**Character & plot concepts**

**Main character:**

**Possible first names:** Achamon, Achas, Bion, Deiphanos, Iael, Ianos, Ladon, Laikon, Mnason, Palaimon, Yorgos (just tell me which name you think would suit the character best, fellas. Alternatively, if RPGMaker allows it, we could just let the player name their character whatever. And if you have your own suggestion, fire away)

**Possible last names:** Diocleon, Kartoriskis, Lachonadrakon, Macroneidas, Pegonitissos, Thrax (same as above: tell me which you think sounds best)

**Appearance:** Let's go for a 'Mediterranean commoner' look. By that I mean: 5'3-5'5" in height (even nobles rarely exceeded the 5'6-5'9" range due to lack of nutrition in those days), olive/tanned skin (as was the case for basically everyone who had to work for a living, the upper classes prized pale skin since it meant you didn't have to work and thus were probably a noble), dark hair and eyes. This guy would also probably be thin but well-muscled, which was par for the course for experienced common warriors (again unlike nobles, who could afford to get fat). Age: I'd say late twenties to early thirties, with a birthdate in the late 1440s or 1450s (remember that the year the game's set in is 1480).

In terms of dress he'd be wearing a 'fustanella' (tunic with man-skirt, like the Byzantines they're based on the Ellisians will consider pants to be barbaric, link to picture below), leggings and simple shoes or sandals, all plain brown or off-white in color. Maybe throw in a dark blue, brown or gray cloak with a hood for night operations as well, I've read that dark blue is actually better than black as night camo and brown or gray would help you blend in with the buildings. If we need him to be a bit more colorful, maybe he can have a red pillbox cap or something for day wear. (it's obviously a bad idea to wear that at night though, and brightly colored cloaks are right out for anything besides formal occasions)

What a fustanella looks like: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/13/Souliotis\_in\_Corfu.jpg

What I mean by 'pillbox cap': http://www.medieval-creation.com/pictures/1342542546.jpg

**Personality:** Should this be left to the player, to be determined through their dialogue choices? Ex. some guy walks up to you and says 'Good morning', then you'd be able to respond 'Hello' (the nice guy option), 'This morning's looking pretty bad actually' (the 'snarker' option) or 'Go jump off a cliff' (the asshole option). Each option will increase a character flag representing the character's dominant personality, for example picking almost all 'nice guy' options and a few or none of the snarker/asshole choices will = your character has a lot of 'nice guy' flags = he'll be marked as a nice person. At critical plot points, your character may gain additional choices depending on how many character flags he's got, ex. in a hostage situation a nice guy would have an extra dialogue option to talk the hostage-taker down, a snarker would have the chance to distract the hostage-taker until the city watch arrives, and an asshole would have the option to just shoot through the hostage.

**Backstory:**

* Born to a 'new money' family that's only recently entered the nobility. Say, grandpa did something so awesome on the battlefield that the Emperor of his day promoted him to an officer and awarded him a title (actual noble estates optional).
* While MC (main character) was still a child, his dad got framed for treason (say, a letter noting troop positions along Ellis' walls that was marked for the Umari) by rival nobles. Both parents and maybe an elder sibling all get attainted and executed for treason, family house & fortune gets confiscated, MC is turned out onto the streets or just escapes the imperial army before he can be captured & killed with the rest of his kin.
* [Group suggestion] The rest of his kin, that is, except for his sister, who also survived the massacre of their family and lived on the streets with him until they were taken in by the Blood Eagles. This sister later died when MC's comrades betrayed him. Haven't settled on a final name for the sister yet, but here are some possibilities: Aglaia, Alkyone, Ambrosia, Anthousa, Barbara, Berenice, Chrysanthe, Daria, Desdemona, Dianthe, Eirene, Echo, Elysia, Euphemia, Harmonia, Hippolyte, Kyriake, Lakhesis, Maia, Mnemosyne, Parthenope, Philomela, Sophia, Theocleia, Thera, Xenia, Zosime
* MC grows up into a feared enforcer for the 'Blood Eagles' criminal syndicate in the slums and is eventually promoted to lieutenant by his boss, who considers naming him his successor ahead of even senior members of the syndicate. Along the way, he becomes friends with his fellow criminal enforcers.
* Too bad there's no honor among thieves here, so they wind up setting him up to look as though he was plotting on ousting his boss. This results in him getting sent to die on a suicide mission by said boss, after which he's arrested by the city watch. Joke's on your boss though, the leader of the traitors offs him and usurps his organization while you were too busy being carted off to jail to save him.
* [Adam's suggestion] The aforementioned little sister harbored her own ambitions of running the Blood Eagles and actually helped betray the MC, but was either accidentally killed by one of the other traitors in the brawl that led to MC's arrest or deliberately eliminated on Skleros' order in the confusion so she wouldn't pose a threat to his plans. Either way, she's still dead by the start of the game & the MC still thinks she was nothing more than his faithful & sweet little sister: the truth won't be revealed until later in-game.
* As of the start of the story, he will first open his eyes in a dungeon late at night, being literally slapped awake by the captain of the city guard. The captain will bluntly inform him that he's already been tried & found guilty on various criminal charges ranging from petty thievery to armed robbery to mass murder & give him an offer to help him bust the crime ring, or else be executed at dawn. Thus comes the first major choice of the game, which I intend to use to demonstrate that every choice has consequences: agreeing results in the game continuing, refusing results in a game over as MC is promptly actually hanged at dawn - there's no realistic way for him to escape his situation (beaten into a pulp, left starving & dehydrated in a stone dungeon cell with no windows and only one locked door, surrounded by armed guards) without outside help, which obviously isn't coming due to the circumstances leading up to him being here.

**City watch captain Blasios Zervis:**

The captain of the city guard who slaps MC awake at the start of the game, and becomes his 'handler': that's to say, the guy who gives you missions, keeps track of your progress and will kill you if you screw up too much or give him reason to think that you're sabotaging his cause. Can become a party member on missions that directly involve the city guard.

Per his name, he's got a lisp as well. (Blasios = Blaise, which means 'lisp' or 'lisper') He'll also beat you half to death if you make fun of it.

**Appearance:** A squat (say, 5'2-3" but pretty wide) man in his forties or early fifties with a combover + a thick dark mustache & beard. Olive-skinned like most Ellisians (and you know, real Greek people). Outside of formal occasions he'll always dressed in the maroon uniform of the Ellisian army and armored in the brimmed helmet, lamellar cuirass, chainmail shirt, gauntlets & greaves of a high-ranking imperial officer. So, his armor would look like this:

https://georgefitzhume.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/img\_0654.jpg

Maybe give the helmet a wider brim, though.

In terms of armament, when he does have to fight (whether as a party member or not): can't go wrong with the sword and shield combo. Swords were used most often by nobles and army officers after all, and a shield's a good idea when your armor isn't as nigh-impenetrable as a late medieval full plate harness. Dude would also carry a short but thick vinewood rod with which to whack insubordinate soldiers (or you) when he's pissed, much like historical centurions.

Sword: http://s1337.photobucket.com/user/AlaeSwords/media/persianandsolingen6\_zpsfe0afe1c.jpg.html

Shield: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/f0/f9/57/f0f95776f7a392f3d261d04a30392eed.jpg (a big kite shield that would cover basically his entire body from the neck down, maybe painted with the Ellisian coat of arms found in the other document)

**Personality:** Kind of a self-righteous douche. Ill-tempered, stubborn as a mule, and absolutely convinced that his extreme methods to clean up crime (which go well beyond hiring crooks like the MC to bust other crooks and into the territory of summary executions, blackmail, reading nobles' mail and taking hostages to ensure criminals' good behavior among other things) is totally warranted by the dire straits Ellis is in. In general, he has a Manichean view of the world: either you're with him 100% and thus a good guy or you're not and thus an evil enemy of Ellis who must die, either quickly at swordpoint or slowly in a jail cell, plus any means are justified in the pursuit of his 'greater good' (defined by him as the continued survival of Ellis as a crime-free & efficient empire). Also a harsh martinet to his men, and absolutely convinced that the MC's former criminal outfit is involved with a plot to sell the city out to the Umari.

All that said, he'll mellow out if the player is nice to him. (alternatively, you could continue to answer his jerkitude with your own, in which case he'll never stop viewing the MC as anything more than a mad dog that may occasionally need to be let off its leash) And even if he continues being a douchebag, that doesn't necessarily make him wrong all the time - sometimes his harsh advice will actually work, and he is actually spot on in regards to that pro-Umari criminal conspiracy mentioned above. In addition, most of his dickishness toward you will be due to the fact that the MC is after all an infamous criminal: he looks out for the men under his command (indeed, he believes in harsh discipline as a form of tough love - the men might hate him for being a martinet but he's certain that it's better for them to go through harsh training/disciplinary regimes than to needlessly die due to lack of discipline) and although he will grimly sacrifice them in the name of his duty if he feels it's necessary, he won't just casually throw their lives away either - and you can expect the same treatment if you get on his good side.

