a 5th Edition D&D campaign

SESSION #1
RED LARCH
It is early spring on the Sword Coast and the cold grasp of winter is fleeing, although stiff breezes still soar through the air, especially at night. The adventure begins in the small mining community of Phandalin approximately one month after the horrific eruption of Mt. Hotenow to the north and the partial destruction of the city of Neverwinter.

Rumors fly high and wide regarding the nature of the eruption, from warring gods to fickle giants to even worse, darker tales. But after some time has passed and nothing else seems to evolve from the devastating event, days return to normal for Phandalin, and especially well for dwarf prospector Gundren Rockseeker who has rediscovered and reopened the long lost Mine of Phandelver, after the help of some very brave heroes.
Gundren is happy as a clam. The Mine of Phandelver has been operation for a few weeks now and it is pumping out a healthy supply of minerals and metals.

He wants to get some of his new wares out and he arranges a sample of raw tin, nickel and iron to be carted several hundred miles east to the town of Red Larch were he knows some potential clients. But it’s a long, long journey, and his former adventurous allies, Cora, Carp, Elgweth and Thorin, left for Neverwinter a month ago and he’s hasn’t heard from them since.

He hopes nothing bad has happened to them...
Fortunately for Gundren, there are some new travelers in town and they look suitably formidable enough to survive a long overland trek from Phandalin to Red Larch to deliver his shipment of ore to interested parties.

These three 3rd level heroes recently arrived from The City of Splendors:

1) “**Hadrian Garyx**” male aasimar paladin of Bahamut
2) “**Serena Vortex**” female genasi sorcerer
3) “**Brey**” male elf rogue/ranger /druid
Now these three heroes have been traveling together for a short while, and Brey and Serena both have some affiliation with the Emerald Enclave. The elf Brey in particular has loyalties with a small subset of the Enclave that is elf-centric. All of these characters have intricate and unique backstories, more than I am going to info-dump here, but they’ll slowly come out in play.

But there’s one more person who wants to make the trip as well now that there’s an escort going – Lady Ghaele of the Shrine of Luck. She’s been having dream visions that she is meant to do her duty at the Allfaiths Shrine in Red Larch, and this is the perfect opportunity to get there safely.

So the ox-led wagon is loaded up with heavy ore and crates and boxes and the group piles on or walks alongside and the lengthy, dusty journey
to Red Larch begins, some 300 miles and many days and nights of camping. Along the Triboar Trail they don’t encounter any raiders or bandits, and Gundren told them this is because the last group of heroes in the region, the ones who went to Neverwinter, cleared out every single last orc at **Wyvern Tor!**
So they pass Conyberry and eventually reach Triboar and then head south through Westbridge toward Red Larch, and around here I started making lots of random encounter rolls...

...and they all yielded NIL.

That’s right, it was a lonely, easy-peasy-this-is-breezy-journey with not a whiff of danger or fart of excitement or tidbit of mystery. Sure, I could have pulled from the book but I wanted to see what the random element of dice gave us, and they gave us nada.

The only thing they do notice is that way, way off in the distance there are dark clouds brewing over the Sumber Hills with the occasional flash of lightning sparking vividly against the blackness, but that’s hundreds of miles away.

![Image of a stormy sky with lightning](image)

Eventually after many long days of toil and travel the group arrives safely in Red Larch.
Red Larch is a fairly quiet town of at least 1000 people, mostly human but there is a smattering of demi-races as well. Horses and carts toil in the streets and bells clang in the distance. Chickens dart between their feet and cows moo and bellow as the group slowly enters town with the ox-pulled cart of ore from Gundren’s mine.

“I need to find the Allfaiths Shrine,” says Lady Ghaele. “In my dreams I must come here to serve Tymora, the Lady of Luck.”

The Allfaiths Shrine is not difficult to find. The front door is garishly emblazoned with most of the benevolent faiths of the Realms and the doors are flung wide open. Lady Ghaele enters with the paladin Hadrian Garyx at her request while the elf Brey and the genasi Serena wait outside, the latter playing a flute...
They immediately meet one of the current residents of the shrine, a middle aged, burly human who introduces himself as Sir “Rel” Relvaunder. Sir Rel is a devout priest of Tempus and has only been stationed here at the Allfaiths Shrine for 2 weeks. As he explains, it is common for traveling priests to remain here for a full month in a type of sabbatical, and the priest of Sune had been there until just that very morning. Surely Tymora herself must have arranged such fortunate timing for Ghaele to now arrive!

