

# THE HALL OF FIRE FAN WEBZINE

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## GREETINGS,

Salutations... Hello All!

42 and going strong. But the fate of The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game in the hands of Decipher doesn't sound as if it is though. Towards the end of last month it was announced that Decipher is not renewing the license for the LOTR TCG, which doesn't bode well for the RPG as the two product lines are intertwined with the same license agreement. Could this spell doom for our messageboards? Is it possible that the manuscripts still in work have their rights reverted back to their creators? and could those documents be published in the open for everyone to see and use? To these questions we've heard no definitive answers either way, so hold in there.

Now on to some happier news – the reason why we're all here – the articles. This month sees a new Random Encounters for social situations, a new creature, a generic item used as a key to accomplish a task, and more!

Happy Gaming to you,

**Matthew Kearns**  
aka GandalfOfBorg  
Editor

# THE MRKX:FN:CM HALL OF FIRE

The Unofficial Lord of the Rings RPG Webzine

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# A NARRATOR'S SO-CALLED LIFE: BEST LAID PLANS GONE AWRY

by Matthew "GandalfOfBorg" Kearns

The game is now going – the stage is set, the actors are in their roles, and the story is unfolding. But what comes next is something that can disrupt the flow of the game from simply giving the Narrator pause to paralyzing her and even the game if a solution isn't met. What am I talking about? I am talking about actions, inactions, or other reasons that cause a Narrator to freeze with indecision and creating a delay in the game to even holding it up indefinitely.

## RUINED PLOTS

Games would go more smoothly sometimes, do you think, if the players would just shut up and go with the flow instead of making decisions that are contrary to your script? What if they weren't even there? Been there, done that. When a Narrator spends hours upon hours to devise a carefully laden story with plots and sub-plots that incorporate tie-ins from character backgrounds and recurring villains and then its presented to a group and maybe in one fell swoop, the lynch pin to connecting everything together is killed or otherwise taken out of the action or the group insists on finding the one thing you don't present in engrossing detail and decide to explore it – it's enough to make one scream.

Unfortunately these things are going to happen when you are presenting a scripted adventure and usually moreso if you are running a published module. Getting around these travesties can be difficult for some, especially if a Narrator invested a long of time and care into developing a game he wanted to share with his players.

But the two questions that are asked at this point are:

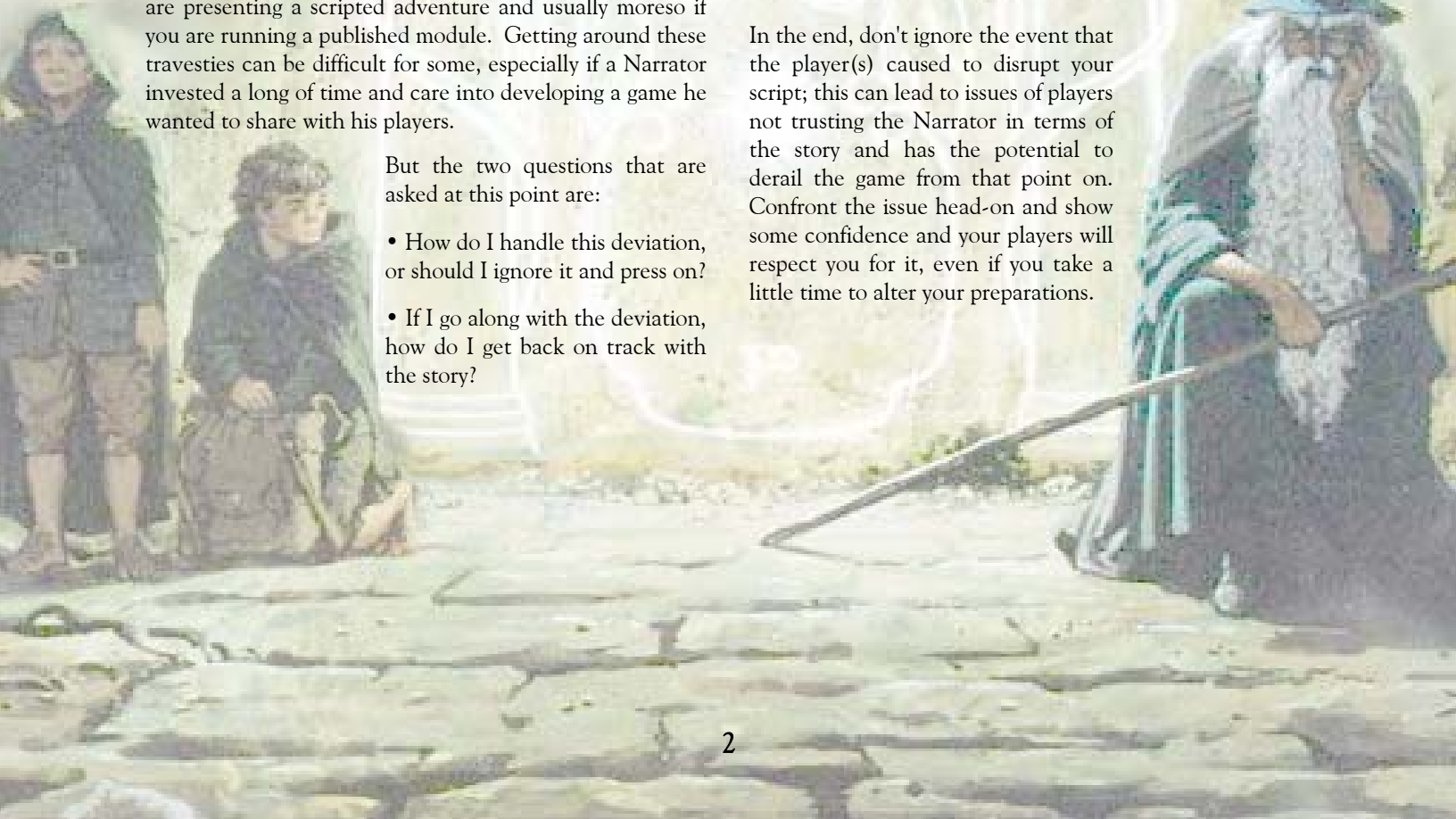
- How do I handle this deviation, or should I ignore it and press on?
- If I go along with the deviation, how do I get back on track with the story?

Answering these questions without causing the game to stagnate or the Narrator getting writer's block is tricky. Any way you skin it, how you handle it will depend on your style and level of comfort in presenting the story.

Going along with the unexpected deviation is a brave thing to do, especially if you haven't previously accounted for a divergence. An easy way to address it is to have on hand some useful Narrator tools such as a list of random encounters, plot hooks, or Hostile Haunts; they can provide a quick fix to keep the flow of the game going along with providing the Narrator some time to devise a way to incorporate the divergence back into her story.

The difficult way is to just wing it. Many Narrators feel this option is just as scary as the encountering a ruined plot because the potential for being unable to come up with good ideas and options for going forward if the story stalls. If you feel adventurous and want to try this path, take a deep breath, even ask for a few minutes from your players to prepare or even end the night there (or shortly after) to allow you time to prepare something to move the story on. Don't be afraid or ashamed that you had to do this, it can happen to anyone at anytime.

In the end, don't ignore the event that the player(s) caused to disrupt your script; this can lead to issues of players not trusting the Narrator in terms of the story and has the potential to derail the game from that point on. Confront the issue head-on and show some confidence and your players will respect you for it, even if you take a little time to alter your preparations.



## GAME STAGNATION

The game is running along but it's hard for the Narrator to get the players engaged in the storyline, they seem to only react to conflicts instead taking the lead in being proactive like they normally are. At this point, I think you've reached the doldrums in your game. Of all the things to be issues in bringing a game down, I think this one is the easiest to address as it can be fixed with a group effort as opposed to primarily a Narrator's problem to be dealt with.

If a game has the signs of stagnation, stop the game at a suitable point and confront this issue with all the players. Ask them where they see things going wrong, share your thoughts on the same, and discuss them all. The output of this discussion can help in identifying problems both parties can solve from the Narrator giving the characters a stake in the story instead of just running a game that any bunch of character sheets could do to players thinking more in-character and reacting as such while cutting out some of the metagame thinking they do that might be beyond their characters' scope of knowledge.



## NARRATOR'S BLOCK

This issue is a little bit of both discussed above – a twist in the party's reaction to a situation leads the story down a path that the Narrator didn't account for or when a party has achieved the story's goals, where do they go next? If a Narrator doesn't have any idea of what to do next, how can the game go on? Luckily, since this issue is like the two above, you can use a combination of their solutions to get out of this mental log jam. For example, to tide the game over a bit, take out a side adventure or random encounter to buy you time with where to go next or take a break and discuss with your players the game to this point and get their input on what they've liked, disliked, and where they would want to the story to go. Take the best, discard the worst, and move on. All it takes is one small germ of an idea that can blossom into a whole new direction for the game to everyone's delight.

## FAN FLAVOUR

by Matthew "GandalfOfBorg" Kearns

## TOKEN OF SIGNIFICANCE

A token of significance is any sort of item or papers declaring something of great importance to those who recognize its purpose. An example of a token of significance as papers could be permission for access to a restricted section of a great library, orders to be sent to field commander from the Captain, or important correspondence between two towns or realms. Papers are usually sealed with wax imprinted by the signet of the sender. If sent in a special case, it, too, could be sealed in the same manner. If the writ is an item, the very sight of it has potent effects upon those who see it and understand its meaning. An example of a writ of purpose as an item would be the Red Arrow. This token has a special significance between the lands of Gondor and Rohan – it is something used only in the direst of circumstances when the aid of the aid is so important that the fate of the calling realm hangs in the balance.



