L O A A

The Prologue

The free opening of TLOAA · Several hours, seven chapters



The hollow lich: its strings snap, and far away someone laughs



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The Prologue is the free first part of TLOAA: seven chapters, several hours of play, that begin with the Hollow Lich demo and end with the party stranded on a frozen northern shore and Stalvan taken. One purchase then unlocks Acts 1–3 and the finale, and the same save carries straight on. Under the main road runs a second, quieter story, told in side quests: the mayor of Stara Luka who hired the party is missing, and wherever they go, a soft-spoken gentleman in a grey coat has been there a day before them.

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Who's who



The hero

The player's own character, a sellsword who takes the Stara Luka contract. Silent: the hero speaks only through the choices the player picks, and those choices are remembered.



Stalvan

The tank, the party's heart: big, bald, warm and honest. He knows he isn't clever and doesn't mind. He runs into every fight first and makes every quiet moment funnier. He is from Meneferu, and he pawned his red-stone armour there before he took the party's job. In Chapter 6 he is taken.



Zanze

A paladin and librarian-detective, the Keeper of the Library of Papyria (its lead librarian and sworn protector), Manfred's girlfriend: precise, patient, evidence first. Joins in Chapter 5.



Peels

The old dockmaster: gruff, few words, and he knows more than he says.



Vella

A warlock, the party's mind: dry, curious and quick, and she never says everything she knows. A pact mark on her wrist flares when the threads are near, and she hides it.



Manfred

An inventor from Meneferu: distracted, enthusiastic and always in the middle of a project. Joins in Chapter 4.



Nana

Stara Luka's innkeeper: tired, blunt and fiercely protective of her town.

Never seen in portrait:

- **The captain** lends the party her ship at Ragosa: friendly and practical. *Name unconfirmed.*
- **The mayor** of Stara Luka, Ser Filip *(working)*, hired the party and has not been seen since. A gentle, generous man who lost his wife and his little daughter in the fever winter two winters ago. Everyone remembers his grey coat and his grey mare, and no two people saw him last on the same day.
- **The Puppeteer** is the unseen villain who works the dead like marionettes on glowing pale-gold threads. In the prologue he is a faint laugh, a sign stamped on silver (a tied knot with three hanging threads, *working*), and once, in Chapter 6, a calm and amused voice speaking through a dead king's mask.
- **King Ormar** *(working)*, the good king of Kaldvik: old, slow-spoken, and he carves a notch for every one of his people his neighbour takes.

The stones

Three stones lie hidden across the islands. Nobody in Stara Luka knows that yet; the dead do, and they dig for them.

- **What they are:** woken together, the three make *"a ruler who never dies"*. That is all the scholars of Papyria know for certain, and Zanze is the first to say it aloud, in Chapter 5.
- **Where they are:** the library of Papyria has guarded one for generations, in a vault below its shelves. Another has already been woken by someone, before the story begins. The third lies under Stara Luka, where the dead's tunnels end, and the party finds it only in a later chapter.
- **How they behave:** the stones and the Puppeteer's threads answer each other; a severed thread pulls toward a stone and glows near it. Vella's pact mark flares near them too, and she doesn't say why.

- **The Drowned Chart:** a green-bronze sea chart from a town drowned under a lake on the road to Ragosa (Chapter 3): three islands, one small mark on each, and no words. Only in the library's vault does it become certain what the marks are.
- **A rumour from the north:** in Kaldvik they say the Iron King of Jarnborg has worn a new stone in his crown since the thaw, "dark, warm as a hearth".
- **Who is searching:** someone has the dead digging on more than one island (the mausoleum's tunnels, the vineyard at Montevigna) and has had the words beside a carving of the three stones chiselled away in the tomb of the Sealed Kings, so that nobody else can read them.
- *Unconfirmed — awaiting the director:* the stones' origin and names, who woke the second one, and whether the red stone in Stalvan's armour is related.

CHAPTER ONE

The Hollow Lich

Stara Luka · *Free the town and defeat the lich. This is the demo.*



THE DOCK. *The party steps off the boat into a town already burning. Before anyone has said a word, the dead climb out of the harbour onto the planks of the pier, and the first fight begins within seconds: Vella's lightning forks between them, Stalvan's axe goes through two at once.*

The party comes in from the open sea at sunset on a contract from Stara Luka's mayor to "liberate the town". A warning bell tolls across the water, smoke rises from the roofs, and on the headland across the harbour the old mausoleum stands among its cypresses. The last crew that took this contract never came back. Skeletons climb out of the harbour onto the dock, and the party fights its way into the town: past the mayor's house, barred from the outside, to Mare at the fish market, who sends them to the stables, where the stable boy Luka saw the mayor ride out to the headland alone. At the inn the dead are pounding on the door and clawing at the cellar grate. When the last of them falls, Nana, the innkeeper, opens with a cleaver and a candle and points them to the mausoleum on the headland.



THE INN SIEGE. *At the end of the dock road the only lit building is the inn. Skeletons pound on its barricaded door and claw at the cellar grate, as if they wanted under the inn rather than into it. When the last one falls, the bar lifts and Nana looks out with a cleaver in one hand and a candle in the other: "Three of you. The mayor promised a company."*

On the Glavica the party goes in through the breach where the dead broke out of the graveyard. Below the mausoleum, past diggers and a bone caster, they find the crew that took the same contract three weeks earlier, risen against them, and take the key to the way down from their pack. At the mouth of a fresh tunnel dug toward the town waits a lich. They kill it, and it turns out to be hollow: its strings snap upward, the robes fall empty, and far away, faint, someone laughs. The cut threads do not fall: they fade into the dark above and are gone, and nothing is left to take. Only Vella's mark flares under her sleeve, for half a second.



THE HOLLOW LICH. *Below the mausoleum the old catacombs end in fresh tunnels heading toward the town. At their mouth the party kills the lich, and its strings snap upward one by one; the robes fall empty, there was never a body, and far away someone laughs.*

Then the rock groans. For three weeks the dead dug under the old stair; with the threads gone, every digger dropped where it stood, nothing holds the shoring, and as the party runs back the stair falls in in front of them. There is no way back up. Stalvan rubs his bald head: *"Wait. Feel that? The air's moving."* … *"Cold, and it smells of salt. It comes from there."* Behind the dead's spoil heap he knocks on the wall (*"Hear that? Planks. Not rock."*), drags the spoil aside and tears out an old tarred plank gate, the way the lost crew came in. He keeps it. Beyond it a sea passage leads down to a hidden berth at the water's edge.