He gives Lady Ghaele a brief tour of the facilities and shows her where she’ll be sleeping, and while she is making herself at home he pulls Hadrian aside and says, “Friend, perchance, are you affiliated with the Order of the Gauntlet? I have a feeling about you…”

Well, Hadrian the paladin is not officially affiliated with the militant order of the Gauntlet, but he knows about it, and Rel seems eager to induct him (insert raunchy induction jokes).
Rel goes on to question Hadrian about any news along the road, particularly about the missing delegation.


“Really? No gossip or roadside rumormongering? They were bound south from Mirabar, must have been a group of at least 15 or 16 people, and they vanished somewhere in the Sumber Hills not but a week ago. No one has heard from them since, not a single peep from a survivor. I heard they even had a fallen knight in their midst, a champion from Icewind Dale they were bringing all the way south to bury in warmer lands of his original home. Impressive, yes? All the way from Icewind Dale!”

Sir Rel goes on to explain that although he is new here in Red Larch, and probably won’t stay long past his month rotation, he has heard strange whisperings and dire tidings. The weather has been odd too, and although he’s not seen it so much himself, he’s been hearing stories of hail the size of fists and flash floods that wiped out entire farming communities.

“There is something happening out there, I can feel it. But what it is I cannot say for sure.”

So there’s some more roleplaying that goes on here, and while they’re doing that, the elf rogue/ranger/druid Brey pokes around the main streets looking for something interesting, and he hasn’t gone far when he finds it:

They passed it actually on the way into town but he didn’t notice at first glance – the sign for Haleeya’s Bathhouse says in stylized letters:

*Enter & Enjoy!*

But the two E’s are a hidden call sign for the Emerald Enclave, the secret faction of which he and the genasi sorceress are affiliated. This is a contact location. Brey doesn’t enter yet but he does note its location.

The group of three reconvenes outside and the paladin tells the others what he heard, that there are some rumors of strangers about town and a missing delegation of people who vanished in the hills not far away. But for now they need to complete the mission they were paid to do – unload Gundren’s ore at the smithy and the stoneworks.
Tantur the blacksmith seems like a genial fellow, wiping the soot and sweat from his brow as the PCs enter his shop. He says he’d expected them arrive at some point from Phandalin, but had no idea how long it would take. Smalltalk with the smithy reveals similar information that Sir Rel revealed –

Many strangers have been seen in town recently, and moreover, the weather patterns the past six months have become increasingly strange – purple lightning and frogs raining from the sky that splat and die miserably in the
street and fields. And missing folks too, oh yes, like the two little girls that vanished two weeks prior, two little blond sister Keera and Kate. The family is devastated and no one has a clue what happened.

“Or, maybe it was those masked men they say been stalkin’ the rock quarry!” whispers the blacksmith warily. “Oh yez, men in stone masks watching the miners at night, standing just at the edge of lantern light. Spooked em so bad they quit working the night shifts! Can’t say I blame ‘em.”

The heroes find this information odd too. Well, the stoneworks is their last stop anyway to dump off the ore Gundren paid them to bring, and the ox and cart were expendable as the dwarf wasn’t expecting them back any time soon, if at all. Gundren was just hoping to get trade routes open with Red Larch, and for what it was worth, Tantur the blacksmith says he can use some of that raw material, he just needs a smelter to extract the metal. Maybe they’ll ask the owner of the stoneworks if anything strange has been happening at the quarry just to see what the answer is.
Mellhiko, owner and proprietor of the Stoneworks quarry on the north side of town is NOT what they expected. She’s a skinny, scrawny, scratchy-voiced, chain smoking old woman, as wrinkled as a night hag and about as unpleasant.

“Whatcha want?” she drawls, pulling on the cigarette and blowing smoke in their faces.

“We’re here with a shipment from Master Gundren of Phandalin, raw ore from the Mine of Phandelver. He said you might be expecting it, a sample of his wares.”