**Backstory:**

* Kinda like the MC's backstory, except everything went right - Zervis was born into a 'new money' family originally from the slums that had been elevated to nobility in his grandpa's time for military feats, and thus was looked down on by the high nobility as a bunch of thuggish upstarts. Unlike MC's family, his never got framed for treason, allowing him to grow up in relative luxury while not being too far removed from the terrible conditions in Ellis' Brown Quarter.
* As the second son in his family, Zervis wasn't going to inherit anything (not that his parents even had that much to pass down), so while still in his mid-teens he decided to join the army to make his own fortune like his grandpa.
* He has served in the Ellisian army for 30-35 years at this point, and performed well on the battlefield. He was noted to only be a competent fighter but a very capable commander.
* Six years ago, he retaliated against a higher-born junior officer's mockery of his lisp by smashing said boy in the face with his stick. The officer's family wanted his head on a platter but Emperor Harudion saw that he'd be more useful to Ellis alive than dead, and so appointed him to lead the city guard: this way he'd be able to do good for Ellis by rooting out crime & corruption at home, while also being denied the more glorious role of a frontline officer.
* Also has a wife and kids. Not that he's ever going to let the MC (who is after all a convicted criminal) anywhere near them.

**Crime lord Aegidios Skleros:**

The head honcho of the largest and most powerful crime syndicate of the game (for which I still have no name), one of the MC's former friends turned worst enemies, and the big bad villain of the game. He's the guy who engineered the MC's frameup and thus got him nearly killed & delivered into the hands of the city guard, and while you were in jail he overthrew your/his former boss and usurped control of the syndicate. The player won't (and probably shouldn't) fight him until the end, until then he'll be busy throwing his goons & lieutenants at you instead.

**Appearance:** An olive-skinned man of average height with short to shoulder-length dark hair and a thin mustache, appears to be in his late twenties to early thirties. Should look fairly similar to the MC, since he is after all meant to be a foil of sorts to you. He'd wear fancier clothes than expected of a commoner, ex. a particularly colorful embroidered fustanella and hat, to set himself apart from the common criminals he rules with an iron fist. When forced to fight, he will make use of a crossbow at range and a simple spear & shield in close quarters: you might recognize all of these as commoners' weapons, a perfect fit for a former street urchin like Aegidios.

**Personality:** In one word: ruthless. In another: ambitious. Aegidios is driven by his ambition to rule Ellis, and according to him the first step towards that goal was to become the master of the crumbling empire's criminal underworld, hence him betraying the MC (and their boss) before the game begins. Since the nobility would never voluntarily accept someone born as a gutter rat as their overlord, he's entered talks with the Umari behind closed doors to betray the city to them when they attack again in exchange for being made governor of Ellis after their victory.

All of the above said, he isn't exactly a sociopathic cutthroat. He knows all too well that the overwhelming majority of Ellisians are struggling under the corrupt and apathetic rule of the Marethi dynasty & the aristocracy, and although he does partly want the Ellisian throne out of ambition he also honestly believes that he would make a better & more caring ruler than them, having come from the underclass himself. Indeed, he hates anyone who looks down on the commons, and though he's normally a reserved fellow mocking his own station of birth is the fastest way to piss him off. He recognizes his less than savory deeds, from all of his past criminal activity as a common footpad to him screwing you over, as dick moves and accordingly feels kinda bad about it, but believes they were all necessary sacrifices to help him reach his goal and thus tries not to think about it too much.

Like most lower-class people of this time period, Aegidios is illiterate, and though he is capable of working out some pretty clever schemes (like the one that lands the MC in jail and their boss Byennios in a grave) he's blind to the subtler intrigues practiced by the nobility he despises so much. The worst example would be his belief that when the Umari take over Ellis they'll really make him the governor, as opposed to oh I don't know, slitting his throat & tossing him in a sewer to rot while placing one of their own to rule the city. (revealing the Umari treachery, thus proving that basically everything he does over the course of the game was for nothing, could be the diplomatic way of 'defeating' him at the end of the game)

**Background:**

* Born to a prostitute in the Brown Quarter. His mother tried to raise him as best she could before dying of 'the pox' (syphilis) when he was five, after which the brothel owner threw him out onto the streets.
* There he spent his days begging and stealing until at the age of 12 he dared try to pick the pocket of Maurikios Byennios, a half-Thiareike former Excubitor (imperial guardsman) and the leader of the Blood Eagles. Byennios was impressed by Skleros' suicidal bravery in making the attempt and, far from simply killing him, hired him as a thief for the syndicate.
* Skleros became an accomplished thief, and by the end of his career (right before the game begins) he's pilfered millions of nomismae in valuables from all over the city, either directly or through the gangs of lesser thieves given to him by Byennios. He is one of the syndicate agents to have visited the upper districts of Ellis, and in the process he was simultaneously awed & made envious by their wealth. Why should all of the city's wealth be hoarded by these noble fools and fat merchants, he thought? If he were Emperor, he'd distribute that gold to the needy of the Brown Quarter so that all could eat well and have a roof over their heads, and there'd still be enough left for himself…
* Eventually his envy of the upper classes and his ambition to take over the place drove him to betray & frame the MC, thus knocking him out of the running to succeed Byennios, and to poison Byennios' wine minutes after the man named him his successor. He now reigns as the leader of the Blood Eagles, and is working to sell the city out to the Umari in exchange for being made its governor after their victory.

As for other characters: before I get around to writing them, I want to know how many levels you believe this game should have first. It'd suck if (for example) I wrote like 10 additional arc villains to serve as final bosses for 10 different parts of the map but then only 3 can make it to the final cut, after all.

The plot - well, we already talked about this. MC gets hired by the city guard to bust other crooks, and proceeds to spend the rest of the game doing just that. The ending should be a cliffhanger linking Skleros' Umari scheme to traitorous nobles further up the social food chain, giving MC a reason to look into the upper districts of Ellis and get involved in noble politics. I want to know how many levels we should stretch this plot over.

Plot starting point for combat prototype: MC wakes up in dungeon cell, guard captain demands he join the law in stamping out his former allies (who betrayed him). Choice: Go along with him, game continues as normal; refuse, you die and it's a game over right there. Go along with him 🡪 guards let you crash at their barracks for 3 reasons: 1. you can hide there without giving up your identity, 2. you can't be attacked by your former allies turned enemies there, 3. you're always surrounded by other guards so no tomfoolery. Guard agent will also be present to warn you that he's watching you.

First target: Street thieves. Three pronged approach possible: either bribe/talk your way past the 6 lesser gangsters (so you don't have to fight them), sneak your way past them, or attack them head on (then you have to fight them all). If you attack head-on, the city guard will help (some guards will join your party). If you reach the boss, you can spare./kill him, ultimately the consequence is the same though: he's out of your way forever. Then the guard captain either congratulates/yells at you for killing/not killing the boss, tells you to go hit the sheets & that he'll have another mission for you tomorrow, THE END.

So, my concept for that thief leader/level 1 boss:

**Crime lieutenant Aiolos Katsaros**

The game's first boss, and (per Carlito's plan) the only one to show up in the level prototype. A relative newcomer to the Ellisian criminal underworld, and the last & least of MC's betrayers. After helping to stab MC in the back and Skleros to ascend, Aiolos was promoted to lead a gang of pickpockets & burglars operating in the Central Brown Quarter, where he and his boys get to keep a full quarter of each day's 'haul'. As of the start of the game, he is planning to support another criminal lieutenant in a major robbery at the docks - not that he'll ever get a chance to do so thanks to the MC's interference.

**Appearance:** A short, scrawny young man, many years younger than the MC - let's say in his late teens or early twenties. Like most of the other commoner characters he's got 'Mediterranean' physical features - olive skin, dark eyes and dark hair (in his case, messy black curls cut short to reflect his last name, Katsaros is literally Greek for 'curly-haired'). Maybe toss in a ratlike face and a thin wispy mustache, as a sign that he is trying way too hard to fit in with the properly-bearded senior criminals. He'd wear a brown fustanella with hood, makes it easy for him to blend into crowds: at most, maybe give his fustanella some embroidery to make him stand out from his lackeys. This is a good visual reference:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f3/Hood-1100s.png

Aiolos will fight with a mix of throwing knives and two long daggers. I envision him as a speedy but fragile opponent whose individual attacks don't do a whole lot of damage, but makes up for it by having a chance to land multiple hits with every attack.

**Personality:** In three words: arrogant, overambitious and cowardly. Aiolos is basically a grown-up version of that kid who cheerleads for bullies on the playground: all too happy to harass people weaker than him and to kick folks when they're down but also prone to suck up really hard to people who are clearly stronger than him, to the point where they're likely to find him an annoyance. That is, after all, basically how he survived on the streets as one of many urchins before really getting involved with crime, and to his credit he can be a pretty cunning guy (he wouldn't have gotten involved with the betrayal plot in the first place if he wasn't): it's just that he thinks he's far smarter than he really is, in other words he's also a poster boy for the Dunning-Kruger effect. That arrogance does tend to melt away real fast if he's beaten down by someone stronger than him, though: if he finds himself at MC's mercy, he will have absolutely no problem with begging for his life.