THE COLLAPSE. *Deep under the tomb the undermined stair back up to the upper crypt falls in, and the party runs from the dust. "Deep in the rock, something gives. The way they came down is gone." Stalvan: "Everyone whole?" Vella: "Whole. The stair isn't." Stalvan: "We won't dig through that. Not in a week."*



THE BERTH AND ROKO. *A hidden sea cave under the headland: a short plank deck beside dark, still water, and an empty berth. Roko, the crew's deckhand and the last of them, kneels at the mooring post, still sawing at a rope with no boat on it. "That dead sailor was alone. Waiting for his friends?" "Waiting for the boat."*

Roko, the crew's deckhand, kneels there at the mooring post, still sawing at a cut rope, and wakes when they reach the landing. When he falls, the rope tells the rest: he was sawing at it when they took him, and the tide carried the boat home empty, where Mare watched it come in. The others went down, saw what was digging, and locked the

gate behind them so that it couldn't reach the town. Now there is no boat, only the ebb that would carry anything that floats. *"We have one. The crew's gate,"* says Stalvan, and goes back for it.



STALVAN AND THE DOOR. *Stalvan comes back with the gate he kept and lifts it over his head, proud; Vella looks at the door, then at the dark water, deeply unimpressed. Stalvan: "Wide enough. Three of us, if we kneel and keep still." Vella: "That is a door." Stalvan: "Today it is a boat."*



THE WATER CAVE. *The door rides very low, water washing over its planks, as the ebb carries it down the sea tunnel toward the growing grey light at its end. Vella: "It's sinking." Stalvan: "It's riding low. Weight in the middle, and it holds."*

The door rides low and the water washes over its planks, but it floats. The ebb carries it round the long half-circle of a water channel under the hill toward a grey light, and at dawn it drifts out of a low cave mouth in the Glavica's east sea cliff into the outer cove. Round the headland's seaward point it turns west into Stara Luka harbour, the arrival in reverse. Stalvan pulls out the soggy contract: *"'Liberate the town.'"* … *"Done. The ink ran, but it's done."* Along the pier, where their boat was moored, only its masts lean out of the water: *"One night. We were gone one night."* On the pier head stands Peels, the old dockmaster, a plank from the hull at his feet.



OUT OF THE HILL. *Seen from the sea at dawn: the door raft drifts out of a low cave mouth in the Glavica's east sea cliff into the calm outer cove, the cypresses and the mausoleum above. Stalvan: "Daylight." (beat) "East cliff. The harbour's round the point." Vella: "This is how Jure's boat went home. Empty."*



HOME ON A DOOR. *The raft rounds the headland into Stara Luka harbour in the low morning light, Vella soaked and dignified. In the new ending it passes the party's sunk boat and Peels waits on the pier; this painting predates that change and still shows Mare on the quay.*

"Dawn comes over the bay. For the first time in weeks, the dead stay where they are buried." Peels "saw nothing. Heard nothing. Slept like a stone." He won't look at the masts, and the player can tell he is hiding something; the hull was cut clean, and Vella pockets a splinter from the cut edge, the **Cut Splinter**, which still holds the colour of the threads. At the inn Nana closes the quest: the bells are quiet, the scratching under her floor has stopped, and she pays them the rest (*"The mayor can owe me instead."*). The party brings Mare the news of her husband Jure and of Roko, the boy who crewed for him, and she gives them the sea sabre Jure's father carried: *"Then they died for this town. Both of them."* The town is free, but the boat is gone and someone made sure of it. The whole chapter, scene by scene, is in the Chapter 1 script; this chapter is the demo, the part of the game that is built today. This ending is the plan of 31 October 2026 (CH1-END-2); the built demo still ends with Vella's portal and the Severed Thread until it is built.



A GLIMPSE AHEAD: THE STONE UNDER STARA LUKA. *Not in this chapter, but later in the story: one day the party goes down into Nana's cellar, where the dead's tunnels stop just short of the wall, and to a plain old stone that has been there longer than the inn. When the thread's trace comes near it, it glows. "It's not cold. It's waiting."*

CHAPTER TWO

The Morning After

Stara Luka · *Find a way off the island after the party's boat is sunk.*



THE SUNK BOAT *(now at the end of Chapter 1). Only the mast of the party's boat shows above the water. Peels holds up a plank from the hull: the hole was cut clean, and its edges glow faintly in the colour of the thread. "Boats don't leak like that."*

The party already knows: the boat is at the bottom of the harbour, cut clean (since CH1-END-2 that scene closes Chapter 1). The town comes out into the morning light, and Peels, who would not talk at dawn, admits what he saw: a hooded figure on the dock after midnight. No ship leaves this island except from Ragosa, so the party takes the coast road east, with wolves and boars in the hills and a leatherworker who will sew them a bigger pack.



THE MORNING SQUARE. *For the first time in weeks the townsfolk come out into the square. A child asks Stalvan about the scar on his head ("Sea serpent. Big one. I bit it back."), and he tries to make a coin vanish, very badly.*

On the road. Every night of her life the mayor's grey mare, Bura, has come home to Luka's stables; last night she didn't. The party finds her riderless at a spring on the hill road, where a carter from Dolac has waited three days with a closed cart, hired by letter for *"a long box, and no questions"*. She wandered up to him near midnight, he says, with nobody on her, "like someone had let go of her reins". In her saddlebag lie a summons sealed with a knot, *"The door is open. Come alone, and bring the key."*, and a child's wooden marionette whose strings were cut, carefully. Back at the stables Luka explains: the mayor had a daughter, Mila, until the fever winter took her and her mother a week apart. *"He kept her room the way it was. Like she'd be back for supper."* (The Grey Without a Rider)

On the lake road a widow's olive press has split. While Stalvan carries a whole oak down the lane for its new screw, the charcoal burners above Masline point at a light that blinks every night in the old Querceto tower, answered by a pale glow from under the lake. The widow still has forty jars of oil the mayor bought after the fever winter and never collected: *"He was different, after. Kinder. Like a man paying off a debt to someone who wasn't there."* (New Oil)



