair, falling to her knees in front of Mariam and enfolding her with her arms. "Yes," she says, kissing Mariam's forehead. "Yes, yes, yes," she says, kissing each cheek and then her lips.

"Huzzah!" calls Sapphire, suddenly lifting a bottle of sparkling wine and launching its cork halfway across the room. "My niece is getting married! Free drinks for everyone!" She leaps to her feet and runs around pouring wine for everyone in the common room, running back to the kitchen when the bottle runs out.

Mariam climbs up onto the table and clasps a shining silver necklace around Braxton's neck, then sits down at her side. When Sapphire returns with more wine, she gasps, touching her throat. "Oh, Mariam! You kept it. Your mother's bridal necklace." Mariam beams, and Sapphire steps forward to wrap her niece and as much of Braxton as she can manage into a hug.

➥ *Read entry 9840.*

1495

Mariam jams her thumb over her shoulder toward a tall shelf. "The good stuff is on that shelf. You should find what you're looking for over there." The gnome leans toward you with a wink. "And I'll give you a special price if you promise not to mention it to anyone else."

➥ *You may purchase up to three healing potions (item A) for 25 gold per potion.*

If story point S4 is marked…

➥ *You may purchase one swiftness potion (item D) for 50 gold.*

If story point L8 is marked…

➥ *You may purchase one strength potion (item F) for 50 gold.*

Regardless…

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1501

You climb up to your room and prepare for bed. Out the windows you can still see sparks and light from the bonfire on the village green, and hear the odd snippet of music or rowdy celebrants. It seems as if the village is settling down to sleep with a smile on its face.

You sleep hard and deeply, and if you dream, you don't remember it.

➥ *You each recover half of your maximum stamina.*

➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*

➥ *This chapter of the story ends here. When you're ready to begin the next chapter, read entry 6452.*

1514

"Quite a few characters in this village," laughs Sapphire. "Who did you want to know about?"

"What can you tell me about Lady Regina Fairfax?"

➥ *Read entry 1779.*

"Can you tell me about Sonia Fairfax?"

➥ *Read entry 8415.*

"What do you know about Celyse?"

➥ *Read entry 1002.*

"Can you tell me more about Mariam?"

➥ *Read entry 3746.*

"I'd like to know about the Belmont family."

➥ *Read entry 7256.*

"What do you know about the Cunninghams?"

➥ *Read entry 1530.*

"Tell me about *you*, Sapphie."

Requires empathy (skill).

➥ *Read entry 9524.*

1518

You suddenly recall the hidden message that you discovered in Celyse's letter. Unsure of the urgency Celyse intended, you figure it best to make your way to meet her before too much longer. You ask Sapphire for directions to Regina's manor.

Sapphire's face shifts to match your own more serious mood. "Of course. The manor is just north of here. If you walk around to the north side of the block and look north you can't miss it. Big fancy buildings on the hill." Sapphire tilts her head slightly. "Is everything alright, dear?"

You can tell that she is truly concerned, but you also get the sense that she's hoping for some juicy gossip. You assure her that everything is fine.

➥ *Mark story point Y5.*

➥ *Read entry 5302.*

1530

"The Cunninghams are an odd bunch," says Sapphire. "They're the lords of Haverford county, on the other side of the river to the south. Lord Oszrick is count at the moment, but by all accounts he leaves most of the actual ruling to his wife while he focuses on his pets and his other projects. The Cunninghams all seem to have something or another they would rather do than be proper nobility; Oszrick's father was the best painter in the barony in his day, but his family was nearly penniless when Oszrick finally married some rich merchant's girl. I hear she is the sharp political mind in the family." Sapphire chuckles. "They're amiable enough people, though. Lord Oszrick's pet drake is a funny little monster. He swears it doesn't breathe fire, but people still break out the buckets of sand whenever he brings the beast around."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

1534

Fiore nods. "Follow the southern road out of the village past the willow grove. If you stay on that road, you can't miss the mine. And one last thing." She looks at you seriously. "The mine has been abandoned for years, and I highly doubt the goblins have improved things. Take care while you're down there and consider your actions well. It's a very unstable environment."

Fiore sighs. "But remember: we want the mine whole. It would cost the county a fortune to excavate the tunnels again. We'll pay you part of the reward up front to cover expenses." She drops a heavy pouch of coins on the table.

➥ *You gain 50 gold.*

"You'll get the rest of the reward after you've reclaimed our mine," says Fiore with a laugh. She claps you firmly on the back. "Don't let us down, eh?"

➥ *Mark story point B1.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1577

"Oh, Hunter was just stocking up on his Kurnos' Spear tablets," says Mariam with a wave. "You dry and powder the root, then mix it with some starch and make tablets out of it. Got lots of masculine essence in a plant like that. I guess men like him need to take them on the regular or they start to look a little too much like women—I cannot believe I just said that," she exclaims, clapping her hands over her mouth. "That wasn't my secret to tell, I have got to apologize to Hunter when I see him next. Don't go spreading that around!" Mariam groans and drops her head on the counter. "This is not my best day. Please buy something."

You take a look around the shop.

➥ *Read entry 7699.*

1582

"Well, the very best place to visit is the Swan, of course!" Sapphire laughs. "But other than that, well, what do you want to know?"

"How's the market?"
➥ *Read entry 1981.*

"Are there any taverns in Dragonholt?"
➥ *Read entry 3391.*

"Where do the villagers spend most of their time?"
➥ *Read entry 9494.*

"How did you come to own the Swan?"
➥ *Read entry 5755.*

1587

"Don't think you scare me, Brynn," hisses the Cunningham boy. His own hand drops to the sword at his hip.

"I should, Albyrt," retorts the Belmont girl. They're both maybe twenty years old, at your best guess, but it's hard not to see them as spoiled children the way they're carrying on, albeit spoiled children armed with live steel.

"What is this about, anyway?" asks Albyrt. "Are you jealous that I'm going to be marrying the Fairfax heir and you're not?"

"Ha!" spits Brynn. "Even if I believed you, I'd say 'good riddance' to you both." She puts a hand on her sword. "In fact, I might just say 'good riddance' anyway."

You step in and attempt to calm things down before they become violent.

If you have persuasion (skill)...
➥ *Read entry 8620.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 1936.*

1590 (Dragon Statues)

Two massive dragon statues tower over the western road like an archway. One statue is carved from black stone, the other from white, and they are positioned to look as if they are dueling. The statues are the closest thing Dragonholt has to a town gate.

If it is day three and story point A4 is marked...
➥ *Read entry 4941.*

If it is day three and story point A4 is not marked...
➥ *Read entry 9978.*

If it is day six and six or more time has passed and story point M2 is marked...
➥ *Read entry 3975.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now. This encounter is complete.*

1629

"Well, it's not like there's a library in Carum's Cross," laughs Sasha. "Or hardly anywhere else. I'd have to go to Highcrest for proper schooling, but I'm too old to sit through that, and anyway, all they teach is etiquette and the classics and rot like that. I've more practical interests. Like mathematics. It's astonishing, really, how mathematics are just waiting out there. For us to discover. Being true, with or without human knowledge. And they remain true, in any language, no matter how you approach them." She coughs and steps away from you. "Ahem. Excuse me, I was getting enthusiastic again. The point is that Lady Regina is a very wise and kind ruler to make this library available to the people, and tuition here is far more modest than at the Universities in Greyhaven."

Inquire about the topic of her studies.

➥ *Read entry 3182.*

Leave her to study in peace.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1640

Fiore is sitting on a bench not far from the front of the smithy, watching a blonde dwarf man hammering on a piece of red-hot metal by the forge. When she sees you, she reaches for her crutch and hauls herself to standing. "Welcome back," she says. "It's finished." She walks to the brownstone annex and pulls a key from within her leather apron, then unlocks a heavy iron door. "Wait here," she says, vanishing through it.

A few moments later she returns with a bundle wrapped in red linen under her arm. "Get the door, will you?" she says as she carries it to her desk. She sets her crutch aside and unwraps the package, standing over the desk. "I kept it simple, a classic thrusting sword design. Full tang, of course, with a modest fuller. The haft is oak, wrapped with calfskin leather, and the pommel is brass. The crossguard is steel. The silver is just the outer layer." She holds the sword up and presents it for inspection. Between the gleaming blade and the polished silver crossguard, inlaid with gems, the whole thing shines in the light.

"The real trick is the runeshard, of course. It's set into the blade itself, with the crossguard helping to hold it in place. There's some Brightmaul silver worked into the blade of the sword, which—hah, you got me going on. I'm not going to reveal all my secrets. Suffice it to say, this sword will outlive you and any foe you wield it against."

She takes a leather scabbard from one of her passing apprentices and offers it to you. "Scabbard comes free. Use the sword well, my friend. It was a pleasure to make it."

➥ *You gain the rune sword (item N).*

➥ *Mark story point R5.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *Read entry 4422.*

1645

You and Sapphire move to the music, spinning and laughing as the song skirls around you. When it ends, a slower and more stately song begins, and Sapphire draws in close to you. "Ah," she sighs. "Festivals always make me feel young again." You point out that she's far from old, and she laughs, giving your hands a squeeze. "Flatterer. But you're not wrong; I've still got a fair few decades left before it's time to totter off into retirement. Plenty of time for a new adventure." She looks up at your face and smiles softly before glancing away, her cheeks pink.

You dance together for a long time.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1656

You finish your breakfast and stack your plates for Sapphire to collect later. As you gather your things to prepare for your day, you see Mariam and Braxton come down the stairs with heavy, bulging bags.

"Thanks for letting us stay here, Aunt Sapphie," says Mariam, leaning in to kiss her aunt on the cheek. "But I'm ready to move in to my new place."

"Of course, hun! You're both welcome anytime," says Sapphire, resting a gentle hand on Braxton's forearm. "Take good care of my niece now," she says with a wink.

Braxton smiles and nods. "Always."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1675

"May as well get started on the next cartload," says Mariam, twirling her prybar dramatically, dropping it, snatching it back up, and smiling as if nothing happened. Together, you dismantle every soot-blackened surface of the back room. As you work, you take the opportunity to get to know Mariam better.

Ask about Mariam's business from before Dragonholt.

➥ *Read entry 7985.*

Ask about Mariam's family.

➥ *Read entry 6049.*

Ask Mariam how she met Braxton.

➥ *Read entry 7125.*

1685

Eventually, the flood of customers becomes a trickle, and Mariam has a moment to breathe. She waves you over as she sits on her countertop. "Thanks for your help," she says. "Forget about that fifty gold you owe me; we'll call it even." She stretches and hops down off the counter. "Now go, and enjoy what's left of the market day. Before I owe you money!"

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1724

"Oh, it's easy," says Hunter with a smile. "You saw the bow over the door on your way in? All you have to do is take that bow and hit the bullseye. You get three tries. And if you manage it, you drink for free all night."

"Tell 'em the catch," says Hunter's dark haired wife as she delivers a tray of dirty dishes. "If it's so easy, why do you only have to give out the prize once a year?"

"Well, the catch is that you don't get to try until you've already started drinking," he chuckles. "But you've already finished your meal. So, are you game?"

"I'll try it."

➥ *Read entry 9477.*

"Maybe another time."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1779

"Oh, Lady Regina!" says Sapphire. "She's a bit of a scandalous figure, you know. Even so, she's our scandalous figure. She wasn't meant to be countess, you see. Her father's natural daughter, so not in line to inherit. But she was raised here and in the hills and forest. They say her mother was a wild woman, a witch of the woods, and she's never been one to follow tradition if she saw a better way."

Sapphire pauses, turning her thimble idly on her thumb. "It happened before I came to the village of course, but apparently Regina did—well, something to save the entire county. I heard she cast a great spell, or that she became the bride of the forest to appease the spirits, or that she did battle with a dragon. Anyway, whatever it was was so impressive that her father legitimized her and made her his heir. He died a few years later, and she's ruled as Countess of Dragonholt ever since. And she's been a good one, too."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

1790 (Willow Grove)

The road leading south out of the village splits around a large grove of willow and oak trees. The villagers seem to treat the grove as a sort of park or meeting spot. There are almost always children playing among the trees or families enjoying the sun and the breeze.

If it is day two and exactly two time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 5955.*

If it is day five…

➥ *Read entry 5080.*

If it is day six and six or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 2765.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 1370.*

1792

"To our new home!" cheers Mariam, swallowing another mouthful of tart red wine. "It feels so good to have my own space. Our own space," she amends, glancing at Braxton. "I'm really looking forward to going back there tonight and breaking in our bed—"

"Mariam!" gasps Braxton.

"By sleeping! Sleeping in our bed!" She turns the same shade as the wine in her cup and hides her face behind another swallow.

Sapphire bursts into peals of laughter, materializing at your side. "I came back at just the right time," she says.

Mariam coughs. "Braxton. Didn't you have something you wanted to tell us when we were all together?" She arches her eyebrows and mouths the word "please?"

➥ *Read entry 4347.*

1793

Mariam and Braxton bustle themselves out the door for their day, bantering about the renovations to the apothecary shop and how much work they still have to do.

"Market day is tomorrow," says Sapphire as she clears away your breakfast setting. "There'll be plenty of activity on the market street then. And tomorrow night there's the bonfire at the village green. I think technically it's some sort of spirit festival thing, but as far as I can tell it's just an excuse to meet and mingle."

She pauses and cocks her head. "I suppose that means there's nothing special happening today, huh. Well, I'm sure you'll find something!"

You thank Sapphire for breakfast and return to your room to retrieve what you'll need for the day ahead.

If story point V6 is marked…

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 9317.*

1799

You point at Mal's feet while loudly proclaiming that he must be hidden so well Penny will never find him. The toddler giggles as Penny thanks you gravely and walks away, only to circle around behind and startle him with a giggle.

You help Penny gather up Mal's discarded clothes and hold him for her while she dresses him. "Thank ye for yer help," Penny says as she finishes the last button on his pants. "I don' know what I'd do if I lost th' wee rascal."

"Oh, I wouldn't blame you if you did," says Jasper, sprawling across a chair next to you. "I lose him two, three times a day."

➥ *Read entry 3960.*

1810 (Eastern Road)

The road that leads east away from the village is mostly cobbled, a more official-looking road than the others leading to Dragonholt. The road is flanked by numerous trees for some distance before twisting out of sight.

If it is day six and three or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 1920.*

If it is day six and four or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 8719.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

1814

You spin the story of your adventures in Nerekhall for a number of nearby patrons, leaving out the more embarrassing moments.

"Oh come on," says Gnorman. "Are we supposed to believe any of that?"

"I do," says Thelga. "It more or less agrees with what Miss Celyse told me." Gnorman turns to peer at her suspiciously. "What? You don't know how I spend my free time."

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

Tell them about your adventure in the crypt.

Requires story point S6 is marked but Q7 is not.

➥ *Read entry 4812.*

Tell them about your great battle on the prairie.

Requires story point L5 is marked but T1 is not.

➥ *Read entry 7269.*

Find something else to occupy your time in the Hog.

Requires six or less time has passed today.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *Read entry 7622.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1847

You make to hand over the purse, then suddenly turn and sprint through the crowd, shoving past the grey-haired dwarf woman and leaping over a cart full of grumbling ducks.

"Stop!" shouts the guard, thundering after you. "Thief!" You hear an answering cry from your left and see another guard moving to cut you off.

If you have stealth (skill) or streetwise (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 9364.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 3799.*

1856

"Bryll, why don't you lend a hand," says Fiore, and the young apprentice comes jogging over to escort you through the stockroom. With his assistance, you sample the wide variety of bucklers, bracers, blades, and bludgeons and make your selections, choosing a variety of new enhancements to your arsenal.

➥ *Mark three progress in combat training.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1868

A dull thwack sounds as you circle around to the rear of the guard house. "Keep your shield up!" calls a gruff voice.

"My shield is fine," drawls another. Two guards, both human, are sparring with wooden swords and shields, one a woman with a bored expression, the other a lantern-jawed man whose face is red with frustration. An orc man, his head spotted with wispy grey hair, sits and watches them, shaking his head.

"Your shield is fine against Deakon, here, but against a real opponent you'd be dead, Tallea!"

Deakon, the human man, puffs out his chest and lowers his sword. "It's not becoming to strike a lady, that's all."

Tallea rolls her eyes. "An easy thing to say after you've spent all morning *trying* to strike me and *failing*." She throws her sword and shield down. "This is pointless. I'm already a better fighter than both of you put together. I'll be back when there's some actual work that needs doing." She stalks past you, barely sparing you a glance, and is soon gone.

The orc man stands stiffly as he notices you. "Ah," he says. "We don't get many visitors here. I'm Tweegal. That was Tallea, this is Deakon." He nods over his shoulder to the human behind him, who flourishes his sword into an over-elaborate bow. "We represent her ladyship's guard here in Dragonholt. Such as it is."

Tweegal stomps over to you and peers at you with watery yellow eyes. "You're new. Just came in with Sapphire's niece, eh? Through Eventide Forest, no less? How'd you find the journey?" You explain about your run-in with the bandits, and how you and Braxton and Mariam fought them off. "Well, good job, that. Bandits, eh?" He turns and studies Deakon, who appears to be trying on different gratuitously masculine poses with his sword, peering at his reflection in a muddy puddle in the practice yard. "That's not good news."

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

➥ *Time passes.*

Request to use the training ground.

Requires seven or less time has passed.

➥ *Read entry 1322.*

Leave the guard station.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1903

You cross to a chair and pick up Celyse's book, as a fan against the heat if nothing else. You flip through it and find some discussion of the Belmont family and their long and proud history. The author of the book seems to suggest that the Belmonts have royal blood and should be held in much higher esteem in Terrinoth than they currently are, with far more lands to their name.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Eventually, Phillip and Celyse emerge from the studio. "I'm sure we have time for one story," says Phillip.

"I'm quite certain we do not," replies Celyse. "Run along to the kitchens; you did promise you would assist today, and it is important to honor one's word."

Phillip sighs, glancing at you with big eyes, then nods and slips down the stairs. Celyse returns to her chair and rings a small silver bell, which causes Mathilda to materialize with a tea service and oat cakes. "Thank you, Mathilda," says Celyse, pouring the tea. "I must say, tea on command is positively civilized."

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

1920

The smoke of the dragon's attack rises on the horizon to the east. A hot wind is blowing, and sweat beads on your forehead. The eastern road is a dangerous one today.

Travel to the site of the dragon attack.
➥ *Read entry 2080.*

Ignore the smoke.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1936

You fumble over your words and point out that swordplay in the streets could be very dangerous, which apparently was the wrong thing to say.

"Dangerous?" sneers Albyrt. "Do you think I'm some sort of coward?" He draws his sword, and before it's even out of its sheath, Brynn's is in her hand.

"It's a Cunningham family trait, after all," sneers Brynn.

The crowd streams away from the two nobles like scattering insects, merchants and customers shrieking as they flee. Things are about to get ugly.

Attempt to subdue them both.
➥ *Read entry 9865.*

Call for the guards.
➥ *Read entry 9967.*

Watch them settle their differences.
➥ *Read entry 3634.*

1954

Ursula looks around the space, as if seeing it for the first time in years. "It was a wedding gift from my father-in-law, to my husband and I. From my first marriage. He ran the place for years, and his uncle before him. Of course, it was called 'The Count's Inn' at the time." She smiles, running a finger over the painted tree behind her. "This painting was different, too. Jeorge, my father-in-law, he didn't exactly retire, though. He helped run the place and spoiled his grandchildren rotten and dozed by the fire and gossiped like an old maid—never let anyone tell you that women gossip more than men, because it simply isn't true," she scolds. "Eventually the war broke out, and Padric marched off to die. Jeorge and I managed the best we could, but he didn't live much longer either, and then it was just me and the children." She reaches out and pats Theodore's hand. "And dear Theo, of course, who came in and insisted on rebuilding my crumbling annex at no charge. I should have suspected, then, how he felt about me."

"I should have said something," sighs Theodore. "But it was so soon after Padric's death, I didn't want to seem like a ghoul."

"It all worked out in the end," says Ursula, smiling. "I am worth waiting for, after all."

➥ *Read entry 2509.*

1964

Moving as one, the guards step toward the market, then stop.

"Where do you think you're going?" asks the woman.

"I'm going back out to the market to patrol," says Deakon.

The woman rolls her eyes and gently shoves him toward you. "No, you're staying here and keeping an eye on our guest. You can tell stories of your many exploits." Deakon sighs, and the woman marches off.

"Well," he says. "I suppose I may as well tell you all about the time I broke up that dream-poppy smuggling ring. It was a warm Suntide night…" The stories go on for hours, each one more outlandish than the last. You press yourself against the bars of your cell and stare fixedly at the sky as the sun creeps down past the horizon and night falls.

A lean figure strides out of the darkness and cuts off Deakon's latest story mid-word. "Deakon," the figure rumbles. "You're relieved." The man wanders off, and your savior steps into the light, revealing the frowning face of the old orc guard captain. "And you," he says. "How could you be so stupid?" He unlocks your cell with a heavy brass key, sighing. "Lady Regina is more merciful than most. Try that stunt anywhere else, you could lose a hand, be branded, even hanged. As it is, if I have to spring you from lockup again, you'll be facing exile."

With a final glare, the captain stomps off into the night.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1981

"The market street is the center of the town," says Sapphire. "Dragonholt serves the whole county; people come from leagues around to buy from the shops here or hawk their wares on market day. Fiore Brightmaul is the best smith in the barony. The fletcher's bows are in high demand by hunters and yeomen everywhere, and they'll let you rent a bow to practice your skills, too."

Sapphire smooths out the fabric in her lap, studying it. "My favorite is Grisbeck's bakery, though. He's a Dunwarr, a refugee from the mountains in fact. He sure can bake, though!"

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

1988

Tymothi bolts up from his seat as you approach. Lady Elena casts an amused glance in your direction.

Tymothi stutters but manages to introduce you properly to the lady, then turns to you. "May I introduce her ladyship Elena Cunningham, Countess-Consort of Haverford."

"Charmed, I'm sure," says the countess. "I understand you are friendly with the Fairfaxes' tutor. Perhaps you could prevail upon her the wisdom of Lady Rochelle marrying into my family."

"I'm certain, my lady, that this is not a matter with which Celyse and ilk need concern themselves," says Tymothi, returning to his seat but with his back as straight as an arrow.

"No?" says Lady Elena. "Perhaps not, but with Regina's failing health and the other tragedies haunting the Fairfax family, I think the matter had better be resolved soon, don't you?" She turns to you and leans forward, her eyes sparkling. "It's like this. Rochelle must marry, and soon. My son Albyrt is the best match. He's educated, intelligent, and well liked by the people. Furthermore, once wed, their first child will be heir to both counties. With a single wedding we'll create the most powerful family in the barony, aside from the baroness herself." She leans back and sips her wine. "What do you say?"

Somehow, you manage to extricate yourself from the situation without committing to a position one way or the other.

➥ *Mark story point T2.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

1996

Your arrow flies well wide of the butt. "Bad luck," suggests Hunter. You take your second arrow and draw again, doing your best to correct your aim.

If story points D4 and W3 are marked…
➥ *Read entry 7242.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9870.*

2012

The librarian glances down at you from her perch, then reaches out one hand and pets the grey tabby cat sleeping on a pile of books at her side. "Celyse is in the archives," she says, nodding to the door behind her.

Join Celyse in the archives.
➥ *Read entry 7087.*

Spend some time doing research or studying.
➥ *Read entry 3007.*

Ask if there is any work that can be done.
➥ *Read entry 7268.*

Donate your collected books to the library.
Requires story point K1 is marked but B7 is not.
➥ *Read entry 8934.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2017

The market appears to have spilled out of the market row proper and is now claiming space in the village green. A handful of merchants who don't have proper stalls have laid out their wares on brightly colored blankets or have simply placed a chest of goods in front of them. A tall woman in a ringmail cuirass strides back and forth in front of them, demonstrating a number of swift and deadly maneuvers with a wooden practice sword.

Browse the offerings of the merchants.
➥ *Read entry 4445.*

Approach the hired sword for training.
➥ *Read entry 6887.*

Lay down your own wares for sale.
➥ *Read entry 4846.*

Leave the village green.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2026

"I'll drink to that!" Mariam crows and throws back another mouthful of the tart red wine. "I was nervous, you know. I invested every silver piece I could scrape together into this, buying the building, laying in stock. If it didn't work, I'd…" She shrugs.

"But it did," Braxton reminds her.

"It did!" she agrees and refills her goblet. Then she glances at her fiancée. "Braxton, what did Tweegal want to talk to you about today?"

"Ah," says Braxton, dropping her gaze to her own wine. "I wanted to wait for everyone to be assembled to make that particular announcement."

➥ *Read entry 4347.*

2038

You approach the bar and order refreshments. Thelga, the orc bartender, pours you a drink in a chipped wooden cup and ladles out a helping of stew atop a slice of stale bread in a wooden trencher. "Only the best," she says in a leaden voice.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

You eat and drink, and find the food improves as you drink. The crowd continues to argue and boast all around you.

➥ *Read entry 7622.*

2076

You join the happy couple at their table just as Sapphire arrives with more food—hot steaming soup with noodles and vegetables, roast duck, and red cabbage pickled in apple vinegar. "Will I still be seeing you for dinners, dear?" Sapphire asks as she lingers at the table. "At least for the next few weeks?"

"I'm not nearly the cook you are," Braxton says, sniffing at the soup. "But I suppose at some point we should provide for ourselves."

"Don't you worry, oh future wife," chirps Mariam. "Once we have our kitchen set up properly I'll be able to remind you how good a cook I am."

"I suppose cooking and alchemy have a lot in common," Braxton muses.

"You enjoy," says Sapphire, and bustles away to tend to other customers.

"Well," says Mariam, pouring you a tall goblet of wine. "What shall we drink to?"

"Congratulations on the grand opening, Mariam!"

➥ *Read entry 2026.*

"Have you two gotten settled in at your new home?"

➥ *Read entry 1792.*

"What did Tweegal want to talk to you about, Braxton?"

➥ *Read entry 4347.*

2078

Grisbeck places a still-steaming loaf of dark bread in front of you. "Eat," he says. "It's best still hot." With a clatter, he drops a crocker of butter and another of honey on the table as well. "I'll say this for th' lowlands," Grisbeck allows. "Th' honey is quite good."

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

➥ *Time passes.*

"I have a gift for you, Penny."

Requires cloth doll (item).

➥ *Read entry 8178.*

"Thank you for the meal."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2080

Evesmoore is almost a day away on foot, or a few hours on horseback, so your first step is to find a suitable mount. You visit the public stables south of the Swan and explain what you're looking for to the stablemaster, a broad-shouldered human man with dark brown skin and a close cap of grey curls. "I'm all for someone taking care of that dragon," the man says with a frown. "But I'm not eager to see my property ride straight at a monster that might find it fancies the taste of horse." He scratches his head for a moment and sighs. "Alright; I suppose I can always ask the countess to reimburse me if you get my animals killed. Lars!"

He shouts, and a tow-headed human boy comes scurrying from within the stable. "Lars will help you get mounted," explains the stablemaster. Lars takes you through the stalls to the paddock out back, where you see several fine horses, ponies, and even a larger-than-usual goat. "Riding goat," explains Lars. "Just got that one from the gnomes yesterday. Sure footed but she's a bit strong-willed. Take your pick."

By the time you're mounted, you find Tweegal leaning against a post outside, a collection of spears and crossbows at his feet. "I heard you're about to go do something stupid," he says. "So I opened up the armory. Have at it." You take what you need from Tweegal's supplies, thank the stablemaster for the loan, and are ready to ride to the east.

➥ *This encounter is complete. Read entry 1007 in the "Terror on the Prairie " quest book.*

2093

You don some padding, grab a practice weapon, and step into the hall with the two women. Braxton critiques your footwork and asks Rochelle to show you her drill with the circles inlaid on the floor. Rochelle happily does so, and then you transition into a few straightforward drills for your footwork and guards. After a few minutes of these, Rochelle paces back and forth at the end of the hall. "Enough," she says. "This is getting me nowhere. Come at me, Braxton."

If story point J1 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 8222.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 5781.*

2119

"It's the anniversary of me wife's death," explains Grisbeck in a hoarse whisper. "If ye don't mind, we'd like ta be alone." He turns back to the pool and bows his head.

Spend some time in quiet meditation.

➥ *Read entry 3196.*

Leave the shrine.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2127

Celyse draws closer, glancing over her shoulder to ensure that you're unobserved. "Well, you know I value your judgment highly. Tell me what you suspect."

Tell her of your suspicions about Tymothi.

➥ *Read entry 7138.*

Inform her about Sonia's interactions with Gawin.

➥ *Read entry 8631.*

Tell Celyse that you do not trust Mathilda's loyalty.

➥ *Read entry 6216.*

2128

"I think I might," says Braxton, beaming. She reaches into her shirt and withdraws a glimmering silver necklace.

"Oh, that relationship," says Mariam.

"Mariam asked me to marry her," says Braxton, grinning like she's drunk.

"And Braxton said 'yes,'" says Mariam, stepping forward to wrap her arms around her fiancée's legs.

Braxton crouches down and kisses the gnome on the top of her head. "I enjoyed that lunch very much, my dear. We should do it again sometime."

"Why not?" says Mariam. "We have the rest of our lives."

➥ *Read entry 7762.*

2129

Phillip appears at your side, holding a small silver lantern. "This is my family's tree," he says in a low voice. "Rochelle and I came to pay our respects to Sonia. You can join us, if you like." He walks to kneel at Rochelle's side, then carefully places a candle in the mound of soft earth, lighting it from his lantern, which he then blows out. He takes his sister's hand, and they both stare at the candle flame.

Join them during their visit.

➥ *Read entry 2576.*

Take your leave.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2193

She sighs, pondering the bombs lying on your cloak and scratching idly at her bad leg. "Alright," she says after a lengthy pause. "Thirty-five gold coins for the lot. That's my final offer."

➥ *Mark story point D7.*
➥ *You gain 35 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

2210

As you draw closer, you see that the orc's beard is completely grey, and his hair, worn in a long braid, is well on its way. He wears a simple loose tunic and wool hose, his feet bare and callused. An animal tooth on a leather thong lies on his chest. "Spirits walk with you," he says as you approach. "You're new, eh? Staying at the Swan, came into town with Sapphire's niece?" The orc sits up and offers one hand. "I'm Skala," he says as you shake it. "I look after the shrine here, talk people through their problems, that sort of thing."

He grins and lies back down. "Lots of important spiritspeaking, you know. I was just communing with the spirits of the sky when you found me." Then he yawns. You can't help but think that "communing with the spirits of the sky" looks an awful lot like taking a nap.

➥ *Mark story point C2.*

Inquire about the spirits.

➥ *Read entry 5336.*

Lie in the grass and watch the clouds.

➥ *Read entry 5388.*

Leave him alone and find something else to do.

➥ *Mark story point Z8.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2211

"Mariam was going to take me for a picnic at the willow grove," says Braxton, pausing in the doorway. "It's said to be a lovely spot."

"It's very nice," says Mariam. "Let's go!"

"Would you care to join us?" asks Braxton as Mariam, behind her, stares at you in mute horror.

"Yes," says Mariam flatly. "Please join us. That would be lovely," she continues in a painfully monotone voice.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2228

You shake your head and begin packing your wares away. "Well, now, let's not be hasty, hey?" says the merchant, bending down to grab your wrist. "Okay, I can see you've got a keen sense of the value of your goods." He releases you, stands, and sighs, digging into a leather satchel at his hip to pull out coins and trade bars of gold and silver. "I can go a little higher."

➥ *You may sell your strange mushrooms (item) for 50 gold per item.*
➥ *You may sell your dragon blood (item) for 120 gold per item.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

2232

The rushing water grows louder and louder, the spirits clamoring to be heard. You realize that the sound is coming not from the spring in front of you, but from the polished shell on your person. You find the shell and hold it up, listening to the roar of rushing water and the crash of waves.

"Ah," says Skala. "The spirits there are ready to return home, I think. Why don't you place that shell back in the spring from whence it came." The old orc nods at you, and you drop the shell into the water, where its great noise is instantly silenced. The sanctuary seems to glow, lit not only by the glass dome above but by a light suffusing the pool before you, a soft blue radiance.

After a short time, the water churns and roils, almost boiling, and the shell floats to the top once more. The blue light now clings to the shell, flickering within its depths. You reach down and pick up the trinket, which seems to ring a single pure tone.

"The spirits' favor," says Skala. "Good fortune for you, I think." He nods, then wanders out into the garden, as if this event is not at all unusual.

- *You lose the polished shell (item).*
- *You gain the spirits' blessing (item O).*
- *Mark story point F3.*
- *Mark one progress in heroism.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

2239

"Time is up. Quill down," calls Celyse as she sweeps into Phillip's studio.

Phillip places his quill back into its inkpot and snatches up a rag to wipe his ink-smeared hands. "Yes, your highness," he says with a smile.

"I know you haven't forgotten your proper forms of address, young man, so I shall have to assume you are making a joke of some kind," says Celyse as she sits on a stool next to him. "You have had one hour. Tell me about the three noble families of this region as if I were a naive traveler from a distant land."

Phillip clears his throat and begins to read. "The counties of Dragonholt, Haverford, and Rostum are linked together by shared geography and history. Ruled respectively by the Fairfax, Cunningham, and Belmont families…" Phillip goes on for some time while you pick up a book from his table and begin to flip through it. The book is a genealogy and history of the three families on which Celyse is currently quizzing Phillip, so you read along with his lesson as he proceeds. Apparently all three families have centuries of history in the region, and they have been united politically and militarily since the reign of Count Aleks Fairfax, when the three counts fought side by side against an undead army. There have been a number of intermarriages between the families over the generations, including the marriage of Phillip's grandfather Lord Holland to a Belmont woman, which your book covers but Phillip does not mention.

"And today," says Phillip, "the Cunninghams are well known for their artistic and scholarly pursuits and eccentric behaviors, the Belmonts for their strong martial tradition, and the Fairfaxes for the tolerant and open-minded leadership that has made Dragonholt Village the economic center of the region."

"That information, Master Phillip, is not supported by any of the books I gave you," says Celyse.

"No," says Phillip. "It's common knowledge. Call it original research; your books are old and out of date. I've just written the first chapter of a new one." He grins as Celyse does her best to maintain a tutorial glower.

"I suppose time will tell how correct you are," says Celyse.

- *Mark one progress in academic study.*
- *Time passes.*

"I think that's enough study for today," says Phillip. "Don't you?" He tugs at his collar and strides to the closest window, pushing it open. "It's too hot to think."

"That does conclude our lesson," says Celyse with the caution of someone knowing she is walking into a trap.

"Oh, good," says Phillip. "Then I think we have plenty of time left for a story." He turns to you with a smile. "And I think we've found just the storyteller."

"Oh, very well," says Celyse. "You may have your story." She gestures for you to take the floor and sits by the window.

"Tell me about Nerek—"

"But not the Nerekhall story," calls Celyse. "Tell him a different one."

Tell a tale of your and Celyse's past adventures.

- *Read entry 9747.*

Tell Phillip about the crypt to the north.

Requires story point S6 or U4 is marked.

- *Read entry 5704.*

Tell him about your great battle earlier today.

Requires story point L5 is marked.

- *Read entry 4835.*

Share a tale about your delve to the south.

Requires story point C1 or U2 is marked.

- *Read entry 3153.*

2242

"Good," she says, pulling a purse from within her leather smock and counting out your money. "These really shouldn't be just out in the world in a human village."

- *Mark story point D7.*
- *You gain 25 gold.*
- *Read entry 1064.*

2270

Rochelle muscles her piebald stallion past you, making for the road. "Mother won't let us ride after the thing ourselves."

"Nor should she," snaps Braxton. "You are the heir. This is a knight's task. My lady, allow me. A dozen men-at-arms, crossbows, a ballista, lances, I believe it can be done."

"We haven't a dozen men-at-arms to spare," chides Regina. "Nor even one. Your wife will not thank me if I send her home your corpse, I think, Dame Braxton. First, we evacuate Evesmoore. Then, we send a rider to Lord Belmont and unite our efforts."

"As you command, my lady." Braxton bows her head and turns her horse toward the road.

"We must not delay," says Regina to you. "If you have a mind to challenge this monster, I cannot dissuade you. Perhaps the Belmonts have already dispatched their soldiers, and they may be of some aid to you as well." With that, the party rides off in a clatter of hooves.

➥ *This encounter is complete. If you intend to face the dragon yourself, visit the eastern road (location 1810).*

2278

You ask if the stories are true about Regina defeating a dragon in her youth. Braxton raises her eyebrows and glances over at her countess. "My lady?" she asks.

"They are true, after a fashion," admits Regina, stepping her mare closer to you. "But I am not the woman now I was then, and such magic is no longer mine to command." She glances to the east, at the pillar of smoke rising to the sky. "And it was not without cost, even then. To fight this beast must fall to some other hero, I am afraid. All I can do is protect my people the best way that I know how, and for Evesmoore, that means evacuation."

"My lady," says Braxton. "Allow me. A dozen men-at-arms, crossbows, a ballista, lances, I believe it can be done."

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2282

"Well, I've lived here a few years now," says Sapphire while tying off a thread. "I think I know Dragonholt and its residents pretty well. What did you want to know?"

"I have a question about someone in Dragonholt."

➥ *Read entry 1514.*

"Anywhere in Dragonholt you'd recommend?"

➥ *Read entry 1582.*

"What is there to do in Dragonholt?"

➥ *Read entry 2800.*

2284

You find a red-faced trading factor arguing the price of wool and slip his purse from his belt without him noticing a thing. Unfortunately, someone else does.

"Stop, thief!" screeches a grey-haired dwarf woman, pointing at you with her walking stick. In moments, a liveried guard is at your side, one hand on the heavy cudgel at his belt.

"What's all this, then?" he asks, peering at you with suspicion.

Say you found the coin purse on the ground.

➥ *Read entry 9027.*

Attempt to escape through the crowd.

➥ *Read entry 1847.*

2299

"Sure do! Wait here!" Mariam tumbles backward off the counter and scurries into the back room. She returns a moment later with a tray holding a handful of flasks of red liquid.

"I haven't gotten to the market to get the rest of the ingredients I need yet. We're still getting the shop fixed up. For now I've just got these." Mariam reaches up to slide the tray onto the counter. Braxton takes it from her and sets it on the counter. Mariam glares at the orc for less than a second before hopping onto the counter again. "These will keep you going."

➥ *You may purchase up to three healing potions (item A) for 25 gold per potion.*
➥ *Mark story point I1.*

Mariam hops off the counter and retreats to the back room to stow her earnings and the tray.

Braxton's expression shows that she is hesitating to say something. After a moment of silence, she speaks. "Sapphire mentioned someone from the manor came to see you this morning. Is everything alright?"

"Lady Regina's son has gone missing."

➥ *Read entry 4690.*

"Nothing you need worry about."

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2319

A group of traveling musicians have set themselves up on the village green, playing music and singing to passersby. There are four of them, including a purple-clad elf of ambiguous gender and three women with their hair tied back by blue ribbons: two humans and an orc. The elf sings while strumming a lute, and the three women sing backup with close harmonies while playing drums, bowed Lorimor lyra, and harp.

Most of the villagers seem to be ignoring the troubadours, but a few drop coins in the hat lying before them, and some even stop to dance and sing along.

Mingle with the musicians and dance.

➥ *Read entry 6554.*

Perform with the group.

Requires performance (skill).

➥ *Read entry 6112.*

Leave the village green.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2326

You step up more closely to the brothers' market stall, trying to figure out what they're selling. The answer appears to be: a little bit of everything.

"I picked up this little trinket in Frostgate," says the elder brother. "A charm blessed by a northern witch-woman, guaranteed to make the young ladies flock to you. It worked for me, folks!"

"Works on young men, too," says the younger brother. "And it can be yours for thirty gold coins!" A hand shoots up in the crowd and in moments the transaction is completed. A tall man with broken veins clustered around his nose pushes by you, clutching a small wooden charm to his chest.

"Now this is a curious specimen, brother of mine," says the elder brother, holding aloft a softly glowing mushroom. "As you know, it grows only on the reflection of the full moon, and its curative powers in the hands of a talented alchemist are second to none."

"Why, that sounds valuable, folks! What are we charging, brother, one hundred coins?" The elder brother shakes his head. "Eighty?" Another shake of the head. "What, you mean to tell me we're giving this amazing fungus away for a paltry forty five gold?"

"No wonder our mother called us crazy! But that's not even the most exciting treasure we have available today, is it brother?"

"You've never been more right, brother!" The younger brother unveils, with a flourish, a twisted horn from some tremendous beast, its top sealed with a metal cap. He flips open the cap, and a strange red-black liquid within the horn begins to steam and roil. The crowd 'oooohs' and steps somewhat back. "Now I'm not rightly certain who had to die for us to gain possession of this priceless relic—"

The elder brother claps a hand to his breast and turns his gaze to the heavens. "Alas, great-uncle Vylan."

"—but this, this, folks, is the blood of a dragon!" Another chorus of gasps. "And not just any dragon, but High Lord Margath himself!" The crowd recoils, as if afraid of being burned. The younger brother chuckles. "Never fear, never fear. He's quite dead. But his blood is priceless."

Purchase the unusual fungus.

Requires you spend 45 gold.

➥ *Read entry 9937.*

Negotiate a price for the dragon blood.

➥ *Read entry 4965.*

Ignore the merchants and leave.

➥ *Read entry 1320.*

2336

The orc seems confused for a moment. "You mean when I'm off duty? Are you asking me what I do for fun?"

"Off duty?" says Mariam. "I hired Braxton to get me safely to Dragonholt, and she did."

"So I did," says Braxton. "When I'm not helping Mariam, well, I keep my skills sharp, and my sword. It's actually quite a lot of work keeping all my equipment in top shape without a squire." Braxton takes a nail from Mariam and pounds it home.

"I like to read," she says finally. "Orcs keep an oral tradition, and I always loved listening to my grandmother's stories. But books are something else. I can read a book and hear a story told by someone whom I've never met, who might be dead or from a far-off land." She looks down at the floor, rolling a nail back and forth between her fingers. "I know, that's not very exciting. But it's what I like to do."

"Your real life is plenty exciting for both of us," says Mariam. "I think you deserve to kick back with a book from time to time."

➥ *Read entry 7762.*

2342

You drop the hoop as often as you successfully pass or catch it, but the other players around you don't seem to mind, and soon you're part of a large circle of gnomes and villagers, all tossing around a pair of hoops. As the game progresses you do improve somewhat, but you're not ready to join in the competitive version of the game being played further down the green.

➥ *You each lose two stamina.*
➥ *Mark one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2364

When you compliment the food, Mariam gapes at you in surprise, as if she's forgotten how to speak. "Did you prepare it, or did Sapphire?" asks Braxton.

"Oh!" says Mariam. "Yes. Well, the bread is from the bakery here, and it's not as if one has to have any special talent to choose a cheese and some fruit and vegetables. But. Um. Yes, I prepared the meal myself." Suddenly she lunges forward and proffers up a small paper package, which she unties to reveal a heap of warm brown nuts, twinkling with sugar and spice. "And I did make these. I mean, the nuts just grew on trees, as nuts do. But I roasted them."

"I look forward to many more meals like this one," says Braxton.

"Maybe you should cook next time," retorts Mariam.

Braxton sighs. "Roast mutton for all, then."

➥ *Read entry 3179.*

2400

You sort through the objects in the back room, looking for something promising. Sapphire eventually finds a small clay jar filled with a shimmering, glimmering powder. "Any idea what this is?" she asks. You shake your head and she pulls out a pinch. "Oh, look, it glimmers when it moves!" She grins and you both look up to the door. You fashion a bag of soft, tearable paper, which you place above the door and tie to the door knob. The next person through the door to the main shop should get a thorough coating of the glimmering powder.

You sneak back out into the alley behind the shop and retreat into the night, still stifling your giggles.

➥ *Mark story point A6.*
➥ *Read entry 3241.*

2405

"I am going to be very busy," says Sapphire with a smile. "Mariam is getting married today, after all, and the reception is here tonight."

"I thought I might skip that," says Jasper, pulling his son into his lap where the boy burbles and waves his spoon around like a sword. "Maybe take a nap, probably go to the theater."

"No theater in this town, I'm afraid," says Sapphire.

"Well, drat. I suppose I'll go to my cousin's wedding after all."

"You should come, dear," says Sapphire to you. "The wedding is in the willow grove. And I'm certain that there will be any number of other interesting things happening throughout the festival."

"But if Lyra the Liar challenges you to a card game, run the other way," says Jasper. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2415

After some back and forth, the man seems deflated. His mysterious, exotic accent is gone, too. "Alright, alright," he sighs. "Twenty-five for the healing potions, fifty for the potion of swiftness, and that's as low as I can go. Have to make some profit out of this backward town."

➥ *You may purchase up to two healing potions (item A) for 25 gold per potion.*
➥ *You may purchase one swiftness potion (item D) for 50 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2440

Theodore pauses only long enough to take a sip of beer, then launches into his next story. "Back in the days of the Two Barons War, there was a levy, and there weren't enough volunteers to satisfy the baroness, so we had to draw lots. Well sure enough mine came up and so I became a soldier then and there, with a mail cap and a spear just like all the others. Now I had no head nor stomach for war you see, so I ran off to the Tree of Tales and cut open my palm with my new spear, and I dripped that blood right into the tree's roots, and I begged the spirits of the forest to let that be the only blood I spilled in the war. And off I went, and wouldn't you know it, my prayer was answered. They had me building palisades and siege towers, running messages, digging ditches, but I never did have to use my spear in anger. I even got some carving done, toys to give to the children in the villages we marched through, you know.

"My sergeant, she called me soft-hearted and soft-headed. They all made fun of me, you know, but when our column was ambushed and we were forming up with spears to fend off the enemy, she chose me to take the message back to his lordship. I think the rest of the soldiers, they didn't want me to kill anyone any more than I did. Tough talkers, one and all, but I know they were good people right through their hearts.

"That reminds me of a story…"

Continue listening to Theodore.

➥ *Read entry 9276.*

Leave before he starts telling another story.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2444

Sapphire takes your hand with a grateful smile. "Yes," she says. "Yes, I believe a dance is just what I need right now."

If story point X6 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 1645.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 7170.*

2447

Workers walk the rows of trees, some carrying sacks, others ladders, still others shears and saws. The orchard foreman, a human woman with skin as brown and wrinkled as an overwintered apple, approaches you. "You here to pay your respects, or you looking for work?"

"What do you mean 'pay respects?'"

➥ *Read entry 6128.*

"Here to help with the harvest."

➥ *Read entry 4948.*

"Came to visit the spirits."

➥ *Read entry 9184.*

"Just passing through."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2480 (Library)

The village library is large for a village of the size of Dragonholt. It features an antechamber, a main room with rows of bookshelves, and a few side rooms. On most days, one of the side rooms is used as a classroom for the village youths.

If four or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 2505.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The library is not open now. This encounter is complete.*

2505

The library's main hall features a tall writing desk underneath a window set in the ceiling and four walls covered in shelves full of books. Perched atop a stool at the writing desk is a grey-robed, grey-haired human woman spattered with ink, her quill scritching as she carefully copies out another letter.

If it is day one and story point V6 is not marked…

➥ *Read entry 7529.*

If it is day six…

➥ *Read entry 3515.*

If it is day seven…

➥ *Read entry 2012*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2798.*

2509

After a few more stories and tearful, but wordless, visits from Ursula's daughter, the small party breaks up. Hunter and Lei return to their own tavern to open for the evening, and Theodore and Ursula settle in with cups of tea and a block of wood to whittle. They look as if they will be quite content to spend the rest of their lives there.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2511

You get into the act, firing back with a few invented details of your own and trying to get the crowd on your side. The brothers keep up their own patter, but you catch the younger brother hiding laughter at your antics behind his hat on two separate occasions, and ultimately you're able to talk them down to a more reasonable price.

"Enough!" groans the older brother. "My grandfather Vylan—"

"Great-uncle," corrects the younger brother.

"Great-uncle Vylan would want you to have this for a mere eighty gold!"

➥ *You may purchase one dragon blood (item Q) for 80 gold.*

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Mark story point P2.*

Purchase the unusual fungus as well.

Requires you spend 45 gold and story point S5 is not marked.

➥ *Read entry 9937.*

Thank the brothers and take your leave.

➥ *Read entry 1320.*

2528

"As long as I can manage," laughs Jasper. "It's pretty common for kids to leave their parents around ten years old and apprentice to an aunt or uncle or some other gnome. But Mariam stayed with her father until she was, what, sixteen, I think?" Jasper looks up at the rafters and the lanterns hanging from them, studying the structure of the Swan. "This is a nice place, and I think we'll do well here. Only time will tell whether he'll thrive or find it stifling, and once we know that we'll know what to do next." He drags a hand through his untidy curls and sighs. "And maybe by then I'll have found some lovely lady to make an honest gnome out of me, and Mal will have a little brother or sister to worry about, so really, what's the use of planning ahead?"

"Gnome motto?" asks Grisbeck.

"Might as well be," laughs Jasper.

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

2534

You stay to play a few games, and one game leads to two more as the crowd proves garrulous and eager to teach you all their favorites from the tea house's frankly staggering collection. From the way the players make ever-shifting alliances, bring up old grudges from previous games that require vengeance now, and laugh at even innocuous comments, it is clear that they have been playing together for a long time. But in no time, it feels like you've come home to join old friends.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2576

You kneel down by Phillip and Rochelle. Phillip reaches out and takes your hand, closing his eyes.

"Hello, Sonia," says Rochelle. "We miss you." She shifts, looking at you for a moment, then turns her green eyes back to the candle flame. Then she introduces you. "Phillip's savior," she adds. "He almost joined you, you know."

"Give our love to father," says Phillip.

Both siblings bow their heads, and silence reigns. For an instant, you feel as if another person is kneeling in the circle with you, and then a wind blows through the grove and snuffs the candle. The moment is gone. You stand and brush dried apple leaves from your knees.

- *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

2585

You threaten once more to make your purchases from Mariam, but the alchemist simply shrugs. "So be it," he says. "Others with more discernment than you will purchase from Al-Emir, a name they know and trust, yes? The price is the price is the price," he says again.

- *You may purchase up to two healing potions (item A) for 35 gold per potion.*
- *You may purchase one strength potion (item F) for 80 gold.*
- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

2599

"Oh, I wouldn't want you to—" Mariam trails off as the door opens and a mass of new customers walks into the store. "Stone in my boot," she swears. "Alright, yes, please, thank you, I would love some help."

Mariam places you under Braxton's direction as she races to help the customers, and so you spend the next few hours fetching and carrying until you slowly grow more familiar with the shop's stock. Eventually, you're stocking shelves on your own and even directing customers to the potions and poultices they seek.

- *Mark one progress in physical training and one progress in social practice.*
- *Two time passes.*

If story point O4 is marked...

- *Read entry 1685.*

Otherwise...

- *Read entry 9814.*

2609

"Good evening," says Braxton. "Mariam and Sapphire are finishing dinner." Just as she's saying it, the two gnomes emerge from the kitchen. Sapphire sets a large pot of stewed potatoes and mutton in the center of the table and vanishes back into the kitchen. Mariam sets a basket of dinner rolls and a jar of berry jam beside the pot and takes her seat beside Braxton.

"Here we are," says Sapphire as she reappears with a pitcher of milk and a second pitcher of water. "Dig in, everyone. I'll be right back after I check on the other patrons."

"Thank you, Sapphire," says Braxton as she ladles stew into a bowl. You serve yourself something to eat and before long Sapphire returns and sits to enjoy her dinner.

"How did things go with the guard?" asks Sapphire as she pours herself a glass of milk.

Braxton swallows a mouth full of stew. "It went well. It seems they could really use my help. The captain of the guard, Tweegal, thinks it would be good for me to start by teaching the others what I've learned as a knight. It seems they haven't had a true master-at-arms since the war."

"That's great!" exclaims Mariam as she stuffs a piece of roll covered with jam into her mouth. "Uh tol' yah yah'd find some work," she manages before taking a drink of milk.

"Congratulations, Braxton!"

- *Read entry 2638.*

"How's the shop looking, Mariam?"

- *Read entry 3702.*

"What brought you to Dragonholt, Sapphire?"

- *Read entry 1185.*

2622

You lean on the counter and flash Sapphire a smile. "Where could we spend an evening together?"

Sapphire looks troubled for a moment before answering, "Well, you're free to stay here at the Swan for as long as you'd like, but if you don't find the room suitable, there's also the Countess Inn just north of here." You can't stop yourself from chuckling, and Sapphire suddenly realizes what you've asked her. "O-oh!" She covers her mouth with her fingers, a rosy hue gracing her cheeks.

"Y-yes, well, I am partial to a moonlit picnic myself. I-if that's what you mean," she manages to say through nervous stutters. She glances away for a moment and then back to your face, her cheeks glowing only brighter.

If it is day four...

- *Read entry 3313.*

If it is day five...

- *Read entry 3030.*

If it is day six...

- *Read entry 6824.*

2626

"That will present no difficulty," says Celyse. "I have a spare mask for you. A rather lovely piece that I made with Phillip." She sighs and stares into her wine. "Find me at the library today and I'll give it to you. That way I'll be able to find you in the crowd."

➥ *Read entry 1388.*

2638

"Yes, congratulations!" says Mariam. She leaps to her feet, standing on her chair, and lifts her glass. "To Braxton, the new master-at-arms!"

"To Braxton!" says Sapphire, raising her own glass, and the two patrons playing their game also raise their glasses.

"I'm not master-at-arms yet," says Braxton. "I've just agreed to help out a little. Formally joining the countess's guard; that's a big commitment, Mariam. I don't make those lightly."

"Oh," says Mariam. "Of course." Then she sits down and stares thoughtfully at her glass of cider.

➥ *Read entry 3381.*

2648

As soon as you show off your dragon claw, a small crowd gathers, murmuring and gossiping about your trophy. "What's that?" "Dragon claw." "Not a chance; must be a hoax." "It's real!" "Did you kill a dragon!?"

A voice breaks through the hubbub: "I'll give you one hundred gold coins for it." The crowd parts, revealing a gaunt elf of uncertain gender, leaning on a crooked staff.

"One hundred and fifty," says another voice. A tall human man in his middle years steps forward, sweeping a crushed blue velvet half-cape back over his shoulder.

"Leave off, Cunningham," says the elf. "You're just going to put it on your trophy rack. I want to actually use it. One hundred seventy-five."

"It's called a 'museum,'" sniffs the human. "Two hundred gold coins."

The elf sighs, like wind rustling leaves. "Enough. You humans have more money than sense." The elf stalks away and Cunningham smiles.

Sell the dragon claw for the offered price.

➥ *Read entry 2794.*

Tell the man about how you bested the foul creature.

Requires performance (skill).

➥ *Read entry 4540.*

Decide not to sell.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2668

"My brothers are supposed to be around here somewhere," says Gnorman. "But they've never been the most reliable or timely sort. Believe it or not, I'm the respectable one in my family." He grins, popping his knuckles.

"A likely story," says Reginald. "I don't believe you have any brothers. These people are all actors or something. I know this is all a prank you're pulling, Gnorm." He wanders off, muttering, and Gnorman laughs.

"You know, he's not entirely wrong. Sapphire and I both pulled a lot of strings to get the festival to be hosted here this time." Gnorman chuckles, running a hand over his receding hair. "He's just so easy, you know? I wonder how much more he can take before he just breaks down completely."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2698

You hand over your coins, and the dwarf parts with his book with a gentle sigh. You retreat across the village green and find a quiet place between the shrine and the library to read.

According to your new book, the dwarves believe that the very first dragons, called the Yrthwrights, created the world by speaking the Words of Creation. The dwarves consider the Yrthwrights the next best thing to gods, and their system of runic magic is based upon the Words of Creation.

Unfortunately, *The Words of the Yrthwrights* doesn't seem to actually include any of these words, discussing them only in oblique terms. You get the impression that the Words of Creation are considered secret, or even sacred, and that the dwarves "paid a high price" for them.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*

➥ *Mark story point K1.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2719

You blurt out the first silly, spontaneous activity that you can think of and wind up inviting Sapphire to build a treehouse with you. "What, here, now?" she asks, raising her eyebrows. She looks around at the trees, and a smile grows on her face. "With what we have on hand, I think we could make a sort of nest, maybe. Unless you want to run back to the woodworker's place and get a hammer, some nails, and some lumber." You agree that doing so would spoil the mood and set about gathering supplies while Sapphire considers the nearby trees.

If you have craftsmanship (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 8193.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 5137.*

2724

It's clear that both Mariam and Hyrim want your bricks, and without really understanding why, you resolve to not let them have any. Instead, you propose an alliance with Braxton, trading her some bricks and wood for her sheep and letting you both make some modest improvements to your caravans.

Your friendly relationship and easy trading soon see you both pulling ahead of the siblings, who retaliate by forming an alliance of their own and doing their best to limit your expansion and progress within the relatively limited scope the game allows. Working together, they come back from behind, and the game tightens up dramatically.

As the game ends, Hyrim exults that his score is higher than yours by the narrowest of margins. "But any victory is a victory!" he says, laughing.

"I'm sorry," says Braxton. "I must have miscounted. I thought I had the highest score."

Mariam laughs as Hyrim recounts Braxton's score for her and finds no mistake: she is the winner, and by an impressive amount.

"Well, I don't quite understand what happened," says Braxton, "but that was fun!"

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

2726

Sapphire puts you to work chopping vegetables for a stew, directing you to a broad wooden cutting board and baskets of white, orange, and purple tubers. You chop them all into cubes the width of your thumb and then drop them into a bubbling pot over the fire.

"Need more whipped cream," says Grisbeck, handing you a large bowl and a stiff wooden whisk. You sit on a stool and stir the cream until your arm burns and the white liquid piles up like clouds. Then Grisbeck sets you and Jasper to breaking eggs and splitting yolk from white, all while the kitchen bustles around you.

➥ *Read entry 8646.*

2744

Rochelle taps the floor with her sword, a coiled spring of energy. "I'll rest later," she says. "I have to be stronger. I have to protect mother and Phillip."

"You will," promises Braxton. "As much as anyone can. But the best way to get stronger isn't to grind yourself down to nothing."

"Let me worry about that," says Rochelle. "Are you ready?" Braxton sighs and glances to you, as if for guidance. She turns back to Rochelle and nods. "Then on your guard!" They clash together once more.

➥ *Read entry 8350.*

2756

The girl suddenly whirls to look at you, her face exploding with joy. "Dah!" she cries. "Dah! This is who saved me from them bullies I was telling ye about!"

"Is't so?" guffaws her father, clapping you on the back. "Well, then, any friend of Penny's is a friend of mine. Come! Let me tempt ye." Grisbeck maneuvers you to sit at a table under the windows, then vanishes while Penny climbs up to sit in a chair across from you. She clutches her knit owl and stares at you with enormous eyes.

Soon enough, Grisbeck returns and lays a platter in front of you, a boule of bread in the center filled with a rich-smelling brown stew. "Made with Dunwarr ale, o' course," he whispers with another finger to the side of his nose. "And there'll be a dessert, of course."

Grisbeck sits next to his daughter and ruffles her hair with one broad, flour-specked hand while you eat. "Thank ye for looking after me Penny," he says.

"Dah," moans Penny, trying to put her hair back in order.

"The people here, they've been kind to us since we came down from the mountains," says Grisbeck. "For th' most part. But some of the youngins, they aren't so used to me an' mine. Not a lot of dwarves in Dragonholt."

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*
➥ *Mark story point Q5.*
➥ *Time passes.*

The stew, and the bread, is delicious and filling. The bread is dark and nutty, a perfect complement to the rich, warm stew. Grisbeck stands and places a delicate pastry filled with red berries in front of you. "Dessert," he grins. "A traditional recipe I brought down from the Dunwarr Mountains with me, although it were cloudberries then, not strawberries."

"I like it," says Penny. "It reminds me of home."

"This is home now, me lass," says Grisbeck warmly.

"Tell me about the Dunwarr Mountains."

➥ *Read entry 3700.*

"I have a gift for you, Penny."

Requires cloth doll (item).

➥ *Read entry 8178.*

"Thank you for the meal."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2765

The night sky is clear, and although you are still near the light of the village, the stars are clearly visible overhead. The willow grove is quiet and still compared to during the day.

If story point C7 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 7613.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 1370.*

2783

Both Sapphire and Isaek take a deep breath. Then Sapphire speaks. "She was brave like Mariam. Wasn't afraid of anything."

"She was a fool of a gnome," says Isaek flatly, perhaps more loudly than he intended. He shades his eyes with a hand. Sapphire takes his other in a gentle embrace. "I'm sorry," he says softly after a moment. "I just miss her so."

Sapphire lets silence hang in the air for a moment before speaking again. "They—Isaek, Jade, and the children—were between baronies, far from any town or city, when they were attacked by bandits."

Isaek grips Sapphire's hand and continues the story. "They were ruthless. They planned to leave us with nothing, not even food to feed the children long enough to reach the nearest town. So Jade…' His voice catches in his throat. "S-she fought them. She protected the children and me. But…"

Sapphire shifts closer and rubs Isaek's back while he cries. "One of the bandits' crossbow bolts pierced the cart and shattered the only healing potions they had prepared," says Sapphire. "Jade died from her wounds."

Silence falls over the pair as they console one another.

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

2790 (Shrine)

The shrine is a building of white marble with a domed, glass ceiling. A garden of flowers, fruits, and vegetables is laid out behind the shrine and surrounded by a low garden wall. In front of the shrine stands a marble column, a beacon fire on at its tip.

If it is day five and one or two time has passed today and story point K8 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 7484.*

If it is day seven and one or two time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 7540.*

If story point C2 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 4740.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 4010.*

2794

"Ah, excellent," the man says. He produces a large sack of coins and drops it into your hands; it is quite heavy. "I am Oszric Cunningham, Count of Haverford. Should you come across any other fascinating examples of the marvelous creatures that populate our world, please don't hesitate to seek me out." With that, he takes his new dragon claw and leaves.

➥ *You lose the dragon claw (item).*

➥ *You gain 200 gold.*

➥ *Read entry 1064.*

2798

The librarian glances at you, then returns her attention to the page. A grey tabby cat drops down from a nearby bookshelf, pauses a moment to stretch, then brushes against your leg.

Spend some time doing research or studying.

➥ *Read entry 3007.*

Ask if there is any work that can be done.

➥ *Read entry 7268.*

Donate your collected books to the library.

Requires story point K1 is marked but B7 is not.

