

FALTHRINGOR



A BOROUGH BOUND CITY

CONTENTS

DISPLACED

FALTHRINGOR7

THE PRESENT RESIDENTS OF FALTHRINGOR8

Lowlanders	8
Lowlander Names	10
Upland Halflings.....	10
Halfling Names	11
Duscarn Giants	12
Giant Names.....	13

THE FORMER RESIDENTS OF FALTHRINGOR 14

THE TORRENT OPUS 16

The Cistern.....	16
Beneath the Cistern	17
The Slopes	18

TRAVELING TO FALTHRIN- GOR 19

HIGH KESTREL MARIUSZ WENJANSK..... 21

Lord Ratchet Foldet	23
Lady Sylwia Wenjansk	23

PLOT HOOK: CURE THE LAND24

Quest Design 1: Delving Into the Mountain.....	25
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Quest Design 2: Unite the Great Houses.....	26
Quest Design 3: The World Tour	27

FORCIFIED

THE SEVERED KEEP33

Severed Peak	34
The Drawbridge.....	34
The Ramparts.....	35

THE ARCHERS37

Klara Urbecik	38
Junchremyn “Baby Hands”	38

PLOT HOOK: ENDORSE A SUC- CESSOR.....40

The Wenjansk Heirs	41
Influence the Succession	45

ASSEMBLED

THE SPEARMEN 51

The “Trip and Spike” Maneuver	51
Lord Ratchet Zarek Deniczik	52
Wodunc.....	54
Chevvek Iczenski.....	54
Irmhilde the Blacksmith..	55

GMING A CASTLE DEFENSE BATTLE.....58

THE KITCHEN60

Head Chef Tola Heddek ... 61
Tola's Staff62

**PLOT HOOK: WIN THE TOUR-
NEY64**

Events..... 65

BEYOND

THE GUILDS69

Lord Ratchet Feliks Sikora75
Agnieszka Sikora 75

USING GUILDS IN GAME 76

THE SPIRIT NEST78

Wenjansk Spiritual
Practices.....78
The High Priests 80
On the Divinity of Nature
Spirits.....81

**IKREEPULK THE TURN-
COAT82**

**PLOT HOOK: ATTACK THE
GIANT CAMP.....84**

Strategy 1: All-Out Assault84
Strategy 2: Infiltration85
Strategy 3: Negotiation...85





CHAPTER 1

DISPLACED

THE MOUNTAINTOP BASTION
THE SOILED SOIL
THE ALCHEMICAL ENGINE



House Wenjansk remembers the warm shores. The sun was bright and the harvests plentiful. Far from the tainted runoff of the Duscarn Range, House Wenjansk wanted for little. Yes, there were bitter rivalries with the neighboring houses, but much was accomplished through diplomacy. War was always a threat and never a reality. Then the giants came.

In great longships, the Duscarn Giants crossed Lake Nodolny and raided Wenjansków. The lowland lords and their vassals alike were unprepared for the assault. Hundreds were killed, and the rest fled. Wenjansków fell in a matter of hours. Those wise enough to abandon their homes climbed into the hills and the mountains beyond. They ascended the treacherous peaks of the Duscarn Range, the supposed birthplace of the pursuing giants. No food could grow here in the corrupted sierra, and so those fleeing became desperately hungry. As many died escaping their city as died in the initial devastation.

But many survived, and those who did climbed higher and higher into the peaks, away from the giants who followed. The giants fell behind, and the exhausted band of survivors slowly conquered the peaks. Atop the distant Mt. Endryr, House Wenjansk found something they had never expected: a colossal bastion on the mountaintop. The castle had sturdy walls, a defensible position, and an alchemical engine that would ultimately save the starving refugees.

They had found Faltringor, the ancient stronghold of the creatures that later became the Duscarn Giants. House Wenjansk claimed their new home. Ten years have passed, and Faltringor is now a remote, self-sustaining city at the pinnacle of the Duscarn Range. The bulwark must stand, for the giants who destroyed Wenjansków seek to reclaim their former stronghold, a castle that has lain dormant for hundreds of years.





Falthringor

POPULATION: Roughly 150 people live within the castle walls, and five times that farm the slopes below. Most residents are lowland humans, but upland halflings are also common. A handful of giants unaffiliated with their battle-frenzied kin from the lowlands have also pledged themselves to House Wenjansk.

GOVERNMENT: House Wenjansk rules Falthringor much as they once ruled Wenjansków. The top-ranking lord in the house—presently the patriarch Mariusz Wenjansk—is named the “High Kestrel,” a title equivalent to “king” in the greater kingdoms elsewhere in the realm. The High Kestrel appoints Lord Ratchets to manage the army, the economy, and the fields.

ECONOMY: There are none bold enough to trade with the residents of Falthringor. It is too dangerous to cross the Duscarn Range, even if House Wenjansk assures that any merchant will be protected. Nevertheless, there is a notable division of labor within the castle walls. Guilds oversee various crafts: chiefly smithing, brewing, and masonry.

RELIGION: Like the great houses scattered across the lowlands, House Wenjansk and their vassals practice a form of shamanism. Priests interpret the wisdom of nature spirits. House Wenjansk honors many beasts in their faith but gives primacy to birds of prey: the Great Falcon, the Canny Harrier, and the All-Seeing Owl.

TECHNOLOGY: The current residents of Falthringor are a medieval people. They use longbows and wear chainmail. They have no printing press, gunpowder, clocks, or windmills. The former residents of Falthringor, however, were experts in alchemy. Their *torrent opus* provides a seemingly unlimited source of fresh water for the castle and nearby hamlets. Most believe there are other useful treasures hidden deep in mountain tunnels, though the inner workings of these alchemical engines are likely to remain a mystery for quite some time.

12 ft

6 ft

4 ft



THE PRESENT RESIDENTS OF

Faltringor

Most who now call Faltringor home are the former residents of Wenjansków—the lowland city destroyed by the Duscarn Giants years ago—and its surrounding fields. The city was no great metropolis but was among the largest urban settlements in the agrarian lowlands.

Lowlanders

The majority of Faltringor's residents are human, typically referred to as "lowlanders." This demonym now carries an ironic undertone, given the elevation of Faltringor. Any humans from the wide swath of land bounded by the Duscarn Mountains to the west, the Silliar Ghats to the north, and the Yartharen Sea to the

south and east are considered lowlanders. They typically have dark skin and coarse hair, features shared by the majority of humans in the sweltering lowlands.

The fertile lands beneath the mountains are ruled by anywhere between eight and eleven great houses, depending on whom you ask. These great houses are the defining political powers of the region. Each house acts as the governing body, the military, and the organizing force that manages agricultural laborers across the plains. In many houses, laborers are serfs, barely freer than slaves. House Wenjansk prefers the term “vassals.” The common people may own land and have some say in governance, and the elders of House Wenjansk, in turn, provide protection and law. There is still a wide gulf between the lords of the great house and the peasants, but vassals in and around Faltringor are treated far better than elsewhere in the lowlands.

The lowlanders pledged to House Wenjansk are sworn to uphold certain ideals: veneration of the bestial spirits, duty to one’s land or guild, a commitment to fight when necessary, and—more recent-



ly—gender parity. Collectively, these ideals are enumerated in the *Wenjansk Code*, a massive tome of laws, tenets, and history that is jointly compiled by the Lord Ratchets. These virtues have always been core to House Wenjansk’s identity among the great houses, but now they are also crucial to the livelihood of Faltringor and immediate surroundings. Even with the stronghold’s walls and life-giving *torrent opus*, day-to-day survival is never assured in the Duscarn Range. Avalanches, infectious diseases, and giant attacks are constant threats, so the unifying body of beliefs that bind the residents of Faltringor has never been more critical.

LOWLANDER NAMES

D8	MALE	FEMALE	SURNAMES
1	Bazyli	Andrzeja	Bartek
2	Dymitr	Dagmara	Cebulsk
3	Idzi	Helena	Jacek
4	Kosma	Jadwiga	Kruk
5	Oswald	Ola	Matuisk
6	Roland	Patrycja	Pinkos
7	Tomasz	Teodora	Smolak
8	Wiktor	Zyta	Walek

Upland Halflings

Many halflings from the nearby hills moved to Wenjansków a few decades ago when their homes were ransacked by House Wenjansk's rival great house: House Jutmek. These halflings are now twice displaced.

In their previous homes, the upland halflings maintained shockingly similar lifestyles to many of the lowlander agricultural workers living outside Wenjansków. Overwhelmingly, these halflings were subsistence farmers who had little in the way of formal government or religion. When necessary, small bands of halflings would form makeshift militias to protect themselves, but this was no match against a proper army of archers and cavalry. When House Jutmek came for their territory, they surrendered their valuable farmland and fled to Wenjansków.



Perhaps surprisingly, most of the relocated halflings had little difficulty assimilating into life on the outskirts of the lake-side city. They willingly became vassals of House Wenjansk and pledged to work the land in exchange for autonomy and protection. This agreement proved exceedingly prudent for both parties in the wake of Wenjansków's destruction: the halflings needed protection more than ever, and the lowlanders needed hardy laborers with experience farming at higher elevations. In general, the halflings fared much better in the mountains than most of the humans. As such, the halfling numbers have grown from roughly 10% to nearly 25% of the population.

All upland halflings are hermaphroditic. As such, any two halflings can mate and bear children. The halflings hold dear the notion that one's biological sex need not mandate one's gender identity. Some halflings identify as male, others as female, and some as nonbinary. Some lowlanders have theorized that the egalitarian spirit of the upland halflings is at least partially the result of their unique biology and gender expression. Undoubtedly, the halfling diaspora has influenced House Wenjansk's recent commitment to gender equality.

HALFLING NAMES

D8	MALE	FEMALE	UNISEX
1	Banran	Aldani	Cannenbuhr
2	Ekkirih	Arin	Deonant
3	Hiltibrant	Cotahilt	Enolt
4	Ingo	Evertch	Mendenno
5	Noathart	Hempi	Ren
6	Paltar	Sahsin	Smeoha
7	Stutran	Ualtni	Traostilo
8	Vuldar	Vehnent	Woto

Duscarn Giants

The Duscarn Range is a dangerous place, even to the giants who claim it as their ancestral home. Many nomadic giants throughout the mountains fall to wild beasts, toxic soil, and extreme weather each year. As such, many sought refuge in Falthringor after House Wenjansk reactivated the *torrent opus*. House Wenjansk listened to their request for asylum, but High Kestrel Mariusz Wenjansk vacillated. On the one hand, giant attacks were the very reason he was forced to flee with his people to the mountains. On the other, these giants were ready to swear fealty and bore no direct relation to the relentlessly warlike tribe that ransacked Wenjansków.

Eventually, giants were granted asylum into Falthringor on the condition that they offer their labor and pledge themselves to the ideals of House Wenjansk. There is still much to be done in the mountaintop castle, and there is no substitute for the strength and craftsmanship of the giants. Additionally, they are hardy folk accustomed to the climate, and they require little in

the way of extra clothing, medicine, or supervision. If worse comes to worst, they can also be called upon to fight, though the High Kestrel has thus far resisted the temptation to pit his vassal giants against their own kin.

Legends speak of different giants elsewhere in the realm:



the unthinking forest giants in the woods of Onotanie or the wise stone giants who live alongside the coastal dwarves. Duscarn Giants seem to be unique among their kin. They have learned the lowlander tongue and speak eloquently, though with a persistently frustrating lack of urgency. They seem distinctly inept when it comes to tending fields. However, their artistry in various media—notably fiber arts, metalsmithing, and vocal counterpoint—is virtuosic compared to any works the humans or halflings can muster. Many lowlanders had assumed the Duscarn Giants to be brainless brutes, but close interaction immediately dispelled this notion.

Lowlanders have difficulty pronouncing many Duscarn names, and thus most giants in Faltringor are given nicknames associated with their chosen work.

GIANT NAMES

D8	MALE	FEMALE	SOBRIQUET/NICKNAME
1	Abrudenjeskor	Beđiš	Cap
2	Brzchértí	Eéèl	Featherborn
3	Egrthúmlrn	Giihgigli	Hide
4	Krrtag-Dentlun	Nunjenskori	Longseer
5	Llatrung	Oh-Hjuntla	Ol' Iron Arm
6	Múrno	Rāi	Swift
7	Teçrimpsz	Stsilstso	Two-Voice
8	Yrrg-Chrê	Ungwêtla	Wise Ass

THE FORMER RESIDENTS OF **Falthringor**

Falthringor was built many centuries ago. When the refugees from Wenjansków first discovered the mountaintop citadel ten years back, they were perplexed. They did not know of any civilizations in the mountains, let alone a people from a millennium ago that could construct such a massive fortification in such an unwelcoming environment. As they explored the castle, however, they found texts and mysteriously preserved tapestries that explained the origins of the castle.

Long ago, the Duscarn were a human-like race who lived in the mountains beyond the lowlands. They had weak constitutions and short lifespans compared to the humans who lived in the lowlands. Agriculture was challenging in the mountains, but the lowlanders—even then!—were exceedingly territorial. As such, the Duscarn did their best to eke out a meager survival in the harsh peaks.

14 Though the details from their own records are murky, the Duscarn somehow became masters of alchemy, concocting potent elixirs that greatly enhanced their lifespans, bolstered their crops, and even sharpened their blades. The Duscarn grew powerful and arrogant. They built Falthringor in the mountains to keep out the lowlanders who had become envious of the now healthy and proud people.

Two things happened next, though in what order is not clear. They poisoned the land, tainting the soil in perpetuity, likely the result of some alchemical mishap. They also built the *torrent opus*, a colossal tower that could summon pristine water from the heavens and deposit an endless bounty in a cistern within the castle. This water allowed the Duscarn to farm the tainted land, and so they prospered despite the calamity.

