

SECRET OF THE COLD SPIRITS

OR THE COMPELLING CASE OF THE CORRUPT COUNSELOR'S CRAVEN KIDNAPPING

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INTRODUCTION

This game is designed to be played as a roleplaying event in the Lord of the Rings Online. The game is similar to a murder mystery party, modified to work inside a virtual environment. Seven volunteers are needed to run the game. There is no limit to the number of people who can play.

The person organizing the game is called the "host". The host should read all of the game materials, becoming familiar with the story, clues and solution. During the game, the host will need to introduce the game, answer questions from participants, and collect their answers. When it is time for the game to end, the host will announce the names of the winners.

The game requires a cast of six actors willing to play specific roles in the story. Five of these actors become the suspects in the story. The sixth actor plays the role of the Chief Investigator. One or more additional actors can participate as Road Wardens. This role is optional but highly recommended.

The actors must be available for the entire event. They will need to read the material for their game persona, roleplay this persona, describe clues that can be found in their area, gossip about other suspects, and answer questions. It is best to provide all actors with the appropriate game materials at least an hour before the game begins.

All other participants take the role of investigators – Bounders, sheriffs, constables and rangers. They will explore the environment, investigate clues, interview suspects, and try to solve a crime. When each participant thinks he has the correct solution, he will whisper his answer to the event host. The winners of the game are those who correctly deduce *who* commit the crime and *why* they did it.

SCENE BY SCENE

The game is divided into "scenes". During each scene, certain events will take place. Specific details for the host and suspects are provided later in this document.

Scene One - The host welcomes the guests to the event, explains how the game is played, and introduces the Chief Investigator. This part of the game is out-of-character.

Scene Two – Roleplay begins. The Chief Investigator recites the basic story to the participants. He reveals the names and locations of the suspects.

Scene Three - The investigators search for clues, interview the suspects, and submit their findings to the host.

Scene Four – The Chief Investigator calls everyone together. Participants are given one last chance to submit their answers to the host. The suspects line up where everyone can see and continue to roleplay appropriately. The C.I. reads the solution to the mystery. The host announces the winners of the game. The guilty suspect is escorted away by the Chief Investigator or driven off by an angry, jeering crowd.

SETTING UP

This document has been written with square brackets [] around text that needs to be modified to suit your particular game. For example, replace all occurrences of [CI] with the name of the character who will portray the Chief Investigator. There are also brackets around personal pronouns such as she, her and hers where the gender of the character is not known.

The suspects should be stationed at different locations around the neighborhood where the game is taking place. Ideally, each should be in an adjacent home. When deciding where to locate the suspects, keep these tips in mind. They should be far enough apart that several participants can question them without blocking the view of other key areas. If possible, participants interacting with one suspect shouldn't be able to hear the /say and /emote chat of participants talking to another. Each suspect and their surrounding area should be a separate roleplay encounter.

Some participants will solve the puzzle quickly and submit their answers to the host long before the game is over. You can keep them entertained until the mystery is revealed by asking musicians to perform. Designate a stage area away from the actors. An ideal stage has an open area with room for dancers. Invite solo musicians and bands to provide entertainment during your event.

PREPARING THE LOCATION

The story is designed to be hosted at five nearby locations in the same neighborhood. A kin house is exceptionally useful as the location for scenes one and four. Property guards can be used as NPC town guards, making sure that suspects don't leave their assigned locations.

Housing items should be placed to help enhance the roleplay locations and make them memorable. The adopted sibling, merchant, and banker should be in areas with fancy furnishings. The party crasher would look appropriate in a location with an odd mix of items and styles. The farmer's décor should look cheap and worn.

It is important not to decorate with items that will cause actual harm to an investigator or transport them away from the story area. Avoid decorating with a Moria Keg, Inn League Keg, or Sinister Keg.

PREPARING THE ACTORS

Before the game begins, the host will need to decide which actor will play each of the special roles in the story. Although a character type has been recommended for each role, they can be played by characters of any race or gender with minor modifications. Once each actor has been assigned a role, the host should give them the information for that role found at the end of this document.

The host and actors should join a fellowship to allow for private communication during the game. The host may also wish to target mark himself and the actors to make them easier to find in a crowd.

Actors should dress appropriately for their role. Each actor can find fashion and roleplaying suggestions with their character information. Weapons should be unequipped. Only small, non-flying, quiet pets should be summoned.

Most importantly, actors should read their game materials and become familiar with them before the game begins. They must be prepared to quickly and accurately provide information to the other participants. They will reveal critical gossip and clues. If the information is lost or changed, the game won't work properly.

PLAYING THE PART

Actors must be careful not to accidentally reveal the solution to the mystery. They should act somewhat suspicious and cast dispersions on the other actors. They should be reluctant to talk about themselves but quick to gossip about others. All of the suspects have something to hide and are determined to prove their innocence. No one is certain who is guilty until the solution to the mystery is revealed.

Clues are hidden in the information that the suspects know about each other. They are revealed through in-character dialog. Clues should be revealed to participants who roleplay well and ask intelligent questions, even if they're not the "right" questions. Actors must be careful to reveal each clue several times. The participants can't solve the mystery without them. Suspects can phrase the clue dialog any way they like to best match the role's personality.

The Chief Investigator can call attention to clues as he moves around the game area.

Road Wardens should roleplay as guards from the nearest city, keeping the peace.

Participants will visit the suspects at different times. Actors must be prepared to reveal the same information repeatedly. They may find the LotroPad plugin useful for storing dialog text and pasting it into the chat window.

When a suspect is asked question related to the story but not covered by his background information, there are several ways he can respond.

- Divert the question to another suspect or the Chief Investigator. *"I don't know why you're asking me about that, you should really be asking so-and-so!"*

- Turn the question on the participant. *"I don't like where this is heading. I tell you I'm innocent, but where were you when Mr. Toper disappeared?!"*
- Carefully change the topic and reveal something from the background information.
- Simply answer, *"I don't know"* or *"How should I know that?"*

When suspects are asked general questions that are not covered by their background information, they are free to make something up. In fact, improvisation is encouraged when not giving out specific clues. Suspects may want to keep things simple – the more complex the story becomes, the harder it is to maintain during the event.

Actors should not give out specific times that events took place. Instead, they should give answers such as *"earlier today"*, *"before the party started"*, *"when I turned around"*, or simply *"I don't recall"*. There aren't any clocks or wristwatches at the location.

All suspects should remain in their assigned roleplay areas until the host is ready to reveal the mystery. They must not roleplay directly with the other suspects during the investigation. If necessary, they should pretend that they cannot hear conversations between the participants and other suspects. When the Chief Investigator calls everyone together during the final scene, suspects may roleplay with each other.

COSMETIC TIPS

Actors must be easy for participants to identify. Each actor should wear a distinctive outfit that plays to the stereotypes of his role.

Outfitters in Bree, Celondim, Michel Delving, Rivendell and Thorin's Hall sell several useful cosmetic items at affordable prices.

