


 **banana (GM):** who wants a Scene Set

 **VoxPVoxD:** I mean, I guess, if you're into that kind of thing


 **banana (GM):** i am! although once the game's defined enough as to have actually started there's no reason vignettes would require gm setup. what i'm gonna do this time though is put a couple of Things around and ahve some stuff going on in the background, which you can pay attention to or not as you please


 **VoxPVoxD:** cool


 **Crion (Ghol):** ...maps?...


 **banana (GM):** Axis, of all cities, is safe for citizens of the Dragon Empire, which you technically are. The wilds outside - the Conqueror and Elector have made them a lot less wild than they used to be. But there's a war on, and sensible people still travel in groups. This requires planning, to make sure that the funny little gnome you met yesterday is still a good companion in the light of unleafy day.


 **VoxPVoxD:** The perfidy!


 **banana (GM):** ..or the brash young wargmaster, or the mandragon, for that matter. And there's one meeting place which everybody knows how to find, where such a gathering won't even be slightly remarkable. Not here, not today. This is Market Square at the arenameet of Axis, and it's Market Blessing Day. Anybody who wants to know what market blessing day \*is\*, feel free to make an int check. Otherwise- flat black stones, irregularly cut, form a vast concave area between Axis' inner lavawall and its major bureaucratic extrusions. Stalls and booths cover two-thirds of the outer square, and travelling entertainers caper in the center- but more and more crowds are gathering to the third side of its irregularly cut triangle, where the Chapel of the Elect rises stone-domed out of stone with stone accoutrements. It menaces with spikes of stone. At the opposite point to the chapel there are overhangs and rapidly moving men selling cool drinks and filling food; beings of all races rest before their next plunge back into the stalls. Which are close enough for you to hear the barkers cries, still, but far and noisy enough that nobody can actually hear your discussion.

 **Crion (Ghol):** Ghol is still grumbling about Kon not being allowed into the city "without muzzle or lead" when he arrives. That guard is lucky there's hundreds of him, as well as well as a massive support structure in place and the rule of law to back him up. The half-orc has at least decided to put on a shirt, a white cotton peasant tunic thing he got in trade from a merchant for some rabbits on the road a few days back. It does not mesh particularly well with the other animal leathers he's wearing, but they didn't teach him much of fashion in the Orc Lord's service.

 **banana (GM):** Ghol draws looks. Ghol isn't the only half-orc about, though! He's seen others in shining armour with men who follow their orders.. but they didn't quite have his ears...

 **Crion (Ghol):** Urgh. He's thought about trying to find something with a hood, but the ears will just tent the thing out... Besides, it's too damn hot right now for a hood.

 **banana (GM):** Faraway: "Fresh mandarins! Mandarins from across the Iron Sea! Preserved in elemental ice for your delight, the juicy treat from the hypothetical East-"

 **Crion (Ghol):** What the heck is going...?

rolling 1d20

(19)

= 19



**Zarick:** Vraknaar definitely isn't going to put a shirt on. These pants already irritate his scales and he's drawn the line. Besides, given his wings, he'd have to mangle the hell out of a shirt to get it to work.



**VoxPVoxD:** Ugh, crowds. Placidus weaves between the careless stomping of larger people, a skill gnomes who have to stoop to city living for any length of time cultivate quickly indeed. It stinks to high heaven, the crush of people in their heat and sweat overwhelming the sweetness of the wares on display.



**banana (GM):** Oh, it's this. Ghol heard people talking about this every time he came close to 'civilised' towns, and the phrases stuck in his head.



**VoxPVoxD:** rolling d20+6

(16)+6

= 22



**banana (GM):** The Market Blessing, taking place every 24 days in all the larger towns and cities of the western Empire, is the travelling circus of the Church of the Elect. It's not a festival of acrobats, but a holy event in the sense of 'bread and circuses' - the people gather, and the Gods of Light fulfil their prayers.

Obviously it's not a surprise to Placidus, either. He's never \*seen\* one, though. The more dedicated services of Megistus have no place for this - it's strictly an act of the gods in combination, a slightly vulgar and blatant display of their might and their right to praise.



**Crion (Ghol):** Hrm. Yes, he's been around for one of these before in a larger village that was up north. Not really so much there anymore. He'll keep his eyes open to anything dedicated to Pauldron, though he doesn't much go in for organized warship (and, in his experience, neither does his god).



**banana (GM):** A barker closer to the gathered three: "Ikons! Get your disposable ikons here to offer in tribute, symbols of thanks, fine jewelery at low prices-"



**VoxPVoxD:** He \*is\* hungry, though. Mandarins, imported mandarins...! You don't get those just anywhere. Lots of towns are big enough to rate a Market Blessing, but only a proper city gets fresh fruit on shipment. He reaches into his habit, by habit, for coins he knows aren't there. Oh, right. Drat.



