



Skyrim Faction Pack: Side Plot C – Allegiances in War

Introduction: *The World of Factions After Alduin*

In the turbulent aftermath of Alduin's defeat and the Dragonborn's disappearance, Skyrim's civil war rages on ¹. Amid this chaos, the province's **major factions** pursue their own agendas. This Faction Pack expansion integrates those factions as playable allegiances for PCs, adding "**Side Plot C**" story arcs that run parallel to the core Civil War campaign. These faction quests deepen immersion by entwining with each city and war chapter – for example, players aligned with the Thieves Guild will find its influence in **Riften**'s events, while Dark Brotherhood agents shape intrigue in **Solitude** and beyond.

Each faction's questline is **inspired by the original Skyrim game** yet takes divergent turns in this alternate timeline (the Dragonborn defeated Alduin but did *not* carry out the faction quests). Key NPCs appear with lore-accurate personalities and placements, but outcomes may change – **Karliah** still seeks to restore the Thieves Guild's honor, but the PC might become the new Guildmaster; **Cicero** arrives with the Night Mother, yet the Dark Brotherhood's fate lies in PC hands. Faction membership confers unique **rewards** (artifacts like the *Blade of Woe*, *Staff of Magnus*, *Nightingale Gear*, etc.) and **Extras** with progression mechanics (special Stunts, magic abilities, and rank-up benefits). Many of these powers – **Nightingale stealth**, **Lycanthropy**, **Vampirism** – are earned gradually at significant milestones rather than granted all at once, reflecting the PC's growing mastery and avoiding early imbalance. Each faction's influence can even sway the war's outcome. By Act IV's climax, these side plots will impact the final Thalmor confrontation, giving the PCs new allies or tools against the Dominion's schemes.

How to Use This Module: This Faction Pack is structured as a campaign supplement that the GM can weave into the main Skyrim Civil War storyline. Each faction section below includes clear headers, quest hooks, major plot points, NPC guidance (with Fate Core stat suggestions), and notable rewards. The content is organized so you can drop in a faction quest when the party enters that faction's sphere of influence (e.g. when the campaign reaches a particular city or hold). The side plots are labeled "**Side Plot C**" to distinguish them from the core plot and the earlier Side Plot A/B content. GMs should integrate these scenes at narratively appropriate moments – ideally during the lulls between battles or as parallel objectives that complement the war effort rather than distract from it. Each faction questline is modular; you can include all for a far-ranging campaign or focus on those tied to your players' interests. It's recommended that each PC commit to at most one major faction allegiance (besides the civil war faction) to allow everyone their spotlight. Note that **faction alignment locks are preserved**: the **Thieves Guild** content assumes the PC(s) are Imperial-aligned (or neutral aiding the Empire), while the **Dark Brotherhood** assumes Stormcloak alignment. The **College of Winterhold** and **Companions** welcome members of either side. The **Forsworn** and **Thalmor** are presented as optional factions – generally not aligned with either side, unless the GM permits an unusual PC background (e.g. a covert Thalmor agent). The new "**Way of the Voice**" offshoot is available to any PC worthy, regardless of political allegiance, as it concerns Skyrim's spiritual heritage. GMs should enforce these locks for story logic (e.g. a proud Stormcloak would never work with Maven Blackbriar's Thieves Guild, and an Imperial loyalist would be hunted by the Dark Brotherhood, not joining it). This ensures each campaign path has distinct side content and prevents PCs from simply doing *everything*.

Finally, keep the Fate Core principles in mind: **aspects** and **Fate Points** are central. Faction allegiances should be written into PC aspects (e.g. "Member of the Companions" or "Nightingale Agent of Nocturnal"), generating compels and invokes that tie the character's fate-point economy to their faction. For example, an Imperial PC with Thieves Guild ties might earn a compel (and a Fate point) when their guild's criminal reputation causes an important NPC to distrust them, or they might invoke their *Guild Influence* for a bonus when calling in a favor from Riften's underworld ². Similarly, completing faction milestones could be tied to minor or major milestones in Fate Core, allowing PCs to spend Refresh on new faction Stunts or Extras as they rise in rank. Use the faction aspects to enrich the narrative and reward players for engaging with these side stories – each faction's arc offers new ways to solve problems (or new complications!) in the main campaign.

Below, each faction section is presented like a chapter of a campaign guide, including storyline **questline entries (Side Plot C)**, key NPC profiles with Fate stats or aspects, and the unique **Extras** and **Stunts** available to members. All content is deeply rooted in Elder Scrolls lore for authenticity. Map references to Skyrim locations are provided where relevant, though you may use any Skyrim map for visual aid. (*For brevity, detailed battle maps are not included here, but refer to the main campaign module for hold capital layouts* ³; *you can annotate those with new faction-related scenes.*) Let's dive into the factions of Skyrim and see how their stories intertwine with the civil war's "Sons of Skyrim" saga.

Faction Questlines (Side Plot C)

The Thieves Guild (Imperial Side) – "*Shadows of the Rift*"

(*Side Plot C – for Imperial-aligned or neutral PCs in Riften*)

Overview & Hook: The Thieves Guild operates in the sewers beneath Riften (the **Ragged Flagon** in the Ratway), but it has fallen on hard times. Decades of corruption and a recent string of bad luck have reduced the guild's influence to Riften alone – and even there, the guild cowers under a powerful patron's thumb. In this timeline, the Dragonborn never restored the guild, so **Mercer Frey** remains Guild Master, secretly draining its coffers. **Maven Black-Briar**, Riften's most influential noble (and an Imperial supporter), uses the guild as her personal tool. For an **Imperial PC**, the Guild can be a valuable ally: as the Empire plans its assault on the Stormcloak-held Rift, General Tullius knows installing Maven as Jarl is key to securing the hold. Maven quietly seeks competent agents to solidify her position. The hook may come when the PCs arrive in Riften during Act II's Imperial campaign: **Brynjolf**, a charismatic thief running a marketplace scam, marks the party as outsiders who might be useful. He baits a PC into helping with a small caper ("**A Chance Arrangement**") – perhaps planting a fake incriminating item on a merchant for leverage ⁴. If the PC succeeds with cleverness or stealth, Brynjolf invites them to meet the Guild. Alternatively, **Maven** herself might approach an Imperial PC with a deal: help her ensure Riften falls smoothly to Imperial control (by sabotaging certain city defenses or swaying public opinion via dirty deeds) and she'll "open certain doors" for them – leading straight to the Thieves Guild.

Guild Initiation: Upon delving into the Ratway, the PC meets the guild's remnants. **Mercer Frey** is skeptical of new blood, but Brynjolf vouches if the PC proved themselves. The initiation quest ("**Taking Care of Business**") has the PC collect debts from three stubborn Riften business owners who have refused to pay guild protection. This is an open-ended challenge: the PC can **Coax or Intimidate** (e.g. use Rapport, Deceive or Provoke in Fate terms) or find leverage on each target. Succeed and the guild accepts the PC as a member, granting them the aspect "**Footpad of the Thieves Guild**". Fate-wise, this aspect can be invoked

for underworld contacts or sneaky endeavors, and of course the GM will compel it if, say, city guards recognize the PC's affiliation during an investigation. After initiation, Mercer gives the PC minor jobs (pickpocketing, burglary) as tests, but the real plot quickly unfolds: **something is rotten in the Guild**. The vaults are low on gold despite successful jobs, and whispers say the Guild's luck has turned ever since the last Guild Master (Gallus) died mysteriously. Veteran member **Vex** or **Delvin** might offhandedly mention that "*Mercer's coin never seems to reach the vault.*" Meanwhile, Brynjolf involves the PC in a more significant mission: Maven asks the Guild to sabotage a meadery competing with her Black-Briar brand ("Honningbrew"), which the PC can accomplish via stealth and poison. This side job cements Maven's trust – and her expectation that the Guild (and PC) will support her when the Empire attacks the city.

The Twilight Plot – Mercer's Betrayal: Soon, a dramatic turn occurs. Mercer sends the PC and Brynjolf on a heist in a Nordic tomb called **Snow Veil Sanctum**, saying an old Guild treasure might be hidden there. In truth, Mercer has set a trap – he intends to eliminate a figure who's been stalking him: **Karliah**, a Dunmer thief. Karliah was Gallus's lover and partner; Mercer murdered Gallus years ago and framed Karliah, exiling her ⁵. She's been in hiding for 25 years, planning revenge ⁶. At Snow Veil Sanctum, events mirror the game: Mercer confronts Karliah and the PC. In the chaos, Karliah manages to wound the PC with a paralysis poison arrow (as a precaution) ⁷. Mercer, thinking the PC will succumb, boasts of his crimes – revealing he murdered Gallus and has been stealing from the Guild for years ⁸ ⁹! He flees when Karliah attacks. The PC blacks out from the poison, only to awaken at Karliah's camp. She chose not to kill them; instead, she explains the truth. **Karliah's Psychological Profile:** A cautious, somber operative, Karliah is driven by vengeance **but** tempered by honor – she won't kill innocents or allies unjustly. She recognized the PC as *not* being Mercer's stooge but rather a patsy, and now hopes they will help right Mercer's wrongs. She gives the PC Gallus's journal and notes it needs translation. The side plot becomes an **investigation**: traveling to **Winterhold** to consult **Enthir** (a friend of Gallus) who deciphers the journal. It exposes Mercer's embezzlement and the existence of something called the "*Twilight Sepulcher*" and "*Skeleton Key*." Karliah is shocked – Mercer didn't just steal gold, he stole the **Skeleton Key**, a Daedric artifact belonging to Nocturnal (the patron of the Guild) ⁸. This key ensured the Guild's luck; with it stolen and the shrine desecrated, their luck has truly dried up. Now the PC and Karliah must convince the Guild of Mercer's betrayal.

Return to the Guild: The duo (with evidence in hand) sneak back into the Ragged Flagon. In a tense scene, Karliah and the PC confront Mercer in front of Brynjolf, Delvin, Vex, and the others ("**The Purged Guild**"). At first the guild draws weapons on Karliah – she's long blamed for Gallus's death – but the proof sways them ⁹ ¹⁰. Mercer's treachery is laid bare as the Guild's vault is found empty, looted dry ⁹. Cornered, Mercer fights through the guild members with surprising ferocity and **escapes** into the city. The Guild is in turmoil; leadership defaults to Brynjolf (a steady, pragmatic presence) but he defers to Karliah for a plan. She proposes a desperate measure: **re-forge the Nightingales** – an elite secret brotherhood within the Guild sworn to Nocturnal – to stop Mercer. She, Brynjolf, and the PC must swear an oath to serve Nocturnal and retrieve the Key.

The Nightingale Pact: Karliah leads the PC and Brynjolf to **Nightingale Hall**, an ancient hidden grotto beneath Riften's wilderness. In a ritual chamber, they don the midnight-black **Nightingale Armor** and formally pledge to Nocturnal. Nocturnal's shadowy presence manifests (perhaps just a whispered voice from the darkness) as Karliah speaks the Oath. *Mechanically, the PC gains a new aspect "Nightingale Agent of Nocturnal" and may immediately take a unique stunt or Extra: Nightingale Powers.* The **Nightingale Gear** itself is a reward: a sleek set of leather armor with an enchantment of heightened stealth (in Fate terms, it could grant +2 to Stealth in darkness or once-per-session turn a missed Stealth roll into a tie). The **Nightingale Extra** might allow the PC to choose one of Nocturnal's blessings: for example, *Agent of Stealth* (become

invisible in shadows for a scene by spending a Fate point) or *Agent of Subterfuge* (once per session, force a target to attack their ally – creating a “Frenzied Betrayal” aspect). The **Blade of Woe**, a legendary dagger, is also made available by Karliah from the guild’s hidden arsenal if the PC favors daggers (though that weapon is more traditionally tied to the Dark Brotherhood – if the PC later goes that route, they might already have it). Newly empowered, the Nightingales set out to confront Mercer.

Showdown at Irkngthand: Tracking Mercer isn’t hard – he’s fled to **Irkngthand**, a sprawling Dwemer ruin in the mountains, where the legendary *Eyes of the Falmer* (two massive gems) lie buried. Greedy to the end, Mercer aims to take these as a final prize before escaping Skyrim. The final dungeon crawl involves stealth and traps (good opportunities for the PC to use Burglary and Stealth, and perhaps their new **Unusual Advantages** – e.g. the PC might use *Nightingale Invisibility* to bypass Dwemer centurions). Eventually, they corner Mercer deep in the ruin’s Grand Cavern, where an underground lake reflects the shimmer of the Falmer Eyes. **Mercer Frey – NPC Profile:** *High Concept:* Traitorous Guild Master Turned Thief-Lord. *Trouble:* Blinded by Greed and Arrogance. *Skills:* Superb (+5) Deceive, Great (+4) Stealth, Great (+4) Fight (he wields a glass sword, possibly the stolen blade **Chillrend** with a frost enchantment), Good (+3) Burglary, Good (+3) Athletics. *Stunts:* **Sword in the Shadows:** Once per scene, Mercer can turn invisible (creating an “Invisible!” aspect on himself ¹¹) and make a sneaky attack – he gains +2 to his next Fight attack from surprise. **Master Thief’s Escape:** +2 to Athletics rolls to overcome traps or environmental hazards (he knows every trick to slip away). In the battle, Mercer uses the shadows and Dwemer machinery to his advantage – e.g. he might activate a stone trap or cut a rope to flood a chamber. At one point he uses a **Frenzy poison** on Brynjolf, causing Brynjolf to briefly attack the PC or Karliah under mind control ¹² (Karliah cries out as she recognizes Mercer’s tactic). The PC must overcome this (perhaps with a Create Advantage or a Physique knock-out on Brynjolf to snap him out of it). Ultimately, the fight likely ends with Mercer badly wounded. The cavern begins collapsing (Dwemer engineering failing due to Mercer’s sabotage during the fight – in game it was a triggered flood). The party snatches the **Skeleton Key** from Mercer as water and rocks start pouring in. Mercer’s final moment can be at GM’s discretion: maybe the traitor is crushed by falling debris, or the PC can choose to finish him. A moral choice: **execute** the man who betrayed them all, or **spare** him (dragging him out to face guild justice). Karliah likely attempts to finish him if PC hesitates – her wrath is great – but the PC could compel her “*Vengeance-Obsessed*” aspect to stop her, urging mercy. Either way, Mercer is **neutralized** and the *Eyes of the Falmer* are recovered (treasure for the Guild’s vaults).