Many years later, their hubris got the best of them. They became gluttonous, imbibing stranger and more dangerous potions. Little by little, they transformed themselves from the meek species that first conquered the mountains into the violent and distrustful

Duscarn Giants of today. They warred amongst themselves and succumbed to infighting, destroying their powerful empire and falling into a perpetual dark age. Incalculable knowledge was lost, destroyed in battle, or forgotten in the depths of Faltringor. Soon,

they could no longer comprehend or reproduce the very alchemy that had turned them into the creatures they had become. At some point, they fled Faltringor and dispersed across the lowlands. The castle was abandoned and remained as such for hundreds of years.



THE Torrent Opus

Atop Falthingor's highest tower, an arcane engine wrests moisture from the heavens. This *torrent opus* was one of the great alchemical achievements of the ancient Duscarn. With their unrivaled mastery of material sciences, the Duscarn were able to harvest endless quantities of impossibly pure water, store it, and then use it to farm even in the harsh landscape of their mountainous home.

When House Wenjansk arrived in Falthingor, the *torrent opus* was inactive. It is unclear whether some creature—perhaps one of the last Duscarn Giants to inhabit the stronghold—turned it off or whether some failsafe prohibits the alchemical engine from running perpetually. Regardless, it was trivially easy to reactivate, requiring only a twist of some gears at the base of the tower.

Now the *torrent opus* provides unlimited fresh water for the stronghold, and aqueducts built into the mountainside

disperse the water to farms along the craggy slopes. Farming Mt. Endryr is still a challenge, given the harshness of the soil and the bitter cold, but it is possible to reap impressive harvests with the warm and cleansing water emitted from Falthingor's great tower.

The Cistern

The water from the *torrent opus* collects in a great cistern carved into the mountain. Though the *torrent opus* had not been active for centuries, the cistern was full when the House Wenjansk first arrived in the stronghold. This cistern is accessible via the maze of corridors and tunnels that lead down from Falthingor's great hall. The cistern is always balmy, a feature that surprised the lowlanders once they reactivated the *torrent opus*. Inexplicably, the heavenly water that the alchemical engine summons is impossibly warm, and some arcane insulator within the cistern is able to sustain that heat.

Small vents throughout Falthingor disperse this warmth across the castle. As such, the cistern provides not just water for the stronghold

but also a small but nontrivial buffer against the frigid mountain-top winds.

In the early days after the lowlanders moved into the castle, High Kestrel Mariusz Wenjansk decreed that the cistern would be off-limits to all but him and the Lord Ratchets. In his view, the cistern was too great a strategic asset to risk. Were someone to tamper with the water supply, they would be forced to drain the entire reservoir. It would take weeks to refill, during which time they would have no fresh water, and the castle would quickly cool. It would likely not mean the end of the Falthingor, but it would be an enormous impediment for an already imperiled stronghold.

Beneath the Cistern

Tunnels and passageways that extend deeper into Mt. Endryr are visible beneath the waters of the cistern. Theoretically, someone *could* swim down into the unexplored chambers deep below Falthingor. It seems inevitable that there are greater mysteries to uncover that may shed light on the final days of the Duscarn.

Alternatively, these passageways would be much easier to explore if the cistern were emptied. There is a central console near the cistern that could be used to deactivate the *torrent opus* and open up mountainside sluices, draining the cistern entirely. This would allow for safe traversal of the once flooded chambers deep below the fort.

GM NOTE: The “passageways beneath the cistern” is your catch-all excuse to add a dungeon crawl to your Falthingor adventures. If you have a crypt/laboratory/dragon lair/et cetera that you want to incorporate into your campaign without the party even leaving Falthingor, have them deal with the cistern. They’ll either have to sneak into the large chamber or convince the High Kestrel to give them access, and then they’ll have to decide whether it’s worth draining all the warm water. Either way, the mysterious fall of Falthingor’s original inhabitants is a perfect hook to help you plop any additional dungeon module you want into the castle’s basement.

The Slopes

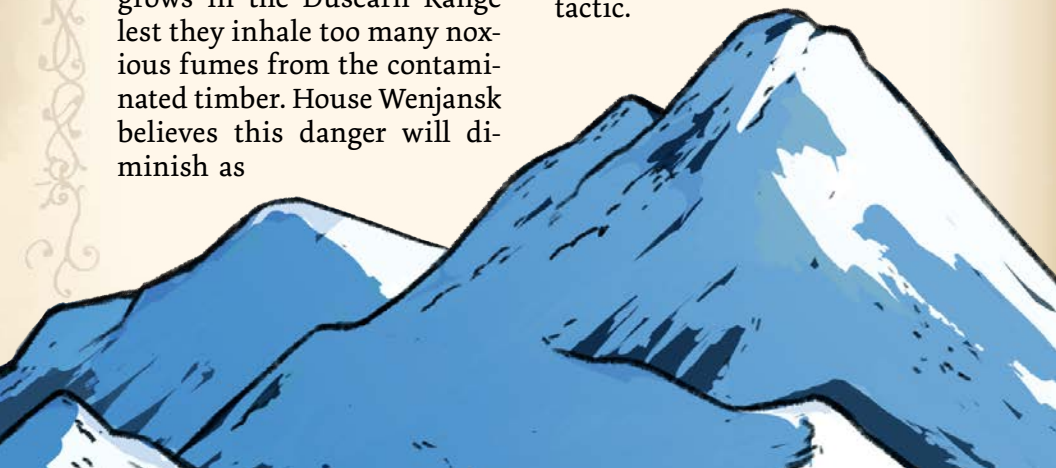
Faltringor was not large enough for the initial band of travelers that escaped Wenjansków, and it certainly isn't large enough for today's burgeoning population. As such, many of House Wenjansk's vassals farm the slopes beneath Faltringor. It is still frigid this high above sea level, but agriculture is possible. Yaks and goats can survive if they eat grasses that are cleansed with water from the *torrent opus*, and hardy tubers thrive if given adequate care and irrigation.

Even with the alchemical aid that Faltringor provides, life in the mountains is a challenge. The *torrent opus* may neutralize the tainted soil, but farming on a windswept mountain is still no easy feat. Farmers must be careful when burning what sickly wood grows in the Duscarn Range lest they inhale too many noxious fumes from the contaminated timber. House Wenjansk believes this danger will diminish as

they continue to irrigate Mt. Endryr with pure water.

Those outside Faltringor's walls must always be prepared to confront giants. Soldiers are deployed as necessary, but the farmers who live in the tiny mountainside hamlets know that every archer or spearman has orders to retreat into the castle if necessary. Those on the slopes know they are better off looking to the spirits for protection than the errant soldiers that House Wenjansk deploys.

Luckily, the Duscarn Giants have thus far opted not to undermine Faltringor's food production with targeted attacks on outer farms. Their formal raids solely target the stronghold itself. It is unclear whether this is purely a tactical blunder or whether the Duscarn Giants have some deeper reason for ignoring what would seem to be the optimal siege tactic.





TRAVELING TO **Faltringor**

Only exceptionally motivated travelers will dare make the trek to Faltringor. It's a dangerous journey, and few outsiders have ventured to the castle since the initial exodus of the lowlanders ten years ago. There are, however, a number of reasons that a party of adventurers may want to head to the city.

1. The discovery of the stronghold was an extraordinary **archaeological reveal**. Curious minds may hope to find alchemical wonders in the fortress's hidden subterranean corridors, or they may just crave anthropological insights regarding the origins of the Duscarn Giants.
2. House Wenjansk is still—at least theoretically—a major player in the **politics of the lowlands**. The other great houses may send emissaries to trade, negotiate with, threaten, or spy on the High Kestrel and the rest of House Wenjansk.
3. Faltringor is the *only* **safe haven** throughout the Duscarn Range. If the adventurers are traveling through the mountains for any purpose, they will likely need to make their way to the fortress to resupply or hide from greater threats.
4. The other great houses were lucky that House Wenjansk led the violent giants away from the lowlands. Still, there is growing concern that the giants will become more brazen in their future attacks should they gain a **permanent foothold** in the Duscarn Range. Noble adventurers may seek to aid House Wenjansk in the defense of their keep to avoid this worst-case scenario.

**D6 DUSCARN RANGE
DANGERS**

DESCRIPTION

1 Avalanche

Violent seismic activity causes frequent avalanches. The initial danger is trauma from the slabs of ice and snow, but avalanches also make the terrain more difficult to traverse for days or weeks to come.

2 Tainted soil

All of the dirt and mud packed beneath the snow is forever corrupted by Duscarn alchemy. Obviously, travelers should not consume the foul plants that grow here, but they may also contract diseases purely through proximity.

3 Alchemical runoff

Reactivating the *torrent opus* set in motion several dormant alchemical machines throughout the Duscarn Range. Some of these emit toxic drainage erratically. Perceptive travelers may notice the well-concealed runoff pipes jutting out from various peaks.

4 Malachite lizards

Only the hardiest creatures can survive in the Duscarn Range. Among them are the hulking malachite lizards. These venomous quadrupeds camouflage themselves among the tainted soil and can grow up to fifteen feet snout-to-vent.

5 Perilous chasm

Earthquakes can cause expected travel routes to transform unexpectedly. A reliable mountain pass may become a gaping crevasse in mere minutes. Bypassing the chasm may add days to an expedition, though the party *could* try to cross the gap instead.

6 Giant attack

The Duscarn Giants are committed to retaking their long-lost fortress, and they are not terribly discerning when it comes to small folks. Anyone shorter than ten-or-so feet tall is a potential target.

HIGH KESTREL

Mariusz Wenjansk

Most High Kestrels face their fair share of challenges. Kajetan Wenjansk had to fortify his borders against raiders from House Jutmek. Remigiusz Wenjansk was confronted with a combination of famine and plague throughout his reign. High Kestral Mariusz Wenjansk (he/him), however, has had to fight to keep his house from crumbling entirely.

Like most High Kestrels, Mariusz inherited the title upon his father's death.¹ As the eldest son of an only child, Mariusz's ascension was not in contention. His early rule saw the integration of the upland halflings into Wenjansków's farms, amendments to the *Wenjansk Code*, and thriving relations with the other great houses. Had Mariusz died prematurely, he would have been remembered as one of the greatest High Kestrels House Wenjansk had ever known, if only for the fortuitous circumstances of his reign. The sacking of Wenjansków and subsequent dispersion called all of that into question.

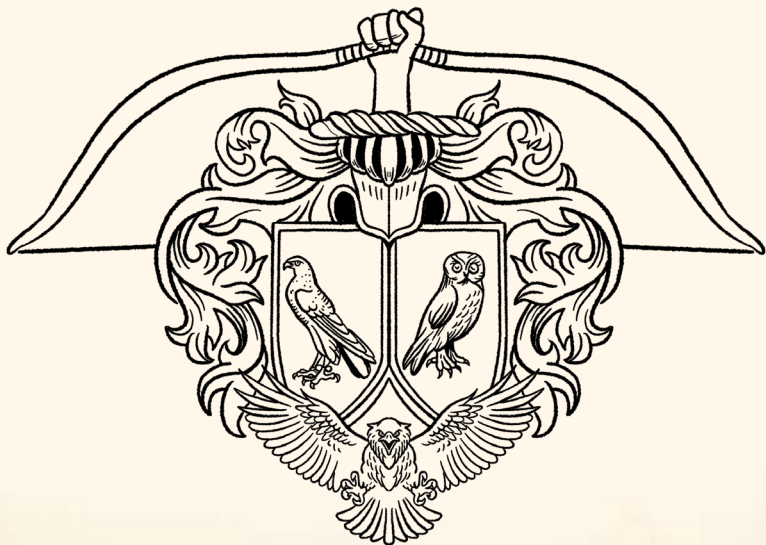


¹ The intricacies of succession within House Wenjansk are explored in greater detail in *Falthingor 02: Fortified*

Mariusz is no great genius. He is a man who places too much trust in his Lord Ratchets and too little in his vassals. Many common folk would die for High Kestrel Mariusz, but he mostly sees them as self-interested and fickle. It is well known that Mariusz is largely irreligious despite the fervor with which most of his subjects revere the Great Falcon, the Canny Harrier, and the All-Seeing Owl. He often acts rashly, and when he cannot make a decision, he is overly deferential to his Lord Ratchets, who frequently pursue ulterior motives. He drinks to excess, keeps a mistress, and plays a dangerous game by picking favorites among his children.

Nevertheless, High Kestrel Mariusz Wenjansk saved his people. None could have predicted the giants would cross Lake Nodolny, and Mariusz was quick to signal the retreat. He led his people into the unclaimed hills and found a new stronghold to call home. The future of House Wenjansk is not certain, but Mariusz has done everything he can to keep his people safe.

Despite his age, Mariusz still trains daily with his guard force. He is healthy and valorous, and when the giants approach his fort, he stands tall atop the ramparts. Many question whether Mariusz is the best role model, the wisest tactician, or the most adept politician, but all give him the credit he deserves. He is an incredible force, and House Wenjansk stands today because of his leadership. The histories will remember that.



Lord Ratchet Foldet

The *Wenjansk Code* supplies surprisingly few guidelines regarding the appointment of Lord Ratchets. Typically, a High Kestrel retains some of the Lord Ratchets from his predecessor and then bestows new titles to close confidants, but few laws codify this process. Many were still surprised when the High Kestrel bestowed a title on Foldet (they/them), one of the first upland halflings to swear fealty to House Wenjansk. Foldet is a plucky halfling who argued convincingly on behalf of their kin. They made the claim that House Wenjansk would be stronger with the agricultural aid of the halflings and that it would be a strategic slight against House Jutmek, the great house that had uprooted them from their previous home.

Foldet gradually became a close ally of the High Kestrel, providing an outsider's point of view that was sorely lacking within Mariusz's inner circle. They were named Lord Ratchet a scant few months after the halflings were granted asylum and have remained true to Mariusz in the twenty or so years since. Their friendship with Mariusz influenced the High Kestrel's progressive views on gender and likely his ultimate decision to welcome giants into Falthingor. Though Foldet seems to many like a true champion of House Wenjansk, they ultimately have never been able to free themselves from their bias toward their halfling kin. Despite years of service, their total loyalty to the great house is far from guaranteed.

