DUNGEON MASTER CHRONICLES



COMPATIBLE 5E FIFTH EDITION

A Dustcloak Primer

Guild Primer

The Dustcloaks of Ruinwatch Keep

FOR PLAYERS AND GAME MASTERS ◆ FREE FROM THE ARCHIVE

RUINWATCH KEEP · POSTED CONTRACT

Contract No. 1 — Recruitment

POSTED BY	Eadric Vorn, Steward of Ruinwatch Keep
MINIMUM RANK	None. Anyone who reaches the gate may knock.
CLIENT	You
SITE	Ruinwatch Keep, Ruinshade district, Maneth
OBJECTIVE	Swear the Code, take a cloak, and pull your first contract from the board.
FEE	A bronze key, a bunk, and a share of every job you finish.

"Seek the shadow, claim the light."

— E. Vorn

Welcome to the Dustcloaks

The Dungeon Masters are the oldest company of explorers in Vildenlund. Most people call them the ***Dustcloaks***, for the weathered cloaks they wear, dusted with the grit of forgotten places. They chart ruins, recover what was lost, decipher what was forgotten, and answer when a village needs help that its lord can't send.

They aren't sellswords. When a duke's soldiers are spread too thin, or a town has a problem no one else will touch, the Dustcloaks are the ones they send for. Every town in Vildenlund knows the bronze key on a Dustcloak's cloak, and most of them are glad to see it.

HOW TO USE THIS PRIMER

Every *Dungeon Master Chronicles* adventure is a contract posted at Ruinwatch Keep. This primer is the background they share.

Players: read the Code, the ranks, and the Initiate's kit. That's all you need for your first contract.

Game masters: the keep, its people, and the kingdom give you something to describe when the party walks in. The last chapter explains how to run Chronicles for a table that changes from week to week.

The Founding



The north tower still leans. Vorn swears it leaned before the city did. Knock twice at the gate. — M.K.

Ruinwatch Keep is older than Maneth. Some say an ancient order of scholars raised it to guard the secrets of a forgotten age. The city grew up around it, and for generations the old fort stood empty. The streets in its shadow came to be called Ruinshade.

The guild began with a single contract. A Duke of Reshima had lost an expedition in the flooded vaults beneath ***Old Maneth***, the abandoned capital on the southern coast. He hired a small company of surveyors and delvers, led by the

cartographer **Aldric Wend**, to bring home his people and their records.

They brought back everything: every ledger, every coin, and every body, each with its proper rites. They wouldn't sell a single grave-good, though the vaults were full of them. The duke had expected looters. Instead he got the truth, and his dead came home.

He paid them with the deed to the empty fort in Ruinshade. Wend named it Ruinwatch Keep. The oath his company swore in the dark of the vaults became the Code. The grit of those vaults never washed out of their cloaks, and the people of Maneth started calling them the Dustcloaks. The words carved over the hearth in the Great Hall are said to be Wend's own.

Seek the shadow, claim the light.

The Dustcloaks have never held a royal charter, and they've never needed one. Their name is their charter.

The Code

Every Dustcloak swears the same three oaths at initiation, in the deepest cellar of the keep, surrounded by relics brought home by those who came before.

- **Preserve.** Protect historical sites wherever possible. A ruin is a record. Don't burn the page to read it.
- **Respect.** Leave the dead their dignity and their resting places. Bring home what you can, and give rites to what you can't.
- **Share.** Knowledge belongs to Vildenlund, not to the one who found it. Bring it to the Archive.

WEIGHING THE CODE AT THE DEBRIEF

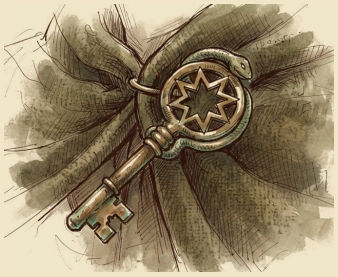
Every Chronicle ends with a ***Guild Debrief***: the party reports to the keep, and the steward weighs what they did against the Code.

The Code rarely gives an easy answer. A client might be paying for a relic that belongs in a tomb, or the fastest way out might be through a burial chamber. The Debrief exists for exactly these choices, and characters who argue for the Code earn renown for it.