Escaping Irkngthand, Karliah pauses at a side cavern – here lies the entrance to the **Twilight Sepulcher**, Nocturnal’s shrine. In a somber epilogue to the quest, she says she must go alone to return the Skeleton Key to the Ebonmere (Nocturnal’s portal) and fulfill their oath ¹³. She thanks the PC genuinely; after 25 years her name is cleared and Gallus’s spirit can be at peace. She offers the PC one of Gallus’s old possessions as a parting gift – the **Nightingale Bow** (a bow with a potent frost enchantment, an item to cite as loot if the PC uses archery). Karliah departs into the shadows, becoming a guardian of the Sepulcher. **Brynjolf** and the PC return to Riften to rebuild.

Guild Restored: In the aftermath, the Thieves Guild’s fortunes dramatically improve. With Mercer’s death and the Skeleton Key returned, Nocturnal’s favor quietly blesses their endeavors once more. Gold starts flowing and influence spreads. The guild offers the PC the title of **Guild Master** for their instrumental role. Brynjolf, however, can handle day-to-day operations if the PC is busy with the war – effectively the PC is an honorary Guild Master whose word carries weight. The PC can call on Thieves Guild resources in future endeavors: a network of spies, burglars, and fences across Skyrim. (In Fate terms, the PC’s **Thieves Guild Member** aspect might upgrade to **Guild Master of Skyrim’s Thieves** – allowing an *invoke* to “have a thief in nearly every city” for intel or minor help, or a compel that the PC is duty-bound to protect the Guild’s

interests.) The **Civil War Tie-In** comes to fruition as the Empire marches on Riften: thanks to the PC, Maven Black-Briar's coup as Jarl is smooth. The Guild, under Maven's patronage, **sabotages** Stormcloak defenses from within – perhaps they quietly unbar a gate or neutralize the watch, ensuring the Imperial assault faces minimal resistance. The city falls with little bloodshed inside the walls. Imperial players will see this as a big win, and even Stormcloak players (if any were present) might note how "someone" helped the enemy – a nice bit of intrigue. Maven becomes Jarl, creating the aspect "**Maven's Pocket Empire**" in Riften's realm ¹⁴. She rewards the PC (and Guild) richly. However, she will expect continued cooperation – a potential compel: Maven might lean on the PC for a *dirty job* at an inconvenient time (maybe silencing a critic or retrieving an heirloom) during a later Act, offering fate points for the complication.

Rewards & Extra Mechanics: In addition to **Nightingale Armor** (a signature costume for the PC now) and possibly the **Nightingale Bow**, the PC can access **Nightingale Powers**. One example is the **Shadowcloak of Nocturnal**: by spending a Fate point, the PC can become invisible for a scene when shrouded in darkness (mechanically creating an aspect "Invisible in Shadows" with free invokes equal to Stealth). Another is **Nightingale Strife**: a stunt to once per session make a surprise attack that drains life (treat as a Fight attack that on a hit lets the PC recover one stress box – a nod to the Agent of Strife power). These powers should be balanced with usage limits (e.g. one per session or costing FP) to avoid overshadowing other PCs. The Guild also provides a steady income (abstracted in Fate – perhaps the PC can declare they have easy access to bribe money or equipment when needed, within reason). As the PC advances in Guild rank (Footpad → Captain → Guild Master), the GM can allow *milestone upgrades*: e.g. at a significant milestone, the PC gains an extra Refresh or stunt slot dedicated to a Thieves Guild benefit (like "Master Fence: +2 to Resources or Contacts when acquiring or selling illicit goods").

NPC Guidance:

- **Brynjolf (Guild Second-in-Command):** Aspects: "Silver-Tongued Swindler", "Loyal to the Guild's Survival", *Trouble*: "In Maven's Pocket (Bound by Favors)". He is a genial rogue who becomes the PC's friend and confidant. **Skills:** Great (+4) Deceive, Good (+3) Contacts, Good (+3) Stealth. **Stunt:** *Smooth Talker*: +2 to Deception when running a scam or misdirection in a busy public setting. *GM note*: Brynjolf can serve as a mouthpiece to deliver guild info and is likely to take over if the PC is away. He eventually admits he'd rather the PC lead, as he's more comfortable as the "man in the shadows" than the Guildmaster.
- **Karliah (Nightingale Mentor):** Aspects: "Exiled Nightingale Seeking Justice", "Patient and Calculating", *Trouble*: "Haunted by Gallus's Death". **Skills:** Great (+4) Stealth, Great (+4) Shoot (her bow and poisoned arrows), Good (+3) Lore (Guild lore and Nocturnal's knowledge). **Stunt:** *Ghost in the Twilight*: Once per scene, Karliah can automatically create a "Veiled in Shadows" advantage on herself (representing her exceptional stealth from years of Nocturnal's blessing). *GM note*: Karliah will exit the storyline after Mercer's defeat (guarding the Sepulcher), unless the GM wants to bring her back for a cameo in a future Daedric module. Her legacy is the restored guild and the PC she helped elevate.
- **Mercer Frey (Traitorous Guild Master, Villain):** (See stat block above.) *GM note*: Mercer is a deadly opponent but not unbeatable. Use his invisibility stunt to stress the players – have him strike from darkness and compel a PC's aspect like "Trusts Too Easily" if they still wanted to believe his lies. If captured alive, Mercer might be a font of information about *other* criminal dealings or even Thalmor connections (perhaps he sold stolen info to the Thalmor – a twist to tie into the final arc). Executing him might satisfy vengeance, but sparing him for trial could be a show of the PC's character. The guild will execute him anyway, most likely – they're not exactly lawful good.
- **Maven Black-Briar (Riften Powerbroker):** Aspects: "Merciless Matriarch of Riften", "Money and Empire Above All", *Trouble*: "Web of Corruption and Enemies". She isn't a combatant but a crucial NPC. She becomes Jarl if the Empire wins the Rift ². Maven will use the Guild (and PC) as needed – e.g., in Act III she might

ask the PC to eliminate a dissident in Riften or spy on a rival. She can be an ally or a source of side quests (likely compels to the PC's Guild loyalty to do unsavory tasks). If the PC ever crosses her, she can be a dangerous enemy due to her influence. In Fate, consider her aspects when the PC deals with Riften politics.

- **Guild Members (Vex, Delvin, etc.):** They provide flavor and minor services (Delvin as a quest-giver for additional heists, Vex for burglary training). Stat them simply if needed: e.g., Vex has Good Stealth and Burglary; Delvin has Good Contacts and Deceive. They rarely fight, but if so, treat as Average thugs with specialty in daggers or bows.

Impact on the War: The Thieves Guild questline yields a stronger Imperial position in the Rift. By **Act IV**, Maven's hold over Riften means that hold firmly supplies the Imperial war effort (or if the PC somehow betrayed Maven, chaos could ensue – but that would be a major twist). When the final Thalmor confrontation occurs, the Thieves Guild might assist indirectly. For instance, **intelligence** gathered from underworld contacts could tip off the PCs about a Thalmor assassination plot. (The GM can say that "*One of Brynjolf's informants in Solitude uncovered a rumor of an Elf disguised among refugees – perhaps Elenwen herself*", referencing a scenario where Elenwen attempts to stab Ulfric¹⁵. This gives the PCs an edge in stopping it.) In short, the Guild provides *information and infiltration*. They likely won't fight on the front lines (they are thieves, not soldiers), but a clever PC could ask them to, say, **steal the Jagged Crown** back if the Thalmor nab it during the final battle. Imagine a scene where, as Thalmor agents try to abscond with the symbolic Jagged Crown (to prevent Skyrim's unity)¹⁶ ¹⁷, a Nightingale PC appears from the shadows to snatch it from under their noses – a very fitting climax for a thief. The guild's success under the PC's leadership can also lead to a more secure post-war Riften (no more gutter crime beyond their control) and a grateful Maven/Empire, which might translate to political clout for the PC's party when establishing the new order in Skyrim.

The Dark Brotherhood (Stormcloak Side) – “Blood in the Snow”

(Side Plot C – for Stormcloak-aligned PCs, or those willing to walk the assassin's path)

Overview & Hook: The **Dark Brotherhood** is a shadowy cult of assassins devoted to the Dread Father Sithis and guided by the Night Mother's will. Once feared across Tamriel, by 4E 201 their organization is but a ragged family operating out of a hidden sanctuary in **Falkreath Hold**. Under the leadership of **Astrid**, the Brotherhood in Skyrim has strayed from some of its traditions, taking contracts for coin more than for religious zeal. In the game's original timeline, the Dragonborn revitalized (or destroyed) the Brotherhood. In our campaign's alternate timeline, *that hasn't happened* – the Brotherhood remains active but vulnerable, and a grand assassination plot looms on their horizon. For a **Stormcloak-aligned PC**, the Brotherhood offers a way to directly strike at the Empire's heart and those perceived as oppressors. Ulfric's rebellion publicly wouldn't condone assassins, but quietly, some Stormcloak sympathizers see the value in eliminating key Imperial targets. The **hook** may present when the PCs are operating in the Stormcloak-controlled holds (perhaps after the Battle of Whiterun or during the build-up to attacking Solitude). The PC might hear whispers in Windhelm: a street urchin mentions **Aventus Aretino**, a young boy, performing the Black Sacrament (a forbidden ritual) to contact the Dark Brotherhood. If the PC investigates (maybe out of pity for the boy or curiosity), they find Aventus praying to "Mother" to send an assassin to kill the cruel headmistress of Riften's orphanage (Grelod the Kind). If the PC takes pity and executes *Grelod* (an evil NPC by all accounts), this act flags them as having the "talent" and moral flexibility the Brotherhood seeks. **Astrid** learns of the deed through her contacts and arranges the classic initiation: one night, the PC is kidnapped in their sleep and awakens in a remote cabin (Lost Knife Hideout or another isolated spot). Three captives kneel, bound and blindfolded. Astrid greets the PC with a dagger and a test: "*Someone in this room owes*

someone else a death... decide who." The PC must choose a victim (or clever PCs might find out all three are somewhat guilty and kill any or even all – Astrid doesn't mind, she just wants to see decisiveness). Passing this macabre test, Astrid offers membership: "You've got the makings of an assassin. Will you swear the Oath of Shadow and join the Family?" If the PC agrees, they become a **Dark Brotherhood Initiate** (aspect gained). If the PC refuses or is horrified, Astrid may try to kill them or wipe their memory, and that's likely the end of this side plot (assuming the PC declines, they won't pursue DB content). Thus, ensure the player is interested in a darker story before pushing too hard – but for those who are, this opens a rich arc.

Life in the Sanctuary: Returning to the Falkreath Sanctuary, the PC is welcomed (as much as assassins do). They meet the eccentric "family": **Nazir**, a Redguard executioner with a dry wit who gives minor contracts; **Babette**, a 300-year-old vampire eternally in a child's body who serves as alchemist; **Gabriella**, a Dunmer killer with a specialty in stealth; **Festus Krex**, an elderly mage who uses dark magic for killing; **Arnbjorn**, Astrid's husband, a hulking Nord werewolf who quit the Companions long ago. And lurking somewhere is **Cicero**, not yet present but soon to arrive. Initially, Astrid assigns the PC a couple of **minor contracts** (Side quests like "Warm-Up Contracts"): these could be quick one-off murder missions that can be completed during travel. For example: *Beitild*, an unpleasant mine owner in Dawnstar, or *Maul*, a thug in Riften's docks who crossed someone – these mirror the radiant contracts from Skyrim. These allow the PC to demonstrate creativity in assassination (poisoning a drink, staging an "accident," or just brute force in a secluded alley). Mechanically, encourage the PC to use Create Advantage (e.g. set up "Lured into Darkness" aspect on a target before striking) and stealth to avoid witnesses. Each success builds their reputation within the Brotherhood and earns them some coin (Resources boost or just narrative money for gear). It also shows the war from a civilian angle – while armies clash, the Brotherhood deals death selectively, reminding players of the common folk's fears in wartime (people hiring assassins to settle scores amid chaos).

The Tension: Cicero and the Night Mother: The real plot kicks in with the dramatic entrance of **Cicero**. Cicero is an Imperial by birth, a former Brotherhood Assassin who has become the *Keeper*, the zealous guardian of the Night Mother's corpse. He arrives at the Falkreath Sanctuary late one night, driving a rickety black wagon containing a large crate – the coffin of the Night Mother herself. Cicero is dressed as a jester and prone to manic outbursts and unsettling laughter ¹⁸. **Personality:** Cicero is **homicidally insane** yet theatrically polite in one breath and shrill the next ¹⁹. He speaks to the Night Mother (who is dead, but her spirit sometimes communicates to a chosen **Listener** telepathically). Astrid is immediately suspicious and hostile toward Cicero. The Brotherhood in Skyrim has been operating without the Night Mother's direct guidance for years (Astrid even thought the old ways were dying). Now Cicero brings the "unholy matron" into their midst, claiming he received cryptic instructions to deliver the Night Mother here. This sets up a power struggle: Astrid vs. Cicero, **pragmatist vs. zealot**. The PC finds themselves in a growing familial conflict. For now, Astrid orders the coffin to be placed in a corner and largely ignored – "We'll humor this fool for now," she tells the PC privately. Cicero capers about tending the coffin, writing in his journal, and complaining that the Night Mother *still* hasn't spoken to anyone. There is currently **no Listener** (the role who can hear the Night Mother's words). This is key foreshadowing.

