

# ARCTURUS



## DESIGN & PRODUCTION

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
Hannah Rose

**AUTHORS**  
Kat Kruger, Amber Litke,  
JB Little (DropTheDie)

**ADDITIONAL DESIGN**  
James Introcaso

**EDITORS**  
Scott Fitzgerald Gray, Sadie Lowry

**SENSITIVITY CONSULTANT**  
Pam Punzalan

**PLAYTEST DIRECTOR**  
Lars Bakke

**LAYOUT**  
Jen McCleary

**TITLE LOGO**  
Tom Schmuck

**ACCESSIBILITY**  
Chris Hopper

**COMMUNITY COORDINATOR**  
John Champion

**CUSTOMER SUPPORT**  
Bobby McBride

**SPECIAL THANKS**  
Laura Hirsbrunner

## ILLUSTRATION

**ART DIRECTORS**  
Nick De Spain, Jason Hasenauer, Hannah Rose

**COVER ARTIST**  
Zuzanna Wuzyk

## INTERIOR ILLUSTRATORS

“The Nocturne Market”: Nikki Dawes  
“The Aurum Court”: Jason Hasenauer  
“Killer Pursuit”: Nikki Dawes, Alex Ngo

**CARTOGRAPHY**  
Clara Daly

## MCDM CONTRACT QA

**SENIOR TESTER**  
Spencer Hibnick

**TESTERS**  
Nathan Clark, Cassandra “Dig” Crary, Alecson de  
Lima Junior, James Dewar, Anna Guimarães, Alex  
Hencinski

## MCDM TEAM

Lars Bakke: Development & Production  
Jerod Bennett: Technology  
Grace Cheung: Art  
Matt Colville: Writing & Design  
Nick De Spain: Art & Art Outsource Management  
Jason Hasenauer: Art & Art Direction  
James Introcaso: Lead Game Designer  
Hannah Rose: Managing Editor

## PLAYTESTING

**PLAYTEST COORDINATORS**  
John Bryant, davidqshull, Félix Gauthier-Mamaril,  
David Lucas, Adam McLaughlin, AJ Metzger, Jeanne  
Parker, Shane Parker, Roman Penna, Joel Russ,  
Matthew Vansprang, Aaron Flavius West

**PLAYTESTERS**  
0XiDi, Nick Borowski, Gina Devlin, Robert G.,  
Thomas Good, Meg Hanna, Thomas “ThomBone”  
Hill, Nathaniel James, Liam Kearney, Lukas, Luke M.,  
William Pfeiffer, Aidan Sherrington, Christopher Teale,  
Marcel Theilig, Drew VandeLune, Wildbynature, Zero

---

Join us on the MCDM Discord server, where you can chat with others about *ARCADIA* and more!  
[mcdm.gg/discord](https://mcdm.gg/discord)

---

Product Identity: The following items are hereby identified as Product Identity, as defined in the Open Game License version 1.0a, Section 1(e), and are not Open Content: All content which is not included in the Systems Reference Document version 5.1 or has otherwise been specifically designated as Open Game Content, including The Nocturne Market, The Aurum Court, Killer Pursuit, all Trademarks, registered trademarks, proper names (including the names of characters, place names, monsters, organizations, new spells, new abilities, etc.), dialogue, plots, story elements, locations, characters, artwork, graphics, sidebars, and trade dress.

# ARCANA

## 1 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hannah Rose

LOCATIONS MAGIC ITEMS NPCs

## 2 THE NOCTURNE MARKET

Kat Kruger  
*A magical location to add delight and wonder to any campaign*

NPCs LOCATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

## 10 THE AURUM COURT

Amber Litke  
*A tangled web of conflicting courtiers and treacherous intrigue*

ADVENTURE

## 22 KILLER PURSUIT

JB Little (DropTheDie)  
*When the characters are framed for a murder they DIDN'T commit*

## 34 RESOURCES

ISSUE 26  MARCH 2023



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Lately I've been thinking about all the things we expect magic to do in a fantasy world—and in a fantasy roleplaying game. Some applications of magic are ubiquitous in the genre: create light and flame, fly, scry on a person or location, turn invisible, divine the future. Others are specific to lore and needs of the setting: open a door to another world, dream creatures into being, manipulate flesh and bone, weave enchantments with thread and cloth.

In any fantasy setting, the question of who has access to magic—is it innate? learned? controlled by a select few?—is usually well defined by the source material. There are two other questions, though, that I always wonder about as a reader and creator when I look at a fantasy setting:

First, what are the limitations of magic in this world?

And second, what are the everyday, practical uses of magic in this world—and are those encouraged or frowned upon?

Both of these questions get at the same thing—understanding the *people*, the societies, the relationships in a world different from our own. That's what stories are ultimately about, really, no matter what genre they are.

It's easy to think of magic in terms of what it can solve, especially when we have a handy list of spells on our character sheet and wish we could teleport to our friends in real life. But the limitations of a magic system tell us what problems *can't* be solved by even the strongest magic within that system—often, this is death, though not for the sufficiently powerful and wealthy in D&D worlds.

Magic can't create real love, loyalty, friendship, or imagination out of nothing—those things can only be simulated or borrowed. Unless you're talking about changing reality with the *wish* spell, I suppose ... but *almost always*, there are problems too personal and too complex to be solved with magic. Or the problem itself *might* be solvable with magic, but it requires pushing the boundaries of what's supposedly possible, acquiring forbidden knowledge, or gaining a godlike infusion of power. And that's a *story*: a story about a person, their society, and their relationships with others in pursuit of their goal.

Meanwhile, small, practical uses of magic are an immersive and fun consequence of having a world with magic. If a mage can fly and call down lightning, can they also boil a kettle of water and summon a quill from 10 feet away? Why or why not? Is it unusual to use magic for such mundanities—and if so, why? Because magic is unpredictable, or just because mages are snobby? Are all mages *really* snobby, or are there mages who can't fly and call down lightning but can boil water *and* descale the kettle to boot?

The answers reveal a lot about the world itself, and what life looks like for people in it. If the Alban Wizards live in an ivory tower and study arcane theory to transmute iron to gold and bats to wolves, but local hedgewitches tell fortunes, heal arthritis, and descale kettles ... well, there's more than one story there.

All this is fun for roleplay and worldbuilding (especially since it's fantasy, and it doesn't *all* have to be too realistic). But the articles this month explore magic on many levels, from the grand conspiracies and dramatic uses all the way down to the everyday delights. And all of them expertly dig into how magic affects people, society, and relationships.

In "The Aurum Court," [Amber Litke](#) offers a ready-made political intrigue scenario: the late king made an infernal bargain to save his people, but now his tiefling daughter faces mistrust and betrayal from the rest of the court. Between a misinterpreted prophetic vision, a treasonous spy-mage, a ruthless regent, and a challenger for the throne, this tangled web is perfect for players who enjoy a complex social challenge (and for GMs who want to pull off a complex intrigue plotline that's easy to run). Magic saved the kingdom of Dhustrad once, but this time it won't be so easy.

In "Killer Pursuit," [JB Little](#) envisions an unusual predicament for the player characters: with a dash of magic and a lot of spite, a local assassin has framed the party for murdering a prominent religious figure. The characters' magic can be helpful, but it's limited: the hierophant was killed in his sleep, so speaking with his spirit won't prove helpful. They'll have to be clever with their resources as they evade capture, put together clues, and identify the real killer to clear their names—without *actually* killing anyone in the process, preferably.

While those two articles explore how magic can be used for good or ill in life-or-death situations, the third grounds us in everyday, communal, heartwarming magic. [Kat Kruger](#)'s "The Nocturne Market" presents a wondrous evening at a magical night market, complete with snacks, street performers, fortune tellers, enchanted face paints, a shadow puppet show, and more. At the Nocturne Market, magic is used to delight, entertain, and bring people together for a shared meal or friendly match of Nightingale. Magic allows the market to travel throughout the Timescape, bringing joy—and some marvelous magic items—to an *ARCADIA* near you....

*De somnio ad itinere,*  
Hannah Rose  
Managing Editor

# THE NOCTURNE MARKET

A MAGICAL LOCATION TO ADD DELIGHT AND WONDER TO ANY CAMPAIGN

by Kat Kruger

IF MEMORIES COULD BE CANNED, WOULD THEY ALSO HAVE EXPIRY DATES?  
IF SO, I HOPE THEY LAST FOR CENTURIES.

—HE ZHIWU, *CHUNGKING EXPRESS*

As twilight descends and the stars begin to twinkle, tantalizing aromas waft through the air. A low murmur of voices rises over the crackle of sizzling foods being grilled. The warm glow of paper lanterns reveals lively market stalls. A journey of the senses awaits those who hearken to the arrival of a magical exchange that rises when the sun sets: the Nocturne Market!

Using magic to travel throughout the Timescape, the market sets up on the outskirts of settlements, spends one night at a location, then packs up its stalls and moves on. Vendors sell anything from handicrafts, magically grown fruits and vegetables, and apparel to delicacies cooked right before the eyes of visitors.

The sprawling open-air market includes amusement zones for revelers complete with live music, while bustling taverns serve cuisines ranging from various worlds and planes. Throughout the market, monster charmers, fortune tellers, resplendent dancers, skilled orators, and street performers add delight to the atmosphere.

## RUNNING THE MARKET

Filled with interesting NPCs, side quests, magical snacks, and more, the Nocturne Market is a magical location and event that's sure to be a night to remember for any adventuring party. Because the temporary stalls appear at twilight and then vanish by dawn, it makes an excellent drop-in location for any setting. As GM, you can also tie the market into an ongoing campaign with one of the following plot hooks (or one of your own creation):

- **Misspelled.** Characters are hired to track down a vendor who sold pirated spell scrolls that are not working as intended due to being literally “misspelled.”
- **Monkey Business.** Thieves (see “Market NPCs” later in this article) have stolen something valuable from the local settlement (or the characters)! This hook provides a fun opportunity for investigation and a possible chase through the market.
- **Food Fight.** A market chef hires the characters to help source the freshest ingredients for a cooking competition.
- **The Show Must Go On.** The characters are hired to procure shadow puppets from Lotus & Lily (see “Market NPCs” later in this article). Unfortunately, there is a spat between the puppeteers that puts their puppet show and business on hold. Characters can help resolve the quarrel and earn a shadow puppet (see “Nocturne Treasures” later in this article) as a reward from the grateful puppeteers.

## BARTERING

Because the market travels to different locations and planes, standard currency is generally not an accepted form of payment. Instead, vendors barter for items they can resell in other locations or ask for favors.

Typically, vendors barter for items of equal value. When looking at costs, consider the monetary value or rarity of an item to determine its value. However, vendors are sometimes willing to part with wares in exchange for favors, with rarer items requiring more



complex favors at your discretion as GM. For example, a character could perform a song, dance, or poem recitation in exchange for a trinket or snack.

A vendor may offer a rarer item in exchange for a favor with an element of danger, or one that requires use of a skill proficiency. For example, a dangerous task could include harvesting an ingredient from a threat-filled local forest, or making a Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to determine which of two similar plants is poisonous. The Determining Favor Value table below offers further guidelines.

### DETERMINING FAVOR VALUE

TASK	DC	VALUE
Very easy	5	Trinkets or 5 gp
Easy	10	Common or 100 gp
Moderate	15	Uncommon or 400 gp
Hard	20	Rare or 4,000 gp
Very hard	25	Very Rare or 40,000 gp
Nearly impossible	30	Legendary or 200,000 gp

## SCAVENGER HUNT

If desired, you can introduce the market to the characters in a more active way. Amah (see “Market NPCs” later in this article) has arranged a scavenger hunt in the market. The characters begin at Nightingale Hall, where details of the contest are revealed. The locations mentioned here are all described in the “Market Locations” sections later in this article. If you like, you can give the players the Nocturne Market map.

**First Clue.** The first task is to claim a moonpie (see “Magical Snacks” later in this article) from the right vendor. The clue Amah gives is: “Where futures are seen and fates unfold, follow the stars to where the moon greets the bold.”

**Second Clue.** A small stall has been set up in Fortune Teller’s Row where an indigo-scaled kobold hands a moonpie to each contestant upon request. One quarter of the moonpie is stamped with edible ink in the shape of a marionette silhouette. The characters are told that they’ll need to collect all four stamps first to win the prize, and are then given the next clue: “Where shadows tell a tale as old as time, learn the beast’s nature from their pantomime.”

**Third Clue.** When characters arrive at the Puppet Show, a small stall with a large screen, they receive a stamp of a cat on one quarter of their moonpie and the following clue: “Seek those guised as animals in a zoo, dodging tails, paws, and claws to earn your next clue.”

**Fourth Clue.** At the small stall in the Kigurumi Menagerie, characters receive a stamp of an inkpot and needle on one quarter of their moonpie, along with the following clue: “Art comes to life in a flash and a shooting star. The fourth stamp awaits you, and the end isn’t far.”

**Fifth Clue.** At the final stall, located in the Inkporium, characters receive a stamp of a bowl of food on the remaining quarter of their moonpie, along with the last clue: “Friends old and new, gather beneath lights released. Make haste—the first to arrive earns their weight in a feast.”

Each clue can be solved by deduction, or with a successful DC 10 Intelligence check made by any character. On a failure, the character still determines the next location, but the ability check to navigate there is made at disadvantage.

To reach the correct location, one character must make a DC 12 ability check of their choice. For example, Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) to find the best route, Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) to swiftly navigate the market, or Charisma (Investigation or Persuasion) to ask people at the market for directions. Any character can make the check, but a different skill must be used each time.

When the characters arrive at each correct location, they find a small stall decorated with the corresponding icon stamped on the moonpie, where the stall attendant then stamps the next icon and gives the next clue. All four quarters must be stamped to claim the final prize at the Driftglobe Garden.

The first group to complete the scavenger hunt is treated to an all-they-can-eat meal at the Driftglobe Garden. The characters win if they succeeded on at least four of their checks to navigate the market.

As the GM, you can include any opponent NPC groups—including the Monkey Around Gang (see “Market NPCs”) in or out of their wizard guise, whom Amah pretends not to notice—and adjust the DCs as you see fit.