Sniffing, Mellhiko pokes a cane into the back of the cart and shoves some stuff around. “Eh, it’s ok, I suppose. I’ll take it. Now be off with you, I’m busy.”

“But...” someone says, “we’re new in town and just hearing weird stories about masked men in your quarry at night, chasing off the workers. So WHAT’S up with that, lady???”

[DM Note – At some point halfway through this session, maybe it was now, I realized this had turned into a Cthulhu investigation and their next option was to hit up the Red Larch library and search for clues]. 😊

Mellhiko is taken aback by their sudden questions, from strangers no less completely new to town, with no reason to be poking around her business. Mellhiko gets indignant and nasty and the genasi sorcerer Serena Vortex feels anger rising up within her, and when she gets angry she can get...volatile. She leaves before her temper gets the best of her.

“Get outta here, the lot of you. Maybe someone was messing around at night and pranking my boys, but it’s no concern of yours! Now get!”

The elf Brey decides he wants to question one of the workers himself, he can see them out in the quarry right now with picks and shovels. The worker is MUCH nicer than Mellhiko, and he spills quite a lot, saying how he saw the masked men at night and it scared the life out of him, and that was two weeks
ago right when the two little girls went missing, and he wonders if they’re connected. No one could find a single hair on their heads, he was sure **Constable Harbuck** did the best he could, and the only witness was their older brother **Jax**.

Constable Harbuck and Jax, two more names added to the growing roster of clues. They decide to check these people out, and for one the PCs feel a growing sense of duty for there is something unpleasant happening under the surface of this idyllic border town, and the citizens might need more help than they realize....

They get Sir Rel of the Allfaiths Shrine to introduce them to **Constable Harbuck**, who also works mostly at the Butchery.
DM Note –so yes, it seemed like a lot of NPCs when we were playing through the scenario, and doing this recap it almost seems like it was too many, but in the slower pace of the game, with roleplaying and interaction between all of the players, it was actually manageable and not confusing, just a little challenging. And by the time we reached the end the players had embraced the “This is not going to be a combat session, this is hardcore roleplay / mystery solving. Which I didn’t know was going to happen either. I’d been hoping for random owlbear encounters on the road!”

Constable Harbuck seems nice enough and welcomes the strangers to Red Larch. He does confirm that sadly two young blond sisters ages 7 and 5 went missing up in the Berry Hills just outside of town not two weeks ago. They searched and searched but the footsteps, including the footprints of GROWN MEN, just vanished into thin air.

This is a mystery that begs to be solved so they ask Constable Harbuck if he will take them to the site of the kidnapping. Shrugging, he says he doesn’t know what good it will do, but he’ll do it. The paladin is quietly studying his words and actions and mannerism and doesn’t get the sense that Harbuck is being untruthful. Unlike like the sense he got from smoky Mellhiko.

Constable Harbuck leads them out of town to Berry Hill, it’s not far, the hills already colored now with flourishes of wildflowers and the scent of spring nectar.
Along the way he explains that the brother Jax heard the girls screaming, and it only took him maybe two or three minutes to run to the site, but the time he got there the girls were gone. He’d run back and found help but all anyone could discover were footprints in the mud and grass, footprints that oddly vanished soon to the west.
They soon arrive and there are old prints here, but the abduction was two weeks ago and the odds of finding anything are slim. The elf Brey has good skills though, VERY good, and he picks up the evidence quickly and follows it about 50 yards away from town...when all the tracks vanish, almost as if washed away by magic. Then he finds HARD evidence – burned sprigs of spell components that he knows are used in the obfuscation of tracks. He tells the others as much, he suspects that this kidnapping looks like someone deliberately concealed their escape.

Frowning, Hadrian the aasimar paladin of Bahamut asks if he can question the brother Jax to see if he can shed anymore information. Shrugging, Harbuck agrees, but doubts the boy can tell him anything else, he saw very little other than what he’d already confessed.

Jax is young and timid, shy at first at all of these strangers questioning him about his missing little sisters, but he soon warms to their concerns and recounts the whole story.