There are a number of hand-held cosmetic items that can enhance an outfit – Pitchfork, and Shovel can be purchased from the Mathom Society with sufficient reputation. Cornstalk and Lantern can be acquired at the Farmer's Faire. Basket of Apples and Fall Gourd and can be bought at the Fall festival.

Road Wardens may wish to remain mounted during the event to make them easy to find. They could also carry lanterns or wear identical uniforms.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

Don't stand in one place the entire time. Occasionally move to a new location. For example -- sit on a bench or chair, warm yourself at the fireplace, pace over to a window and look out, or walk closer to an investigator who is asking questions.

It is more fun to interact with suspects that are visually appealing. Use emotes that include an animation. The following emotes may be useful -- /agree, /ahem, /angry, /beckon, /beg, /blush, /confused, /cough, /cower, /crazy, /cry, /dustoff, /fidget, /grumble, /impatient, /look, /lookaround, /mock, /mumble, /point, /roar, /rude, /sad, /scold, /scratch, /shakefist, /shiver, /shrug, /sigh, /smackhead, /smoke, /sorry, /stare, /story, /stretch, /sweat, /tantrum, /thank, /think, /wait, /wave, whippitydo, /wince, /wink, and /yes.

Actors can enhance their roleplay by using Mood emotes. These emotes change the expression on their character's face. The default is `/mood_calm`. Other useful emotes are `mood_angry`, `mood_apprehensive`, `mood_confused`, `mood_fearful`, `mood_happy`, `mood_mischievous`, `mood_sad`, `mood_solemn`, and `mood_surprised`.

Give clues about how your character is feeling. For example, you might say `/em looks nervous`, `/em scowls, resenting the accusation.`, or `/em sighs with frustration.`

You can change the text of an emote by typing additional text after the command. For example, if you type `/wave`, you will see "You wave to everyone" and they will see "[Your name] waves." If you type `/wave greets everyone with a broad smile.`, you will perform the Wave emote and everyone will see "[Your name] greets everyone with a broad smile."

Avoid using modern slang, abbreviations or "leet speak" in your dialog. You don't have to remain polite or calm in-character, but do keep everything you say family-friendly

Clear your active title or set it to something appropriate to your role. Some of the best titles are social and must be gained by receiving certain emotes. If you do not have the appropriate social emote, you will need to begin unlocking it 20 to 40 days in advance. Eating Barrow-bree cheese from Haudh larchith will allow you to apply "the Unwise" title. The survival title "the Wary" may be appropriate. If you're roleplaying a fisherman, activate a fishing hobby title. There are also a number of appropriate class titles.

The following are regions with useful deed titles:

Barad Gúlaran – Keeper of Books. Urugarth – Torch-bearer. Bree-land – Watcher of Roads. Barrow-downs – Grave-digger. Great Barrow – Maze Explorer. Old Forest – Root-hewer. Enedwaith – Banisher of Spirits, Clear-cutter, Dark Hunter, Follower of the Long Road, Little Wonder, and Wood-chipper. Ered Luin – Wolf-tamer. Sarnúr – Master of Beasts and Troll-kicker. Eregion – Lore-seeker. Tham Mírdain – Diplomat, Forge-warden, Librarian, and Tutor. Helegrod – the Selfless. Moria – Twist-tongued, and Well Travelled. Fil Gashan – Infiltrator. Forgotten Treasury – Treasure Hunter. Halls of Crafting – Master of the Anvil. Nalâ-dûm – Cold-blooded. The Shire – Pie-runner, of the Quick Post, and Shire Brewmaster. Mathom Society – Purveyor of Odd Things. Ale Association – Creep and the Sinister.

GAME INFORMATION

Scene One – Welcome

The following text should be announced to all participants by the host at the start of the game. The suspects should already be in their roleplay locations.

Welcome, guests! You are taking part in a solve-a-mystery game, a roleplaying event where you are investigators tasked with solving a crime.

I am your host for this event. Our story today is “Secret of the Cold Spirits” or “The Compelling Case of the Corrupt Counselor’s Craven Kidnapping”. This building will be the scene of the crime.

To win the game, you must correctly identify WHO commit the crime and WHY they did it. Once you have decided on an answer, /tell (whisper) it to me in secret. The first three who /tell me the correct answer will win a prize!

Once the game begins, please stay in-character when using /say and emotes. Use /tell or the OOC channel to ask me any game-related questions. The Chief Investigator, [CI], will answer your in-character questions.

The suspects and evidence will be located at five different houses – [the cabin at #7 Chestnut Street, the lodge at #8 Chestnut Street, the cottage at #3 Garden Street, the lake house at #4 Garden Street, and the home at #3 Fountain Street].

[One or more] road wardens will ride along roads in this area. They can help you find each of the roleplay locations. They are [insert names here].

To solve this crime, I suggest that you visit each of the suspects – [Adopted Sibling], [Banker], [Party Crasher], [Merchant] and [Farmer]. Feel free to visit them as many times as you like and ask them any number of questions.

The Chief Investigator has information about clues found here and on the suspects. Make sure to ask [him] what has been discovered thus far.

While you roleplay, please do not invent your own clues or evidence. Don't trust gossip from other participants. Only the five suspects and the Chief Investigator have official game information

The game will end in 90 minutes. At that time, [CI] will gather everyone together here at the ranch. [He] will reveal the mystery and I will announce the winners. Prizes will be awarded and the guilty party will be driven from our peaceful neighborhood in shame.

If you have out-of-character questions about how to play the game, please ask them now.

The host should wait for any last minute questions.

Now it's time to begin the game. Please remain in-character from this point forward. Let's roleplay!

Scene Two – Introduction

The following text should be announced to all participants by the Chief Investigator when roleplay begins. Start the 90-minute timer immediately afterward.

Greetings, investigators! A crime has occurred here in [Raglan] and we need your assistance. The victim is Mr. Marlow Toper, a retired barrister. Guests were gathering for his annual Ice Wine Festival when he was discovered to be missing.

There are a few drops of blood in his bedroom and a few more near the front door. Furniture was knocked over but not broken. In addition, the shipment of ice wine is missing – the crate is empty!

The scene of the crime is here at [9 Chestnut Street]. We don't know if Mr. Toper is alive or dead, so we must solve this mystery quickly. I have narrowed our investigation down to five suspects.

Each suspect has been confined to a house for the duration of this investigation. I ask that you interview them, look at the evidence, and determine what took place. Who is responsible for this contemptible crime and why did they do it?

Our suspects are [Adopted Sibling], [Banker], [Party Crasher], [Merchant] and [Farmer]. You can find them at [the cabin at #7 Chestnut Street, the lodge at #8 Chestnut Street, the cottage at #3 Garden Street, the lake house at #4 Garden Street, and the home at #3 Fountain Street].

If you get lost, speak to me or a road warden. Please return here and whisper to [Host] in private (/tell) when you are finished with your investigation. The festival cannot continue until the mystery is solved!

Scene Three – Investigation

The Chief Investigator should help everyone find the roleplay locations and offer advice on how to solve the mystery. Road Wardens should make sure the participants can locate each of the roleplay locations. The host should keep track of each investigator's guess and what time it was submitted.