## MARKET NPCs

Vendors at the Nocturne Market come from various planes, each bringing something unique to the stalls. They live in a cooperative neighborhood, making repairs together, keeping an eye out for trouble, and performing

any other tasks needed to keep the market operating. Although the vendors travel to many locations, they consider the night market itself to be their home. The vendors are welcome to leave at any time, but they rarely do so, as they have no guarantee of returning due to the itinerant nature of the Nocturne Market.

## AMAH

Nobody knows just how old the matron who oversees the market is, but everyone defers to her when it comes to matters of business (and sometimes of the heart). Going by the honorific Amah (she/her), the elderly dragonborn is often found at Nightingale Hall (see “Market Locations” later in this article) playing a friendly match of Nightingale, a strategic tile game. Other times, she wanders the marketplace, using a black lacquered staff topped with a gold crescent moon as a walking aid while she visits with the vendors and samples their wares. Always up for a game of Nightingale, Amah rewards a character who wins against her with any item at the market that’s up for barter, the cost of which she covers.



# AMAH

Medium Humanoid (Brass Dragonborn), Chaotic Good

**Armor Class** 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 77 (14d8 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Con +4, Wis +6, Cha +5

**Skills** Arcana +6, History +6, Insight +6, Perception +6

**Damage Resistances** fire, radiant

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Common, Draconic

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

**Crescent Moon Magic.** Amah carries a *crescent moon staff* (see “Nocturne Treasures” later in this article), which is a magic weapon. When Amah casts a spell that restores hit points while holding the staff, she can roll a d8 and add the number rolled to the amount of hit points restored (included in her Actions).

**Legendary Resistance (2/Day).** If Amah fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Amah makes two Crescent Moon Staff attacks. She can replace one of the attacks with a Starry Bolt attack or a use of Spellcasting.

**Crescent Moon Staff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

**Starry Bolt (Cantrip).** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (6d4) radiant damage.

**Cure Wounds (5/Day; 2nd-Level Spell).** Amah touches a creature and they regain 16 (3d8 + 3) hit points.

**Spellcasting.** Amah casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14):

At will: *dancing lights*, *druidcraft*, *mending*

3/day each: *entangle*, *faerie fire*, *mage armor*

1/day each: *dispel magic*, *moonbeam*, *polymorph*

**Breath Weapons (Recharge 5–6).** Amah uses one of the following breath weapons.

**Fire Breath.** Amah exhales fire in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

**Sleep Breath.** Amah exhales a nebula of twinkling stars in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 5 minutes. This effect ends for a creature if the creature takes damage or if someone uses an action to wake them.

## LILY AND LOTUS

These two puppeteers are like night and day, which is perhaps the secret of their success and great love for each other. Lily (she/her) is a stoic oni who dresses in black silk robes with emerald green embroidery. Moody and somber, she creates masterfully crafted shadow puppets from paper. Lotus (they/them) is a gregarious dryad with ever-changing costumes that match the seasons. When they perform a puppet show, they are the heart of it themselves, eliciting many emotions through beautifully operatic songs.

## MONKEY AROUND GANG

Orphans who escaped their worlds, the Monkey Around Gang are stowaways at the Nocturne Market. The goblin twins FeiFei (she/her) and Wei (he/him) banded together with a deep gnome named Ru (she/they) to help

each other survive. Clever and charming, the children learned to barter early on and have mastered the art of working together and causing mischief—but not so much that they’ll be expelled from the market. Amah punishes those caught stealing or engaging in harmful activities with a magically enforced lifetime ban, so the children never willingly do anything to jeopardize their stay.

Still, there is much relatively harmless mischief to be had. Sometimes they three-stack in a wizard’s robe or another costume. Other times, FeiFei uses a *kigurumi of wild shape* (see “Nocturne Treasures” later in this article) to transform into a weasel and pilfer items from local settlements, which they then barter for basic amenities at the market. They’ve even been known to resell items taken from other worlds in an alley between vendor stalls.



# MARKET LOCATIONS

Like most street markets that operate at night, the Nocturne Market is dedicated to leisurely activities rather than more businesslike day markets. The open-air market includes many cultural features from around the multiverse, many of which are listed here. As GM, you can add to the location as you see fit.

The following locations are shown on the map of the Nocturne Market, which you can share with your players as an in-world item (see the Resources section).

## M1. DRIFTGLOBE GARDEN

Surrounded by food and beverage stalls, the Driftglobe Garden is an open dining area with shared seating crowded together. This social area is meant to create new connections between strangers and provide a sense of community. Various musicians play throughout the night as *driftglobes* shaped like stars float above the patrons and light the area. The Magical Snacks table lists some of the popular items available at stalls in the garden. Snacks spoil if not consumed within 24 hours.

## M2. FORTUNE TELLER'S ROW

Characters can learn more of their fates through seers who prophesize using tasseomancy, throwing bones,

and other means. The fortune tellers here cast divination spells such as *augury*, *divination*, and *scrying*.

## M3. COSMIC COSMETICS

No ordinary makeup counter, these skilled vendors infuse cosmetic products with magic enough to make a star of anyone. The makeup offerings in these stalls provide varying degrees of illusion and transmutation spells (see “Nocturne Treasures” later in this article). One vendor, a charming orc, also offers face-painting services as a one-time use of the *cosmic cosmetics*; the value of this service is equivalent to a consumable uncommon item (valued between 50 and 300 gp) or an easy favor, such as gathering magic components from the local area (see the Determining Favor Value table earlier in this article).

## M4. NATURE'S HARVEST

Along with herbalism kits and poisoner's kits, this stall features monster medicine. At your discretion, the vendors here can craft potions and other consumables using monster parts or herbs the characters offer. Crafting an item has a 10 percent chance of a cosmetic complication arising for a creature consuming the finished product, such as growing a tail. The items in the Monster Medicinals table are readily available at the market at any given time.



## MAGICAL SNACKS

ITEM	VENDOR	DESCRIPTION	PROPERTY
Meowzee	A good-humored dwarf whose face is dusted with flour	Glutinous rice flour dumplings shaped like a cat's face and filled with nut butter or sesame paste	A creature who consumes this item receives the benefits of the <i>Speak with Animals</i> spell until the next dawn.
Star brew	A dreamy sunset-hued tiefling who sighs often	Caramel popping bubbles formed into stars that float in a sweet black nectar	A creature who consumes this item gains darkvision out to a range of 30 feet until the next dawn. If they already have darkvision, its range increases by 30 feet.
Moonpie	A giddy elf who talks incessantly	Round pastries filled with cheesecake	A creature who consumes this item can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to one ability check of its choice before the next dawn. They can roll the die before or after making the ability check.
Astromancy stew	A stern gnome of few words	Noodles form shapes in broth based on a vision	A creature who consumes this item sees a vision from a moon deity as though they had cast the <i>Augury</i> spell.

## MONSTER MEDICINALS

ITEM	RARITY
<i>Dust of disappearance</i>	Uncommon
<i>Oil of etherealness</i>	Rare
<i>Oil of slipperiness</i>	Uncommon
<i>Potion of climbing</i>	Common
<i>Potion of heroism</i>	Rare
<i>Potion of resistance</i>	Uncommon
<i>Potion of speed</i>	Very rare
<i>Restorative ointment</i>	Uncommon

### M5. INKPORIUM

Characters looking to ink their bodies at the Nocturne Market turn to the incredible Inkporium artists, who offer flash sheets of various designs that allow the recipient to cast a cantrip at will. These sheets are available in exchange for an easy favor (see the Determining Favor Value table earlier in this article) and include the following designs and cantrips:

- Constellations to cast *dancing lights*
- Full moon to cast *light*
- Moonflower to cast *druidcraft*

For the rare client who can barter for a more powerful arcane tattoo, a special design—a shower of shooting stars—is available from a kindly goblin (see “Nocturne Treasures” later in this article). The goblin accepts another very rare magic item or a hard favor in exchange for tattooing a character with the *lucky stars tattoo*.

### M6. KIGURUMI MENAGERIE

Characters searching for whimsy need not look further than the market stalls in the Kigurumi Menagerie, which sell animal onesies of all sorts. Those keen to get in touch with their wild side may want to pick up a *kigurumi of wild shape*, which allows its wearer to turn into a specific animal (see “Nocturne Treasures” later in this article).

### M7. PUPPET SHOW

Run by the talented duo Lily and Lotus, the 20-minute play runs at the top of every hour, with the last showing at midnight. Flat, articulated shadow puppets are held between a source of light and a translucent screen. Various effects are achieved through movement, light, and magic. When the characters visit, the current show is called “Beauty of the Beast” and plays out as follows, with operatic music sung by Lotus:

The silhouette of a terrifying beast enters a forest. They gently pick flowers and interact with wildlife, until a young woman with flowing hair and ribbons prances into the scene. When the beast and dancing figure see each other, hearts float above the beast, and he kneels before the beauty, holding a hand to his heart. After a pause, the beauty laughs and points, and the hearts fall like rain upon the beast. She twirls from the scene.

The beast stands, a dim cloud still hanging over him, and wanders dejectedly through the woods until he falls asleep weeping. The sun sets and rises, and when he wakes, he continues his sad walk, not noticing he has entered a briar patch. A thorn pierces his arm, and he unleashes a roar that sends birds scattering into the skies. Soon, another humanoid figure enters the scene. The beast cowers, ashamed. But this humanoid is undaunted, and as she tends to the beast's wounds, the birds return, the cloud of sorrow disappears, and hearts float around them both.

## M8. NIGHTINGALE HALL

The small recreation center is a colorful stone building with paper lanterns hanging from the ceiling. Those who gather here play a tile-based game called Nightingale. The tiles are decorated in suits, including phases of the moon, stars, and feathers. A hand of 13 tiles is dealt, and the goal is to collect the best phases (sets) or wings (pairs).

The characters draw and discard tiles, aiming to complete a hand with playable sets, much like in mahjong or rummy. To play, a character must make three ability checks, and they must succeed on at least two to win. You can set a DC for each check equal to  $5 + 1d20$ , or you can choose the DC for these checks based on how skilled you want their competitor to be. Amah, for example, is an expert player who requires a successful DC 25 on all checks to defeat.

You can use any combination of checks and role-playing to represent a character's attempts to play, but each game should involve three different checks. Generate a separate DC for each check. An Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Perception) check might allow a character to figure out a good strategy, while a Wisdom (Insight) or Charisma (Deception) check gives understanding of the competition or allows a character to bluff.

## NOCTURNE TREASURES

This magical location has many items to delight travelers. Some are more easily obtained than others (see the Determining Favor Value table earlier in this article).

### COSMIC COSMETICS

*Wondrous Item, Rare*

These cosmetics are available in a wide range of products including eye shadow, lipstick, nail polish, and more. The cosmetics have 7 charges and take 10 minutes to apply. They fade after 8 hours or when the makeup is removed by the wearer as an action. While wearing the makeup, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it: *disguise self* (save DC 15) or *alter self* (no concentration required). The spell ends early if you remove the makeup.

The cosmetics are self-replenishing and regain  $1d6 + 1$  expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the cosmetics crumble into chalky dust and are destroyed.

### CRESCENT MOON STAFF

*Staff, Rare (Requires Attunement by a Bard, Cleric, or Druid)*

This black lacquered staff is topped with a gold crescent moon and can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff with a d8 damage die. You can use your spellcasting ability modifier instead of your Strength modifier for attack and damage rolls made with this weapon. When you cast a spell that restores hit points while holding the staff, you can roll a d8 and add the number rolled to the amount of hit points restored.

The staff has 10 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier: *cure wounds* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th), *faerie fire* (2 charges), or *moonbeam* (3 charges).

The staff regains  $1d6 + 4$  expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff disappears forever in a twinkle of stars.

### KIGURUMI OF WILD SHAPE

*Wondrous Item, Varies (Requires Attunement)*

While wearing this cozy one-piece costume, you can use your action to transform into the creature represented by the kigurumi.

The transformation lasts for 1 hour or until you fall unconscious, drop to 0 hit points, or die. You can also end it early as a bonus action. While transformed,

your game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the creature, but you retain your alignment, personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores.

You assume the hit points of your new form. When you revert to your normal form, you return to the number of hit points you had before you transformed. If you revert as a result of dropping to 0 hit points, any excess damage carries over to your normal form. As long as the excess damage doesn't reduce your normal form to 0 hit points, you aren't knocked unconscious.

You can't cast spells, and your ability to speak or take any action that requires hands is limited to the capabilities of your new form. You choose whether your equipment falls to the ground in your space, merges into your new form, or is worn by it. Worn equipment functions as normal, but the GM decides whether it is practical for the new form to wear a piece of equipment, based on the creature's shape and size. Your equipment doesn't change size or shape to match the new form, and any equipment that the new form can't wear must either fall to the ground or merge with it. Equipment that merges with the form has no effect until you leave the form.

Twelve types of *kigurumi* exist. Once you use the *kigurumi* to transform, it can't be used this way again until the next dawn.

### KIGURUMI VARIETIES

CREATURE	RARITY
Goat	Uncommon
Rat	Uncommon
Weasel	Uncommon
Ape	Rare
Boar	Rare
Constrictor Snake	Rare
Crocodile	Rare
Elk	Rare
Riding Horse	Rare
Dire Wolf	Very Rare
Giant Eagle	Very Rare
Tiger	Very Rare

## LUCKY STARS TATTOO

*Wondrous Item (Tattoo), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)*

Obtained by an artist at the Nocturne Market, this shimmering silvery needle creates a magic tattoo of six shooting stars. With each charge used, a star shimmers briefly before dimming slightly.

**Tattoo Attunement.** To attune to this item, you press the needle to your skin where you want the tattoo to appear, holding it in place throughout the attunement process. When the attunement is complete, the needle transforms into the tattoo on your skin. If your attunement to the tattoo ends, the tattoo vanishes, and the needle returns to your possession.