**EFFECTS:** The bearer(s) gain a given edge, ability, or enough required Renown to perform whatever duty that requires a Token of Significance. The actual bearer of the Token gains a +4 Debate or Persuade bonus when using the skills as they relate to the task associated with the Token. Depending on the nature of the Token and age of the token, it could have a monetary value or even be an artifact priceless in the eyes of those to whom it is significant.

# RANDOM ENCOUNTERS:

## NEGOTIATING A SITUATION

by Matthew "GandalfOfBorg" Kearns

From Minas Tirith to Bree, there can always be found some dispute to be reconciled or help to be given or requested.

**Description:** This encounter is comprised of courtiers, local gentry, a leader of some sort, and probably some lookers-on.

**Type:** Social

**Numbers:** (Standard) A simple situation  
(Advanced) A difficult situation

**TN Equivalent:** All the actors' TN Equivalences in the encounter and (number of complications) x2

**Locales:** N/A

### ENCOUNTER PROBABILITY

Roll 2d6 to determine if there is an encounter. If there is, roll a 1d6 for the encounter's difficulty.

CITY SIZE	RESULT	DIFFICULTY
0-500	6-7	1-5 Simple, 6 Advanced
501-2500	5-8	1-4 Simple, 5-6 Advanced
2501-5000	4-9	1-3 Simple, 4-6 Advanced
5001+	3-10	1-3 Simple, 4-6 Advanced

### SAMPLE SITUATIONS

- Settling a dispute over:
  - Tab at the local inn
  - Bet in a game of chance
  - Encroaching upon property lines
  - Purchased item is faulty
- Negotiating a trade deal between realms.
- Convincing a king that there is a traitor to the realm in his midst.

### STATS

The table below presents some example packages that can be applied to any basic character. Each Advancement's worth of picks applied to a character from a package sets the TN Equivalence for a particular role cumulatively (1 Package Advancement = character's Advancements +1, 2 Package Advancements = character's Advancements +3 (1+2), 3 Package Advancements = character's Advancements +6 (1+2+3), etc.).

ROLE	SKILLS	TRAITS	ABILITIES
Leader, Wise	Debate, Inquire, Insight, Language, Lore	Seniority, Wise	Folklorist, Expertise
Leader, Combat	Inspire, Insight, Intimidate, Siegecraft	Bold, War-wise	Air of Command, Leadership, Tactics
Law, Barrister	Debate, Inquire, Insight, Intimidate, Lore, Persuade	Clear Speech, Eloquent, Honour's Insight, Natural Archivist, Seniority, Stern	Expertise, Persuasive Arcana
Law, Investigator	Debate, Inquire, Insight, Intimidate, Lore, Observe, Search	Honour's Insight, Scholarly Lineage, Seniority, Stern	Expertise, Persuasive Arcana
Courtier, Vizier	Debate, Inquire, Insight, Lore, Persuade	Eloquent, Honey-tongued, Seniority, Wise	Air of Command, Courtier, Deference, Noble Mien
Courtier, Fop or Courtesan	Insight, Lore, Persuade	Eloquent, Fair, Honey-tongued, Arogant, Proud	Courtier, Deference, Noble Mien

Additional traits that any one of these roles could have to flesh out an NPC or for when incorporating complications: Ally, Command, Species-friendly, Faithful, Friends, Code of Honour, Duty, Enemy, Fealty, Oath, and Rival.

## COMPLICATIONS

Complications are add-ons to any situation that makes them more challenging to accomplish. Generally, each complication adds +2 TN to the TN Equivalence of the encounter, but the Narrator could make it up to +5 per complication depending on her judgment of how the particular twist affects the encounter. A simple situation with two complications can be considered Advanced when deciding what kind of encounter to use and the Narrator doesn't deem that any difficult situations she comes up with is appropriate.

### EXAMPLE:

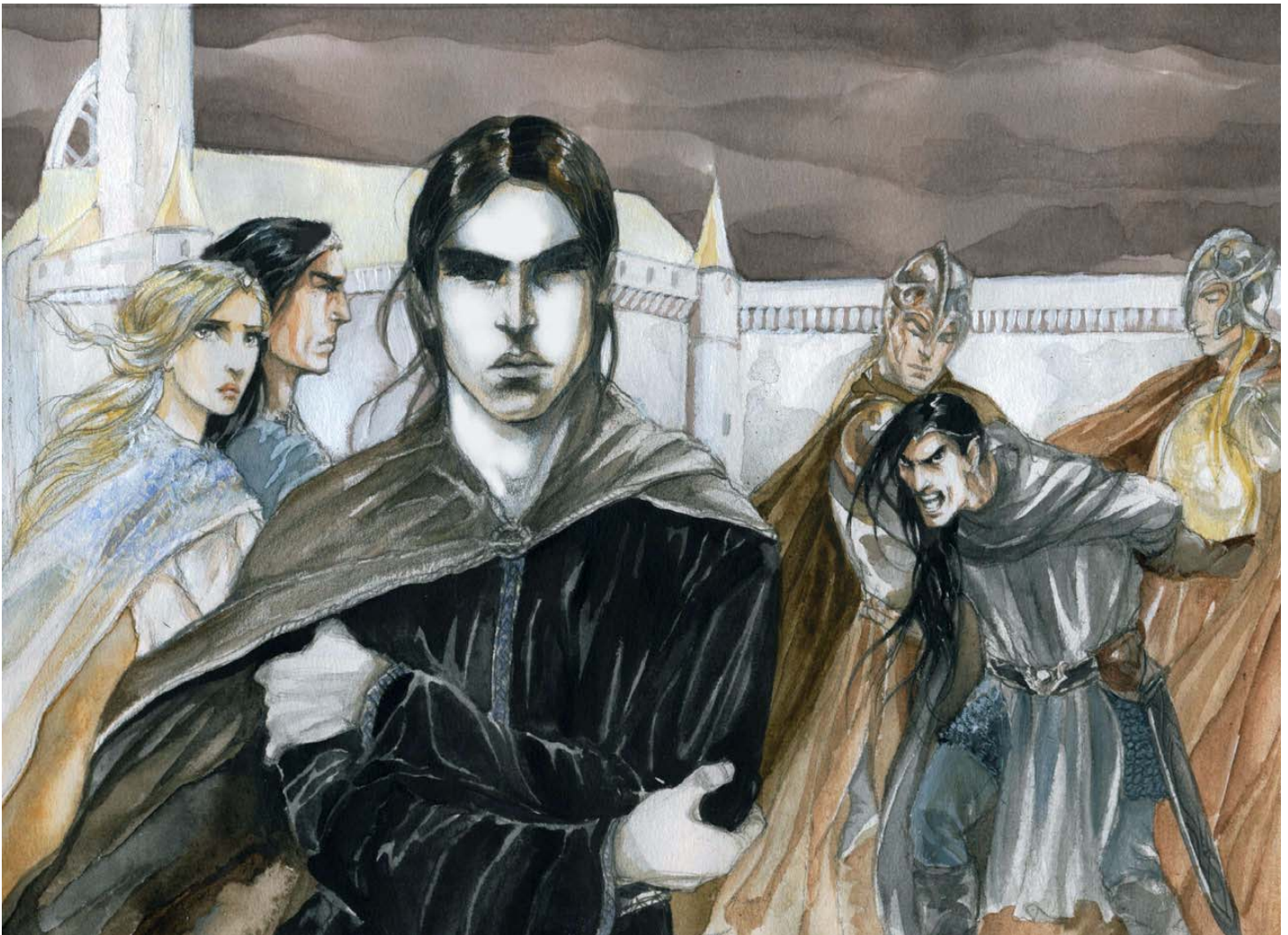
The fellowship has arrived in Bree and seeks refreshment and rest at The Prancing Pony. When they arrive they see Barliman engaged with a disgruntled and drunken patrol who is arguing over his tab. To complicate matters the Narrator could add more drunken and unruly patrons, they could be a gang of local hooligans known for their bad behavior, and/or there is a local festival going on so the common room is full of people.

## DEFINITIONS

**Fellowship:** Number of characters, PC and NPC, in group

**Standard:** This is the base number of foes suitable for a beginning level group (0-3 advancements)

**Advanced:** This is the adjustment used to increase the difficulty of the encounter; each adjustment increases the TN Equivalent by +2



# IT'S ALL OPTIONAL

## ANIMAL INTELLIGENCE

by David "Issachar" D.

### *Is a horse smarter than a turtle?*

If you said **yes**, you'd be wrong, according to the LotR RPG source book *Fell Beasts and Wondrous Magic*, which reveals that the lowly turtle, with a Wits score of 3, is cogitating on a far loftier plane than that majestic but stupid beast the horse, whose Wits score is 1 – a distinction it shares only with the scorpion and the spider.

Meanwhile, the mule – the Einstein of equines – is putting its Wits score of 4 to good use in devising new ways to refuse work. (How, you ask, do a Wits 1 horse and a Wits 3 donkey together produce a Wits 4 mule? Simple arithmetic, the mule will reply.)