The Chief Investigator can offer these tips in addition to his own.

A good investigator always takes notes, so that no clues are forgotten.

Don't spend too much time with any one suspect. Make sure you have enough time to interview all of them

If you're hoping for a direct answer, ask a direct question. Be specific!

Remember the six basic questions – Who, what, where, when, why and how.

Look for motive and opportunity. What do the suspects have against the victim?

If you figure out how the crime was committed, it will be easier to decide who could have done it.

The innocent suspects won't lie about clues, though they may be mistaken. They will all claim to be innocent.

If there is a large crowd interviewing one suspect, move on to another and go back to that house later.

There are a few drops of blood in Mr. Toper's bedroom and near the front door. Furniture was knocked over but not broken. The ice wine delivery crate is empty.

The following text should be announced by the host at appropriate times. It may be necessary to use a public channel to reach all participants.

May I have your attention, please? There is only thirty minutes left to complete your investigation and /tell me of your findings.

Investigators, your attention please! Time is almost up. Ask your final questions. You must /tell [Host] who commit this crime and why within the next 15 minutes.

Before making this announcement, the host should instruct the actors to politely stop answering questions.

It is time to end our investigation! I will wait a few minutes while final reports are submitted. You must /tell [Host] who commit this crime and why within the next 5 minutes. If you have already given your report, please meet inside [the ranch at 9 Chestnut Street]. Thank you!

SUSPECTS SHOULD NOT READ SCENE FOUR!

Scene Four – Mystery Revealed

The Chief Investigator should call all investigators and suspects back to a central location where the mystery will be revealed. Suspects should stand in a row where everyone can see them and roleplay appropriately during the announcements. The suspects may now roleplay with each other.

The Chief Investigator should read the following text once the participants have assembled. The text in brackets [] should be replaced with the appropriate names and pronouns.

Investigators, it is time to gather together and announce our findings! Here before you are the five suspects – [Adopted Sibling], [Banker], [Party Crasher], [Merchant] and [Farmer].

Based on your research, I have been able to reconstruct the events that transpired. Our men are on their way to rescue Mr. Marlow Toper as we speak.

We shall soon see who is responsible for this crime and what drove them to such a disreputable act!

Let's begin with [Adopted Sibling]. Friends of the Toper family have long known about the animosity between Mr. Toper and his adopted [brother]. The relationship has become so strained that they seldom speak.

[Adopted Sibling] went upstairs to find out why Mr. Toper was late to the party. [He] discovered the ransom note left behind by the kidnappers and concealed it. Why, do you ask?

[Adopted Sibling] knows how many people Mr. Toper has wronged over the years and decided that Bree-land would be better off without him. If no one paid the ransom, perhaps Mr. Toper would never be seen or heard from again.

[Adopted Sibling] would inherit everything some time later when Mr. Toper was declared legally dead. For shame! Still, this does not make [him] the guilty party.

[Farmer] was caught with a large sum of money and a document that gave [him] sufficient reason to hate Mr. Toper. As it turns out, [Farmer] lost [his] farm to foreclosure a few years ago.

When the farm fell on hard times, [Farmer] signed a loan contract that was predatory and unfair, with a concealed loophole that cost [Farmer] everything. Mr. Toper and [Banker] wrote the contract and talked a trusting [Farmer] into signing it.

The farm is held by Mr. Toper, who rents it back to [Farmer]. Sadly, the rent is so high, [Farmer] has not been able to save up enough to buy the farm back. So, did [Farmer] do away with Mr. Toper and steal money to repay the loan?

Indeed not! As it happens, [Farmer]'s employees at the farm have been saving their copper and silver all this time. They gave the money to [Farmer] so that [he] could buy the farm back as a cooperative.

Mr. Toper invited [Farmer] to this festival as a snub, but [Farmer] intended to turn the jest around by buying back [his] property! [He] is not the one we're looking for.

Now we will examine the clues surrounding [Banker]. [He] is a greedy, manipulative person if ever there was one. Mr. Toper knows about all [his] questionable dealings and could certainly blackmail [him].

[Banker] was discovered with the key to Mr. Toper's secret vault in his possession. [He] is one of the few individuals who knows the location of the vault and how much money is hidden inside.

Mr. Toper never lets the key out of his sight. Did [Banker] steal the key, write a fake ransom note, and hire thugs to kidnap [his] former partner?

As it happens, Mr. Toper sensed that mischief was afoot and gave the key to [Banker] for safe-keeping. Why was [Banker] so alarmed when [he] discovered that the ice wine is missing?

[He] knew that Mr. Toper had an argument while purchasing the ice wine late yesterday. [Banker] summoned the town guard to search for the victim and the secret vault is untouched. [He] is innocent.

Now we are down to two suspects – the well-known thief who crashed the party and the merchant who brought the ice wine from distant lands.

Is [Merchant] responsible for the kidnapping? When [he] was examined at the beginning of this investigation, we found a tear in [his] shirt sleeve and drops of blood on the front of [his] clothes.

[He] claims that [he] tore the shirt and cut [him]self while delivering a keg this morning. Where is the cut? Why didn't [he] have time to put on a clean outfit before the party? Didn't [he] notice the damage?

[Party Crasher] has a criminal record in Bree-town. [He] has been caught stealing before, but was never arrested for a violent crime. [Party Crasher] stole an invitation from a mailbox in town to trick [his] way into the party.

[Party Crasher] claims to have fallen on bad times since Chetwood brigands destroyed [his] property. We caught [him] with items stolen from this house! [He] could sell them easily on the black market.

Was [Party Crasher] here looking for the key to the secret vault? Did someone hire [him] to locate the vault itself?

We know that [Merchant] was seen at the house this morning with several of [his] hirelings, supposedly delivering a keg, yet [Adopted Sibling] tells us that all the alcohol was delivered late yesterday.

[Party Crasher] remembers [Merchant] arriving just after the party began, looking a bit disheveled and out of breath. [He] had obviously been busy elsewhere.

You see, Mr. Toper drastically underpaid [Merchant] yesterday for the delivery of the ice wine. He knew that [Merchant] wouldn't be able to find another wealthy buyer before the delicate wine went bad.

Mr. Toper also threatened to start rumors and cost [him] future business. [Merchant] had no choice but to accept the lesser amount of money, until [he] had an idea...

[He] could ransom Mr. Toper back to his family for the sum [he] feels [he] is owed. [He] just didn't realize that [Adopted Sibling] would hide the ransom note!

The wagon with a keg spotted near the house this morning was actually the method by which Mr. Toper was kidnapped. He was knocked unconscious, concealed within the empty keg, and taken away!

[Merchant] came to the party as an alibi, and to figure out why the ransom wasn't paid earlier in the day. [He] is our guilty suspect!

All other suspects are now free to leave... or remain and enjoy the party as they choose. As for [Merchant], [he] deserved fair compensation but went about getting it the wrong way.

Let's show [Merchant] how we feel about kidnapping! Rotten fruit to the ready!

The actors and participants should be encouraged to use Rotten Fruit and emotes such as /scold, /mock and /rude on [Merchant].

