

MISSION TO RED LARCH

At whatever point in the search process you deem appropriate, the characters narrow down the search for the ritual site to a final location: the settlement of Red Larch on the western side of the Dessarin Valley. This small town services passing caravans and has a large quarry from which local folk mine marble favored by the wealthy of Waterdeep. A wagon can reach Waterdeep from Red Larch in seven days, and the town of Phandalin is six days away on foot.

Red Larch is also the hometown of Omin Dran and the location of the Dran family business—the Dran & Courtier inn and restaurant. As the characters soon discover, this is not a coincidence. The *Princes of the Apocalypse* adventure contains more information on Red Larch and the surrounding region. As with Phandalin, this version of Red Larch is set about five years later than that earlier adventure.

How the characters arrive in Red Larch is likely determined by what they suspect or have learned regarding the defenses the Six have set up around the ritual. They might choose a stealthy incursion in the dead of night, to roar straight in aboard a mobile franchise headquarters at midday, or any approach in between. But however they first enter the town, the characters quickly confirm that the Six's ritual is already underway.

Something is seriously wrong in Red Larch. The Dran & Courtier inn can be seen at the crossroads near the center of town easily enough. But the beams of purple energy emanating from the establishment are decidedly unusual, as is the presence of frightened townsfolk corralled in a pen nearby. Then, of course, there's the small force of bugbears guarding the pen and the gnolls surrounding the inn. That doesn't look right at all.

The amount of time the characters spend skulking around town is up to them. Each time they investigate a feature noted below, roll a d10. On a roll of 1, a patrol of two **nothics** working for the Six attempts to ambush the party from the cover of nearby buildings, attacking with surprise if not seen.

CORRALLED TOWNSFOLK

Twenty locals have been gathered by Six operatives in a fenced-in yard behind Ironhead Arms, a shop selling new and used weapons and armor. Three townsfolk are currently plotting an escape, but they fear that the other captured folk are not prepared for battle. The three are the shop's owner Ironhead (NG male half-orc **veteran**), the town's constable Harburk (LG male human **veteran**), and an explorer from out of town named Silvana (CG female human **scout**). The three work with any characters who help defend the townsfolk.

Guarding the yard are ten **bugbears** that have been instructed to safeguard the prisoners—but only because it isn't clear to Splugoth whether the ritual might eventually require humanoid sacrifices. The bugbears are focused on watching their captives, and have disadvan-

tage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to notice anyone approaching them. If the characters free the captives, Ironhead, Harburk, and Silvana offer to lead the other townsfolk to safety.

NORTH SIDE OF TOWN

Though these shops and houses look deserted at first, the characters catch periodic glimpses of frightened townsfolk peering through shuttered windows, or hear them trying to barricade doors with furniture. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or good roleplaying can convince the locals to share what they know.

One of the NPCs the characters could meet is Imdarr Relvauder (LN male human **priest**). Imdarr is hiding with four other townsfolk (male and female **commoners**). He won't leave the others, but he casts any of his useful spells on the adventurers if he believes they are earnest about helping Red Larch.

SOUTH SIDE OF TOWN

As described above, characters can spot frightened townsfolk within the houses and other buildings, and can question them with appropriate Charisma checks or roleplaying. Scouting around the area also reveals the odd sight of an unconscious bugbear wrapped up in a floral print dress.

Approaching the bugbear draws the attention of Haeleeya Hanadroum (NG female human **commoner**), who is holed up in her bathhouse and dress shop. Haeleeya knocked the bugbear unconscious after winning an unlikely battle against it by dropping flowerpots on its head from the second-story landing. She tied it up in several of her dresses, and is now wondering what to do with it.

Haeleeya is glad to hand the characters her captive bugbear, which is happy to tell the characters everything it knows in exchange for staying alive. It tells how the bugbears were employed by the Six and ordered to round up twenty captives in case the Six needed them for some ritual, though it knows nothing more than that.

THE DRAN & COURTIER

As you draw closer, you see the sign marking the Dran & Courtier swinging slowly despite the absence of any breeze. Purple light continues to seep out through roof tiles, shuttered windows, and the closed front door.

Even in daylight, the building is shrouded by shadows, as if every part of the inn is somehow in the shade. Ringing the building are twenty **gnolls**, arranged in four packs of five. Even the fearless gnolls are weirded out by the strange lights emanating from the inn. The characters can engage the gnolls head-on or attempt to take them out stealthily. Because the mercenaries are on edge, they can be easily distracted by a fire, recruiting NPCs to draw them off, illusions, or other clever strategies.

Once the gnolls have been dealt with, the characters are free to enter the Dran & Courtier. The incursion of