Lady Sylwia Wenjansk

No special title is granted to the wife of a High Kestrel. They are expected to act as the ruler's spiritual guide and to bear children, but that is all. Lady Sylwia (she/her) has accomplished precisely one of these goals; Mariusz has three healthy children, but he is still a heathen. Sylwia is a religious woman, frequently meeting with the High Priests. She laments her husband's lack of faith and has done her best to nurture a sense of spiritualism in her children.

Lady Sylwia is oblivious to her husband's infidelity, or perhaps she turns a blind eye. In either case, she is a woman filled with shame. She fell ill during the flight into the mountains and has never fully recovered. Mariusz debates whether that is for lack of proper healing or lack of motivation. In truth, Lady Sylwia never became the woman she had hoped she would become. She has become increasingly reclusive throughout her stay in Falthingor.

PLOT HOOK:

Cure the Land

The Duscarn Range was fouled by the arrogant alchemists that ruled the land a millennium ago. The great thinkers of Faltringor have yet to unravel the exact cause of this contamination, but it seems likely that any cure will be alchemical in nature. The *torrent opus* renders the land farmable, but only with considerable effort. It also makes Faltringor a target. If the mountains were rid of their taint, it seems much more likely that House Wensk could come to a peaceful resolution with the Duscarn Giants, that more great houses could move into the mountains, and that plentiful harvests could allow for an unparalleled division of labor for future generations.

GM NOTE: “Curing the land” is a big, nebulous plot arc that you will probably want to stretch out over the course of many sessions or perhaps even an entire campaign. You absolutely *can* expedite this quest by having the players delve into a dungeon, fight a boss, and flip a switch in a single sitting. Still, something as meaningful as *terraforming an entire mountain range* will resonate more strongly if it’s an extended challenge.

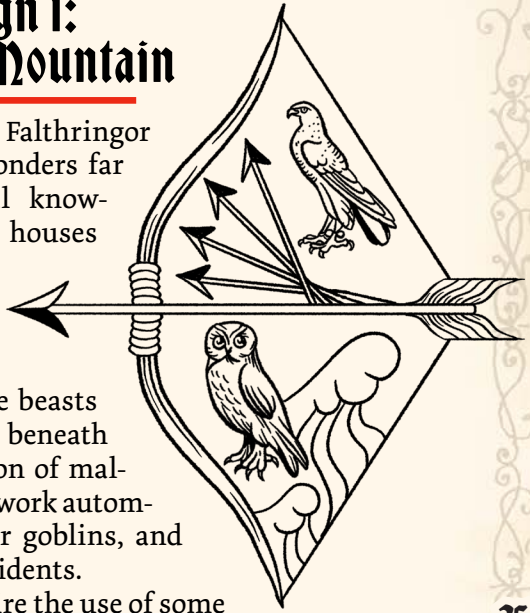
Instead of providing our typical step-by-step guide explaining how players might go about achieving this goal alongside a table or two of challenges, we will instead help you think through designing this quest from a number of different angles. What follows is three versions of this plot hook to suit your preferred time scale: one that will take at most two to three sessions, one that will constitute a complete narrative arc with multiple embedded quests, and one that will function as an overarching hook around which to structure an entire campaign.

Quest Design 1: Delving Into the Mountain

The Duscarn ruins beneath Faltringor are filled with alchemical wonders far exceeding the technological know-how of all the lowland great houses combined. Even after centuries of decay, there are likely to be lingering machines with engines that a clever tinkerer can reignite. Strange beasts prowl deep in the dungeons beneath the cistern: some combination of malachite lizards, Duscarn clockwork automations, magma golems, Silliar goblins, and spirits of the fort's former residents.

Curing the land will require the use of some ancient treasure deep in the dungeon, beyond traps and monsters. Consider the following options:

1. An **agricultural processor** that transforms waste into a fertilizer that will neutralize the contaminants in the soil
2. An additional **alchemical engine** that must be affixed to the top the *torrent opus* to augment its curative properties
3. A **vault of seeds** for crops with roots that will purge the soil of its rot
4. A star map that explains **arcane rituals** that must be conducted in tandem with certain astral phenomena
5. An incredibly destructive **earthquake generator** that will crumble the Duscarn Range, revealing healthy soil buried underneath the mountains
6. Directions to a second fortress hidden miles below, where a society of **Duscarn refugees** still practice alchemy to this day



Quest Design 2: Unite the Great Houses

Each Lord Ratchet has proposed a different solution. One says House Wenjansk ought to dig great trenches and flood the various canyons, and another says new soil must be carried up from the lowlands. Some have even suggested building a brand-new alchemical engine, a feat far beyond the capabilities of anyone living in Faltringor today. The High Kestrel can't decide which of the proposed solutions is likely to work, but it is obvious that any successful plan will require unfathomable manpower. The few hundred residents of Faltringor and the surrounding hills simply can't accomplish this feat alone. They'll need a lot of help.

High Kestrel Mariusz Wenjansk believes it's time to finally unite the great houses. He can't spare his army or advisors so long as Faltringor remains beset by giants, so he has deputized the adventurers to negotiate on his behalf. If the party can convince even just *four* of the eight or so great houses to join in the quest to heal the Duscarn Range, he believes the rest will follow. He makes a few suggestions about how the adventurers might start.

1. The seat of **House Degimalz** lies far to the northeast, in the dangerous Silliar Ghats. Simply *getting to them* will constitute a meaningful peace offering, as the other great houses typically do not send diplomatic emissaries to the secluded Degimalz capital.
2. **House Jutmek**—historic rivals to House Wenjansk—respond only to strength. The adventurers will gain a great deal of negotiating power if they can prove their might in the Jutmek coliseum.
3. The various lords and ladies of **House Enthira** play dangerous games of subterfuge and backstabbing politics. The adventurers might be able to infiltrate their court and influence the conspiratorial nobles at their elaborate balls.
4. The leadership of **House Teeçzik** is fervent in their devotion to the Discerning Hound. The adventurers might find it easier to commune with the canine spirit in an effort to sway the devout great house.

Quest Design 3: The World Tour

It is no simple quest to heal the soil of an entire mountain range. It will require lengthy periods of fact-finding in far-flung libraries and temples, magical artifacts from across the realm, and contributions from mages, scholars, and mythical beasts. This is not a quest that will be solved in days or weeks but in years—a mission to which adventurers will have to dedicate a considerable portion of their lives.

Should the adventurers pledge themselves to this great and honorable task, the leaders of House Wenjansk will supply whatever resources they can: gold, weapons, transportation, and royal writs. The Lord Ratchets will provide a lengthy set of tasks for the adventurers:

1. Learn about **alchemy and soil** at the Grand University of Material Sciences
2. Collect the **blessings of the four seasons** from the fae Principality
3. Command the earth titan **Maoim-Slèibhe** to destabilize the soil
4. Assemble a team of **kinesis mages** to reshape the winds
5. Help House Wenjansk win the **war against the giants**, even it means requesting aid from far-off kingdoms
6. Travel to the **realm of spirits** and consult with the Great Falcon
7. Complete the **abandoned alchemical engines** scattered throughout the Duscarn Range
8. Defeat the **spirit of corruption** that has made its home in the ashes of Wenjansków

These are unreasonable tasks to ask of any but the most committed heroes. Accomplishing all eight will require traveling to the farthest corners of the realm and beyond. The High Kestrel knows he will likely die before seeing this goal completed, but also that if the adventurers succeed, they will forever change history.

There is no expectation that the adventurers *will* succeed, or even that they will commit themselves fully to the task; after all, most adventurers end up getting sidetracked, and that's okay! This is aspirational, and even accomplishing a small portion of these quests may go a long way toward healing the scarred sierra.

GM NOTE: These are just examples. When you plop Falthringer into your campaign world, the specific steps necessary to cure the land will depend on the rest of your worldbuilding. Ideally, though, a lengthier campaign will include more than just defeating a cabal of assorted boss monsters across the world. Try to concoct tasks that will necessitate a variety of roleplaying *modes*: exploration, puzzle-solving, negotiation, stealth, dungeoneering, and—of course—combat. If you design a “world tour” quest deftly, you'll have sowed the narrative seeds for dozens upon dozens of tabletop sessions.





CHAPTER 2

FORCETED

THE SHATTERED MOUNTAIN
THE NOBLE ARCHERS
THE IMPERILED SUCCESSION



althingor has many layers of defense. At the broadest level, its strongest asset as a citadel is its location. Attacking a fortress on a mountain peak is unlikely to be successful. Even if the invading army chooses to attempt a lengthy siege, the besieging forces will slowly succumb to the poisoned earth just beneath the snow. In fact, some in House Wenjansk posit that the ancient Duscarn may have intentionally tainted the soil for this purpose: to turn the very mountain itself against any who would dare approach.

Even if invaders can summit Mt. Endryr and survive the ambient miasma, they then have to breach the walls. These ancient, alchemically fortified stones will not fall to a common battering ram, and it seems the Duscarn may have even enhanced their walls to withstand explosive forces as well. Summiting the battlements is an option, but whipping winds and volleys of arrows will make this a challenge for all but the most armored and dexterous of climbers.

Finally, there is a reliable fallback. Should the advancing army make their way inside the walls of Falthingor, the inhabitants can always retreat to the donjon. The castle's tallest tower may be the *torrent opus*, but its most fortified tower is the Severed Keep. This bastion sits on its own craggy peak, and when the drawbridge is raised, accessing this innermost tower requires either lengthy siege ladders or exceptional mountaineering.

The Severed Keep is the safest part of the inhospitable mountain range. It offers incredible views and unrivaled protection. The heirs to House Wenjansk keep their quarters within the tower, and Falthingor's archers have made it their headquarters.



THE Severed Keep

The donjon¹ itself is colossal, larger than many full castles in the lowlands. Indeed, more residents can comfortably sleep in the Severed Keep than in all of Fort Wenjansk in the house's fallen capital.

When the refugees from Wenjansków first discovered Faltringor, the keep was entirely empty. Many tapestries, errant tools, and pieces of furniture were left lingering across the rest of the castle, but whoever left Faltringor behind made sure to thoroughly cleanse the Severed Keep first. No one is sure whether the halls had been pillaged in the centuries since by some other people—the giants? another great house?—prior to House Wenjansk's arrival, or whether the ancient Duscarn purged the tower of its contents prior to fleeing.

Only scant evidence remains of what the tower may have once held: worn staircases suggest hurried footfalls, nicked stone walls imply armed combat, and blackened ceilings evoke rampant fires. Whatever happened here is lost to time, but it seems the previous residents may have met a violent end.

Luckily, the chambers of the tower make for perfect bedrooms, though the lack of proper ventilation demands that most food be cooked elsewhere and carted in. The ample arrowslits and high crenellations also made the tower a perfect fit for the house's archers. Because of this shared function, the Wenjansk heirs have become quite close with the bowmen. The future of the house is now symbolically tethered to the fate of the archers. Some even say that it is the archers who will *truly* choose the High Kestrel's successor.

1 We employ the archaic term “donjon” to connote a specific era of medieval castle design. It is important to distinguish this form of keep from a “dungeon,” which may bring to mind either imprisonment or dangerous subterranean locales in a tabletop context.

Severed Peak

As with all details associated with the fall of the ancient Duscarn, it is all too easy to speculate as to whether some powerful material sciences may have been involved in the creation of Severed Peak. The cleave in the mountaintop certainly *could* be natural, but there is also the distinct possibility that the keep's former residents tore the mountain asunder with their alchemy. If they were capable of poisoning the entire sierra, they may have been able to carve through the earth with their fluidic engines. Perhaps they chose to break Mt. Endryr in half to better suit their fortification needs.

There is some evidence that this may be the case. No plants can grow anywhere on Severed Peak: no grass in the summer, nor root vegetables on its lower peaks. Even house plants wither within the warm walls of the keep itself. If indeed the Duscarn toyed with dangerous alloys and elixirs, then the peak has certainly paid the price. In return, the inhabitants of Faltringor have the perfect summit upon which to make their last stand.

The Drawbridge

Some have speculated about the drawbridge as well. Its mechanism for operation is surprisingly rudimentary: a hand-powered winch on an upper floor coils chains attached to the bridge's far-edge. The design of this simple machine seems to belie the expertise of the Duscarn. Certainly, the ancient alchemists would have come up with a cleverer means to retract a drawbridge, right? Or could it be that this simple device sufficed?

At least one soldier is stationed near the drawbridge's winch at all times. Should the need arise, they are to err on the side of caution. Lord Ratchet Lubomir will unexpectedly run drills to test preparedness. After giving the signal, he starts counting and expects the on-duty soldier to have fully retracted the drawbridge before he reaches 30. Those who fail are given the nightshift at the top of the keep, a brutal assignment given the frigid winds.