The Black Sacrament – An Offer to Kill an Emperor: News reaches the Sanctuary that a mysterious client named **Amaund Motierre** has contacted the Brotherhood (via a dead drop) with an outrageous contract: **to assassinate the Emperor of Tamriel, Titus Mede II**. This is the pivotal plot of the Brotherhood arc. In the game, the Night Mother herself guides the player to Motierre; here it can unfold slightly differently to fit our war narrative. Perhaps *Ulfric Stormcloak's camp* receives a missive from a "concerned Imperial noble" (Motierre) who offers to pay the Stormcloaks if *their agents* will eliminate the Emperor (Motierre has his own motives, but Ulfric might see this as an intriguing proposal). Ulfric, not officially sanctioning murder,

passes this along through backchannels – maybe Galmar or **Ralof** (if alive and friendly to PC) quietly tells the PC *"If one were inclined to ensure the Emperor never meddles in Skyrim again... certain friends have deep pockets for it."* This approach ties the DB quest to the Stormcloak leadership's knowledge without making Ulfric dishonorable (he didn't *order* it, he just failed to discourage it). Alternatively, Motierre's approach is entirely independent: the Night Mother does speak to someone. If the PC has embraced the Brotherhood fully, one night while they rest in the Sanctuary, they experience a dark whisper in their mind – *"Listener..."* Possibly, against all expectations, **the PC becomes the new Listener** (this can happen if the GM deems it dramatically appropriate – perhaps because the Night Mother senses the PC's significance in shaping Skyrim's future). This would enrage Cicero (he wants to be Listener but she did not choose him), and unsettle Astrid. The Night Mother instructs the PC to **"Seek out Motierre at Volunruud"** (an ancient tomb turned meeting place). The next day, the PC can tell Astrid that the Night Mother spoke. Whether Astrid believes them or not, the contract offer is real – Motierre awaits. Astrid, though uneasy, realizes the *payoff is huge*. She decides to pursue the Emperor plot, thinking it could restore the Brotherhood's fame (and fortune). She sends the PC, representing the Dark Brotherhood, to meet Amaund Motierre in Volunruud (a crypt north of Whiterun).

At **Volunruud**, the PC meets **Amaund Motierre**, a Breton noble from Cyrodiil with Thalmor-sympathizing family. He performs the Black Sacrament in a candlelit hall and is relieved to see the Brotherhood's emissary. Motierre lays out the plan: The Emperor is planning a state visit to Skyrim (perhaps to boost morale of Imperial troops and attend the wedding of his cousin, Vittoria Vici, in Solitude). Motierre wants Titus Mede II assassinated. He provides *initial payment* (a chest of gold and a jeweled amulet as a show of good faith) and a sealed letter with instructions for later. Payment on completion will be **astronomical** (enough to set the Brotherhood up for years). The PC can roleplay this negotiation, but Motierre is essentially buying an evil deed with no strings – though he urges secrecy: if word gets out, the full Imperial Legion would hunt them. The letter details a **Bonus**: if *Commander Maro* of the Penitus Oculatus (the Emperor's security detail) is killed as well, extra reward. The PC returns to Astrid with the news and treasure. The Brotherhood sets in motion **"The Kill Emperor Plot"**, which will unfold in stages:

1. **The First Target – "Death on Ice" (Optional):** Commander Maro's son, Captain Maro, is in charge of security in Solitude. In the game, the player could destroy the Bravil sanctuary for him; here we might skip that. Instead, Astrid suggests removing Maro's son quietly to unnerve the commander. This is optional but Astrid believes in eliminating loose ends. The PC could infiltrate the East Empire Company docks in Solitude where the son patrols and take him out (perhaps faking a **stormcloak raid** or a dock accident). This adds an emotional stake: later Commander Maro will be enraged by his son's death, making him a more personal antagonist.
2. **City on Edge – "Breaching the Gates":** To get close to the Emperor, the plan is to exploit the public event: Vittoria Vici's wedding at the Solitude **Temple of the Divines**. Astrid dispatches the PC (and possibly a second Brotherhood NPC like Gabriella) to Solitude *during the festivities*. The war might be ongoing, but during Act III there might be a lull or perhaps the Emperor's visit forced a temporary ceasefire around Solitude for diplomatic reasons (GMs can justify why Stormcloak PC can infiltrate Solitude – maybe in disguise or maybe the siege hasn't begun yet due to an armistice for the wedding). At the grand wedding, amidst nobles and cheer, the PC has a chance to strike a high-profile blow: assassinate Vittoria Vici (the Emperor's cousin) *during her wedding speech*. This mimics the game's quest "Bound Until Death." The PC can choose dramatic methods: shoot her from a vantage (let the bride fall to her death from a balcony – an *Advantage "Panicked Crowd"* is created) or rig the ceremonial gargoyle statue to crash on her. Killing Vittoria causes mayhem – it's a message to

the Empire: *nowhere is safe*. The PC must then escape Solitude, which could involve a chase (Compel the PC's notoriety: city guards flood the streets). Perhaps **Jarl Elisif** witnesses the murder; this will make her fearful and more sympathetic to ending the war to avoid further bloodshed (or more spiteful toward Stormcloaks, up to interpretation, but likely fearful). This assassination doesn't directly further the contract except to ensure the Emperor *will attend her funeral*, which might keep him in Skyrim longer – and serves as proof the Brotherhood is capable.

3. The Betrayal – “Purification by Fire”: With the wedding assassination done, the next phase is set: the plan to kill the Emperor on his visit. Unbeknownst to the PC, Astrid is growing uneasy. The Night Mother named the PC Listener (if that occurred), undermining Astrid's authority. Astrid also did not appreciate Cicero's antics – in fact, around this time, Cicero's behavior worsens. He writes in his diary about his disappointment in Astrid's leadership. Perhaps he even attacks a Sanctuary member in a fit of madness (in the game he wounded Veezara, here maybe he tries to sabotage Astrid's orders). Astrid confides in the PC that Cicero must be dealt with: she sends the PC to **punish Cicero** when he finally snaps and flees. There's a side encounter at **Dawnstar** Sanctuary (an old abandoned sanctuary) where the PC catches up to Cicero. The PC can choose to **kill** the traitorous jester or **spare** him (in the game, you could spare him and he returns later to serve you). If spared, Cicero, injured, will vanish for a while, claiming if the PC is true Listener, he'll follow them not Astrid from now on. If killed, Astrid quietly approves.

However, the true betrayal is Astrid's: Astrid, despite being like family, cannot abide the idea of the Brotherhood being guided by an outside voice (Night Mother) or a new leader (PC overshadowing her). She also fears this Emperor contract will bring destruction on them (she's not entirely wrong – it's high risk). Thus, Astrid secretly bargains with Commander Maro. In exchange for **clemency** for herself and remaining family, she gives away the plan. The trap is set in **Solitude**: The PC is told by Astrid that the Emperor will be arriving on his ship *The Katariah* soon, but first he's meeting a decoy or some functionary at **Castle Dour** for a private dinner – a perfect chance to strike. The PC is instructed to infiltrate Castle Dour disguised as a chef (in Skyrim game there was a plot to poison the Emperor's double). The PC goes through with it – possibly using Deception to pass as kitchen staff, sneaking into a grand dining hall. The target sits at the head of the table – appearing to be Emperor Titus Mede II. The moment the PC makes the attempt, they realize it's a **body double!** An ambush is sprung: Commander **Maro** and a squad of **Penitus Oculatus** agents surround the PC. Maro declares the Brotherhood is broken and thanks “someone” for the tip. The PC must fight or flee – but even if they escape Castle Dour (a challenging conflict/challenge scene), tragedy awaits back at the Sanctuary.

When the PC returns to Falkreath Sanctuary, they find **nightmare**: the Sanctuary has been **raided and burned** by Penitus Oculatus. Bodies of Brotherhood members litter the ground, some burnt, some riddled with crossbow bolts. This is a dramatic low point (“**Death Incarnate**” scene). The PC, perhaps with a lump in their throat (if they'd grown fond of the dark “family”), searches for survivors. They find **Nazir** and **Babette** barricaded in a partially intact room, fending off one remaining Penitus soldier. Together they dispatch the attacker. Nazir is wounded but alive, Babette being a vampire survived the fire. No sign of Astrid initially. The Night Mother's coffin is seen blackened but intact – suddenly, the PC *hears* the Night Mother's voice urging them to “*Embrace me, Listener. Hide.*” If the PC does so (entering the coffin as in game), they survive a collapse or explosion as the Sanctuary's fire causes a cave-in. (Alternatively, if not doing the coffin scene, just have them survive the wreckage with a fate point handwave – but the coffin scene is iconic to show Night Mother protecting them supernaturally). After the collapse, the PC pushes out of the coffin to find Nazir/Babette managed to survive too.

In the ruins, they discover **Astrid**, barely alive – horribly burned (a Severe consequence “Sacrificed by Flame”). She betrayed the Brotherhood and, in poetic justice, got caught in the slaughter. Dying in guilt, Astrid admits her betrayal: “*I... I did this. I wanted us safe, but... I have doomed us.*” She performed the **Black Sacrament on herself** – offering her own life to summon the Brotherhood (the only contract she ever issued) as penance and to ensure the **Night Mother would guide the Listener to her now**. In essence, she asks the PC to **give her a merciful death**, completing the sacrament she started. This is a heavy moment. If the PC complies (likely – it’s a dark mercy killing, and also symbolically the final step to rebirth the Brotherhood under new leadership), they effectively take Astrid’s place as leader. Astrid with her last breath might hand the PC her dagger, the **Blade of Woe** (if the PC didn’t have it yet, here it is – a fitting artifact for the new Listener). Astrid dies with a mix of sorrow and relief, entrusting the “family” to the PC.

Rebirth and the Emperor’s Demise: The survivors – PC (now **Listener**), Nazir, Babette – decide to finish the contract, not for the reward solely, but for revenge and to prove the Dark Brotherhood survives. They relocate to the **Dawnstar Sanctuary** (Cicero’s hideout, which he revealed when he fled). Using the password “Silence, my brother,” they claim the empty sanctuary as their new home base. There the Night Mother’s coffin is installed and the PC can commune with it for guidance. The Night Mother likely gives final instructions: the real Emperor is aboard his ship **Katariah**, anchored in Solitude’s harbor under heavy guard, preparing to depart now that his double was used to flush them out. This leads to the final assassination mission: **boarding The Katariah**. The PC can approach via underwater (maybe using a Potion of Waterbreathing Babette provides), climbing anchor chains in the dead of night. On board are elite Penitus Oculatus agents. The infiltration can be run as a stealth challenge (taking out patrolling guards quietly) or a full assault if the PC prefers open combat (but the enemies are numerous – better to be stealthy). Eventually, the PC reaches the Emperor’s quarters. There sits **Emperor Titus Mede II**, surprisingly calm for a man with an assassin at his door. He dismisses any remaining guard to speak privately if the PC allows it.

Emperor Titus Mede II – NPC: Aspects: “Weary Ruler of an Fracturing Empire”, “Noble Bearing Even in Death”. He is not a fighter of note (in game he has some fight, but here he expects his death). In conversation, the Emperor delivers a solemn speech: “*So it’s come to this. I expected as much. If I must die, I would request something: make it quick...and perhaps, tell your Stormcloak friends – if this is them – that this changes nothing. Or perhaps it changes everything?*” He even admits that if his death would bring Skyrim peace, so be it, but he suspects “...the Thalmor are the only winners of our little war.” This is a key lore nod – the Emperor essentially validates what the PCs learned: the Thalmor benefit from this chaos ²⁰ . If the PC has any honor, they might give him a dignified end. The Emperor also intriguingly says, “*I have one last request: see that whoever hired you gets what they deserve.*” – implying Motierre’s treachery even to his own liege. After the dialogue, the PC executes Titus Mede II. A single stroke, and the Emperor falls – **the leader of the Imperial Empire is dead**. The **Shard of the Empire** aspect can be placed on the game world: the Empire is now in disarray, though this won’t stop the immediate war effort in Skyrim (Tullius will still fight on, but news will rock Cyrodiil soon). The PC can, if inclined, find Commander Maro on deck after and also kill him (fulfilling Motierre’s bonus condition, and personal revenge for the Brotherhood). Maro will curse them with his dying breath for his son’s death (if that occurred) – a bit of pathos.

The **aftermath:** The Brotherhood collects Motierre’s reward. Amaund Motierre is found hiding in a safe location (perhaps the **Bannered Mare** in Whiterun, or back in Volunruud). Interestingly, the Emperor requested Motierre’s comeuppance – the PC may choose to *double-cross* Motierre and kill him instead of leaving him. If they do, they likely still find where his payment is stored (he had arranged gold with his Elder Council contacts – maybe a sealed letter allows the PC to claim it). The reward is immense: enough gold to

fill a treasury (GM can say it funds the Brotherhood's rebuilding or perhaps the PC could even donate some to the Stormcloak war effort, ironically funded by a deceased Emperor!). The PC and Nazir, Babette move forward, rebuilding the Dark Brotherhood in Dawnstar sanctuary. **Shadowmere**, the legendary demon-horse, might appear to the PC as a final gift (climbing from a shadowy pool near the sanctuary – now the PC has a black steed for swift travel).