**Lucky Stars.** The tattoo has 6 charges, and it regains all expended charges daily at dusk. While this tattoo is on your skin, you gain the following benefits:

- As a bonus action, you can cast *guidance* at will.
- When you make an attack roll, an ability check, or a saving throw, you can expend 2 charges to twist fate: you reroll one d20 and choose which roll of that die to use. Alternatively, when an attack roll is made against you, you can force the attacker to reroll one d20, and you choose which roll of that die to use.
- As an action, you can expend 1 charge to shoot one of the stars from the tattoo, casting *magic missile* as a 3rd-level spell. Alternatively, you can expend 3 charges to cast it as a 6th-level spell.

## SHADOW PUPPET

*Wondrous Item, Rare*

This paper craft puppet is small enough to fit in a pocket. If you use an action to speak the command word and throw the puppet to a point on the ground within 10 feet of you, the puppet becomes a **shadow** with the following adjustments: its creature type is Construct instead of Undead, and it can't create more shadows. The shadow is friendly to you and your companions. It acts independently of you, but it always obeys your commands. In combat, it rolls its own initiative and acts on its own turn.

The shadow reverts to a puppet after 8 hours, if it drops to 0 hit points, or if you use an action to speak the command word again while touching it. When the shadow reverts to a puppet, it can't become a shadow again until the next dusk.

# THE AURUM COURT

A TANGLED WEB OF CONFLICTING COURTIERS AND TREACHEROUS INTRIGUE

by Amber Litke

**Content Warning:** This article contains an instance of a teenage girl in danger and themes of prejudice against tieflings. We recommend using the [MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit and Checklist](#) and adjusting as needed to ensure everyone has a good time.

THE COURTS OF KINGS ARE FULL OF PEOPLE, BUT EMPTY OF FRIENDS.

—SENECA THE ELDER

When your players enter a major city, they might expect to be—intentionally or begrudgingly—embroiled in its politics. For a table that enjoys political intrigue, the twisted web of red thread and pushpins can be extremely satisfying to navigate. However, creating engaging personalities and tangled motivations for a satisfying intrigue plotline isn't easy, and a GM in a pinch might not have the time.

“The Aurum Court” is here to help! This article, suitable for any tier of play, contains a court of NPCs vying for the throne, adventure hooks to engage the characters in the story, and the Gilded Gala, a one-to-two-session encounter to tie it all together. The article can be dropped into your campaign as a ready-to-use political scenario, or its pieces mixed and matched to supplement an existing intrigue plot. Have a setting and NPCs, but missing motivations? Change out the names. Already drafting a political web, but struggling to fill it out? Take some of these NPCs and tweak them to fit your narrative. Have the cast, but unsure how it all comes together? Use the framework of the Gilded Gala scenario to bring your tense politics to a climactic finish.

## A COURT IN CHAOS

The following section outlines the Aurum Court's history, key players, and tumultuous political situation—ultimately, the player characters will shape the kingdom's future by deciding who to support as its next monarch. The provided adventure hooks introduce the characters to the state of affairs, either neutrally or in a way that immediately draws the characters into a courtier's plans.

## OUR STORY THUS FAR

For centuries, the kingdom of Dhustrad has been in conflict with the empire of Atrus. Minor skirmishes, stolen resources, and disrupted trade culminated in several bloody wars, feeding Atrus's power and leaving Dhustrad in increasingly dire straits. The most recent Dhustrad king, Alphonsus Hithalwynn, sought peace, but his overtures were repeatedly rejected by Atrusian Empress Venetia Kain.

Desperate to avoid another full-scale war, young Alphonsus made a deal with a devil—trading the fate of his soul for peace with Atrus. Empress Venetia died suddenly, leaving the throne to her spiritless heir, Helias, who established a strained truce with Dhustrad that persists to this day.

Alphonsus's infernal dealings went undiscovered until his wife, Odette, gave birth to their daughter—a tiefling. As the king was human and his wife half-elven, rumors regarding their infernal dealings circulated throughout Dhustrad, burgeoning into discontent despite the kingdom's recovery and continued prosperity.

Then, thirteen years later, Alphonsus and Odette were assassinated.

The monarchs were killed during a public address, and the culprits were never caught nor identified. This article assumes the sovereigns were killed by Atrusian zealots, but depending on the narrative you wish to tell, the assassin could be from Dhustrad and working with one of the courtiers.

Crown Princess Lyetta Hithalwynn is heir to the throne, but Dhustrad's Aurum Court is divided on whether to let her bear the crown. While numerous key figures angle to take advantage of the empty throne, the characters are unknown variables who can tip the balance and determine the future of Dhustrad.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

The following adventure hooks can lead characters into the Aurum Court's intrigue:

**A Formal Request.** The characters receive a letter requesting political assistance from Lyetta or the courtier whose views and motivations best align with the characters'.

**Witnesses of Tragedy.** The characters are present for the public address where Alphonsus and Odette are killed.

**Supporting an Alliance.** The characters are sent by one of Dhustrad's allies, who is concerned by the unrest in the kingdom's leadership following the assassination.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following section describes the five key members of the Aurum Court. The "Earning Trust" section under each NPC gives a foundation for building relationships with these characters, which is then continued under "Creating Intrigue" later in the article. While no quests are necessary, each one gives the characters further insight into the NPCs, which is pivotal to their decision-making as tensions ramp up and the Gilded Gala approaches.

**Lyetta Hithalwynn** (Lie-EHT-uh hih-THALL-winn). The young crown princess of Dhustrad, who seeks the throne to restore honor to her family's legacy.

**Lorentius Granvhulf** (lo-REN-shus gran-VULF). The princess's lord regent, who is obsessed with making an infernal pact for the power to puppet the throne through Lyetta.

**Zoya Ionvi** (ZOY-uh eye-YON-vee). The court's spymaster and a divine agent whose premonitions of a dark future position her against the princess.

**Brenum Nidar** (BREH-num nih-DAR). A lord with a claim to the throne who champions the people, but whose ideals might lead them to revolution.

**Shani Jissal** (SHAH-nee jih-SALL). An Atrusian zealot posing as a noble of Dhustrad to pave the way for her empire's conquest.

This article assumes that, without the intervention of the player characters, Lorentius succeeds in using infernal magic to make Lyetta a puppet sovereign.

## PRINCESS LYETTA HITHALWYNN

As Alphonsus and Odette's sole heir, Crown Princess Lyetta Melodia Prospera Hithalwynn sits at the center of the court's controversy. Opinions are divided on whether House Hithalwynn should retain the right to rule after Alphonsus's infernal dealings, leaving Lyetta's position uncertain as key figures and groups withhold their support.

**Appearance.** Lyetta is an adolescent, gold-skinned tiefling with swept-back horns and thick, wavy, pale-blond hair. She wears loose dresses in pale fabrics with elaborate embroidery.

**Personality and Mannerisms.** Aware of the machinations around her, Lyetta is keen, wary, and affords trust only after sufficient action. Despite her guarded



demeanor, she is too forthright to lie and bluntly avoids topics she is unwilling to discuss.

**Motivations.** Though Lyetta recognizes what her infernal heritage means, she seeks to uphold the honor of her father's legacy by ruling Dhustrad and maintaining peace with Atrus. To become that queen, she needs to gain the favor of Dhustrad's nobles and common folk, prove her regent's treachery, and wield her own power.

**Stat Block.** Lyetta uses the **noble** stat block with the following changes:

- She has resistance to fire damage.
- She can cast *thaumaturgy* at will.
- She is attuned to the following magic items: a *brooch of shielding* (a diamond necklace), a *cloak of displacement* (a sheer shawl), and a *rod of alertness* (a golden scepter).

**Guardian.** Lyetta is always accompanied by her childhood protector, Pallus, a winged white lion. Pallus uses the **chimera** stat block, but is neutral good and can only understand simple Common phrases.

## HALCYON GUARD

The Halcyon Guard protects the royal palace, known as the Halcyon Seat, and the royal family. It is led by Knight Commander Alluin Evenvale (**gladiator**, or **bodyguard** from "Appendix NPC: Part 1" in *ARCADIA* 18), an elven man with copper-toned skin, tightly bound dark brown hair, and a prosthetic mithril right arm. He and most of his guards are deeply loyal to the princess, though some guards are in the pockets of other courtiers.

## RELATIONSHIPS

The following section details Lyetta's relationship with the other courtiers.

**Lorentius.** Lyetta has glimpsed the darkness behind Lorentius's mask through his increasingly disquieting behavior and no longer trusts him.

**Zoya.** Lyetta trusts Zoya and believes the spymaster is protecting her from threats, especially ones related to her disputed inheritance.

**Brenum.** Lyetta respects Brenum, but fundamentally opposes their claim to her father's throne.

**Shani.** Lyetta mistrusts Shani's sly tongue and unpredictable decisions.

## INTERACTIONS

The following section describes Lyetta's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

**Call to Action.** Lyetta wants the characters to perform tasks she can't do herself, such as investigating the other courtiers or helping her cultivate relationships with potential allies. In exchange for aid, she offers monetary rewards or the Halcyon Guard's assistance.

**Mood.** Lyetta starts off indifferent toward the characters. She becomes friendly if the characters consistently aid her, especially publicly. She becomes hostile if the characters openly maneuver against her, patronize her, or otherwise disrespect her; while Lyetta is hostile, the Halcyon Guard is also hostile toward the characters.

**Earning Trust.** Lyetta must trust the characters before she brings them into her confidence or asks for their aid with sensitive tasks. The characters can earn her trust by publicly declaring they support her, turning the opinion of minor nobles in her favor, standing up to Lorentius for her, letting her keep an item of significance for each character as collateral while they assist her, or treating Pallas with respect and bringing the winged lion his favorite treat—a spiced pitaya, which grows near Dragon lairs.

## LYETTA'S AGE

As written, Princess Lyetta is 13 years old—a cunning adolescent navigating treacherous politics after her parents' assassination. Ensure your table is comfortable with a child's endangerment before running this scenario. If your table isn't comfortable with Lyetta's written age but you want to use this material, you can make minor adjustments, such as aging her up to an older teenager, or major changes, such as making her a young woman whose agency as a future ruler is unfairly held by a regent, and adjust the timeline accordingly.

## LORD REGENT LORENTIUS GRANVHULF

A close friend of the late king Alphonsus, Lorentius Granvhulf was named lord regent after the assassination due to his position as chief advisor, since Lyetta is not of age to hold administrative power. However, despite publicly supporting the princess, he is obsessed with Alphonsus's infernal dealings. Lorentius won't squander such a deal, as he believes Alphonsus did—he would instead wield the power to pull Dhustrad's strings while Lyetta reigns as a mere figurehead. Lorentius has great favor with Dhustrad's minor nobles by investigating Alphonsus's devil deal, which Lorentius claims is to ensure their safety.

**Appearance.** Lorentius is a middle-aged half-elven man with pale skin, slicked-back salt-and-pepper hair, and graying stubble. He wears dark, well-cut attire with a spotless white cravat.

**Personality and Mannerisms.** Opportunistic by nature, Lorentius's self-centered and ambitious traits were tempered by his friendship with and duty toward Alphonsus. After the revelation of the king's infernal dealings, an

obsession with fiendish power festered in Lorentius—and once the king was murdered, he abandoned his dedication to the crown entirely to pursue it. He lies easily and manipulates others by playing on their emotions. Outwardly disarming, Lorentius talks with his hands and wears a charming smile.

**Motivations.** Lorentius wants to discover the devil Alphonsus dealt with so he can make a deal of his own. If his scheming comes to light, Lorentius claims he seeks to cure his ill wife, Tahvia. This is a lie; after Tahvia confronted him about his erratic and obsessive behavior, Lorentius sealed her in his *mirror of life trapping*, something he is willing to do to anyone who threatens his goals.

**Stat Block.** Lorentius uses the **cult fanatic** stat block with the following changes:

- He knows Common and Elvish.
- He has a +6 bonus to Charisma (Deception) checks.
- He is attuned to a *ring of mind shielding*.
- He has the following trait:

**Fey Ancestry.** Lorentius has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

## RELATIONSHIPS

The following section details Lorentius's relationship with the other courtiers.

**Lyetta.** Lorentius considers Lyetta a tool, both a puppet he can use to control the country and a valuable



soul to offer the devil Cerzus, given his essence runs through her blood, in lieu of Lorentius's own soul.

**Zoya.** Lorentius is frustrated he can't monitor or control Zoya's actions.

**Brenum.** Lorentius regards Brenum as a nuisance he wants removed.

**Shani.** Lorentius believes Shani could be a useful ally, though not one he trusts.

## INTERACTIONS

The following section describes Lorentius's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

**Call to Action.** Lorentius wants the characters to assist in his investigation into Alphonsus's infernal deal. In exchange for aid, he offers consumable magic items or arranges political favors from minor nobles. If the characters prove bribable and morally bankrupt, Lorentius could bring them into the truth of his plan, offering them infernal power of their own—whether he'll make good on that promise is up to you as the GM.

**Mood.** Lorentius starts as indifferent, leaning hostile, toward the characters. He becomes friendly if the characters assist him while remaining ignorant of his real plan or wholeheartedly support his true desires. He becomes hostile if the characters maneuver against him, such as by aiding Brenum or Lyetta; while hostile, Lorentius sows distrust of the characters among the minor nobles and, if pushed far enough, tries to ensnare them in the *mirror of life trapping* (the command word is "ambuscade") in his palace chambers.

**Earning Trust.** Lorentius trusts no one, even those who know his true plans, but makes a convincing show of acting as though he does. Even while working with those who would help him achieve his goals, Lorentius is prepared to betray them the moment it is more advantageous than their presence.

## SPYMASTER ZOYA IONVI

Dhustrad's spymaster is the taciturn Zoya Ionvi. Though she appears devoted to the crown, she is a primordial scion (see the "Primordial Scions" sidebar) whose loyalty to the heavens outweighs any faith in a mortal throne.

**Appearance.** Zoya is an angular woman who appears human, with warm brown skin and shoulder-length, curly black hair. She wears dark leathers on missions or muted court gowns in the palace. When Zoya draws upon her primordial magic, her eyes and veins glow with pale blue light and her form blurs at the edges.