FB&WM exhibits, shall we say, a lack of consistency and realism in its distribution of brains among the fauna of Middle-earth. If it bothers you that a bear (Wits 4) can think blazing circles around an elephant (Wits 2), then *this article is for you!*



*"Even our Nob has been doing some guessing in his slow pate: and there are others in Bree quicker in the uptake than he is."*

*– Barliman Butterbur, The Fellowship of the Ring*

Although "average" human intelligence is represented by Wits 7, the rules don't penalize anyone with a Wits score as low as 4. (House rules commonly alter this so that an attribute score of 4-5 carries a modifier of -1.)

I propose that there must be an important break-point between Wits 4 and lower Wits scores. Even the lackwits among the Free Peoples can perform feats of reasoning that an animal cannot, however intelligent.

The table below shows a proposed scale of animal Wits scores, with descriptions and examples that typify each level of intelligence.

WITS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
0	Purely instinctual behavior, virtually no capacity for learning	Arachnids, insects, invertebrates
1	Behavior far more instinctual than learned	Amphibians, fish, reptiles, many birds
2	A great deal of learned behavior	Most mammals, some birds
3	Advanced reasoning and problem solving	Special cases: apes, dolphins, <i>mearas</i> , ravens
4+	Human-level intelligence	Beasts gifted with supranormal intelligence, such as elven steeds

Of course, assigning a simple numeric score and calling it "Wits" greatly over-simplifies a variety of factors that together comprise animal intelligence. These include elements like memory, language complexity, the ability to perceive and differentiate between types of objects, the use of tools, and the ability to solve problems using abstract thinking. Among animals with identical Wits scores, some may excel in particular areas while others do not. (Dogs, for example, have excellent short-term "working" memory, while cats have excellent long-term "visual" memory.)

Also, even animals of comparatively low Wits can be conditioned to perform in ways that mimic intelligent behavior.

How does this translate into an animal's abilities in the game? Admittedly, it might not impact your game at all. Narrators will most likely run animals in their chronicles without reference to their listed Wits scores, and that is probably for the best.

If an animal's Wits score has an effect on the game at all, it is probably at the point where a PC attempts to train the animal or learn to communicate with it. In this case, treat a Wits 0 animal as essentially untrainable and incapable of communication. A Wits 1 animal is very difficult to train, able to learn only the simplest responses to stimuli such as the promise of food, and cannot understand any complicated commands at all. A Wits 2 animal is readily trainable and can learn fairly complex tasks and understand many vocal and visual commands. A Wits 3 animal is exceptionally smart and may regard itself as an equal of the PC; it might indeed attempt to "train" the PC in order to get what it wants out of the relationship.

According to the scale I'm proposing in this article, the majority of animals an adventuring party will encounter will have Wits 2. This is slightly lower than in FB&WM, where the mean score among animals is Wits 3. A table follows which presents the original and newly revised Wits scores for each animal listed in FB&WM.

ANIMAL	ORIG	NEW	ANIMAL	ORIG	NEW	ANIMAL	ORIG	NEW
Badger	3	2	Donkey	3	2	Ox	2	2
Bear	4	2	Elk	3	2	Scorpion	1	0
Bee swarm	0	0	Fox	4	2	Shark	2	1
Bird of prey	2	1	Horse, pony	1	2	Snake, constrictor	3	1
Bird, carrion	4	2	Horse, riding	1	2	Snake, viper	2	1
Boar	3	2	Horse, war	3	2	Spider	1	0
Cat	3	2	Horse, <i>mearas</i>	5	3	Squirrel	2	2
Deer	3	2	Horse, elven	8	6	Turtle	3	1
Dog	3	2	Mule	4	2	Wolverine	3	2
Dolphin	5	3	Oliphant	2	2	Wolf	2	2



What about unusual cases? In Tolkien's work there are many instances of animals exhibiting intelligence equal to that of Men, such as the fox who muses to himself over why he has discovered Hobbits sleeping out under the stars, or Roac the raven bringing news to Bilbo and the Dwarves.

You could simply treat these creatures as individual exceptions, of course. You could "explain away" cases like the curious fox as Tolkien simply describing the fox's primitive animal thoughts in human terms. Or you could regard this level of intelligence as the norm for animals in Middle-earth, unlike our own world.

You could also take a more cosmological approach and account for exceptional intelligence among animals as the work of the Valar. Some beasts are specially favored by one Vala or another, who might act as a patron of sorts, as Manwë is to the Great Eagles. An animal favored by one of the Valar should exhibit unusually high intelligence and should function like one of the Free Peoples.



# FEATURED CREATURES

## HALF-TROLLS (OGRES) by Matthew "GandalfOfBorg" Kearns

*"[Bilbo] sat in the dark thinking of all the horrible names of all the giants and ogres he had ever heard told of in tales..."*  
*—The Hobbit chapter 5, "Riddles in the Dark"*

**ATTRIBUTES:** Bearing 6, Nimbleness 5, Perception 6, Strength 12 (+3)\*, Vitality 10 (+2)\*, Wits 5

**REACTIONS:** Stamina +3\*, Swiftiness +1, Willpower 0, Wisdom 0

**MOVEMENT:** 7

**SIZE:** Large (6 Wound levels, 2 Healthy)

**HEALTH:** 13

**DEFENCE:** 10

**COURAGE:** 3

**RENOWN:** 10

**TN EQUIVALENT:** 15

**SKILLS:** Armed Combat: (Weapon) +6, Intimidate (Fear) +5, Language: Southron +4, Run +5, Survival (Jungle or Desert) +4

**EDGES:** None

**FLAWS:** None

### RACIAL ADJUSTMENTS

To use the Half-Troll (Ogre) as a player character race, make the following racial attribute adjustments.

Nimbleness -1, Strength +4, Vitality +3, Wits -1

### UNIQUE ABILITIES

#### HARDNESS OF BODY

Ogres receive a +2 bonus on rolls to resist weariness caused by physical activities.

#### HARDNESS OF HEAD

Ogres are known to be quite stubborn people. Ogres can resist persuasion attempts at +2.

### HEALTHY

Ogres have an unusually strong constitution. They resist diseases, sickness, and poisons with a +5 bonus.

### INCONVENIENT SIZE

Ogres are slightly taller and broader than humans, and at times can suffer a -1 penalty when taking actions in spaces that a human would not suffer the same penalties.

### THICK SKINNED

The skin of ogres is much thicker than that of a human. It gives them 1 point of damage resistance which is cumulative with any armor worn.

### UNTEACHABLE

Ogres have a difficult time with learning and understanding new concepts. Any skills that are based on wits will require double the normal advancement picks to learn.

### DESCRIPTION

Half Trolls, or Ogres as they are called in the south, are a blend of human and troll. They carry more of the human traits than troll. They appear to be very tall humans that have a height between 7 and 8 feet tall, with some even taller. They have dark skin with very little hair. Their facial features are rough and rather beastly looking which makes them look less than human.

### HABITAT

Ogres will live almost anywhere, though they tend to shy away from settled areas as they are feared by most civilized people. They live in small family groups of up to twenty individuals, though 8-10 is more average.

## HISTORY

In the far south of Middle Earth live a race of creatures that Sauron once created to enhance trolls. In the latter part of the Second Age, he attempted to merge trolls with humans in order to create a powerful race of creatures that could stand to go about in the sunlight.

His early attempts did not succeed as he had hoped. These half trolls proved to be smaller than he had hoped, but they also proved to be hard to control. The half-trolls, or Ogres as they came to be known, had a will of their own and were quite stubborn. They were not necessarily good, but they were repulsed but some of the actions of Sauron, and they refused to be controlled by him. Before he could perfect this new race, the Last Alliance came to oppose him, and the Ogres were left alone.

In the later part of the Third Age, Sauron tried new tactics to recruit the Ogres. He sent messengers with gifts and promises that proved to be a little more fruitful. Still, there were many that resisted joining with him, and by the latter part of the Third Age, Sauron had perfected his Olog hai, and the Ogres were no longer his main hope for these powerful troops.

Still, by the time of the War of The Ring, many ogres were in Sauron's service, and responded to his call. A small company of them participated in the Battle of the Pellenor fields.



# A FIELD GUIDE TO THE CREATURES OF MIDDLE-EARTH

## EQUINES, PART 3 by David "Issachar" D.

In this third and final part of our series on equines, we'll discuss individual horses of note in Tolkien's work, skills and equipment related to handling equines, and more!

### NOTABLE EQUINES

**AROD:** A horse of the Rohirrim, loaned to Legolas by Éomer. Arod bore Legolas to Helm's Deep, and often bore both Legolas and Gimli together.

**ASFALOTH:** The horse of Glorfindel, the mighty Noldor Elf. Asfaloth bore Frodo to safety at the Ford of Rivendell.

**BILL THE PONY:** Purchased by Frodo and company in Bree, Bill accompanied the Fellowship of the Ring as far as the gates of Moria.

**NAHAR:** Steed of the Vala Oromë. Nahar's hooves were shod with gold, and his coat shone white in the sun and silver at night.

**FATTY LUMPKIN:** Tom Bombadil's pony, who befriended Merry's ponies and guided them back to the Hobbits after they had been lost on the Barrow-Downs.

**FELARÓF:** The progenitor of the *Mearas*, Felaróf was captured as a foal by Léod of the Éothéod, but threw Léod and killed him. Léod's son Eorl the Young hunted the stallion and demanded its service in payment for the death of his father, to which Felaróf consented. Felaróf later bore Eorl into battle when he led the Éothéod south to the aid of Gondor.