NPC Guidance:

- **Astrid (Brotherhood Leader, mid-arc antagonist)**: *Aspects*: "Pragmatic Leader of a Dying Brotherhood", "Loves Her Family (to a Fault)", *Trouble*: "Betrayer Burdened by Guilt". **Skills**: Good (+3) Fight (dual-wields blades), Good (+3) Deceive, Good (+3) Will (strong-willed). **Stunt**: *Heartless Calculation*: +2 to Deceive when negotiating or betraying someone who trusts her (she was unfortunately good at lying to her "family"). *GM note*: Astrid's betrayal should be portrayed sympathetically – she truly thought she was saving her family from annihilation by cutting a deal. In her final scene, emphasize her remorse. This gives the PC a complex emotional payoff when deciding her fate.
- **Cicero (Mad Keeper, potential ally or enemy)**: *Aspects*: "Homicidally Insane Jester", "Devoted Keeper of the Night Mother" ¹⁹, *Trouble*: "Unstable – Could Snap at Any Moment". **Skills**: Great (+4) Stealth, Good (+3) Athletics, Good (+3) Melee (he uses a dagger, acrobatic style). **Stunt**: *Jester's Dodge*: Cicero's erratic movements give +2 to Athletics when avoiding attacks in combat. *Role*: If Cicero survives (PC spares him), he'll resurface after Astrid's death, pledging loyalty to the *true Listener* (the PC). In the final sequence on the Katariah, Cicero could even show up to assist as a surprise (maybe he stowed away to make sure the Emperor dies). Cicero's presence adds dark comic relief and a wildcard. If the PC killed him, no help – but perhaps less chaos earlier.
- **Nazir (Brotherhood Second, quest-giver)**: *Aspects*: "World-Weary Assassin with Dry Wit", "Practical and Loyal (to survivors)". **Skills**: Good (+3) Fight (scimitar), Good (+3) Stealth, Good (+3) Contacts (criminal underworld). *Note*: Nazir survives to help reconstitute the Brotherhood. He can act as the fixer, obtaining new contracts in peacetime after the war.
- **Babette (Child Vampire Alchemist)**: *Aspects*: "Ancient Vampire in Child's Guise", "Sweet-Tooth and Sweet-Faced Killer". **Skills**: Great (+4) Alchemy (represented by Create Advantage with poisons), Good (+3) Deceive (she's a child – who'd suspect?), Average combat (she avoids direct fights). *Note*: Babette's vampirism could be a vector for the PC's **Vampirism evolution** if the PC shows interest. She might offer, "*I could give you my Dark Gift, if you ever tire of mortal life...*" as an aside. (See below under **Werewolves & Vampires** for mechanics.) Babette remains a noncombatant in big fights but can brew potions (maybe providing the PC with a potent **Jarrin Root poison** used to kill the Emperor's double in the soup).
- **Commander Maro (Penitus Oculatus Chief)**: *Aspects*: "Vengeful Royal Guard Commander", "Honor-Bound to Protect the Emperor". **Skills**: Good (+3) Shoot (crossbow), Good (+3) Tactics (Notice or Create Adv. for ambushes), Good (+3) Fight (sword). He orchestrates the ambush at the Sanctuary. If confronted one-on-one, he's formidable but the PC likely overmatches him by endgame.
- **Emperor Titus Mede II**: Not presented as a combat challenge, more a narrative one. He could have aspects like "Regal Even in Death" to invoke for making his final moments impactful. If one needed stats: Average in combat (old man), but with a presence that could be an obstacle (if PC had second thoughts due to his words, compelling their Morality aspect). Ultimately, his fate is sealed.

War Impact: Killing the Emperor is a huge event ²¹. For the Stormcloak side, this is a symbolic victory – the "head of the snake" removed. However, it doesn't immediately win the war in Skyrim (Tullius's army is still in Solitude fighting Act IV). It does sow confusion in the Empire's chain of command. News might not reach Skyrim until after the final battle due to the short timeline, but certainly by the *epilogue* it will matter. For example, if the Stormcloaks win, an Emperor's assassination might discourage the Empire from attempting

to reconquer Skyrim soon (they'll be too busy with succession crises). If the Empire were to win (less likely in the intended narrative), the loss of Titus Mede II could actually weaken the occupying forces' morale, possibly forcing a truce or withdrawal. Either way, the Thalmor *benefit* – the Emperor was one of the few holding the Empire together against the Thalmor threat. Now a weaker Empire may result, which the PCs might realize with dread. This adds complexity to their victory: even Ulfric might muse, "*His death... a costly justice. The Dominion will surely smell blood in the water.*" The **final confrontation with the Thalmor** in Act IV can explicitly reference this: perhaps **Elenwen** gloats to a PC assassin during the climax, "Fools, by killing Titus Mede you did our work for us!" – trying to unnerve them with the idea that the Brotherhood's greatest success actually served the Dominion's long game. The PC could counter by foiling the Thalmor plot here and now, proving that Skyrim will not be easy prey. In terms of rewards that affect the climax: the Dark Brotherhood's biggest asset is **Shadowmere** – a nearly indestructible steed that could allow the PC to move rapidly across the battlefield (narratively). Additionally, the Brotherhood (small as it is) could assist in one critical hit: perhaps the PC can dispatch Nazir or Babette to stealthily take out a secondary target during the final battle (for example, Babette might poison Thalmor mages' wine before the battle, giving the PCs an aspect "Thalmor Spellcasters Sluggish" to exploit). But due to their losses, the Brotherhood can't contribute large numbers, only precision. Lastly, if the PC embraced **Vampirism** through Babette, they might wield new powers in the finale (e.g. turning into a cloud of bats to reach the top of a tower where a Thalmor agent is doing a ritual – a cool visual enabled by their curse).

Milestone Evolutions – Werewolves & Vampires: *(This applies to both Brotherhood and Companions arcs, as PCs may gain these conditions in either.)*

- **Lycanthropy (Werewolf Transformation):** Gained during the Companions questline (detailed in that section), but if the PC didn't join Companions, one Brotherhood member (Arnbjorn) is a werewolf. The PC might even be bitten by Arnbjorn or share blood as a pact in some scenario, though that's unlikely given Arnbjorn dies in the sanctuary attack. Assuming the PC *does* become a werewolf via the Companions, it is a *Minor Milestone ability* at first: they gain the aspect "**Beastblood of Hircine**". Initially, transformation is limited – perhaps only during narrative full moons or moments of extreme stress (a compel could trigger an involuntary change in a dire battle, causing the PC to frenzy). As a werewolf, the PC's physical abilities spike – you might give them a +2 to Physique and +2 to Fight while transformed, and they can cause terrible consequences on foes. However, they cannot easily distinguish friend from foe unless they succeed at a Will roll to control the beast within. This is the drawback and source of compels (e.g. "*Bloodlust of the Wolf*" compel to attack the nearest target regardless of allegiance). At a **Significant Milestone** (after curing Kodlak and becoming Harbinger, for example), the PC can choose to **master or cure** the lycanthropy. Mastery could be a stunt like "**Controlled Transformation**" – PC may transform at will once per session (or scene) and maintain enough mind to avoid attacking allies (still might cause collateral damage though). Alternatively, **Curing** removes the Beastblood aspect entirely (the PC might perform a ritual similar to Kodlak's). If cured, perhaps they gain a different benefit – Kodlak's spirit could bless them, giving an aspect "**Blessed by Sovngarde**" which could be invoked for courage or resisting fear (since they overcame the curse). In the final battle, a PC who kept lycanthropy might deliberately unleash it to rip into Thalmor agents – a potent but risky move (the GM can allow it to clear out waves of mooks quickly, but be ready to compel a narrative consequence like the PC taking a Moderate consequence from silver weapons or being feared by NPC allies).

- **Vampirism:** While not a dedicated faction reward here (the Volkhar vampire questline is separate and Daedric-related, reserved for a future module), the seeds are present. For example, **Babette** in the Brotherhood is a vampire. If a PC expresses interest (or suffers repeated vampire attacks in random encounters and contracts **Sanguinare Vampiris**), the GM can allow vampirism to take hold over time. Initially, after contracting the disease, it's a *Minor Milestone* to decide if it progresses. If untreated for a few

in-game days, the PC gains aspect "**Blood-Starved Vampire (Stage 1)**". They feel new powers and new weaknesses: sensitivity to sunlight (perhaps any scene in daylight the PC gains a situational aspect "Blistering Sunlight" that can impede them or be compelled to exhaust them), an aversion to holy symbols or fire, and the **thirst**. At Stage 1, they get a minor ability like improved night vision or a charm gaze (maybe a +2 to Rapport to appear innocent, as fledgling vamps can beguile). If the PC feeds (drinks a NPC's blood) before the next milestone, they can remain at Stage 1. If they refrain, they progress to Stage 2 (Significant Milestone): "**Vampire Adept (Stage 2)**" – now they gain more power (perhaps a stunt like *Vampiric Drain: use Will to attack a living target, siphoning 1 stress if successful*), but also more obvious signs (pale skin, need to avoid direct sunlight more actively – maybe they automatically take a mild consequence "Sunburnt" after any long exposure which can't be healed until they rest in darkness). At Stage 3 or 4 (Major Milestone equivalent), the PC becomes a **Master Vampire** with significant powers: invisibility (mist form) or summoning bats, and very high bonuses to physical abilities at night. However, by Stage 4, they'd be seen as a monster by most NPCs (everyone notices the red eyes and fangs, leading to social penalties or outright aggression from guards). Reaching that might not happen during the war timeline unless the PC fully embraces being a creature of the night. The PC can also **cure vampirism** at certain points (with a ritual from a mage like Falion in Morthal, though that quest would be a side mission perhaps in Act IV's downtime if the PC seeks it). For the scope of this module, simply outline that if a PC becomes a vampire, it should follow this gradual progression and be role-played. Vampirism is an Extra that can be "leveled up" with milestones, as opposed to an on-off switch. This keeps it balanced – the PC didn't just instantly get superpowers; they deal with the hunger and secrecy before harnessing full power. In the final battle, a vampire PC might use their mist form to infiltrate enemy lines or call upon a **swarm of bats** stunt to terrorize Thalmor wizards (creating an advantage "Swarmed by Bats" on them). But they also must avoid the dawn if the battle goes long – e.g., if the climax is at morning's first light on the **Throat of the World**, a vampire PC could be compelled to take cover or suffer a complication while dueling a Thalmor in sunlight.

(Daedric Note: We avoid direct Daedric quests here, but Nocturnal's and Sithis's involvement were necessary for these faction arcs. The GM can treat these in broad strokes without deep-diving into Daedric realms – e.g., we don't roleplay Nocturnal beyond a voice or Sithis beyond thematic presence. Other Daedric Prince storylines like Azura, Boethiah, etc., are omitted, saved for future modules.)

The College of Winterhold (Neutral Faction) – "The Eye of Magnus"

(Side Plot C – available to PCs of any allegiance who pursue magical mastery)

Overview & Setup: High in the frozen north, the **College of Winterhold** stands as a beacon of arcane knowledge. It's one of the few places in Skyrim where mages can study openly, and it remains neutral in the Civil War by tradition ²². The Nords of Skyrim largely distrust magic, especially after the **Great Collapse** that sank most of Winterhold (the cause of which many blame on the College). At the campaign's start, the College's internal affairs seem removed from the war. But as Acts II–III progress, strange rumors emerge: magical anomalies sighted near Winterhold, an ancient underground find at Saarthal, and whispers of a Thalmor agent lurking within the College's halls ²³. This side plot is the *College Questline*, inspired by Skyrim's "Eye of Magnus" story. **Any PC with magical inclination** or curiosity might be drawn here—perhaps during Act II or III, when war actions in Winterhold hold are minimal (Winterhold is a poor hold of little strategic value, so military presence is light). The GM can introduce the hook via reports: "*Couriered letter from Winterhold: Arch-Mage Savos requests aid investigating bizarre lights in the sky.*" For an Imperial PC, General Tullius might encourage gaining the College's favor (maybe promising them resources if they help later). For a Stormcloak PC, Ulfric might grudgingly allow it or be unaware—they might have to go AWOL

briefly to pursue their academic interests. **Alternate hook:** If the PC isn't initially interested in joining, consider a scenario in Act II where, say, a magical anomaly (like a rift or elemental creature) attacks a refugee camp the PCs are helping, and clues point to Winterhold. Or a friendly mage NPC (like Farengar from Whiterun or a court wizard) recommends the PC check out the College to improve their skills for the battles ahead.

Joining the College: Upon arriving at the College's bridge in Winterhold, the PC is met by **Faralda**, a stern Altmer sorceress guarding entry. She requires the applicant to demonstrate some magic. This could be as simple as casting a basic spell (if the PC knows one), or if the PC is not a mage at all, Faralda might ask a riddle about magic to test their understanding (or offer a **Scroll of Conjure Flame Atronach** and ask them to use it). Passing the test, the PC is admitted as an Apprentice. They meet Arch-Mage **Savos Aren** (a Dunmer) and Master Wizard **Mirabelle Ervine** (Breton, who handles daily affairs). The PC gets a tour: the Hall of the Elements (main chamber), the Arcanaeum library run by **Urag gro-Shub**, and the dorms. **Tolfdi**, an elder Nord mage, becomes the PC's mentor for the first lessons ²⁴. Tolfdi is kind, a bit absent-minded, and values careful study over reckless spellcasting. He begins with a lecture on ward spells for defense. This is our chance to provide some Fate mechanics for learning spells: maybe treat spells as *creating advantages*. E.g., a "Ward" can be an advantage like "Protective Barrier" which can cancel one magical hit if invoked. The class is interrupted by news: the College has an active excavation at **Saarthal**, the nearby ruins, where something big has been unearthed. Tolfdi invites the apprentices (PC and a few NPC student peers: **Onmund** the Nord, **J'zargo** the Khajiit, **Brelynna** the Dunmer) to join him at Saarthal to investigate.

Under Saarthal – Discovery of the Eye: In the Saarthal dig site, the PC assists in exploring some newly opened chambers (perhaps by solving a small puzzle, like deactivating a magical barrier with a Ward or aligning some ruins – a challenge for their Lore or Investigate skill). Suddenly, upon removing an artifact (as in the game, maybe the PC picks up a strange amulet), the PC experiences a **vision**: time freezes, and a spectral figure from the **Psijic Order** (an ancient order of mystics) appears – a monk named **Quaranir**. He cryptically warns the PC of "*a swirling eye of trouble*" at the College and says they've been "*chosen to prevent a great catastrophe*." Then he vanishes, time resumes. Tolfdi and the others notice nothing except now parts of the ruin collapsed, revealing a grand chamber beyond. Inside, glowing with eerie blue light, is a **massive orb** suspended in the air – **The Eye of Magnus**. This artifact, clearly powerful, is a globe of magical energy swirling like a miniature galaxy. Tolfdi is astonished; he decides they must secure it and bring it to the College for study. They also find draugr awakened by their presence, including a powerful undead (perhaps **Jyrik Gauldurson**, as per Skyrim). This can be a combat encounter where the PC and Tolfdi work together. The orb seems to weakly empower the undead, but the PC's earlier acquired amulet or quick thinking (like disrupting runes fueling the undead) helps defeat it. The Eye is too large to move easily, but the College fetches magical means (perhaps levitation spells cast by multiple mages) to transport it to the College's Hall of the Elements.