**Personality and Mannerisms.** Zoya is often silent and unexpressive, making her difficult to read, and only conveys what she means to. She has tight control of her body language, save one tic: she subtly taps her foot when stressed.



**Motivations.** While her premonitions as a primordial scion made her an effective spymaster under Alphonsus, Zoya has foreseen doom if his devil-tainted lineage holds the throne. Her visions depict Dhustrad becoming conquerors under fiendish banners, burning Atrus in hellfire before descending on the wider world—though she is unaware Lorentius’s scheming is the cause of this future. She acts from the shadows to prevent that outcome. At the GM’s discretion, Zoya could witness new visions of a better future if the characters work against Lorentius.

**Stat Block.** Zoya uses the **assassin** stat block with the following changes:

- She has darkvision out to 60 feet.
- She has a +6 bonus to Charisma (Deception) checks.
- She has resistance to necrotic damage and radiant damage.
- She knows Celestial and Common.
- She gains the following action option:

**Divine Arbiter (1/Day).** Zoya becomes an avatar of primordial magic for 1 minute or until she ends it as a bonus action. During the transformation, she can use a reaction to cause one creature she can see within 30 feet of her to reroll their damage dice after they make a successful attack. The creature must use the new roll.

- She gains the following bonus action option:

**Manipulate Forces (3/Day).** Zoya can cause a creature she can see within 60 feet of her to make a DC 14 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is moved up to 10 feet in a direction of Zoya’s choice, including upward.

## PRIMORDIAL SCIONS

From “Angelic Ancestries” in *ARCADIA* 11, primordial scions are bestowed power by ancient angels, allowing them to “glimpse the grand inner workings of the universe—the eternal clockwork of time, kismet, and the unknowable energies that connect the planes.” They typically become agents of fate and influence the direction of the world to maintain balance.

## RELATIONSHIPS

The following section details Zoya’s relationship with the other courtiers.

**Lyetta.** Zoya has nothing personal against the princess, but has sworn to remove her infernal heritage from Dhustrad’s throne.

**Lorentius.** Zoya doesn’t trust Lorentius and hasn’t figured out where he’s moved his wife.



**Brenum.** Zoya subtly supports Brenum, as they are the strongest contender to dethrone House Hithalwynn.

**Shani.** Zoya believes Shani is a problem, but one to be dealt with after the matter of succession.

## INTERACTIONS

The following section describes Zoya’s actions and attitude toward the player characters.

**Call to Action.** Zoya wants the characters’ assistance supporting Brenum, though she is not overt about these requests unless the characters have earned her trust. In exchange for aid, she offers monetary rewards or information the characters wouldn’t be able to gather themselves.

**Mood.** Zoya starts off indifferent toward the characters. She becomes friendly if the characters aid her goals directly or indirectly. She becomes hostile if the characters maneuver against her or if they attract suspicion while aiding her; while Zoya is hostile, her spies impede the characters through false information and, eventually, assassination attempts.

**Earning Trust.** Zoya won’t let the characters into her confidence unless she trusts them, which requires consistent and verifiable proof from their past that the characters zealously oppose fiendish forces or that they publicly support Brenum over Lyetta. She more easily trusts characters who work for the divine (such as clerics or paladins in service to a Celestial deity).

## LORD BRENUM NIDAR

The implications of House Hithalwynn's infernal dealings have created opportunities for House Nidar, which can trace its bloodline to the early sovereigns of Dhustrad. Lord Brenum Nidar has staked a claim against Princess Lyetta, considering her unfit to lead for her father's sins.

**Appearance.** Brenum is a nonbinary human with dark umber skin and short, upswept brown hair. They wear sleek court robes made of many rich colors and gold embroidery.

**Personality and Mannerisms.** Brenum is passionate, outspoken, and a poor liar. They believe what they say and, while they can debate logically, they are driven by their emotions. Brenum uses their whole body while communicating and is very tactile.

**Motivations.** Brenum feels betrayed by Alphonsus's infernal deal, a sentiment they have seen echoed among parts of Dhustrad's populace, and believes Lyetta can't be trusted with the throne. They seek to establish a rule that represents the people—whether by gaining the support necessary to be coronated or rallying the disillusioned common folk to revolution.

**Stat Block.** Brenum uses the noble stat block.

## RELATIONSHIPS

The following section details Brenum's relationship with the other courtiers.

**Lyetta.** Brenum believes Lyetta is too young and too influenced by her father to be the ruler Dhustrad needs.

**Lorentius.** Brenum considers Lorentius too close to Alphonsus to be trusted as lord regent.

**Zoya.** Brenum doesn't trust Zoya, believing her loyal to the Hithalwynn crown.

**Shani.** Brenum considers Shani an ally, though one to hold at arm's length.

## INTERACTIONS

The following section describes Brenum's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

**Call to Action.** Brenum wants the characters' help forging connections to solidify and support their claim to the throne. In exchange for aid, they can offer monetary rewards or open up connections with merchants and suppliers.

**Mood.** Brenum starts off indifferent toward the characters. They become friendly if the characters publicly support them. They become hostile if the characters maneuver against them or take advantage of Dhustrad's people; while hostile, Brenum publicly decries the characters, spreading rumors about them or digging up controversies from their pasts.



**Earning Trust.** Brenum is quick to trust those that support them, especially those that provide succor to the common folk. They confide in characters whom they trust, communicating their struggles and asking for advice.

## LADY SHANI JISSAL

A recent addition to Dhustrad's Aurum Court, Lady Shani Jissal has established herself as a mercurial political player. Secretly, she is an Atrusian agent who infiltrated Dhustrad's minor nobles and cleverly angled her way into the court through cunning and magic. Shani numbers among the Atrusian zealots who consider Helias spineless and seek to finish Empress Venetia's grand vision of conquest.

**Appearance.** Shani is a tall, plump half-orc with cool, tan skin and auburn hair in a thick braid down her back. She wears off-the-shoulder dresses with eye-catching patterns.

**Personality and Mannerisms.** Shani has a sharp tongue, sharper wit, and keen insight, knowing just the right—or wrong—thing to say. Restless, she is constantly moving in some way, literally and figuratively, and her courtly persona is flighty, never holding the same allegiance or opinion for long.

**Motivations.** Shani holds fast to Empress Venetia's ideology of Atrus supremacy and angles to destabilize Dhustrad—either by inciting revolution through Brenum



or helping Lyetta onto the throne without Lorentius's aid, whichever seems easier to achieve.

**Stat Block.** Shani uses the **mage** stat block with the following changes:

- She has a +6 bonus to Charisma (Deception) checks.
- She knows the *modify memory* spell instead of the *cone of cold* spell. (If your group is uncomfortable with memory alteration, she knows the *mislead* spell instead.)

## RELATIONSHIPS

The following section details Shani's relationship with the other courtiers.

**Lyetta.** Shani treats Lyetta with the courtesy due her station, but believes Lyetta is ineffectual and harmless by herself.

**Lorentius.** Shani considers Lorentius a threat to be removed if Lyetta claims the throne, recognizing that he seeks to manipulate the princess.

**Zoya.** Shani is frustrated by Zoya's evasiveness and considers her dangerous.

**Brenum.** Shani gleefully fuels Brenum's seditious ideals, hoping for a revolution rather than the lord legitimately claiming the throne.

## INTERACTIONS

The following section describes Shani's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

**Call to Action.** Shani wants the characters' aid supporting revolution or making Lyetta an independent ruler, based on the party's actions and who they support. In exchange for aid, she can offer magic items or support through fellow zealots—though she won't mention they're from Atrus unless the characters support her homeland.

**Mood.** Shani starts off friendly toward the characters, believing them useful tools for her schemes. She becomes neutral and eventually hostile if the characters maneuver against either of her goals or position themselves against Atrus; while hostile, Shani uses her network of zealots (**gladiators** and **mag**s) to sabotage the characters' efforts.

**Earning Trust.** Shani feigns trusting characters she's allied with. Her sincere trust is reserved for those who believe in Atrus's supremacy and swear themselves to Empress Venetia's vision; to characters she trusts, Shani is an unyielding ally, willing to do almost anything to support her bloodsworn collaborators.

## CREATING INTRIGUE

So far, this article has provided a foundation and chess pieces. The sections to come give guidance on conclusion conditions in "To Become Queen" and a structured event in "The Gilded Gala." But what do you do between set up and pay off?

After drawing the player characters to Dhustrad using one of the adventure hooks, have multiple courtiers approach them—especially courtiers with opposing goals to the courtier the characters were invited by or have gravitated toward—for various favors over the next few sessions. The characters could change allegiances or brush off those requests and instead ask their courtier of choice what tasks they need accomplished. Throw in complications caused by hostile courtiers as the characters' allegiances become clear and public. When you feel tensions have appropriately reached a head, you can transition to the Gilded Gala.

## DEVELOPING DRAMA

This section outlines two examples that follow this formula to help visualize this chain of events.

### A PRINCESS'S REQUEST

Lyetta invites the characters to Dhustrad through the "A Formal Request" adventure hook. After informing the characters of the situation, Lyetta ensures their trustworthiness; if the characters prove themselves, Lyetta asks a favor of them (see "Example Quests" below). The characters are also approached by Lorentius, Zoya, and Brenum, who attempt to pivot the characters toward

their specific goals. If characters remain loyal to Lyetta, she continues to request favors while the previous courtiers slander the characters throughout Dhustrad (though the characters' reputation and future deeds could dispel such defamation). When the characters have uncovered enough evidence of plots against Lyetta, they receive their invitations to the Gilded Gala and must put a stop to the treachery.

## A KINGDOM IN STRIFE

The characters are present for Alphonsus and Odette's assassination through the "Witnesses of Tragedy" adventure hook. In the aftermath, Brenum approaches the characters and requests aid from capable adventurers to help them claim the throne. If the characters agree, they are also approached by Zoya and Shani—the former to help with a legitimate claim, and the latter to fan revolution. While the characters consider what method to support, Lyetta and Lorentius create obstacles for the characters until the tension reaches a boiling point. The characters can either attend the Gilded Gala as normal to help Brenum secure support for a coronation or march on the gala to aid Brenum in forcefully taking the throne.

## EXAMPLE QUESTS

The following quests are examples of what the courtiers might ask the characters to do that further their goals. These quests can be given after the characters have created some rapport with the characters (such as Lyetta's high-stakes quest) or given at the start to draw the characters into their goals (such as Brenum's campaigning). You can change, expand, or entirely replace the quests with your own if desired.

**Lyetta's Quest.** Lyetta asks characters she trusts to investigate Lorentius and find proof of his treachery. This might involve finding records of his plans, his *mirror of life trapping*, or another piece of physical evidence. If the characters are successful, Lyetta rewards them with access to the Halcyon Seat's hidden royal passages.

**Lorentius's Quest.** Lorentius requests the characters find some record of the ritual Alphonsus used to summon a devil. The characters can find this information in one of the king's journals amongst his effects, which Lyetta controls access to. If the characters are successful, Lorentius rewards them with a *potion of speed* (or another magical consumable appropriate to the party's level).

**Zoya's Quest.** Zoya asks the characters to aid her spies in digging up blackmail on three of the minor nobles. The characters can achieve this by whatever means available to them, as long as their connection to Zoya remains obfuscated. If the characters are in her

confidence, Zoya is honest this is to help Brenum—otherwise, she claims it's to secure loyalty to Lyetta. If the characters are successful, Zoya rewards them with several pieces of information about topics of their choice.

**Brenum's Quest.** Brenum requests the characters help them start securing support with the minor nobles by convincing one to meet with Brenum and overseeing the meeting. If the meeting is successful, Brenum rewards the characters with 500 gp each (or a monetary reward appropriate to the party's level).

**Shani's Quest.** Shani requests the characters deliver a package from House Jissal to one of Dhustrad's community leaders. The package contains heirloom jewelry worth 750 gp in total. In truth, the items are stolen from minor nobles, as Shani wishes to inflame tensions between the nobles and the common folk in preparation for revolution. If the characters are successful, Shani rewards the characters with a *cape of the mountebank* (or another magic item appropriate to the party's level).

## TO BECOME QUEEN

Though Lorentius is acting monarch, his attempts to schedule Princess Lyetta's coronation have been delayed due to the court's debate and the threat of a coup—from Brenum or potentially other nobles—if he acts too hastily. To secure the support necessary to move forward with her coronation, Lyetta needs to gain the courtiers' loyalty or deal with the obstacles they present. She must resolve matters with at least two of the following courtiers:

**Convince Zoya.** Lyetta must convince Zoya that her rule won't bring about Zoya's foretold doom by proving Lorentius is the one with infernal ties.

**Persuade Brenum.** Lyetta must persuade Brenum to cede their claim to the throne, either through force or by earning their support by proving her goodwill and capability.

**Handle Shani.** Lyetta can earn Shani's support by deposing Lorentius or gain significant favor in the public eye by exposing Shani as an Atrusian infiltrator.

In addition, Lyetta must gain the support of either the minor nobles or the common folk:

**Common Folk.** The common folk support Brenum, but can be convinced to back Lyetta with the right motivation, such as a concession of power to the common people or evidence of policies that guarantee their safety and well-being. Lyetta is willing to listen to reasonable suggestions from the characters, especially

if the party has spent time talking to servants or other commoners in Dhustrad.

**Minor Nobles.** The minor nobles are fickle with their backing, and many place their trust in Lorentius as a regent. If Lorentius's scheming is exposed, the minor nobles are shaken and are more likely to support Lyetta's choice of regent or even independent rule. Lyetta can curry favor with them by proving her leadership capabilities and wisdom, or bribe them with tangible benefits, promises, and gifts.

However, even if Lyetta becomes queen, there is still a risk Lorentius makes her a puppet sovereign unless his treachery is revealed. After he's dealt with, Lyetta must either put forward a new regent or overturn the regency law and gain administrative power. By this point, the characters have likely gained enough recognition to weigh in on this critical decision, either putting their faith in Lyetta's independent rule or supporting someone they trust to work with Lyetta as regent.