**FIREFOOT:** Éomer's horse, who bore both Éomer and Gimli to Helm's Deep.

**HASUFEL:** A horse of the Rohirrim, loaned to Aragorn by Éomer. Hasufel bore Aragorn to Helm's Deep.

**ROCHALLOR:** The horse of Fingolfin, king of the Elves. Rochallor bore the king to the gates of Angband, where he challenged Morgoth to single combat.

**ROHERYN:** Aragorn's horse, brought to him by the Dunedain of the North.

**SHADOWFAX:** The chief horse of the Mearas at the end of the Third Age. Shadowfax bore Gandalf on many errands. Théoden said of him: "There is none like to Shadowfax. In him one of the mighty steeds of old has returned. None such shall return again." And Éomer said: "Were the breath of the West Wind to make a body visible, even so would it appear."



**SNOWMANE:** The horse of Théoden, king of Rohan. Snowmane bore the king to battle at the Pelennor fields, but the arrival of the Witch-king terrified the horse and it fell atop Théoden, who died soon after.

**STRIDER:** A pony that bore Frodo from Minas Tirith back home to the Shire, and later to the Grey Havens.

**STYBBA:** A pony that bore Merry from Helm's Deep to Edoras.

**WINDFOLA:** The horse that bore Merry and Eowyn (disguised as Dernhelm) to battle at the Pelennor fields.

## ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Domesticated equines require a variety of equipment to help them perform work and bear travellers and warriors. The elements of equine riding, working and fighting gear are described below. Collectively, these items are known as *tack*.

**BRIDLE:** An assembly of leather straps that fits over a horse's head and is used to control the horse. The straps of a bridle go over the crown of the horse's head, across its forehead, beneath its throat, down the sides of its cheeks, and around its nose. The bridle secures a metal bit in the horse's mouth, resting on the gums in a gap between its front incisors and back molars.

**HARNESS:** An assembly of straps that attaches a horse to a wagon, plough or other load. A typical harness consists of either a breastcollar that passes around the front of the horse's chest with another strap running down between the front legs, or a collar around the horse's neck to distribute the load around the neck and shoulders without obstructing the animal's breathing. Traces – ropes or straps – run from the harness back to the object the horse is pulling.

**REINS:** Straps secured to each end of the bit. By pulling the reins on one side or the other, a rider can communicate to the horse what direction to turn. This is done in conjunction with other signals such as leg pressure and spoken commands.

**SADDLE:** A seat for a horse's rider. A hard wooden base is carved to fit comfortably on the animal's back, then covered in leather. Atop this base is the rider's seat. The front of the saddle is slightly raised and may have a knob; this is called the pommel. From the sides hang stirrups, in which a rider can place his feet for support. The saddle is secured around the underside of the horse by a strap called the girth.

## BARDING

A special category of equipment is the armour worn by war horses. Barding may consist of hard leather, chainmail, metal plates, or a combination thereof.

Typical pieces of armour include a head plate running from the ears to the muzzle, a set of segmented, overlapping metal plates covering the neck, a single metal plate curving around the front of the horse's chest, and plates or chainmail to cover the hind quarters.

(Note: Our terms for these pieces of armour are French in origin and do not sound as though they fit in Tolkien's setting, so I have opted not to include the specific terms in this article.)

A war horse's reins are also often reinforced with metal studs to prevent an enemy from cutting through them and thereby disabling the rider's ability to control the mount.

**Note:** A *Mearas* or an Elven steed will not consent to wear either tack or barding, if it consents to bear a rider at all.



## ASSOCIATED SKILLS

### RIDE

The Core Book gives few examples of what a rider can do while mounted, and what kinds of actions call for Ride tests. Following are some suggested additions to the standard rules.

**Mount/Dismount:** A TN 5 Ride test is required to mount or dismount your steed, at a cost of 1 action. If you achieve an Extraordinary success on the test (effectively meeting TN 15), it costs you no action to mount or dismount. Use your Nimbleness modifier instead of your Bearing modifier for this Ride test.

**Guide Without Hands:** To guide your mount using only pressure from your legs and vocal commands, make a Ride test at TN 7. If you succeed, both your hands remain free for this round.

**Increase Speed:** Using spurs or other means, you can urge your mount to greater speeds. If you succeed a TN 7 Ride test, your mount gains a +5 bonus to its Run test for the round. Most mounts cannot sustain such speeds for long, however. Each round after the first, the mount must make a Stamina test to avoid losing a Weariness level. The Stamina test starts at TN 5 and the TN increases by 1 every round you continue to urge greater speed from the mount.

**Leap Obstacle:** Successfully leaping over an obstacle depends as much on the mount's abilities as on your skill as a rider. In addition to your Ride test, your mount must make a Jump test. Both tests must succeed in order to clear the obstacle.

**Stay Mounted When Hit:** If you are struck in combat, you must make a Ride test to avoid falling off your mount. The difficulty depends on the degree of success of the attack that hit you: TN 5 for a Complete success, TN 7 for a Superior success, and TN 10 for an Extraordinary or better success. (No test is required if your attacker scored only a Marginal success.) Use your Nimbleness modifier instead of your Bearing modifier for this Ride test.

## TEAMSTER

A skill of little value to the average PC, a few ranks in Teamster might nonetheless be taken as a representation of the character's professional background. The Core Book states that the Ride skill gives an affinity bonus to Teamster tests. I suggest that the reverse should also apply: ranks in Teamster should give an affinity bonus to Ride tests.

## CRAFT: HANDLE ANIMAL

*The Hall of Fire* issue 32, page 8 provides rules for this optional skill not found in the Core Book. That article lists a number of actions that you can train an animal to perform using the Craft: Handle Animal skill.

Training a horse or other equine for labor requires two weeks of time, with a Craft: Handle Animal test at TN 7 each week. A failed test means no progress is made that week.

Training a horse or other equine for riding requires four weeks of time, with a Craft: Handle Animal test at TN 10 each week. A failed test means no progress is made that week.

Training a horse or other equine for war requires six weeks of time, with a Craft: Handle Animal test at TN 15 each week. A failed test means no progress is made that week.

## NEW MAGIC ITEMS

Most of these items have minor enchantments laid on them.

### Sure Feet

A virtue is on these black iron horseshoes that enables the animal to traverse difficult terrain without slipping, including riverbeds, steep and rocky slopes, swamps, snow, and so forth. The shoes always find a secure spot for the horse's feet, and it never missteps or falls due to difficult footing.

### Swiftrunner Charm

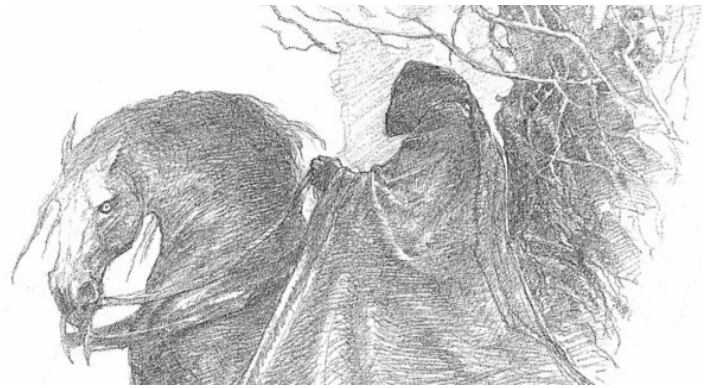
When a rider grasps this small talisman and invokes its magic, his mount receives the benefits of the spell *Swift of Foot* (*Paths of the Wise*, page 60) for one minute. The charm's magic is expended after one use.

### Mount's Call

This whistle is attuned to a specific animal on whom the *Naming* spell has been cast. When the whistle is blown, the animal answers and comes as quickly as it can. The whistle's call extends for up to a league (three miles) in all directions.

### Homeward Road Biscuit

This delicious (to a horse!) wafer is enchanted with the *Finding and Returning* spell. When given to an animal to eat, the animal knows how to travel to the place where the biscuit was prepared, and begins the journey as soon as it is able to do so.



### Black Bridle

The spell *Enslave Beast* is laid on this evil device, which Sauron's servants use to bend horses to their service. A person making Ride or Craft: Handle Animal tests on a horse wearing the Black Bridle adds his or her Corruption score as a bonus to the test result. After a time, the animal learns to serve such evil masters willingly even without the bridle.

## NEW SPELL

### HORSE-BOND

**Casting Time:** 1

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** 1 minute per point of Bearing

**Weariness TN:** 7

**Cost:** 1 spell pick

**Method:** Standard

**Specialty:** Beasts

**Effect:** The caster experiences a special linking of senses with the target horse. The caster receives a +5 bonus to Ride tests and Craft: Handle Animal tests made to guide the horse. The caster can also make Observe tests using the horse's senses (Perception score and ranks in Observe) instead of his or her own. If the horse detects something interesting or alarming, the caster also knows in what direction the source of this interest or fear lies.



*This concludes the series on horses in Middle-earth. Hope you gleaned some useful information for your equestrian characters!*

# THE ROAD GOES EVER ON...

## THE TROUBLES OF THE TWEENLANDS by David "Issachar" D.

*(Being an account of the defence of Minhiriath during the Great Years of the Third Age)*

### INTRODUCTION

This chronicle takes place in Minhiriath, also known as Cardolan, the southernmost part of the divided kingdom of Arnor. It is set early in the year 3019 in the Third Age, concurrent with some of the events in J.R.R. Tolkien's book *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The adventure is suitable for low-level characters with 0 - 2 advancements.

