

Elder Scrolls: Skyrim – Fate Core Campaign Module

“Sons of Skyrim, the hour of war is at hand...”

Introduction: The World on Edge After Alduin’s Fall

Skyrim stands at a crossroads of fate in the turbulent aftermath of the dragon Alduin’s defeat. The Dragonborn hero has vanished to parts unknown (rumored to be in Solstheim), leaving a mortal world to settle its own flames ¹ ². In his absence, the civil war between the Imperial Legion and the Stormcloak Rebellion reignites with fury. The province of **Skyrim** – especially the rugged province of **Skyrim** (with our focus on the hold of **Skyrim** in this campaign) – is a land of **harsh beauty and harsher choices**, where Nords, Imperials, and other peoples now clash over the very soul of the nation.

This campaign module is designed for **Fate Core**, emphasizing narrative-driven, cinematic play with rich character drama. Players take on the roles of heroes swept up in Skyrim’s civil war in **4E 201**, shortly after Alduin’s fall. The **Dragonborn will not save the day** – instead, the fate of Skyrim may hinge on the **player characters (PCs)**. They are not the Dragonborn, but soldiers, mages, mercenaries, or wanderers whose choices and ideals will shape the war’s course.

Faction Perspectives: The campaign accommodates **three perspectives**:

- **Stormcloak Rebellion:** Nord patriots and allies fighting for Skyrim’s independence, Talos worship, and Nordic traditions under Ulfric Stormcloak ³ ⁴.
- **Imperial Legion:** Loyalists striving to preserve the Empire’s unity and Skyrim’s stability under General Tullius and Jarl Elisif ⁵ ⁶.
- **Neutral Skyrim Factions:** Characters working for a native faction such as the **Companions, College of Winterhold, Dark Brotherhood**, or others. These PCs are not officially aligned with either army, but their adventures entwine with the war’s events. They might act as mediators, spies, or free agents pursuing their own agendas amid the conflict.

Setting – Skyrim at War: The war is at a bloody stalemate as we begin. The Empire holds the western and southern holds (Haafingar, Falkreath, Hjaalmarch, the Reach), while Stormcloaks control the east and north (Eastmarch, the Pale, the Rift, Winterhold) ⁷. **Whiterun Hold** lies in the center as a critical neutral territory – but not for long ⁸. Each hold’s capital city becomes a focal point of conflict or intrigue in the campaign, from the ancient stone city of **Windhelm** to the highland market of **Markarth**. Every city has its own **local history, power players, and unrest** which the war will inflame. GMs are provided detailed profiles for each hold capital – its geography, key NPCs and factions, and unique quests or troubles – ensuring you have material to bring these locations to life.

Themes: This campaign explores **identity, ideology, tragedy, patriotism, and moral conflict** against the backdrop of war. Nords struggle with what it means to be a “true son/daughter of Skyrim,” while others weigh duty to Empire vs. loyalty to home. The tragedy of civil war touches every storyline: friends and families divided, cities in flames, and the looming shadow of the Aldmeri **Thalmor** exploiting the chaos. Patriotism inspires acts of heroism and sacrifice, yet blind nationalism or imperialism can lead to cruel

choices. PCs will face **moral dilemmas** at every turn – whether to spare enemies, how to protect civilians, whether ends justify means – with **no easy answers**.

Fate Core Approach: We encourage a cinematic style where rules support the story. Scenes will often be framed as **Challenges or Conflicts** with environmental **Aspects** for players to invoke. Fate Points flow readily for dramatic storytelling – GMs should compel the PCs’ ideals and troubles to heighten tension. **Stress tracks, Consequences, and Clocks** are used to model the grind of war: protracted battles and plots may have “countdown clocks” of discrete steps to victory or disaster, so players see time running out. For example, a major siege might be run with a six-segment clock (countdown) for the city’s walls being breached or a ritual completed, ticking down as rounds pass or as certain triggers occur ⁹ ¹⁰. When PCs take bold action, they reduce the enemy’s clock or advance their own. Likewise, **Consequences** in battle will represent lasting wounds or trauma – a soldier might suffer a *Severe Consequence* “Crushed Leg” after a battering ram strike, which affects future scenes. Use these mechanics to reinforce the gritty stakes of war.

Tone: The tone balances **epic war drama** with personal stories. Expect stirring battle scenes – clashing shields on the Whiterun plains, dragon roars over Windhelm’s walls – but also quiet moments of camaraderie in a tavern or a mourning scene in Falkreath’s graveyard. As **GM**, reward heroic sacrifices: if a PC stays behind to hold a gate, maybe grant an extra Fate Point and narrate their legend sung by bards. But also let the darkness of war show: comrades will fall, and even victories have costs. NPCs will exhibit conflicting loyalties and hidden pains. By the end, the players should feel the weight of what it means to fight for Skyrim’s future.

Key Themes and Motifs (GM Guidance)

- **War and Loss:** Every victory is bittersweet. Show the toll of war – burning villages, jarls grieving fallen housecarls. When a beloved NPC dies heroically, give the party a moment of silence and perhaps a *Boost* aspect like “**Emboldened by Sacrifice**” to use in retribution. PCs may earn Fate Points for choosing to suffer to save others (a classic compel on their heroic aspects).
- **Identity & Ideology:** Play up the cultural clash. Stormcloak characters shout “Skyrim belongs to the Nords!” while Dunmer refugees in Windhelm whisper their fears. An Imperial PC proud of the Empire’s law might clash with a Nord PC who reveres Talos above all. These ideological differences can be compelled: e.g., compel a Nord’s aspect “**Son of Skyrim, Son of Talos**” to make them resist an Imperial diplomat’s order, creating dramatic social conflict.
- **Moral Ambiguity:** Few decisions are purely good or evil. Perhaps the Stormcloaks plan to sabotage an Imperial supply train – but it’s full of medicine for a plague in Imperial-occupied Markarth. Do the PCs allow innocents to suffer to win a tactical edge? These dilemmas can be represented mechanically by offering a *Fate Point* for one choice (a compel of a principle) or the other, forcing the players’ values into the spotlight.
- **Unseen Manipulators:** Foreshadow the **Thalmor** involvement subtly. In Act I-II, drop hints of a hidden hand: a Stormcloak scout remarks, “Strange how the Thalmor always seem one step ahead,” or an Imperial officer finds evidence of elven poison in a murdered Jarl’s mead. The Thalmor represent a secret antagonist force sowing chaos ¹¹ ¹². Use **Countdown clocks** for their schemes – for example, a “Thalmor Influence” clock ticks up each time the war intensifies or a city’s side plot goes unresolved. In the final Act, this clock reaches completion, revealing the full scope of their plan.
- **Camaraderie and Tragedy:** Amid bloodshed, allow moments of human connection. A quiet night in **Windpeak Inn** at Dawnstar, where soldiers of both sides separately nurse nightmares, could turn into an impromptu calm where a PC leads a prayer to Mara for all the fallen – forging a temporary

peace. Such an interlude might remove a Mild Consequence like “Shaken by Guilt” from a character as they find solace. Encourage roleplay of bonds: a simple meal shared with Ralof or Hadvar can yield a *Boost* aspect “**Trust Between Comrades**” in the next battle ¹³ ¹⁴ .

Campaign Outline

The campaign is divided into **five Acts**, each comprising major events and turning points in the Civil War. Acts are structured to accommodate branching outcomes and perspective shifts. If the PCs are Stormcloak-aligned, scenes are provided from the Stormcloak point of view; if Imperial, from the Imperial side. **Neutral faction PCs** (Companions, College, etc.) will have guidance on how to involve them in each Act’s events (e.g. which side they might assist or unique tasks suited to their faction). Many scenes have variants or sub-scenes depending on which faction the heroes support – these are clearly indicated below. GMs should feel free to improvise transitions and even reorder some events based on player choices. **Player agency is paramount**: their decisions (which city to strike next, whether to negotiate or press an attack, whom to trust) can alter the sequence of events. The module notes the most likely sequence for each side, but is flexible.

Crucially, the war can **end in multiple ways**. The default assumption is that the PCs’ chosen faction will triumph in the Civil War by Act V, but the module provides branches for **major battle defeats or alternate outcomes**. It’s possible (with GM creativity) for the war to conclude in a truce or alliance against the Thalmor if the players pursue that path. Throughout the acts, use Fate mechanics to reinforce the narrative: invoke location aspects (a raging blizzard, a narrow bridge) during battles, compel character aspects when their loyalties are tested, and let the outcome of contests shape the political landscape. Major NPCs like Ulfric and Tullius are story fixtures (plot armor to an extent), but how the PCs influence them (perhaps swaying Ulfric to mercy or convincing Tullius to consider Nordic customs) can change the flavor of the ending.

Below is a summary of the five Acts:

- **Act I – The Battle of Whiterun**: The campaign opens with the **epilogue of Alduin’s defeat** at the Throat of the World, then pivots to Whiterun, where the war ignites. The PCs are thrust into the pivotal **Battle for Whiterun**, either as Stormcloak attackers or Imperial defenders (or caught in between). By the end of Act I, Whiterun’s allegiance will be decided and the civil war fully rekindled.
- **Act II – Spreading Flames**: The war expands to new fronts. Stormcloak forces push into the Empire’s holds (the Reach, Falkreath), while Imperials launch offensives into rebel territory (the Rift, possibly the Pale). The PCs engage in **military campaigns and city-based story arcs** in holds like **Markarth** or **Riften** depending on side. Each major conflict is paired with a **Side Plot B** – local intrigue or Daedric meddling that complicates the war. By Act II’s end, the faction map of Skyrim will have visibly shifted, and clues of Thalmor interference begin to surface in the periphery.
- **Act III – The Shadows Lengthen**: As each side fights for advantage, internal conflicts and **faction subterfuge** come to a head. Acts of sabotage, assassination, and ancient magic occur in cities such as **Windhelm**, **Dawnstar**, or **Winterhold**. The PCs must resolve city-specific crises (a murderous conspiracy, a Daedric curse causing chaos, etc.) even as they prepare for the final sieges. Thalmor agents step up their covert operations, possibly interacting directly with the PCs under false pretenses. By the end of Act III, the war is one step from climax, but the *true enemy* is starting to make their presence felt.

- **Act IV – The Breaking Point:** The penultimate act covers the **siege preparation and final battles** for the enemy capital (Solitude if Stormcloak, Windhelm if Imperial). This is when the **personal arcs** of major NPC allies **Hadvar** and **Ralof** reach their climax. Each faces a profound personal conflict or sacrifice that can inspire the PCs and sway the battle's outcome. For example, Ralof might confront the death of someone dear or a crisis of faith in Ulfric's cause; Hadvar might be torn between orders and saving civilians. The war's victor seems imminent – yet the PCs may discover definitive proof of the **Thalmor's hidden hand** in orchestrating the conflict ¹¹ ¹⁵ . Act IV likely ends on a dramatic note: one of the faction capitals falls, and the true puppet-masters stand revealed.
- **Act V – The True Enemy:** In the final act, the spotlight shifts to the **Thalmor**. Armed with evidence and allies, the PCs take on the Thalmor's covert operation that aimed to prolong or escalate the war. This could involve infiltrating the Thalmor Embassy or a secret Dominion outpost, stopping a dark ritual or assassination plot, or thwarting an attempt to cripple Skyrim in its moment of vulnerability. Stormcloak and Imperial leaders might be forced into an uneasy alliance in the face of this threat (the GM can arrange a temporary truce if dramatic). The climactic confrontation pits the PCs against a formidable Thalmor antagonist – perhaps a First Emissary with deadly magic – and the outcome will decide Skyrim's future free of manipulations. **Epilogue:** The campaign concludes with the war resolved (one side victorious or a stalemate brokered) and Skyrim either beginning to heal or bracing for new conflicts to come. Optional epilogue scenes let the PCs reflect on their choices, possibly even crossing paths with the Dragonborn returning from Solstheim for a brief, poignant cameo.

Throughout each act, you'll find **GM tips**, branching notes for different factions, and suggestions for invoking **Fate mechanics** to enhance play. Now, gather your mead and sharpen your swords – the saga of Skyrim's civil war awaits!

Act I: After Alduin – The Battle of Whiterun

Summary: Act I launches the players into action immediately following the defeat of the World-Eater, Alduin. In a vivid opening scene, the sky clears over Skyrim's tallest peak, and news spreads that the **dragon crisis is over**. But any relief is short-lived – without the dragon threat to unite them, the Stormcloak vs. Imperial conflict erupts anew. The centerpiece of Act I is the **Battle of Whiterun**, a decisive early clash in which Whiterun hold's neutrality is shattered and both factions commit fully to war ¹⁶ . The PCs will pick a side (or find themselves in the crossfire) as Whiterun is besieged. By Act I's end, Whiterun will either fall to Stormcloak liberators or remain firmly in Imperial hands, setting the stage for the rest of the campaign.

Scene 1: Epilogue at the Throat of the World

Setting: **High Hrothgar**, on the slopes of the Throat of the World. The sun rises over a battered Skyrim. In the distance, Alduin the World-Eater has been vanquished by the Dragonborn atop the mountain – a monumental event the PCs may only witness in legend or from afar.

Narrative: The air is charged with ancient magic as Alduin's death-throes echo like thunder. Perhaps the PCs came to High Hrothgar seeking refuge or answers after rumors of dragons. **If a PC is a member of the College of Winterhold** or similarly learned, they sense a great disturbance in the flow of magicka – as if a dark shadow has lifted. **If a PC is Nordic or a Companion**, they recognize the echoing *thu'um* shout of the Dragonborn's victory as the voice of a hero in Sovngarde's song.

Allow each player to describe what their character was doing in these final moments of the dragon crisis. Are they injured survivors of a dragon attack who staggered up the 7,000 Steps? Did they aid villagers fleeing a dragon's wrath en route? This is a chance to tie the characters to recent world events.

GM Note: You can create a quick **Aspect** for the environment here, such as **"Skies Cleansed by Alduin's End"**. Any PC can invoke this for comfort or inspiration in the coming scenes (e.g. a +2 when rallying others with hope: "Take heart, the World-Eater is dead!"). Conversely, you might compel it to remind them that **the Dragonborn's absence** now leaves mortals to face their own conflicts (triggering unease or urgency). This helps transition from the mythic threat of dragons to the gritty reality of civil war.

After a brief calm, a messenger (perhaps a loyal **Courier** Aspect "Wide-Eyed and Out of Breath") arrives at High Hrothgar or wherever the PCs are catching their breath. He brings news that **Ulfric Stormcloak is marching on Whiterun**. Jarl Balgruuf, erstwhile neutral, has **declared for the Empire** ¹⁷, refusing Ulfric's ultimatum, and now Whiterun city is poised to become the war's first battlefield. The **Civil War has reignited** overnight. The messenger implores any able warriors or mages to hurry to Whiterun's aid – or, if the PCs have Stormcloak leanings, perhaps they receive a separate call to arms from a Stormcloak scout: "All true sons and daughters of Skyrim, rally to Windhelm – the hour to take Whiterun is nigh!"

This sets the stage: the PCs know Whiterun will be attacked imminently. They have a personal decision – which side to support, or whether to get involved at all.

- **If PCs are Stormcloak-aligned:** They likely heed Ulfric's call and travel toward the Stormcloak camp near Whiterun to join the assault force.
- **If Imperial-aligned:** They rush to Whiterun's defense, possibly joining Legate Quentin Cypius and Irileth in shoring up the city's walls.
- **If Neutral/Other Faction:** Consider their motivations. A **Companion** PC at Jorrvaskr in Whiterun will naturally defend their home city (even if the Companions as an organization try to stay neutral, individual Companions will fight to protect Whiterun's people). A **College of Winterhold** mage might go to observe or test their magic in a real battle. A **Dark Brotherhood** assassin could be traveling incognito, only to find a potential high-value target in the chaos. Encourage neutral PCs to involve themselves – perhaps a personal friend (NPC) in Whiterun begs for help evacuating their family, or their faction gives them a task (the College might want an artifact secured from Dragonsreach before it's sacked, for example).

Transition the scene by describing the journey to Whiterun. Snow gives way to the tundra plains. As the PCs approach, they see **Whiterun** on its hill, the fortress of Dragonsreach silhouetted against a stormy sky. Camps of soldiers (tents bearing either the red dragon banner of the Empire or the bear of Windhelm) dot the plains. Tension is in the air. The battle will commence at any moment.

Scene 2: War Councils and Choices in Whiterun

Before swords clash, give the PCs a chance to participate in their faction's **war council**. This frames their involvement and lets them make strategy suggestions (which can affect the battle's mechanics). Choose the appropriate sub-scene based on faction:

Stormcloak War Council (Stormcloak PCs):

At the **Stormcloak camp** at Whiterun's western approach, **Ulfric Stormcloak** and his field commander

Galmar Stone-Fist stand over a map on a crate, lit by torchlight. Ralof (if he survived Helgen and is affiliated with the PC, he's here as a Stormcloak soldier) gives the PCs a hearty welcome – he's relieved to have capable friends on this dangerous day. Ulfric's voice booms: "Whiterun's Walls are high, but our cause is higher! Balgruuf's refusal of my offer means he has sided with the enemy." He nods to the PCs, acknowledging any who escaped Helgen: "You know firsthand the Empire's disregard for Nord lives." (Ulfric might be playing to the crowd here – consider giving Ulfric an Aspect **"Charismatic Rebel Jarl"** that he's using to sway his troops.)