**banana (GM):** Nobody has money on them? That's going to be a shame when it comes time to pay for the breadsticks and lager they've been serving at this sheltered table.

On the other hand, it suggests some definite goals for the coming journey.



**Zarick:** Vraknaar has a small money pouch tied to the rope belt on his pants, which seems pretty risky in a city of this size, but on the other hand, who's going to cut a dragon's purse strings?



**banana (GM):** It's the City of Stones, not the City of Thieves (that would be Shadowback, some way to the east).



**Crion (Ghol):** Breadsticks. Why not just call them bread? Ghol downs some more lager.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus was only able to scrape together enough coin to hitch a ride on a caravan to Axis a few days ago. He's been strapped for cash since, though as a mendicant brother he's both used to relying on charity and more doors are held open to him. His quick, dark little eyes are roving the crowd, and he marks things with little bobs and jerks of his head that threaten to topple him off of the precarious booster seat he's on to be mostly-level with Ghol.



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol, being on his best behavior, has only BRIEFLY considered just, like, poking him. Just once. Not that hard. He's right there!



**banana (GM):** In the distance the churchgrowing crowd has assembled. There must be hundreds of petitioners and ten times that many spectators, all queueing eager and pious in lines defined by rope and wooden poles. It looks like the travelling priest has come out to join them - a hefty woman in well-cut robes of simple material, flanked by a couple of Imperial soldiers and carrying the plain cross of the Elect. Cheers go up prematurely- it'll still take a while to set up the altar.



**VoxPVoxD:** It's a credit to the length of Placidus's limbs that he can still reach the table from his awkward perch. He grabs a breadstick (not touching the beer; living in an abbey spoiled him for most commercial brewing) and uses it to point at the gathering throng. "You see that? Business is good."



**Zarick:** "Business? What are they selling there?"



**Crion (Ghol):** "What AREN'T they?" asks Ghol rhetorically before another swig.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "They're not selling. They're buying. Specifically, they're buying adoration. The gods of light are what they are, but the Elector has made an enterprise of them."



**banana (GM):** The priest's voice is effortlessly audible across the square, travelling as it is by divine energy rather than motion of the air. "Please form into two lines. The blessings for the sick first, those in most need, then the announcements, and then we will attend to the general congregation.."

Closer, a new salesman becomes audible, yelling ever-louder to compete with the voice of the Gods. "Maps! World maps, detail maps, made to the specifications of noble princes, guaranteed accurate survey within the Wards of the Realm! Get your fine and incredibly cheap maps-"



**Crion (Ghol):** Maps!



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Do any of you have maps? We could really use some maps."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol, Getting Maps puts down his lager and stands up.  
The half-orc shakes his head. "We should at least see what he's asking for his."



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus nods. "It's a good idea."



**banana (GM):** Oh my gods, the dwarf has radar hearing. He's already turning in your direction. "Sirs I heard you say the word maps and maps is the name of my trade."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ears on a swivel.



**banana (GM):** Lugging a couple of scroll cases around the side of his booth: "You look like the venturing types. Now I won't tell a lie and say these are maps to hidden treasure or magic ruin- these are maps commissioned by lords, by wizards, maps of the whole known world - but they're so fine and lasting, serve you wherever you want to go, and you won't \*believe\* the prices."



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus's head turns veeeery sloooowly.



**Crion (Ghol):** And how!



**Zarick:** "No treasure maps? That's disappointing," Vraknaar rumbles.



**banana (GM):** "Lord dragon sir." The shopkeeper's face is set in a frown. "At prices like these the maps IS the treasure."



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "But not the territory."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol picks up his lager again, face eager. "Do you have maps of the way east?"



**banana (GM):** Dwarf: "I have exactly that - the lands between here and there, the sea and the countries around it, ports and borders. This-" he pats the largest case- "is all the map you'd need for a long journey East."

It's a big one, the sort of map you roll up and carry on your back - or attach to a mule. Looks like something tougher than parchment.



**Zarick:** Vraknaar just doesn't know how to respond to that, and settles for shaking his head. "Going east, then?"



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol looks up, eagerness dimmed by sudden caution. "Might be."



**banana (GM):** Of course you'd have to go south or north first, seeing as the ocean is in the way.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Can we get a look at the map before we decide?"



**banana (GM):** The dwarf beams! "Ah, and I have a rubbing prepared for just this case. Here's a miniature, sir, with the detail removed - showing you the scale and the facets - with fine eyes like yours and magic like that of the walking dragons, of course I can't unroll you the whole thing and have the sale rendered moot. But have this preview."

His parchment copy, a fraction the size of the actual map, looks like this:  
<http://i.imgur.com/mJEOPa.png>



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus squints.



**banana (GM):** You note there's just a couple of parchment rubbings a whole booth of rolled up maps, so he must sell just a couple different series of map.