**Background:**

* Born the youngest of 11 siblings in a family of slum dwellers. Aiolos' father 'disappeared' after taking out a loan he couldn't repay when he was 4, and his mother was killed in a robbery three years later. The local landlord promptly evicted him & his siblings from their already dreadful apartment, and from there the Katsaros kids went their separate ways.
* For the next four years Aiolos made a living by begging and pickpocketing on the streets. He was discovered by MC and Skleros after he tried to pick the latter's pocket while they were walking back to a Blood Eagle safehouse after a night of bloody action. Amused at the irony of the situation (this was after all how he himself got involved with the Blood Eagles), Skleros let him tag along.
* Aiolos became a messenger/errand boy for the Blood Eagles, and by age 16 he had impressed/sucked up to enough senior criminals to find himself as part of a thieves' ring under the syndicate's control. MC and Skleros treat him as something of a bratty little brother at first, and as an obnoxious asshole friend that they allow to hang around b/c he's 'OUR asshole friend' later.
* However, Aiolos found that he couldn't advance up the Blood Eagle hierarchy very quickly from there, thanks mostly to his teammates' endless complaints about his abrasive personality and attempts to bully them into doing as he says by threatening to basically run to MC/Skleros & tell on them.
* When Skleros offered to promote him to help take out MC & Byennios, Aiolos accepted his deal. He felt bad about it for maybe 10 minutes, then proceeded to seal the trap for the MC by being the one to rat him out to the authorities. After Skleros completes his takeover of the Blood Eagles, he kept his word & promoted Aiolos to lead a different gang of thieves (knowing full well that his old co-workers would try to shank him at every possible opportunity rather than accept his leadership).
* As per the plot outline above, he will become the first boss you fight. He'll have a minor panic attack upon realizing that the MC not only survived his treachery but also killed/eluded all of his guards on the way to his room, but quickly decides to try his luck against MC anyway: if he can actually kill MC & present his head to Skleros, he's sure to get another promotion.
* Upon defeat, he'll beg MC to let him live & swears that he'll stow away on the first boat out of Ellis if you let him go, without even telling Skleros that you've made your triumphant return. You could be a nice guy and do that…or you know, you could also do what everyone would expect you to & just finish him off on the spot for any reason - making sure he can't rat you out to Skleros, simple vengeance, annoyance at his cowardice, just for the lulz, whatever.

**Proposed diplomacy prototype plotline:**

MC is tasked to infiltrate a party being hosted by a slum-born merchant, ostensibly to celebrate him finally getting the right to live in the Bronze Quarter but which is suspected by the city guard to be a front for Baddie Lt. #2, where said Lieutenant is probably plotting something + a captured informant is being held🡪MC can snag an invitation one of two ways: 1. buying the invite from one of the party-goers or 2. charming another attendee so she'll procure an extra invite for you🡪Once MC gets by the guards thanks to his invite, he must find a way to his two objectives: 1. rescue the informant and 2. find out what the criminals are plotting (ideally, it should be possible to carry these objectives out in any order)

1. Rescuing the informant:

* To get to the dungeon (actually the merchant's house's cellar), MC must create a distraction to get the guards away from the cellar door.
* Two options: either engage one of the guests in a drinking contest & get him both drunk and pissed so that he starts a brawl, or (only if you charmed the lady guest from before AND haven't gotten her to distract the stair guards) get your date to start a scene.
* Once down in the cellar, you'll free the informant from his bindings, but he will need a disguise to escape the merchant's house. You have two choices: either get one of the servants to give you one of their spare outfits for some gold or ambush a guard for his clothes.
* Ambushing a guard requires luring him down to the cellar, then engaging him in a fight. If possible, have the informant join you as a temporary party member just for this one fight.
* Once you've gotten either of those disguises for the informant, he will fool the guards & escape through the front door.

2. Uncovering the criminals' plan:

* To reach the upper floor where the 'VIPs' are talking, MC must create another distraction to get the guards away from the stairs.
* Three options: either procure a mild poison from the cook to sicken the host merchant's brother (who the cook hates), get your date to start a scene (only if you charmed the lady guest AND haven't gotten her to distract the cellar guards), or bribe the stair guards to turn a blind eye to you (only if you haven't spent any money previously).
* Once MC is upstairs, he just has to eavesdrop on a door at the end of the hallway to learn of the lieutenant's plans: he's going to get his lackeys together to fight a smaller gang at the docks tomorrow evening.
* However, just before MC can head downstairs, he's stopped by the host, who is obviously less than pleased to see a non-VIP upstairs and demands an explanation for his presence. Two options here: attempt to bluff him into thinking that you are indeed on the VIP list (failure = instant game over, since the guards will throw you out & the criminals will be alerted to your presence), or get your date to vouch for you (only works if you charmed her into inviting you in the first place, naturally).

Once both objectives have been accomplished, leave the house out the front door and the prototype will basically end there. Maybe throw in a cutscene of both gangs getting jumped at their meeting place by the city guard & forced to surrender after some of the more reckless goons on both sides get themselves killed, plus an option for the MC to decide whether Lieutenant #2 lives or dies at the captain's blade.

My proposal for the Big Bad Lieutenant of this round:

**Crime lieutenant Alusian Atanasov**

The 'boss' of the diplomatic stage. A descendant of Perikunian (Southern Antae, equivalent to Serb/Bulgarian) refugees who fled the southern plains when their kingdom was overrun by the Umari a century ago, and who have been stuck in the slums of the Brown Quarter ever since. Atanasov's a brute who used to lead his own gang of cutthroats until they were crushed by the Blood Eagles, and has since become one of the more feared enforcers fielded by the syndicate. He helped betray MC & Byennios after Skleros promised him leadership of several neighborhoods near the docks, and since he received his due reward he's been tasked with expanding the Blood Eagles' power into the eastern docks from his new base.

**Appearance:** A tall (let's say 6'2"), broad and powerfully-built man in his early to mid-thirties. He has messy dark hair, a magnificent chest-length beard & dark beady eyes to match, though he's also paler than most of his peers on account of his Antae(= South Slavic) blood. He'd wear a brown or dark-colored fustanella, but unlike the actual Ellisians (who prefer to go with man-skirts) he'd also wear an undershirt and ankle-length woolen trousers like his Antae ancestors. Unlike the much weaker Katsaros, as former leader of a gang of armed robbers & a major street enforcer for Skleros he'd have both the wealth and the inclination to wear a simple chainmail hauberk between his fustanella & undershirt for protection. This is a good visual reference of what his clothes might look like:

https://www.pinterest.com/pin/129056345544636767/

**Personality:** On the surface, Atanasov seems to be a perfect fit for the Perikinian stereotype - a boorish loudmouth who loves booze, violence and 'loose' women in no particular order. But such a man wouldn't get very far in the Blood Eagles, and in truth Atanasov is a fair bit smarter than he likes to let people know. He had enough sense to notice the most successful merchants in the neighbors given to him, and to NOT extort protection money from them but rather treat them as investments - he'll have his thugs actually protect their shops & ransack those of their competitors who won't collaborate with him, in exchange for them remaining his contacts when/if they move up into the upper districts of Ellis & allowing him to use their homes and shops as hideouts and meeting places, allowing him to hide from his enemies and the law practically in plain sight.

**Background:**

* Born to a family of refugees from Perikun, the kingdom founded by Perich (youngest son of Tvarich, the patriarch of the Antae who came to Eldath in the 6th century) in the plains south of Ellis. His great-great-grandfather fled the country when it was overrun by the Umari, but wound up being stuck in the Brown Quarter of Ellis with no hope of ascending upward for the rest of his life; the same fate befell the next generations of Atanasovs.
* When he was young, Atanasov bullied all the other kids in the 'hood. Around age 13, he formed a gang with the meanest and toughest kids on his street and spread havoc across the neighborhood before getting the bright idea to start shaking random passers-by for their gold & valuables a year later.
* Years later, Atanasov & his thugs made the mistake of mugging a passing Blood Eagle, who resisted violently and was cut down in turn. The Blood Eagles sent a force (including a younger MC & Skleros) into his 'hood in revenge, resulting in the massacre of his gang. However, Atanasov himself put up such a fight that MC & Skleros - the only Blood Eagles to survive the street battle - offered to let him live on the condition that he join them.
* For the next decade of his life, he worked as hired muscle for the Blood Eagles, extorting shopkeepers, intimidating competitors & busting heads or knees as the bosses demanded. He remains on frosty terms with MC & Skleros, on account of the whole 'murdered his gang/childhood friends' thing, though he eventually became slightly less antagonistic towards the two as he comes to terms with the fact that they're staying dead & he has no future outside of the Blood Eagles.
* As mentioned above, he helps betray the MC in exchange for being made boss of several neighborhoods near the eastern docks. In this capacity, he spends his days running protection rackets (excepting only a few especially successful local shops, whose owners he befriends) and smacking down lesser gangs with an eye on expanding into whatever parts of the docks aren't already under Blood Eagle control.
* The diplomacy prototype will revolve around learning his plan while he's hiding in the VIP section of one of his merchant buddies' homes. Since he's too much of a badass to fight head-on, MC wisely decides to just eavesdrop on him when possible & then inform Captain Zervis so he can get the city guard to take him down.
* Atanasov will initially attempt to resist arrest when ambushed by the guards at the end of the diplomacy prototype, but orders his men to stand down after it becomes clear that this is a fight he can't win - he remembers all too well what happened the last time his followers tried to fight to the bitter end against MC & his more powerful/numerous allies.
* Once this level is done, ideally you'd get another choice to determine his fate after he's been arrested by the city guard. You could demand Zervis at least take him in alive, since he has after all thrown down his weapon & surrendered instead of forcing a bloodbath…or alternatively, advise Zervis to summarily execute him since everybody knows he's guilty of a litany of crimes, he himself doesn't deny it, and there's a risk of him breaking out of the city watch's clutches with or without the help of the other Blood Eagles en route to prison. (and of course MC could have private reasons to want him dead, like revenge)

**Future plot elements:**

Haven't done too much in this area since I have no idea how long you want this game to be, but I've sketched out five more areas & villains to bring the total (including the above two prototypes' plotlines + the central slums ruled by Skleros himself) of plotlines to eight:

* Western docks - main criminal enterprise: smuggling - villain: teetotal hardass sailor, provisional name: **Eber Marinos**
* Northwestern slums - main criminal enterprise: gambling - villain: MC's former girlfriend in the Blood Eagles, PN: **Yeina Xanthos**
* Southeastern slums - main criminal enterprise: prostitution - villain: upjumped pimp & overambitious lackey of Skleros, PN: **Hilarion Metaxas**
* Northeastern slums - main criminal enterprise: extortion & robbery - villain: cutthroat runaway mage who's also Skleros' #2 lieutenant, PN: **Haimon Raptis**
* Eastern docks - main criminal enterprise: none, site of a major turf war between the Eagles & smaller gangs - villain: Skleros' right-hand figure & another mage, PN: **Tisiphone Apion**
* Central slums - Final area, Skleros' own stronghold - major criminal enterprise: a little bit of everything, plus of course the Umari conspiracy in action - villain: **Aegidios Skleros**

**Proposed party members:**

Just spitballing here since I have no idea how many party members you're planning to make available to the player. Basically everything about these characters, from their name to personality to party role, is provisional and can be changed if you or the editors so desire.