Galmar lays out the plan gruffly: storm the city gates with a battering ram, while another team uses ladders near the stables. They expect heavy resistance from Whiterun's guards and Imperial reinforcements inside. Here, let the **PCs offer ideas or volunteer for key tasks**. For instance, a PC might suggest a flanking move through the **undercroft tunnel** beneath the city (invent one if needed, perhaps using a Fate Point to declare a story detail). If so, Galmar can assign them a small squad to infiltrate that way – this can become a distinct challenge during the battle (avoiding torch patrols in the tunnel, etc.). Another PC might propose using a captured catapult to bombard the gates first, creating an advantage. Ulfric is open to bold plans if they promise fewer Stormcloak deaths.

Use this as a **Challenge scene** with social skills: perhaps a **Command + Strategy** challenge. Each overcome action by PCs to plan or inspire could create **Boosts** or situation Aspects for the upcoming battle. For example, if a PC with **Tactics** or high **Lore** rolls well to assess the city's weak points, create an Aspect **"Gates Weak from the Last Raid"** (with a free invoke for the battering ram team). If a persuasive PC rallies the soldiers with a speech invoking Talos ("We fight for the god that the Empire denied us!"), they might place **"Zealous Morale"** on the Stormcloak side. Conversely, a failed roll could impose a setback – perhaps Galmar disagrees and an Aspect **"Ulfric's Doubt"** hangs in the air, meaning the PC's plan won't have full support (the GM can invoke that to complicate their plan).

Ralof is present as an ally who chimes in: "Brothers, sisters, I know many of the Companions in Whiterun. They won't take kindly to us storming their city... but they might stay out of the fight if we're careful." This foreshadows that not everyone in Whiterun is a faceless enemy; some are Nord companions they respect. A Stormcloak PC might choose to later find the Companions and convince them to stay neutral – a possible **flashy social encounter mid-battle** instead of combat, if desired.

Finally, Ulfric raises his fist: "For Skyrim!" The war chant goes up. **Stormcloak PCs** gain 1 Fate Point each if they wholeheartedly join the cause here (a compel on any appropriate aspect like **"Stormcloak Loyalist"** – rewarding them for binding themselves to Ulfric's orders). Now, the siege begins! Proceed to Scene 3, Stormcloak assault.

Imperial Command Briefing (Imperial PCs):

Inside **Dragonsreach**, the great hall of Whiterun, Jarl **Balgruuf the Greater** has reluctantly allowed Imperial Captain **Legate Quentin Cypius** and a contingent of Legionnaires to take charge of defense ¹⁶. The atmosphere is tense; Balgruuf paces, troubled by turning his city into a battlefield, while Irileth (his Dunmer housecarl) sharpens her blade, ready to defend her Jarl. **Hadvar** (if he survived Helgen and is known to the PCs, he's here, freshly assigned after Helgen's escape) greets the PCs warmly if they're his comrades: "Glad you made it – we'll need every sword. It's worse than we feared: Ulfric's got siege engines out there." Hadvar's presence can humanize the Legion for any Nord PCs on the Imperial side – he's a Nord fighting for the Empire, just like them, proving not all Imperial soldiers are foreigners.

General **Tullius** is absent (he's coordinating reinforcements from Solitude), so the defense falls to Legate Cypius and Balgruuf. Cypius spreads a map on Balgruuf's war-table (a map of Skyrim marked with colored flags ¹⁸). He barks orders: archers on the battlements, barricades at the main gate, and oil cauldrons atop the walls. Give the PCs a chance to speak up with their own defense plans or volunteer for crucial positions. For instance, a PC might suggest evacuating civilians to the Temple of Kynareth cellars (preventing collateral casualties – a *Good idea* that Balgruuf appreciates, possibly granting a temporary Aspect **"City Folk Sheltered"** which means fewer distractions during combat). Another PC might say, "What of the Companions in Jorrvaskr? Can they aid us?" Balgruuf could note the Companions will defend the city but *will not take official orders* – they'll just protect their mead hall and the local people. This is a hook to involve a Companion PC or an opportunity for a PC to rally them (if a PC is a Companion, this is their time to lead their shield-siblings in defense).

If the PCs have magical ability or siege engineering knowledge, Cypius listens grudgingly. An engineering-inclined PC might rig a **"Collapsing Street Trap"** (sandbags or rubble to unleash on Stormcloaks when they breach – an Advantage they can invoke later). A mage PC could propose using the castle's old **arcane enchanter** to create a one-time ward over the gate – perhaps a **Clock** with 3 boxes labeled "Ward Integrity" that ticks down as it absorbs damage. Make these ideas tangible with Fate mechanics: the ward might be an Aspect **"Magical Ward on the Gate"** with 3 free invokes (or 3 stress boxes) that Stormcloaks must overcome before the gate can fall. The PCs may be the ones manning that ward, feeling each shudder as axes hit.

Balgruuf will address the garrison with a somber pride: "I have no wish to shed Nord blood on my doorstep... but neither will I hand Whiterun to Ulfric on a plate. We hold the line here. For Whiterun, and for the Empire." This is a potent moment for an **Empathy or Leadership** roll from a PC to bolster morale. Success might give the troops an Aspect **"Whiterun Stands United"**. Failure could instead introduce **"Fear in the Ranks"** if the soldiers doubt they can resist the Stormcloak onslaught; Hadvar or the PCs will have to work harder during the battle to keep order. Hadvar himself can be seen reciting a quiet prayer to Talos under his breath (a subtle character beat: even some Empire loyalists still worship Talos in secret ¹⁹, showing his inner conflict). If a PC notices and has similar leanings, this forms a bond ("You too honor the Ninth Divine?"). If a Thalmor observer were around, they'd bristle – but none are present... yet.

By the end of this briefing, **Imperial PCs** should know their roles: whether manning the main gate defense, patrolling the ramparts as mobile responders, or guarding a key location like the Skyforge (which could be a target for the enemy to demoralize Whiterun). Issue Fate Point awards or compels as appropriate: e.g., compel an Imperial PC's **"By the Book Soldier"** aspect to insist on a strict formation (which might later be a hindrance if creativity is needed). Or reward a bold plan with an extra Fate Point to the group pot, symbolizing the resources allocated to their idea.

Balgruuf gives a final nod: "May the Gods watch over us." A horn sounds from outside – the Stormcloak army has arrived at the gates. **Battle is upon you.** Proceed to the siege scene appropriate to the faction.

Neutral/Independent PCs in Whiterun:

If the party is not aligned to either side explicitly, they might be present in Whiterun as the attack begins. Options for their involvement:

- **Companions:** If any PC is a member of the Companions (or the whole party is a band of Companions), **Kodlak Whitemane** or **Aela** will call them to defend the people of Whiterun. "We're not political," Kodlak growls, "but we'll be damned if we let our home burn." The Companions take up arms primarily to protect

citizens and quell chaos, not to advance either faction. The GM can direct neutral PCs to tasks like evacuating the marketplace, slaying any pillagers (on either side), or rescuing the wounded. They might end up fighting both Stormcloak raiders and Imperial deserters who take advantage of the confusion. This can create complex choices – e.g., do they stop a vengeful Nord militia from torching a known Imperial household?

- **College of Winterhold:** A mage PC could be in Whiterun researching at Arcadia's Cauldron or visiting Farengar Secret-Fire (the Jarl's court wizard). As battle looms, Farengar eagerly plans to test a scroll of *Fireball* on the attackers. The College's stance is officially neutral, but an individual mage might choose to assist Whiterun's defense (scholars often lean Imperial for stability) or simply protect innocents with wards. A PC mage might be asked by Balgruuf to help maintain the magical ward on the gate (if that was established), or by a friend in the city to ensure the Gildergreen (sacred tree of Kynareth) isn't destroyed.

- **Dark Brotherhood:** If a PC assassin is present, they could have been shadowing a target in Whiterun when all Oblivion broke loose. The **Side Plot** for them might involve their target (say, a minor noble or even the Jarl) being marked for death amid the chaos. In the middle of the siege, an assassin PC might slip away to fulfill or thwart a contract. Perhaps the Thalmor (secretly) hired the Brotherhood to eliminate Jarl Balgruuf during the confusion – a contract the PC might know of or even be assigned to! This puts them in a moral bind: do they defend the Jarl or carry out the assassination? This can foreshadow Thalmor manipulation if clues link the contract back to an anonymous Altmer benefactor.

For neutral parties, emphasize **moral conflict**. They aren't duty-bound to Stormcloak or Imperial orders, so they must define their own purpose. Encourage them (with player input) to set goals like "Minimize civilian casualties" or "Ensure our faction's interests are secure (e.g., retrieve a Companions heirloom from the burning hall if needed)." Mechanically, they can treat the battle as a **Challenge** where success on various objectives (like an Athletics test to carry water to douse fires, a Fight roll to take down an arsonist, a Rapport to calm panicked townsfolk) yields a victory condition: e.g., if they accumulate 3 successes before 3 failures, "**Whiterun Civilians Safe**" could be an outcome Aspect. Failures might mean some lives lost or property destroyed, affecting mood and future scenes.

Once the stage is set for all parties, move to the core action: the siege combat itself.

Scene 3: The Battle for Whiterun – Siege and Storm

This is the first major **Conflict** of the campaign – a large-scale battle. It should be run cinematically, with the PCs' actions deciding key turning points. We'll break it into phases and note differences for Stormcloak vs. Imperial experiences. The GM may handle this as a series of **zones** (Whiterun's main gate, the marketplace, the wall ramparts, etc.) and **Waves of enemies**, or as a dramatic challenge with a clock for the battle's progress. We suggest using a "**Siege of Whiterun**" clock – perhaps 6 segments – representing which side is nearing victory. PCs can add ticks to their advantage by accomplishing objectives (raising their flag on the gate, defeating an enemy commander, etc.), while certain events (the ram breaking through, a section of wall collapsing) add ticks to the enemy's side. You might even use two opposed clocks: **City Falls** vs **City Holds**, filling one or the other based on outcomes of clashes.

Battlefield Aspects: The chaos of siege warfare provides plenty of environment aspects. Some examples to establish: "**Blazing Fires in the Streets**", "**Panicked Citizens Underfoot**", "**Sturdy Stone Wall (Whiterun's outer wall)**", "**Rubble and Debris**" (from catapult strikes), and "**Raging Rainstorm**" (perhaps Kynareth sends rain to quell the flames – or just as dramatic weather). PCs and NPCs can invoke these for advantage

or the GM can compel them: e.g., compel **Blazing Fires** on a Stormcloak to force them to detour, or invoke **Rubble** to give a PC archer a steady rest for their bow.

Stormcloak Side – Taking Whiterun:

Stormcloak PCs begin outside the gates amid the assault. The **first phase** is breaching the gates. Galmar Stone-Fist leads a charge with the battering ram under a hail of arrows. The PCs could be holding the ram (requiring Physique checks as a group effort Overcome each exchange to break it down), or providing cover to the ram team. Perhaps one PC handles a siege **catapult** acquired earlier – each successful shoot action with it could reduce a gate “stress track.” Here you can treat the **City Gate** as an opponent with, say, 3 stress boxes and a Moderate consequence (“Gate Splintered”). The Stormcloaks must overcome it to enter. If the PCs had set up advantages in the War Council (like soaked the gate in oil stealthily, etc.), allow them to invoke those now for extra damage.

About two exchanges in, **Whiterun’s defenders** will unleash a volley of **flaming arrows** or drop rocks. One PC (or a nameless Stormcloak at GM’s whim) might take a hit – offer a Minor Consequence “*Arrow Burn Wound*”. This is a good time for a **Compel**: perhaps compel a PC’s **Brash Berserker** aspect to charge ahead alone on a ladder, separating them on top of the wall (new zone) surrounded by enemies. If they accept, Fate Point awarded, and now they have a solo scene atop the rampart fighting off 2-3 guards – a heroic but risky position! They could create the Aspect “**Distracted Defenders**” if they hold them off, helping comrades below. Other PCs might need to rescue them or use Create Advantage (like firing an arrow to cut a rope that drops a banner on some guards). Encourage creative stunts – e.g., a PC Nord might use “*Battle Cry*” stunt to intimidate a section of guards, forcing them back (maybe an area-of-effect provoke attack causing a mild fear consequence on the NPCs).

Once the gate is breached (perhaps with a satisfying crash and cheer), the **second phase** moves into Whiterun’s streets. Stormcloak PCs can now push into the **market district**. Describe vivid chaos: merchants’ stalls overturned, a house on fire (the **Bannered Mare** inn, perhaps). Whiterun’s **Battle-Born clan** (loyal to the Empire) are actually taking up arms too – you might show old **Olfrid Battle-Born** and sons firing from windows at Stormcloaks. Meanwhile, the **Gray-Manes** (secret Stormcloak sympathizers) might be helping Stormcloak wounded to cover. This gives a sense of the city’s own split and may present a social choice: do Stormcloak PCs focus on military targets or also ensure their local allies (Gray-Manes) are safe from reprisals? If a PC has the Aspect “**Skyrim’s People First**”, compel them to prioritize rescuing a Gray-Mane child from a burning house instead of chasing an enemy officer.

A key **objective** for Stormcloaks here could be reaching Dragonsreach (the keep) at the top. But first, **Jarl Balgruuf** himself enters the fray in the streets, clad in armor and swinging his hammer **Wuthrad** (if you fancy a lore moment – maybe he wields the ancient axe of Ysgramor loaned by the Companions). Balgruuf, defended by Irileth and Housecarl **Hrongar**, makes a stand at the **Gildergreen tree** in the Wind District. He shouts for the attackers to turn back or face the wrath of a true Nord and his companions. This is an opportunity for a **dramatic confrontation**. The PCs might duel Irileth or other notable NPCs here while soldiers clash around. If a Stormcloak PC tries to convince Balgruuf to surrender (maybe appealing to his care for his people, reminding him Whiterun need not be destroyed), that could be handled as a Contest of Rapport vs. his stubborn Will. A victory might get Balgruuf to yield later with honor if pressed enough. More likely, the fight must play out.

Major NPC Notes (Battle of Whiterun):

- *Ralof (Stormcloak NPC Ally)* – He fights alongside the PCs if present. Give him an Aspect “**Fiercely Loyal**

Stormcloak" and a Stunt like *Brotherhood in Battle: Because Ralof never abandons a shield-brother, once per conflict he can intercept an attack meant for a nearby ally*. Use him cinematically – maybe he saves a PC from an ambushing Imperial with a timely axe throw. Ralof's presence should add heart; he might utter, "By Shor, we're really doing this," with equal parts sorrow and determination as he fights fellow Nords of Whiterun.

- *Balgruuf the Greater* – He is a staunch fighter but not reckless. If badly wounded (e.g., taken a Moderate or Severe consequence "Cracked Ribs"), he'll fall back toward the keep. If the Stormcloaks seem to clearly have won, he will **yield** rather than have his city utterly ruined, telling his Housecarl to stand down. The Stormcloaks then would capture him.

- *Irileth* – The Dunmer housecarl might duel a PC rogue or mage. She has an Aspect "**Unflinching Protector**" (and could be compelled to fight to the death unless Balgruuf specifically orders her to live on).

- *Hadvar (if somehow present with Stormcloaks?)* – Unlikely; he's on the other side. But if the PCs managed to talk during Helgen and remain friendly, maybe they spot him on the wall as an enemy. Locking eyes, there's recognition – a potential compel for later. They might even trade a few shouted words mid-battle ("You don't have to do this!" "I gave my oath to the Legion, friend – Talos protect you."). This humanizes the conflict.

Ultimately, the Stormcloak goal is to force Balgruuf's surrender and **raise the Stormcloak banner** over Whiterun. The final phase could be storming Dragonsreach. However, given the chaos, it might be achieved by negotiation if enough key NPCs are down. **Outcome – Stormcloak Victory:** If the PCs and Stormcloaks defeat Balgruuf's forces, the Jarl surrenders Whiterun. A cheer goes up: Whiterun is in Stormcloak hands. Ulfric arrives (later, after the fighting) to commend the heroes. He names **Vignar Gray-Mane** as the new Jarl ²⁰, and the Stormcloak banner is hoisted atop Dragonsreach. The city's strategic value is immense: with Whiterun taken, the Stormcloaks now have the central hold and can threaten all Imperial positions ⁸. PCs are hailed as heroes of the assault (likely earning a couple of Fate Points for completing this milestone). But they also witness the cost: buildings smoldering, soldiers tending wounded, families grieving. The act should close with a mix of triumph and somber reflection. Perhaps Ralof thanks them quietly: "My sister's family made it through safely, thanks to you pulling that burning timber off her house." That personal touch anchors the victory.