➥ *Read entry 8934.*

Leave the library.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2800

"Oh, there's lots to do in Dragonholt," exclaims Sapphire. "Many of the villagers enjoy picnics at the village green or the willow grove when they aren't running their own businesses. The market street is also quite lively during the day. Was there anything specific you wanted to do?"

"Where could I learn something new?"

➥ *Read entry 8737.*

"Do you know if anyone needs help with anything?"

➥ *Read entry 5304.*

"How is the nightlife in Dragonholt?"

➥ *Read entry 3391.*

"Where could we spend an evening together?"

Requires story point X6 is marked and it is day four, five, or six.

➥ *Read entry 2622.*

2806

"Is that right?" asks Hunter. "Tell us about it, Theo." The tavern owner sets a small bowl of nuts in front of you as the older man begins to tell a story about climbing trees in the forest. You can tell immediately this story will last some time. Hunter leans over the counter to whisper to you, "Don't mind ol' Theodore. He just likes to tell his stories to anyone who'll listen. Can't tell if he forgets he's already told the stories or if he just likes telling them again."

You are about to respond when you get the sense that you're being watched. You cautiously glance around the tavern once more until your eyes fall on a hooded figure—a woman if you had to guess—sitting alone in the corner. You can barely see her face under the shroud of her ivy-green cloak.

Suddenly, the cloaked figure stands and exits the tavern through the back door. You follow her into the alley, looking around the corners of the nearby building to ensure no one else is around before calling out to her in a hushed voice, "Celyse."

➥ *Read entry 5682.*

2816

The door opens with a jingle of bells, and a number of wool-clad humans come stamping through, kicking the grime of the road from their boots. "Excuse me," says Sapphire, and she moves off to assist the new customers.

"I will need to report to the guard post later in the day," Braxton says to Mariam. "Tweegal wanted to talk to me about something important."

"I'll make do without you, I suppose," says Mariam with a smile. "Somehow."

Ask Mariam about the grand opening of her shop.

➥ *Read entry 5938.*

Ask Braxton about her position with the village guards.

➥ *Read entry 7483.*

Ask about Mariam and Braxton's wedding.

➥ *Read entry 7949.*

Quietly finish your breakfast.

➥ *Read entry 1656.*

2840

You return to the Swan and are immediately put to work chopping vegetables and watching over simmering pots. The Swan's kitchen is built low, the perfect height for gnomes, but extra tables and workbenches are pressed into service out in the common room for the humans and others who are helping with the cooking.

"Sonia should be here," sighs Sapphire as she throws a handful of dried fruit into a pot of porridge. "She helped us out last year, dear girl. Regina always insisted she and her children help with the harvest, and Sonia made a point to work in the fields, in the green, and the kitchens, to know the whole village's efforts." Sapphire smiles and begins to stir. "I think she liked the kitchens best, though. I know I do."

"Everyone seems to have liked her," says Mariam as she hefts a basket of tubers and vegetables up to the counter. "I wish I could have met her."

"Ah, she were a darling girl," grumbles the dwarf baker. "Delivery for you, Sapphire." He places a basket heaped high with still-warm bread on a table, and Sapphire scurries over to take it from him. "We all miss Sonia. This should be the last of the loaves for lunch, Sapphie. I'm off to get the bread for dinner into the oven."

"Don't forget to eat!" calls Sapphire as she hands the bread off to a passing assistant. "Lunch is ready!" she proclaims. You load a cart with porridge, loaves of bread, and jugs of clear, cool water.

You accompany the cart to the fields where hungry fieldhands excitedly swarm the cart before settling down to eat their lunch. "On to the green!" calls Sapphire, and you notice Mariam and Braxton share a parting kiss. The lunch delivery to the green is made easier by a gang of children who bring the food to Regina and the others who are threshing or winnowing the harvested beans.

➥ *Mark two progress in social practice.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Upon returning to the Swan, you quickly eat your own lunch, and then it's back to cooking. The kitchen is a whirlwind of activity, but it seems as if you're only making half a meal, and as you carry enormous earthenware bowls of piping hot, seasoned tubers to the green, you see why: more villagers are streaming out of the doors of the Countess Inn, the Chatty Archer, and the village bakery with their own portions of the evening's feast.

Sapphire sets down a covered dish proudly at the head of the table. A tall, regal-looking human woman deposits her own dish next to it. "What have you got under there, Ursula?" asks Sapphire. "Think it'll be better than last year?"

"Glazed onions and blanched green beans," says Ursula. "You won't be repeating your triumph this year, Sapphire."

"Now now, ladies," says the dark-haired cook from the Chatty Archer, placing her own dish alongside the others. "If we argue about this little contest of ours, Lady Regina might actually notice, and that would spoil all the fun."

"We wouldn't want that," giggles Sapphire. The workers stream into the green from the fields, and dinner is served.

➥ *Read entry 6476.*

2875

You see no sign of either Ursula or her daughter—in fact, there's no sign of any staff. The place seems to be running quite efficiently anyway, as gnomes quietly carry tea services or trays of biscuits here and there.

"Are you looking for Ursula?" asks a matronly gnome woman, tucking a silver tray under her arm. "She's off to her wedding, the dear child. She's at the shrine; if you hurry you might catch her." You leave, trying to parse the idea of anyone calling Ursula "child."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2876

Inside, a large common room makes up most of the building, though it appears to have been out of use for years. A sprawling maze of wooden tables and chairs is laid out before a bar and shelves that once contained ornate tea sets. Virtually every surface is covered in a thick layer of dust.

A support beam once held up a now-collapsed ceiling in the back of the room. The beam has since fallen and left the back wall crumbling and open to the back alley. The weeds and grass from the alley has begun to reclaim the shop's hardwood floors.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2900 (Village Green)

The village green is a common meeting place for much of the village. It features a small pond, a well, a fire pit where the village holds frequent bonfires, and a penned area for livestock, though much of the livestock brought to the green are left to wander and graze.

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

2901 (Village Green — Day One)

As you enter the green, a small horde of ducks runs quacking away from you, settling down to grumble to one another once they're safely out of reach. A few villagers walk along the edge of the green on their own business. Lying in the grass in the center of the green you see an orc man, his arms folded behind his head.

If story point Z8 is marked…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

If story point C2 is marked but Z8 is not…

➥ *Read entry 5793.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2210.*

2902 (Village Green — Day Two)

A woman in a sheepskin vest drives a small group of goats before her with lazy swings of a switch. A small dog cavorts at her heels. On the far side of the green, near the market, a group of children is playing.

If story point H8 or Z6 is marked…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 8440.*

2903 (Village Green — Day Three)

The visitors for market day seem to have spilled into the green from the market street. The green is crowded with animals, hobbled horses, and oxen still in their traces. The paddock is crammed full of sheep and as many goats as can be convinced not to climb and jump straight over the fence. Dogs run everywhere, trying to keep the animals under control, and knots of breeders, herders, drivers, and farmers cluster together, talking livestock.

A young boy races past, a duck under each arm. A goat wanders up and begins nibbling at your belt to see if it's food, then runs off with a dismayed bleat when you swat at it.

At the far edge of the green from the market proper, a small number of merchants who presumably couldn't secure a spot in the row have laid out bright blankets, displaying their own wares. Standing nearby is a tall woman wearing a cuirass of leather sewn with metal rings. She has a long wooden training sword in her hand and is chatting with a number of curious locals, apparently demonstrating its use.

Approach the hired sword for training.

➥ *Read entry 6887.*

Lay down your wares for sale.

➥ *Read entry 4846.*

Leave the village green.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2904 (Village Green — Day Four)

If anything, the village green is more crowded today than it was last market day. Goats bleat and stream across the open space like a cloud, driven by a dusky-skinned woman in a sheepskin vest and an enthusiastic dog. A cart, its axel broken, lies half on its side near the eastern edge of the green while several men argue about the best way to repair it. A mule stands close at hand, quietly waiting and watching the people come and go.

If six or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 8981.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2017.*

2905 (Village Green — Day Five)

The village green is dense with gnomes. The paddock is flooded with grazing donkeys and packgoats still in their harness and ringed about with brightly painted wagons and caravans.

A pole has been erected in the center of the green, hung with many sashes in a variety of colors. Clusters of gnomes form and re-form all across the green, gossiping and dancing and trading and laughing. From somewhere, fast-paced music reaches your ears. It's all almost too much to take in.

If zero or one time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 8318.*

If six or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 5894.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 8490.*

2906 (Village Green — Day Six)

Three human boys, laughing and crying at the same time, run past you, pursued by an irate goat that smells of burning hair. A dog races happily after, barking in general excitement as if pleased to see some action for a change. In only a moment, the entire parade is gone, pelting down the market row and out of sight.

If four or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 2319.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

2907 (Village Green — Day Seven)

The village green is busy with people and animals. A number of horses have been put to pasture in the paddock, where they crowd out the usual goats. Servants in the livery of several noble families tend to the horses and scurry about on business. A few small-time merchants have laid out their wares here, doing their best to attract the attention of those on their way to or from the market row proper.

A woman in a leather cuirass sewn with iron rings paces back and forth in front of the paddock, a variety of weapons laid out behind her and a sheathed sword resting on her shoulder. She steps in front of a passing merchant and, with a few gestures with her sword, invites him to train with her. The man steps wide around her, scurrying past with a few furtive glances.

Approach the hired sword for training.

➥ *Read entry 6887.*

Lay down your wares for sale.

➥ *Read entry 4846.*

Leave the village green.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2938

You attempt to match wits with the brothers and keep up with their verbal sparring, but to no avail. They keep you off balance and invite the crowd to mock you at several points. Shame burning on your cheeks and turning your ears red, you are forced to accept their price or nothing. At least it came down a little from its early heights.

➥ *You may purchase one dragon blood (item Q) for 130 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Mark story point P2.*

Purchase the unusual fungus as well.

Requires you spend 45 gold and story point S5 is not marked.

➥ *Read entry 9937.*

Take your leave.

➥ *Read entry 1320.*

2949

"I want to make it meself," says Penny, "in proper Dunwarr fashion. But ye c'n sit an' watch, an' if I get ta a difficult bit, I c'n ask ye f'r help then."

Grisbeck smiles in her direction, then glances down at his own mask, a simple but elegant affair of white and black checks. "Mine be almost done," he says, "but I feel it be lacking a little something."

If you have craftsmanship (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 6878.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6015.*

2962

You volunteer to make one of your favorite dishes, and Sapphire directs you to one of the few remaining clear spaces of countertop. Soon you are hard at work gathering ingredients and making your preparations, while Sapphire and Grisbeck offer commentary and advice. You offer each a taste as your dish nears completion, and they nod appreciatively.

"That will do quite nicely," says Sapphire. Soon enough, your dish is going out the door, being carried by a young gnome to a room of hungry guests.

➥ *Read entry 8646.*

2967

On the other side of the cart, Mariam is pacing back and forth, pausing to peek through the curtain and wring her hands. She's wearing a new skirt of blue Aymhelin cloudweave over tall, laced boots. Her jacket is new as well, waist-length, of thick fawn linen. White wildflowers are braided into her red-brown hair, and a spray of white lace emerges from her cuffs.

When she sees you, Mariam reaches up and touches the flowers in her hair. "You like them?" she asks. "Penny picked them. Daisies. They can help wounds close and ease rheumatism." Mariam peeks through the curtain again. "Ugh. I'm so nervous. My family has never met Braxton before. What if she doesn't like them?" She wrinkles her nose. "Ugh, Hyrim, why did you have to wear that coat? And don't stand so close. My stupid brother is going to ruin everything." She steps back and takes a deep breath. "No, he's not, Mariam, calm down. Braxton doesn't care what coat anyone wears. She won't hate your family. This is so hard," she says as she turns to you. "I'm not brave like Braxton. I feel like I have butterflies in my stomach, only they're not butterflies, they're fish or something with sharp teeth."

Suddenly, she reaches out and grabs your hand. "Thanks for being there. I can do this." She reaches down and lifts a beautiful white cloak, settling it over her shoulders and fastening it with a silver pin. "Aunt Sapphire made it for me. It's my new favorite cloak." She nods. "Tell them I'm ready." You step back in front of the divide and get ready for the nuptials.

➥ *Read entry 3069.*

2979

As you approach the front door of the tea house, you think you hear laughter from inside for just a moment, but then the sound is gone, and you're unsure if you truly heard it. You reach out to knock on the door.

If story point N5 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 6206.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 5086.*

2994

After breakfast, you return to your room to grab what you'll need before venturing into the village for the day. When you return to the common room, you see that Braxton is also about to set out. Many of the patrons have dispersed since breakfast, but a few remain in the common room, reading or mingling with one another. Mariam is nowhere to be seen.

"If you have any questions about Dragonholt, don't hesitate to ask me," says Sapphire.

"Where has Mariam gone off to?" asks Braxton.

"Oh, that child couldn't wait any longer and ran off to see the old apothecary's shop." Sapphire shakes her head. "Even if she buys it, it'll be some time before it's up and running. Nasty fire, it was. Lorimor fire is nothing to take lightly."

If you discovered the hidden message in the letter from Celyse…

➥ *Read entry 1518.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 5302.*

2996

You produce a handful of mixed silver and copper coins and sort them into two piles. With a small crowd of gnomes watching, you move coins back and forth between the piles, until all the coins but one in one pile are silver, and all the coins but one in the other are copper. Then with a flourish you pound your fists on the table and show that the mismatched coins have swapped places. "Oooh!" says the crowd.

"Not bad," says the woman with the round cap. "You palmed 'em, right? But it was smooth, and a good bit of business and patter, that was." She slaps down a deck of playing cards in front of you. "Now watch this one. Mind the Queen of Swords, eh?"

You spend a few hours swapping tricks and riddles back and forth to general cheers from the gathered gnomes and villagers.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

2999

You show your customer your wares, and he nods. "Good, good," he says, opening a leather satchel at his hip. He starts counting out coins and trade bars. "Pleasure doing business with you."

➥ *You may sell your strange mushrooms (item) for 35 gold per item.*
➥ *You may sell your dragon blood (item) for 75 gold per item.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

3007

You ask the librarian if you can do some research and read some interesting books in her collection. "The library is provided by the Countess for the benefit of all residents of Dragonholt," she says as she sprinkles some drying resin on her latest page. "You are free to read any of the books you wish, as long as you don't damage them or remove them from the library. I can direct you to a suitable volume if you have any particular topic of interest."

Study a topic at random.

➥ *Read entry 9280.*

Research the history of Dragonholt.

➥ *Read entry 8059.*

Study magic and runebound shards.

➥ *Read entry 5098.*

Research the rumored crypt to the north.

Requires story point B3 or B5 is marked.

➥ *Read entry 4324.*

3015

"You've met Tymothi, I assume. He's the steward. Bit of a mess, but he takes good care of Regina's estates. Phillip has his manservant, Talbot, and Rochelle her lady's maid, Myra. Mathilda brought us this lovely tea." Celyse takes a sip and makes a face. "This is adequate tea. There's the cook, Sylvie, and her son. Macklin takes care of the gardens and grounds, and Gawin minds the horses with his assistant. And myself, of course."

Celyse takes another sip of her tea and sets it down. "It might seem like a lot by elven standards, but I understand it's quite modest as humans go. Even for such a small family as Regina's."

You ask about Regina's family specifically, and Celyse nods. "I'm quite fond of Regina and her family. The countess possesses wisdom far beyond her years—of course, she is not young by human standards. And the children have bright futures ahead of them, I think."

At length, you finish your tea, and Celyse stands and excuses herself, saying she has some correspondence to catch up on. The serving girl returns to escort you from the manor.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3030

"What about the willow grove?" asks Sapphire. "After sundown. Tomorrow night." You agree and the date is set.

➥ *Mark story point C7.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3033

Celyse wraps her delicate elven fingers around the teacup and breathes in the steam. "I've been doing as little as possible since that business in Nerekhall. I vowed to keep myself out of trouble for a decade at least." She smiles through the steam at you. "I'm no better at that than you are, I'm afraid.

"After Nerekhall I went to Greyhaven to make use of the libraries there and offer my services as a tutor. I found the city didn't agree with me that well; very noisy, very crowded. When I heard that a countess in Allerfeldt was requesting a tutor for her estate, I packed my things and set off. I've been serving here in Dragonholt for over a year now, and I find it a considerable improvement over the city. Here, at least, I can go into the forest and find some peace."

"I do miss home from time to time, but I won't go back to the Latari just yet."

You mention that Celyse never did tell you why she left in the first place, and she laughs. "No, I didn't. I suppose there's no harm in it. It was my own choice. Or rather, given the circumstances of my birth and what I was forced to do to redress them, I chose to leave. It can take elves more than a century to stop calling you by the wrong name and stop describing you using the wrong gender after you make a change that dramatic, you see." She shrugs. "No hard feelings, though. I'm sure everyone would have meant well. I just thought it would be easier for all of us if I gave everyone a chance to get used to the idea while I got to go and live as my true self straightaway." She stares at her tea and frowns. "Or perhaps I've just delayed the century of fumbling and awkwardness to begin on my return. Ah well. I still made the right choice. I wouldn't have met you otherwise."

At length, you finish your tea, and Celyse stands and excuses herself, saying she has some correspondence to catch up on. The serving girl returns to escort you from the manor.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3034

You find Sapphire, Grisbeck, and a handful of other gnomes hard at work in the kitchen. Grisbeck is carefully squeezing whipped cream from a pastry bag onto a towering cake, spotted through with currants and adorned with fresh red berries. Sapphire is chopping freshly washed garden greens, which she then scoops into a broad wooden bowl and dresses with oil and vinegar. She hands the salad off to a runner and bustles to her oven to baste a pair of ducks roasting there. "Hello, dear," she says over her shoulder to you. "Here to help?"

If you have craftsmanship (skill)…
➥ *Read entry 2962.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 2726.*

3069

At some unspoken signal, gnomes begin sitting down on the grass of the willow grove. They form themselves into rough rows in a broad semicircle, facing toward the wagon-stage. Space is filling up quickly as more and more guests filter in from the outskirts of the grove.

Sit next to Sapphire.
Requires story point X6 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 8977.*

Sit next to Grisbeck and Penny.
Requires story point Q5 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 4100.*

Sit wherever is nearest.
➥ *Read entry 6953.*

3081

"Oh, too many to count," he chuckles. "Let's see, I'm sure I can pick just one. Ah, I know. This was just before I met Jade. I must have been, oh, just twenty or so, and I took service on a ship sailing out of one of those lawless freeports on the Kingless Coast. I knew nothing about sailing, but I knew enough of the apothecary's trade to get a berth as a ship's chirurgeon, although not as much as I let the captain think I knew, ha. Well, we wound up sailing across the Cerridor Sea and then south, deep into the Sunderlands. We left behind any languages I knew soon enough and then made port in what they called the Empire of the Serpents, which seemed a strange name to me at first. You see, the people thronging the docks, they were humans and orcs and a few elves, same as you see in cities here, if a trifle darker in skin and wearing fewer clothes on account of the heat. There were even some gnomes, mostly from some southern band, but we managed to communicate well enough." He drums on the table with his fingers, as if recalling the music of that faraway city.

"Well, word got out I was an apothecary, and I got roped in, almost kidnapped I'd say, to assist a human woman who was in over her head. I couldn't understand her very well, but it seemed that someone was suffering from a snakebite wound, and could I help? Of course I knew how to brew up an anti-venom if I had a sample of the poison to hand, so I said, 'Take me to the snake.' And the next thing I knew I was in some dilapidated old temple somewhere, a dark room at the center of an enormous stone pyramid, and there was the snake alright, a huge monster, easily thirty feet long! There were somber-faced guards with feathered capes and gold medallions and the woman led me right up to that monster serpent with no sign of fear, so, well, I jumped right in and milked its venom right enough." He laughs, wiping tears from his eyes. "I had it all wrong, you see. The snake was the patient. The Empire of the Serpents was ruled by the things! Some sort of naga. Ah. Whoo. I still have no idea how I made it out of there alive."

➥ *Read entry 4083.*

3107

"Right here, is the plan," says Jasper. "I've a mind to take up innkeeping."

"If that's the case," says Sapphire, "you could lift a finger to help at some point today."

Jasper drags his son from the table into his lap. "Oh, I would, Aunt Sapphire, but I need to be watching Mal right now. You understand." Mal grins and shoves a spoon into his mouth, coating it instantly in toddler drool.

"Going to have to solve that problem soon enough, my dear," says Sapphire. "He can't live on your lap."

Jasper laughs. "I was hoping to find that dwarf girl you mentioned today, Penny, and see if she could watch Mal for a few hours. I'll have to find a proper caregiver soon, of course, but I'd just as soon let everyone else enjoy the festival today."

"I think you'll be enjoying it more than me," grumbles Sapphire, standing up again to see to her customers.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3120

You walk among the trees, reading wooden placards proclaiming names, birthdays, dates of death, and other details of those interred in the orchard. Here and there a memento dangles from a cord on a branch or rests in the bole of a tree.

After a while the calls and sounds of the orchard workers fade away. The drone of crickets and the singing of birds combine to make the grove feel like another world, a place removed from who and where you once were. You pause beneath an enormous tree, one twisted and gnarled with age. There's a mound of recently turned earth between its roots and a silver circlet, fashioned to resemble two dragons pursuing one another, nailed to the trunk of the tree. For a moment you think you see a woman standing next to you, gazing sadly at the tree just as you are, but when you turn your head she is gone.

➥ *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3146

Cheers spread through the crowd, and you turn about to see Grisbeck and a pair of gnomes carefully carrying a towering cake through the common room. It rises up and up, layers of custard and sponge cake shot through with currants, all crowned with mountains of cream and colorful flowers and berries.

"Oh my," says Braxton as the dessert arrives at the bridal table. "That looks incredible."

"Good enough to eat!" chirps Mariam.

➥ *Read entry 9087.*

3152

You lash out, and the lead goat retreats with a wail. The other goats bleat and scatter in all directions as you lunge after them. You corner one against a willow tree, and it jabs at you with its horns, but you knock the beast down with another swing of your weapon.

Just then, a rock strikes your temple, blurring your vision and leaving you on your knees.

➥ *You lose three stamina.*

"Ya, there! Away from me goats!" A dusky-skinned human woman in a sheepskin vest stands at the edge of the market row, already whirling another stone in a leather sling. "What's wrong with you? What'd the poor devils ever do to you, eh?"

Braxton and Mariam approach, drawn by the commotion. Braxton has one hand on her sword. "What's going on?"

"This one here has been having at me goats is what!" shouts the goatherd angrily.

"Weed my garden," groans Mariam. "Why is this happening to me."

Braxton turns to you. "Why don't you get out of here. Mariam and I will smooth this over." You nod and back away. "And don't attack any more livestock. I would take it as a personal favor."

➥ *Mark story point W7.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3153

You recount your adventures in the mine to the south, playing up the comic aspects of the goblins and minimizing the amount of danger you were actually in. When you get to Splig, you find that you don't have to embellish at all: a plain recitation of the facts is enough to have Phillip crying out in disbelief.

"He did not!" he calls, and "Really?" Phillip shakes his head as your story winds to a close. "I knew goblins were strange creatures, but this Splig is something else. I hope we've seen the last of him."

➥ *Read entry 7629.*

3157

All the regulars seem to be in place: Thelga behind the bar, Reginald propping it up, Gnorman enduring Reginald's drunken ramblings. The crowd in the Drunken Hog is as noisy and anonymous as ever.

Eat, drink, and engage in tavern banter.
Requires you each spend 5 gold
➥ *Read entry 2038.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3159

Just as you're about to announce your presence, Celyse closes her book with a snap and stands up. "I was about to check on Phillip's studies. If you promise not to distract the child with stories of our adventures, you're welcome to join us." She smiles and crosses to the door. "Or you can wait here, and I'll be back soon."

Join Celyse in Phillip's study.

➥ *Read entry 2239.*

Wait for her to return in the salon.

➥ *Read entry 1903.*

3179

Between you, you manage to eat most of the food Mariam packed, and at length the gnome pops back to her feet. "Enough lollygagging!" she says. "We have to get back to the shop and get back to work." With all of you working together, cleaning up the picnic takes no time at all.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3182

"Mathematics and natural philosophy," says Sasha. "I'd study medicine, too, but there's only so much you can learn out of a book, and proper physicians are thin on the ground. And no, I'm not going to go up to the Temple of Kellos in Highcrest and learn from one of their healers—they use magic and prayer! There's nothing to be learned there," she scoffs, waving one hand.

"Sasha is pursuing her own independent course of study," proclaims the librarian Ainsley from her perch, "as she is rather beyond simple reading, writing, and primary arithmetic."

"Guided by you, of course, teacher!" says Sasha. "I wouldn't know where to even begin without you. I didn't even know about the theory of mass attraction until you explained it to me, and why would I chance to read Didimus without it?" She turns to you and leans forward, suddenly alive with frenetic energy. "Have you heard about the theory of mass attraction? It explains why things fall to the ground, and why even things that weigh different amounts fall at the same speed. I think it can be expressed mathematically, but no one has worked out how, yet."

Share what you have observed about natural laws.

Requires awareness (skill) or reasoning (skill).

➥ *Read entry 6716.*

Search the library for other materials about this topic.

➥ *Read entry 1362.*

Leave her to study in peace.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3191

"O-oh," says Sapphire as she glances down at what she's holding. "I've made us something to eat. I was hoping we could sit together under the stars." You nod and carry the basket for her.

➥ *Read entry 8545.*

3196

You settle yourself on a rock by the pool's edge and open yourself to the experience. As you meditate, Skala silently places a candle before you, lights it, and shuffles away. You watch the candle burn down, listening to the murmuring of the spirits and the water.

➥ *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*

If story point I7 is marked but F3 is not…

➥ *Read entry 2232.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3231

Theodore goes off on a long and winding story about his youth, playing in the village and on the edge of Eventide Forest. "The millpond, there, where the river flows out of the forest, was where we used to spend most of our time. We would catch frogs and then hide them where the girls would find them, just to watch them shriek." Theodore bursts out laughing, shaking his head. "There was one girl, though, Ursula, she never let our pranks frighten her. She gave as good as she got. Ah, I loved that girl, but I never could tell her that. I used to write her letters and love poetry, but I could never give them to her. I took them to the Tree of Tales instead, out in the forest, and asked the spirits to bring us together. One time I gave her a little wooden badger I'd carved, told her that it reminded me of her because she was fierce, too. I don't think she liked that! Let that be a lesson to you; if you're going to compare a girl to an animal, choose something more majestic than a badger. But that was the closest I ever got to telling her how I felt."

Theodore sighs. "That reminds me of a story…"

Continue listening to Theodore.

➥ *Read entry 2440.*

Show Theodore the wooden trinket you found.

➥ *Requires wooden trinket (item)*

➥ *Read entry 1390.*

Leave before he starts telling another story.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3233

You take the doll from Penny and crouch down with your needle and thread. It's the work of a few moments to re-attach the owl's head, and Penny is delighted with your efforts, clapping her hands together in joy. "Oh, Thegn Owl! Ye're all better! Oh, thank ye, thank ye!" The girl hugs you, then takes her owl and races over to her father, shouting "Dah! Dah!"

Grisbeck scoops her up into his arms, laughing and smiling. He presses his forehead against hers. "Well that's a fine thing, isn't it just?" he laughs.

"Dah, we have to do somethin' nice for 'em," says Penny.

"That we do, me lass." Grisbeck plops her down on the ground and places one finger alongside his nose. "Just ye wait, now, I'll fix you something special."

Soon enough, you are seated beneath the windows with a boule filled with piping hot stew in front of you. "Made with Dunwarr ale, o' course," grins Grisbeck.

- *You each recover two stamina.*
- *Mark story point Q5.*
- *Time passes.*

The stew and the bread is delicious and filling. The bread is dark and nutty, a perfect complement to the rich, warm stew. Grisbeck stands and places a delicate pastry filled with red berries in front of you. "Dessert," he grins. "A traditional recipe I brought down from the Dunwarr Mountains with me, although it were cloudberries then, not strawberries."

"I like it," says Penny. "It reminds me of home."

"This is home now, me lass," says Grisbeck warmly.

"Tell me about the Dunwarr Mountains."
- *Read entry 3700.*

"I have a gift for you, Penny."
Requires cloth doll (item).
- *Read entry 8178.*

"Thank you for the meal."
- *This encounter is complete.*

3241

Eventually, your night comes to an end, and the two of you make your way back to the Swan. You part ways at the front door. "Be careful getting in," says Sapphire with a wink. "You wouldn't want to wake the landlady and get an earful." She grasps your hand for a moment, then slips away to go to her own rooms at the back of the ground floor.

- *Mark story point L2 and Y1.*
- *All remaining time today passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

3253

"I think we're ready to start laying new floor," says Braxton, wiping her hands clean on a rag.

"After lunch," says Mariam. "You'll like it, I promise." Mariam vanishes into the back room and returns with an enormous basket, covered with a red blanket.

"Is that all for me?" asks Braxton with a laugh.

"That's the idea," says Mariam. "Shall we?"

"Where are you going for lunch?"
- *Read entry 2211.*

"See you back here after lunch?"
- *Read entry 1398.*

"See you later."
- *This encounter is complete.*

3273

"Now, when I was a young lad, I–now wait a moment, I've told this one before." He blinks, frowns, and his brow furrows. "I suppose I'll have to tell a different one. Now let me think…"

If it is day four or seven…
- *Read entry 4256.*

If it is day five…
- *Read entry 5809.*

If it is day six…
- *Read entry 6927.*

3278

Damp and exhausted, your hike back down to the village is far from pleasant. Fiore's harried apprentice, Bryll, meets you on the road and leads you straight back to the forge, then asks you to wait while he fetches his mistress. When he beckons you inside to where she sits at her desk, Fiore's frown is like unwrought iron.

"How bad is it?" she asks. You explain that the mine is now free of goblins but less free of water. Fiore sighs and leans back in her chair. "That's not good. Clearing that out will take months and a full crew. Still, at least they can work safely with the goblins gone." She drums her fingers on the desk, glaring at an iron strongbox resting there, then unlocks it and counts out a small pile of gold coins. "Half pay for half a job done, then." She hands you a pouch full of coins. "And I do appreciate the effort. It's more than anyone else has been able to do."

- *You gain 50 gold.*
- *Mark one progress in heroism, one progress in combat training, and one progress in physical training.*
- *Mark story point C1.*
- *Two time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

3284

You step outside to find that a group of three gnomes has gathered with Hunter to take their turns trying the archery challenge. Hunter reaches up to pull down the ash longbow that always rests above the door to his tavern and presents it to the first gnome, a stout fellow with a fringe of hair ringing a bald head.

"This blasted thing is taller than me," the gnome complains. He plants one end on the ground, nearly drops it as he acquires an arrow, and then groans and grunts as he struggles to draw the string back. Eventually, arms shaking, he gives up with a huff and hands the bow to the next gnome in line.

The next gnome, a lean fellow with a mass of unruly hair the color of straw, grins cockily and throws his entire body into drawing back the bowstring. His arrow, when loosed, flies almost halfway to the target. His second shot fairs little better, and his third, loosed after a long grunting trial at the bow, flies off into the distance, missing the butt by yards.

"I told you it was harder than it looked," says Hunter, taking the bow back and handing it to the third contestant, a sharp-faced woman with ruddy skin and broad shoulders.

"I think I've got this figured out," she says, hiking up her skirt and then sitting on the ground.

"A foot draw?" Hunter laughs. "I admit, I've not seen that tried here before."

"Watch and learn!" crows the woman, bracing the bow against her feet and then pulling the string back with her arms. She lifts her feet in the air, wobbling slightly, and looses her first shaft. It flies wide of the target but certainly doesn't fall short! "Another!" she says, and a young gnome rushes to slap another arrow into her hand. She draws again, and her arrow flies wide to the other side. Hunter shakes his head as she draws back her third arrow, straining to keep her feet level as she rolls on her back. Then, with a solid "thock!" her arrow finds its mark, striking the bullseye!

"Well done!" says Hunter as the assembled gnomes cheer. "She drinks for free tonight!"

"Pour me a glass of your best, then!" the gnome woman says, leaping (a little unsteadily) to her feet, and everyone goes back inside.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3313

"The willow grove?" suggests Sapphire at length. "After sundown. Two nights from now." You agree, and the date is set.

➥ *Mark story point C7.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3320

Placed on its own stand is a book bound in red leather, its cover marked with a silver dragon and a black iron dragon circling each other—clearly a version of the noble crest of the lords of Dragonholt. Within it, you find a formal history of Lady Regina's family, stretching back many generations. The back third or so of the book is blank, but the last few entries detail the reign of Regina's father, Lord Holland, and the beginning of Regina's reign as Countess.

Although the author states that Lord Holland was a good ruler and beloved by his subjects, it tells of great struggle in the latter part of his reign. The spirits became angry when a dragon burned part of Eventide Forest, and they punished the county of Dragonholt with a great drought and all manner of misfortune. Monsters roamed unchecked, and the Count of Dragonholt despaired, until his bastard daughter Regina defeated the dragon and saved everyone with "a great feat of magic." Count Holland named Regina his heir, in defiance of custom. The section ends with a note that Countess Regina, in one of her first acts, established a public library in the village, moving the bulk of the family's private collection there.

The only mention you can find of Count Holland's other child, his trueborn son Kyric, is the fact of his birth and the death of his mother in the process.

➥ *Mark story point Y3.*
➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.

Requires seven or less time has passed.

➥ *Read entry 1362.*

Leave the library.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3328

As you approach Fairfax Manor, you hear voices and the whickering of horses from your right. Stepping around the manor you find a group of people mounting horses in front of the Fairfax stables: Braxton, the guardswoman Tallea, and Rochelle are already mounted, and the stablemaster Gawin is helping Regina up into the saddle of a calm grey mare.

"I thought you might come around," says Braxton with a smile as she adjusts the lie of her sword. You note that she's not carrying a lance, or really any weapon you'd expect her to bring to fight a monster ten times her size. "If you want to help, mount up. We're riding to Evesmoore to evacuate the people there."

If story point Y3 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 2278.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2270.*

3356

You suggest that Mal may have gone upstairs, for which Penny thanks you before darting away to look for herself. After a few more giggles, Mal emerges from beneath the table and climbs into your lap.

A few moments later Penny returns, carrying Mal's discarded clothing. "I dinna find him up—Malachite!" she squawks as he coos gleefully. "Ye wee monster! Oh, I'm so glad ta see ye!" She rushes toward you, and together you manage to wrestle the child back into his clothes.

Jasper sprawls into the chair next to you. "Hullo, Penny," he says. "He's not being too difficult, is he?"

"A perfect bairn he is," Penny lies with a smile. "Nae trouble at all."

➥ *Read entry 3960.*

3362

One of the stories being traded across the smoky room catches your attention. It revolves around a local hero, perhaps dating back to the Dragon Wars, who could fight dragons and win.

"I'm telling you it's impossible," exclaims Gnorman. "No one could fight a dragon and win, not without magic, not even a bigjob."

"I never said it weren't with magic what he done it," says the old man with the missing fingers. "This hero: a great and powerful magic what he had, like to freeze a dragon's fire in its very throat!"

"If we had a magic like that, the Dragon Wars would have gone very differently," observes Thelga.

"Well, this fella done died, didn't he just?" says the tale-teller. "And his magic were buried with him, not far from this very spot!"

"More likely it died with him," says Gnorman. "You don't bury perfectly good magic, not when there are dragons to consider."

"Mayhap it were the dragons what buried him," suggests the old man. "Certain his tomb is a haunted place now. What I been there meself, ha'n't I? Just to the north of the village it be, but that howling, it chilled me bones."

"More likely you heard the wind and made up the tomb to make yourself feel better," scoffs Gnorman. "Let's have another drink."

➥ *Mark story point B3.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Find something else to occupy your time in the Hog.

Requires seven or less time has passed today.

➥ *Read entry 7622.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3367

The town clerk coughs politely to catch your attention then steps forward and introduces himself. "Hello," he says. "My name is Marques. I serve as the clerk for all village business." He smiles an anemic little smile and tugs on his brown tunic. "You just came into town with that orc woman, no?"

If story point F7 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 9734.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 5729.*

3381

You try and fail to stifle a yawn. Mariam and Sapphire follow suit, and even Braxton folds to the impulse. "I think I'll be going to bed now," says Mariam as she stretches. "Big day tomorrow."

You help Braxton and Sapphire clear the table. Braxton and Mariam ascend the stairs together toward their room, and Sapphire checks on the woman reading by the hearth. The two men who were playing chess must have returned to their rooms while you ate.

You stretch and decide to turn in for the night as well.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3385

The day after harvest ends it rains, dawn is clear and warm, and life returns to normal in the village. Braxton reports for duty with the village guard, and Mariam returns to her shop, explaining that she really must get ready to open tomorrow. "Tomorrow's a market day," she explains. "The town is already overflowing with people. I can't miss out on the business!"

"The other villages in Countess Regina's territory had their own harvests to reap," explains Sapphire as she serves you muffins and berries in the surprisingly busy common room. "But they all bring their goods here for market. I'm going to get myself a goodly amount of that fine Evesmoore wool and see if anyone has any silk thread."

Celyse visits you that evening to reminisce about happier days and share a bottle of elven wine. Sapphire invites herself to join you, and you wind up toasting old friends and new friends and everything you can think of before finally collapsing in your bed, tired and happy.

➥ *You each recover half of your maximum stamina.*
➥ *You each recover one skill.*
➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*
➥ *This chapter of the story ends here. When you're ready to begin the next chapter, read entry 7996.*

3391

"Well, there's two taverns in Dragonholt. The Chatty Archer is just around the corner, there." She points out the window. "Hunter and Lei run the place; they're a lovely human couple. Lei is an excellent cook. Nearly as good as me." Sapphire smirks. "Then there's the Drunken Hog. It's the dingy place right near the shrine. A bit of a rough crowd, there. Thelga, she keeps order, but she has a very orcish idea of what that means. Brawls aren't that uncommon. A bit too ruckus for my tastes."

Sapphire gestures at her own common room. "There's two inns, as well, but the Swan is the best one. The Countess Inn is very staid. Boring. Not a proper home, like my place. Visitors for Lady Regina from outside the village tend to stay there."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

3432

You wake the next morning a bit later than usual, greeted again by the smell of freshly baked bread and seasoned meats. As you dress yourself, you can hear Mariam's voice above the other patrons coming from the common room.

You step out of your room and head down to breakfast. Mariam, Braxton, and Sapphire are sitting together as usual, and the younger gnome waves you over. You greet them and take your seat, serving yourself a plate of delicious-looking food.

Braxton has apparently asked Sapphire about the great oak in Eventide Forest. "Oh! You must be talking about the Tree of Tales," answers Sapphire. "That old oak has been there for centuries, according to the stories. The people of Dragonholt say that a benevolent spirit lives in the tree."

Sapphire stops to take a drink of her tea before continuing. "There's a custom in Dragonholt to tell your tales to the spirit, whether spoken or written. They say you will be blessed with good fortune if the spirit is moved by your story. Some of the villagers have taken to leaving gifts for the spirit as well, in hopes of gaining its admiration, I suppose."

"Fascinating!" says Braxton. Mariam frantically scribbles something on a piece of parchment and pockets it. When Braxton looks at her curiously, Mariam says, "Just making a note to myself." Braxton raises an eyebrow, and an almost imperceptible grin crosses Sapphire's lips.

Ask Mariam and Braxton about their plans for the day.

➥ *Read entry 4674.*

Ask Sapphire about the wooden trinket you found.

Requires wooden trinket (item)

➥ *Read entry 9906.*

Ask if there are any special events coming up.

➥ *Read entry 1793.*

Finish your breakfast and prepare for the day ahead.

➥ *Read entry 4197.*

3460

A muscular dwarf man comes bustling through a door in the back wall, carrying a wooden tray piled high with steaming pastries. The man has golden-brown skin and chestnut hair. His beard is tied in many braids, currently all bound together by a length of twine. He brushes flour off his hands and off the sturdy, practical apron he wears. "Hello," he says. "Me name is Grisbeck Hearthstone, an' this here be the Hearthstone Bakery. Welcome."

Grisbeck slides the pastries off his tray, placing each one carefully on a shelf beneath the counter as he does. While he works, he continues to chat. "I don' think I've seen ye about before. New in town, are ye?" You confirm that you are and introduce yourself, and he bobs his head. "Well, pleased to meet ye. Ain't that fine."

"Dah!" calls a small voice. "Th' door!"

Grisbeck smiles and lays one finger alongside his nose. "Jus' a moment." He turns and opens the door in the back wall, admitting a young dwarf girl carrying a broad basket. Her hair is copper, as compared to his warm brown, but the same golden-brown skin. "This is me daughter, Penny," he explains.

➥ *Mark story point N2.*

"Pleased to meet ye," the girl says as she stacks loaves of bread from within her basket on the counter above her head.

If story point H8 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 2756.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 8125.*

3493

You ask how the ladies are finding Dragonholt, which leads to a brief pause as they look at each other, as if trying to find the correct answer.

"The shop was a mess, of course," begins Mariam. "Much worse than I expected. But Aunt Sapphie was right about the people. They're a good sort here, I think. And the town is prosperous in its modest way."

"I find the village entirely pleasant," says Braxton. "There are even some other orcs here. Not so much staring as I'm used to. I think I could stay, at least for a few years."

"I hope so," says Mariam, "I mean, I'm glad you like it here. Hate to think I dragged you all this way and you'd be miserable, hahaha." She breaks into uncharacteristically nervous laughter, then grabs for a clay cup and takes a long drink of what smells like a light wine. After finishing off the cup, she holds up a wedge of cheese on a cutting board. "Try the cheese."

➥ *Read entry 3179.*

3500 (Drunken Hog)

The Drunken Hog is marked by no sign save a discarded oak hogshead. The building is low and square, its entrance sunken below the street and barred by a door black with grime. Its windows are greasy waxed paper, and the entire building seems like it hasn't been cleaned since it was built.

If five or more time has passed today...

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

Otherwise...

➥ *The Drunken Hog is not open until late evening. This encounter is complete.*

3501 (Drunken Hog — Day One)

The long common room is hazy with smoke from the hearth and the pipes of the patrons. A burly human man with a shaved head and a pointed beard is arm wrestling with an equally burly human woman covered in tattoos. A small crowd has gathered, excitedly exchanging coins as they wager on the outcome.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open...

➥ *Read entry 6166.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 3157.*

3502 (Drunken Hog — Day Two)

An old human man is holding court by the hearth, his leg propped up on a stool as he gesticulates with his pipe. The leg, you see, is carved from wood and chipped and splintered in places, and the hand holding the pipe is missing two of its fingers.

Meanwhile, a tall man and a gnome are having what seems to be an old argument by the bar.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open...

➥ *Read entry 6166.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 3157.*

3503 (Drunken Hog — Day Three)

The usual dull roar of the crowd in the long common room is competing with a new sound, the rise and fall of a lively tune played on the lute. A young human woman in a brightly colored tunic dances on a table in the center of the room, strumming the lute and being roundly ignored by the patrons. A small collection of coins at her feet suggests that at least someone appreciates her work.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open...

➥ *Read entry 6166.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 3157.*

3504 (Drunken Hog — Day Four)

The common room thrums with louder noises, thicker smoke, and more pungent smells than usual, and more people crammed into every available seat. Three variously inebriated men, two humans and an orc, are merrily throwing knives at a block of wood hung from one of the tavern's supporting posts. Each knife lands with a loud "thock!" and a roar from the crowd of onlookers. A tall human woman with a leather cuirass watches the knife throwers with an air of curiosity that ranges somewhere between the professional and the romantic, while she polishes a sword of smoky-grey steel.

➥ *Read entry 3157.*

3505 (Drunken Hog — Day Five)

The Drunken Hog is its usual noisy, smoky, crowded self, only more so. There are so many gnomes, drinking, cheering, singing, swapping tall tales, and playing bar games that you almost don't spot the tavern regulars. Reginald is, as it happens, in his usual spot at the bar, but he is also snoring peacefully facedown in a puddle of ale. The other patrons simply move around him as if he were part of the scenery.

Eat, drink, and engage in tavern banter.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 9645.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3506 (Drunken Hog — Day Six)

A group of four musicians has created a stage out of the simple expedient of pushing two tables together against the wall to your left—a purple-clad elf of uncertain gender and three women, two humans and an orc, with their hair tied back by blue ribbons, support him with close harmony and a variety of instruments. The Drunken Hog's crowd hasn't lost any of its usual rowdiness, but they seem to be enjoying the music and swaying along to its rhythm as they drink and fight and joke to one another.

Perform with the musicians.

Requires performance (skill).

➥ *Read entry 7863.*

Eat, drink, and engage in tavern banter.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 2038.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3507 (Drunken Hog — Day Seven)

The common room is crammed too full of people and their smells and stories. An old human man with fewer teeth than fingers (and fewer fingers than the usual allotment) is telling a loud and somewhat cruel story, to judge by the jeers that accompany it. From the way he brandishes his pipe in the general direction of a sweaty looking human man wearing the livery of a noble's servant, one of the visiting noble families is the butt of the joke.

➥ *Read entry 3157.*

3515

A grey cat lies on top of a shelf in a beam of sunlight. It opens its eyes, stares at you a moment, then closes them again. A young, brown-skinned human woman with honey-colored hair, not yet twenty at a guess, comes through the door from one of the side rooms carrying a slate and a piece of chalk. "Miss Ainsley," she says. "I've finished." She hands the slate to the librarian, who takes it and reads, pursing her lips as if doing so tastes bad.

"Hello," says the honey-haired woman to you. She smiles, her eyes sparkling and open. "My name is Sasha. I've just come to town from Carum's Cross last night to study with Miss Ainsley. Are you from around here?"

Chat with the student from Carum's Cross.

➥ *Read entry 5025.*

Spend some time doing research or studying.

➥ *Read entry 3007.*

Ask if there is any work that can be done.

➥ *Read entry 7268.*

Donate your collected books to the library.

Requires story point K1 is marked but B7 is not.

➥ *Read entry 8934.*

Leave the library.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3533

You've done this before and you know what you're doing. Your first arrow lands square in the bullseye, and Hunter claps his hands in delight. "Ha!" he calls. "Two in a row. I hope you're not thirsty; if this keeps up I could go out of business." He takes the bow from you and returns the price of your meal, shaking his head all the while, then leads you back inside. "Another bullseye," he calls to Lei, who greets you with a tankard of stout brown ale.

The other patrons each raise a glass in acknowledgment of your success, but there are no cheers and celebrations like the first time. Still, free beer is free beer.

➥ *You gain 5 gold.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3547

You step up behind Grisbeck and cough quietly to announce your presence. He startles and twists about to peer up at you.

If story point Q5 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 4115.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 2119.*

3630

You stumble and tremble your way out of the hills surrounding the crypt, but eventually the warm summer air and exercise dispels the worst of the terrifying chill you felt in that dark place. By the time you return to the village, you feel nearly yourself again.

➥ *You each recover one skill.*
➥ *Mark two progress in combat training.*
➥ *Mark story point U4.*
➥ *Two time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3634

You back away with the rest of the crowd, forming a crude dueling ring around both combatants. Albyrt lunges forward to strike first, but Brynn knocks his slender sword away and drives him back with a flurry of stabs that sends him scrambling. He barely parries another thrust, then staggers back as his misaimed riposte leaves him open, and Brynn slashes him across the arm.

"Poor little Albyrt," teases Brynn. "Thought he was a real man, but it happens he is just a boy. Just like his simpering father."

Cunningham roars and rushes forward, but Brynn dances aside and slashes his leg, sending him stumbling to the ground. As he struggles to rise, Brynn Belmont rushes up behind him, sword raised for a fatal blow.

"That's enough!" bellows a voice, and the orc captain of the guard, Tweegal, shoves past you. "Drop that sword, my lady, or I will clap you in irons, and I don't care who your father is."

"He struck first," hisses Brynn, lowering her sword and stepping away.

"Be that as it may, you are both coming with me." Tweegal gestures, and two more guards step forward, carrying Brynn off toward the guard station and Albyrt toward the apothecary for treatment.

The market crowd murmurs to itself, thrumming with gossip, and returns to its shopping.

➥ *Time passes.*

If five or less time has passed today...

➥ *Read entry 7285.*

Otherwise...

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3639

Mathilda leads you up a spiral stair to the left and through a well appointed salon. You hear quiet voices through the double door at the back of the room, and Mathilda knocks softly. "Miss Celyse," she says. "You have company." At a muffled call of "Come in," the serving girl opens the door and steps aside to let you pass.

Through the doors you find a somewhat chaotically decorated space. There's a pair of long writing desks under the windows. A long chaise and cushioned chair lie arranged beneath a bookcase filled more with oddments than books: a fleshless deer skull, a large glimmering rock, a crudely fashioned wooden horse, a colorful assortment of feathers, books ranging from children's primers to classical poets, and a dozen other treasures of more sentimental than monetary value. An easel stands in one corner, its canvas a muddy mess of color.

At a table near the center of the room sits Celyse, rising to greet you, and a startled-looking young man you take to be Phillip. "Welcome," says Celyse with a smile. "May I introduce Phillip, Regina's youngest child?"

Phillip stands and bobs his head. "How do you do?" He has light-brown skin, soft black hair, and green eyes set in a delicately featured face. He smiles shyly, then stands uncertain of what to do next.

"And Rochelle, the countess's daughter and heir," says Celyse, turning to indicate a young woman slumped in a chair by the window, a book across her lap. "Rochelle, we have company. Please rise."

"Oh," says Rochelle, shooting to her feet. "Hello, so good to meet you." She offers a stiff bow, then rolls her eyes and grabs hold of both edges of her dress to drop into a proper curtsy. She is both taller than her brother and broader in the shoulder, with curly brown hair. But she shares his same green eyes, light-brown skin, and delicacy of face. "I'm sorry, I bungled the courtesies again, Celyse, didn't I?"

"You did just fine, dear," says Celyse. "A curtsy or a bow is usually sufficient; no need for both." She turns to the serving girl and nods her head. "Thank you, Mathilda. That will be all."

➥ *Mark story point I6.*

"We were just in the middle of our studies for the day," says Celyse. "Phillip was explaining the Council of Barons and the rules surrounding its operations, and Rochelle was reading—" Celyse bends down and picks up the broad folio that Rochelle dropped in her haste. "—a fencing manual. Really, Rochelle?"

Rochelle grins and shrugs. "You told me to improve my mind. Aren't you the one who told me battles are won as much with the mind as the body?"

"Keep practicing that rhetoric, my dear, and perhaps one day it will be as fast as your sword."

Phillip steps toward you. "Excuse me. You were with Celyse at Nerekhall, weren't you? Please, would you tell me the story? She keeps promising she will but never does."

You open your mouth, but before you can begin to speak, Celyse cuts in. "That's enough, Master Phillip. It's time to resume your studies. Rochelle, you are plainly bored out of your wits. Please find someplace else to be before you distract your brother."

"Probably time for my daily practice anyway," Rochelle agrees, bowing to you again and stepping through the side door.

Celyse turns to you. "My friends are always welcome to join our studies, of course," she says.

Study with Phillip and Celyse.

➥ *Read entry 8996.*

Practice swordplay with Rochelle.

➥ *Read entry 5801.*

Take your leave.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3664

Penny is sitting in the window playing with her doll. She waves to you as you wait. After a moment, the door to the kitchen opens and Grisbeck steps into the storefront. "Sorry 'bout th' wait; just need' ta put th' loaves in ta bake. What can I do for ye?"

Get something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 2078.*

Give Penny a gift.

Requires cloth doll (item).

➥ *Read entry 8178.*

Leave the bakery.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3672

You help Braxton wheel the cart toward the village green, stabilizing the load while she grabs hold of the cart's yoke. When you reach the green, you unload the cart onto a slowly growing pile of scrap wood in a stone circle. Meanwhile, you take the opportunity to get to know Braxton better.

Ask about Braxton's career as a knight.

➥ *Read entry 6490.*

Ask about Braxton's family.

➥ *Read entry 4435.*

Ask Braxton how she met Mariam.

➥ *Read entry 8751.*

3677

As you decline, Grisbeck's expression falls out from beneath him, becoming an empty shell. "Ah," he says. "Of course. It is late, I suppose." He drops his hand to his side and bows stiffly. "Thank ye for joining me for dinner. Don' worry about the dishes an' things, I marched 'em out here an' I'll clean them away." He begins snuffing the lanterns one by one.

You pause on your way back to the village, turn back, and see Grisbeck's silhouette lying on the blanket, watching the stars with the bottle of whiskey in one hand.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3700

"Ah, the mountains. I do miss them dearly," sighs Grisbeck. "The story goes that when th' dragons came ta follow us there, they turned back, for they saw th' Yrthwrights had made us a perfect home." He laughs as his daughter rolls her eyes and goes back to playing with her doll. "I miss the sheer white beauty of th' peaks, the carvings of my ancestors, the echoin' deephalls. Ah, but the mountains, they're no fit safe place to raise a daughter, not anymore." He shakes his head and leans on the bakery's counter, staring off into the distance. "It were a goblin what got me wife, Penny's ma. Barbed arrows, they use, an' they'll kill ye for a loaf of bread to be sure. But there are worse things moving in the deep, and the Guardians ain't what they used ta be."

He grins and slaps his palm on the counter. "So me an' me Penny, we came here, and a good thing we did, too. Why, we wouldn't never have met ye had we not, eh?"

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3702

"It could be much worse!" says Mariam.

"Oh?" asks Braxton. "How much worse?"

"I don't think the roof needs any repair at all!" Mariam lifts her glass. "This is going to go great. I'm going to fix the shop up and stock up, and then people will come, and they'll buy things, for gold, and everything is going to go great."

"That's my girl," says Sapphire.

"I'm sure it will," says Braxton, smiling down into her jar of cider. "I suppose I don't need to come to the shop tomorrow with you and help out then."

Mariam looks up at Braxton with a face of horror, her mouth open to say something, but Braxton speaks up first with a chuckle. "Just kidding. I'll come help."

➥ *Read entry 3381.*

3705

Lady Regina settles down on one of the benches as Tymothi frets at her side. The old carpenter, Theodore, examines threshing boxes and winnowing flats and shouts instructions at a small army of scurrying apprentices and children.

"Phillip!" calls Theodore. "Set up those drying—" his voice trails off. He swears softly under his breath, then points one finger at you. "You there! Set up those drying racks. Reginald will show you how."

Reginald is a tallish man, his nose and face red with broken veins, who shows you how to assemble the drying racks and explains that gnomes don't exist. When baskets of beans begin to arrive from the fields, he helps you lay the bean pods out to dry while clarifying that clearly some people are very short, but they're not really a separate race.

➥ *Mark two progress in social practice.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Around midday, Sapphire, Mariam, and a few others appear in a mule-drawn cart with enormous pots of porridge, baskets full of bread, and pitchers of clean, cool water. Children run through the green delivering food and full baskets of beans from the field. You pause to eat, and Reginald explains that shortness runs in families, but that doesn't mean that Sapphire and Mariam are gnomes.

After lunch, Tymothi sets a threshing box full of broken pods and leaves on the table in front of Lady Regina and himself. They winnow the chaff from the beans by throwing handfuls of the stuff into the air. The heavy beans fall back down into the flat, while the chaff is blown away by the wind. Lady Regina goes through the motions of winnowing mechanically, scarcely seeming to make any progress at all. But soon, children are dumping full flats of round red beans into clay jugs, then hauling them away for storage.

As the sun crawls down the sky, the villagers get to work rearranging the benches and tables to prepare for the evening meal. Soon the food arrives from kitchens all throughout the village, and the tables are covered with hot, filling, honest food, just as the workers arrive from the fields, tired and hungry.

➥ *Read entry 6476.*

3736

"No, thank you," says Mariam. "I'll be fine. I mean, it's time to see if I can stand on my own two feet, right?"

Braxton clears her throat and arches an eyebrow.

"Right," says Mariam. "I mean, obviously if you want to help I'm not going to turn you out into the street." Braxton nods. "But really, we'll be fine. Go enjoy the market day; don't worry about me." With that, she hops to her feet.

➥ *Read entry 1656.*

3746

"Oh, Mariam, what a darling child." Sapphire smiles, her eyes sparkling. "I love her like my own daughter. I'm glad she's come to Dragonholt while I'm still here, I think she'll do well here and it will be good for her to stop wandering for a bit."

Sapphire wets the end of a thread with her lips, then carefully passes it through the eye of a needle. "Mariam is so brave. Such a happy child, even after what happened to my poor sister, her mother." Sapphire shakes her head, remembering. "It was bandits on the road. Always a danger for wanderers like us. Happened when Mariam was just a babe. After that, her father was restless, wandering at a breakneck pace, even for gnomes. I offered to take Mariam in and raised her as my own until she was a teenager." Sapphire smiles as she remembers the past.

"Around that time, Mariam decided to travel with her father, see the world and learn to brew potions. I had my own wandering to do as well, so we parted ways. We wanderers, we get used to not seeing our families for months, even years on end. I'm so glad she came to Dragonholt. And I'm glad she found Braxton, and you."

Sapphire smiles. "Thank you for being Mariam's friend."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

3799

You dodge past a cart piled high with cabbages, then find yourself running straight into a large human woman with a small pig under one arm. You stagger back, into the stack of cabbages, and soon there's fresh produce everywhere.

The guards close in as you're pulling yourself back to your feet, each grabbing one arm with a grip like iron. "That's enough out of you," proclaims the male guard. "Stand back, everyone. We've apprehended the thief."

"Deakon, shut your damn hole and let's just lock this rat up," hisses the other guard. Together, they drag you to the guard station and hurl you into the only jail cell.

➥ *Read entry 1964.*

3806

"Oh, a little," says Isaek. "It's not common to marry outside the people, but it happens. It does come to grief at times, when the gnome half of the couple gets the itch to wander once more, but the settler spouse wants to stay put. They'll have to resolve that when it comes, same as any other couple." He grins, spotting Braxton across the crowded common room. "I'm not at all unhappy that my new daughter-in-law seems very well equipped to keep my daughter safe, though. Not at all."

➥ *Read entry 4083.*

3807

"Oh, did no one tell you?" asks Sapphire, grinning like she's enjoying a private joke.

"It's a festival day!" says Jasper, bouncing his son high into the air.

"Bestiba!" chirps the child.

"It's an important celebration in wanderer gnome life," explains Sapphire. "A time for all the wanderers to gather and be in the same place for a change."

"It's a good time to catch up with family you might not have seen in a long time," says Jasper. "This is the first festival both Aunt Sapphire and I have been to since Mal was born!"

"That's because it's the first one held in Allerfeldt in years," explains Sapphire. "I suppose I just got lucky it was held in my very town."

"Luck nothing, Auntie, the festival's here because you are," laughs Jasper. "Gnomes move around, and so do our festivals," he explains to you. "We don't often hold our celebrations in the same place twice."

You ask what, precisely, the festival is celebrating, and both gnomes glance at one another as if confused.

"Well," says Sapphire.

Mal grabs a fistful of ham from your plate. Jasper laughs and holds his son close to him. "Life," he chuckles. "We're celebrating life. All of it. We come together, we trade, we gossip, we get married and buy and sell and launch new business ventures and make apprenticeships and trade knowledge. And we live."

"Liff," says Mal, and jams the fistful of ham into his mouth.

"Did you come just for the festival, Jasper?"

➥ *Read entry 4838.*

"I must be going. Thanks for breakfast."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3817

You stay together all night, whispering about the stars, about the night wind, about nothing at all, laughing at everything, until you fall asleep side by side.

In the grey hours before dawn you wake to find Grisbeck already up and clearing away the remnants of your night together. "Sorry ta wake you," he says. "Bakers rise early." With a sleepy complaint that it's no trouble, you rise to help him. Holding hands, you walk back into the village, full of shy smiles, and part outside the bakery. You return to the Swan, climb to your room, and collapse for just another hour or so of blessed sleep.

➥ *Mark story point Y1.*
➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

3820

You settle yourself down into the grass at Celyse's side and mimic her posture: legs crossed, hands resting lightly on your knees. You close your eyes and do your best to open yourself to nature.

Somewhere, a dog barks. You hear the sounds of the Fairfax household going about their business, calls from the kitchen, the complaining of ducks being chased from the garden. One by one, these sounds fall away from you. You feel as much as hear the wind, the gardens breathing around you, and in that sound you feel the shape of the hedges on either side, the quiet strength of the oak at your back. You feel a bird settle upon your branches, and suddenly your eyes snap open and you gasp.

➥ *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*

"Thank you," says Celyse, "for not disturbing me." She takes a deep breath and turns to look at you. "Can I offer you some tea?" She stands and leads you to a wooden bench placed against the hedge, with a basket placed upon it. She sits and withdraws a rugged-looking tea service from the basket, pouring into a broad clay cup.

"What have you been up to since Nerekhall?"

➥ *Read entry 3033.*

"I have suspicions about someone in the manor."

Requires story point P8 is marked.

➥ *Read entry 2127.*

"Just came to enjoy your company and this tea."

➥ *Read entry 8121.*

3826

You join in with the celebrants and are soon surrounded by smiling, happy people. Directly in front of you, a circle of gnomes and villagers spins about, hooting and whooping to the music as they dance. To your left, a group of musicians has launched into a fast-paced jig while a chorus of (mainly gnomish) singers provides the lyrics. You see Jasper among them, his son sitting on his shoulders. Mariam and Braxton dance nearby, completely absorbed in one another, while Sapphire looks on and dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief. Closer to the fire, Penny tugs on her father's hand, trying to drag him toward the dance.

Dance with Sapphire.

➥ *Read entry 2444.*

Dance with Grisbeck and Penny.

➥ *Read entry 9660.*

Join the gnomes in song.

Requires performance (skill).

➥ *Read entry 9182.*

Join the group dance.

➥ *Read entry 1163.*

3877

You return to your room and turn in for the night, collapsing into sleep almost immediately. Your dreams are strange and unsettled, full of lurking threats and the shadow of wings falling across the land, cast by a roaring fire. You wake in the middle of the night, cross to your window, and look out across the sleeping village by moonlight. Eventually, you sleep again and dream of an endless forest and a plaintive voice calling for you.

➥ *You each recover half of your maximum stamina.*

➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*

➥ *This chapter of the story ends here. When you're ready to begin the next chapter, read entry 3432.*

Chapters and Taking Breaks

The end of each day marks the end of a chapter in the story. The end of a chapter is a great time to take a break. You might wish to stop playing for now and pick up from here at a later date. If so, record the entry number you have been directed to on the story tracking sheet so you can pick up where you left off next time you play.