* **Blasios Zervis (disregard, NOT a party member anymore)** - Needs no explanation, since his blurb is already up there. Would be a tank with high HP & defenses, but low speed. Wields a 1-handed weapon and shield: as a result, he emphasizes defense & grinding the enemy down slowly over dealing out huge amounts of damage. Maybe give him some status-buffing abilities (ex. a specific command for the party to fight defensively, increasing their chances of dodging attacks/reducing damage at the cost of speed/attacking power), the ability to taunt enemies so they focus on him, and/or the ability to summon a squad of Ellisian soldiers as temporary allies.
* **Corrado Miglione** - The 2-handed specialist who will deal more damage than the other warriors, but has less HP & weaker defensive stats. A knight from the Broken Bowl whose treatment of his peasants was so bad that they revolted, and his overlord wound up confiscating his fief & exiling him to calm them down. He turned to brigandage to survive & later put his training and gear to better use as a *condotta* or professional mercenary. Recently he spent his remaining coin on a ship to Ellis in hopes of landing a gig with the imperial army, but was informed that they couldn't afford more mercenaries by the time he landed. So, he'll work for you for an appropriately high sum of gold. Despite being a knight, he doesn't have a problem with working for commoners like MC so long as the pay's good, you always use the honorific 'Don' (equivalent to Sir, befitting his knightly rank) when addressing him, and of course he gets to satisfy his sadistic bloodthirst in battle. His stats should be balanced between Pachis and Zervis.
* **Badriyah çeksene Hatun lent Dulai** - The balanced warrior who can competently wield both 1 and 2-handed weapons, and whose stats are balanced between the slow defensive 1-H tank & the aggressive but low-HP 2-hander. A young Umari exile who was born to a Pink Priestess & an unknown father in a Bahamutallite brothel in the northern reaches of the empire. Though she was expected to follow in her mother's footsteps, the brothel-goers' tales of adventure and the garrison's sparring sessions interested her far more than the idea of becoming a glorified sacral prostitute, and at age 15 she fled her home to Ellis. Four years later, she's hiding in the Brown Quarter under the false name 'Callidora Kalonimos' and counting on her knowledge of Ellisian to avoid being lynched, while doing odd jobs for employers whose moral conduct she considers 'tolerable' (typically non-violent criminals, such as smugglers) to get by and counting on the swordfighting techniques she learned by observing her hometown's garrison's sparring sessions to defend herself. She'd join the party for free but will turn against you if she witnesses you committing atrocities.
* **Aellō Sanna (disregard, NOT a party member anymore)** - The physical-oriented rogue. A slender, olive-skinned and raven-haired smuggler whose profitable operation became the victim of a hostile takeover by the Blood Eagles under Skleros, who killed her entire crew along the way. She'll join with you for free in the name of revenge, but will get pissed if you spare a boss instead of killing them & will leave if you spare too many bosses. (how high do you think we should set that limit of spared bosses at?) Fast but lightly equipped & uses melee or short-range weapons such as daggers, spears and throwing needles: she might not do as much damage as the warriors, but she'll make up for it by landing multiple hits with every attack.
* **Eros Argyros** - The range-oriented rogue. A very handsome young man from a wealthy merchant family who was born & bred in the Silver Quarter and had a promising career ahead of him as an imperial archer after consistently outshooting all of his fellow recruits in training, but had to flee to the slums after seducing a nobleman's only daughter: his family was also forced to officially disown him to avoid the nobility's fury, though they've been discreetly sending him food & wine to keep him alive in style while he lies low. Joins the party in a recruitment mission that involves saving him from a pack of hitmen hired by that pissed-off noble, who will have tracked his latest food shipment in your first encounter with him. Will hit on basically any dudettes he finds (including other party members), and sufficiently attractive dudes as well. As the party ranger, he can use crossbows & bows, making him respectively a high-damage but slow-firing sniper or a low-damage arrow-spammer.
* **Adelhard Baumkircher** - The firearms specialist. A blond, green-eyed and thickly bearded mercenary born & bred in the Thurin Empire, whose company is presently chilling out in Ellis since they don't have a contract right now. To augment his salary, he'll join the party for a sufficient amount of gold. Like most veteran mercenaries, he's a ruthless cutthroat and will obey even your more atrocious orders without complaint, so long as you're paying him of course. Will be the only party member who can use guns. He can wield handgonnes for sheer killing power at the cost of a long reload time, pistols for firing speed at the cost of damage, or arquebuses for a balance between reload speed & damage.
* **Maion Apokaukoina** - The white mage. A fair-skinned, brown-haired, noble-born adept of the Magical Association who was sent to the Brown Quarter to recover texts stolen by Skleros' Blood Eagles. Will join the party if you help her recover the artifacts & seek permission to help you finish the main quest afterwards if she likes you enough, though you should have an option to betray her & keep the magical texts for yourself (MC isn't a mage, but can sell the books for gold) which would cause her to try to kill you on the spot. Specializes in healing magic and telepathy, allowing her to buff your party or debuff the enemy by analyzing & telling you about their next moves, but can also cast barriers & use them offensively (ex. by pushing a solid barrier at someone at high speed, hitting them with the force of a modern speeding car).
* **Baldric Waltheofessunu fram Wyllt** - The red mage/battlemage. A redheaded adept of Brel-Meravia's Vermilion Order with a short temper & serious bloodthirst (both of which are often exacerbated by alcohol) who has been assigned to guard duty for a Dual Monarchy trading vessel, but since said vessel is now safely docked at Ellis his supply of combustible enemies has run dry. He'll gladly moonlight as a mercenary for the opportunity to practice his magic on live targets & to supplement his salary with some of your gold, but will betray you on the spot if you go against his home country's interests even by accident - he might be a bloodthirsty cad, but like many other Brelynn who were born after the Sixty Years' War he's a *patriotic* bloodthirsty cad, dammit. Specializes in fire magic like most other Brelynn mages, can't heal but has more HP than the other mages & can equip heavy armor to increase his survivability.
* **Ildeti Abakhez (disregard, NOT a party member anymore)** - The black mage. A pale, dark-haired Dusklander mage of noble origin whose family refused to convert to the Northern Rite of the Church of Errai when their king did, and was outlawed for it. Appropriately paranoid given his background, so the MC would have to run some errands to earn his trust before he'd even consider joining the party: but if you do all of his quests, and don't sell him out to the Dusklander headhunters pursuing him, he'll join you for free. To better defend himself from assassins, he has dabbled in blood magic, and if he were to become cut off from mana sources he's capable of using his own blood to power his spells through a ritual originally crafted by heretics to mock the sacrifices of the Holy Fathers/Mothers during Eldath's two demonic invasions - not that he should perform this in public if he wants to not get lynched or arrested & then officially executed, since blood magic is banned under pain of death across all of Eldath. Specializes in shadow magic and should do the highest damage out of all the mage party members, but is also the squishiest of the bunch: low HP (which he can cut into himself via blood magic to avoid spending mana), poor defenses and completely lacking in healing abilities.

Minor characters:

* **Pappas and Macholakos:** City guardsmen who serve as allies in the combat prototype. Adam proposes making them into recurring comic-relief characters (bumbling guardsmen, essentially). At the time of this writing they don't have much to their characterization beyond 'good cop' (Macholakos, who advocates for taking Katsaros in alive at the end of the prototype) and 'bad cop' (Pappas, who advocates just killing Katsaros on the spot).