Jax also reiterates what others have been saying – strange folks have been in town recently, strange men who lurk in the shadows and often leave a lingering stare a hint too long. Jax has seen most of them hanging around Berthunder’s storage warehouse. According to Jax, Berthunder is a man who doesn’t ask questions about what’s stored in his warehouse, even if it begins to stink...*then they just quietly bury it.*

“Boy, if you see any more of these strange men, could you identify them?” asks the paladin. “Have they left town or are they still here?”

Jax nods, tearful now, and says that he’s seen them time to time, and if he does he can let Hadrian and the others know. Lastly, they want to ask Jax’s father what he knows, and that leads them to the Poultry where the man works. The father is obviously still distraught over his missing daughters and the line of questioning rankles him and brings up his defenses, but he is gently calmed and assured that the PCs are only trying to help and they have particular skills that might be useful to resolve this problem. Hadrian even gives him 5 gp although he knows it won’t heal the emotional wound.
The group splits up here.

**Serena** the air genasi wants to check out the local tavern and inn and arrange sleeping arrangements for the night and possibly some evening entertainment. She actually an accomplished musician having worked in Waterdeep for years, sometimes in less than savory locales.

**Brey** the elf rogue /druid /ranger [This class mix needs a unique name!] returns to the “Enter & Enjoy!” establishment of Haeleeya’s Bathhouse to inquire more about the Emerald Enclave.

**Hadrian** the aasimar paladin has one final name on his list, Berthunder’s storage warehouse where some of the shady characters have been seen loitering or even working.

So, Serena heads to the ramshackle Helm at Highsun tavern. It’s early afternoon and the clientele is light. A balding barkeep asks if he can get her an ale and she says no, she’d actually like to know if there is a way she can perfume flute playing at night at his establishment.

“You gonna play that flute naked?” he asks, chuckling luridly.

She slaps him hard across the face.

“How dare you offend me, pig!”

The barkeep’s chubby face turns red with rage and embarrassment, but immediately a halfling hops on the counter and intervenes.
“Ho, temper, temper there, friends! 
**Garlen,** I’m sure this young miss just didn’t appreciate your crude sense of humor. He’s not just a bad sort, a bit of a fool I might add, no offense, Garlen, but a dearie inside. Isn’t that right, Garlen?”

Grumbling with a rag and mug in hand, the barkeep still glares at Serena, but eventually concedes to let her play her flute at the Helm at 8pm this night, WITH clothes on. She cheerfully agrees. Her next stop secures the group some rooms at the *Swinging Sword Inn.*

Meanwhile, **Brey** the elf enters the *Haeleeya’s* bathhouse, which seems to be partly a dressmaker’s shop and partly a relaxation parlor. He’s immediately met by an attractive redheaded human female.
“Might I help you good sir?” she asks. “A traveler new to town, come to wash the dust and grit from your feet? We can certainly help sooth your troubles.”

Brey is quick to make the secret **GANG SIGN OF THE ENCLAVE**, whatever that looks like, and Leeya’s expression changes, her lips pressed firmly together.

“Come with me.”

**Leeya** closes a door behind them in a private room and she expresses relief that someone else from the Enclave is finally in Red Larch!

“Strange things are happening. They have been for months now. Odd weather swirling in the west over the hills, the vanished delegation from Mirabar and strangers in Red Larch and even recent missing children. My very soul feels that an ill omen
threatens to rise, and we can do naught but wait for it.”

Brey confides that he has heard these rumors as well from multiple villagers already, and the looming tension is thick in the air, although not obvious at first until the locales started talking. He and his comrades now feel too that something strange is in the air, and it does not bode well.

Leeya confirms the missing delegation, mentioning the dead knight from Icewind Dale, but then adds a new quirk particular the Enclave – an elf was bringing enchanted seeds to plant in Goldenfields to the south, seeds that were supposed to yield a fantastic grove!” [which naturally we all assumed was marijuana]. But the seeds, along with everyone else, vanished in the Hills.

“I have a friend, the halfling Thistlehair. He is not an Enclave member, nor does he know I am and that is how it shall remain, but he works at Berthunder’s storage and Thistle has confided in me privately that he has seen strange activity at the warehouse at night, persons lingering there far after hours, the owner included. Coming and going at bizarre times. He has told no one else for fear of losing his job. I am suspicious of what Berthunder is up to, I’ve never trusted that man anyway. He smells of a rat.”