Minhiriath, colloquially referred to as the Tweenlands by its rustic inhabitants, has long been subject to the petty squabbles of its clans and their lords. In recent months, however, a new warlord named Maradoc has arisen and successfully defeated many of his nearby rivals. Bands of Maradoc's soldiers are now abroad in the country, collecting tribute and taxes from the common folk. Though they act under the new lord's official authority, these men are little more than brigands, taking whatever they want and answering with steel those who resist their demands. The plight of the Tweenlands folk moves the PC's to defy this ruthless warlord and put an end to his depredations.

Minhiriath lies in the middle of a variety of different cultures, which provides a reason for PC's of widely different origins to participate in the chronicle. Some suggested character origins include:

- Dwarves from the southern end of the Blue Mountains
- Wild Men from the forested peninsula of Eryn Vorn
- Elves of Rivendell or the Wandering Companies
- Hobbits of Buckland or the Southfarthing
- Middle People native to Minhiriath
- Dunedain from among the Rangers of Arnor

#### Note to Players

Although it includes a fair bit of fighting, *The Troubles of the Tweenlands* is a roleplaying-heavy adventure, especially in the first act. It centers on the classic Tolkien themes of loss, sacrifice, and courage in the face of imposing odds. There's a lot of talking, and a lot of NPC's, some of whom are characters that will develop over the course of the chronicle. In short, *Troubles* is for people who really get into the story and characters of an RPG.

### RECENT EVENTS

On 22 September, 3018, the Nazgûl arrived at Sarn Ford along the Brandywine river and drove off the Dúnedain Rangers who held the ford against enemies. Passing into the Shire, the Black Riders continued their search for "Baggins", leaving a decimated group of Rangers to keep watch over Minhiriath.

At this time Maradoc began building up his forces. Soon his soldiers begin their raids across the land. The menfolk of villages subdued by Maradoc's army are conscripted to serve in warbands and given orders to collect supplies for the war effort, forcibly, from the people in the region.

Now it is 15 January, 3019. Far away in Moria, Gandalf has just fallen in combat with the Balrog at the chasm of Khazad-dûm. But the PC's in the Tweenlands have matters closer at hand to deal with. After weeks of increasingly brutal pillaging by Maradoc's soldiers, a few heroic souls are ready to put an end to this villainy.

## ACT 1: RECRUITS

*In which heroes take up the cause of the common folk and strike a first blow against the forces of the warlord Maradoc.*

### SCENE 1: ALLIANCE

It is late afternoon on the 15th of January in the year 3019. The PC's have been traveling through the region of Girthlin. The countryside is sparsely inhabited: in the last two days they have seen no living thing apart from several deer and a couple of winter hares. A chill has set in the air; the snowy season is not far off. Their breath steams forth in cloudy bursts.

Suddenly a sharp-eared party member leans forward, alert. There it is again: the faint sound of voices shouting somewhere in the nearby woods. As the group moves forward among the trees, the cries grow louder. The voices are both male and female, and they seem to be calling out the same word – perhaps a name? – over and over. Though the forest is not dense, the people shouting are not in view, but they must be only a few hundred feet away.

There are four separate encounters that might happen initially: three groups of searchers and the little girl they are looking for, whose name is Caidy.

**Group 1: Tirroc and Dera Berkos**

The missing child, Caidy, belongs to this middle-aged couple. Intent on finding their daughter, they call out to her frequently.

At the sound of the party's greeting, the man and woman wheel around, the anxiety on their faces swiftly replaced by fear. The man takes a step forward to place his stocky frame between his companion and the strangers. His thick mop of brown hair is peppered in places with the first gray of middle age; his hands are large and strong. His steely eyes quickly take in the group, lingering momentarily on their weapons.

"Who are you, and what business are you about?" the man asks, equal parts gruff bluster and uncertainty mixing in his voice.

If the party demonstrates goodwill, Tirroc or Dera will explain their trouble and ask for assistance in finding Caidy.

**Group 2: Barnie, Adel and Violet Jorinn**

This husband and wife and their teenage daughter are neighbors who are helping to search for Caidy.

The trio look the PC's up and down warily, concluding that if they meant harm, they could have attacked already.

The man introduces himself as Barnie Jorinn; with him are his wife Adel and daughter Violet. All three are dressed in the simple garb of farm folk. They appear to be very tired.

"Our neighbors have lost their little girl...and more...today," Barnie explains. Behind him, Violet winces and swallows her breath. Her father sighs and continues. "The girl's name is Caidy. She went missing a couple of hours ago. Have you seen her? We must find her before nightfall; it is too cold for her to sleep in the open air."

**Group 3: Cadoc, Will and Gertrude Redhawk**

This white-haired man and his daughter and son-in-law are also neighbors assisting in the search for Caidy.

The older man, Cadoc, is hale and strong, with a tough and wiry frame. He seems to be an experienced woodsman and is leading the young couple who accompany him in the search. After introductions are made, he explains that they are looking for their neighbors' daughter, and asks for help.

"I have lived long enough to judge a man's mind, and I deem you good folk who would see a child returned safely home. Too much evil has befallen her parents already this day."

**Group 4: Caidy**

The PC's might meet Caidy before meeting any of the searchers. A **TN 12 Observe (Spot) test** is required to notice her in hiding.

A twitch of movement catches one PC's eye. Turning to look more closely, he or she sees what appears to be a sack, stuffed between the gnarled roots of an old tree and concealed beneath a tangle of broken branches.

If the PC's move closer and peer through the mass of branches, the "sack" emits a shrill cry and presses itself deeper into the crevice between the tree roots. Now the child's face is visible, her eyes wide beneath a tangle of unkempt brown hair. Her lips are blue-tinged from the cold and remain parted after her initial shriek, though she makes no further sound apart from the quick gasps of her breathing. The child is curled into as tight a ball as she can manage, her limbs squeezed together beneath her plain brown dress.

A **TN 15 Persuade test** is required to coax Caidy from her hiding place. She will come out willingly for her mother or father, but not for anyone else who fails the Persuade test. If the child screams in fear at anyone, the sound will soon bring her parents to the location.

Dera cries out her daughter's name and runs to put herself between Caidy and the strangers. Tirroc confronts them with angry suspicion.

"And who are you? Why have I followed my child's cries to find you here? What were you doing to her? Speak quickly!" He advances on the group, fists clenched.

If the party satisfactorily explains their presence and shows that they mean no harm, Tirroc backs down. The other searchers should arrive soon afterward, if they are not already present.

The relief on Tirroc's face at finding his daughter soon gives way to exhaustion, and there is little joy in his eyes as he invites the PC's to return with them to their farmhouse, where they can shelter themselves from the cold winter night.

Tirroc and Dera Berkos live in a small farmstead house close by those of the neighboring families the Jorinns and the Redhawks. A summary of the NPCs follows:

**Berkos family:** Tirroc (father - age 38), Dera (mother - age 36), Clement (son - age 17), Caidy (daughter - age 8)

**Jorinn family:** Barnie (father - age 41), Adel (mother - age 40), Poppy (daughter - age 19), Violet (daughter - age 16), Mat (son - age 10)

**Redhawk family:** Cadoc (father - age 58), Will (son-in-law - age 24), Gertrude (daughter - age 22), Ivy (granddaughter - age 4)

Tirroc ushers everyone into his home, where Poppy Jorinn has a fire already going and a thin soup prepared in a pot. Dera Berkos bundles up her daughter Caidy before the fire. The other farm folk disperse throughout the modest room, some taking a seat on the floor, others standing against the walls. All of them look careworn and exhausted, and for a long minute no one breaks the uneasy silence.

At last Tirroc stirs and approaches the PC's. "Another night, I would offer you all a hot meal before you retire. But this day... this day the raiders came." He draws a deep breath and lets it out slowly before continuing with his story.

### Tirroc's Tale

"They came in the early morning, a group of five men in masks, armed with swords and spears. They had a donkey and a small cart. They demanded our food stores and livestock. For the sake of our families we emptied our cellars and brought them what we had."

Tirroc pauses and swallows. His words are scarcely above a whisper as he continues.

"As the men were loading their cart, our son Clement rushed at them from hiding, a pitchfork in his hand. He wounded one bandit in the shoulder...but the man's fellow wheeled quickly and struck Clem down with his spear. Clem fell down dying...and we could not approach. We watched him breathe his last as the gang finished their business, loading their wounded man on the back of the cart before they strode away, driving our goats on before them.

"So you see. I have nothing to offer you this day. Our goats are gone, our winter stores...and our son."

A choked sob is heard from the back of the room; it is the young lady Violet. Tirroc sighs again and explains. "Violet and Clement were to marry this summer. Our loss is also hers."

The group falls silent again for several moments. Then Violet, no longer crying, leaves her mother's side and crosses the room to stand before the newcomers. Her eyes burn with a fierce intensity.

"Find those thieves for us," she says in a low voice. "Find them and kill them like the filth they are. Had I a sword-arm and a blade, I would do the deed myself. Say that you will do it!" She looks each man in the eye. "Say that you will give us justice!"

Violet is a firebrand, a fierce, passionate and unreasonable young woman who is the dominant personality in her home. Though a wise PC might be reluctant to swear a vow to avenge the death of her betrothed, she will lash out at any who decline to promise her what she asks:

Violet's expression grows cold. "You strong folk will not trouble yourselves to bring murderers to justice?" Her voice trembles. "We are dogs to such people as you. You care nothing for our grief, though our hearts break with it! Go, sleep! And then, come the morning, be off!"

