L O A A

The Escape

SCRIPT

2026-11-26



TYPE	Story arc, main quest "The Escape" *(working)*
ACT	Act 1, its opening region (full game, the first paid act; not the prologue)
LOCATION	Island 3: Kaldvik, Ulfskard, the prison of iron and ice, Jarnborg
PARTY	Four (the hero, Vella, Zanze, Manfred), then five: Stalvan joins in the escape
FOES	Torgrim the Iron King, Skarde the Taker, the ice-bear sow, the Gaoler, Jarnborg's raiders
LENGTH	About 2 hours 15 minutes on the main line; about 3 hours 30 minutes with the side quests
STATUS	**Proposal**, *Unconfirmed — awaiting the director*. Written 2026-11-18 (NORTH-STORY); nothing built

Cast



HERO

TLOAA's player character and the leader of the party: a mercenary who takes the mayor's contract to free Stara Luka with Vella and Stalvan.



VELLA

The party's warlock and its mind: dry, curious and never saying everything she knows, with a pact mark on her hand that flares when something old is near.



MANFRED

Manfred, written Manfred by the director and on screen, is an inventor in Meneferu, distracted, enthusiastic and always in the middle of a project, who joins the party in Chapter 4 and drives them to Papyria in a car he built himself.

S

SKARDE

O

ORRI



STALVAN

The party's tank and its heart: a huge, bald barbarian from Meneferu, warm, simple and honest, who knows he isn't clever and doesn't mind.



ZANZE

A paladin and librarian-detective, the Keeper of the Library of Papyria (its lead librarian and sworn protector) and Manfred's partner, who joins the party in Chapter 5 of the prologue.

O

ORMAR

King of Kaldvik, the good king; he carves a notch for every name his neighbour takes.

G

GUNNVOR

T

THE CAPTAIN

THE STORY, AS YOU PLAY IT

It is the morning after the prologue. Four of you are stranded in Kaldvik, a fishing town on a frozen fjord: the hero, Vella, Zanze and Manfred. Your ship lies sunk at the pier. Stalvan, your sellsword, sits in the prison of iron and ice beyond the mountain.

The boots. At dawn a man walks down to the pier under a white truce shield. He is Skarde, who carries people off for the Iron King of Jarnborg, the raider town to the north. He throws Stalvan's boots at your feet. He says the old miners' door into the prison is shut. You found that door only last night, and named it at one fire. That leaves two questions. Why take a man's boots in a prison of ice? And who told Jarnborg?

The sled road. Ormar, Kaldvik's old king, sends you after the sled that took Stalvan. On the pass of Ulfskard, a farmer named Gunnvor saw it go by. The prisoner was "whole, and warm, and willing". He paid for his supper from his sock and would not wear his captors' fur. "Said it wasn't his."

Bread. Bread goes up to the prison every day, and you hide a note in a loaf. The basket comes down with an answer, every letter a different height. Zanze knows the hand: "It's him." Stalvan writes that he is cold. They bring his armour to his cell every night and take it away in the morning.

The escape. The way in is an old miners' drain under a frozen tarn. An ice-bear sow, the first boss, dens in its mouth. Inside, the guards walk their rounds to a drum. You move between the beats, cut a grate, and hold the door when the round comes back. Then you do it again, bigger each time. One cut frees Stalvan. The next frees a row of Kaldvik's taken. The last cut drops the ice plug of the miners' door outward in one great slab, and everyone pours out into a blizzard. Stalvan carries his plate armour out on his back. "Not paid for," he says. "I'll carry it." From here on you are five.

The first fire. By the fire that night, a kitten climbs out of Stalvan's collar. "He was cold." Then he tells you about his cell. Every night the Iron King came down and offered him his own warm armour as a gift. Every night he said no. Zanze: "They didn't take you to keep you. They took you to send you back to us." Nobody yet knows how.

The same house twice. At dawn the raiders take a man from the one house named aloud at the king's feast. Jarnborg hears everything said at Ormar's fire, and four people could be the traitor. Then

Zanze sees it. The bread plan was made in a kitchen, and it is the only plan Jarnborg never knew.