**Replacement Regent.** Lyetta can suggest a new regent to replace Lorentius. By default, her choice is Knight Commander Alluin. However, if she has the support of another courtier, such as Zoya or Brenum, they could fulfill this role instead.

**Overturning Law.** If Lyetta has the support of both the minor nobles and the common folk and has dealt with the other courtiers, she can opt to overturn the law and forgo a regent, instead taking on administrative power herself. Unless convinced otherwise, Lyetta appoints a chief advisor, following a similar decision-making process as suggesting a new regent.

If the characters directly or indirectly support Brenum, the lord must meet similar criteria—gaining the support of the public and dealing with the courtiers—to be crowned sovereign. Alternatively, Brenum can incite revolution within Dhustrad's people, bypassing the requirements and forcibly seizing the Halcyon Seat.

## THE GILDED GALA

The Gilded Gala is one of Dhustrad's preeminent social events, in which the palace gathers the upper echelons of Dhustrad to celebrate the kingdom's current successes and discuss the future. This is the first gala since Alphonsus and Odette's assassination, so there is much socializing and scheming to be done.

The characters receive an invitation from a member of the Aurum Court if they are friendly with that courtier, though a character can only enter the gala under the patronage of one courtier. Without an invitation, or if

## LYETTA'S REGENT

The party may feel conflicted about whether to let Lyetta lead independently or vouch for someone who may not be the best choice. Knight Commander Alluin is loyal to Lyetta, but has little political experience (however, as the GM, you can decide whether his service to the crown, knightly honor, or prowess as a commander affords him respect or influence among the court). Brenum and Zoya have political experience, but neither of them has Lyetta's best interests at heart: Brenum may subtly work against Lyetta for their own power, and Zoya is led by her visions above all else. At the same time, Lyetta is still a child.

At your discretion, in a long-term campaign, the characters can put forward NPCs they already know and trust, or you can seed possibilities by introducing other NPCs the characters would trust as regent, based on their connections and allegiances. The characters' suggestion holds much weight, and if the characters have gotten to this stage, Lyetta likely trusts them to suggest someone wise and just, who will be a good regent not just for Lyetta, but for Dhustrad, as well.

they want to avoid showing loyalty to a single courtier, they'll have to sneak or bluff their way into the event.

The Gilded Gala is divided into four sections: mingling, dinner, an auction, and dancing. During each of these sections, simultaneous events involving members of the Aurum Court occur, as long as all courtiers involved can participate.

## PALACE LAYOUT

The Aurum Court gathers at the Halcyon Seat, the royal palace of Dhustrad. The palace is divided into the following areas. If you want, you can add other locations within the palace, or even make an abstracted map for the party to track the locations of their characters and key NPCs during the gala.

**Landmark Rooms.** These rooms are where major events take place and include the atrium, dining hall, grand hall, courtyard, and gardens.

**Court Chambers.** Members of the Aurum Court have their own estates, but also have chambers for their use within the Halcyon Seat. Additional guest rooms can house minor nobles, foreign dignitaries, or other guests of honor.

**Servant Areas.** Crisscrossing the palace are servant halls that lead to high-traffic areas, such as the court chambers and the kitchens, as well as to the servants' quarters.

**Royal Wing and Passages.** The royal wing holds the private chambers of the royal family. Additionally, hidden passageways throughout the palace, known only to the Halcyon Guards and the royal family, provide escape routes and locations from which to eavesdrop.

## RUNNING THE GALA

Per the examples above in “Creating Intrigue,” the Gilded Gala can act as a climax to an intrigue plot, allowing the characters to foil courtiers’ plots. Alternatively, if you want to spin a longer intrigue with the courtiers, the gala can be a step along the way, focusing on one or two plots the characters can expose to narrow the playing field for the courtier they support. Consider where the gala fits into your greater intrigue and seed the clues necessary to point your characters to the plots in motion.

Princess Lyetta and each courtier attend the gala with a specific goal. Refer to the sections within the gala for where they take action. This article assumes all five goals are simultaneously in play, but you can pick and choose which plots to pursue based on who the characters are allied with, whose motivations have been uncovered, and which courtiers have already been dealt with or exposed:

- **Lyetta.** Lyetta wants to earn the favor of the minor nobles attending the gala.
- **Lorentius.** Lorentius wants to sneak into Alphonsus’s old chambers to acquire the last reagent he needs to summon and make a pact with the devil Cerzus.
- **Zoya.** Zoya wants to poison Lyetta with a catatonic draught.
- **Brenum.** Brenum wants to stir up the common folk to march on the palace during the gala and pressure the nobles into supporting their coronation.
- **Shani.** Shani wants to sneak Atrus zealots into the gala to sow chaos; her goal depends on who the characters are supporting (see “Finale” later in this article).

The dining hall and great hall are protected by ten **guards**, who cover points of entry and the main stage. In addition, during the dinner, auction, and dance, Knight Commander Alluin personally oversees the security. The other areas of the gala each have five **guards**. The halls of the court chambers are patrolled by two **guards** (if the characters are sneaking through the public hallways, roll a d6; on a result of 6, they encounter the guards). At your discretion, you can replace the guard stat block with one that would be more challenging for your party’s level (such as the **mercenary** or **honor guard** stat blocks from “Appendix NPC: Part 1” in *ARCADIA* 18).

## MINGLING

The gala begins with a period for mingling before dinner. Light refreshments and appetizers are served, and guests are encouraged to socialize in the atrium and gardens.

### THE CROWD

Lyetta and Zoya are mingling with guests in the atrium. Shani is socializing in the gardens.

### CLANDESTINE MEETING

Brenum is meeting one of Zoya’s spies in secret outside the palace gates; they are unaware of the spy’s affiliation, believing them to be a simple informant from within the palace. The spy agrees to run messages to leaders of the common folk, instructing them to keep their eyes on the palace and await an opportunity.

### THE MIRROR

Lorentius can be found in his room, checking on his *mirror of life trapping*. If Lorentius is hostile toward the characters, he tries to convince a character to come to his room—either by imploring them to help his sick wife or implying he has information that might help them during the gala—to trap them in the mirror.

## DINNER

Following the mingling, the guests are called to the ornate dining hall and shown to their seats. Before dinner is served, several speeches are given, then the guests are treated to five courses of exquisite Dhustradian food, which include light greens showcasing fresh citrus, heartily spiced appetizers, tender game meats with sweet sauces, a sweet pitaya sorbet, and rich, layered desserts.

### SPEECHES

Lyetta gives a speech to the assembled guests to thank them for their attendance. Lorentius speaks after her, publicly mourning the loss of Alphonsus and Odette. Brenum, Zoya, and Shani are all present.

### DEBRIEFING

Zoya covertly exchanges messages with a few of her spies among the servants during dinner. A character who knows thieves’ cant and has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher notices and understands what she’s communicating with hand signs. She commands several spies to keep the kitchen clear during the upcoming dance.

### INFILTRATION

Shani attends dinner, but is distracted because she’s being contacted via *sending* by several Atrusian zealots

sneaking into the palace. They have knocked five servants unconscious and stowed them in a disused storage room, where they can be found for the rest of the evening, to don their livery and pose as help. A character who has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher notices that Shani is distracted. If a character succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check or is proficient in the Arcana skill, they realize she's distracted because she's communicating by magical means.

## AUCTION

After dinner, an auction is held in the dining hall; the proceeds will fund charity efforts throughout Dhustrad. Guests who wish not to participate can take refreshments and additional desserts and continue conversations in the atrium and gardens.

## BIDDING

Lorentius, Shani, and Zoya are all present for the auction. The item being auctioned is a 4 ft. × 6 ft. *carpet of flying*. Zoya only bids up to 10,000 gp, while Lorentius bids up to 20,000 gp. The character with the highest passive Perception score notices that, unlike most of the other nobles, Shani isn't participating in the auction at all. If the characters are friendly with either Lyetta or Brenum, they donate 10,000 gp to the characters to bid on the item on their behalf. If desired, you can adjust the item or the bidding price based on the party's level and wealth.

## FRESH AIR

Lyetta takes Pallus to the gardens for fresh air. If any characters are present and friendly with Lyetta, she confides that the stress of the gala and remaining put together in front of the entire nobility is suffocating her.

## PERSUASION

Brenum is in the atrium, trying to convince several minor nobles to support their coronation by claiming the people of Dhustrad are poised against House Hithalwynn.

## DANCING

Once the auction has concluded, the doors to the great hall are opened. A band plays sweeping orchestral music and guests can dance or socialize until the evening comes to a close.

## THE GREAT HALL

Lyetta, Brenum, and Shani are dancing or socializing in the crowd throughout this section of the gala. Lyetta and Brenum accept invitations to dance from characters they are friendly with, but only request a dance from a

character they are particularly close to. Shani accepts any invitation to dance, but only requests a dance from a character she is hostile toward; she uses the opportunity to needle her dance partner for information or unsettle them by taunting them about things they don't know or flaws she sees in their plans, hoping to push them into making a mistake.

## DARK RITUAL

Unless indisposed, Lorentius reaches Alphonsus's former chambers, acquires the obsidian kris set with a bloodstone that the king used in his original ritual, then brings Cerzus (**horned devil**, or another devil appropriate for the party's level) to the Material Plane to strike a deal. In exchange for the power to influence and control others, Lorentius will use Dhustrad's resources and people to further Cerzus's schemes in the mortal world. Lorentius also makes an additional bargain—if he can manipulate Lyetta into offering her soul to Cerzus, the devil will claim hers as payment instead of Lorentius's.

With Cerzus's infernal blessing, Lorentius has a Charisma score of 22 (+6) and can cast any enchantment spell, requiring no material components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability. Pick spells appropriate for your party's tier of play, but examples might include *suggestion*, *charm person*, *mass suggestion*, and *dominate person*.

## SLEEPING DRAUGHT

Unless indisposed, Zoya goes to the kitchen after the auction and poisons Lyetta's chalice for the toast with a catatonic sleeping draught. If the characters have earned Lyetta's trust, Knight Commander Alluin notices the kitchen staff standing around and asks the characters to check on the kitchens and report back to him. Alternatively (or in addition), if any character has been friendly with the staff during the gala, they hear that same staff member complaining that the staff was suddenly told to clear the kitchens by order of the lord regent.

## FINALE

To close out the evening, Princess Lyetta stands before the assembled guests to thank them for their contributions to Dhustrad's success and their support for their future. It's the perfect opportunity for an enemy to strike. Depending on what has occurred during the gala, choose from one of the following finales:

**Zealots.** If Shani succeeded in sneaking in Atrusian zealots (2 **mag**es, who have the *sending* spell prepared, and 3 **gladiators**), they launch an attack on the crowd of nobles to sow fear and chaos. At your discretion, you can replace these stat blocks with ones more

appropriate for your party's level. If the characters are directly or indirectly supporting Brenum, the attack is staged to implicate Lorentius to cast further mistrust over House Hithalwynn's rule. If the characters are directly or indirectly supporting Lyetta, the attack is staged to implicate Brenum.

**Revolution.** If the characters supported Brenum among Dhustrad's people, the common folk march on the gates of the palace to instate the lord as king. If the rebellion is quelled with violence, unrest in Dhustrad—and distrust for Lyetta—significantly increases.

**Poison.** If Zoya successfully poisoned the royal chalice, Lyetta makes a toast at the end of her speech, but is put under the catatonic draught upon drinking. Zoya frames Lorentius for the poisoning, then subtly stirs up support for Brenum's coronation to ensure Dhustrad is not left without a leader. While under the effects of the catatonic draught, Lyetta is unconscious. This effect can be removed only by a *wish* spell or by casting *greater restoration* on her three times within the same hour.

**Pact.** If Lorentius succeeded in contacting Cerzus, he gains infernal powers that allow him influence over Lyetta, stopping her attempts to depose him as regent and ensuring that he'll secretly remain in control even when she's old enough to rule on her own. Whether Dhustrad becomes a conquering force under fiendish banners, Cerzus gradually corrupts and manipulates the populace, Lorentius quietly sacrifices the impoverished to the fiend, or something else happens is up to you—Cerus's intentions are purposefully fluid to fit any campaign.

**Nothing!** If the characters prevented each plot against Lyetta, the gala is a rousing success for the princess. If they uncovered Lorentius's plot, Lyetta encourages the characters to expose him to the nobles. This evidence gives her the means to depose him as regent and to find a replacement or overturn the law to become acting monarch. Additionally, exposing Lorentius could

convince Zoya—or help build a case—that Lyetta won't cause Dhustrad's downfall. Any other exposed plots affirm Lyetta's capability to the minor nobles. If this is the climax of the intrigue plot, they can approve Lyetta's coronation if she has fulfilled the other requirements necessary to do so.

Based on the characters' actions, multiple plots can come to fruition during the gala's finale. You can choose to have certain plots supersede the others (Zoya successfully poisoning Lyetta could cause Shani to hold off on signaling for the zealots to attack) or occur at the same time (Lorentius uses his newfound infernal powers amid Brenum's rebellion). It's up to you how much chaos you want to track and how many consequences you want your party to deal with!

## CORONATION

While the Gilded Gala can act as a climax, the true finale to the intrigue of the Aurum Court is the coronation of a new monarch. If all obstacles have been dealt with, the coronation can be a simple affair to close off the overarching plot—a congratulatory event that celebrates what the heroes have accomplished. The characters could use the time between the gala and the coronation to tie up any remaining loose ends, such as helping their chosen monarch gain the last support they need or bringing aggressors to justice.

However, if there are still schemes against the characters' chosen monarch, the coronation can be a more momentous finale. The characters could stop another sabotage by Zoya, a riot stirred up by Brenum, or an assassination by Shani. Once they have dealt with the interruption, their chosen monarch can be crowned and Dhustrad's future decided.

For their efforts, the characters have stabilized a tumultuous nation and earned themselves a grateful ally (or allies) in their adventures to come!