Ranks and Clasps

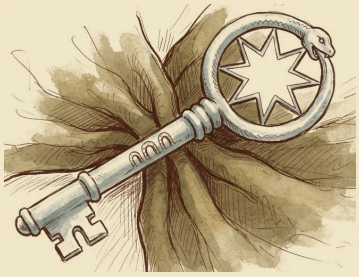
A Dustcloak's rank shows on their cloak clasp. Every clasp is a key whose bow is a compass star circled by a serpent, and each rank adds to the design. Every contract on the board names a minimum rank, which sets the adventure's level range.

1. Initiate



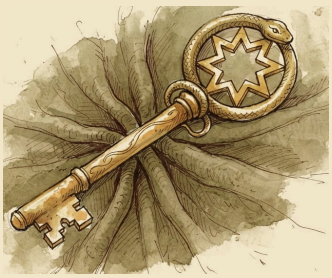
Levels 1–2 · A simple bronze clasp. New recruits learn the trade under a mentor. They catalog finds, mend gear, and go into the field beside more experienced members.

2. Explorer



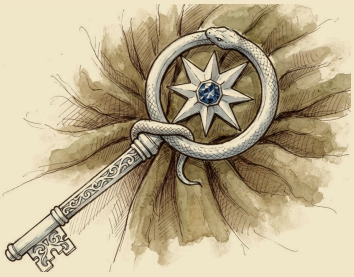
Levels 3–4 · A silver clasp engraved with ruins. Explorers are the guild's backbone. They lead small, low-risk delves and are often the guild's face in the towns near a dig.

3. Wayfinder



Levels 5–8 · A gold clasp engraved with a winding path. Wayfinders are field commanders, trusted with the guild's most dangerous contracts and with training those below them.

4. Loremaster



A platinum clasp set with a gem. Loremasters are the guild's scholars. They work from the Archive, deciphering texts and advising expeditions. In the Chronicles they appear as mentors and quest-givers.

5. Master Explorer



A clasp of rare materials, unique to its wearer. Master Explorers sit on the **Council of Masters**, which sets the guild's course, approves great expeditions, and speaks for the guild to dukes and other powers.

Renown and Promotion

Characters earn ***renown*** at the end of each contract, in the Guild Debrief.

Earned for	Renown
Completing a contract	1
Upholding the Code when it costs something	+1

Promotion	Requirement
Initiate → Explorer	3 renown and 3rd level
Explorer → Wayfinder	8 renown and 5th level
Loremaster, Master Explorer	Appointed by the Council

A promotion is celebrated in the Great Hall. The steward reads out what the member has done, and a Master Explorer pins on the new clasp.

The Guild's Share

The guild keeps ***one tenth of every contract fee***. The share pays for the Archive, the Initiates' kits, and the funerals of the fallen. A party that brings a relic to the Archive instead of selling it is paid a **finder's bounty** from guild coffers. The Archive keeps most relics. A few are entrusted to the guild masters who can use them best.

The Initiate's Kit

Every new Dustcloak is given the following on the day they swear the Code:

- A Dustcloak: a long, hooded traveling cloak in earthy green and brown
- A bronze key clasp
- A blank field journal and a stub of chalk
- An explorer's pack: a backpack, a bedroll, a mess kit, a tinderbox, 10 torches, 10 days of rations, a waterskin, and 50 feet of hempen rope



Four cloaks, one road. Pack rope. Then pack more rope. — M.K.

Write in the journal every night, even if it's only "still alive." The Archive wants all of it. — F.C.

Ruinwatch Keep



Board's fullest after the autumn rains. Read the minimum rank twice before you pull a pin. — Z.N.

The keep is a squat, brooding block of dark granite in Ruinshade, against Maneth's northeastern wall. It rises three stories, with a tower at each corner. Each tower is capped with weathered slate, and one leans from a long-ago tremor, which gives the whole keep a lopsided, defiant look. Ivy softens the lower walls. A stout iron portcullis guards the gate, and above it a carved compass circled by a serpent greets everyone who comes in. In the small courtyard stands the statue of a hooded figure, its face worn away by time. No one knows who it was.