HOW IT ENDS SPOILERS

The leak is not a person. It is a silver cup at King Ormar's right hand. Last spring a stranger in a grey coat offered Ormar a dark stone for his crown. Ormar refused, but the law of bread and salt made him keep the guest's cup. The cup listens. Worse, the stranger asked who else might say yes, and Ormar told him: "My neighbour likes gifts."

The choice. Ormar can break the cup. That is open feud: Kaldvik marches with you, and loses a man. Or Ormar can lie into it. Jarnborg's men go to the wrong pass, but a king has lied at his own fire, and he steps down.

Why they took Stalvan. A dark stone takes a living man only as a gift he accepts. The Iron King accepted his, and has been a puppet ever since. The hand behind him wanted a second one, to walk back to your fire. Stalvan's plate holds a red stone, so they made him cold and offered it. He refused because the plate was in pawn, and he had not paid.

Jarnborg. Skarde fights you at the landing and yields. In Jarnborg the paymaster Orri throws his ledger on the fire, and Zanze pulls it out. Stalvan finds his own purse in Orri's chest, pays forty for his plate and puts it on. "Now it's paid." The Iron King, Torgrim, fights like a marionette. The hero lifts his crown. A calm voice says, "He was always a poor king. Keep him." Threads pull the stone up through the smoke hole. Torgrim wakes, and his prisoners walk home.

What it leaves. You sail south on the black ship, Stalvan on the bow. The ledger says Jarnborg's men were paid in foreign gold, through one house in Valponte on Island 1. Vella knows the house. That is the next story, The Weighmaster's Funeral.

The Escape *(working title)* is the proposed opening region of Act 1, the first paid act of TLOAA, set on Island 3 the morning after the prologue ends: the search for Stalvan, his breakout from the prison of iron and ice, and the reckoning with the Iron King of Jarnborg, who turns out to be a puppet.

> ***A design proposal for the full game, not the prologue. Nothing here is built.*** *Every name is a working name, and everything on this page is Unconfirmed — awaiting the director. It follows the shared spine of the full game, "follow the gold" (also Unconfirmed), and builds on Chapter 7 without changing it.*

AT A GLANCE

Hand-in	the party of four stranded at Kaldvik, the ship sunk, Stalvan in the prison ("Supper's late.")
Hand-out	the black ship home, Stalvan in his plate (paid for), a kitten, and the paymaster's ledger in Zanze's hands
Main line	10 parts (Quests of the Escape)
Side chains	The Seven Stones (5), The Drummer on the Wall (4), A Ship for a Ship (4)
Small quests	6, plus Stalvan's three hidden doors
Bosses	the ice-bear sow, the Gaoler and his bear (mini-boss), Skarde the Taker, Torgrim the Iron King
The choice	the cup at the king's fire: break it, or lie into it

THE MYSTERY

WHY THEY TOOK STALVAN

- **The rule of the gift** *(new, proposal)*: a stone of the three takes a living man only as a gift he accepts. The Iron King took his dark stone as "a gift from the south" and has been on the thread since.
- The hand behind it wanted Stalvan, huge, trusting and wearing a red stone of his own, as a second living puppet: a champion who would walk back to the party's fire with someone else behind his eyes.
- So they took his boots to make him cold, kept his warm plate beside him in a cell of ice, and every night the king came down with the same stories and the same offer: "You're cold. Your plate is warm. Put it on. My gift."
- He never did. It wasn't the king's to give, and it wasn't paid for: Hepu has his ticket. The trust that got him taken did not save him; one stubbornness about money did.

The fair clues: the boots on the pier; Gunnvor's "willing" and the fur he kept taking off ("Said it wasn't his."); his note ("They bring my plate every night"); the red glow in the high window; Ormar's law ("A gift asks for a gift."); Vella on the tundra path ("It has to be let in."); the crown's "gift from the south".

WHAT THE GOOD KING HIDES

- At the thaw the grey coat came to **Kaldvik first** and offered King Ormar the dark stone. Ormar refused it.
- By the law of bread and salt he had to keep the guest-gift laid on his table: a southern silver cup, kept at his right hand on the high seat ever since.