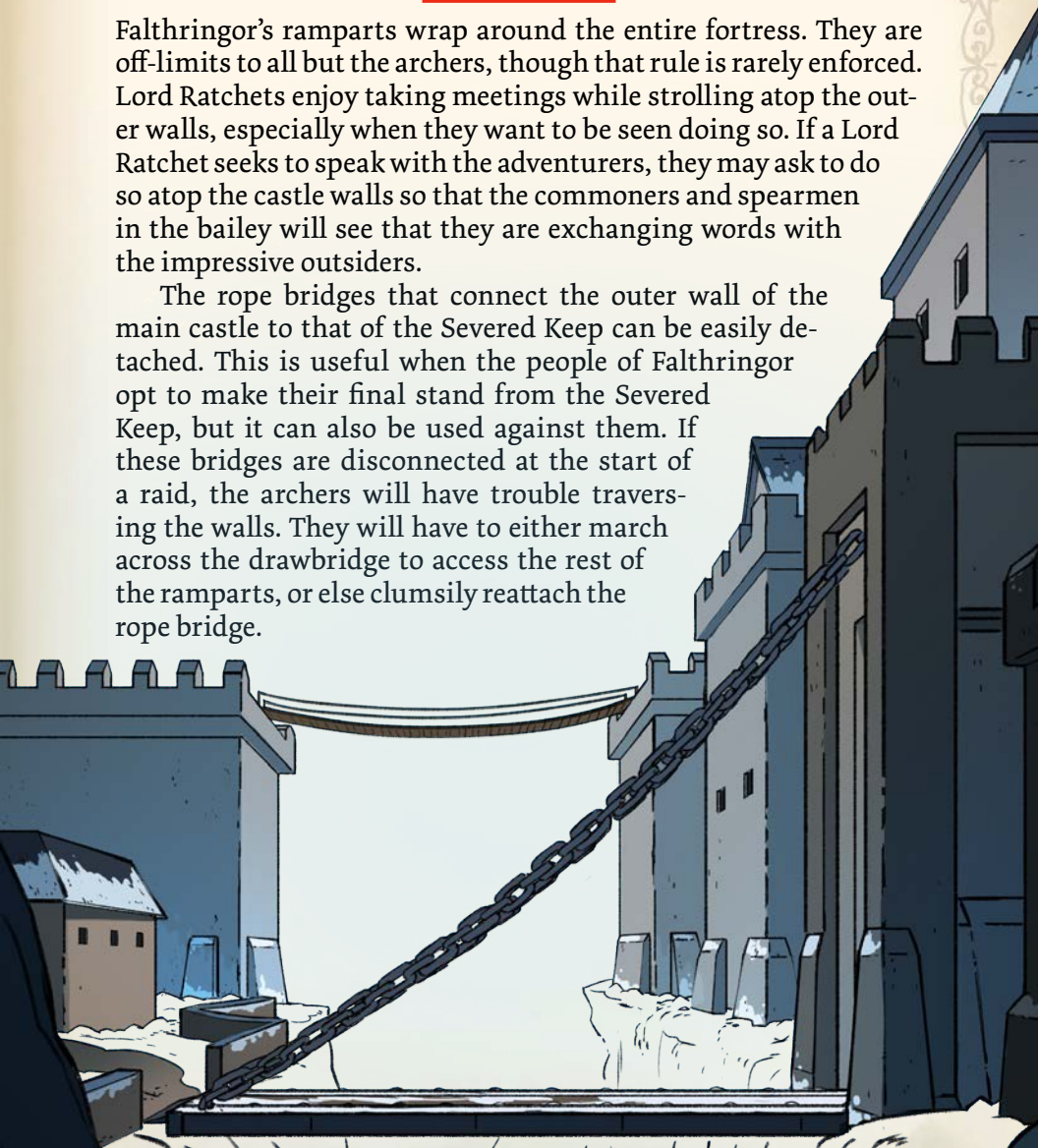
There is a downside to having but one entrance and exit to the Severed Keep. It means that residents can easily be cor-

nered. Luckily, there is a secret passageway that leads down into the mountain and into the cistern beneath the *torrent opus*. This is a seeming strategic necessity, but it is also a liability; were an invading force to uncover this secret, they'd be able to sneak into the donjon simply by infiltrating the cistern itself, thereby bypassing the majority of Falthingor's defenses.

The Ramparts

Falthingor's ramparts wrap around the entire fortress. They are off-limits to all but the archers, though that rule is rarely enforced. Lord Ratchets enjoy taking meetings while strolling atop the outer walls, especially when they want to be seen doing so. If a Lord Ratchet seeks to speak with the adventurers, they may ask to do so atop the castle walls so that the commoners and spearmen in the bailey will see that they are exchanging words with the impressive outsiders.

The rope bridges that connect the outer wall of the main castle to that of the Severed Keep can be easily detached. This is useful when the people of Falthingor opt to make their final stand from the Severed Keep, but it can also be used against them. If these bridges are disconnected at the start of a raid, the archers will have trouble traversing the walls. They will have to either march across the drawbridge to access the rest of the ramparts, or else clumsily reattach the rope bridge.



D8**RAMPART
ENCOUNTERS****DESCRIPTION**

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------|---|
| 1 | Giant in the distance | A lone giant approaches through the snows. Is he an enemy combatant or a refugee? Is it worth investigating, or should the party call an archer to fire now? |
| 2 | Surreptitious plotting | Lord Ratchet Feliks meets with High Priestess Henryka. They hush as the party approaches, though it is clear they are whispering of Zosia Wenjansk, the heir apparent. |
| 3 | Spirit trio | Three birds land on the parapet: a falcon, a harrier, and an owl. They are unmistakably emissaries from the realm of spirits. They telepathically call on the adventurers to follow them across the mountains. |
| 4 | Jutmek arrows | A great force from battle-hungry House Jutmek is attacking Faltringor. An opening volley of arrows signals their approach. The castle must prepare to defend itself. |
| 5 | Mariusz contemplates | The High Kestrel himself paces along the rampart sipping spiced vodka. Something weighs heavy on his mind. He may enjoy sharing his thoughts with an outsider. |
| 6 | An unlikely archer | Waltraud, an upland halfling, strings up his shortbow. The poor kid desperately wants to join House Wenjansk's archers, but they don't allow halflings into their ranks. He's not even supposed to be up on the ramparts. |
| 7 | A likely assassin | A cloaked figure—likely an elf—quietly sneaks toward the Severed Keep. He seems to be holding a dagger. An assassination attempt would never look this obvious... right? |
| 8 | Archery training | Lord Ratchet Lubomir leads archery training atop the fortress's walls. Whoever can hit the furthest target will win his helm, a masterpiece of craftsmanship. |

THE Archers

With no real cavalry to speak of, House Wenjansk's army consists of but two distinct forces: archers and spearmen. While the spearmen train and arm themselves in and around the bailey, the archers use the Severed Keep as their primary hub of operations. Fletchers prepare arrows in the basement, soldiers train in the range, and those on-duty keep watch from the battlements.

Historically, cavalry had always been more crucial to military victory in the great plains of the lowlands, but they are of little use in craggy peaks. When the Duscarn Giants slowly make their way up the mountainside in one of their raids, it is the archers that have proven essential in the defense of Falthringor. As such, the bowmen of Falthringor are revered like no Wenjansk soldier ever before. Children idolize the bowmen, and young women dream of marrying one of the noble protectors. Pious members of the community believe that the Great Falcon has blessed House Wenjansk's arrows in an effort to protect the displaced people.

Falthringor's bowmen consist solely of lowlanders. The standard longbow is 6 feet in length, meaning even the tallest upland halfling cannot properly wield such a weapon. Most bowmen are also of noble birth. There is no culture of "kighthood" among the lowlanders, and as such, high-born vassals who choose to fight for House Wenjansk typically pursue ranks with the lowest casualty rates. Even before the exodus from Wenjansków, an archer in the city had a much higher likelihood to survive a battle than a spearman on the frontlines. The high birth of the house's archers may go some way to explain why they were also able to claim the more defensible part of the castle as their territory.

As rooftop archers only require minimal mobility during a giant raid, most wear heavy armor. The Duscarn Giants are adept with slings, and a well-aimed projectile could easily kill a soldier at great range unless they're well protected. Most archers wear chainmail, though many don bespoke plate armor—a luxury that the typically wealthy bowmen can afford. Their armor is adorned with feathers as a nod to their house's heraldry as well to their patron spirit.

Klara Urbecik

Even before House Wenjansk explicitly codified their commitment to gender parity, women were allowed to serve as archers. Unlike many military ranks, there is a more or less objective measure of ability for archers: if you can draw a longbow and hit a bullseye from a great distance, little else matters. Klara (she/her) is low-born but proved herself an impeccable shot shortly after the relocation to Faltringor.

Klara cannot afford a cuirass, and so she wears mail crafted by her mother, a farmer on the slopes. The realities of wealth and class did not disappear overnight just because House Wenjansk relocated. Social status still determines one's fate. Thus, Klara has had to fight to prove herself in more ways than one. She must demonstrate that she's an excellent marksman despite her sex, and that she's a committed soldier despite her low birth. She may not fight for lands of her own, but she has proven time and time again that she would die for Faltringor and what it represents.

Junchremyn "Baby Hands"

Junchremyn (he/him), a refugee giant, has made a name for himself in the basement of the Severed Keep as one of the most dexterous craftsmen in Faltringor. His arrows fire true and the sheer quantity of his production is unmatched. That such a large creature could possess such astounding fine motor skills would be surprising to anyone unfamiliar with Faltringor's giant population. Junchremyn takes pride in his work, but he is also racked with guilt. To be productive and to earn one's respite is a virtue, but knowing that his arrows are used to slay his kin... that is an unpleasant thought. Junchremyn is a valued member of the team in the Severed Keep, but Lord Ratched Lubomir has made it repeatedly clear that he has no patience for philosophical hesitation concerning the simple act of fletching.



PLOT HOOK

Endorse a Successor

As with the appointment of Lord Ratchets, the rules concerning the High Kestrel line of succession are nebulous at best. The *Wenjansk Code* reads:

Upon the death or indisputable mental decline of the High Kestrel, a successor shall be selected based on lineage, merit, and the stated preferences of the leaders of the house and Lord Ratchets.

This imprecise language has repeatedly caused unnecessary political upheaval. What constitutes “indisputable mental decline?” What aspects of lineage matter most? *Who actually makes the decision?* An errant line in a later chapter may shed some light on the bizarre lack of clarity.

The Canny Harrier blesses House Wenjansk with the wisdom to discern. In the realm of beasts, there is no need for strict law. Virtue and instinct rule. House Wenjansk must always make decisions as the Canny Harrier: with vision unclouded by the trepidation of men.

Countless Lord Ratchets have extolled the *Wenjansk Code* throughout the centuries. After all: they wrote it, and in most instances, they end up making the final decision regarding the succession. Its deliberate ambiguity would seem to be the entire point.

In either case, the current succession is in question. High Kestrel Mariusz is in good health, but he also makes a show of ostentatiously standing atop the ramparts every time the giants attack his keep. All it would take is one well-aimed sling-bullet, and House Wenjansk would be thrust into a succession crisis. Centuries ago, Faltringor fell because its residents stooped to infighting. Unless the party of adventurers can help ensure a peaceful transition of power, the same fate may befall House Wenjansk.

The Wenjansk Heirs

High Kestrel Mariusz Wenjansk has three legitimate children, and at least one bastard. These four adult children all keep their chambers in the Severed Keep: three for protection, and one to protect.

For better or worse, these four noblemen have an outsized influence on life in Faltringor. In all likelihood, one will go on to become the next High Kestrel.

GM Note: Unless you plan on returning to Faltringor repeatedly throughout a lengthier campaign, the most compelling way to weave a succession plot into your narrative is to have Mariusz die one or two sessions after the party arrives. Give you players an overview of the politics of House Wenjansk, let them meet Mariusz, give them a quest or two, and then kill the High Kestrel in a giant attack, an assassination plot, or an alchemical accident. This will force your party's hand. Can they help the house resolve their tricky politics before Faltringor succumbs to chaos?

ZOSIA WENJANSK

Mariusz's firstborn takes after him. Zosia (she/her), age 27, is rowdy and spirited. Her father says that she "embodies the ideals of House Wenjansk," but most in Faltringor just see her as a drunk. She is undeniably her father's favorite child, and he has coddled her since birth. Though she is competent at sparring with staff, she has no formal combat training and only a baseline understanding of military tactics. She is as irreligious as her father—much to her mother's dismay—and has studied no craft.

Zosia believes that there is no question that she is the High Kestrel's rightful heir. She



is the firstborn, and to reject her for any purpose would seemingly fly in the face of the house's recent insistence that all genders be treated equally. The position of High Kestrel is her birthright, and those who would deny it are either sexist or misled by dubious visions from the realm of spirits.

She has convinced herself she is enjoying her limited time unshackled by the responsibility of the throne. Yes, she may drink and make love to excess today, but only because she knows her rule will be different. No matter what her detractors say, Zosia cares about her house and her vassals, and she will see House Wenjansk protected.

The Lord Ratchets are split. Some dream of a High Kestrel Zosia, because it will mean they will have incredible sway. It's not as though she will overrule the Lord Ratchet of Guilds or the Lord Ratchet of Fields. Then again, many fear that she will prove inept and ineffectual.

ADOK WENJANSK

Lady Sylwia gave Mariusz one son. In generations past, Adok (he/him), age 24, would have been the obvious choice for High Kestrel. Of course, Mariusz has made a point of ensuring that women are treated equally, and thus Adok's claim is in question. This troubles him little. Adok has no aspirations to take his father's throne. He has taken a wife, Brygida, who lives in a hamlet on the slopes. Though Adok maintains quarters in the Severed Keep, he spends most of his time with Brygida and their newborn in a humble farmhouse.

Unless a child of House Wenjansk is named Lord Ratchet or High Kestrel, there are no codified expectations for them. They can marry, join the priesthood, or pledge a guild. As such, Adok is not *explicitly* forsaking his family by pursuing a simple life, though many see it that way.



Unsurprisingly, many common folk adore Adok. They see him as a man of the people. Many farmers have also yet to embrace the progressive views that the *Wenjansk Code* now endorses. They want a *man* on the throne, and they can think of no one better than humble Adok.

Few Lord Ratchets are fond of Adok, but the clergy overwhelmingly endorse him. All seven High Priests claim to have received visions of the Great Falcon selecting Adok as the rightful successor. Are they telling the truth? Or are the priests—many of whom have traditional views on gender and power—using their reputation and influence to ensure House Wenjansk stays male-led?

KALINA WENJANSK

As Zosia took after her father, Kalina (she/her), age 23, took after her mother. She is pious, quiet, and resolute. After an injury left her without the use of her legs, Kalina became doubly-committed to being useful to her family. She apprenticed under master seamstress Chaçêr-Sto, a renowned craftsman among the giants, and began to stitch tapestries outlining the history of House Wenjansk.

Unlike her siblings, Kalina is well studied. She spent years of her adolescence shadowing many of her father's Lord Ratchets, learning much of agriculture, economics, military strategy, and statecraft. When she shares her opinions on matters of public importance, however, her father rarely listens. This has reinforced her shyness. Presently, she spends most of her time with Chaçêr-Sto in quiet work in the upper floors of the Severed Keep.

