

The Duchy of Falcondale

The Duchy of Falcondale is small and remote, well away from Aurinesse, the capital city of the Kingdom, its annoyingly efficient town watchmen and infuriatingly alert nobles. Falcondale is reputed to be fabulously wealthy, owing to the gold and jewel mines in its central mountains. The Duchess of Falcondale is a noted beauty, known for her extravagant collection of expensive silk gowns and the latest imported fashions from across the Azure Sea.

It sounded like an excellent place for a "working vacation", far away from the capital and the unpleasantness of people who know all about a certain stylishly-dressed Elven jewel thief.

You've been here a couple of weeks and the place does not disappoint. You've already slipped into a minor ducal reception and spied on the Duchess first-hand- her clothes are sumptuously rich silks and velvets, tastefully accessorised with fur and big fat sparkly diamonds and rubies. You could live like a princess for a year on just one. Even better, the security here seems to be very low-key, quite unlike the paranoia of Aurinesse.

A few facts: the only settlement of any size in the whole Duchy is the city of Falconstone, based around Castle Falconstone. Neither would rate more than a "small town" down south, but up here that's the height of sophistication. There's a few thousand people in the city, at most. The town watch seem fairly with it, but you've yet to see any detective wizards or judicial paladins.

Imaginatively, the local currency is called gold falcons. Falcon flags fly everywhere. It's very tiresome, they should have chosen a flock of sheep as their emblem instead.

The rest of the Duchy is a bunch of small villages, mines in the central mountains with the usual complement of grumpy dwarves, a few orcs and ogres and giants in the higher reaches and many more of them in the wild mountains which enclose the Duchy to the north, east and west. The local Elves are mostly river-folk, living on boats and houses on stilts out in lakes. They seem stand-offish, which is good because being invited to the naming day parties of a dozen random elves just because you said hello in the street gets tiresome; no-one can be THAT merry.

You've made contact with a thieves' guild fence in the city already - his name's Terrence and he's a total wet lettuce. He runs a little cloth and tailoring shop in town with a nice line in imported silks for noble lords-and-ladies undies. You thought you'd got him completely wrapped around your little finger.

But he seems to be scared that you're going after real jewels and stuff worth serious money, rather than the penny and half-penny trash the local ineffectual street low-lives fence through him. He's probably worried about getting exposed, upsetting his nice little knicker business and landing him with risk of actual prison-and-torture-and-punishment. Wimp.

You've a fairly strong inkling that dear Terrence is tattling to the town watch, which is something you're probably going to have to deal with. You've not been formally introduced to anyone else in the Thieves' Guild yet. Allegedly the boss is someone calling themselves the Silver Sceptre, which is totally a real name and not some no-hoper pretending to be a big scary Sorcerer-Thief, oh no.

The local street thieves are a sorry bunch, mostly sticking to picking the pockets of out-of-towners like drunk Dwarven miners and boat elves out for a night on the imported southern wine.

Intriguing rumours:

- 1) There's a big-shot wizard called Hermanticus who lives in a traditional wizard's tower just outside town. Wizards always have good stuff, and rumour says that he has a beautiful wife who never speaks and rarely leaves the tower, but is always bedecked in emeralds and gold filigree from head to delicate toe. They say there's a dungeon underneath the tower full of loot from Hermanticus' adventuring days, too.
- 2) The biggest local temple is to Zemir, god of destiny (and law). Rumour has it that the high priest, Ernould the Resolute, has been up to things he shouldn't have, possibly with Ismaya, a senior priestess of Niphine, the goddess of professions (which includes miners, merchants and boat-men and which explains her popularity in this no-fun town). Temples are RICH. Maybe blackmail?
- 3) The lizardfolk down by the river not far from town are rumoured have a secret temple to Ixone, goddess of Envy, adorned with gold statues with jewels the size of your fist. It's autumn and getting cooler, the lizardfolk will surely be a bit sluggish by now and easy to sneak past?
- 4) The Duke is distinctly unfriendly towards elves. Apparently some Elven princess once cut him dead and totally embarrassed him at a grand royal ball in Aurinnesse and he has never forgiven it. The girl in question sounds remarkably like dear half-sister Renestrae, the oh-so-perfect bitch who married a prince and who your whole family won't shut up about. Even a thousand miles away she's making your life actively more difficult. Cow.
- 5) The head of the town watch is a grumpy old git called Redegain the Cat - not because of his great agility but because of his reputed habit of sleeping at least eighteen hours a day. The one to watch out for is his deputy, Senzoreth the Scorpion, who is not called that because she sleeps in people's boots. She's a real fanatic, apparently. Bit how bad can a small town deputy be?
- 6) The minor nobility of the Duchy come to town rarely; they mostly keep to their country estates. There are a couple of balls per year when they come to court, but you've just had the last one of the autumn and the next one isn't until early summer when the snows melt on the mountain roads so the rural hick barons can get their wagons to Falconstone.
- 7) There are orcs and hobgoblins in the sewers. Of course there are, there always are. They are probably as imaginary here as everywhere else, a tale to scare the credulous.
- 8) A magnificent white dragon called Medresat, champion of the yellow (whatever that means) is reputed to live at the top of the central mountains. A dragon's horde is a big too high to aim for even for you, for now, but who knows for the future?
- 9) More prosaically but much more usefully, Orc bandits are known to have set up shop in a ruined keep off the western road. They caused much consternation at the recent ball, having attacked the convoy of the Baron of Falconwood West (these people are sheep! Baa! Pick a better name!) and allegedly carried off his niece, a bunch of servants and guards and a whole lot of loot- she was laden down with gowns and jewels for her debut at court. There's a reward for her rescue and a pile of loot to pilfer- how scary can a few orcs in a ruined keep be?