3921

"There you are," calls Celyse as you reach the common room. She is seated at your regular table with a cup of wine in front of her. Her own breakfast looks untouched.

You sit, and Sapphire delivers a fresh platter of whipped cream, blueberries, and steaming hot griddle cakes. Celyse places a carefully written folded note in front of you as you tuck in. "It's your formal invitation to the countess's masquerade ball tonight," she says. "You'll have to put on a mask and eat all of Regina's best food and dance the night away for no reason at all. Not that terrible." She leans back in her seat. "But you must come masked. Nobles take these things very seriously."

"What's the occasion?"

➥ *Read entry 8457.*

"I don't have a mask to wear."

➥ *Read entry 2626.*

3933

You clear away a few more dishes while Grisbeck gets his custard just right, then you both converge on the nearly done wedding cake. It wobbles somewhat in its dish, towering above you. "I am beginnin' to wonder if I've outfoxed meself," murmurs Grisbeck, setting his custard aside. "Moving this confection inta the common room may prove difficult."

If story point Q5 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 8624.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 4235.*

3960

Mal climbs into his father's lap, and Jasper swings him upside down, to many giggles. Penny laughs, too, sitting next to you with her legs swinging in the air.

"So, how about it, Penny? You interested in looking after Pebble here as a regular job?" asks Jasper, hauling his son back up into his lap.

"Well, I have ta help me dah in the bakery," says Penny. "But I would love ta look after the wee one when I can."

"I can use all the help I can get," says Jasper. "Although I suppose as long as I'm staying here, it's not like he can wander off and lose us entirely." Jasper turns to you and flips Malachite upside down in your direction. "What about you? You like kids? Any plans of your own?"

"I love kids!"

➥ *Read entry 6744.*

"Kids and I don't really get along."

➥ *Read entry 4729.*

Awkwardly change the subject.

➥ *Read entry 7955.*

3972

You watch the gnomes play for a few minutes before a young man cartwheels past you with a hoop spinning from his ankle. He lands on one leg, twists his other leg around, and launches the hoop at you. "Take it!" he calls, and the next thing you know you're spinning a hoop around your arm, and you've joined in the fun.

If you have agility (skill) or athletics (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 9556.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2342.*

3975

A light swings through the darkness and becomes a lantern, swaying from the end of a pole. Grisbeck steps into the puddle of golden light and smiles. "Ah," he says. "Ye came. Come along, I have everythin' prepared." So saying, Grisbeck leads you through the slumbering orchard, where the scent of fall is in the air and the fireflies dance, their lights tiny cousins to Grisbeck's swaying lantern.

"I love the night," says Grisbeck. "Th' darkness, th' quiet. 'tis so bright, during th' day, livin' above the ground." His hand brushes yours as you walk together. "But 'tis not all bad."

Hold his hand while you walk.

➥ *Read entry 6954.*

Pretend not to notice.

➥ *Read entry 9984.*

3988

You step closer to the ongoing dispute, and the fishmonger promptly attempts to rope you in on her side. "Can you believe this furball?" she complains. "She wants over a hundred pounds of fish, but will she pay for it? No." The woman slaps her hand on the weathered board that serves as her countertop and points a finger at the catfolk. "Not only that, she seems to think she can just help herself to my stock!"

"I was only pointing out that my village needs the fish more than you do," says the catfolk woman with a twitch of her tail. "And anyway, I'm offering you a very fair trade. This mask is very useful and beautiful!"

"But it's not sixty gold coins, now, is it?" asks the fishmonger. "That's the price, and that's what you'll need if you want your two barrels of salted salmon." She sniffs. "Do you have any idea how hard it is to even find salmon this far from the ocean?"

"What is the ocean?" asks the cat-woman. Her eyes narrow and her tail lashes. "Are you making a joke of me?"

The human groans and turns to you. "I give up. You talk to her."

If you are a catfolk (race) or you have empathy (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 7334.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 9173.*

3998

You cross out of the orchard and into a broad, flat meadow dotted with oak and cedar trees. The sky overhead is clear and limitless, a vault strewn with glimmering stars and the wonders of the heavens.

In the center of the meadow lies a table, complete with chairs, awaiting your arrival. A ring of lanterns hung from poles surrounds it, each a twin to the light in Grisbeck's hands. Grisbeck places his lantern to complete the circle, then busies himself lighting candles on the table. "Come," he says, pulling out your seat.

"I wanted ta do somethin' special for ye," he says, uncovering the silver trays on the table to reveal a stunning repast: a summer salad of greens and berries, with just a hint of sweet vinegar for dressing, and goat cheese; a basket of warm, nutty bread, still steaming; a tureen of hearty vegetable stew; an entire roast duck, its skin crisp and golden and speckled with savory herbs; a bottle of some golden-brown liquor that can only be Dunwarr whiskey.

"This all looks amazing!"

➥ *Read entry 9965.*

"You didn't need to do all this."

➥ *Read entry 7488.*

"A little much, isn't it?"

➥ *Read entry 6793.*

4010

The sanctuary is cool and peaceful. It ripples with light and shadow as natural light filters through the glass dome and falls upon the rocky pool in the center of the room. The space is filled with the silence of a babbling spring, as water bubbles up from the rock and flows out to the garden outside.

"The spirits are strong here," says a voice from behind you. An elderly orc man emerges from the shadows, his arms clasped behind his back. He walks to the pool and stands, staring into its ever-shifting light. "If you listen, you can hear them speaking." He cocks his head, then grins a tusky grin in your direction. "Or perhaps that's just the water. I'm Skala. I look after the shrine. You are welcome here."

➥ *Mark story point C2.*

Spend some time in quiet meditation.

➥ *Read entry 3196.*

Leave the shrine.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4026

"Oh? Who's your friend?" asks Sapphire. "I know most everyone in the village." You mention that Celyse has sent for you to come to Dragonholt.

"Oh, yes!" exclaims Sapphire. "Celyse did tell me she used to do some adventuring before she became a tutor for Lady Regina's kids. She comes to the Swan for lunch from time to time, though I can't say I've seen her lately. Last would have been, oh… two or three days ago. I saw her going into the Chatty Archer—a lovely little tavern run by a nice human couple."

Sapphire suddenly tilts her head as if she's thought of something. "She looked quite frazzled actually. She had her cloak drawn all around her. I almost didn't recognize her. I don't think I've ever seen her like that before. Come to think of it, it's the first time I've seen her go near either of the taverns in the village. If she's not at the manor you might try the library. She spends much of her time there."

The bells on the front door jingle, signaling someone entering the inn. Sapphire stands. "Excuse me," she says and hurries off to welcome the new patron.

➥ *Read entry 2994.*

4058

Clearly violence is the answer. You draw your weapon, ready to drive the goats back by force.

If you have empathy (skill) or reasoning (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 4628.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 3152.*

4061

On Theodore's side stands Hunter, the bartender from the Chatty Archer, and Theo's apprentice Reginald, who for a change seems sober but is blowing noisily into a handkerchief as he weeps. Ursula is flanked by her daughter and Lei, Hunter's wife. Skala takes in the witnesses, nods to you, and raises his hands. "I know you've both been waiting a long time for this," he says. "So I'll keep it short." The audience chuckles, and Skala begins his invocation. "Spirits!" he calls. "We invite you to witness the union of these two people. Bless them, may their years together be long and fruitful."

He closes his eyes and the crowd falls silent. The murmuring of the pool and the whisper of the chamber grows stronger, as if the spirits were, indeed, gathering to watch. Skala opens his eyes once more. "Normally I do a speech about love, about lifelong commitment. I think you two understand that well enough. Let's have the rings, please." Hunter smiles and steps forward, pressing a gold ring into Theodore's palm. Ursula's daughter sobs and hands one to her mother as well. "Theodore Carpenter, do you take this woman to be your wife, to have and to hold, to stand by in sickness and in health, until death parts you?"

"I do," says Theodore, as he slips a ring onto his wife's finger.

"And do you, Ursula, take this man to be your husband, to have and to hold, to stand by in sickness and in health, until death parts you?"

"I do, at long last," says Ursula, sliding a ring onto Theodore's hand.

"Then I pronounce you wed. You may kiss the bride."

"Finally," growls Theodore, and he gathers her, giggling, into his arms, kissing her to much cheering and merriment from the assembly. "You know," he says, "this reminds me of a—"

"Not now, dear," says Ursula, putting a finger on his lips. "Let's just enjoy the moment."

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4081

You sit near the action and watch with amusement as the gnomes play their games. Somehow, you find yourself roped into joining the board game, which a gnome man with freckles crowding across his fair face explains with great enthusiasm. It seems to be a game about claiming territory, only to abandon it at key points to seize better territory with the same pieces. The rules are confusing and seem to contradict one another at several points.

If you have reasoning (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 7447.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 9748.*

4083

"I'm back!" bubbles Mariam, dragging Braxton by one hand and her brother Hyrim by the other. "I found them outside."

"I was just showing Hyrim the work we put into restoring the shop," explains Braxton.

"Not bad for a couple of amateurs," says Hyrim with a wink.

Mariam makes introductions all around and then fusses her bride into a seat at Isaek's side. "Move over, daddy," she says.

"Mariam," scolds Braxton. "That's no way to talk to our father—" She claps a hand over her mouth and flushes a deep scarlet.

"'Our father,' eh?" says Isaek. He lifts a mug of cider to his lips to hide a smile. "I think I like the sound of that."

"What's next for the happy couple?"

➥ *Read entry 5806.*

"Was Mariam a troublemaker as a child?"

➥ *Read entry 7323.*

"What do you keep yourself busy with, Hyrim?"

➥ *Read entry 5084.*

"Any fun stories about Sapphire?"

Requires story point X6.

➥ *Read entry 9319.*

4093

Another day in Dragonholt comes to an end.

➥ *You each recover half of your maximum stamina.*
➥ *You each recover one skill.*
➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*
➥ *This chapter of the story ends here. When you're ready to begin the next chapter, read entry 9739.*

4100

"When I get married," says Penny as you settle down on the grass beside her and Grisbeck, "I'll wear a splendid gown of cloth-of-gold. Me crown will be shining silver, and I'll have rubies at me wrists an' throat." She glances up at her father, who chuckles. "And a braided copper girdle, o' course."

"And who will you be marrying, me treasure?" asks Grisbeck.

"Thegn Owl, of course," says Penny, leaning against her father and looking at the stage. "I know he's only a toy and I canna marry him. That's why a magical faerie will have ta turn him alive for me." She cocks her head and pushes away to look back up at her father. "Dah. Have you ever thought about getting married again?"

Grisbeck glances at you then hugs his daughter close and turns to the wagon at the center of the crowd. "Plenty o' time to worry about that later," he says. "Now hush. 'tis about ta start."

➥ *Read entry 8123.*

4106

"I suppose you wouldn't know if you hadn't made a study of Dragonholt's history," says Celyse, nodding. "Well, I can't verify any of it, but the legend goes that this very village is the site of one of the first victories in the war against the dragons. In fact, the legend claims that this was the very first time Shaarina, the Dragon Rex, intervened on behalf of the mortal races and made war against her own kind." Celyse sips her tea, then sets the cup back down, organizing her thoughts.

"The region was under the thrall of Dragonlord Varinex, who forced the people to mine silver from the hills to the south and caused great suffering as he made his lair near here. Or her lair; I confess Varinex's sex is unclear to me. Shaarina came and struck Varinex down; the twin dragon statues outside the village commemorate that event. The people were understandably very grateful. Refugees from all over gathered here, believing that Shaarina protected them and founded the settlement of Dragon's Hold." Celyse shrugs. "Who knows? Maybe she did; the settlement survives today, doesn't it?"

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*

Ask about the three dragon attacks she mentioned.

➥ *Read entry 6483.*

Change the subject.

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

4115

"It's the anniversary of me wife—of Penny's mother's death," explains Grisbeck in a hoarse whisper. He reaches out to his daughter and touches her shoulder. She looks at him and nods. "Ye c'n join us, if ye like," he says.

Stay with them and meditate.

➥ *Read entry 1328.*

Leave the shrine.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4122

"This is all some elaborate trick," mumbles Reginald. He takes a long quaff of ale, then wipes at his mouth with the back of one trembling hand. "Gnorm, he, he spread the word, got every short person in the barony to all come here on the same day."

Gnorman chuckles and sets down the now-empty keg of ale. "Should I go get us some gnomish delicacies?" he asks. "Goat-cheese flatbread? Corn pancakes? A sammich?"

"That sounds nice," manages Reginald. Gnorman walks over to the tables of food, and Reginald begins to cry in soft, shuddering, drunken gasps. "Gnomish delicacies," he sputters.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4135

Despite your best efforts, the man is resolute. "I'm sorry," he says. "But I simply cannot compromise on price. Travel back to the Dunwarr mountains is not inexpensive at any time, but with the rumors of war in the east and the bandits in the forest here, well, I'm afraid I'm trapped in human lands, and my books are my only asset." He tugs at his snow-white beard and puffs out his cheeks, blowing out a long, ragged sigh. "Now please, won't you buy something?"

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

Buy just a single tome.
Requires you spend 75 gold.
➥ *Read entry 2698.*

Buy the whole collection.
Requires you spend 150 gold.
➥ *Read entry 9771.*

Leave without buying anything.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4152

A crowd is arrayed in a rough semicircle around a brightly painted gnome caravan, parked between two willow trees. A small platform is suspended from the back of the caravan, and a pair of patchwork blankets hang from either side of the wagon to the nearest willow trees, creating a backdrop.

As you approach the crowd, you see a number of people you recognize, both gnomes and others. Deakon and Tweegal, the guards, stand clustered together looking hot and uncomfortable in their black and white livery. Lady Rochelle, the countess's daughter, stands with them in a ruffled peach riding dress with tall brown boots. Grisbeck the baker laughs as he watches his daughter run in circles with a number of gnome children even smaller than her. Everyone seems to be standing around waiting for something to happen.

Sapphire rushes out of the crowd to grab your hand. "Oh, splendid!" she says. "You're here. Come, come, meet the family." She drags you down toward the caravan stage, where two gnome men are standing in high-collared coats. "Time to meet the father and brother of the bride," says Sapphire.

She turns you to the older man, a slim, straight gentleman with white hair and a sharp mustache. He bows a little stiffly in your direction while he tugs at his collar. "Isaek," he says. "I'm Mariam's father. I've heard so much about you."

"That's his stock answer when he meets anyone he doesn't recognize," says the younger man with a twinkle in his eye. "I'm Hyrim, Mariam's brother." He bows and doffs an imaginary hat. "Good to meet you." Hyrim looks to be a few years older than his sister, with laughing blue eyes and his hair just long enough to have a few insolent curls brushing on his shoulders.

"Oh, I think I see my cousin Pearl," says Sapphire, and she excuses herself.

"I believe the brides are on either side of the caravan back there," says Hyrim, gesturing behind him. "If you want to visit before the ceremony starts."

"Have you met this Braxton?" asks Isaek. "Is she a good sort?"

"Poppa," says Hyrim, placing a hand on his father's shoulder. "Mariam wouldn't be marrying her if she weren't. Anyway, Aunt Sapphie likes her."

"Hmm," says the older gnome, nodding.

Mingle with Mariam's father and brother.
➥ *Read entry 9719.*

Approach Grisbeck and Penny.
➥ *Read entry 8873.*

Look for Sapphire and Jasper.
➥ *Read entry 6854.*

Seek out the brides to be.
➥ *Read entry 4608.*

Leave before the ceremony starts.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Follow the south road beyond the willow grove.
➥ *Read entry 1370.*

4178

"Spinnin' beard o' flamin' death! Spinnin' beard o' flamin' death!" Penny starts up the chant, soon taken up by nearby celebrants, and Grisbeck, laughing, relents.

"Well, ye're all for it now! If there be any loss o' life tonight, let it rest on your heads!" He sends his flaming torches up in dramatic spirals, snatches them out of the air, and then spins around to present his back to the crowd. "I'm warnin' ye," he mumbles, "'tis not for the faint of heart!"

With a roar, Grisbeck spins back around and shows his flaming beard, crackling around his face like an inverted halo. He holds his hands high and then tumbles to the side, hurling himself into a cartwheel as the crowd laughs and Penny shrieks with delight. The flames stream around and behind him as he moves, making him seem like some sort of elemental spirit, leaping through the assembled crowd with mighty roars and a few off-color jokes.

Soon, he returns to where he started and tears the torches from within his braided beard, where of course he had jammed them, haft first, in order to create his "flaming beard" illusion. "Ah, hot, hot," he mutters, tossing them to the ground and beating at a few small casualties near the fringes of his facial hair. The acrid fumes of burned hair waft to your nose, and then Grisbeck strikes a triumphant pose. "Spinnin' beard o' flamin' death!" he shouts, to general applause.

➥ *Read entry 5482.*

4197

Mariam changes the subject, asking Braxton what she would like for lunch today. While you are finishing your breakfast, you overhear that Braxton will be helping Mariam with renovations to the apothecary shop today.

You thank Sapphire for breakfast and return to your room to retrieve what you'll need for the day ahead.

If story point V6 is marked...

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 9317.*

4200 (Countess Inn)

A painted sign showing a woman's profile with a silver coronet adorns this two-story building. The ground floor is of pale red stone, while the upper story is a sprawling half-timber affair, hanging over the entrance and supported by thick wooden posts. Flower boxes filled with colorful flowers are arranged between the support beams.

If this is your first time visiting this location...

➥ *Read entry 8742.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

4201 (Countess Inn — Day One)

The common room is nestled into a gentle murmur, dotted with people engaged in low conversation or quiet contemplation. The landlady, Ursula's quiet daughter, nods in recognition as she cleans empty plates away from one table.

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

4202 (Countess Inn — Day Two)

Low laughter spreads through the room. A silver-haired man throws a hand of painted cards on the table before him, groaning, as another man chuckles and moves a wooden peg on a board marked with many holes.

The room is soon quiet once more as the men shuffle the cards and prepare to deal another hand.

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

4203 (Countess Inn — Day Three)

Aside from Ursula sipping tea beneath the painted tree, there are only two people in the common room. One is a human woman with streaks of grey in her dark braid, reading a slim leatherbound book by a window. The other is an elderly human man with a round belly, snoring by the fire.

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

4204 (Countess Inn — Day Four)

A human woman with streaks of grey in her dark braid reads a slim book, bound in blue linen, by the window. Two merchants, a man and a woman, both humans in fine silk doublets, argue quietly at another table, pausing to take deep breaths and lower their voices every time the landlady, Ursula, casts a disapproving glare in their direction.

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

4205 (Countess Inn — Day Five)

After the rolling, gnome-filled riot that is Dragonholt's streets today, the Countess Inn is a blessedly quiet respite. But it is not free of gnomes at all. A large number of them, mostly wearing browns and greens, with waistcoats for the men and sensible dresses for the women, fill the common room, quietly sipping tea or nibbling biscuits. The few regulars seem to have adapted to the gnomish invasion with no visible discomfort.

If zero or one time has passed today and story point K8 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 2875.*

If two or three time has passed today and story point K8 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 9692.*

If exactly four time has passed today and story point K8 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 5133.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

4206 (Countess Inn — Day Six)

There are only a handful of people in the common room, and yet the Countess Inn feels more full than usual. A human woman in her middle years, with heavy-lidded brown eyes, light golden skin, and a long salt-and-pepper braid, sweeps through the room. Her plum-and-gold gown rustles, and she snaps orders at Ursula's harried daughter as she moves. "A bottle of white wine; any Vynelvale vintage will do. And a cheese plate. Haverford cheese, mind, none of that Evesmoore sheep's milk."

"Of course, Lady Elena," says the hostess, and the lady settles herself into a private booth against the wall.

If story point T2 is not marked...

➥ *Read entry 5553.*

If four or less time has passed today and story point K8 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 5133.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

4207 (Countess Inn — Day Seven)

The Countess Inn seems to have been overtaken by nobles and their retinues, with the usual patrons nowhere to be seen. Ursula still sits at her regular table, but now she is flanked by human nobles on either side. To her left sit the Cunninghams, tall, fair, distractible Lord Oszric and shorter, darker, formidable Lady Elena. To Ursula's right sits Count Leone Belmont, all roundness and bluster and bushy red beard. Various servants, attendants, children, and kin cluster around the room at their own tables, all eying the table beneath the painted tree with interest.

Mingle with the nobles.

➥ *Read entry 6062.*

Get something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 8815.*

Deliver the letter to Ursula.

Requires story point O3 is marked but K8 is not.

➥ *Read entry 7276.*

Leave the Countess Inn.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4235

Working together, you and Grisbeck spoon the custard over the wobbling sponge cake and adorn it with berries and edible flowers. "We don't usually go for such displays in the Dunwarr Mountains," says Grisbeck as you work. "A pie, p'raps, or some sweet bread." He stands back, studying the dessert.

Eventually, you're done, and the cake is ready.

➥ *Read entry 9972.*

4255

You climb the stairs and find Celyse in the large and well appointed salon. In the light spilling through the southern windows, she has surrounded herself with a collection of maps. Some are on large sheets of yellowing paper, others on small scraps of vellum, and some painted carefully on flats of wood.

"Why, hello," says Celyse when she sees you. She rests her teacup on its saucer and places the whole back on the tray nearby. "Can I interest you in some tea? I nipped out to the market earlier and bought some quite acceptable leaves."

"What's that you're working on?"

➥ *Read entry 7633.*

"What have you been up to all these years?"

➥ *Read entry 3033.*

"I have suspicions about someone in the manor."

Requires story point P8 is marked.

➥ *Read entry 2127.*

4256

"My father wasn't a woodworker. He was a farmer. He wanted me to follow in his bootsteps and farm, but I never did have the head for it. The cycles of the seasons and the constant chores…" The old man shakes his head. "My father told me I was a dreamer, like it was a bad thing. I suppose I wasn't much of a son. I kept running off into the forest or the orchard, finding beautiful things to collect. I would build little faerie houses out of tree bark and stones, you know, places for the spirits to dwell." He chuckles. "Well, my father put me to work building a hutch for some rabbits, and I put it together right enough. After that, we got on better, and I started building things for the nearby families. Eventually, I came into town, and I apprenticed to the woodworker here. What was her name…" He frowns and shakes his head. "Ah, but then came the war."

"That reminds me of a story…"

Continue listening to Theodore.

➥ *Read entry 5809.*

Leave before he starts telling another story.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4275

With the dragon gone, Rochelle rides off to find her mother and reverse the evacuation. You, Braxton, and Rochelle take custody of the merchant, who seems a broken shell of a man, as terrified of Tallea as he ever was of the dragon.

As you approach Dragonholt, a stiff, cool breeze blows past, a blessed relief from the heat of the day. It lasts only an instant, but it promises a cooler night ahead, and even your mount seems to perk up at the prospect.

In time, you deliver Keven to his jail cell and your mount to the stable. It seems word of your success has already spread, and the anxiety that gripped the town this morning is dissipating faster than the heat.

➥ *Mark two progress in heroism. Mark one additional progress if story point W2 is marked.*

➥ *Mark one progress in combat training and two progress in physical training.*

➥ *Two time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4283

The serving girl—Mathilda—comes to greet you. "Miss Celyse is tutoring young Lord Phillip at the moment. I can show you to her if you wish."

"Please, lead the way."

➥ *Read entry 3639.*

"No need. Sorry to bother."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4292

"I was reading up on the local nobility," says Celyse, running one slim finger over the leather cover of her book. "There are three important families in the area: the Fairfaxes, of course, but also the Belmonts of Rostum and the Cunninghams of Haverford. The families have been allied politically and militarily for over a hundred years, according to what I've read. Why, Regina's father's wife was a Belmont, and even her steward Tymothi is a Cunningham by blood. Distantly, it must be said." She takes up her teacup once more and takes another sip. "I feel certain that understanding the families will help illuminate Kyric's threat to the Fairfax family."

"What have you learned about the Cunninghams?"

➥ *Read entry 5383.*

"What can you tell me about the Belmonts?"

➥ *Read entry 5674.*

4303

Braxton notices you and waves you over, so you walk up and sit down at the edge of the blanket. "Oh!" exclaims Mariam, reddening slightly. She shifts away from Braxton, not making eye contact.

"Mariam prepared enough food for a small army," teases Braxton. "Your presence is a bit of a godsend. There's no way I could eat this all myself." She reaches down and grabs hold of her sword lying in its scabbard by her side, then shifts it around to lie in the grass behind her to make room for you on the blanket.

"Oh, of course, right, sure, have a seat," babbles Mariam. "Here, have a sandwich." She presses a sort of uncooked pie into your hand: meat, cheese, and vegetables between two slices of bread. "Gnomish invention," says Mariam, rather proudly. "Nothing like it for eating on the go, or a picnic like this."

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

Braxton eats quietly, a small smile sparkling in her eyes. Mariam is all bouncing energy, alternating between forcing some new choice of food on you or Braxton and peppering you with high-velocity questions, only occasionally pausing for an answer. "Nice weather, isn't it? I love summer. It's my favorite season, except for autumn. And spring. And winter is nice, too. Do you have a favorite season? Is it too hot out here? Would you like an apple? It pairs nicely with the cheese."

"Don't forget to eat, Mariam," chides Braxton. Mariam snaps her mouth shut and turns an alarming shade of red.

"The food is delicious, Mariam."

➥ *Read entry 2364.*

"What do you think of Dragonholt so far?"

➥ *Read entry 3493.*

"Thanks for the food. See you later."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4311

The trek back to Dragonholt is solemn, made even grimmer as you come across Braxton and Rochelle on the road, shepherding a column of refugees.

"I'm glad the dragon killed that bastard," mutters Rochelle when you tell them your tale. "Chased by a dragon, so he leads the beast straight to the closest village? I'd kill him myself."

"At least the evacuation seems to have worked," says Braxton. "I don't believe anyone else died."

With the dragon gone, Rochelle leads a group of volunteers back to the village to battle the flames and save as much as they can. Battered and sore, you return to Dragonholt.

At least the heat of the day has broken somewhat.

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

➥ *Mark one progress in combat training and two progress in physical training.*

➥ *Two time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4324

In a tome named *Bygone Heroes*, you find reference to a story about Kharthuun, a mighty warrior possessed of great magic. Apparently Kharthuun had the ability to "freeze a dragon's fire" and "burn a man's flesh with the cold." As described in the story, Kharthuun seems less a hero and more a tyrant, ruling with an iron fist in defiance of the Barons of Daqan until he was buried "with all his treasures" in a crypt, not far from Dragonholt.

The tome gives enough detail regarding the crypt's location north of the village that you have no doubts that you could find it if you searched.

➥ *Mark story point U3.*

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*

➥ *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.

Requires seven or less time has passed.

➥ *Read entry 8496.*

Leave the library.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4325

The woman lowers herself to a crouch with a gentle grunt, using her hands to move her stiff right leg out of the way. "These must be old. They've corroded, look there. I'm not even sure they'd still work, and if they did they might just kill you. No, twenty-five is the right price. That's my final offer." She uses her crutch to haul herself back up to standing.

➥ *Mark story point D7.*

➥ *You gain 25 gold.*

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Read entry 1064.*

4346

The bakery is doing a brisk trade as a torrent of gnomes streams in and out through the door. Grisbeck is waving his arms and quarreling with the gnome at the front of the line, an old woman wobbling on a fine cane.

"This isn't th' market square!" grumbles Grisbeck. "I'll not haggle over me prices."

"Well, then I will just have to go to some other bakery," sniffs the old woman.

"There is no other bakery in this village," grumps Grisbeck. The old woman sniffs and hands over her money for three large loaves of bread. "Can ye believe that?" says Grisbeck as you approach. "A copper piece per loaf an' the woman was tryin' ta haggle me down."

"Oh, don't mind her," says another gnome, leaning on the glass of the counter and pressing his face against it. "We call her Pinchpenny for a reason. Wow, these pies look great. We don't usually have ovens in our caravans."

Two pies later and you've reached the front of the line. "What can I do for ye?" asks Grisbeck.

Get something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 1459.*

Leave the bakery.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4347

Braxton nods, and stands, and holds her wine goblet out in front of her. She glances from Mariam, to you, to the recently returned Sapphire. "Very well, it's time for my announcement. As of today, I am officially her ladyship's next captain of the guard." The gnomes clap and cheer and Braxton bows her head and smiles. "Tweegal recommended me for the position, and he's going to stay on for another month or two and teach me everything I need to know. Then he's retiring, and it'll be all my problem."

"That's great!" says Mariam. "I'm so glad they recognize your talents, not like Lord Jerk—"

Sapphire places a hand on her arm and smiles up at Braxton. "I'm so happy for you, dear. Her ladyship is lucky to have you."

"Hear, hear," says Mariam, and she lifts her glass. "Another toast! To Dame Braxton—to Captain Braxton!"

Many more toasts are proposed that night, and by the time the merriment and cheer have died down, Mariam is thoroughly drunk, and even Sapphire is giggling more than is usual. Braxton hoists her fiancée over her shoulder and takes her leave, carrying Mariam, singing, out into the night.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4350

You return to the common room to find Sapphire waiting to pounce. "Well?" she asks. "What did the steward want? Was it about the countess's son? He's missing, I hear. Tell me!"

You explain in brief terms what Tymothi asked of you while Sapphire fixes you a breakfast of oat cakes, butter, and a small basket of berries. "That poor child," she adds when you finish both your meal and your story. "Well, you may want to see my niece at her shop; she might have potions or something for you. Good luck; Phillip is a good lad and I'd hate to see him hurt." Then Sapphire is called away to deal with a new guest, and you walk out the front door of the Swan, still eating berries.

➥ *This encounter is complete. When you are prepared to enter Eventide Forest, visit the dragon statues (location 1590).*

4375

Rochelle paces back and forth, swinging her sword in short, angry strokes. "I'll rest later," she says. "I must become stronger. If Kyric ever shows his face within reach of my sword—"

"He'll kill you if you let your anger drive you," interrupts Braxton. "Your body is as much a weapon as your sword. Ask too much of it and it will break, and bodies are much harder to replace."

"Let me worry about that," says Rochelle. "Are you ready?" Braxton sighs and glances to you, as if for guidance. She turns back to Rochelle and nods. "Then on your guard!" They clash together once more.

➥ *Read entry 8350.*

4422

Fiore directs your attention to her stockroom, which is directly adjoining the workshop and filled with useful items—trivets and nails and horseshoes, of course, but also swords, daggers, coats of mail, a vicious-looking warhammer, and a wide selection of other implements of the adventuring trade. "Or I'm available for special commissions, of course," she adds, idly fondling her silver necklace. "Well, Bozarth is. He's a journeyman; his rates are much more affordable than mine," she laughs.

Purchase new equipment.

Requires you each spend 25 gold.

➥ *Read entry 1856.*

Contract Fiore to forge a magical sword.

Requires war rune (item).

➥ *Read entry 8726.*

Ask if there is anything you can do to help.

➥ *Read entry 9888.*

Leave the smithy.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4435

"I haven't seen them in years," she says. "My brothers were not happy about me 'abandoning' them to take service with Lord Kahler. But to be honest, I had to get away. After our father died, my brothers became more and more domineering. They wouldn't let my mother and me do anything without their permission. I was going on long hunting trips just to avoid them. It was on one of those trips that I met Lord Kahler." She glances up at the clouds, as if to see her brothers there.

"It's funny, but now that I'm grown, and a knight, I miss them. I'd like to see them again, as equals."

Braxton brushes her hands clean and grabs hold of the now-empty cart again. "Maybe someday. Let's go back to the shop."

➥ *Read entry 9485.*

4445

You browse the wares of the merchants set up on the green. Most have a selection of items that are of little use to you: wagon wheels, glass jars, paper packets of seeds. One older dwarf man catches your eye, however, holding a thick book in one hand and beckoning you closer with the other.

He clears his throat with a "harrumph!" and leans toward you with a conspiratorial tone. "You look like you might have some interest in learning." The dwarf adjusts his spectacles and fluffs out his snow-white beard a bit before continuing. "Well, I have some very rare books for sale. You won't find many copies of these in the flatlands." He shows you the cover of the book in his hands: *The Histories of the Deeplords of Dunwarr*, in dwarven script. Seeing the expression on your face, the man crouches down and exchanges that book for another from the pile at his feet. "My collection is quite extensive," he assures you, displaying a copy of *The Words of the Yrthwrights*. He presses the book into your hands, and as you flip through it you see that there are many passages that cast new light on the study of runic magic.

"Now, these rare treasures are not to be had lightly." The dwarf removes his spectacles and tucks them away, revealing brilliant blue eyes in a face as brown as rich earth. "Seventy-five gold is the price for the volume in your hands right now. But I will offer a discount if you purchase the entire collection; say, one hundred and fifty gold coins for the lot?"

Buy just a single tome.

Requires you spend 75 gold.

➥ *Read entry 2698.*

Buy the whole collection.

Requires you spend 150 gold.

➥ *Read entry 9771.*

Attempt to negotiate a better price.

➥ *Read entry 5868.*

Leave without buying anything.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4455

"Oh, interesting," says Mariam, turning the mushroom around in her hands. She holds it up to the light streaming in through the window, sniffs it, and touches it to her tongue. "Ugh," she says. "I think this might be…" The gnome clambers up to stand on her workbench, then stretches to reach a high shelf and pull down a book whose cloth binding looks tattered and moth-eaten. "The previous occupant left his library behind, lucky me. Let's see." Sitting cross-legged on the table in front of you, she flips through the book until she finds what she's looking for. "Aha! This is a goblin cap mushroom, also called a death's flower, also called a spirit of wind mushroom. For some reason." She filches a scrap of ribbon from her pocket and uses it to mark her page in the book, then closes it and sets it aside.

"The good news is, I can also render it down to an especially potent tincture useful for speed and agility potions. In fact, with this one mushroom I should be able to brew enough for a few batches." She stands again and places the mushroom in a clay dish on another, slightly lower shelf.

➥ *You lose one strange mushroom (item).*

➥ *Mark story point S4.*

"Thank you for this! Once I'm done brewing up a batch, you can have as much as you like at cost." So saying, she climbs back off the workbench.

Give her the dragon blood as well.

Requires dragon blood (item).

➥ *Read entry 8339.*

Take your leave.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4479

"There you are," calls Celyse as you reach the common room. She is seated at your regular table with what looks like your regular breakfast lying already eaten before her. Phillip sits beside her with Mal hanging upside down from his lap.

You sit, and Sapphire delivers a fresh platter of whipped cream, blueberries, and steaming-hot griddle cakes. Celyse watches you eat with a smirk while Phillip continues to play with Mal.

"Phillip, didn't you want to say something?" asks Celyse.

"What? Oh!" says Phillip, placing Mal on the ground and patting him on the head. "Sorry, I was distracted." He turns to you and smiles. "I wanted to invite you to mother's masquerade ball tonight," he says. "All sorts of people will be there, and I think you'll have a very good time. But you must come masked. It spoils the game otherwise."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

➥ *Read entry 7303.*

"But I don't have a mask to wear."

➥ *Read entry 6281.*

4494

You, Mal, and Penny draw happily on your slates. After a while, you've put together enough basic squares, rectangles, and triangles to make what you think are reasonable facsimiles of the Swan and the Hearthstone Bakery.

"Look," says Penny, showing you her strange winged creature. You compliment her on her dragon, which makes her sigh. "'Tis a unicorn!" she exclaims. "What have ye done?" You show her, and then at her dubious look explain that you've drawn the Swan and the bakery. "If that's so, why are they right next ta each other?" she asks. "Th' bakery is around th' corner from here."

Mal shows you his drawing, a collection of scribbles and vague shapes. "Penny," he says, which makes the girl squeal and cuddle him fiercely to her.

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

4501

You point out Malachite's hiding place beneath your table, then send Penny off to gather up his discarded clothes. When Mal pokes his head out to see why everyone is ignoring him, you greet him with a sparkling coin, which you make vanish into thin air! Intrigued, he climbs up onto the seat next to you as you dazzle him with feat after feat of parlor magic. Mal is so entranced by your performance that he doesn't even object when Penny crams him back into his clothes.

"Nice show," says Jasper, collapsing into the chair next to you. "I should learn some of those tricks."

➥ *Read entry 3960.*

4525

With the goats out of the way, you glance over at where Braxton and Mariam are picnicking to see Mariam down on one knee. Her voice, probably louder than she intended, drifts across the grove toward you. "You ground me. You keep me safe, and I don't mean with your sword. I'm a wanderer, Braxton. My people are always looking to the future, always looking forward to what comes next, and I've found it. It's *you*. *You*'re my future, if you'll have me." Mariam pauses and swallows. "Dame Braxton of Harmon, will you be my wife?"

Mariam holds up a hand. Something small and sparkly catches the sunlight. Braxton's hands go to her mouth before she finally chokes something out, reaches down, and scoops up the gnome into a fierce hug. Mariam's laughter runs through the grove as they spin in a circle, then Braxton crouches down and Mariam stands on tiptoe in an effort to fasten a necklace around her fiancée's neck.

You retreat as the happy couple cleans up from their date, tears in their eyes.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4540

You spin a grand tale of how you defeated the dragon, making sure to exaggerate the heat of its fiery breath, the hurricane winds of its tremendous wings, the size and power of its teeth and claws. The crowd follows along with rapt attention, gasping at all the right moments, cheering at the others. When you finish, proclaiming that an item you purchased yourself at such a dear cost could never be sold, they applaud and look at the claw you hold in your hand with new respect.

"Marvelous!" says the nobleman. "Why, now I know just what to write about it in my museum." He clasps his hands together. "I must have it. Three hundred and fifty gold."

Accept the generous offer.

➥ *You lose the dragon claw (item).*
➥ *You gain 350 gold.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

Keep the claw, stating it is too valuable to part with.

➥ *Mark story point Q2.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

4542

"Come, try my elixirs!" calls the merchant. His voice is lilting with an accent you cannot place. "They are brewed with secret recipes from far-off lands, yes?" Catching your eye, the man steps forward. "You! Ah, fortune has brought you to me, I think. Come now. Come see what I have to offer." He makes a sweeping gesture, ushering you forward to stand before his cart as if presenting you into a grand ballroom or secret sanctum. "The fire of Lorimor, nectar of the desert rose, powdered dragon's tooth, I have all these things, yes. But I see you eying my potions of healing, yes, thirty-five gold per vial for you—special price! And also, this!" He flourishes, and you see a slender glass vial filled with a sparkling green liquid. "A potion to grant you incredible speed! Yours for only seventy gold. Very handy in a tight spot, yes?"

The man steps back, placing the potion on a rack on the edge of his cart. He tugs at the exotic silks of his strange attire and arches an eyebrow. "So? You will buy, yes?"

Buy the potions for the listed price.

➥ *You may purchase up to two healing potions (item A) for 35 gold per potion.*
➥ *You may purchase one swiftness potion (item D) for 70 gold.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Attempt to negotiate a better price.

➥ *Read entry 1264.*

Leave without buying anything.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4570

You find yourself paging through an almanac, which details when, where, and how to plant the various crops in widespread use in the region. The author divides the crops into grains, legumes, and garden vegetables, with a recommendation to consult another book for orchards and fruit trees.

That other book transpires to be part farmer's guide, part religious text, part history, and part book of fables. It describes a practice of burying the ashes of loved ones and family members in the roots of a tree to provide a home for a person's spirit, that they may continue to enrich the community in death. You think of the orchard outside Dragonholt, of the brooding apple trees, many carved with names and dates, and wonder how many dead are interred there.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.
Requires seven or less time has passed.
➥ *Read entry 6905.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4608

Walking around behind the hung sheets you see that Braxton and Mariam have been separated, each exiled to opposite sides of the caravan wagon. You find Braxton polishing her gorget, sitting on the edge of the cart in full armor. The white of her black and white Fairfax tabard is crisp and bright, and the black is deep and strong. Her mail gleams, and her leather boots are freshly shined. Her straight black hair has been tied back, and a wreath of white anemones circles her head. She glances up as you approach, and she smiles, setting aside her polishing rag.

"Are you nervous?" she asks you. "I am. I shouldn't be. We already did the hard part. You know, orcs don't even have a wedding ceremony, exactly. There's a celebration, but for us the wedding is just part of what humans and gnomes consider the proposal. As far as I'm concerned, we're already married, and this is just a formality." She looks down at the gorget and blows out a sigh. "So why am I nervous?" She lifts the gorget to her neck and fastens it in place. "It's her family. I need them to like me. They're so important to her, and they've never even met me. What if they don't like me?" She stands and fingers the silver chain of her bridal necklace where it lies on the side of her neck. "This is torture. I'm not fearless like Mariam." She reaches out to where a beautiful snow-white cloak hangs from the wagon. With a sweep of the fabric, she settles it over her shoulders and fastens it with a silver pin. "You can do this, Braxton. You're a knight. A few dozen gnomes armed with judgmental stares is not the most dangerous thing you've ever faced." She nods to you. "Thanks for listening. I'm ready. You can tell the others."

➥ *Read entry 2967*

4616

Mariam and Braxton's wedding reception has begun, adding to the chaos of the common room. The wedding party has claimed a long table under the windows, where you see Mariam seated next to her father. Sapphire waves to you as she passes, headed to the kitchen, where you see that Grisbeck the baker is hard at work on what you presume is the traditional wedding cake. Penny, Grisbeck's daughter, waddles past with the gnome toddler Mal balanced on her feet, cackling with delight at each step they take together.

Sit with Mariam and her father.
➥ *Read entry 6669.*

Watch Penny and Malachite play.
➥ *Read entry 9390.*

Help out in the kitchen.
➥ *Read entry 3034.*

Return to your room for a while.
➥ *You may have any amount of time pass today.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4628

You give the goats a few gentle swats with your weapon and drive them away from Braxton and Mariam, toward the market. After a few moments, a human woman with dusky skin and a sheepskin vest comes trotting down the market row. "Heyo! Goats! Ya, there! Come along," she calls. The goats trot over to her, somehow managing to do so in a huff. You get the distinct impression that, in all their bleating around the goatherd, they are tattling on you. "Oh you poor darlings, getting no less than what you deserve at that, I reckon." The woman gives you a wave from the edge of the willow grove, then she and her enthusiastic dog drive the goats back up the row to the village green.

➥ *Read entry 4525.*

4674

"I'll be helping Mariam around her shop today," says Braxton. "There's rather a lot to do."

"Yes, I'm a cruel taskmistress," says Mariam. "In fact, we should get going." She hops down from the table and vanishes into the kitchen for a moment, returning with a basket. Braxton smiles, rolls her eyes, and wolfs down the last of her food, then they're both out the door.

You thank Sapphire for breakfast, then return to your room to collect your things.

If story point V6 is marked…
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9317.*

4690

You share what the steward told you as Mariam and Braxton pause in their tasks and listen intently.

"You're going after him?" asks Braxton.

"Oh, that poor kid," says Mariam. "I hope he's okay."

"I'll go with you," says Braxton. "Let me fetch my—"

"You will not!" says Mariam. "I need you here, and you're barely recovered from that beating the bandits gave you."

"Actually, Braxton, you would be a big help."

➥ *Read entry 9022.*

"Get some rest, Braxton."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4691

"I was going to get married once," says Sapphire. "It didn't work out. Why do you ask?" She grins and leans toward you. "Are you asking if I have anyone special in mind?"

You sip your wine, and Sapphire laughs. "Good answer. No, I don't have a sweetheart. But, well, you never know. Maybe things are developing in that direction." She sips her own wine and smiles at you over the glass. "A girl can hope, anyway."

You chat and laugh with Sapphire for the rest of the night.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Mark story point X6.*

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4729

"No!" laughs Jasper. "I suppose you don't. I guess being a tough adventurer type doesn't leave you a lot of room in your life for children." He balances Mal on his knee and stares, star-struck, into his son's eyes. "Children have a way of taking everything you are, and yet you don't mind in the slightest. Or at least, that's how it is for me. I guess it's a good thing that this cute little pebble here doesn't have us all wrapped around his little finger."

"Little finger?" asks Mal, holding out his pinky.

"That's the one, Pebble. That's the one."

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

4740

The ripple of water and light gives the sanctuary an ever-changing-yet-always-the-same feel. The stillness of the space, in the face of the movement of the water, seems to reach inside you.

Spend some time in quiet meditation.

➥ *Read entry 3196.*

Leave the shrine.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4765

"That's enough for today," says Celyse. "Phillip, good work today. Rochelle, thank you for indulging me earlier."

"You are still my tutor," says Rochelle. "Even if I'm not a child anymore."

"I'm not either," says Phillip.

"Keep telling yourself that, Sprout," says Rochelle.

Phillip sticks his tongue out at his sister. She puts her thumb against her nose and blows a raspberry. For the moment, they both seem impossibly young.

There's a pause, as if both children are thinking of something else. Then Phillip bows to the room. "I must take my leave. It was good to meet you," he says to you.

"Where are you headed?" asks Rochelle, untying her doublet and following Phillip out of the room. "Shall I come with you?"

"Talbot's already got the horses saddled, 'Chelle. I don't need a wet nurse." Both siblings clatter down the stairs, and you find yourself alone with Celyse.

"So," she says. "Tea?"

Join Celyse for tea and snacks.

➥ *Read entry 5802.*

Take your leave.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4772

Mariam and Braxton sit at their usual table not far from the stairs, surrounded by the decimated remains of dinner. Mariam stands on her chair, carefully pouring a goblet of wine. That done, she lifts it into the air and clinks it against Braxton's. "To a successful grand opening," says Braxton.

"To all that money!" sighs Mariam.

Braxton laughs as she sets her goblet back down. "It went that well, then?"

"I think this town has been wanting a proper apothecary for a while. The second day won't be as strong." She stares up at the ceiling, running the future out before her.

"But it doesn't have to be. I think this is going to work out."

"To things working out," says Mariam, raising her goblet again. Then she sees you and waves you over. "Come join us!" she calls. "We're celebrating my grand opening!"

Join the celebration.

➥ *Read entry 2076.*

Retire for the night.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4812

You tell the story of your journey to the Crypt of Kharthuun, describing the battle with the barghests in chilling detail. Gnorman seems ready to dismiss your story as pure invention when you pull out the frost rune and hold it above your head with a flourish. With a gesture, you send a rime of frost across every glass in the room, chilling beers and sending up a smattering of applause.

Gnorman looks at his beer and takes a sip. "Well I'll be," he says, then turns in his stool. "Hey!" he calls. "Shaffer! You were right, you crazy old coot!" The old man with the missing fingers stomps up on a wooden leg, and Gnorman repeats your story, with additional embellishments, gesturing at you with his frosted beer glass. It seems your story is already spreading.

➥ *Mark two progress in heroism.*
➥ *Mark story point Q7.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Find something else to occupy your time in the Hog.
Requires seven or less time has passed today.
➥ *Read entry 7622.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4832

You find your step light as you descend from the hills and pass the mill on your way back into Dragonholt. Fiore's harried apprentice, Bryll, meets you on the road and leads you straight back to his mistress.

"You're back," says Fiore, setting aside a sheaf of yellowing papers. "Tell me everything."

You summarize your adventure in the mine, being sure to highlight the involvement of Splig, and end by declaring the claim free of goblins and ready to resume operations.

"Splig, eh?" asks Fiore. "Is that a name I should know?" She shakes her head, fingering the silver chain around her neck. "Well, good work. I had a feeling I could count on you." She gestures to her apprentice, who places an iron strongbox on the table beside her. She unlocks it and removes a heavy felt bag that clinks and clanks as she presses it into your hands. "We had a bargain, and I'm a woman of my word." She snatches up her crutch and stands. "Bryll! Bozarth!" she calls. Then she turns to you. "I'd very much like to sit around and toast your victory, but apparently I have a lot of work to do getting that mine up and running again." She grins and stomp-drags away.

➥ *You gain 150 gold.*
➥ *Mark two progress in heroism, one progress in combat training, and one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Mark story point U2.*
➥ *Two time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4835

You describe in great detail your battle with the dragon, the heat of its wings, the thunder of its roar. The memories are fresh, and you use the opportunity to sort through them, fixing them in your mind to ensure you get them right in the future.

"Weren't you scared?" asks Phillip as you describe one particularly ill-advised maneuver on your part. "I would have been so frightened. But I suppose, if you didn't do that, the dragon would still be out there. And then who knows what might have happened." He leans back in his chair, staring at the ceiling. "Thank you," he says. "Let's all hope that's the last time you risk your life for Dragonholt."

➥ *Read entry 7629.*

4838

"I did come for the festival," acknowledges Jasper. He lifts Mal up and rests him on the table, where the child reaches out and snatches up a spoon. "But Aunt Sapphire suggested that this might be a good village to spend a couple years in, let little Malachite grow up a bit before I get back on the road."

"I still think so," says Sapphire. "In spite of recent events. I'm sure everything will shake out well in the end."

"I hope so, Auntie." Jasper grins. "If nothing else, Mal and I will get to know cousin Mariam a bit better."

"Is Mal's mother in Dragonholt too?"
➥ *Read entry 6729.*

"Are there any special events during the festival?"
➥ *Read entry 2405.*

"Where will you be settling in, Jasper?"
➥ *Read entry 3107.*

4846

You find an open space on the green and spread out your cloak, just like the other peddlers around you. Then, you lay out your wares and attempt to attract interest from passersby.

Sell alchemical ingredients.
Requires strange mushroom (item) or dragon blood (item).
➥ *Read entry 5719.*

Sell your dragon claw.
Requires dragon claw (item).
➥ *Read entry 2648.*

Sell the dwarven firebombs you found in the crypt.
Requires story point C6 is marked but D7 is not.
➥ *Read entry 7132.*

Sell craft goods you've made yourself.
Requires craftsmanship (skill).
➥ *Read entry 6348.*

Sell some of your old adventuring gear.
➥ *Read entry 1393.*

4848

You step back to leave Mariam and Braxton to their lunch and wander around the edge of the willow grove. You come across a herd of goats nosing through the bushes along the edge of the nearby road. As you approach, they bleat and prance away. The lead goat pauses and tastes the air, seeming to notice the picnic for the first time. Tail flicking, the goat starts trotting toward the center of the grove.

If you do nothing about it, Mariam and Braxton are going to have some unexpected guests.

Herd the goats away from the willow grove.

➥ *Read entry 8025.*

Pull the goats away by force.

Requires athletics (skill) or endurance (skill)

➥ *Read entry 7151.*

Attack the goat and scare them away.

➥ *Read entry 4058.*

Ignore the goats and leave.

➥ *Mark story point W7.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4852

Mariam and Hyrim are chattering away as they set up a game board out of a clattering of wooden hexes, fire-etched with designs that mimic markings on a map. Braxton sees you approach and arches her eyebrows in a plea for rescue. "Please," she says. "Join us. It might be nice not to be the only person in the game who doesn't know what she's doing."

"Oh, yes," says Mariam, making room for you. "Join us!"

The game features small tokens representing each player's caravan, moving through the hexes which are flipped face-up to represent exploring unknown territory. As you play, you accumulate resources such as sheep, wood, and bricks (all represented by colored stones) and then trade them with one another to improve your caravans. It seems that the trading is the true strategy, and an alliance with another player is the best way to proceed.

"I need some bricks," says Mariam. "I'll trade sheep for them."

"I already have more sheep than I can use," says Braxton.

"Don't trade her your bricks," says Hyrim to you, leaning over. "If you do, she'll build a village, and then she'll be sure to win the game. Trade them to me, instead."

Trade resources with Mariam.

➥ *Read entry 5460.*

Trade your bricks to Hyrim instead.

➥ *Read entry 7990.*

Form an alliance with Braxton.

➥ *Read entry 2724.*

4859

As you approach the alchemist's cart, he catches your eye and beckons you closer. "Ah, a discerning customer, I see, I see, yes!" He indicates his wares with a flourish, the ring on his finger flashing in the light. "Come, come. I have many fine potions and poultices to offer! I have the passionflower extract for your lovely friend of any gender, I have herbs from the Aymhelin, perhaps a draught of Isheim salts?" He peers at you for a moment, as if unsure if he recognizes you or not, then resumes his patter.

"Ah, but you are in the market for something special, no? Perhaps these wondrous potions of healing, for only thirty-five gold apiece? A special price for my friend!" He flourishes two vials filled with a greenish liquid, then spirits them back away somewhere within his exotic costume. "Or perhaps you are interested in something stronger, yes? A potion of mighty strength, to give you victory in the trials ahead?" With a grin, the man holds up a thick, rounded bottle of a viscous red fluid. "Very rare! Dragon's blood is the main ingredient, and that is not easy to come by, as you know! Eighty gold for you! Come my friend, tell me, what do you desire?"

Buy the potions for the listed price.

➥ *You may purchase up to two healing potions (item A) for 35 gold per potion.*

➥ *You may purchase one strength potion (item F) for 80 gold.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Attempt to negotiate a better price.

➥ *Read entry 4895.*

Leave without buying anything.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4871

You catch the landlady's attention, and she smiles through tears when she sees you. "Oh, mother will be so pleased you're here," she says, steering you to the bridal table. "Sit, sit." Soon, you are sitting with the happy couples and in possession of your own slice of seedcake and glass of sparkling wine.

"So happy you could join us, dear," says Ursula.

"Oh, yes," says Theodore. He glances at his wife and grins. "It reminds me of a story, but it can wait for later."

"Hopefully much later," cracks Hunter.

➥ *You each recover one stamina.*

"Let's hear the story then, Theo."

➥ *Read entry 8665.*

"How did you come to own the inn, Ursula?"

➥ *Read entry 1954.*

"Hunter and Lei, how did you two meet?"

➥ *Read entry 6920.*

4895

You point out that there is a new apothecary shop that has opened not ten paces from where Al-Emir's Elixirs is currently located, but the merchant shakes his head and clucks his tongue. "No no no, it is irrelevant! A simple country apothecary can never hope to equal the fine wares of Al-Emir. I travel all across the world, bringing the expertise of Al-Qalim, ingredients from as far as Isheim, Zanaga, and Lorimor—no, it is of no consequence. The price is the price is the price." He crosses his arms and nods his head, giving a final sniff.

If you have persuasion (skill) or streetwise (skill)...

➥ *Read entry 5634.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 2585.*

4923

Sapphire takes the rune from you, her eyes wide. "Wooo," she says. "Tingly. I don't really know anything about magic, but I can certainly fashion something if you want to wear this." She reaches beneath her and pulls a measuring strip from within her sewing box, measuring the stone along each of its axes. She mumbles the measurements to herself under her breath and then vanishes through a door to the kitchens.

After a while she returns. "Hold out your arms," she says, and snatching up the measuring line again she examines your forearms carefully. She nods and steps away again. "Help yourself to something to drink," she calls as she passes through the door. "This may take some time."

A mug and a half of good cider later, Sapphire returns with a set of fur-trimmed leather bracers. "There you have it," she says. "Not my finest work. I'd really like to spend some time doing some embroidery, especially around the rune, but it will do in a pinch." She helps you don the bracers.

They are the most comfortable and well crafted article of clothing you've ever owned. Even feeling them against your skin fills you with a sense of purpose and power.

➥ *You lose the war rune (item).*
➥ *You gain the rune bracers (item T).*
➥ *Two time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4930

Armed with the approximate location of the rumored crypt, you consider a hike to the north.

Travel to the crypt.

Requires neither story point S6 nor U4 are marked...

➥ *This encounter is complete. Read entry 1008 in the "Crypt of Kharthuun" quest book.*

Ignore the rumors.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4941

Braxton is leaning against the black dragon statue, a knife in one hand and half an apple in the other. "There you are," she says, wiping the knife on her breeches and slipping it into its sheath at her belt. "Let's be off quickly," she says. "I'm worried for Phillip."

➥ *Read entry 9978.*

4948

The foreman grins and hands you a bushel bag. "Good to hear! Get to picking. When that bag's full, bring it me, and I'll give you another."

It's hard, hot work, moving down the row of trees and finding the ripe apples. The workers help point you toward the trees that are in season. "Most of the orchard comes ripe in the fall, of course, but these trees closest to the village are summer apples," explains a dwarf man with his beard in two braids. "I like 'em. Tarter. They make better cider, too."

You manage to fill five bushel bags with a few hours work. The foreman pays you two coins per bag.

➥ *You each lose one stamina. You each lose one additional stamina unless you have endurance (skill).*
➥ *You each gain 10 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Time passes.*

There's lot of work to be done. Continue helping.

➥ *Read entry 6052.*

Leave the orchard.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4955

You hear Mariam's alto and Braxton's tenor voices talking as you approach and find them in the front room, tearing up damaged and burned floorboards.

"Hello!" calls Mariam, when she sees you. "I appear to have bought myself an unending job, which helps explain why the place was so cheap."

"Not unending," says Braxton. "Why, we're done with the back room already."

"We're done with the teardown on the back room," clarifies Mariam. "We still need to lay new floors and panel the walls, but that can wait. The front room is what the customers will see!" She stands in the middle of the room, looking about. "Actually, most of this floor can stay. I think we'll finish this up this morning; we can start laying new floor in the afternoon."

Offer to help with the renovations.

➥ *Read entry 6703.*

Leave Mariam and Braxton to their work.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4963

As you browse the stalls, a young human man in a crushed velvet half-cape tumbles to the ground in front of you. He springs back to his feet and adjusts his cape carefully. "I'll be expecting an apology, Belmont."

"You won't get one, Cunningham," sneers an equally young human woman in a burgundy riding dress with a duelist's sword at her side. "You should have been watching where you were going."

You glance around for guards, but the only ones you see are clear at the other end of the market row and not looking in your direction.

➥ *Mark story point A7.*

Attempt to break up the dispute.

➥ *Read entry 1587.*

Browse "Al-Emir's Elixirs."

➥ *Read entry 4859.*

Attempt to steal some coins.

Requires thievery (skill).

➥ *Read entry 8984.*

Leave the market.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

4965

You offer fifty gold coins for the dragon blood. The younger brother looks affronted. "Fifty coins? After our great-uncle Vylan gave his life?"

"My brother is right," says the elder brother. "Who can put a price on familial love and the weight of that obligation? We won't take less than two hundred gold." The man waggles his eyebrows and the crowd chuckles. This is as much a performance as it is a mercantile transaction.

If you have performance (skill) or streetwise (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 2511.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2938.*

4991

You don't see any sign of Sapphire or Jasper. "The kitchen is closed," notes a passing gnome woman as she sees your confusion. She settles down at a loud table, where it seems that a large group of gnomes is collectively losing a card game against a human woman with dusky skin and a sheepskin vest. At the next table down, several gnomes are pushing wooden pieces around a game board with fast and frenetic energy.

Observe the gnome games.

➥ *Read entry 4081.*

Leave the Swan.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5017

Mariam snickers and leans in to whisper something into Hyrim's ear. He chuckles, "Way to go, Aunt Sapphie!"

Sapphire blushes lightly. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean," she says. Sipping her tea to avoid making eye contact with anyone.

"I have a good story," says Isaek, to a chorus of "Go on!" and at least one "Please don't." Isaek clears his throat and runs a finger along his silver mustache. "Now, let me see. This was before any of you children were around, when Sapphire and Jade and I were getting into trouble in Red Bridge, if I recall correctly."

"I want the record, if there is such a thing, to show that everything that Isaek is about to describe was your mother's idea," says Sapphire to Mariam.

"Now, Red Bridge is a town in two parts, separated by a river and a bridge of red brick. The two halves of town each swear up and down that they brew the finest beer in Terrinoth, and that the beer from the other half of town undrinkable swill." Isaek leans forward, eyes twinkling. "Now, Jade never saw a self-important blowhard that she didn't want to humiliate in some way."

"Probably why she spent so much time around you in those days," teases Sapphire.

"You may have something there. So, Jade found the two leading brewers, one imaginatively named Brewer and the other Mills. And she and Sapphie—ah, let's say 'bought'—bought a few barrels of each of their ales, and of course she swapped the barrels, poured it out and changed the labels, so Brewer's ale was in Mills' barrels and the other way around. Then she sold the ale back to the people during a street carnival and waited for the fireworks."

"There were no fireworks," sighs Sapphire.

"None, literal or metaphorical," agrees Isaek. "It seems that Sapphire and I had gotten confused, and when we put the ale back in the barrels, we weren't certain if we'd swapped them or not. We spent the rest of the day running back and forth between our two supplies of beer, taking a mouthful here and a mouthful there trying to figure out if there was any difference between the two or not." Isaek shrugs and leans back. "Well, we couldn't find any, and of course the celebrants in the street couldn't tell them apart either, except to refuse to cross the bridge to buy their beer."

"We did, however," says Sapphire with a dark look at Isaek, "get run out of town for selling beer without a license. And I had to lie about my age to keep you two out of gaol."

"Yes," drawls Isaek. "That did happen. But we got quite agreeably drunk on all that mediocre beer."

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

5025

You explain that you are a newcomer to Dragonholt, too, and you and Sasha swap stories of how and why you came to town. It transpires that Sasha's parents run the Carum's Cross Inn (the village has only the one) and wanted her to get an education, so they've dispatched her to Dragonholt to learn. "Actually, it was my idea," says Sasha. "But my parents were happy to get me out of their hair for a few months. They'll be happy not to have to put up with my experiments any more."

"Why have you come to the library in Dragonholt?"

➥ *Read entry 1629.*

"What are you studying?"

➥ *Read entry 3182.*

5035

The gnome festival continues into the small hours, but aside from the occasional lilt of gay music or burble of laughter, no noise reaches your room. You climb into bed exhausted and unable to shake a feeling of deep contentment.

Your dreams are troubled, however, red things thick with menace. You wake several times in the night and once cross to your window, seeking some sign of what woke you. Finding nothing, you collapse once more and are soon asleep.

➥ *You each recover half of your maximum stamina.*
➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*
➥ *This chapter of the story ends here. When you're ready to begin the next chapter, read entry 5248.*

5036

"Oh spirits," says Braxton. "I haven't even thought about that." Her eyes go wide. "I don't even know what a gnome wedding entails. In my tribe we didn't really have a wedding ceremony. One person asks, the other person accepts, there's an exchange of gifts with the families, and it's all done. As long as the people who are getting married agree, the wedding is legal."

"We'll get married next festival," states Mariam. "My whole family will be there. Braxton's aren't invited because they're jerks."

Braxton laughs. "I've half a mind to invite my brothers just to see the looks on their faces. If my mother is still alive, she'd be very happy for me, but she'll be retired to an elder enclave by now."

"Maybe we'll go visit her on our honeymoon," suggests Mariam.