Until recently, she had never considered the position of High Kestrel. However, some of the Lord Ratchets have decided to back Kalina. She worked directly with many of these political advisors,



and they know her as strong-willed, well educated, and deft at handling social conflicts despite her shyness. Kalina is still debating whether this might be a calling she could embrace. She certainly understands the ins and outs of government better than her siblings, but she doubts whether House Wenjansk's vassals will accept a third-born child, a non-amulatory *woman*, as their leader. For now, she looks to the All-Seeing Owl for guidance.

LORD RATCHET LUBOMIR CZIBLIK

Technically, Lubomir Cziblik (he/him), age 28, is Mariusz's firstborn. Unfortunately for him, he's a bastard. Mariusz is an honorable man, though. He may not have legitimized the boy, but he has been a proper father figure throughout Lubomir's life. Lubomir studied under the best tutors, trained in well-appointed facilities, and never wanted for money. Soon after arriving in Faltringor, Mariusz named Lubomir Lord Ratchet of the archers.

Some would argue that Lubomir is the second most powerful person in Faltringor. He leads the strongest force in the castle, and his orders may just determine whether the stronghold stands or falls. He has the blessings of his father, and though he does not bear the Wenjansk name, his parentage is an open secret.

Lubomir is tough. He is a callous sergeant with little empathy for those who fall short of his expectations. As he sees it, the bowmen of Faltringor keep everyone else alive, and so there is no wiggle room for mediocrity. Though he is stern, he is not known for other vices. He does not drink, he prays regularly, and he has pledged not to take a wife until the



Duscarn Giants are defeated. This last point is strange. Chastity is no sacred virtue in the *Wenjansk Code*. It seems that Lubomir seems to be implying that he'll give the war his full attention, but others have questioned whether this may just be a way to deflect his distaste for women until a later date.

As it stands, there is no chance Lubomir will become High Kestrel. To crown a bastard when the current leader has legitimate heirs is simply unheard of. However, the future is not written in stone. Mariusz could legitimize Lubomir by wedding his mother, Lady Snežana Cziblik. Zosia, Adok, and Kalina could die or get captured by giants. Hell, there *could* be a military coup. Lubomir commands archers. Could he conquer Faltringor from within? Would he want to?

Influence the Succession

The adventurers need not meddle in politics. House Wenjansk has its flaws, but it will probably survive a succession crisis. *Probably.*

If they choose to get involved, however, they have a number of avenues to follow.

- ♦ **Influence Mariusz.** Frustratingly, Mariusz has yet to say whom he would see take his place. When asked publicly, he has repeatedly—and erroneously—stated that the *Wenjansk Code* speaks for itself. It's clear he is just trying to avoid the inevitable uncertainty. If the adventurers can get close to Mariusz, either by proving themselves in the war against the giants or else by socializing their way into his inner circle, they may be able to influence his decision making. If Mariusz can be convinced to make a public statement endorsing one of his children or legitimizing his bastard, that would almost certainly end any debate about who has the blessings of the “leaders of the house.”
- ♦ **Influence the Lord Ratchets.** Mariusz may be inaccessible to common adventurers, but the Lord Ratchets decidedly are not. If anything, these leaders of Faltringor will be clamoring to speak with the adventurers who will no doubt have precious news from the world beyond the mountains. Crucially, the



Lord Ratchets do not act in concert. They each pursue their own aims, and as such, adventurers may elect to try their hand persuading just a few that one or another heir should gain their support.

- ◆ **Influence the Commoners.** The lowlanders, halflings, and refugee giants won't listen to a bunch of outsiders unless those outsiders have truly proven their worth. It does not matter if the party has compelling logic for why one of the heirs is more worthy of the title than someone else. The common folk will not listen. However, if the party performs an incredible feat—slaying a crew of giants, augmenting the *torrent opus*, or winning a tourney—they will gain respect. Should the party use their newly earned platform to extol the virtues of their favored heir, this might just tip the scales.
- ◆ **Eliminate Options.** If the adventurers are certain that one or more of the potential heirs would be bad fits for the position, they can always work around the *Wenjansk Code* by simply eliminating these potential successors. Mariusz's children are well guarded, but they are not immune to steel. Clever adventurers will make it look like an accident. Cleverer adventurers will immediately flee the castle regardless.



CHAPTER 3

ASSEMBLED



THE AWKWARD TACTICIAN
THE APPEASING CUISINE
THE UNUSUAL HASTILUDES



althingor's bailey functions much like a commons. Farmers from the slopes enter the castle to trade their crops, meat, and dairy amongst each other. Priests provide impromptu guidance at the small shrine the lowlanders have added to the courtyard. Itinerant giants petition the Lord Ratchets for asylum. Spearmen spar, minstrels tell tales, and craftsmen peddle their wares. There are no truly public spaces in the halls of Falthingor—all chambers and halls are claimed by some such lord or guild—so despite the frigid temperatures, when commoners assemble, they do so outside.

There is always danger for those who spend their time in the bailey. After all, the innocuous seeming ward was designed for *defensive* purposes. Attackers who hope to take the stronghold by force will have to make their way through the bailey en route to the great hall, the Severed Keep, or any of the strategic bastions. Whether they scale the walls or burst through the portcullis, they will still have to pass through the bailey, all while getting pelted by arrows and harried by spearmen. If ever the Duscarn Giants levy a full assault on Falthingor, it seems inevitable that the bailey will be the site of maximal violence.

That has yet to occur. Thus far, Falthingor has stood strong against all invaders. Thanks to some combination of archery and bold defense by the spearmen, the bailey has remained a safe place for common folk and lords alike to convene and relax in the wind shadow of the curtain wall.





THE Spearmen

The largest body of Falthringer soldiers are the spearmen. Most fit adult male vassals must offer their services to the spearmen for at least a few years. These soldiers are generally ill-equipped, wearing chainmail if they can procure it and tough leather armor if they cannot. They wield modified farm equipment as weaponry, and they share a small barracks that can only hold roughly one fifth of their numbers at a time. Everyone else is expected to sleep in their homes, typically in the hamlets along the slopes below.

House Wenjansk's archers have become the most decorated force bearing the High Kestrel's flag, a position once held by the house's cavalry. Yet again, the spearmen are given little praise or honor, despite their significantly higher rate of casualty. In raid after raid, the spearmen have been instrumental in slowing the advancing Duscarn Giants. It is only the combination of their efforts that has allowed the stronghold to weather so many

unpredictable strike forces. And yet, the archers alone reap the glory.

There are many reasons for this, not least of all is the preponderance of low-born troops among the melee soldiers. A second cause may be the unusual tactic that has proven most effective against the giants, a tactic that many lowlanders view as comical and undignified, a tactic that has saved the lives of countless Wenjansk vassals.

The "Trip and Spike" Maneuver

Spearmen operate in platoons of six soldiers, five of whom carry billhooks and one a pike. During a giant assault, every platoon will target one giant each. The five subordinate soldiers (called "trippers") will attempt to surround the giant, reach for their legs, and ultimately bring them to their knees. Giants have incredibly thick skin that makes it difficult to fell one with a sharp blow anywhere but their soft heads. By tripping a giant, the lone pikeman (the "spiker") gains the opportunity to stab through the giant's skull and

into their brain. Barring that, a successful topple still slows the giant considerably and provides a window during which one of the archers above may land the killing blow while the giant stumbles to right itself.

In practice, this is a surprisingly effective tactic that impedes giant assaults and maximizes the potential of every attempted finishing strike. It works specifically because the giants tend to invade in frantic, scattered formations. Unfortunately, it means the majority of spearmen spend their battles using makeshift farming equipment in an effort to awkwardly trip the lumbering brutes. It is still exceptionally dangerous for the spearmen, even when a platoon is working in perfect concert.

Most spearmen are already quite familiar with the billhook when they start training in the bailey. After all, the majority of spearmen are farmers who dedicate roughly half of their working hours to the defense of Flathringor. There is considerable animosity regarding this arrangement. The agricultural hamlets below are relatively unprotected, while the adult men spend

time protecting a castle whose outermost wall has never been breached. Nevertheless, civilian casualties along the slopes have remained modest, even after ten years of lowlander occupation of the fortress.

Lord Ratchet Zarek Deniczik

House Wenjansk's spearmen were never given the respect they deserved, even before the house's relocation. When the Duscarn Giants raided Wenjansków, the melee infantry gave their lives in shocking numbers, protecting the High Kestrel as he and his vassals escaped Fort Wenjansk. They sacrificed themselves to ensure that lords and peasants alike could flee the burning city. As such, their ranks were in disarray once the lowlanders arrived in Faltringor.

High Kestrel Mariusz recognized early on that the archers would not be enough to protect the castle from some such a massive threat, and so he elevated one of the few surviving spearmen, a scrawny, scrappy, low-born soldier, to the rank of Lord Ratchet. Mariusz tasked this unlikely leader,

Zarek Deniczik (he/him) with re-establishing a squad of warriors who would protect House Wenjansk's new home.

Zarek is a committed servant to the High Kestrel, but he is also a deeply practical and empathetic man. He witnessed untold horrors during the fall of Wenjansków, and he swore to find a better means to confront the Duscarn Giants in the future. He devised the "trip and spike" maneuver, a tactic that many of his spearmen loathe. They believe it puts each of them in far greater danger, as it forces groups of soldiers to get close to a giant instead of poking from afar with lengthy pikes. Nevertheless, Zarek stands firm. The tactic is the only reliable way to kill a giant at close range. If the giants were free to wreak havoc on Faltringor as they did Wenjansków... well, best not to think about that.

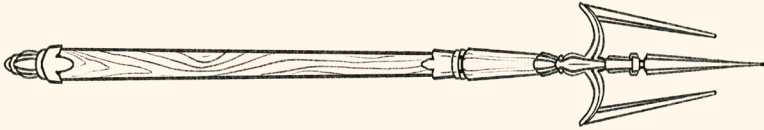
Defeating the giants means more than just strong walls and sharp arrows. It means leveraging every advantage House Wenjansk can muster. Lowlanders are nimbler than the giants, and so a squad can easily flank a given invader. Zarek's forces are also more coordinated, and so targeted strikes should always be prioritized over the chaos of a free-for-all battle.

Zarek is oft-maligned by his peers and the common folk alike. They see him as both meek and knavish, a cowardly peasant who should have fallen in Wenjansków and who should never have achieved the rank of Lord Ratchet. And yet, Zarek persists.



Wodunc

While upland halflings are forbidden from joining the archers, Zarek welcomes his short-statured neighbors into his ranks. Halflings can't wield lengthier polearms, but they're just as proficient with the billhook as the lowlanders. Wodunc (they/them), a cousin of Lord Ratchet Foldet, is perhaps the greatest tripper in all of Faltringor. They can weave and bob between a giant's legs and then yank with surprising force, often toppling an invader all by themselves. Watching Wodunc assail a giant is like watching a masterful dancer. They move with grace and strength that belies their small frame. Adventurers could learn a thing or two by training with Wodunc; they'll happily spar with a worthy opponent in the bailey if challenged. On rare occasions, Wodunc may even join a team of adventurers who need additional help during a tourney.



Chevvek Jczenski

There is no expectation that the spearmen will be a cohesive, uniform military force. They are a group of oddballs, united only in their assigned weaponry and duty to protect Faltringor. Still, some spearmen are odder than others. Chevvek (he/him) fancies himself an amateur moss expert. This obsession dominates his life, and he has troubling maintaining a conversation without bringing it up. When Chevvek isn't on duty or training in the bailey, he's delving into forbidden tunnels below Faltringor, grabbing samples of the strange mosses and lichens that grow in the warm stone hallways. He believes consuming these strange plants and fungi will give him the same strength as the Duscarn Giants. After all, the ancient Duscarn only became giants after consuming arcane elixirs developed in this very castle. Perhaps some of that alchemical magic lingers in the moss of today...

Irmhilde the Blacksmith

Adventurers tend to conflate “blacksmiths” with bladesmiths and armorers. They find someone proficient at metalworking and just *assume* that their specialty is creating swords, mail, and the like. In practice, most blacksmiths predominately make grills, gates, nails, and most importantly: farming equipment.

Irmhilde (she/they) has spent the better part of her blacksmithing career crafting scythes, yokes, spurs, spades, and other practical agricultural tools. She was a valued member of the outer Wenjansków community, outfitting lowlander and uplander farmers alike. They had a bit of trouble acclimating to life in the majority human farmlands, but gradually Irmhilde learned the quirks of lowlanders customs: the Wenjansk vassals expected her to stick to deadlines and avoid breaking out in song and dance until *after* a transaction was completed.

After the exodus from Wenjansków, Irmhilde figured she'd have to make a few alterations to her work schedules, namely expediting the creation of shovels to dig through the thick and tainted soil. What she did *not* expect was a writ from the High Kestrel himself demanding that they assist Lord Ratchet Zarek.

Other folks can make tools for the farmers on the slopes. Exuberant Irmhilde has been tasked with outfitting the trippers. After all, she was already an expert at making billhooks for farming. How hard would it be to tweak her creations for use in warfare?

Many of their kin expected Irmhilde to bristle at this new demand. The halflings figured that they would not want to craft implements for killing after so many years working in agriculture. Irmhilde sees it differently. This writ means they never have to woo picky buyers, and that they can work behind the protective castle walls. They can collaborate with Lord Ratchet Zarek to ensure that the people of Faltringor are properly protected. Every giant felled is another hamlet safe from random acts of violence. Though the specifics have changed, Irmhilde's craftsmanship still means that farmers can go about their days without worry.

Every once in a while, Irmhilde gets to flex their creativity, creating unusual polearms for the spikers or for specially outfitted spearmen platoons.



D6**IRMHILDE'S
UNIQUE POLEARMS****DESCRIPTION****1** Lizard Cracker

The malachite lizards of the Duscarn Range have exceedingly dense gemstone scales. This weapon has a weighty hammer at one end and a blade at the other, perfect for cracking malachite scales and then disemboweling the aggressive lizards.