Ancano's Intrigue: Back at the College, the artifact is installed for study. Enter **Ancano**, a Thalmor advisor attached to the College (officially as an "observer" per the terms of the White-Gold Concordat, to ensure no magic threatens the Thalmor's interests). Ancano is smug and inquisitive; he will try to insert himself into any investigation of the Eye. **Aspects:** "Thalmor Agent with Ulterior Motives", "Burning Curiosity for Power". He begins buttering up the PC perhaps, or more likely, subtly warning them *not* to meddle in College affairs beyond their station. Tolfdi, Mirabelle, and Savos focus on analyzing the Eye – it radiates Magicka, seems to respond to specific spells. Over some days, anomalies start occurring around Winterhold: Magical *tears* or anomalies (glowing wisp-like entities) that appear and cause havoc. The **war** can come into play: Stormcloak soldiers in Winterhold (since Winterhold hold is Stormcloak-controlled initially) suspect the College is behind

these “attacks” and tensions rise. A few soldiers or town militia might even confront the College gates demanding they “stop whatever sorcery” is happening. The PC could be involved in defusing this via social skills or helping slay an anomaly in town to protect civilians, showing the College isn’t hostile. This can earn them respect (or if Imperial PC, perhaps they are doing it to keep relations smooth so maybe in future the College might side with Empire, but the College stays neutral outright).

The Staff of Magnus Quest: The Psijic Order monk Quaranir later appears *again*, this time in the College (perhaps freezing time during a College council meeting about the Eye). He speaks only to the PC and Savos or just PC if one-on-one: *“You must find the Staff of Magnus, the only thing that can contain what you’ve found. Hurry, before it’s too late.”* They provide a hint: it’s located in **Labyrinthian**, a ruin once home to the mage Shalidor. The Arch-Mage Savos Aren visibly reacts if he hears this – he looks disturbed, perhaps sharing a glance with Mirabelle (as in lore, Savos and some mages ventured into Labyrinthian in youth and it ended badly). Savos confesses he suspected something like this – he knows there’s a relic, the Staff of Magnus, said to suppress magical power. He reluctantly entrusts this mission to the PC (since war keeps the holds busy, few outside the College can be spared, and Savos as leader must remain). Mirabelle gives the PC some leads: an old map or writings they have on Labyrinthian. *Quest note:* Labyrinthian is deep in Hjaalmarch hold (currently Imperial-controlled, but possibly dangerous to travel because of war). The PC might have to navigate around fighting or through under-the-radar. If Stormcloak, they might slip through lines; if Imperial, they have an easier pass; if neutral, perhaps they get an unofficial pass from whichever side’s soldiers at the border if explaining they’re on a non-war critical quest (or they travel stealthily). The GM can incorporate a small war-side encounter here (like a checkpoint that could turn into a scuffle if not handled diplomatically).

Labyrinthian Trials: The PC (possibly accompanied by a fellow apprentice like Onmund for help, or even Tolfdir or Mirabelle if GM wants an NPC along) ventures into Labyrinthian – a sprawling ruin. They face magical puzzles and undead (the place was an ancient Nord test for mages). This is an excellent place to have the PC use Lore or spellcasting cleverly – e.g., a puzzle door that only opens when lit by elemental runes in the correct order (combining clues from inscriptions). They might also encounter a haunting vision of Savos Aren’s ill-fated party from years ago, which provides story context (Savos lost friends sealing away a great threat here). The climax is battling a powerful spirit or dragon priest named **Morokey** who wields the **Staff of Magnus**. This is a tough fight – Morokey might even have two enthralled mage shades siphoning energy to shield him. The PC must disrupt those links (maybe by physically moving special focal crystals or by hitting each with a dispelling action). Once those are down, they face Morokey’s onslaught of spells. Utilizing Fate points and aspects here is key (maybe the environment offers cover or magical amplification nodes the PC can use to their advantage). Victorious, they claim the **Staff of Magnus**, a long ornate staff that seems to hum with energy absorption powers. This is a major **Extra/Item**: in Fate, we can model it as *Once per scene, the wielder can use the Staff to neutralize a magical energy source or shield – essentially automatically overcoming a magical barrier; also as an Attack action it can drain magical energy from a target* (against a mage, this can act as a Weapon:2 attack that also gives the target an aspect “Magicka Drained” if hit, rendering them unable to cast effectively). It might have limited charges (or cause the user stress to channel it, since it’s powerful). On the way out, the PC might find a skeleton of one of Savos’s old comrades with a note – implying Savos sacrificed others to contain Morokey. This builds a bit of emotional nuance for later when confronting the final crisis.

Mid-Crisis at the College: Upon returning (likely Act III now), the PC finds Winterhold in chaos. **Ancano has made his move.** While the PC was away, Ancano convinced Savos to let him “examine” the Eye of Magnus. During Ancano’s meddling, the Eye became unstable. When the PC arrives, a magical **Barrier** envelops the

College's Hall of the Elements – a shimmering forcefield with Ancano and the Eye inside. Savos and Mirabelle are outside, desperately trying to dispel it. The moment the PC shows up with the Staff, Ancano's experiment hits critical mass: a blast of energy erupts from the Eye, **killing Savos Aren** (Savos jumps in front of Mirabelle to shield her and is vaporized or thrown back mortally wounded). Mirabelle is knocked down, hurt (maybe losing an arm or taking a severe consequence "Crushed Arm"). The **city of Winterhold** experiences magical shockwaves – perhaps buildings collapse (one last insult from the College as far as the town is concerned). This event also tears open rifts around the College that start spawning more Magic Anomalies (which begin to drift toward Winterhold town). Now the PC must act as interim hero: Mirabelle, injured, gives the PC the artifact **Mage's Circlet** (or Savos's Amulet) and says, *"Use the Staff on the Eye! It's our only hope... Stop Ancano!"* The barrier prevents entry, but the **Staff of Magnus** is specifically suited to bring it down ²⁵. The PC uses the Staff (draining the barrier like sucking the life out of it). The barrier falters and collapses. The final confrontation ensues in the Hall: **Ancano**, now partially imbued with the Eye's power, faces the PC. He's jubilant and crazed: *"I am tapping limitless power! You cannot stop me!"* The Eye of Magnus is spinning, releasing arcs of energy. Mechanically, during this fight the Eye might create situational aspects like "Unstable Arcane Storm" that affect combat each round (could be invoked by either side for explosive effects or compelled to cause random damage). Ancano cannot be harmed normally while the Eye feeds him (in-game he was invulnerable until the Staff is used on the Eye). So the PC must figure out to use the **Staff of Magnus on the Eye** itself – draining its energy which also weakens Ancano's shield. This can be a challenge sequence: Each time the PC channels the Staff into the Eye, it temporarily subdues the Eye (maybe closing it or dimming it), making Ancano vulnerable for an exchange or two. Ancano will desperately attack the PC to stop this, using powerful destruction spells (lightning, fire, etc.). **NPC Stat (Ancano):** He's effectively a **Boss Mage**. **Aspects:** "Delusions of Godhood", "Thalmor Battle-Mage". **Skills:** Superb (+5) Will (for magical duels), Great (+4) Lore, Great (+4) Shoot (for aimed spells). **Stunts:** **Thalmor Lightning Cloak:** Anyone who attacks Ancano in melee takes a 2-shift hit automatically from crackling lightning (unless dispelled). **Focused Blast:** +2 to Shoot when he concentrates fire on a single target without moving. The PC might have allies: Tolfdiarr arrives after barrier drops to assist (as in game). Tolfdiarr could create advantages like "Ancano Distracted" by throwing lesser spells, giving PC openings. But Ancano might knock Tolfdiarr out early (not kill, but injure) to keep the duel primarily PC vs. Ancano. With the Staff's help, the PC can sever Ancano's link, and then a well-placed attack (perhaps invoking "Vengeance for Savos" or similar aspect) will take Ancano down. On defeat, Ancano might collapse, perhaps realizing at the last second he was a fool: *"No... it's not possible..."* The Eye of Magnus by now is fully destabilized – it begins to whirl open, perhaps even causing gravitational distortions (objects lifting in air). This is when the **Psijic Order** intervenes for the finale.

Resolution – The Psijics Remove the Eye: As the PC and surviving mages brace for something awful, time freezes once more. Three Psijic monks (including Quaranir) appear around the Eye. They commend the PC: *"Your actions have averted disaster. We shall take this from here."* In a scene of high magic, the Psijics collectively teleport the Eye away to their hidden isle for safekeeping ²⁵. They also likely take Ancano's comatose (or corpse) with them, or it's disintegrated by the departing magic (ensuring no further Thalmor meddling – presumably they wouldn't return him to Thalmor; maybe he's just dead). Time resumes. The Eye is gone. The immediate threat is over. Winterhold is saved from annihilation (though parts are ruined further).

Aftermath & Rewards: With Savos dead, **Mirabelle Ervine** if alive might decline leadership due to injury (and in game she also died – maybe she succumbed to wounds here too). It falls to **Tolfdiarr** and the surviving faculty to choose a new Arch-Mage. They unanimously select the **PC** – in recognition of their pivotal role and bravery. If the PC is young or unready, Tolfdiarr can offer to serve as *acting Master Wizard* handling day-to-day,

but insists the PC take the title Arch-Mage as a symbol of a new era. The PC is bestowed the Arch-Mage's robes and the keys to the Arch-Mage's Quarters (essentially symbolic since in Fate there's no mechanical housing benefits beyond narrative). The **Staff of Magnus** is entrusted to the College (the PC can keep it for now, since it may be needed in war's final battle against Thalmor magic). The College remains neutral in the Civil War officially, but this crisis taught them a lesson about vigilance and perhaps cooperation.

NPC Updates:

- **Tolfdír** becomes the PC's advisor for running the College ²⁶. His outlook is warm: he's proud of the PC. Aspect: "Avuncular Master Wizard". He will likely discourage the College from taking sides in war, but privately he and many mages are grateful to the PC (if PC is Stormcloak, Tolfdír might even confront his own Nord bias and realize not all magic is bad – he always was pro-magic anyway. If PC is Imperial, he respects their heroism beyond politics).
- **Winterhold's Jarl** (likely a Stormcloak-appointed one since Stormcloaks hold Winterhold): He hears of the PC's deeds. Even if he hates magic, he's forced to acknowledge the College saved the hold from an unknowable catastrophe. This could improve relations between town and gown – e.g., the Jarl might allow College apprentices to help rebuild parts of Winterhold that were ruined. The PC could broker peace: perhaps persuading the Jarl to drop a grievance (like demanding compensation for damages – the PC/College can voluntarily help town as goodwill). This is narrative but can be an aspect: "**Tentative Trust between Winterhold and the College**".
- **Thalmor Involvement**: Ancano's failure will not be publicly known immediate, but the Thalmor surely notice that one of their emissaries died/disappeared. It's one more reason for the Thalmor to have grudges. The Psijic Order's removal of the Eye means the Thalmor *don't* get that power – a huge thwarting of their plans. In the final Act, Elenwen or other Thalmor might sneer about the College: "*That pretentious school cost us a valuable asset... but no matter, we have other plans.*" If PC is Arch-Mage, that's a very high-profile position – which could ironically put them on the Thalmor's *most-wanted* list (a compel possibility: a Thalmor assassin taking a shot at them later due to "Arch-Mage of Winterhold" fame). Conversely, it gives the PC respect across Skyrim's courts (even a jarl who distrusts magic recognizes the title's prestige).

War Integration & Finale: The College questline yields the **Staff of Magnus**, which is explicitly a tool that can counter magical threats. In the final confrontation with the Thalmor, this staff becomes clutch if the Thalmor attempt any magical superweapon or summoned creature. For instance, if the Thalmor (per Act IV outlines) unleash a **Daedric Storm Atronach** on the battlefield ²⁰, the PC can use the Staff of Magnus to weaken it – perhaps straight-up absorbing the atronach's bound energy, banishing it in one decisive action ("the storm cloud creature crackles, then implodes as the Arch-Mage's staff drains its essence!"). Or if the Thalmor cast a great ward (barrier) to protect their agents or leaders, the Staff can bring it down, mirroring how it took down the Eye's barrier. Essentially, it nullifies any *magical advantage* the Thalmor hoped to have. This could turn the tide. Additionally, having the PC recognized as **Arch-Mage** means in any *post-war negotiation* (or moot), their voice carries weight as a leader of an institution, not just an adventurer. That might be beyond scope, but it's worth noting the influence gained. The College itself likely remains neutral physically – you won't see ranks of mages charging in the battle. However, individual mages who owe the PC favors could covertly assist. E.g., **Faralda** might join as a sniper on the walls if the final siege is at Solitude or Windhelm, picking off enemy mages from afar (if GM wants an excuse for why PC gets a boost on a check: "Faralda's lightning takes out the enemy mage — you gain +2 on your next move as the opposing spell fizzles" – basically an invoke because the PC established good relations). **Urag** could supply them with scrolls or information about a Thalmor ritual (like the Jagged Crown, maybe he dug up lore on how to counter a specific Aldmeri spell). These little touches show how an invested PC's work at the College pays dividends beyond just raw power.

Mechanical Rewards:

- **Arch-Mage's Authority (Aspect):** The PC can add "*Arch-Mage of Winterhold*" as an aspect. They can invoke it when dealing with any scholarly or magical folk for credibility or when attempting magical feats that require confidence and leadership. Of course, it can be compelled if, say, a miscast spell somewhere is blamed on them ("the Arch-Mage should have prevented this!").
- **Mage's Gear:** They receive the **Arch-Mage's Robes**, which could be an aspect "*Regalia of the Arch-Mage*" (invokable for presence or for concentration in spellcasting). Not giving mechanical bonuses beyond flavor, unless the GM wants to treat it as a stunt: e.g., "because of the robes' enchantments, +2 to Lore when casting particularly complex spells, once per session."
- **Staff of Magnus (Item Extra):** As described, allow potent one-use-per-conflict abilities to negate magical effects. In a mundane fight, it might not be very useful (it's not a great weapon against a sword fighter, say), but any magical foe or obstacle it shines. If the PC doesn't want to personally lug it, they might leave it displayed at College or with a trusted ally, but likely they'd keep such a trump card handy for the war's endgame.

Overall, the College questline adds a **supernatural dimension** to the campaign's events, reminding players that Skyrim's troubles are not only political but also mystical (and that the Thalmor threat extends to arcane manipulation). It also humanizes magic-users in the setting and can resolve the Winterhold isolation by integrating it into the larger story.