**Weapons & armor:**

For **melee weapons**, firstly we should stick to the classics: knives, swords, axes, that kind of stuff. Since the MC is set up as a rogue-like character, he'd probably use knives the most, since after all they can be hidden more easily than an arming (one-handed) sword, a two-handed sword or an axe. In any case, swords were mostly used by upper-class warriors, so a lowly criminal isn't likely to have one unless he steals one (could be a side mission in-game). A Byzantine-esque short knife, which would be easier to stab with but obviously isn't as heavy & effective at penetrating heavy armor as a longer knife (maybe represented by higher accuracy and/or being able to hit multiple times but inflicting lower damage in-game), would probably look like this:

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-QpMZrqpRgnA/UKbXpi2hjhI/AAAAAAAAAgw/bWzukRLuhgI/s1600/image(2).png

Whereas the opposite, a longer and heavier knife (dealing more damage & ignoring enemy armor/defense but also less accurate & unable to land multiple hits) could basically replace the sword for the MC and look something like this:

http://www.worldmuseumofman.org/img1000/20.jpg (as you can see: much longer blade, much shorter handle)

Another possible weapon would be a spear of some kind, spears were after all the easiest weapon to craft (any fool could slap a spike on top of a long stick) and the most frequently used weapon by common soldiers. They were typically meant to be group weapons (one peasant with a spear is no challenge to an experienced soldier, esp. one on horseback, but 100 peasants all pointing their spears at you & advancing as a wall on the other hand…) but a skilled spearman could use his weapon's longer reach to control the flow of a one-on-one battle. Since MC isn't likely to use pikes (which were mostly a Western European thing, or in the game's case a Northern thing) if we're making him a spearman I'd have him stick to using 6-12 foot long spears instead. Some examples of Eastern spears or spearheads:

http://www.worldmuseumofman.org/img1000/25b.jpg

http://www.levantia.com.au/military/pictures/formation.jpg

As for **ranged weapons**…well, we could use the usual crossbow and bow for sure. The Late Byzantine army definitely used crossbows thanks to Italian influence, and considering that Ellis directly borders the Holy See (AKA our Papal States) the Ellisians too should have 'em. The crossbow was a powerful and accurate weapon, hence why it was so useful against knights, but couldn't be reloaded as quickly as a normal bow. In terms of bows, the Byzantines didn't use longbows but preferred composite bows (reflex bows made of multiple materials). So our MC could wield a crossbow (high accuracy and damage, but can't hit more than once), a bow (low damage, high accuracy, can hit multiple times) or ideally both would be made available.

Crossbow: http://www.swordsandarmor.com/images/CB5F\_Carved\_Crossbow.JPG

Composite bow: http://vignette3.wikia.nocookie.net/deadliestfiction/images/c/c9/Composite\_recurve\_bow.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20121106165333

In terms of **firearms**, well Ellis (like the actual late Byzantine Empire) won't have many, at least not in its official forces - it's pretty far behind the other factions in terms of gunpowder tech. However it'd probably still be possible to purchase a private firearm or two off the black market (you are after all still a criminal, and one the city guard will look the other way for if they trust you enough) or foreign merchants who've set up shop in the city. While it would obviously be silly to haul a cannon around while playing a rogue, but there'd be three varieties of personal firearms in use in this time period: the handgun/'handgonne' (NOT a pistol as you might guess from the name, but rather it was basically a medieval bazooka), the pistol (single-shot, but faster to reload than an arquebus) and the matchlock arquebus (a primitive, shorter version of the smoothbore musket that you had to load with gunpowder & lead balls through the muzzle/front, and which was fired by lighting a slow match & pulling the trigger to lower said match into the gunpowder pan). Do you think it's possible to force a firearm-wielding player to reload (classified as a special action) before attacking again? In that case the handgun could be the most powerful firearm available but take two or three turns to reload, the pistol would be the weakest but take only one turn to reload, and the arquebus would be in-between both in terms of power & reload speed.

PS. Basically no firearm in this day & age was rifled, which made them ridiculously inaccurate, so all of the above should have pretty poor chances of hitting their target: with firearms, you're sacrificing reload speed & accuracy for sheer power.

Handgun: http://i245.photobucket.com/albums/gg51/mike53787/dae2dfc9-0465-4f1c-9400-39baa02df29a\_zps9ffb5ba3.jpg

Pistol: http://www.thefirearms.guide/wp-content/uploads/img\_matchlock.jpg

Arquebus: https://i.warosu.org/data/tg/img/0330/59/1403947325152.jpg

Grenades also existed in this time period, actually they've been around since the 700s historically. The Byzantines found a way to fill clay pots with 'Greek fire' (a substance that's likely some variation of napalm, I guess in this game's universe we'd call it Ellisian fire), which their elite soldiers would then throw either by hand or using a small catapult. In addition, Medieval Europeans started tossing cast-iron grenades filled with gunpowder & crude shrapnel (ex. small nails & sharp metal scraps) at each other in 1467. We could include both in-game with different effects: for example, the conventional cast-iron grenade would deal more damage, while the Ellisian fire grenade does a lesser amount of damage at the start of every turn for like three or four turns.

Greek clay grenade: http://4.bp.blogspot.com/\_wgmuAZYk-ww/TTiRepy\_k2I/AAAAAAAAA9k/9MU-CM-HXDI/s1600/17010254.jpg

Western cast-iron grenade: http://cdn.obsidianportal.com/assets/7617/Medieval\_Grenade\_1.jpg

In terms of armor, I believe I've already supplied you with some images of Byzantine gear, which the Ellisians (being the Byzantines of this world and all) would be dressed in as well. However, for MC specifically, since he's a rogue who wouldn't wear heavy armor I'd recommend only partial armor over his clothes (the fustanella and such recommended above). The first piece of light armor he'd wear is a kidney belt, made of thick leather to protect the lower body (especially, of course, your vulnerable kidneys) in close combat in addition to having even thicker leather liners at its top & bottom so you can attach a hip-quiver (the most common kind of quiver in the Middle Ages, incidentally) to it & not fear said quiver rolling, loosening and falling off when you're running long distances. Here are some examples:

http://www.faireleather.com/images/kidney-belt.jpg

http://www.gottahaverockandroll.com/ItemImages/000010/apr2013-364\_lg.jpeg

http://www.hoppersgiftware.co.uk/roman-gladiator-leather-kidney-belt-2019-p.asp

(you may also recognize the kidney belt as part of Altair's costume from AC)

Far below the belt, MC would also likely wear leather gaiters. Those would offer a degree of protection for his lower legs & upper feet without being uncomfortable or too heavy to move around quickly in. Examples of medieval gaiters:

http://www.medieval-shop.co.uk/13575/gaiters-adjustable-knight.jpg

http://pre00.deviantart.net/194a/th/pre/i/2012/099/f/e/medieval\_style\_gaiter\_by\_cosmicangelsephiroth-d4vmz9i.png

In terms of hand protection, MC could just stick with simple leather gloves. Since he isn't exactly a knight or a heavy infantryman, it's not like he'd wear steel gauntlets & vambraces into battle. If you really want him to have heavier hand protection, he could have demi-gauntlets: steel gauntlets which only protect the wrist & the back of the hand, and which could be used as impromptu knuckle dusters like full gauntlets. (could even count as an in-game special attack, dealing light damage but coming with a chance to stun the target)

Demi-gauntlets, seen here being worn over gloves: http://www.albion-swords.com/images/armor/mercenary/demigauntlet.jpg

Finally, helmets. Being a rogue I'd say MC doesn't even need to wear a helmet, instead going bareheaded or donning a hood & maybe a kerchief 'round his mouth. However, if you want him to have a helmet available (perhaps as a pricy defensive purchase), it'd make sense for him to wear a skullcap or *cervelliere*: a simple metal helmet that you can wear under the aforementioned hood, often worn by peasant soldiers. It's literally just a metal bowl that you strap to your head, but even that's better than no armor at all in a battle, and since it's easily hidden underneath a hat or hood it could help you surprise an enemy who keeps swinging at your head.

Western skullcap: http://images.history-revisited.com/l/alias3/Y35M-medieval-cervelliere,-reenactment,-14th-cent-.jpg

Byzantine skullcap: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/\_bH2LXBIfx6c/TIDRiYpvQzI/AAAAAAAAT8I/qRtTLNWOtdM/s1600/BYZANTINE+CONCENTRIC+HELMET.jpg

**Final companions list (agreed with Adam):**

**Badriyah:**

* **Role:** Warrior. She could be set up as either a flexible fighter capable of using 1-H and 2-H weapons or a dual-wielding fighter prioritizing speed and offensive power over defense, but not to the extent of (and with more HP & beefier defensive stats than) the MC, and would rely on high stamina coupled with a wide variety of special moves to win battles instead of raw force (the basic Attack command). In RPGMaker stat terms: moderate ATK + LUK, higher AGI than DEF, very high MP (technically Stamina in-game since she's not a mage) and MAT (= high-power combat skills), low MDF.
* **Appearance:** Consider the looks of an upper-class Arabic/Turkish woman: long dark hair (tied into a ponytail, bun or just hidden under a hat so it doesn't get in the way during combat), dark eyes and olive to even pale skin (Turks in particular were famous for being the polar opposite of the 'swarthy Mideastern savage' stereotype that many medieval to early modern Europeans believed in). She shouldn't look too different from the Ellisians themselves, which besides being realistic is also a good reason as to why she's been able to effectively blend in. On account of being a melee fighter, she should have a more muscular and toned figure instead of looking like a twig or an overweight noblewoman - both are pretty bad ideas when you're going into close combat. In terms of clothing colours, grey/brown to blend in perhaps? She absolutely shouldn't be wearing black & gold though, since those are Umari colours and half the reason she's still alive now is that she's been successful in getting people to think she isn't one of them.
* **Background:** As outlined above, she's the daughter of an Umari Pink Priestess (essentially a sacred prostitute) and an unknown father. As she grew up, she grew interested in the brothel-goers' tales of adventure and the town watch's sparring sessions. On the flip side, she wasn't the biggest fan of her mother's lifestyle or the idea of marrying someone many times her own age. She finally fled the Umari Empire four years ago to avoid such a fate and is currently living in the slums of Ellis under the false name of 'Callidora Kalonimos', working odd jobs for criminals she deems 'tolerable' (smugglers, thieves & street cheats, mostly) to stay afloat financially & counting on her (admittedly limited) knowledge of the Ellisian language and customs to avoid getting lynched by a mob.
* **Personality:** As suggested by Adam on 22/12/15, she's pretty reserved and conservative in her demeanor - something that will come as a very big surprise to pretty much all of the other characters, whose image of the stereotypical Umari is a hard-drinking, hard-partying sex machine. She's martially inclined and has little time for the hedonism & slacking off encouraged by her religion (at least for all 'highborn' Umari like her anyway, slaves & the lower classes are most definitely not encouraged to slack off): as mentioned in her backstory entry, she much prefers to fight or hear war stories. Character development trajectory over the course of the game: open up to the rest of the party and Ellisian society, maybe even convert fully from the Umari Circle of Bahamut to the more conservative Erraian Church followed by the Ellisians (and almost everyone else on the continent).