Outcome – Stormcloak Defeat (Alternate): It's possible (though unlikely in the game's narrative, the GM can allow it for dramatic effect) that the Stormcloak attack fails – say the PCs make grave errors or flee, or Balgruuf's forces rout them. In this case, many Stormcloaks retreat or are captured. If PCs survive, they may have to escape Whiterun under pursuit or conceal themselves among sympathizers until nightfall. Ulfric's army is repelled this day. This will significantly alter Act II: Stormcloaks would regroup for a second attempt or shift strategy (maybe attacking the Reach first to avoid Whiterun for now). The module can proceed with the war continuing, but the **Imperials will hold Whiterun** in the interim, bolstering Imperial morale. GMs should adapt by perhaps compressing some later battles or having Ulfric attempt a different approach (like obtaining an Elder Scroll... though that goes into the fantastical). Ensure the PCs still have paths forward – maybe they must rescue Ralof from execution after the failed attack (a side mission) or regain Ulfric's trust. This failure branch can be extremely interesting, highlighting the tragedy of war (not every heroic charge succeeds). However, for scope, we'll assume the **default path is Stormcloak success** at Whiterun, since the rest of the Acts anticipate progression. But we encourage keeping this loss-outcome in your back pocket if drama calls for it.

Imperial Side – Defending Whiterun:

For Imperial-aligned PCs, flip the perspective. They start on the walls or at the main gate, bracing for impact.

First phase: Hold the Gate. The Stormcloaks' ram pounds the reinforced gate. Imperial PCs might be coordinating arrow volleys or dumping boiling oil. One PC could command a squad of archers – treat that like an Advantage “Disciplined Archers” they create and can invoke as a free tag when an enemy rushes. Each round the gate holds is a success for them. Perhaps set a simple clock “**Gate Breach**” with 4 boxes – ticking as the ram hits (maybe one per round unless PCs do something to slow it). PCs could sally out through a side postern gate to sabotage the ram (a risky maneuver, but a cool mini-mission: fight through a few Stormcloak elites, maybe plant a keg of firepowder on the ram). If they try this, narrate it as a quick outside-the-walls skirmish under fire. A successful Sabotage could add the Aspect “**Ram in Flames**”, halving the attackers' effectiveness. But being outside might expose them to being cut off – Hadvar or another NPC might have to open the sally gate again under covering fire to let them back in (nice tension scene).

On the wall, give each PC a moment: e.g., a ranger-type PC can target the Stormcloak **flag-bearer** with a bow shot. Dropping the bear-banner can impose “**Stormcloak Disarray**” for a bit, a moral blow. A mage PC could unleash a lightning bolt at the siege tower (if Stormcloaks have one), perhaps blowing it apart (invoke “**Storm Clouds Gathered**” if any to supercharge it). Use NPC calls to action: Legate Cypius yells from one tower, “Hold, you bastards, hold!” and perhaps gets hit by an arrow (taking a Moderate consequence “**Arrow to Shoulder**”). He might drop, leaving an opportunity for a **PC to take command** of his sector – a chance for leadership. If they do, they might later get promoted (reputation boost).

Second phase: Wall Breach and Street Fighting. Likely the Stormcloaks manage to force entry (in The Elder Scrolls lore, Whiterun falls to Stormcloaks if the player sides with them, so either outcome is possible; we show both). If the gate falls, or siege towers unload Stormcloaks onto the battlements, now Imperial PCs fight within the city. Set scenes in key locations: the market, near **Jorrvaskr** (the Companions' hall), and by the **Gildergreen** tree. The Imperials must protect Jarl Balgruuf and push the Stormcloaks back out.

A fun twist: A Stormcloak **battering ram team** bursts through the gate, but as they charge in, they trigger a trap the PCs suggested – e.g., spikes hidden in the ground or a palisade funnel. Describe Stormcloak soldiers impaled or stumbling – giving the PCs a momentary upper hand. At this point, you can introduce a Stormcloak named NPC (maybe *Ralof* if he's alive and the PCs met him in Helgen, now on the opposite side). Ralof might recognize the PCs atop the wall or on the field: “Hadvar! You damn milk-drinker, I knew I'd find you here!” If Hadvar is an NPC ally to the PCs, he can engage in a brief duel of words with Ralof before swords, illustrating two friends now foes. Perhaps Ralof calls out a PC Nord: “You fight for them? The Thalmor's pawns?!” This can be a mental attack via provoke on the PC's belief – compel their **Nord Pride** to shake them. Resolving this could be roleplayed: the PC might shout back, “I fight to protect our people, not tear our home apart!” – if well-said, that could even stun Ralof (remove an invoke of Stormcloak morale). This personal touch makes the battle more than nameless enemies.

Major objective for Imperials: **Keep Jarl Balgruuf Safe and Hold Dragonsreach.** Possibly at some point, Stormcloaks make a push for Dragonsreach (with Ulfric's axe-wielding lieutenant, Galmar, at the forefront). Imperial PCs could form the last line of defense in the throne room. Picture a cinematic showdown: Galmar and a couple of Stormcloak officers smash into the hall. A PC stands guard before Balgruuf's throne while the Jarl, wounded, tries to pull himself to fight. Legate Rikke might even arrive as reinforcement if you want to include her (she's likely at Solitude at first, but could belatedly come). Regardless, the PCs might directly duel Galmar Stone-Fist here. Give Galmar an appropriate profile: Aspect “**Old Bear of the Stormcloaks**”, with a Stunt like *Blood on the Snow: Galmar gets +2 to attack when he's taken a consequence (fighting harder wounded)*. This makes him a tough foe who actually becomes more dangerous as he's injured. The fight with Galmar could be pivotal: if he is defeated (or even killed, if you allow that – though Galmar is plot-important

on Stormcloak side, the GM might choose not to have him die here unless planning big deviations), the Stormcloaks' morale plunges and they may retreat. If he overpowers the PCs, he might hold Balgruuf at axe-point, forcing surrender.

Imperial Victory in Whiterun (Repelling the Stormcloaks): If the Imperials hold, the Stormcloak forces withdraw after heavy losses. Whiterun's citizens rejoice cautiously – but Balgruuf is grim, knowing this was just the first battle. Tullius arrives later, clapping the PCs on the shoulder: “Well done. You’ve proven the Legion isn’t just foreign generals – Skyrim’s own sons and daughters fought bravely here.” He likely rewards them (perhaps a **Promotion aspect** like “Proven Defender of Whiterun” which might grant an honor or medal they can invoke socially in Imperial territories). Hadvar is relieved his home (Riverwood, nearby) is safe for now. But there’s fallout: parts of Whiterun are damaged (the outer gate smashed, a section of wall broken), and whispers spread that **the Thalmor** might be pleased – since Skyrim weakened itself today, regardless of victor ²¹. Balgruuf thanks the PCs personally, offering them mead in Dragonsreach and voicing his sorrow that Nords had to kill Nords. “This cannot be what Talos wants for us,” he muses, setting a tone of regret. The war will go on, however, and the Legion now has momentum to strike back at Ulfric’s holdings.

Stormcloak Victory in Whiterun (Alternate, if Imperials fail): Should the players badly fail and Whiterun fall under their watch, it’s a dark moment. Balgruuf is exiled or captured, Imperial troops retreat if possible. PCs might have to escape as the city falls (perhaps carrying a grievously wounded Hadvar out of the carnage). This sets a very different tone for Act II – Imperials on the back foot, regrouping to defend the next hold. The campaign can still proceed, but likely with an urgent drive to **reclaim Whiterun** later. The PCs might be blamed by superiors (unfairly or fairly) for the loss; they may seek redemption by extraordinary heroics in upcoming battles. It can be a powerful motivator. GMs could incorporate an event where General Tullius, furious, says, “We’ll retake Whiterun if it’s the last thing we do – and you, my friends, will be at the tip of the spear.” The next acts would then include a detour to reclaim Whiterun. However, for the standard path, we’ll assume **Imperials successfully defend Whiterun** in Act I (since that aligns with many playthroughs and because either side can plausibly win here).

Neutral Party in the Battle:

Neutral PCs will have their own measures of success aside from the city’s fate. After the battle, gauge how well they accomplished their personal objectives: Did they save all the civilians they intended to? Did they keep the Temple of Kynareth from burning, or slay that rampaging frost troll someone let loose from the palace menagerie (you can throw in a random chaotic event like that for fun)? If they succeeded, reward them with positive aspects like **“Trusted by Whiterun Citizens”** (the people saw them help). If they failed in some tasks (perhaps they saved many but couldn’t prevent a portion of the city from igniting), impose a temporary aspect **“Haunted by Whiterun’s Flames”** on one or more PCs, representing trauma or guilt – this can be compelled in future scenes where similar stakes arise, driving home war’s cost. Neutral PCs might not shift the macro outcome of who holds Whiterun, but they could influence **how much destruction** occurs or **who survives**. For example, if they worked to minimize violence, maybe Jarl Balgruuf’s children and family are safely escorted out before Stormcloaks breach (preventing a tragic massacre). That can have story value later (those family members might later beseech aid to rescue Balgruuf or thank the PCs). Or if they prioritized taking out key aggressors, maybe the battle ends quicker. Decide based on their actions whether Whiterun fell to Stormcloaks or not; neutrals could tip balance if they choose a side mid-battle (e.g., the Companions ultimately side with Balgruuf, turning the tide to Imperials – or maybe they side with Stormcloaks if something sways them). You as GM can justifiably choose whichever outcome serves the ongoing story or the players’ leanings, since neutral PCs give some freedom. Just

ensure the consequences of Act I naturally lead to Act II's scenarios (we provide for both faction control maps).

Aftermath of Act I: Whiterun's New Dawn

As the smoke clears, Act I concludes with a **brief epilogue scene** in Whiterun. Give the players a moment to breathe and roleplay: perhaps at **Jorrvaskr** mead hall, whether in victory or defeat. If Stormcloaks won, they may be attending a victory gathering in the great hall of Dragonsreach; if Imperials won, maybe a field hospital scene in the Temple of Kynareth, treating wounded. This is an **Interlude** where consequences can be healed (bandage wounds, drink to numb pain) and relationships deepened.

Encourage each player to reflect in-character on what just happened. A somber Nord might lament fighting kinsmen. A fierce one might celebrate glory in battle. A clever one might already worry: "Ulfric/Tullius won't stop now. This was just the beginning." Offer a Fate Point if a PC's Trouble could surface here – e.g., a PC with **"PTSD from the Great War"** might suffer a panic attack at the smell of ash (compel that to have them step outside for air, where an NPC follows to comfort them, providing a touching scene). Or a **young idealistic soldier** PC might over-celebrate, only to be confronted by a distraught civilian ("My home... my shop... it's gone."), tempering their zeal.

Also, **foreshadow the Thalmor** strongly here for the first time. Perhaps while tending the wounded, Hadvar (Imperial) quietly confides to a PC he trusts: "Legate Fasendil told me something... he suspects the Thalmor are pulling strings to keep this war raging ²². After today, I believe it. Who really won? The elves must be laughing." If Stormcloak side, maybe Ralof mentions, "Mark my words, the Thalmor will come sniffing. They always do – like crows after a battle." These comments plant seeds that there's a bigger picture. PCs with Lore or contacts could even find a clue: maybe among the corpses, an Imperial PC finds a Stormcloak soldier's orders that oddly include an addendum in Aldmeri script (some coded Thalmor note). Or vice versa: a Stormcloak PC finds an Imperial missive referencing Elenwen, the Thalmor ambassador, subtly. They likely can't decode it yet, but the *detail is there*.

Finally, reward and recognition: If Stormcloaks took Whiterun, Ulfric might send a personal message thanking the heroes and promising them a stake in the new Skyrim (perhaps a minor treasure or a field promotion to "Ice-Veins" rank). If Imperials held it, General Tullius might arrive by horse to congratulate them, or Jarl Balgruuf promises to remember their service (a potential title or gift of a weapon named in their honor down the line). These rewards can be abstracted as **Aspect permissions** – e.g., "Hero of Whiterun" aspect can be invoked in social situations in that hold for respect, or to requisition supplies from locals.

With Whiterun's fate decided, **Act I ends**. The Civil War is now in full blaze. The hold map of Skyrim shifts: Whiterun belongs to whoever prevailed, and both factions lick their wounds and strategize the next moves. The players have forged their reputations in fire and blood. Ahead lies a wider war across Skyrim's nine holds – and more hidden perils as the Thalmor and Daedric influences begin to surface in earnest. Gather the war maps and prepare for Act II – the flames of conflict spread to every corner of the land.

Act II: Spreading Flames – War on Multiple Fronts

Summary: In Act II, the civil war escalates and engulfs multiple holds. After the clash at Whiterun, both sides mobilize for broader campaigns. The PCs will experience **military engagements in two or more regions**, and we'll delve into **city-based story arcs** in those locales. If the PCs are Stormcloak-aligned, they will focus on liberating Imperial-controlled holds (like Falkreath Hold and The Reach), whereas Imperial-aligned PCs will concentrate on crushing rebellion in Stormcloak territories (such as the Rift and The Pale). Neutral faction PCs may choose or be thrust into one front or shuttle between them. Act II features at least two major battles or operations, each tied to a hold capital and accompanied by a **Side Plot B** – a subplot of intrigue or supernatural meddling that occurs in parallel with the military action. These side plots not only add depth and variety (investigation, diplomacy, or dungeon-crawl style encounters), but also begin to reveal the covert work of the Thalmor (or other forces) behind the scenes. By the end of Act II, the war's brutality will be on full display, one or two more cities will have changed hands, and the PCs should start suspecting that someone is manipulating events for their own gain ¹².

Act II Structure: This act can be played somewhat non-linearly. Depending on player choices, they might tackle objectives in a different order. We present two primary “campaigns” in Act II – one for each faction perspective – but GMs can intercut them or adapt as needed. Also consider geography: the holds targeted often border the one taken in Act I. For example, if Stormcloaks hold Whiterun now, they might strike west into **The Reach (Markarth)** next, or south into **Falkreath**. If Imperials solidified Whiterun, they likely push east into **The Rift (Riften)** or north into **The Pale (Dawnstar)**. We'll detail two major operations: **Operation Hammerfall (Stormcloak liberation of The Reach)** and **Operation Shadowfang (Imperial offensive in The Rift)** as representative arcs. GMs can swap these if different holds make more sense or use them as templates for other holds (e.g., an Imperial operation in Winterhold would have similarities to the Rift plan but different flavor).

Throughout Act II, maintain the theme of **war spreading like wildfire**. Show refugees on the roads, new local militias rising, and how everyday life is disrupted in each hold. And in each location, highlight **city-specific unrest or questlines** that can entangle the PCs. The side plots will tie into Daedric or faction intrigue – the Thalmor's hand might not be obvious yet, but careful PCs could notice a pattern (e.g., in every hold, some chaos occurs that conveniently weakens that hold's ability to fight, benefitting the Thalmor's goal of prolonging conflict).

Stormcloak Campaign – “Operation Hammerfall” (Liberating the Reach)

Setting the Stage (Stormcloak context): With Whiterun in Stormcloak hands (assuming Act I outcome for Stormcloaks), Ulfric turns his eyes westward to the **Reach**, the hold of **Markarth**. The Reach is a rich prize – its silver mines and strategic position are vital. It's also symbolic: Ulfric's rebellion traces back to the Markarth Incident, where he once liberated the city from Reachmen (Forsworn) only to be betrayed by the Empire's concordat with the Thalmor ²³ ²⁴. Now Markarth is held by Jarl Igmund, a young Imperial loyalist, and heavily garrisoned by Legion troops and local militia (the **Silver-Blood** mercenaries). Ulfric codenames the plan to take The Reach **“Operation Hammerfall”** – a nod to Shor's sacred hammer and the idea of smashing Imperial power in the west. The Stormcloak army will need to capture strategic forts (such as **Fort Sungard** or **Fort Greenwall** – though Fort Greenwall is in the Rift, you can adapt fort names as needed) to cut off Markarth, then besiege the city. PCs are likely to be at the forefront, given their achievements at Whiterun.

Before the main assault, there's a **briefing in Windhelm** (or in Whiterun if Ulfric moved his court there temporarily to command). Ulfric addresses his war council, including Galmar (nursing some wounds if he survived Whiterun) and the PC Stormcloaks. **Galmar** growls that the Reachmen (Forsworn) are also active in the hills, complicating things: "Those Forsworn devils hate the Nords and the Empire both – they'll surely try to murder us as we march in, or worse, strike Markarth amid the chaos." Ulfric tasks the PCs with a crucial preliminary mission: to secure the **Karth River valley** approach so the main army can move. This might involve taking **Fort Sungard** (an old fortress on a hill in the Reach) or clearing a large Forsworn camp that could ambush their supply line. Essentially, the PCs must handle a **mid-sized battle or infiltration** to pave the way for the larger siege. This can be a classic **Dungeon/Combat scenario** using Fate challenges.

Scene 1 (Stormcloak): Clearing Fort Sungard / Dealing with the Forsworn

The **Forsworn** are a tribal insurgent faction of rebellious natives in the Reach. They are *neither friend to Stormcloaks nor Imperials*, seeking to reclaim their land from all Nords. This presents an interesting dynamic: The PCs could attempt to **negotiate** with Forsworn leaders (perhaps promising them autonomy or rights if Ulfric wins) or simply fight them as enemies. The module encourages a chance for diplomacy, albeit risky – it's an opportunity for a politically-minded PC to shine. Ulfric privately doesn't mind if the Forsworn get slaughtered (they've terrorized Nord settlers), but a PC might see value in neutralizing them through a truce.