The Companions of Jorrvaskr (Neutral Faction) – “Blood of the Harbinger”

(Side Plot C – available to PCs of any allegiance who seek martial honor and the secrets of the beastblood)

Overview & Hook: The **Companions** are an ancient order of warriors headquartered in **Whiterun** at the mead-hall *Jorrvaskr*. Neither mercenaries nor knights, they are a brotherhood (and sisterhood) of heroes-for-hire who carry on the legacy of the *Five Hundred Companions of Ysgramor*. They famously eschew politics – in the Civil War, the Companions refuse to officially take sides, instead taking contracts to help the people regardless of faction ²². However, the war does affect them: Whiterun itself becomes a battleground in Act I, and the Companions' values of honor and courage are tested by the divisiveness of the conflict. **Kodlak Whitemane**, their elderly Harbinger (leader by example, not by command), strives to keep them focused on their own code. But the Companions harbor a secret beyond ordinary warriors: the elite circle of Companions are **werewolves**, a gift (or curse) they accepted in olden days to enhance their strength. Kodlak views it as a curse on his soul, one he quietly seeks to cure ²⁷. The Companions questline in this module follows the beats of Skyrim's "Companions" plot, with adjustments to fit the war timeline and Fate Core mechanics.

Joining the Companions: The PC can join as early as Act I. For instance, during the **Battle of Whiterun** (Act I's start), the PC might notice Companions like **Vilkas** or **Aela** aiding in defending the city (they likely would fight to protect Whiterun's people, even if "neutral"). If the PC fights bravely alongside them, afterward Vilkas might say "*You fight well. We could use more like you in Jorrvaskr.*" Alternatively, if the PC visits Whiterun earlier (perhaps the war is briefly delayed or they arrive as envoys), they could encounter a **giant attack** on a farm outside the city. This is straight from the game's intro to Companions: a giant is attacking Pelagia Farm, and Companions (Aela, Farkas, Ria) are already battling it. If the PC rushes to help and manages to land a hit or show courage, they earn the Companions' notice. Aela might greet the PC with the classic line "*You handle yourself well. You could make for a decent shield-brother/sister.*" She invites them to speak to **Kodlak Whitemane** at Jorrvaskr if they seek to join. Kodlak, upon meeting the PC, studies them (maybe

asking philosophical questions like “*Why do you want to join the Companions? To seek glory? To protect others?*”). The test of entry comes as a **sparring match** against one of the members, typically Vilkas. This is not to defeat him, just to show heart. The PC duels Vilkas (who might have Great Fight but he’s not going full lethal, just gauging form). If the PC holds their own or at least doesn’t back down, that suffices. They are admitted as a **“Whelp”** (newblood). They gain an aspect **“Companion Aspirant”** or simply note membership.

Proving Honor – Early Quests: Initially, the PC runs errands and minor jobs to prove themselves. They might go on a hunt for a troublesome beast or clear out bandits harassing a nearby village (this could coincide with war side-missions or be separate). One significant early quest is **“Proving Honor”**: the PC is sent with **Farkas** to retrieve a fragment of the axe **Wuuthrad** (the weapon of Ysgramor) from a tomb called **Dustman’s Cairn**. This is a test of mettle. In the tomb, after fighting Draugr, they are ambushed by a group of renegade warriors called the **Silver Hand** – fierce werewolf hunters. In a scripted moment, Farkas will reveal the Companions’ secret: when the PC is cornered by Silver Hand fighters in the crypt, Farkas *transforms into a hulking werewolf* and slaughters the attackers (the PC likely witnesses this in awe). Afterward, Farkas returns to human form and nonchalantly says, *“Kodlak will want to talk to you about... this.”* They retrieve the fragment of Wuuthrad and return to Jorrvaskr.

The Silver Hand’s appearance marks them as antagonists. They are essentially a fanatical group dedicated to exterminating werewolves, and they consider the Companions (specifically the Circle) their enemies. The war’s chaos has emboldened them; hearing rumors of beast-blood among Companions, they aim to wipe them out while attention is on the war.

The Beastblood and The Circle: Back at Jorrvaskr, Kodlak addresses the PC. He explains the history: the Companions (specifically the elite inner Circle: Kodlak, Vilkas, Farkas, Aela, and until recently Skjor) possess the **blood of the wolf** – a blessing (or curse) from the Daedric Lord Hircine. It grants great strength and healing, but at the cost of their souls (their spirits are claimed by Hircine’s Hunting Grounds after death, barring them from Sovngarde which Kodlak yearns for). Kodlak is gentle in tone: he doesn’t force the beastblood on anyone. In fact, he wishes he could cure it for himself and those who want a cure. He asks the PC how they feel about what they saw. If the PC is horrified, Kodlak respects that and says they need not partake, they can remain a normal member. If the PC is intrigued or eager (common for players who want the power), Kodlak warns them of the spiritual price but allows them to undergo the **rite** to join the Circle when ready. At some point soon (perhaps after a ceremony of raising the PC’s rank to *Companion* from *Whelp* for proving themselves), **Skjor** and **Aela** approach the PC by night. They invite the PC to the **Underforge** – a hidden cavern beneath the Skyforge. There, under the moonlight, Aela (already a werewolf) performs the **blood ritual**: the PC drinks Aela’s werewolf blood from a basin. This is Fate-wise the point the PC gains the aspect **“Werewolf Transformation (Novice)”**. The PC then transforms into a wolf for the first time – uncontrolled, feral. They might black out, waking up outside Whiterun with Aela (as in the game). Aela welcomes them to the Circle. From now on, the PC can call themselves a Companion of the Circle, albeit they must learn to control the beast.

(*Mechanics – Werewolf Extra initial effect: When transformed, the PC gets +2 Physique, +2 Fight, can move 2 zones per exchange easily, and claws (Weapon:2). But they must attack anyone not clearly a friend – likely the first transformation is completely uncontrolled, possibly the GM describes them going on a rampage against some wildlife or bandits outside town. Subsequent transformations require a Will roll to maintain control or at least direct the fury at enemies.*)

The Silver Hand Strike: Shortly after the PC's induction, the Companions face tragedy. The Silver Hand launch a surprise **attack on Jorrvaskr**. Perhaps timed when many fighters are out (say the PC and others were on a small mission or just returning from a hunt). The Silver Hand infiltrate Whiterun (taking advantage of city guard focus on war preparations) and assault the mead-hall at dusk. In the scuffle, **Kodlak Whitemane is slain** – they murder the old Harbinger in his quarters, stealing his journal and the fragments of Wuuthrad the Companions had collected. By the time the PC and circle rush back, it's over: they find Kodlak's body. This scene is heavy on roleplay: Vilkas and Farkas are enraged and grief-stricken (Vilkas: "*The Silver Hand will pay in blood!*"), Aela is stoically furious, wiping blood from her sword. The dynamic can be to spur the PC to take leadership in vengeance. The Companions decide on immediate retaliation: "**Blood for blood.**" They identify a major Silver Hand fort (e.g., **Gallows Rock** or **Driftshade Refuge** – in game it was Driftshade Refuge where they took fragments). The PC joins Vilkas, Aela, etc., in storming the Silver Hand hideout. This is essentially a raid scenario – likely framed as a Challenge or contest: fight through Silver Hand operatives (who are tough but ultimately just mortal fighters, though they often use silver weapons that can specifically hurt werewolves badly – a compel if the PC is in beast form could be "Silver burns your flesh, impairing your attacks"). The climax is confronting the Silver Hand leader (perhaps **Krev the Skinner** if following game names). This Silver Hand boss might have Kodlak's personal effects and the Wuuthrad fragments. The PC and companions slay them (likely brutally – Aela will insist on giving no quarter). They reclaim the **Wuuthrad Fragments**. Back at Jorrvaskr, the Circle convenes. Vilkas perhaps says the PC, though new, has proven themselves greatly and Kodlak's spirit would approve of them stepping up. They decide the PC and Vilkas will take on Kodlak's **final wish**: to cure the Circle of lycanthropy if they choose and to let Kodlak's soul rest. Kodlak's **journal** (recovered from the Silver Hand or found in his study) speaks of a possible cure: using the heads of the **Glenmoril Witches** who bestowed the beastblood to the Companions long ago.

Purifying the Soul – Glory of the Dead: The final legs of the Companions plot involve a quest to **Glenmoril Coven**, an isolated cave where some ancient witch hagravens reside. The PC, perhaps with Aela or alone, hunts down these witches. They need to obtain at least one **Witch's Head** (rather grim, but in lore these are used in a ritual to cure lycanthropy). The witches themselves are challenging foes – basically hagravens (half-woman, half-bird witches) who cast nasty curses. The PC might face multiple ones if they want extra heads (in game, you can gather up to 5 heads to cure all Circle members; here maybe they just specifically want one for Kodlak, and any others optional if the PC or Vilkas/Farkas want to cure themselves later). After slaying a witch (or witches), the PC returns. The final ritual takes place at the ancient tomb of **Ysgramor** in the far north (on an island – might require a ship or long trek, but consider the war calm enough to allow it in Act III's quieter period). The Companions bring Kodlak's body (or rather, his remains) to the Tomb of Ysgramor's chamber to lay him to rest. Inside, they are tested by a few ghostly adversaries (perhaps previous Harbingers' spirits or Draugr). At the climax, they perform the ritual: throwing a Glenmoril Witch's head into the **Flame of the Harbinger** (a magic fire in the tomb). This summons **Kodlak's wolf spirit**, which emerges as a spectral great werewolf that attacks the PC and company. The PC must defeat this beast (without killing Kodlak's soul, more like dispelling the beastly curse from it). Once overcome, Kodlak's spirit appears in human form, grateful and at peace. He declares the PC the new **Harbinger** (if they are worthy – Kodlak clearly thinks so due to all they've done). The spirits of other Companions might nod in approval. Kodlak's ghost then goes to Sovngarde. In Fate terms, this lifting of the curse could translate to the PC (and any others curing themselves) removing the "Beastblood" aspect if they choose. Aela explicitly will *not* want to cure hers (she's staunchly proud of being a werewolf); Vilkas and Farkas in lore do cure themselves after Kodlak. The PC gets a choice: remain a werewolf (keeping the powers and curse) or cure it. If they cure themselves, they lose the transformation ability (possibly trade it for an aspect like "Cured of Lycanthropy, Soul is Mine" which could be invoked for strong will against Hircine's influence or compelled as maybe now

physically just normal when facing something where being a werewolf would have helped). If they keep it, they might still help the others cure Kodlak and maybe themselves later.

Aftermath & Harbinger Role: The Companions return to Whiterun with renewed purpose. The PC, as **Harbinger**, is not an authoritarian leader (Companions leadership is by respect, not orders ²⁸). But they hold the honor and legacy now. They may reform some policies – e.g., maybe under PC's influence the Companions take a slightly more active stance in protecting the innocent during the war, even if not officially joining either side. For instance, if the PC is Stormcloak, perhaps they ensure that the Companions will help rebuild after battles or protect civilians. If PC is Imperial, similar story – the Companions remain neutral but humanitarian. The war likely sees the Companions individually choosing sides at times (there could be divided opinions internally: some younger members might favor Stormcloaks, others Empire, reflecting Whiterun's own split families). As Harbinger, the PC's example will help unify them beyond politics – a great roleplaying point where the PC might, say, deliver a speech: "*We are Companions. Our oaths are to Skyrim and her people, not any crown. We'll defend Whiterun from any threat – be it Stormcloak or Imperial aggression – but we will not murder our shield-siblings over flags.*" (Interestingly, in the main campaign, Whiterun does end up siding with Empire at first then can flip, but Companions staying out of it except protecting the city itself is plausible).

Rewards & Items: - **Wuuthrad:** The legendary axe of Ysgramor is re-forged once all fragments are retrieved. In game, it's given to the player. Here, the PC being Harbinger may ceremonially receive Wuuthrad. Wuuthrad is especially deadly to elves (in TES lore). In Fate, Wuuthrad might be an aspect or give +2 when fighting Thalmor or elf-kind specifically (could be a stunt: "Elf Bane: Weapon +2 vs elves" for example). It's a two-handed greataxe – maybe the PC's not specced for that if they were more of a mage or something, but it can still be an iconic symbol. Even if not used in combat by the PC, it's a relic that may matter. For example, the Thalmor in Act IV might have considered stealing/destroying Wuuthrad (the Act IV mention of "retrieve/destroy a symbol of Skyrim's royalty" ²⁹ could easily be Wuuthrad or the Jagged Crown; since Jagged Crown is used earlier in war, Wuuthrad could be a stand-in for something that unites Nords culturally). If PC has Wuuthrad, perhaps the Thalmor attempt to capture it to demoralize the Nords – giving the PC a chance to foil that. - **Shield of Ysgramor:** Another artifact from Ysgramor's tomb. Could be given to the PC or left as Kodlak's memory. If given, treat as a strong shield (maybe an aspect to invoke for defense). - **Harbinger's Honor (Aspect):** The PC effectively gets an aspect like "Harbinger of the Companions" reflecting their leadership. They can invoke it for reputation when dealing with Nord nobility or warriors (most Nords respect the Companions greatly), or to rally their guild in times of need. - **Oath of Neutrality:** The Companions won't *officially* join the civil war. However, individual Companions might show up to help the PC per their personal loyalty. For instance, if the PC Harbinger calls for aid against the Thalmor in the finale, you can justify a Companion or two (maybe Farkas and some fighters) turning up as surprise reinforcement to defend civilians or engage Thalmor elites. It wouldn't break neutrality, since fighting Thalmor is defending Skyrim itself, not taking a side in the internal war. Also after the war, with the PC's influence, the Companions might become key in healing the divides (the module's epilogue hints at unity – a Harbinger respected by both sides can help with that). - **Werewolf Evolution:** If PC kept lycanthropy, we handle it as earlier mentioned: initial uncontrolled shifts, later maybe mastery. At a major milestone like after killing the Silver Hand chief or Kodlak's funeral, the PC could take a stunt: "Beast Form Mastery – can consciously shift once per session and keep mind." That's a big advantage but with narrative downsides (people fear you, silver weapons more dangerous, etc.). If PC cured it, they lose the power but maybe gain peace of mind and Sovngarde access (not mechanical, but story).