\*and a whole



**Crion (Ghol):** Hrm. Looks like...land there, sea over there...yes. Ghol is confident that this is a map.



**banana (GM):** "The handiwork of the original sages, I'll admit, is better than my poor copy."



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus just keeps squinting.

rolling d20+5

() + 5

= 6



**banana (GM):** The geography of the map looks very accurate indeed - Placidus hasn't seen better in either of his careers.

"Five gold for the main copy. Barely covers the costs of reproduction, let alone the original survey and materials." That IS cheap if it's as accurate as it looks.



**Zarick:** rolling 1d20+7

(**11**)+7

= **18**



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus leans back, apparently satisfied. Let's see what his companions have to say.



**Zarick:** The dragonwrought doesn't squint, but his eyes do... something, and he seems to focus on it intently.



**Crion (Ghol):** rolling 1d20+2

(**18**)+2

= **20**



**banana (GM):** Vraknaar came from the East - if the southeast, rather than the northeast where Ghol wants to go- and he knows the terrain from land and air. The coastline and the mountains and the forests all look accurate, if stylised- it's obviously a large scale map, no good for military movements, but it looks totally correct.

Ghol doesn't know much to compare it to, but he can tell the quality is fine indeed. He's just got no frame of reference for the actual geography.

Actually, it's a bit too fine. Ghol does not think that the dwarf would be charging 5 gp for a map this size of this quality unless SOMETHING was wrong.



**Crion (Ghol):** The half-orc leans in for a closer look.



**banana (GM):** There's no more to see in the preview than what you've got, sadly. "You won't find a better deal in Axis. Unless you're with the Army. But even the Army don't have maps of the inner sea, not as it is now."



**Crion (Ghol):** "Five gold, hrm. Placidus, what else could we buy with five gold?"

Ghol's not quite sure how far that goes these days and inside these particular borders, being a barterer by both nature and nurture.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "That depends. Five gold is enough to live on for quite some time if you're on your own. But a traveler, especially one who expects danger, will have much greater expenses. You couldn't get a quality sword at that price, for instance, not with the war on. Five gold is a very good price for a map of this size and quality."



**banana (GM):** "Words of wit and wisdom," the salesdwarf flatters.



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol nods. "Thought as much. And it is an exceptionally fine map, to all appearances: that much is plain."



**banana (GM):** On the other side of the square cries begin. "Avantus, whose leg was born twisted, petitions for aid.. the brother of Avantus, whose family has nothing to eat, petitions for green hands.."



**Crion (Ghol):** To the dwarf: "So what's wrong with it?"



**banana (GM):** The priestess: "Rise, Avantus, in wellness, by the blessing of the Elect." A great cheer goes up as the cripple stands, ruined leg visibly filling out into olive flesh.



"Nothing's \*wrong\* with it unless you prefer higher prices, sir."

"In my long career I've found few do. Too many sales unmade due to a hard working salesdwarf's need to meet basic costs."



**VoxPVoxD:** Well, that's nice. As detached and almost cynical as Placidus can be about the Elect, and the arbitrary nature of their manipulation of the faith, the fact remains that the gods of light do good, when they can. They make people's lives better.



**Zarick:** "If you don't meet your costs then what's the point of selling it at all?" Vraknaar asks skeptically.



**Crion (Ghol):** "Grmph. I prefer honest dealings. See, I'm willing to believe a man of your clear acumen might -- might -- be convinced to part with such a map after an afternoon's negotiation. The act of negotiation itself establishes the value of the good being sold. A man who is not willing to negotiate the price of the thing he is selling is, to me, a man who does not value it."



**banana (GM):** "Rise, Azille, in wellness, by the blessing of the Elect." A halfling's face is turning from sickly white as she beams and capers. The crowds definitely agree with Placidus' fonder sentiment right now.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus himself would be glad to take the map at that price, so he tunes out while his bigger, scarier friends haggle and listens to the rituals.



**Crion (Ghol):** "That is to say," says Ghol, "with no offense meant to you, that I am wary of merchants' charity."



**banana (GM):** Looks like there are so many people that they're going in alphabetical order. It proceeds \*fast\*, though. The priest makes motions and lays on hands - and the power of the Gods is evident. Even the desperately ill are being healed in moments, and in numbers.

Shall we abstract this? Given his sense of something a little off, Ghol manages to talk the guy into an even lower price at the cost of some offence- low enough that it doesn't make a dent in even your meager finances.



**Crion (Ghol):** Works for Ghol.



**banana (GM):** The downside is that now you're \*sure\* something is wrong, as he hands over the huge scroll case and scuttles away to begin unpacking the stall- but it's a large and good quality thing, for sure.



**VoxPVoxD:** Is it apparent what the map is made of?



**banana (GM):** On the upside, that was one of the most friendly dwarves you've met. Most of them yell a lot more.

Animal skins, heavily treated.

You'd need the whole table to unroll it on, but there's nothing stopping you from taking a look right now if you want.