Once [Merchant] has been escorted or driven out, the host should gather everyone back together at the main party location.

I would like to thank all of our investigators for bringing this case to a successful conclusion. Please stay and enjoy the hospitality of Windy Acres Ranch. Food, ale and pipe-weed are available in abundance. Let the Ice Wine Festival begin!

[Host] will announce the names of the first three investigators to successfully deduce both the identity and the motive of the suspect after a short break.

SUMMARY INFORMATION FOR THE HOST

THE STORY

Several events take place before the game begins, leading up to the crime. The following is a summary of these events.

The Backstory

[Adopted Sibling] has always been a thorn in Mr. Toper's side. As a child, he resented the arrival of a new sibling. He wanted all of the attention for himself. He often tormented [Adopted Sibling], saying that [his] birth parents didn't want [him] and that [he] was left in the forest to die. Mr. Toper believes that [Adopted Sibling] stole a large portion of his birthright when his parents passed away. A few times when Mr. Toper intended to use his position as a barrister for ill purpose, [Adopted Sibling] threatened to report him. Unlike [Banker], Mr. Toper didn't have anything to hold over [Adopted Sibling]'s head, so he was forced to relent.

Several years ago, [Farmer] fell on hard times and couldn't afford to run [his] farm. [He] went to [Banker] for a loan to make it through the drought season without having to lay off any employees. Mr. Toper and [Banker] drafted a devious loan contract. When [Farmer] wasn't able to repay the loan on time, the property was purchased by Mr. Toper. He rented it back to [Farmer] at such a high rate that [Farmer] couldn't put any money in savings. Recently, [Farmer]'s employees surprised [him] with a great gift. They saved a portion of their wages all this time and offered the money to [Farmer] in order to buy back the farm as a cooperative. [Farmer] was very grateful and readily agreed.

[Party Crasher] used to be a respectable craftsperson, until brigands from Chetwood stole everything of value and left [him] beaten in [his] own front yard. The community had fallen on hard times so there was little assistance offered. [Party Crasher] had heard about Mr. Toper's and [Banker]'s shady business deals and blamed them for some of the local poverty. One evening, while drinking ale at the Prancing Pony, [he] overheard the barrister and banker talking about the Ice Wine Festival. Mr. Toper was going to fetch money from a secret vault to pay for party food and decorations. [Party Crasher] became determined to find that vault and steal the money. [He] checked mailboxes every day until [he] managed to steal an invitation. Since most of the guests would be wearing traditional masks, [he] knew it would be easy to bluff [his] way in.

Last week, [Merchant] and [his] hirelings arrived to sell goods around Bree-town. Yesterday, [he] went to the ranch to meet with Mr. Toper and sell the ice wine for the festival. Mr. Toper offered only 70% of the agreed upon price. He knew that [Merchant] wouldn't have time to find another buyer wealthy enough to pay for a crate of expensive, imported wine. The delicate wine had already spent weeks arriving from foreign lands and it wouldn't last much longer. [Merchant] had to accept the deal or risk making no money at all on the shipment. Mr. Toper also threatened to destroy [Merchant]'s hard-earned reputation in the community if he didn't accept.

[Merchant] and [his] hirelings discussed the situation late into the night. They eventually came up with a plan to kidnap Mr. Toper and ransom him back for 30% of the amount that had been agreed upon for the wine. They assumed that [Adopted Sibling] would find the note in the morning and pay it by early afternoon.

[Banker] and Mr. Toper have been friends for many years. Their business dealings have been mutually profitable. They could easily blackmail each other, so neither of them dares to cross the other. This has led to a strange bond of trust between them. Mr. Toper and [Banker] wrote the loan contract that doomed [Farmer]'s farm to foreclosure. The night before the party, [Banker] and Mr. Toper met to finish some business, leaving the weekend free for revelry. Mr. Toper seemed pensive and distracted but wouldn't say why. He entrusted the key to his secret vault to [Banker], something he had never done before.

The Day of the Party

[Merchant] arrives in the morning with his hirelings and kidnaps Mr. Toper. There is a slight struggle in the bedroom, since Mr. Toper slept in late. Furniture is knocked over. [Merchant] punches Mr. Toper in the face to convince him to stop struggling, causing a bloody nose. There is a second struggle near the front door. A small part of [Merchant]'s shirt is torn. They load Mr. Toper into a keg in a small wagon which Merchant drives off into the woods. The hirelings leave the ransom note, pause to snack on a few fancy appetizers while having a good laugh, divide the crate of ice wine between them, and then walk to their camp in the woods.

[Adopted Sibling] notices the wagon with the keg heading toward the house but thinks nothing of it. Later, [he] visits Mr. Toper's house briefly to make sure all of the party decorations are in order. [He] doesn't see his sibling but isn't surprised, since Mr. Toper is usually scarce when there is work to be done. [He] notices several dwarves leaving the house when [he] arrives. After checking on the food and drink, [he] returns home to get dressed for the party.

[Adopted Sibling] returns after a short while, before the other guests. [He] goes upstairs to chide his tardy sibling and discovers the ransom note. [He] makes a rash decision to conceal it.

[Farmer] arrives at the party second, carrying a copy of the loan contract and a large sum of money. Although Mr. Toper sent the party invitation as an insulting act of charity, [Farmer] intended to turn the slight back on [his] host by re-purchasing the farm.

[Party Crasher] arrives third, knowing there will be fewer guests who might realize [he] isn't who [he] claims to be. [He] makes idle conversation but takes advantage of every opportunity to search the house for the secret vault. [He] also swipes a few small valuables when [he] realizes that Mr. Toper is going to be late to his own party.

[Banker] arrives next, fashionably late but not so late as to offend [his] host.

The ransom deadline comes and goes without payment, so [Merchant] rushes to the party to investigate. [He] had been invited but had no intention of attending until now.

Guests begin to ask after Mr. Toper. [Adopted Sibling] hopes to conceal the kidnapping as long as possible. [He] goes upstairs to pretend to talk to [his] older brother, planning to come back down to make his apologies. [He] was going to lie and claim that Mr. Toper had taken ill from staying up too late the night before.

[Banker] notices [Merchant] and is reminded of the ice wine. Unfortunately, [he] can't find any to drink and goes looking for the crate. To [his] dismay, the crate is empty. [He] goes upstairs to inquire with Mr. Toper, only to find [Adopted Sibling] there. The drops of blood and damaged furniture prompt [him] to call the city guard.

The guard arrives. The guests are sorted and suspects are identified. Each of the five suspects is sent to their home to wait for interview by investigators. In [Merchant]'s case, [he] is sent to the house [he] is renting until spring trading is done.

LOCATION SUMMARY

Here is a list of locations, with the actors and clues found at each. This should be adjusted to fit the game site and available props.

Location 1 – [9 Chestnut Street] – Mr. Toper’s Home

This is the start and ending location of the event.

Décor: Rare and expensive items, books, trophies, kegs and tables of food.

Location 2 – [3 Fountain Street] – Banker’s Home

[Banker] can be interviewed here.