**Eros:**

* **Role:** Archer. He exclusively uses bows and crossbows, not guns, and would be pretty fragile and incapable of equipping heavy armor. To compensate, he's faster on his feet than most of the other party members and will have better luck dodging attacks than trying to soak them up. In RPGMaker stat terms: low HP + DEF + MDF, moderate AGI + MAT, high ATK + MP (technically Stamina in-game since he's not a mage) + LUK.
* **Appearance:** Think of how a middle-class Greek would look like: dark hair, but fair skin (at the very least he'd be paler than MC). Should have a 'pretty boy' look to him, befitting his 'handsome lech' background. His body should be slim & athletic, with the exception of his arms, which should be muscular in contrast to the rest of his lean frame: medieval archers' skeletons show that their arm bones are larger than average and often have bone spurs as a result of the stress of constantly nocking, drawing & loosing arrows (in layman's terms: medieval archers may or may not have matched the 'lean, physically weak' stereotype of archers today, but their arms would pretty much always be weirdly buff in comparison to the rest of their body).
* **Background:** As outlined above, Eros comes from a middle-class background: his dad's a successful merchant from one of the higher districts of Ellis and made him an apprentice with plans to have him inherit the family business eventually, so while he didn't grow up surrounded by wealth & luxury that most of the cast couldn't even begin to imagine like nobles do, he'd have grown up in a nice house with a few servants and would almost never have to worry about going hungry. He would also have been exposed to foreign cultures quite a bit more than say the MC, on account of his old man either having business partners over at their home or taking him along to visit them in their respective foreigners' quarters. However, his comfortable lifestyle and lack of any real challenges in life led him to become an irresponsible and shameless skirt-chaser instead of a hard-nosed merchant, eventually resulting in him starting an affair with the wrong highborn girl and forcing his parents to send him to the Brown Quarter to lie low for a few years so he doesn't get murdered by the girl's pissed off noble relatives. Maybe he could be introduced as the centerpoint of a quest where he's being chased down by assassins sent by the noble house he wronged, or (in a reverse of the above scenario) trying to kill that noble house's agents in the Brown Quarter before they can reveal his location to their superiors?
* **Personality:** As mentioned above, as of this writing he's a boisterous and cheerful fellow, quick to crack jokes even in completely inappropriate settings (ex. in the middle of a fight for his life, or at a funeral) and to respond to mockery with an insult or two of his own before letting it go. He's also a shameless flirt and in all likelihood will hit on all female characters at least once. That said, his devil-may-care attitude does also translate to carelessness, a lack of responsibility and inability to take most things seriously, best evidenced by him hooking up with a noble lady (resulting in his dad's business coming under attack by a bunch of people who are basically above Ellisian law and he himself having to live in the Brown Quarter). This could manifest in-game by him trying to live high on the hog even though that'd obviously attract the attention of assassins, shooting his mouth off around the other party members or important NMCs or disregarding obvious warnings to jump into dangerous situations. Character development trajectory over the course of the game: become more responsible, level-headed and willing to at least try to patch things up with the nobles he wronged not just for his own sake, but that of his family as well.

**Maion:**

* **Role:** Mage. She'd be physically even more fragile than Eros, incapable of equipping any real armor (so mage robes don't count) at all and using only her staff in melee, but that shouldn't matter if she's deployed the way mages are supposed to be used - attacking from range with her powerful spells, and buffing & healing party members or debuffing enemies as necessary. As mentioned, she specializes in fighting with barriers and predicting opponents' moves (= stat buffs). In RPGMaker stat terms: very low HP + ATK + DEF, moderate AGI + LUK, high MP, very high MAT + MDF.
* **Appearance:** Maion is unapologetically upper-class to the core, and her looks should reflect that accordingly. She'd wear elegant robes to showcase her cool dignity and high birth without coming across as crass or tacky, and might also be sporting some jewelry to show off her status (reference: the Byzantine noblewoman pics in the pic folder) while also broadcasting to the world that she knows she's better than everyone around her in the Brown Quarter, and is practically daring them to try to steal from her. The only color she wouldn't use is dark purple, which is strictly reserved from the imperial family: light blue or lilac and white might work though. Physically she'd be a fair-skinned young woman with long light brown hair, lighter-colored eyes and a slender, graceful frame - another sharp contrast in appearances to the olive-skinned or tanned and darker-haired lower-class characters.
* **Background:** As mentioned above, Maion comes from an upper-class background. Not just any aristocratic background either, but an ancient, high-and-mighty noble family that can trace its family tree all the way back to one of Marae's trusted companions in the war against the non-humans & which has close blood ties with the imperial Maraioi family at that, which in modern terms would basically make her a member of the 0.01%: it doesn't matter that she isn't the oldest child and thus heir to the family, she would have grown up in the lap of luxury. Having been born a mage, she'd have gone into Ellis' Magical Association in her childhood, although on account of Ellis' fairly liberal attitude towards magic and her high birth she'd have been able to keep in close contact with her family and even wander outside of their tower, the *Pendaitolon*, for extended periods of time. She might have even spent a few years studying abroad at the Northern Kingdoms' magical universities, and so would be familiar with foreign customs & languages like real medieval high-ranking nobles were expected to be. As we've discussed, I think she'd be best introduced to the player via a quest to help her recover some magical texts stolen by the Blood Eagles (since she wouldn't have set foot in the Brown Quarter if she could help it) and permanently join the party to repay her debt to them for saving her academic life.
* **Personality:** Maion's a noble, and pretty damn proud of it: she prefers to consort with those she considers her equals and doesn't want to interact with her inferiors in any way unless she absolutely has to. Like your average noble she isn't likely to think highly of commoners, when she thinks of them at all: as far as she's concerned they exist to serve her interests & others of her social class, and they should meekly accept their lot in life as underlings to their betters which was obviously handed to them by Errai. She'll come across as cold & condescending to those beneath her, **very** confident in her abilities, prone to giving orders instead of discussing things with others like they're equals and quick to snapping back when someone attacks her noble birth, her academic & magical prowess or her attitude (though she'd be totally cool with doing the exact same thing in reverse to those 'beneath' her). That said, she's so out of touch with the lower class - her initial quest might even be the first time she properly set foot in the Brown Quarter - that when she isn't mocking them, she'll probably be baffled at just how bad they have it and might even be moved to pity for them at times. In a time where nations as we know them don't really exist and most people couldn't care less who their overlord is, she and other nobles like her exhibit something we'd recognize as patriotism and are ready to die for Ellis not to defend their families & property or w/e, but for the glory & safety of their empire. Character development trajectory over the course of the game: become more sympathetic to the lot of the poor, less willing to accept the 'fact' that high birth = a license to use & abuse the underclass, and generally less of a jerk to everyone around her who isn't a fellow 0.01%er.

**Optional companions:**

**Corrado:**

* **Role:** Warrior. Corrado is a tank who relies on brute force and the ability to shrug off most attacks to win battles as opposed to Badriyah who employs finesse & special attacks, taking full advantage of advances in metalworking & armor-smithing technology to make himself even more invulnerable to non-blunt-trauma & gunpowder weapons like all other knights would. In RPGMaker stat terms: very high HP + DEF, high ATK, moderate AGI, low LUK, very low MAT + MDF + MP.
* **Appearance:** Corrado should give off a 'dangerous badass' vibe as soon as you see him. Standing at over 6 feet tall (very tall even by the standards of the chivalry), with dark hair in a bowl cut + scars across his olive skin + intimidating facial expressions, should do the trick. He should be wearing a suit of Italian-esque plate armor: a sallet with bellows visor, and a set of polished steel plate with a gambeson (padded jacket) underneath. In terms of heraldry to identify his noble lineage with, he could have a crest on his helmet shaped like his house's animal and/or a shield painted with his coat of arms strapped to his shoulder.
* **Background:** As mentioned above, Corrado was formerly a landed knight in the 'Broken Bowl' region north of both Ellis and the Holy See: a war-torn land divided into hundreds of tiny feuding principalities & city-states that have often become pawns in the geopolitical games of their better-organized neighbors. He treated his serfs so badly that they eventually revolted, and his cruelty was severe enough that his direct overlord (an independent baron) cut him loose: he was deprived of all lands and titles, and exiled from the only home he had known. He promptly became a mercenary in the Thurin-Dual Monarchy war to survive, fighting for whichever side would pay him more and defecting when he missed so much as one payday: in the process, he found his former overlord on the opposing side in one battle and naturally proceeded to kill him. After he gained a reputation for cruelty, badassery and treachery in equal amounts on the battlefields of the Broken Bowl, he went south to Ellis and is looking for new employment opportunities there - the Dual Monarchy & Thurin both consider him too dangerous and unpredictable to hire again.
* **Personality:** Pretty much everything to be said about Corrado's nature has already been said above: he's sadistic, violent, and dangerously unpredictable. He was such a terrible overlord to his serfs that they rebelled; like all experienced knights, he's been trained from youth to fight and is a monster on the battlefield with a variety of melee weapons, on horseback and on foot; and he's got quite the rep for betraying his employers if they miss a payment, though if they can keep to their end of a contract then he will fulfill his end until his term is up - he might be a bastard who considers honor a polite suggestion but he won't betray people for no reason at all, if nothing else then b/c he knows that's bad for business. He has no patience for intellectual life and might even be illiterate, considering books to be something for clerics & scholars, and will only afford what little courtesy he's learned to employers and his social equals or superiors.