**VoxPVoxD:** That \*is\* good quality. Placidus looks up when the dwarf totters off. "Shall we take a look?"



**Crion (Ghol):** The half-orc frowns. "It's not that I'm unhappy to get a map almost for free, but I'm definitely suspicious of it."

"Sure." Ghol begins clearing the table.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Now that he's got our money, hopefully whatever defect will be more apparent."

"It looked very good at a glance..."



**banana (GM):** Oh, the defect's apparent. It takes about a second's attention.

This map is very well made - it really is of the quality a lord would want for their Map Of The Known World to hang up somewhere.

Also, it's at least 25 years old, and could be double that.

(( i've added a handout. it's large, so you might want to open this standalone version instead: <http://11a.forthedor.de/map-federation.png> ))

Consequently, it does not take into account the existence of the Dragon Empire.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus snorts.

"Is that even legal?"



**banana (GM):** Nope.



**Zarick:** "Unless you want me to scatter to crowd going after him, it's probably not worth pursuing. Nice catch, Ghol. At least we didn't pay much for it."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol grins and nods at Vraaknar. Who cares about the Dragon Empire? He's got a map -- a good one, too -- of how to get east. The only lines he cares for are the ones for mountains, forests, rivers and roads.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus nods. "Very perceptive. And it's not like the sea's in a different spot now."



**banana (GM):** Priest: "..Ciara, whose child was born half-orcish, petitions for relief. The child will be taken into the Church and raised as a priest, and Ciara is blessed with the ability to tell good from evil for her forbearance.."

This time the petitioner looks instantly dismayed, but the crowd still cheers.

Right, not even this "world-ending" war has altered the coastline.



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol looks up and frowns briefly at the woman giving up her child, but then dives back into the map. Not really his problem.

After a moment Ghol glances over at Placidus, trying to figure out how to best phrase this innocuously. "I don't see the Elven capital marked on here." Surely they have a capital, right?



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus looks at the map. Ought they to have a capital?



**Zarick:** "Do they have one? I thought they just like... lived in trees and such."



**banana (GM):** Well. It shows the PREVIOUS elven capital.

Between ten and fifteen years ago.. Placidus lived in Gnoplac, right? Somewhere along the lakes?

The conflagration of the Kingswood was visible from a hundred miles away.

They call that area Forge Colony now, and it's where the dwarves are making a new home.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus clears his throat. "I don't know where they live \*now\*. But the Kingswood, here - the elves used to have their capital here at the Court - is gone."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol keeps his shoulders from slumping. "Hrm." So, still no idea where she is.



**banana (GM):** He'll have to ask an elf... or follow his dreams.



**Crion (Ghol):** At this rate he might actually have to talk to an elf. Ghol has been trying to put off that

conversation -- indeed, contact with elves at all -- for as long as possible.



**VoxP****VoxD:** Placidus, unhelpfully: "Perhaps they all moved from Kingswood to Queenswood."



**banana (GM):** Priest: "Fhernon, whose company is marching out to the front lines of the Glitterwood siege, petitions for victory. The blessings of the Elect upon him and his men; their swords will strike true and their shields will deflect terrible bone claws." This time, the surge of divine energy is so powerful that you can *\*feel\** it throughout the square, as a sort of low-grade warmth - people gasp and mutter and wonder at these blessings of war.



**Crion (Ghol):** Whoa. Ghol looks up again. "Glitterwood, huh?"



**VoxP****VoxD:** Placidus: "What? What about Glitterwood?" He looks around.

"...oh."

"Oh, yes. The siege. Terrible business."



**Zarick:** "That's some strong stuff. Hope we don't have to fight them."



**banana (GM):** This one's a matter of public knowledge: Glitterhaegen still holds out after all these years, and without Glitterhaegen, the Conqueror has no deepwater port in the West.  
So Omen, such as it is, still rules the sea...



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol points to it on the map. "Can't get east without getting through it, not without swinging north and going through...whatever's left here." He taps the Kingswood.



**VoxP****VoxD:** Placidus: "The dwarves are making a new home of what's left of the Kingswood."

"It isn't safe to go through Glitterwood."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol makes a face. Again...not his problem, but...



**Zarick:** "Well, they're our allies, right? Shouldn't be too hard to go through there."



**banana (GM):** Well, Ghol does know ONE thing that's left there, way up north: a shitload of orcs. The main body of the Orc Lord's Movement is in the northwest corridor, stalemated with some sort of evil gods' army.

Getting to the dwarven lands would be safe enough. Beyond them, maybe not.



**Crion (Ghol):** He'll keep that to himself for the moment.



**banana (GM):** Ghol himself, of course, deserted\* from the smaller horde that's swung around to cross what the map calls High Dock (not that any of the mountain villages were calling it that as they were crushed and despoiled).

He lost maybe six months of his life slowly crawling through that damn marsh, orcs dying of fever and dengue and crocodile, but following strange maps and protected by odd "allies"' lights in the night.