Option A – Combat Route: The PCs lead a strike team to **Fort Sungard**, currently occupied by a mix of Imperial scouts and Forsworn who have taken advantage of the region's instability. It's a nighttime raid under torchlight. **Battlefield Aspects:** Narrow mountain trails, bone totems that induce fear (Forsworn magic), and the fort's crumbling walls (easy to climb in spots). This can be run as a **contest or challenge**: the PCs must secure three key areas (the outer wall, the courtyard, the fort interior). Each key area can be an overcome action or small conflict. For example: - *Outer Wall:* Sneak up and silently take out the lookout archers (Stealth or Fight). Success = they gain entry quietly (Aspect **"Surprise Gained"** for next fight). Failure = alarm sounded, they face a volley of arrows as they climb (each PC might have to roll Athletics to avoid a minor hit).

- *Courtyard Skirmish:* Forsworn barbarians and perhaps a domesticated bear (! why not?) rush them. One PC might handle the bear (a Create Advantage to scare it off or Acrobatics to lead it into a trap pit). Others duel the Forsworn. They notice some Imperial soldiers' corpses staked on pikes here – evidence the Forsworn overcame an Imperial patrol earlier. This scene seeds the cruelty of the Forsworn.

- *Interior Showdown:* In the fort's central hall, a **Forsworn Briarheart** shaman leads a ritual around a captured Imperial officer, intending a blood sacrifice to their Daedra (perhaps Hagraven totem to the Daedric Prince Hircine or Namira). The Briarheart has a literal briar heart (magical) granting him resilience – an aspect **"Briarheart's Regeneration"** that PCs might overcome by specifically targeting it (a called shot type action). During the fight, the shaman might unleash a burst of nature magic – e.g., vines erupt from the stone floor (Aspect **"Entangling Vines"** to complicate movement). Once the PCs defeat him (or he escapes via secret tunnel if you want a recurring villain), the fort is theirs. They can choose to free the captured Imperial officer or not; that officer could yield intel (like Markarth's gate codes or number of legionaries inside Markarth). Freeing them might seem odd (a Stormcloak killing Imperials normally), but if a PC has a kind heart, this Imperial's gratitude could become useful later (maybe he defects or helps reduce needless bloodshed in the final siege).

After victory, they raise the bear-banner over Fort Sungard. A Stormcloak courier rushes to Ulfric with news that the way is clear. The PCs might also find **clues** here: perhaps a **Thalmor order** on the dead Imperial officer indicating he was tasked to watch for Thalmor sightings (Legate Fasendil's influence – a nod that

even the Empire suspects Thalmor meddling ²²). Or they discover the Forsworn were equipped with unusually fine steel arrows – bearing an Elven make. Could it be the Thalmor quietly armed the Forsworn to harass both sides? (This is indeed a plausible thing – weaken the Reach by encouraging conflict between Nords and Reachmen, something the Thalmor would smile upon.) PCs might deduce or at least note the oddity.

Option B – Diplomatic Route: The PCs decide to parley with the Forsworn rather than attack. Perhaps they send a scout ahead with a white flag. The Forsworn leader is a hagraven or chieftain named e.g. **Cadius the Crow-Eyed**. Arrange a meeting on neutral ground – perhaps a stone circle atop a cliff at dusk, with Forsworn painted warriors watching from above. This negotiation is extremely tense; use **Opposed Rapport/Deceive vs. Insight**. The Forsworn want Markarth for themselves. They view Ulfrik's lot as no better than the Empire – both persecuted them. A clever PC might promise that if Stormcloaks win, they will **withdraw Nord settlers from some Redoubt areas** or at least cease persecution of Forsworn worship. (This is a big promise – perhaps a lie, which would be a Deception roll. If found out later, it could have repercussions.) They could also point out a common enemy: “Why weaken ourselves fighting each other, when the real enemy is the Thalmor who would kill both Nord and Reachman?” If they have evidence (like that elven arrow or knowledge that Thalmor fear a united Skyrim), they might persuade the Forsworn to a truce of convenience.

Likely outcomes: If successful, the Forsworn agree to *sit out* the battle for Markarth and not harass Stormcloak supply lines (Aspect “**Forsworn Truce**”). They won't fight alongside Nords, but even this neutrality is a boon. Perhaps they even secretly give a token of trust: the PC negotiator receives a **reachmen talisman** that can be shown to other Forsworn to grant safe passage. Mechanically, the PCs earn an extra invoke or remove a potential obstacle from the siege (no Forsworn guerilla attacks). If the roll fails badly or the PCs offend them (very possible, given cultural hatred), the meeting could explode into an ambush. In that case, it shifts to combat with unfavorable positioning – maybe the PCs must retreat under arrow fire or fight their way out of an encirclement. Surviving that, they'll probably resort to Option A after all, albeit with more difficulty (and perhaps one PC with a new arrow scar consequence).

Side Plot B – “The Forsworn Conspiracy” (Markarth Intrigue):

As the Stormcloak army marches toward Markarth for the big siege, an intriguing subplot unfolds within the city's stone walls. **Markarth**, the City of Stone, is rife with internal tension: the native Reachmen (some secretly Forsworn sympathizers) versus Nord settlers, the ruling Silver-Blood family's stranglehold on commerce, and rumors of a **Daedric presence** in the haunted halls of Understone Keep. In Elder Scrolls V, there is a quest named “The Forsworn Conspiracy” involving murders in Markarth orchestrated by Forsworn agents in the city. We adapt a version of that here to give the PCs a chance for investigation or social maneuvering either before the siege (if they can infiltrate the city) or during the siege as a parallel objective.

Premise: A series of mysterious murders has occurred in Markarth's streets, targeting figures loyal to the Jarl and Empire. The killer leaves a distinctive token – the **engraved symbol of the Forsworn** – on each body. Panic and distrust grows in the city. Jarl Igmund's men suspect a Forsworn sleeper cell is active, possibly planning sabotage when the Stormcloaks arrive. In truth, the murders *are* being committed by Forsworn agents (possibly led by an old man named **Nepos the Nose**, a respected citizen who is secretly a Forsworn leader – as in the game). However, here's the twist: **the Thalmor know about it and have quietly decided not to interfere** (maybe even subtly encouraging it), because it serves their goal of weakening Markarth's defenses from within. If the PCs do nothing, this conspiracy could result in the city guard being distracted or key figures killed right when the siege hits, causing more chaos (which helps prolong and

bloody the battle – a Thalmor win). So unraveling this plot can save lives and shorten the conflict – exactly what the Thalmor *don't* want. Thus, the Thalmor will covertly try to thwart any investigation, possibly via a **Thalmor operative in the city** (a Justiciar posing as a diplomat).

How PCs engage: If Stormcloak PCs are outside, they might not directly investigate in the city before capturing it. However, they could become aware of it via intel from sympathetic citizens or infiltrators. Perhaps **Elisif the Fair's** court in Solitude passed word to Ulfric that “something is amiss in Markarth – murders blamed on Forsworn.” Ulfric, seeing an opportunity, could ask the PCs to contact the Forsworn (if friendly) about it, or more pragmatically, to use the chaos to their advantage. But Ulfric wouldn't care to stop the murders (they hurt Imperial loyalists). It might fall on the PCs' conscience: fewer innocents dead = better moral high ground. Alternatively, if the PCs negotiated a truce with Forsworn outside, one Forsworn druid might tip them off: “Some of our vengeful kin inside the city act tonight. Blood will flow in Markarth's streets.” That might spur them.

During the siege, if/when they breach Markarth, they could then actively seek out Nepos or others to stop a hidden plan (perhaps the Forsworn agents intend to open the city gates at a specific time – helpful to Stormcloaks actually! But they might also plan to massacre civilians or assassinate Jarl Igmund in the chaos, which Ulfric might not want if he prefers to capture Igmund alive for legitimacy reasons). The PCs face a choice: let the Forsworn cell run wild (makes victory easier but at cost of civilian lives and giving Forsworn a foot-hold), or intervene to stabilize things (harder fight for them, but morally right and denies Thalmor a messy prolonged urban conflict).

Key investigative scenes (if they undertake them):

- Discovering clues of the conspiracy: a note on a dead vigilant with Nepos's name, or an encounter with **Eltrys** (a citizen whose family was victimized) who begs them to look into it.
- Infiltrating Nepos's house: if done stealthily during battle or just after victory, they might catch him performing a dark **Daedric ritual to Molag Bal** or Namira, fueling the murderous rage of his followers. Indeed, Markarth houses the **abandoned house** with Molag Bal's shrine – maybe Nepos is working with a Hagraven there to summon Daedric aid to slaughter Nord citizens as revenge. The PCs could storm that mini-dungeon (a creepy horror-themed encounter with whispers of a Daedric prince).
- A confrontation with a Thalmor Justiciar: Perhaps **Elenwen** herself (or a lesser Thalmor like Ondolemar, who in game is in Markarth as a Justiciar) steps in “to secure the Jarl's safety” but subtly hinders the PCs. If they recognize him as Thalmor, they might wonder why he's not helping catch the Forsworn – maybe he even tries to kill a Forsworn witness before they can talk. A chase or duel with a Thalmor agent in the burning streets could be a thrilling aside. If captured, that Thalmor might smugly hint: “This war... we've been *watching*. You have no idea how you're dancing on our strings.” Most likely, he escapes to maintain the bigger mystery.

Resolution: If PCs resolve the Forsworn conspiracy by Act II's end (e.g., Nepos is defeated and his cell dismantled, saving whoever was targeted like Jarl Igmund or Thane Thongvor), they effectively lessen Thalmor influence here. Give them a benefit: Markarth's civilian population is calmer, meaning maybe fewer losses or the new Jarl (if Stormcloak, Thongvor Silver-Blood likely) has an easier time establishing order. If they ignore it, Markarth post-battle is a nightmare of continued insurgency – which will occupy Stormcloak resources for acts to come (maybe a compel in Act III about “Constant Unrest in Markarth” interfering with their war plans).

Now, moving back to the military front:

Scene 2 (Stormcloak): Siege of Markarth – Stone and Silver

With Fort Sungard/Forsworn dealt with, the Stormcloaks surround Markarth. **Markarth** is unique: built into a cliff of Dwemer ruins, with natural defenses. A single main gate crosses a bridge over a river chasm. It's hard to assault head-on. However, inside the city, unrest (the Forsworn conspiracy) may have weakened the defense. PCs might implement strategies: scaling a side wall near the waterfall, sneaking through **Understone Keep's dwemer ruins** if they discovered an entrance, or using the classic Trojan Horse trick (maybe captured caravan wagons from the Reach are rolled to the gate, filled with Stormcloak troops hiding under hay). Let the players be creative. Use their earlier actions: if they allied with Forsworn, perhaps some Forsworn in the city open a sally port for them (though that could lead to Forsworn also rampaging). If they wiped out the Forsworn cell, then it's purely a Stormcloak vs Imperial fight.

Phase 1: Breach the Gates or Walls. The Markarth city gate is reinforced Dwemer stone. A frontal ram might be impractical. If players planted explosives (maybe mining black powder from Dawnstar earlier? If any), this is a good payoff: blowing the gate open. Otherwise, they might opt for a **distraction and climb**: cause commotion at the front (fire arrows, siege noise) while a team scales the less-guarded back wall near the river. A PC with Climbing or Magic could lead that. This is an overcome (Athletics or Stealth) with the risk of a fall into rapids if failed. Once atop, they secure a small foothold on the battlements and can drop ropes for others – essentially opening a way. A conflict breaks out on the walls with Markarth guards (who use Reach for fighting style, perhaps lighter armor but deadly scimitars).

Markarth's **ballistae** (Dwemer built maybe) fire from towers; a PC might prioritize taking those out before they skewer Stormcloak ranks below. Perhaps one dramatic moment: a ballista bolt nails a Stormcloak captain to a wall. A PC could try a Craft or Sabotage roll to turn a captured ballista around on the defenders (tagging **"Captured Dwarven Ballista"** to rain their own quarrels on them).

Phase 2: Street Fighting in Markarth. Markarth's layout is terraced. Stormcloaks fight through the market terrace (where Silver-Blood Inn and shops are). Civilians cower in the Warrens and under bridges. Emphasize environment: narrow stone streets, lots of cover and verticality (archers on balconies). Possibly incorporate the **Dwemer machinery** aspect: pipes that hiss steam, some still-functional automated defenses (maybe a couple of dormant *Dwarven automaton spheres* get awakened by stray damage – because why not have a sudden third-party enemy?). If that happens, those automata attack indiscriminately (both sides). PCs can choose to turn that to advantage (lure Imperials into a trap with an angry automaton) or shut them down to protect everyone. A scholarly PC might recall a shut-off lever in Understone Keep's museum (leading them to dash there under fire to pull it).

Major Beats:

- **Jarl Igmund and Family Evacuating:** The young Jarl Igmund (Imperial loyalist) might attempt to flee to the Keep's secret exit if defeat seems imminent. If PCs intercept him, they can capture rather than kill him (Ulfric would likely prefer capturing Jarls to show legitimacy, except Ulfric's known to execute some – he executed Torgg earlier in the war). This could be a tense negotiation: Igmund yields if assured his people won't be harmed. Or if the PCs have a grudge (maybe Igmund's father betrayed them in the past), they might duel him. Keep in mind his replacement if removed is Thongvor Silver-Blood, a Stormcloak supporter. The Silver-Blood family might even *aid the Stormcloaks from within*: if a PC made contact with Thongvor or his brother Thonar, they might betray Igmund mid-battle (e.g., Silver-Blood thugs attack the city guards from behind at a critical moment, turning the tide). In that case, Markarth falls faster (the Silver-Bloods essentially stage a coup). This moral complication – working with a ruthless family of crime lords – can be noted by PCs. Maven Black-Briar and the Silver-Bloods are somewhat parallels in corruption on SC side.

- **The Cidhna Mine:** Markarth's prison, full of Forsworn captives. During the fight, either due to sabotage or the PCs' choice, the mine's gates might be opened. If Forsworn prisoners pour out, chaos ensues. They'll attack Nord soldiers and maybe even Stormcloaks. It might benefit short-term (distracting the city guard), but long-term it's another wild card. A PC might run to Cidhna Mine to keep those prisoners locked until after the battle (especially if they promised a truce with Forsworn – you wouldn't want newly freed angry Forsworn in the middle of your victory). Alternatively, freeing them could be used as a tactic if the Stormcloaks are struggling – turn the prisoners loose as extra fighters. Present this choice if possible.

- **Daedric Artifact in Markarth:** Markarth houses the **Shrine of Talos** (where Eltrys in game meets you) and that **abandoned house** (Molag Bal's shrine). If a fight spills into the Talos shrine, perhaps a Stormcloak (with Talos amulet) gains a Boost **"Blessing of Talos"** from the sacred aura, inspiring them. Conversely, if they chase some cultist into the abandoned house, a sudden supernatural event could happen (like the doors slam and a disembodied voice of Molag Bal taunts them). This might be foreshadowing for Act III if Molag Bal will have a role (maybe not, but it's a creepy Easter egg for Elder Scrolls fans). It can simply set tone of Markarth's haunted past.

Climax of Siege: Likely, the final holdout is **Understone Keep**, the palace. The last Imperial defenders (and/or city guards who remain loyal to Igmund) barricade the huge Dwemer doors. The PCs and Stormcloak elites must push in. This could be resolved by either a negotiation (maybe an overwhelmed steward opens the gates to avoid bloodshed in the sacred keep) or by a forceful assault. Understone Keep interior is vast, with the **Dwarven museum and the Jarl's throne area**. A boss fight idea: The Imperials activate a **Dwarven Centurion** (giant automaton) as a last ditch defense. The PCs then face this steam-belching giant. They might have to lure it under a collapsing pillar or hit it with shock magic to disable. While that rampages, Jarl Igmund either flees or fights from his throne dais with his personal guard. Eventually, the centurion collapses with a thud, and the Stormcloak banner is raised in the Keep. Markarth falls to Ulfric's cause.

Aftermath (Stormcloak success): Ulfric will install **Thongvor Silver-Blood as Jarl** ²⁵, unless the PCs did something radical like insisted on someone else. Thongvor, gruff and satisfied, thanks the PCs: "You'll never pay for a drink in Markarth again, mark my words." However, those more virtuous PCs may note: the Silver-Bloods are basically crime lords. Markarth's "liberation" might just hand it from one tyrant to another. This is great fodder for *moral conflict*. For instance, if a PC is from Markarth and hates the Silver-Blood oppression, how do they reconcile helping them to power? That could be compelled for inner turmoil or argument with Ulfric's decisions. Ulfric might argue pragmatically: "Thongvor's support was vital. We all must make sacrifices." Fate Point opportunity for the conflicted.

Also, by now, the PCs almost certainly see patterns: Whiterun's siege was costly, Markarth's siege too – each time, there were strange undercurrents (Forsworn, possibly Thalmor hints). Perhaps they discuss among themselves how *every hold has some dark secret or conflict fanning the flames*. If one PC has high Lore or a knack for conspiracy, they might even suspect the Thalmor involvement behind these consistent troubles (the GM can feed them an intuition). They may not act on it yet, but the idea is planted.