THE GREY WITHOUT A RIDER. *The mayor's grey mare drinks at the spring on the hill road, where a carter waits with a closed cart for a gentleman who never came. In her saddlebag: a summons sealed with a knot, and a child's puppet with its strings cut.*



NEW OIL. *Stalvan carries a whole seasoned oak down the lane for the widow Jela's split press ("It's lighter than the door." "The door floated."). Up the hill the charcoal stack smokes, and on the far knoll stands the old tower where a light blinks at night.*

CHAPTER THREE

The Closed Gates

Ragosa and Montevigna · *Earn a ship from a captain stuck outside the city walls.*



RAGOSA. *The walls of Ragosa rise straight out of the sea, and the gates are shut: the news from Stara Luka arrived first, and nobody from the cursed town gets in. Families who fled the coast are camped beneath the walls.*

Ragosa, a great walled city rising straight out of the sea, has shut its gates: news of the dead rising in Stara Luka arrived first, and nobody from there gets in. Under the walls lies a camp of refugees, and at the outer dock a captain whose ship is stuck outside too. She will sail the party south if they solve her problems around the hill town of Montevigna: skeletons digging in a vineyard, bandits paid in coins stamped with a strange sigil, and perhaps a hermit who studies the ruins under the volcano's ash. A guard lets slip that a man in fine clothes slipped into the city just before the gates closed.



THE CAPTAIN. *At the outer dock a captain whose ship is stuck outside the walls too squints at Stalvan. She will sail the party south if they solve her problems around the hill town of Montevigna.*



THE BANDIT TOLL. *On the cypress road inland, bandits hold the captain's crew. Their pay was stamped with a sigil nobody in the party has seen before.*



THE VINEYARD. *In her wine supplier's vineyard the dead are digging too: a second dig site, far from Stara Luka. Whoever is searching is searching in more than one place.*

Around the walls. On the hill of Glavat a scholar of the old empire, shut out of his own city, is measuring a ruined signal tower; when Stalvan puts its corner stones back, its beacon burns again and the hill becomes a watchtower. The scholar knows the mayor: Ser Filip wrote to him twice this year for everything he had on the old empire's "kings who did not die", and said he was afraid of what lay under his town. *"Only that it was older than the town. And that it was waiting."* (The Scholar in the Footings)

At low tide a salt maker leads the party along the rocks under the south wall to a basket lowered from a postern, and her son's letter comes down from the city's kitchens: the mayor of Stara Luka got in the day before the gates shut, eats at the council's high table and asks about ships south. *"He laughs at supper, Mama. He's the only one in the city who does."* That night the great harbour chain sags into the water, and a boat with no lights slips out over it, a man in a long grey coat upright in its stern, and nobody rowing. Vella remembers that Luka saw the mayor ride to the headland the night they landed. Stalvan: *"So he's fast."* Vella: *"Or there are two of him."* (The Salt Road)



THE FOOTINGS ON GLAVAT. *Shut out of his own city, Teodor the scholar measures the old empire's signal tower while Stalvan puts its corner stones back. Across the bay, Ragosa's walls rise out of the sea.*



UNDER THE WALLS. *Midnight at low tide: the party carries the salt maker's sacks along the rocks to a basket lowered from a postern. Far off, the harbour chain sags into the water and a boat with no lights slips out, a man in a grey coat in its stern.*

What the lake keeps. Inland, the small lake at Jezerine has been sick since the new moon. Every night at midnight the wheel of the Studena mill jams, and in the morning the miller pulls drowned men's boots and cut threads out of the race; three weeks ago a gentleman in a good grey coat, on a good grey horse, paid him in old silver to keep the old sluice shut and not mind the lights. An old fisherwoman rows the party out at dusk, and far below the water a line of

lanterns walks the lake bed toward drowned roofs and columns: a town older than the lake. At the top of the Querceto tower a dead watchman works a shuttered lamp on threads, and when the party cuts them, they drift east on the night wind, toward Ragosa. So the party opens the old empire's sluice at the falls, and for one night the lake drops. On the wet lake bed, among broken columns and a drowned bell tower, the dead haul a bronze-bound chest out of a sunken courtyard for their overseer, the Knot: many drowned bodies bound by threads into one shape. When it falls, the threads snap upward, and the bell under the water rings once, though no one touched it. In the chest lies a green-bronze sea chart: three islands, one small mark on each, and no words. *"Someone sent the dead swimming for it. I'm keeping it."* (What the Lake Keeps)



THE MILL AT MIDNIGHT. *At the turn of midnight the wheel jams, and the drowned dead come over the falls tangled in loose threads.*



LIGHTS UNDER THE WATER. *Old Kata rows the party out at dusk. Far below, a line of lanterns walks the lake bed toward the drowned roofs of a town older than the lake.*



THE KNOT. *With the old sluice open, the lake drops for one night. On the lake bed the dead haul a bronze-bound chest out of a sunken courtyard for their overseer: many drowned bodies bound by threads into one shape.*



THE DROWNED CHART. *At dawn the water rises again over the ruins. Vella holds the chart from the chest: three islands, three marks, no words. The miller gives back the gentleman's silver: "I don't want his silver in my house."*



DEPARTURE. *The ship leaves at dawn and Ragosa's walls shrink behind it. Stalvan climbs onto the bow with his arms spread wide: "Vella! I feel like a king!" The captain: "Every ship you board sinks." "Not this one." (beat) "Probably." Vella names Papyria: "The great library. If it was ever written down, it's there." The captain: "I'll put you off at Meneferu. Nobody sails further."*

CHAPTER FOUR

The Inventor

Meneferu · *Meet Manfred and learn that the great library has fallen.*



MENEFERU. *The ship sails into a river-delta city of domes, markets and heat haze. Stalvan is home: "Home. Still smells like hot bread and camels." Papyria is across the sand, on the east coast.*

The ship reaches Meneferu, a river-delta city of domes and markets. Vella wants a scholar who can tell her what cut the boat and what the threads are, and the greatest library in the world is in Papyria, across the sand on the east coast, behind its sea walls. No caravan will go, but an innkeeper points the party across the river, to an inventor who built a cart that needs no camel and whose sweetheart runs the library. In a smoking workshop they meet **Manfred**, an inventor who is always in the middle of a project, and he tells them Zanze is the Keeper of the Library, its head librarian and its sword. Then a messenger, Tefi, runs into the car yard: fanatics have seized the library, and Zanze is trapped inside, holding the inner door. *"The car isn't finished."* (beat) *"The car is finished now."*