"Mmm," says Braxton. "Outsiders aren't allowed in the enclaves. But since you'll be my wife by then, you'll be part of the tribe." Mariam makes a strangled squawk, and then they share a kiss.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5045

You set yourself down on the edge of the paddock next to the old orc, who nods his head as you approach. "An ancient tradition," he says, nodding toward the fire. "Who can say when it began, or why? It's said that these celebrations are to invite the blessings of the spirits on the village and all who gather here." He grins, his thick, heavy teeth white in the half-darkness. "Said by me, every week, when I light the fire. Who knows? It might even be true."

"If anyone knows, shouldn't it be you?"

➥ *Read entry 7502.*

"How far back does the tradition go?"

➥ *Read entry 9349.*

5061

"It varies from gnome to gnome," says Isaek, "like anything. Sapphire's settled here longer than most, haven't you, Sapphie."

"Most of a decade," agrees Sapphire.

"You must be getting itchy feet by now."

Sapphire smirks and lifts her wine glass to her lips for a drink. "I've enjoyed my time here," she says at length. "Being somewhere where they honor the spirits so much, it's made me feel closer to Jade somehow. And of course I'm glad I could help Mariam get settled."

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

5067

"Talbot is a steady man and has been Phillip's trusted servant these past ten years. He was once a member of her ladyship's guard before an injury forced him to seek lighter duty." Tymothi puffs out his chest. "I myself was once a soldier, you know. Logistics."

He pauses as if lost in memory for a moment, then returns his attention to you. "In any case, Talbot is a good man and a personal friend. If any harm has befallen young Phillip, you can rest assured it befell Talbot first."

"What can you tell me about Phillip?"

➥ *Read entry 7244.*

"Say no more."

➥ *Read entry 4350.*

5080

The willow grove is busy with gnomes of all descriptions. White ropes have been strung between the trees with festive ribbons dangling from them.

If two or three time has passed today...

➥ *Read entry 4152.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 1134.*

5084

"Hyrim's a traveling carpenter," says Mariam.

"Indeed I am!" says Hyrim, mussing Mariam's hair and grinning at her when she glares at him.

"That's more exciting than it sounds, actually. Several of the barons are making pushes to settle their wildlands, so new steadings are cropping up all over, and someone has to build those houses and palisades and barns." He snatches up an apple from a tray in front of him and starts cutting it open with a slightly curved knife. "But those yeomen who claim that land, they're doing so without the barons' or any lords' protection. No soldiers, just militia. Plenty of those settlements are burned to the ground by monsters or brigands."

Braxton grunts. "Or monster brigands, in the case of goblins, beastmen, and the like."

"I try not to think about it," says Hyrim. "How many of those houses I helped build are still standing? At least I know that if they've brought me along, the settlement is being planned by someone with a good dose of sense."

"Because gnomes bring trade," says Braxton, her eyebrows rising. "If they bring along some gnome workers, those gnomes will spread the word of their settlement, and perhaps a caravan will come through."

"Exactly," says Hyrim. "And trade means food when crops fail, tools when a tool breaks, even just someone knowing you exist to help each other out. So, even if it's dangerous out there, I like to think that I'm giving them the best chance they've got to succeed." He raises his mug. "To the settlers on the frontier," he says, and everyone drinks.

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

5086

You knock gently and wait. After a moment a voice calls "Come in!" and you find that the door is unlocked.

Inside is a quiet and cozy tea house, festooned with pillows, blankets, and eclectic decor. A number of tables are crammed haphazardly into the room, and each table is surrounded by people intent on their tea and games.

The table closest the door hosts four people playing a tile game, in which they remove and place tiles from a collection in the center according to some scheme that seems impenetrable at first glance. A calico-furred catfolk woman with a black patch of fur over her left eye and ear takes her turn and glances at you with golden eyes. The man next to her, a tall human with cropped brown hair and smooth skin, studies the tiles intently. Next to him an unusually tall dwarf man with sparkling blue eyes and freckles chuckles and nudges the gnome woman who is their fourth. She turns in her chair and sees you, leaping to her feet, straightening her lovely floral dress and running a hand through her bright pink hair. "Hello!" she says. "Welcome. Can I get you anything to eat or drink? Or perhaps you'd like to play a game?"

A general welcome goes up from the other game table, as well, where a scrawny orc man with spectacles holds court behind a carefully arranged wooden screen. To his left sits a human man with dark hair and a neat, handsome beard, who taps one of the game's several oddly shaped dice against the table as he ponders. Another player, a human man with a scruffy beard and a straw hat, mumbles something about "but it's what my character would do," and nudges a small pewter figurine into a new position on the table. The man next to him, a thin gnome man with light-brown hair nearly shaved down to his scalp, shakes his head and picks up a handful of dice. The man at the end of the table, a tall, stout human man with a mane of bushy dark beard and hair, stands and waves to you. "You can have my seat," he says. "I have to hurry home and make sure my daughter hasn't gotten into too much trouble."

Stay and play a few games.

➥ *Read entry 2534.*

Order some tea and snacks.

Requires you each spend 5 gold.

➥ *Read entry 7005.*

Leave the tea house.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5098

You start reading about runic magic, beginning with a rather poetic text titled *A Runebound Age* and continuing into an ancient, dust-clad book called *The Final Charge of Timmoran Lokander*. Both texts agree that runebound shards are pieces of crystallized magic created using an art now lost. The shards' magic is lent focus and direction by the mystic runes carved into their surfaces.

Final Charge, however, claims that their existence is due to great deeds of darkness and evil, making reference to something called the Night of Betrayal and the ultimately failed efforts to keep the shards secret from the world. The book argues that the shards—both "runebound" and "unbound"—should be destroyed before The Enemy acquires them.

In contrast, *A Runebound Age* makes no mentions of any of this, and the author seems almost wistful in her longing for more magic and the great works of ancient masters, whose secrets might someday be rediscovered to the betterment of all.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*

➥ *Time passes.*

Extend your study session.

Requires seven or less time has passed.

➥ *Read entry 8165.*

Leave the library.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5100 (Village Hall)

The village hall is easily the largest building in the town, a tall edifice of pale grey stone with peaked windows of glass at regular intervals. The main entrance is a pair of heavy oak doors, standing at the top of a short but broad stone stair and flanked by a pair of columns.

If five or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The village hall is closed for the day.*
This encounter is complete.

5101 (Village Hall — Day One)

A young woman with her hair in dozens of braids ponders the message board. She appears to be sounding out the words of the various missives posted there under her breath, reading slowly and with difficulty.

The message board announces that the next market day is in two days, and that there will be a village bonfire that same night. There's also a posting offering a shop for sale, "slightly damaged." The price is quite modest, considering the size of the building and its location.

You notice a weathered page that states a reward for a passing hero who can help with a goblin infestation. The hero is to report to Fiore Brightmaul at the smithy.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open…

➥ *Read entry 3367.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5102 (Village Hall — Day Two)

A stout man with his thumbs hooked through a brightly colored sash is arguing with the town clerk. "Surely you can find a space for me," he blusters. "Why, I've never been so insulted!"

"I'm sorry, sir," sighs the town clerk, an almost colorless man in a brown tunic. "All the spots for tomorrow's market have already been claimed. But I'm sure you can display your wares outside the market street and you'll find plenty of business."

The message board reinforces the clerk's mention of the market tomorrow and also invites one and all to a village bonfire tomorrow night. There's a posting offering a shop for sale, "slightly damaged," with the word "SOLD" written across it in bright red paint.

You notice a weathered page that states a reward for a passing hero who can help with a goblin infestation. The hero is to report to Fiore Brightmaul at the smithy.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open…

➥ *Read entry 3367.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5103 (Village Hall — Day Three)

The main hall is host to a small group of men and women in fine but rustic clothes—wool tunics, leather boots with brass tooling, broad-brimmed hats resting on their knees. You take them for a group of wealthy local farmers and ranchers, apparently discussing harvest and taxes. "What we should do," says a human woman with her blonde hair piled up atop her head, "is take our grievances directly to the countess. It's not right to levy these taxes before the harvest is even in."

"It sounds as if the Baronial Seat doesn't much care what our harvest is like," mutters a human man with a thick, bushy mustache. "My cousin lives in the next county over. It's just as bad there."

None of the farmers pay you the slightest attention, continuing to grouse and grumble just as if you were not there.

The message board reminds you, as if the hubbub outside weren't enough, that today is a market day, and that tonight will be a festive bonfire for the village. There's also an offering of a shop for sale, "slightly damaged," with the word "SOLD" written across it in bright red paint.

You notice a weathered page that states a reward for a passing hero who can help with a goblin infestation. The hero is to report to Fiore Brightmaul at the smithy.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open…

➥ *Read entry 3367.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5104 (Village Hall — Day Four)

A human man and woman, both wearing rich clothes but with sun-weathered faces, spit on their hands and shake as you enter, sealing some deal or another.

"You won't regret it," says the woman. "You'll get a dozen calves out of her; improve your whole herd for generations."

"I'd better," says the man. "If she comes up barren, I'm coming back for my money."

They part ways and let you past, into the main hall, where other ranchers and farmers in town for market day swap tips and make deals with promises and handshakes, not with coins.

The message board reminds you that today is market day. It also suggests that the orchard is looking for more hands and that today is the "GRAND OPENING!!!!" of Mariam's apothecary shop.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5105 (Village Hall — Day Five)

The town clerk, an almost colorless man in an off-white tunic, sits at a table in the center of the village hall. "Gnomes," he mutters, flicking coins from one pile to another and tallying the count on a clacking abacus. "Blasted gnomes everywhere."

He finishes his count, apparently doesn't like what he sees, and then starts over. "Have the stall fees paid to the penny, how did they…?"

The message board has a very elegant-looking message proclaiming that the Countess's Annual Masquerade Ball will be in two days' time. It also indicates that a special market will be hosted that morning, and that the orchard is seeking hired help. Another message in small, neat handwriting says that a newcomer to the village requires lodging while she completes her studies at Dragonholt's library, starting tomorrow. The note is signed "Sasha."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5106 (Village Hall — Day Six)

The village hall is a commotion of hustling people, none more frantic than the village clerk. Tables are pressed back against the wall, fresh rushes are laid down, blankets hung to form makeshift curtains, and two human women push past you with their arms full of fresh linens.

The town clerk accosts you and gently drives you out of the hall proper. "I'm sorry," he says, "we're preparing this space to house refugees from Evesmoore and the surrounding farms." He leaves you at the message board and turns back to attempting to orchestrate the chaos.

The message board informs you, in very elegant calligraphy, that tomorrow night is the Countess's Annual Masquerade Ball, and that a special market day will be held in her honor. The orchard still needs hired hands—that message looks like it may have been up all summer. And a message in small neat handwriting says that a newcomer to the village, named Sasha, requires lodging while she completes her studies at Dragonholt's library starting today. An addendum to the note reads: "Thank you, Miss Bourne, I have a place to stay now -S."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5107 (Village Hall — Day Seven)

A small group of humans is clustered around the town clerk in the center of the common hall. A young man with dark skin and a cap of dense curls holds hands with an equally young woman whose cheeks are round and red like apples. One by one, they sign a book held by the town clerk, who then brings the book around to the people on either side, who you realize are the families of the young couple in the center.

"Did the ceremony out on the farm last night," the girl's big grey-grizzled father explains as he signs. "But have to make it official, you know?"

"Consider dropping by the shrine and getting Skala's blessing," suggests the clerk, closing his book.

The father makes a noncommittal grunt. "Not sure I want an orc blessing my daughter's union, no offense intended to anyone."

"Father," sighs the girl, leading her family out and past you. "Could you be any more of a hidebound bigot?"

The message board informs you, in elegant calligraphy, that the Countess's Annual Masquerade Ball is tonight. It also reminds you, if such a reminder were necessary given the noise and the crowds, that a special market is held today in its honor. You see an announcement of a celebration tonight on the village green for those not attending the ball, and another notice proclaims the good news of what you presume is the wedding you just witnessed. Finally there is a note from Skala, suggesting that everyone take a moment to visit the shrine and seek peace.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5133

A small group of silver-haired men and women ponder a board of light and dark squares adorned with wooden playing pieces. A woman knits by the fire, pausing occasionally to turn the page of a heavy book on a reading stand in front of her.

Ursula sits at her usual seat beneath the painted tree. Theodore approaches, hands her a silver cup of tea, and sits down at her side. They share a kiss, then he takes up his current whittling project and knife. "This reminds me of a story…" he says.

"Tell me about it," Ursula says with a smile.

Get something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 8815.*

Listen to Theodore's story.

➥ *Read entry 3273.*

Leave the Countess Inn.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5137

Sapphire finds a suitable tree, one with a broad, flat branch only about a human's height off the ground among its other wandering limbs. You boost her up into the tree and hand her fallen branches and other materials as she calls down instructions from above you. In time, she weaves together a passable nest, rather like a large bird. Sapphire uses her blanket to cushion the thing and soon you are both snuggled together beneath the willow tree's spreading fronds, giggling and gossiping by lantern-light. You stay that way well into the night.

➥ *Read entry 3241.*

5155

As you settle in at Mariam and Braxton's table, Sapphire appears with another jug of cider and some mugs. "The food will be ready in just a few minutes, dears," she says as you pour yourself a drink.

If story point W7 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 7953.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 8465.*

5175

"No, I suppose she wouldn't," says Isaek with a sigh. "Jade was—she transformed my life in a way that nothing else has. She changed it forever by coming into it, changed it again by giving me two children, and then changed it a final time when she left us far too soon."

He withdraws a folded white cloth from within his coat and dabs at his eyes. "It was bandits, on the road. It's always a risk when you travel, but we know how to look after ourselves. Travel in groups, hide when you can, fight when you must. These bandits, they were new. Some cousins of ours had traveled the same road a few months before with no trouble, and of course we're not above paying for safe passage from time to time with some of the more established bandit bands. But this time…"

He sighs. "Mariam was about a year old. She doesn't really remember her mother, she just has my stories and Sapphire's stories to carry with her. But she's so like Jade. Every day I see it, in her smile, her laugh. They have the same irrepressible mirth, you know. Jade could laugh in a thunderstorm, turn getting our whole journey delayed into a game. Mariam is the same way. She lightens the burdens of everyone she travels with." He smiles and blows his nose. "Jade would be so happy for her."

➥ *Read entry 4083.*

5216

You settle around the cluster of gnomes playing bar games, watching as they trade riddles and bits of banter in between rounds of flicking wooden pucks. A woman with waves of hair bursting from beneath a round cap shows off a trick with a pair of her bracelets, interlocking then detaching them effortlessly despite both being solid rings of metal. A young man places three cups on the table and sends them in looping circles, challenging onlookers to find the red ball hidden beneath them.

"How about you?" asks the woman with the round cap. "Care to join in? What have you got?"

If you have performance (skill) or thievery (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 2996.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 5329.*

5230 (Guard Station)

The guard station is used as a meeting place for the village guard and a place to store the few implements of war the village has. An attached annex accessible only from outside serves as a jail cell, though it is rarely used. Behind the building is a training area with several training dummies.

If this is your first time visiting this location…

➥ *Read entry 1868.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6259.*

5232

You shout and run toward the boys, screaming at them in your most heroic voice. They instantly break and run, screaming. "We're sorry!" shouts the largest boy, huffing and puffing along behind his faster fellows. "We're so so-ho-horry!" He stumbles and falls, scrambles, sobbing, to his feet, and keeps running.

You bend down to pick up the knit owl and offer it to the dwarf girl. She takes it from you, staring with enormous eyes glimmering with tears. "That were amazing," she says quietly. "Some day I hope I'm a brave fierce hero like you." You assure the girl that someday, if that's what she wants, she will be.

If story point N2 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 8435.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6114.*

5237

"You won't regret it," says the dwarf with a grin. She takes your money and the rune and places it in an iron box, which she closes and locks before tucking the silver key into her smock. "Bryll!" she calls, and the young dwarf apprentice comes running. "Run to the stores and bring me a ten-weight of black iron and a single bar of Brightmaul silver." The apprentice rushes off, and Fiore reaches for her crutch again. "I'll get started straight away. Come back tomorrow, I may have something for you."

➥ *You lose the war rune (item).*
➥ *Mark story point N1.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5239

After a few silent sobs, you hear Mariam's choked and muffled voice. "You better come back. I'll kill you if you die out there."

Braxton opens her mouth as if to comment on the error in logic within Mariam's previous statement, but she instead says, "I will." Braxton releases the gnome from her embrace and gently brushes away a tear with her thumb.

Mariam looks at you. "Take good care of her, will you?" She looks away and grumbles under her breath, "I need someone to reach things on tall shelves." A warm smile crosses Braxton's lips.

You promise Mariam that you will be cautious.

"I'll head back to the Swan to retrieve my gear," says Braxton. "I'll meet you under the Dragon Statues."

➥ *Mark story point A4.*

If story point I1 is marked…

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6546.*

5248

You wake, sweating, to a commotion. At first you think the gnomes are still running rampant, but a quick glance outside your window shows that the few gnomes you do see are quietly cleaning up from their festival or heading west out of town. You dress, somewhat reluctantly in the great heat of the day, and go downstairs.

The common room is nearly empty, with half-eaten breakfasts neglected on various tables and no sign of Sapphire or Jasper anywhere. You help yourself to a roll left over from last night's dinner and wander outside to finally find the source of the hubbub.

A large crowd has gathered outside the Swan, all muttering to one another and staring to the east. You find Sapphire standing precariously atop a rain barrel, straining to see over the crowd, with Hunter, the bartender from the Chatty Archer, at her side. "That doesn't look good," she murmurs.

To the east, a pillar of black smoke towers into the sky. A red, sullen light lurks there.

"What is it?" asks a villager with a straw hat.

"Dragon," answers Hunter, his eyes narrowed. A murmur of agreement spreads through the crowd. "North and east of Evesmoore, if I'm reading it right."

"In Belmont lands, maybe?" asks the villager in the straw hat.

"Right on the border," says a dusky-skinned human woman in a sheepskin vest. "My cousin rode in with the news this morning. Evesmoore is mighty scared right now."

"They should be," says Hunter, his face dark.

Inform the guards that a dragon has been spotted.
➥ *Read entry 8283.*

Warn Lady Regina that Evesmoore could be in danger.
➥ *Read entry 3328.*

Head east and protect Evesmoore yourself.
➥ *This encounter is complete. When you are prepared to face the dragon, visit the eastern road (location 1810).*

Ignore the commotion and go about your day.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5281

"I'll tell you what would really help," she says, stomping toward a rack of shelves and papers. "There's a silver mine, south of here past the willow grove. I'd like to get it re-opened, but there's a small goblin problem. You wouldn't know any adventuring heroes who have some free time, would you?"

Offer to clear out the silver mine.
Requires three or more fame.
➥ *Read entry 7417.*

Offer your assistance for simpler matters.
➥ *Read entry 9407.*

5288

The next day is grey and rainy. The village seems to retreat into itself, the streets empty but the taverns full and loud. Braxton leads a patrol into Eventide Forest, from which she returns looking grave and shaking her head.

➥ *You each recover half of your maximum stamina.*
➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*

You are awakened early the morning after by the voice of Skala, the orc shrine attendant. "Harvest!" he bellows as he walks the streets shaking a dried gourd as a sort of rattle. "The spirits have spoken, and it is time for the harvest!"

The whole village springs to life, doors flung open and people rushing about on errands. Sapphire seems to be going at a full run in and out of the kitchen, pausing only long enough to shove a hamsteak and a pile of eggs at you. "Eat up!" she calls. "The harvest has started!"

After your meal, you step outside to find most of the village gathering at the fields south of the Swan. You arrive to find Lady Regina atop a tall bay horse wearing a crown of golden wheat and holding a beanhook in one hand. She raises the beanhook above her head, and the crowd grows silent.

"It has been my pleasure for many years," she says, her voice trembling only slightly, "to watch my people work together as one at harvesttide. The work you do together now secures our future." Regina guides her horse to the edge of the bean fields, then leans down with her hook and plucks the first bean pod. An autumn wind ripples through the field, making the pods rattle.

"We thank the spirits for their blessing during this harvest!" she calls. Everyone cheers, and the workers pour into the fields. Braxton and Rochelle join the workers among the crops. Regina, the stablemaster, and a smaller group of villagers move toward the village green, some carrying stools or baskets. Mariam and Sapphire return to the Swan babbling excitedly about what to make for the feast.

Join the workers in the fields.
➥ *Read entry 5712.*

Expedite the harvest with runic magic.
Requires runes (skill).
➥ *Read entry 7591.*

Assist with setup at the village green.
➥ *Read entry 1104.*

Join Mariam and Sapphire in the kitchen.
➥ *Read entry 2840.*

Avoid the harvest as much as possible.
➥ *Read entry 5908.*

5302

"Thank you for your hospitality, Sapphire," says Braxton as she opens the door to leave.

"Of course, hon," replies Sapphire. "Good luck with the guards!"

Braxton smiles and nods before leaving. You are about to leave yourself when Sapphire stops you. "Oh! I almost forgot. If you're going around Dragonholt without a map, you might get lost. It's a small village, but some of the alleyways are a real labyrinth." She produces a folded piece of parchment and lays it out on the counter.

"Let's see," she mutters and scans the map. "Ah, here we are!" She marks a spot on the map with "the Swan." She spends a moment marking numerous other locations for convenience. "Here you are. Don't lose it now," she says as she folds up the map and hands it to you. "If you have any other questions about Dragonholt, come back and ask me."

➥ *You gain the map of Dragonholt.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Map of Dragonholt

After completing an encounter, use the map of Dragonholt to choose a new location to visit. Each location has a four-digit number that corresponds to an entry in this book. When you choose a location, read the corresponding entry in this book.

If playing with two or more players, you will each take turns choosing locations to visit. When you choose a location to visit, exhaust your activation token. You become the active player and remain the active player until the encounter is complete. You should make decisions within the encounter as a group, but as the active player, you have the final say on those decisions.

Gathering Information

During your time in Dragonholt, you might wish to gather information about the village or county or the events that happen within. Returning to the Swan to speak with Sapphire or visiting the village hall are great ways to gather such information. In addition, you might try visiting the local taverns in search of rumors.

Days

The encounters in this book take place over multiple days as tracked on the tracking sheet on the back cover of this book. At the end of each day, an effect on the tracking sheet will instruct you to read a specific entry that bridges the gap between the day that just ended and the next day in the story.

The events that occur at each location might change from day to day, and special events might occur on specific days. However, some locations will have the same or similar events on multiple days. You cannot gain the benefits of any single entry more than once each day.

5304

"The orchard always needs extra help in the summer, and they'll pay, too. Plenty of gnomes make a few coins traveling to orchards that need pickers. You might want to check the village hall or see if Fiore Brightmaul has a job for you at the smithy. And I'm sure if you get to know the villagers, you might find the odd job here or there." Sapphire grins. "Emphasis on 'odd,' I suspect."

If it is day one or two...
➥ *Read entry 8464.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 6740.*

5322

You wake late the next morning to knocking at your door. "Forgive the disturbance, dear," you hear Sapphire's voice say from the hall. "Someone from the manor—from Countess Regina's household has come to speak with you."

You quickly dress yourself, and Sapphire leads you to a private sitting room where your guest is waiting for you: Tymothi, the countess's steward, fussing in a ruffled yellow shirt.

"Thank you for seeing me," he says. "I trust you are finding Dragonholt to your satisfaction." He stands and paces to a window, peering through it for a moment, then turning to you. "I shall skip past the pleasantries as I fear time may be of the essence. The countess's son, Phillip, is missing. He was last seen yesterday, leaving for a day-trip to visit the Tree of Tales in the forest with his manservant, Talbot. They rode two of her ladyship's best horses and should have been gone and back in a handful of hours." Tymothi sighs and dabs at his face with a lace handkerchief. "The horses came back, riderless, early this morning."

Tymothi reaches to his belt and places a velvet bag on the table before him. It clinks. "I wish to—the countess wishes to contract your services. Phillip must be found, but none of her ladyship's guards are," he pauses, picking his words, "ideally suited for such a task. Celyse recommended you, specifically, for this." Tymothi slides the purse across the table to you.

➥ *You gain 50 gold.*

"This is an advance for any expenses that may accrue. The rest awaits the safe return of Regina's youngest child. Please. Hurry. The family can bear only so much grief."

"What do you mean, 'so much grief'?"
➥ *Read entry 9316.*

"What can you tell me about Talbot?"
➥ *Read entry 5067.*

"What can you tell me about Phillip?"
➥ *Read entry 7244.*

"Say no more."
➥ *Read entry 4350.*

5329

You beg off and Gnorman chuckles, settling down next to you. "Come on, Lyra. Not everyone can pull off the crazy tricks you do."

"I suppose that's true," Lyra says, then slaps a deck of cards on the table in front of him. "Alright, then. Shuffle and cut. Mind the Queen of Swords."

"Your favorite card on account of your razor tongue, huh?" Gnorman teases as he shuffles the deck and hands it back. She sticks her tongue out at him, as if to let him inspect it.

"Right," she says, fanning the card. "Take one." He does. "Show it around, then, but not to me." He shows you the card, the Knave of Skulls. "Now," she says, holding out the cards and closing her eyes. "Put it back in the deck." He does, sliding it between two others, and she quickly takes the deck, cuts it, and shuffles it together. "Now, my card is the Queen of Swords," she says. "First of all, I bet you a gold piece it's higher than yours."

"Easy bet," says Gnorman. "Queens are higher than most of the cards in the deck."

"Then I bet you a gold piece it's higher in the stack," she says. With that, she fans the cards across the table, showing a spread of plain card backs and two card faces: the Queen of Swords placed directly above the Knave of Skulls. Gnorman howls and claps his hands and the crowd hoots and stamps their feet.

"Where's my gold piece?" Lyra asks, to general laughter.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5336

"Well, the thing about spirits is that they are everywhere all the time," says Skala. "Some are big, powerful spirits, ones that dream long green dreams and make the seasons turn, like the Spirit of Eventide." He nods to the west. "But most are little things, the spirit of this blade of grass, the spirit of your shoe. They care only about grass things, or shoe things." The orc stretches his arms out above his head, and thrusts one finger at the sky.

"But just because they're little, or far away, or simple doesn't mean they're not important. That cloud has a spirit, and when the cloud is gone the spirit will be, too. But today it might rain on us, or it might not. And it's for me to listen, and understand."

He yawns and closes his eyes. "And sometimes the spirit of the sun and the field conspire to put a man to sleep. And I'll listen to that, too."

Lie in the grass and watch the clouds.
➥ *Read entry 5388.*

Leave him alone and find something else to do.
➥ *Mark story point Z8.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5349

Phillip happily shifts his chair to make room for you and lays his book out on the table in front of him. "This is *The Baronies and the Soulstone Kingdom*," he explains. "We're skipping past all the stuff about the Usurper Kings and just reading about the baronies themselves. Right now I'm learning about our own barony, Allerfeldt." You follow along with Phillip as he describes the general geography of Allerfeldt, mainly grasslands and rolling plains, its rich farmland, and its position to the northwest of Dawnsmoor and southwest of Nerekhall. You learn that its largest city is Highcrest, some two days' ride through Eventide Forest from Dragonholt, and that its rich farmlands help feed the Free Cities and other, less fertile baronies. "This book still thinks that Baroness Tyrese of House Hull rules here," chuckles Phillip. "Wow is it old. I've never even heard of House Hull before."

"That is because you have been neglecting your genealogy reading," chides Celyse from her chair. "You would know that House Hull, while extinct in the primary, survives today through the secondary line in the form of what family?"

"Uh…" Phillip scratches his chin. "Well, it's probably the same family that sits on the seat in Goldhall now, isn't it?" He glances to you for support as he feels through his answer. "So, House Hull survives in Baroness Katrin of House Sephone?"

"Lucky guess," sniffs Celyse and turns the page.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5352

The moon shines through a thin layer of clouds. The night is crisp and threatens rain, but the Swan is warm and inviting as you clean off the dust of your day.

If story point J1 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 8461.*

If story point O6 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 6147.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 6795.*

5376

The old carpenter, Theodore, is sitting on a stool outside his shop. A light carpet of wooden flakes falls around him as he whittles at a block of wood, and he appears to be telling a story to a flock of kids. Also a group of human children, intermingled with the goats.

Listen to the old man's story.
➥ *Read entry 5534.*

Ignore him.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5383

"The Cunningham arms are azure, a chevron or between towers sable—ah, that would be blue with a gold chevron dividing two black or grey towers. They're the lords of Haverford, to the south. The Cunninghams have never been as powerful, militarily, as the Belmonts, nor as wealthy as the Fairfaxes—did you know that the Fairfaxes are considered rich by the standards of the region? It's true, you have to go all the way to Highcrest to find a larger town and market. In any case, the Cunninghams have two manor halls on their lands. One for living in, and the other to store all their strange curiosities and obsessions. An elder Cunningham built a telescope there and kept a library and star charts, the one after that fancied himself a sculptor, and eventually the place became so full of clutter it was just unlivable. I believe Count Oszric now calls it his 'museum' as he crams it full of curious animal specimens."

Celyse shakes her head. "I admire their dedication to learning, but it does seem that they at times neglect the business of ruling. Lord Oszric married a merchant's daughter from Highcrest, at least partially so her dowry could pay off his county's debts. The good news is that the woman—Countess Elena—seems to have inherited her mother's good sense, and she does most of the day-to-day running of the county now."

Ask about the Belmonts.

➥ *Read entry 5674.*

Change the subject.

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

5388

You lie back and watch the clouds as they march across the sky, twisting and turning as they go. The sun fills you with golden warmth. The sound of the crickets and Skala's snoring lulls you into a state of peace, and the vague shapes of the clouds become more and more distinct, until they seem as real as your hand in front of your face.

You see two people embrace, although you cannot make out their features in your dreamlike trance. A dragon flies across the sky, then doubles back on itself and devours its own tail until the wind tears it to shreds. Trees rustle and fall away, revealing a tall tower that crumbles and collapses. You take in each event with the same calm as a still pool, touched by a falling leaf.

"It will rain tomorrow," says Skala, his voice jolting you back to your senses. "A hard, fierce rain, overnight." He nods and sits up. "But that's not what you saw, is it." He runs a hand through his beard, then nods. "No, don't tell me. What you saw was for you. May it bring you some comfort or aid in the days to come."

➥ *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*
➥ *Mark story point Z8.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5429

The woman, who you guess calls herself Leafcutter, turns, indicating a selection of wooden training weapons leaning against the fence behind her. "Choose your weapon," she says. "I have mastered them all. You will walk away from here halfway competent with one."

Your choice made, you stretch out (Leafcutter insists) and stand ready, holding your weapon before you. "No," she says. "Your grip is too hard." You adjust your grip. "Now it is too weak. Like this, you see?" She shows you on her own sword, a delicate balance where the weapon is free to move, but under your control. "Now try to strike me!"

Each task you attempt, Leafcutter finds flawed and drills you with corrections. She pushes you hard, until your muscles are sore from your fingertips to your feet and your body drips with sweat.

"A beginning," she says, at last.

➥ *You each lose three stamina.*
➥ *Mark two progress in combat training and one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5455

You go with Celyse to Fairfax Manor, where a middle-aged human woman in servant's livery opens the door for you with an expression of surprise.

"I must speak with the countess at once, Mathilda," says Celyse. Mathilda only nods and ushers you upstairs, where Regina's audience chamber lies in the manor's ancient round tower. The countess's enormous black throne is empty, but the countess is seated on a carpet by one hearth. She is a human woman of middling years with fair skin and enormous green eyes, almost luminescent in a face more lined by pain than by age. The countess has a round hoop in her lap, a piece of intricate needlework. "My lady," says Celyse.

"Celyse," says Regina. "I had wondered if you had quit my service. Please, introduce us." Celyse bows and introduces you. Regina inclines her head but makes no effort to rise. "What brings you to me today, my friend?"

With many pauses to word her story as diplomatically as possible, Celyse shares the same suspicions with Regina that she had shared with you. As she speaks, a rail-thin man in a ruffled tunic slips into the room to stand silently at Regina's side.

"Yes," says Regina at length. "Tymothi told me much of this the day you disappeared, was it, Tymothi?" She offers one hand to the man in the ruffled shirt, who helps her to her feet with perfect form.

"Yes, m'lady. I was not sure what to make of Miss Celyse's suspicions, but I reported them dutifully."

Regina crosses to her throne and sits with a sigh. She gestures to Tymothi and points to a writing desk against the wall. "Tymothi, the book in the drawer, there." He goes and fetches a slim leatherbound volume. "This is Sonia's journal. I have not read it; there are things that a mother should not know about her daughter, I think. But you must do, my friends. I do not want to believe that my brother would stoop to so reprehensible a crime as kinslaying. But I will not risk my children on my hope that Kyric is still the honorable man who stood aside for me when our father named me heir over him." She presses the book into your hand.

➥ *You gain Sonia's journal.*
➥ *Mark story point P8.*

"So. Please. Read it. Perhaps it contains some clue as to Sonia's fate, and perhaps you might prevent Rochelle and Phillip from falling prey to a similar doom." She waves a hand, and Tymothi rushes forward to shepherd you from the room.

"Her ladyship tires easily these days," he says. "Thank you. We will speak again."

Celyse frowns as she walks you to the door. "So Tymothi isn't the traitor after all. Or perhaps he's covering. Or perhaps there is no traitor, just rotten luck." She shakes her head and opens the door. "Read that book and make it a point to get to know the locals. I will call upon you again when you are needed."

➥ *Two time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Sonia's Journal

You now possess Sonia's journal. You may read and refer back to the journal at any time.

5460

You desperately need sheep to finish your loom improvement, so you make the trade with Mariam. "Aha!" she crows, placing a wooden village at the location of her caravan.

"I warned you," sighs Hyrim.

With the ability to gather resources permanently from her village as well as from her roving caravan, Mariam's lead proves insurmountable, and she soon claims victory.

"So," she says to Braxton as you all clear the game away. "What did you think?"

"I don't understand why the game makes no allowances for using force," says Braxton. "I had more iron than the rest of you combined, but I couldn't find any way to make weapons."

"We don't, uh, like to teach our children that violence is the best way to solve problems," explains Hyrim.

"Well, the important thing is that I enjoyed myself," says Braxton, squeezing Mariam's shoulder gently.

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

5480

"Oh, Elena handles most of that business," drawls Lord Oszric.

"Thankfully," says Elena. "We have good relations with Dragonholt. We keep our tariffs low between the counties, and our merchants trade Haverford cheese, leather, and beer for Dragonholt apples, cider, and wool."

"And Rostum stone!" puts in Lord Leone.

"Yes, your quarry is very nice," says Elena. "When it's running."

"Small labor shortage, is all," mutters Leone.

"These oafs will tell you that blood oaths and history keep our counties friendly," says Elena. "I say it's trade. Let trade flow and peace will reign."

➥ *Read entry 6062.*

5482

All relevant fires extinguished, Grisbeck scoops his daughter up into his arms. "Time f'r bed, I think."

"Dah!" complains Penny. "Can't I stay up just a bit longer? I'm not"—her comment is interrupted by a long yawn—"sleepy!" But she rests her head on his shoulder as he takes his leave of you.

"Enjoy yer night," he says and carries the already half-asleep Penny toward the bakery.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5486

You find an interesting book, titled *Folk Tales of the Faerie Peoples*, and settle in to read. The book is a collection of fanciful tales from a variety of sources, curated with the patronizing indulgence of an educated uncle addressing his backwater nieces and nephews. One particularly arresting tale describes the "second fall" of the elves and the rise of darkness in the world, attributing to that time the appearance of humans, gnomes, orcs, and other races. The author describes the descent of each of these races from some animal touched by elven or demonic magic. Orcs, for example, the author claims are "kind to the great grey juggernauts of the southern lands, made a mockery of human kind by demonic taint," while gnomes are described as "the rabbit of the burrow and the squirrel of the tree, brought to lively life and laughter by the singing of the elves."

Humans are not mentioned at all, and the text shifts tone and subject so rapidly you suspect that a large portion has been removed, or even censored. Clearly, the details herein are not free from bias.

"You're reading too loud," says Celyse as you turn the page in perfect silence. "And anyway, those stories are perfect drivel."

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5500 (Market Street)

Dragonholt's market street is barely a hundred yards long, a wide partly cobbled lane that runs from the village green out toward the fields and farms that surround the town. Along the center of the street marches a line of trees, providing a number of convenient boughs to which merchants might tie their tents and awnings when they set up their stalls.

Bordering the street are several permanent fixture stores. Along the west side of the street: a seamstress, a woodworker, a butcher, and a smithy. Along the east side: the apothecary shop, a bakery, and a fletcher. A small tea house stands between the apothecary shop and the bakery. There are no posted business hours, and you can't say you've ever seen the shop open. But it is kept in fine condition all the same.

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

5501 (Market Street — Day One)

A small group of young goats is cavorting in the row of trees, climbing up into the lower branches and leaping down upon one another. Two small human children are watching and laughing, but when they see you they run off between the baker's and the fletcher's to play somewhere else. The goats, at least, are indifferent to your presence.

For the time being, no stalls or carts are set up along the center of the street. A notice board under a large tree at the end of the street indicates that the next market day is two days from today.

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5502 (Market Street — Day Two)

A small group of villagers and visitors are gathered at the head of the market street discussing their wares. You overhear that they are excitedly preparing for tomorrow's market day and boasting about their sales from the previous.

A few carts are already in place, and some vendors are in the process of setting up their stalls. However, no one is offering anything for sale at the moment. They seem to be conserving their efforts for tomorrow.

If three or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 5376.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5503 (Market Street — Day Three)

The street is bustling with activity, full of carts groaning with produce and other goods. Vendors cry out prices, shoppers argue with one another, and two guards in Lady Regina's livery march up and down the street to dissuade thieves and cheats. It feels as if there are twice the number of people crowding the street as actually live in Dragonholt Village, which might in fact be true.

There are heaps of apples for sale, round red tomatoes, mushrooms gathered from the forest, cages full of squawking chickens and grumbling ducks, bolts of wool cloth dyed green and orange and red, skeins of yarn, jars of honey and fruit preserves, baskets of round, black bilberries and sweet, purple blackberries and bright red strawberries, buckets of nails, not to mention baskets and buckets and jars themselves.

One cart near the end of the row catches your attention, a gaily painted wagon hung with a sign that reads "Al-Emir's Elixirs." A short fellow with an enormous striped turban and a thick mustache stands in front of the cart, holding aloft various bottles of brightly colored liquids.

Browse the merchant's wares.

➥ *Read entry 4542.*

Attempt to steal some coins.

Requires thievery (skill).

➥ *Read entry 8984.*

Leave the market.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5504 (Market Street — Day Four)

You've never seen the market street so crowded, thronged with people and animals and carts inching along. Merchants shout themselves hoarse hawking their wares while customers inspect their goods. Travelers wander the street, gawking at the throngs of people, and two guards in Fairfax livery walk a slow and purposeful patrol.

You recognize several of the crops for sale as being from the recent harvest, bushels of round red beans and sheafs of golden grain and baskets piled high with red apples. One end of the row seems to be dominated by carts piled high with black and white wool and thronged with customers haggling so loudly it seems a fight might break out at any moment. A round-faced human woman with a smile and a gaily embroidered dress displays blankets, coats, dresses, and other clothes all worked in similar bright colors.

A short human man with a thick mustache and a striped turban has placed his cart at one end of the row. The sign hanging from his wagon reads "Al-Emir's Elixirs." He is holding aloft one bottle of colored liquids after another and proclaiming their efficacy in a strong, strangely accented voice.

"Step right up!" calls a red-haired human man with white at his temples. He gestures with a curved cane, as if to snag a passing sheep, at his stall. "Come see what my brother and I have in store for you! You have my personal guarantee you've never seen anything like it!"

His brother, also red-haired but somewhat younger, takes up his patter with the ease of long practice. "That's right, brother of mine! Our wares are one of a kind, never to be equaled! You cannot afford to pass this chance by, folks!" Although their market stall is very well decorated and laid out, you cannot seem to make out what, precisely, this dynamic duo is selling.

Not far from the wool merchants, a brown-furred catfolk woman in a red tunic argues with a pinch-faced human woman. The human's stall is laden with dried and salted fish. The catfolk's tufted ears are pointed back and her tail swishing with angry vigor.

Browse "Al-Emir's Elixirs."

➥ *Read entry 4859.*

Browse the wares of the excitable duo.

➥ *Read entry 2326.*

Approach the catfolk in red.

➥ *Read entry 9312.*

Attempt to steal some coins.

Requires thievery (skill).

➥ *Read entry 8984.*

Leave the market.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5505 (Market Street — Day Five)

There is no market today, but the street is both crowded and busy. In lieu of market stalls, wagons and caravans are crammed along the middle of the street, with gnome families going about their business, hanging out fresh laundry, chasing children down the street, and generally creating a village within the village of Dragonholt. Apart from a few waves and lingering glances, no one seems to notice you.

A constant stream of gnomes and villagers is headed to and from the village green where you can see a great number of them have gathered.

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5506 (Market Street — Day Six)

The market row looks a trifle trampled and beaten down after the last two days have thronged it so thoroughly. A small group of children pick their way through the row, collecting trash and debris, followed by a pair of inquisitive goats who nibble at everything they leave behind.

If three or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 5376.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Nothing of interest is happening here right now.*
This encounter is complete.

5507 (Market Street — Day Seven)

The market row is full of carts and stalls, bright colors flashing in the breeze. Merchants and customers bustle to and fro. You see stalls offering wool coats and blankets, a leatherworker hard at work on straps and buckles with her wares hanging all around her. A fishmonger shrieks an offer for salted fish, and a traveling butcher pushes past you with shanks of red meat dangling from a pole over his shoulder.

Stalls groan with mounds of shiny red tomatoes and piles of melons in a variety of bright colors. A merchant wearing a priest's vestments offers bottles and casks of wine, "made by the Poor Brothers of Vynel's Vale." Two cheese merchants side by side each proclaim their cheese is superior. Near the end of the row, a short man in a striped turban extravagantly touts his collection of potions and poultices beneath a sign reading "Al-Emir's Elixirs."

If story point A7 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 7285.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 4963.*

5534

"When I was a young lad," says Theodore, "I used to spend hours exploring Eventide Forest. The forest was not so dangerous then as it is now, although more dangerous than I knew then, hah. The Tree of Tales was where I returned again and again. I always felt at peace there, knowing that so many generations of my people have been coming and telling their stories to the Tree. I told my share, too, never you doubt it."

The old man rubs his chin, scratching at the grey stubble there. "One time I got powerful hungry in the woods, so I thought I'd best rustle up some food. Now there's plenty to be had if you know what to look for, and so I soon enough found a stand of blackberries that I thought would suit me just fine. But I suppose someone else had the same idea, since as soon as I started picking berries I heard a mighty howling and a yowling and the whole thicket shook. I fell back just as a great enormous cat with glowing green eyes burst out to land on me. The creature bounded off just as quickly, but I'd swear I saw an amber necklace on a silver chain hung around its neck."

Theodore shakes his head and picks his knife back up. "That reminds me of a story…"

If it is day one or six…

➥ *Read entry 9276.*

If it is day two, four, or seven…

➥ *Read entry 3231.*

If it is day three or five…

➥ *Read entry 2440.*

5553

Lady Elena's posture, her dress, her arched eyebrow and pursed lips, have a way of commanding the attention, and you can feel every eye in the room glancing her way. In fact, you at first fail to notice that someone else is in the booth with her: Tymothi, Lady Regina's steward.

As soon as a servant brings a bottle of wine and a plate of artfully arranged cheese to her table, Lady Elena turns her attention to Tymothi, and they begin talking together in quiet tones.

Eavesdrop on their conversation.

➥ *Read entry 8097.*

Approach them directly.

➥ *Read entry 1988.*

Ignore them.

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

5559

"She learned her runes fr'm the lorekeeper in Korim Hold," says Grisbeck. "Well, she were learning them, at least, when we left. We've a wee few more runes in our script than the humans use in their alphabet, an' I don't suppose Penny ever learned more than the commonest few hundred." He chuckles and scratches at his beard. "As f'r the rest, I got her in f'r lessons at the library here in Dragonholt as soon as we arrived. She's a bright lass, she picked it up right swift enough. To tell th' truth, I do believe she reads in the human tongue better'n me now. Mayhap I should get a few lessons from th' librarian."

"It's nice the village has a public library," says Jasper. "I don't think I've seen one outside of Greyhaven or Tamalir."

"Aye, 'tis a fine village ye've chosen ta raise yer bairn in, me friend," says Grisbeck. "A fine village."

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

5562

A small group of silver-haired men and women ponder over a board of light and dark squares adorned with wooden playing pieces. A man half reads, half dozes by the fire. The room is filled with a vibrant, intense hush.

Ursula sits in her usual seat beneath the painted tree, sipping tea from a silver cup.

Get something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 8815.*

Deliver the letter to Ursula.

Requires story point O3 is marked but K8 is not.

➥ *Read entry 7276.*

Leave the Countess Inn.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5586

"Oh, you may have come to the wrong village in search of adventure, dear," says Sapphire. "Dragonholt is a pretty sleepy little village. A place to retire from adventures it seems. Eventide Forest is the most adventurous thing about the area, if you ask me, but even that's just a big, dark forest when you take a closer look." Sapphire winks at you before continuing. "That said, we do have our share of folklore. Mariam might have told you this one already, but apparently some hero type was buried in a crypt to the north. They say he wielded powerful magic and even defeated dragons. It's pretty far-fetched, but it's a nice tale for the children at least."

➥ *Mark story point B5.*

The bells on the front door jingle, signaling someone entering the inn. Sapphire stands. "Excuse me," she says and hurries off to welcome the new patron.

➥ *Read entry 2994.*

5601

"Well, after barely surviving Nerekhall—and thank you for that, by the way…" You cannot tell from her tone if Celyse is thanking you for saving her life (you did) or thanking you for putting it in danger in the first place (you did that, too). "…I decided that there was a lot I wanted to do before I die, and perhaps I should look for a less dangerous line of work. I've always enjoyed learning and lately I've been fascinated by human culture and history. It just moves so fast, and yet never changes."

She takes another sip of tea and gestures at the manor house around her. "So, here I am. A tutor. I get to watch the children grow up, and then, well, I can move on to something else after a decade or two. I don't know how long I'll be doing this, but it suits me for now."

"What awaits you after being a tutor?"

➥ *Read entry 1187.*

"Hoping to find a romantic partner someday?"

➥ *Read entry 7777.*

5602

Your arm wobbles at the last moment, and the arrow flies astray, vanishing into the night. "Ooh," says Hunter. "I hope that doesn't hit anyone I know." He claps you on the shoulder and takes the bow back, hanging it once more above the door. "Good effort," he says. A small chorus of answering murmurs erupts around you as you realize for the first time that you have acquired an audience. With more conciliatory backslapping, the other patrons filter back inside the Chatty Archer, leaving you alone with your disappointment.

➥ *Mark one progress in combat training.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5624

You step through the door into the long, narrow back room that serves as Mariam's laboratory. Racks of strange liquids bubble and boil against one wall, and herbs hang from the ceiling to dry. A pair of cauldrons, one iron and one copper, rest neatly on shelves near a large hearth, ready to be put to use. Directly under the room's round window stands a workbench, its tools all neatly arrayed and stowed, with a set of stairs built in for the convenience of gnome-sized folk.

It looks like Mariam already has a number of potions brewing, but there is still plenty of equipment available for you to make your own.

Brew healing potions.

➥ *You may brew up to three healing potions (item A) for 25 gold per potion.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Brew swiftness potions.

Requires strange mushroom (item).

➥ *Read entry 7518.*

Brew strength potions.

Requires dragon blood (item).

➥ *Read entry 8767.*

5634

With a shrug, you turn to walk to Mariam's shop, and the merchant snatches at your sleeve. "Ah, but I can see that you are a person of exceeding taste and discernment! Never satisfied with what you see, no? You must buy only the best then, I won't hear of anything less." The alchemist glances over his shoulder, then leans in to whisper conspiratorially: "Thirty gold each for the healing potions, sixty-five for the strength potion. And that's cutting me own throat." For just an instant, it seems his accent has fled completely and he speaks in the rough tones of lower-class Tamalir.

➥ *You may purchase up to two healing potions (item A) for 30 gold per potion.*

➥ *You may purchase one strength potion (item F) for 65 gold.*

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5656

The old orc officer, Tweegal, sits on a stump in front of the guard house, polishing a coat of mail. "Keep yourself out of trouble," he advises mildly. "Can I help you with anything?"

Request to use the training ground.

➥ *Read entry 1322.*

Leave the guard station.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5673

Theodore waves you over, grinning ear to ear. "Ah," he says. "I have you to thank for this, you know." When you ask what he's talking about, he chuckles, shaving a flake of wood from the block in his hands. "If it weren't for you, I'd never have gotten up the courage to tell Ursula how I feel." He glances around the bar, then leans toward you and speaks in a low voice. "I'm going to propose to her tomorrow morning, at the shrine. If she says 'yes,' I'll marry her then and there." He leans back, his lips barely containing a childish giggle. "Why waste time at our age, eh? I'd like you to be there as witness," he says, and then turns to point at Hunter with his knife. "You and Lei, too, if you're free."

"I wouldn't miss it," says Hunter.

➥ *Mark story point Y6.*

Theodore leans back and places his knife flat on the counter and sighs. "You know, that reminds me of a story…"

Listen to Theodore's story.

➥ *Read entry 3273.*

Order something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 8054.*

Leave the Chatty Archer.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5674

"The Belmont arms are gules, a rose proper argent—sorry, a white rose on a red field—and they're the lords of Rostum county to the east. They celebrate a near-mythical character they call the Rose Knight as the founder of their house, calling him the 'Flower of Chivalry.' Whatever that means." Celyse rolls her eyes as she stirs her tea. "Throughout the generations they've produced a number of fine warriors and generals, and knights of course. Many have earned great fame on the battlefield in far-off lands, and one even served as a Marshal of the Citadel not long ago."

She sips her tea and turns to glance out the window, as if to see the Belmont lands in the distance. "In recent generations their fortunes have fallen somewhat. Their treasury has been unable to maintain the garrisons and fortifications they desire, and so Lord Leone has been raising taxes to compensate, with predictable results, given that travel is not restricted, and the two neighboring counties are prosperous and have lower taxes. His populace is moving away. I don't imagine he's pleased about that." She sets her tea back down. "Kyric's mother was a Belmont, as it happens. Lord Leone's aunt, Mabel."

Ask about the Cunninghams.

➥ *Read entry 5383.*

Change the subject.

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

5682

"I'm glad you came," says Celyse. "There is trouble afoot, and I am getting too old for trouble." Celyse doesn't look a day older than when you met her, but then again, she is an elf. "I believer that someone is plotting against the noble family here."

"You might already know that the local lord is Lady Regina Fairfax, Countess of Dragonholt. She had, up until recently, three children: Sonia, Rochelle, and Phillip. Regina is sick; she seems a little young to me to be dying already, but humans will do that on you I suppose. So her daughter Sonia was poised to inherit the county. But Sonia came to me and said she had received a letter from her uncle Kyric, Regina's brother. Kyric demanded that Sonia renounce her position and support Kyric's claim to Regina's seat. Sonia refused him, of course."

"Days later," continues Celyse, "Sonia fell from her horse, struck her head on a rock, and died. Not suspicious on its own, perhaps, but Sonia is—was—an excellent rider. She was alone in the forest when it happened. I became concerned that Kyric had murdered her. I shared my suspicions with Tymothi, Regina's steward, and that night as I returned to my bedroom a heavy statue in the gallery toppled over and nearly killed me." Celyse closes her eyes and leans back, resting her head. "So I fled. I'd already sent the letter to you, so I hid in the village waiting."

➥ *Mark story point V6.*

Celyse stands, brushing down her cloak and taking a deep breath. "But nothing unusual has happened since then and Phillip and Rochelle remain safe. It would seem the situation is not as dire as I had suspected. For now, I think it wise for you to acquaint yourself with the villagers and gain their trust. We will need them on our side if it comes to a struggle for leadership. But right now, I will go straight to Lady Regina and tell her everything. Will you come with me?"

"Of course, Celyse. Let's go now."

➥ *Read entry 5455.*

"Go on your own. I have other business to attend to."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5704

Taking care to dramatize events appropriately, you describe your adventure in the Crypt of Kharthuun. You transform the howling of the wind into the howling of the undead hounds within the crypt, and Phillip is enraptured through the entire tale. When you describe the chilling cold of the tomb itself, it almost seems that his breath mists in the summer heat. You spin a yarn of your triumph over (well, survival of, any way) the barghests, one that makes you sound much more heroic than you really are.

"Wow," says Phillip. "I actually feel cooler."

"I don't," says Celyse. "I almost wish I'd been there."

➥ *Read entry 7629.*

5712

You head into the fields to help the other harvesters, finding a basket and a beanhook and working your way down a row of bean plants. You find a rhythm with the aid of several of the farmers singing a working song, and begin filling your basket with bean pods while Braxton and Rochelle work down their own rows nearby.

As the sun climbs in the sky, workers shuck their outer layers of clothing and start mopping at their brows with sweat-stained rags. Braxton and Rochelle seem to be locked in an unspoken battle of wills, each struggling to fill her basket fuller, work harder and longer, than the other.

"Hah!" exclaims Rochelle triumphantly, hefting her full basket to her shoulder. Braxton merely smiles and keeps picking, apparently unaware there had ever been a rivalry. For your part, you can barely keep up with the gnome barfly, Gnorman, who walks happily down the rows of beans plucking without the aid of a hook or any need to bend down to reach.

"Bigjobs are too tall," he comments as he hefts his full basket easily onto one shoulder. "I could do this all day."

➥ *Mark two progress in physical training.*

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Around midday, Sapphire, Mariam, and a few others appear in a mule-drawn cart with enormous pots of porridge, baskets full of bread, and pitchers of clean, cool water. Children run up and down the rows delivering food and carrying full baskets of beans away to dry while the workers pause to eat and rest, and then you're right back to the harvest.

Working together with the villagers, you finish the first field before sundown. Your back aching, you stagger with the other workers into the village green where an enormous feast has been laid out—good, plain, filling food, and delicious given how hungry you are.

➥ *Read entry 6476.*

5719

A short human man with a thick mustache approaches, scratching at his chin. "Did I hear something about alchemical ingredients? You know, I'm always in the market for exotic goods. If you've got one of the rarer mushrooms, I could part with, say, thirty-five gold. And if, I mean, you just happened to have some dragon blood, hah." He chuckles and fiddles with his shiny gold belt buckle. "Well, if you did, I might pay seventy-five gold for such a rarity." He leans forward, examining your assembled wares. "So, what have you got?"

Sell the ingredients for the offered price.

➥ *Read entry 2999.*

Negotiate for a higher price.

Requires persuasion (skill) or streetwise (skill).

➥ *Read entry 2228.*

5729

You confirm that yes, you've just come into town. "Good, yes, glad to hear it. How was your journey? Uneventful, I trust?" You mention the bandits on the road and the clerk sighs. "Blast those bandits. I hope her ladyship does something about them, and soon."

You also mention the fallen trees blocking the road, and he cocks his head. "Oh, yes? Well, we cannot have that. That road is our main source of trade with the outside world." He shuffles into a side office, piled high with ledgers and pamphlets and historical records, and flips through stacks of official-looking papers. Eventually, he finds one he likes and scribbles out a missive, then marks it with a heavy pewter seal. "That will do," he says, tucking the document away. "We must clear that road as soon as we can."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5755

Sapphire lifts the sewing project in her lap by way of answer. "I used to be a tailor. Made a good tidy sum that way, then I came to Dragonholt and decided to stay. A human woman used to own this place; Hedy her name was. Well, her children were grown and her daughter married in Carum's Cross so she wanted to get out of the innkeeping business and go spoil her grandchildren, so I bought the Swan from her. Got a good deal, some money up front, sending the rest to her in monthly installments for the first few years. Had enough left over to help pay for a little remodeling, make the place feel a little more like a home."

Sapphire shrugs. "The village was reluctant at first. They liked Hedy and didn't know who I was. But every gnome who passed through, they stayed with me, and bit by bit the village warmed up. Why, by now you'd never know I wasn't born here." She winks. "Don't know what they'll do when I eventually move on."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

5780 (Smithy)

At the end of the market row stands a low building with a grey slate roof and a thick chimney: the smithy. The workshop portion of the building sports clapboard walls, easily opened to let in cooler air when the furnace is in use, while a brownstone annex hosts what you presume are living quarters, offices, storage, and other necessities of the smith's trade.

A polished silver hammer hangs from a wrought-iron signpost outside the front door, inscribed with Dunwarr characters. A bronze plaque is set into the wall, with the same legend written in the common tongue: Fiore Brightmaul, Smith.

If five or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 7743.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The smithy is closed right now. This encounter is complete.*

5781

"Your anger is making you neglect your fundamentals," chides Braxton as she settles her arming cap back over her black hair. "It's making you sloppy."

"Are you going to talk or are you going to fight?" asks Rochelle. Braxton grunts and rushes forward with a speed and ferocity that seems completely at odds with her usual reserve. Rochelle knocks her attack aside and sweeps her own sword up for a high slash. Braxton ducks under the strike, then blocks another, and on the third sends Rochelle's sword clattering to the floor.

"Fundamentals!" shouts Braxton. "It was a good block, and a well timed riposte, but you let your grip become too tense."

"I know," hisses Rochelle through clenched teeth. She picks up her sword and takes a deep breath. "Again," she says.

Braxton gestures, and you step up to be Rochelle's next opponent. Rochelle snarls and launches a vicious attack, which you barely knock aside. You trade blows until your muscles are sore and you stagger back for a rest. "Again," says Rochelle, her breathing ragged.

➥ *You each lose three stamina.*

➥ *Mark one progress in combat training.*

➥ *Read entry 8350.*

5784

You sort through the objects in the back room and find something intriguing: glimmerdust. "What is it?" asks Sapphire when you pull down the small vial. You explain that it's an alchemical powder that flares into light when it moves, creating a dazzling, shimmering cloud when it disperses into the air and limning anyone caught in it with a nimbus of light for hours afterward.

"Is it safe?" asks Sapphire with wonder. When you assure her that it is, she helps you fashion a bag of soft, tearable paper, which you place above the door and tie to the door knob. The next person through the door to the main shop should get a thorough coating of glimmerdust.

You sneak back out into the alley behind the shop and retreat into the night, still stifling your giggles.

➥ *Mark story point A6.*

➥ *Read entry 3241.*

5791

You finish your breakfast and gather your things. As you do, you overhear Sapphire asking Jasper to go out to the market and fetch her a few things. "Today is a special market day in honor of the Three Lords' Ball," she explains. "It will be good for you to get used to the market street. And don't forget to buy mushrooms! Even if you don't like them, our customers do!"

Full and refreshed, you step out into the bright summer sun.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5792

The young dwarf man on the bellows pauses in his exertions, mopping his brow with a rag and staring at you with frank curiosity. The clanging continues for a few moments more until the smith puts down her hammer and leans back on her padded stool. "What is it, Bryll?" she calls. The apprentice on the bellows points in your direction, and the smith twists to glance at you. "Ah," she says. "New customers. Come closer and let me have a look." She lifts a glowing-hot piece of metal from her anvil with the aid of sturdy tongs and plunges it into a bucket of water at her side, then pulls it back out and sets the quenched work in progress aside.

The smith is a sturdily built woman, simply dressed in a light white shirt and heavy leather smock. Her auburn hair is pulled back from her face in a tight bun, and her only ornament is a bright silver necklace around her neck with a subtle purple sheen. "Fiore Brightmaul," she says as you approach. "Hand me my crutch, will you?"

You find a wooden crutch with a padded grip close by and offer it to her. She takes it, situates it under her left shoulder, and swings herself on one good leg over to the edge of the workshop, away from the heat. Her right leg moves stiffly at her side.

"I know what you're thinking," she says. "I must have some great story of battling a troll to a standstill to go with my injury. But I'm sad to say I was born like this. Sorry to disappoint." She settles onto a carved wooden chair and lays her crutch to the side. "Welcome to my smithy. My apprentices and I can handle any work you need, or perhaps you'd like to browse my stock. I assure you, we Brightmauls are the finest smiths south of the Dunwarr mountains." She grins and leans forward, conspiratorially. "And frankly, I'm better than most of those overproud duffers, too."

➥ *Read entry 4422.*

5793

As you draw closer, you see that it is Skala the orc spiritspeaker who maintains the village shrine. He turns his head and nods at you as you approach, then relaxes back to stare at the sky.

"Don't mind me," he says. "Just communing with the spirits of the sky." Then he yawns. You can't help but think that "communing with the spirits of the sky" looks an awful lot like taking a nap.

Inquire about the spirits.

➥ *Read entry 5336.*

Lie in the grass and watch the clouds.

➥ *Read entry 5388.*

Leave him alone and find something else to do.

➥ *Mark story point Z8.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5801

You pass through the door after Rochelle and find yourself in a long, open salle, its floor laid with smooth, polished wood and marked with white paint in lanes and circles. A number of wood and leather mannequins stand in the corners, some marked with bright colors at critical junctions of throat, groin, and joints. Racks of wooden weapons stand against one wall.

Rochelle is nowhere to be seen at first, but as you explore the space and slide your feet along the slightly springy floor, she emerges from a back door dressed in padded doublet, hose, tall boots, and long gloves. "Oh," she says, crossing to one rack and removing a wooden longsword. "I have a sparring partner today I see." She nods to the rack and pulls up her enthusiastic curls, tying them off before cramming an arming cap down over her head. You choose yourself a weapon and a cap, then square off with Rochelle.

"On your guard!" she calls, then rushes forward with her sword held in a classic fencing grip, and battle (or something like it) is joined. You lose track of time with the constant back and forth, thrust and parry, and circling footwork. Rochelle introduces you to the classic fencing lanes painted on her floor, as well as the circles of defense, shifting between various drills and methods of sparring with ease.

After some time, you realize that Celyse is watching you with an amused smirk, Phillip with a wide-eyed stare. Rochelle lowers her sword and waves. "I guess time goes by quickly when you're having fun," she says.

➥ *Mark one progress in combat training.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *Read entry 4765.*

5802

You adjourn to the salon and sit enjoying the sun through the south windows. Celyse rings a bell, and the raven-haired serving girl appears. "Tea, please, Mathilda, thank you."

You chat briefly about her young charges as you wait. "Humans recover so fast," says Celyse. "I suppose they have to, with lives so short. They miss their sister terribly, but life continues. Since my return—and thank you for that—I've seen them smile and even heard them laugh from time to time."

Mathilda returns with a tray including a silver tea service and a cluster of small, flaky biscuits. Celyse thanks her and dismisses her.

➥ *You each recover one stamina.*

"What have you been up to all these years?"