Alternate Outcome (Stormcloaks fail at Markarth): Should the players utterly fail, maybe reinforcements from High Rock relieve Markarth or the Forsworn disrupt the Stormcloaks fatally. This is unlikely unless by GM design, as losing two big battles in a row would probably end the rebellion. But one can salvage a partial failure: e.g., Stormcloaks take Markarth but Ulfric's beloved second Galmar dies in combat, making it a pyrrhic victory (affecting morale). Or they fail to get inside initially and have to retreat from the first

attempt – meaning Act III might include a second attempt or a shift of strategy. In general, assume their momentum carries, but calibrate difficulty so wins are earned but not impossible.

Imperial Campaign – “Operation Shadowfang” (Crushing the Rift Rebellion)

Setting the Stage (Imperial context): Meanwhile, on the Imperial side in Act II, General Tullius isn't idle. With Whiterun secured for the Empire (assuming that Act I outcome), Tullius decides to press the advantage into the rebel holds. He plans a major push into **The Rift** – the southeastern hold containing **Riften**, long a Stormcloak-aligned city (Jarl Laila Law-Giver supports Ulfric ²⁶). The Rift is strategically important as it borders Cyrodiil and Morrowind, potentially allowing Ulfric to get outside help or escape routes. Taking Riften would cut off Stormcloak resource lines (and give the Empire control of that region's rich resources like timber and Nightshade). Tullius codenames the plan “**Operation Shadowfang**” – since the Rift's terrain is forested and often shrouded in mist, and perhaps referencing the need to quietly neutralize Riften's infamous criminal networks that could bite the Empire from the shadows. The PCs, given their performance at Whiterun, are key operatives in this plan. Legate Rikke (Tullius's Nord deputy) will likely coordinate this offensive, and might personally accompany part of it.

Operation Goals: Seize **Fort Greenwall** (a fort north of Riften) to stage troops, then assault **Riften City**. Additionally, **neutralize the Thieves Guild and Black-Briar influence** in Riften that might undermine Imperial authority. Maven Black-Briar, a powerful Riften noble, is actually pro-Empire (she stands to become Jarl if the Empire wins ²⁷), but she's self-serving. Meanwhile, Riften is home to the Thieves Guild and maybe a hidden Dark Brotherhood contact – lots of underworld activity. The Empire might actually strike a deal with Maven to betray the Stormcloak Jarl from within, but they need to ensure the city's criminal element doesn't cause chaos during the attack. The PCs could be tasked with something unique: *Make contact with Maven or infiltrate the Thieves Guild* to either secure their cooperation or sabotage them before the siege.

Scene 1 (Imperial): Ambush at Fort Greenwall

Imperial scouts report that Fort Greenwall is held by a strong Stormcloak garrison blocking the road to Riften. Rikke decides on a two-prong approach: one force will attack the fort's front as a diversion, while a second (led by the PCs) sneaks through **Shadowgreen Cave** (a known nearby cave/tunnel) to emerge inside or behind the fort. This uses stealth and cunning – an Imperial specialty over Stormcloak brute force. The goal is to open the gates from inside or cause confusion so the main force can take the fort with minimal losses.

Cave Infiltration Challenge: The PCs navigate Shadowgreen Cave (or a similar cavern). It's dark, filled with bioluminescent fungi – an Aspect “**Gloomy Bioluminescence**” which can either help (dim light, easier to hide) or hinder (weird glowing mushrooms that might react to movement). Inside lurk either wild animals or perhaps a band of **Skyrim's creatures** – e.g., a cave bear or a troll. The PCs can choose to eliminate these quietly or avoid them. A fun bit: maybe the cave connects to **Skyrim's famous Dwemer ruins** a bit – like they find an old Dwemer steam pipe that leads under the fort. They might need to solve a minor puzzle to open a maintenance grate (Craft or Lore roll to manipulate Dwemer mechanism). If the players fancy a fight, toss in a **Frostbite Spider lair** – thematically in a shadowy operation, spiders are apt. Killing them quickly without noise is key to remain undetected.

They emerge at night behind Fort Greenwall's walls. Rain begins (Aspect “**Pouring Rain and Mud**”). They see Stormcloak sentries on the ramparts, but the main attention is facing the road where Rikke's frontal assault is beginning (distant sounds of clamor). The PCs must act fast: either open the fort's gate or

sabotage something. Perhaps they split: one group to the gate winch, another to eliminate the commander. Set up **zones** in the fort: courtyard (with barracks and stables), walls, gatehouse, inner keep.

Using stealth, the PCs could knife a few guards (Fate note: you can treat mooks as one-roll minions or challenges to overcome quietly). If they get spotted too early, an alarm sounds and they'll have to fight a full garrison at once – not impossible but tough. Ideally, they time opening the gate as Rikke's troops charge. That triggers a big melee where PCs have allies flooding in. They might then duel the Stormcloak fort commander, a brutish Nord nicknamed **"Hulking Harraald"** or such, on the battlements. Show his perspective: he's been expecting this, and curses the Empire's trickery when he sees the gate inexplicably open. Possibly he tries to collapse the tunnel or blow the ammo cache as a last resort; PCs might stop him.

A **complication** to introduce: The fort's storeroom has **caged wolves** (for war) – during battle, those get loose (perhaps a stray fire sets them free). Now wolves are attacking indiscriminately. This chaos can be compelled onto someone (maybe a PC with **"Fear of Animals"** or just as environment causing harm). PCs could try to calm or corner wolves (Animal Handling type overcome). Or leave them – they might end up mauling a fleeing Stormcloak, which is both brutal and telling of war's unpredictability.

Victory at Fort Greenwall is likely. Imperial flag replaces bear flag on fort. Legate Rikke congratulates PCs, possibly with a grim nod: "This was well executed. We'll make proper soldiers of you lot yet." One PC maybe thinks, "We already are, Legate," if they're career soldiers – some banter. They also find useful intel here: perhaps a **letter from Ulfric** to Jarl Laila in Riften saying help is on the way, etc. Or a **Thalmor dossier** (if a Justiciar was liaising with Stormcloaks here) but that might be too revealing too soon. Maybe not yet. Instead, maybe an captured Stormcloak mutters "Damn those elves in their embassy... This is all because of them." If pressed, he drunkenly rants that the *Thalmor wanted this war*. Planting seeds.

Side Plot B – "Underbelly of Riften" (Thieves Guild and Black-Briar Intrigue):

Before or during the siege of Riften, the PCs have the chance (or order) to handle Riften's internal snake pit. **Riften** is known for corruption. Maven Black-Briar effectively runs the economy, and the **Thieves Guild** operates out of the Ratway undercity. Additionally, the **Dark Brotherhood** might have a small presence (perhaps merely hinted at by the mysterious **cemetery door** of the Nightingale Hall or something – but that's more Thieves Guild/Beyond scope). The Thalmor interest here: likely minimal direct, but in a chaotic siege, thieves could loot everything or cause civilian harm, which again drags things out. Actually, a cunning Thalmor might have bribed the Thieves Guild to take certain actions (like steal an important artifact or sabotage the city's defense from within) to ensure maximum confusion. Alternatively, the Thieves Guild might just see opportunity. Maven, being pro-Imperial, might attempt to bring Riften to capitulation with minimal fight – if she can quietly oust Jarl Laila or incapacitate her guards, the city could fall with less blood. The PCs might be her instruments or her rivals in this.

Approaches: - Diplomacy/Bribery: Tullius instructs the PCs: "Contact Maven Black-Briar; assure her if she helps us, she will remain in power." The PCs meet Maven perhaps in secret at **The Bee and Barb** inn, upstairs. She's a shrewd, intimidating woman (Aspect **"Riften's Real Power"**). She doesn't need persuading to side with the winning team, but she does demand promises: e.g., the Empire will ignore certain... "businesses" of hers. If the PCs give too much, they risk enabling a tyrant after war. If they press her, she can threaten to withhold her help (which means a tougher fight for Riften). Ideally they strike a deal: Maven will ensure the city guard captain (who is on her payroll) orders a stand-down at critical moment, and in return the PCs vow that Maven will indeed be Jarl and her family privileges protected. Fate-wise, this might give them an Aspect **"Maven's Secret Support"** to invoke during the battle (e.g., one round the city guard

doesn't shoot because of her orders). But later, if they go back on the deal, Maven will become an enemy.

- **Thieves Guild infiltration:** The PCs (particularly a stealthy or criminal-background one) might choose to talk to or neutralize the Thieves Guild. Maybe Brynjolf or Vex from the Guild greet them in the Ragged Flagon: "Well, if it isn't the mighty heroes. We've no quarrel with you lot. We just want to make some coin out of this mess." The guild might actually be convinced to cooperate for a price – e.g., ensure minimal harm to civilians or not sabotage the gates. Or the PCs could sabotage the guild themselves – e.g., flood the Ratway (perhaps break the cistern gates, causing water to rush in). That might incapacitate some thieves temporarily. Or they arrest the guild leader (though that's hard; these are slippery folk).

- **Dark Brotherhood cameo:** If any PC is of the Brotherhood or they have interacted before, Riften's graveyard could host a hooded "friend". Possibly the Brotherhood was hired to kill either Maven (by Stormcloak sympathizers who hate her) or Jarl Laila (by Maven herself or Thalmor stirring pot). The PCs might stumble upon an assassination attempt mid-siege: an assassin aims for Laila Law-Giver as the walls are breached. Do they let it happen (makes conquest easier but a dishonorable murder)? Or stop it? This can be a brief but dramatic scene. If a PC is pro-DB, they might even be the assassin's ally or competitor.

Main idea: By addressing these underworld elements, the PCs can reduce Riften's resistance or collateral damage. If they succeed, when the main battle comes, perhaps the city yields faster – e.g., half the city guard simply doesn't fight (Maven's influence), making the PC's job easier. If they fail or ignore it, Riften's defense is stiff and chaotic: thieves might take up arms against *everyone* (imagine them looting during fire, or the guild setting parts of city on fire to cover escapes). That could ironically hamper the Imperials (fire spreads beyond control).

Scene 2 (Imperial): The Battle for Riften – Lions at the Gate

Now the culmination: With Fort Greenwall taken, Imperial forces march on **Riften**. Riften sits on Lake Honrich, with high walls. The Imperial plan likely involves an frontal assault on the **main gate** (guarded by a drawbridge over the canal) while possibly a small force swims the lake to come from the docks side. PCs could choose either approach.

Phase 1: Storming the Gate. If Maven/guard collusion is in play, maybe the drawbridge is lowered at an opportune time, suspiciously easily. If not, PCs might have to lower it under fire (climb the wall or find the mechanism via the canal). Perhaps they sneak a couple of soldiers via sewer to pop up and open the gates. A famous TES reference: **Maul**, Maven's thug, could double-cross someone – maybe he was paid by Ulfric to actually lock the gates and hold Maven hostage if she tried betrayal. The PCs might catch him at the winch trying to keep it shut. A quick fight with Maul (Aspect "**Thug with a Vengeance**") and they toss him off the rampart, and then the gates open.

Phase 2: City fight. Riften's narrower than Whiterun/Markarth, mostly a big plaza (the market) and surrounding lanes. The central **market** becomes a battlefield. The unique environment here: **canal boardwalks** and a **honeycomb of wooden houses** (risk of fire). The Temple of Mara's bells ring in alarm. Stormcloak archers on rooftops, maybe the **Riften Fishery** workers joining to fight off invaders with fishing spears (loyal to their Jarl). The Imperials push in phalanx style. The PCs probably carve a path to **Mistveil Keep** (Jarl's palace at city's end).

Notable NPCs in battle:

- *Jarl Laila Law-Giver* – A decent but not extraordinary leader. She might rally a last stand at the Keep, or if Maven's coup happens, she might be found wounded or locked up before PCs even arrive (Maven's doing). The PCs then deal with Maven or her personal mercenaries inside (Maven might try to claim credit: "I've

saved you the trouble; Riften is yours. Now honor our arrangement.”).

- *Maven's son, Hemming Black-Briar* might lead some house guards either to help Imperials or if upset by invasion, even fight them (if they double-cross Maven).

- *The Thieves Guild* mostly stays hidden. But one thief named **Brynjolf** might take this chance to pickpocket a PC mid-fight for fun – up to you for a light moment (“really, during a war?!”).

Side encounter: The Ratway. At some point a fire or collapse might open a hole into the Ratway. Perhaps fleeing Stormcloaks hide there. PCs could pursue in the dark tunnels and find themselves ambushed by desperate stragglers or thieves. It's a moody aside – torchlit brick corridors, dripping water. They might also discover evidence of a Skooma lab** (indicating Riften's drug trade). They could destroy it (which scores points with law-abiding citizens but maybe annoys Maven who profits from it if allied).

Climax at Mistveil Keep: The final confrontation occurs in the Jarl's throne room. If Laila is present with her housecarl and a few staunch Stormcloaks, she'll refuse to surrender until pressed. Possibly Legate Rikke joins the PCs here to accept her surrender or fight. If Maven orchestrated things, maybe the PCs arrive to find Laila already deposed and Maven sitting coolly on the throne with a Black-Briar banner. That's eerie for them: they essentially traded an overt Stormcloak for a subtle tyrant. Possibly Rikke disapproves but pragmatically accepts.

Outcome (Imperial victory): Riften falls, the Imperial Dragon banner raised over Mistveil Keep. Jarl Laila (if alive) is exiled or imprisoned. **Maven Black-Briar is installed as Jarl** (she will indeed in canon if Imperials take Riften ²⁶). There's no joyous celebration from citizens – Riften's folk are sullen and fearful (they traded one set of masters for another perhaps). PCs might feel that moral gray. However, strategically it's a big win: the Empire now controls the south-east.

Legate Rikke thanks them, maybe a bit somberly: “We did what we had to. The Rift is ours. Talos guide those who fell today.” She might quietly caution a PC she trusts: “Keep an eye on Maven. The Empire may need her, but I fear what Skyrim will become under such people.” Hinting that victory could be hollow if it empowers corrupt figures – reflecting the theme of costs of war.

Alternate outcome (Imperial fail at Riften): If Stormclaw reinforcements arrived or the PCs didn't neutralize the guild and got overwhelmed, maybe the Imperials have to retreat from a botched first assault. They could try again later or shift to another target (like attempt Winterhold or something). But likely with PC heroics, Riften will fall to them. If something like Maven betraying them happened, that could cause fiasco: e.g., Maven double-crosses and at last moment swings city guard back to Stormcloak side, surprising the Imperials and repelling them. That's dramatic but maybe too early for such a twist; maybe save double-cross for later story if at all.

Act II Resolution:

By the end of Act II, each faction's campaign likely succeeded in capturing key cities: Stormcloaks took Markarth (and perhaps Falkreath or others in interim), Imperials took Riften (and likely Dawnstar or Winterhold next, which could be off-screen or quick missions if needed). The **map of Skyrim** is now heavily in each side's favor in different regions. Only the final strongholds remain: Solitude for the Empire, Windhelm for the Stormcloaks – setting the stage for Act III/IV ultimate confrontations. But more importantly, through Act II's side plots, the PCs have encountered multiple instances of *covert interference*: Forsworn chaos, Daedric cults, criminal factions – all seemingly independent but each conveniently fueling

disorder. Patterns start emerging. The **Thalmor** presence hasn't been loudly revealed, but keen players should suspect their influence after reading documents or hearing rumors at least ¹² .

Allow a **breather scene** after the dust settles. Perhaps a war council meeting for each side to plan the next act, where PCs can voice concerns. For Stormcloaks: Ulfric might be buoyant after Markarth, planning to move on **Solitude**. For Imperials: Tullius, proud of Riften's fall, eyes **Windhelm** next. Both sides likely consider **Winterhold** or **Dawnstar** minor mop-ups if not done (they might delegate those to secondary forces or quick treaties – e.g., Winterhold's pro-Stormcloak Jarl could capitulate if isolated).

Crucially, seed Act III by having NPCs bring news of strange occurrences: maybe reports from **Dawnstar** of mass nightmares (Vaermina's doing), or **Winterhold** of magical anomalies near the College, or **Falkreath** of a plague of undeath (vampire or undead stirring, maybe due to the war causing neglected graves). These are hooks for Act III's more supernatural/dark elements. They underscore that the war is unleashing or coinciding with other evils – which a perceptive character might link to “someone taking advantage of the chaos.” Indeed, the Thalmor or even Daedric Princes are exploiting Skyrim's turmoil.

Transition to **Act III** will involve tackling some of these internal crises, character development (especially for Hadvar and Ralof), and possibly a temporary lull in direct military campaigns (maybe a truce or stalemate occurs as both sides lick wounds), giving room for more investigative and character-driven stories. Little do the factions know, the Thalmor's grand scheme is inching toward fruition in the background, ready to be unveiled in Act IV. The players' actions in Act II—whom they allied with, what compromises they accepted—will have ripple effects felt in the next acts, both narratively and via aspects (e.g., “**Maven's Pocket Empire**” in Riften or “**Forsworn Resurgence**” in the Reach could be aspects to invoke/compel later).

With Act II done, the stage is set: Skyrim is bloodied and weary, victories have been won but at moral costs, and ominous shadows loom behind the scenes. Act III will delve into those shadows, pushing the PCs to confront the *heart of darkness* within their own factions and the land itself, before the final confrontation with the puppet-masters fueling this war.