The Great Hall

The heart of the keep. Long trestle tables are covered with maps, lanterns, and half-finished tankards. Trophies hang on the walls: a cracked dragon skull, a rusted blade etched with runes, and a tapestry of a crumbling tower under a stormy sky. The ***contract board*** hangs by the door, and a great hearth roars at the far end beneath the carved motto.

The Archive



Every expedition ends here. Write it down, or it didn't happen. — F.C.

A dim chamber on the second floor, packed with scrolls, tomes, and artifacts: maps of lost crypts, sketches of strange glyphs, and journals of explorers long dead. A single lectern holds the ***Codex of the Veiled Age***, a prized text said to hint

at Traevas's forgotten history. Most of it is still undeciphered.

The Armory

A basement vault stocked for the road with longswords, crossbows, grappling hooks, and vials of alchemist's fire. Dustcloaks prefer practical tools to ornate weapons, and most of the gear here has been repaired more than once. A grizzled smith tends a small forge in the corner and mutters in a thick Vilden accent.

The Dormitory

A long, low hall in the east wing, lined with wooden bunks under green and brown blankets. Each bunk carries its owner's mark: a rune carved into a bedpost, a dagger stuck in the frame, a tattered map pinned above. Some Dustcloaks stay for weeks, others for a single night. Eadric Vorn sleeps in an alcove at the far end, his bunk piled with ledgers of who is in and who is out on a job.

The Watchtower

The tallest tower looks out over Maneth and the Obsidian Sea. Expeditions are planned here by lantern light. A scratched bronze telescope stays trained on far shores where ruins might lie.

The Training Yard

Behind the keep, between its rear wall and the stub of an older curtain wall, lies a yard of packed dirt and gravel. There are battered practice dummies, a rack of blunted weapons, climbing ropes, and a trap rigged with bells that jingle when someone trips it. A gnarled oak in the middle serves for pull-ups, or as a lookout perch during mock sieges. On clear days the clang of steel carries out into Ruinshade's streets.

Faces at the Keep

Eadric Vorn, Steward



Vorn sees you limp in before you see him limp out. Report to the steward first, always. — Z.N.

Dwarf Loremaster. Eadric is a wiry dwarf with a graying beard and a limp from a troll's club. He keeps the keep running. He's gruff but fair, and he has a knack for spotting promising recruits. He pins every contract to the board himself, and he hears every Debrief.

The Council of Masters

- **Elara Moonwhisper** *(elf)* is a veteran leader with centuries of experience and a deep knowledge of ancient lore.
- **Arannis Starweaver** *(elf)* is a brilliant, aloof strategist.
- **Vexira Flameheart** *(dragonborn)* is an old soul with a bold and fearless spirit.

Loremasters

- **Fizzlewick Cogspinner** *(gnome)* is a quirky scholar obsessed with runes and ancient texts. His notes fill the margins of half the Archive. *(F.C.)*
- **Shellback** *(Shellfolk sage)* is slow, patient, and the guild's expert on the drowned civilizations of the deep.

Wayfinders

- **Maeve Kiernan** *(gnome)* is the keep's combat trainer. She has a scarred cheek, a quarterstaff, and a talent for taking weapons away from people. *(M.K.)*
- **Thrain Stonehelm** *(dwarf)* is gruff and reliable, and the guild's best navigator underground.
- **Grukthar Bloodaxe** *(half-orc)* is gentle and fierce by turns, and no one in his care has ever been left behind.
- **Marcus Vale** *(human)* is eager and determined, and has proven himself contract by contract.

Explorers

- **Zarael Nightshade** *(tiefling)* is a quiet scout who is at home in dark places. *(Z.N.)*

Traders at the Keep

Merchants know where adventurers spend their coin, and two in particular make regular stops at Ruinwatch Keep. Prices are the standard ones unless noted.

Liora Velthorne's Cart



Liora's rope held when mine didn't. Cheap, not shoddy, and she'll tell you which is which. — M.K.