Integration with War and Thalmor Climax: The Companions primarily protect Whiterun. In the campaign's Act I, **Battle for Whiterun**, how did they act? Possibly, as mentioned, they defended the city from the attacking force (if Stormcloaks attacked). They'd particularly ensure the safety of non-combatants. Balgruuf (Jarl of Whiterun) might have asked them to stand with the guard if Imperials side, which they likely did because it's their home. If Stormcloaks took Whiterun violently, there could be some casualties among Companions (maybe Skjor died there instead of by Silver Hand, but we used him in story so likely they tried to stay out). Could note that *some* Companions might have left to avoid killing friends – that aside, in the end, Whiterun's outcome doesn't remove the Companions. Tullius or Ulfric, whichever held Whiterun, would allow the Companions to continue (neither would want to anger them).

By Act IV, as discussed, the Companions can act as a wildcard help. Possibly the final battle (Solitude or Windhelm) sees civilians in peril – cue the Companions showing up to evacuate non-combatants or take down chaos-causing threats. Also, if the PC Harbinger is present, any Companion present will absolutely follow their lead. A nice scene: In the final moment when allied forces (Imperial and Stormcloak) must join to fight Thalmor, a brief hesitation might be broken when the PC (Harbinger) steps forward and roars "*Companions, with me! For Skyrim!*" and even the soldiers of both sides feel inspired (because the Companions are legendary impartial heroes). This can justify an extra Fate point refresh or bonus to all PCs due to morale.

After the war, the Companions under PC's guidance could help mend relations by doing heroic deeds for all communities regardless of faction, demonstrating unity.

NPC Guidance:

- **Kodlak Whitemane:** Aspects: "Sage Harbinger Burdened by the Beast", "Mentor and Father-Figure", *Trouble*: "Haunted by Unsung Dead (guilt over friends lost)". Kodlak's wisdom is available early and his death is a catalyst. Make his presence warm so players feel the loss. His stat not needed to fight; he's killed off-screen by Silver Hand in dramatic fashion (shock of safety of home violated).
- **Aela the Huntress:** Aspects: "Devout of the Hunt, Blood of the Wolf", "Unwavering and Fierce", *Trouble*: "Vengeance-Driven". She remains a werewolf and sort of voices the old ways. After PC becomes Harbinger, Aela will still run many day-to-day jobs (she's the best quest giver type). She supports PC but will challenge them if they suggest fully abandoning Hircine's gift (which she sees as holy). In final war, Aela might volunteer to scout or sabotage Thalmor due to her stealth and archery prowess.
- **Vilkas and Farkas:** Twins. *Vilkas*: more articulate, thoughtful but brooding. *Farkas*: simple, kind-hearted, not bright but extremely loyal. Both are werewolves initially and choose cure later. If PC remains a werewolf, they might not cure either to stand with PC (or maybe they do because they wanted Sovngarde like Kodlak). They are your main companion allies in battles; stat both as great warriors (Good or Great Fight, high Physique). They have aspect "*Brothers in Arms – We Protect Each Other*". They could assist in final fight against say a powerful Thalmor Justiciar (tag-teaming) or guarding PC's back.
- **Silver Hand:** Not a singular NPC except their leader. Treat Silver Hand goons as skilled bandits who have the aspect "*Fanatic Werewolf Hunters*" (they'll prioritize attacking anyone with beastblood). Their leader Krev might have "*Hatred of Monsters*" giving her fearless in melee with even a werewolf. Use them as mid-campaign antagonists only; by Act IV presumably all wiped out or irrelevant. Possibly one stray Silver Hand shows up as a twist allied with Thalmor (Thalmor might have employed them to weaken Companions) – but not needed.
- **The Glenmoril Witches:** Not personified except as monstrous hags. They represent the Daedric influence (though we minimize actual Hircine cameo to avoid Daedric focus). On kill, treat retrieving their head as a gruesome overcome action.

- **Ysgramor's Spirit:** maybe glimpsed giving silent approval; no stats. But Wuuthrad's symbolic weight is tied to him.

Conclusion: The Companions' arc yields a PC who is both a war hero and a cultural hero (Harbinger). The **impact on the climax** is mostly intangible but important: it adds to the idea of **Skyrim united**. If the PC can say at the negotiation or at the victory, "*As Harbinger, I pledge the Companions will stand watch for all sons and daughters of Skyrim, no matter what banners they flew before,*" it becomes a nice narrative beat resolving some war bitterness. Mechanically, having them around can translate to one or two free invokes of "*Battle-hardened Companions*" in the final fight that any player could use (basically a boost from allied NPC presence).

The Forsworn (The Reachmen Rebellion – *Optional Faction*)

(*Side Plot C – GM Optional; for PCs inclined to side with or explore the wild Reach folk. This can function as a smaller questline or an alternative perspective.*)

Overview: The **Forsworn** are a faction of rebel Reachmen, native to the Reach (around Markarth). They were once the rulers of the Reach briefly during the Great War, but were ousted by Ulfric Stormcloak in the infamous "Markarth Incident." Now they exist as guerilla clans, following ancient druidic traditions and seeking to reclaim their homeland from Nords and Empire alike ³⁰ ³¹. They are considered **savages** by most Skyrim folk – known for guerilla raids, usage of primitive armor made of bones and feathers, and dark magic (including working with Hagravens to create **Briarheart** warriors who literally have their hearts replaced by briar seeds). In the Civil War campaign, they are mostly an enemy (in Stormcloak path, the PCs might fight them or broker a truce as seen in Side Plot B Markarth ³²). This **optional faction pack** allows a PC (especially one with Breton Reachmen heritage or a very sympathetic outlook) to align with or **infiltrate** the Forsworn. It's a morally gray storyline, as the Forsworn commit atrocities but also have suffered them.

Joining or Dealing with the Forsworn: A PC could pursue this path if, say, they are **Reach-born** or personally victimized by Nords in a way that parallels the Forsworn's cause. Alternatively, a PC might initially engage them as enemies but then see their perspective (maybe a neutral PC decides both Empire and Stormcloaks are flawed and is drawn to a third option). The main war will bring the PCs to Markarth in Act II if Stormcloak, or in Act III via side plot. During "**The Forsworn Conspiracy**" side event in Markarth (as seen in main module side plot B ³³ ³¹), the PCs could uncover that the Forsworn within the city (Nepos and cohorts) are behind some intrigue and either choose to eliminate them or strike a deal. If a PC leans Forsworn, perhaps instead of killing **Madanach** (the Forsworn King in Cidhna Mine), they decide to help him. This is a big divergence: in Markarth's conclusion (if Stormcloak path), Ulfric or the new Jarl might still want Madanach dead. The PC could secretly free Madanach ("No One Escapes Cidhna Mine" scenario).

Questline Option 1 – The Forsworn Conspiracy Outcome: If the PC sides with Madanach: The PC meets **Madanach** (the Forsworn leader, called King in Rags) in the prison. Instead of fighting, they talk. Madanach is highly intelligent, charismatic in a hard way. *Profile:* "Rightful King of the Reach (in his mind)", "Bitter Genius Revolutionary", *Trouble:* "Heart of Stone (will do anything for vengeance)". He promises the PC that if they aid his escape, he can guarantee no Forsworn attacks on that PC's allies for a time (a temporary alliance). The escape from Cidhna Mine can be run as a tense skill challenge: gathering a shiv, bribing a guard (maybe using a silver item Nepos smuggled in), and finally breaking out through old tunnels into **Understone Keep** or the city. The PC and Forsworn must fight through surprise (maybe city guards or Thonar Silver-Blood's mercenaries) to get free outside Markarth. If they succeed, Madanach gives the PC the

Armor of the Old Gods (a unique Forsworn armor set, which could have minor enchantments or just be symbolic). He and his followers flee to the countryside.

The PC at this point becomes effectively an ally of the Forsworn. They might even be invited to their hidden lair in the **Druadach Redoubt**. There, a **Hagraven** and Forsworn shamans conduct a ritual to initiate the PC if they truly want to join: possibly a blood pact or vision quest under hallucinogenic herbs. The PC gains the aspect "**Blood Marked by the Forsworn**", signaling acceptance by the clan. This will carry complications (Nords will consider them a traitor if known, but it grants them safety among the Forsworn). Forsworn quest tasks might include: helping raid an Imperial caravan to steal weapons (if PC is anti-Empire) or even sabotaging a Stormcloak assault by misdirecting them into a trap-filled canyon. These would pit the PC covertly against whichever side they originally came from – very dramatic if the party had Stormcloak leanings and one PC is secretly aiding Reachmen.

One major quest is **Becoming the Briarheart (optional)**: If the PC is willing, a Hagraven offers to perform the Briarheart ritual on them or on a dying ally to rebirth them with greater power. This involves physically replacing the heart with a briar seed and arcane measures. In Fate, that's essentially a permanent extreme consequence ("Heartless Undead") one takes – they lose some humanity but become exceptionally hard to kill unless the briar heart is destroyed. It's likely too grotesque for a PC, but a truly committed one might. Benefits: increased resilience, perhaps no need to breathe or ignore pain, etc. Downsides: vulnerability that if someone tears out the heart they instantly perish, and a loss of emotion (compel to be more monstrous). Probably not something the module expects most PCs to do, but it can be mentioned.

Questline Option 2 – Forsworn Peace Broker: If PC doesn't want to join but work with them for the war's sake: The PC might instead aim to broker a **truce** as depicted in side plot (convincing Madanach to hold back attacks so Stormcloaks can take Markarth more easily ³⁴). In that scenario, the PC meets with Madanach or a representative and negotiates. The likely outcome: Forsworn agree to not harry Stormcloak supply lines for the siege in exchange for something, perhaps safe passage or release of some prisoners. The PC might not join them but earns their *respect*. This partial alliance could later mean in the final battle, Forsworn stay out (so not exactly helping, but at least one less enemy). If PC goes further to promise them autonomy post-war, that's non-binding of course (Ulfrik likely would not honor it fully).

Outcome and Impact: If PC fully sides with Forsworn, they essentially forsake loyalties to either main faction – that could lead to them becoming more of a wild card in campaign's latter half. Perhaps they stop actively helping Stormcloaks or Imperials and pursue Forsworn goals, which might somewhat parallel Stormcloak cause (both want Nords out of their land, ironically, but Forsworn also hate Nords). Possibly the PC tries to *co-opt* the Stormcloak rebellion to include Forsworn independence. That would be controversial – Ulfrik's worst nightmare ironically, as he despises Forsworn. GM should carefully navigate so the party doesn't split disastrously. If only one PC is doing this, it could be a secret side quest separate from group.

If PC established alliance, in the final Thalmor confrontation, maybe the Forsworn get a brief mention: while the main battle is elsewhere, Forsworn in the Reach took advantage to slaughter some recovering Thalmor encampment, preventing them from sending reinforcements. If the final battle is in Solitude, maybe a ragtag group of Forsworn the PC befriended traveled unseen and at a key moment, they snipe a few Thalmor from the cliffs (a surprising assist – *"Arrows tipped with raven feathers rain from above on the Thalmor – the Forsworn honor their pact!"*). It can provide an invoke for the players ("Forsworn Ambush" aspect on Thalmor).

NPCs:

- **Madanach (King in Rags):** Aspects: "Charismatic King of the Forsworn", "Cunning Strategist and Sorcerer", Trouble: "Unforgiving Heart (no mercy for Nords)". He's mid-50s, physically not imposing but magically adept and very intelligent. If allied, he'll treat PC as a valued confidant but always test their loyalty. If crossed, he could become a future enemy. Stats: High Lore (druidic earth magic), decent Fight (dagger), high Deceive or Provoke (as manipulator).
- **Kaie:** Madanach's lieutenant (from game, Forsworn agent). She could be friendlier to PC, maybe the one who actually orchestrates their escape in the mine. Use her as a companion NPC to PC within Forsworn quest. Agile and deadly, aspect "*Swiftblade of the Reach*".
- **Thonar Silver-Blood:** Not Forsworn, but Markarth's noble who hates them. If PC goes Forsworn, Thonar becomes a personal adversary. In the game quest, if PC sides with Madanach, they likely kill Thonar on escape. Could happen similarly – if so, Markarth's politics shift (somebody else takes over but likely still Stormcloak-aligned eventually). Killing Thonar might cause issues with Ulfric's supporters though (since Silver-Bloods were funding Stormcloaks). So that's a huge consequence – possibly Ulfric finds out PC was involved and brands them traitor (leading PC fully to Forsworn side). A dramatic possible path.
- **Forsworn Ideology:** Emphasize how differently they view the world. E.g., NPCs mention "*the old gods of the Reach*" and perform ritual dances. They see themselves as rightful owners of the land, with generations of grievance. Not monolithic evil, but definitely not gentle. They'll kill civilians who they deem colonizers. If PC has a conscience, they might moderate some actions (maybe they dissuade Madanach from a plan to massacre a whole Nord village – that could be a moral test, with a Persuasion check or similar to push for a less bloody method).
- **Forsworn Gear Reward:** If PC fully integrated, aside from Armor of Old Gods (which could be an enchanted light armor, maybe +1 to Stealth and minor magic resistance), they might get a **unique Forsworn weapon**, like the **Forsworn Bow** (with poison), or even permission to use **primal magic** (maybe learning a rare spell or two like frenzy or life-drain taught by a reach shaman). These can be flavor or minor mechanical stunts (e.g., once per session can brew a strong poison from Reach herbs giving +2 to next attack).

- Integration Summaries:** - If PC is Stormcloak but sympathetic to Forsworn, they might create a bridging of alliances: e.g., *in final battle* maybe PC convinces Ulfric to spare Forsworn or even quietly accept their help against Thalmor. Hard to imagine given Ulfric, but a peace gesture could be mentioned: "*Ulfric, after victory, grants amnesty to Forsworn insurgents as sign of unity vs Dominion.*" Possibly influenced by PC's actions.
- If PC is Imperial and allied Forsworn, likely it's more just a personal path (Forsworn equally hate Empire because of past betrayal). But they'd happily see Empire weaken, so they'd indirectly support Stormcloaks ironically to cause chaos (Thalmor logic too).