# KILLER PURSUIT

WHEN THE CHARACTERS ARE FRAMED  
FOR A MURDER THEY DIDN'T COMMIT

by JB Little (DropTheDie)

The bells of the city of Monte-de-Thoules (mont-duh-THOOLS) toll a doleful rhythm on a bright, clear morning—announcing that Hierophant Dara Everflame is dead. The perpetrator was a resourceful human assassin named Enyat “the Sloth” Fyjin, who used illusory disguises to frame the player characters for the deed. Word quickly spreads throughout the city that adventurers matching the characters’ descriptions are responsible, and several hundred priests begin to scour Monte-de-Thoules to capture the characters alive, by order of the high priests of Saint Bróccan.

The party’s pursuers have been told that the characters are murderers, and having any priests killed during the chase will confirm those accusations! The characters must either evade capture long enough to find evidence that clears their names, escape from the city with a bounty on their heads, or take their chances trusting the priesthood’s justice.

“Killer Pursuit” is designed for four or five characters of 4th to 8th level.

## BEYOND COMBAT

A beautiful, brutal simplicity can be found in slaughtering dangerous monsters or bloodying one’s fists in a barroom brawl. Blades and magic are the go-to tools for solving problems in heroic fantasy games ... but they’re not the only approaches. Conflicts that *can’t* be solved with violence can be just as tense, exciting, and dramatic as any knockout boss battle. As the GM, it’s your job to communicate that the characters have interesting options and resources beyond combat in this adventure. The challenge of the scenario is that fighting the priests is only going to make things worse for the party, so make sure your players know that before you start.

## OVERVIEW

This adventure is divided into three sections:

- In “Part 1: Murderers!” the characters learn that they have been framed for killing Hierophant Dara Everflame and are pursued by priests through the city streets.
- In “Part 2: Enyat’s Trail,” the characters race against time to clear their names by finding and bringing the real killer to justice.
- In “Part 3: Enyat’s Hideout,” the characters find and confront Enyat at the assassin’s safe house.

## SETTING

The adventure takes place in Monte-de-Thoules, a city of some ten thousand people with a prominent temple of Saint Bróccan the Resolute, patron saint of iron will and strength in pursuit of justice. From nobles to commoners, the people of the city venerate Saint Bróccan, and the temple’s hierophant serves as a de facto advisor to Monte-de-Thoules’s rulers. Most of the action in the adventure takes place in the Temple City, the district around the Church of Saint Bróccan.

Alternatively, you can replace Monte-de-Thoules and Saint Bróccan with any city and deity that make sense in your campaign.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

During the adventure, the characters encounter clergy of the Church of Saint Bróccan who want to capture them, NPCs who can help them, and the assassin who framed them. The major players are noted here, with other NPCs introduced throughout the adventure where they appear.

## CLERGY

At your discretion as GM, you can adjust the stat blocks or the number of clergy antagonists the party encounters during the adventure. All the clergy have received descriptions telling them what each character looks like.

### HIEROPHANT DARA EVERFLAME

The murder of Hierophant Dara Everflame, a dwarf who lived to serve his congregation, has shocked not just the Church of Saint Bróccan but the entire city. Monte-de-Thoules's poorer citizens praised Dara's generosity, for the dwarf opened the high temple's doors and larder to anyone in need, believers and nonbelievers alike. But Dara wasn't so kind to everyone.

He hated assassins' guilds, believing that they recruited the less fortunate into their fold and taught them how to kill for coin. The hierophant often lumped adventurers and mercenaries into his angry rhetoric, claiming that such folk were no better than those who murdered for money. Despite his firebrand behavior, though, Dara never sent his priests after adventurers, though agents of the church did often break up assassin bands.

**Silent in Death.** Dara, like many adherents of Saint Bróccan, had long made it known that he had no desire to be raised from the dead once his time in the world had run its course. Additionally, the Sloth is a savvy assassin, whose single-strike killing blow and use of the characters' guises was intended to subvert any chance of the dead Dara reporting on his own demise, whether by being raised or through the *Speak with Dead* spell.

In fact, you might decide that the priests of the temple using *Speak with Dead* is part of what's put the characters in peril. Gleaning Dara's final memories would have confirmed that he died without waking up to see his killer—and that he saw all the characters individually at the temple on his final day of life.

**Bad Blood.** At your discretion, you can collaborate with the players to come up with a negative public interaction their characters had with Dara just weeks before his death. Maybe they reacted angrily to his belief that most adventurers are no better than contract killers. Alternatively, the hierophant might have spoken out against them publicly, telling the people of the city to worship gods and not money-grubbing mercenaries. Or perhaps one of the characters put Dara's name into a satirical play or song.

In an ongoing campaign, you can insert such an encounter into a session shortly before Dara's assassination. This negative interaction can help justify why the other members of the clergy believe the characters are Dara's killers.

## ENTROPY

A tiefling high priest named Entropy leads the Church of Saint Bróccan's efforts to capture the characters. She was a disciple and devoted friend of the departed Hierophant Dara Everflame. Though upset about her friend's murder, Entropy is merciful and even-handed, and is dedicated to capturing the characters so as to bring them to justice alive. If the characters are 6th level or lower, Entropy is a holy knight (see the sidebar). If the characters are 7th or 8th level, she uses the *deva* stat block but is a Humanoid.



## PRIESTS

Many members of the Church of Saint Bróccan in this adventure use the **priest** stat block. If you decide to use a different god, you can adjust these NPCs' spells to better fit the deity they worship. Alternatively, choose a different stat block entirely if doing so serves the narrative. The **cult fanatic** and **druid** stat blocks make excellent choices for divine servants, or you might opt for something a little more unusual. For instance, the clergy of a tiger god or a god with a tiger aspect could use the **weretiger** stat block!

### HOLY KNIGHTS

A holy knight uses the **knight** stat block with the following adjustments:

- Their **Wisdom** score is 16 (+3) and they have a +5 bonus to **Wisdom** saving throws.
- Whenever a holy knight deals damage, they can deal 4 (1d8) radiant damage or restore 7 (1d8 + 3) hit points to a creature they can see within 30 feet of them.

## KORANA GORAX

The head of the Delver's Guild in Monte-de-Thoules, the dragonborn **veteran** Korana Gorax looks after all the city's adventurers as if they were her kin. If the characters are newly arrived to the city, Korana will have heard of them and their previous adventuring exploits. If the characters are well established in the city, you might set up that they already know the dragonborn prior to this adventure.

Gruff but kind, this blue-scaled warrior doesn't want to believe that the player characters killed the hierophant. They're heroes, not killers! What's more, the party's reputation reflects on the rest of the adventurers in the city, so Korana wants to help the characters clear their names. She won't get involved too directly, though, wanting to maintain plausible deniability in case the priests of Saint Bróccan are right about the characters' evil deed.

## ENYAT "THE SLOTH" FYJIN

The notorious assassin Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin earned his nickname through patience. Other assassins marveled at Enyat's ability to wait, sometimes for days on a rooftop with a crossbow pointed at a street, knowing that eventually his mark would have to walk by. Cold, calm, and willing to do anything for money, Enyat realized that his living the good life in Monte-de-Thoules would eventually be threatened when Hierophant Dara Everflame began his crusade against the city's assassins. The Sloth had to take action.

Knowing that a group of renowned adventurers was in Monte-de-Thoules, Enyat used a *hat of disguise* to impersonate each member of the party at different times in the temple and around the city. Working methodically, he made sure that multiple people saw his disguised forms at the temple before he killed the hierophant. Saint Bróccan's priests thus have no idea of Enyat's involvement in the murder.

## PURSUIT AND CAPTURE

At different points during the adventure, the characters face members of the clergy attempting to capture them. If Saint Bróccan's servants reduce a character to 0 hit points, they stabilize that character and capture them rather than killing them. In this adventure, fleeing from pursuers is a better option than fighting them.

## STAND AND FIGHT

Make sure the players understand the consequences if their characters fight during encounters with priests instead of fleeing. Many of the combat encounters in the adventure are hard or deadly in their difficulty, especially for 4th-level characters.

Even if the characters don't kill any members of the clergy, dealing damage to a priest results in the church dedicating extra resources to capturing the party. Each time the party encounters priests, add one **priest** to the encounter for each previous encounter where any character dealt damage to one or more members of the church.

If any members of the clergy are killed during the chase, add one holy knight (see the sidebar) to each subsequent encounter instead of a priest. Additionally, the clergy attack with lethal intent and no longer stabilize a character reduced to 0 hit points. Even if the characters can clear their names regarding the murder of the hierophant, the priesthood continues to pursue them for their other crimes, as you determine.

If Entropy is killed and the characters are 7th or 8th level, a **deva** called upon by the clergy joins the hunt to replace the high priest in any subsequent encounters.

## OUTRUNNING PURSUERS

If the characters choose to flee from a fight, have the players roll initiative. Acting in order, each character can undertake an activity from the "Ability Checks" or "Features, Traits, and Magic" sections below to attempt to evade the clergy. You don't need to include pursuers in the initiative order, and these pursuits are best played out using theater of the mind.

Each time a character succeeds on an ability check to evade pursuit, the party loses one pursuer. Characters



making use of class features, ancestry traits, or magic to evade pursuit might lose one pursuer, lose all pursuers, or grant advantage to each character's ability checks to evade pursuit for a short time.

If all pursuers are lost, the characters have outrun the church for the time being. If a character fails an ability check or takes an action that you think is unhelpful, a pursuer of your choice catches up to that character and takes one of the following actions:

- The pursuer makes an attack against the character.
- The pursuer casts a spell with a casting time of 1 action or 1 bonus action that has the character as a target.
- The pursuer attempts to grapple the character.

If a character is grappled, paralyzed, restrained, stunned, or unconscious for three consecutive turns without being carried or otherwise assisted by any ally, that character is captured by the pursuers at the end of the third turn. While carrying an ally, a character has disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity ability checks.

## ABILITY CHECKS

While being pursued, a character can make one of the following ability checks on their turn as an action.

**Push through the Crowd.** With a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, the character pushes through a crowd, or rushes into an occupied area to put a crowd between them and their pursuers. A character with a speed of 40 feet or more has advantage on this check. Any character with a speed of 20 feet or more can gain advantage on this check if they can take the Dash action as a bonus action on the same turn they make this check.

**Climb Up High.** With a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, the character climbs up the side of a building and loses their pursuers. A character with a climbing speed automatically succeeds on this check.

**Trip Them Up.** With a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check, the character trips one of their pursuers and knocks them prone to prevent others from following.

**Hide!** With a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check, the character hides from their pursuers in a nearby alley or behind a convenient structure.

**Good Dog.** With a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, the character causes a dog, horse, or other passing animal to get in the way of their pursuers. (You determine whether any suitable animals are available before a character attempts this check.)

**Shortcut.** With a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check, the character finds a shortcut that their pursuers don't know about.

**Blend In.** With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Deception) check, the character blends in with the crowd or makes their pursuers think they ran off in a different direction.

At your discretion, a character can make other ability checks to cover different activities.

## FEATURES, TRAITS, AND MAGIC

While being pursued, a character can use any class features, ancestry traits, magic item properties, or spells to help them escape, as long as doing so takes 1 action or 1 bonus action. The following suggestions can be used as guidelines for the kinds of benefits characters might gain from features, traits, or magic.

**Invisible.** If a character becomes invisible, the party loses one pursuer. If every character becomes invisible, they lose all pursuers.

**Flying.** The first time a character uses a flying speed in an encounter, the party loses a pursuer.

**Slowed Down.** If a pursuer's speed is reduced to half their normal speed, the party loses the pursuer.

**Debilitating Conditions.** If a character leaves a pursuer blinded, frightened, paralyzed, prone, restrained, stunned, or unconscious, the party loses that pursuer.

**Obscure the Field.** If a character creates an effect that can hinder the ability of pursuers to fix on the party's location (such as casting the *darkness* or *fog cloud* spells), each character has advantage on any ability check made to evade pursuit until the end of the next turn of the character who created the obscuring effect.

Any similar actions or resources might result in the loss of one or more pursuers, or give characters advantage on their next ability check, as you determine.

## CAPTURE AND NEGOTIATION

If the characters surrender to or are captured by members of the clergy, they are stripped of their equipment, clapped in manacles, and questioned by Entropy at the location where they were caught. The captured characters must then make DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion)

or Wisdom (Insight) checks to convince Entropy of their potential innocence, collectively succeeding on four checks before collectively failing four checks. The players can decide which characters attempt the checks. Because Entropy is convinced of the characters' guilt, the first of these checks is made with disadvantage.

If the characters succeed on four checks before four failures, they are given back their equipment, and are allowed to help clear their names by joining the search for the true assassin (see "To the Hideout"). Entropy orders the party escorted by one holy knight per character (see "Dramatis Personae"), and reminds the characters that the killer must be captured alive to corroborate their innocence.

The characters might be able to gather clues during "Part 2: Enyat's Trail" before being captured, with each clue providing a benefit to their attempts to convince Entropy of their innocence. If the characters successfully collect all four clues and present them to Entropy, she acknowledges their innocence with no need for ability checks, and asks for their help catching the real killer (see "To the Hideout").

## IMPRISONED

If the characters fail to convince Entropy of their innocence, they are imprisoned in cells in the temple. However, they still have a number of options they can pursue to escape their fate.

**Law and Order.** As accused murderers, the characters have a chance to argue for themselves in front of a tribunal of priests. The rules for convincing the tribunal of their innocence are the same as for convincing Entropy, above, except that the characters have 1 hour to prepare their arguments.

Give the players time to coordinate what their characters plan to say at trial, and grant characters who make well-reasoned arguments an automatic success on their checks. At your discretion, the priests can also turn up one or more clues the characters overlooked or had no chance to find in "Part 2: Enyat's Trail," which can also help their case.

**Breakout.** A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check can steal the keys to their manacles and cell off the belt of an unsuspecting guard. The characters' equipment is kept in an unlocked chest just outside their cells, but the three holy knights who watch over the area must be distracted or dealt with.

**A Little Help.** If all else fails, a local thieves' guild can show up to rescue the characters, whether in exchange for a future unscrupulous favor (determined by you), one permanent magic item, or some other appropriate fee. Being freed in this way gives the characters a chance

to restart the adventure, making another attempt at tracking down the real assassin and clearing themselves. Entropy sends out patrols to seek the characters as soon as it's determined they're missing.