Half-elf traveling merchant. Liora is wiry and sun-browned, with green eyes, a freckled face, and an auburn braid that never quite holds. She wears a pouch-covered leather coat and a wide-brimmed hat. Her mule cart has patched canvas sides and faded runes painted on the boards. She hums elven tunes while she haggles and taps her foot when buyers dither. Her goods are for Initiates on a budget.

"You don't need the best—just what works. And I've got what works."

Item	Price	Stock
Rope, hempen (50 feet)	1 gp	3
Torch	1 cp	5
Lantern, hooded	5 gp	1
Oil (flask)	1 sp	4
Piton	5 cp	10
Sack	1 cp	3
Chalk (1 piece)	1 cp	8
Crowbar	2 gp	1
Potion of healing	50 gp	2

Delver's Bundle. A 50-foot rope, 2 torches, and a piton for 1 gp 5 sp.

Trade-In. Liora swaps a torch or a piece of chalk for any minor oddity from a dungeon, such as a goblin's tooth or a cracked gem, just for the story.

Tilly's Trove

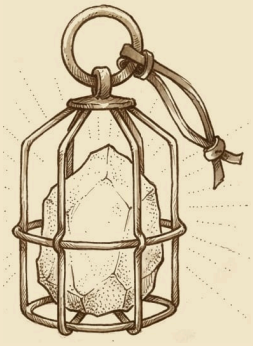


Ask Tilly about the roper and clear your afternoon. Buy the dust, though. It works. — Z.N.

Gnome curio-seller. "Tilly" Vask is a retired caver with wire spectacles, a graying auburn bun, and an oil-stained apron. She wears a headlamp strapped to her forehead, even indoors. A collapsing tunnel ended her delving days. Now she sells gear she has scavenged, repaired, or built herself, and she throws in free advice, or a trinket, for customers she likes. Most of her stock is secondhand, so it sells for well under the price of new gear. Her one real treasure is the glowstone lantern. She'll barter for monster parts and oddities.

"Green as moss or seasoned as cave rot? Either way, you're in the right place."

Item	Price
Climber's kit, secondhand	15 gp
Collapsible pole (10 feet)	2 sp
Trapspringer's pouch	3 gp
Glowcap dust (3 doses)	3 gp
Shortsword, "broken in"	7 gp
Handaxe, rehafted	3 gp
Light crossbow, refurbished, with 20 bolts	18 gp
Dagger	1 gp
Glowstone lantern (only one in stock)	15 gp



Tap once and it burns till morning. Pried from a ruin, she says. I didn't ask which. — F.C.

Glowstone Lantern

Wondrous item, common

A fist-sized stone in an iron cage. As an action, you can tap it to make it shed bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet for 8 hours, or until you tap it again to put it out. Once lit, it can't be lit again until the next dawn.

Collapsible Pole. It works as a 10-foot pole, but it folds down to 2 feet for carrying.

Trapspringer's Pouch. A small satchel holding chalk, a hand mirror, and a spool of thin wire.

Glowcap Dust. Powder from luminous fungi. As an action, you can sprinkle one dose to cover a 5-foot square. The square glows faintly for 1 hour, and creatures in it have disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

The Kingdom of Vildenlund

Vildenlund is an old kingdom of stone keeps, deep forests, and long memories. Its laws and its pomp are orderly. Its songs and its stories run a little wild. ***High King Frederick Stahlwyrm*** and **Queen Gisela Stahlwyrm** rule from Maneth, and four duchies govern the land in their name. The Dustcloaks' contracts take them across all of it.



Duchy	Seat	Ruler
Kragmier	Vults Behn	Duke Gambril Faerhund
Orverdan	Idium	Duchess Ilse Brandmauer
Kitalias	Dalspien	Duke Aldwin Corrigan
Reshima	Halvend	Duke Rikon

Baron Vorin Marquet holds the mountain town of Behrgren for the Kragmier. In the peaks near Halvend, the dwarven city of ***Blimstelgrum*** answers to its own king, **Jhaelin Foehammer**, who is guarded by the Hammerfist Clan.