➥ *Read entry 3033.*

"What can you tell me about the Fairfax household?"

➥ *Read entry 3015.*

"What do you know about Kyric?"

➥ *Read entry 9442.*

5803

"Oh," says Grisbeck as you turn him down. "Well, o'course, I don' know what I was thinkin'. Gettin' ahead of meself, quite forward, all that." He coughs, then stands abruptly and vanishes back into the kitchen where you hear him clattering and banging around.

"Och, poor Dah," says Penny. "He fancies ye, y'know. But don't ye worry, he'll be right soon enough."

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5806

"Oh, I haven't really thought about that," says Mariam, setting down her mug of cider. "The shop just opened, and Braxton's rather busy with this captain of the guard business."

"And there's the threat of Kyric to consider," agrees Braxton. "We'll be staying here for the immediate future, at least. But once things are settled, I would like to take you for a proper honeymoon."

"Oh my goodness!" breathes Mariam. "We could go visit your mother!"

"We might, at that," says Braxton with a smile. "Perhaps my brothers, too, just to see the looks on their faces." Mariam giggles, and the two press their foreheads together, smiling.

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

5809

Theodore takes a long drink before continuing. "When I was drafted into the war, you know, the first one, I ran to the forest and I went to the Tree of Tales and I begged the spirits to spare me, to save me from the horrors of war. And I don't know that they heard me, except of course here I sit, and there was one other thing. It was on my way back from the Tree, you know, I was crossing over that stream, the one that feeds the millpond. It was a shortcut I knew, a little off the trail. And so I splashed through the stream and leapt from rock to rock, and wouldn't you know it, the last rock leapt back." He chuckles at the memory. "It was a frog! A monstrous huge frog as big as a cart! It fixed me with its most affronted glare, as offended as I've ever seen a frog before. 'I'm sorry for stepping on your head,' I said. The monster just croaked at me and hopped away. And I don't know what to make of a frog the size of a goat, except the spirits must have been involved somehow, I figure." He gazes at the block of wood in his hands, which is shaped just slightly like a frog.

"That reminds me of a story…"

Continue listening to Theodore.

➥ *Read entry 6927.*

Leave before he starts telling another story.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5831

Fiore explains, "When the mine was originally dug, the richest veins of ore intersected with a large underground river, which kept the tunnels submerged. The mining engineers used a series of waterwheels and Dunwarr water screws to pull water from the lower levels up and out of the mine."

"The pipeworks itself are a double safety system," continues Fiore. "But the backup is down here, at the emergency dam. With how long the mine has been abandoned, the dam is likely holding back an entire river. That is, if it hasn't collapsed and flooded the heart of the mine. In any case, if the pipeworks aren't already running when you get down there, you should activate them if you can."

"What can you tell me about the blastworks?"

➥ *Read entry 9796.*

"Anything else I should know?"

➥ *Read entry 1534.*

5867

You follow Mariam inside to find that the interior of the shop is a scene of surprising devastation. Everything in the back room is covered in thick black soot except for a human-shaped silhouette against one wall. The furniture lies in ruins, and part of the interior wall leans drunkenly into the front room.

The door between the rooms is gone—in fact, you think that might be it lying against the front wall, charred and lying in a pile of ash. "I think whatever was in this cauldron exploded," says Mariam from the back room, nudging a twisted piece of blackened, corroded metal with her foot. She pads through the wreckage to the front room, where the wall is covered in ash. "The door flew off its hinges, hit the shelf here, where the Lorimor fire was kept. Fwoosh. Never store Lorimor fire in a wooden building." She turns a slow circle and exhales a long breath.

"Well, I've got my work cut out for me," says Mariam. "Most of these floor boards and walls will need to be replaced. No use standing around; I'm off to get the deed!" With that, she exits the shop through the hole in the back door and skips off toward the village hall.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5868

The dwarf shakes his head, clutching the book to his beard. "No, I'm afraid I can't accept a silver less. I need this money to get home, so I can carve my father's funereal monument."

If you have empathy (skill) or persuasion (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 7157.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 4135.*

5874

You settle down by the fire with Sapphire and Isaek.

"I was just telling Isaek how much Mariam reminds me of my sister at her age," says Sapphire.

"I can see it," says Isaek with a smile. "I don't see much of myself in her."

"It's there," says Sapphire. "Underneath. She's thoughtful and clever, Isaek. Like you."

"You flatterer," says Isaek, preening his white mustache.

"Where have you been traveling, Isaek?"

➥ *Read entry 8129.*

"Do wanderer gnomes settle in one place for long?"

➥ *Read entry 5061.*

"What was Mariam's mother like?"

➥ *Read entry 2783.*

5879

"Please forgive her," says Regina. "She never asked for any of this." She pauses and closes her eyes as a shiver passes through her, then sighs and straightens. Her eyes open, brilliant and clear and green. "Rochelle shows openly the grief we all feel in my household. Still, we are grateful. I feel that we will need more heroes willing to step forward in the days to come. People who will make the attempt to make the world better, even when it is hard, even when failure seems certain." She stands, trembling only slightly, and extends her hand to you. "I fear that Rochelle may have cause to call upon you before too long."

➥ *Mark two progress in heroism.*

You kiss Countess Regina's signet ring and then are escorted from the hall by Celyse, who looks more upset than you've seen her since Nerekhall.

"We all miss Phillip," she says as she leads you down the stairs. "Tell me everything that happened." The great hall is deserted aside from the stocky stablemaster, busying himself by the hearth, so you sit and do so. Celyse nods and asks clarifying questions as you go. "Regina doesn't talk about her brother Kyric much," she says. "But if I had any doubts that he'd arranged Sonia's death, they're gone now. He's two-thirds of the way toward his goal. We must ensure Rochelle stays protected. Fortunately, she's a more challenging target than either of her siblings."

Celyse walks you to the door and bids you good night. "I still think there must be a traitor within Regina's household. With Phillip dead, I no longer have a formal role as his tutor, but I'm going to stick by Rochelle's side until we get to the bottom of this. Get some rest; there will be more to do soon."

The rain shifts as you trudge back to the Swan for the night, becoming colder and more cutting. You try not to take it as a sign.

The next day, a ceremony is held at the shrine. Although the event is short, nearly the entire village is in attendance, spilling out of the shrine into the village green. A low murmur runs through the crowd, punctuated here and there with sobs. Rochelle says a few words, vowing to bring justice to Phillip's murderer. Celyse speaks of Phillip's virtues. Others speak next, each in their turn. It seems like almost everyone in town has something nice to say about Regina's youngest child. Even Sapphire climbs up to stand on a chair and say a few words.

Eventually, everyone filters out, leaving the noble household and the shrine attendants behind to perform the final steps of the funeral rites in privacy.

➥ *Read entry 5288.*

5883

You pull up a chair to sit near Grisbeck and Jasper, and moments later Penny and Mal climb into the seat next to yours. She sets a broad, flat slab of slate on the table in front of the toddler and then places a few pieces of chalk on top of it. Together, they begin to draw.

"I remember when Penny was so wee," sighs Grisbeck. "So much has changed since then, but it still feels like yesterday."

"I can only imagine," says Jasper. "He's already grown so fast, changed so much in the short time I've known my son."

They clink their glasses together. "To the children," they say as one.

Watch the children and chat with the adults.

➥ *Read entry 9309.*

Draw with Penny and Malachite.

➥ *Read entry 7993.*

5894

A bonfire burns at the edge of the green, surrounded by chattering crowds of villagers and gnomes. A large band of gnomes and humans is sawing their way through a variety of folk songs, alternating between the two traditions and learning as they go. The dancers, a mixture of visiting gnomes and Dragonholt villagers, are likewise teaching one another dances to go with the music. Among the dancers, the newlyweds Braxton and Mariam are radiant, although the flowers in their hair are becoming somewhat tattered. You also see Sapphire, Jasper, Grisbeck, and Penny intermingled among the crowd.

Resting against the paddock, you see Skala, the orc shrine attendant, watching and smoking his pipe.

Join the crowd in song and dance.

➥ *Read entry 3826.*

Talk with Skala about Dragonholt's traditions.

➥ *Read entry 5045.*

Leave the village green.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

5908

You do your best to avoid hard labor over the course of the harvest, which proves more difficult than you thought. People keep seeing you and dragging you into some chore or another, and you eventually wind up hiding in the back room of the library with Celyse, reading and talking in quiet voices lest the villagers notice you.

"I'm going to visit the Tree of Tales," says Celyse as the harvest enters its second day. "Regina doesn't want anyone going into the forest for fear of the bandits right now, but I figure together we should be safe enough." Since you've already had to duck out of being pressed into a threshing gang, you readily agree and lead Celyse to the great oak.

Celyse spends a few hours making notes, climbing all over the tree, examining the charms and orisons left there by petitioners, and meditating in some sort of elf-trance, proclaiming the whole thing "fascinating." "It's definitely important to the spirits of this place," she says as you ride back.

The next day you ride to Evesmoore on some pretext Celyse invented, and so you spend the whole harvest riding the length and breadth of Lady Regina's territory, visiting each tiny hamlet and farmstead in its turn. Celyse takes copious notes at each stop. "Very valuable, this experience," avows Celyse as you pass beneath the dragon statues. "A much better use of my talents than manual labor."

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study, one progress in social practice, and one progress in spiritual meditation.*
➥ *Read entry 3385.*

5938

"Everything will go perfectly!" chirps Mariam, pausing to shove some sausage in her mouth. "I triple-checked everything last night—except, oh no, maybe I only double-checked the woundwort stock. And I left the burn salve to cool and set overnight, but what if something happened?"

Braxton reaches out and clasps a hand on Mariam's shoulder. "Mariam. Everything will be fine. We'll eat breakfast, and we'll walk over together, and we'll have plenty of time for last-minute disasters."

Mariam nods and swallows her sausage. She leans forward and kisses Braxton on the cheek. "Thanks, dear. How'd I get so lucky?"

"Mariam," murmurs Braxton, her cheeks flushing. "Not in front of the everyone."

"Would you like some extra help with the shop?"
➥ *Read entry 3736.*

"Could I use your laboratory to brew some potions?"
Requires alchemy (skill).
➥ *Read entry 6444.*

"Good luck today, Mariam!"
➥ *Read entry 1656.*

5955

As you approach the willow grove it seems that Braxton is sitting alone on a thick wool blanket beside a covered basket, but as you draw closer you see that Mariam is sitting tucked up against her, cutting an apple into segments with a pen knife. Braxton leans down and murmurs something in Mariam's ear, and the gnome laughs and crams an apple slice into Braxton's mouth. Braxton chews happily, enfolding Mariam in one arm and squeezing, gently.

Join them for lunch.
➥ *Mark story point W7.*
➥ *Read entry 4303.*

Leave them to their meal.
➥ *Read entry 4848.*

Follow the south road beyond the willow grove.
➥ *Read entry 1370.*

5957

A smile spreads across his features. "Oh, good, ah, that's brilliant," says Grisbeck, smoothing out his beard with one hand. He stays and keeps you company as you finish off the soda bread, which is sweet and a little tangy and quite an intriguing morsel, grinning and not saying much of anything.

As you say your goodbyes to him and Penny, Grisbeck points to the west. "And don't forget. Tonight. At th' dragon statues. I'll see ye there."

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6000

"Absolutely not," says Mariam. "I forbid it."

"Mariam," says Braxton. "I'm a knight. This is what I do."

"Those bandits nearly killed you last time!" Mariam scrambles to her feet on the counter; her eyes are level with Braxton's and shining with the threat of tears. "You tried to pretend that you weren't hurt—the big strong orc—but that was a lie, wasn't it!"

Braxton's eyes fall to the floor, conflicting emotions streaming across her face. She opens her mouth to speak, but she cannot find the words. She leans on the counter in silence.

"We'll be careful, Mariam. I promise."
➥ *Read entry 9788.*

"Phillip could be in grave danger."
➥ *Read entry 6969.*

"Just potions will be enough. Do you have any ready?"
➥ *Read entry 9971.*

"Get some rest, Braxton."
➥ *Mark story point I1*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6015

Grisbeck eventually decides on gold trim for his mask, then fetches you a sweet roll and a glass of milk and honey while you watch Penny work on hers. She explains that her mask is an owl, but it's not Thegn Owl, because she doesn't want to be Thegn Owl, she wants to be his very best friend who is also an owl.

She asks for help with attaching the beak and with painting the feathers, but you don't think your suggestions amount to much. Eventually, both masks are done, if rather amateurish, and you make your farewells.

- *You each recover one stamina.*
- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6027

You point out to Reginald that you are a gnome and you do, in fact, exist. The tall man just shakes his head and laughs. "Oh come on, did Gnorm put you up to this? Gnorman, buddy, you don't have to try to justify yourself to me. It's okay to be short."

"I am not short!" says Gnorman, his chest swelling. "I am a perfectly average height for a gnome!"

You affirm Gnorman's gnomishness and point out that Reginald is now conversing with more gnomes than orcs. Does he doubt the existence of orcs?

"That's different," says Reginald. "Everyone knows that we've fought all sorts of wars with the orcs, even if we're friends now. And I mean, look at her. No one is going to mistake Thelga for a human. No offense, Thelga."

"Offense taken," snarls Thelga, her tusks flashing.

"Oh, the old 'there's never been a gnomish state' canard," moans Gnorman. "We wanderer gnomes never had a need for a nation of our own, and the burrow gnomes live all over but they're hidden you moron."

"Sure they're hidden," laughs Reginald. "After all, they're very small."

You leave the conversation not at all certain that Reginald has been convinced, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.

- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*

Convince Reginald with your fists!

Requires seven or less time has passed today.

- *Read entry 8492.*

Find something else to occupy your time in the Hog.

Requires seven or less time has passed today.

- *Read entry 7622.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.

- *This encounter is complete.*

6028

You see Braxton at a table near the kitchen, leaning back in her chair with a relaxed expression. She too notices you and waves, motioning for you to join her.

Join Braxton in the common room.

- *Read entry 2609.*

Ignore Braxton and retire for the night.

- *All remaining time today passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.

- *This encounter is complete.*

6049

"Oh, they're out there, somewhere," says Mariam with a wave of her hand. "You know us gnomes, we don't settle down much. But my father taught me most of what I know about brewing potions, and my mother was almost as good a tailor as Aunt Sapphie before—never mind about that."

Mariam falls into an uncharacteristic silence for a time. She pours a fizzing liquid from a flask onto the floor. She then begins to scrub the area with a broom. To your surprise, the caked-on gunk simply dissolves, revealing not-too-damaged floorboards beneath.

"My father and brother are out on the road somewhere," continues Mariam. "I'm sure I'll see them at the next festival. Aunt Sapphie and Braxton are all the family I need for right now."

Braxton pokes her head in through the door. "I'm back," she says. "I suppose we'd better load the cart back up; you've gotten a lot done in here."

- *Read entry 9485.*

6052

With a good number of apples now filling her cart, the foreman leads you to the cider house at the edge of the orchard. You spend a while sorting apples into massive crates, then carting barrels of the lower-grade ones up to the press itself, tumbling them into the hopper and turning the massive crank to squeeze out the cider. You fill several barrels of cider that way, then set them aside to ferment.

"A good day's work," says the foreman. "Thanks for your help." She gives you a tall mug of cider and ten gold coins, then walks off, whistling.

- *You each lose one stamina. You each lose two additional stamina unless you have athletics (skill) or endurance (skill).*
- *You each gain 10 gold.*
- *Mark two progress in physical training.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6062

The assembled nobles accept your presence, perhaps because Ursula seems to respect you. Their conversation continues with or without your input.

Ask about Cunningham trade relations.
➥ *Read entry 5480.*

Ask about Belmont family history.
➥ *Read entry 6881.*

Ask about the regional partnership.
➥ *Read entry 8233.*

Leave the Countess Inn.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6063

The jingle of a silver bell greets you as you open the door. Behind the counter, you see Braxton holding a hammer in one hand and aligning a board along the door frame to the back room with the other. She holds several nails in her mouth as she works. You can hear Mariam humming happily and the sound of glass tinkling, but you do not see the gnome until she peeks over the counter that is just taller than she is.

"Well, look who it is!" bubbles Mariam. "A customer!" Braxton's reply is impossible to make out as she keeps her lips tight over the iron nails. Mariam hops up on the counter, sitting with her feet swinging. "Braxton, take a break. We have company!"

Braxton drives a nail home with quick, efficient strikes, then steps back to examine her work. She nods, spits the remaining nails into her hand, and smiles warmly at you. "It's good to see you," she says.

"How are the renovations to the shop coming along?"
➥ *Read entry 9291.*

"Do you have any potions for sale?"
Requires you have 25 or more gold
➥ *Read entry 2299.*

"Lady Regina's son has gone missing."
➥ *Read entry 8298.*

6079

You ask Sapphire for something to eat and she sets her sewing aside. "I can fix something. Wouldn't want you to go hungry!" A few minutes later you're seated at a table by the windows and tucking into a hearty, filling meal. Eventually, you can eat no more, and you push your chair back with a groan. Sapphire smirks as she clears your plate away.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6112

You join in with the troubadours and find their fast-paced and unusual style difficult to blend. The elf wanders over toward you and directs your attention to their fingers during the bridge. It seems this group's style includes a hitch in the rhythm, which makes even their traditional songs feel fresh and new. It takes you a bit to incorporate the trick into your own performance, but before long you're playing as if you've always been part of the band.

After finishing a frenetic and humorous version of "Harvesthorn's Autumn Maids," the elf hands you a jug of wellwater, and the band takes a brief break. "You learned our trick quickly," says the elf.

"That is the highest sort of praise from the Princeling," says the older of the human women, her large brown eyes crinkling with her smile. "My sisters and I had seen five of the Free Cities with him before he felt that we were 'competent.'"

"I have high standards," says the Princeling. "I admit it. But Lin, you and your sisters are divine. Together, we are something new. The Princeling and the Anders Sisters," he says to you. "Tell your friends."

"I'm adopted," volunteers the orc with the Lorimor lyra. She holds her ear next to the instrument as she tunes it. "It's not a big deal."

"Where are you headed next?"
➥ *Read entry 6327.*

"Will you be staying in Dragonholt long?"
➥ *Read entry 9617.*

Leave the village green.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6114

"Thank ye for returning Thegn Owl to me," says the little girl. "My name is Penny. Penny Hearthstone. Me an' me dah run the bakery here in the village." She gives you a little curtsy, then glances down at her owl, and her expression shatters. "Oh no!" she cries. "They've torn it again!"

Indeed, the owl's head remains connected to the rest of its body by only a single thread. "Ah well," she says, cradling the toy gently. "I'm still very grateful ye got it back. Maybe someday I'll be a hero like you."

➥ *Mark story point H8.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Repair the doll.
Requires craftsmanship (skill).
➥ *Read entry 9947.*

Bid Penny farewell.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6128

The orchard foreman cocks her head. "You new in town? These trees were planted with the village, you understand? Our ancestors are here, in the trees." She gestures to the closest tree, where a small wooden placard hangs from one bough, its paint faded from sun and time. "Both me sons, their ashes are buried under this tree here. Died in the war." She bows her head and doffs her leather cap.

"Everyone's got a friend or loved one who lives on in our apple trees. The countess's family, they've got that big tree in the middle of the grove. Young Sonia was just interred there the other day, may her tree grow strong." The foreman dons her hat again and turns away. "Anyway, I got work to do."

"Need help with the harvest?"

➥ *Read entry 4948.*

"Thanks for your time."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6147

You push through the Swan's door into a chill mist that must have rolled in during the scant few minutes you were stowing your gear and washing up. As you walk through the fog toward the manor house, a weak rain begins to fall.

The door to the manor swings open before you can knock, and Tymothi ushers you into the great hall where a collection of servants are cleaning up after dinner. "Her ladyship will see you directly," he says and leads you up a stair to the right, to a balcony overlooking the main hall, then through an archway into a large round tower room where Regina sits on a throne of black wood. Rochelle kneels at her feet, clinging to her mother's skirts. Celyse stands at one of the tall, narrow windows nearby, watching the rain run down the glass.

Regina beckons you closer, gesturing with one pale hand. Her golden signet ring gleams in the light of the hearth, its fire built tall. The room is uncomfortably warm. "We wish to thank you for your attempts on our behalf." One hand rests on her daughter's shoulder, and Rochelle shrugs it off.

"Don't speak for me, mother." She pushes herself to her feet, towering above the fading countess. Her green eyes are puffy and still damp with tears, and she rubs angrily at her nose. "Phillip is dead. I don't much feel like thanking anyone."

"You are my heir, Rochelle. When you are countess, being gracious even in the face of tragedy is just one of the things that will be expected of you."

"I'll only be countess when you die, and I've had enough visits from death of late!" Rochelle sweeps past you and stomps down the stairs.

➥ *Your fame decreases by one.*

➥ *Read entry 5879.*

6166

The Drunken Hog's common room is long and narrow, its rafters too low and its windows too high and small. The dim lighting and rushes on the floor hide what you judge from the smell is a terrible conglomeration of sick and mess and spilled ale. None of the patrons seem in the least put out by the squalor, and the room is full of raucous celebration and surly solitary alcoholism in equal measure.

Against the long east wall lies a counter of rough-hewn wood, as much palisade as bar. Behind it stands a gaunt orc woman, her cheeks marked with scars too regular to be accidental. At the counter leans a tall human man with broken veins and the red flush of alcohol coloring his speech. A short but heavily muscled gnome man perches atop a stool close at hand. They appear to be locked in an argument.

"I'm telling you, Thelga, there's no such thing as gnomes," says the human man to the orc.

The orc woman raises an eyebrow and nods her head toward the gnome—right? Yeah, he's clearly a gnome—sitting right next to the human. "So what about Gnorman then? What's he? He even spells his name with a 'G.'"

The gnome finishes his drink in one gulp. "Yeah, man! How do you explain me sitting right here if gnomes don't exist?"

The human makes a face somewhere between offended and pity. "Don't be so hard on yourself, Gnorm. You're just short. No reason to call yourself a gnome." He pats the gnome—seriously, he has to be a gnome—on the shoulder.

Gnorman brushes the human's hand aside. "'Gnome' isn't an insult, it's my race!" he exclaims, shaking his head. "Alright, what about Sapphire? Or the new girl, Sapphire's niece…" He trails off, snapping his fingers for a moment. "Miriam!"

"Mariam," corrects the orc woman.

The human man looks almost shocked. "Who? The little one that just came to town with the orc? She can't be more than a decade old. What are you on about?"

"I swear, Reginald, you're just impossible to deal with." He slaps two coins on the bar. "I need another drink, Thelga. This idiot is too much." The orc woman behind the bar chuckles and pours him another mug of ale, then pockets the coins.

Eat, drink, and engage in tavern banter.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 2038.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6197

Mariam leads you to the supply of tools. "If you could cut some of these boards to length, that would be very helpful, thank you," she says. "But keep your name suggestions to yourself. I'll think of one. It'll be great."

She returns to Braxton as you use a length of string, a piece of chalk, and a hand saw to measure and cut lengths of board. Mariam continues to coach Braxton through the process of hammering the boards in place, lingering by her side far after it's clear that Braxton has understood the nuances.

➥ *Time passes.*

Occasionally, when they don't think you're looking, you see Mariam rest her hand on Braxton's shoulder or the back of her neck, or Braxton smile shyly at the gnome. Not a lot is said, until they seem to remember you're there and Mariam clears her throat and marches across the room to gather more nails.

"We're making great progress!" she says. "Thanks so much for your help."

Ask Mariam where she learned carpentry.

➥ *Read entry 6835.*

Ask Braxton what she does besides helping Mariam.

➥ *Read entry 2336.*

Ask Mariam and Braxton about their relationship.

➥ *Read entry 9532.*

6203

The librarian shows you to the bookbindery, a side room where sheets upon sheets of loose paper lie carefully stacked, with glue and thread and boards and the other necessities of bookbinding close at hand. Settling down at the workbench, you carefully stitch together a completed manuscript. Once that's done, you glue the pages inside a bracket of stiff boards and fasten a vice around the book while the glue sets. Finally, you wrap the whole thing in leather and burn the title into the cover with a hot iron.

When the librarian sees your work, she seems impressed, nodding as she turns the book over and over in her hands. "I'll always have work for someone of your skill," she says, passing you a handful of coins.

➥ *You each gain 25 gold if you have craftsmanship (skill).*
➥ *Two time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6206

With the lock broken, the door swings open easily under your knock. Nothing is stopping you from walking inside.

➥ *Read entry 2876.*

6216

You mention Mathilda, the servant, and Celyse bursts into laughter. "Mathilda? The poor girl is surly at times, I'll grant you, but I can't imagine a less likely traitor in the household. I've seen her faint dead away at the sight of a slaughtered duck. She would never have the stomach for espionage and murder."

Celyse shakes her head. "If Mathilda did want me dead, or Sonia or anyone else in the household for that matter, it would be a childishly simple exercise for her to poison our tea. No, I'm sorry, I cannot believe that Mathilda of all people could be Kyric's secret patsy."

"There's something else."

➥ *Read entry 2127.*

"That's all I had."

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6232

Hunter nods at you as you enter, then goes back to cleaning his bar. Theodore leans back and places his knife flat on the counter and sighs. "You know, that reminds me of a story…"

Listen to Theodore's story.

➥ *Read entry 5534.*

Order something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 8054.*

Leave the Chatty Archer.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6259

The guard house door stands open, revealing a spare room with a crude desk and a large iron bell. A black iron cage covers the entire back wall, its gate secured with a heavy lock. Swords, poleaxes, coats of mail, and various other armaments glimmer in the shadows of the cage.

If zero or one time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 5656.*

If two to four time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 7634.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 9930.*

6278

You suggest playing a prank on Mariam and Braxton to welcome them to their new home, and Sapphire devolves into giggles. "No!" she says. "We couldn't. Well. We could. I do still owe Mariam for the whipped cream incident. And I do have a key to the shop." She shoots to her feet, grabbing your arm and hauling you upright. "Let's go."

You pack up and creep to the apothecary shop, where Sapphire carefully opens the back door, and you slip inside. The lights are out, and there are no sounds aside from your own muffled footsteps and giggling; Braxton and Mariam must already be asleep.

If you have alchemy (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 5784.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2400.*

6281

"Oh, don't worry about that," says Phillip. "Some people always forget; we keep a collection of masks available for guests at the door. But most of them are rather plain…" He wrestles Mal into his arms and dangles him over this back, where the child giggles and kicks. "Oh, Celyse! Don't you have a spare mask?"

"I do, as it happens." Celyse drums her fingers on the table, studying your face. "Yes, it will do nicely I think. Come see me at the library today and I'll give it to you."

"It's a very fine mask," says Phillip. "Miss Celyse made it while I was working on mine." He leans toward you and speaks in a hoarse whisper, as if imparting a great secret. "Mine has a butterfly wing that rises over half my face. I can't wait for you to see it."

➥ *Read entry 1388.*

6291

Mariam wipes her face with a sleeve and takes a deep breath. "Don't go anywhere just yet."

Mariam hops off the counter and scurries into the back room. She returns a moment later holding two bottles of red liquid. "Take these with you. You can pay me back later if you don't have the gold now."

➥ *You gain two healing potions (item A). You may distribute them among yourselves.*

➥ *Mark story point O4 unless you spend 50 gold.*

With a final farewell and "good luck" from Braxton, you leave the shop. The silver bell jingling as the door closes behind you.

➥ *Mark story point I1.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6300 (Apothecary Shop)

The apothecary shop is a two-story building featuring a large storefront and multiple back rooms. A show window fills nearly the entire front wall of the building, looking out toward the village green.

If five or less time has passed today…

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The apothecary shop is not open at this time.*
This encounter is complete.

6301 (Apothecary Shop — Day One)

The walls of the apothecary shop are darkened by soot and burnt wood. The front door and its frame are splintered as if the door had been blown off its frame by an explosion. Several boards fastened in a sheet are nailed over what was once a large show window.

If zero time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 7542.*

If three or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 8272.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The apothecary shop is not open at this time.*
This encounter is complete.

6302 (Apothecary Shop — Day Two)

The walls of the apothecary shop are still darkened by soot and burnt wood, but you see the front door and its frame have been replaced. The boards that previously covered the front window have been replaced by a tarp.

If zero or one time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 4955.*

If three or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 7842.*

Otherwise…

➥ *The apothecary shop is not open at this time.*
This encounter is complete.

6303 (Apothecary Shop — Day Three)

Although the exterior walls of the apothecary shop are still darkened by soot and burnt wood, you see that the front window has been replaced, and the door has been painted a bright red color.

If three or more time has passed today or story point I1 is marked…

➥ *The apothecary shop is not open at this time.*
This encounter is complete.

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6063.*

6304 (Apothecary Shop — Day Four)

The shop has been completely restored, with no sign that it was a gutted ruin only a short time ago. A large banner hangs outside, the words "Grand Opening!" written on it in friendly letters.

As you pass inside, you find the shop decorated with sunflowers and sprigs of lavender in every corner and crowded with patrons and the curious. You see Braxton emerge through the back door, carrying a wooden crate full of glass bottles, which she carefully unpacks onto a high shelf. Mariam is standing on the counter, talking in rapid-fire sentences to two patrons at once, explaining how her elixir will relieve an elderly human woman's back pain ("willow bark in spring tonic, will reduce swelling and dull the pain!") and how her cough tonic will cure an orc man's son's cold ("hyssop and elder flower in honey").

After a few moments, Mariam hands over small glass bottles to both customers in exchange for jingling coins, which she tucks into her apron. Then she bounds off the counter and jogs over to you. "Good to see you!" she says. "Isn't this great? How can I help you?"

Offer your assistance running the shop.
➥ *Read entry 2599.*

Browse the potions and elixirs in the shop.
➥ *Read entry 7699.*

6305 (Apothecary Shop — Day Five)

A sign hangs from the door to the apothecary shop, its message painted in large, friendly letters. "Getting married at the willow grove!" it reads. "Reception to follow at the Swan."

Despite the sign, the door isn't locked, and you step inside to find another sign on the counter, next to a small basket of coins. "Honor system," the second sign reads. "Help yourself and leave your coins in the basket. Thank you!"

A pair of gnomes chatter by one of the shelves, their rough clothing and the weapons hanging from their belts suggesting that they lead interesting or even adventurous lives.

Watch the gnomes to ensure they pay.
➥ *Read entry 9322.*

Purchase some potions.
➥ *Read entry 8085.*

Steal some potions and the coins.
Requires thievery (skill).
➥ *Mark story point G3.*
➥ *Read entry 9859.*

Use Mariam's alchemy equipment.
Requires alchemy (skill).
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *Read entry 5624.*

Leave the shop.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6306 (Apothecary Shop — Day Six)

The shop is relatively quiet, which (judging from Mariam's bedraggled appearance) is a good thing. The only customer that you can see is Hunter, the bartender at the Chatty Archer. He hands Mariam some coins and receives a small paper envelope that rattles with some sort of pills in exchange, then thanks her for her time. He steps around you with a nod as he leaves, and Mariam waves weakly in your direction.

"It's too hot and I think I drank too much at my wedding," she complains. "And for some reason I don't stock a miracle hangover cure. What can I help you with?" She tugs at her shirt and does her best to fan herself against the heat.

Ask what Hunter was doing here.
➥ *Read entry 1577.*

Browse the potions and elixirs in the shop.
➥ *Read entry 7699.*

6307 (Apothecary Shop — Day Seven)

Inside the shop, Mariam stands talking to a grey-haired woman by a rack of potions and dried herbs. "Be with you in a moment!" she calls, then goes back to her conversation. A few other customers browse her shelves; it seems that Mariam's new business is succeeding.

After a moment, the grey-haired woman pays for a small package, and Mariam rushes back to her counter to help the next customer.

➥ *Read entry 7699.*

6327

"We're traveling from Nerekhall down toward Dawnsmoor," explains Lin. She sets aside her drum and starts massaging her hands with her thumbs. "The Princeling declared that we would have to tour all of the Free Cities, to share our music with the world. And Dawnsmoor is the last one."

"Frostgate was wild," opines the orc sister. "I just wish we had been there in the winter. It's supposed to be a much more interesting city in the winter months."

"After Dawnsmoor, we head west," declares the Princeling. "Perhaps the Empire of Lorimor will be an appreciative audience."

"I'd like to hear what music they're playing there," says Lin, nodding her head. "But I hear the journey is dangerous."

"Nothing we three can't handle," says the third sister, dusting her fingers with some sort of rosin. "And the Princeling will be there, too, which might be a net positive."

"Will you be staying in Dragonholt long?"
➥ *Read entry 9617.*

Leave the village green.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6338

"Oh, would ye?" says Penny, clapping her hands. "I'd like that." She turns on her stool and bellows: "Dah! We got some extra hands now!"

The dwarf baker comes bustling back out into the front room, brushing flour from his hands. "What's this now? Well, I canna say we don't need th' help." Soon, you are installed behind the glass counter, taking orders and money from a steady stream of patrons. Penny, with all the grave solemnity a nine-year-old can muster, teaches you everything you need to know, showing you where the money is to be placed, helping you remember all the prices, and teaching you where to find each item on the menu.

"Ah, Penny, I see you've been promoted," says one customer, a willowy human woman with a sad smile. "How is your new help working out?"

"Very well," Penny declares. "I believe I will be able to help me Dah in the back soon."

"I do believe you will be running the entire shop by sundown," the customer says.

➥ *Mark two progress in social practice.*
➥ *Two time passes.*

In time, Penny leaves you to your own devices behind the counter and busies herself with bringing food to patrons seated at the bakery's few tables, vanishing into the kitchen to shout orders at her father. You scramble to keep up, but eventually the rush dies down and the baker claps you on the shoulder with one floury hand.

"Ye done good work," he says. "Let me fix ye a little somethin'." He presses a loaf of steaming golden honey bread on you, along with a wedge of cheese and a trencher of rich-smelling stew, then crouches down by his copper-haired daughter. "Thank ye for all yer help t'day, treasure. Run along an' play, now, and I'll see ye for suppertime." She kisses his forehead and races to a shelf behind the counter, where she takes down a small toy owl, knit from colored yarn.

"I have a gift for you, Penny."
Requires cloth doll (item).
➥ *Read entry 8178.*

"Thank you for the meal."
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6348

You line up several of the finer examples of your handiwork on the blanket and soon attract a number of interested buyers. You do a brisk trade in your crafts, selling to farmers, herders, villagers, and other merchants alike—even accepting some coins as a down payment on a future commission.

➥ *You gain 25 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Read entry 1064.*

6435

"Why, Jasper, that sounds like an excellent chance to show what you've got," says Sapphire with a smirk.

"Anything to get away from these accounts," says Jasper, pushing away from the table and fleeing into the kitchen. He returns soon after with a piping hot meal, sizzling and fragrant with rich spices. He seats you at a nearby table and leaves you to eat, which you do with gusto. Eventually you push your empty plate away, and Sapphire nods.

"Not bad," she says to Jasper. "You might have what it takes after all."

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6444

"My new equipment is all prepared," Mariam says. "And I won't have much chance to use it myself today, I hope, with all the customers I'll be tending to!"

"You'll have to provide your own ingredients, however," says Braxton.

"What? Oh, yes, I suppose I should stop giving away the stock for free if I'm going to make a living at this." Mariam shrugs and smiles, as if to apologize. "I'm sure you've had plenty of chances to find some fun ingredients, though, with all your heroing about."

➥ *Read entry 1656.*

6452

The rising sun brings with it a rising sound of chatter and commotion. It seems, somehow, that the village is even noisier this morning than it had been on the market day yesterday. You rise and look through the window to find the streets already bustling, crammed full of gnomes. Gnomes run shouting toward one another, coming together like old friends long apart. Gnomes cluster in groups, laughing and talking. Gnomes rush hither and yon, carrying goods and supplies every which way. The few humans on the streets at this hour alternate between lending a hand and staring in mute amazement.

You dress yourself and open the door, intending to go down to the common room for breakfast. Standing in the hall just outside your door is a young boy, a gnome toddler sucking his thumb. He stares up at you silently with large blue-green eyes.

"Malachite! There you are!" A gnome man climbs the stairs into the hall. He's young for a father—no more than his early twenties—with bronzed skin and a tangle of messy dark-brown hair. The child toddles over to the man and is scooped up to sit held on the man's hip. "Sorry if he was bothering you," says the

gnome before he hoists the boy over his shoulder and turns to descend the stairs. "Let's go back downstairs, buddy." The toddler flexes his fingers in your direction as a sort of unpracticed wave.

Downstairs, you find the common room buzzing with activity. Dozens of gnomes sit or stand everywhere. As you watch, the door opens, and a group of three gnomes comes inside, kicking dust from their boots and doffing traveling capes. Sapphire greets them warmly as she hurries by, carrying a platter piled high with golden eggs and steaming ham. As she returns to the kitchen she meets a gnome woman with her frizzy hair bundled behind a green kerchief. They exchange words, and the frizzy-haired woman rushes to the newcomers and escorts them to a table near the back wall, encouraging the gnomes already sitting there to shift on their benches and make room. A young gnome man with a silver stud flashing in his ear soon delivers a pitcher of cider to the newcomers—clearly, Sapphire has acquired additional staff to accommodate the rush, although it's not clear from where.

The gnome man you met earlier sees you standing at the stairs and beckons you over to his table, where he bounces his son on his knee. "I'll make room," he says. "I guess you weren't expecting the crowd." You sit, and a few moments later Sapphire approaches, clattering a broad plate of eggs and ham to the table in front of you.

"Oh, good," she says. "I see you've met my nephew Jasper and his son Mal. My brother's son. Mariam's cousin," she explains.

"Pleased to meet you," says Jasper. "Aunt Sapphire, this is who you were telling me about?"

Sapphire blushes slightly. "Now, Jasper, don't you go making me out to be some sort of gossip."

"Oh, no, Auntie, I'd never do that." Jasper says, then winks at you.

"What's going on? There are so many gnomes here."

➥ *Read entry 3807.*

"Will you be staying in Dragonholt long, Jasper?"

➥ *Read entry 4838.*

"I must be going. Thanks for breakfast."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6476

Harvest continues for three more days. Work gangs spring up in the village green threshing the beans from their pods and packing them for storage through the winter. The village goats are set loose in the bean field, eating their fill of the remaining plants, and a team of oxen appears to plow under the fields.

Harvest ends with a great bonfire and a feast on the market street. "No venison this year," notes the old woodworker Theodore. "Her ladyship won't have anyone hunting in the forest right now. Why, this reminds me of a story…"

➥ *Read entry 3385.*

6483

"Oh, perhaps you hadn't heard. Aside from the dragon spotted near Evesmoore today, there have been two other dragons of note in relatively recent history. Countess Regina, of course, vanquished one twenty-five years ago."

Celyse grins like a fox at your expression. "Don't underestimate her. Regina is frail now, but in her youth she was a terror. She wouldn't have been made countess over her brother otherwise." Celyse stirs her tea and thinks. "And the other one, well, that was almost a century gone, I think. A powerful dragon had already defeated the forces the three counts arrayed against it when a traveling hero named Kharthuun came to the rescue. He had some great magical power, perhaps a potent runebound shard, that allowed him to defeat the dragon. He was celebrated as a hero and buried somewhere north of here." Celyse frowns and picks up her tea. "Now that I think of it, I'm not certain whether he survived killing that dragon. Ah well."

She drinks and sets her tea down. "I haven't done any sort of comparative analysis, but there are other stories of dragons threatening the region, going back all the way to the settlement's founding after the Dragon Wars. I think it's likely that this is the most dragon-plagued region in the barony, perhaps in all of Terrinoth."

➥ *Mark story points U3 and Y3.*

Ask about Dragonlord Varinex and Shaarina.

➥ *Read entry 4106.*

Change the subject.

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

6490

Braxton shrugs. "There isn't much to tell, in truth. I was knighted rather unexpectedly, after saving Lord Kahler from a pack of beastmen. I didn't even know what being a knight meant, at the time. I spent my first year just training, learning to ride a horse, to fight properly, to read and write in the common tongue, things like that."

Braxton settles a particularly large timber on the pile and stares into the distance for a moment. "I served Lord Kahler for, what, almost ten years I think. In his service I led a campaign against a rebel lord, I fought in a war, I even killed a manticore. Two, actually, a mated pair that were taking cows from my lord's pastures." Braxton sighs. "Everyone thought I should be so proud of that, but I felt wretched. There were little manticore…lings? Manticorelets? In the den. I brought them back to the manor to see if the houndmaster could rear them, but they died."

Braxton brushes her hands clean and grabs hold of the now-empty cart again. "I think some peace and quiet would suit me better than adventures as a knight, to be honest. Let's go back to the shop."

➥ *Read entry 9485.*

6500 (Chatty Archer)

An archery butt lies under a maple tree outside this rustic lodge-style tavern. Several arrows are stuck within it, and others stand point-down in the earth by the tavern's polished pinewood door. A strung bow hangs over the door, nestled under the awning to protect it from the elements.

If four or more time has passed today...

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

Otherwise...

➥ *The Chatty Archer is not open until evening.*
This encounter is complete.

6501 (Chatty Archer — Day One)

You open the door and step into a warmly lit hall containing a smattering of oak tables and chairs. A long counter stretches the length of the left wall, bar stools in a row on one side and a shelf holding bottles of varying shapes, sizes, and colors on the other.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open...

➥ *Read entry 8752.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 6232.*

6502 (Chatty Archer — Day Two)

A small group of women passes a horn of ale around as they throw darts at a wooden board. Occasionally they burst out into peals of laughter for no obvious reason. An elderly human man sits at the bar whittling, as flakes of wood float to land on his legs and the floor beneath him.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open...

➥ *Read entry 8752.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 6232.*

6503 (Chatty Archer — Day Three)

The barkeeper, Hunter, is standing in the middle of the room with his old regular, Theodore. The two men are pointing at the rafters and supports and conversing in a low voice. When he sees you come in, Hunter claps Theodore on the shoulder and walks back behind the bar.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open...

➥ *Read entry 8752.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 6232.*

6504 (Chatty Archer — Day Four)

An inebriated man, his nose pink, staggers past you to the archery butt outside, followed by a small crowd. Egged on by their cheers, he tries and fails to land an arrow on the butt three times, to general laughter.

A dark-haired woman, Lei, emerges from the kitchens with a heavily laden tray. She pauses at the bar to lean in and trade a kiss with Hunter, the barkeeper, then carries her tray to a nearby table. Theodore, the old regular, sighs at the exchange. "Ah," he says. "Young love."

If story point K8 is marked but Y6 is not...

➥ *Read entry 5673.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 6232.*

6505 (Chatty Archer — Day Five)

The hall is crowded with villagers and gnomes, chattering, gesticulating, and swapping stories. Theodore, wearing what seems to be his best coat, is in his usual spot by the bar, telling stories. A small group of gnomes is playing a game in which they throw beans into mugs of beer laid out on a table. It seems that the game is punctuated by drinking the beer, but you cannot discern the hows or whys.

Listen to Theodore's story.

➥ *Read entry 8786.*

Order something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold

➥ *Read entry 9143.*

Leave the Chatty Archer.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6506 (Chatty Archer — Day Six)

A collection of rough-looking men and women, with a below-standard number of eyes, fingers, and limbs between them, shares stories of their adventures in the wilds. Hunter, the barkeep, listens with half an ear as a woman with a bear-skin cloak resting on the back of her chair describes her own close encounter with a dragon some years ago and a hundred leagues to the east.

➥ *Read entry 6232.*

6507 (Chatty Archer — Day Seven)

A stout human woman with her white hair in two pronounced buns on the sides of her head stands at a table, boasting in a loud voice about her many hunting and fishing triumphs to a mostly younger audience. Judging from the incredulous looks on the faces of the onlookers, she is exaggerating her prowess more than a little.

➥ *Read entry 6232.*

6546

The silver bell on the door jingles as Braxton exits the shop. Mariam wipes her face with a sleeve and takes a deep breath. "Don't go anywhere just yet."

Mariam hops off the counter and scurries into the back room. She returns a moment later holding two bottles of red liquid. "Take these with you. You can pay me back later if you don't have the gold now."

- *You gain two healing potions (item A). You may distribute them among yourselves.*
- *Mark story point O4 unless you spend 50 gold.*

Mariam looks you in the eyes. You can see tears starting to form once more. "You be safe out there too! Bring Braxton and the boy home."

- *Mark story point I1.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6554

You dance along with the music as the elf struts and gyrates in front of the others. Something about the rhythm makes even old, traditional songs feel fresh and new and surprisingly easy to dance to, and you throw yourself into it with abandon, moving your body and shaking your head.

After finishing a particularly frenetic and humorous piece, the band pauses to drink and tune their instruments.

"I saw you dancing," says the elf, whose eyes you realize are an intense purple to match their silk tunic. "We always like to be appreciated."

"Don't pay the Princeling any mind," says the older of the human women, her brown eyes crinkling with her smile. "He's just playing that exotic, alluring outsider role to the hilt. We've been to seven of the Free Cities now with him, me and my sisters, and he pulls this same routine everywhere we go."

"Lin," says the Princeling, whirling to fix her with his gaze. "I know you're jealous, but how could I choose from among you three beautiful women? I couldn't be the one to drive you sisters apart."

The orc with the Lorimor lyra glances up from where she tunes it and snorts at your expression. "I'm adopted," she explains. "It's not a big deal."

"Where are you headed next?"
- *Read entry 6327.*

"Will you be staying in Dragonholt long?"
- *Read entry 9617.*

Leave the village green.
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6600

You trek west through orchards and across a rocky plain, following the main road in an effort to pick up any sign of Phillip's passage. As you reach the edge of the forest, you see three people marching down the road toward you: a pot-bellied orc man, a twitchy-looking elf woman, and a bald and scarred human man. Between them, they are carrying two still figures, a slim brown boy with delicate features and a bearded man with his black hair streaked with silver.

"Ah," says the orc, laying down the youth's body. "Good, I was worried we'd have to cart this refuse all the way to the village. Toss that big bugger down here, Dez, Twitch." The orc grins savagely, fingering a wicked-looking knife at his belt. "We just happened to find these lying around in the woods."

"You should be more careful with your things," sneers the elf woman as she and the human toss the older man to the ground. "Little boys shouldn't wander around in Eventide Forest. Who knows what terrible things could happen."

"Did happen," corrects the orc, then guffaws and turns to go. His compatriots follow, leaving you alone with Phillip's and Talbot's corpses. You gather the bodies and return to Dragonholt.

- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6622

"Is that right?" asks Hunter. "Tell us about it, Theo." The tavern owner sets a small bowl of nuts in front of you as the older man begins to tell a story about climbing trees in the forest. You can tell immediately this story will last some time. Hunter leans over the counter to whisper to you, "Don't mind old Theodore. He just likes to tell his stories to anyone who'll listen. Can't tell if he forgets he's already told the stories or if he just likes telling them again."

Listen to Theodore's story.
- *Read entry 3231.*

Order something to eat.

Requires you each spend 5 gold
- *Read entry 8054.*

Leave the Chatty Archer.
- *This encounter is complete.*

6645

The dwarf woman's eyebrows rise as you make your counteroffer. "Don't get too far ahead of yourself," she chides. "I'm the only person in the village who knows how to make and use these. You think you're going to get a better offer?"

If you have persuasion (skill) or streetwise (skill)…
- *Read entry 2193.*

Otherwise…
- *Read entry 4325.*

6646

As night gathers, you stagger into the village green, carrying Phillip's corpse. Despite the hour, a number of people are gathered in the green, clutching candles and lanterns. You feel a murmur rustle through the small crowd as they notice you and the body you carry.

You lay Phillip down in the grass, sinking to your knees. The crowd parts, and a young woman rushes toward you. "Phillip!" she cries, dropping down beside you in a rustle of skirts, her candle falling from numb fingers. As she bends over the young man's death-pale face, you see that she has his same delicate features, the same large green eyes and light-brown skin, although hers still has the bloom of life. "So I'm the last," she breathes, her tears falling onto Phillip's face.

After a moment, she turns her attention to you. Her voice sounds ragged, torn from her by a wild animal. "Why didn't you save my brother? I wanted to go after him, get him back at swordpoint if need be, but mother refused. She said the famous adventurers, Celyse's friends, would do the job. And like a fool, I believed her."

She stands, and the crowd gathers closer, silent hands lifting Phillip into the air. "What shall we do with him, Lady Rochelle?" asks one woman.

"Take him to the shrine," says Phillip's sister. "I suppose I will have to tell my mother that her heroes have failed."

With that, she stalks away, and the assembly disperses.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6669

At Mariam's frantic waving, you settle down across the table from her and her father Isaek, a slim gnome with a sharp white mustache. "Daddy," she says, "this is who I was telling you about."

"I see," says Isaek. "I understand I have you and Braxton to thank for saving my daughter from bandits. I'm grateful."

"Me, too," says Mariam. She hops to her feet and smooths her wavy blue skirt with one hand. "Speaking of Braxton, I'm going to go look for my wife." She giggles and flounces off, leaving you and Isaek together.

"Mariam says you taught her alchemy."
➥ *Read entry 7371.*

"Any good stories from your travels?"
➥ *Read entry 3081.*

"Mariam doesn't talk about her mother much."
➥ *Read entry 5175.*

"Is it odd that she married an orc?"
➥ *Read entry 3806.*

6703

Mariam seems uncertain she wants to accept your help at first. "Oh, no, I mean, I can't pay you—"

"You're not paying me, either," says Braxton, sitting with her legs dangling between floor joists. "Consider the possibility that we're doing this because we like you."

You set about tearing up floorboards and removing wall paneling with Braxton while Mariam cleans trash and debris from the corners, meanwhile swapping stories of your various adventures.

➥ *Mark one progress in physical training.*
➥ *You each lose two stamina.*
➥ *Time passes.*

"I don't think we have a story to top your exploits in Nerekhall," says Braxton.

"Sure we do," says Mariam. "Remember that business with the circus faire?"

"Mariam—" Braxton attempts to interrupt.

"And the clown? And the bear? And the naga tamer?" continues Mariam excitedly.

"We promised the monkey we wouldn't talk about it," says Braxton in a hush but stern tone.

"Oh, right," says Mariam. "Never mind! No one stole anyone's pearls." She returns to cleaning, humming as she sweeps. "Anyway, I think he was an ape."

If two or more time has passed today…
➥ *Read entry 3253.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9400.*

6716

You point out that a feather and a stone decidedly do not fall at the same speed, which launches into a discussion about the effects of air and surface area as compared to an object's mass and its displacement, and soon Sasha and you are chattering away and drawing diagrams on a slate.

"…of course we know that there is something physical, tangible, to the air, because we know that wind blows and we can feel it," says Sasha, turning and then flapping to a limp halt at the sight of Ainsley's disapproving face. "Too loud?" she asks.

"Indeed," says the librarian.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

Search the library for other materials about this topic.
➥ *Read entry 1362.*

Leave her to study in peace.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6719

There are three competing books describing the Dragon Wars, one written in the immediate aftermath and the others written after. Each of the later books claims to be more accurate than its predecessors and to reflect new research and a clearer understanding of "the historical context." They all agree that the Dragon Wars consisted of a sudden and surprising invasion by dragons under the leadership of a cadre of powerful beasts known as the dragonlords. Various revisions to the history hold that High Lord Margath, Zir the Black, or a "secret, unnamed master," were the true leaders of the dragon armies.

In any case, the Dragon Wars saw the end of the rule of the Soulstone kings, also called the Usurper Kings, and the death of the entire royal line. Even the Aymhelin was conquered before the dragons were ultimately pushed back by an alliance of the Free Peoples—including a large faction of orcs. The three histories each have a different version of the assistance of Rex Shaarina, variously described as "rightful queen of the dragons," or "empress-consort to Margath," or even "divine mother to all dragonkind." In all cases, her assistance was invaluable and resulted in her death at the hands of one dragonlord or another.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.
Requires seven or less time has passed.
➥ *Read entry 4570.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6729

"Well, we never married," says Jasper. "She raised Mal on her own for most of the first year, until I caught up with her and joined her caravan. I shouldn't say on her own; her parents helped." He drags the child back into his lap, where he starts happily banging on the table with a spoon. "Chryssi—Chrysanthemum—wanted to keep traveling, I thought it'd be better for Mal to find a safe village somewhere and settle for a couple years. We parted ways not far from Tamalir, and she kept going south while I came here. I'm sure she'll stop by for a visit in a while."

You ask if it's normal for gnome families to split up like that, and Jasper shrugs. "It's not ideal. But sometimes things happen and that's just the way it is. The important thing is that we not let our problems get in the way of Mal growing up, you know?" He leans down to kiss his son's hair. "That's why I'm putting down some roots here, at least until the little guy is big enough."

"Lots of young parents are settling down to raise their kids these days," Sapphire says with a nod. "I had a mind to do it myself. The roads aren't as safe as they used to be, and there are enough communities that welcome gnomes, it just makes sense."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6740

Sapphire holds her sewing project up to the light to examine her progress. "Was there anything else you wanted to know about, hon?"

"I have a question about someone in Dragonholt."
➥ *Read entry 1514.*

"Anywhere in Dragonholt you'd recommend?"
➥ *Read entry 1582.*

"What is there to do in Dragonholt?"
➥ *Read entry 2800.*

"No, that's enough for now."
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6744

You share some stories of your own interactions with children, which have Jasper nodding and laughing along with you. "I could tell," he says. "You're the tough, scary, adventurer type, but I could tell you had a soft spot. Well, I'd offer you a job looking after Mal, but I don't think I can afford your rates."

"My rates are very reasonable, Mister Jasper," says Penny, smoothing her skirt out in front of her.

"You are a bargain," agrees Jasper.

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

6761

The sunset paints the sky above you a deep orange, and Mariam sighs, looking up at it. "Alright, that's a good day's work I think. Let's go back to the Swan and get some dinner."

Braxton's stomach rumbles and she nods. "Yes, let's."

Mariam turns to you. "If you care to join us, I'm buying! It's the least I can do after your help today." She hops down from the shop and skips, humming, down the street.

Braxton follows after, her voice rumbling in the twilight. "'Buying' dinner is quite easy when your aunt refuses to let any of us pay for food."

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6793

Grisbeck's shoulders slump, and he looks away. "Ah," he murmurs. "Yes. I s'pose it is a bit…overdramatic, at that." He serves in silence, opening his mouth a few times, only to close it again. Finally, he takes his seat.

The food, though excessive, is marvelous, and after a while (and a few mouthfuls of the whiskey) Grisbeck opens up again, sharing stories of his past and laughing along with you.

➥ *Read entry 1355*

6795

The next morning you are awakened by pounding on your door. A gaunt-looking Tymothi, the countess's steward, stands in the hall, his cloak damp with rain and his face wet with tears. "It will no longer be necessary for you to go in search of Lord Phillip," he says. "His corpse was recovered in the night." He pauses a moment, his eyes closing. "I hope you employed the last day profitably, as there will be no question of any reward or any further employment from the countess. Good day." With that, he turns and departs, his movements stiff.

When you come down for breakfast, Sapphire refuses to meet your eye, then excuses herself as soon as you are served. You eat your meal of porridge with honey and butter, a rasher of bacon, and warm brown bread without seeing another soul.

A pall has fallen over the village. You step out into a grey mist, the sky weeping a light rain, and find the streets almost deserted. Many of the businesses and homes are closed up, no light shining in their windows despite the leaden twilight of the day. Even Mariam's apothecary shop is devoid of life.

You finally find most of the people thronged into the shrine, some weeping, others stoic. Lady Regina and a young woman with curly brown hair you assume must be her surviving daughter, Rochelle, stand in the center of the sanctuary over the corpse of a young man, his light-brown skin ashen with death. Phillip. You see Tymothi wiping at his eyes with a silk kerchief behind the noble family, Celyse with her hood pulled up to hide her face, and Mariam balanced on a decorative plinth against the back wall, braced against Braxton. Both women look grave. A low murmur runs through the crowd, punctuated here and there with sobs.

Regina and Rochelle cling to each other for support, whispering a few words. Then, with a final clasp of their hands, Regina sits in a rustle of velvet on a stool Tymothi hurriedly moves into place. Rochelle steps forward and raises her hands; the crowd falls silent.

"My brother is dead," says Rochelle. "He was murdered in Eventide Forest." Her voice is brittle, her dark eyes shimmering with tears. She drops one hand to the sword at her hip and takes a deep, shuddering breath. "I didn't do enough to protect my brother. We didn't do enough." You feel eyes on you, though Rochelle doesn't even look in your direction. The silence that reigns in the cramped hall takes on a hostile tone. "But I promise you that changes now. Phillip's murderers will be found and punished. Not because he would have wanted it—Phillip was a gentle soul who wouldn't wish harm, not even on his murderer—but because he deserves it."

Rochelle sits, and then Celyse steps forward and speaks of Phillip's virtues, his love of poetry and his love for the people of Dragonholt. Others speak next, each in their turn. It seems like almost everyone in town has something nice to say about Regina's youngest child. Even Sapphire climbs up to stand on a chair and say a few words.

Eventually, everyone filters out, leaving the noble household and the shrine attendants behind to perform the final steps of the funeral rites in privacy. No one meets your eyes as you walk through the miserable rain.

➥ *Mark story point 06.*
➥ *Your fame decreases by three.*
➥ *Read entry 5288.*

6800 (Bakery)

The bakery has a warm and cozy storefront featuring a counter with various baked goods on display and a few tables and chairs for customers to enjoy their pastries.

If five or less time has passed today…
➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

Otherwise…
➥ *The bakery is closed for the day. This encounter is complete.*

6801 (Bakery — Day One)

You step into the bakery and are greeted by the warm smell of baking bread and the chiming of a silver bell on the door. "I'll be right wit' ye!" calls a voice with a thick Dunwarr accent.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open…
➥ *Read entry 3460.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 3664.*

6802 (Bakery — Day Two)

A cat dozes in a sunbeam in the middle of the floor. As the door closes behind you, a silver bell tinkles and the cat startles awake, then rushes away as if embarrassed to be found sleeping.

A voice with a Dunwarr lilt calls through the door to the kitchen. "Coming!"

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open…
➥ *Read entry 3460.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 3664.*

6803 (Bakery — Day Three)

A silver bell hangs from the door, presumably to tinkle whenever it opens or closes. However, the traffic coming in and out of the bakery is so steady the door has been propped open with a wedge of wood.

Within, you see a copper-skinned dwarf girl standing on a stool behind a glass case, displaying a panoply of delectables. She takes coins from the steady tide of patrons and passes over round loaves of brown bread or baskets piled high with flaky pastries. The stool wobbles alarmingly as she strains to reach some of the more distant foods, but she never falls.

A muscular dwarf man comes bustling through the rear door, laden with steaming loaves of bread. He quickly transfers them to the shelves behind the girl. "Careful, Penny," he says. "Wouldn' want ye ta fall, now."

"I'm being careful, Dah," says the girl with a roll of her eyes. "We need more of the honey bread."

"Ach, we always need more of the honey bread," the baker grumbles as he stomps back through the door. "I've some in th' oven now."

"How can I help ye?" Penny asks you when you reach the front of the line.

Get something to eat.
Requires you each spend 5 gold
➥ *Read entry 2078.*

Offer to help with the rush.
➥ *Read entry 6338.*

Give Penny a gift.
Requires cloth doll (item).
➥ *Read entry 8178.*

Leave the bakery.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6804 (Bakery — Day Four)

The bakery's silver bell tinkles every few seconds as a patron comes or goes. Penny, the baker's young daughter, stands on a stool behind the glass counter, wearing the responsibility of her position like a badge of office. She takes orders and payment with solemnity, then turns to shriek those same orders through the door to the kitchen at the top of her lungs.

"Dah!" she bellows. "Soup in bread!"

"Comin' up!" he hollers back.

The next customer asks for a loaf of honey bread, which Penny dutifully fetches from a basket at her side, and then you're at the front of the line.

"How c'n I help ye?" she asks. Grisbeck stomps in from the kitchen with a steaming boule of brown bread, torn open and filled with rich, chunky soup. He delivers the soup to a man with a wooden leg and only some of his fingers, then brushes flour off his apron and smiles approvingly at his daughter.

Get something to eat.
Requires you each spend 5 gold
➥ *Read entry 2078.*

Offer to help with the rush.
➥ *Read entry 6338.*

Give Penny a gift.
Requires cloth doll (item).
➥ *Read entry 8178.*

Leave the bakery.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6805 (Bakery — Day Five)

A sign on the door reads "Closed at noon" in clean, neat handwriting, then repeats the message in the Dunwarr script just below it.

If zero or one time has passed today…
➥ *Read entry 4346.*

Otherwise…
➥ *The bakery is closed for the day. This encounter is complete.*

6806 (Bakery — Day Six)

The dwarf baker Grisbeck hums to himself as he carries fresh loaves of bread from the kitchen out to the shelves that line the shop. His daughter Penny lies on top of a table, dangling a string to brush along the flagged stones of the shop's floor. A calico cat lurks beneath the table, periodically lunging at the string. When it sees you, the cat rumbles a tiny growl, then sprints out of the room with all its hairs standing on end.

If story point Q5 is marked but J3 and M2 are not…
➥ *Read entry 9950.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 3664.*

6807 (Bakery — Day Seven)

A sign on the door reads "Sorry, we're closed" in both the common and Dunwarr scripts. The smell of baking bread still wafts from within the building, however.

If two or more time has passed today…
➥ *Read entry 7807.*

Otherwise…
➥ *The bakery is closed for the day. This encounter is complete.*

6810

You give Hetharr the coins. She holds them in her hand for a long moment, feeling their weight, and then surrenders the mask.

The fishmonger makes a grunt of approval as Hetharr places the coins on the countertop. "For thirty five, I can give you a barrel," she says and hefts a large, heavy barrel out from her stock. She hands it to the catfolk woman, then scoops the coins into a leather envelope, which she tucks back into her belt. "And don't walk off yet. I can throw in a little extra." She slips a few smoked fish of uncertain origin from a jar and hands them to her newest customer. "For the road," she says.

Hetharr nods gravely and stalks off, her tail bristling and back straight.

➥ *You gain the spirit mask (item M).*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6814

You join hands and dance—or at least move—to the skirling music as Penny shrieks and laughs. Before long, a passing gnomish toddler catches her attention, and she promptly abandons you to chase after him.

"Well, then," says Grisbeck. "Should we try something a wee bit more formal?" He places a hand on the small of your back and holds your hand with the other, pulling you with strong arms that smell faintly of fresh bread. Together, you sway and spin to the music, moving in a broad circle around the fire. "I'm glad ta see I still seem to remember some of this," Grisbeck says as he maneuvers you through a turn out and back toward him. "It's been a fair few years since I've done any dancin'. Thank ye for indulgin' me."