Brey and Leeya chat some more, and they leave with the agreement that no one else is to know of their Enclave pact outside Brey’s group, but they will keep each other informed of any new developments.

LASTLY (and really, this was only a 2-hour game session but it sure as hell feels longer from the recap) the paladin inquires on his own at Berthunder’s storage about possible unsavory characters hanging out.
The warehouse area consists of four large buildings back to back. Hadrian the paladin has only been standing there a few moments when he’s approached by a man and asked, “Well met, sir, do you need some items stored? You’ve found the right place. I’m Berthunder, or Bert to friends.” [Or Bencinio del Toro]

“No, no storage needed, friend, just questions answered, as truthfully as you can. I have heard rumors of unsavory characters loitering in the area of your warehouse. Do you know about this?”

The paladin’s delivery is deadpan without a hint of mirth or even a slight social nicety, as if he doesn’t give a godsdamn what Bert thinks.

The other man’s face darkens at once. “Who the hell are you? You don’t know me! Don’t dare to come here asking such things! If you have no business with me then get out. I have nothing to hide.”

Hadrian’s player rolls an Insight, rolls well, and does not believe Berthunder.
“Sir,” he says gravely, but politely, “I do not believe you. I ask again, and I ask that you respond in the upmost honesty – what do you know of unsavory men in the vicinity of your warehouse, or even men in stone masks at the Quarry, men who might know something of two missing young girls recently?”

“There’s no unsavory men here! Nowhere here, I’m an honest businessman!” Bert snarls these last words and glowers at Hadrian, but quickly adds: “You need to look at Lance Rock. Yes! Lance Rock! Not far outside of town. I hear there’s all kind of rituals they conduct there at night. Black things not meant for mortal eyes. Yes, that’s where you should be looking, not in my warehouse.”

“But your warehouse is where I am and where I shall continue to look because you are an untruthful man.”

Berthunder is pissed off now and tries to nudge the paladin away verbally, but Hadrian ignores him and enters the warehouse unabashed. He scans out with his divine senses, trying to pick up the hint of something truly monstrous or evil and vile that might remain hidden in the sundry crates or behind the walls, but he detects nothing. Only some bewildered warehouse workers watch him, a tall, intimidating champion of Bahamut who stands defiantly in the building, searching it for evildoers who need a righteous smiting.

Eventually he leaves and reconvenes with Serena and Brey and they all compare notes. Something odd is going on, and no one is sure exactly what it is. There are several distinct problems now they immediately think are related, but the how’s and why’s elude them. In fact, they’re eluding most of the general populace of Red Larch who might not have the wherewithal or courage to the dig to the bottom of the sordid mess.

1) **The missing delegation from Mirabar.** This seems to be a bunch of people traveling together southward with their own distinct goals and missions. They didn’t pass through Red Larch itself but instead further east at Beliard, but they were never seen beyond Beliard, and never reached their final destination of Goldenfields. The factions of the Emerald Enclave and the Order of the Gauntlet, at least these two, had personal interest in some of these travelers.
2) **The missing blond sisters at Berry Hill.** Someone used a *pass without trace* spell mere moments after the kidnapping to hide their getaway, and where they went from there is anyone’s guess. But that was two weeks ago the outcome for the girls looks grim.

3) **Stone-masked men at Stoneworks Quarry.** Again, these people were spotted at night, eerily watching the night shift workers who were so terrified they refused to go back. Nothing otherwise terrible happened, but the ornery Mellhiko scoffs at practically any of that.

4) **Strange weather patterns.** So far it has been mostly confined east of Red Larch to the wide expanse of the Sumber Hills, but they’ve also experienced the occasional violent hail storm or rain of frogs locally.

5) **Odd comings and goings at Berthunder’s warehouse.** The boy Jax mentioned this, but more importantly, Leelya of the Emerald Enclave said that shadowed figures have been seen coming and going at abnormal times of night, sneaking in and out. The halfling Thistlehair saw them himself. He even claims to have seen the proprietor do this, Berthunder, or Bert to friends, but Hadrian will never call him Bert.

6) **Lastly, strange rituals at Lance Rock.** Berthunder told the paladin he should look into this place and leave him and his warehouse alone. The group suspects at best that it’s a red herring; at worst…a trap.