Act III: The Shadow War – Subterfuge and Sorcery Amid Conflict

Summary: Act III shifts focus from open battlefronts to the **hidden and psychological dimensions** of the war. With each side holding significant territory, the civil war enters a phase of attrition, espionage, and internal strife. This Act is about the “**war in the shadows**” – uncovering Thalmor plots, dealing with Daedric meddling directly, and resolving personal vendettas. The PCs will likely undertake missions that involve infiltration, investigation, and confronting creeping darkness within Skyrim's society and even within themselves. **Major NPC arcs** move toward resolution here: Hadvar and Ralof each face intense personal tests that reflect the war's toll on identity and loyalty. Act III's climax might not be a grand battle, but rather a **turning point revelation** – the discovery of the Thalmor's grand interference (or at least undeniable proof of it) and perhaps a moment where PCs can influence their leaders' recognition of the true enemy. The end of Act III likely sees the war approaching its final act – with possibly a pause or uneasy **truce** as both sides grapple with revelations, setting the stage for Act IV's endgame.

By now, **thematic stakes** are high: players should feel the weight of patriotism vs. conscience, see Nords on both sides questioning themselves, and sense tragedy in every victory. This Act is structured around key

events in a few cities and locations: **Dawnstar's nightmare curse**, **Winterhold's magical crisis**, a possible **peace negotiation at High Hrothgar** (optional but a classic scenario reminiscent of Skyrim's "Season Unending" conference quest), and the personal side-stories culminating for Ralof and Hadvar. Branching paths are significant here: players might push for a temporary ceasefire to deal with a greater threat (e.g. a Daedric monster or a Thalmor assassin targeting both sides' leaders), or they might double-down on partisanship until the Thalmor's hand forces an unlikely cooperation. GM should be flexible – Act III could even allow a scenario where, say, Stormcloak and Imperial PC groups (if the party was split by perspective earlier) **finally intersect and could choose to either clash or collaborate** against a revealed third-party threat.

We'll break Act III into several scenario segments:

Scene 1: The Dreams of the Pale (Dawnstar's Nightmare)

In the northern coastal town of **Dawnstar** (the Pale's capital), an uncanny affliction strikes: everyone is plagued by **unending nightmares**, leaving the garrison and civilians exhausted and paranoid ²⁸. This is the setup of the Skyrim quest "Waking Nightmare" (Vaermina's artifact, the Skull of Corruption). In our campaign, whichever faction holds Dawnstar now (initially Stormcloaks under Jarl Skald, but it could have switched to Imperials under Brina Merilis if Imperials took the Pale in Act II) – the problem affects all equally, an opportunity for a **side ceasefire**. For instance, if Imperials control Dawnstar, Jarl Brina (an ex-Legionnaire, pragmatic) might *ask Stormcloak prisoners or contacts for help* if they have a clue; or vice versa, Stormcloak Jarl Skald might grudgingly welcome any help including from an Imperial envoy because he sees it as a curse likely sent by elves or something. The PCs, if nearby or notified, are asked to investigate as this could be either a Thalmor trick or a genuine Daedric curse threatening to sideline an entire hold's contribution to the war.

Investigation: Arriving in Dawnstar, the PCs find a bleak scene. Men with red-rimmed eyes wander like living ghosts. Miners too scared to enter the mines (they "saw things" in the dark). The local priest of Mara, **Erandur** (if using game NPC, a reformed Vaermina cultist) seeks help to end this curse ²⁹ ³⁰. He explains it's Vaermina's doing – a **Daedric Prince of nightmares**. The source is the **Nightcaller Temple** on the hill, an old abandoned monastery where Vaermina's **Skull of Corruption** artifact resides, polluting dreams. He's tried to form a small band to go dispel it, but needs protection. The PCs likely accept (both out of heroism and pragmatic need: a whole hold's soldiers ineffective = weakness to enemy). This can be a classic **dungeon crawl horror scene**.

Nightcaller Temple Dungeon: Inside the temple, which is an old fort, they face magical traps causing hallucinations (Aspects like **"Phantasmal Terror"** causing Will saves or mental stress), cultist remnants or manifestations (maybe dream-induced specters of past Orc invaders that fought here in lore). The goal is to reach the inner sanctum and destroy or seal the Skull. Use Fate challenges: e.g., a **mental conflict** where each PC experiences their worst fear as an illusion. You can personalize: maybe Hadvar sees Helgen's dragon fire again, immobilizing him until a PC snaps him out; Ralof might see Imperial torturers; a PC mage might see themselves losing control of magic etc. They overcome by clever roleplay or resisting with Will. At the climax, maybe a **mini-boss: A Vaermina Devotee** (possibly the entity of a former priest possessed by the Skull's power) fights them, using mind-control attempts (could temporarily turn a PC against others – a compel on an Aspect like **"Susceptible to mind tricks"** if any, or just a temporary Aspect **"Dominated by Nightmares"** on a PC to overcome to act freely). Eventually, Erandur and PCs perform a ritual to nullify the Skull – or if PCs are greedy, they might be tempted to take the Skull artifact (dangerous, as it allows

siphoning dreams at cost of corruption). The likely righteous path is destroying it, freeing Dawnstar from the curse ³¹. Dawnstar's people immediately start to sleep better; morale restored. The Jarl (Skald or Brina) thanks them.

Impact: If Stormcloak and Imperial players/groups are separate, this quest is a great neutral ground to have them **cooperate** briefly. Maybe Tullius and Ulfric agreed that Dawnstar's nightmare needed solving and allowed a joint task force (the PCs from each side). After working together in a dark dungeon, even bitter enemies might gain respect. Use this to build Ralof and Hadvar's personal camaraderie if possible – maybe they were uneasy allies here and saved each other's lives from a terror demon. That can deepen their arcs (especially if in Act IV they need to possibly broker peace). Reward the party with a boon: perhaps **a rare alchemical ingredient** from Vaermina's realm that Erandur gives (mechanically could allow a one-time create advantage "Dreamstride Vision" to be used later for insight). Also, a Fate Point refresh could narratively occur after this cathartic win.

Importantly, in investigating the temple's history or Erandur's notes, the PCs find references that the Vaermina cult initially grew strong because the **Orc chieftain of the Great War** (a historical event) had collaborated to attack Dawnstar, implying external influences sowing nightmares to weaken the hold even back then. This parallels current events – a subtle sign that **someone always tries to weaken Skyrim through its own fears**. Hmm.

Scene 2: The High King's Ghost (Windhelm's Racial Tensions and "Blood on the Ice")

Switching to Eastmarch and **Windhelm**, especially if Imperials are about to attack it or if Stormcloaks still hold it but are troubled internally. Windhelm's known issue: the **serial killer** ("Blood on the Ice" quest in game) targeting young women in the city, and the simmering racism towards Dunmer in the Grey Quarter. If Imperials hold most of Skyrim except Windhelm, maybe some in Windhelm think of surrender; if Stormcloaks still hold, maybe morale is shaky hearing of Ulfric's conquests stalled or reversed. In either case, a specter from the past arises: a murderer known as the **Butcher** strikes in Windhelm's streets, killing locals (likely Nords but in game it was young women, possibly of various races). The twist: The murderer is **Calixto** (an old man with a necromantic obsession, in game), trying to reassemble his dead sister's body. But I propose adding a thematic angle: he is also spurred by the unrest – maybe he explicitly targets those who "consort with the enemy" (if Stormcloak, he kills a Nord girl seen talking to an Imperial; if Imperial, he kills someone collaborating with occupying forces). So his insanity gets a political tinge.

The PCs could be drawn in if in Windhelm (either because they are there for talks, or infiltrating, or stationed). For Stormcloak PCs, Ulfric might quietly ask them to solve it because it's scaring citizens (and he doesn't want to seem incapable). For Imperial PCs if they just captured Windhelm in Act IV, maybe this occurs during occupation – a killer undermining their 'liberation' by causing chaos, perhaps a Thalmor leftover? So either timeline it fits: presumably Act III likely before final battle at Windhelm, when tension is high.

Investigation: They examine crime scenes (using Investigation skill). Clues: strange amulets, butcher's journals referencing "the power of King's flesh" – maybe he imagines resurrecting **High King Torygg** (weird twist: what if he's trying to assemble the dead High King that Ulfric killed, thinking to create a ghostly claimant to scare Ulfric? That's one way to incorporate "High King's ghost"). This is optional but adds mythic feel: some citizens claim to see **Torygg's ghost** wandering the city at night, moaning. It could just be Calixto

in a cloak with an illusion. Or perhaps Vaermina's leftover magic causing apparitions from trauma (Ulfric's shout death of Torgg left a spiritual scar?). PCs must decipher reality.

Confrontation: They likely corner Calixto in the Candlehearth Hall or in his House of Curiosities. If Hadvar is around (Imperial), he might be especially invested – one victim could be someone he knew from childhood (maybe a cousin in Windhelm). If Ralof is present (Stormcloak), maybe he's frustrated that Windhelm, supposed safe capital, is as dangerous as warfront. They capture or kill Calixto. On him they find something interesting: a **Butcher's journal** detailing how he acquired a necromantic tome from a "hooded Altmer" weeks ago that taught him life-extending rituals. Aha – possibly a Thalmor agent manipulated him (Thalmor loves sowing fear in Windhelm to weaken Ulfric's base). This is a **direct piece of evidence of Thalmor interference**. It names no names, but description matches a known Thalmor emissary (perhaps one they met earlier, like that Justiciar in Markarth or Elenwen's subordinate). PCs get this clue.

Also, this scenario addresses Windhelm's prejudice: maybe during investigation a Dunmer woman is falsely accused (similar to game, where they suspect Wuunferth the court mage). PCs can choose to defend the innocent. If Ralof's around, this could be pivotal for him – seeing a Dunmer treated unjustly in "his" city might stir empathy or conflict with his worldview. It plays into his arc (possibly realizing what Ulfric ignored).

In the end, solving the murders calms Windhelm's populace somewhat, and if Stormcloak side, Ulfric publicly thanks them (or privately acknowledges it). Perhaps he reassigns some guards to better protect the Grey Quarter now (inspired by PC's insistence). It's minor but meaningful change. If Imperial side (taking city) and they solve it, it helps win trust of Windhelm citizens a bit (the invaders stopped a killer where Ulfric's regime didn't). That could reflect hearts-and-minds aspect.

Scene 3: Council of Heroes (The High Hrothgar Truce Negotiation) – *Optional Heavy Roleplay Scene*

This scene is a homage to the "Season Unending" peace council in Skyrim's main quest ³² ³³, which might occur if the war stalemates or the PCs push for it upon realizing the Thalmor threat. It is Act III's dramatic centerpiece for politics and character confrontation.

Setup: The idea can arise that the civil war is exhausting both sides with Alduin gone, maybe some voices (like Arngelir of the Greybeards, or General Rikke if Imperial, or Jarl Elisif if Stormcloak side is winning and she's captive, etc.) call for a temporary ceasefire to discuss terms or at least prisoner exchange. Perhaps more pressingly, news of a possible Thalmor incursion or conspiracy freaks out someone in power enough to agree to talk. For example, after seeing enough evidence (like Butcher's journal, Forsworn indirect aid, Dawnstar nightmares clearly magical interference), **General Tullius** and **Ulfric Stormcloak** could be convinced (by the PCs or their advisors) to send envoys to a neutral parley – likely at **High Hrothgar**, home of the Greybeards, who in lore brokered the ceasefire once ³². The Greybeards (or just Arngelir) invite the leaders under the ancient rule of peace on sacred ground. The PCs might accompany their respective leader as part of the delegation (indeed, they may be recognized as instrumental heroes whose words carry weight).

Council Dynamics: Present are Ulfric and Galmar (Stormcloak), Tullius and Rikke (Imperial), possibly Elisif (to speak for Solitude if Tullius insists) and perhaps an advisor like Elenwen the Thalmor ambassador *tries* to attend (in the game she does, which was controversial). Actually, yes, having a Thalmor representative **Elenwen** present will really spark drama – and give the PCs a chance to expose or confront her. Arngelir

moderates, expecting civil discussion. But bitterness runs high: Ulfric might immediately taunt Elisif about her slain husband, Tullius might call Ulfric a murderer, etc. The system can be run as a social conflict or contest, where each side has “demands” to trade. In the game, they traded holds to balance. Here, maybe things like: Ulfric wants Empire to withdraw from the Reach and Markarth; Tullius wants Ulfric to cease Talos rhetoric in exchange for a ceasefire, etc. The PCs can intervene to sway arguments with Diplomacy, Intimidation (a loud Thu’um shout to silence bickering maybe, if a PC has Voice powers).

Key moment – Thalmor Reveal: During talks, one agenda item: evidence of Thalmor interference. The PCs (assuming they have collected proof pieces) can lay them out on the negotiation table. For example: “We have here a dossier from a Thalmor operative that none of you have seen – it calls Ulfric an ‘uncooperative asset’ and explicitly says the Thalmor benefit from this war ³⁴ ¹⁵.” That is explosive. Ulfric, furious, denies being anyone’s asset – but the evidence is strong (maybe signed by Elenwen). Tullius is grim as he reads it – he mutters that his suspicions were right. If Elenwen is present, she’ll try to dismiss it as forgery, but her facade cracks (maybe sweat). A PC with Insight can call out her lie. If cornered, she might lash verbally: “It’s true. We did everything short of gutting your leaders ourselves to keep this conflict alive – and you fools played into our hands!” Possibly she reveals too much if villainously monologuing – and tries to storm out or call backup. Ulfric might roar in rage and attempt to physically attack Elenwen then and there. This could escalate: if Elenwen had hidden guards outside, a brief skirmish could break out (the **truce nearly collapsing**). PCs must decide – do they protect Elenwen from Ulfric’s wrath to maintain peace, or let him kill her? If Elenwen is killed here by Ulfric or someone, that’s one Thalmor down but maybe not strategically best – she could be more useful as a prisoner. Arngeir would be dismayed at bloodshed in High Hrothgar.

Nevertheless, this reveal should unify (at least partially) the humans against the Thalmor threat. The ultimate theme: **Maybe Nords and Imperials have more in common than they thought – a common enemy.** This doesn’t end the war automatically, but it definitely causes pause. Perhaps a **temporary armistice** is agreed: e.g., a 30-day ceasefire to deal with “certain revelations.” Ulfric might not shake Tullius’s hand, but he nods curtly, “When we resume, General, it will be with all this in light. But for now... the Dominion has much to answer for.” Tullius begrudgingly respects Ulfric’s willingness to pause for greater good (or sees it as chance to rearm – up to interpretation). The Greybeards praise this “first step toward true peace,” though PCs might know true peace is far off.

Personal arc notes in council:

- *Hadvar* likely stands by Tullius, glaring at Ulfric (who nearly had him executed at Helgen). But after hearing Thalmor stuff, he might swallow pride and say something like, “Sir, perhaps... this fight can wait until the Dominion’s dealt with.” This shows his maturity – big growth from just a loyal soldier to someone who sees bigger picture (Talos worshiper in him quietly cheering to fight Thalmor directly).
- *Ralof* stands by Ulfric and might call Hadvar a bootlicker at first. But when evidence of Thalmor comes, he looks shocked, remembering Helgen too (he saw Elenwen there). He perhaps publicly apologizes to Ulfric for doubting, but privately to a PC later admits, “I hated the Empire so much I never dreamed the real enemy stood right beside them.” If Elenwen is still present, Ralof likely spits at her feet, uttering a curse about avenging all murdered by Thalmor.

Thus Act III could end either with that fragile truce or at least all sides aware of Thalmor treachery. If you choose not to have a peace council, you can still have the evidence reveal happen via other means (like PCs sneaking into Thalmor embassy themselves and catching evidence, culminating in a boss fight in Act IV perhaps). But the council is a nice chance for roleplay and final venting of grievances before final battles.

Regardless, by Act III's end, the **Thalmor's covert role is definitively exposed** to the PCs and likely to leaders. The **true antagonist** stands revealed: the Thalmor orchestrated much of this tragedy ²¹. Now Act IV can focus on confronting the ramifications – either the war resumes with more ferocity (but perhaps clarity), or maybe a brief alliance of convenience happens (e.g., both sides allow the PCs to launch a joint strike on a Thalmor target).

Additionally, by Act III end, **Hadvar and Ralof's personal arcs hit their climax**: perhaps Ralof sees Ulfric not as infallible (maybe he's troubled Ulfric was inadvertently used by Thalmor), and Hadvar sees the Empire's failings (the Concordat enabling this situation). Each considers what Skyrim truly needs. They might voice these doubts to the PCs, each considering perhaps that victory at all costs isn't as sweet if the Thalmor still rule from shadows. This primes possible endings where these NPCs could make surprising choices (like Ralof maybe prevents Ulfric from executing Elisif, or Hadvar refuses an order to kill a surrendering Stormcloak – those could be Act IV moments).