You dance together for a long time.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6818

"I don't mind the commotion," says Phillip from the next chair over. He also has a book close at hand, but unlike her he is fairly vibrating in his seat. "I want to help with the decorations."

"After your studies are done," scolds Celyse. "You are not making much headway on the *Baronies*, I see."

"Sorry, teacher," sighs Phillip, and he drops his head to his book again. After a moment he straightens. "Oh! The mask!" he says. "You said you had that extra mask—"

"Quite right," says Celyse. She stands and rummages through her bag, which hangs from a hook over her chair. "Here it is." She turns toward you, revealing a mask fashioned of painted leather to resemble a crescent moon. It looks quite expertly made.

➥ *You gain the moon mask (item H).*

Celyse glances back at Phillip and arches a slender eyebrow. "Eyes on the book, Phillip," she says, and the youth sheepishly drops his puppy-like gaze away from you.

Help Phillip study.
➥ *Read entry 5349.*

Sit quietly and read.
➥ *Read entry 5486.*

Leave Celyse and Phillip to their studies.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6824

"The willow grove is very nice," says Sapphire. She takes a deep breath and nods. "Tonight. After sundown. I'll see you there."

➥ *Mark story point C7.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6835

You ask Mariam where she learned her carpentry, and she shrugs. "Picked it up here and there. We wanderers don't build many of our own houses or raise barns, but I grew up in a wagon that needed repairs, and sometimes you all come together and build a new one to give someone as a wedding present." She grins. "Uh, not that I'll be needing—ahem. Anyway. My brother actually is a really good carpenter. He does lots of work in human towns, in between helping out as a farmhand."

"Mariam is good at anything she puts her mind to, as far as I can tell," says Braxton as Mariam delivers another bag of nails.

"Flatterer," says Mariam. "Keep talking."

➥ *Read entry 7762.*

6854

You find Sapphire in close conversation with her nephew, Jasper. Sapphire is laughing merrily. Jasper rolls his eyes and turns to you for rescue.

"Hello again," he says. "Aunt Sapphire was just going to tell an embarrassing story from Mariam's childhood."

"Oh, the look on your little face—"

"From Mariam's childhood," reiterates Jasper.

Sapphire chuckles and dabs at her eyes. "Oh, there was the time down near Blackwing Marsh. We'd stopped by the river to trade with a riverboat caravan, and I'd told Mariam that if she was good we'd have eel pie for dinner. So she ran off to catch some eels."

"Oh, no," murmurs Jasper.

"Well, the next thing I hear is shrieking, and Jasper comes running down the river bank, and Mariam is right behind him. 'Auntie, auntie!' she calls. 'Jasper is afraid of my eels!'" Sapphire laughs, a deep belly laugh that rolls right through her.

"They were not eels," complains Jasper.

"They weren't! I come out of the wagon to see what's happening, and she's got a snake in each hand!"

"They looked a lot like river adders." Jasper sighs. "I was just a kid, how was I supposed to know they were actually harmless water grass snakes?"

Sapphire guffaws, snorting, and doubles over. "They were! They were river adders! I just didn't want to panic either of you, so I made something up and threw the snakes back in the river!"

"What?" Jasper wheels on his aunt, eyes wide. "Stone in my boot, of course! No wonder no one else has ever heard of a 'water grass snake.' You lied to me, Auntie!"

"I did! I did!" Sapphire wheezes, clinging to you for support. "Ah. And now she's all grown up." Then she starts to cry.

➥ *Read entry 3069.*

6878

You suggest gold trim for Grisbeck's mask, which he finds most agreeable, then enjoy a sweet roll and glass of milk and honey as he and Penny work. At a few key points Penny gets stuck and asks for your advice, so you supply key suggestions for how to attach the beak to her owl mask and how best to paint feathers onto its surface. Meanwhile, Penny explains to you that her mask is an owl, but it's not Thegn Owl, because she wants to be Thegn Owl's friend.

Eventually, both masks are done and looking quite good, and you make your farewells.

- *You each recover one stamina.*
- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6879

"I have traveled from Lorimor to the Unspeakable Kingdom, from Dunwarr to Al-Kalim, and never have I been so offended as I am today!" The merchant mops at his brow with a silk handkerchief, his face purpling. "The price is the price, yes?"

- *You may purchase up to two healing potions (item A) for 35 gold per potion.*
- *You may purchase one swiftness potion (item D) for 70 gold.*
- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6881

"We Belmonts have a proud lineage," boasts Lord Leone. "Dating back to the Rose Knight himself, a younger son of one of the Penacor Kings."

"But which one he'll never say," sneers Elena.

"That's rich, coming from a common-born merchant's daughter," rumbles Leone.

"Oh, that's right, I forgot that one's birth is the only thing that matters," says Elena.

"Now now," murmurs Oszric. "You're both pretty."

Ursula snorts, then covers with a sip of tea. "I believe you were discussing your family's history, my lord?"

"Yes. We've been defenders of the realm for generations, always standing firm against the enemies of Terrinoth." He frowns at Elena again. "Some might suggest that order is kept through trade, but in fact it is strength at arms, and the loyalty of those swords, that keeps the peace. And no one is stronger or more loyal than House Belmont."

- *Read entry 6062.*

6882

Somewhere a bell rings, and music begins to drift through the evening. Villagers and nobles, wearing their finest clothes, emerge from the inns and taverns and homes of the village and begin to stream toward the manor house. The masquerade ball has begun!

- *You each refresh your activation token.*
- *This encounter is complete. Read entry 1006 in the "Paper Faces" quest book.*

6887

The woman shifts her stance slightly as you approach, keeping you in front of her at all times without breaking the flow of her conversation. When the villager she's talking to thanks her and leaves, she turns her attention to you.

"So," she says. "You want training." She frowns and rubs a finger against a scar that runs across her nose. "No, you need training. And Leafcutter can give it to you, for a small fee." She whirls the training sword around her hands and then brings it smartly to rest against her side. "Are you ready to begin?"

"Let's do this!"

Requires you spend 30 gold.

- *Read entry 5429.*

"No thank you."

- *This encounter is complete.*

6905

There's a small, much-neglected section of what appears to be travelogues and descriptions of far-off places. One book is titled *The Immortal Throne* and describes the distant Empire of Lorimor as the most splendid achievement of the human art. The writer is a Terrinother, but he seems willing and eager to defect to Lorimor, so eagerly does he speak of her great beauty, her mighty armies, her fleets and colonies in the Torue Albes, and her staggering wealth. The book is, however, a few centuries old.

Another book is *The Travels of Tarik Al-Farabi*, which is an account of a Sunderman traveling from far-off Al-Kalim to Terrinoth. Al-Farabi's journeys take him through a host of foreign nations including Zanaga, Lorimor, and the Kingless Coast. It appears that he finds the journey quite dangerous and exciting, although how much of that is authorial exaggeration is unclear.

- *Mark one progress in academic study.*
- *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.

Requires seven or less time has passed.

- *Read entry 4324.*

Leave the library.

- *This encounter is complete.*

6920

"Oh, it's the classic story," says Hunter. "Boy meets girl, you know, boring stuff."

"Boy meets girl halfway through Madman Pass, puts an arrow through the ogre crushing girl's windpipe, then nearly dies in the avalanche," deadpans Lei. "Then boy spends a week being nursed back to health by girl in the Smokeblue Hills, dodging goblin scouting parties, before finally making it to Riverwatch to warn the Lords of the Watch about the monsters massing in the Mountains of Despair."

"You know," says Hunter. "The same way anyone else meets." He smirks at his wife. "You sure were surprised when you undressed me the first time to get me out of those wet clothes, though."

"Surprised about what?" asks Ursula.

Hunter and Lei share a look, then he turns to the rest of you. "That was when I'd just started living as a man, you know, binding my breasts, the whole bit."

"Oh," says Theodore, then: "I had no idea."

"Well, that's rather the point," says Lei with a grin. "Besides, it was none of your business."

➥ *Read entry 2509.*

6927

"Now I'm sure you know," says Theodore, "that Regina didn't grow up in the manor. She didn't even grow up in Dragonholt. I don't rightly know what her childhood was like, but they say she walked, barefoot, out of the forest with that husband of hers in tow—couldn't have been more than twenty years old—and surprised her father with the fact that she was alive.

"We were all so surprised, but then, Lord Holland had been a bit of a wild one himself in his youth, so I hear. He traveled about a bit, strapped on a sword and did a bit of the adventuring hero, mingled with all sorts. When he finally came home, married that nice Belmont girl, and settled in as the Count of Dragonholt, we all stopped talking about his adventurous past. And then Kyric came along, and he doted on the boy. Thought he'd be as brave and strong as his father; we all did." Theodore frowns, thinking back. "Things didn't turn out that way, but children are always disappointments to parents who have decided who they'll be before they even meet the little blighters.

"That reminds me of a story…"

Continue listening to Theodore.

➥ *Read entry 4256.*

Leave before he starts telling another story.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6930

Celyse sips her tea before setting it down with a gentle "clink." You take a moment to eat one of the flaky biscuits and drink some tea. A calming silence that you've come to associate with spending time with Celyse falls over the salon.

"What were you reading?"

➥ *Read entry 4292.*

"Are dragon attacks common in Dragonholt?"

➥ *Read entry 1087.*

"You never did say why you retired from adventuring."

➥ *Read entry 5601.*

"I have other matters to attend to."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6949

Mathilda, the serving girl, brushes past you carrying a heavy vase. "Miss Celyse is at the library in the village today," she says. "Something about wishing to avoid all the commotion. If you're looking for Dame Braxton, she and Lady Rochelle are in the salle on the second floor." She nods to the staircase to your left and then scurries away.

Proceed to the salle.

➥ *Read entry 8729.*

Leave the manor.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

6953

You find a seat next to Jasper. Mal comes toddling shyly out of a cluster of gnome children and collapses into his father's lap, where he curls up, staring at you. "It's your first wedding, Pebble," says Jasper. "Your Aunt Mariam is going to marry the love of her life. We should all be so lucky."

At your arched brow, Jasper laughs. "Am I sounding bitter? I'm sorry; I'm happy for Mariam, but it does make me think about my own romantic…ah, let's just say my 'happily ever after' is this guy and leave it at that. Right, Mal?" He leans down and kisses his son on the head, then turns his attention to the stage.

➥ *Read entry 8123.*

6954

You take Grisbeck's hand, and your fingers entwine. He squeezes gently, and warmth seems to radiate up your arm and into your being. "It's not that we never see the sun in the Dunwarr Mountains, o'course," he says. "Aye, we live under th' ground, but there be many reasons ta go ta th' surface. There c'n be things of…great beauty on the surface, after all." He glances over at you, then quickly looks away. It's difficult to tell in the lantern light, but you think he might be blushing.

➥ *Read entry 3998.*

6959

You spend a couple more hours tearing up the damaged pieces of the shop until your back aches and your hands are sore. Braxton shows no obvious signs of wear, but Mariam's constant chatter eventually winds down to practically nothing, and you work in silence until every piece of broken or burned wood has been removed from the back room.

- *Mark one progress in physical training.*
- *You each lose two stamina.*
- *Time passes.*
- *Read entry 6761.*

6969

"I'll head back to the Swan to retrieve my gear," says Braxton. "I'll meet you under the Dragon Statues."

"What!" Mariam glares at you before hopping down from the counter and marching toward the back room. "Fine, go get yourself killed for all I care." As she sweeps out of sight into the back room, you see her wipe her eyes with a sleeve.

"Mariam," breathes Braxton, but the gnome says nothing and slams the door behind her.

- *Mark story point O5.*

Braxton sighs. "Please forgive her. She is only worried for our safety. Leave her be for now. I'm sure she'll be back to her cheerful self once we return."

You leave the shop together. Braxton locks the front door and makes for the Swan to retrieve her gear.

- *Mark story points A4 and I1.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

6971

The Swan is as pleasant and homey as ever. Sapphire smiles when she sees you and waves to you from where she sits under the windows, sewing.

Ask Sapphire for something to eat.
- *Read entry 6079.*

Ask about someone or something in Dragonholt.
- *Read entry 2282.*

Ask Sapphire to craft you magical armor.
Requires war rune (item).
- *Read entry 4923.*

Return to your room for a while.
- *You may have any amount of time pass today.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.
- *This encounter is complete.*

6990

"It's easy," says one young gnome man, tying his long hair back with a red bandana. "I'll teach you. Alright, so you're on the red team with me." He pauses and filches a red cloth from his pocket, which he tosses in your direction. "Our goal is these two trees here."

The explanation doesn't make very much sense, but soon enough you are running and kicking the ball along with all the others. What seemed a simple game soon has your legs burning and you gasping for breath. The gnome children, for their part, show no signs of being the slightest bit tired.

Eventually, the red team wins, although you are not at all certain why.

- *You each lose two stamina.*
- *Mark one progress in physical training.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

7005

The pink-haired gnome woman vanishes for a moment and returns with a pot of steaming, fragrant tea and a stack of sweet, buttery cookies. Then she returns to her game, laughing and chatting with the other players.

- *You each recover two stamina.*

As you eat and watch the others play their games, you notice a small furry creature that resembles a hybrid of a rabbit and an otter curled in a chair beside you and peering up at a high shelf where an enormous brown tabby cat lurks, eyes gleaming in the gloom near the ceiling.

Stay and play a few games.
- *Read entry 2534.*

Leave the tea house.
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

7009

"And hello ta ye, too," says Grisbeck. "Stay a while, I c'n fix ye a bite." He stands and goes into the kitchen.

Penny climbs back up into her seat and speaks at length about her mask. You learn that it is an owl, but it isn't Thegn Owl, because she doesn't want to be Thegn Owl, she wants to be his friend, and a heap more details besides, all while enjoying a small sweet roll and cup of milk with honey.

After a little while, you thank Grisbeck for the roll and leave them to their crafts.

- *You each recover one stamina.*
- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

7049

The Swan is as pleasant and homey as ever. Sapphire and Jasper talk at a table near the kitchen, she sewing and he poring over a leatherbound ledger and a few loose leaves of paper on the table before them. When she sees you, Sapphire waves and beckons you over.

Get something to eat.

➥ *Read entry 6435.*

Ask about someone or something in Dragonholt.

➥ *Read entry 2282.*

Ask Sapphire to craft you magical armor.

Requires war rune (item).

➥ *Read entry 4923.*

Return to your room for a while.

➥ *You may have any amount of time pass today.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7087

You make your way through the cramped shelves of the archives and find Celyse sat quite comfortably in a leather-padded chair, a book in her lap and more books strewn about all around her. "You found me," she says without looking up. "I couldn't abide all the commotion at the manor today, so I'm hiding here."

If story point J1 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 6818.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 9568.*

7090

Braxton waves off your apology, apparently not much offended. "Believe me when I say I have suffered far worse. Mariam explained that her family often engages in similar harmless tomfoolery, so I rather consider it a touching welcome to the family." She tucks a lock of hair back under her arming cap, and you realize it is still shimmering with glimmerdust. "That doesn't mean, however, that I will not take my revenge, someday, when you least expect it."

She grins, a slightly tusky grin with a certain hint of menace. "Speaking of, would you care to train with us?"

"Sure. Let's do this!"

➥ *Read entry 2093.*

"I'll just watch if you don't mind."

➥ *Read entry 8845.*

"No thanks. Must be going."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7096

Gnomes and villagers flock to the tables of food, helping themselves to a few morsels before hurrying away again. A scrum of busy cooks rushes to and fro behind the tables, putting out new dishes and replenishing dwindling stocks.

The smell of everything is bright and tangy, a rich spicy odor that makes your stomach rumble. It seems that the dishes are as varied as the gnomes, a mixture of fruits, meats, vegetables, fish, nuts, and grains that must have been gathered while on the road to be shown off here at the festival. There's a dish of salt-and-spice encrusted flatbread, and another bread sizzling with melted cheese. Sausages and cuts of cold meat are arranged on one platter, with cheeses and sliced vegetables close by, and pillowy pocket bread piled behind. You see one gnome take up a piece of the bread, tear it open, and stuff it with meat, cheese, and vegetables before walking off, holding his meal in his hand and taking big, grunting bites. A nearby platter is covered in orange and purple root vegetables blackened with a pungent spice, with wedges of cut, tart fruit as garnish. Next to that is a tremendous clay pot, bubbling with beans and smelling of rich, fatty meats.

You help yourself to a little bit of everything you can find. Even two bites of everything on offer proves impossible, and you retreat from the feast full and happy.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7125

Mariam starts laughing before she even begins her story about meeting Braxton. "Well, first of all, whatever Braxton tells you, I wasn't drunk," says Mariam. "But we did both get thrown out of the same tavern together! It was a good night."

Mariam pauses in her excited chatter to pour a fizzing liquid from a flask onto the floor. She then begins to scrub the area with a broom. To your surprise, the caked-on gunk simply dissolves, revealing not-too-damaged floorboards beneath.

"After we left the bar, Braxton helped me out a few times that night," continues Mariam. "We're walking along, talking, and some thug just walks right into me. So naturally I give him a piece of my mind, and he pulls a knife on me! Braxton was still so worked up from the brawl at the tavern that she let the guy and his friends have it. After that, we decided to cool off by the river. I thought it would be fun to go for a swim, but Braxton wouldn't let me. She's a real wet blanket sometimes, you know?" You nod, but you're not sure how much of Mariam's story you should (or she expects you) to believe.

Braxton pokes her head in through the door. "I'm back," she says. "And also I am not a 'wet blanket.' Let's load the cart back up."

➥ *Read entry 9485.*

7132

An auburn-haired dwarf woman leans on her crutch as she examines the articles on your blanket. "What have we here?" she asks. "Those are dwarven firebombs." She glances at you, her gaze sharp and eyes narrowed. "I'd like to buy them. Twenty-five gold coins for the lot."

Accept the offer and sell.

➥ *Read entry 2242.*

Attempt to negotiate for a higher price.

➥ *Read entry 6645.*

7138

You explain that Sonia was not fond of Tymothi, who kept trying to marry her off to a member of the Cunningham family. You further postulate that, when Sonia continued to rebuff him, he arranged her "accident" in Eventide Forest.

"Interesting," says Celyse. "Tymothi is distantly related to the Cunninghams by blood, and he's always been favorably disposed to the family. I believe his mother still lives in Haverford. But Kyric is a Belmont by blood; I don't see that Tymothi is a natural ally to Kyric." She frowns and taps her chin. "I admit, I suspected Tymothi early on, when the attempt on my life was made. But since my return to the manor, I've been watching him like a moonhawk, and I haven't seen him do anything that I would consider suspicious. Regina relies on him utterly; we'll need concrete evidence if we're going to accuse him."

Celyse nods and stares off into the middle distance for a moment. "I'll redouble my efforts. Perhaps I'll find a chance to snoop through his things. If there's any evidence tying him to Kyric, I'll find it."

➥ *Mark story point E1.*

"There's something else."

➥ *Read entry 2127.*

"That's all I had."

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7151

Each of the goats has a rope dangling from around its neck. You grab hold of those and haul the beasts, bleating and complaining, out of the grove and toward the market. A human woman with dusky skin and a sheepskin vest waves to you, striding down the market row. "Heyo! Goats! Ya, there! Come along," she says, and the goats happily trot over to her. A dog materializes behind the goats, barking enthusiastically at any that move to step out of line. "Where did you find the devils?" asks the goatherd. "Right monsters, this lot. Chewed right through their leads."

The woman thanks you. Then she and her dog lead the goats back up the market street toward the village green.

➥ *Read entry 4525.*

7157

You argue that he'd be better off offering a larger discount now, so that he can be more assured of selling his books in a timely manner, but he's unwilling to budge on the single tome. "If I sell this book alone the value of the collection drops substantially," he says. "But you do have an argument. Hmm. Perhaps, one hundred and twenty-five gold coins for all volumes?"

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

Buy just a single tome.

Requires you spend 75 gold.

➥ *Read entry 2698.*

Buy the whole collection.

Requires you spend 125 gold.

➥ *Read entry 9771.*

Leave without buying anything.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7170

You and Sapphire move to the music, spinning and laughing as the song skirls around you. When it ends, a slower and more stately song begins, and Sapphire draws you into the larger group to promenade, spin, and glide across the green. "I'm so glad you could join us tonight," says Sapphire. "You know, I've heard people shocked and amazed at the way we wanderer gnomes find friends everywhere. They seem to think that every stranger is an enemy. But I find that strangers are usually only enemies if you treat them that way. Far better to treat them as friends; that's more likely what you'll find." She grins. "And if not, well, it's helpful to have a lot of friends when you do meet an enemy."

You dance together for a long time.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7199

There's a flare and a hissing crackle as Mariam lights a lantern, and you realize that you've been struggling to see in the dark for the past few minutes. The sun has set.

"That's a great day's work. What do you say, Braxton, should we head back to the Swan for dinner?"

"Dinner and a bath, I think," says Braxton, stowing her tools. "Thank you for your help," she says to you. "You'd be welcome to join us for dinner."

"Not the bath, though," says Mariam.

"No, that's—no." Braxton looks at Mariam with quizzical disbelief, but the gnome only smiles and sticks her tongue out at the orc.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7242

With a loud and satisfying "thock!" your arrow strikes the center of the butt, and a cheer goes up from a gaggle of onlookers you didn't even realize you had. "Well done!" says Hunter, clapping you on the back. "I'm not even sure I can make that shot these days." You are surrounded by well-wishers and celebrants as you walk back into the Chatty Archer, where Lei greets you with a tankard of stout and the money you'd just paid for your meal.

You're the toast of the tavern for the rest of the night, and the ale keeps flowing until you decide that you'd better cut yourself off.

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *You gain 5 gold.*
➥ *Mark story point O8.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7244

"Phillip is a darling lad. Thirteen—no, I tell a lie. He has just celebrated his fourteenth name day. He is bright and inquisitive, always reading books and telling stories. This trip of his to the Tree of Tales is just the sort of thing he does, you understand."

Tymothi smiles and shakes his head. "He once brought home an injured bird and tried to get me to nurse it back to health. I have no idea how to care for a bird, of course, and neither did Phillip. And so the bird died after only a few days, poor thing. Phillip cried and cried and insisted we bury it beneath the family's apple tree in the orchard."

The steward sighs, then looks directly into your eyes. "Please. Bring Phillip home."

"What can you tell me about Talbot?"
➥ *Read entry 5067.*

"Say no more."
➥ *Read entry 4350.*

7256

"Oh, the Belmonts are a large and powerful family. Well, powerful by local standards I suppose. Lord Leone Belmont is the ruler of Rostum county, which is just across the grasslands to the east." Sapphire pulls a few more stitches, thinking, then continues. "I think I recall something about the Belmonts marrying into the Fairfax line a while back. That must have been Lord Holland's wife, then, who was a Belmont. Of course, Regina has no Belmont blood, so I imagine they're trying to marry back in this generation. Maybe that's why Belmont's daughter Brynn is a frequent visitor."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

7267

You retrieve your tools from a secret pocket and set to work. After only a few moments, you hear the click of the lock turning, and the handle turns freely. A human woman walks down the market street, but she doesn't seem to pay you any mind as you slip inside.

➥ *Read entry 2876.*

7268

The librarian gestures to an untidy stack of books on a table in the middle of the room. "These need to be sorted and re-shelved," she says. "People are so inconsiderate sometimes, just leaving the books lying around. There's also some work to do in the bookbindery, if you've the skill."

Return the unsorted books to their proper shelves.
➥ *Read entry 9216.*

Bind some of the new books.
Requires craftsmanship (skill)
➥ *Read entry 6203.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7269

You start telling the story of your encounter with the dragon in the grasslands to the east, beginning with finding the shattered merchant's caravan. As you describe the melted, burned wreckage you feel a hush settle over the nearby crowd and see a glint of fear rise in their eyes.

When you describe the dragon smashing through the watchtower and the flight of the cowardly merchant, the crowd gasps. You move between them, the rhythm of your story matching the hoofbeats of your mount, the crescendos of your voice mimicking the pounding of your heart as you did battle with the great wyrm!

When you reach the end of your tale you realize that you haven't felt the need to embellish or exaggerate at all. Silence greets your final words. Every eye is on you.

Finally, an old human man with missing fingers and a wooden leg stomps up to you. "If it weren't for you, we all could have burned," he says. "I'd like to buy you a drink."

"And me!" says Gnorman.

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *Mark story point T1.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Find something else to occupy your time in the Hog.
Requires seven or less time has passed today.
➥ *Read entry 7622.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7276

You offer the sealed envelope to Ursula, and she begins to smile as soon as she sees the handwriting on the outside. "Oh, Lady's grace," she breathes. "Theo you damn fool. Took you long enough."

➥ *You lose the love letter (item).*

She breaks the seal and spreads the letter on the table before her. "Candle, girl. Candle," she says, and her willowy daughter brings a candle in a silver holder, placing it on the table to cast its light on the letter. Ursula reads carefully, tears beading in the corners of her eyes. Then she stands, presses the letter to her heart, and closes her eyes. "I have something for you," she says and steps through a door almost invisible under the mural's paint.

A moment later, she returns holding a timeworn cloth doll that she cradles with obvious affection. "My mother made this doll for me when we first came to Dragonholt. I had no friends then, you see, so she told me the doll would keep me from being lonely. And it has, for all these long years." She reaches out and places the doll in your hands. Its colors are fading, but its stitches still hold true. Something about its crooked face seems welcoming. "I don't need this anymore. I won't be lonely. I want you to have it. Maybe you can find some other poor lonely child in need, as you seem to be going about doing good deeds."

➥ *You gain the cloth doll (item R).*
➥ *Mark story point K8.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

She sighs and settles down again in her seat. "I shall have to think about how to respond to Theo. Might be fitting to let him stew a week or two. But in the meantime, was there anything I could do for you?"

Get something to eat.
Requires you each spend 5 gold
➥ *Read entry 8815.*

Leave the Countess Inn.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7285

Two guards in Fairfax livery walk past you and give you a nod. The crowd gives them a respectful distance, as if they've recently seen the guards in action.

Browse "Al-Emir's Elixirs."
➥ *Read entry 4859.*

Attempt to steal some coins.
Requires thievery (skill).
➥ *Read entry 8984.*

Leave the market.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7303

"I'm so pleased!" says Phillip. Mal reappears and hands him a length of rope, which leads to a mighty tug-of-war struggle as Phillip attempts to maintain the thread of the conversation with you. "We have this ball every year, to honor the alliance between the three counties. But this year, with Sonia gone, it will be… emotional. I'll be glad to have as many friends there as I can manage." Phillip lifts the rope and Mal with it with a grunt, then lets go to send the child crashing to the ground in a pile of giggles. He leans toward you and whispers. "I've been working on my mask for months. It's got a butterfly wing covering half my face. It's beautiful. I hope you like it."

➥ *Read entry 1388.*

7323

"You could say that," giggles Hyrim. He sets down his drink and leans toward you. "Now, the thing to understand is that for much of our childhood we lived in one of those wagons you see outside. Ours was drawn by a donkey, a sweet half-blind creature named Daisy."

"He did not smell like a Daisy," mutters Mariam.

"Mariam hated Daisy," explains Hyrim, punching his sister lightly on the arm.

"He tried to kick me! All the time!"

"You never learned to stop coming up from his blind side. Anyway. One day, I come back to the wagon, and there's a goat, wearing a harness, standing on top of it and bleating. No sign of Daisy anywhere."

"Two goats, I recall," offers Isaek. "Mariam was very proud of that part."

"Two goats," nods Hyrim. "A team. Now, a pack goat is a lovely way to travel. They can climb anything, carry their loads anywhere a gnome can walk and then some. But there's one important thing to realize about pack goats."

"They don't pull wagons," sighs Mariam.

"They do not pull wagons. Mariam had traded away our only donkey for two pack goats, and she spent the better part of a week trying to train the damn things to pull as a team and be draft animals." Hyrim shakes his head at the memory, his curls spilling across his face as he does. "That's how long it took me to find another donkey to replace Daisy."

"They were learning!" protests Mariam. "They pulled the wagon two leagues that last day! I saw a half-dozen wagons being drawn by goats outside at the festival!"

Braxton smiles and wraps an arm around her wife. "Sounds like you were just ahead of your time, darling."

"Genius is always misunderstood," sniffs Mariam.

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

7334

After a few placating words you manage to get the catfolk woman calmed down sufficiently to at least get her name out of her.

"I'm Hetharr," she says. "And I am not some stupid rube to be taken advantage of! I just don't know very much about these human customs."

Leaving the question of the ocean aside for the moment, you explain that in human society it is customary to assign value to discs of shiny metal and use those to mediate exchanges of goods and services.

Hetharr nods slowly, her ears twitching as she absorbs what you've said. "Then I will need to find some of my own shiny metal discs." She looks down at the lacquered green mask in her hands and flattens her ears against her head. "Perhaps this is worth your sixty gold coins," she says to the merchant. "And you can exchange it for the coins you want."

"Perhaps it's worth thirty and you can sell it somewhere and bring me the coins," says the fishmonger. "I don't barter. I want cold, hard, currency."

Offer to buy the mask from Hetharr.

➥ *Read entry 8220.*

Pay the merchant for the food Hetharr wants.

Requires you spend 60 gold.

➥ *Read entry 1345.*

Leave the two of them to work it out themselves.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7363

You brace yourself and plant a strong kick against the door just under the handle. The door frame splinters apart as the door flies open. A human woman walking down the street nearby jumps at the sudden sound of cracking wood and stares after you as you enter the building.

➥ *Read entry 2876.*

7371

"I did indeed," says Isaek, nodding. "Taught her everything I know, although I daresay by now not everything she knows. A very bright girl, for all she seems so scattered at times. I've never known her to measure anything or show a lick of patience, but her potions always brew up perfectly." He puffs his chest and beams proudly in her general direction. "Wonderful girl. I'm so delighted by the young woman she's become." Then he sniffles and dabs at his eyes with a folded white cloth. "Pardon me," he says. "Allergies, I'm sure."

➥ *Read entry 4083.*

7400 (The Swan)

The Swan is a neat, elegant building standing on a foundation of grey stone. The inn rises two stories above you, its walls shingled with blue-stained wood and its glassed-in windows surrounded by whitewashed shutters. The obvious care that goes into the building's upkeep somehow conspires to make it seem smallish and homey, despite being one of the largest buildings in the village.

➥ *Read the entry below that corresponds to the current day.*

7401 (The Swan — Day One)

The common room is particularly quiet. A pair of patrons are playing a game that features a circular board and several pieces of wood carved to resemble knights, dragons, or other fanciful creatures. A human woman sits in a comfortable-looking chair by the hearth, wrapped almost entirely in a blanket and reading a book.

If six or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 6028.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6971.*

7402 (The Swan — Day Two)

The common room is raucous with excitement and commotion and too many patrons for you to easily count, some groups excitedly singing or joking, others engaged in frantic conversation or tense boardgaming. Seemingly multiple celebrations have combined into a single, much larger celebration.

If six or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 1189.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6971.*

7403 (The Swan — Day Three)

The common room is uncharacteristically devoid of patrons or commotion. You see only a single young human man curled up in the comfy chair by the hearth taking a nap. One edge of the room has been strung with ropes, with blankets and quilts slung over them to dry.

➥ *Read entry 6971.*

7404 (The Swan — Day Four)

The Swan is rather busy at the moment, with many faces you haven't seen before. A barrel-chested man with a flushed red face holds court by the windows, telling stories that break into loud laughter to a small group of people. He punctuates his tale with occasional moments of drumming on his thick belly with his hands while the others hoot and stamp their feet.

If six or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 4772.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6971.*

7405 (The Swan — Day Five)

The Swan is busier and more crammed full of patrons than you've ever seen before. The scattered humans, orcs, and dwarfs of Dragonholt cluster in corners or, in one case, sit with their feet drawn up under them by the fire, looking about with wide eyes at the seemingly endless parade of gnomes that fill the rest of the available space. Gnomes chatter at all the tables, gnomes bustle in and out of the kitchen with trays of food and beverages, gnomes slap each other's shoulders and swap stories on every scrap of floor. A gnome woman with a glass eye is clowning about near the stairs, popping her eye in and out of its socket to the cheers and gasps of a gaggle of children. Two gnome men with long black beards perch on high stools and suck on unlit pipes, frowning at everyone and everything. A cluster of gnomes surrounds a dusky-skinned human woman in a sheepskin vest, apparently trying and failing to beat her at a card game.

It's all rather a lot to take in.

If zero or one time has passed today...

➥ *Read entry 7049.*

If four or five time has passed today...

➥ *Read entry 4616.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 4991.*

7406 (The Swan — Day Six)

A loud banging sound comes from the kitchen, causing a few patrons to crane their necks and arch their brows as they try to find the source of the noise. You see Jasper walk into the kitchen, then emerge with a wooden spoon. He walks over to his aunt and together they wrap the spoon with a quilted rag. Jasper returns to the kitchen and the banging resumes, now muffled. You see Mal toddle past, banging on a tin pot with his newly muted spoon.

➥ *Read entry 7049.*

7407 (The Swan — Day Seven)

A cluster of noble's servants gossip and toast one another near the door, wearing livery of a host of nearby noble families. Merchants and travelers from afar recline at the various tables, sipping cider and hiding from the heat of the day in the common room's relative cool.

"How long have you had a cat?" Jasper asks Sapphire as he walks past you.

"I don't, to my knowledge," she says, then turns to watch Malachite chase a small calico cat, screeching, out the front door. "Oh good," she says. "I don't anymore."

➥ *Read entry 7049.*

7417

Fiore looks you up and down before she rummages through a shelf full of old papers and forgotten work requests. She crosses to a large table and unrolls an old map, yellowed with age, and delicately places weights on the sides.

"This is a map of the silver mine," she says. "It's said to be the richest in the region. But it was abandoned during the war when all the workers were pressed into military service."

You nod, absorbing the information, and Fiore continues. "After the war, we discovered goblins had taken to living in the mines. With so many of our workers killed or injured in the war, we didn't have the forces to evict the squatters immediately. Now there are so many of them, there's not much we can do."

You inquire if there's anything else you'll need to know before you go, and Fiore nods grimly.

"Here's where the rooster becomes the cockatrice," she sighs. "We had the area scouted. The scout said there's one goblin who seems to be leading the others—a great big one too." She gestures to the main entrance to the mines. "The goblins have fortified the main path, but here"—she points at an emergency access tunnel—"is well concealed. If the goblins know about it, they seem to give it only minimal attention. That's your route in."

You look at the map, casting your eye along the twisting passages. The mine is a model of efficiency, with the vast majority of the mine dedicated to work, and only a few rooms set aside for alternate purposes. Two rooms catch your eye: the "pipeworks" and the "blastworks."

"What are the pipeworks?"

➥ *Read entry 5831.*

"What can you tell me about the blastworks?"

➥ *Read entry 9796.*

7447

You realize that the midgame shifting of territory is unnecessary and direct your pieces to seizing the choice endgame territories on the board much sooner than the other players. As a result, you score the most points by a considerable margin.

"But," says the freckled gnome, "if you do that, the game isn't any fun!"

"Hah!" laughs another player, a gnome woman with a glass eye. "You're only saying that because you got beat. Well played," she says to you, offering her hand.

"Let's go again," says the freckled gnome. "I'm ready for you this time."

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7450

You glance around as if checking if anyone is listening before leaning in. Sapphire and Mariam also lean closer, and in a low voice, you say, "I seek vengeance on the man who killed my father."

Braxton's eyes go wide as she looks at you, and Mariam and Sapphire cover their surprise with a hand. "What—" starts Sapphire louder than she intended before stopping herself and glancing around. She continues in a whisper, "What happened? What do you plan to do?"

You try not to let your grin show on your face as you continue. "I was young when it happened, but I dedicated my life to the art of combat. So the next time I see him, I will say to him, 'Hello. My name is—" Just then, you are interrupted by the sound of bells signaling someone entering the inn. Mariam and Sapphire nearly jump out of their seats from the shock.

"Goodness!" exclaims Sapphire as she gets up and hurries to welcome the new patron.

Mariam looks at you with wide eyes, "Is all of that true?"

"Must be just a story to get a rise out of Sapphire. Your father wasn't actually killed, right?" asks Braxton, but the concern on her face indicates that she believes you.

➥ *Mark story point W5.*
➥ *Read entry 2994.*

7482

A call goes up from the crowd for dessert, and to general cheers Mariam and Braxton rise and cross to the imposing confectionery edifice. Sapphire rushes forward with a silver serving knife as Braxton lifts Mariam up to stand on a chair. The brides each place a hand on the knife and then, together, they cut into the custard-and-cake dessert, to much cheering. Braxton carefully serves her wife the first forkful of cake, but when Mariam returns the favor she smears a trail of cream across Braxton's nose. The crowd hoots as Braxton gasps, lifts the gnome up with one hand, and returns the favor with a finger's worth of custard.

Grisbeck and Sapphire serve out the dessert as the two brides clean up, and then a raucous cry of "Speech! Speech!" erupts from the crowd.

"Alright, you animals!" calls Mariam, climbing up atop a table.

"No," says Braxton, touching Mariam's back. She turns and Braxton smiles. "Let me say a few words." Braxton steps forward, and you realize that somewhere along the way she traded her armor for a generous floor-length gown, one that leaves her shoulders and arms bare. She looks every inch the blushing bride as she looks down at the floor and takes a deep breath. "I don't love speaking in front of crowds," she manages, to general chuckles. "But I do love Mariam. I fight, and I risk my life, but that isn't courage, or it isn't from me. It's just what I know and what I do. I've never been afraid to die, but I think that before I met Mariam I was afraid to live. I was afraid to ask for happiness in my life, for anything beyond duty, beyond the fight. So I wanted to thank Mariam, and all of you, for giving me the courage to live." She drops her eyes to the floor again, her cheeks flushed. "If that's all right with you." She turns to Mariam, whose eyes overflow with tears.

Mariam chokes and sputters and finally calls out: "My wife, everybody, Dame Braxton Everon Brightstone Time-to-figure-out-a-new-family-name-already of Dragonholt! Hands off, she's mine!" A roar and great stamping of feet goes up from the crowd, and Mariam hurls herself into Braxton's arms, then everyone tucks into their dessert. Yours has a thick slab of cake shot through with currants, drowning in custard and cream and covered with sweet red and blue berries. It's sweet without being overwhelming and refreshing on your tongue, and far too soon it's gone and the party is over.

"The celebration continues on the village green!" calls Sapphire, waving people out the door. "Another bonfire, tonight!"

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7483

"Things have been going well," says Braxton, then she pauses, her brow furrowing. "As well as can be expected. Regina's guard isn't the most fearsome fighting force I've ever seen. But all the more reason that I'm needed and appreciated; Captain Tweegal seems to think I'm captain material myself, when he retires." She purses her lips. "I suppose he's thin on options." She shifts her attention to you, putting down her mug of apple juice. "You're welcome to come train with us, you know. With any luck, you'll teach my fellows a thing or two."

"Not this morning, though," Mariam says.

Braxton laughs. "You're still welcome to go train this morning, but I will be otherwise engaged."

➥ *Read entry 1656.*

7484

The quiet of the shrine is disturbed by coughing, rustling, and shuffling as several people array themselves before the pool. You see Theodore, wearing what you can only assume is his best coat, and Ursula, with a wreath of white flowers on her head, standing side by side. Ursula's quiet daughter stands behind her, dabbing at her watery eyes with a handkerchief. Skala stands between them, his head bowed. You appear to have walked into a wedding ceremony.

Stay for the wedding.
➥ *Read entry 4061.*

Leave the shrine.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7487

You join hands and dance—or at least move—to the skirling music as Penny shrieks and laughs. You do your best to imitate the villagers and gnomes dancing in the large group closer to the musicians, but your best isn't particularly good between Grisbeck's constant frowning and missteps and Penny's incessant laughter and occasional falling down in fits of giggles.

"I know," says Grisbeck, releasing your hands. "I'll teach ye a traditional Dunwarr dance." He folds his arms in front of him and kicks himself high into the air. "This is called th' hammer dance, an' the trick is ta land like a hammerblow!" Penny shrieks and leaps into the air, slamming her two feet down together as she hits the ground. "Hah, you've got the right idea!" says Grisbeck.

You dance all together for a long time.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7488

"Nae," he says. "I didn't have to. But I wanted to." He grins as he places your food in front of you and crosses to his own chair. "Ye've been so kind ta Penny, and ta me. I wanted to repay at least a fraction of yer goodwill." His eyes sparkle for a moment. "An' I wanted th' excuse ta spend time wit' ye."

The food is amazing, and you pass a pleasant meal, swapping stories of your past beneath the stars.

➥ *Read entry 1355*

7502

"You might think that, mightn't you," concedes the old orc. He takes a long slow drag on his pipe, then blows sweet-smelling smoke out into the night air. "The truth of the matter is complicated. The spirits are powerful beings—hah, even that's not strictly true. Some spirits are as powerful and ancient as the forest itself. Others are ephemeral, brief things that live but for the space of a candle's flame—or a bonfire."

He chuckles and strokes at the long, braided beard on his chin. "I can say that this ritual is not displeasing to the spirits, and some may feel it, pulsing through the world as regular and changeable as the seasons. The spirits like the seasons, they like things that live in the world and are of it. Some spirits, they are just people who haven't given up on the world yet. I suppose you might call them ghosts."

Skala reaches out and claps you on the shoulder. "Enjoy the bonfire. And don't worry too much about the spirits. They don't worry about you." Laughing, he walks off into the night.

➥ *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7518

You set the strange mushroom on the workbench and search around through the laboratory until you find Mariam's small collection of books. In the volume titled "Botanica Arcana", you find a comprehensive description of your fungus and are able to conclusively identify it as a goblin cap mushroom, also known as "death's flower." Armed with that knowledge, it's fairly easy to find a description of its uses and an effective recipe for a potion of swiftness made from it.

You discard the stalk and slice the cap thinly, then set it to simmer in grapeseed oil in the copper cauldron. You collect and combine the other ingredients, hen's teeth and eye of newt and tincture of wormswort, in the other cauldron, then pour off the mushroom mixture through a sieve, leaving you with goblin cap-infused oil. You add the oil drop by drop to the potion mixture until the cloudy solution becomes clear.

Removing it from the heat, you ladle out just a small amount of the potion and take a careful sip. The scalding hot liquid sends a chill through your body, and suddenly your surroundings crystallize into perfect sharpness. You can feel, see, hear, and smell everything. The liquid in the cauldron bubbles with curious slowness. Your own movements feel unhurried, but also measurably faster than everything around you.

➥ *You lose one strange mushroom (item).*
➥ *You gain three swiftness potions (item D).*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7529

After a moment, she places her pen aside and picks up a sander made from silver-chased horn, sprinkling a fine dusting of powdered resin to dry her ink. Then she turns to you.

"Welcome to the Dragonholt Library," she says. "Can I help —" Her question trails off as she takes a look at you for the first time. She takes in your appearance and mannerisms with a critical eye for a moment before asking for your name. You tell her, and she blows out a breath she may not have realized she was holding.

"Come this way." She dismounts her stool and leads you through a low door to a tall, narrow room lit only by windows far above you. "No candles or torches, please," she says. "A fire here would mean centuries of wisdom lost." She leads you around a long bookshelf, and you find that the room was not narrow at all, only blocked off by the enormous shelf. Celyse is resting comfortably in a chair with a book on her lap. "Celyse," says the librarian. "I've brought company."

"Thank the spirits you are here!" says Celyse, springing to her feet and narrowly rescuing the book before it falls to the floor. "Thank you," she says to the librarian, who nods and shuffles away, leaving you alone with Celyse.

➥ *Read entry 5682.*

7540

The dwarf baker, Grisbeck, and his daughter Penny are kneeling before the pool in the center of the shrine. Skala, the orc shrine attendant, approaches and places a lit candle before them, then walks off to tend to the garden. The dwarves seem lost in thought.

Spend some time in quiet meditation.

➥ *Read entry 3196.*

Approach Grisbeck and Penny.

➥ *Read entry 3547.*

Leave the shrine.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7542

The front door is crossed by several boards that are nailed into the wall on either side. There doesn't appear to be a way to access the building's interior from the main street.

You hear someone mumbling and glance down the narrow alley between the shop and the next building over. Mariam is standing in the alley, hands cupped over her eyes as she looks into the building through a dusty window. She's mumbling to herself too softly for you to understand what she is saying.

"Hey Mariam. What are you doing?"

➥ *Read entry 8354.*

Pretend you don't notice.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7549

The mushroom tastes like bitter, chalky earth, and you wonder as you force the last bite down your throat why you thought this was a good idea. You're just rinsing the taste from your mouth with water when the poison takes hold.

It comes over you like a rushing wind, knocking you to your knees and knifing through your gut like a wound. But the pain only lasts an instant, and the wind continues to roar, tearing you from the ground and from your body, scattering you like autumn leaves across all of Eventide Forest. You feel yourself gathered up by an infinitely patient force and placed, gently, back inside yourself.

After a while the wind dies down and you find yourself lying on your back in the middle of the village green. A few passing villagers give you odd looks, but you appear to be unharmed. In fact, you feel somehow larger than yourself.

➥ *You lose one strange mushroom (item).*
➥ *Mark a total of three progress divided as you choose among academic study, combat training, physical training, social practice, and/or spiritual meditation.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7575

Sapphire smiles but averts her gaze. "Thank you," she says. "You can have as much as you like."

You sit together and eat, trading stories of your past and light-hearted jokes. Sapphire laughs at all of your jokes, even the bad ones.

When the food is done, you push back and lean against the trunk of the closest willow tree, gazing out from beneath its branches at the stars above. Sapphire settles herself down near your feet, fiddling with the edge of the blanket.

➥ *Read entry 8638.*

7591

You draw out your growth rune, holding it in your cupped hand as you approach the closest bean plants. You feel the magic within the rune reach out to the crop field and the plants begin to respond. Like fingers brushing against an unexpected hand in the dark, you feel some other magic within the field merge into your rune's effect.

Taking up a basket, you walk down the row as each plant leans forward and politely drops its bean pods for you. The closest workers point and stare, and soon quite a crowd has gathered as you reach the end of your row with an overflowing basket.

Two young farmers, a man and a woman, both human, run up to you each holding a basket. "Do that again," says the young man. You reach out with your rune again, and again feel the field's own magic respond, and this time the two farmers walk ahead of you, filling their baskets in short order.

"Spirits save us," whispers the young woman. "This is so much easier." Soon the farmers have fully adopted you and your rune, leaving you to perform your magic while they do the lifting and carrying, laughing and making up jokes about you and your rune as they work.

➥ *Mark two progress in social practice.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Around midday, Sapphire, Mariam, and a few others appear in a mule-drawn cart with enormous pots of porridge, baskets full of bread, and pitchers of clean, cool water. Children run up and down the rows delivering food and carrying full baskets of beans away to dry while the workers pause to eat and rest, and then you're right back to the harvest.

Working together with the villagers, you finish the first field before sundown. Your back aches despite your magic making the process easier. You stagger with the other workers into the village green where an enormous feast has been laid out—good, plain, filling food, and delicious, given how hungry you are.

➥ *Read entry 6476.*

7613

A gentle song drifts through the grove on the wind. A serene, almost ethereal singing that carries a sense of hope and wonder. You follow the sound, parting a curtain of hanging willow leaves. Sapphire is leaning against the trunk of a large willow tree wearing a finely woven sundress and holding a wicker basket and singing. She notices you as you approach, and her song halts and her cheeks flush with color.

"Sorry. Did you wait long?"
➥ *Read entry 1211.*

"Don't stop. Your voice is beautiful."
➥ *Read entry 9976.*

"What's in the basket?"
➥ *Read entry 3191.*

7622

At the bar, Reginald continues in his incoherent insistence as to the non-existence of gnomes. Gnorman, for his part, seems to have put that argument aside in favor of trading boasts with an old human man missing several of his fingers. The stories and rumors the two of them swap seem more than simply improbable.

Listen to rumors and stories.
➥ *Read entry 3362.*

Brag about your own adventures.
➥ *Read entry 1814.*

Argue with Reginald that gnomes exist.
Requires gnome (race)
➥ *Read entry 6027.*

Look for an excuse to start a tavern brawl.
➥ *Read entry 9711.*

Finish your meal alone.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7629

Phillip chatters excitedly as you finish your story, bombarding you with dozens of questions, but Celyse cuts him off. "That's enough, Phillip," she says. "I believe you promised to help in the kitchen today, did you not?"

Phillip sighs, and stands up. "I suppose. Thanks for the story," he says to you, then walks through the salon and down the stairs.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

You and Celyse return to the salon, where Mathilda soon serves tea and oat cakes.

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

7633

When you express interest in her maps, Celyse shifts into her tutor persona without appearing to notice. "I've been reviewing some maps of the area," she says. "Here, you can see Dragonholt county, with the village and Evesmoore and Carum's Cross. And here's Rostum, and Haverford, and Eventide Forest." She taps the forest on the map a few times with one elegant finger. "Curious how Dragonholt is the only county to border the forest, despite its size. No one has really settled around it, and the majority of the forest is unclaimed land."

She shakes her head and turns to another map. "Now, this is the barony entire. Dragonholt is here," she says, pointing to one edge of the map. "And here's the forest again, and over here is Highcrest, and the baronial seat here. And over here on the edge of the map, Dawnsmoor."

You nod, following along well enough, and then ask if Celyse has a point or just likes geography. She chuckles.

"I'm trying to wrap my mind around the political situation here, and see who benefits if Dragonholt's succession becomes disordered. There's so much empty land in Allerfeldt, so much of it unclaimed or lost to wars and monsters, that I don't see how the baroness herself or any of the distant nobles could be involved here. If Kyric has allies, I have concluded they must come from within Rostum or Haverford, the two counties that lie the closest and have the most shared history."

You point to another map, showing all of Terrinoth as well as the Aymhelin in the south, the Kingless Coast to the west, and Dunwarr to the north, and she shrugs. "Well, that's just because I like maps. You caught me." She leans over the map you indicated and chuckles. "Also, it amuses me how inaccurate the depiction of the Aymhelin is."

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*

"I have suspicions about someone in the manor."
Requires story point P8 is marked.
➥ *Read entry 2127.*

"I have other matters to attend to."
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7634

The lantern-jawed guard with more good looks than, well, really, anything else, Deakon, is admiring his reflection in the blade of his sword. "Oh," he says, noticing you. "Hello. Can I help you?"

Request to use the training ground.
➥ *Read entry 1322.*

Leave the guard station.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7636

You leave the market stall and creep around to approach it from behind. Soon you manage to insert yourself into a gap between the stall and the one behind it, peering at the brothers and their wares through a gap in the curtains that form their walls. You wait, biding your time until the brothers are both distracted by another customer, a brown-skinned dwarf man with a snow-white beard.

You reach through the gap in the curtains and snatch the stone from where it lies, then scamper away, your heart thrumming in your chest like a trapped bird. The stone is even more beautiful up close, a glimmering, shimmering treasure. You have never seen anything you value more. The thought of being without it is like a weight, crushing against your spirit. You will never allow yourself to be parted from the stone.

- *You gain the loadstone (item E).*
- *Mark story point F2.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

7699

The shop smells of warm herbs, with a metallic tang lurking beneath. Mariam gives you a friendly wave from her place by the counter as you look through the racks of potions, elixirs, raw ingredients, and supplies.

Purchase some potions.
- *Read entry 1495.*

Offer Mariam alchemical ingredients.
Requires strange mushroom (item) or dragon blood (item).
- *Read entry 9618.*

Request to use Mariam's alchemy equipment.
Requires alchemy (skill).
- *Time passes.*
- *Read entry 5624.*

Leave the shop.
- *This encounter is complete.*

7743

A hot wind blows around you as you duck into the workshop. The roar of the furnace is punctuated by loud clanging and the in-and-out breathing of the bellows.

If this is your first time visiting this location while it is open…
- *Read entry 5792.*

If story point N1 is marked but R5 is not…
- *Read entry 1640.*

Otherwise…
- *Read entry 4422.*

7752

As you descend from the hills north of Dragonholt, you come across a lively stream, splashing down through the rocks. On a whim, you withdraw the frost rune from your pack, gingerly unwrapping the sheepskin to point the crystal at the stream. In moments, crackling and groaning, the stream is frozen over. You walk carefully across, then will the shard to thaw the ice, which it does just as quickly. You experiment a bit more and find that the frost rune responds easily to your mental commands as long as you hold it in your hand—but never touch it with your bare skin, which results in near-instant frostbite and terrible pain.

Your discovery, the warm summer air, and the hike, all conspire to make you feel much better, and your spirits are soaring as you stride back into the village.

- *You each recover one skill.*
- *Mark two progress in combat training.*
- *Two time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

7762

With the boards cut and the floor in good shape, you start paneling the wall in the front room. Braxton brings a basket full of straw, and you tuck it into the space between the beams as insulation. "Better than nothing," Mariam agrees. "I'll probably want to hang some blankets or tapestries or something come winter."

Braxton nods. "It sounds like you want to make it very cozy."

"Well, I'll be here a while," says Mariam, smiling at the orc. "So why not?"

- *You each lose one stamina.*
- *Time passes.*

If six or more time has passed today…
- *Read entry 7199.*

Otherwise…
- *Read entry 9836.*

7777

Celyse laughs, music falling around you. "Are you still on about that? Love may find me, someday, or it may not. I don't see much point in looking for it until my people are ready to accept me as a woman. Oh, I could find a dalliance among the humans I suppose, but I think it would just be heartbreaking to love another person so completely only to watch them die." She sighs and shakes her head. "No, better to wait. I have time."

Ask about her plans after she stops being a tutor.
- *Read entry 1187.*

Change the subject.
- *Read entry 6930.*

7792

Lady Regina settles down on one of the benches and watches as the green is set up. The old carpenter, Theodore, examines threshing boxes and winnowing flats and shouts instructions at a small army of scurrying apprentices and children.

Phillip enlists your help with assembling drying racks. "The beans will have started drying on the vine," he explains. "But we'll need them to be fully dry before they can be threshed."

After an hour baskets of beans start to come in from the fields. You and Phillip arrange them on the drying racks. A small gang of children runs down the racks, plucking fully brown pods into baskets and then running to the threshing boxes and dumping them in. Skala, Theodore, and a number of the village women remove their shoes, roll up their hose, and step into the threshers, happily stomping on the bean pods. "The beans fall into the gaps between the threshing flats," explains Phillip. "So they don't get crushed."

➥ *Mark two progress in social practice.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Around midday, Sapphire, Mariam, and a few others appear in a mule-drawn cart with enormous pots of porridge, baskets full of bread, and pitchers of clean, cool water. Children run through the green delivering food and full baskets of beans from the field. You pause to eat, then go back to work.

Tymothi sets a threshing box full of broken pods and leaves on the table in front of Lady Regina and himself. They winnow the chaff from the beans by throwing handfuls of the stuff into the air. The heavy beans fall back down into the flat, while the chaff is blown away by the wind. Soon, children are dumping full flats of round red beans into clay jugs, then hauling them away for storage.

As the sun crawls down the sky, the threshing and winnowing stops and the villagers get to work rearranging the benches and tables to prepare for the evening meal. Soon the food arrives from kitchens all throughout the village, and the tables are covered with hot, filling, honest food, just as the workers arrive from the fields, tired and hungry.

➥ *Read entry 6476.*

7807

Through the glass windows you can see Grisbeck, the dwarf baker, and his daughter Penny working on their masks for tonight's ball. One entire table is covered with materials, and both dwarfs are daubed with paint about the face and fingers.

If story point Q5 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 8412.*

Otherwise…
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7842

You hear hammering from within the shop, and as you look in through the door, you see Braxton pounding nails into the floor. Mariam stands close at hand, holding the next nail ready. Stacks of lumber lie piled against the walls, and tools are scattered everywhere.

"Ready," says Braxton, pausing, and Mariam bends down and places the nail, point down, against the floor board.

"In line with the joist, see?" she says. "The nail is going through the board, and it needs something to bite into on the other end." She holds the nail steady while Braxton lifts her hammer.

"Oh," says Braxton, laying her hammer down. "Company." She nods over her shoulder at you, and Mariam bounces to her feet.

"Hello!" says Mariam. "Welcome to Mariam's Mortar and Pestle!" She scrunches her face up and sticks out her tongue. "No, I hate that. Mariam's Mixings. Ew. Worse." Braxton laughs, and Mariam nudges her with her foot. "Well, you come up with something."

"No, no, I have perfect faith in you," says Braxton.

Offer to help with the renovations.
➥ *Read entry 6197.*

Leave Mariam and Braxton to their work.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7852

You give Hetharr the coins. She holds them in her hand for a long moment, feeling their weight, and then surrenders the mask.

"Now everyone's happy," says the fishmonger as she counts out the coins and slides them into a leather envelope. "Commerce at its best." She bustles about in the back of her stall for a moment, then delivers two heavy casks.

You help Hetharr carry the two casks as far as the dragon statues that mark the edge of town, then set them down. "Thank you for your help," she says. "I will have to see about finding my own coins if I'm going to do any more trading with humans."

Before you can ask how she's going to carry both casks off to the forest on her own, three more hyrrinx emerge from the shadows of the orchard, stalking forward on silent cat feet. They nod their heads gravely to you, and then the four of them heft the heavy barrels of fish and vanish into the trees.

➥ *You gain the spirit mask (item M).*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism and one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7863

You climb up on stage alongside the troubadors and join in to their fast-paced rendition of "Kissed by Fire," adjusting relatively quickly to their distinctive rhythmic tricks. The purple-clad elf wanders over to play their lute alongside you, showing off phenomenal dexterity as they pick out complex arrangements of notes faster and more accurately than almost anyone you've ever seen.

When the song ends, the elf leans in. "Not bad. How's your 'Little Red Wagon'?"

"You just got a 'not bad' from the Princeling after one song?" sighs the woman on drums.

The elf flashes her a smile, whirls to the crowd, and shouts "The Princeling and the Anders Sisters, and special guest!" and then you launch into the next song, and then the next, until you're tired and hoarse and happy. Thelga, the barkeeper, shoves you a meal of warm-smelling brown stew and black bread and a tall horn of tart beer to go with it. "Musicians eat free," she grunts, then leers briefly at the elf and returns to her bar.

The musicians break for a meal, which leads to the orc sister shaking her head incredulously as the half-drunken regular Reginald explains to her that gnomes do not exist.

"I take it back," says the younger of the two human sisters. "I don't want to live in this village after all.

"Told you," grunts her orc sister.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Stay a while longer and engage in tavern banter.
Requires seven or less time has passed today.
➥ *Read entry 7622.*

Leave the Drunken Hog.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

7949

"Oh," says Braxton. "Didn't Mariam invite you?"

"I thought you were going to," protests Mariam.

"I thought—never mind!" Braxton shakes her head. "I'll do it now."

"We're getting married tomorrow afternoon," gushes Mariam, grabbing Braxton's hand and leaning toward you with her face aglow. "At the willow grove. Reception to follow at the Swan, of course."

"And we would be very pleased if you would attend," says Braxton, squeezing her fiancée's hand.

➥ *Read entry 1656.*

7953

As Sapphire retreats to the kitchen, Mariam abruptly jolts to her feet. "I'd better go help her. Sapphire. My aunt. With the food." She hops down from her chair to the floor, turning briefly to look at Braxton.

"Hurry back?" says Braxton raising an eyebrow.

"Will do!" says Mariam, and races off. Braxton watches her go, then shakes her head.

"She's been acting odd all day." Braxton sighs. "I hope she's not having regrets about coming here." Braxton stares glumly down into her mug of cider. Then she sighs and glances over at you. "I was offered a position with the town guard," she says. "They want me to train them. They haven't had a proper knight in the village since the war." Her fingers drum on the table. "But it means, well, staying. Maybe longer than Mariam will want to."

You point out that Mariam did just buy an apothecary shop, but Braxton waves that away. "She'll stay a few years, but—never mind." Braxton sighs again.

Sapphire returns and places a tray with an entire roast chicken on it at Braxton's elbow. She stands there, grinning, for a moment.

"Thank you, Sapphire," says Braxton.

"Oh, don't mention it!" says Sapphire, vanishing again. Soon she's back with more food, smiling with her whole body, and then Mariam returns as well, carrying nothing. She makes to sit next to you, but Sapphire suddenly lowers herself into that seat, leaving only the chair next to Braxton empty. Mariam glares at her aunt, then climbs into the seat. She grabs hold of her too large jug of cider with both hands and takes a deep, long drink. She's trembling, you realize as she places the jug down, sloshing cider on her hand. She grabs a cloth from the table and mops her hand dry, staring fixedly at nothing.

➥ *Read entry 1477.*

7955

You flail about for a new conversation subject and wind up asking Penny about her dress. You get the distinct impression that she is humoring you as she explains who made it and her favorite thing about it.

"And the best part," she concludes, "is that it has wee pockets in front like this." She shoves her hands in and pulls out a tattered knit owl toy. "So I c'n carry Thegn Owl wi' me where'er I go."

Mal reaches frantically for the owl, which Penny shoves back into her dress with a look of horror on her face. Jasper laughs. "I suppose I should get him some sort of doll," he says. "Maybe Aunt Sapphire can sew him one."

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

7985

You ask Mariam how she learned her trade, and she laughs. "I get that a lot. I think people think I'm too young to be an alchemist, but I've been learning since I was knee-high on a… on something not terribly tall because, hey, gnome." She tosses the most recent board out the back door and rests her prybar against the wall. "My father, he taught me. Lots of wanderer gnomes apprentice to family members, and my father says that he couldn't keep me out of his bottles and flasks, so he put me to work."

Mariam pauses in her excited chatter to pour a fizzing liquid from a flask onto the floor. She then begins to scrub the area with a broom. To your surprise, the caked-on gunk simply dissolves, revealing not-too-damaged floorboards beneath.

"I've been on my own for a few years now, ever since my father decided he'd taught me everything he could. Just traveling from town to town, selling powders and potions wherever they're needed. My aunt reached out to me when she heard I'd finished my apprenticeship. She told me that Dragonholt could use a new apothecary, although she didn't tell me the last one had—uh—died quite so dramatically." Mariam leans on her broom, looking at the person-shaped silhouette on the wall. "Ah well, I would have come anyway. Having my own workshop is going to be great. It's hard to brew some of the more interesting stuff if you're constantly on the move."

Braxton pokes her head in through the door. "I'm back," she says. "I suppose we'd better load the cart back up; you've gotten a lot done in here."