Décor: Valuable items, fancy rugs and tapestries.

Location 3 – [3 Garden Street] – Party Crasher’s Home

[Party Crasher] is located here.

Décor: Poor furnishings, worn items, signs of poverty.

Location 4 – [4 Garden Street] – Merchant’s Rental Home

[Merchant] is located here.

Décor: A mix of Dwarvish and other foreign items, a small keg.

Location 5 – [7 Chestnut Street] – Farmer’s Home

[Farmer] can be found here.

Décor: Well-mended but simple furniture, potted plants and gardens.

Location 6 – [8 Chestnut Street] – Adopted Sibling’s Home

[Adopted Sibling] is waiting here.

Décor: Expensive but tasteful items, paintings and pets.

CONTACT THE AUTHOR

The game designer can be contacted in-game as “Kiralynn” on the Landroval server, or by email at kiralynn@roll3d6.com. Feel free to send questions, suggestions and comments. Please include “Mystery Game” in the subject line.

Hosting a mystery game? Kiralynn would love to see your screenshots!

The Windy Acres Ranch web site is located at <http://WindyAcres.MyMiddleEarth.com>

INFORMATION FOR THE ACTORS

The host should distribute each suspect's information only to the player who has been assigned that role. If possible, replace the names in brackets with the appropriate character names. Actors should be given at least an hour to prepare for the role.

INFORMATION FOR SUSPECT 1 – "ADOPTED SIBLING"

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Male or female human.

How To Prepare: Wear something fashionable and expensive, yet tasteful. Think of some short, embarrassing childhood stories to tell about your older brother, Marlow Toper. Bring Rotten Fruit to throw when the guilty person is revealed.

Location: [Indoors at 8 Chestnut Street]

Description:

You are an artist with a love of nature. You are also highly intelligent and well-educated. You had to be clever to survive as Marlow Toper's unwanted sibling.

Reason For Conflict:

You know about many of Marlow's and [Banker]'s predatory deals. You have an intense dislike of Marlow for being a cruel sibling and for abusing his power as a barrister. Because Marlow isn't married, you stand to inherit everything upon his death.

The Plan:

You found signs of a struggle in your sibling's bedroom earlier in the morning. There was also a ransom note asking for a sizable sum of money, but not more than the family could easily pay. You decided to conceal the note and Marlow's disappearance, in the hope that the kidnappers wouldn't return him.

Clues To Reveal:

- You have a ransom note on a piece of parchment. It was hidden in your clothing until the Chief Investigator found it.
- [Merchant] and his hirelings were at the house early this morning. They seemed to be delivering a keg of ale. When you visited the house later, you noticed that there weren't any new kegs from the day before.
- [Farmer] was the first suspect to arrive at the party. [He] looked smug and self-satisfied.
- [Farmer] took out a loan several years ago during a terrible drought and couldn't pay it back. [He] lost [his] farm because Marlow and [Banker] tricked [him] into a contract with a cruel and clever loophole.
- Perhaps [Farmer] wrote the ransom note to raise enough money to buy back [his] farm, without using the money [his] employees gave [him]. After all, making the farm a cooperative means losing complete control over it.

- If [Party Crasher] killed Marlow, [he] could have stolen the cloak clasp right off of Marlow's chest. It's too beautiful and valuable to resist. (This is almost a lie, since you know Marlow has been kidnapped, but not quite!)
- Marlow would never trust anyone with the key to the secret vault, especially not [Banker]. After all, [Banker] knows where the vault is. [He] must have stolen it from your brother.
- [Banker] has been involved in many shady deals with Marlow over the years. No doubt [he] fears that your brother could blackmail [him] any number of ways.

Answers To Common Questions:

- *Where were you when Mr. Toper disappeared?*
 - At home, getting ready for the party.
- *Do you have a reason to dislike Mr. Toper?*
 - Yes. He's a corrupt barrister who flaunts his wealth. He was also a cruel older brother when you were very young.
- *Who do you think did it?*
 - If you had to guess, it was probably [Farmer]. [He] lost [his] beloved farm. [His] employees are like family, so Marlow made more than one enemy on that deal. People like [Farmer] are quick to think of violence as a solution. Perhaps [he] already spoke to Marlow and your brother wouldn't sell [him] the farm. The farm hands might be the kidnappers.
- *Why does [Banker] think you did it?*
 - [He] is Marlow's best friend. If your brother doesn't like someone, [Banker] doesn't like them, either.
- *Why doesn't Mr. Toper trust you with the key to the secret vault?*
 - Marlow probably would have, but [Banker] happened to be the one he was with late last night. You had already retired for the evening.
- *What about the inheritance?*
 - You hope to use it to aid the community, perhaps undo some of the damage your brother has done.
- *Did you write the ransom note?*
 - No. It's not even in your handwriting.
- *Why didn't you report the ransom note?*
 - Everyone would be better off if Marlow was gone. He dug his own grave. The kidnappers might have just taken the money and killed him anyway.
 - It crossed your mind that Marlow might have faked his own ransom note to trick you out of money, since he has never forgiven you for receiving a large sum in your parents will.
- *What does the ransom note say?*
 - In large, blocky letters, it reads – "Leave 300 gold at the gnarled, lightning-burnt tree on the edge of Midgewater Marsh by one hour past noon or Marlow Toper will be fed to the giant spiders!"

Timeline From [Adopted Sibling]'s Point Of View:

You have always been a thorn in Marlow's side. As a child, he resented your arrival and wanted all of the attention for himself. He often tormented you, saying that your birth parents didn't want you and that you were left in the forest to die. Marlow believes that you stole a large portion of his birthright when his parents passed away. A few times when Marlow intended to use his position as a barrister for ill purpose, you

threatened to report him. Unlike [Banker], Marlow doesn't have anything to hold over your head, so he was forced to relent. He hates you for it.

Yesterday, [Merchant] and [his] hirelings arrived to sell the ice wine. There was a heated negotiation, which seemed normal for two strong-willed and stubborn men.

Early this morning, you noticed the dwarves dropping off another keg of ale at Marlow's house. Later, you visited his house briefly to make sure all of the party decorations were in order. You noticed that there wasn't an extra keg of ale and that some of the appetizers had been eaten. You didn't see your sibling but you weren't surprised, since Marlow is usually scarce when there is work to be done. After checking on the food and drink, you returned home to get dressed for the party.

You went back after a short while, before the other guests. You went upstairs to chide your tardy sibling and discovered the ransom note. You made a rash decision to conceal it.

[Farmer] arrived at the party shortly after you. Although Marlow sent the party invitation to [him] as an insulting act of charity, [Farmer] looked surprisingly smug and self-satisfied. [Party Crasher] arrived next. [Banker] arrived fairly late, as usual. [Merchant] arrived last.

Eventually, guests began to ask after Marlow. You hoped to conceal the kidnapping as long as possible. You went upstairs to pretend to talk to your older brother, planning to come back down to make his apologies. You were going to lie and claim that Marlow had taken ill from staying up too late the night before. [Banker] walked into the bedroom and found you standing there. [He] noticed the overturned furniture and blood, then called the city guard. You were sent home to await interview by investigators.