Give the players and their characters a moment in quiet after the council or revelations: perhaps at night on the 7,000 steps, a PC contemplates the sky, now free of Alduin but filled with uncertainty. A perhaps unexpected cameo: **the Dragonborn** themselves passes by on their way down from speaking with Greybeards (if timeline fits) – they nod to the PCs and offer a word: "The gods gave you all a hard path. But I have faith you'll make the right choices for Skyrim." This subtle blessing (call it a **Dragonborn's Blessing** aspect for final battle use) can be a neat cameo that doesn't overshadow. Or the Dragonborn sends a **gift** via Arngair: perhaps a **Horn of Calling** that PC can blow once for aid (maybe summoning a dragon ally exactly once in final battle or giving a +4 one-time).

Now the stage is set for Act IV: final battles with clearer villainy. The war might still need concluding (Ulfric vs. Tullius, Windhelm vs. Solitude), but now the Thalmor will likely intervene directly, perhaps making a last move to kill Ulfric or seize Skyrim's power in the chaos. The PCs will be at the crux, deciding the war's outcome and dealing with the Thalmor's endgame plan. Themes of **identity and unity** reach peak: will the Nords and Empire remain divided or stand together at the eleventh hour? Act IV will answer that, shaped strongly by all these prior acts' choices.

Act IV: The Final Storm – Siege of Solitude/Windhelm and The Thalmor Gambit

Summary: Act IV is the climax of the campaign. The civil war comes to its final battle: either the **Stormcloaks' siege of Solitude** or the **Imperial assault on Windhelm**, depending on which side the PCs support (or potentially both, if the party has members on each side or if a negotiation led to a joint focus against the Thalmor; we'll accommodate both possibilities). Parallel to this grand battle, the **Thalmor execute their endgame plan**: a covert (or overt) operation to sabotage the victor and tighten Aldmeri Dominion control over Skyrim. This could manifest as an attempted **assassination of Ulfric and Tullius both**, a plan to unleash a Daedric horror during the battle, or even an effort to retrieve/destroy a significant artifact (like the Jagged Crown or some symbol of Skyrim's royalty) to prevent unity. The PCs must fight on the front lines of the battle and likely break away at a critical moment to thwart the Thalmor's scheme. Major NPCs like Hadvar and Ralof will reach their ultimate fate or reconciliation in this Act. By the end, one faction wins the war – but the focus is on ensuring Skyrim isn't left vulnerable to the Thalmor in victory or

defeat. The **epilogue** then ties up the PCs' personal journeys, the political aftermath, and possibly an appearance or acknowledgment by the Dragonborn (as a legendary figure giving them kudos or gifts).

Structure: We will outline the final battle from both perspectives (Stormcloak attack on Solitude and Imperial attack on Windhelm). There's a lot of symmetry: both cities are the enemy's capital, heavily fortified, with the faction leader present (Ulfric in Windhelm, Tullius and Elisif in Solitude). In each case, incorporate the third-party Thalmor interference as a timed event or clock that if not stopped could ruin everything. The PCs will likely have to make tough choices: do they pursue the primary objective (defeating the enemy leader) or divert to stop the Thalmor plot when it emerges? Ideally, they delegate or split party to handle both – cinematic multitasking. Branches from Act III matter: e.g., if a truce happened, maybe an unusual scenario occurs where some Imperials *assist* Stormcloaks to remove Thalmor influences in Solitude or vice versa, at least for a crucial hour. Or if no truce, the PCs might individually choose to prioritize killing the opposing leader or joining forces to strike the Thalmor first. The module should allow the PCs to be heroes by making the wise call (likely foiling Thalmor plan even if it means the war outcome is slightly altered).

Let's break down by perspective:

Stormcloak Path – “Battle for Solitude” & The Thalmor’s Trap

Prelude: Ulfric's host surrounds **Solitude**, the great coastal capital ³⁵. Solitude's blue banners of the Empire fly high; General Tullius commands defense from Castle Dour, and Jarl Elisif rallies what troops she can (though her heart is heavy without her husband, Torgg). The mood is tense: Solitude expects a brutal siege, but perhaps underestimates Ulfric's fury after all the Thalmor revelations. Ulfric addresses his Stormcloaks: *“Today, we cast down the last puppet of the Empire, and tear out the Thalmor threat by its roots!”* He's combining goals: He likely intends to execute General Tullius (and perhaps Elisif) to end Imperial rule, but also has quietly told Galmar to hunt down any Thalmor agents inside the city – he's wary of more treachery. The PCs as his elite team are tasked with spearheading a breach and *specifically* to secure the Emperor's cousin (if she's present, like Vittoria Vici) or any high-profile hostages – because Ulfric suspects the Thalmor might try something with them (maybe intelligence says the Thalmor plot involves harming such figures to prolong conflict). Essentially, Ulfric trusts the PCs now to look out for the *unseen threats* even as the main force battles. Ralof is at the PC's side, determined to see this through, but he confides privately that this victory feels different: *“I used to think it would be Sovngarde-grand. But now I just want it over so we can deal with the real enemy.”* He's implying his hatred has shifted from Empire to Thalmor. This is huge character growth.

Siege Start: Solitude's main gate (at the end of a long arching bridge) is heavily defended ³⁶. Catapults from Stormcloaks bombard the walls. The initial assault is brutal: Stormcloaks push across the bridge under withering arrow fire. The PCs can lead from the front or take a side route: maybe climbing along the rocky sides of the arch to flank a tower (Athletics challenge, failure means a perilous dangling but maybe they recover). They likely have to break the gate with a battering ram or explosive. If they recovered any Dwemer tech from Markarth, now's a time to use it (maybe they rig a repurposed ballista as a door-breaching crossbow). They smash through and Stormcloaks flood into Solitude's lower city (the marketplace by the docks). Street-to-street fighting ensues.

City Combat Highlights:

- Solitude's layout has narrow alleys and grand plazas (the Bards College area, etc.). The Bards College

ironically might be playing intense martial music audible even over battle – one poetic Bard decided to score the battle. PCs could invoke **“Inspirational War Ballad Echoing”** for courage or distraction.

- **The Blue Palace** (Elisif’s palace) is on one end, **Castle Dour** (military HQ) on the other near the gate. Likely Ulfric wants Tullius found in Castle Dour and Elisif in Blue Palace. They probably split forces: Galmar leads some to Castle Dour, while PCs perhaps are sent to secure Blue Palace. Ulfric himself fights where the battle is thickest (maybe at Castle Dour after gate, or moving between).

- **Civilians:** Many Solitude civilians (merchants, etc.) hide or flee to the docks. Some misguidedly take up arms for their city (PCs might face not just soldiers but an irate shopkeeper swinging a pan – do they knock out or kill such non-combatants? Morality test!). Possibly, remember **Jarl Balgruuf** and others exiled from Whiterun are actually in Solitude’s basement if they were ousted ³². If Stormcloaks find them, will they harm those refugees? PC Stormcloaks could decide to show mercy, scoring moral points.

Thalmor Interference: At some point mid-battle, possibly when Stormcloaks seem to have the upper hand, the Thalmor spring their trap. A few ideas:

- **Assassination attempt on Ulfric:** Elenwen (if not killed at the peace council or earlier) may have a last resort plan. Example: disguised as an injured refugee, she gets close to Ulfric with a hidden dagger envenomed in some terrible poison. A PC might notice this (“that refugee’s eyes glint with too much hatred”) and intervene. This could be a quick time event – if they fail, Ulfric gets stabbed. Perhaps he has a chance to survive but is weakened (taking a Severe consequence **“Poisoned Wound”**). If they succeed, they expose and stop her – maybe Ralof or PC kills Elenwen, fulfilling his vow. But if Ulfric goes down, the Stormcloak assault falters (some might think him dead). The PCs might need to rally them (shouting “For Ulfric, for Skyrim!” with a Leadership roll to create **“Unbroken Stormcloak Morale”**). Ulfric’s survival or not will dramatically alter ending – presumably PC will try to save him (maybe an antidote exists, could tie to something from Vaermina’s temple that cures exotic poisons, if they got such an item).

- **Summoned Creature or Daedric Beast:** The Thalmor, cornered, might unleash a bound Daedra in the streets – e.g., a **Storm Atronach** or even enslaved dragon (though Thalmor using a dragon might be far-fetched, but possible through some twisted magic, or an undead dragon? That’s very high fantasy but it’s finale!). The PCs would have to break off to fight that monster rampaging among soldiers of both sides (again a scenario where for a moment Stormcloaks and Imperials both run from or tackle the beast). That fight can be a set-piece: e.g., a Storm Atronach towering, hurling lightning – PCs can use environment (lead it near wet docks then tip over metal anchor chain to short-circuit it – a clever overcome to destroy it without direct confrontation).

- **Kidnap/Hostage scenario:** Perhaps Thalmor agents grab **Jarl Elisif** amid chaos and threaten to kill her (or actually plan to take her to Alinor) thus depriving Skyrim of a peaceful figurehead for post-war (Thalmor would love to martyr her to inflame Nords or, conversely, kill Ulfric to decapitate Stormcloaks). If PC Stormcloaks come across this – do they save the Imperial Jarl? If they don’t, the Thalmor kill her – which possibly cheats Ulfric of legitimacy (he might have wanted her to publicly yield to him to unify Skyrim). This could also be Ralof’s arc test: He used to hate the Empire so would he care to save Elisif? Maybe yes, if he’s grown – “She’s not our enemy, not truly.” This can be an emotional rescue scene. If saved, Elisif perhaps yields gracefully to Ulfric after seeing Stormcloaks aren’t monsters (especially the PC actions). If not saved, Ulfric actually might mourn in his own way (he didn’t wish her dead, in fact planned to try to marry or negotiate with her in some fan theories). This can sow regret.

Climax at Castle Dour/Palace: Eventually the final fight is either Ulfric vs. Tullius in Castle Dour’s war room, or if Ulfric was incapacitated, maybe the PCs do it. Ideally, Ulfric (if alive and present) should get his confrontation with General Tullius as in game – perhaps with PC at his side. Tullius is a seasoned fighter; he and Ulfric duel while PC deals with Legate Rikke interfering or other guards. In a dramatic moment, Tullius

is beaten to his knees. Ulfric either executes him or the PC can influence showing mercy. If the PC argues for mercy (maybe citing that unity against Thalmor is needed and spilling more Imperial blood will hinder that), Ulfric might actually listen if respect was earned. He could instead order Tullius to leave Skyrim in exile humiliated. That drastically improves chances of reconciliation later. If the PC stays silent or agrees with Ulfric's vengeance, Ulfric likely has Ralof execute Tullius with the axe (or does it himself if he wasn't wounded). This fulfills the Stormcloak ambition but leaves a bitter note. Either way, that effectively ends organized Imperial resistance. Elisif's fate: if alive and present, Ulfric might spare her (especially if PC encouraged mercy) and even allow her to remain Jarl of Solitude under him (which in UESP note he does to legitimize his rule ³⁷). If she died by Thalmor, Ulfric appoints someone (maybe PC, if a noble or such? Or keeps Elisif's steward Falk Firebeard to ease transition). This could be player's decision if they have influence – maybe they ensure a stable, fair person gets the role.

Stormcloak Victory Epilogue: Ulfric Stormcloak is now High King of Skyrim (by right of conquest). The war is won. There's jubilation among Stormcloaks, yet also tremendous rebuilding and mending to do. Ulfric addresses the crowd in Solitude's plaza: "We have thrown off the yoke of the Empire! But our true enemy remains – we shall ready ourselves for the day the Dominion comes for us. By Shor, they will find us united!" – This sets stage for future struggle vs Thalmor. He thanks the PCs individually, perhaps offering them titles (Thanehood in a hold, or even governorship of a hold that lost its Jarl). E.g., if PC is a Nord of good standing, Ulfric might name them Jarl of Whiterun or even give them an heirloom weapon (War Axe of Eastmarch, etc.).

Ralof's arc ends with him somewhat somber amid victory – he likely visits the graves of fallen friends (maybe Laila or Galmar if they died) and vows to ensure their sacrifice isn't wasted by falling for Thalmor tricks again. He possibly accepts a promotion (maybe becomes Ulfric's new general now that Galmar might have died or retired). Alternatively, if Ulfric was gravely poisoned and perhaps needs time to heal, Ralof could step up as an acting leader in interim or support whoever Ulfric picks. Ralof thanks the PC for opening his eyes to bigger picture and says, "You'll always have a brother in me." (If PC was very anti-Empire before, maybe they had growth too, acknowledging some Imperials fought honorably. If PC was moderate or Imperial-sympathizing, Ralof definitely changed because of them).

The **Thalmor threat** is diminished for now: many agents were slain or chased off. Possibly one high-ranking Thalmor (if Elenwen escaped or another) slunk away and might plot revenge (sequel hook). The campaign could end on a note: Skyrim is free but must stand vigilant.

Imperial Path – “Battle for Windhelm” & The Thalmor’s Last Stand

Prelude: General Tullius marshals the Legion for the final strike on **Windhelm** ³⁸. This is it: Ulfric's stronghold, ancient city of Ysgramor. The Imperial army, bolstered by regained holds, travels to Eastmarch. Tullius, though stoic, perhaps addresses his troops: "The rebellion ends today. We will show Ulfric and his followers no quarter until they lay down their arms. But remember – the Thalmor would see us fight forever. Let's finish this with honor." This acknowledges the recent revelations. He privately instructs the PCs on a special task: to secure **Ulfric Stormcloak alive if possible**, because Titus Mede (the Emperor) may want him for negotiation – and also to foil any Thalmor plan to martyr Ulfric. Legate Rikke agrees strongly; she's Nord and doesn't relish killing a hero of her people, even if an enemy. Hadvar stands ready, resolved but saddened (he's likely lost friends on both sides by now).

Windhelm expects them. The city has thick snow, giving cover to approaches. Possibly a giant storm is raging (either natural or maybe the Court Wizard does something). The **Stormcloak camp** inside is prepared to fight to last. Ulfric likely gave a similar rousing speech to his men at the Palace of Kings: "If it is to die today, we die for Skyrim!" There's despair but determination. Notably, if Act III's peace talk happened, Ulfric might secretly instruct some loyalists: "If I fall, don't continue senseless bloodshed; focus on Thalmor infiltration in our land." That could make some Stormcloaks less zealous, maybe surrender quicker if Ulfric is down. But initially, they fight.

Siege Start: Imperials attack the main gate of Windhelm. It's a bone-chilling cold morning. Imperial battering rams and mages blow through the wooden gates after heavy fighting. PCs could lead a **scaling operation** – climb over an icy section of wall by the docks as a flanking maneuver. If they do, they might encounter resistance from the **Cruel-Sea** family (a Windhelm family) defending their dock, which is an interesting personal touch (maybe an old fisherman swinging an axe). They can try not to harm civilians, etc.

City Combat Highlights:

- Windhelm's Stone Quarter becomes a battlefield. That includes the **market and the revered statue of Talos** there. If an errant fireball knocks the Talos statue down, it's symbolic – maybe saps Stormcloak morale (their god's effigy toppled) but could also anger them into berserking. PC could perhaps deliberately avoid damaging it to show respect (if PC is Nord Imperial, they may order catapults to avoid the temple). That could earn unexpected trust from some Stormcloaks who notice "the Empire soldiers didn't defile Talos shrine," aiding surrender later.

- The **Gray Quarter** (Dunmer district) might stay out of it mostly; Dunmer residents hide. Possibly a Dunmer group actually opens a side gate for Imperials (out of dislike for Ulfric's rule) – a moral complication: the Empire benefiting from the actions of an oppressed minority. PC could take advantage or not. Legate Rikke might caution to be careful trusting them (not out of racism but fear of trap). But it could be genuine – Dunmer just wanting the conflict over. If accepted, Imperials slip in through Grey Quarter, bypassing a chokepoint, making fight easier. That should be seen as an act where the Empire did what Ulfric never did – cooperate with Dunmer.

- **The Palace of Kings** stands at end, where Ulfric awaits. Stormcloaks form shield walls in(continued)

Imperial Victory Epilogue: General Tullius stands in the courtyard of the Palace of Kings, Windhelm's banners replaced by the Imperial Dragon. The civil war is over. **Jarl Elisif** is soon to be crowned High Queen by the moot (with Imperial backing), promising to honor Nord traditions and **restore the worship of Talos in Skyrim** – an open challenge to the Dominion, but a calculated one given the revelations of Thalmor treachery. The Empire chooses to quietly overlook this breach of the Concordat, a sign of shifting winds. A ceremony is held in Solitude, where **High Queen Elisif** and General Tullius honor the heroes of the war. The PCs are lauded as **"Heroes of Skyrim and the Empire"**, their names to be sung by bards for generations. They may receive formal titles – perhaps **Thane of Windhelm** (to help pacify that restive city) or even governance of a hold as envoys of the Empire. In a moving gesture, Elisif presents the **Shield of Solitude** to the lead PC, an ancient relic symbolizing the defense of the realm.

Hadvar stands by in polished armor, newly promoted to **Legate**. His face is proud yet pensive. In a private moment after the ceremony, Hadvar thanks the PCs: *"We did it. Skyrim is unified again... under the Empire, yes, but maybe now on our terms."* He touches the Talos amulet hidden beneath his collar and smiles – for the **White-Gold Concordat's ban on Talos worship is effectively a dead letter in Skyrim now**, an outcome he'd quietly dreamed of. Hadvar's arc concludes with him optimistic: he plans to help rebuild Skyrim's

shattered villages and fortify against the Dominion. Perhaps he asks the PC to join him in training the new generation of soldiers – ones who will be ready when the Dominion inevitably retaliates. His personal Aspect **“Devotion to Empire and Skyrim”** has evolved – he now truly sees no difference between serving his province and his Empire, as both strive together against the Thalmor.