## ON ENYAT'S PAYROLL

If the characters appeal to Entropy and prove their innocence relatively early in the adventure, it can remove much of the tension in the investigation, as the characters end up assisted by the clergy rather than needing to hide from them. To compensate, you can decide that some or all of the holy knights who escort the characters through the city are actually on Enyat's payroll and want to cover up his crime.

After the characters find their second clue in "Part 2: Enyat's Trail," the corrupt knights attack, attempting to kill the characters, and planning to tell Entropy that the characters attacked them first after confessing to the murder. When the knights attack, the characters can flee using the rules in "Outrunning Pursuers." If the characters kill any of the knights, they have disadvantage on subsequent ability checks made to convince Entropy or other members of the clergy that they were set up.

Alternatively, you might save this double-cross scenario for the final showdown against Enyat. For higher-level characters, one or two knights might even reveal themselves to be **assassins** loyal to the Sloth, and willing to die to protect him. If you make use of this scenario and are playing Entropy as a deva, you might want to have her not accompany the characters to the hideout, so that the final battle doesn't become centered around the powerful NPCs on both sides. Instead, Entropy can send holy knights to help the characters arrest Enyat, while she confers with the rest of the church's high priests about how the assassin should be tried once arrested.

## TO THE HIDEOUT

If the characters convince Entropy of their innocence and are allowed to join in the search for the real killer, you can carry on with their investigation or simply have Entropy's agents discover the identity of the assassin and learn the location of Enyat's hideout. Entropy then asks the characters to accompany her there, along with one holy knight per character. See "Part 3: Enyat's Hideout."

## RESTING

If the characters want to rest during the adventure, explain to the players that the longer they take to clear their names, the greater the chance that they might be found by their pursuers, or that the real killer could flee the city and never be found. Each time the party takes a

short or long rest while pursued by the clergy, there is a 50 percent chance that three holy knights (see "Dramatis Personae") discover them halfway through the rest and interrupt it.

Additionally, if the party takes a long rest, you might need to establish narratively why Enyat sticks around the city a little longer than expected. You should also feel free to make the final encounter more challenging by giving the assassin allies, as described in the "More Combat!" sidebar.

## PART I: MURDERERS!

While the characters are making their way through the streets of Monte-de-Thoules, read or paraphrase the following to set the scene:

The bells of Monte-de-Thoules have been ringing all day, announcing the unexpected death of Hierophant Dara Everflame. Based on how early their pealing started up, the head of the Church of Saint Bróccan must have passed in his sleep. The old dwarf was a champion of the down-trodden in the city, though his opinion of adventurers wasn't high. Dara often said that people of that profession were no better than the contract killers his priests so often fought against.

As you make your way along a crowded thoroughfare, you notice a group of armored priests from Dara's order led by a tiefling, handing out paper handbills to passersby. Then the tiefling's eyes go wide as they spot you, shouting out, "Take them alive! These murderers killed the hierophant in his bedchambers and must be executed for their crime!" The crowd parts in fear as the well-armed priests begin to move toward you—their anger making it clear that they have no interest in negotiation.

Entropy, two **priests**, and two holy knights (see "Dramatis Personae") approach the characters, attempting to surround and arrest them. Use the rules in the "Pursuit and Capture" section to adjudicate this encounter.

## TROUBLING HANDBILLS

During or after any confrontation with Entropy and her priests, the characters can pick up one of the many identical handbills being passed around the city. The handbills state that Hierophant Dara Everflame was murdered—and includes descriptions of the assassins that perfectly match the characters in ancestry, gear, and clothing. The handbills state that the suspects were all seen individually in the temple in the hours leading up to the hierophant's death.

## KORANA'S HELP

Once the characters evade, defeat, or negotiate with their pursuers, they are approached by Korana Gorax, head of the Delver's Guild (see "Dramatis Personae"). She might meet the characters on a rooftop, in an alleyway, or in an abandoned house as they catch their breath after a fight or a narrow escape.

A blue-scaled dragonborn in splint armor approaches you, her hands to her sides and open to show that she comes in peace. "I've seen your descriptions in the clergy's handbills," she says gruffly. "You lot are in a heap of trouble. I want to help you get out of that."

If the characters don't know Korana, the veteran introduces herself and explains that she leads the city's Delver's Guild, representing working adventurers in Monte-de-Thoules. She doesn't want to be seen chatting with the characters for too long, so she passes on the following information before going on her way:

- Whether she knows the characters personally or only by reputation, she doesn't believe that they killed the hierophant.
- She knows that having adventurers take the fall for the murder of a beloved public figure would be bad for every member of the Delver's Guild. She'd thus like to see the characters clear their names.
- Korana has heard rumors that because the priests of Saint Bróccan are so sure the characters killed Dara, they haven't done a thorough search of the murder scene yet. That might be the best place to start an investigation, especially since most of the temple's priests are currently at large in the city, looking for the characters.

### LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

If the characters don't want to clear their names and would rather just flee Monte-de-Thoules, you can use the rules in "Navigating the City" to adjudicate their escape. If the characters make it to the city walls, they must pass through a gate guarded by one holy knight per character (see "Dramatis Personae"), or must climb up and over the 25-foot-high wall with a successful DC 16 group Strength (Athletics) check.

If the characters make it outside the city, Entropy continues to pursue them for 2d10 months, after which the tiefling gives up the hunt. Each time the characters take a long rest until they clear their names or Entropy ends her pursuit, roll a d20. On a roll of 1, Entropy and one holy knight per character interrupt the rest.

## PART 2: ENYAT'S TRAIL

However clever he thinks himself, the assassin Enyat left several clues to his identity at the murder scene and other locations across the city, each of which can help prove the characters' innocence.

Each clue the characters gather grants a benefit when they eventually attempt to convince the priesthood of their innocence (see "Capture and Negotiation"), as noted for each clue.

## NAVIGATING THE CITY

To evade capture and avoid undue attention during their investigation, the characters must navigate Monte-de-Thoules carefully and quickly. Each time the party moves from one location to another in the city, ask for a group ability check to determine how successfully they avoid the members of the priesthood and the public scouring the streets for them.

You can choose options from those noted below, or use them as inspiration for options of your own. Some of the suggested options allow skills to apply to ability checks in nonstandard ways. If the players have additional ideas that might help their characters avoid detection, call for whatever ability check and skill combination makes the most sense.

Each time the characters use a particular method for getting around, the priests pursuing them get wise to that method. At your discretion, each character has disadvantage when attempting a group ability check they have already made.

**Back Alley Mazes.** The characters can quietly traverse the city's sprawling back alleys with a successful DC 13 group Wisdom (Survival) check.

**Blending In.** While moving through the streets, the characters can temporarily blend in with the crowds with a successful DC 15 group Charisma (Stealth) check.

**Cover of the Crowd.** The characters can duck behind groups of pedestrians, stalls, and carts to avoid observation with a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Deception) or Dexterity (Stealth) check.

**Overhead Scramble.** The characters can evade pursuers on the streets by scaling buildings with a DC 12 group Strength (Athletics) check.

**Shadow to Shadow.** The characters can creep along shadowed lanes and narrow passages with a successful DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check.

**Through the Sewers.** The characters can move through the sewers of the city with a successful DC 16 group Wisdom (Survival) check. If they do so, each character must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of the journey or be poisoned for 1 hour.

**Wild Eyes and Fierce Words.** The characters can push past city folk who recognize them with the promise of violence and a successful DC 14 group Strength (Intimidation) or Charisma (Intimidation) check.

## BACKGROUNDS

A character who has a background feature that gives them a useful contact can seek out that contact and ask for their help in getting the party from one location to another. It takes a successful DC 16 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to convince a contact to aid the party in this way, granting the characters an automatic success on a group check to move through the city. A contact helps the party only once during the adventure.

## CONSEQUENCES

Each time the characters fail a group check while moving through the city, roll a d4. On a 1–3, they encounter one holy knight (see “Dramatis Personae”) leading four priests, who try to subdue them. On a 4, Entropy is also with the group (see “Dramatis Personae”).

Use the rules in “Pursuit and Capture” to adjudicate this encounter. If the characters get away from the clergy, they make it to their intended destination without further complications.

### FLYING AND INVISIBILITY

If any character can fly or become invisible to avoid detection, you can give that character advantage or an automatic success on ability checks made to avoid notice.

## TRACKING ENYAT

After visiting any of the locations where Enyat was seen in disguise as one of them (broken out in the following sections), the characters can try to track the assassin to his hideout by learning of his movements.

Let the players come up with an approach to determining where Enyat came from before arriving at the Stubborn Root Inn, after leaving Gleeman’s Apothecary, or before or after the time he spent at the Temple planning the assault. For example, while in disguise themselves, they might pretend to be looking for the murderous adventurers, asking shopkeepers and other locals if they saw anyone matching the description of one of the characters Enyat was impersonating.

After leaving a location and succeeding on a subsequent check to cross the city (see “Navigating the City” above), the characters can make a DC 15 group Intelligence check or Charisma check (if in disguise), with either check making use of proficiency with the Investigation skill. (On a failed check to cross the city,

having to fight or flee from the clergy makes it impossible to track Enyat.)

On a successful group check to track the assassin, the characters eventually hear that the disguised Enyat was seen heading for, then slipping into a shack at the edge of the Temple City district (see “Part 3: Enyat’s Hideout”). On a failed group check, the characters lose the trail, and can’t attempt to track Enyat again from the same location.

### THE ASSASSIN’S ASSASSIN

If you wish to add more combat to the adventure, after the characters find their second clue, Enyat performs a ritual to summon an **invisible stalker** to hunt the party. If the characters then search Enyat’s hideout in part 3, they find the partially burned remains of a scroll bearing the instructions for the ritual.

## CHURCH OF SAINT BRÓCCAN

If the characters investigate the scene of the hierophant’s murder, read or paraphrase the following when they arrive at the Church of Saint Bróccan:

The streets outside the high limestone walls of the Church of Saint Bróccan are alive with activity. A crowd of worshippers wait to enter the temple to pay their respects to the departed Dara, though no one is permitted through the temple doors before being questioned by the three knights on guard there.

## ENTERING THE TEMPLE

Three holy knights (see “Dramatis Personae”) guard the entrance to the church, questioning all those who enter and occasionally patrolling around to the back entrance of the temple.

The characters can attempt to enter the temple in any of the following ways.

**Bluff.** Characters who act the part of grieving worshippers can attempt to bluff their way past the guards. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check gets the party into the church.

**Disguises.** A character with a disguise kit who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check to use the kit can change up the look of all the characters. Doing so allows the characters to move by the busy guards with barely any scrutiny. On a failed check, the characters are questioned on their way in, but can still attempt to bluff their way past the guards.

**Sneak In.** With a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, the characters can sneak into the



church by using the movement of another group of worshippers as cover. On a failed check, they are questioned but can attempt to bluff their way in.

**Climb In.** With a successful DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check, the characters can scale one of the less-observed walls of the church to enter through an unlocked window.

**Back Door.** The door at the church's back entrance is locked. Picking the lock requires a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, with a failed check damaging the door and drawing the attention of the guards.

Unless otherwise noted, failing any of the checks above causes the knights on guard to attack the characters (see "Pursuit and Capture"). If the characters flee, they need to navigate their way back to the church later (see "Navigating the City") if they wish to investigate the murder scene. The knights become even more vigilant against infiltration methods the characters attempted and failed at, so that attempting the same method again results in automatic failure.

## MURDER SCENE

Characters who enter the temple can make their way to the hierophant's bedchambers without incident, as most of the temple's clergy are out looking for the characters or preparing for the hierophant's funeral. Read or paraphrase the following when the characters enter the bedchamber:

This chamber has a high, vaulted ceiling carved with bas-reliefs of devils, demons, angels, and armored paladins frozen in eternal combat. The door and a single window appear to be the only ways in or out. A wardrobe, chairs, and a table strewn with documents are of plain crafting, but the room is dominated by a fine, velvet-draped four-poster bed—whose white silk pillows are stained by dried blood.

While searching the room, the characters can attempt ability checks to discover the following information:

- A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check recognizes that the pattern of blood on the pillows was created by a single slash to the throat of the hierophant—the stroke of an expert killer.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence check to study the blood using alchemist's supplies or a poisoner's kit determines that the blade used in this attack was coated in wyvern poison. A character who identifies the poison knows that Gleeman's Apothecary is the nearest shop that sells such toxins to adventurers.

- A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check notes that the room's window is closed and locked—but that scuff marks around the lock indicate it was coaxed open with thread or wire. They also find barely discernable white fluff along the top of the otherwise-undisturbed manuscripts on the table.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the velvet chairs nearest the window and the stool at the foot of the bed are dotted with peculiar white fluff.

**Thistle Fluff.** A character who examines the white fluff found on the tabletop, the chairs, or the stools, and who succeeds on a DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes it as the seed fluff of a particular type of thistle that flowers in the current season (whatever that season happens to be in your campaign). The character further knows that although these thistles are treated as weeds and eradicated in garden plots, they are grown intentionally and in good numbers in the garden outside the Stubborn Root Inn.

If the characters can't identify the thistle fluff, a character with proficiency in Nature or a suitable background knows that famed herbalist Hilda Westvol at Gleeman's Apothecary likely can.

If the characters fail to notice the fluff using ability checks, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score eventually notes it just before the party is ready to leave. However, the extra time it takes to notice the fluff sees three priests arrive at the bedchamber right after it is found to challenge the characters. See "Pursuit and Capture" to handle the confrontation.

## Clue: Thistle Fluff

By obtaining and showing this clue to Entropy, the characters inspire her and her priests to search them, finding none of the fluff stuck to their clothing or gear. This grants each character a +1 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks made to prove their potential innocence to Entropy (see "Capture and Negotiation").

## STUBBORN ROOT INN

The Stubborn Root is a three-story boarding house and inn just blocks away from the Church of Saint Bróccan, run by Marden Flishe and his adult daughter, Ardi. On the eve of the hierophant's murder, Enyat stayed at the Stubborn Root Inn, planning his bloody work. That last night, the assassin took on the appearance of one of the characters using his *hat of disguise*, having impersonated each of the characters at different times while visiting the temple and mapping out the site the day before.

