

# WORDS REMAIN BELOW

by LARRY BIERWORTH & PATRICK RIEGERT

*Fantasy, Historical, Intrigue*

## Setup

This adventure is about the player characters dealing with superstition, fear, justice, and morality in the midst of a volatile situation.

The story takes place at the Hallowed Hearth Inn during a heavy blizzard. The Hallowed Hearth Inn is located in a village called Fortune's Pass, in an isolated mountain pass. It is part of a barony within a nation affected by a plague.

The PCs are snowed in for the evening, and among the guests are an inquisitor of the church and a young woman suspected of being a witch. The inquisitor dies of the plague at the start, leaving the fate of the girl in the hands of the PCs.

If the girl is delivered to her fate in the city, she will burn for witchcraft. If the locals are left unchecked, she will die at their hands instead.

## Player Characters

Read the following descriptions to the players.

**Innkeeper:** This character is in a desperate position. Their dying spouse is somewhere within the inn, and they are going to try to get the witch to them without anyone knowing. But, they are at their own inn. The employees and supplies are at their disposal.

**Mercenary:** This is the most difficult character to play. The mercenary has no direct goal in this game, but can easily be an impediment for other characters. A smart character will try to win with their favour.

**Minstrel:** This is the true wild card of their adventure. The minstrel wants to escalate the situation. Give them the opportunity to do so.

**Scholar:** This character is likely to have the most useful skill set for this game. They know about witchcraft, law, and are geared towards getting in debates. They also have the weakest position to obtain what they want. The scholar might get in and fight for what they want, or they will not succeed.

**Bastard:** The bastard is full of secrets and made-up power. This character has a lot of potential on the surface, but has a lot to lose from failure.

## Non-Player Characters

**The Witch:** The witch is the sister of the noble to whom the baron's bastard is betrothed. She knows that she will not survive a trial and is willing to make deals to escape her fate. Other details are up to the GM, including whether she is a real witch. The witch knows she is being scapegoated, and is desperate to escape her fate. She is fighting for her life.

**Locals:** Every other NPC the players encounter in Fortune's Pass is an antagonist. The locals want to burn the witch, believing that her death will end the plague. Feel free to use some of the specific characters below, or create your own to represent some of the interests and attitudes typical of the villagers.

*Will Hattan:* Hateful and stupid, and also very dangerous. Will is the most likely local to nudge his fellows toward violence, but would never act without others backing him up.

*Sam Draper:* A large man; Will Hattan's cousin. He'll back up Will, even when it gets him into trouble.

*Ingrid Tasser:* Very superstitious and very vocal. She tends to speak aloud the fears felt by others in a group, bringing them to the forefront.

## Introduction

*A terrible blizzard has fallen upon Fortune's Pass, and a few travellers have found their way to the Hallowed Hearth Inn. Storms such as these are common in the mountains, and nothing can be done but wait until it passes. Despite the recent plague, the Hallowed Hearth is busy tonight, as locals and travellers seek an escape from the storm.*

Have the PCs introduce their characters. Start with the Innkeeper, followed by those who come in from the blizzard (the Mercenary will be the last one to be introduced — see below).

It is also recommended that the players describe a feature of the common room of the Hallowed Hearth, such as the part of the room they occupy, or one they move to when they enter.

The Mercenary is travelling with the inquisitor and the witch, and will be introduced last. The inquisitor is obviously quite sick. His status as an inquisitor of the church allows him to avoid the consequences of being a possible plaguebearer. After entering, he roughly pulls a bound and gagged young woman in behind him.

The inquisitor turns to the witch without warning and raves:

*"Were it not for your sacrilege I'd be in comfort and better health right now, little witch. I shall smile to see your trial, and laugh at your burning."*

After this, he will erupt into a coughing fit. He will arrange a room for himself and a separate one for the Mercenary (whom he will leave in the common room), and retire to it with the witch in tow.

Allow the PCs to react to this. The dozen or so locals in the common room will stir, and all their discussions will focus around what they have just seen and heard.

## The Inquisitor's Death

After the players have been given a chance to interact with each other and NPCs, the barmaid will return from having gone to the inquisitor's room (to see if he wishes to eat or draw a bath) and has found him dead. The barmaid is visibly shaken, and her return is noticed and reacted to by everyone in the room.

Anyone who goes to the inquisitor's room will find that he is on his bed, lying on his back, with blood on his lips and collar. The witch is on the floor in the corner of the room, still bound, but has worked her gag free. Her wrists are chafed and her hands are bloody.

If any PCs remain in the common room, they will notice the locals becoming agitated. Play up their fear of the witch — and dead inquisitor — they are now trapped with at the inn.

## The Witch's Fate

At this stage, the players will have their own agendas to pursue. However, fear will grow among the locals and, if left unchecked, they will take action against the witch.

If the locals are ignored, intentionally agitated, or dismissed, they will escalate. Things are also likely to become increasingly problematic if the locals do not get the outcome they want; namely, having the witch dealt with in a decisive way. Their actions become more severe in proportion to their fear:

- At first, the Minstrel will be asked to perform in the common room. They will request a song about the hero of Fortune's Pass (the Mercenary).
- They will call upon the PCs to act. This request/demand could be directed toward any of them, except the Minstrel. Typically, target the character whose player is the most quiet, or the one who would create the most tension or problems.
- A mark of condemnation is placed on the door to the room in which the witch is being kept. This is something that the locals would prefer to do surreptitiously, but will do openly if they must. The mark is a religious one, and indicates that the girl is to be killed.
- A direct attempt is made to kill the witch.
- The inn is set on fire in an attempt to kill the witch.
- The witch manifests her powers.

## Running the Game

This scenario is primarily about the discord that will arise for the PCs, given their different and conflicting agendas. Use the locals and the witch to increase tension and force action; the players themselves will provide most of the conflict for the game.

Few characters are suited well to combat, including the locals, so if a Fight! May not work for many situations. A bloody versus test is better suited for most characters in this story.

This game is begging for a Duel of the Wits. Every character has at least some social skill, and a witch trial in the inn is very likely. Keep in mind that the locals may not be satisfied with the results.

Remember that the witch herself can be used to move the story along. If things are growing cold, or if a player is sitting by the wayside, she might be able to appear to them directly.

## Involving the Players

Every PC has something that can be used "against them." Below are a few examples of ways to involve a passive player in the events of the game more directly:

- The Innkeeper's spouse is heard coughing or crying out from somewhere in the inn.
- A war widow recognizes the Mercenary.
- The locals become bored with the Minstrel.
- A request is made to have the Scholar replace the inquisitor.
- The locals demand that the witch be tried by the [mad] baron.

## Playing With 3 or 4 Players

If you have only four players, remove the Minstrel character. If there are only three players, take out the Scholar as well. We do not recommend running this game with less than three players.

## Ending the Game

This scenario ends when the question of the witch's fate is resolved. Due to the danger of the locals, this may happen after the players have made their decision.