Kon had dire fleas.



**Crion (Ghol):** Not an experience either is enthusiastic about repeating.



**VoxP****VoxD:** Placidus: "This will do for a start, at least. We might look into getting a better map later, but this is adequate to our needs and very well-made."



**Zarick:** "You can hang it on your wall when you're done wandering."



**Crion (Ghol):** If they HAVE to go through the old elf kingdom, however, he'd certainly at least like to



visit the ruins of the old Court. Though the dwarves might have been angry enough to not even leave ruins...



**banana (GM):** Priest: "Yellow Boy, whose pigs were taken by bandits, petitions for justice.. the Elect curse his foes and reveal them to the Light.. the location of their lair will be given to the Dragon Army, and the disposition of their souls left to inevitability."



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Assuming that when you're done wandering, you settle down in a place where displaying this map wouldn't be treason."



**Crion (Ghol):** Wow. Go Yellow Boy.



**VoxPVoxD:** He's probably not getting the pigs back, though.



**banana (GM):** The Gods can only do so much.



**Zarick:** "Where would displaying an old map be treason?"



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "The Dragon Empire, which this map doesn't acknowledge the existence of at all."



**banana (GM):** It'd probably depend on whether you hung it up with a sign reading THE WAY THINGS SHOULD BE or something.



**VoxPVoxD:** "You see, even the volcano is marked here as Crucible. Have either of you ever heard it called that?"



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol shakes his head.



**banana (GM):** Vraknaar should roll to see if he has, actually.



**Crion (Ghol):** He hasn't heard a lot of things, though.



**Zarick:** "No. I mean I get it, I guess. But they changed it?"



**banana (GM):** They have a different view of history in the southeast, and there's a chance..



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "I've never known it to be called Crucible. I suspect that's a name for it in the east."



**banana (GM):** This can be either an int check... or a relationship roll with the Five.



**Zarick:** "Makes sense, I guess. This whole operation didn't even exist that long ago."

rolling 1d6 i love dragons

( 3 )

= 3

aw



**banana (GM):** The name rings a bell, but you couldn't say what the implications are.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Well, it's not terribly important right now."

**banana (GM):** Most people round here are certainly quite happy to look to the future.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Though, actually, I could use a word with a local scholar if we can find one. I want to ask about the forest..."



**banana (GM):** Speaking of which, the blessings are done. Even as weeping families embrace, the healed head determinedly to sweet stands, etc, the priest keeps talking - fatigueless in her service of the Elect Gods.

"..announcements and then questions from the petitioners. Firstly, we must give thanks to the long and loyal service of Megistus, travellers' god."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol's ears perk up at the mention of the forest. Like, they twitch a little bit. They've started doing that recently. Kind of concerning.



**banana (GM):** "He has been a patron to those in need and a pillar of the gods since near the year zero, but of course the Election results are clear.."

How is it concerning. Kon's always done that!



**Crion (Ghol):** As he's fond of reminding Ghol.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus frowns in the direction of the priest.



**Zarick:** "Election? Do they vote on their gods here?" This seems like a sincere question (and a bad idea).



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Not exactly."



**banana (GM):** "..and the good news is the elevation of Prame. Prame, the green-eyed dwarf, whose domains are the excision of unnecessary regrets and the channelling of dark thoughts into light deeds, has much to offer- the blessings of Prame were on display today among others.."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol just waves a dismissive hand in response. The whole "Election" business has seemed a silly idea to him since the day the Host's tutors first explained it to him.



**banana (GM):** Big cheer from one small section of the crowd. "..and the disciples of Prame have been a familiar sight around these streets recently I'm sure. Praise be to all the Elect who serve the Empire so reliably."

The ikon sellers in the stands are already updating their inventory, replacing the little symbols of Megistus on their racks with a stylised hammer-turned-inward highlit in jade ochre.



**VoxPVoxD:** What a racket.

Placidus: "We should roll this up and get going."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol nods and gets to it.



**banana (GM):** The atmosphere here has turned rather.. political. Might be best as the man says to get somewhere calmer and away from the crowds.

You can't hear what the petitioner calls, only the priest's reply, but she's helpfully repeating the main points: "When are the field blessings available for the planting? Check with your nearest chapel, but the Elector's chosen will be arriving at major homesteads and markets on the first feastday after the vernal equinox.. that's eleven days from now.."



**VoxPVoxD:** So, what does it take to find a savant or a librarian in this town?



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol frowns and tugs a bit on his collar. Librarians. Book learning. Still not used to this shirt.



**banana (GM):** The questions and answers are still coming as you leave the heat and noise of Market Square. "Why is Skerrl the Deep among the Elect? Well, he's a powerful deity.. many have questioned the wisdom of the Erskines, but negotiations are still ongoing.. the joint-rule experiment in Ersatz is going well. The Elector is keeping an eye on Skerrl's chosen people for sure, but they aren't actually \*enemies\* at this time, and they could provide us access to the vile city of Santa Cora.." MANY boos at the mention of the City of Palaces.