The parts. Tefi brings a page from Zanze's ledger, folded, and Manfred goes pale: *"She fined a prince for a folded page. She has never folded one in her life. Not one."* The car still needs a gear and fuel. The gear was taken off Medjira's cart as a "toll" by Dosh's thugs in the dyers' court, and when they yield it turns out to be a wooden copy dyed brass-yellow, forty teeth instead of forty-two; the real one was sold to Hesuk the camel merchant, who gives it back once Stalvan talks his kneeling camel Sefa to her feet. The fuel sits in Bakhu's warehouse, where men in the same ochre sashes are draining Manfred's green barrels: *"They're stocking fuel for a fire, Manfred. A big one."* One barrel is left. In the car yard the engine fails twice and catches on Vella's spark, the party climbs aboard, Stalvan on the roof, and the car rattles out of town toward Papyria. On the desert road camel riders strike at it, and the hero answers from the gun. *"Hold on, Zanze. We're coming."*

In the game today. Chapter 4 is playable end to end (2026-10-30): from the river pier to the drive out, then the card *"To be continued: Papyria"*, *"Meneferu · Chapter 4 complete"*. In the game the drive out closes Chapter 4; the arrival scene on the ship and the side quests' later steps are not built yet. Sabu the mummy seller's small quest The Mummy Thread sends the party to the ruins of Hetsa in the desert. Every line is on the Chapter 4 script.



MANFRED'S WORKSHOP. *The party walks in mid-experiment: a small explosion, a soot-covered face and pure delight. "Don't touch that. Or that. That one's fine." (beat) "No, it isn't." Stalvan touches it anyway.*



THE CAMEL MARKET. *Wearing Manfred's borrowed welding goggles against the desert sun, Stalvan turns slowly to a camel merchant: "Your camel. Give it to me." "...No." "Worth a try."*

Stalvan's town. Before the party ever reaches the workshop, Stalvan's first words in Meneferu are *"Bread first."*, and he leads the party to Ipu's bakery on the palm-garden square, where the old baker who raised him on honey bread has news: there has been a light in his window three nights. His court has been forced and his writing chest smashed; the silver cup is still there, but every letter he ever sent Ipu from the road is gone, and in the gate hangs a tuft of grey fur. Who wears fur in Meneferu? A gentleman with a soft voice and island vowels, in a grey coat in this heat, asked which house was his, and whether he still had the red stone. At the pawn shop his armour is safe on its stand; the same gentleman offered to buy it outright, and when the pawnbroker refused, *"He smiled. He said he could wait."* The letters change hands at the ferry landing at night, between a street gang and two pale northerners in fur, and as the fight ends Ipu's bakery goes up in flames behind them. The party saves the bakery or chases the boat, never both, and the letters are lost either way. On the roof terrace afterwards, Stalvan shrugs: *"They can keep the letters. I'm a terrible writer." "What did you write about?" "Supper, mostly."* (A Light in Stalvan's Window)

Three smaller stories wait in the town. The old temple keeper has a library book forty-one years overdue, with one page torn out long ago (it turns up wrapped around Stalvan's fried fish) and another cut out with a blade only last month, the night after a foreign gentleman asked about library books (Overdue). From the top of the watchtower the harbour captain shows the party a lantern blinking in the reeds and a dark northern ship answering it; the signaller is a boy of twelve with a purse of silver stamped with the knot, and *"a quiet man from the islands counted the coins first. He gave me an extra one. For being brave."* (Eyes on the River) And in the reeds lives Grandfather, the oldest crocodile on the river, whom the fisher children feed and Stalvan befriends: *"No threads on these." "Just teeth."* (Grandfather of the Reeds)



A LIGHT IN STALVAN'S WINDOW. *At dusk in the gardens district Stalvan stops dead, a loaf in his hand: a lamp is burning in the window of his own closed house, and his gate has been forced. Ipu, the baker who raised him on honey bread, holds his arm.*



THE PAWN SHOP. *His armour, the red stone in its chest, safe on its stand. "Not yet, old friend. Soon."*



THE FERRY LANDING. *Northerners in fur row away with the stolen letters while Ipu's bakery burns across the square. The bakery or the boat: never both.*



EYES ON THE RIVER. *From the watchtower, a lantern blinking in the reeds, and a dark northern ship answering from outside the harbour.*



OVERDUE. *A library book forty-one years late, one page cut out with a blade. Behind them, Stalvan's lunch is wrapped in the other missing page.*



GRANDFATHER OF THE REEDS. *"Good crocodile. Best crocodile."*

CHAPTER FIVE

The Burning Shelves

Papyria · *Rescue Zanze, hold the library, and see the stone.*



THE DRIVE. *Manfred drives the improvised Model T across the desert while the hero works the rotating-barrel gun on the rear deck and fanatic riders close in. Stalvan rides the cargo rack over the front bench, and a stop pin keeps the gun from firing at him. "Can I drive?" "No." It falls apart as it arrives.*

The party races across the desert in Manfred's prototype car, Manfred at the wheel, the hero on the gun and Stalvan on the roof rack, and fights through the library while torch-bearers set the shelves alight. **Zanze**, a paladin and librarian-detective, is found holding the restricted section alone. They capture the first sect's leader, and then a rival sect with a different god arrives to burn the same library, and the captured zealot has to fight beside them. In the vault, Zanze shows them a dark stone on a pedestal; the Cut Splinter from the party's boat pulls toward it and glows (it took the severed thread's role, CH1-END-2). She names what the dead have been digging for across the islands: *"There are three. Woken together, they make a ruler who never dies. We guard one."* Someone has already woken another, and the third is still hidden.