If **Ralof** survived the final battle, he is among the Stormcloak prisoners brought before Elisif. Many expect harsh punishment, but Elisif, guided by the PC’s counsel, extends amnesty to most ordinary Stormcloak soldiers. Ralof steps forward, defiantly expecting execution. Instead, Elisif thanks him for his bravery defending Skyrim (even if misguided) and, in a surprising turn, offers him a place in the new guard of Windhelm under the Empire. This is perhaps at the PC’s urging (a compel on Ralof’s **“Proud Son of Skyrim”** to accept an honorable role over martyrdom). Ralof is stunned. After a long pause, he kneels and swears an oath – not to the Empire directly, but *“to the protection of the people of Skyrim, against all who threaten us.”* Elisif accepts this wording. Ralof’s eyes meet the PC’s; there’s a mix of gratitude and lingering sorrow. His war is over, and though his side lost, he has found a new purpose free of Ulfric’s shadow. In his heart, Ralof’s hatred has shifted entirely toward the Thalmor – and perhaps, one day, **he and Hadvar will stand side by side** when the next war comes. Their personal feud buried, Ralof even clasps Hadvar’s forearm in the old Nord manner, a gesture of hard-won respect.

The Thalmor, for now, have been utterly exposed and routed from Skyrim. Any captured Thalmor agents (like Ondolemar or Elenwen, if alive) are delivered in chains to the High Queen’s court. It’s decided (perhaps by Imperial-PC influence) that these prisoners will be kept as leverage rather than executed – a move that gives the Empire diplomatic cards to play and denies the Dominion new martyrs. In secret, General Tullius sends word to the Emperor about the Thalmor’s orchestrations ³⁴ ²⁴, accompanied by the evidence the PCs obtained. The **Empire’s high leadership** is forced to reckon with the uncomfortable truth that appeasing the Dominion nearly destroyed Skyrim. There are quiet but significant shifts in policy: the Empire begins covertly rearming for an eventual war with the Aldmeri Dominion, and Talos worship is increasingly tolerated even outside Skyrim. While the **White-Gold Concordat** isn’t officially overturned, the Emperor tacitly permits Skyrim (and its veterans) to honor Talos – a morale boost to the populace and a subtle rebuke to the Thalmor. The PCs’ actions in revealing the Thalmor plot have thus not only saved Skyrim but begun to change the course of the Empire itself.

In the aftermath, **fate point economy** in the narrative: each PC likely gains a cache of Fate Points symbolically – they are flush with **renown and goodwill** after the war. The GM can highlight a few lingering open aspects to tie off: e.g., **“Maven Black-Briar’s Ambitions”** – if the PC struck deals with her, note that under Elisif’s reign Maven’s influence is checked (perhaps the PC ensured Maven was kept on a short leash in Riften in exchange for past cooperation). **“Forsworn Resurgence”** – now that the war is done, the new leadership might finally address Reachmen grievances (the PC could spearhead a diplomatic approach, turning a former side enemy into an ally against Thalmor). These are seeds the PC can influence in epilogue scenes, leveraging their new station to resolve Skyrim’s internal conflicts more justly.

Finally, as the PCs depart Windhelm on their journey back to Solitude or wherever they choose to settle, **a shadow passes over the sun – the silhouette of a dragon**. For a moment, weapons are raised in alarm. But the dragon (it could be **Odahviing** or another freed dragon) simply circles and heads off into the northern mountains. A voice familiar to the PCs – the **Dragonborn** – hails them from a nearby outlook where he stands with a smile. He gives a respectful nod and perhaps shouts a single word of the **Thu’um** in their honor – not a destructive Shout, but one of **glory and victory** that echoes across the skies. (If a translation is needed, Arngair later explains it was the Old Nord word for *“Unity.”*) It’s a final salute from one

living legend to the new heroes of Skyrim. *"This land endures because of heroes like you,"* the Dragonborn says quietly (or leaves carved on a tablet if one prefers a subtler cameo). *"Kaal do sahrot Heim"* – 'Carry on the greatness of the Home.'^{*} With that, the Dragonborn departs on the dragon's back, heading into his own next adventure, leaving the PCs to their well-earned chapter in history.

Conclusion: Skyrim's New Dawn

The civil war has ended, but the campaign's true finale is the *transformation* of Skyrim's spirit. **If Stormcloaks prevailed**, Skyrim stands free – battered but unbowed, guided by High King Ulfric (or his successors) who now temper pride with wisdom. The Moot convenes and, under the PC's counsel, formalizes a policy of vigilance against the Thalmor above all. Nords, Dunmer, and other peoples of Skyrim begin mending rifts. Perhaps the PC is present when Ulfric makes a surprising conciliatory gesture – like commissioning a monument in Windhelm to honor **"all sons and daughters of Skyrim"**, including those who fought against him, emphasizing that they are one people now. The **themes of identity and patriotism** reach full circle: no longer defined by hatred of the Empire, Skyrim's identity reforms around protecting its sovereignty and way of life from true tyrants (the Dominion). Tragedy gives way to hope as families reunite across battle lines – a poignant scene might be the PC witnessing a pair of soldiers from opposite sides, now both discharged, lighting a candle together for fallen comrades of both armies. **Fate Core mechanics** wise, many negative aspects (like **"Civil Unrest"** in each hold) can be removed as the narrative conditions have been addressed by PC actions, while new aspects like **"Pride of the Unified Skyrim"** apply, granting the land a bonus to resist outside threats (and granting PCs narrative justification for greater resources when facing external conflicts). The PC, perhaps taking up a Jarlship or advising Ulfric, can use their accumulated **Fate Points (and goodwill)** to shape policies – for instance, compelling Ulfric's **"True Son of Skyrim"** aspect to persuade him to allow a **representative Moot** to give all holds a voice in governance, thereby avoiding future succession crises. Ulfric, influenced by the PC, might agree – a legacy of ideological growth born from the campaign.

If Imperials prevailed, Skyrim remains within the Empire – but changed. The Empire, humbled by how close it came to losing Skyrim, grants the province greater autonomy in practice. High Queen Elisif forms a new **Skyrim Council** including former rebels and neutrals (perhaps the PC chairs it) to address grievances in each hold. The **moral conflicts** of the war yield reforms: for example, the persecution of the **Forsworn** is officially ended; Elisif (advised by the PC who recalls Markarth's lessons) issues an edict pardoning Forsworn fighters and inviting a summit in Markarth to negotiate peace – a use of **Diplomacy** by the PC on a national scale. The PC might travel one last time to **Understone Keep** to oversee this meeting between Silver-Blood representatives and Forsworn elders, resolving that long-standing intrigue with a treaty (perhaps even involving a **Fate Challenge** with social rolls to calm hostilities – success yielding an Aspect **"Peace in The Reach"** on the epilogue, failure meaning a simmering insurgency remains but reduced). Meanwhile, **Talos worship** resumes openly – when the Thalmor angrily protest, the Empire (backed by evidence the PC provided of Dominion misdeeds) refuses to enforce the ban, effectively nullifying that hated clause. The **White-Gold Concordat** is left in tatters; the Dominion must either swallow this defiance or reveal its weak hand post-war. A brief scene might show a Thalmor dignitary departing Elisif's court in a fury – a victory not just martial but ideological for the Nords. Ordinary citizens begin to see the Empire in a more positive light, not as overlords but as fellow victors against deception.

In both outcomes, the **PCs' personal stories** conclude with them at the center of Skyrim's future. They have become more than soldiers or adventurers – they are **statesmen, peacemakers, and champions** whose decisions shape the political and spiritual landscape. Importantly, they carry the weight of the campaign's

themes: *identity, ideology, tragedy, patriotism, and moral conflict*. They have forged an identity for Skyrim that transcended the simple dichotomy of Empire vs. Stormcloak – forging instead a narrative of *Skyrim united against the true evils of the world*. The tragedy of brother fighting brother is recorded in harrowing detail by the Bards College (with which the PC might collaborate to ensure a truthful, healing account). Patriotism remains, but wiser – the PC might establish, for instance, a memorial in **Whiterun**, on the very plains where the war's first full battle was fought. At its base, an inscription reads: *"May future sons and daughters of Skyrim remember: our blood is one when faced with the night."* This directly acknowledges the pain (blood spilled) and the ultimate lesson (unity against darkness).

In a final cinematic vignette, perhaps months later, the **High King/Queen (Ulfric or Elisif)** holds a grand moot or gathering at **High Hrothgar** – this time not for war, but for a *celebration of Skyrim*. Representatives from every hold, every faction – Companions, College mages, even a reformed Thieves Guild envoy – attend. The PCs stand at the High King/Queen's side as honored heroes. A **great horn (clock)** is sounded (or a metaphoric Fate **"scene aspect"** is invoked): **"The Dragonborn's Oath"** – that all in attendance swear to defend Skyrim together against any threat. The Greybeards bless the gathering with a deep resonant **"LAAS"** (meaning "life" in the dragon tongue) which echoes warmly. As mead is raised and old enemies clasp hands, the camera (so to speak) pans upward out of the hall to the clear sky above. The **aurora** dances over Skyrim, vibrant and peaceful, no longer torn by war. In that sky, for a keen eye, a flash of scale and wing might be seen – dragons still circle the world, but for now, **the land of Skyrim knows peace**, hard-won and well-deserved.

Campaign Module Conclusion: The Fate Core mechanics throughout have enabled epic narratives: PCs managed **extended conflicts with countdowns** (like siege progress clocks and Thalmor schemes) and felt the weight of **Consequences** that carried from Act to Act (Ulfric's poisoned wound, Ralof's crisis of faith, cities bearing aspects of unrest). They invoked **Aspects** like *"True Unity"* in the final moments to turn potential tragedy into alliance. The GM should reward players with additional **Fate Points** for resolving major story arcs – these can translate into lasting **character Aspects** on their sheets reflecting their legacy. For example, a PC might take **Aspect: "Hero of the Skyrim Civil War"** or **"Voice of Reconciliation"** – something that could influence any future adventures in Tamriel, marking them as a major figure. NPCs like Hadvar and Ralof have grown from simple soldiers to nuanced friends whose personal journeys (their **psychological profiles** of loyalty, doubt, and growth) reached fulfilling conclusions at the climax of Act IV, largely thanks to the PCs' interventions and the **compels** that drew out their deepest conflicts.

The **final scene** belongs to the players. As the new dawn's light breaks over the Throat of the World, painting the snow-capped peaks in gold, the PCs gather perhaps on the steps of High Hrothgar or at the gates of Solitude/Windhelm. They reflect on the long road from Alduin's epilogue to this moment. They recall the battles won and lost, the friends made and fallen. They stand now not as **Stormcloak or Imperial**, not as **outsider or native**, but as **Skyrim's champions**. In this moment of hard-earned peace, allow each player to narrate a short epilogue for their character: one might describe how they will take up the **jarl's mantle** and lead their hold with wisdom, another how they found a **quiet farmstead** to finally raise a family, hanging up their sword except when duty calls again. One may plan to go **dragon-hunting with the Dragonborn**, seeking new horizons with a certain gleam of adventure in their eyes (the open-ended future). Encourage them to tie their epilogues to their **aspects and consequences resolved**: e.g., a PC with *"Haunted by War"* might narrate how they build a veterans' hall in Whiterun to counsel other soldiers, turning that trouble into a positive Aspect *"Healer of War's Wounds"*.

As a **GM closing note**, you might address the players out-of-character: congratulate them on steering the fate of Skyrim and note how their choices led to this specific ending. In Fate Core style, highlight a few **"Fate Points well spent"** – the clutch invoke that prevented Ulfric's assassination, the compel that had Ralof see reason, etc., reinforcing how their creative play truly shaped the story. This reinforces that in Fate (and in this campaign), *the players' agency and the story's outcome are entwined*.

The **skalds** will craft sagas of these events. The **"Campaign Aspects"** that defined this module – *Civil War*, *Hidden Thalmor Menace*, *Ideals in Conflict* – have been resolved: the Civil War ended, the Thalmor menace unmasked and largely driven out, and the ideals (both Nordic freedom and Imperial unity) reconciled into a new, stronger theme: **Hope for Tomorrow**. The final image in the module might be an illustration of the PCs standing atop the Throat of the World at sunrise, cloaks fluttering, gazing out over the unified province they helped forge – a truly cinematic end.

Thus ends the Skyrim Civil War Campaign. The land's fate is secured, for now, by the players' hands. The **Game Master** is encouraged to continue the story if desired – perhaps segueing into post-war intrigues or the looming Great War with the Dominion – but as a self-contained saga, this campaign concludes with Skyrim entering a new era of dawn. The bards sing a final verse:

*"From Whiterun's flames to Solitude's sun,
Our heroes fought 'til peace was won.
Stormcloak courage and Imperial grace,
Together struck the Aldmeri base.
Talos smiles upon our land,
Freed from hatred, hand in hand.
By fate's design and heroes' end,
Skyrim stands, unbroken – to defend."* ¹³

This is the legacy of the PCs – a legacy that will guide Skyrim when the **next storm** comes, and one that turns war's tragic end into the promise of a united, stronger tomorrow. The **final Fate Point** is awarded to each player as the credits roll – for they have truly earned the title **"Saviors of Skyrim."**

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GM Tips and Campaign Retrospective: *(below are additional notes for the GM to consider after running the campaign)*

- **Player-Driven Outcomes:** This module provided numerous branching paths and optional scenes (like the High Hrothgar peace council) that can drastically alter the tone of the ending. Embrace the outcome your players steer toward. If they opted for uncompromising victory instead of reconciliation, frame the ending accordingly – perhaps a harsher but stable regime, and note that Consequences (like lingering rebel sympathies or embittered populaces) may persist as aspects into future play. Conversely, if they somehow brokered peace without a final battle, let that stand as their triumph (maybe Ulfric and Elisif forming a joint moot because of the PCs) – a rarer outcome but within Fate's flexibility. Every ending should address the campaign's core conflicts as resolved, one way or another, to feel satisfying.

- **Integrating Fate Mechanics in Final Sessions:** In the climactic scenes, many **aspects** were in play – encourage players to use their Fate Points to invoke those cinematic details. For example, in the final duel, a player could invoke Ulfric’s **“Thalmor’s Unwitting Pawn”** aspect (exposed in his dossier) to hit him with an emotional argument instead of a sword – possibly taking him out of the conflict by compelling surrender rather than dealing a killing blow. Likewise, the **final battle clocks** (like the Thalmor’s assassination countdown) can be represented physically on paper for players to see, heightening tension (“3 boxes left until Elenwen reaches Ulfric – what do you do?!”). The players’ quick thinking and use of Create Advantage actions (like rigging a bridge to collapse or rallying troops with a rousing speech) should be encouraged and rewarded, as these can dramatically swing the large-scale conflict in Fate’s narrative system.
- **NPC Fate Point Uses:** Remember that major NPCs (Ulfric, Tullius, etc.) have their own pools to spend. You demonstrated this when Ulfric perhaps invoked **“The Sons of Skyrim are my strength”** to boost his troops or when Tullius compelled **“By the Book”** on himself to initially insist on Ulfric’s execution. In the final sessions, using these NPC Fate actions lets the players feel the weight of these legendary figures, but by Act IV the players likely have more Fate Points and narrative control – appropriately, as the climax is their story to finish.
- **Aftermath and Sequel Hooks:** The module leaves room for further adventures. If a campaign were to continue, you could carry forward unresolved threads as **aspects** on the world. For instance, **“Unfinished Business of the Thalmor”** could be an aspect signaling that while Thalmor influence is curbed, agents still lurk (the PCs might hunt them down in a sequel). **“Skyrim Reborn, But...”** might denote an issue like economic strain or a resurgence of dragons (if running concurrently with the Dragonborn’s timeline) – giving a new storyline. Provide Fate Points to players when these world aspects complicate their peacetime life (e.g., a compel that a Thalmor assassin seeks revenge on a PC dignitary, dragging them into a cloak-and-dagger duel in the new court).
- **Character Advancement:** By campaign’s end, consider allowing players to rewrite one of their aspects or swap a stunt to reflect their growth. Perhaps a PC’s **“Vindictive Patriot”** trouble no longer applies after they learned mercy – they might change it to **“Protective Patriot”** or an entirely different trouble like **“Burdened by Expectations of Leadership”** if they took on a ruling role. This solidifies the campaign’s long-term impact on their personal identities.

The **Skyrim Civil War Fate Campaign** is now concluded, with the players having authored a new chapter in Elder Scrolls lore through collaborative storytelling and Fate Core’s dynamic mechanics. As a Game Master, take a moment to commend the group: they navigated complex plots of war, intrigue, and moral choice, and emerged not just as stronger characters but as part of Skyrim’s living history. In the end, the **world of Tamriel** is a little changed by their deeds – and should any dark clouds gather again on the horizon (whether Daedric princes scheming or the drums of the Dominion’s armies), the heroes of this saga stand ready, **fate tokens in hand**, to face whatever comes with courage and honor.

End of Campaign Module.

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