West of the duchies lie ***the Wilds***, where few roads go. In the southwest, the **Vash'ati Desert** stretches to the border of the Kingdom of Vash'ati. The **Gnome Kingdom of Traemid** lies east, beyond the Western Marsh.

At the kingdom's heart is the ***Obsidian Sea***, a great inland water. The **Groaning River** flows south from it to the ocean, past **Respite** and the dark waters of Midnight Shallows. On the southern coast lie the ruins of **Old Maneth**, the capital that came before.

Maneth, the Island Capital



Maneth from the King's Span road. Ruinshade is the northeast quarter, tucked behind the wall. — M.K.

Maneth sits on an island at the southern end of the Obsidian Sea, where the Groaning River begins. Legend says the first king, ***Aelfric the Stonecrowned***, raised the island from the depths with forgotten magic. High basalt walls ring the city, and their gatehouses are carved with stags, wolves, and ravens. A single half-mile causeway, the **King's Span**, links the island to the mainland. Its drawbridges can be raised to seal the city in a siege. The Gothic towers of the **Royal Spire** rise over everything.

- **Crownward** is the noble quarter around the Spire, with manors, rose gardens, and the deep bell of St. Eadwyn's.
- **Irongate**, by the southern gate, is the district of smiths, traders, and off-duty guards. Its taverns include the Stag and Hammer.
- **Mistmere**, along the western shore, is the common folk's quarter of fishing docks, thatched cottages, and tales of lake spirits.
- **Ruinshade**, against the northeastern wall, is the adventurers' district. It's home to Ruinwatch Keep, alchemists, cartographers, curiosity shops, and the Dusty Lantern inn. The air smells of old parchment, sweat, and the faint tang of magic.

GODS OF THE ROAD

Most people in Vildenlund worship ***Melitheliel***, the high god of light and goodness. A Dustcloak might also offer a word to:

Duramandara, god of good fortune, whose sacred serpent coils around the guild's key. **Farren**, god of protection. **Roxar**, god of courage and self-sacrifice. **Etris**, god of knowledge and healing, patron of the Archive. **Wesson**, god of trade, whom every merchant on the King's Span thanks. **Vishna**, god of the seas. **Velgas**, keeper of the dead.

THE LAST LIGHT

When a fallen Dustcloak's body makes it home, the guild lays it on a pyre boat and pushes it out onto the Obsidian Sea at dusk. The best archer present looses a single flaming arrow from the shore. No one speaks until the fire has gone out.

Running Chronicles with a Changing Table

Dungeon Master Chronicles are built for groups whose players change from week to week. The guild is the glue: the characters come and go, but the keep, the steward, and the Code are always there. This chapter collects what works at those tables.

The Core Loop

Everyone is a Dustcloak. Each character belongs to the guild, so any mix of characters makes sense together. Whoever is in the keep tonight answers the contract. No one needs a reason to be there, and no one needs to know what happened last week.

Start at the board. Every Chronicle opens with a Guild Contract: who posted it, the client, the site, the objective, the fee, and the minimum rank. Read it aloud, and the party is ready to go. The board does the job of a campaign's opening scene in about two minutes.

End at the Debrief. Every Chronicle closes with a Guild Debrief. The party reports, the steward weighs their choices against the Code, and each character earns renown. A session that ends at the Debrief leaves nothing hanging for players who might not come back.

Let the keep carry the continuity. Continuity lives in Eadric, the board, and the Archive, not in any one player's character. A returning player picks up where they left off. A new player sees the same faces everyone else did.

Before the Session

Know your headcount, then scale. Every Chronicle is written for a party size and suggests how to scale its fights. For each player above or below that number, add or remove about a quarter of each major fight's monsters, or raise or lower the boss's hit points by a quarter. Puzzles and traps don't need scaling.

Keep spare Dustcloaks. Have two or three ready-made Initiate characters on hand: a name, a species, a class, and one line of personality each. A friend who turns up unannounced can be playing in five minutes, and they can keep the character or swap it for their own next time.

Agree on limits once. Tables of shifting strangers benefit from a quick word at the start: anything that's off the table, and a simple signal for "let's skip this" that no one has to explain. Chronicles keep their darkest material in backstory, but players differ.