**Crion (Ghol):** "Vile city of Santa Cora?" Huh.



**banana (GM):** As the operating base of the dark gods' cults, it is probably considered "worse than omen" by some of the church.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "We need to think about which way we want to go when we leave. If we want to go east, then we'll need to break either north or south from here. I'd favor south - there's work I'd like to do and the Marrow would be a good place to do it, safe and stable and full of scholars."



**banana (GM):** Ghol might not know that vOv



**VoxPVoxD:** For Ghol's benefit: "Santa Cora is the seat of the cults of darkness."



**banana (GM):** Some of them, anyway. They tell Stories about Santa Cora.  
\*very unpleasant stories\*



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "They tell stories about Santa Core. Very unpleasant ones."



**banana (GM):** On the other hand it's a port from which you could easily and safely sail to Queenswood. Land of contrasts?



**VoxPVoxD:** "It is a port, though. You might have seen it on the map, it's quite close to Omen."



**Zarick:** "Lots of people tell nasty stories about Drakkenhall, too. Being close to Omen is probably bad for everyone involved, though."



**banana (GM):** Only if you don't like the eternal reign of the legions of the dead and damned over a captive, stagnant land.



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "I bet the Wizard King likes it just fine."



**Zarick:** The dragonwrought actually growls, a sound that probably terrifies any passing common folk. "Not for long, if I can help it."



**banana (GM):** Sounds like \*someone's\* going East.  
(but not as far east)



**VoxPVoxD:** Placidus: "Well, we're well short of a warband, even if your mysterious brother will be joining us - will he, by the way?"



**banana (GM):** So Axis is a town of logistics and entrepreneurs. The Conquest is supplied out of here, and the caldera population swells daily - but they're not scholars, generally. With Horizon relatively close, sages and spellcrafters gravitate to the City of Crowns (or as it's being rebranded, Of Wonders).



**Zarick:** "Hopefully. He's a little more... hot-tempered. Which is funny, given our birthrights, I suppose."



**banana (GM):** The most comprehensive repository of knowledge Placidus has been able to find, to which he's leading the others, is therefore: the Dragonriders' College.



**VoxP****VoxD:** Placidus: "Well, that's typical. Whatever you two do is typical, being that you are alone of your type."  
"Nobody gets to tell you what it means to be a man-dragon, because nobody else could possibly know."



**banana (GM):** This spiralling edifice is set into and up the caldera wall; towers, stairs and platforms rise high above the scrubland and stone pathway. There's a little guardpost at the main ground level tunnel-entrance; it's only a little guardpost because like. Sitting on those platforms and soaring around above and even scrambling within the caverns are \*dozens of adult wyrms\*.  
It's a school for officers and cavalry of the empire, teaching history and tactics and dragonfriendship alike- and for this moment of Axis' youth, they've got the most comprehensive library around.



**Zarick:** "It turns out that no one tries to tell you much, really. Being seven feet tall and breathing fire is a good way to ward off annoying questions."



**banana (GM):** It's also a really good way to get access to the Dragonriders' College.  
Last time Placidus came here they asked all sorts of questions and wanted authorisation and so on. Now, mailed soldiers just nod and step out of the way.



**VoxP****VoxD:** Wow, that was easy. Placidus should hang out with dragons more often.



**banana (GM):** What, this wasn't his plan?



**VoxP****VoxD:** It hadn't actually occurred to him that the man-dragon would tag along. He didn't seem the bookish type.



**banana (GM):** That's lucky. Inside, the outer ground halls are humanoid-sized- [other] dragons don't come in this way. Students of all shapes and sizes hurry down the halls in leather uniforms, occasionally berated and laughed at by fully armoured instructors; the College's lower halls are smooth-melted stone, oval passages leading to dwarf-cut rooms for lectures, reading, sparring and so on.  
What with the unexpected ease of access, the question becomes how to find and get to the library without someone asking questions. Who here knows their way around academic-military institutions?



**VoxP****VoxD:** It's not lucky. There's no such thing as luck, merely things one neglects to account for.  
But Vraknaar is here now, and it'd be foolish to waste him. "Have you been here before?"



**Zarick:** Who? Just because Vraknaar looks like the draconic equivalent of a beach bum doesn't mean he doesn't belong here. "Yeah. I've learned a lot, actually, even if the collections in Drakkenhall are usually bigger than this one."



**banana (GM):** Vraknaar's got this kind of weird status where people assume he's part of the Imperial hierarchy because \*obviously\* -  
In fact he holds no rank at all and doesn't know a lot of, like, soldiers or diplomats, but it seems it's not going to become an issue today.



**Zarick:** Yeah, he's learned here, but not in an official capacity. He just sort of walked in and no one really asked questions.