Anyway, Forsworn content is optional – use if it adds to your story; otherwise the main campaign covers some interplay with them via Markarth side plot B ³⁵.

The Thalmor (Aldmeri Dominion) – “The Shadow War of the Thalmor”

(Side Plot C – GM Optional faction, typically antagonistic. Guidance for including Thalmor-focused scenarios or even a PC working with/within the Thalmor.)

Overview: The **Thalmor** are the ruling party of the Aldmeri Dominion (comprising Altmer of Summerset Isles and Bosmer of Valenwood). In Skyrim, they are ostensibly allies of the Empire by treaty (White-Gold Concordat) and have agents (Justiciars) enforcing the ban on Talos worship and spying ²¹. Secretly, the

Thalmor want both Empire and Stormcloaks weakened, intending to dominate Tamriel eventually³⁶. In the core campaign, the Thalmor's interference is a hidden thread revealed gradually, culminating in Act IV's finale where they try to sabotage the war's endgame²⁹.

This faction entry provides a *mini-campaign within the campaign* about dealing with Thalmor conspiracies. It can be used from either angle: **investigating and thwarting Thalmor plots** (for PC heroes) or **a PC infiltrator/agent playing a double game**.

Thalmor Plots to Integrate: - Espionage in the Court: In Act II or III, PCs could discover that a key figure's advisor is a Thalmor plant. For example, if they interact with Jarl Siddgeir of Falkreath (an Imperial-leaning, possibly Thalmor-friendly young Jarl), they might notice his steward is overly keen on policy that delays sending troops – could be Thalmor influence. Exposing or quietly countering such influence is one side mission. The *dossier* trope can happen: PCs steal documents from a Thalmor agent (maybe an office in Solitude's Embassy or Windhelm's Palace if an advisor is present) showing evidence of sabotage plans (like deliberately provoking massacres to fuel hatred). This aligns with retrieving dossiers as in the main mod mention of Ulfric's dossier. - **Infiltration of Thalmor Embassy:** A classic scenario borrowed from the game main quest ("Diplomatic Immunity") but applied to war context. Possibly Act III, if PCs suspect Thalmor orchestrating things, they get contacted by e.g. **Malborn** (an Altmer who dislikes Thalmor, like in game) or **Delphine** (if Blades are around, though with Dragonborn gone, maybe not). They plan a break-in during a Thalmor party. The goal: steal secret files (dossiers on Ulfric, on the Empire's plans, maybe on Dwemer artifacts or on the Eye of Magnus scenario to show Thalmor knowledge)³¹. Running this as a social stealth mission is exciting: PC must mingle, maybe with a disguise or cover story, then stealth through, overcome locks, etc. If caught, a fight with Thalmor guards ensues. Reward: evidence of Thalmor nefariousness to show leaders, and possibly rescuing a prisoner (like **Thorald Gray-Mane** if that sidequest is included, or some Imperial officer kidnapped). - **Elimination of a Thalmor Cell:** At some point, PCs might have opportunity or be tasked (by their faction leader or by an independent like Jarl Balgruuf or even by Gray-Mane family if following game sidequest) to destroy a Thalmor base such as **Northwatch Keep** (where in lore they keep prisoners). This is straight combat infiltration. Alternatively, a more narrative approach: as war battles are happening, they take a detour to assault a known Thalmor outpost to stop a flanking or to free prisoners who can then aid war effort (e.g., free a captured Legion captain who returns with intel). - **Optional PC as Thalmor Agent:** If a player wanted to be a Thalmor agent undercover in the party – extremely tricky, but if allowed, their "questline" is basically the inverse of above. They receive orders via drop (maybe meet a Thalmor handler at night or coded letters) instructing them to subtly sabotage key events: ensure certain NPCs die, inflame tensions. This could lead to serious party conflict if discovered. But if done, the GM would have to balance that PC's objectives with overall group fun. Possibly that PC has a redemption arc (realizing the cruelty of Thalmor and betraying them later). If they remain loyal to Thalmor throughout, at final they might even turn on party or call off support. That's likely out of scope of cooperative style.

Thalmor Endgame (Act IV): The main mod outlines multiple possible Thalmor gambits in final battle³⁷: assassination attempts, Daedric horror unleashing, stealing Jagged Crown or similar symbol to break morale. We should tie that to faction quests results: - If PCs did well in uncovering Thalmor plans earlier, maybe they discovered a reference to "Project Oblivion" which hinted at the daedric horror plan, so they prepared countermeasures (like the Staff of Magnus or holy amulet). - If they rescued an informant, that informant warns them mid-battle "Check the rooftops – an assassin is in position!" giving them chance to intervene in assassination attempt (maybe that's an overcome or mini duel to save Ulfric/Tullius). - If PCs had allied Forsworn or others, maybe those help disrupt one Thalmor scheme. - Overall, earlier successes

can remove or reduce some final complications: e.g., if they killed Elenwen or key Thalmor earlier, the final interference might lack leadership (perhaps the Daedric ritual is weaker or Emperor's assassination attempt less organized). - Conversely, if they ignored Thalmor until final, hit them with multiple things at once (time pressure to choose which to stop – e.g., do they stop assassin or monster? They must split or decide, the other causing a consequence).

NPCs:

- **Elenwen (First Emissary):** The face of Thalmor in Skyrim. *Aspects:* "Smooth Diplomat, Cold-Hearted", *Trouble:* "Overconfident in Elven Supremacy". Likely boss of embassy infiltration. She might survive till final for a showdown (like she tries to stab a leader and PC can duel her). Stats: Great in magic (destruction) and fencing, but more likely to escape if cornered, unless dramatic moment calls for her death.
- **Ancano:** Already covered in College plot, but he's part of Thalmor faction. If survived that (if PCs didn't do College quest, maybe he still lurks around). Possibly if College quest not run, he could show up as final boss instead of Elenwen, using Eye of Magnus unleashed (though we covered Eye in College side).
- **Ondolemar:** Thalmor in Markarth. If PC did Forsworn stuff or Markarth intrigue, they might have killed or expelled him. If alive, he could appear as one of final Thalmor field commanders.
- **Thalmor Justiciars (mooks):** Well-trained Altmer soldiers with glass armor and lightning spells. They often carry orders that can be looted to glean intel.
- **If PC was Thalmor:** a possible handler NPC might be **Valmir** (a false identity from a side quest, could adapt as their direct superior, cunning and ready to sacrifice the PC if needed). This NPC might become an enemy if PC defects or loose end if PC remains loyal.

Unique Rewards: There's no "*join Thalmor and get artifact*" aside from items you might loot. However, if somehow a PC ended up siding enough, maybe they got to use some Thalmor-exclusive gear: *High Elven armor*, an *Ayleid crystal* that holds magical charge, etc. But that's incidental. Perhaps retrieving the *dossiers* and *secret correspondence* is the reward itself (to influence other factions). One thing: the mod mentions maybe a "symbol of royalty" being targeted, e.g. Jagged Crown. If PCs save Jagged Crown from Thalmor, they could give it to the rightful High King at end, cementing legitimacy. Or if they don't, Thalmor destroy it and so the moot is more contentious. That's more narrative outcome than item for players.

Integrating: The Thalmor content is mostly integrated throughout as hidden antagonists. Many main plot points we have references to them, so this just arms the GM to do more with those references (and give players proactivity in stopping them, rather than just reacting in final battle).

Final Note: Defeating the Thalmor plots should feel like an extra achievement for PCs beyond just winning the war. They effectively foiled a greater evil. In epilogue, maybe the Thalmor temporarily withdraw from Skyrim entirely (having been exposed and beaten). The PC might even get labeled "*Thalmor's Bane*" by common folk. It sets stage for a potential future "Great War II" but for now Skyrim's safe.

Side Plot C and Climax: We have now introduced all major factions and their side arcs – each provides the PCs with unique boons and allies that come into play during the final confrontation. In the **climactic Thalmor confrontation** of Act V, consider these cumulative impacts:

- A **Thieves Guild-aligned PC** ensures intelligence on the enemy's moves, possibly preventing surprise setbacks.

- A **Dark Brotherhood PC** might have already decapitated the Empire's leadership, weakening any cohesion in Imperial ranks ²¹ – at the finale, that could mean fewer reinforcements for the Imperial side (making Stormcloak victory easier or, if Imperials are PC's side, meaning they fight more desperately for revenge). But crucially, the Brotherhood's elimination of certain targets (like Emperor or a Thalmor collaborator) can remove a piece from the board, simplifying the endgame confrontation (no Penitus Oculatus interference, for example). Also, a DB PC may attempt a critical strike on a Thalmor leader in the final battle (assassin vs assassin).
- A **College-aligned PC** directly counters magical threats. When the Thalmor attempt to unleash a Daedric horror or powerful spell, the Arch-Mage PC stands forth with the **Staff of Magnus**, nullifying the summoning ²⁵. This could save countless lives on both sides and turn what would be a nearly hopeless scenario (e.g. a rampaging Daedric storm atronach amidst the troops) into a manageable one (the atronach disperses as the Staff drains its binding energy).
- A **Companions Harbinger PC** brings moral authority and skilled warriors. In the chaotic climax, they can rally any wavering soldiers – “We fight as one!” – perhaps preventing the panic the Thalmor hoped to instill. If the PC retained *werewolf* power, they might even lead a fearsome charge by transforming and tearing through Thalmor ranks (imagine the enemy’s terror seeing the legendary Harbinger turn into a great wolf – it could even compel Thalmor lesser soldiers to flee). If cured, their presence is still inspiring, a symbol of unity. The Companions also specifically ensure that no Thalmor assassin reaches fleeing civilians or flanks the PCs; the likes of Vilkas and Farkas hold choke-points, fulfilling their oath as shield-brothers to the bitter end.
- **Forsworn involvement**, if achieved, adds an unpredictable ally. The Reachmen hate the Thalmor (as oppressors just like the Empire/Nords). Perhaps a cameo: during the final battle at Solitude’s docks, a horn sounds and Madanach’s Forsworn warband – painted in blood and woad – ambushes the Thalmor reinforcements, keeping them from encircling the PCs. This fulfills the “truce of convenience” the PC brokered ³². While the Stormcloak soldiers might be uneasy seeing Forsworn fighting nominally on their side, the result is undeniable: the Thalmor are caught in a pincer and chaos breaks their formation. (After victory, the Forsworn melt away to the hills – they sought no glory, just vengeance on the Thalmor who would subjugate any human.)
- **Thalmor reckoning:** If the PCs followed the threads of the Thalmor’s schemes, the final confrontation might expose the Thalmor leader (say, Elenwen or a Justiciar general) to direct confrontation with the PCs. Armed with knowledge from captured dossiers and the tools gathered from all factions, the PCs can confront this mastermind. For example, the PC may shout to Elenwen that her plan is known: “*Elenwen, we found your orders to your assassin – your ploy is foiled!*” ¹⁵ This might socially unnerve her or cause her to commit to a fight on unfavorable terms. In the ensuing fight, a DB PC could land the killing blow from the shadows (poetic, since the Thalmor tried to use assassins, now *face* one), or a Mage PC could nullify her spells with the Staff, or a Harbinger PC might strike her down with Wuuthrad, an axe crafted to slay elven tyrants ³⁸. However it plays, defeating the Thalmor in person provides a cathartic sense of closure – the hidden enemy is dragged into the light and vanquished by the united efforts of Skyrim’s heroes.

Acknowledging Side Plot C in the Climax: The module’s conclusion should highlight how these faction side stories influenced the outcome. For instance: “*Thanks to the PCs’ alliances and hard-won powers, the final battle turned in the heroes’ favor. The Thieves Guild intel forewarned them of the assassination plot* ¹⁵, *saving Ulfric/Tullius’s life at a crucial moment. The College’s Arch-Mage contained the unbound Daedric storm before it could ravage the battlefield* ¹⁶. *Under the Harbinger’s command, Nord and Reachman and Imperial (and even one mighty werewolf) fought side by side against the Thalmor, putting grudges aside in the face of a greater foe. The Dark Brotherhood’s black sacrifice sowed chaos in the Empire’s ranks – an irony not lost on General Tullius as he realized the assassination of the Emperor only fueled Skyrim’s defiance.**

In the aftermath, as the war smoke clears and Skyrim finds a dawn of tentative peace, the **factions** leave their mark on the new era. The Companions, led by their Harbinger, help rebuild across faction lines – their mead-hall open to any honorable warrior. The College of Winterhold, its name redeemed by the PC's heroism, becomes a pillar of counsel, its mages working to repair magical damage wrought by the war (and quietly ensuring that no Thalmor agent infiltrates again). The Thieves Guild, with a new Guildmaster, moderates the shadows – underworld unrest in check so commerce revives (Maven Black-Briar may sit as Jarl, but she knows who helped secure her throne ¹⁴). In the peace that follows, the Dark Brotherhood's actions remain in shadow – the Emperor's assassination ²¹ will reshape the Empire's politics, perhaps giving Skyrim breathing room; the PC who walked that dark path may either dissolve the Brotherhood or steer it to more “selective” targets (one can only hope).

Skyrim's people sing not just of the war leaders, but of the **heroes and their factions**: *“By blade and by stealth, by magic and by valor, they wove fate in Skyrim’s hour of need.”* These side plots (designated “Side Plot C” in the module) provided depth and unpredictability to the campaign – showing that in Skyrim, **anyone** from any walk of life (be they mercenary, mage, thief, assassin, rebel, or even outcast) could rise to shape the world's destiny.

Thus, when the skalds recount the final battle against the Thalmor, they won't just tell of Stormcloak or Imperial banners – they'll tell of how a Nightingale's blade felled a dread spellcaster under the moon ³⁹, how a child of the Circle gave a victorious howl that echoed over Solitude's walls, how an Arch-Mage's staff sundered a conjured storm, and how even the wild Forsworn danced in the flame as Dominion schemes burned to ash. Skyrim's future was forged not by one hero alone, but by a **circle of allies** drawn from across the realm's myriad factions, all bound by the choices of the player characters – truly a **Fate**-woven saga.

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