- Asked whether a neighbour might say yes, Ormar, who has hated Jarnborg for two generations, said: "My neighbour likes gifts."
- The cup is an ear. Everything said at his fire reached Jarnborg: the miners' door, the guard at the dusk horn, the house to raid. The bread plan, made in Ulla's kitchen, never did.

RED HERRINGS

Brand the door-ward (his brother rows for Jarnborg), Eyvind the bread-carrier, Hrodny the skald, the false trader in the pit, and Skarde himself. Each is cleared by one fact (Quests, M7).

THE REVEAL AND THE TWIST

- **The reveal** (M6, confirmed at M9): the Iron King is a puppet, and the bad king is the act's first victim.
- **The twist** (M7, at about two thirds): the leak is the good king's own fire, and the good king sent the grey coat on.

THE STORY, PART BY PART

M1-M2 · THE BOOTS AND THE SLED ROAD

At dawn Skarde comes down under a white-painted shield and throws Stalvan's boots on the pier; his men grab a net-mender on the way out, and the act's first fight is on the fjord road within three minutes. Ormar sends the party up the sled road. From the Ulfskard beacon the player sees everything the act will reach: the black ship at the north landing, Jarnborg on its sound, a dark line under the tarn, seven raw stones, the drum on the prison wall. At Gunnvor's fire comes the first witness, and then the first played blizzard on the pass.



Ulfskard in the blizzard. *The party leans into the wind between the cairns, with wolves in the white and the beacon above (story picture, proposal).*

GUNNVOR
Then he woke and asked what was for supper.
(beat)
I fed him. He paid me. With a coin out of his sock.

Whole, and warm, and willing. The tall one kept saying it. Willing.

M3-M4 · BREAD, AND THE WAY UNDER

A note goes up in the heel of a loaf on Eyvind's sled, and the basket comes down with an answer. Zanze lays it beside the forged letter of Chapter 6: every letter a different height. Then the black tarn, Svartvatn, where the old miners drained the hill, and an ice-bear sow in the culvert's mouth (boss).



The prison of iron and ice. *The old mine on its hill from the beacon, the red window, the drum on the wall and the black tarn below (story picture, proposal).*

ZANZE
Every letter a different height.
(beat)
It's him.

MANFRED
He's asking for bread.

VELLA
He's telling us he's himself.

M5 · THE ESCAPE

The act's first great set piece, built on Stalvan's theme: the prison's own round drum is the snare, and each layer of play adds an instrument (the full design is on the prison's page).



The last cut. *The ice plug of the miners' door falls outward and the column pours out into the blizzard, Stalvan with his plate on his back (story picture, proposal).*

STALVAN
Late.
(He eats.)

"Good, though."

STALVAN
You carried it.

HERO
All the way.

VELLA
Put it on. We're leaving.

STALVAN
Not paid for.
(He lifts the plate onto his back.)

"I'll carry it."

M6 · THE FIRST FIRE (THE MIDPOINT)

At Hrodny's hut the kitten, Stalvan's account and the chest story, and Zanze's sentence. That night Vella's grave-sight wakes (as set in Vella and The Puppeteer).

VELLA
Why was there a cat in your chest?

STALVAN
He was cold.

Not his to give. I hadn't paid Hepu.

ZANZE

They didn't take you to keep you, Stalvan.

(beat)

They took you to send you back to us.

STALVAN

What was that?

VELLA

I don't know.

(beat)

Yet.

M7 · THE SAME NOTCH TWICE (THE TWIST AND THE CHOICE)

Hallvar taken again; four suspects; one cup.

ORMAR

I cut this line a month ago. I had to think how.

I don't have to think how to carve.

He came here first. With the stone. I said no.

(beat)

Then he asked who else might say yes.

(beat)

I told him.

CHOICE The cup at the king's fire (stored as `north_cup`)

> HERO **Break it.**
>
> Ormar breaks the cup on his hearthstone: open feud. Kaldvik's men march over Ulfskard with the party; Brand falls at the landing, and Ormar carves the first notch ever cut crosswise.
>
> HERO **Lie into it.**
>
> Ormar speaks a false plan for the cup to hear; Skarde's host goes to the wrong pass while the party crosses the sound by night.