If at least some of the PC's swear to bring justice to Clem's killers, Violet nods, satisfied, and murmurs a folk blessing on the errand the strangers have undertaken.

**A TN 12 Lore/Group: Cardolan or equivalent test** allows a PC to notice something unusual about Tirroc's story. Maradoc's plundering soldiers are not known to conceal their faces behind masks. These gangs do not generally care who sees them; they are acting, after all, under the authority of their lord, and do what they will with impunity. Indeed, many raids in the last months have taken a higher toll in lives than this one, which but for Clement's daring attack might have concluded without violence.

The neighbors soon begin to disperse: Barnie, Adel and Violet are the first to depart. The young couple Will and Gertrude leave not long afterward, but their father Cadoc remains awhile, quietly gazing into the fire.

Dera emerges from the hall with little Caidy in tow. "She will not sleep in her room tonight," Dera tells her husband. "I will take her to bed with me." She leads the child into another room and closes the door behind her.

"Caidy shared a room with Clem," Tirroc explains. "What this day has done to her, I cannot know. She ran off as soon as we laid her brother in the ground." He sits quietly for awhile, then rises to his feet. "You need not all rest on the floor in here. I offer you the use of Clem's room tonight. Indeed, if he were alive he would insist on it. But do as you will." Tirroc retires to his own room to see to his wife and daughter.

Old Cadoc stirs and climbs to his feet. "It is time I returned home as well," he says, shuffling towards the door. "It was a noble pledge you gave this family. But do not throw away your lives after the dead. Life is precious and there are many chances to show your honour – if only you live long enough."

In the silence following Cadoc's departure, the PC's find themselves alone. The late hour does not make for easy rest. The night is punctuated by the sound of muffled weeping from the family in the room nearby. Long after the last cinders have faded on the hearth, complete silence falls over the house at last.

During the night, if the PC's did not promise to deal justice to Clem's murderers, Violet will sneak into their room and attempt to steal a sword or other weapon. If she succeeds, she will leave on foot at night, following the trail of the soldier-bandits on her own. If she is caught, she rails against the PC's and curses them for their cruel heartlessness.



The next day, in the chill of early morning Tirroc greets his guests, saying that he is off to try hunting a deer with Will Redhawk, who owns a bow. Any of the PC's are welcome to join them, especially if they have good hunting skills.

To successfully hunt a deer, the following extended test is required: **TN 15 Track test + TN 15 Stealth test + TN 12 Ranged Combat test.**

The group spends no more than a couple of hours at the hunt. If they are successful, the farmers set about preparing and preserving the meat, and before the morning has grown late there is a stew ready to eat.

When the PC's are ready to leave, the farm folk gather to see them off. The twin ruts of the heavily-laden cart, and the grass trampled flat around them, are plain to see as they lead away from the Berkos home to the north-east. Tirroc bids the PC's farewell and prays a blessing on their journey.

## SCENE 2: A TEST OF METTLE

Travel proves easy throughout the mid-morning as the party traverses sprawling meadowlands. Grey wisps of cloud overhead absorb a portion of the sun's light; the air is crisp and cold. The track of the cart never vanishes for long.

Toward noon the party enters lightly wooded lands, and the trees grow gradually more dense with every mile. Hills that begin as gentle swells soon give way to a green chop of earthy waves. The PC's must study the ground more closely as they walk, for now and then the track is nearly lost to sight, repelled by the cold ground.

It is an hour or so after noon when the trail leads into a true forest. Though the warband's tracks are now quite difficult to find, the small number of paths that could accommodate both the cart and the goat herd make their route easy to guess. But the going is slower now than before.

A PC who makes a **TN 12 Observe (Hear) test** detects the sound of something moving in the woods. They are the sounds of a beast of some sort: a deer perhaps, though the party is upwind and a deer should be moving away from their scent, not nearer as these sounds are moving.

The sounds are a group of two to four wolves, depending on the size and strength of the party. This is a warm-up encounter, intended to help the Narrator test the abilities of the low-level PC's, for whom this might be a first-time adventure.

Use the standard stats for wolves found in the Core Book or in *Fell Beasts and Wondrous Magic*. These wolves are quite hungry and won't run away until they've taken quite a beating. Once driven off, however, they will not return to trouble the PC's again.

**Note:** If Violet successfully stole off with one of the party's weapons, then this encounter becomes a rescue. The girl defends herself bravely, but can't hope to drive off the wolves on her own. She shows no gratitude to her rescuers, however, and blames them for denying her even the chance to avenge Clem herself. It should be plain to the PC's that she is untrustworthy and a liability, and the best course is to send her back home. Though angry, she will depart of her own will at any rate, her encounter with the wolves having shown her that she has no chance of killing the bandits herself.

## SCENE 3: TREACHERY

The afternoon is growing late as the party rounds the base of a broad hill, sparse of trees. The faint odor of burning wood is in the air: a campfire, most likely. A PC who walks up the hill a little way can see a wisp of smoke rising above the treetops not far to the east. The sky darkens to an iron-grey as the party approaches the smoke; evening is setting in and before long it will be dark.

A party that approaches the camp stealthily has an opportunity to learn information about the bandits by overhearing their conversation. They are distracted and do not expect anyone to follow them, so it is fairly easy to move close enough to listen: a **TN 7 Stealth (Sneak) test** brings a PC within 50 feet of the camp, and a **second Stealth (Sneak) test at TN 10** brings the PC within twenty feet. At this closer distance, no Observe (Hear) test is required to overhear the bandits talking; whereas from 50 feet away, a PC must succeed a **TN 15 Observe (Hear) test** to overhear the conversation.

The bandits are conversing in Dunlendish, and a **TN 7 Language: Dunlendish test** may be required for PC's not fluent in the language.

### The Bandits' Conversation

In a clearing, six men are seated around a campfire, over which a hunk of meat has been placed on a spit to roast. A few lean-to shelters are in the middle of the clearing. The mule and the cart of stolen goods stands near the treeline. Farther away, the goats are tethered to a tree, grazing listlessly on cold stalks of grass.

The men are absorbed in conversation; the exchange between two of them in particular appears to be growing heated. The drift of the dispute seems to involve the recriminations of one man – Helm by name – against his fellow, Tobias, the raider who slew the young man at the farmstead. Beside Helm, a man whose injured arm is bound tightly in cloths speaks up on behalf of Tobias, who was only acting to defend his friend, he says. Tobias himself sits morose and silent, a little apart from the others.

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At length, the eldest of the group – a man of about forty years – intervenes in the dispute. "Enough," he says, and the others fall silent. "The act is done and your words will not undo it. Make peace with one another."

"Peace I would gladly have, and not with these men only," mutters Helm. "I care not for the policies of the butchers who now style themselves our clan-chieftains. They recruit warriors – and send forth thieves! I will have it no longer! I will not!"

A young, muscular man stands to his feet. "If you desert us, you will bring the same fate upon our own families! And *I* will not have *that*!" His hand moves to the pommel of his sword.

"Enough," the older man repeats, without raising his voice, and the young soldier sits down. "If we mutiny, they will replace us with others. Others more like themselves, more bloodthirsty. These farmers will have nothing to rebuild after such warbands have done their work. They will lie dead in their own fields, and their women..." He trails off, then draws a deep breath. "The young man was ill-fortuned. We were surprised and unprepared. We will see to it that no more are slain by our hands." He looks around wearily at his men. "That is all we can do."

The men of the warband are not cheered by their leader's words, but they leave off their argument. One of them sees to the roasting meat, turning it over on the spit. Two others rise and move off, attending to camp duties.

These men are reluctant recruits into Maradoc's army. They resent the rapacious plundering that their superiors have commanded them to carry out, but feel powerless to do anything about it, lest they bring Maradoc's wrath on their families back at home in the town of Chalten.

A summary of the bandit soldiers follows:

**Mabric:** The band's leader, a grey-haired man of middle years. He is intelligent and practical, a capable leader, but wearily resigned to the grim fate forced upon him and his men.

**Theobald:** Mabric's second in command, a tall, strong young man with experience in soldiering. His brashness is tempered by the wisdom of his leader, to whom he is fiercely loyal.

**Tobias:** The soldier who killed Clem when the boy attacked them with a pitchfork. He is deeply remorseful over the death.

**Braddoc:** The man wounded by Clem during the raid. His arm is bandaged. He considers the killing regrettable, but insists that Tobias was acting in defense and is not at fault.

**Helm:** A young soldier whose anger at Maradoc makes him ready to openly rebel, except for the restraining influence of Mabric and the other soldiers, whose families are all in danger if they risk disobedience.

**Caran:** The band's best woodsman and tracker. After Mabric, he is the oldest of the group, but is quiet and politic, offering no opinion in the debate over whether to rebel.

### Confronting the Band

If the PC's interrupt this conversation, the Dunlendings leap up and prepare to do battle. If the PC's attempt to parlay, Mabric asks them their business. If the PC's attack, the Dunlendings fight back, but Mabric attempts to negotiate for a parlay early in the combat. If the PC's strike from secrecy, the Dunlending they hit should be Tobias; if he dies, the Dunlendings can be persuaded to accept it as a fated death in payment for young Clement.

