**Your town:**

You begin your adventure in the town of Merchant’s Rest, which sits sullenly upon a fork in the Olendel River at the edge of the Spirit Wood, resigned to its fate as a glorified tannery. Merchant’s Rest was once alive with strange folk, music, dance, and rare goods from across the freshwater sea known as Boro Lake. There were riveting tales to be heard from travelers who claimed to travel as far north as the high steppes of Om and as far south as the frozen jungle of Raga.

Trade started to slow as rumors of terrible beasts rising from the depths of Boro Lake became reports of ships disappearing and pirates taking control of major trade ports. Slowly, those who once came to do business and revel became fewer in number. Those residents who had better prospects elsewhere picked up and left as the economy choked.

One resident of Merchant’s Rest, the tanner Obelius Caul, saw an opportunity and petitioned some residents to stay and work at his tannery. After all, the Spirit Wood was still there and the capital needed its hides. Now, the tannery and its workers’ housing take up all but the former town center and the northeastern outpost. A few residents of the town stoically maintain some semblance of their old ways, but their lives are a faint, sad echo of what was and will never be again.

**Your nation:**

Merchant’s Rest is part of the nation of Novite, the massive nation-continent governed by the living god, Praesidio. It functions as a sort of theocratic oligarchy. Members of a ruling council, called the Order of the Stone, are elected by popular vote and, while worship of Praesidio is not required in Novite, being a member of its church is a prerequisite to running for council.

Life in Novite is good for those who are well-suited to stability and security. The nation prides itself on its tenets of order and forgiveness. Those who abide by its laws are rewarded with the opportunity to carve a life of security and prosperity in the capital or nurture a life of simplicity and comfort in the foothills and plains. Even those who find security and safety to be an insufferable bore can find their danger and excitement in the far reaches or the untamable places within Novite. Those who do not abide by its laws are restrained and then given opportunities to rehabilitate and reenter society in a way that works for them.

Not everything is perfect in Novite. There are those who would criticize the distribution of wealth, claiming that it is concentrated in Méa, the Capital city in the heart of the Shield Mountains, and that towns in the foothills and plains are all but forgotten. Some would say stability without upset leads to stagnation and corruption, and that it is unreasonably difficult for the young to stray from the path laid out for them by their parents. Change is not valued highly enough by the god, Praesido, some say (only in whispers, of course).

**Your God:**

Praesidio is the living god of all things. It is by Praesidio’s mercy that the people of Novite are granted peace and safety from the evils of this world. There are those who rejected Praesidio’s mercy, eons ago, and they were sadly lost to the Waste. This pains Praesidio deeply, and it is not something that Praesidio will allow to happen again. There are evils beyond the Waste that wish to cover the world in darkness and decay, and they are held at bay only by the might of Praesidio.

Praesidio is a god of mercy, not punishment. Those who stray from the path shall be given every opportunity to find their way to fulfillment within the vast and diverse nation. In people, there is hope. However, the evil from beyond the waste does occasionally find its way into Novite, and Praesidio is forced to call upon the Agents of Stone, the mortal extensions of the immortal being. All tremble before the unthinkable power of the Agents of Stone. Nothing can oppose their intention.

**Your job:**

You have been enlisted into the Defense and Acquisitions Ready Reserve, a branch of the Novite military which falls under the Department of Anomalies (DA). This branch is responsible for handling any situations for which there are no established protocols. The Defense and Acquisitions Ready Reserve consists of the kinds of people who can handle anomalies (they are often anomalous themselves). The DA scouts for these kinds of people on the fringes of society and beyond. Here are some ways in which one might end up in the Defense and Acquisitions Ready Reserve:

* You were a criminal with a particular set of skills and you were offered military service as a path to rehabilitation
* Your family has worked in the mines for generations (a proud and lucrative profession near the capital), but you don’t want to inherit that lifestyle. This is one of the few ways out.
* Your family might have a tradition of serving in this particular branch of the military and you are following in those footsteps
* You were a mercenary from the far reaches or the Waste who heard there’s good job security near the capital. Service in the military could grant you capital citizenship.
* You demonstrated special abilities as a child, your family was approached by a DA scout, and you were drawn to the prospect of adventure and treasure and stuff.

**Your station, The Merchant’s Rest Operations Headquarters (Northeast OHQ):**

The OHQ was established in Merchant’s Rest nearly two centuries ago after the peace treaties with the Whisper Tribes were finalized. The trade hub is located east of Méa, at the edge of the Spirit Wood. It once served as an outpost to guard against any threats from the forest, keep the peace with the Whisper Tribes, and pursue any leads about potential assets which came from travelers to the trade hub. Its reputation has diminished significantly in the past two decades, as most opportunities for glory have gone with the trade.

A recent initiative was passed by the Order of the Stone to beef up security around the capital. More and more refugees from the lands surrounding Boro Lake seek refuge in the protected lands near the capital, and they bring tales of pirates, cultists, unnatural beasts, madness, and corruption. Communication with the Whisper Tribes has all but ceased as they have begun to retreat deeper into the forest or disband entirely. The Spirit Wood is more dangerous than ever, and far less predictable.

You are the first wave of new recruits to reach the Eastern OHQ. Your commanding officer is Captain Cassia Callas, a spirit-touched Knight of the Wood, former emissary to the Whisper Tribes. She has seen this OHQ through its height of glory, its fall, and she intends to see it rise to a place of honor once more. She will not tolerate sandbaggers, but she will also do everything she can to help you succeed if she believes that you mean well.