**Baldric:**

* **Role:** Mage. Baldric is a 'battlemage' almost as adept at fighting in melee as he is with magic, and the spells he has access to are pretty much all purely offensive in contrast to Maion's more varied arsenal. That said, he has less MP available and isn't as fast as the rogues either. He'll be able to equip heavier armor and is unlikely to get wiped out in the first round of close combat. In RPGMaker stat terms: high HP + ATK + MAT, moderate MP + DEF + MDF, low AGI + LUK.
* **Appearance:** What do most people think when they think of the 'Celtic' looks? Red hair, green eyes, fair skin, maybe freckles - well, Baldric has all of that, favoring his mother's side of the family in looks. He should look pretty wild to match his volatile temperament, with messy hair, expressive eyes and scruffy clothes. Being a battlemage, he should have more muscle definition than most mages as well. In terms of clothes, he should wear medium armor (say, a corrazina breastplate and skullcap) along with robes in the red, orange and gold of his homeland, and he could also wear a wooden salamander-and-lily brooch to show his allegiance to the Dual Monarchy.
* **Background:** As mentioned above, Baldric is a mage hailing from Brel, an island nation composed of a volcanic archipelago northwest of Ellis and the dominant half of the Dual Monarchy. His father was a yeoman ('churl') longbowman from the island of Lesser Meon in central Brel while his mother was a mage from the western isle of Magh Ithe where the blood of Old Lorval still flows strongly, which in RL terms means he's basically of mixed Anglo-Irish heritage. He would have been educated with (maybe even under) his mom from childhood, and given Brel's extremely martial culture, rushed to the front-lines of the war with Thurin by his early teens. Further feeding his anger issues and obvious bloodthirst, his parents could have been killed in earlier battles with Thurin, and we could also give him a mundane brother (elder or younger, it doesn't really matter) who served as a common soldier in the Brelynn army and was killed in front of him - ideally while unarmed and trying to surrender, which would give him a real reason to prefer death to giving up in battle. He's currently in Ellis as a guard for the Brelynn diplomatic mission but will moonlight as a mercenary in the player's service for gold & a chance to get in even more fights.
* **Personality:** As has already been said, Baldric is basically fire given flesh: wild and emotional with a volcanic temper, prone to acting recklessly instead of thinking first, just as quick to laughter as he is to murderous fury, but whose rage can burn out and give way to forgiveness surprisingly quickly. He's a passionate & blunt fellow with simple tastes who loves fighting, booze and women in no particular order and is the type to say whatever's on his mind without any attempt at sugarcoating, and will laugh at the lavish excesses, haughty mannerisms and (to him) 'phony' courtesy of nobles like Maion. Mirroring Maion's proto-patriotism, he is staunchly loyal to the Dual Monarchy & will betray even you if he thinks you're going against his king's interests, though his undying loyalty is really to his specific King Cearl (a charismatic warlord who leads from the front, basically right up his alley) than to the country. Despite his obvious appetite for a good fight or ten, unlike Corrado he's generally not unnecessarily cruel to his enemies, unless they go out of their way to push every button he's got and/or they're Thuriners in which case he'll enjoy BBQing them with fire magic.

**Adelhard:**

* **Role:** Rogue, specifically a ranged one. Adelhard is a medieval gunner, which in practice means he's specialized in one-shot-killing anything with the three firearms available in this time period: the bazooka-like handgonne, relatively fast-loading pistol, and middle-of-the-road arquebus. However, he can't wear heavy armor and will be in a bad spot if he's caught in close quarters. In RPGMaker stat terms: very high ATK, high AGI + LUK, moderate MP, low HP + MAT + MDF.
* **Appearance:** Adelhard should have the look of an experienced and old mercenary to him. That means scars, dull eyes and probably some gray in his dirty-blond hair, as he's older than both Baldric and Corrado. His figure should be buff and imposing, almost Schwarzenegger-like: medieval & Renaissance arquebusiers were likely to get caught in a melee at least once in their service terms, and a veteran like Adelhard would've experienced that more than once. As for clothes, medieval German landsknechts (who Thuriner troops are based on) had developed a pretty crazy style of dress, and Adelhard would follow closely: a broad flat beret, slashed doublet with multicolored undershirts pulled through the gaps, baggy lederhosen and flat shoes will make him an unmistakable (and ridiculous) sight. Maybe throw in a boar's tusk necklace to show his allegiance to Thurin as well.
* **Background:** Adelhard is a common mercenary who was born to serfs living on land that belonged to their noble overlord rather than themselves, and so he would've spent his earliest years working himself to the bone on the farm with his parents, siblings and the other peasants. In his late teens/early adulthood he decided this life wasn't for him and ran away to become rich in his own way, stealing a gun & ammo from one mercenary company so he could enlist in another, and made a modest fortune in the internecine conflicts of the Thuriner nobility, the Great Cleansing targeted at Vinculi heretics in the mid-1400s and finally the long Thuriner-Dual Monarchy Great War while also picking up a wife (likely a camp cook or follower) & siring kids of his own. To justify his rabid hatred of Brelynn & Meravians, the Dual Monarchy could have screwed him over massively - say, a raiding party on Chevauchée (raiding deep in enemy territory) could have targeted his village, pillaged his house & raped and/or murdered his family, which is especially likely if they're living in western Thurin. Anyway, his company's still working for Thurin today and has been assigned to protect their foreign quarter in Ellis, where he will be happy to sell his firepower to MC for the right price so long as MC in turn doesn't hurt Thurin's national interests.
* **Personality:** Being born a serf who was at best ignored & at worst actively mistreated by the nobility, then spending his prime years raiding towns & wandering from one battlefield to another to kill people for a living would have made Adelhard a pretty grim fellow (and possibly an alcoholic). Don't expect him to laugh or talk a lot, or to express much emotion in general, but instead to focus on carrying out whatever mission he's been assigned as quickly and efficiently as possible. There are a few exceptions, though - he might well drop Ahnuldian quips after killing enemies or at the end of missions, he's no less blunt & direct in his approach to people than Baldric (ironically, the two would surely hate each other if they met face to face) and the mistreatment of commoners, highborn arrogance in general & the presence of Brelynn/Meravians are all sure to set him off.

**Plot structure notes:**

**Episode I:**

Already outlined above & in discussions at Tim’s, but to reiterate:

* A tutorial section where the MC is still a Blood Eagle & carrying out a hit for them. The city guards know he’s coming and intercept him & his party, resulting in an unwinnable fight. As MC tries to flee, he’s betrayed and left for dead by the other Blood Eagles, who kill his sister in the process.
* MC is obviously captured by the city watch. Upon waking, he’s taken up to the office of Zervis, the captain of the guards, and bluntly informed that mastermind of his betrayal, Aegidios Skleros, has launched a coup against the Blood Eagles’ old leadership and has been seen using weapons of Umari design, a concerning development as Ellis is still in danger of being overrun by the Umari in the south, and so MC now has two choices: work with Zervis against his former comrades in exchange for a pardon or at least a more lenient sentence, or be hanged as a criminal within 24 hours. Obviously, the game can only proceed if the former option is taken.
* MC is directed to kill/arrest Aiolos Katsaros in the southern-central slums first, since he’s the newest & weakest of the Blood Eagle lieutenants. This was already covered in the prototype.
* Once Katsaros has been dealt with (one way or the other), MC must eliminate the other lieutenants, each presiding over a district of the Brown Quarter (Ellis’ slums, where the game takes place): Alusian Atanasov in the eastern harbor, Eber Marinos in the western harbor, Yeina Zanthos in the northwest, Hilarion Metaxas in the southeast, Haimon Raptis in the northeast and Tisiphone Apion in the southwest. This should ideally be possible to do in any order.
* With each defeated lieutenant, the MC should find information linking the Blood Eagles to the Umari government. By the time the last lieutenant is defeated, he should have enough evidence to directly name Skleros a traitor working with the Umari.
* MC & the guards then storm Skleros’ own hideout, but do not find him: they do, however, find his plans to meet with Umari agents in a remote grotto just outside of Ellis, and race off to confront him there.
* A small battle breaks out at the grotto between the Ellisian army and city watch, including the MC, and the Umari + Skleros & his remaining loyal men. Ultimately the Ellisians win (or else there wouldn’t be another episode) and Skleros is either killed or taken in for questioning by the MC. However, if the MC elects to capture Skleros **without killing every other Umari troop on the map first** he’s betrayed & murdered almost immediately afterward by one of the Umari, to everyone’s surprise. If the MC had the foresight to eliminate all of the Umari before defeating Skleros, he can finally take the guy in alive without a hitch.
* After searching the grotto & the bodies of the fallen Umari/interrogating Skleros (depending on whether or not the player was able to take him in alive), the MC & Ellisians uncover evidence that Skleros was just a pawn in a much larger conspiracy: Ellisian nobles far above Skleros & the MC’s station in life are the real masterminds behind the plot to deliver Ellis into Umari hands in exchange for preferential treatment under their rule, and Skleros was never more than a middle-man between this aristocratic cabal of Umari collaborators & the Umari government. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the Umari have recovered from their defeat a year & a half ago, and that a 150,000-strong Umari host is once again marching on Ellis. Zervis declares that this matter must be investigated & the conspirators executed before they can open the gates to the oncoming enemy army, and invites/commands (depending on your relationship with him) the MC to assist him in the upper districts of Ellis. Cue cliffhanger ending.