You're currently rooming at the The Cunning Falcon Inn (you see what I mean about sheep? There are about eight more Falcon-something Inns and Screeching-Falcon-or-other taverns in town). It is not the best the city has to offer, but the purse is a bit light after a long journey from the capital.

One big heist and you'll be upgrading to the Black Butterfly, an altogether more salubrious rooming inn used primarily by visiting rich folk and nobles. At least one of which you hope to be yourself, very soon. And without having to marry a boring old prince, too. You'd case the place for a robbery but all the rich folk have just gone home for the winter, and you'd prefer to leave it as an option to move into yourself in a few weeks once you've struck it rich. So best not spoil the porridge by risking staff members recognising you as a dashing jewel-thief.

Summary of People

Duke Eldon Falcondale - local ruler
Duchess Viessa Falcondale - local ruler and dream robbery target, oh yes
Terrence - wimpy merchant, dubious side-business as a fence, ratting you out to the town watch
The Silver Sceptre - reputed head of local thieves' guild
Hermanticus - local wizard-in-a-tower with a mysterious wife and a dungeon full of loot
Ernould the Resolute - high priest of Zemir, god of destiny and law, local big wig possibly dodgy
Ismaya, senior priestess of Niphine, goddess of professions. Possibly doing the dirty with Ernould
Renestrae, your darling half-sister who married a prince who NO ONE WILL SHUT UP ABOUT
Redegain the Cat - lazy, grumpy old git in charge of the town watch
Senzoreth the Scorpion - fanatic deputy of the town watch with a zealot's gleam in her eye. Avoid
Baron Donendyl of Falconwood West - minor noble, orcs kidnapped his niece
Lady Avryl Falconwood - niece kidnapped by orcs on way to recent ball along with servants & loot
Medresat, champion of the yellow - white dragon who lives in the mountains
Boris - landlord of the Cunning Falcon Inn, where you are currently staying

Gods and Goddesses

Zemir, god of destiny and law, a whole bunch of no fun. Takes the place of local sky-father patriarch deity and the death-and-burial god locally, too. He's the only god with a temple or shrine in town, the rest are minor goddesses who are all reputed to be his wives and/or daughters (sometimes both at once) in local mythology.

Niphine, goddess of professions, whose idea of a good time is doing the accounts
Ixone, goddess of envy. Never one to let her temples go unadorned by magnificent wealth. Reputedly a shrine to her at among the lizardfolk down by the river
Dheremis, goddess of Miracles. Useful healing goddess who doesn't demand a total fortune for services, has a small temple in town.
Qodione, goddess of fertility. Small shrine in town, much bigger out in the countryside. Reputed to sponsor occasional orgies, but never by anyone who has actually been to one of these bacchanalian feasts

Summary of rich robbery targets

Castle Falconstone and the Duke and Duchess of many rich clothes and fist-sized rubies
The wizard's tower (and dungeon full of loot)
The temples of Zemir and Niphine in town, with the potentially-blackmailable clerics
The orcs who kidnapped Lady Avryl Falconwood, her debutante ball clothes and jewels, and her servants
The reputed temple of Ixone in the lizardfolk encampment down by the river