THE BURNING LIBRARY. *Torch-bearers are setting the shelves alight. Zanze holds the restricted section alone, sword drawn, a lectern jammed against the door: "Manfred. You're late." "I built a car!" "Is that the smoke?"*



THE SECOND SIEGE. *A rival sect with a different god arrives to burn the same library, and the leader the party just captured has to fight beside them, terrified. "They'll burn the books!" "Yes. Remember how that feels."*



THE VAULT. *Zanze leads them down to a dark stone on a pedestal; the thread pulls toward it, and it glows in answer. "There are three. Woken together, they make a ruler who never dies. We guard one." Someone has already woken another, and the third is still hidden.*

If the party carries the Drowned Chart, Zanze lays it beside the stone. *"This mark is this vault. The chart is real."* … *"So the other two are real too."* Stalvan: *"One of them is where we started."* Nobody answers him. After the siege the party gives her the temple's overdue book; she waives the fine (*"Today."*) and reads the gap where the page was cut: *"This chapter was about the kings who would not die. And what it cost them." "What did it cost them?" "That was the page."*

In the game today. Chapter 5 is playable up to the high reading hall (Milestone 3, accepted 2026-11-13). The car breaks through to the library's back door, the party fights up the halls, and at the top Zanze is held at the lectern by the fanatics' leader, Pehrut, the First Mouth, reading his god's sayings to him: *"I've been free for an hour. I was waiting for the end of the chapter."* She joins, Pehrut yields after a few hits, and in the talk she takes the Vault key from the wrapper of the Sayings, the one scroll he would never burn. Then the siege (Milestone 4, in the game since 2026-11-14): at sunset the white faces, the second sect, come up the main stair under Ysra, the Reader's Hand, to burn the library, and Pehrut fights beside the party to hold the map hall: *"How do I hold this?" "Both hands. Stay behind me."* After three waves the Pharaoh's Guard arrives under Commander Ibeneset, the sects scatter, and the vault is ordered sealed at dawn: *"Then we go down tonight."* Pehrut is left alone in the burnt hall with the scroll. That night (Milestone 5, in the game since 2026-11-17) Zanze takes the party down to the vault, where the splinter in Vella's hand pulls toward the stone: *"There are three. Woken together, they make a ruler who never dies." "We guard one. Another is awake already. The third isn't in any scroll."* Ibeneset will not lend the Guard's camels, so Pehrut gives them the ones his men left in the yard (*"They're the one thing of ours that never burned anything."*), and the five ride out by night. Chapter 5 ends in the ride's last picture: *"It's my armour. I'll carry it home."* See Papyria.

CHAPTER SIX

The Empty Seat

The desert island · *Learn Stalvan was taken north, and gather what the blowtorch needs.*



THE EMPTY SEAT. *Stalvan went to fetch his armour and said he'd be back before supper. Night falls at camp, his supper goes cold, and his seat by the fire stays empty. "He's never late for supper."*

Stalvan goes off alone to redeem the armour he pawned in Meneferu before he took the party's job, and doesn't come back. His place at Imsa's supper table stays empty and his supper goes cold. Zanze's investigation finds the threads: the armour collected with a forged letter, a northern ship that went out on the night tide carrying a huge man, and a dropped seal ring from the north. The four of them gather in Manfred's workshop, where Zanze lays out the library's old survey of a northern mine and they work out how to break in. Manfred can cut through northern iron and ice with a blowtorch, but it needs a fuel that burns hot enough: the oil of the ever-burning lamps in the sealed tomb of the Sealed Kings. There, past halls of mummified cats and jackal-headed guards, beneath a mural whose words someone has just chiselled away, the party defeats the Warden, and the unseen villain speaks for the first time, through a dead king's mask: *"You keep breaking my toys."*



HOW STALVAN WAS TRICKED. *He went to the pawn shop to fetch his armour and found a friendly stranger with a cup of wine, a sealed letter "from Stalvan" that he never wrote, and his armour already promised away. He suspected nothing. In the doorway behind him, northern men waited with chains and a net, and a dark ship waited at the quay. A man that strong could only be taken asleep.*



PLANS FOR THE NORTHERN PRISON. *With Stalvan taken, the hero, Vella, Zanze and Manfred gather in Manfred's workshop at night. Zanze and Manfred bend over a plan of the northern prison camp, iron palisades and watchtowers in the snow, and work out how to break in, with the dropped royal seal and the half-built blowtorch on the bench. The hero listens with his arms crossed; Vella sits by the empty chair where Stalvan would be. (Older concept: in the game the plan is an old mine from the library's survey, and the talk is at dusk.)*



THE HALL OF CATS. *Manfred's blowtorch needs the oil of lamps that have burned for a thousand years in the tomb of the Sealed Kings. The first hall is lined with niches full of mummified cats that pour out in packs. "No strings on these. They're just angry."*



THE SEALED KINGS. *Manfred read the old words aloud from a black book ("Did you just read that out loud?"), and two sarcophagi open: the kings rise. Behind them a relief shows three stones raised above a crowned figure, but part of it was hacked off only days ago, and the cuts still glow. "Someone was here before us."*



THE WARDEN. *Among the ever-burning lamps waits a warden that never sleeps: chains through his shoulders, a cracked bronze mask, embers glowing inside him. At half health he tears off his wrappings and catches fire.*



THE PUPPETEER SPEAKS. *Threads drop from the dark and lift a dead king's mask like a marionette, and for the first time the villain speaks, calm and amused: "You keep breaking my toys." The mask turns to Vella: "And give your patron my regards." (Concept note: this mask reads too close to a real pharaoh's mask; it will be redesigned as an invented mask before any production use.)*

The forged letter that collected his armour is in Stalvan's own clumsy hand, copied from the letters stolen from his house: *"Even 'Wednesday' with two Ds."* The news of the dark ship comes from the signal boy the party freed in Chapter 4, or from the harbour captain who took him in. And under the chiselled mural Zanze says it again: *"Someone keeps cutting out the price."*

In the game today. Chapter 6 is playable from the ride in to the empty cup (Milestone 5, in the game since 2026-11-17). A night and a day on the sect's camels; the party rides into Meneferu at dusk under the message "Chapter 6 · The Empty Seat". Short of the Old Bridge the camels kneel and bolt (*"They smell something on the river. Desert animals. They'll be home by morning."*), and Stalvan goes ahead alone to Hepu's pawn shop: *"Back before supper. Nobody eat my supper."* The cut-away "A cup of wine" shows the player what the party cannot see: Orri, the friendly one, has a cup ready (*"Stalvan! At last. Here. You'll want a cup after the desert."*), the plate has "gone ahead" by a letter in Stalvan's own way of writing, and Skarde, the Iron King's Taker, waits in the doorway with the chain while Stalvan, standing at the counter, drinks: *"Strong. ...My friends are coming. You'll like them."* The party finds the shop empty, fights Skarde's men at the quay steps in a fight that ends on time, and from the top of the steps sees the boat row off with Stalvan under the net. The captain promises a ship once they know where she went; Hepu offers them the forged letter, the hero may take Stalvan's axe from the stones, and at the counter they read what happened: *"His cup's on this side. He drank with his back to the door." "He never turns his back to a door. ...He thought he was home."* From here the party is four. See Papyria.