Building a Party on the Spot

THE TWO-MINUTE DUSTCLOAK

A new player answers three questions, out loud, at the table:

1. **What's your name, and what do you do best?**
2. **Who in the guild vouched for you?** Pick anyone from *Faces at the Keep*.
3. **What did you bring back from your last job?** A trinket, a scar, or a story.

Then they take the Initiate's kit and swear the Code. Read *Contract No. 1* aloud if there's time.

Mixed levels are fine. The contract's minimum rank sets the challenge, not the party's average. A lower-level character can come along if a higher-ranked member leads. If one character is far above the rank, have them lead and give the hardest fights one extra monster rather than rebalancing everything.

Introduce characters in one line each. Go around the table and have each player say who they are and what they were doing at the keep when the contract went up: mending a cloak, losing at cards, arguing in the Archive. It takes a minute and gives the party a reason to talk to each other.

During Play

Plan for one session. Chronicles are built to finish in a single sitting. Keep an eye on the clock. If time is running short, cut to the finale: the party pushes through, and you narrate what they skip.

Unfinished contracts. If a session ends before the contract does, the party's field notes go back to the keep. Next time, whoever shows up picks up the job from those notes, even if it's a different crew. "Previous team got this far. Finish it."

Late arrivals, early exits, and absent friends. A late character arrives with a message from the keep. One who has to leave escorts a wounded client home. A character whose player misses a session is out on another job. All of them keep their share and their renown.

Share the spotlight. Each Chronicle mixes puzzles, social scenes, exploration, and fights so that every kind of player gets a moment. If a quiet player hasn't had one, ask their character a direct question: "Your journal's open. What do you sketch?"

Rule quickly. Make a fair call, keep playing, and look it up afterward. A changing table loses more to a ten-minute debate than to a wrong ruling.

Pay Off Their Stories

Many Chronicles include small elements meant to be bent toward one player's backstory: a client with no fixed past, a nameless body in a tomb, a relic whose maker is never stated. The best sessions are the ones where a player suddenly realizes the story is about them.

Ask one question before you start. Read each character's backstory, or just ask each player: "Who or what from your past would you least expect to find here?" Pick one answer per session and weave it in. You don't need to do this for everyone every time.

Swap, don't add. Change what's already in the Chronicle:

Chronicle element	Turn it into
The client	An old mentor, a creditor, or an estranged sibling
A body or a lost explorer	A relative who never came home
The treasure	A family heirloom, or something stolen from the character's village
An inscription or a field note	Writing in a hand the character knows
A rival or a villain's servant	Someone from the character's past, on the wrong side
The Debrief reward	A letter, a pardon, or a name the character has been searching for

Keep it portable. Players come and go, so never make a contract depend on one character being there. Plan each payoff so it falls back to the written version if that player doesn't show up, and so the contract still works without it.

Finish what you start, or log it. A payoff should land in the same session, or at least land a piece of it. If it opens a bigger thread, write it in the Guild Ledger so whoever runs the next Chronicle can pick it up.

Use the Two-Minute Dustcloak. A drop-in's answers are instant backstory: the one who vouched for them can turn up at the Debrief, and the trinket can turn out to matter.

Add your own flare. These books give you the bones. The moments your table remembers will be the ones you build for your players: a name only they would know, a door only they can open, a debt finally paid.

Between Sessions

Keep a Guild Ledger. A single page at the table, or a shared note, listing each regular's character, rank, renown, and one notable deed. It's Eadric's ledger in the real world, and it turns a run of one-shots into a shared history.

Gear and gold carry over. Characters keep what they earn. Relics go to the Archive, which pays a finder's bounty. Between contracts, characters can shop at Liora's cart or Tilly's Trove.

Promotions are moments. Open the next session with it: the Great Hall, the steward's speech, a new clasp.

When a Dustcloak Falls

If a character falls and the party brings the body home, hold the Last Light. The player makes a new Dustcloak, perhaps one the fallen character vouched for, and the old name goes on the wall in the Great Hall.

The board is always full. Someone always comes back. That's the whole trick of the place. — E.V.

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