2 Gold Fork

Certain bizarre alchemical entities in the tunnels beneath Faltringor abhor gold. This gold-tipped war fork keeps them at bay.

3 Giant-Slaying Scythe

Some exceptional spearmen are capable of felling a giant without the assistance of a team of trippers. It is an awkward maneuver, but it is possible to decapitate a giant with a strong swing from this reinforced scythe.

4 Upland Halberd

Silliar goblins riding bizarre beasts occasionally make their way to the Duscarn Range, where they tend to ravage halfling farms. This small-scale halberd was designed to yank goblins off their mounts and then slice their necks.

5 Sling Slicer

Duscarn Giants are at their most dangerous when they are slinging ammunition at great range. This extended sickle is perfect for tearing apart a sling in a giant's hands.

6 Glaive of the Falcon

The High Kestrel wields this mostly ceremonial glaive when commanding troops from the ramparts. Irmhilde considers it a liability. Adorned with feathers and crimson ribbons, it makes Mariusz an obvious target for Duscarn slingers. Nevertheless, the High Kestrel claims that the High Priests have blessed this weapon, and that he will be protected so long as it's in his hands.




GMING A CASTLE DEFENSE BATTLE

The war with the giants is a stalemate. The giants likely cannot muster a bold enough attack to take Falthingor, and House Wenjansk has yet to wage a proper counter-offensive.¹ Nevertheless, each giant raid involves casualties, and there is a wide gulf between a successful defense and a near catastrophe.

If you want to demonstrate to your players that the giants are a legitimate threat, it is strongly recommended that you present a giant raid soon after the adventurers arrive at the castle. If the party decides to help, they'll gain the favor of the High Kestrel, the respect of the Lord Ratchets, and the admiration of the common folk.

The most straightforward way to run a giant attack encounter is to split the action. "Off-screen," the soldiers fight the brunt of invading force. Your players just need to tackle one or two giants while the battle rages around them. Make sure you provide plenty of flavor in between turns of combat: mention the awkward efficiency of the "trip and spike" maneuver, the brutality of the violence, and the chaos of the unfocused giant tactics. Once your players complete their fight, narrate the conclusion of the battle overall. In this instance, the party's performance acts as a proxy for the whole battle. If they easily defeated the giants with superior tactics, then so too did the forces of House Wenjansk.

¹ *Falthingor O4: Beyond* provides a plot hook that will give your party the chance to bring the fight to the giants.





If the party barely eked out a win, then the spearmen and archers faced unprecedented casualties.

There are infinite variants on this format. You can run a combat gauntlet with waves of enemies. You can have a platoon of spearmen act as one “unit” in initiative, fighting alongside the party. You can present the party with an escort mission, a fetch quest, or a chase *during* a raid. All of these options likely require limited tweaks to the existing combat mechanics in your RPG system of choice.

Alternatively, you can emphasize the large-scale tactical side of combat. The party works with Lord Ratchets Lubomir and Zarek, commanding the spearmen and archers across the castle. You can replace the normal combat rules of your system with a castle defense minigame, or else simplify the encounter to a series of dice rolls to determine success. You can swap out the player characters with full platoons, and ask the players to act like military strategists instead of a band of heroes. In many ways, this is the inverse of typical fantasy RPG combat: hordes of weak “fodder units” (i.e. House Wenjansk’s regular soldiers) are tasked with taking down a few ultra-powerful giant “heroes.”

Consider the pace of your campaign. Are your players bored of exploring the castle and do they *crave* the mechanical complexity of your system’s standard combat? Are they burnt out on adventuring and yearning instead for new modes of roleplaying combat? Maybe this is an opportunity for you to experiment with optional mechanics, or perhaps you just need a little bit of combat to heighten the narrative. Use the giant raid to create tension and to expand the scope of your story. Remember: no battle should ever be filler.





THE Kitchen

The highest nobles of Faltringor² are not expected to procure their own food, nor to cook for themselves. Breakfast is brought to each of their quarters, midday dinner³ spreads are provided in rooms throughout the castle (guild chambers and noble offices), and all of the nobles of Faltringor supper together in the great hall.

Preparing all of this food is a daunting task, especially given the discerning palates of Faltringor's nobles and the limited menu of foodstuffs available in the Duscarn Range. In the lowlands, diets were exceptionally varied: fishermen brought in great hauls from Lake Nodolny, hunters captured big game across the plains, and farmers could harvest a wide array of fruits and vegetables. Atop Mt. Endryr, the options are comparatively meager. Most meals consist of tough root vegetables, yak cheese, roasted goat, and pungent teas in various combinations.

Making do with this bounded list of ingredients requires an impressive kitchen and exceptional chefs. Faltringor has both.

The cooking facilities in Faltringor are near to the bailey. Ovens and stoves have configurable vents that allow scents and steam to be directed toward the rest of the castle or dispensed out the chimney; likely a holdover from the days when bubbling alchemical elixirs released soothing vapors. Refrigeration generally is of little concern in the cool mountains, but it can be a challenge in the castle itself, warmed by the ambient steam from the unnaturally hot cistern. Luckily, a tunnel beneath the kitchen leads to a

2 Relevant nobles include the High Kestrel, his wife, his children, the dozen or so Lord Ratchets and their immediate families, and the families of some three or four former Lord Ratchets who have been grandfathered into positions of elevated nobility. Altogether, this amounts to roughly 50 people, most of whom live within the castle itself.

3 "Dinner" refers to the main meal of the day. As most nobles eat their largest feast at midday, that meal is called "dinner," while evening's smaller courses are referred to as "supper."

wind-chilled basement room that is disconnected from the thermal network that keeps the rest of the castle warm. Different chambers within this room are used for cooling, freezing, pickling, and jerking.

Head Chef Tola Heddek

As Lord Ratchet Zarek had to fundamentally reimagine infantry in the war against the giants, aged head chef Tola (she/her) has had to innovate in the realm of cuisine. Though she has served the High Kestrel since he was but a toddler, she is only now coming to appreciate the cultural and political significance of expert cooking.

Theoretically, the only thing explicitly keeping House Wenjansk in the mountains is the giants. Without the threat of giant raids, they would likely return to the lowlands, either to reclaim their former capital, or else to found a new city in environs more hospitable. As it stands, that *seems* impossible, but it *probably isn't*. The entire great house could relocate again, call on allies for aid, and return to some sense of normalcy. A homecoming is possible. So why don't the no-

ble lowlanders retake Wenjansków?

Some would say that the war ties up the house's resources. Others might make the credible claim that certain leaders in the community seek to learn the secrets of the ancient Duscarn. Still others might suggest House Wenjansk has always been isolationist, and that this long-forgotten castle perfectly suits the great house.

Tola would argue otherwise. She would say that the people stay because the nobles are well fed. The High Kestrel, the Lord Ratchets, and all of the noble families are cared for and they need not worry about their next meal. Their diets may have changed, but the exceptional quality of their meals has not. Few nobles contemplate the merits of insurrection or desertion. There is peace and stability because those in charge are sated. Tola is proud of this fact. Her cooking is instrumental in providing the stability that House Wenjansk desperately needs.

Adventurers who wander into the kitchen can learn unbelievable secrets from Tola



while she is distracted. As a rule, whenever the head chef is focused on preparing a spice blend or perfecting a stew, she will blabber without exerting any control over what comes out of her mouth. Parties seeking gossip would be wise to interrogate the loose-lipped chef.

Cola's Staff

As Faltringor's kitchen staff works directly for the nobles, they do not belong to their own guild. Instead, Tola is in charge. She has hired a team of seven Faltringor residents to run the castle's food operations. Note that there are additional servants—mostly maids and footmen—who will occasionally help Tola, though they do not work directly for her.

- ♦ **Emelrich** (they/them), upland halfling, age 17, sous-chef. Quiet, diligent, unusually stern and serious for a halfling; hopes to become head chef when Tola retires.
- ♦ **Franciszka** (she/her), lowlander, age 14, assistant chef. Niece of Lord Ratchet Feliks, though she is technically not a noble herself.
- ♦ **Leszek** (he/him), lowlander, age 35, butler. Has direct access to the nobles when they are at their drunkest; a trusted confidant of the High Kestrel.
- ♦ **Sigdag** (he/they), upland halfling, age 45, pantler. Responsible for maintaining the basement storage spaces, and thus the food supply for the entire castle.
- ♦ **Dorota** (she/her), lowlander, age 24, baker. One of the High Kestrel's mistresses, though she has luckily yet to birth him another illegitimate child.
- ♦ **Lidia** (she/her), lowlander, age 22, larderer. Dorota's sister, exceedingly pious, cheerful, and extroverted.
- ♦ **Aloxæris "Spit"** (she/her), giant, age 18, confectioneer. Creates bizarre candies with beets and rare mountain herbs, a delicacy of the giants.



PLOT HOOK

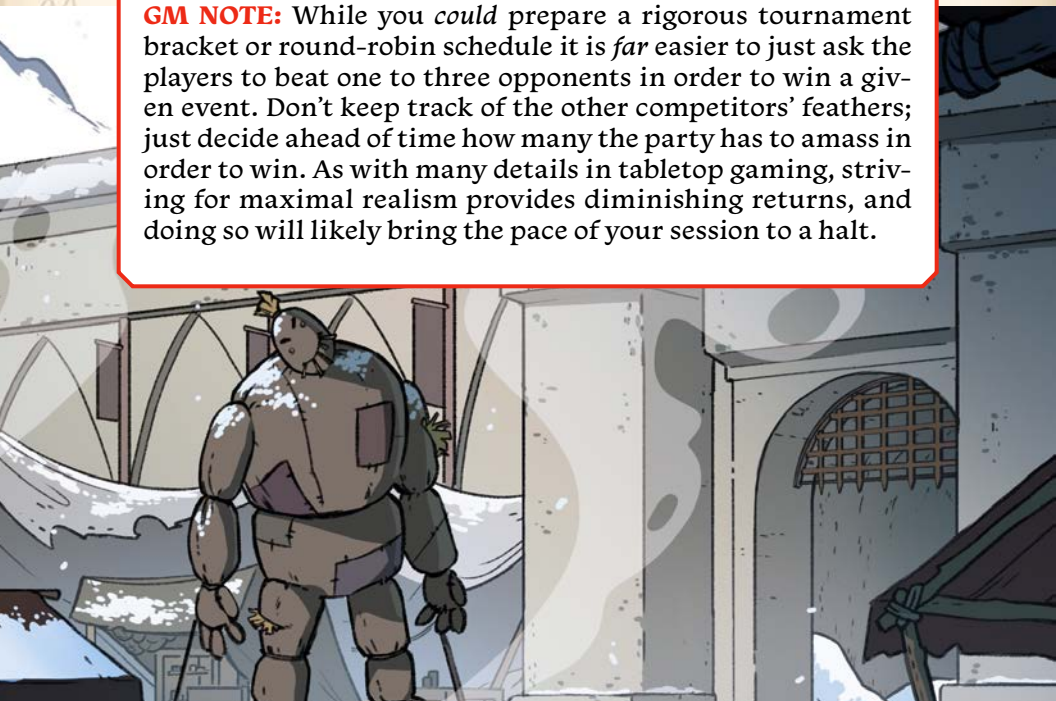
Win the Tourney

The people of Faltringor need entertainment, and the spearmen need practice. As such, Lord Ratchet Zarek hosts tourneys each season as a way to motivate his soldiers' practice as well as perform for the common folk. These tourneys take place in the bailey, and all are welcome to watch and participate.

House Wenjansk has always maintained a strong tradition of hastilude, though most martial games were on horseback prior to the destruction of the Wenjansków. Faltringor has few horses, and so traditional jousts and horse races are now relegated to the history books. Instead, tourneys are all-day affairs that encompass a wide variety of more unusual competitions.

Spearmen—or occasionally: civilians and travelers—enter in teams, though most events are 1-on-1. The winner of an event wins three feathers, and second place gets one. Whichever team holds the most feathers by the end of the day is declared “the Harrier’s Favored,” and a party is held in their honor.

GM NOTE: While you *could* prepare a rigorous tournament bracket or round-robin schedule it is *far* easier to just ask the players to beat one to three opponents in order to win a given event. Don't keep track of the other competitors' feathers; just decide ahead of time how many the party has to amass in order to win. As with many details in tabletop gaming, striving for maximal realism provides diminishing returns, and doing so will likely bring the pace of your session to a halt.



Events

Most tourneys involve just a small subset of these events.

CROSSED STAVES: 1-on-1 duel in which competitors are given wooden staves. First to yield or let their shoulder hit the ground loses.

YAK JOUST: Even at full speed, Duscarn yaks are not terribly quick beasts. Yak jousts are thus more about landing a perfectly aimed blow and keeping a firm grip than it is about speed or strength.

DYE SLAP: Each contestant is given a pike dipped in dye. Whoever can place their dye highest on the wall (with a jump, a vault, or a risky “wrist slap”) wins the event.

SPIKE THE GOURD: A colorful squash is placed in the snow beyond Faltringor’s walls. Contestants compete to see who can throw their spear furthest while still piercing the gourd.

PASSAGE OF ARMS: Entrants take turns guarding the gate to the bailey. Whoever lasts the longest without another entrant passing through wins.

THE LONELY SHEPHERD: Each entrant stands within their own 10-foot radius ring of rope which they must not exit. Dozens of goats are released into the bailey, and the entrants must attempt to corral as many as possible into their ring using only a shepherd’s crook. The winner is whoever has the most goats in their ring after one minute.

BUCKING GIANT: Contestants are placed on a giant’s shoulders and attempt to hold on for as long as possible while the giant writhes, shakes, and rolls. Many decry this event as humiliating or dehumanizing for the refugee giants, but the High Kestrel loves watching the event and requests it every tourney.

NICK RED: Lord Ratchet Foldet hides the Wenjansk flag somewhere along the ramparts. Contestants must race to find the flag and then bring it to the front gate first. There are few rules, and dirty tactics are not just allowed but encouraged. Many contestants simply wait by the portcullis in an effort to steal the flag at the last minute.