INFORMATION FOR SUSPECT 2 – "BANKER"

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Human or hobbit of either gender.

How To Prepare: Wear expensive, elegant clothes. Speak in a formal manner. Invent a few predatory loans to brag about. Bring Rotten Fruit to throw when the guilty person is revealed.

Location: [Indoors at 3 Fountain Street]

Description:

You are very shrewd and opportunistic, without an ounce of guilt. You look down your nose at lesser people. Only idiots are poor; smart people always find a way to be rich.

Reason For Conflict:

You have the key to Marlow Toper's secret vault, where all his money is hidden. It is cleverly concealed in his house. Marlow could blackmail you and send you to prison for life, but you could easily blackmail him as well. Your mutual trust is based on the ability to destroy each other. This makes for an odd friendship.

Clues To Reveal:

- Ice wine is a favorite drink of yours. You were the first to notice that the ice wine crate is empty. You went upstairs to look for Marlow and tell him the bad news.
- You have the key to Marlow's secret vault. He gave it to you late last night.
- Marlow seemed distracted and worried last night but wouldn't say why.
- Marlow and [Adopted Sibling] never got along with each other. They have had some legendary arguments.
- Marlow obviously doesn't trust [Adopted Sibling] because you were given the key.
- [Farmer] must have stolen the money [he]'s carrying. You know how much is in his bank account, and it isn't nearly that much.
- [Party Crasher] was probably hired by [Adopted Sibling] to find the vault and rob it.
- Marlow paid [Merchant] only 70% of his asking price for the ice wine, which was a fair deal, but [Merchant] was furious about it. Marlow had to put him in his place. The two of you laughed about it over a drink at the Prancing Pony last night.
- You can't trust dwarves. They're prone to greed, stubbornness, and outbursts of anger. It's a shame they're necessary for foreign trade.
- When you went upstairs to look for Marlow Toper, you found [Adopted Sibling] in his bedroom, standing next to overturned furniture. There were also a few drops of blood on the floor.

Answers To Common Questions:

- *Where were you when Mr. Toper disappeared?*
 - Running late. Most of the other suspects arrived before you.
- *Do you dislike Mr. Toper?*
 - Not at all. The two of you have a healthy respect for each other, and a mutually beneficial business arrangement. If he is dead, it can only hurt your business. His investments are a large portion of your holdings.

- *Who do you think did it?*
 - It has to be [Adopted Sibling]. You caught [him] at the scene of the crime. [He] has a fake ransom note that [he] hoped to use as proof of [his] innocence. [He] has always been jealous of Marlow and has tried to sabotage his business arrangements more than once. [He] is lucky the Toper family took [him] in and ought to be more grateful.
- *Why does [Party Crasher] think you did it?*
 - That dirty thief will naturally accuse the most successful person in the room. It's pure class envy. Besides, that rogue has been lying since [he] tricked [his] way into the party.
- *Why did Mr. Toper give you the key?*
 - He seemed to sense that something bad was going to happen. He knew that you could be trusted with it. He obviously didn't trust his [brother], [Adopted Sibling].
- *Where is the secret vault?*
 - Somewhere in the house. Obviously you won't reveal more than that, not even to the city guard. It's none of their concern.

INFORMATION FOR SUSPECT 3 – "PARTY CRASHER"

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Human or hobbit of either gender.

How To Prepare: Wear something that seems rich to you, but is really a cheap knock-off that is a little tacky. After all, you had to beg, borrow and steal most of it. Make sure you have a masquerade mask, not an animal or Halloween mask. Bring Rotten Fruit to throw when the guilty person is revealed.

Location: [Indoors at 3 Garden Street]

Description:

You used to be a respectable craftsperson (pick a craft you can chat about). You weren't a criminal until you fell on hard times and no one was willing to help. Brigands from Chetwood robbed your home and left you beaten and unconscious in your front yard. Without tools and supplies, you couldn't practice your trade. Life has taught you some bitter lessons. You are clever, resourceful, and charming when you want to be.

Reason For Conflict:

Mr. Toper is a leech that drains the community. While children starve in the alley, he throws a big party with expensive wine. He should be helping those in need.

The Plan:

One evening, while drinking cheap ale at the Prancing Pony, you overheard the retired barrister (Mr. Toper) and the banker ([Banker]) talking about the Ice Wine Festival. Mr. Toper needed to fetch money from a secret vault to pay for food and decorations. You became determined to find that vault and steal the money. You checked mailboxes every day until you managed to steal a party invitation. Since most of the guests would be wearing traditional masks, you knew it would be easy to bluff your way in.

Depending on this suspect's race and gender, the invitation was stolen from:

- Elf – Northel (female) or Durvenel (male).
- Dwarf – Osur Stouthammer
- Hobbit – Albra Lowbanks (female) or Leland Underhill (male).
- Human – Sally Marshfell (female) or Dalton Willow (male).

Clues To Reveal:

- You have fallen on hard times, it's true, but you're not so desperate for money that you would kill someone. Murder is very different than theft.
- You were found with a men's gold cloak clasp in your possession. You stole it while searching the house.
- You were searching the house for the secret vault that you overheard Mr. Toper talking about one night at the Prancing Pony.
- Mr. Toper and [Banker] were sharing a bit of cruel laughter about [Merchant] last night at the Prancing Pony. You're not sure what they were talking about.
- If Mr. Toper turned up dead, [Banker] could lie about how much money was in his vault and keep a portion of it for [him]self.

- You tried to talk to [Banker] during the party but [he] seemed agitated. [He] was in a hurry to leave and brushed you off.
- You stole the invitation from a mailbox in Bree and pretended to be that person. The mask was a perfect disguise at this party.
- [Adopted Sibling] knows the house better than anyone except Mr. Toper. If anyone managed to steal the wine and abduct the victim without being seen, it's [him].
- [Adopted Sibling] could get close enough to Mr. Toper to knock him out, even kill him. Anyone else would seem out of place creeping around the house.
- [Adopted Sibling] probably faked the ransom note. Forgery is a classic scam.
- [Farmer] lost his farm. [His] family and employees are in a bad situation. If you were [Farmer], you'd have done something about it by now.
- [Merchant] looked a little out of breath when [he] arrived late at the party.

Answers To Common Questions:

- *Where were you when Mr. Toper disappeared?*
 - You were practicing acting like a rich snob in front of the mirror, so that you could talk your way into the party.
- *Do you dislike Mr. Toper?*
 - Who doesn't? Even other rich people are always backstabbing each other for an advantage.
- *Who do you think did it?*
 - [Banker]! [He] has the key to the secret vault. Nobody kidnaps a powerful man for a crate of ice wine. If it wasn't for corrupt people like [him], townsfolk wouldn't have to steal to survive. You've heard that [he] sends thugs to break bones if someone doesn't pay their loan on time.
- *Why does [Merchant] think you did it?*
 - Thieves are a merchant's worst enemy. They'd like to see all criminals put in prison, even homeless children who steal an apple off the cart. [He]'s not going to blame a customer.
- *Did someone hire you to find the vault and steal the money?*
 - No. You're not a mercenary for hire. Why split the money with someone?
- *Was Mr. Toper wearing the cloak clasp when you took it?*
 - No. You found it in his room upstairs. He has so many expensive trinkets, he won't miss a few.
- *Why didn't you notice signs of a struggle?*
 - You noticed the overturned furniture, but it wasn't any concern of yours. You didn't see the spots of blood. You were busy looking for the secret vault.
- *Have you ever kidnapped or killed anyone?*
 - Never. You don't even fight unless you have to. You're not a violent person.