You decide which character Enyat pretended to be during his stay at the inn. Where [*character*] is noted in the read-aloud text, use that character's name.

## INN ARRIVAL

In the garden outside the Stubborn Root Inn, a heavysset human wearing a leather apron and sporting a thick, wiry mustache gently tends to a bed of thorny but majestic thistle plants. Many of the plants appear to have been trampled, their spiky, bright-blue flowers and thick masses of white seed fluff spread across the ground.

This is Marden Flishe, a **commoner**. At a point of your choosing, he notices the characters.

The gardener rises to his feet and marches up to [*character*], inexplicably angry. "Why couldn't you leave through the front door like everyone else?" he demands, gesturing around him at the trampled thistles. "Look at this mess!"

Clearly upset, Marden can explain that he saw the named character sneaking out the window from the room at the inn just before dawn that morning—and trampling through the garden in the process. He is easily confused, and responds uncertainly if the characters tell him that the named character isn't staying at the inn.

With a successful DC 11 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check, Marden can be made to hand over a key to room 8, which he believes the named character is currently renting. Otherwise, he demands 8 sp to pay for his trampled thistles and a replacement key.

**Open Window.** If the characters case the inn, a character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices more trampled thistles beneath the unlocked first-story window leading to room 8.

## IN ROOM 8

This simple chamber is clean but unadorned, furnished only with a writing desk and a bed. If the characters investigate, Marden watches them closely unless shooed away.

While searching the room, the characters can attempt ability checks to discover the following information:

- A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices where fresh quill shavings have fallen into the cracks of the wooden floor. Someone appears to have written a great deal while in this room, then cleaned up the more obvious evidence of that activity.

- A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds an empty ink bottle and a sliver of quill discarded in an empty chamber pot under the bed, along with a crumpled scrap of paper. Uncrumpling the paper reveals that it has "Gleeman's Apothecary: 1,212 gp 1B, 1P, 1W" written on it.
- The drawer to the desk is locked (and the flustered Marden can't remember where the spare key is if he is present). Enyat threw away the key, but the lock can be picked with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or the drawer can be forced with a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. Inside the drawer is a leather writing pad with only two sheets of paper left in it.

**Writing Pad.** Any inspection of the writing pad determines that its final sheets of paper show the faint impressions of what was written on the sheets above them. Though all the observable writing is illegible, a character studying the pad can see where someone drew a detailed map on it—and can make that map's boldest lines visible by rubbing a pencil across the pad or coating it with chalk or some sort of fine powder.

**Chamber Pot.** If the characters fail to notice the chamber pot using ability checks, the character with the highest passive Intelligence (Investigation) score eventually notes it just before the party is ready to leave. However, the extra time it takes to locate the chamber pot sees Entropy and two holy knights arrive at the inn right after the contents of room 8 have been claimed, responding to rumors of the characters having been spotted in the area. See "Dramatis Personae" for information on those NPCs, and "Pursuit and Capture" to handle the confrontation.

## Clue: Writing Pad

The faint lines revealed on the writing pad show the layout of the temple, as any clergy who serves there can recognize. By obtaining and showing this clue to the clergy, each character gains advantage on Charisma checks made to prove their potential innocence to Entropy (see "Capture and Negotiation").

## COMMON ROOM

If the characters spend time in the inn's common room, they notice Marden's daughter Ardi behind the bar, gossiping with several patrons (all **commoners**) about a mysterious and handsome traveler she saw the previous night. A character who asks for more details—and who succeeds on a DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check or offers Ardi a gratuity of at least 1 gp—entices her to describe the stranger as having bright-green eyes, sandy-colored curly hair, and a deeply cleft chin, and to have been seen entering room 8 late the previous night.

This description matches that of Enyat “the Sloth” Fyjin, though Ardi has no idea who Enyat is.

**Enyat’s Description.** A character who hears the description of Enyat can attempt a DC 17 Intelligence (History) check, made with advantage if the character has a criminal or law-enforcement background. On a success, the character recognizes the description as matching that of Enyat “the Sloth” Fyjin, an infamous and high-priced assassin.

### Clue: Enyat’s Description

With this clue, the characters need to make one fewer successful ability check to convince Entropy of their potential innocence (see “Capture and Negotiation”).

## GLEEMAN’S APOTHECARY

Hilda Westvol runs Gleeman’s Apothecary. The day before Dara Everflame was murdered, Enyat visited the apothecary—disguised as one of the characters—to buy the ink, quill, and writing pad used to draw out a map of the Church of Saint Bróccan, as well as to obtain the poison used during the assassination.

You decide which character Enyat pretended to be while making his purchase.

The long front counter of Gleeman’s Apothecary stands opposite shelves piled high with reagents, ingredients, and other materials. A waxy-faced human woman with thin purple lips stands behind the counter, arranging tiny vials.

Hilda Westvol is a **commoner** who has truesight out to a range of 15 feet, thanks to a special potion she drank when she was just an apothecary’s apprentice. When she notices the character Enyat was impersonating, she tilts her head quizzically but says nothing.

During any conversation with Hilda, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Insight) score can tell that she is hiding something from the characters.

**Thistle Fluff.** If the fluff found in the Church of Saint Bróccan is described or shown to Hilda, she identifies it as seed fluff from a type of thistle known to flower in the current season, and tells the characters that the most plentiful source of that plant in the city is in the garden outside the Stubborn Root Inn.

**Hilda’s Testimony.** If a character presents Hilda with the ink, quill, or writing pad from the Stubborn Root Inn, or if a character who recognizes that she’s hiding something asks her to come clean, that character must make a DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

On a success, Hilda confirms that she sold the ink, quill, and writing pad to a human wearing the illusory disguise of the chosen character—and shakily confesses that she also sold a vial of wyvern poison to that same customer. She speaks of her truesight ability, and guesses that the disguise must have been created by spell or magic item. Assuming the customer was an adventurer, she didn’t ask about the disguise, thinking it was none of her business. If the characters ask her to make a statement to the clergy pursuing them, she obliges and apologizes for not coming forward sooner.

On a failed check, Hilda is confused and frightened by the presence of the character who looked like her former customer—having heard that that customer now stands accused of murder. She flees the shop, shouting for help. Whether the characters pursue her or search the shop in her absence, three holy knights confront them 1 minute later (see “Dramatis Personae” and “Pursuit and Capture”).

**Enyat’s Description.** If asked for a description of her customer, Hilda describes his bright-green eyes, sandy-colored curly hair, and deeply cleft chin. This description matches that of Enyat “the Sloth” Fyjin, though Hilda has no idea who Enyat is.

### Clue: Hilda’s Testimony

With this clue, the characters need to make one fewer successful ability check to convince Entropy of their potential innocence (see “Capture and Negotiation”).

## PART 3: ENYAT’S HIDEOUT

Enyat “the Sloth” Fyjin thinks he’s committed the perfect crime. While the characters are pursued by the clergy of the temple, the assassin is hiding in his safe house—a seemingly abandoned, windowless, one-room shack at the edge of the Temple City district around the Church of Saint Bróccan.

The characters might successfully track Enyat to his hideout, or might accompany Entropy and other members of the clergy there after proving their innocence to the high priest and being asked to help bring the real murderer to justice. As they approach the shack, the characters can see smoke rising from its battered tin chimney, suggesting that someone is inside.

## ENTERING THE SHACK

If the characters case the shack before going inside, ask for DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) checks. On a success, a character notices that the shack has a trapdoor in its ceiling in addition to an obvious front door. The trapdoor is unlocked and unwarded, and allows characters to drop straight down into the shack. However, it takes

a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to clamber quietly onto the roof, with a failed group check indicating that Enyat is ready for the characters when they appear.

The front door of the shack has been magically warded with a *glyph of warding* spell by a spellcaster-for-hire of Enyat's acquaintance. The glyph can be spotted only with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check. When any creature other than Enyat touches the door, the glyph erupts with magical energy in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on the glyph. Each creature in that area must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) acid damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

## SHOWDOWN WITH ENYAT

When the characters can see inside the shack, read or paraphrase the following:

A fire burns low in the shack's single dark, dingy room. A lumpy straw mattress is the only other feature of the place.

If the characters set off the glyph of warding or made noise ascending to the roof, the **assassin** Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin hides under the straw mattress, waiting for a chance to strike or flee. If the characters didn't alert Enyat to their presence, add the following:

A lone human sits hunched over the fire, his green eyes and sandy blonde hair flickering in the light as he feeds a paper to the flames.

The assassin is burning the map he drew of the Church of Saint Bróccan.

If the characters came alone, Enyat attacks them, fleeing when he is reduced to half his hit points. If the characters came with priests of Saint Bróccan at their side, Enyat flees immediately.

When the assassin flees, he uses his action each turn to fire his light crossbow, then moves as far away from his pursuers as he can. If his crossbow attack is ineffectual, he might use his *hat of disguise* to try to throw off pursuit, as you determine. If Enyat is reduced to 15 hit points, or if he is blinded, paralyzed, restrained, or stunned, he surrenders.

## MORE COMBAT!

If the characters show up with the support of the Church of Saint Bróccan, the showdown with Enyat is intended as less of a straight-up combat encounter and more of a chase through the city. However, if you wish to make this final encounter more dramatic, you can give Enyat one or more Beast or Humanoid allies who are watching the shack from a distance and enter the fray after it begins. The **bandit captain**, **cult fanatic**, **giant constrictor snake**, or **worg** stat blocks are all good choices for Enyat's allies.

## TREASURE

In addition to his *hat of disguise*, Enyat keeps a pouch with 100 pp stuffed into his lumpy mattress. If he gets no warning before the characters enter the shack, he leaves the pouch behind when he flees.

## CONCLUSION

If the characters capture Enyat alive and hand him over to the clergy of the Church of Saint Bróccan, the assassin confesses to the murder, clearing the characters' names if they haven't already done so on their own.

If the characters have been fully cleared of the accusations against them (and if no clergy were attacked during the adventure), Entropy awards each character 250 gp and a *potion of greater healing* as an apology for pursuing them. If they also caught the real killer, Entropy gives the characters a blue sapphire *elemental gem*.

If the characters clear their names in relation to the murder (with or without any assaults against the clergy), Korana Gorax awards the party a diamond worth 500 gp. If they also caught Enyat, Korana gives them a *wand of secrets*.

If Enyat escapes justice, he tries to get as far from the characters and Monte-de-Thoules as possible. You can decide when and where the characters might cross paths with the Sloth again.

# RESOURCES

## MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

<https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit>

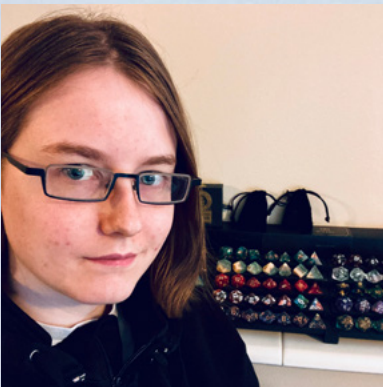
You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on [Patreon](#) and in the [MCDM shop](#).

## NOCTURNE MARKET MAP

<https://files.mcdmproductions.com/Arcadia202303/NocturneMarketMap.jpg>



**KAT KRUGER** is a freelance game designer and author at her owner-operated company, Steampunk Unicorn Studio. Having worked for clients such as Hasbro, Wizards of the Coast, MCDM, Hit Point Press, and Larian Studios, her game credits include: *Betrayal at House on the Hill 3E*, *HeroQuest*, and *Divinity Original Sin: the Board Game*. In the TTRPG sphere she has most notably contributed to the D&D NERDS collaboration and is also the Dungeon Master on the family-friendly, actual-play podcast *d20 Dames*. Her latest book, *How to Be More D&D* (Running Press Books), is an officially licensed publication through *Dungeons & Dragons* (Wizards of the Coast). She was also a Creative Laureate with the Storytelling Collective in 2022. When she's not designing games, she's raising a geeky toddler with her partner and their dachshund in Seattle. Visit [steampunkunicornstudio.com](http://steampunkunicornstudio.com) for a complete list of Kat's work.



**AMBER LITKE** is an ENNIE award-winning freelance writer and editor. Her work has been featured in best-selling titles on the DMsGuild and in projects from MCDM. When not writing for or playing TTRPGs, she enjoys playing critically acclaimed MMO *Final Fantasy XIV*, making eldritch pacts to cook dinner, or watching really bad movies with her friends. Find her on Twitter [@quantum\\_synergy](https://twitter.com/quantum_synergy) or [amberl.carrd.co](http://amberl.carrd.co).



**JB LITTLE**, better known as DropTheDie online, is a game designer based out of Las Vegas. Writer, editor, layout artist, product reviewer, and streaming personality, he has worn many hats over the past five years of full-time TTRPG freelancing. Since publishing his 27th bestselling title for 5th Edition, he's freelanced and contracted with such companies as Kobold Press, 2CGaming, Action Fiction, Absolute Tabletop, and many more. He also wants you to drink some water and wash your sheets.

## OPEN GAME LICENSE VERSION 1.0A

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, LLC. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. **Definitions:** (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, License, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, Spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and Special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, Equipment, magical or supernatural Abilities or Effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the OPEN Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to Identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. **The License:** This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or Conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. **Offer and Acceptance:** By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. **Grant and Consideration:** In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, nonexclusive License with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. **Representation of Authority to Contribute:** If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original Creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. **Notice of License Copyright:** You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game

Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. **Use of Product Identity:** You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a Challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. **Identification:** If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. **Updating the License:** Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. **Copy of this License:** You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. **Use of Contributor Credits:** You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. **Inability to Comply:** If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. **Termination:** This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. **Reformation:** If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

### 15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.

System Reference Document 5.1 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

ARCADIA Issue 26, Copyright 2023, MCDM Productions, LLC. Authors: Kat Kruger, Amber Litke, JB Little, Hannah Rose, and James Introcaso.