➥ *Read entry 9485.*

7990

Seeing that Hyrim has accumulated quite a bit of wood, you trade him some of your brick for a larger quantity of wood and are a little surprised when Hyrim accepts the uneven trade.

"No!" groans Mariam, as Hyrim merrily places a wooden village on the board next to his caravan. "Never listen to Hyrim! His words are honeyed lies!"

"You would have done the same thing if you had any bricks," Hyrim fires back, and the two spend the rest of the game trading insults as Hyrim races ahead to a runaway victory.

Braxton leans over to you as the game wraps up and Mariam invents new naughty words just to use them against her brother. "Did that make any sense to you?" she asks. "I always knew Mariam was clever, but I don't think I ever realized just how naturally using her mind for everything comes to her. She's been clever all along, hasn't she?" You're not at all certain Braxton realizes it was Hyrim, not Mariam, who won the game, and you're also not certain it matters.

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

7993

You help yourself to a spare slate and some chalk and begin drawing. Penny glances over at your work and edges her chair closer. "I c'n help ye if ye like," she says. "I'm an expert."

If you have craftsmanship (skill) or performance (skill)…

➥ *Read entry 9559.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 4494.*

7996

The next morning is bright and cool, with a taste of autumn in the air. The voices of merchants and market goers drift into your room from the already-busy market street. You head downstairs to find Mariam already dressed and nervously sitting at the breakfast table, jittering and pushing sausage about on her plate.

"Look who's here," says Sapphire, placing a pitcher of apple juice on the table. "Don't fret, dear, I'm certain Braxton will be down soon."

"Who's fretting?" says Mariam. "I'm not nervous or anything."

"It's her first day open for business, and a market day at that," explains Sapphire. "Although I don't know why you're opening so soon. You can't be ready for customers yet."

"We already had to delay because of the harvest," explains Mariam. "I should have been open on the market day a week ago. I can't miss today's market as well!" The gnome stands and paces back and forth on the bench as you sit down to a breakfast of sausage, fried apples, and golden cakes with honey. "Where is Braxton? I should go up and get her."

"You're not married yet," chides Sapphire. "Give the young lady her space. I suspect you won't be disappointed."

"I hope not," says Braxton from the stairs. Her usual leathers and mail are gone, replaced with tall, freshly shined boots and a brilliantly white shirt under an embroidered vest. Her hair has been carefully piled up behind her head, held in place with a shining silver pin. She pauses, smiling as she sees the look on Mariam's face.

"That…is not a guard uniform," manages Mariam, at length.

"I thought I'd make an appearance at the shop this morning and help out," says Braxton, settling down at the table and carefully covering up with a napkin. "It's your first day. I wanted to do something special." She accepts a plate of food from Sapphire, then glances at Mariam shyly. "Do you like it?"

Mariam breaks into a smile. "I like it very much."

If at least one of you is a gnome (race)…

➥ *Read entry 8304.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2816.*

8001

"I'm certain it wouldn't be proper to let a perfect stranger into Celyse's room," huffs Tymothi. You display Celyse's letter, pointing out that you are her old friend and that if she has been missing for two days, perhaps you had better find her. "Well," says Tymothi, looking over the letter. "Yes, I can see your point. This way."

He leads you to a doorway to the left of the great hall, then into a long gallery hung with portraits and adorned with statuary. He stops at the second door off the gallery. "This is Celyse's bedchamber," he says as he opens the door. "All the guest rooms are in this wing; even my own chamber."

The steward watches from the doorway as you investigate Celyse's room. It's rather large and grander than her usual, with most of the decorations belonging, you suspect, to the manor itself. Only the mess of papers, books, and scrolls across the writing desk under the window make you certain the room belongs to your elven friend.

You don't see any evidence of foul play, but Celyse's traveling cloak is not hanging in the closet, her boots are missing, and you don't see her journal anywhere. You ask Tymothi about her wardrobe, and he purses his lips. "Yes, now that you mention it, it seems that some of her clothing is missing. Perhaps she packed for a trip? Odd that she didn't tell me where she was going, if so."

Eventually, Tymothi escorts you politely—but firmly—from the manor, with promises to send for you if Celyse reappears or reaches out.

➥ *Mark story point S8.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8025

You do your best to herd the goats away from the willow grove and back toward the village green. The goats aren't terribly interested in complying, and a few attempt to get by you by using their horns.

➥ *You each lose two stamina unless you have survival (skill).*

Ultimately, you nudge the goats out of the grove and toward the market. A human woman with dusky skin and a sheepskin vest waves to you, striding down the market row. "Heyo! Goats! Ya, there! Come along," she says, and the goats happily trot over to her. A dog materializes behind the goats, barking enthusiastically at any that move to step out of line. "Where did you find the devils?" asks the goatherd. "Right monsters, this lot. Chewed right through their leads."

The woman thanks you. Then she and her dog lead the goats back up the market street toward the village green.

➥ *Read entry 4525.*

8035

You recognize the hyrrinx woman as Hetharr, the woman you met in Eventide Forest only a few days ago. She recognizes you in turn. "You!" she says. "Please help. This human refuses to give me her fish, even though I am offering a great treasure in exchange."

"Your 'great treasure' is some manky mask. I'm not going to the countess's masquerade, and I don't want it." The fishmonger sniffs and slaps her hands on the countertop. "It's sixty gold coins for the fish you want and that's final."

"I don't have any coins. But I am offering you something useful," explains Hetharr. "And anyway, I should just take the fish. I'm just doing it this way to be polite."

"Just take my fish? You greedy thief! I won't hear of it."

"No, no, I am not greedy. These fish are not just for me. My whole village needs food. The bandits—"

"Everyone's got a sob story," says the merchant. "My fish cost money and that's that."

Hetharr turns to you, her ears standing up straight and her whiskers twitching. "Please," she says. "Can you help me?"

Offer to buy the mask from Hetharr.
➥ *Read entry 8220.*

Pay the merchant for the food Hetharr wants.
Requires you spend 60 gold.
➥ *Read entry 1345.*

Leave the two of them to work it out themselves.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8054

Lei, a dark-haired woman with a soft smile, places a wooden plate in front of you, piled high with steaming, delicious-smelling food. You dig in and find it hearty and filling. When you clean your plate, you release an enormous sigh of contentment.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

As you loosen your belt, you notice a sign hanging on the wall, with a simple, expressive figure of an archer. "Archers drink free," the sign reads. "Ask about our archery challenge."

"That reminds me of a story…" says Theodore.

Listen to Theodore's story.
➥ *Read entry 5534.*

Ask Hunter about the archery challenge.
➥ *Read entry 1724.*

Ignore Theodore and leave the Chatty Archer.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8059

You find a volume titled *A History of Dragon's Hold and its Foundation in the Wake of the Dragon Wars, After the Fall of Margath*. You feel as if just reading that entire title has taught you something useful, but you crack the book open and begin to read. Although the language is rather dry and archaic, the story describes a pivotal battle in the Dragon Wars, when Dragonlord Varinex was defeated by Shaarina, the Dragon Rex.

According to the author, this represented the first intervention by a dragon on the side of the free peoples, and the first dragon-versus-dragon battle of the Dragon Wars. A new community of refugees and newly liberated people formed on the site of Varinex's defeat, and the settlement became known as Dragon's Hold because the people believed they lived under the protection of Sharrina. (The author never does manage to spell her name the same way twice in a row.)

When the rule of the Council of Barons was restored, Dragon's Hold was created as a county, and Sir Kyric the Just was named as the first Count of Dragonholt. (No explanation is offered as to the change in name.)

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Extend your study session.
Requires seven or less time has passed.
➥ *Read entry 3320.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8085

You find the potions you're looking for on a shelf on the back wall. Small signs near each set of bottles indicate the prices, which you note are the same as the "friendship discount" Mariam normally gives you. Another sign reads "Special low prices today! Enjoy my wedding!"

You take the potions you need and leave your coins in the basket on the counter.

➥ *You may purchase up to three healing potions (item A) for 25 gold per potion.*

If story point S4 is marked…
➥ *You may purchase one swiftness potion (item D) for 50 gold.*

If story point L8 is marked…
➥ *You may purchase one strength potion (item F) for 50 gold.*

Regardless…
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8097

You slip into the adjoining booth and listen with your back to Elena and Tymothi. From there, you can hear their conversation quite well.

"We must act quickly," says Lady Elena. "Regina will not be with us much longer, and if she dies with the matter unresolved…"

"Then anything could happen," Tymothi agrees with a sigh. "But I rather think, my lady, that you overestimate Regina's control of the girl."

"What about your own control? You had no luck with her sister, either, I seem to recall."

"No, more's the pity. I mishandled Sonia, I admit." You hear wine pouring and the wet sounds of someone drinking. "My lady, I do not believe that Rochelle can be led into anything. The only solution is to let her come to the idea herself."

"You mean, let Albyrt win her hand on his own?" gasps Lady Elena, her voice shot through with horror. "I cannot entrust the future of both our houses to chance, Tymothi."

"You may have to," says Tymothi with a sigh. Then he stands, and you can all but hear his bow. "Forgive me, my lady. My duties call; I must ensure the Evesmoore refugees are settled properly." With that, he is gone. You slip out soon after.

➥ *Mark story point T2.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8116

Moving quickly but quietly you creep up behind the largest boy, and when he next lifts the knit owl above his head you snatch it from his hands.

"Look at this, Penny, look at your stupid little—hey, where'd the owl go?" he says, finally noticing that it's gone. He turns around to stare dumbfounded at you, dangling the owl from your hand as if it was always there.

"That was amazing," says the littlest boy, the one missing his front teeth.

You remind the boys that taking things that don't belong to them is wrong, then return the doll to the girl and the biggest boy's belt to him. "Wha—!?" he says as his hose falls down. "When did you—!?" His friends laugh, his cheeks turn red, and all three of the boys race away.

If story point N2 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 8435.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 6114.*

8121

"Of course," says Celyse. She pours you a cup and removes a cloth bundle from within the basket, which she unties to reveal a pile of golden oat biscuits. "I like to come out here and meditate from time to time," she says.

"I visit Eventide Forest as well, of course. It's curious how that forest feels, well…" she pauses "…different from the Aymhelin. Old and powerful, of course, but somehow wilder. The Aymhelin is our home, our ally. It can be dangerous in places and at times, and it must always be respected, but the elves are as much a part of the forest as the trees." She sips her tea, studying the oak standing before you. "That is not the case in Eventide. This forest doesn't need me." She sets down her tea. "But listen to me, chattering on. Tell me about your own adventures."

You pass a quiet hour, talking and laughing with your old friend about times gone by. The tea is quite good, and the oatcakes sweet and flaky.

- *You each recover one stamina.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

8123

A hush settles over the crowd as Skala, the orc shrine attendant, walks to the wagon. He climbs up onto the stage and raises his hands. "Hello, everyone," he says. "I understand that gnomish tradition calls for an elder who knows both of the intended to perform the ceremony. I was very pleased to be invited to do so for these two women. If you'll all bear with me, I'll do my best to keep this short—brief. Keep this brief." Laughter ripples through the crowd, and Skala tugs at his long beard. He gestures, and musicians begin to play a stately tune somewhere behind you.

One by one, Mariam's father and brother walk through the crowd and stand to one side of the stage. They are followed shortly thereafter by the captain of the guard, Tweegal, in his uniform, and Rochelle, the countess's daughter, who stand opposite. "Someone is missing," Skala says, glancing between them, then his eyes rest on you. "Aha! Come, come, they want you to stand witness, too." You stand and join the others down below the stage.

The music stops, then starts again in a brighter and more spritely tune as Braxton and Mariam walk out from behind the hung curtains, each emerging from the opposite side of the wagon. Braxton is wearing her guard uniform and a crown of white flowers, while Mariam wears a flowing blue skirt, with white flowers braided into her hair. New white cloaks flutter from their shoulders. They walk, slowly at first, then faster and faster, around the outside of the assembly, meeting at the top of the semicircle and joining hands. Even in the bright sun of the summer's day, their smiles make your day warmer.

Hands joined and sneaking glances at one another, they walk as solemnly as they can manage through the crowd to the stage, where Mariam climbs up to stand with Skala, and Braxton stays standing on the grass. For once, Mariam is the taller of the two.

"The gnomes say that marriage is walking together," says Skala. "The orcs say that marriage is an alliance, fighting side by side against the challenges of the world. Trust orcs to turn everything into a battle." Skala grins as the crowd chuckles. "You two have come together because you love one another. You wish to walk together, to face whatever may come, together." He gestures to the witnesses gathered on either side. "Marriage is a lifelong commitment, and beyond, as well. The union you create here goes beyond you. It unites your families and creates a new family and a new tradition that will carry on after your deaths." He raises his voice, speaking to the assembly. "And all of you, here, today, are part of that. You have brought these people together. And they have brought you together, as well. Look around you. This community is forged this day, and may it last ever after."

Skala reaches out his hands and touches each bride on the shoulder. "It is time. Say your vows."

Mariam takes a deep breath. "I, Mariam," she squeaks, "pledge myself to you, Braxton." Her voice grows stronger as she continues. "I will walk with you when you travel and stay beside you when you rest. I will wander with you wherever you go, because my home is with you, now and forever."

"I, Braxton, pledge myself to you, Mariam," chokes Braxton, her voice flooded with tears. But as she continues, her voice, too, grows stronger. "I will be your shield and your comfort. I will hunt for you when you are sick and beside you when you are strong. My home is with you, now and forever."

"Mariam Emerald Elyad Everon Brightstone and Dame Braxton of Dragonholt, I pronounce you wed," declares Skala. "You may kiss the bride."

They turn to face each other, and Mariam bursts out laughing. "I'm finally tall enough to do this!" she says, bending over her wife and dipping her backward with a passionate kiss. Cheers erupt all around you as children run every which way, hurling flowers into the air or directly at the faces of onlookers. The musicians strike up a gay melody, Sapphire begins to sob, and the newlyweds walk through the crowd, arm in arm, smiling and waving as they go.

When they reach the edge of the semicircle, they turn. "Reception at the Swan!" shouts Mariam. "See you all there!" Then she grabs Braxton's hand and they sprint, laughing, across the grove.

- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

8125

"Penny," says Grisbeck. "Ye've done plenty to help yer dah out today. Ye should run and play with your friends now."

"Oh, dah," says the girl. "I told ye, what use have I got for friends when I've got the best dah south of the Dunwarr Mountains?" She smiles, but it seems a fragile sort of thing, and then she settles down under the windows with a knit owl whose head is attached by only a thread.

"Penny," says Grisbeck. "What happened to Thegn Owl?"

"Those boys tore him again," says Penny, patting the owl mournfully.

"Oh, that ain't right," sighs the baker. He tugs at his beard and clicks his tongue. "They ought ta know better'n t'do such a thing." He frowns then shakes his head and turns his attention to you. "What can I do for ye?"

Get something to eat.
Requires you each spend 5 gold
➥ *Read entry 2078.*

Offer to repair the doll.
Requires craftsmanship (skill).
➥ *Read entry 3233.*

Give Penny a gift.
Requires cloth doll (item).
➥ *Read entry 8178.*

Leave the bakery.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8129

"Since Mariam was born I haven't gone quite as far afield as I did in my youth," says Isaek. "For a while we all traveled together, Sapphire too, in the south of Terrinoth and into the Aymhelin. The elves are a wise and welcoming people, as long as you come in peace and bring respect for their ways."

"I don't think they much care what we think of their ways," observes Sapphire, "so long as we leave their forest alone. Very strict rules about gathering firewood in the Aymhelin."

"When Mariam struck off on her own, I headed west, even went so far as Lorimor," says Isaek. "Curious place. Very good place to find alchemical reagents; their bazaars are something to see. But I came back to Terrinoth eventually; I was near Dawnsmoor when I got word from Sapphire about Mariam's impending nuptials, so I headed straight here. Barely made it in time."

"I sent that message the day I met Braxton," laughs Sapphire. "I could already tell. I'm glad I was right!"

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

8165

Tucked behind a number of other books, you find an ancient tome bound in what seems to be dragon's hide, its cover chased with gold and set with small gems. Happily, it is illuminated and despite its great length uses a variety of diagrams and illustrations to help break up the dense, cramped text.

The book, whose title is *Alto Magica Empyreal*, is written mostly in an ancient language, but between many pages are tucked loose sheets of notes and annotations written in a modern tongue. Apparently some past sage wanted to include notes but was reluctant to mar the beautiful manuscript with his or her own hand.

The notes refer to something called the "Verto Magica," and suggest that it is the source of "all change and transmutation and e'en the inexorable march of Tyme's swift arrow and yea the turning of the seasons e'enso."

The final note is simply "What did Timmoran know?"

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.
Requires seven or less time has passed.
➥ *Read entry 8059.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8178

You crouch down and offer Ursula's doll to the dwarf girl. She creeps forward, taking the doll from you as if she thinks this is some cruel joke. "For me?" she says. "Oh, thank ye. I love her!" She squeezes the doll tight, then lifts up her stuffed owl. "Thegn Owl, meet yer new friend. Oh, does she have a name?" she asks you.

➥ *You lose the cloth doll (item).*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

You tell her about Ursula, and her mother, and how the doll was her friend when she was lonely. Penny nods, drinking in your story. "Oh, yes," she says. "I'll call ye Ursula, then," she says to the doll. "Oh! Wait here!" she says to you and rushes out the door. You hear her feet clattering up a stair and then running about above you, and soon she's back, holding a whorling shell in her hand.

"I found this," she explains, slightly out of breath. "When we first came t' Dragonholt, me dah an' me. It's been me good luck charm." She nods. "I want ye to have it, now."

➥ *You gain the polished shell (item J).*
➥ *Mark story points I7 and Q5.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8189

Penny hands you a colorful streamer as you approach, and the spiky-haired gnome woman wraps up her explanation of the dance. She crosses outside the circle of dancers and picks up a pair of wooden spoons, sitting on a folding chair next to a man with a zither and another with a gleaming brass horn. She starts rattling out a rhythm with her wooden spoons and calls out "Let's begin!"

The music starts out slow, and the dancers' movements are languid, lifting the tassels up above their heads and walking in a slow spiral around the pole. As the music shifts measure by measure, the dancers change direction, shouting out with each shift. Soon the dance becomes more intricate, as the dancers begin to swap places, braiding their tassels together as they move in smaller circles, handing the fabric off to one another as they rotate around the pole once more. The music moves faster and faster, quickening your pulse as the dancers become more and more energetic and the patterns become more complex. The occasional collision sends the—mostly younger—dancers falling to the ground in fits of laughter, leaving their fellows to snatch up their trailing streamers and keep the pattern moving.

Somehow, the dance ends in a tight knot around the pole, shrieking children and dancers running full tilt in a circle as the brilliant braids above come together one last time. As the last chords ring out, you and all the other dancers collapse in a tired, laughing heap.

- ➥ *You each lose one stamina.*
- ➥ *Mark one progress in physical training and one progress in social practice.*
- ➥ *Time passes.*
- ➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8193

You work together to find a suitable tree, one with a broad, flat branch only about a human's height off the ground among its other wandering limbs. Then you boost Sapphire up into the tree and hand her fallen branches and other materials you find around the place as she weaves together a passable nest, rather like a large bird. Sapphire uses her blanket to cushion the thing while you climb up and draw in a curtain of falling willow fronds, weaving them together to shelter you both from the outside world. You even find a suitable place to hang the wicker basket and another for your lantern.

"Well, this is cozy," says Sapphire as you finish and settle into the nest with her. "I haven't done anything like this in years and years. What a good idea." She reaches into the basket and produces more snacks, and you whisper together by lantern-light well into the night.

- ➥ *Read entry 3241.*

8209

The dancers effortlessly add you into their number, whirling and marching in intricate patterns according to the will of the singer, who has incorporated dance-calls into her song. As she sings of the stars burning brightly above, the dancers form a star with their bodies, and revolve beneath the twinkling sky. As the drummer sings of the river running swiftly, the dancers form two lines as riverbanks and send pairs dancing down the middle two at a time, to much hooting and cat-calling.

You dance briefly with the old orc spiritspeaker, Skala, and then watch as Gnorman and Reginald strut down the row with high-kicks and much laughter. The old woodworker, Theodore, dances a sprightly jig when his turn in the middle comes up, then retires to sit against the paddock and nurse his complaining back.

You dance until your feet are sore and your throat is parched from singing and laughing. Fortunately, someone is handing around a heavy clay jug full of cider, so you take a deep drink, then hurl yourself back into the dance.

- ➥ *You each lose one stamina.*
- ➥ *Mark one progress in physical training and one progress in social practice.*
- ➥ *Time passes.*
- ➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8220

You offer to buy the mask from Hetharr, and she steps back, clutching the mask to her chest. "What? No, this mask is precious to me. And anyway, I need to trade it for the food this human refused to just give me."

"I won't trade it for food, you lunatic," shouts the fishmonger. "But I'll sell you fish for coins. Take the damn deal."

"Oh," says the catfolk woman. "I think I understand." She holds the mask toward you so you can take a better look. It seems like a face composed of leaves and plants, fashioned from wood and leather. Its green lacquer is vibrant and glossy.

Offer her only a small amount.

Requires you spend 20 gold.

- ➥ *Read entry 9341.*

Pay her a moderate amount.

Requires you spend 35 gold.

- ➥ *Read entry 6810.*

Pay her handsomely for the mask.

Requires you spend 60 gold.

- ➥ *Read entry 7852.*

Refuse to buy the mask and leave.

- ➥ *Time passes.*
- ➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8222

"Don't neglect your fundamentals, Rochelle," chides Braxton, but she settles her arming cap back over her black hair and ties it off under her chin.

"I need more than fundamentals to keep Phillip and mother safe," says Rochelle, settling herself into a guard position—one that Braxton had just drilled her on, you note. "Let's begin."

Braxton attacks with speed and ferocity that takes you aback, it's so unlike her usual calm. Rochelle meets the attack with grim determination, knocking it aside and holding her ground. Braxton presses her but despite her power can find no opening in Rochelle's guard, until she falls back and calls "Switch!"

You step forward and press your own attack, which Rochelle deflects as you begin to maneuver around the hall. You trade blows with grunts and wordless cries, but you're never able to gain the upper hand on Rochelle, until Braxton calls "Switch!" again and steps in to replace you. "You're tiring," says Braxton. "You're spending too much effort on your parries and counterblows. A defensive posture relies on shepherding your strength until an opportunity presents to use it." Braxton whirls and knocks aside a thrust, then blocks a high cut and counters with a low slash. Rochelle leaps over her sword, and they slam together with a shout, then come to rest. Braxton's sword lies against Rochelle's collarbone, and Rochelle's hard against Braxton's stomach. Braxton chuckles. "Now we're both dead. You protect your family best alive, my lady."

"Let me worry about that," says Rochelle, stepping back. "Switch." You grab your weapon and approach.

- ➥ *You each lose two stamina.*
- ➥ *Mark one progress in combat training.*
- ➥ *Read entry 8350.*

8233

"All three counties have been united for generations," says Ursula.

"Since the days of Countess Priscylla Belmont of Rostum," says Lord Leone. "She led the three counties in the defeat of the Raven Horde."

"I think you'll find that it was Countess Ygraine's white sorcery that broke the magic of the Raven Priest and saved us all," says Oszric.

"I was told that it was Count Aleks Fairfax of Dragonholt who orchestrated the alliance," says Ursula.

"Gods save us all from nobles and their pride," groans Elena.

"You're a noble now, dear," says her husband.

"She's certainly prideful enough," harrumphs Leone.

- ➥ *Read entry 6062.*

8272

The front door and the boards that held it in its frame are leaning against the outside wall. You can hear the chipper voice of a certain gnome prattling away inside. The excited chatter is occasionally punctuated by commentary from Braxton.

Within, you find Braxton holding the charred remains of a cabinet and Mariam gesticulating with a broom. "And we'll—I'll replace that window with one giant pane of glass! I'll put some tools and some ingredients in the window, showy stuff, you know, glass tubes and colorful mushrooms and things." Mariam turns to include you in her excited chatter, apparently not at all surprised to find you in her shop.

"Today we get all this debris out, and tomorrow we bring in the materials to lay new floor and start fixing these walls. It'll be great! You'll see." She flourishes with her broom toward the back room. "I'll set up my workshop back there and use the front space for stock and sales. It'll have good light; it's important that my customers feel comfortable."

"How about your guests?" asks Braxton, nodding at you.

"Oh. Right. Good to see you!"

Offer to help with the renovations.

- ➥ *Read entry 1057.*

Leave Mariam and Braxton to their work.

- ➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8276

The woman in the faded dress finishes her story, and before the general hoots of appreciation and derision have even reached their peak, an older gnome man with a sharp nose and the stem of a pipe caught between his teeth leaps to his feet to take her place. "That's nothin'!" he calls. "Let me tell you all about my trip through Blackwing Swamp! Now, what you should know first is the legend of the Drowned City."

"How about the legend of the Droning Gnome?" jeers an elderly gnome woman, her nose and ears pink with alcohol.

The stories continue in this vein for some time, each tale met with disbelief and wonderment in equal measure, with hecklers and boosters by turns. You note that storytellers displaying great confidence are heckled aggressively, while those who seem more timid are gently encouraged to continue. You also note that the audience is not shy about supplying additional details or improvements to the storytellers as they go about their business.

All told, you're not certain any of the stories are true, but you can't claim you were ever bored.

- ➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- ➥ *Time passes.*
- ➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8283

You rush to the guard station, where you find the old orc Tweegal on duty, already trying to calm a nervous crowd. "What are you going to do about the dragon?" frets a tall human man with broken veins all through his face and nose.

"Try to stay calm," says Tweegal. "Dame Braxton and Tallea have already gone to the manor to ask her ladyship for instructions. We will do everything possible to keep you all safe."

"Oh?" calls a surly-looking gnome man. "And what's that, then? Got any dragon-slaying tricks up your sleeve, then?"

"There's no need to panic," says Tweegal. "The dragon was sighted leagues away and there's no reason to think it will come to the village."

"If it does come," says the grey-robed librarian, clutching a thick book to her chest, "Lady Regina is the person best equipped to deal with the threat. She defeated a dragon before."

"That's just some old story," grouses the gnome. "Regina is an old lady; she's got no better chance of beating a dragon than I have."

It's clear that you won't be of any particular help here.

➥ *Mark story point Y3.*

Go to Fairfax Manor to speak with Lady Regina.

➥ *Read entry 3328.*

Head east and protect Evesmoore yourself.

➥ *This encounter is complete. When you are prepared to face the dragon, visit the eastern road (location 1810).*

You've already done everything that you can.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8298

You share what the steward told you as Mariam and Braxton pause in their tasks and listen intently.

"You're going after him?" asks Braxton.

"Oh, that poor kid," says Mariam. "I hope he's okay."

"I'll go with you," says Braxton. "Let me fetch my—"

"You will not!" says Mariam. "I need you here, and you're barely recovered from that beating the bandits gave you."

"Actually, Braxton, you would be a big help."

➥ *Read entry 6000.*

"Just potions will be enough. Do you have any ready?"

➥ *Read entry 9971.*

"Get some rest, Braxton."

➥ *Mark story point I1*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8304

You inquire if anyone has any plans for the festival tomorrow, with a knowing wink to Mariam. Sapphire laughs and places a hand on Braxton's shoulder. "I think your engagement has been long enough, don't you?"

"If I understand correctly, we either hold the wedding tomorrow or in half a year, and half way across the country," says Braxton. She squints, peering down at Mariam, who smiles as innocently as she can manage. "Although I'm not at all certain that I have understood correctly. I'm not sure I believe half of Mariam's stories about your gnomish festivals."

"They're your gnomish festivals, too, now, dear," says Mariam. "Father and brother will be there, so it's time to get hitched. Outsiders are always so surprised," she muses as she cuts herself a serving of sausage. "It's like they've never had a few dozen caravans and a few hundred gnomes arrive all at once, hold their traditional festival with dancing and games and all sorts of fun things, and then vanish with the morning mist the next dawn."

"You move them every year!" exclaims Braxton. "Most people never *have* seen one before!"

Sapphire shakes her head. "It's one of the great mysteries," she agrees.

➥ *Read entry 2816.*

8318

A group of gnomes and children, including the dwarf baker's daughter, Penny, are gathered around the festival pole. Each of them takes hold of one end of a colored sash as a gnome woman with spiky hair explains the intricacies of the dance.

A number of gnomes are playing a game with hoops, jumping through them, swinging them about on arms, and hurling them back and forth. As far as you can tell the rules involve never using the hands. One girl is showing off by running a hoop up to her shoulders, then back to her hips, up and down her torso, just by swinging her body. A small crowd of children stands in a circle around her, clapping and cheering.

Near the market row, several trestle tables have been arrayed in a ring around a cluster of iron stoves, their chimneys trailing threads of woodsmoke. The tables are covered with earthenware dishes piled high with food, flatbreads and foraged greens and sautéed tubers and legumes, all spotted with spices from all across the world.

Take up a colored sash and join the dance.

➥ *Read entry 8189.*

Join the gnomes for a game.

➥ *Read entry 3972.*

Dish up some delicious looking food.

➥ *Read entry 7096.*

8339

"What, no, what, what, what?" says Mariam as you present her with the horn of dragon blood. "Are you serious—of course you are. Cook my goose, it's still warm." She takes the horn carefully and slips it into one of her racks for bottles.

"I don't know if you knew this, but dragon's blood is a very potent ingredient for someone like me." She jumps down from her steps and starts rummaging through the cabinets against the wall, then emerges with several flat-bottomed glass flasks. "Strength potions, obviously, but also it helps with the chills—how could it not? And the horn you've got it in, I could use some fireproofing, not going to lie."

She climbs back up and arrays the bottles neatly, then pulls a key from one of her pockets and unlocks a small steel box. She counts out a small stack of gold coins and presses them on you. "Just, a dozen different things I can do with this, easily. I can't accept this as a gift; here. And if you need any strength potions, they're yours at cost."

➥ *You lose one dragon blood (item).*
➥ *Mark story point L8.*
➥ *You gain 100 gold.*

Give her the unusual fungus as well.
Requires strange mushroom (item).
➥ *Read entry 4455.*

Take your leave.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8350

At length, Braxton calls a halt and strips out of her training outfit. "That is enough for today, my lady. I must attend to other matters and prepare for the ball."

Rochelle bows stiffly, sword at her side. "Thank you, Braxton. I shall practice my forms for a time."

"You really should take a break, my lady."

"Your opinion is noted," says Rochelle, pacing to the center of her fencing circles.

Braxton sighs and leads you out of the room. "I'm worried about her," she confesses. "She's pushing herself too hard. I only hope she comes out of it before she does herself some sort of injury, or makes a mistake she will regret." She bids you farewell at the manor's door and walks away, one hand on the hilt of her sword.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8354

"Oh!" says Mariam, stepping away from the building and whirling to face you. "Whoo. Snuck up on me, there." She turns back and peers through the window again. "I was just taking a look at the building, seeing how bad the damage is before I go sign the papers and hand over my gold." Mariam walks down the alley toward the back. "I bet the back door is unlocked. Let's go see."

The back door is boarded shut, but there's a gap in the boards large enough for Mariam to squeeze through. "Oooh, I'm glad I wasn't here for this," she says, her voice sounding muffled from within the building.

Follow Mariam inside.
➥ *Read entry 5867.*

Leave her to her business.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8412

You tap on the glass, and Penny leaps from her chair to run toward you. You hear her muted shouts echoing through the glass, and then she opens the door and the words catch up to her.

"…can't wait until it's finished! Come an' see!" She grabs you by the hand and drags you into the bakery. "Dah, look!" she says. "He's makin' his mask, too," Penny tells you. "But mine will be better."

"Always good ta see ye," says Grisbeck from his seat, daubing paint on a mask. "What brings ye here today?"

"Just dropping by to say hello."
➥ *Read entry 7009.*

"Do you want help with your mask, Penny?"
➥ *Read entry 2949.*

8415

Sapphire looks away and sighs. "Oh, Sonia. She really was a darling young woman. She was thoughtful, she was studious, compassionate. I used to play cards with her; she was sharp once she learned the rules." Sapphire smiles at some memory and looks back to you. "She'd always help in the kitchens come harvesttime. It's such a shock that she'd die so young, and in a fall from her horse no less. She was a devoted equestrian; I don't know that there was a better rider in the whole village."

Sapphire sets down her needlework and raises a small sparkling glass of what you presume is cider. "To Sonia Fairfax. She would have been a splendid countess." She throws back a small mouthful and sets her drink aside.

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

8430

Albyrt lunges forward, making the first attack. Brynn dances eagerly forward to parry, but you put yourself in the way and take a cut across your arm for your trouble. Your arm feels a chill before the pain flares up, and you bite your lip to keep from crying out.

➥ *You lose two stamina.*

The two nobles clash together as you stagger from your wound, swords ringing and flashing in the summer sun. Albyrt cries out, and Brynn dances away, her sword red with blood and her dress flaring around her like a peacock's tail. You force yourself back between the two before they can do each other further harm, and the guards arrive a few moments later.

"That's enough," roars Tweegal, the old orc captain.

"He started it," hisses Brynn.

"And you damn near killed me," moans Albyrt.

"Thanks for keeping these two idiots from murdering each other," says Tweegal to you. "We'll take them back to their fathers." He snatches swords away from both youths and marches them off in the direction of the manor house. The nearby merchants all give you a brief round of applause before going back to hawking their wares.

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *Time passes.*

If five or less time has passed today...
➥ *Read entry 7285.*

Otherwise...
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8435

The little girl—Penny, the baker's daughter—beams up at you. "Thank ye so much!" she says, turning her owl around in her hands. She looks down at the stained, almost-colorless toy, and then her expression shatters. "Oh no!" she cries. "They've torn it again!"

Indeed, the owl's head remains connected to the rest of its body by only a single thread. "Ah well," she says, cradling the toy gently. "I'm still very grateful ye got it back. Maybe someday I'll be a hero like you."

➥ *Mark story point H8.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

Repair the doll.
Requires craftsmanship (skill).
➥ *Read entry 9947.*

Bid Penny farewell.
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8440

A loud cry from the edge of the green catches your attention. Three boys are laughing cruelly at a crying little girl, tossing a tatty, knit owl back and forth over her head. "Look!" says one of the boys. "She's flying!"

As you get closer, you realize that the girl isn't that young, maybe ten years of age, but she is very small. She has copper hair, golden-brown skin, and a traditional Dunwarr dwarf knot pattern woven in the fabric of her skirt. "Aw, the shorty-short beard-girl can't reach!" jeers one boy, throwing the owl over her head again. You don't see any evidence that the girl has a beard, so you assume that "beard-girl" is just another bit of cruelty about her heritage.

"Give her back!" cries the girl. "Me ma made her for me!"

"Where is your ma?" jeers the biggest boy, a thick-necked youth with unruly black hair. "Didn't she come down out of the mountains with you?"

The little dwarf girl collapses and sobs, and the pack of boys laughs, pointing at her and mimicking tears of their own.

Scold the boys and console the girl.
➥ *Read entry 8777.*

Threaten the boys and scare them off.
➥ *Read entry 5232.*

Steal the doll from the boys and return it to the girl.
Requires stealth (skill) or thievery (skill).
➥ *Read entry 8116.*

Pretend you didn't see anything.
➥ *Mark story point Z6.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8457

"Nominally, it's a celebration of the alliance of the three houses, meant to mark their triumph over some undead horde or another a few centuries ago." Celyse flicks her fingers dismissively. "I suppose that's how they justify it being a masquerade as well, macabre costumes to remember the enemy. But of course it has little to do with that now and is mostly an excuse to drink too much, eat lovely food, dance, and gossip with the other important people." She sighs. "Did that sound cynical? I suppose it might." She swirls her wine in her glass and takes a sip.

"There is also the matter of the recent tragedies to befall the Fairfax family. So I imagine that, in addition to everything else, it will be a memorial for Sonia and Phillip. And of course that will be politicized, too, while poor Rochelle and Regina will just be trying to grieve." Celyse shifts in her seat and turns to you. "My goodness I'm being maudlin. I promise I will not be so morose this evening. It will be a grand time, I promise."

➥ *Read entry 1388.*

8461

You push through the Swan's door into a crisp, clear night, the crescent moon so bright you could read by it. When you reach the manor house, the door is opened by a stocky human man, the stablemaster you'd suspect. He peers at you as he ushers you inside.

"Her ladyship an' the rest are in her solar," he says. "Up those stairs there." He gestures to a heavy stone stair that climbs up to an ancient stone balcony overlooking the great hall. Then he returns to a long table where a half-dozen other servants are cleaning up from dinner.

When you reach the balcony, you pass through an arch into the manor's ancient east wing, a stone roundhouse from Dragonholt's more violent past. Regina is seated in a tall chair of carved black wood with her children on either side, each clutching a hand. Celyse stands by one of the tall narrow windows, smiling at the noble family. The steward, Tymothi, whispers something to a servant who promptly vanishes down a staircase near the hearth.

"Be welcome, please," says Regina. She makes no effort to stand. With a nod, she indicates a number of chairs, forming a broad circle in the center of the room. "Please sit. My son has been telling me of your heroism in Eventide Forest."

➥ *Your fame increases by two.*

"I would like to hear more about the bandits," says Celyse, crossing from the window to take her own chair.

"Yes," says Rochelle. She has acquired a sword from somewhere, which now leans against her chair in its scabbard. "How many? How are they armed? Where exactly is this ruined tower?" Her fingers drum on the hilt of her sword.

"It won't matter, 'Chelle," says Phillip. The boy slumps in his chair as if he might slide off to puddle, snoring, on the floor at any moment. "By now they've moved their camp."

"Perhaps," says Tymothi, settling in to his own chair at Celyse's side. "Perhaps they've left entirely. They can't be foolish enough to remain in Eventide Forest now that we know they're there." He gestures, and the servant from before appears at Regina's elbow with a tea service, then proceeds to give everyone a cup of steaming tea. Regina sets hers carefully on the arm of her chair and ignores it.

When the servant withdraws, Regina speaks. "If it is truly my brother Kyric who leads these bandits, he will not leave until he is dead, or he sits in this chair. I trust everyone in this room with my life and the lives of my children, but we must consider the possibility that Kyric has allies within the village."

"Within your household, mother," says Phillip. "Who else knew Talbot and I would be riding into the forest?"

"Let us not succumb to paranoia," Regina says with a gentle smile. She reaches out and clasps Phillip's brown hand with her pale one, her signet ring flashing in the light of the roaring hearth. "There are many ways Kyric's forces could have learned of your visit to the Tree of Tales."

"But surely one of them is that we have an informer in the household," says Rochelle.

"What would you have me do, Rochelle? Release my entire staff from service? Throw them all in the dungeon?"

"We don't even have a dungeon," says Phillip. "You turned it into a wine cellar before I was born."

"We can keep our eyes open," says Celyse. "Kyric will try again. And when he does, we'll stop him."

"Quite right," says Regina. She closes her eyes, green like her children's, and shivers, before pushing herself to her feet. Some color blooms in her pale cheeks. When she opens her eyes, they are clear and bright. "My son is alive, thanks to you. I can never fully express my gratitude, but perhaps this might be a start." She nods, and Tymothi stands and hands you a small velvet pouch. It is surprisingly heavy.

➥ *You gain 150 gold.*
➥ *Mark three progress in heroism.*

"It is my hope you will remain in Dragonholt, for now. I understand you have lodgings at the Swan. Please ask Sapphire to send me the bill for your room and board." With that, she extends her hand with its glimmering ring. You kiss it and are dismissed.

Rochelle escorts you to the door. She is darker than her mother, her skin brown rather than alabaster, her hair curly rather than straight, and her shoulders broad and her arms strong compared to Regina's almost wraith-like thinness. She has her mother's eyes and her mother's height. And as she steps through the door into the moonlight, you see she has her mother's regal bearing. "My brother is very dear to me," she says. "With my sister's death and my mother's failing health, I could not have borne his loss. I am grateful."

You part with Rochelle at the manor stairs and walk back to the Swan as the moon passes its zenith. After arriving in your room, you eschew your gear and collapse in bed, almost immediately asleep.

➥ *Read entry 5288.*

8464

"Speaking of odd jobs," adds Sapphire. "I'm sure my niece would appreciate your help with the renovations on her new shop. It's a big job, even with Braxton's assistance."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

8465

"Let me help you with that, Sapphire," says Braxton, standing to follow the gnome into the kitchen. A silver necklace flashes on Braxton's neck in the firelight as she goes, and she and Sapphire chatter happily as they work.

Mariam grins, watching them go, then leans back in her chair and sighs happily. "Everything's going to go great," she says. "The shop is coming along very nicely, and the upstairs rooms weren't damaged at all. There's enough room up there for storage and living, both. There's even a huge bedroom!" She grins, eyes focusing on something only she can see.

Braxton sets a platter with several roast chickens on it in the center of the table, and Sapphire soon follows with the rest of the food. You busy yourselves with serving while Sapphire checks on the rest of her patrons, vanishes into the kitchen one more time, then settles herself at your table to join your meal.

Sapphire is all smiles and cheer. She looks from Mariam to Braxton and back to Mariam. "So," she says, "Anything fun happen today?"

Braxton blushes slightly. She picks up her mug of milk and takes a long, slow drink, not making eye contact with anyone. A smile crosses Mariam's lips as she watches Braxton's reaction.

"As a matter of fact, yes," says Mariam, hopping up to stand on her chair. She reaches out and takes one of Braxton's hands in both of hers. "Everyone, it is my distinct pleasure to inform you that Braxton has agreed to be my wife."

"Huzzah!" calls Sapphire, lifting a bottle of sparkling wine and sending the cork arcing out over the center of the table. "My niece is getting married! Free drinks for everyone!" She leaps to her feet and runs around pouring wine for everyone in the common room, running back to the kitchen when the bottle runs out.

"Aunt Sapphie!" laughs Mariam. "How did you know to have the wine ready so quickly?"

"You think I don't know my own sister's bridal necklace when I see it on my new niece's neck?" chides Sapphire, returning to the table. She embraces Braxton and kisses her on the cheek. "It looks good on you, dear. I'm very happy for you both."

➥ *Read entry 9840.*

8472

"Aye, bakers rise early in the morning," says Grisbeck. "Best if we both get ta bed as soon as we can." Together, you clean away the remnants of your meal and then walk back to the village. You part ways outside the bakery and walk back toward the Swan humming to yourself under your breath.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8490

The festival pole in the center of the green is tightly woven with cloth streamers in all colors. They've been braided around the pole in a complex pattern and tied off near the base. Nearby, a gnome woman with spiky hair and a pair of wooden spoons leads a small band as a group of gnomes dances in a loud, whooping circle around her.

Another group of gnomes and villagers are playing a game with hoops, jumping through them, swinging them about on arms, and hurling them back and forth. As far as you can tell the rules involve never using the hands. One gnome man is hopping about on one foot as he spins a hoop around his other leg and one around each arm. As you watch, he ducks his head and catches a fourth hoop around his neck, which he also sets spinning.

Near the market row, several trestle tables have been arrayed in a ring around a cluster of iron stoves, their chimneys trailing threads of woodsmoke. The tables are covered with earthenware dishes piled high with food, pans of sizzling fried river fish, a pot of stewed vegetables, and piles of fresh berries with clotted cream, among dozens of other dishes. Standing nearby, you see Reginald, the carpenter's apprentice, red-faced and stock still. His friend Gnorman pours a cup of ale from a small keg and hands it up to him. Reginald drinks, still staring fixedly into nothingness.

Join the group dance.
➥ *Read entry 1163.*

Join the gnomes for a game.
➥ *Read entry 3972.*

Approach Gnorman and Reginald.
➥ *Read entry 9916.*

Dish up some delicious looking food.
➥ *Read entry 7096.*

Leave the village green.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8492

With a howl of frustration that sounds vaguely like "could a non-existent gnome do this!?" you launch yourself at Reginald and send him sprawling down the length of the bar. He staggers and spills Gnorman's drink all across the top of the bar.

Gnorman slaps both hands on the bartop and leaps down to the floor. "That's done it," he says. "No one beats up Reg but me." He shucks his vest, revealing a surprisingly well muscled body, and tilts his head from side to side, cracking his neck.

"Fight, fight, fight!" roars the crowd.

➥ *Read entry 1200.*

8496

You find a thick volume with no title written on its cover or spine but overflowing with stray bits of paper, leaves, pressed flowers, and what seems to be a folded scrap of a flag. "Ah," says the librarian. "That's the *Book of Eventide*, there. A living history of fact and legend; my predecessor started it, and I've been adding to it."

The tales within are fascinating in their curious combination of fanciful improbability and prosaic everyday nature, ascribing supernatural causes to things as mundane as the weather. According to the book, Eventide Forest is home to powerful spirits, the greatest of which is the spirit of the Tree of Tales. The people bring their stories to the Tree of Tales and offer prayers at the shrine to keep the spirits friendly and well disposed to the village, so that the forest will remain safe and the crops will be bountiful.

There is also some mention of a "marriage of spirit and flesh" that takes a "terrible toll" on a human but rewards him or her with all the power of the Spirit of Eventide.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*
➥ *Time passes.*

Continue studying another topic.
Requires seven or less time has passed.
➥ *Read entry 5098.*

Leave the library.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8545

You and Sapphire walk together to an open glade surrounded by drooping willows. The ring of trees makes the clearing feel like a secluded room, a secret place away from the village.

"I love coming here at night to watch the stars," sighs Sapphire with a smile. She gazes up at the night sky. Countless shimmering stars are laid out on a blanket of black velvet and swirls of astral color.

You can't help but notice how happy Sapphire looks as she watches the sky, and a single word passes your lips. "Beautiful." Sapphire blushes lightly, unsure if you're directing the comment toward her or the stars.

Sapphire takes a blanket from the wicker basket and spreads it out near the center of the glade. Next she sets out a few dishes: a creamy potato salad, uniformly cut vegetables, sandwiches, and a selection of cheeses, meats, and crackers.

"It looks delicious."
➥ *Read entry 7575.*

"You prepared all this for me?"
➥ *Read entry 9600.*

8620

Making an educated guess, you remind them both that they're in Dragonholt for the countess's masquerade ball, and probably neither of them will be attending if they murder each other in the street.

"You think I care about some stupid ball?" sneers Albyrt, assuming a (rather sloppy) fencer's ready position.

Brynn, on the other hand, slams her half-drawn sword back into its scabbard. "No, that's a good point. My father won't thank me for making him spend the entire ball apologizing for your death." She smiles sweetly up at the much-taller Albyrt and manages an extremely insouciant curtsy. "My apologies, my lord. The error was entirely mine." Then she sashays off, leaving the Cunningham youth swallowing nervously.

"Stars above, I thought I was about to die," he says, deflating like an empty wineskin. "Thank you for that, my friend." He staggers away, looking grey but unharmed.

A few nearby merchants clap you on the shoulder and thank you. "That could have been bad for business," one says. "I'll tell the guards to keep an eye on those two."

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *Time passes.*

If five or less time has passed today...
➥ *Read entry 7285.*

Otherwise...
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8624

Working together, you and Grisbeck spoon the custard over the wobbling sponge cake and adorn it with berries and edible flowers. "I wanted ta thank ye," says Grisbeck. "F'r bein' so kind ta me an' Penny. It has been difficult to call anyplace home, f'r me, since leaving the Dunwarr Mountains." Grisbeck sets the custard aside and sighs. "Mostly I worry about Penny. She's had a hard time makin' friends, ye know." He smiles at you as you work the pastry bag, adding loops and swirls of icing to the cake. "She's taken quite a shine ta ye. So, thank ye."

Grisbeck glances up at you and chuckles. "Ye have something on ye," he says softly. You brush one of your cheeks but don't feel anything. "Here," he says as he brings his hand up to caress your neck and brushes your cheek with a firm, calloused thumb. His hand lingers on your neck for a moment as he gazes into your eyes. Then he draws his hand away and presses his thumb to his lips, tasting the cream while maintaining eye contact. "Sweet."

You finish decorating the cake under a gentle silence, Grisbeck glancing up at you from time to time and smiling to himself.

➥ *Read entry 9972.*

8631

You share your suspicions about the stablemaster, Gawin, noting that he saddled her horse for her the day she died, and that she considered this unusual enough to mention it in her diary.

"And he could easily have tied a sloppy knot, or even cut through the straps, causing her to have an accident," Celyse agrees. "He'd be the one to examine the saddle, as well, so he could hide any evidence of foul play." She frowns and taps her chin. "He has the means. In fact, he has better means than practically anyone I can think of. But I'm not so sure about motive. He's served the countess's family for years; in fact, his father served as stablemaster to Lord Holland. Still, humans have done all sorts of things for gold; perhaps he's in Kyric's pocket or has gambling debts I don't know about."

Celyse nods and tugs at her clothing. "I think you might be on to something. I'll take a careful look at Gawin. If there's any evidence tying him to Kyric, I'll find it."

➥ *Mark story point D5.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*

"There's something else."
➥ *Read entry 2127.*

"That's all I had."
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8633

As you approach, Grisbeck shifts to keep both you and Penny in front of him and starts adding a few flourishes to his act, tossing a burning brand into the air to spin a few times, then snatching it up again with ease. Now that you're closer, you see that his sticks aren't branches, but torches cut to the purpose and tipped with oily rags. Presumably, these are much better balanced and safer to handle than random sticks pulled from the bonfire.

"Ho, friend," says Grisbeck from behind a swirl of flame. "Enjoying yourself this evening?"

"Dah, dah, do the spinning beard of flamin' death trick!" Penny waves her own burning stick about her and jumps up and down.

"What?" gasps Grisbeck, mock-shocked. "An' burn me beard off? I'd better not!"

Juggle with Grisbeck.
➥ *Read entry 9401.*

Play with Penny.
➥ *Read entry 9729.*

Ask about the "Spinning Beard of Flaming Death."
➥ *Read entry 4178.*

8638

"If you go far enough," says Sapphire suddenly, "the stars change. They're changing all the time, of course, over a single night, from month to month. But in the far south or far north, it's a strange sky. Many wanderer gnomes learn to navigate by the stars, but Jade never had the trick of it." She smiles, thinking back over some memory of her sister. "I never did, either, but I didn't tell her that. I had my poor sister convinced that I always knew where we were by the stars, that I'd learned it from Uncle Beryl. One time, she challenged me to find my way through the marsh by celestial navigation. What she didn't know was that I snuck in there beforehand and hid myself landmarks all through that marsh, and I led us straight home." She chuckles, leaning back. "Well, straight home through a nest of marsh lizards, but that's what she gets for doubting me."

You refrain from pointing out that Jade had every reason to doubt her, since Sapphire didn't know how to navigate by the stars.

"I did love my pranks as a girl," says Sapphire with a wistful smile. "That and building my secret homes, anytime we stopped for a spell. I'd build tree houses, secret castles in the forest, whatever I could. I suppose that might be what I'm doing with the Swan, on a grander scale." She lies back, and for an instant she seems a young girl again. "What shall we do now?" asks Sapphire.

Lie together and watch the stars.
➥ *Read entry 9750.*

Build a nest in one of the trees together.
➥ *Read entry 2719.*

Play a prank on Mariam and Braxton.
➥ *Read entry 6278.*

8646

Soon enough, the dinner has all been prepared. Sapphire wipes down the counters as Jasper does a few dishes, then steps back and nods. "Grisbeck," she says. "I'll be joining the party now, if you don't mind."

"You go on ahead, then," he says, carefully stirring a copper pot of egg custard. "I just have this cake to finish."

Sapphire and Jasper dry their hands and leave the kitchen. A raucous roar of celebration comes through the door to the common room as it swings open.

Return to the party with Sapphire.
➥ *Read entry 8822.*

Join Jasper with Penny and Malachite.
➥ *Read entry 3960.*

Stay and help Grisbeck in the kitchen.
➥ *Read entry 3933.*

8665

"Well," says Theodore. "I was just thinking back to the days when we would play at the millpond. We had this friend, Yaran—"

"You had this friend, Yaran," sniffs Ursula.

"Yaran was a frightful sort, I admit. Terror to the rest of us at times, with his pranks. You learned not to leave your clothes by the edge of the stream when Yaran was around, I tell you, not if you didn't want to run back to the village naked and dripping!" Theodore chuckles at the memory.

"He never did dare try that with me," says Ursula.

"Ha!" Theodore laughs. "No one would. But Yaran was not a coward, no, and there was no one you'd rather have with you when things got hairy. One time, we were splashing about in a pool just inside the forest when something came whuffling through the bushes toward us. Well, we'd all heard the stories of angry spirits and cat-monsters and worse, so we were mighty scared, but Yaran, he just snatched up a stick and put himself between us and the monster. And when it transpired that the monster was a wild pig, well, he didn't flinch, just yelled and waved his stick at the thing until it wandered off." Theodore sighs and squeezes his wife's hand, then looks at you. "Yaran was a true friend. It's good to have friends. That's all I was thinking."

Ursula leans in and kisses him firmly on the cheek. "You big softie," she says. "You're not wrong."

➥ *Read entry 2509.*

8681

You lay under the sky and watch the stars dance. "Look at 'em," says Grisbeck. "The ancient Dunwarr believed th' stars were gems, set in th' vault of the Cavern of Night. We know better now, o'course, but I see what the ancients saw, clear as silver."

You allow that the stars are very beautiful and Grisbeck shifts to look you in the eyes. "Not as beautiful as you," he says, touching your cheek lightly. Then he blushes and rolls back to study the stars again.

You lie together, making up constellations, gasping at the streaking lights of shooting stars, and enjoying the warm summer night. Eventually, you realize that the stars have revolved around you, and that it must be very late.

"Don' worry about that," says Grisbeck. "Penny is stayin' the night wi' Jasper an' Mal at the Swan. We c'n stay out here together all night…if you'd like."

Stay with him all night.

➥ *Read entry 3817.*

Return to the Swan.

➥ *Read entry 8472.*

8719

You start out along the eastern road, riding toward Evesmoore and the plume of smoke on the horizon. Less than an hour into your ride you are met by Braxton and Rochelle, horsed, riding back. They rein up as you approach, shaking their heads.

"It's over," sighs Braxton. "The dragon changed course and came straight to Evesmoore. It was wounded, but even so it tore through the village, destroyed half the buildings outright, and half the remainder burned before we could get the fires out."

"Only one fatality, though," says Rochelle. She wipes at her forehead and seems surprised when her hand comes back covered in soot. "Some Rostum merchant. The dragon was searching for him. It killed him, took something from his corpse, and left, heading north faster than any horse."

"Your mother was right; evacuating Evesmoore was the most important thing."

Rochelle makes a non-committal grunt. "I'm glad the dragon killed that bastard. He knew he was being chased by a dragon so he hides in the middle of a village full of innocent people?" She shakes her head. "Well, people are starting to move back into the village already. I'm sure mother will be looking for some way to speed the rebuilding along."

You join them and ride back to Dragonholt, there no longer being any question of pursuing the dragon.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8726

"Let me see that." Fiore takes the runeshard from you and holds it up to the light, turning it slowly to examine it from all angles. She shifts her chair toward a nearby table, then places the rune on the wooden surface and scrabbles about a bit for a piece of paper and a stick of charcoal. With a few quick strokes, she takes a rubbing of the rune, which she sets aside. "I'm no runemaster, but I think this is the Draconic glyph for 'war,'" she says. She sketches for a moment, humming quietly, then nods. "At the crossguard, with a thread of silver running the length of the blade. Yes, I believe I can work with this."

She returns her attention to you. "With this, I can forge you the finest sword you'll ever see in your life. And I'll do the work myself; none of my apprentices are up to this task. One hundred and fifty gold is my fee." She takes up the rune and presents it to you. "What do you say?"

Accept the offer.

Requires you spend 150 gold.

➥ *Read entry 5237.*

Reject the offer.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8729

You climb the staircase on the west side of the hall and pass into the salon. You can hear grunting and the clang of metal coming from behind the right door, and passing through it you find Braxton and Rochelle locked in mock combat.

Both women are wearing thick padded doublets and arming caps and wielding longswords that you hope are blunted for training. They circle and clash, locking steel against steel and often body against body, parting with a shove and grunt each time. Rochelle, by far the smaller of the two, is also the more aggressive, forcing Braxton to give ground with rapid overhand strikes, then shifting to darting slashes from either side. Braxton knocks each attack aside with quick, subtle movements. Eventually, Rochelle pulls back and then lunges, only to have her sword knocked aside and thrown from her hand with a swift slash against her knuckles.

"Margath's breath!" swears Rochelle, clutching at her hand. "I thought I had you."

"You didn't," says Braxton. "I baited you, and you took it." Braxton bends down and retrieves Rochelle's sword. "You were trying to keep me off balance. Against a weaker duelist, it might have worked. But I have some experience at this sort of thing." She returns the sword and turns to you. "Did you need something from me, or from Lady Rochelle?" she asks.

"Just 'Rochelle,' please, Dame Braxton."

"Then just Braxton, please, Rochelle."

"Here to train with you both."

➥ *Read entry 2093.*

"Just wanted to watch."

➥ *Read entry 8845.*

"Sorry about this morning."

Requires story point A6 is marked.

➥ *Read entry 7090.*

8737

"Well, if learning is what you're after, then you might start with the library. More books there than I've seen in my life. If you want to learn to shoot a bow, you can try the fletcher's, or if you want to learn to fight maybe the…" Sapphire pauses and purses her lips. "The village guard aren't the best. At anything. But it can't hurt to ask.

"Fiore at the smithy can always use a hand and might be of a mind to teach her trade while she's at it. And the orchards always need help, if you want to become a proper country farmer.

"And the taverns are full of stories. Who doesn't like learning a new story?"

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

8742

The Countess Inn's common room is hung with old, faded banners, most showing some variant of a black and white dragon crest: the coat of arms of the various rulers of Dragonholt going back generations. The far wall is painted with an expansive mural, showing a large tree that you take to be the great oak at the heart of Eventide Forest, its boughs enfolding the figure of a green-eyed woman wearing a silver coronet—presumably Countess Regina.

The patrons in the common room are a collection of men and women of various races all in their middle or later years, well-to-do judging from their clothing. They talk quietly in small groups or sit reading (or napping) by one of the two hearths, on either side of the room. You find yourself matching their demeanor, walking more carefully, lowering your voice, almost without meaning to.

An elderly human woman in a green dress sits at a table directly beneath the painted tree, and waves you over as soon as she catches your eye. "Welcome to the Countess Inn," she says in a hushed tone. "You must be new in the village. I'm Ursula. If there's anything you need, don't hesitate to ask me or my daughter." She motions toward a slender, almost ethereal woman in her middle years carrying a tray through the common room. "Pretty young thing, isn't she? The only one of my children left; the others have all moved away."

If story point O3 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 7276.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 5562.*

8751

"We were both thrown out of the same tavern, if you can believe that," says Braxton. "Well, I say 'thrown.' I walked out under my own power, at least. Mariam was already a bit drunk by the time this happened, of course. After that, she got herself into all sorts of trouble—stumbled into a group of thugs, nearly leapt from a bridge, and at the end of the night she decided to curl up in a water trough to sleep it off."

You and Braxton lift one side of the cart, dumping the majority of its contents into the fire pit. "All in all, I saved her life three times over the course of the night," continues Braxton. "So she figured she might as well make it official and hire me."

Braxton chuckles to herself and smiles, apparently recalling something Mariam had said. "There is some disagreement as to precisely how much lifesaving happened that night. But in any event, I'm glad we met."

Braxton brushes her hands clean and grabs hold of the now-empty cart again. "Let's go back to the shop."

➥ *Read entry 9485.*

8752

A tall human man with broad shoulders stands behind the counter polishing a mug. His sleeves are rolled up, revealing muscular arms. He looks up at the door as you enter and gives you a toothy grin and a friendly nod.

"You new to Dragonholt?" asks the man behind the counter. "I don't reckon I've seen you before." He gives his mug a once over and sets it on a lower shelf with others like it. Then he slings the drying cloth over his shoulder and steps toward you. "The name's Hunter. I'm the owner of this here drinking hole."

You introduce yourself and glance around the room before taking a seat. There are patrons at several of the tables—men and women enjoying food, drink, and banter. Others are sitting at the bar engaged in conversation with a human woman behind the counter. Beside you sits an elderly human man whittling a small wooden duck.

"You look like the adventurous type. Me and my wife Lei used to do some adventuring before settling down and opening this place." Hunter gestures to the woman behind the counter. She smiles and waves. "Lei can fix you up something to eat if you're peckish. Just shout at us if you need anything at all."

"Oh ho, adventuring, eh?" exclaims the older man sitting beside you. "I had myself many an adventure in my day. Spent much of my youth making day trips to Eventide Forest. Though back then it wasn't as dangerous as it is now." The old man blows on his whittled duck, removing excess wood shavings.

If story point V6 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 6622.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 2806.*

8757

You walk among the trees, reading wooden placards proclaiming names, birthdays, dates of death, and other details of those interred in the orchard. Here and there a memento dangles from a cord on a branch or rests in the bole of a tree.

After a while the calls and sounds of the orchard workers fade away. The drone of crickets and the singing of birds combine to make the grove feel like another world, a place removed from who and where you once were.

➥ *Mark one progress in spiritual meditation.*

You pause beneath an enormous tree, one twisted and gnarled with age. You see a young woman—Rochelle, the countess's surviving daughter—kneeling beneath it, her eyes closed.

If story point J1 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 2129.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 9290.*

8767

Consulting your notes, you begin by taking down the iron cauldron and upending it over the fire. You build the fire up with sticks of green oak until the smoke threatens to overwhelm you. Pulling thick leather gloves over your hands, you lift the cauldron and slap an iron lid over it before flipping it upright and setting it aside—still full of smoke—to cool.

Bustling through the cramped space, you gather the rest of the ingredients, including a base of bull's blood, bat's wings, and a few things that the future drinkers of the potion would rather not know about. You add them to the cauldron, mixing with the cooled oak smoke and the flakes of iron from the cauldron itself.

Eventually, you're ready for the final ingredient: the dragon's blood. You put on a heavy apron and re-don the gloves, then pour just a bit into the cauldron. In moments, the liquid is returned to a simmer as the heat from the dragon's blood spreads through it. Another splash and the potion has come to a roiling boil. With the last drop of dragon's blood, the potion leaps and froths in the cauldron, spattering some onto your apron before finally settling down. You try a small sip and feel strength rush through your body like a hurricane.

➥ *You lose one dragon blood (item).*

➥ *You gain three strength potions (item F).*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8777

You summon up every moment of every parent you've ever seen scolding a wayward child and unleash it on the cruel boys. You invoke their own parents and their sense of right and wrong, asking if their families would be proud of how they're treating this girl.