INFORMATION FOR SUSPECT 4 – "MERCHANT"

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Dwarf of either gender.

How To Prepare: Wear a formal, Dwarf-style outfit. Think of trade goods that you bring from the Blue Mountains to trade in Bree-land, in addition to ice wine.

Location: [Indoors at 4 Garden Street]

Description:

You are stern and driven when it comes to business. You can be stubborn and perhaps a little greedy, but that just makes you more successful as a merchant. You have to be smart when dealing with the wealthy – they'll cheat on a deal if they can.

Reason For Conflict:

You delivered the crate of ice wine to Mr. Toper as promised, but he changed the deal. He only paid you 70% of what he promised. When you refused to sell for that price, he pointed out that few people can afford to buy the shipment. The ice wine had to make a long journey from the Blue Mountains, so it won't be good much longer. Also, Mr. Toper threatened to ruin your reputation with other wealthy residents of Bree-land. You reluctantly took the lesser amount. That evening, you and your three trusted hirelings began to plan a way to recover the additional gold.

Clues To Reveal (some are falsehoods):

- You have a few drops of blood on the front of your shirt. There is also a small tear on a sleeve. Although this happened while you were kidnapping Mr. Toper, claim that you got a small cut and damaged your clothes earlier this morning while dropping off a keg of ale.
- [Adopted Sibling] stands to inherit a fortune, now that Mr. Toper is gone. [He] didn't get a full share when their parents passed away. Mr. Toper saw to that.
- [Adopted Sibling] either wrote a fake ransom note or concealed a real one. If [he]'s willing to go that far, what else is [he] capable of?
- Mr. Toper mentioned that [Farmer] was invited just to "rub things in", and hoped [Farmer] wouldn't drink much of the ice wine.
- [Farmer] resents foreign merchants that import goods, especially wines and produce, because [he] thinks it cuts into local business. The truth is, you can't make good ice wine in Bree-land. The soil and weather aren't right for it.
- [Party Crasher] is probably a Chetwood brigand. [He] undoubtedly has experience in murder and theft. Only an experienced criminal could disappear with Mr. Toper.
- Someone ought to go to Bree to check on the person [Party Crasher] was pretending to be. What happened to that poor [man/woman/hobbit/dwarf/elf]?
- Mr. Toper said that he was going to use another banker, since he didn't trust depositing his money with [Banker]. That's probably why he needed a secret vault. If [Banker] knew about this, [he] would have to take action to prevent it.
- Ice wine is [Banker]'s favorite drink. [He] probably stole the bottles of wine from the crate so that [he] could claim you never delivered it.
- [Banker] has a bad reputation for crooked deals and predatory lending.

Answers To Common Questions:

- *Where were you when Mr. Toper disappeared?*
 - Lie – claim that you and your hirelings were dropping off a keg of ale, and you let your hirelings eat a little free food before the party. They earned it.
- *Do you dislike Mr. Toper?*
 - Lie – you don't particularly dislike him. He has been a good customer. Delivering wine for the festival is a good excuse to visit the wonderful city of Bree. You hope to expand trade in this area, to everyone's benefit.
- *Who do you think did it?*
 - Lie – It must have been [Party Crasher]. [He] is a known thief. It's utterly ridiculous to suspect any of the honest businessmen of Bree-land or an upstanding merchant such as yourself. Perhaps Mr. Toper caught [him] in the act of stealing and [Party Crasher] was forced to do away with him.
- *Why does [Farmer] think you did it?*
 - [Farmer] is an uneducated peasant who doesn't trust foreigners, especially dwarves. It's really quite insulting to be accused simply because of one's race. You come from a long line of honest merchants.
- *Why does [Adopted Sibling] claim that an extra keg wasn't delivered?*
 - That's a good question. Perhaps Mr. Toper put it in storage to use later. Maybe [Party Crasher] stole it. Who knows? You really hadn't noticed it missing because you were detained before the party really got started.
- *Why were you out of breath when you arrived?*
 - Lie – You were running late and didn't want to be rude to your host. Dwarves don't believe in being "fashionably late".
- *Where are your hirelings?*
 - Lie – At a guest house in Bree. They will be preparing for the journey back to your homeland. You were planning to stay in Bree-land longer, but these baseless accusations have made you feel unwelcome.
- *Where were you cut and why isn't it still bleeding?*
 - You were cut hours ago, so of course it isn't bleeding. Dwarves are a hardy race. It's on your upper arm, so you can't show it without taking off your shirt. You're not willing to undress in front of strangers.

Timeline from [Merchant]'s Point Of View:

Last week, you and your three hirelings arrived to sell goods around Bree-town. Yesterday, you went to Mr. Toper's house to sell him the ice wine for the festival. Mr. Toper offered only 70% of the agreed upon price. He knew that you wouldn't have time to find another buyer wealthy enough to pay for a crate of expensive, imported wine. The delicate wine had already spent weeks arriving from your homeland and it wouldn't last much longer. Mr. Toper also threatened to destroy your hard-earned reputation in the community if you didn't accept. You had to accept the deal or risk making no money at all on the shipment. With great resentment, you took the deal.

You and your hirelings discussed the situation late into the night. You came up with a plan to kidnap Mr. Toper and ransom him back for 30% of the amount agreed upon for the ice wine. This would bring you up to payment in full. You assumed that [Adopted Sibling] would find the note in the morning, when [he] arrived to decorate for the party. The family has plenty of money to pay the small amount you were asking for. The note

read, "Leave 300 gold at the gnarled, lightning-burnt tree on the edge of Midgewater Marsh by one hour past noon or Marlow Toper will be fed to the giant spiders!"

You and your hirelings took a large hand cart with a small, empty keg of ale to Mr. Toper's house. The fool was sleeping in late, so you were able to ambush him in the bedroom. A few pieces of furniture were knocked over in the struggle. You punched Mr. Toper in the face and knocked him out, giving him a nose bleed. There was a little struggle by the front door, but you were able to haul him outside. While you concealed Mr. Toper in the keg, your henchmen went inside to sample some of the party appetizers that had already been delivered. Although you didn't ask them to, your hirelings stole the bottles of ice wine out of the crate. You were disappointed with them but didn't have time to argue. With great amusement, the four of you hauled Mr. Toper to your secret camp in the woods.

You went to the Prancing Pony to create a public alibi while your hirelings kept an eye on Mr. Toper and waited in the marsh for payment. The ransom deadline came and went. Eventually, it was the hour of the party. You had to figure out what was going on and avoid suspicion, so you rushed to Mr. Toper's house to investigate.