**Episode I sidequests/companion recruitment quests:**

* Badriyah: Offer to assist with keeping order at the tavern she works at🡪Step 1: Beat up & throw out disorderly, drunken patrons who are ruining everyone else’s time (starting fights for no reason, harassing the servants, etc.)🡪Step 2: Prevent greedy servants from stealing money from the tavern owner🡪Step 3: Tavern owner wants to stop paying protection money to the local neighborhood gang (Blood Eagle allies), assist him & Badriyah + the other guards in wiping out said gang when they inevitably come by to collect.
* Eros: Offer to hide him from men sent by the noble family he pissed off🡪Defeat said noble’s retainers when they break into his hideout OR Negotiate with the noble’s retainers, offering them either a ton of gold to look the other way or to do another errand for them in exchange for their master’s forgiveness.
* Maion: Offer to assist her in recovering a magical tome stolen by the Blood Eagles🡪Track down & defeat the Blood Eagle crew.
* Foreigners: No quest required, just pay them a ton of money. Baldric & Adelhard should be found in their respective foreign quarters, Corrado can be found in a tavern (same one as Badriyah perhaps, to keep it simple) since he’s an outlaw & both the Dual Monarchy and Thurin hate him.
* Medieval Wiseau sidequest: Untangle the love triangle between Lord Thierry D’Oiseau, his fiancee Elisabeþ and his squire Marcus. Should be three possible outcomes: The Room reenacted in a medieval setting (D’Oiseau dead, Elisabeþ disgraced, Marcus leaves), the D’Oiseau marriage goes ahead smoothly, or Elisabeþ and Marcus run away to be together.
* Medieval Trump sidequest: Drumpf hires MC to assassinate a nobleman who interfered in his plans to climb further up the Empire’s social hierarchy by arranging the marriage of his son to the daughter of a destitute but respected noble house, which Drumpf had hoped to marry into. Naturally, you’ll have to kill the rival nobleman’s heir as well. Three outcomes: assist Drumpf & carry out the hit as ordered, betray Drumpf & kill him instead for a reward from the nobleman, or inform the Thuriner authorities so they arrest Drumpf for a smaller monetary reward, a political favor and Adelhard’s respect (if he’s in your party).
* Sabotage Thurin’s artillery shipment for Brel-Meravia: Available only if the player takes Baldric into the party. Baldric is given a mission to destroy a shipment of cannons & gunpowder made/bought by Thurin in Ellis before it sets sail for the imperial homeland. Obviously, going through with this mission makes an irrevocable enemy out of Thurin.
* Eliminate Dual Monarchy spy for Thurin: Available only if the player takes Adelhard into the party. Adelhard is given a mission to take out a double agent working for the Dual Monarchy and recover state secrets related to new gunpowder weapons that said agent had stolen. Obviously, going through with this mission makes an irrevocable enemy out of Brel-Meravia.
* Inquisition vs. Ildeti Abakhez: Initiated by finding Ildeti Abakhez, a highborn fugitive from Solamut who claims he witnessed the massacre of his family during Solamut’s religious civil war and had to flee his homeland to avoid a similar fate. He’ll want you to protect him from agents of Solamut’s Inquisition, who are searching for his head with the permission of the Ellisian government. When confronted, the head Inquisitor claims Ildeti and his family are not only heretics but also war criminals of the worst order, and insists that the player aid them in bringing him to justice. Two outcomes: help Ildeti & kill the Inquisitors for a large monetary reward, or help the Inquisitors kill Ildeti to improve Solamut-Ellisian relations (they’ll become allies again, Solamut will help Ellis fight the Umari).
* More to be decided

**Episode II:**

* The MC & friends deal with the noble conspirators in Ellis’ upper districts. Needless to say this means getting mixed up in imperial & foreign politics, as the Ellisian government stands at a crossroads.
* On one hand, there are powerful foreign nations willing to support Ellis, for a heavy price. The Dual Monarchy of Brel & Meravia as well as the Empire of Thurin are prepared to send their large & highly experienced armies to drive back the Umari, trusting that the Church will force the other power to respect a truce in their 25-year war. However, Ellis will be forced into becoming a vassal for whichever foreign power it sides with & will later be annexed fully, and it will also have to convert to the Northern Rite of the Church of Errai that the two empires (and almost every other nation north of the continent’s Neck) follows. This option is favored by the Empress-Regent Sevenna but opposed by basically everyone else at court, from the proto-nationalistic Grand Domestic & Grand Arcanist who believe defending Ellisian independence is pointless if you’re just going to hand it to the Northerners, to the Holy Father of the Southern Rite who would rather see the city fall to the Umari than convert to the ‘false’ and ‘schismatic’ Northern Rite, to corrupt nobles who just don’t want foreigners imposing their laws on them & scrutinizing their less than wholesome activities.
* In another corner, the Grand Arcanist of the Ellisian Magical Association has his own plan to save the city without bending the knee to a foreign power. Elaudos Ralethannos intends on mounting a conventional defense and letting the Umari breach the outer walls, before using the entirety of the Association’s stock of pyr ierós (magical Greek fire) – further empowered with blood magic – to burn down the Brown Quarter and wipe out the invading army…as well as everyone still living there. Ralethannos plans to assassinate the Empress-Regent, become Regent in her place and turn Ellis into a magocracy that will allow him to carry out his bloody plan.
* The last option available to players is to side with the Grand Domestic (field marshal & commander of the Ellisian army), Galenos Mouzalon. He maintains that Ellis can defend itself conventionally, without resorting to massacring half the population or submitting to foreigners. His plan is to launch a coup against the government, deposing both the child Empress and her regent mother, then expelling the foreigners & bringing the Magical Association under control by supplanting Ralethannos with one of his allies. This is by far the riskiest course of action since Ellis has almost no chance of thwarting the Umari alone with conventional means, but it is the only option that lets you maintain Ellisian independence without committing mass murder on your own people.
* Ultimately the player will have to eliminate the pro-Umari conspiracy and make a choice. Siding with Brel-Meravia results in Ellis converting to the Northern Rite and the Empress Erennia marrying their Crown Prince, dooming Ellisian independence in the long run but ensuring their support against the Umari in the short term, that aristocratic corruption will be cleaned out (violently) and that the Magical Association will continue to operate; siding with Thurin results in Ellis becoming a protectorate of the larger Northern empire and the Empress being demoted to a queenly dignity, and since Thurin has a ‘kill on sight’ policy regarding mages, the Magical Association will be dissolved and its members forced into exile even if they serve Ellis capably in the defense of the city; siding with Ralethannos results in Ellis becoming Medieval Greek North Korea with magic, a hated hermit-kingdom known for massacring & brutalizing its own people; and siding with Mouzalon results in him becoming Emperor and Ellis standing alone against the Umari tide.

**Episode III:**

* The Umari reach Ellis’ gates and the siege begins.
* No matter what path is chosen, the Umari will assault the city walls. The MC can try holding them off at the outer (non-magical) walls of the Brown Quarter, and if the Ellisians are beaten there, fall back to the (magical) walls of the Copper Quarter, the city’s third tier. If **that** falls, game over.
* If the player had Ellis side with a foreign power, they’ll send a smaller army at first to support the garrison in the defense of the city while they mobilize their full strength, and later land that full-strength army of theirs on either the western or eastern beaches to deliver the final blow to the Umari army. It will be pretty much impossible for Ellis to lose, even if the MC dies, since the foreign ally of your choice will arrive in time to save the day.
* If the player puts Ralethannos in power, for the Grand Arcanist’s plan to work Ellis’ outer wall must fall. Once it’s down & the Umari have swarmed into the Brown Quarter, his mages will ignite the ‘holy flame’ that destroys the Brown Quarter, killing everyone still there – both Umari and Ellisian. The war’s over and Ellis remains free, at the cost of millions of lives (most of them being lower-class Ellisians killed by the ‘holy flame’). In time Ralethannos will dispose of the puppet Empress Erennia & transform Ellis into a full magocracy, which will remain diplomatically isolated from everyone else (there won’t be many fans of a magocracy that overthrew its legitimate monarch, figurehead or not, and killed millions of its own people).
* If the player puts Mouzalon in power, they MUST hold the outer wall. If it falls, there’s no grace period where they can survive if they hold the inner walls – the Umari will easily overrun the hugely outnumbered & literally outgunned defenders well before they can reach the safety of the inner walls. We could have this end in a way mirroring the historical fall of Constantinople; Mouzalon hands the imperial regalia to the MC and maybe even names him his successor, before charging off into the Umari swarm dressed as a common soldier & dying. The MC then gets to reign as the last Emperor of Ellis for like 5 minutes, before he too is surrounded & struck down by Umari troops hellbent on taking his head (and the ancient crown of Ellis with it) as the city falls. If the outer walls hold, the Umari will retreat after several failed assaults and Mouzalon stands triumphant, but the player should be warned that the Umari will surely try again another day, no foreign power will have any interest in supporting Ellis and that Ellis itself is not likely to become much stronger, meaning they’ll be back at square one in a decade or two at most.