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol finishes the meat roll he'd been munching on in one bite before entering the library, returning the guards' suspicious glances with suspicious glances of his own, albeit with cheeks puffed out full of food.



**VoxP****VoxD:** Nobody asking questions is often just as good as having answers for them. We're looking



for books on the history and founding of Axis, for a start; things that might shed light on the artificial topography or the name 'Crucible'.



**banana (GM):** Ghol is definitely the most out-of-place here. Actually, he might come off as LESS odd if he brings Kon - there are a few weird specialist/monster types hanging around. You pass a seminar room where a score of nearly-naked men, clearly just fresh from sparring, are listening to an anatomy lecture from an earnest snake-headed humanoid \*thing\*.



**Crion (Ghol):** If he can get away with bringing Kon, he most certainly will!



**VoxPVoxD:** A yuan-ti? Hail H.Y.D.R.A.



**Crion (Ghol):** Are the doors even big enough to fit a warg the size of a small bear...?



**banana (GM):** Well:



**Zarick:** If not, Vraknaar will have a hard time with his wings and all.



**banana (GM):** For the history of Axis itself, you've come to the right place. The College has a recent-military-history study section, smooth tiered stone with shelves of melted glass, hundreds of tomes and thousands of scrolls- and two sides. The actual bookcases all run down the middle of the chamber, then on one end are desks on the other are Platforms, for reclining.

Two parallel sets of tunnels, ordinary and vast, admit humanoids and dragons alike. The mostly-young entirely-metallic flight that inhabits this place clacks around and snorts and makes very occasional conversation, and several of them are in here reading books with special lenses. Finding wide doorways is not an issue.

There's a larger bronze dragon on the 'large' side of the library who stares at Vraknaar when you arrive, eyes whirling but saying nothing..



**Crion (Ghol):** Kon pads in after Ghol, sniffing in the guards' general direction once before resolving to ignore them.



**banana (GM):** There aren't that many guards, given the military mien of the students and instructors. One wonders whether the One-Eyed King has ever heard of spies..



**VoxPVoxD:** Ah, yes, wonderful. Let's see here... Placidus can read titles on high shelves quite well, but reaching them is, of course, another matter. He looks around, occasionally stepping back to get a better view of the bookcase like a painter surveying their work.



**banana (GM):** There are some pretty suggestive names up there. CAUSES OF WAR by J Horrocks, FOUNDING OF THE CAPITAL by the College of Conjurors, and the anonymously-authored FROM GROVE TO GRAVE



**Crion (Ghol):** Kon blinks at Placidus twice, then takes him by the back of the collar and lifts him up level with the top shelf, gently enough not to damage the fabric with his teeth.



**banana (GM):** A dragon snorts in probably laughter.



**Zarick:** The dragonwrought whispers, "Hopefully no one bothers us. If they do, just stay calm."



**Crion (Ghol):** Ghol rolls his eyes and turns back to scanning the shelves on his own. Elf secrets...



**banana (GM):** The one pair of soldierguards watches as you examine books. This is ordinary activity, in a library. If someone tries to \*remove\* one from the premises they might get excited.



**VoxPVoxD:** "Aah!" Placidus's legs kick in the air a bit before he's realized what's going on. Once he



does, though, he hastily grabs Founding of the Capital and From Grove to Grave to look through them.



**Crion (Ghol):** ...Come to think of it, this is a place of learning and magic, full of strange creatures. Are there any elves about Ghol might want to give a wide berth?



**banana (GM):** Given the military history nature of the library, there's only a couple of titles that seem relevant to Ghol after he wanders a while. There's a sort of pamphlet or monograph entitled THE COURT AND NEUTRALITY, as well as Horrocks' VENGEANCE, which has an engraving of a dismembered elf on the cover.

Not right now.



**Crion (Ghol):** Hrm. Well, that's good. In any case, he'll have a look around, examining more closely anything that seems...elf-y.



**banana (GM):** ((so is this going to be 'everyone settles in to read'? if so, do you want to just Learn some Facts and finish here, or continue after a timeskip?))



**VoxPVoxD:** (placidus definitely intends to sit and read. I could keep going afterwards but I have to go fairly soon actually)



**Crion (Ghol):** (same, except not having to go anywhere)



**VoxPVoxD:** (the others could leave him here and wander around after)



**Zarick:** (learning facts and finishing seems fine to me)



**banana (GM):** When you're about to head out into the world and seek adventure, it's wise to arm yourself with knowledge.

Vraknaar, Placidus, Kon and Ghol get several hours' interesting reading in before someone comes in and starts frowning about student identification, College security, et cetera. Particularly, they learn from the military-history point of view about Axis and about Elves.



**Crion (Ghol):** So you're NOT allowed to flop down in front of the Culinary & Cooking folios and act like a giant lazy pillow for your orc buddy while he reads about Elves? Kon is highly chuffed.