A short while later, guests began to ask after Mr. Toper. [Adopted Sibling] went upstairs to prod [his] tardy elder brother. [Banker] followed [him] upstairs shortly after, looking concerned. You could barely overhear a garbled conversation with raised voices. Perhaps they were just now discovering the ransom note. Soon after, the city guard was called and the chief investigator sent you to your rental house to wait.

The Big Reveal

When the Chief Investigator names you as the guilty suspect, admit it proudly! Mr. Toper tried to cheat you and owes you money. All this would have been over hours ago if [Adopted Sibling] had simply paid the debt. Mr. Toper is barely even hurt. If you let one customer get away with dealing dishonestly, they'll all start doing it.

INFORMATION FOR SUSPECT 5 – "FARMER"

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Female human.

How To Prepare: Wear the nicest outfit that a poor farmer can afford. If possible, equip a pouch or satchel. Bring Rotten Fruit to throw when the guilty person is revealed.

Location: [Indoors at 4 Garden Street]

Description:

You are protective of your family and employees. You are also a little suspicious of dwarves and elves, perhaps even a bit racist. You often speak fondly of the farm that has been in your family for generations. Despite the lack of formal education, you're a smart person, capable of managing a large farming operation.

Reason For Conflict:

Several years ago, during a year of unusual drought, you borrowed money from [Banker] to keep the farm operating. You couldn't stand the idea of laying anyone off – your workers are like family. You read the document but didn't understand all of the legal jargon. [Banker] told you it was standard legal text and convinced you not to worry about it. For a time, everything seemed to be working out well.

Unfortunately, you couldn't make all of the payments on time. [Banker] had written a clause into the loan contract that caused an immediate foreclosure. The property became owned by Mr. Toper, supposedly because he had put up the money for that particular loan. Mr. Toper agreed to rent the farm back to you, but the rent is so high that you haven't been able to save any money.

Recently, your employees came to you with an amazing gift. They have been saving money all this time and have raised enough to help you buy back the farm. They have asked that you purchase it as a cooperative, meaning that each of you becomes part-owner of the farm, based on how much you contributed toward the total cost. You agreed immediately. These workers have been with you for years and you trust them.

You were trying to think of the best way to approach Mr. Toper and buy back the farm when the Ice Wine Festival invitation arrived. You knew that Mr. Toper invited you to show off his wealth and pretend to be a generous landlord. He enjoys rubbing your nose in his success. This looked like the perfect opportunity to buy back the farm in front of his guests and embarrass him in public.

Clues To Reveal:

- You have a copy of the loan and rental contracts in a pocket. You brought them in case Mr. Toper tried to trick you and avoid selling you the farm.
- You have a large sum of money with you, more than is required to buy the farm. You had a little extra and brought it in case Mr. Toper or [Banker] invented some kind of repayment penalty.
- [Adopted Sibling] and [Banker] were the only ones who knew about the secret vault before now. It must be the biggest cache of money outside of the city.

- You saw [Party Crasher] having a serious conversation with [Adopted Sibling] when you arrived at the party. They spoke too quietly for you to overhear.
- [Party Crasher] is a known thief who spent time in Bree jail. The Chetwood brigands recruited [him] some time ago. They oversee all the crime in this area and take a share of the profits.
- [Merchant] is a shady, greedy dwarf. All dwarves are cursed with unnatural greed.
- You only deposit a small amount of your money with [Banker]. You don't trust [him], but you don't feel safe keeping all of your money hidden at home.
- [Banker] has very expensive tastes. [He] wants a bigger house and finer clothes. [He] gets very jealous of Mr. Toper sometimes. Jealousy can make you do things you wouldn't normally do.
- The only people who don't hate [Banker] are people too rich for [him] to swindle or too poor to save money on account.

Answers To Common Questions:

- *Where were you when Mr. Toper disappeared?*
 - You walked here from your farm, which is located to the northwest. That's where the money was hidden.
- *Do you dislike Mr. Toper?*
 - Mr. Toper is a rum-nosed, jug-bitten, banjanxed lout, with more penny pots than spots on a cow. You dislike [Banker] even more. Once you buy back the farm, you hope that you never have to deal with either of them again.
- *Who do you think did it?*
 - [Merchant] must be the one. [He] is a shifty foreigner and there is blood on [his] shirt. Isn't it obvious?
- *Why does [Adopted Sibling] think you did it?*
 - You'll be the first to admit, you have said some terrible things about Mr. Toper, especially after a couple of brews at the Pony. You were just letting off steam. You didn't mean everything that you said.
- *Did you know about the secret vault?*
 - You didn't know about it until the Chief Investigator found the key on [Banker]. You're not surprised to learn that even Mr. Toper didn't trust [Banker] with all of his money.
- *Why did you take a loan from [Banker] if [he] has such a bad reputation?*
 - There aren't many places to borrow large sums of money in Bree. Besides, this was several years ago, when you hadn't heard much about [Banker].

INFORMATION FOR THE CHIEF INVESTIGATOR

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Any race and gender.

How To Prepare: Wear something that looks official, perhaps a hauberk. Study the clues carefully. Bring Rotten Fruit to throw when the guilty person is revealed.

Tasks: Reveal key clues. Offer tips on how to investigate. Warn all participants when time is running out. Answer in-character questions.

Clues To Reveal:

- [Farmer] was taken into custody with a large sum of money and a loan contract in [his] possession.
 - [Merchant] was found with a few drops of blood on [his] shirt and a torn sleeve.
 - [Banker] was discovered to possess the key to Mr. Toper's secret vault.
 - [Adopted Sibling] had a ransom note from Mr. Toper's kidnappers in [his] pocket.
 - [Party Crasher] is a known thief who spent time in Bree jail. [He] had one of Mr. Toper's fine golden cloak clasps in [his] pocket.
 - The crate in which the ice wine was delivered is empty.
 - There are a few drops of blood in the bedroom. Some furniture had been overturned. There were also drops of blood by the front door.
 - Mr. Toper has not been seen since late last night.
-

INFORMATION FOR ROAD WARDENS

The words "he" and "him" are used in this text, however this persona can be either gender.

Suggested Character Type: Any race and gender.

How To Prepare: Wear something that looks official, perhaps a hauberk. Try to wear the same outfit as other wardens. Carry a sword or dagger. Bring Rotten Fruit to throw when the guilty person is revealed.

Tasks: Help participants find all roleplay locations. Ask participants to unequip large weapons and dismiss pets.

Clues To Reveal:

- Suspect #1, [Adopted Sibling] the adopted sibling, is located [indoors at 8 Chestnut Street].
- Suspect #2, [Banker] the banker, is located [indoors at 3 Fountain Street].
- Suspect #3, [Party Crasher] the party crasher, is located [indoors at 3 Garden Street].
- Suspect #4, [Merchant] the merchant, is located [indoors at 4 Garden Street].
- Suspect #5, [Farmer] the farmer, is located [indoors at 7 Chestnut Street].
- Mr. Toper's home and the ice wine festival is located at [9 Chestnut Street].