The empty seat (Milestone 6, in the game since 2026-11-17). That night Hepu gives them the forged letter (*"Take it. I don't want it in the house tonight."*) and a real note to hold it against (*"Last spring's. 'Hepu, it's me. The plate. Keep it dry.'"*). At Imsa's forecourt one table is laid for five, and the fifth cushion stays empty, a bowl going cold before it and the axe beside it: *"I laid for five. I'm not taking it away." "He's never late for supper." "He'd have said something here. Something about the bread." "He'd have said it better than you."* Nobody eats. A plain fade, and it is morning. On the way to the harbour watch Manfred tries Stalvan's goose story and nobody laughs. Captain Ruhet names the ship from its papers: *"A northern ship. Papers in order, from Jarnborg. Iron traders, they said."* The captain walked one of the northmen to Ruhet's gate in the night, and he sits in the watch's cage: **Hallvar**, a Kaldvik fisherman taken off his own boat in spring and made to row (*"I'm not one of them. I'm from Kaldvik."*). The party talks to him through the bars with a roll, each member in their own way, and whatever the dice say, he names Kaldvik; told well, he names the prison: *"The Iron King keeps his prisoners in the old mine above Kaldvik. Iron bars. Walls of ice."* In Manfred's workshop, with the car's yard empty outside, Zanze lays out the library's survey of the northern mines (*"I copied it first. I copy everything."*), Manfred names the tool (*"A flame would do it. ... I can build the torch." "The fuel is the problem."*), Zanze names the fuel, the lamps of the Sealed Kings, and the hero decides: *"Then we go east."* Beside the main road run three small quests (Ipu's Letters, The Man on the Quay, The Nozzle). The part ends at dusk in the picture, with Hesuk at the camel pen pointing the road east to the Sealed Kings, and no black screen. See Papyria.



THE EMPTY SEAT. *One table laid for five at Imsa's forecourt, the fifth cushion empty with the axe beside it: "I laid for five. I'm not taking it away." (engine frames of the cinematic).*

The Steward (Milestone 7a, in the game since 2026-11-18). After a night at Imsa's, with knocks at the door and nobody there (*"Somebody's polite tonight."*), the party of four walks out at first light over the old causeway to the necropolis of the Sealed Kings. The pyramid's door is sealed, with three hollows in the shape of a face. In the first crypt the Steward, a dead man in a copper mask, tolls his bell and his servants rise from the floor. When he has fallen, the mask lies on his table: *"That isn't his face. It's the king's."* The built story ends at the General's door. The General's and the Embalmer's crypts and the pyramid itself are planned. See Papyria.



THE STEWARD'S MASK. *The copper mask on the Steward's table, the party around it: "That isn't his face." (engine frame of the scene).*

The ever-burning lamps (Milestone 7c, built in B59, 0.1.257, on 2026-11-25). The pyramid on island 2 holds the king's rooms: the cat rooms, the Gallery of Jackals with its level-5 chest, the lapis King and the red King, who can be killed in either order, and the Lamp Warden among the burning pools on the floor. The party walks out into the sunset and down the causeway to the town at night. The objective is "Sail north with the captain"; the voyage north comes with the next build.

The Faces (Milestone 7b, built in B57, 0.1.255, on 2026-11-24, not installed). The necropolis goes on into the General's crypt and the Embalmer's crypt, with two fights, the General and the Embalmer. The masks in the sand are shown in a cinematic, the party walks out, and the story holds at the pyramid door: *"The pyramid opens with the next build."* The third part, M7c "The ever-burning lamps", is built in B59, on 2026-11-25 (see below).

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Frozen Shore

Kaldvik · *Finish the first northern mission, then lose the boat again.*



KALDVIK. *A fjord harbour of longhouses in the snow. The good king welcomes them warily: another king has been seizing people he calls dangerous, and he will help only if they prove themselves.*

In Kaldvik, a fjord harbour of longhouses in the snow, the good king, Ormar, will help only if the party proves itself, and a blizzard rolls in during their first mission. When they return, the captain's ship is sinking at the pier, cut by the same glowing cut as in Stara Luka. *"Someone is following you."* In the hills north-west of Kaldvik, in a prison of iron and ice, Stalvan sits in chains, lifts his head and grins at the bars: *"Supper's late."* A single snare drum begins. The prologue ends on *"Who pulls the strings?"* and the first act, *The Escape*, begins with his breakout.

Bread and salt. Nobody in Kaldvik will speak to a southern face: since a southern gentleman went to Jarnborg at the thaw, Jarnborg's men have come dressed as southern traders and taken people. The door to the king's hall stays shut until the party pulls an ice-fisher and her son out of a boat caught in the freezing fjord, with Manfred's blowtorch (*"It's for Stalvan." "Stalvan would already be on the ice."*) or on foot across the cracking ice. By the old law, whoever pulls a life out of the ice eats bread and salt at the king's fire. King Ormar is carving a notch into a pole covered in notches when they come in: *"Every notch is a name. Taken by Jarnborg since spring. A king who forgets a name doesn't deserve the next one."* His neighbour was a hard man, but a man, until a gentleman in a fine grey coat came to his hall with gifts. *"They say he wears a new stone in his crown now. Dark. Warm as a hearth."* Vella's mark flares under her sleeve, and Zanze sees it. (Bread and Salt)



THE ICE. *A fishing boat caught in the pack ice, twenty metres out. Manfred cuts a channel while Zanze crawls out with the rope: "Hold the rope. Don't hold the boat. The boat isn't coming."*



THE KING'S FIRE. *King Ormar offers bread and salt beside the name pole: "Eat, and you're my guests. Guests don't lie at my fire."*



THE BLIZZARD. *Raiders from the other king's land attack a fishing village on the fjord, and a blizzard rolls in halfway through the fight. They win the king's trust, and one hint: a giant was taken through the mountain pass.*



THE BOAT SINKS AGAIN. *Back at the harbour the captain's ship is going down, cut by the same glowing cut as in Stara Luka. "The same cut, twice, on two islands. Someone is following you."*



SUPPER'S LATE. *Far away, in a prison of iron and ice, Stalvan sits in chains without his armour. He lifts his head, looks at the bars and grins: "Supper's late." A single drum begins, and the prologue ends.*

Side quests

Eleven side quests run beside the main road, each worth playing for itself and each with a choice the game remembers, and one thread quest, Puppet Silver, follows the Puppeteer's marked coins through them all; their full scripts are on Side quests of the Prologue.