**banana (GM):** 20 years ago, Axis did not yet exist. It's common knowledge that the High Druid died and the Conqueror rose up against undead tyranny - the anonymous 'Q. of Chorizon' puts these events in perspective. The Federation had been tense for many years, with the humans of the southwest and the dragons of the southeast seeking to throw off the yoke of Omen; holding everything together in the south was the High Druid, an iconic figure who spoke for the Wild, which had much to lose in any war.

The Druid's eastern base was the Wildwood Grove, and in the west, the sacred Mount Crucible. Its ecology was cultivated and shaped as a place of primal ritual, and from Crucible she and her followers held the West together for the theoretical prosperity of the Federation.



**VoxPVoxD:** Ah. That would explain it.



**banana (GM):** Somehow, an assassin penetrated the grove and killed the Druid - and the Conqueror was ready. The first battle of what would become a war took place there, and the mountain erupted. Rather than yield to the devastation, he made it his and harnessed the caldera as the Axis of a new Empire.

Barely a year into the ensuing struggle, the elves took advantage...

The black elves had long resented their place in the elven woods, living in burrows and tunnels in the forest mulch; their true preference was for the deep places of the Underworld, and they saw themselves trampled by the other shards. For some reason, the Elf King assented to their goal: while the dwarven army was occupied on the surface as the Federation tore itself apart, they invaded the Throne beneath

the Mountain.



**Crion (Ghol):** Admirable ambition; idiotic execution.



**banana (GM):** The dwarves were unprepared and undefended - their home regiments all expecting attacks from monsters \*below\*. Those attacks came, as the (mostly-black) elves made pacts with deep evils, but they were a distraction from the main force above. The dwarven homeland was totally sundered, and refugees poured onto the surface mid-wars, blinking light and blood out of their eyes. (J Horrocks has a turn for the gruesome).

The white and grey shards were not exactly happy per se at what the black elves had done, but it meant they had the Kingswood to themselves, and that was nice.. briefly. The dwarf army on the surface wasn't actually destroyed or anything, as the dragons had entered the war, which nobody expected. Dragons didn't \*do\* wars.

As the College history puts it, the Conqueror made a gamble and a pledge: he put the liberation of the human race on aid to seek justice and a new homeland for the Dwarf King. In return, the King unsealed the Hall of Vengeance and retrieved the Axe of Seven Bloods.

\*put the liberation on hold

The struggle in the northwest was long and bloody, but within two years the Dwarf and Elf Kings met on the battlefield, outside Anvil. The book states in a totally matter-of-fact tone that the only difficulty for the combined Imperial forces was restraining the dwarves from slaughtering every last elf once they began to flee.

They were, however, restrained, and so the duty of slaughter fell to the elves themselves.



**banana (GM):** It was in the year 12 R.D. - twelve years after the High Druid's death - that wild magic from the East gave the orc trauma plague a new locus, a brilliant point of fury. At the deliberate behest of the new Elf Queen, the Orc Lord arose to punish her own race for its sins.



**Crion (Ghol):** ...Whoa.



**banana (GM):** With dwarves to the south and orcs to the north, the Kingswood burned. The only thing averting a clash between the forces of Empire and the orcs at that point was the sudden arrival of a THIRD force: the black-armoured fist of the Dark Gods.

For more recent history, Ghol can turn to the tactical monograph. Queenswood these days holds the surviving surface elf population and the new Court of Stars; everyone is leaving it the hell alone because what the hell. It's certainly not part of the Empire, but you don't think the Federation wants to claim it either.



**Crion (Ghol):** Aha. He'll have to go there if he wants more answers.



**banana (GM):** The Orcs and the Dark are stalled, and taking advantage, the dwarves built and barricaded a new colony. Forge is their home now, but the underworld is still lost.

Right now most grey elves are still Federation citizens, in Amity and in Omen and in Coven. Most white elves live in the Queenswood and write worrying poetry about these worrying times. Most black elves do not show their faces on the surface of the world.

The status of the elves as a whole, then, is: they are no longer one. The elven race is broken, as a sign that the world itself is breaking.



**Crion (Ghol):** White elves...he's never met a white elf. Well. He's never really MET any elf, but the only ones he's seen even from a distance are the grey.



**banana (GM):** There are a few grey elves here in imperial lands. They're not EXACTLY scorned, given the great act of violent apology, but most people don't trust them.

And finally, with that period of consolidation and slaughter over, the Empire is once again expanding.

Axis has become Axis, the forests are burning, and all trace of the druids is gone from the West.



**Crion (Ghol):** Given that they've retreated to their forests to write poetry and songs and probably be very serious and boring about both (along with everything else), he finds it hard to muster much enthusiasm for going to see them, specifically. But if he's to meet her, it must be done.



**banana (GM):** That concludes the oddly-focused study session on recent history. There are a few more ties between events than either Placidus or Ghol expected.