> **ORMAR**
> Guests don't lie at my fire.
> *(beat)*
> Kings, it seems, do.
>
> He eats on the low bench from then on.

M8-M9 · THE BLACK SHIP AND THE IRON HALL

Skarde and his net at the north landing (boss). In Jarnborg, the paymaster, the purse, the plate, and the king on threads (boss).



The Iron Hall. *The Iron King on his high seat with threads rising into the smoke, and Stalvan in his red-stone plate at last (story picture, proposal).*

ZANZE
I don't let books burn.

ORRI
Stalvan. You'll want a cup.

STALVAN
These are my friends.
(beat)
You won't like them.

Forty.
(beat)
Now it's paid.

The freed king remembers only a voice, and "a big man in a cell who wouldn't take a thing from me". He says the grey coat stayed on in Jarnborg after the thaw and kept a room in the high loft. It is warm, swept and empty, with a chair turned south and a half-carved wooden figure of a girl on the sill. Nobody understands it yet.

M10 · A SHIP FOR A SHIP

Ormar cuts the lines; the captain names her price; the ledger.



The ledger and the black ship. *The ship home clears the narrows at dawn: Stalvan on the bow, the captain at the steering oar, Zanze with the scorched ledger on her knee (story picture, proposal).*

THE CAPTAIN
Up on the bow. Say it again.

STALVAN
She'll never sink.
(beat)
Probably.

THE CAPTAIN
That'll do.

ZANZE
Every man in Jarnborg paid in foreign gold. All of it through one house.
(beat)
In Valponte.

Do you know it?

VELLA
In Valponte everyone knows every house.
(beat)
Yes.

The act ends in the picture, on the open sea, with the objective *Sail home to Island 1*. No end card.

THE PARTY IN THE NORTH

- **Without Stalvan** (M1–M4): the hero carries Stalvan's axe; Zanze holds the line but nobody can Taunt; Manfred counts the torch oil nine times; Vella walks where Stalvan walked and gets the doors wrong ("He'd have told us the hinge side by now.").
- **Stalvan back:** dry, plain, a professional who has been cold for weeks. He takes no gifts in the north: he pays Torvi for his boots, keeps a coin for Gunnvor, and puts a coin down for Ormar's fur ("That's what worries me.").
- **The plate:** carried on his back from the high cell to Jarnborg, worn only once it is paid for.

HOW THIS HOOKS THE PLAYER

The arc is built on named techniques (the full table and the sources are in the design file): an opening question in the first five minutes (the boots), a fight in the first three, open loops that close (the boots, who told, the breathing walls, the black ship seen from the beacon), layered goals, variable rewards (chests by level, hidden doors, roll tiers that change the scene), a set piece about every 15 minutes, foreshadow and payoff (the forged letter's even hand; "My friends are coming. You'll like them."), dramatic irony (the player saw Orri drug Stalvan; the party never did), a choice with a visible cost, a midpoint reversal, a twist at about two thirds, curiosity gaps from the Ulfskard beacon, people whose lives change, and a cliffhanger at the exit: the ledger.

TIES TO THE OTHER STORIES

- **To Island 1 (Valponte):** the ledger names a house in Valponte; Vella knows it. It is the town's Weighhouse, kept by Lapo Rinaldi, the man she calls uncle (The Weighmaster's Funeral). The captain puts the party ashore at night below Smokovje (proposal).
- **To Act 2:** the five arrive with Stalvan's plate back (as Under the Green Crown and The Keeper of Ragosa assume).
- **To the final act:** the second stone is drawn away, never held by the party; the high loft's carved figure waits; who cut the captain's ship from the sea stays open.

PICTURE CREDITS

Story pictures requested 2026-11-18 (NORTH-STORY) for the main session to paint; none is painted yet. Reference art for the wiki only, never shipped. Files: wiki/_images/north_act1/.

THE END

Sources: docs/plan/full_game/north_act1.md (NORTH-STORY, narrative-writer, 2026-11-18); docs/plan/papyria/prologue_full_story.md §6-§8; docs/plan/papyria/story_bible.md §3.6-3.7, P10-P11; plan - future for prologue.md (chapter 7, Act 1); picture requests /Volumes/External/LOAA-files/full_game/north_act1/req/.

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