Quest	Type	Chapter	Where
The Grey Without a Rider	minor	2	the stables, the spring on the hill road
New Oil	minor	2–3	Masline, the charcoal burners' hut
The Scholar in the Footings	minor	3	the old-empire tower on Glavat
The Salt Road	minor	3	the salt pans, under Ragosa's south wall
What the Lake Keeps	**big**	2–3	the mill, Jezerine, the Querceto tower, the drained lake
A Light in Stalvan's Window	**big**	4	Ipu's bakery, Stalvan's court, the pawn shop, the ferry landing
Overdue	minor	4–5	the temple archive, the fish stalls, the library
Eyes on the River	minor	4	the watchtower, the reeds
Grandfather of the Reeds	minor	4	the reed bars
The Mummy Thread	small (in the game)	4	Sabu's stall at the bazaar, the ruins of Hetsa
Bread and Salt	pre-quest	7	Kaldvik: the king's door, the fjord ice, the king's fire
Puppet Silver	thread quest	3 to the final act	wherever the coins turn up: the road to Ragosa, Meneferu, Kaldvik



THE QUEST MAP. *The five road quests on the planning map of the road from Stara Luka to Ragosa (MAP-RAGOSA-1, version 4). Badges 1–4 are the minor quests, L1 to L5 the steps of What the Lake Keeps; every one lies within four minutes' walk of the inn.*

The Missing Mayor

The mayor of Stara Luka never appears in the Prologue, but every chapter finds his trail, and he is always one day ahead of the party: Stara Luka, Ragosa, out through the harbour chain at night, Meneferu, and, the spring before the story began, Jarnborg in the north.

- **Chapter 1.** The party carries his contract, and finds its twin on the lost crew: the same words, three weeks older. He promised the town "a company"; three came. His house is barred from the outside, his coat still on its hook. Nana saw him a week ago, Mare three nights ago, Luka last night: no two on the same day. Names are crossed out in the book of the dead, not by Nana's hand.
- **Chapter 2.** His grey mare is found riderless, with a knot-sealed summons in her saddlebag and a child's marionette with cut strings. He ordered a waterproof saddlebag a month ago, "travelling far, and soon". After the fever winter he became kinder.
- **Chapter 3.** He asked a scholar about "the kings who did not die". He got into Ragosa before the gates shut and laughs at the council's supper. He paid a miller to look away from the lights under the lake. A boat with no rowers

carries a grey coat out through the harbour chain.

- **Chapter 4.** A soft-voiced islander in a grey coat asked for Stalvan's house and his red stone, offered to buy his armour ("He said he could wait"), asked the temple for library books, and counted a frightened boy's coins, then gave him one extra for being brave.
- **Chapter 7.** At the thaw a southern gentleman in a fine grey coat came to Jarnborg with gifts. Since then its king doesn't sleep.

Every clue can be read three ways: **victim** (the barred door, the shaking hand that pressed the seal twice, his fear of what lay under his town), **accomplice** (the miller's silver, the knot coins, the red stone) or **culprit** (the sightings that don't add up, the cut marionette, the laughter in a city under quarantine). Nobody in the party says it aloud. Vella comes closest, once: *"Or there are two of him."*



THE FEVER WINTER. *A flashback: a father in a grey coat on the edge of his daughter's empty bed, a little wooden marionette in his hands. The marionettes he carved for her hang on their rail.*



PUPPET SILVER. *The bandits' pay on the road to Ragosa: old silver struck with a knot, three threads cut below it and a tiny puppet of red gold where they end. The same coins turn up in a frightened boy's purse in Meneferu, and on a northern king's table.* *Puppet Silver*

The mystery threads

The prologue plants ten questions and answers none of them.

Thread	Planted	The open question
The crew that never came back	Chapter 1, the boat	Why did the mayor send two letters, with the same words, three weeks apart?
Who controlled the lich	Chapter 1, the threads and the snapped strings	Who is the Puppeteer?
What the dead were digging for	Chapter 1, the tunnels toward the inn and the dig face	What is the stone?
Vella's pact mark	Chapter 1, the mark that flares (the hollow lich, the dig face)	Who is her patron, and why does the stone affect her?
The missing mayor	Chapter 1, Nana's Insight roll; then every side quest	Victim, accomplice or culprit? And how is he always a day ahead?
The sunk boats	Chapter 1's end, the glowing cut and the Cut Splinter (CH1-END-2; Chapter 2 before)	Who is following the party, and why strand them?
Stalvan's capture	Chapter 6, the stolen armour and the seal	Why does the northern king want Stalvan?
The three stones	Chapter 5, the vault	Who woke the third stone, and how?
The Drowned Chart	Chapter 3, What the Lake Keeps	Who drowned a map of the stones under a lake, and who sent the dead to fetch it?
The cut words	Chapters 3–6: the scholar's tablets, the temple book, the mural	What do the stones cost, and who keeps cutting out the price?

Behind the curtain

Spoilers: the director's notes for the acts after the Prologue and the ending, never said in the Prologue. The full notes are on The Puppeteer.

The Puppeteer is the mayor, and he is pure evil behind a good man's face. Ser Filip *(working)* is Stara Luka's notary turned mayor, who passes for a rope-maker's son: secretly the last of the patrician family that took the Octagon, about three hundred years old, a warlock of the Pact of the Thread. Every kindness the town remembers is an act, a purchase or a tool. The one true thing in him is his love for his wife and daughter. It doesn't make him good. It makes him certain.