SUMMIT THE TORRENT: The High Kestrel begins counting down from 60, and every entrant begins to climb the *torrent opus*. No contact is allowed, but that’s rarely a concern as most climbers can barely get off the ground. Whoever is highest when Mariusz reaches 0 is the winner.



CHAPTER 4

BEYOND

THE POWERFUL GUILDS
THE SHAMANIC COMMUNION
THE FINAL ASSAULT



those living along the slopes below think of Faltringor as a defensive structure. They see it as little more than a series of walls and fortified chambers that *protect* the most important members of House Wenjansk. This is true, but it also misses the point. Faltringor is a home, an assertion of order and normalcy in a dangerous world.

Vigilant bowmen patrol the curtain walls, and no effort is spared to shore up defenses. And yet, it is also true that commoners commune with the divine in the Spirit Nest. Craftsmen meet in guildhalls to discuss their trade. Lords and servants alike sleep soundly in the warmth of the castle walls. Clashes with the giants are loud and terrible, but they are also infrequent.

In the early days after the fall of Wenjansków, it was hard to imagine a future for this ailing people. They knew any chance they had relied on the castle itself. Faltringor is the beating heart of House Wenjansk, the core of their present safety and potential.

The other great houses have heard tales of House Wenjansk's trials and tribulations in the Duscarn Range. They imagine lives of endless peril, struggling against the cold, the uncooperative soil, and the tireless giants. Across the lowlands, everyone pities House Wenjansk. And yet, the displaced people atop Mt. Endryr persevere. The threat of violence is an omnipresent reality, but so too is the certainty of work, faith, and family. House Wenjansk has occupied the ancient castle for ten years now. Most have ceased to yearn for a return to Wenjansków. Faltringor has become home.



THE Guilds

Agriculture in the Duscarn Range is incredibly labor intensive, and thus Falthingor has a comparatively minimal division of labor. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of lowlanders, halflings, and giants alike whose primary trade is neither farming nor fighting. Craftsmen are expected to join a guild. Rather: they will find little success in Falthingor and the surrounding hamlets unless they pledge themselves to these professional organizations

Guilds serve many purposes in Wenjansk society. First and foremost, guilds give members a means of accessing communal knowledge. The Duscarn Giants razed the great library of Wenjansków, and there has been no meaningful effort to replace it in the mountains. As such, most expertise is exchanged via guild mentorships. Many trades have become more complicated up in the mountains, and thus craftsmen rely on cooperation and the accumulated insights of their guildmates.

The second purpose of guilds is to regulate commerce and to facilitate communication with the Lord Ratchets. A cooper may be an expert craftsman, but they'll likely need the help of a guild to manage contracts with the High Kestrel. As each guild maintains a guildhall within Falthingor's walls, each gains access to the Lord Ratchets and can thus negotiate with the highest powers in House Wenjansk. All craftsmen will barter with commoners, but the most lucrative contracts come directly from the noble families.

Finally, guilds provide craftsmen the opportunity to coordinate. Masons can argue for better treatment from the nobility. Potters can decide whether they feel comfortable using Duscarn soil in drinking bowls. Loggers can designate which copses they will leave untouched. Even in the sparsely populated mountains, organized labor serves both the workers and the general populace.

Prior to the exodus from Wenjansków, there were dozens upon dozens of guilds, each with a narrow focus. Today, many of those guilds would only consist of a single craftsman, as many died fleeing the city, and many more had to abandon their former trade to assist in farming. Instead, Falthingor maintains only five guilds, each of which encompass a number of related trades.



THE GUILD OF FIBER AND LEATHER ARTISANS

70

Yaks, goats, and even some hardy Duscarn plants provide plenty of fiber with which to make clothing, rugs, tapestries, blankets, cloths, flags, and tents. In recent years, a pair of halflings have even discovered a means of crafting paper from the fibers in rugged bushes found just below the treeline. In an effort to beautify the spartan halls of Faltringor, House Wenjansk has commissioned countless tapestries and banners to adorn the castle. Those who craft the dyes used in these fiber arts are also members of the guild. Finally, though their numbers are few, tanners and leatherworkers are also expected to join the guild.

- ♦ **Łukasz** (he/him), lowlander, age 46, weaver and guildmaster. Designs and weaves all official banners and tapestries for the High Kestrel. Almost never speaks, but listens intently to the castle's gossip.
- ♦ **Marzena** (she/her), lowlander, age 17, apprentice papermaker. Hates her life and wants to flee Faltringor. Frequently drinks on the job and is deeply in debt to Jagoda the distiller.
- ♦ **Beeluk** (he/him), Silliar goblin, age 20, tailor. The only goblin permitted to live in Faltringor. Loud and disrespectful, but the finest dressmaker House Wenjansk has ever known.



THE GUILD OF STONE ARTISANS

Falthingor's walls are built from alchemically reinforced stones, but every giant raid has resulted in cracked walls. Quickly repairing and occasionally *augmenting* Falthingor's defenses is the greatest responsibility of the members of the Guild of Stone Artisans. However, many stoneworkers also build sculptures for the High Kestrel, millstones for the farmers, and tombstones for the dead. Unsurprisingly, there is a disproportionate number of giants among the stone artisans.

- ♦ **Hrekiczee "Wallbud"** (she/her), giant, age 33, stonemason and guildmaster. Tirelessly tends to the curtain walls while training apprentices, regaling them all the while with bizarre stories she invents.
- ♦ **Celestyn** (she/her), lowlander, age 49, stone engraver. Chisels heraldry and shamanic symbols into the castle's stonework. Frequently works alongside Łukasz the weaver, for whom she pines.
- ♦ **Kacper** (he/him), lowlander, age 19, stonecutter. Steadfast and loyal to guildmaster Hrekiczee. Much prefers cutting stone to his intermittent service with the spearmen.



THE GUILD OF WOOD ARTISANS

Everyone in the hamlets below Fathringor lives in wooden homes. Most of these homes, however, were built by their occupants. Subsistence farmers are expected to hone a great number of skills, and basic woodworking is chief among them. The Guild of Wood Artisans, however, is dedicated to those building woodcrafts for others: coopers, joiners, and furniture makers. This guild also includes those employed by the Lord Ratchets to construct buildings such as watchtowers and garrisons specifically for House Wenjansk.

- ♦ **Adelheid** (they/them), upland halfling, age 38, carpenter and guildmaster. Crafts any and all furniture used by the High Kestrel and his family. A close companion of Lord Ratchet Faldet, and a staunch believer that the upland halflings should be wary of their lowlander “hosts.”
- ♦ **Kamil** (he/him), lowlander, age 50, carpenter. Builds Wenjansk sentry towers across the Duscarn Range. Typically works alone. Has repeatedly and inexplicably communed with the Great Falcon. Often questions his sanity.
- ♦ **Arek** (he/him), lowlander, age 23, woodcutter. Often distracted. The best hurdy-gurdy player in Falthringor, despite possessing only seven remaining fingers.



THE GUILD OF METAL ARTISANS

The soil of the Duscarn Range may be tainted, but metals of all varieties can be found in abundance. Early expeditions from Falthringor revealed dozens of small mines along the mountainside, remnants of former Duscarn dominion. Though these mines are far from fully operational, it is still surprisingly easy to recover iron, copper, tin, and zinc. Metal artisans in this guild include blacksmith, tinsmiths, armorers, and a handful of dedicated miners living along the slopes. The vast majority of their work is wholly unrelated to the average adventure's idea of stereotypical blacksmith fare; they mostly craft mugs, nails, hinges, and the like. Even so, it is possible to barter for a shortsword or some chainmail.

- ♦ **Natalia** (she/her), lowlander, age 72, tinsmith and guildmaster. Mystical to the point of being nearly incoherent. Speaks solely in obtuse or quasi-religious metaphors.
- ♦ **Petrig** (they/them), upland halfling, age 39, blacksmith and armorer. Makes small-scale weapons and armor for halflings who don't trust the Wenjansk armed forces.
- ♦ **Damek** (he/him), lowlander, age 26, miner. An escaped criminal from House Jutmek. Traveled all the way to the Duscarn Range after being accused of murder.



THE GUILD OF FOOD AND LIQUOR ARTISANS

74 Subsistence farmers typically grow more food than they can eat themselves. The rest they barter with their neighbors or sell to dedicated artisans. These artisans take that foodstuffs and make jerky, pickles, vodka, and preserves. Much of these finer foods end up in meals for the nobles or as strategic reserves within Faltringor. This is not to say that common folk don't also enjoy jerky and moonshine, but merely that they typically make their own. The highest quality product, however, will come from the expert artisans within the guild.

- ♦ **Jagoda** (she/her), lowlander, age 29, distiller and guildmaster. Makes the best vodka in Faltringor. Has nearly perfected a handful of alchemical concoctions in her off-time, though only ever in secret.
- ♦ **Hania** (she/her), lowlander, age 14, pickler. Pickling is easy for precocious Hania, who would much rather focus on her scarily detailed and accurate star charts.
- ♦ **Wynnflæd** (she/her), upland halfling, age 37, butcher. Bonded to a mysterious alchemical homunculus named Kyrin that emerged from Faltringor's cistern. Surprisingly unfazed by this development.

Lord Ratchet Feliks Sikora

Mariusz has no patience for the guilds. Logically, he understands their significance, but any time he contemplates interacting with them directly or—spirits forbid—granting them political authority, it makes him sick. Thus, he appointed a Lord Ratchet specifically to deal with them. Lord Ratchet Feliks Sikora (he/him) is responsible for managing “Faltringor’s production and distribution of wares” (i.e. the economy, though the lowlanders don’t use the word).

Feliks is perhaps too close to his charge. He was born a minor nobleman, but his sympathies have since shifted. He sees the way the masterful craftsmen of Faltringor toil away with minimal autonomy, and he contemplates whether there might be a better system of governance that puts power in the hands of those who contribute most to the markets and not simply the man who was born into the position. Feliks connives in secret with the guildmasters. Many of his discreet conversations would constitute treason in the eyes of House Wenjansk.

Agnieszka Sikora

As the wife of a Lord Ratchet, Agnieszka (she/her) lives a carefree life. She has not worked the fields since her childhood, and she cares little for the “petty arts and crafts” of her peers. Instead, she spends her days in seemingly idle gossip with the other nobles in the keep. She lounges in the great hall throughout the day, even as the servants prepare meals around her. Head chef Tola and her staff despise Agnieszka and her constant frivolous requests.

Agnieszka is blissfully unaware of the schemes her husband Feliks is enacting, but she is carefully following the politics of House Wenjansk’s looming succession crisis. She plans to wed her son Witold to one of Mariusz’s daughters.... though she has not yet decided whether Zosia or Kalina are more likely to take the throne. For now, Agnieszka bides her time, frequently amusing herself by forming frivolous feuds and alliances with the other women of the court.




USING GUILDS IN GAME

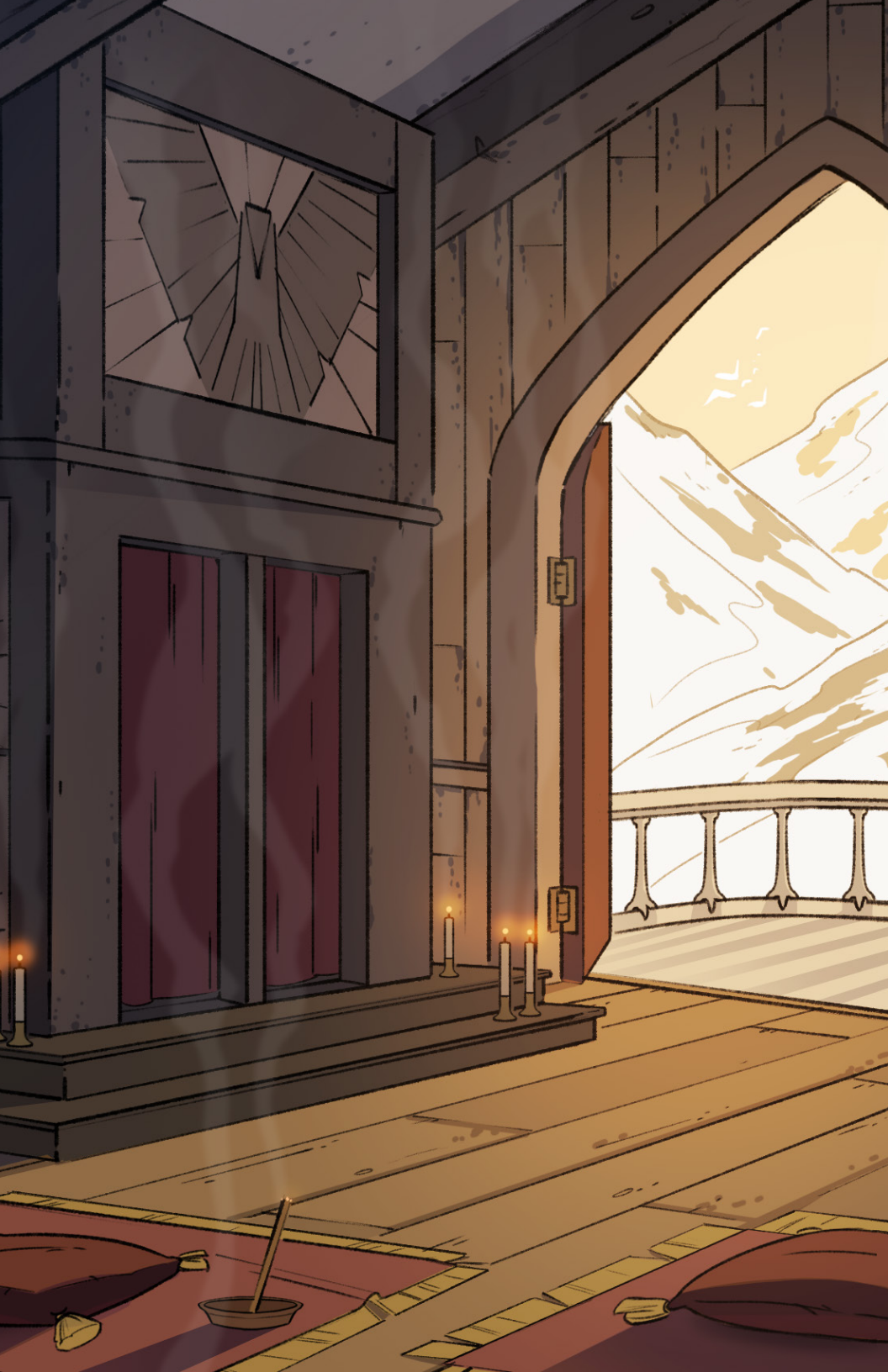
When GMing most cities, you will likely spend little time expounding the inner workings of the non-adventuring economy. These guilds, however, provide a few distinct narrative and mechanical opportunities for adventures in Falthingror.