"Well, I guess—" says the biggest boy, but you cut him off and point out that the spirits are always watching and judging, and how would the spirits think of their behavior?

"I don't—" says the next-biggest boy, the one with the pox scars all over his face, but you cut him off too and unleash your most scathing attack: what would Countess Regina think?

"She'd be disappointed in us," whispers the smallest boy, the one with the missing teeth in front. He holds out the plush owl to the dwarf girl. "We're real sorry, Penny."

"I don't think you're short, Penny," says the tallest kid. "You're just the right size, you know, for a dwarf." The girl takes her knit owl back as the boys shuffle away, heads hung low.

If story point N2 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 8435.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 6114.*

8786

"Now, this was back in the war," says Theodore.

"Which war?" interrupts a gnome man with a tall hat.

"Ah, the first one," says Theodore.

"First one?" says the gnome, cocking his head. "Just how old are you?"

"Not the first war ever," explains Theodore. "The first war I served in. The one before the Two Barons War."

"Well, what was its name, then?"

"It was—it doesn't matter," says Theodore. "The point is that during the war—"

"Was it the One Baron War?" asks another gnome, a woman who is merrily (and a little drunkenly) braiding her hair back along the side of her head.

"That would make sense, wouldn't it?" says the gnome with the hat.

Theodore sighs and taps the bar, ordering another drink. "I give up," he says.

"Ho!" calls a gnome from near the door. "Slantwise Joss is going to have a go at that archery challenge!"

Watch the gnomes attempt the archery challenge.

➥ *Read entry 3284.*

Leave the Chatty Archer.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8813

"Come here," says Braxton, throwing one arm around Mariam as the gnome approaches. Crouched down as she is on the floor, Braxton is close enough to Mariam's height to press their foreheads together. "I don't think anyone will be surprised to learn that we care for each other."

"But I don't want anyone thinking I took advantage—"

"Mariam, I'm three times your size. No one thinks you took advantage."

"Okay. Fine." Mariam sighs. "Yes, we care for each other."

"Was that so hard?" asks Braxton.

"You have no idea," says Mariam.

"What?"

"I said no, dear."

They smile at each other. You'd swear the room got a little brighter.

➥ *Read entry 7762.*

8815

Ursula's daughter, whose name you still haven't managed to coax out of her, brings you a platter mounded high with lightly spiced boiled vegetables, rich red beans, and a cut of cold mutton. The food is a little on the bland side, but filling, and seems appropriate to the clientele.

➥ *You each recover two stamina.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8822

You follow Sapphire through the crowd to a table below the windows, where Mariam's father and brother are already sitting. "Isaek," says Sapphire, leaning over to kiss the slim white-haired gnome man on both cheeks. "So good to see you again. And Hyrim!" Sapphire smiles as she sits across from Mariam's brother with his sparkling blue eyes. "You've grown up very handsome, haven't you."

"Aunt Sapphie, it hasn't been that long since we last saw each other, has it?" asks Hyrim.

"Too long," announces Mariam, arriving with her new bride at the head of the table. They sit and Mariam beams. "I'm so glad to finally have my family together again. Well, and Jasper, wherever he is."

"And new family, at that," says Hyrim, raising his glass to Braxton. "To the happy couple!" Glasses clink as everyone cheers and drinks.

"What's next for the happy couple?"

➥ *Read entry 5806.*

"What do you keep yourself busy with, Hyrim?"

➥ *Read entry 5084.*

"Any good stories about Sapphire's past?"

Requires story point X6.

➥ *Read entry 5017.*

8845

You find a seat on the bench against the wall and watch as Braxton and Rochelle clash again and again. Twice more, Braxton disarms her smaller opponent, until Rochelle is pacing and fuming with frustration. Braxton tears off her arming cap and helps herself to a jug of water. "Take a break," she suggests. "There's no hurry."

If story point J1 is marked...

➥ *Read entry 2744.*

Otherwise...

➥ *Read entry 4375.*

8873

Grisbeck waves at you as you approach. "An excitin' day, ta be sure," he says. "I'm very happy ta be welcomin' these two fine ladies as me neighbors." He grins as Penny races by, chased by a pack of young gnomes. "Sapphire was one o' th' first to welcome us when we came inta town, ye know. We stayed at the Swan f'r the first few days, afore I bought the bakery. Miss Sapphire always made us feel at home. And her niece is cut from th' same seam, her an' her young lady both."

You ask about Grisbeck's own wedding. He sighs and strokes his beard. "Oh, it were a beautiful thing. We, ah, had ta get married in a hurry if ya catch my understanding. We barely finished our wedding gifts in time. I made her a lovely ring for her hair out of gold, all marked with runes from both our families an' set with stones me cousin cut. Ah, I'm no smith ta speak of, but I think it turned out all right. She forged me a knife, folded steel, worked bronze on th' handle. A lovely piece. I still have it back at th' bakery."

He chuckles and looks up at the willow trees spreading their branches above you. "We were married in th' hall o' the ancestors in Korim Hold. Tis a lovely chamber, tall vaulted ceilings, lightwells shinin' down upon th' statues. When we jumped th' fire our families cheered an' the whole hall rang with th' sound of it." He nods down at the gaily colored caravan. "This is nice too."

➥ *Read entry 3069.*

8934

You pull out your collection of Dunwarr history books and drop them on a nearby table with a loud "crack!" The librarian comes racing toward you like an angry serpent, then stutters to a halt when you explain that you would like to donate the books to the library's collection.

"Truly?" she asks, reaching out to touch your books like they're a newborn child. "It's so rare that anyone adds to my collection—goodness, is this *The Words of the Yrthwrights*? I've been looking for a copy for over ten years." She examines the books, gasping in increasing joy as she sees the titles. "This copy of the *Histories* is in the original Dunwarr!" she exclaims. "I can finally read it without the alterations made by that reckless hack Brianna Brightflame to suit her political agenda!"

Abruptly, she takes your hands in hers and shakes them up and down with great enthusiasm and no grace at all. "Thank you, thank you!" she says. "I will begin cataloging them straight away!" She takes the books to her writing desk and begins writing on a new sheet of paper with an audible sigh.

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *Mark story point B7.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8977

You notice that Sapphire has kept a space open for you, so you settle down on the grass next to her. She leans close and whispers. "It's happening! I can't believe it, Mariam, of all of her generation, is the first to get married." Sapphire grabs your hand and stares at the stage, vibrating in place.

You ask Sapphire if she's worried that she'll be more beautiful than the brides. "Oh, I shouldn't think so," she says, still distracted. "I made Mariam's outfit myself, and it fits her perfectly, and Braxton sure knows how to fill out a uniform—" She trails off as the implications of your comment filter through her excitement. She blushes and swats your arm. "Behave," she says. "This is their day."

➥ *Read entry 8123.*

8981

The ever-present pile of scrap wood and lumber has been set ablaze, and dozens of people gather in the light of the bonfire. Some chat in small groups, others throw in their own discards left over from the end of the market. A simple stage has been erected in the form of a cart with its wheels blocked, where a human man and a woman stand, she beating a broad skin drum and singing while he trills away on a reed pipe. About a dozen people dance in two long lines between the stage and the fire.

The dwarf baker, Grisbeck, and his daughter Penny laugh and play near the fire. He is juggling several burning brands, whooping and laughing, while she watches and claps, holding her own burning stick. The old orc spiritspeaker, Skala, sits on the edge of the paddock, smoking from a long clay pipe and watching the goings-on with amusement.

Everyone seems to be having a splendid time.

Talk with Skala about Dragonholt's traditions.
➥ *Read entry 5045.*

Approach Grisbeck and Penny.
➥ *Read entry 8633.*

Join the crowd in song and dance.
➥ *Read entry 8209.*

Leave the village green.
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

8984

You let yourself drift through the crowd in the market street, sizing up the merchants and their customers. Soon, you spot a few who you think might be suitably easy marks.

If you have awareness (skill) or streetwise (skill)…
➥ *Read entry 9028.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 2284.*

8996

You join Phillip and Celyse at the table, as Phillip explains to her the custom of the Daqan Lords to rule through the Council of Barons. Celyse asks clarifying questions and asks him to name his sources several times, sending him scrambling through a collection of books and loose papers on the table.

"In the event of a split vote, who decides a course of action?" asks Celyse.

"The council was formed with thirteen lords to prevent just such an occurrence," says Phillip, pointing to a dog-eared copy of *The Last Days of King Daqan*.

"But?"

"Ah, yes, but, the thirteenth chair has been empty for centuries after the Night of Betrayal. So the barons can become tied, in which case…" Phillip pauses in thought. "The Steward of the Citadel would be asked to vote?"

"Are you asking me or telling me?"

You're reasonably certain that Celyse knows the answers to all these questions, but watching her put Phillip through his paces is an education in itself.

➥ *Mark one progress in academic study.*

After some time, Rochelle walks back into the studio, now dressed in a fencer's doublet and hose, flushed and breathing hard. "Still at it?" she asks.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *Read entry 4765.*

9022

"Absolutely not," says Mariam. "I forbid it."

"Mariam," says Braxton. "I'm a knight. This is what I do."

"Those bandits nearly killed you last time!" Mariam scrambles to her feet on the counter; her eyes are level with Braxton's and shining with the threat of tears. "You tried to pretend that you weren't hurt—the big strong orc—but that was a lie, wasn't it!"

Braxton's eyes fall to the floor, conflicting emotions streaming across her face. She opens her mouth to speak, but she cannot find the words. She leans on the counter in silence.

"We'll be careful, Mariam. I promise."
➥ *Read entry 9788.*

"Phillip could be in grave danger."
➥ *Read entry 6969.*

"Get some rest, Braxton."
➥ *Mark story point I1*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9027

The guard takes the purse and listens to your explanation with a nod of his head. The grey-haired dwarf wrinkles up her face like she's just eaten something sour. The red-faced merchant seems to have only now realized something is amiss.

If you have deception (skill) or persuasion (skill)…
➥ *Read entry 9548.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9958.*

9028

As you size up your opportunities, you also stay aware of the threats. Two guards are wandering back and forth up the row in the black and white of the lords of Dragonholt. Neither is paying especially close attention, but you make sure to keep their location in mind at all times. A bigger threat is the handful of private guards hired by the richer merchants, bored-looking men and women with weapons at their hips and all the pity of hungry cats.

You give these guards wide berth and bump into a red-faced trading factor arguing the price of wool, slitting his purse with a palmed dagger. A little later, you feign interest in a merchant's patter as she displays a few brass curios, and you dip your hand into her till. You wander about, finding or creating a few more opportunities to purloin valuables, and then count up your earnings.

➥ *You gain 10 gold plus an additional 5 gold for each of the following skills you have: agility, awareness, deception, performance, and stealth.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9072

The young woman sees you and calls out: "Mister Tymothi!" A moment later a slender man in a slightly rumpled velvet doublet emerges from a door to your left. "Ah," he says. "Yes, hello. I'm Tymothi, her ladyship's steward."

You ask after Celyse, explaining that you are old friends. "Terribly sorry," says Tymothi. "I'm afraid Celyse is not available. To be honest, I haven't seen nor heard from her in two days." You ask after Countess Regina and Tymothi shakes his head. "No, I'm afraid the countess is not available to visitors. She is far too busy."

If story point Y5 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 8001.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9087

With dinner finally served in full, the guests all settle down into their seats and begin to eat. Sapphire stands up on her chair and welcomes everyone, including those poor innocent passersby who thought they were just coming for a normal evening at their favorite inn. "The good news," she says, "is that you eat free tonight, and all you have to do is suffer through a few toasts." Chuckles spread through the crowd as Sapphire looks down at her niece and smiles.

"Mariam and Braxton are embarking on one of the greatest of life's journeys, and they're doing it together. Seeing the joy they bring each other, I can't imagine anything different." She raises a glass of sparkling wine, a gesture echoed across the room. "To Mariam and Braxton!" she calls. "May their journey together be long and never boring!"

More toasts follow, from Hyrim, from Mariam herself. Even Isaek, slightly tipsy, stands up to say a few words. Your focus, however, is on the food: steaming roast duck, crisp greens dressed in oil and vinegar, rich brown bread with soft goat cheese, stewed vegetables fragrant with lemon-tinged spices, a traditional gnomish flatbread of milled corn and peppers. The food seems to never end, and it fills you with warmth and joy.

- *You each recover two stamina.*
- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*

Eventually, you, and everyone else, are full, and the crowd pushes away from the tables. Some leave the Swan, off to tend to their own business elsewhere, while others cluster into groups as tables are cleared away.

Sapphire and Isaek take seats by the fire, sipping mulled wine and reminiscing about the past. Mariam and Hyrim drag Braxton to a nearby table, promising to teach her all about their favorite game they played as children. Jasper and Grisbeck share a bottle of mead as they watch their children run shrieking through the room, chasing each other around.

Join Mariam, Braxton, and Hyrim for a game.

- *Read entry 4852.*

Sit with Sapphire and Isaek and talk.

- *Read entry 5874.*

Watch the children with Grisbeck and Jasper.

- *Read entry 5883.*

Return to your room for a while.

- *You may have any amount of time pass today.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

Leave the Swan.

- *This encounter is complete.*

9143

Lei soon brings you a meal of roast venison with a side of mashed peas and onions, which smells like a warm fire on a cold night and warms you like a mug of mulled cider. You sit and eat as Theodore tells another story to a group of frequently interrupting gnomes.

- *You each recover two stamina.*

Another group, already a little drunk, is chatting with Hunter. "It's pretty simple," he says. "You get three tries. If you hit the bullseye, your drinks are free tonight."

"With your bow?" a gnome asks, drumming his calloused hands against the bar top. He has no hair on the top of his head, but a fringe of it gathered up into a long tail down his back.

"With my bow," says Hunter. "You stand one stride from the door, no more."

"Your bow is probably a piece of trash that never flies straight," the gnome complains.

"If it were easy, what would be the point?" Hunter chuckles. The gnome grumbles, stroking his chin.

Listen to Theodore's story.

- *Read entry 8786.*

Watch the gnomes attempt the archery challenge.

- *Read entry 3284.*

Leave the Chatty Archer.

- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9173

You attempt to explain the nuances of currency-based systems of exchange, but with every word the catfolk woman's ears get flatter and flatter and her tail lashes faster and faster. "Enough," she growls and spits. "I can tell you have no respect for any ways other than your own!" Several nearby people draw away from the woman, creating an open space around her. She snarls, and claws extend from her free hand, shining white in the summer sun.

"What's all this then?" asks one of the liveried guards, stepping up with his hand on the cudgel at his belt. "Who's this? What kind of creature are you?" He peers at the catfolk woman with naked curiosity and disdain. She shrieks, slashing in his general direction with her claws, then bounds away, scrambles up a tree, and leaps to a nearby rooftop. In moments, she's gone.

The fishmonger shrugs, thanks you for your help, and offers some discount fish that makes your stomach churn just to look at. You politely decline.

- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9182

You join the musicians and singers, who step aside to make room for you and are happy to add you to the music. Jasper drifts over to stand beside you as you perform, nodding happily as you zip through the difficult bits of the piece and then settle smoothly into the more somber number that follows.

As the evening progresses, Mariam comes to join you, adding her voice to a plaintive gnomish "Lament for the Lost," a song memorializing those who vanish on the road never to be heard from again. Sapphire drifts over as well and grins at her niece and nephew.

"Should we do 'A Silver Piece for A Fair Young Maid?'" asks Sapphire.

"Only if you promise not to do the silly dance," says Jasper. Sapphire agrees, and the three of them launch into a dizzying and fast-paced comic song, trading verses back and forth as they unfold the increasingly improbable reasons the Fair Young Maid needs the silver piece, including "to replace the moon in the sky" and "to stop a leak in the sea." You do your best to keep up while the rest of the assembled musicians laugh and cheer. It seems as if these three have been practicing this particular song for literally decades, and when they finish the applause is thunderous.

Sapphire pats you on the shoulder. "Not many people can keep up with us when we get started on that one," she says. "I should have known you were special."

- *Mark one progress in social practice.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9184

The foreman nods. "No one's working out on the western side of the orchard today, if you want some peace and quiet," she says. Then she leaves you to your thoughts.

If it is day four…

- *Read entry 8757.*

Otherwise…

- *Read entry 3120.*

9216

Returning the books to their shelves is easy. Returning the right books to the right shelves is much harder, and deciphering the librarian's opaque schema for organization seems nearly impossible. Still, after hours of tedious work, all of the errant books are returned to their homes.

The librarian thanks you for your time.

- *You each gain 5 gold.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9276

Theodore laughs to himself, his eyes watering as he looks off into his memories. "When I was a young man I was in love with a wonderful girl. Oh, but I was too shy, too scared to talk to her. Eventually, when we weren't so young anymore she married a man who wasn't me. Oh, I was a tempest of anger and resentment, but then I realized that the person I was angry with wasn't him, wasn't her…it was me. I'd had my chance to tell her how I felt and I didn't do it, so why shouldn't she marry some man who made her happy? And he did! I saw that, once I'd drunk myself stupid and gotten all my sobbing out of the way. At their wedding, well, I'd never seen her more happy, and if I was a little sad that it wasn't me making her feel that way, at least I was happy that she was happy. And when her little ones came along, well, that made me happy, too."

Theodore sighs. "Her husband died in the war, sad to say. And by then, having fought alongside him, all I had left was grief at his passing, because I'd lost a friend, and I knew she'd lost her love, too. But that was years ago. Her children are grown now, and here I am, propping up a bar and telling stories."

"That reminds me of a story…"

Continue listening to Theodore.

- *Read entry 3231.*

Leave before he starts telling another story.

- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9280

You decline the librarian's offer of help and start scanning the spines of books on the shelves, looking for anything that might happen to catch your eye. It's a large collection, and you find that the side rooms are also full of books. Eventually, you grab a book off the shelf and start reading. To your delight, you find that not only is it interesting, it appears to be shelved near other texts on similar subject matter.

If it is day one or six…

- *Read entry 8496.*

If it is day two…

- *Read entry 3320.*

If it is day three or six…

- *Read entry 6905.*

If it is day four…

- *Read entry 8165.*

If it is day five…

- *Read entry 6719.*

If it is day seven…

- *Read entry 4570.*

9290

Dried leaves crinkle underfoot, and Rochelle whirls to face you. "You," she sneers. "Getting Phillip killed wasn't enough, now you're here to, what, gloat?" Before you can protest that you intended nothing of the sort, she stands, gathering her skirts around her. "My brother is dead. My sister. My father. And I want some time with them, alone, so kindly leave!" She looks away, tears brimming in her brilliant green eyes. "Please."

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9291

You ask about the renovations, a subject that is clearly dear to Mariam's heart. "Oh, just great!" she gushes. "Braxton's been a big help."

"I believe the building is very nearly fit for habitation," says Braxton. "It's possible that it won't fall down around Mariam's ears." Something in the building groans and Braxton cocks her head.

"It's fine," says Mariam. "Just the shop settling."

"Do you have any potions for sale?"
Requires you have 25 or more gold
➥ *Read entry 2299.*

"Lady Regina's son has gone missing."
➥ *Read entry 8298.*

9309

"I remember when we first came down from the mountains an' Penny started learnin' the human tongue. It were like she were a wee bairn all over again, all a-stumblin' over her words," sighs Grisbeck, with no apparent sense of irony or awareness of his own thick accent. "She'd use the dwarf word for everything, o' course, an' then get flustered when no one understood her. Now look at her. I do believe she's teachin' the wee thing his letters."

"Good luck!" chuckles Jasper. "My boy's already got the wanderer gnome itch. I don't believe I've seen him sit still in any one place for more than ten minutes at a stretch. He's constantly wandering off and driving me to distraction, vanishing without a trace."

"Constant vigilance," intones Grisbeck.

"Constant vigilance," agrees Jasper.

"Where did Penny learn to read and write?"
➥ *Read entry 5559.*

"How long will Mal stay with you?"
➥ *Read entry 2528.*

9312

The catfolk woman growls slightly as you approach. She's holding something in her hands—a mask, fashioned from wood and leather and lacquered green. She leans forward, offering it to the fishmonger. "Please," she yowls. "This is a special mask, blessed by the spirits! It is very valuable. I must have two baskets of fish."

"I don't care if the mask belonged to King Daqan himself," scoffs the fishmonger. "I sell these fish for money, you hear me? This isn't a swap meet."

➥ *Mark story point D1.*

If story point V5 is marked...
➥ *Read entry 8035.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 3988.*

9316

"Oh, perhaps you haven't heard; forgive me. Lady Regina's eldest daughter and heir died not ten days past. Thrown from her horse. I believe Phillip had gone to place a memorial to her at the Tree of Tales."

Tymothi looks away, staring at nothing. "Such a shame. A lovely girl, clever, well loved by the people. She would have made a splendid countess."

"What can you tell me about Talbot?"
➥ *Read entry 5067.*

"What can you tell me about Phillip?"
➥ *Read entry 7244.*

"There are bandits in Eventide Forest."
➥ *Read entry 9776.*

"Say no more."
➥ *Read entry 4350.*

9317

As you are tidying your room, you hear a gentle knocking on your door. Too gentle to be Mariam or Braxton, but the knock is not followed by Sapphire's voice either. Instead, a voice you haven't heard in many years speaks your name.

You open the door to find a tall elf woman wrapped almost entirely in an ivy-green cloak. You recognize her immediately as your former traveling companion, Celyse.

"Thank the stars, you're here!" exclaims Celyse in a hushed tone as she sweeps into your room and closes the door behind her. "I heard a rumor that new travelers had come to Dragonholt, and I hoped it would be you. I have much I need to tell you, but I felt it unwise to put it into plain writing."

➥ *Read entry 5682.*

9319

Mariam grins and playfully punches your shoulder. "This one here has been putting the moves on our sweet Aunt Sapphie!"

"Oh, really?" exclaims Hyrim. "Sapphie might find herself a suitable partner yet!"

"Good," grunts Isaek. "After that business with—Sapphire deserves every happiness."

Hyrim leans toward you and speaks in a not-at-all-quiet whisper. "Poppa doesn't like to talk about Tybalt," he explains, "because the no-good so-and-so broke Aunt Sapphie's heart."

"I'd simply rather focus on the positive," says Isaek. "Her heartbreak is Sapphire's business, Hyrim, and she doesn't need you spreading stories about it." Hyrim ducks his head, pulling away. "As for you, best of luck. She loves flowers," he suggests. "Jade did, too."

➥ *Read entry 3146.*

9322

You inspect a shelf of elixirs while keeping an eye on the gnomes. One of them, a man with dramatic, sweeping muttonchops and a flat leather cap, picks out a few vials and hands them to his companion, a woman with her auburn hair wrapped in a long blue scarf. "Yes," she says, and "No," to each vial in turn. Eventually, they settle on three small vials of pink liquid and two flasks, one of a blue liquid and the other of green. They cross to the counter and the man counts out some coins into the basket. "Wait," says his companion. "We have three of these, not two. You've underpaid."

"Eh?" he says, counting on his fingers. "So I have." He slaps down two more gold coins, and they slip out the door together.

Purchase some potions.

➥ *Read entry 8085.*

Steal some potions and the coins.

Requires thievery (skill).

➥ *Mark story point G3*

➥ *Read entry 9859.*

Use Mariam's alchemy equipment.

Requires alchemy (skill).

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *Read entry 5624.*

Leave the shop.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9330

You return to your room for the night. Despite the comforts of the Swan, you have a fitful rest, woken in the night by thunder. Heavy rain pelts your windows, and strong winds rattle the shutters. Somehow, you manage to fall asleep before dawn.

➥ *You each recover three stamina.*

➥ *You each recover one skill.*

➥ *You each refresh your activation token.*

➥ *This chapter of the story ends here. When you're ready to begin the next chapter, read entry 5322.*

9341

You give Hetharr the coins. She holds them in her hand for a long moment, feeling their weight, and then surrenders the mask.

"Twenty?" says the fishmonger. "Really?" She shakes her head as Hetharr places the coins on the countertop. The fishmonger sighs and looks at her feet a moment, then to the sky as if seeking an answer there. "One barrel," she grits. "That's half what you were asking for." She hands the barrel over, and Hetharr takes it without a word. The catfolk stalks off, and the fishmonger stares at you with penetrating eyes.

➥ *You gain the spirit mask (item M).*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9349

"I just said I didn't know, didn't I?" The old orc chuckles and tamps down a fresh wad of some sweet-smelling herb into his pipe. "I've tended this shrine for, oh, it must be near twenty years now. Before me, the spiritspeaker—we orcs would have called her a spiritspeaker, the villagers just called her "Mother Mereth"—was an old human woman, and she lit the bonfires same as me. And she had the tradition from the speaker before her, and he from the speaker before him."

The orc packs away his pouch of pipeweed and strokes his braided beard. "There must have been a first bonfire. Someone must have started the tradition. But it hardly matters. If they hadn't, someone would have done something else. The community wants an event like this; it needs it. People need to come together and celebrate the fact that they can, or things go wrong. I don't know if the blessings of the spirits come upon those who gather here, but I know that the blessings of one another do, and I think that is even more important." He stands, and waves his pipe at you. "Time to light it. Enjoy your night." He walks toward the fire, humming along to the music.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9364

You dodge past a cart piled high with cabbages, then change direction and cut directly across the market row to slip between two buildings. A few moments later you're sitting comfortably at the edge of someone's cottage garden and counting out your earnings. There's no sign of any further pursuit.

- *You gain 10 gold.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9390

You pick a seat and watch as Penny and young Mal play, cutting back and forth through the crowd, shrieking and giggling. You soon realize that each time he toddles past you (at an alarming pace), Malachite is wearing fewer and fewer clothes.

Eventually, a nearly naked child grabs your leg, grins, and then scoots under your table where only his chubby feet are visible beneath the table cloth. Penny soon stops by you, fingers all tangled in her dress as she chews her lip. "Excuse me," she says. "Have ye seen Mal anyplace? This is me first time minding a bairn, an' I do so want ta do a good job."

Point out Mal's hiding place.

- *Read entry 1799.*

Send Penny on a wild goose chase.

- *Read entry 3356.*

Help Penny by distracting Malachite with magic!

Requires performance (skill) or thievery (skill).

- *Read entry 4501.*

9400

As you remove the last of the debris from the front room, Mariam is chattering excitedly about Braxton, who is doing her best not to look at anyone and blushing furiously.

"You should have seen her! Three of these wolves, circling around us, but she just stands her ground, looks the biggest wolf in the eye, and growls at it! I near jumped out of my skin." Mariam laughs, leaning on Braxton's shoulder—who is standing in the hole left by torn up boards. "Of course the wolf knew better than to mess with my Braxton, and the whole pack of them ran away."

"Your Braxton?" asks Braxton.

"What was that?" says Mariam, jumping away as if burned. "Did someone say something? Is Sapphire calling?"

Braxton smiles and climbs up to the floor.

- *Time passes.*
- *Read entry 3253.*

9401

You gesture for Grisbeck to toss you a torch. He shrugs. "Mind ye catch it by the cool bit," he says and tosses it spinning end over end in your direction.

- *You lose two stamina unless you have agility (skill).*

Soon enough, the two of you have worked out a pattern, tossing the torches back and forth and from side to side. Penny shrieks and laughs, running back and forth between you with her own flame streaming behind her. A small crowd gathers, cheering you on and clapping as you push yourselves with increasingly difficult tricks. No one seems to mind when either of you drops a torch, although you do notice that Skala, the old orc spiritspeaker, has brought a bucket of water from the well and set it down close at hand.

- *Mark one progress in physical training.*

Eventually, the oily mixture at the end of the torches runs out, and the flames die. The crowd disperses, and Grisbeck claps you on the shoulder. "Hah!" he says. "That were fun. Haven't had a proper spot of fire-throwing since we left the mountains. Thank ye for that."

- *Read entry 5482.*

9407

"Good news, Bryll!" calls Fiore. "You get to practice some metalwork today. Our new friend here will be minding the forge." She escorts you to the forge and shows you where the coal is stored and how the bellows are operated, then leaves you to work while she tends to her apprentices.

You soon find yourself stripped to the waist, sweating and throwing your entire body into the heavy bellows pump. Fiore moves between her handful of apprentices, commenting on their work as they pound away at their anvils and pour molten steel into molds and quench glowing hot metal in heavy barrels of what smells like seawater.

After a while, Fiore approaches and offers you a clay cup of cold water. "Thanks for the help," she says. "My apprentices certainly appreciate it." As you gulp the life-giving water and dress yourself again, she counts out a small handful of silver coins and presses it into your palm. "If you need more work later, come by."

- *You each lose two stamina.*
- *You each gain 10 gold.*
- *Mark one progress in physical training.*
- *Time passes.*
- *This encounter is complete.*

9408

"You've come to Dragonholt at the right time if you're looking for work. The orchard needs as many hands as it can get during the harvest," says Sapphire. She suddenly snorts at something amusing that must have come to mind. "With what Mariam tells me about you fighting off those bandits in the forest, you would be better guards than the ones Dragonholt has now. They're not very good at their jobs."

Sapphire tilts her head to one side. "Fiore over at the smithy often needs some help with general labor, but I seem to recall her complaining about some goblins giving her trouble lately."

The bells on the front door jingle, signaling someone entering the inn. Sapphire stands. "Excuse me," she says and hurries off to welcome the new patron.

➥ *Read entry 2994.*

9442

"I've never met Regina's brother myself," says Celyse as she dunks a biscuit in her tea. "Honestly they don't discuss him much here. I gather that he was not pleased when Regina was named Lord Holland's heir. Lord Holland had no other children to my knowledge, and Kyric was nearly a man grown, trained, and groomed to command when he was set aside for Regina, the natural daughter. I assume he must have left Dragonholt and hasn't been heard from since.

"Now it seems he might be back. He reached out to Sonia and asked her to renounce her inheritance and support Kyric's claim to the title. She refused him. Then she wound up dead. I don't think that's a coincidence."

At length, you finish your tea, and Celyse stands and excuses herself, saying she has some correspondence to catch up on. The serving girl returns to escort you from the manor.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9459

You sit down across from Celyse as she continues to read. Blessedly, you find that your chair is positioned in a cross-breeze between two windows, and you quietly enjoy that fact for a few minutes as Celyse turns another page. Eventually, Mathilda appears with a tea service and oat cakes.

"Thank you, Mathilda," says Celyse. "That will be all." She sets her book aside and pours. "What brings you to the manor today?"

➥ *Read entry 6930.*

9477

You go outside and Hunter pulls down the bow over the door, a long piece of ash that seems quite well made to your eye. It also seems a little the worse for the weather. Hunter inspects it, sighs, and unstrings the bow. "Just a moment," he says. "Wouldn't want the string to give while you're holding it." He slides a fresh bowstring from within his tunic, then restrings the bow with a grunt. "Alright," he says. He points to a spot just near the door. "You stand there." Then he sinks three arrows into the earth at your side. "Those are your three tries."

You take the bow and your first arrow. Like the bow, the arrows have been warped and abused by their constant exposure to the weather. You're starting to see why the challenge is so difficult. When you nock the arrow and draw, you realize the other reason practically no one succeeds: the draw weight on this bow must be five stone. Your arms wobble and burn just drawing back for your first shot!

If story point O8 is marked...
➥ *Read entry 3533.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 1996.*

9485

Working together, you fill the second cart full of refuse quickly and deposit another load at the village green. Then you pause for a drink of water and take stock of the situation.

➥ *Time passes.*

If six or more time has passed today...
➥ *Read entry 6761.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 6959.*

9494

Sapphire gestures to the west. "The heart of the village is the green. Villagers graze their livestock there from time to time, and any time there's a festival or a gathering, the green is where we meet up.

"Of course, the shrine and the village hall are both adjacent to the green. The village goes to the shrine to pray to the spirits or meditate, and all sorts of business goes on at the hall. And the library is near there, as well. Some of the village children get tutored there."

Sapphire smiles, perhaps at some memory. "Then there's the willow grove, south of the green. A popular spot for couples or children at play. Lovely trees; cool shade in the summer."

➥ *Read entry 6740.*

9524

"Me?" asks Sapphire with a laugh. "Buy me a drink and maybe I'll tell you!" You walk to her bar, grab a bottle of cider and some glasses, and return, Sapphire laughing the whole way. "Well, that's me hoisted by my own petard," she says as you pour.

"Not much to say about me, I suppose. I'm a wanderer gnome, but you knew that. I bought this place with money I'd saved up working as a tailor, selling nice clothes, altering dresses, you know the thing. Thought I was going to get married, raise a few kids. Dragonholt seemed the place to do it." She purses her lips, shakes her head. "Anyway, I didn't get married after all, and then I was running this place all on my own." She gestures, taking in the entire Swan. "I'm quite good at it now, but you should have seen what a disaster I was in the early days! I'm a little surprised they didn't throw me right out of town!" Sapphire smirks into her cider and takes a sip. "On second thought, I'd rather you see me now."

➥ *Mark story point X6.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9532

Mariam turns bright scarlet, and Braxton just laughs.

"What do you mean 'our relationship'?" asks Mariam. "What's that supposed to mean? I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about."

If story point W7 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 8813.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 2128.*

9548

"Sounds innocent enough," the guard says, tapping the factor on the shoulder. "H'lo, chief, seems you dropped this." He turns to you and taps his face, right by the eye. "As for you, citizen, see I don't find you up to any mischief, eh?" With that, he resumes his patrol.

"Innocent my beard," mutters the dwarf woman. "I'm watching you." You decide not to attempt any more larceny today.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9556

Slinging hoops back and forth with the other players is tricky, but you soon get the hang of it and join in the competitive version of the game, in which two teams try to sling their hoops onto a barrel placed at either end of the field. "If your hoop touches the grass or stops moving, you have to drop it and give it to the other team," a gnome girl with her hair in a dozen braids explains. "So pass it before a player from another team can knock it down with her hips!"

The game is frenetic and frequently hilarious, and with lungs burning and mouth parched, you eventually collapse triumphant at the goal. Your team cheers and brings you a mouthful of water.

➥ *You each lose two stamina.*
➥ *Mark one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9559

Your hand moves quickly on the slate, sending up a cloud of chalk dust, but soon you have a fairly lifelike portrait of Penny and Mal.

"It's me!" gasps Penny when she sees it. "Look Mal, 'tis us!"

"Us!" coos Mal, clapping his hands and laughing.

"Do Dah," says Penny, glancing at her father. "An' do Malachite's dah, as well." You shift your chair to get a good look at the fathers talking and laughing together, and you draw a reasonable likeness of them, too. "Oooh, ye've even got his beard!" giggles Penny. She reaches down and shows you her slate. "Look what I've drawn," she says, clearly proud of the winged creature on her slate. You hazard a guess that it's a dragon, and Penny sighs. "Nae," she says. "'tis a unicorn, clearly, see its horn here?" When you ask why the unicorn has wings, she sighs again, as if unable to believe how dense adults are. "Because he's part owl."

Mal shows you his slate, a collection of scribbles with a few recognizable shapes. "Penny," he says, which makes the girl squeal and cuddle him fiercely to her.

➥ *Read entry 7482.*

9568

Celyse holds up a single finger. "Before I forget," she says, then stands and rummages through her bag hanging from the hook over her chair. "Here it is." She turns toward you, revealing a mask fashioned of painted leather to resemble a crescent moon. It looks quite expertly made.

➥ *You gain the moon mask (item H).*

Celyse returns to her seat and picks up her book once more. "If you don't mind, I'm not much in the mood for company at the moment." She pauses to take a drink from the goblet balanced on a table near her. "This masquerade ball will be rather draining, so I'd like to just sit and read quietly. You can join me if you promise to be quiet."

Sit quietly and read.

➥ *Read entry 5486.*

Leave Celyse to her studies.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9591

As you reach the village green, a human woman emerges from the shrine. "Phillip!" she shouts, rushing toward you. She has Phillip's same fine-boned face, large green eyes, and light-brown skin, but her hair is a barely restrained mass of brown curls to his soft black locks, and she is almost a full head taller.

"'Chelle," says Phillip. "It's good to see you."

The woman wraps her arms around Phillip and lifts him off the ground, laughing. "I'm so relieved! I wanted to ride off after you and cut my way through the forest if need be, but mother wouldn't allow it."

"You're the heir now," says Phillip. "Mother was just being cautious."

Rochelle clasps one fist to her chest and gives you a formal soldier's salute. "Thank you for saving my brother," she says. "Truly. Celyse said you could do it."

"Celyse was right," says Phillip. He turns to you. "I imagine you'll want to freshen up, but you should really come to the manor as soon as you can. Mother will want to thank you too." Phillip bows, then he and Rochelle walk off into the darkening evening. She wraps an arm around him, and they lean their heads together, talking in low tones as they make their way toward the manor.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9600

"Y-yes, well," says Sapphire. "I wasn't sure how long we would be here. So I packed enough that we could snack for a while."

You lie together and watch the stars, snacking idly and trading stories of your past and light-hearted jokes. Sapphire giggles nervously at your bad jokes and guffaws heartily at the good ones. Eventually, most of the food is gone, and Sapphire is curled up near your feet, fiddling with the edge of the blanket.

➥ *Read entry 8638.*

9617

"Just for tonight," says the Princeling with a smirk. "We play here on the green, and then this evening I have arranged to play in the Drunken Hog. Which I admit is not a particularly auspicious name, but I hope it will all be well."

"However bad it is, we've played worse," says Lin. "And like you said, it's only for the night. Come the morning we move on, and we'll likely never see this village again."

"That's a shame, really," says the third sister. "I almost like this town."

The orc sister shrugs. "That's the life we chose, ladies. You'd be bored of this place in a week, anyway, Mei."

"Where are you headed next?"

➥ *Read entry 6327.*

Leave the village green.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9618

At the mention of rare ingredients, Mariam's face lights up. "Well, let's go see! Come, come," she says and drags you through the door in the back wall to her laboratory. Racks of strange liquids bubble and boil against one wall, while the ceiling is hung with drying herbs. The long, narrow space has a sharp, tangy smell that isn't entirely unpleasant. Mariam leads you to the workbench, well situated under the window, and mounts the stairs placed there for gnomish convenience. "Let's see what you have," she says.

Give her an unusual fungus.

Requires strange mushroom (item).

➥ *Read entry 4455.*

Give her draconic essence.

Requires dragon blood (item).

➥ *Read entry 8339.*

9645

You get a bowl of something brown and a mug of something browner and look for a place to sit. Near the hearth, a buxom gnome woman in a faded dress is telling a story about her adventures in the Broken Plains, to much merriment and heckling from the crowd. Not far away, a cluster of gnomes is playing a game on a wooden board set with metal pegs, flicking pucks of wood at one another.

Listen to the gnome tales of adventure.

➥ *Read entry 8276.*

Join the gnomes in their games.

➥ *Read entry 5216.*

Finish your meal alone.

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9660

Penny tugs on Grisbeck's hand. "Please, Dah," she says. "Let's dance!"

Grisbeck sighs dramatically and winks at you. "Well, alright, me treasure. Let's all dance together, then."

If story point Q5 is marked…

➥ *Read entry 6814.*

Otherwise…

➥ *Read entry 7487.*

9692

Ursula, a wreath of white flowers on her head, sits at her usual table beneath the painted tree. The old woodworker Theodore sits at her side, wearing a coat with shiny brass buttons. Their hands are intertwined on the table between them, and they are eating a generous slice of seedcake off a single plate with silver forks. And giggling.

Ursula's daughter breezes here and there, pouring sparkling wine and occasionally sniffling and dabbing tears from her eyes. Hunter and Lei, the couple that runs the Chatty Archer, sit at Ursula and Theodore's table, laughing together. No one else in the room is paying much attention to the four of them, but you gradually realize that you are witnessing Ursula and Theodore's wedding reception.

Stay for the reception.

➥ *Read entry 4871.*

Leave the Countess Inn.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9711

You order a tankard of cheap, yellow beer and look around the room for a likely target. Not far from the bar you find an enormous human man sitting on a stool with his back to a wooden post. He stares at the fire, watching the flames with a scowl, until you "accidentally" stumble and spill your beer all over his colorless shirt.

"What'd you do that for?" he squeaks, staring down at his soaked and dripping torso. "I don't…" He sniffs, dabs at his nose, and begins to cry in great, hiccoughing sobs.

Suddenly, a hand claps on your shoulder and you're spun to stare face to face with the gnome regular, Gnorman. "You made Tiny cry, friend," growls Gnorman. "And you're going to pay for that!" He roars, shoves you back, and leaps to the floor, shucking his vest and revealing a surprisingly well muscled body.

"Fight, fight, fight!" roars the crowd.

➥ *Read entry 1200.*

9719

"So how do you know my Mariam?" asks Isaek. He tugs at his cuffs and glances behind him at the caravan-stage as you explain meeting her on the road to Dragonholt.

"'Friends made on the road share the load,'" quotes Hyrim. "Old gnomish proverb. It makes sense, though; friendship is about shared experiences as much as it is about shared beliefs or opinions."

"And if it weren't for friends made while traveling, we wouldn't have many," says Isaek. "A friend of my daughter is a friend of mine. I'm glad you could be here."

You chat for a bit longer and learn that Isaek is an apothecary, like his daughter, while Hyrim is a traveling "carpenter and odd-jobs gnome." They both seem excited but a little nervous about Mariam's wedding. Isaek has a grave streak, but Hyrim seems to have the same impish sense of humor that his aunt and Mariam share.

➥ *Read entry 3069.*

9729

You help yourself to a burning brand from the fire and join Penny in laughing and twirling, tracing bright patterns in the air around you. Soon you are racing back and forth between her father, still juggling his torches and laughing, and the musicians on their stage, moving to the music and generally causing mayhem.

➥ *Mark story point Q5.*

Eventually Penny falls over, laughing too hard to stand, and hurls her smoldering branch back into the fire. "Too much fun!" she gasps. "I think I might die."

"Well, then I'd need to find a new daughter, so ye'd best not." Grisbeck approaches, his torches extinguished, and hauls the girl to her feet.

➥ *Read entry 5482.*

9734

You confirm that, yes, you've just come into town, and you also mention that you cleared a blockage on the road when you did so.

"Yes, quite!" The clerk nods and shuffles away through a side door into an office piled high with ledgers, pamphlets, and what must be official records. "The orc woman—Braxton, was it?—mentioned that you'd done so. You have the village's sincere thanks. That road is our main source of trade with the outside world." He returns then, counting out a stack of coins into his hand. "And our sincere thanks means more when there is gold behind it, no?" He offers you the coins.

➥ *You gain 50 gold.*
➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9739

Sometime in the hour or so before you wake, a brief but vigorous thunderstorm shakes the village, bringing blessed relief from the heat with it. You rise feeling quite refreshed, considering, then wash and dress before going downstairs.

If story point J1 is marked...
➥ *Read entry 4479.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 3921.*

9742

"I won't go," says Braxton.

Mariam looks into the orc's eyes. "Truly?"

Braxton nods. "I'm sure the boy will be okay." She looks to you. "Good luck. Be safe out there."

Mariam wipes the tears from her swollen eyes and gives you a look that says both "good luck" and "I'm sorry."

If story point I1 is marked...
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise...
➥ *Read entry 6291.*

9747

You search through your memory for a while before settling on an amusing story of your travels across the Thelsvan Plains with Celyse, who refused to believe the legends that the plains were haunted. "It's not that I refused to believe them," complains Celyse. "I simply wasn't prepared to accept the dubious testimony of a drunken grandmother without any evidence in support of her extraordinary claims."

"Oh, of course," says Phillip with a smirk. "Who ever heard of a haunted plain?"

You explain that you came across a farmstead that had apparently been destroyed a long time ago, but that its stone walls were still standing and so you took shelter in the house, only to be startled in the night by apparitions of the farmer and her family going about their business. When you get to the part of the story that had Celyse attempting to milk a ghost cow, Phillip is doubled over with laughter. When you reach the punchline ("but cow's milk is white!"), he falls out of his chair.

"I suppose you had to be there," says Celyse with a sigh.

➥ *Read entry 7629.*

9748

You think you understand the rules, but you find yourself reluctant to abandon your scoring territories as the endgame territories become available. You finish the game with a mediocre score, although you enjoy yourself well enough. The other players laugh along with you and suggest a few ways you can improve your play as they set up the board to play again.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9750

You lie together and watch the vault of the heavens revolve above you. Sapphire shares gnomish stories about the stars and the constellations of the sky, trailing off in wonder every time a bright streak of a shooting star flashes overhead. You share some of your own stories, and as the night wears on you find yourselves drifting closer and closer together, eventually huddling together for warmth. Soon enough, you're both struggling to keep your eyes open.

➥ *Read entry 3241.*

9771

You count out your money to the grateful dwarf man as he gathers up his entire collection of books and binds them with a leather strap for you. "Thank you," he says. "I can afford to go home, now."

Carrying your new library of heavy books, you don't get far, but instead find a quiet place between the shrine and the library to spread out and read. Your new acquisitions amount to a comprehensive history of the Dunwarr dwarves and a thorough grounding in their myth and culture. You learn about the Yrthwrights, the mythical first dragons who created the world, and the Words of Creation that they used to do so. You learn about the deeplords and the secrets they guard, the runic magic that the dwarves work deep underground to protect their mountain homes.

After a while you put your new books aside, your mind dancing with images of vaulted stone caverns lit by the glow of runelight.

➥ *Mark three progress in academic study.*
➥ *Mark story point K1.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9776

"Bandits?" Tymothi wrings his hands. "I don't like the sound of that. Talbot is a good man, and I know he was wearing his sword, but it's been many years since he was in a real fight." The steward dabs at his forehead with a lace handkerchief. "I had better tell her ladyship about this."

With that, the steward retreats in a flourish of silk and perfume, pausing at the door for just a moment. "Please," he says. "Bring Phillip home." And then he is gone.

➥ *Read entry 4350.*

9788

"I'm sure you will," say Mariam. "But it's too dangerous. Her wounds still haven't healed fully."

"Mariam," says Braxton. "A boy is missing. He could be in danger, and I can help."

Mariam's eyes begin to glisten with tears. "What if you're caught by the bandits again? What if you don't come back?" She moves to wipe her tears with a sleeve, but Braxton hugs the gnome to her chest.

If you have empathy (skill) or persuasion (skill)…
➥ *Read entry 5239.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9742.*

9796

"Those are areas meant for storing and mixing blasting powder—an alchemical compound that was used to excavate large areas of solid rock. I know rooms like that had a fair number of safety features in place to keep the contents as stable as possible, but you never know how well something like that really works. Well, possibly one well trained in the alchemical arts might know, but I couldn't say for sure. The one thing I can tell you for certain." She stares at you, dead serious. "Leave. Your lantern. Outside the room." She holds that piercing stare until you emphatically agree.

"What are the pipeworks?"
➥ *Read entry 5831.*

"Anything else I should know?"
➥ *Read entry 1534.*

9814

Eventually, the flood of customers becomes a trickle, and Mariam has a moment to breathe. She waves you over as she shelves bundles of fragrant herbs. "Thanks for your help," she says. She brushes her hands clean on her apron, then walks to the counter and steps up the convenient gnome-stairs, then starts counting out coins from her many pockets.

"I have to know that I can actually make this shop run without relying on charity from my friends. So, here." She slides a stack of silver and gold coins into a small bag and ties it off. "Your wages. Now go, and enjoy what's left of the market day!" She presses the bag into your hands and leaps down to tend to another customer.

➥ *You gain 30 gold.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9836

"This looks great!" Mariam says, standing in the middle of the room and turning a circle. You and Braxton pause to stretch. The walls and floor are complete, with no unsightly or dangerous holes or cracks. "Thanks for the help; we finished much faster than I thought. Let's get started on the back room!"

Braxton hops down into the hole left by the lack of a floor in the back room, and you start handing her boards. Over the next hour you manage to create a walkable pathway between the doors and finish a sizable portion of the back floor.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *You each lose one stamina.*
➥ *Mark one progress in physical training.*
➥ *Read entry 7199.*

9839

Mathilda leads you through the back door and into the hedge maze beyond the garden. You find Celyse sitting beneath a tall oak tree in the center of the maze, her legs crossed and her eyes closed.

"She says she likes to come out here to commune with nature," whispers Mathilda. Then she creeps away as quietly as she can manage. You approach, and Celyse cocks her head but does not rise.

Meditate with Celyse.
➥ *Read entry 3820.*

Share your suspicions about the Fairfax household.
Requires story point P8 is marked.
➥ *Read entry 2127.*

9840

The common room is full of good cheer, aided by Sapphire's liberal distribution of free alcohol, and Mariam and Braxton seem to be simultaneously completely entangled in one another and eagerly sharing their love with the entire room. Dinner is excellent, but the obvious joy on your friends' faces makes it taste that much better.

Propose a toast to the happy couple.
➥ *Read entry 9953.*

Ask about Mariam and Braxton's wedding plans.
➥ *Read entry 5036.*

Ask Sapphire if she's ever considered marriage.
Requires empathy (skill).
➥ *Read entry 4691.*

9859

You loiter for a few minutes until you're sure you're the only person in the shop, then you slip a few potion vials into your bag as you cross to the counter. In one smooth motion, you snatch up the basket and dump its contents into your bag, replacing it before anyone can notice. You glance down in your bag and see that your collection of gold, silver, and copper coins is enhanced by the addition of some vegetables and a small wooden dragon figurine. Apparently at least one person paid for their potions in barter. You're briefly offended by their dishonesty, then remember that you're a thief.

You slip out of the shop before anyone else comes in.

➥ *You gain two healing potions (item A)*

If story point S4 is marked…
➥ *You gain one swiftness potion (item D).*

If story point L8 is marked…
➥ *You gain one strength potion (item F).*

Regardless…
➥ *You gain 20 gold.*
➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9861

"It sure is," agrees Gnorman. "Not too hot, sunny but with a bit of a breeze. Thank you, Keely," he says to a gnome child who rushes up with a plate of steaming hot food. The girl coughs and holds out a hand until Gnorman laughs and gives her a copper piece. Then she runs away. "Girl after my own heart," says Gnorman.

"Very short," mutters Reginald.

"Was she?" asks Gnorman. "I didn't notice. Anyway," he says, turning to you. "Have you tried the spiced tubers?" You and Gnorman maintain a stream of idle chatter as Reginald begins to sob.

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9864

The salon's windows have been thrown open in an attempt to minimize the heat of the day. Celyse sprawls in a large overstuffed chair with a book open on her lap. As you watch, she turns the page. She doesn't appear to have noticed your presence.

If story point J1 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 3159.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9459.*

9865

You draw your own weapon and command the two nobles to stand down in as loud a voice as you can muster.

"You stay out of this," snarls Brynn Belmont, stalking gracefully around her prey.

"Uh…quite right. It's a matter of honor," stammers Albyrt Cunningham.

You have no choice but to bring them to heel by force.

If you have dueling (skill) or military (skill)…
➥ *Read entry 9876.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 8430.*

9870

This time you hit the target, but low on the outer ring. "Not bad," says Hunter. "Most people don't even manage to land a hit." You grab the final arrow and draw again, shifting your aim up just slightly.

If you have archery (skill) or story point D4 or W3 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 7242.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 5602.*

9876

Albyrt lunges forward, making the first attack. Brynn dances eagerly forward to parry, but you put yourself in the way, knocking both swords aside. Albyrt withdraws, and you think at first that's the end of it, but Brynn slips past you and cuts the young man along his arm. You quickly lash out and knock the Belmont's sword from her hand, then do the same to Albyrt before he can take his revenge.

When the guards arrive, Albyrt is clutching at his wounded arm and looking ill, while Brynn is loudly declaring that "he struck the first blow, you all saw it" to anyone within earshot.

"We'll take them both back to their fathers," growls the orc guard captain, Tweegal. "Thanks for your help." The guards carry both youths away, and the nearby merchants all give you a brief round of applause before going back to hawking their wares.

➥ *Mark one progress in heroism.*
➥ *Time passes.*

If five or less time has passed today...
➥ *Read entry 7285.*

Otherwise...
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9888

"You want to help?" Fiore asks, her eyebrows rising. "You understand that my apprentices actually pay me, right?" She reaches for her crutch and stands. "But I'm sure I could find something useful for you to do."

If story point B1 is marked…
➥ *Read entry 9407.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 5281.*

9906

You produce a small bundle of cloth and unwrap it, revealing the wooden trinket you found at the Tree of Tales. "Oh my," breathes Sapphire. "May I?" You nod, and she carefully lifts the trinket, examining the craftsmanship. She turns it over in her hand and giggles when she sees the letters etched into the wood.

"As I thought," she says as she returns the trinket. "This is most certainly carved by Theodore. Have you met him? He's a very kind, elderly human man. He's lived in the village his whole life. Theo opened the woodworking shop in the market when he was a young man, but he's been retired for a while now. He comes by the Swan for breakfast or lunch on occasion, but he spends most of his time at the Chatty Archer or in the market. Even after retiring, he's still whittling every day."

The bell signals someone entering the Swan, and Sapphire stands. "I'm sure Theo will be happy to see that particular piece again," she says before running off to greet the new patron.

You return to your room to retrieve what you'll need for the day ahead.

If story point V6 is marked…
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

Otherwise…
➥ *Read entry 9317.*

9916

"You did this, somehow," mutters Reginald as you approach. "I don't know how you did it, Gnorman, but I know this is all your fault."

"I don't know what you're talking about," chuckles the gnome. He waves and smiles at a group of young gnomes scurrying by, then draws off another mug of ale. "Have another drink, Reg. It'll make you feel better."

"Do you believe gnomes exist yet, Reginald?"
➥ *Read entry 4122.*

"So, Gnorman, do you have any family here?"
➥ *Read entry 2668.*

"Lovely day, isn't it?"
➥ *Read entry 9861.*

9930

At first you don't see any evidence of a guard on duty, but then you notice that Tallea is propped in a chair against the side wall, her helmet tipped down over her eyes. She stiffens and tips her helmet up, peering at you. "Oh," she says. "It's just you."

Request to use the training ground.

➥ *Read entry 1322.*

Leave the guard station.

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9937

"Ah yes, ah yes!" says the older brother.

"Indeed!" says the younger.

"An excellent choice!" they say in unison. You try to negotiate a better price, but somehow they talk circles around you, and you nearly find yourself overpaying. You take the offered price and count yourself lucky.

➥ *You gain one strange mushroom (item S).*
➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*
➥ *Mark story point S5.*

Negotiate a price for the dragon blood.

Requires story point P2 is not marked.

➥ *Read entry 4965.*

Take your leave.

➥ *Read entry 1320.*

9947

You take the doll from Penny and crouch down with your needle and thread. It's the work of a few moments to re-attach the owl's head, and Penny is delighted with your efforts, clapping her hands together in joy.

"Oh, Thegn Owl! Ye're all better! Oh, thank ye, thank ye!" The girl hugs you, then takes her owl and races for the bakery, shouting "Dah! Dah!"

➥ *Time passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9950

"Ah, there ye be," says Grisbeck, smiling. "Sit, sit," he says, gesturing at the table Penny is still lying on. "Penny, lass, get off o' there an' wipe that table down, please." She does so, then uses the rag to mop at her brow.

"It's too hot ta play," she sighs, flopping down in a corner of the shop.

Grisbeck returns from the kitchen with a small dish, holding a delicate biscuit of oats and sweet smells that steams slightly from the oven. "I made ye this," says Grisbeck. "It's a bit different from mainly what I sell here in me shop; a traditional Dunwarr dish. A soda cake." He sets it down in front of you and sits, tugging at his beard absently while you eat. "I wanted ta say, ye've been so good ta me an' Penny since ye came here. Ye've done quite a bit ta make us both happy. And, well, I was wonderin' if—I wanted ta invite ye ta join me for a walk this evenin'. After sunset. From the dragon statues, out inta the orchard."

➥ *You each recover one stamina.*

Accept Grisbeck's invitation.

➥ *Mark story point M2.*
➥ *Read entry 5957.*

Turn down his invitation.

➥ *Mark story points J3.*
➥ *Read entry 5803.*

9953

You call for silence, then stand and propose a toast to Mariam and Braxton. You praise their courage, their compassion, their diligence, and their obvious love for one another, to a general "hear, hear!" from the room.

➥ *Mark one progress in social practice.*

This sets off a string of toasts, which are all well received as long as Sapphire is supplying the alcohol. Sapphire toasts her "nieces," calling them "Dragonholt's newest family." Mariam toasts her aunt for being a gracious host. Braxton stands and toasts you for your friendship to both her and Mariam.

Eventually, the celebration breaks apart.

➥ *All remaining time today passes.*
➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9958

"Well, if you think I'm going to fall for that," chuckles the guard, "think again!" He grabs you with a surprisingly strong grip and shoves you ahead of him, marching you off toward the lockup.

"I don't believe it, Deakon," says another guard, a human woman, as she falls in behind you. "You actually caught one." Soon they reach the guard station and hurl you into the only jail cell.

➥ *Read entry 1964.*

9965

"Ye're kind ta say so," says Grisbeck with a blush as he serves. "I've always had a knack f'r th' kitchen. Me father, he wanted me ta join th' Warrior's Guild, like him, like his father. Made me train wit' them as a wee lad. Ha," he chuckles, settling into his own chair. "Bit of a surprise for him when th' warriors put me ta work in th' kitchens. Soldiers need to eat too, eh?"

The food is amazing, and you pass a pleasant meal, swapping stories of your past beneath the stars.

➥ *Read entry 1355.*

9967

You call for the guards, backing away with the rest from the naked steel in the youths' hands. Albyrt lunges forward to strike first, but Brynn knocks his slender sword away and drives him back with a flurry of stabs that sends him scrambling. He barely parries another thrust, then staggers back as his misaimed riposte leaves him open and Brynn slashes him across the arm.

"Poor little Albyrt," teases Brynn. "Thought he was a real man, but it happens he is just a boy. Just like his simpering father."

Cunningham roars and rushes forward, only to be knocked to the ground by a mailed fist belonging to Tweegal, the orc captain. For an instant, it seems that Brynn is going to lunge forward and finish him off, but Tallea appears beside her and relieves her of her sword.

"That is enough out of both of you," grouses Tweegal. He marches them both off in the direction of the manor house.

➥ *Time passes.*

If five or less time has passed today...

➥ *Read entry 7285.*

Otherwise...

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9971

"Sure do! Wait here!" Mariam tumbles backward off the counter and scurries into the back room. She returns a moment later with a tray holding a handful of flasks of red liquid.

➥ *You may purchase up to three healing potions (item A) for 25 gold per potion.*

You tell Braxton to get some rest and prepare to leave. "Thank you," says Mariam, walking you to the door. She glances over her shoulder at Braxton, who has resumed her hammering with perhaps more than the necessary force. "Good luck. Bring yourselves and Phillip back safe."

➥ *Mark story point I1.*

➥ *Time passes.*

➥ *This encounter is complete.*

9972

With utmost care, you and Grisbeck carry the towering cake from the kitchen out to the common room. A hush spreads across the room as you move, followed by a wave of rippling applause. Grisbeck beams and grins as you settle the dessert on the bridal table.

"Oh my," says Braxton. "That looks incredible."

"Good enough to eat!" chirps Mariam.

➥ *Read entry 9087.*

9976

The blush of Sapphire's cheeks spreads to her ears, but she takes a breath and continues to sing. The melody seems to resonate under the cover of the willow's hanging leaves and settles over you as a gentle calm that makes you feel at peace.

When the song ends, Sapphire wiggles the basket she's holding and mutters shyly, "I-I've made us something to eat. Shall we set up under the stars?"

➥ *Read entry 8545.*

9978

You pass beneath the twin dragon statues and begin your hike toward Eventide Forest. You turn back once as you go, in time to see a cloud pass across the sun and cast the statues into shadow.

If five or more time has passed today…

➥ *Read entry 6600.*

Otherwise…

➥ *This encounter is complete. Read entry 1005 in the "Whispering Leaves" quest book.*

9984

"It's not that we never see the sun in the Dunwarr Mountains, o'course," he says. He takes hold of his lantern pole with both hands. "Aye, we live under th' ground, but there be many reasons ta go ta th' surface. S'where me wheat for flour is grown, after all." He glances at you, then quickly looks away.

➥ *Read entry 3998.*

9990

The road through Eventide Forest is wider and easier to travel than you remember, despite the snow and churned mud of spring that clings to it. The old ford has been replaced by a new bridge, which you note is marked at either end with a small shrine to the spirits.

Captain Braxton overtakes you on the road, reining in her horse and circling around to smile down upon you. "It's good to see you," she says. "Go on ahead to the Swan; the others are meeting there. I need to report back to her ladyship first."

Mal greets you as you arrive at the Swan, gravely telling you that you are expected and that his father has set aside a table for you. He escorts you there and even pulls out a chair before his childish dignity evaporates and he races giggling from the room. Sapphire is already seated, smiling at you over a mug of cider. "It's good to be back here," she says. "I like what Jasper's done with the place."

You chat happily, catching up, as Celyse, Braxton, and Grisbeck arrive one by one and join you.

"And where is Penny?" asks Sapphire. "I'd hoped to see her."

"At school in Highcrest," beams Grisbeck. "First dwarf lass they accepted there, you know."

"I hope my recommendation was helpful," says Celyse. "I wouldn't blame you if you decided to disavow it, not after that business with the goblins."

"She'd never have been ready f'r the school there without yer tutelage, miss," Grisbeck assures her.

Braxton frowns, surveying the table. "Where are—"

She is interrupted as a whirlwind of frenetic energy erupts through the door and a young orc girl races across the room to tackle her. "Momma!" she shouts. "You're back from your trip!"

Mariam comes puffing after, her hair in disarray and still wearing her stained shop apron. "Are all orc children like this?" she asks. "Or just mine?"

"All of us," says Braxton, smiling more broadly than you've seen since her wedding. She lifts the girl up to rest at her hip and turns her toward you and Sapphire. "Max," she says, "I'd like you to meet some good friends of mine."

Mariam appears at Max's other side, reaching up to place a hand on her back as the younger orc stares at you with enormous dark eyes.

"Hello," she says after a pause. "It's nice to meet you."

"Finally," says Mariam with a grin. "The whole family is back together." Her glance seems to include you and Sapphire as much as it does her wife and daughter.

Braxton leans down to kiss her wife. "Always good to see you, Madam Wildheart," she says.

"Likewise, Captain Wildheart." Mariam blushes and settles down in her chair. "Let's eat!"

You talk, and eat, and laugh, and reminisce, and eventually the sun sets. You watch as Braxton, Mariam, and Max walk back toward the apothecary shop.

Something tells you that, in that shop or elsewhere, they will live happily together to the end of their days.

The End