The fever winter. Two winters before the game a grain ship with sick men aboard anchored off the hungry town. Filip wanted it kept at anchor thirty days, as Ragosa would have done; the council and the harbour outvoted him, and the law made the mayor sign. Forty houses buried someone that winter. His daughter Mila, seven, died first, and a week later his wife Dora, the midwife, who had nursed the sick children of the houses that shouted loudest for the grain. Then the town came to his door, one family at a time, to forgive *him*. He thanked each of them, and never forgave the town. Nine nights after Mila's burial he took up the founder's old threads under the headland and tied one to his daughter. *She stood. She smiled when he pulled. She never spoke.*

What he wants. The three stones, woken together, make *"a ruler who never dies"*, whom the dead obey. He believes they will give him back Dora and Mila whole, and he means the price, *"A ruler who never dies rules a people who never live"*, as the town's sentence: every soul in Stara Luka on threads, forever. He cuts that line out of every text on the

party's road so that no one who could stop him reads it.

The knot and the two letters. The founder, afraid of his own house, had tied the stone under Stara Luka shut with a knot that *"nothing I have raised and no one of my blood"* can undo, so Filip needs living strangers. **The first letter was a key:** Captain Harl's crew went in by the sea door with his key to cut the knot; the dig was weeks short, they saw the dead tunnelling toward the town and locked the gate on him, and he set the crypt's dead on them and listened until they stopped. **The second letter was a leash:** he chose the party himself, and gave them a master to beat (the hollow lich was only his control bar, dressed up), a thread to carry, a question they can't leave alone and a fee he never pays. *"A paid man goes home. A man who is owed comes back."*

Vella's sight (Act 1). After the Prologue, one night by the fire in the north, Vella wakes screaming under the roaring face of a dead man: Captain Harl, who has followed his contract in the party's pack since Chapter 1. From then on she sees the dead who wait, and only she sees them. In Act 2 Zanze names it: grave-sight. In the final act the captain's ghost walks behind the mayor all the way home, and a woman and a girl in a white dress wait on the mausoleum hill.

The reveal. In Act 1, in Stalvan's cell, the Puppeteer tells him a story through the Iron King's mouth: *"Every family has a chest like that. Most never open it."* Zanze writes it down. In the final act, at Nana's table, the night he comes home with the party, Filip tells Nana the same story in the same words. **Zanze:** *"What? Can you say that again?"* **Filip:** *"You heard me well. Even this empty-headed brute has figured it out."* **Stalvan:** *"Same story."* Then the chaos starts, because the last stone lies under the inn and now he has everything he needs. When he dies, every thread he holds falls, Mila's too.

The last scene of the game. The party sails out of Stara Luka at dawn, past the headland it came in by. On the hill by the mausoleum only Vella sees him, with Dora and Mila, at peace at last. She nods to him.



THE SLIP (FINAL-ACT CONCEPT). *Nana's inn at night: Filip, at ease by the fire, has just told his story; Zanze's pen has stopped, and Stalvan is already on his feet.*



THE LAST SCENE. *Dawn; the ship leaves Stara Luka with the hero, Vella, Stalvan, Zanze and Manfred at the rail. On the headland by the mausoleum stand the mayor, his wife and his daughter, at peace. Only Vella can see them, and she nods to him.*

Stalvan's jokes

Stalvan carries the party's comedy, in the story and never in the combat AI: a different scar story every time someone asks, a coin trick he hasn't finished learning, a ride on the car roof and many more, plus a joke in the tomb for the others. They are all on their own page, line by line: **Stalvan's jokes**.

Notes

Abilities

Every party member has exactly two abilities in the prologue: a main one on the big attack button and a second one on a skill button. The hero has Slash and Whirlwind, Vella Lightning Bolt and Urok, Stalvan Boring Attack and Taunt (see the demo); Manfred brings Explosive Bolt and a clockwork Frag Grenade, and Zanze Smite and the healing Oathlight. While Stalvan is gone, Zanze holds the enemies as the off-tank.

Rules the story keeps

- **This world's own faiths.** Both of the library's sects worship gods of this world, with their own colours and symbols, and the Sealed Kings and their jackal guards belong to this world's own ancient history.
- **The stones are named only in Chapter 5,** and the lich is never named in advance.

Open decisions

Unconfirmed — awaiting the director: the captain (she or he) and the captain's name; the final names of the mayor, his family, the good king and his neighbour (working since STORY-QUESTS-1: Ser Filip, Dora and Mila, King Ormar of Kaldvik, the Iron King of Jarnborg; proposed by STORY-MAYOR-2: the rope-makers Užar, and the patrician family de Nodo or Corvo); the sigil and the thread colour (working: a tied knot with three hanging threads, pale gold); the final act's shape (the proposal is in Behind the curtain; what the party does for the mayor on the day they come home, and the last fight, "we will define this later"); Vella's patron; where exactly the stone under Stara Luka lies, and in which chapter the party finds it; Zanze's heal values and Vella's armour; levelling after Chapter 1; whether Peels appears on the northern dock at the end; and the story of the red stone in Stalvan's armour. See Open questions.

L O A A

Sources: plan - future for prologue.md (the director, 2026-10-06, revised to 2026-10-22); the side quests, the missing mayor and the Puppeteer's motive from docs/plan/story_quests_1.md (STORY-QUESTS-1, the director's ask of 2026-10-25); the mayor's life and the two letters from docs/plan/story_mayor_2.md (STORY-MAYOR-2, the director's ask of 2026-10-26); Chapter 3-5 beats approved by the user 2026-10-16 (docs/plan/ch4_ch5_story.md); the Chapter 1 escape from docs/decisions.md 2026-10-22 11:36 (STORY-SCRIPT-1) and Chapter_1_Script.md Scene 8; Chapter 6 in the game (Milestone 6) from docs/plan/papyria/m6_lines.md, data/demo/meneferu_story.json and data/cinematics/men_empty_seat.json, men_prison_plans.json (PAP-M6-DOCS); pictures: references/concept/prologue_future/, references/concept/ch1_script/ (shots.tsv), references/concept/ch6/, references/concept/story_quests_1/ (Nano Banana 2, look-dev only).

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The paintings are look-development concept art, never shipped in the game.

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