Mabric hails the PC's in Westron if they do not appear to understand Dunlendish: "Know, sirs, that you have entered into a war-camp of the army of Maradoc master of Cardolan, without leave and with no word of your coming. What is your business here? Speak plainly, and quickly."

If the PC's say that they have come to bring back the goods stolen from the farmstead and to see justice done for the killing of Clem Berkos, Mabric answers thusly:

"Swords are now the only justice left in this land, whose old lords passed away long ago. Those who would now rule must do so by force of arms, and none in this country can challenge Maradoc.

"Whose justice will then prevail? Not yours, save only for a few days or weeks. Therefore consider carefully what may befall you, your people and your lands in consequence of what you do this night. You have not asked for my counsel, but I give it nonetheless: see to the safety of your own home and family while you may! Evil times have come, but men may preserve what fair things they can and endure until the darkness passes.

"So. It is in our hands tonight to take few lives, or many. Your justice will bring death to many families in payment for one boy, and that I will not have. The guilty and the guiltless must both live, or neither will. There, you are answered. Now it is best for you to leave this place."

If the PC's refrain from hostility and wish to continue the parlay, Mabric will tell them more about the situation.

## The Tale of Maradoc's Rise to Power

"It is nigh on six months now since Maradoc claimed the chieftaincy of the Folcwalda clan. He was long a guest in the clan-chief's house, and became a trusted advisor, though many believed he was given too long a leash to carry out his policies. But the common folk pay scant attention to such matters. Even when Maradoc moved to depose his lord, it would have been little remarked on – the powerful are ever in dispute with one another – but for the manner in which the thing was brought about.

"The clan-chief began to suffer strange tricks of the eye, visions of unearthly beasts that stalked him, ever at his back, though no one else could see them. Soon he could not be rid of them in waking or sleeping, and madness took him. His guardsmen wisely emptied his chamber of weapons, but did not think to remove the tasseled ropes adorning the windows. They entered the next morning to find their lord dead, hanging from the rafters.

"His son fared no better. A week after assuming the chieftaincy, he was set upon by a great bear while hunting with his guardsmen. Turning to flee the bear, they were halted by a trio of wolves in their path. More beasts appeared among the trees: bears, wolves and others. As one, they converged on the men and tore them to pieces. A single guard who had lagged behind the others beheld the scene and fled back to report what had happened.

"After that, there was no one to oppose Maradoc's claim to the chieftaincy. At once, he began building an army. His lieutenants paid visits to each town and village, conscripting able men into their ranks. Not all were willing. One obdurate village was burned to the ground; its men were put to the sword and the rest taken away in chains. That is the punishment awaiting all who would resist Maradoc's rule."

At this point young Theobald makes bold to speak. "We are not murderers, nor even thieves according to Maradoc's law, by which we must gather supplies for the war effort. Some, no doubt, use their orders as license to despoil the country for themselves and kill as they wish. But we have kept nothing, and spilled no blood until yesterday morning. Had the boy not rashly attacked us, he would live still; Tobias' blow was in defense only. We will not surrender him to you for judgement." The soldier looks to his leader for support, suddenly aware that he has overstepped his own authority on the matter.

"No, we will not surrender Tobias," says Mabric. "He is no more to blame than any of us, though the burden on his mind is heaviest. And that is the only certain answer I can give our guests. We cannot mutiny, or even forsake our duties. We can offer no justice or consolation to the bereaved. We can do nothing but wait and endure, and hide our faces from those we cause to suffer."

Negotiations between the two groups are suddenly interrupted by the keening of a bird of prey. A black hawk flies overhead, circles the camp and returns in the direction from which it came. The Dunlendings are instantly on edge.

"That hawk belongs to Maradoc himself," Mabric whispers. "It often travels with his lieutenants on their errands. Geth must be coming earlier than expected. To the woods, quickly, and hide! Make no sound! We have no love for Geth and will not betray you to him, but neither can we risk your discovery. Hide, or we must fight you!"

By now the sky is dark and the trees around the camp's perimeter are shadowed in gloom, offering the PC's an effective hiding place. Hopefully, they will take Mabric's advice and hide at a vantage point from which they can observe the arrival of Maradoc's lieutenant Geth. If they refuse to hide, Mabric commands his men to attack the PC's, and Geth's party will soon join the battle. This is likely to result in the deaths of the PC's!

If the PC's act wisely and hide to watch, they will observe the following events.

### A Treacherous Act

Mabric and Theobald cross the clearing to await the arrival of Maradoc's lieutenant, and presently they return to the fire accompanied by four other men. Three of the men are tall and muscular, arrayed as experienced warriors. The fourth, to whom Mabric gives his attention, is presumably Geth. His face is cold and cunning. Gold rings glitter on his fingers, and his black cloak has the sheen of velvet. He cursorily inspects Mabric's men as they stand in file. One or two flinch from his hard gaze.

Soon, all the Dunlendings take seats around the campfire and begin to dine on the roasted meat. Geth holds aloft his cup and proposes a toast to the band's latest successful venture. Mabric's men drink dutifully, without cheer. At Geth's prompting, Mabric recounts the band's exploits over the preceding fortnight: they have carried out four raids on farmsteads within five leagues of the camp. The spoils have been carefully recorded and are ready to be sent on to Maradoc.

Geth raises his eyebrows in mock surprise. "Only four ventures?" he says. "Why, the last two warbands we visited had carried out twice that number! The settlements in this region must be far more sparse than I had supposed, eh?" he says, grinning without humour. Then his expression grows hard. "Your report is disappointing, Mabric. I deem that new leadership is required if this group is to meet the standards of our illustrious chief. How fortunate for us all that I had the foresight to bring a suitable replacement with me tonight." He indicates the warrior seated beside him, who nods in cold acknowledgement.

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Geth turns to address Mabric once again. "You," he continues, "have sadly been demoted in the ranks. Demoted to a very...low...station indeed." Mabric suddenly splutters and begins to choke, staring with sudden understanding at the cup before him. "Poison—" he croaks, before his face contorts in pain and he falls over, clutching his stomach and crying out in raw gasps.

"Yes, and no quick, easy poison for you, traitor," Geth snarls. He turns to address the others. "This dereliction of duty will cease now. What Maradoc commands, you will do, or suffer as this fool now suffers."

But Theobald is already on his feet. He yanks his sword from its scabbard and, with a wild yell, aims a mighty overhand swing at Geth, who rolls aside at the last moment. Now everyone is on their feet, as the men of the warband attack the others in fury. But Geth's men are seasoned warriors and move as one to defend their leader. The clash of steel rings out in the forest night.

If the PCs do not intervene at this point, Mabric's warband is slain to a man in less than two minutes. Geth stabs each fallen foe in the throat to make sure of them, but leaves Mabric himself writhing on the ground, tormented by the poison. The victors quickly and efficiently break down the camp. Within fifteen minutes, they extinguish the fire and depart the clearing, driving the donkey and goats before them. The PCs will find Mabric still alive and conscious, and he pleads with them to bear him to his village to prepare its defences against the soldiers Maradoc will send in punishment for this act of treachery.

If the PCs do intervene, with their assistance Mabric's men should be able to defeat Geth and his guards without much loss. (Note: Narrators, try to see to it that Tobias survives the battle if possible; he has a further part to play.) Geth is cowardly and will attempt to flee for his life if the battle turns heavily against him and his men. Stats for all the characters involved in this combat are provided at the end of this article.

From the bodies of Geth and his guards, the following items may be recovered:

- Four suits of leather armour (which may be badly damaged in the fight, giving them an armour value of 1)
- Three longswords, one of which is of fine make
- One short sword
- One dagger, whose pommel is embellished with a black stone set among gold tines
- Two shortbows and forty arrows
- Four gold rings, two of them set with small amethysts

- Coins totalling 4 silver pieces and 11 silver pennies
- Food and drink provisions, five days' worth x 4 people
- Written records of the previous week's work: three warbands were inspected and a shorthand inventory of their loot is recorded
- Four riding horses, which are tethered to a tree on one side of the clearing

## CONCLUDING ACT 1

Immediately after the conclusion of the battle, a keen screech breaks the night's stillness, and the black shape of Maradoc's hawk glides overhead, swiftly crossing the clearing and vanishing over the tree-tops. The Dunlending men are wide-eyed with apprehension. "This deed will be known to Maradoc ere morning," says Helm, his voice rising in panic. "Our homes will burn, our families put to the sword for our treachery!" He utters a great cry of impotent rage that echoes faintly around the camp.

A low moaning sound draws everyone's eyes to the crumpled form of Mabric lying near the fire. The Dunlendings gather around their fallen leader. He labours to speak.

"There is no time for rest tonight," he whispers. "We have but two days before soldiers from Argond will arrive to raze our town. We must return to Chalnen and defend our homes. Bear me with you on the cart. I will instruct you about the defences."

One of Mabric's men steps forward. It is Tobias. (If Tobias died in the battle, another Dunlending will take this part.)

"I will return the provisions," he says quietly. Some of his fellows murmur their disapproval of this idea. Theobald objects that there is no time, that every man is now needed to mount a defence.

But Mabric stirs and lifts a hand to halt the debate. "Though our need is great, so also is theirs." He looks at Tobias. "You wish to die an honest man ...as do I. Go then and cleanse all our names of Maradoc's wrongs."

"If I am still alive, I will join you in Chalnen ere the battle begins," Tobias vows.