First and foremost, the guild system provides utility for the adventurers. If one of your players wants to procure a shield, a disguise, or some long-lasting rations, you know to whom they can speak, and the economic structures within which that NPC works. You can add a little bit of narrative flair to what would otherwise be a mundane exchange of goods, and a minor character quirk may evolve into a unique story moment or a minor quest hook. This small bit of added verisimilitude can enhance immersion without slowing the pace of the game.

Guilds also provide the potential for factional politics. Insular intrigue can make for great hooks, especially in the context of a secluded castle. For example: imagine an assassin attempts to kill the High Kestrel, but fails to pierce his armor. The assassin's blade is tested, and it is revealed to contain impure metals. Now there is bickering among the metal artisans. If they can deduce who's using low-grade metals, they may figure out who supplied the assassin with his weapon. All of a sudden, the other four guilds are calling for more proper regulation in the Guild of Metal Artisans. Will guildmaster Natalia step down? This sort of slow burning political narrative won't be to everyone's taste, but it might just sow the seeds for a neat sleuthing quest.

Finally, guilds allow for players to flesh out their characters. Maybe one of the PCs is from Falthingror, and their backstory includes details about their father's loyalty to his guild. Likewise, if a player wants their PC to train with an expert artisan, they can easily seek out an apprenticeship with the guilds. These details can tie your player's characters to the world and augment the stakes of their adventuring.





THE Spirit Nest

If the Duscarn had built a chapel of some sort within Falthingor's walls, it is not at all clear where that may have been. Little is known of the Duscarn's faith, though many suppose that their alchemical hubris led them to believe they were their own gods—blasphemy in the eyes of House Wenjansk.

In either case, most chambers in Falthingor serve a similar purpose today to what may have been their original function. The present great hall was almost certainly a grand meeting place in the original castle, the Severed Keep a last-resort bastion, etc. As there was no appropriate place of worship, House Wenjansk saw fit to build the Spirit Nest.

This cantilevered chapel was a grand undertaking. An entire chamber dangling over the edge of a cliff face was hardly within the realm of possibility in the flat lowlands of Wenjansków. Nevertheless, the priests, masons, and Lord Ratchets trusted in the guidance of their bestial spirits. As far as anyone can tell, the Spirit Nest is structurally sound.

This chapel is of great importance to House Wenjansk. Its completion felt like a turning point for the great house, when their occupancy in Falthingor transformed from exile to dominion. This chapel is a symbol not just of the bird spirits that it venerates, but also of the resilience of House Wenjansk and its vassals.

Within, priests commune with the spirits, offer benedictions and guidance, and administer sacred rites.

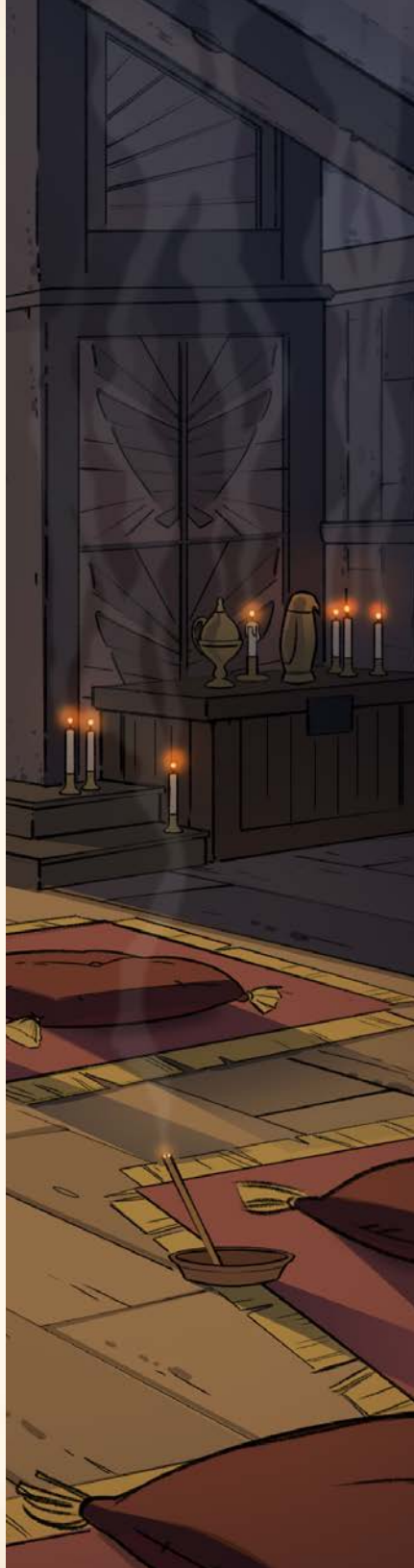
Wenjansk Spiritual Practices

There is no name for the religion of House Wenjansk. All the great houses of the lowlands practice a similar faith. Each communes with bestial spirits, seeking both guidance and the exceptional traits of the animal kingdom. While each house assigns primacy to a different set of spirits, each follows similar customs. As such, House Wenjansk has never felt a need to put a name to this practice. There is only “having faith” or being irreligious.

The highest form of worship is the ability to commune directly with the three primary spirits: the Great Falcon, Canny Harrier, and All-Seeing Owl. Such a connection occurs at seemingly random intervals. A follower of the faith will be going about their day when suddenly they are thrust into the realm of spirits, traveling alongside one of the bestial guides. This ethereal escort will impart some nugget of insight or prophecy, sometimes practical and straightforward, sometimes cryptic.

Common wisdom suggests that only the most devout should be able to commune with the spirits, but there is ample evidence to suggest this is not the case. Seemingly anyone might enter a psychic trance, find themselves briefly intersecting with the realm of spirits, and then just as quickly return to the physical world. The seven High Priests perform elaborate ceremonies in an effort to encourage these trances, but it is unproven whether the frequency of visitations can be influenced in any capacity.

There is no expectation that the priests will be in regular communication with the spirits, but rather that they will help to interpret the visions of others. Children are frequently the recipients of guidance from the All-Seeing Owl in particular, and the sage guidance of this beast is often enigmatic at best.



The High Priests

Only lowlanders may become High Priests. Though some deem this discriminatory, the High Kestrel defends the restriction on the basis that lowlanders are overwhelmingly more likely to commune with the bestial spirits. There are presently seven High Priests, and each one expresses their faith in unique ways. Some cover themselves in feathers to emulate the spirits, while others spend hours upon hours in meditation. All are called upon to offer guidance as needed, and none are expected to contribute to Falthingor's agricultural needs. High Priests must remain celibate.

- ♦ **Henryka** (she/her) is most popular among the commoners. Though she speaks with grace and authority, she also conspires to overthrow the High Kestrel. Adventurers critical of House Wenjansk will find an ally in her.
- ♦ **Kazimiera** (she/her) has never once communed with any spirits, though she hides this fact with her unrivaled fervor and enthusiasm.
- ♦ **Romuald** (he/him) believes that the best way to honor the spirits is to provide for those in need. He spends his days raising goats and sharing their milk and fur with the needy.
- ♦ **Nikodem** (he/him) has communed with each of the birds of prey, but is also regularly summoned to speak with the Discerning Hound. He cannot say why the canine spirit favors him.
- ♦ **Lilia** (she/her) protects the skeptics who would otherwise end up in prison for their blasphemy. Those who have doubts regarding the wisdom or divinity of the bestial spirits can seek counsel with High Priestess Lilia.
- ♦ **Weronika** (she/her) defies the High Kestrel by training her acolyte Unjitrir, a giant. Mariusz swears he will not allow the giant to become a High Priest, but Weronika persists nonetheless.
- ♦ **Jerzy** (he/him) believes himself to be a messianic figure. He has received visions from the Great Falcon that seem to imply he will rid the world of a great evil. He is cocky, but does not know how to go about claiming his destiny.

ON THE DIVINITY OF NATURE SPIRITS

Are people actually getting whisked off to the spirit realm to talk with nature deities that provide cryptic advice? Maybe! That's entirely up to you. If you want to run a comparatively "grounded" campaign (or at least... a grounded campaign in which alchemy and giants are real), you can always provide alternative explanations for the phenomenon. Perhaps lowlanders are predisposed to suffer hallucinations, or maybe there is a true God, but He can only communicate with mortals by sending bestial emissaries. Alternatively, perhaps the spirits are real, but they aren't divine. They're just weird creatures communicating from some parallel reality.

The decision should come down to the role of faith in your campaign. Are Gods pulling strings to influence the events of your adventure? Or is religion just a cultural system that binds societies in common practice? Are deities akin to magic, or do they exist wholly separate from the arcane laws and principles of your world?



IKREEPULK

The Turncoat

Most of the giants living in Falthringor were nomads wandering the Duscarn Range prior to seeking asylum within the castle walls. They were completely unaffiliated with the comparatively organized force that sailed across Lake Nodolny to destroy Wenjansków. In the eyes of the High Kestrel and the Lord Ratchets, they are free from blame, and they ought to be welcomed into the castle with open arms. Ikreepulk (he/him) is an exception.

Ikreepulk killed lowlanders. Ten years ago, he leapt out of his longship and slew dozens during the attack on Wenjansków. He chased House Wenjansk into the Duscarn Range and continued to fight for years. Then, in a strange twist, he was captured. For the first time, the spearmen were able to take a Duscarn Giant alive, imprison him, and then interrogate him.

At first, Ikreepulk divulged little. However, the lowlanders did not resort to torture. They spoke with him plainly, explaining their situation. The High Priests provided guidance. Guildmasters offered to teach him a craft. The High Kestrel himself spoke of House Wenjansk's storied history and lamented what they had lost. Eventually, Ikreepulk began to see the world through the eyes of the lowlanders. These were not a people who deserved to die. They were kind, and they listened.

The High Kestrel offered the captive a deal: if Ikreepulk told the Lord Ratchets where the Duscarn Giants assembled, Ikreepulk would become the first of House Wenjansk's enemies to be offered clemency. He could live in Falthringor as any other giant might, with the full protections that affords. Ikreepulk accepted.





PLOT HOOK

Attack the Giant Camp

Ikreepulk has revealed the hidden location where his former kin assemble on the other end of the Duscarn Range. These are not the nomads who occasionally learn of Falthringor and seek asylum, but the violent conquerors who destroyed House Wenjansk's former home. The war has remained a stalemate for years now, but a coordinated assault on the giant's encampment might tip the scales in House Wenjansk's favor.

A group of nobles—including the High Kestrel and Lord Ratchets Lubomir and Zarek—convenes to discuss plans. If the adventurers have proven themselves in the eyes of Falthringor's elite, they will be invited as well. The council considers three possible strategies moving forward, though they cannot settle on the best course of action. They will undoubtedly weigh the party's feedback heavily.

STRATEGY 1: ALL-OUT ASSAULT

Assuming Ikreepulk has told the truth about the giant encampment, the High Kestrel sees no reason why they shouldn't just press forward with all of the might Falthringor can muster. The trek will take days, but with some 150 archers and spearmen and the assistance of the adventurers, victory seems certain.

Some Lord Ratchets dissent. Even if the giants are totally routed, such a brazen attack would devastate Falthringor's population. If even twenty or so spearmen are felled, it seems doubtful there will be enough labor to feed the city next year.

If your party opts for this strategy, you can follow the advice listed for running large battles presented in *Falthringor 03: Assembled*. You can either run combat normally, with the party taking on some high-value targets among the giants, or you can switch to a more high-level tactical format for adjudicating the results of combat.

STRATEGY 2: INFILTRATION

Lord Ratchet Zarek suggests that Ikreepulk can bring in the adventurers as hostages. The legion of Duscarn Giants presumably doesn't even know that Ikreepulk had been captured. The giant can lead the party in as though he captured them after escaping from Faltringor. Once inside the encampment, the party can either take out the giants as they sleep, attempt to trigger an avalanche, or wield any powerful alchemical weapons they've found in the tunnels beneath Faltringor. Ikreepulk also suggests that the party can thrust the army into disarray if they defeat his former commander, a brute he refers to as "Nourished One."

This is a risky strategy. It will only work if Ikreepulk can successfully dupe his former kin. It also relies on the small squad of adventurers to accomplish as much as an entire army. Still, a proper infiltration will mean the party can slip behind enemy lines, and it won't risk losing an entire army if the strike fails.

STRATEGY 3: NEGOTIATION

The giants are not stupid. Though they are frequently disorganized in battle, it is clear that the Duscarn Giants are intelligent and capable of empathy. Many lowlanders once thought that the invaders who destroyed Wenjansków were some lesser form of the nomads in the mountains, but Ikreepulk proves that isn't true. They may be open to negotiation. After all, it seems as though they want to claim Faltringor as their home much more than they want to kill the lowlanders.

Ikreepulk claims that Nourished One is rational, but the High Kestrel doesn't exactly trust Ikreepulk's judgment. Still, he is open to the idea of accompanying a small squadron of soldiers and suing for peace. Mariusz is not the perfect leader, but he is willing to put his life on the line if it means he can achieve peace for his people. Is that a risk the people of Faltringor are willing to take?