"That is good," whispers Mabric, before another spasm of pain contorts his face.

Tobias soon departs, driving the goats and a single horse laden with as many provisions as he could pack atop it. The cart is needed for Mabric, who cannot ride and indeed seems not long for this world.

The Dunlendings now make haste to depart, checking their fallen foes to be sure of their deaths, and then stripping them of their gear. Braddoc utters a quick rite over the bodies while the others build up the campfire into a proper pyre on which to pile the dead. Theobald sits for awhile in the cart with his leader and listens carefully whenever Mabric summons the strength to speak his instructions.

Reward each PC with 500 XP at the conclusion of this Act, plus any additional experience point rewards you wish to give out for good roleplaying.

The PC's must now decide whether to part ways with Mabric's men or to continue with them and help defend their home town of Chalnen against the soldiers Maradoc will send to punish them. If the PC's decide to help, they will continue the adventure in Act 2, to be published next month. The following description closes this part of the story:

The group is silent as they depart the camp, each of Mabric's men comparing in his mind the eight leagues' travel home and the twenty-five leagues to Argond, from which their enemies will certainly march forth at dawn. The crackling of the charred corpses in the clearing behind them lingers in their ears for a long time after their departure.

## NPCs

### MABRIC

**Race:** Middle Man      **Gender:** Male

**Racial Abilities:** Skilled, Adaptable, Dominion of Man

**Attributes:** Bearing 8 (+1), Nimbleness 8 (+1), Perception 7, Strength 8 (+1), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 7

**Reactions:** Stam +4, Swift +2, Will +1, Wis +2

**Defence:** 11      **Health:** 9      **Courage:** 4

**Orders:** Warrior      **Advancements:** 2

**Order Abilities:** Warrior-born, Battle-hardened

**Skills:** Armed Combat: Blades (Longsword) +9, Heal (Treat Wounds) +5, Inspire +5, Intimidate (Power) +6, Language: Dunlendish +6, Language: Westron +4, Lore/Group: Dunlendings +4, Lore/Realm: Minhiriath +4; Observe (Spot) +3, Ranged Combat: Spears (Spear) +6, Siegecraft (Unit Leadership) +6

**Edges:** Resolute, Warwise      **Flaws:** None

**Gear:** Longsword, Spear, Leather armour

### THEOBALD

**Race:** Middle Man      **Gender:** Male

**Racial Abilities:** Skilled, Adaptable, Dominion of Man

**Attributes:** Bearing 7, Nimbleness 9 (+1), Perception 6, Strength 9 (+1), Vitality 9 (+1), Wits 6

**Reactions:** Stam +3, Swift +2, Will +0, Wis +0

**Defence:** 11      **Health:** 10      **Courage:** 4

**Orders:** Warrior      **Advancements:** 1

**Order Abilities:** Warrior-born

**Skills:** Armed Combat: Blades (Longsword) +8, Heal (Treat Wounds) +4, Inspire +3, Intimidate (Power) +5, Language: Dunlendish +5, Language: Westron +3, Lore/Group: Dunlendings +4, Lore/Realm: Minhiriath +3; Observe (Spot) +4, Ranged Combat: Spears (Spear) +6, Siegecraft (Unit Leadership) +4

**Edges:** Dodge, Faithful (Mabric), Lion-hearted      **Flaws:** None

**Gear:** Longsword, Spear, Leather armour

### BRADDOC, CARAN, HELM, TOBIAS

**Race:** Middle Man      **Gender:** Male

**Racial Abilities:** Skilled, Adaptable, Dominion of Man

**Attributes:** Bearing 5, Nimbleness 8 (+1), Perception 6, Strength 8 (+1), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 5

**Reactions:** Stam +3, Swift +1, Will +0, Wis +0

**Defence:** 11      **Health:** 9      **Courage:** 4

**Orders:** Warrior      **Advancements:** 0

**Order Abilities:** Warrior-born

**Skills:** Armed Combat: Polearms (Spear) +6, Heal (Treat Wounds) +3, Intimidate (Power) +4, Language: Dunlendish +5, Language: Westron +2, Lore/Group: Dunlendings +3, Lore/Realm: Minhiriath +3; Observe (Spot) +3, Ranged Combat: Spears (Spear) +6, Siegecraft +3

**Edges:** Dodge, Faithful (Mabric)      **Flaws:** None

**Gear:** Spear, Leather armour

**GETH****Race:** Middle Man      **Gender:** Male**Racial Abilities:** Skilled, Adaptable, Dominion of Man**Attributes:** Bearing 6, Nimbleness 10 (+2), Perception 8 (+1), Strength 8 (+1), Vitality 6, Wits 8 (+1)**Reactions:** Stam +1, Swift +5, Will +1, Wis +2**Defence:** 12      **Health:** 7      **Courage:** 4**Orders:** Rogue      **Advancements:** 3**Order Abilities:** Lurking in Shadows, Treacherous Blow**Skills:** Armed Combat: Blades (Short Sword) +8, Climb +3, Conceal (Weapon) +3, Guide +3, Inquire (Converse) +1, Intimidate (Torture) +3, jump +3, Language: Dunlendish +7, Language: Westron +6, Legerdemain +4, Lore/Group: Dunlendings +5, Lore/Realm: Arnor +4, Lore/Realm: Minhiriath +5; Observe (Hear) +5, Persuade (Fast Talk) +2, Ranged Combat: Bows (Shortbow) +8, Stealth (Hide) +6, Survival (Forests) +2**Edges:** Dodge, Furtive, Night-Eyed      **Flaws:** None**Gear:** Short sword, Shortbow, 10 arrows, Leather armour**GETH'S BODYGUARDS****Race:** Middle Man      **Gender:** Male**Racial Abilities:** Skilled, Adaptable, Dominion of Man**Attributes:** Bearing 6, Nimbleness 8(+1), Perception 6, Strength 10 (+2), Vitality 8 (+1), Wits 6**Reactions:** Stam +4, Swift +2, Will +0, Wis +0**Defence:** 11      **Health:** 10      **Courage:** 4**Orders:** Warrior      **Advancements:** 2**Order Abilities:** Warrior-born**Skills:** Armed Combat: Blades (Longsword) +9, Intimidate (Power) +7, Language: Dunlendish +5, Language: Westron +3, Lore/Group: Dunlendings +4, Lore/Realm: Minhiriath +3; Observe (Spot) +3, Ranged Combat: Bows (Shortbow) +6, Ride +5, Siegecraft (Unit Leadership) +6, Survival (Forests) +4**Edges:** Dodge, Hardy, Warwise      **Flaws:** None**Gear:** Longsword, Shortbow, 10 arrows, Leather armour**ART CREDITS**

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## WHAT'S OUT THERE

This is a list of Web sites along with Decipher's official Web sites. We have found they supply useful *Lord of the Rings* game information.

<p>DECIPHER'S LORD OF THE RINGS RPG HOME  <a href="http://lotrrpg.fanhq.com">http://lotrrpg.fanhq.com</a>            DECIPHER'S LOTR RPG BOARD  <a href="http://forums.fanhq.com/viewforum.php?f=164">http://forums.fanhq.com/viewforum.php?f=164</a>            THE HALL OF FIRE WEBZINE SITE  <a href="http://halloffire.org">http://halloffire.org</a>            FAN MODULES FOR MIDDLE-EARTH  <a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fan-modules">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fan-modules</a>            THE MAD IRISHMAN  <a href="http://www.mad-irishman.net">http://www.mad-irishman.net</a>            STARBASE CODA  <a href="http://www.starbase-coda.com">http://www.starbase-coda.com</a>            ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ARDA  <a href="http://www.glyphweb.com/arda/default.htm">http://www.glyphweb.com/arda/default.htm</a>            SCOTT'S RPG CENTRAL  <a href="http://www.geocities.com/scott_metz/">http://www.geocities.com/scott_metz/</a>            CHRONICLES OF THE NORTH  <a href="http://roleplay.avioc.org/index.htm">http://roleplay.avioc.org/index.htm</a></p>	<p>THE LAST ALLIANCE  <a href="http://thelastalliance.com">http://thelastalliance.com</a>            RPG TOOLS FOR DECIPHER'S CODA GAMES  <a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rpgtools/">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rpgtools/</a>            THE STEWARD AND THE KING  <a href="http://www.stewardandking.net">http://www.stewardandking.net</a>            THE TOWER HILLS  <a href="http://homepage.mac.com/jeremybaker/towerhills">http://homepage.mac.com/jeremybaker/towerhills</a>            TREK-RPG.NET  <a href="http://forum.trek-rpg.net/index.php">http://forum.trek-rpg.net/index.php</a>            CODA WEBZINE REPOSITORY  <a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/coda_webzine">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/coda_webzine</a>            THE ONE RING.COM  <a href="http://www.theonering.com/">http://www.theonering.com/</a>            THE ONE RING.NET  <a href="http://www.theonering.net/">http://www.theonering.net/</a>            VALINOR  <a href="http://sauron.misled.us">http://sauron.misled.us</a></p>
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Please note that if you would like to submit a mini-adventure, Decipher will not consider it for publishing. Please do not directly submit your items to us without prior approval.

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If so, write to us at [codawebzine@hotmail.com](mailto:codawebzine@hotmail.com) with 'Writer' in the subject line. One of the editors will get back to you with details about writing for **THE HALL OF FIRE**.

### *If you would like to post an advertisement for:*

- A local or online RPG that you are hosting
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